

President's column

A wife, a mom, and an administrator

By Shaunna Johnson, MCMA President, City Administrator, Waite Park

While pursuing my education and trying to determine my career path, I found myself struggling with how I could have a career and a family. As a strong-spirited young woman, I knew early on that I wanted to be able to have a career that would allow me to have the flexibility of being a mom, but the satisfaction of feeling successful with a career. How was that going to be possible?

This was a question I asked myself often. Even pursuing my master's degree in public administration did not make it clear to me that being an administrator was what I wanted. I never had that vision or that confidence in myself that I could be that person. I often thought I would work in the private or nonprofit sector or that I might be an HR director. I was never going to be that person in charge of everything.

It took someone else believing in me and seeing more in my potential than I could see in myself. It was a city manager who took a chance on me, gave me a job, and spent five years of his time mentoring me, guiding me, and encouraging me to think about the management career beyond the assistant role or a department head position.

I started my career with my mentor Stan Stewart. He hired me as the planning and zoning coordinator for El Dorado, Kansas. In that role, I had many challenging situations that made me question whether or not this was the career for me. Stan was great to remind me of my potential and was direct in telling me that I needed to develop some thick skin to stay in this game and not give up before I even started. His message resonated with me and allowed me to see beyond the situations I faced. He continued to guide me through many challenges and helped me develop the confidence that I did not have when I started in this career.

My first job as a city administrator was with the City of Waite Park. With some good insight from a great mentor, I was able to

negotiate a good contract that provided me with some flexibility within my position to have a family and be a city administrator, too. I came into my position and was able to set a tone with the Council, staff, and department heads that allowed me to be committed to my job while also being a wife and a mom. I don't miss my kids' activities, and I try to set an environment in our organization where we work hard, but we all know that our families come first.

I can tell you that I have certainly had my challenges of trying to juggle everything. Some days I tend to fail miserably, while other days I have managed to do it all with very few hiccups. At the end of the day, it allows me to put things into perspective and realize that in the end, it is worth it. I have a career that I love, and I have a husband and four boys that I wouldn't trade for the world.

I share my story with all of you because I know many of you may face similar challenges. We are all at varying stages of our careers, but we all find the balancing act difficult at times.

The challenge is that the traditional role of a person in management has changed from what it once was. Traditional managers have typically been males who have had a spouse that has stayed home to raise the kids. They typically have not had to worry about child care or other family-related challenges because their spouses have always been there to take care of these things for the family. While many of these things have changed, our government system has not caught up to this new norm. Our contracts, our personnel policies, and the expectations created by our communities do not mirror the new norm of family life in many of our lives.

As a result we are seeing fewer people joining our profession. We have also seen little change in the number of female CEOs in local government professions in the last 30 years. Many females choose the assistant role and do not look to the CEO positions as career oppor-

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tunities for them. So, as an organization, we have focused our efforts on addressing these challenges. We all believe in the value of local government and are passionate about the importance of what our positions bring to our communities and know that we have the ability to make change.

One of these new initiatives that we are focusing on is Women in Local Government. We have created a task force that has spent the last several months discussing these issues related to women and the changing workforce. It can be a very challenging environment for women in particular to get into this profession as a result of the demands, and balancing that with family desires. We have seen that women tend to gravitate toward assistant positions, and we have seen women passed over for CEO positions because some organizations are challenged with seeing women in that position. While the efforts of our task force have focused on women in the profession, we have found many correlations to men who are also balancing the additional responsibilities that they have with their family and career.

The group has centered our focus on three areas that include networking, connecting, and educating. We want to find ways that we can encourage more women to be part of the profession, be more supportive of the women in our profession, and to educate everyone on the importance and the challenges that both women and men face in our profession. We look forward to sharing our recommendations with the organization in the future.

