

Reaffirm your passion for public service

By Heather Worthington, President

My friend and colleague told me “I remember when I first met you, I recall thinking that you were really committed to public service—everything about it”. It was a good reminder about why I stay in this business, despite the ups and downs of the last few years.

Many of us in counties and cities are facing further budget impacts from the trickle-down economics of the state, and many of us have faced job loss or a spouse’s job loss recently. Even in the good times, this is not a career for the faint-of-heart, or the thin-of-skin! Because of our adherence to the ICMA Code of Ethics, we are often put in a position where we are not able to speak plainly about our opinions or feelings. We work hard not only to be objective and neutral on many things, but we also feel obligated to stay “above it all” when our communities are struggling through highly political or contentious issues. Sometimes this leads to a perception that we are aloof, cold, or uninterested (and we all know that is not the case!).

Recently, I have realized that this neutrality can lead to our residents and others not really knowing us as people—as fellow human beings—and they sometimes treat us accordingly! Sure, we’re probably all involved in the Rotary Club, or the Chamber of Commerce, our kid’s sports and school activities; but do the people who live and work in your community really know you? Do they know that besides being a City or County Manager, you are also really interested in hunting, fishing, cycling, travel, sports, crafts, home remodeling, your kids or grandkids? It can be difficult to “let people in”—after all, our jobs are already so public, so visible all the time.

I think we have a propensity to be private, because all day long, our lives are so public. I remember a colleague telling me once that when he went for a run, people would stop him to ask questions, or berate him about a local issue. It’s not easy living in the fishbowl.

Without a doubt, county and city managers are one of the single-most interesting groups of people I’ve ever observed. The diversity of personalities, interests, styles and expertise is awe-inspiring. Management and leadership can be difficult concepts to merge in our positions. We are constantly walking that tightrope between being an effective manager, and also being a leader. We are all seen as leaders in your communities with good reason. Don’t forget to let people get to know you—they deserve that chance.

As for me, I’m thankful that I work in this profession with all of you. I have truly enjoyed my last year as President. We have much to be proud of, and much work to do as an association. We will need to continue to support each other in the coming years. We will need to support and mentor those coming into the profession. We will need to continue to educate our elected officials about our role, and the value of the profession. I can’t think of a better group of people to be with as we tackle what will surely be some difficult times ahead. More importantly, we are blessed to have the leadership of Curt Boganey as your next President-Elect; please give him the same support and help you have given me in the past year. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you this past year! ◻

*The Professional
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of Appointed
Administrators
Serving Local
Governments
in Minnesota*

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APMP creating value for the profession

By Bart Fischer, APMP President

Late in 2009, the APMP (the assistants' group!) Board met for a half-day retreat to discuss and brainstorm on how to strengthen and move our organization forward.

Coming out of that retreat, it was made obvious that APMP would best be served by partnering with the MCMA Board on their strategic goals and plans. Specifically, the APMP Board intends to expand its role in promoting the local government profession by becoming more involved with the MCMA's Next Generation Committee. APMP will work to coordinate activities with the committee, including participation in career fairs and visits to college and university classes to promote our profession.

Furthermore, the board decided it was important to strengthen our communication resources and to connect with current and potential members through the web and social media in order to "get the word out" about our profession. As a result, an APMP Facebook page was created (visit us at (www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Minneapolis-MN/Assoc-of-Public-Management-Professionals/163519216377?ref=ts)) and we are seeking to make our webpage (www.mnma.org/apmp.cfm) more informative and functional. Through the use of these tools and through our partnership with MCMA, we hope to reach more young people and energize them to choose a career in local government administration.

In addition to our board retreat, the APMP also held a meeting with our general membership on how to get the most out of the organization. This session was facilitated by Richard and Irina Fursman and included a panel of past APMP Presidents: Heather Worthington, Jamie Verbrugge, and Justin Miller. After the discussion, it became evident that our mission to provide a place for assistants, department heads, and staff and interns to network and to develop professionally is right on target. It also became clear that we should not try to make APMP everything to everyone, but rather that we should concentrate on making APMP meaningful to our regular attendees.

The APMP is grateful for the support MCMA has provided our organization and we look forward to strengthening our partnership in the coming year. As always, if you have or you are an assistant, department head, staff person, or intern that needs a place to "break into the profession," please let them know about APMP and support them in joining our organization.

