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Betterton's departure

Only two months after his greatest triumph in Kankakee, Charles Betterton has left city government.

Betterton, the director of the city's Community Development Agency, resigned Thursday, citing differences of opinion with Mayor Russell Johnson.

It was only in May that Betterton pulled off what arguably has been the high point of the Johnson administration to date. Betterton, overcoming both public and government cynicism, got Norman Vincent Peale and inspirational speaker Les Brown to appear at the Paramount Theatre. Betterton got 1,000 plus tickets sold and financially broke even.

The event was typical of Betterton. Starting with his own imagination, he created an event that no one else would have even thought of. Then he turned it into a success.

Betterton was the most charismatic and colorful figure in the administration. If government could have been turned into a revival meeting, he would have been the preacher. He endlessly told people that it could be done, that things could be better.

In fact, it was his insistence on running

government more professionally that earned him so many enemies. Betterton, in administering government grants, insisted on a higher level of accountability than previously accepted in Kankakee. He was successful in disentangling problems with previous HUD grants that had the city sending back money to the federal government.

A loan review committee was set up to provide the city with an objective basis for dispensing its critical economic development dollars. Under the committee, some small projects that would have consumed fair amounts of money and employed few people were defeated. Rejection turned into resentment. Betterton was not popular with every segment of the community.

In a government often divided into political factions, he was usually an apolitical figure. He worked to do what he saw as best. If that trampled on the toes of a previous political ally — so be it.

The strength of his personality and the force of his optimism far outweighed the complaints made by his detractors. Betterton will be missed.