As I look at my own career, I am thankful that I had a great mentor who saw more in my ability than I saw in myself. I am thankful that I did not settle and that I found a way to create a balance that works with being a wife, a mom, and an administrator. I am excited for the opportunities that the Women in Local Government Task Force are considering. I believe that through this work and through our commitment as an association to making local government a preferred career choice, we will develop the next generation of great leaders to manage our communities. ☐

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are here
to help!**

Board meeting recap

The MCMA Board of Directors met July 17 in Waite Park and Oct. 30 in Oakdale. Highlights of the two meetings included:

- Meeting Mary Wynne, new executive director of MnGTS, and approving a contract with GTS to continue managing the MCMA annual conference.
- Approving new priorities for fiscal year 2016 in the areas of support for members-in-transition and creating a new task force to consider the issues of women in the profession in local government management.
- Approving the recommendation of the Recognition and Membership Committee that the third criteria for the annual Dr. Robert A. Barrett Award for Management Excellence be changed from “being a mentor” to “having a demonstrated track record of supporting professional local government through outreach to peers, the general public, and those entering the profession.” It is hoped that this broader criteria will help nominees from smaller jurisdictions compete well for the award.
- Approving the recommendation of the Recognition and Membership Committee that MCMA create a discretionary annual President’s Award. *See more information in related article on page 4.*
- Directing that future board meeting agendas include an update on Association of Public Management Professional activities from the APMP president. ○

Reaching the MCMA Secretariat

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Appointments and other professional news

- **Valerie Halvorson**, fiscal officer at Lac Qui Parle Family Services, has been appointed city manager, Madison.
- **Kandis Hanson**, former city administrator, Mound, is in transition.
- **Pat Klaers**, city administrator, Arden Hills, has retired.
- **Larry Kruse**, city administrator, Thief River Falls, has been appointed city administrator, Willmar.
- **Bob Louiseau**, city administrator, Detroit Lakes, has announced his retirement.
- **Al Madsen**, city administrator, Maple Grove, has retired.
- **Heidi Nelson**, city administrator, Wayzata, has been appointed city administrator, Maple Grove.
- **Pat Oman**, city administrator, Moose Lake, has been appointed county administrator, Mille Lacs County.
- **Jon Radermacher**, city manager, Madison, has been appointed city administrator, Little Falls.
- **Ellen Richter**, assistant city manager, White Bear Lake, has been appointed city manager there.
- **Mark Sather**, city manager, White Bear Lake, has retired.
- **Mark Sievert**, former city administrator, Fergus Falls, has been appointed city administrator, Lake City.
- **Elizabeth Tolzmann**, former community engagement coordinator, Brooklyn Park, and now with Hennepin County, has been appointed assistant city manager, Bloomington.
- **Craig A. Waldron**, Hamline University, has been named director of Public Administration Programs and co-director of the Center for Public Administration and Leadership at Hamline. ○

Be sure to check out MCMA’s website:

www.mncma.org

2016 Mid-Winter Workshop is set for Jan. 28-29 in St. Cloud

This year's Mid-Winter Workshop moves to St. Cloud, in part so we can meet and enjoy time with faculty and students from the new MPA program at St. Cloud State. Here are some of the highlights of the event, which will take place Jan. 28-29.

Thursday afternoon—Karen Thoreson, president of the Alliance for Innovation, will present their brand new workshop “Next Big Things,” covering the 44 very specific drivers the Alliance has identified that will impact communities and local governments across the country during the next 20 years. This highly interactive workshop will help you think about which are most relevant to your community, how to get prepared, and how all of them together might impact us collectively in Minnesota.

Friday morning—we'll delve into a simmering and timely topic of concern to all local government managers—the too often troubled relationship between our law enforcement agencies and communities of color. Maplewood Director of Public Safety Paul Schnell, along with Civil Rights Activist and Diversity Trainer Jason Sole, will talk about the differing world views of professional law enforcement and people of color, and the hopes that they,

as leaders in those respective worlds, hold for better mutual understanding and ways to de-escalate hostilities. Following their presentation and a break, we'll have plenty of time for questions and open dialogue with Paul and Jason. Bring your toughest questions!

Thursday evening fun—we'll enjoy a social hour and dinner at the upstairs of DB Searles, easily walkable from the Marriott. And we'll honor our MCMA retirees from the past year. Then we'll “adjourn” to the Red Carpet across the street for after-dinner drinks and more socializing for as long as you want to stay.

And some new friends—our workshop is being co-hosted by the faculty and students of the brand new MPA program at State Cloud State University. They have been invited to join us for any and all of the workshop and social events. On Thursday afternoon, we'll learn more about the program, including how MCMA and SCSU can form a solid partnership in preparing the “next generation” of local government managers.

For registration, housing, and more—visit the MCMA website at www.mncma.org.