For more information, please contact APMP President Bart Fischer at (952) 227-7529 or bfischer@chaskamn.com. ○

MCMA Annual Conference to focus on leadership and legacy

By Bill Malinen, Planning Committee Chair; and Melanie Mesko Lee, Board liaison

Hope you have marked your calendars for our annual MCMA Conference to be held May 5-7 at the Grandview Lodge in Nisswa.

Our MCMA conference planning committee has put together this "Leadership Institute" that will inspire you and provide all of us with the tools we need to become better leaders and to make a difference in our communities. The theme for this conference is about creating a legacy; we all leave a legacy at work and in life and so want to be inspired to do great things. Start today by committing to attend this Leadership Institute. Brochures have been mailed and registration and housing is now open. Housing registration closes April 5 and conference registration closes April 21, so get your information in!

From effective networking and mentoring to trust, leadership, and productivity; from civic engagement tips and tools to those "Horns of Dilemma", we have kept your professional development needs in mind. We hope you can join us for development and renewal—see you in May! ○

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MCMA Mid-Winter Professional Development Seminar recap

By Mark McNeill, Shakopee

Twenty-seven MCMA members, and some twenty partners, children, groupies, and other assorted entourage members attended the MCMA Mid-Winter Professional Development Seminar at Grandview Lodge on February 5-6.

Those in attendance were treated to a presentation by Anna Mararvelas on the subject of "Reducing Conflict, and Stress." The two-day format allowed her to go into much more depth than she was able to do at the spring 2009 conference. Participants learned and were motivated, and by consensus it was determined to be one of the best mid-winter seminars in quite some time.

Special thanks go to Heidi Nelson of Ramsey, and Waconia's Susan Arntz. They taught several future MCMA members (ages 4-12) about the behind-the-scenes workings of city and county government. The highlight for that group was presenting plans for new parks that they designed themselves to the seminar attendees (seminarians?).

Attendees can attest that Grandview Lodge is a wonderful year-round facility (well, perhaps the beach and pontoon rides aren't quite the same in February, but ...). The new conference center is now open and should be a great location for the spring conference. We are looking forward to that! ☐

Coming soon: MCMA website update!

By Phil Kern, Secretary-Treasurer and Chair, Technology Task Force

This year's MCMA Annual Conference will feature a presentation of the new MCMA website. Over the past six months, the MCMA Board and its Technology Committee have been working to complete an update to the MCMA website.

The content and presentation of the website will remain focused on member support. Links to management resources, news on training opportunities and relevant news topics will continue to be mainstays of the forum. This information, though, will be presented in a refreshed look and feel.

The new site will include other functionality that will provide additional services to members. By switching to the GovOffice format, MCMA will gain ease in terms of maintenance and updating. In addition to MCMA's support staff, others can be delegated with updating portions of the website. One of the resulting benefits is the Regional Associations section, where formal and informal regional groups will have the ability to share information and have contact information. Regional group managers will independently have the opportunity to access, edit, and share information relative to their region. ☐

Recap of February Board meeting

By Kevin Frazell, Secretariat Officer

The MCMA Board of Directors met on Feb. 5 at Grandview Lodge in Nisswa, just prior to the Mid-winter seminar. Highlights of Board action were:

- Voted to increase the number of Range Riders in the state from the current one up to a possible five. ICMA pays half the cost of agreed upon Range Riders.
- In recognition of strained local government budgets, reduced fees for the 2010 annual conference from \$225 to \$199.
- Adopted a 2010/11 budget of \$88,200, which is essentially unchanged from the prior year. There were, however, a few significant shifts in categories of expenditure. The Range Rider budget is increased from \$2,000 to \$7,500 in anticipation of the larger number. Secretariat agreement with LMC is increased from \$17,000 to \$20,000 to provide more staff time to maintain the revamped website. Other website expenses are reduced from \$10,000 to \$2,500 in recognition of the relatively low costs associated with maintaining a GovOffice site. ☐

Recognition and Membership Committee meets with managers in transition

By Kevin Frazell, Secretariat Officer

One of the strategic goals of MCMA is to strengthen its support for managers in transition. In February, the Recognition and Membership Committee met with several managers who are or have been in that situation to get their perspective. The managers in transition (MITs) reflected on the challenges they face, including:

- Maintaining perspective and not losing confidence, particularly when the search for a new position is going slowly.
- Staying active and engaged, when your tendency may be to just want to withdraw.
- Staying in the information loop of the profession and of local government.
- Feeling isolated as the calls of support and encouragement from colleagues start to wane.
- Keeping skills sharp, including job search, resume writing and interviewing.
- Dealing with practical difficulties of separation like COBRA, severance checks that aren't right, etc.

