

About Avael & Associates

After more than 20 years away, the City of Key West welcomed Julio Avael home in 1996. After graduating from Key West High School, he worked within the state division of youth services and even as far away as Lake Tahoe, Nevada, before returning to the city of his birth and many of his family and friends.

Key West is the place where he grew up listening to the clatter of dominoes, smelling the aroma of Cuban Black Beans, café con leche, and Cuban bread and awakening to the sound of near-by roosters in the early mornings. He spent his youth playing with friends and visiting with family in a time when the island was much simpler, a time when city curfew was 9 p.m. and movies cost 10 cents.

Avael's long career in public administration began as a juvenile court counselor for Monroe County and later he became Florida's Division of Youth Services Probation and Parole District Supervisor before leaving for Tallahassee, where he was promoted to a regional director position with the Division.

Avael served as North Florida Regional Director for the Bureau of Community Services, Division of Youth Services North Florida and managed 22 North Florida Counties. He later was promoted to Service Network Manager for Collier, Hendry and Glades Counties, where he was responsible for a myriad of human and social service programs. Subsequently, he served as Florida Economic Services Program Analyst/Supervisor for the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, and later, he became Department of Human Services Director for Lee County. He was soon recognized by the Lee County Commission as a leader and appointed Lee County Administrator, where he was responsible for a \$1 billion budget and managed 2,000 employees.

Avael took a turn out west as County Manager for Douglas County, Nevada. While in the Lake Tahoe area, Avael enjoyed the snow, the mountains, cross-country skiing, and, of course, a little gambling. When the City Manager position for the City of Key West opened, Avael jumped at the chance to get back home. Key West gave him the opportunity to get reacquainted with childhood friends he had not seen since leaving Key West in 1975.

Avael returned to his hometown with plans to make the city run more openly, effectively and efficiently. Avael began his tenure in 1996 and retired in 2007, and he now holds the distinction of being the longest tenured city manager in the city's history. Avael required city departments to become state and/or nationally certified. He also instituted a formal computerization and training program, which achieved, with help from the Information Technology Department, three awards for the city's website www.keywestcity.com. These awards included first place in the 12th annual "People's Choice Awards", presented by local radio station WKEY, and two separate Golden Web Awards from the International Association of Webmasters and Designers, and the American Association of Webmasters. Today, all city commission meeting can be accessed via the internet.

Residents of the City of Key West became involved in the decision-making process through Avael's citywide summits. The city's mission, vision, core value statements, goals, and objective were established with input from the city's cross-section of residents. Moreover, residents, city commissioners and city associates addressed hot topics such as parking, transportation, traffic, affordable housing, homelessness, cleanliness of the city and surrounding waters, cruise ship traffic concerns and environmental issues. The well-attended summits put together a mixture of workers, business leaders, retirees and military personnel, all with strong pro and/or con opinions on the subject matter. Many told Avael it would never work, but as a believer in open government, he went ahead.

The success of the summits became obvious at their finales, when opponents sat down and discussed the solutions they agreed would help solve the problems. Within a year of the cruise ship summit, fees paid to the city by the ships were increased, one of the summit participants' top priorities. A homeless summit added community outreach organizations to the mixture of summit attendees. Again, it was about a year afterward that the city's homeless safe haven was erected and the city commission passed a no panhandling ordinance. Both products of the summit have helped improve the problem of the homeless sleeping on city rights-of-way, panhandling on city streets and has resulted in those wanting help to improve their situation, finding it in housing, employment and counseling.

Avael, a strong believer in open government, challenged the residents to learn how city government works. He instituted the Key West City Ambassador Program. The first 13-week academy brought about 25 skeptical residents together for three hours, once a week, and introduced them to the city charter, city directors, city programs and an in-depth explanation of the city's budget. Before the first academy was completed, Avael began receiving calls from residents interested in attending the next Ambassador Academy. Avael's promise of no restrictions when it came to questioning directors impressed the future Ambassadors, and without advertising the program, all classes have been full, thanks to word-of-mouth chatter.

The success of the Ambassador Academy, led the graduates to form its own Ambassador organization. They now have their own board members and hold monthly luncheons featuring guest speakers. Additionally, the Ambassador graduates now organize, schedule and facilitate the weekly classes. Its success also led the Key West Police Department to begin a yearly Police Academy, working on the principles of Avael's Ambassador Program.

In mid 2004, Avael announced to his directors that the city had moved far enough ahead of where he found it in 1996, that he felt it was on the right track to be one of a very few cities in Florida to receive the Sterling Award. Avael explained the challenges to city directors and said he expected the city to be a recipient of the Sterling Award. One of the first Sterling Award challenges to Avael was to establish a strategic plan. To find out what the citizens wanted, a survey was arranged, and it should be noted that because of the volunteerism of Ambassador Academy graduates, the city saved about \$100,000 doing the survey. A subsequent independent survey, arranged by city business leaders, and conducted by pollster Lou Harris, came back with similar results of the city's survey.

Armed with demands of Key West residents, Avael presented the strategic plan to city commissioners; it was

unanimously approved and implemented. Throughout much of his professional life, Avael also attended school full-time. He has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Florida International University and a master's of public administration from Nova University. In 1991, he received a Fellowship from the Organization of Hispanic Health and Human services to attend the Senior Executive Program in Public Administration at Harvard University, where he studied under former Secretary of Labor Dr. Robert Reich. He has also attended MIT/Harvard Negotiations seminar and presented a white paper, "Can There Be Progress Without Conflict" at the Senior Executive Program 20th Anniversary Reunion in Lake Tahoe in 1999. Avael has published two articles in the International Public Management Magazine, "Solving Multi-year Budget Problems in a Single Budget Year Cycle," and "Development of an Ambassador Program," and has been a presenter at the International City Managers Annual Conference in San Antonio.

Avael completed the requirements of the Certified Public Manager two-year program at FSU in June 2005, and taught classes at the FSU 2007 pre-graduation Classes in Tallahassee. He also was an adjunct instructor at the Florida Keys Community College where he taught Criminology. Avael started Avael and Associates, a management consulting firm, in 2008.