Annual President's Award created

For the past couple of years, the Recognition and Membership Committee, along with the MCMA Board of Directors, has grappled with the question of whether MCMA should offer a second annual award to stand alongside the Dr. Robert A. Barrett Award for Management Excellence. This was based on the perception that the Barrett Award has effectively become more of a lifetime achievement award, and there should be some mechanism for recognition of more contemporary accomplishments.

The committee was concerned about the complexity and difficulties of administering a second competitive award, including that it might end up being disproportionately given to members from larger jurisdictions. However, as a way to recognize a *significant* current accomplishment, the committee

recommended, and the board concurred, that each year's president should have the discretion to extend an award to any member that they personally felt had displayed the best of the profession over the past year. “Accomplishments” could range from public improvement projects, to response to a natural or man-made disaster, to working effectively in an especially difficult political environment, to whatever!

If you know of someone who has done something great and think they should be considered, feel free to shoot an email suggestion to MCMA President Shaunna Johnson at shaunna.johnson@ci.waitepark.mn.us.

Spotlight on Kansas City, host of the ICMA 2016 Annual Conference

By Brian Gramentz, MCMA First Vice President, City Manager, New Ulm

"I'm going to Kansas City, Kansas City here I come ... " That's what you'll be singing if you join us for the 2016 ICMA Annual Conference, slated to take place Sept. 25-28 in Kansas City—the city of fountains and boulevards. This is a city that has a lot to offer its visitors, so you'll have plenty to do between conference activities.

I had the opportunity to visit Kansas City recently to attend the second meeting of the ICMA Conference Planning Committee Nov. 20-22. As luck would have it, that coincided with the BIG snowstorm event that crossed Iowa and dumped 18-24 inches in the Iowa-Wisconsin-Illinois-Indiana region. I did get through Iowa before it snowed, and arrived in KC at a balmy 50 degrees. The drive down was 6.5 hours from New Ulm, and equaled the travel time I would have had if I traveled by air. I-35W takes you right to KC!

As expected, the meeting was a blend of picking out topics and issues for the sessions and checking out the Kansas City Convention Center and downtown areas. The committee did a good job of identifying the topics, issues, and potential speakers (John Stewart at \$200,000 is not likely going to speak), and made suggestions on the activities proposed by the Host Committee.

What to expect from the host city

Here is the skinny on Kansas City:

1. It is literally the cleanest downtown metropolitan business district I have ever seen.
2. Wear walking shoes. The Kansas City Convention Center is a horizontal facility. The full Conference Center is eight blocks long, but we are only using three blocks of the facility.
3. Hotels will be in the range of \$139-\$190 per night. They have seven lined up, with the possibility of adding two more. There will be a few hotel locations that will have a shuttle bus. The Kansas City Marriott Downtown will be the headquarters.
4. Social program activities include the Saturday Evening Reception at 18th & Vine, at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum and the American Jazz Museum. Sunday evening's Welcome Reception will be at the Convention Center—expect some great food! Monday is the State Association get together night. The Tuesday

evening event is at "KC Live!"—a full city block with two levels of restaurants, taverns, and nightspots with a full live band concert stage (Host Committee hinted at Earth, Wind and Fire performing, but we will see).

5. Sports fans may want to consider attending a pro baseball or football game. The Kansas City Royals will be playing the Minnesota Twins at Kauffman Stadium (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday). The Host committee is thinking of reserving 100 tickets for any ICMA members wanting to attend. Learn more at www.royals.com. The Kansas City Chiefs' 2016 football schedule isn't available yet, but as the date gets closer, you'll find it at www.chiefs.com.
6. More things to check out:
 - Kansas City Power & Light District (KC Live!)—www.powerandlightdistrict.com
 - Negro Leagues Baseball Museum—www.nlbm.com
 - Country Club Plaza—www.countryclubplaza.com
 - American Jazz Museum—www.americanjazzmuseum.org
 - Union Station—www.unionstation.org
 - National WWI Museum—www.theworldwar.org
 - The College Basketball Experience—www.collegebasketballexperience.com
 - Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts—www.kauffmancenter.org

For more information on these and other Kansas City attractions, visit www.visitkc.com. Click on the Discover tab and you can access videos of Kansas City and what it has to offer.

The ICMA Executive Board has chosen to select conference locations using a fairly simple formula, rotating between one year in a prime tourist destination and the next in a secondary tourist market. I think Kansas City is a great conference location! I hope to see you all there!

