Meet Mike Twitty: Pinellas elected official by day, rock star by night

By Gabrielle Calise / Times staff

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Mike Twitty s smiling face greets each visitor on the Pinellas County Property Appraiser homepage, where homeowners and potential buyers check home values, apply for exemptions or peep at parcel maps. His constituents may not know that their buttoned-up elected official has a whole other side. He s a straight up rock star when he s on stage, said Twitty s son and band mate, Sam. For over two decades, Twitty has led the Florida band Folk University. While the lineup has changed since he founded the band after college, he has remained singer and guitar player, rocking out both on and off the clock. It s been a nice distraction from your more technical work, and my golf game is not good enough for me to do that on the weekends, said Twitty, 55. I m a much, much better musician. Pinellas County property appraiser Mike Twitty.

Twitty, a Pinellas County native, started playing around age 10, when his dad brought home a guitar from Vietnam. One of his buddies taught him, like, two songs to play, and they both sounded the same, he said with a laugh. That was my only exposure to live music around the house. He spent his time as a Largo High School student in the 1980s jamming to 60s and 70s tunes, gravitating to singer-songwriters like James Taylor and Cat Stevens. As a real estate major at the University of Florida, Twitty could be found playing in bars, backyards and boats around Gainesville. Many gigs were fraternity and sorority events. Several times a month, he and his pals had a standing show at a local Italian staple, Napolitano s. Twitty came back to Pinellas County after graduation and started a job in a local real estate appraisal firm, where he would work his way up to partner and beyond. In his off time, he formed an acoustic duo with an old high school buddy and called it Folk University. The group, which plays both original tunes and covers, would grow and morph over the years. Folk University played in front of a crowd of 5,000 to open Dennis Miller s show at the O Connell Center in Gainesville in the early 90s. They also traveled to New York City for a private show at the Waldorf Astoria for Jeff Gordon, in celebration of the NASCAR driver s second Winston Cup win. And in 2021, the group opened for Everclear at Ferg s Sports Bar and Grill.

By then, Twitty had made the jump to elected office. He d been sworn in as Pinellas County property appraiser in January 2017. The first thing I did when I started working here was call all of my family and say, You re not gonna believe this, but my boss is the lead singer of a band, said Lori Gioia, a residential appraiser for Pinellas County. The fact that he brings it to the office and the community, it humanizes him more. Pinellas County property appraiser Mike Twitty performs on stage with band Code Red at the Oldsmar Days festival on March 26.

As the Pinellas County property appraiser, he guides an office that values about 450,000 parcels. He oversees 24 cities, plus unincorporated areas, working with almost 60 different taxing authorities. It s only gotten busier over the last few years as the housing market has exploded. When I came in, a lot of people said, Oh, each year is going to be the same, he said. I haven t been bored at all. Twitty is on multiple boards in the county, chairing several. He has traveled back and forth from Tallahassee, most recently championing a consumer protection bill to get online listing platforms to show a realistic tax estimate for new buyers.

When he gets back to town, it s time to rock. Depending on how busy he gets, Twitty can play up to several shows a month, either in Folk University or Code Red, another local classic rock band that he joined two years ago. Back then, Folk University had slowed down due to the pandemic. Code Red, however, had found luck playing outside shows. The group, which often plays around north Pinellas County, covers everything from Billy Idol to Lynyrd Skynyrd. But Folk University has remained special for Twitty. The group allows him to enjoy extra time with his 25-year-old son-turned-band mate, Sam. I ve always been his sports coach, and we d fish and dive and hunt and do all those kinds of things together, Twitty said. But playing music together is a different kind of bond. It was something I always looked forward to, regardless of what was going on, Sam Twitty said. Their band, like Code Red, often plays covers at Pinellas venues like Ozona Blue Grill. Sam Twitty describes his dad as organized and calculated, focusing on the little details, like stage setup and sound. He s a big knob-tweaker, making sure everything is perfect, he said.

Twitty also has used music to bring some fun to his work life. Sometimes, that means playing songs on the campaign trail during fundraisers. Frequently, it means his 120 or so employees get a private concert of their own. At monthly meetings, every employee who is celebrating a birthday can nominate a song they d like to hear their boss sing. He chooses one to learn, and then performs it along with Happy Birthday. He invites his staff to come play along, whether it s joining on the keys or hopping in to harmonize. It keeps us human, he said. The job can get to you sometimes, and you ve got to be able to blow off steam.

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