The MITs and committee members discussed several ways that MCMA might be able to strengthen its support:

- Having Range Riders play a more proactive role in helping members in trouble assess the reality of their situation and prepare for possible separation.
- Offering something like an Employee Assistance Program, but aimed at the public sector.
- Offering members who would be willing to review resumes and conduct mock interviews.
- Arranging other professional support services such as consultation with outplacement consultants, psychologists, and other unemployment resources.

The MCMA Board of Directors has already voted to expand the Range Rider program in order to provide more support to all members, including MITs. Other recommendations from the group will be considered for implementation by the 2010/11 Recognition and Membership Committee. ○

Appointments and other professional news

- **Jim Elmquist**, formerly Administrator, City of Carver is now the Administrator for Dodge County.
- **Lisa E. Henning**, Assistant to the County Administrator, Dakota County since 2007 has been appointed Assistant Director of Community Revitalization of Dakota County Community Development Agency.
- **Tim Madigan**, former City Administrator, Faribault, is in transition.
- **James Norman**, formerly City Administrator, Ramsey, has been appointed City Manager, Albert Lea.
- **Joe Rudberg**, former City Administrator, Becker, has been appointed City Administrator, Breezy Point.

Memorandum from the edge

Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

I had a really good idea for this article, but I completely forgot what it was. No matter how much I think about it or retrace my steps or ignore it and come back to it, I just can't remember it. But all of this thinking about remembering reminded me of a session at a League of Minnesota Cities conference a decade or so ago. It was one of those "old hands share war stories" sessions that are the bread and butter of the practical track, featured in nearly every professional and local government conference.

One one-time public servant after another told the group what it was like back in the day. Pat Bonniwell of the City of St. Bonifacius told about the days before pagers when the siren on the St. Boni water tower was used to summon volunteer firefighters to the station for fire calls. She dreaded the day when a fire call might come in at 1:00 p.m. on the first Wednesday of the month, when the siren was scheduled to be tested. She was afraid the firefighters would think it was the usual test and not a real call.

One first Wednesday, it happened. A fire call came in at 12:59. She immediately turned on the siren, hoping the firefighters who set their watches by the siren would realize it was early and divine the reason. She looked out the window of City Hall, up and down the street, and saw no one was coming. She left the siren on for more than the usual 60 seconds, again assuming that the firefighters would realize that there was a reason behind the anomaly and, again, no one came.

She went out of City Hall and onto the sidewalk, knowing that a number of the firefighters were business people nearby. She began waving at them and pointing up the street toward the Fire Station. Each of them, at their windows, smiled and waved back. Finally, she said, she went out to the middle of the street and laid down on the pavement. The firefighters who saw her do this ran up to see what was wrong. She sat up, pointed toward the fire station and yelled, "There's a fire!" And finally, they understood and responded.

It was a great story. Necessity is the mother of invention and Pat invented one solution after another until one of them worked. God bless the resourceful public servant. But all of this is the prelude to another story from that panel.

Jack Irving, the former City Administrator of the City of Crystal, was next and he told about being a professional local government manager in the days when Council meetings weren't cablecast and statements from the dais were relatively unconstrained. In the days before the gift law, when winning and dining was common. In the days before some of our current robust environmental laws, when the basic background for some pretty substantial projects was good enough because at least three of five Councilmembers thought it was and voted that way.

Jack told one story after another, but he really got going on a story about a controversial public improvement. As he built to the climax, he said, "And then we ... then we we, um ..." Then after a long pause, he said, "You know, that began to happen quite a bit. That's when I decided to get out of the business."

They say the legs are the last thing to go, which is great if you are a dancer, but doesn't do you much good if you are local government manager. How quickly or slowly the mind goes ranges widely. My personal theory is that the mind is like the hard drive on your computer. When it gets full, some of the files need to get deleted. Some of those files are the old ones you haven't used for a while. Some involve the silly stuff other people might believe, but you don't. Some are useful and necessary, but they were filed near the silly stuff and become the victims of friendly fire.

I like to believe that occasionally, some old files can be retrieved. Speaking of which, I just remembered what I was going to write about. It was a solution for the health care issue that everyone could agree to. I'll have to remember that for the next article. ◻

**Be sure to
check out
MCMA's
web site:**

www.mncma.org