Memorandum from the edge

By Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

Sometimes after I've written an article, someone will ask, "How do you come up with this stuff?" The simple answer is, "I don't." I just wait and watch and listen and sooner or later, something fun or unusual will come to me. Some people have an ear for music, a nose for news, or an eye for color. I have been blessed with an antenna for the silly.

As George Carlin said, my job is to think up goofy stuff and then come back and report it to you. And the easiest way to do that is to let God, nature, or human-kind do what they do and take notes. If you listen to Carlin and a lot of comedians who learned from him, much of the material is observational: Have you ever noticed this or that? Why do people do something? Who came up with whatever? And they expound, improvise, or riff from there. How many times have you experienced something and said, "You can't make this stuff up!"? Well, when that happens, make a note to yourself and, when you have time, write an article about it. That's what I do.

For example, one day while looking for a car radio knob at U-Pull-R-Parts in Rosemount, I realized two men, named Mojo and Stink, had lost track of each other in the far reaches of the salvage yard and wanted to reconnect. How did I figure that out? It was simple, they were using the Marco Polo method of interpersonal location, walking up and down the aisles yelling, "Mojo!" and "Stink!" back and forth as loud as they could until eventually, they reunited somewhere in the Ford section. To my great pleasure, however, they took a good five minutes to do it. I made a note.

Likewise, a friend shares a story about a former roommate who, after several drinks, would play the cat. To do that, the man would hold the cat under one arm facing backwards, put the end of its tail in his mouth and squeeze gently until the cat voiced its opinion of the situation. He swears it looked and sounded exactly like someone playing the bagpipes. Note to self: Goofy stuff to share with others.

On another occasion, while on a family vacation, we discovered the City of Hustler, Wisconsin, where they were enjoying the annual Hustlerfest celebration. In the City Park outside a building identified by a large sign as the Beer Palace, a schedule of games of skill and strength was being overseen by a woman wearing a ball cap with the word "Judge" on it. She was also wearing that year's festival souvenir T-shirt with "Hustlerfest—Git 'Er Done" printed on the front and "Hot Girls Like Farmer Tans" on the back. When I found her, she was enlisting sign-ups for the rubber chicken toss.

There were two main events of the afternoon—the straw bale toss, judged by distance, and the rubber

chicken toss, judged on accuracy. For the latter, contestants would stand behind a line painted on the trail outside the Beer Palace and try to toss a regulation rubber chicken into a hula hoop that was about 50 feet away. She explained to the potential participants that if more than one contestant got the chicken in the hula hoop, those who did would play elimination rounds. If no one got the chicken in the hula hoop, the closest to it would win. Essentially, it was poultry jarts.

It was a windy day, so technique was going to be a big factor. I wanted to learn from a veteran's experience, so I asked the judge, if she were playing, would she throw overhand like a baseball or underhand like a softball, demonstrating the motion each time. She looked at me as if I had just asked whether a person could actually buy beer at the Beer Palace and said dismissively, "I'm left-handed." No need to make a note; this one was unforgettable.

Sometimes people also ask why I didn't follow some of my friends from college who write comedy for a living. After all, we had all grown up watching the "Dick Van Dyke Show," and we all wanted to be Rob Petrie. The answer can be summed up in two words: Ramen noodles. As successful as some of the people I knew have become, nearly every one of them spent years living hand to mouth or reciting "today's features" to the people at the tables in their section, before they actually made a living at writing. There are also six other words: They were consistently funnier than me.

A wise person knows his limits. Most of all, from everything I've read and seen, it takes extraordinary courage, very thick skin, and a passion for the business to make it in comedy. By fits and turns, I decided to apply the level of courage, thick skin, and passion I have to public service. Note to self: This drips with irony. Save and share with others.

Fortunately, that choice offered me two things that have fit very well together—countless experiences stranger than anyone could make up, and membership in a professional organization that lets me report goofy stuff in its newsletter. I have gotten to make a living serving the people, businesses, elected officials, customers, and co-workers in my community while, on the side through MCMA, I've gotten a built-in audience who seems to share an appreciation for the things I find silly. If not, at least they have the good manners not to say so.

By the way, have you ever noticed how hard it can be to come up with a good closing for an article? What's up with that? ◉