

Ray Collins - Former Newscaster Still Telling Stories

By Ed Bertha | Photography by Chad Spencer

Ray Collins is used to meeting people at the highest or lowest points of their life.



As a TV anchor and reporter, Ray met thousands of people over 25 years and put them on the news that night.

"I caught people when they had something really good—or really bad happen to them. There wasn't much in between," he said.

Ray was the Sarasota/Bradenton Bureau Chief for Fox 13 News in Tampa. He also anchored "Good Day Tampa Bay Weekends."

"Over the years, I had a chance to cover some of the biggest stories of my generation—politics, crime, sports, hurricanes. I've had a front row seat to history."

Collins also saw the region's housing bubble expand and pop—and then the local economy re-calibrate.

"When I began covering the area for Fox 13 in 2004, most of my stories dealt with development—entire neighborhoods or commercial projects. Developers were writing checks to move people out of their homes to make way for demolition. So many of those projects never came to fruition."

Stalled projects as big as the billion dollar plans at the former site of The Quay at the foot of Fruitville Road—or as small as the trailer park behind the former gas station at US 41 and Stickney Point.

"It's been a tumultuous few years locally, and as a journalist—I had an opportunity to tell people's stories," Collins said.

"There's a segment on one of the network newscasts called 'Everyone Has a Story' and it's so true. I love telling people's stories—and ideally, helping them in the process," he said.

Ray Collins grew up in Buffalo the youngest of six children and dreamed of being a broadcaster since he was ten years old.

"My father had a friend who was a famous sportscaster in town, and I was so enamored by him. I used to go to his TV station and watch him work. I knew at an early age I also wanted to tell stories for a living," he said.

By the time Ray graduated from St. Bonaventure University in upstate New York, he had held a dozen internships or part-time jobs in the media. Collins first moved to the Gulf Coast of Florida shortly after college in the late '80s. He began in Tampa on Newsradio 970 WFLA doing news and sports, and then broke in to TV news in Ft. Myers/Naples.

"But I always loved the Sarasota area. My parents were snowbirds at the Plantation Country Club in Venice, and I'd come visit whenever I could," he recalled.

"I love this area: Not too big, not too small. I've lived in eight cities over my career, and the quality of life here is like none other. When I have to travel outside the area, I can't wait to get back!"

Through his position on Fox 13 News, Ray had the opportunity to meet all the newsmakers and community leaders in the region. Since leaving the news business

in 2009, he's had a chance to use those contacts to build a communications business called Ray Collins Media.

"All the skills I developed on TV are coming in handy now in my consulting work. I train politicians and executives with media skills. I also produce marketing videos for private companies, non profits or individuals trying to promote themselves. Some call them 'Impact Movies,'" he said.

"Telling stories is what I do best. For example, I can work with realtors who are trying to sell a home-- or sell themselves!" he said.

Collins produces two- to five- minute videos that can go on a website, as an email hot-link or as a hard-copy DVD to hand out to prospective clients. Ray interviews the client on camera, gets video of them at home or the office, then writes and 'voices' the story. The videos are professional, crisp and have the authority of a news story on TV.

"The videos can be hard-sell with quick edits, or include light music and a soft touch," he said.

"Not to sound cliché, but to say 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is so true in this case. If I can tell someone's story, make them seem more human and allow them to literally pass around their story in the format of their choice—it can't help but promote their cause."

"Telling stories is what I do best. For example, I can work with realtors who are trying to sell a home—or sell themselves!"

Who better to tell your story than an award-winning story teller who told thousands of other people's stories on television every night for a generation?

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