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## First Female UCF Alumni Elected Official Runs for Reelection to Florida House

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In this 2006 photo, Representative Kimberly Berfield speaks at the Florida House floor in Tallahassee, Florida.

Courtesy from Kimberly Berfield

When she was just a high school student, UCF alumni Kimberly Berfield already had a passion for serving her community.

She joined an organization called Girl State, a summer leadership and citizenship program for high school juniors who have an interest in government.

Little did she know, this path would lead her to eventually becoming a local and state

government official.

After graduating from mass communication at UCF in 1993 and starting a career in broadcast media, seven years later, Berfield became the first female UCF alumni to become an elected official in the Florida House. She served as a Republican state representative for Pinellas County, District 50, from 2000-2006. Today, she is the vice president of Government Affairs and Community Health at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida, where she is still committed to giving back to her community since 2015.

However, new issues have moved Berfield back into state politics. The former state representative is campaigning for re-election in the Florida House for 2022. She said since she left office, she has seen the COVID-19 pandemic intensify issues that affect Florida's youth, and she wants back in to serve District 50 again.

"While young people are incredibly resilient, we are going to need to identify ways to leverage private and public resources to assist the young people, families and schools," Berfield said.

Growing up, her father was also involved in local government as a Pinellas County Court judge. Berfield said, because of this example in her household, she ultimately chose to become a leader to in her community, as well.

In addition to her upbringing, Berfield said there were individuals at UCF who also influenced her.

"I had a philosophy professor here at UCF, and he talked in class about a story and said, 'People have expectations about how a holiday, event or something at your job is going to work out. And traditionally those expectations don't work out. And unless you voice those expectations, or make an effort to be part of making it happen, they won't be,'" Berfield said.

It's those memories at UCF that had an impact on Berfield's mindset and character, she said, when going into politics with a communications degree.

Berfield said, in the past, some have viewed her as the "blonde Barbie doll" when she walked into office at 27 years old, having obtained her bachelor's degree only seven years prior and leaving behind a career in broadcasting. But during her first term in office, she had early success.

Her first year, she managed to pass four bills into law, and brought back \$3 million to her home district. In 2003, she received the Florida Chamber of Commerce Top 20 "Quick Starter" Legislative Award and was named Representative of the Year by the Florida Insurance Council in 2004.

At the end of her first term, she decided to run for Florida Senate in 2006, but was ultimately defeated by Charlie Justice, the Democratic candidate.

After stepping down from office, Berfield joined the Florida Department of Health and was appointed deputy secretary by former Gov. Charlie Crist from 2007-2012. During that time, she also got a master's degree in business administration from Northeastern University.

Jacqueline D'Heere, a campaign associate, said she's known Berfield since 2006 and has seen her grow over the last 15 years.

"Leaving office has not only allowed for personal and career growth, but she also became more diversified after receiving her MBA, and from working in healthcare," D'Heere said.

Berfield said how maturity, current events, social media and personal experiences can make a difference in campaigning and in how candidates are viewed.

Kristi McCoy, Berfield's sister and a UCF graduate and employee in the Office of the Provost, said her sister has had to get creative with her campaign to stay relevant.

"You never had to think about social media, like Facebook, Instagram or TikTok in the past like you do now," McCoy said, adding that negativity and false information often start on social media and that it's up to the current generation of college students to alter this.

When it comes to their UCF heritage, the sisters feel UCF has a reputation of development, achievements and accomplishments.

"People are really taking more notice of UCF," McCoy said.

She described UCF as being the underdog in a David and Goliath story, saying it makes her and her sister proud to be "alum-Knights."

Berfield said she believes there are two types of people in politics: a policy geek or a pomp and circumstance official. In her opinion, it's more about "getting down, and getting dirty and talking nuts and bolts."

As she readies to trudge the hyper-polarized path of the political world, Berfield said she is hoping to serve as a bridge for both sides of the aisle during her campaign and if elected back into office.