



## Don Armstrong: “I went through a stupid stage”

Back in the day, Don Armstrong was a bad boy. He readily admits that. Armstrong has been arrested, ticketed and appeared in court multiple times.

“I went through a stupid stage,” he admits.

Armstrong, 39, won a seat on the Lee County School Board on Aug. 24. In the weeks following the primary, I’ve fielded calls and e-mails from folks who stumbled upon Armstrong’s record from the 1990s. Yes, a criminal record, one that includes a drug possession charge, an injunction for domestic violence and three convictions for writing worthless checks, among other offenses.

“I wish I could change the hands of time, but with these mistakes, I’ve learned from them,” said Armstrong, who will be sworn in Nov. 16. “It’s part of what made me who I am.”



People have asked how Armstrong can be a role model and effective school board member, given his past. Armstrong says he sympathizes with students who get busted for breaking the rules or whose personal lives are less than ideal.

“I know what kids go through. It doesn’t mean they’re bad kids; it just means they put themselves in a bad position.”

It’s been a decade since Armstrong last ran afoul of the law.

“I keep my nose clean,” he said. “I’ve got a wife and two beautiful kids. That type of lifestyle is behind me.”

Armstrong denies ever using drugs or abusing alcohol. In 1993, as a 23-year-old, he was found guilty of marijuana possession, which is a misdemeanor. Here’s his explanation: Armstrong owned a “party van,” and one of his buddies rolled up some dope and smoked a joint in the cargo area. A few days later, he was pulled over by law enforcement, and mixed in with crumpled McDonald’s bags and other trash were traces of marijuana. He acknowledges the excuse may sound worn out, but affirms the weed wasn’t his.

“I got busted for something that wasn’t mine,” he said.

In 1999, his former wife filed an injunction of protection related to domestic violence. It stemmed from a heated argument. Armstrong said she bit him, and when he tried to leave the house, she was sitting behind

his truck. So he forcefully picked her up, moved her out of the way and left the scene. Police later tracked him down.

Another injunction for domestic violence appeared on his record in 2002, but it was Armstrong who was seeking protection from an ex-girlfriend, not the other way around. The only court-related item since then is his well-publicized foreclosure, which was settled in 2009. Armstrong and his wife were both laid off for a period and couldn't afford their mortgage payments.

Armstrong does laugh about one of his run-ins with the law. In 1998, he was cited for fishing without a permit. He was trying to catch snook, a saltwater fish, at a lake in Lehigh Acres. Snook can survive in freshwater, but Armstrong thought he didn't need a permit if he was fishing for a saltwater species in freshwater. However, he couldn't prove his intentions to the arresting officer. Armstrong didn't walk away empty-handed from that fishing excursion, though.

"I caught a ticket, a \$65 ticket," he said.

Armstrong knew his past would resurface during the campaign against two-term incumbent Steven Teuber, and he's OK with that.

"I'm in the public's eye, so it's to be expected," he said.

The other big question I've heard since the election is whether Armstrong graduated from high school. He attended North Fort Myers High and Mariner High, but as for whether he graduated with a standard diploma, certificate of completion, dropped out or was kicked out, Armstrong isn't quite yet ready to divulge the mystery surrounding his high school days.

"I really don't want to comment on it right now," he said.

If you want more details about his past, he encourages you to ask. His contact info is posted on his Web page, [donniearmstrong.com](http://donniearmstrong.com), or you can e-mail him at [don@donniearmstrong.com](mailto:don@donniearmstrong.com).

"I will not hide anything from anybody," he said. "Transparency is important to me. I'm ashamed of what I did, but I won't hide from it."

Below is a chronological list of Armstrong-related cases filed with the Lee County Clerk of Court. Dates listed are disposition dates, not the dates cases were filed.

#### **TRAFFIC/MISDEMEANOR COURT CASES**

- Aug. 29, 1990: improper tag
- March 25, 1992: driving with a suspended license (adjudication withheld)
- May 17, 1993: writing worthless check under \$50
- May 17, 1993: writing worthless check over \$50
- May 17, 1993: writing worthless check under \$50
- Aug. 6, 1993: marijuana possession
- Feb. 24, 1995: violation of driving restrictions (charges dropped)
- Feb. 24, 1995: driving with a suspended license (charges dropped)
- June 23, 1995: driving with a suspended license
- July 14, 1998: battery (adjudication withheld)
- July 14, 1998: fishing/hunting without a license

### **CIVIL/SMALL CLAIMS COURT CASES**

- Feb. 2, 1993: Financial Realty Services vs. Don Armstrong (eviction)
- July 12, 1993: Donnie Marlene Sharpe vs. Don Armstrong (eviction)
- Aug. 17, 1999: Jennifer Armstrong vs. Don Armstrong (injunction for domestic violence; order dismissed after hearing)
- July 5, 2000: Ford Motor Credit vs. Don Armstrong
- Aug. 17, 2000: Money Corner vs. Don Armstrong (case dismissed)
- July 31, 2002: Don Armstrong (petitioner) vs. Lori Ann Flipse (injunction for domestic violence; order dismissed after hearing)
- Nov. 23, 2009: HSBC Mortgage Services vs. Don/Stephanie Armstrong (foreclosure)