

## President's column

By Phil Kern, MCMA President, City Administrator, Delano

"In a democracy, the people get the government they deserve." —Alexis de Tocqueville

I've always hated that statement. For me, it is right next to "good enough for government work" on the list of things that raise my blood pressure.

I realize the statement isn't necessarily as critical of government as much as it is of a democratic society. Also, in some cases, there may be a degree of truth to it. I'd like to believe, however, that government can and should be held to a higher standard. (I would guess we all share that opinion or we likely wouldn't be in this profession.)

On many levels, we're inundated with dysfunction. Political polarization and gridlock in Washington have led to all-time record low congressional approval ratings. In some cases, nasty personal attacks have been lauded under the auspices of virtue and conviction, while these unfounded accusations are little more than a ploy for political gain. Politics has always been messy, but it seems there's a decreasing distinction between the procedures warranted in a democratic process and unhealthy bad behavior.

On the local level, there are plenty of examples of good policy, good programs, and certainly good managers that have been victims of dysfunction. Boards and councils that act in this fashion get headlines across the state. Citizens and special interest groups that make waves end up YouTube sensations. And even if it's not in our community, it's a negative reflection on local government that ultimately has an influence on all.

This past year, as MCMA revisited its Strategic Plan, the number-one priority of the organization was to discuss and develop strategies to help our profession maintain civility in local government. Additionally, the League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) has made this topic one of its highest priorities.

In March, the LMC and MCMA launched a joint task force to discuss the topic of civility in local government. The purpose of

the task force is to explore if there is a role MCMA and LMC can play, and if so what those strategies may be in terms of helping local communities combat incivility.

I think it's encouraging that the League and MCMA are taking on this issue. We don't know how successful these efforts will be. However, by acknowledging that "incivility" is a topic that requires our focus, and that members in our profession are managing

in a climate where civility is in question, we have taken a strong step in the right direction.

Further, it says that local government needs to and expects to maintain a higher standard. As an association of professional managers, it reiterates our commitment to honest, civil, good government, even when portions of its constituency do not deserve it. The adage, "good enough for government work," must mean more. It's up to us to set the tone. ◻

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# MCMA Board meetings recap

The Board met on Feb. 21 at the Renaissance Depot Hotel in Minneapolis, and on April 4 at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bloomington. Highlights of Board action were:

- Approving the group dinner at the ICMA Boston Conference for the Back Bay Social Club.
- Approving the recommendation of the Education and Outreach Committee to join the Cal-ICMA online educational and coaching program.
- Approving constitutional amendments to be submitted to the members that would re-create the Association of Public Management Professionals (APMP) under the MCMA constitution; also granting Board voting status to the president of APMP and to the MCMA past president.
- Approving a new five-year secretariat agreement with the League of Minnesota Cities.
- Approving an FY 2014 budget in the amount of \$86,450.
- Meeting with ICMA Midwest Regional Director David Limardi to discuss an ICMA membership recruitment campaign. ○

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Riders  
are here  
to help!**

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All can be reached at (651) 281-1200.

**MCMA Newsletter** is published three times a year for the members of the Minnesota City/County Management Association by MCMA's Secretariat:

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## Minnesota joins CAL-ICMA educational partnership

*By Susan Arntz, Chair, Education and Outreach Committee, City Administrator, Waconia*

The MCMA Education and Outreach Committee has been hard at work this year on new programs that provide some exciting opportunities for our entire membership. The MCMA Board has approved the inclusion of an exciting new partnership with Cal-ICMA. We join Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Oregon City-County Management Associations in the endeavor. Over time, the programs and offerings will include managers from all of these states, including our own! The cost for MCMA to participate is \$5,000 annually, which is matched on our behalf by ICMA.

This partnership includes several new programs that the Committee will be working on over time. The main programs include:

- **Coaching resources** and assistance with making connections with coaches. Over time we will be working with the program staff at Cal-ICMA to enhance our mentoring program.
- **Webinars and podcasts** of training on a variety of topics. You can join live and participate in the questions, or listen to a podcast of a webinar at a time more convenient for you and your team. These webinars are designed for you to share with your entire staff. Watch for announcements on the MCMA listserv.
- **Career Compass** article series, which is now linked from the MCMA website.
- **Women Leading Government.** This is a series of educational, coaching, and networking events for aspiring women leaders as well as support for women in senior management.
- **Manager in Residence Program.** This is a program where managers are hosted for a week on campus. This is a program that we will grow into over time.

We are excited to offer this program and work with all the partners. As the year progresses, we encourage you to share feedback with any member of the committee about the experience.

And, as always, if you are looking for a coach/mentor, resources are available on our website or by contacting Chad Adams at [cadams@city.albertlea.org](mailto:cadams@city.albertlea.org), or Susan Arntz at [sarntz@waconia.org](mailto:sarntz@waconia.org). ○

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## Board approves new secretariat agreement with LMC

The MCMA Board has approved a new five-year agreement with the League of Minnesota Cities for secretariat services running from July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2018. The agreement adds new services that have evolved over the years such as managing the ICMA state affiliate agreement, the MCMA dinner at the ICMA conference, and the Mid-Winter Workshop. The annual fee for all services is \$22,200, which is a 5 percent increase over the current agreement. The fee is increased each year of the agreement by the Consumer Price Index. ○

## Appointments and other professional news

- **Kevin Watson**, city administrator, Junction City, Ore., has been appointed city administrator, Vadnais Heights.
- **Shawn Gillen**, city administrator, Grand Rapids, has been appointed city administrator, Doraville, Ga.
- **Susan Harper**, city administrator, Gilbert, is in transition.
- **Mike DeRosia**, city administrator, Lake St. Croix Beach, has taken a public relations position in the private sector.
- **John Harrenstein**, city administrator, Eudora, Kan., has been appointed city administrator, North Mankato.
- **Wally Wysopal**, city manager, North St. Paul, has been appointed city manager, Fridley.
- **Susan Wothe**, city administrator, Clearwater, is in transition.

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## Alliance for Innovation Conference Coming to St. Paul

We are very pleased and excited to announce that the Alliance for Innovation, a partnership with ICMA based at Arizona State University, will be bringing its annual Transforming Local Government (TLG) Conference to St. Paul in June 2016.

TLG, which normally attracts about 500 staff members from innovative cities and counties, will be co-located with the 2016 conference of the League of Minnesota Cities at the St. Paul River-Centre. The two conferences will share keynote speakers, a number of social events, an expanded exhibit hall, and delegates will be able to attend concurrent track sessions offered by either organization, creating a very unique conference experience for both groups. MCMA is an official co-sponsor.

Watch for updated information and plan now to attend and be a part of the volunteer corps needed to support the effort and show off the Gopher State to our guests from throughout North America. ○

## 2013 ICMA Conference Planning Committee Report

By Melanie Mesko Lee, MCMA First Vice President  
Interim City Administrator, Hastings

The 2013 ICMA Conference in Boston/New England, happening Sept. 22-25, is less than six months away, and the Planning Committee and ICMA staff continue to work to plan the “best conference ever!” As you may recall in an earlier update, ICMA President Bonnie Svrcek tasked the committee with that lofty goal . . . and the committee is meeting that challenge! Why attend the conference?

### Top 10 reasons to attend the 2013 ICMA Annual Conference in Boston/New England:

10. Association dinner—we have an excellent association dinner and networking event planned on Monday at the Back Bay Social Club!
9. Theme: Revolutionary Leadership!
8. The weather—average highs in the upper 60s/low 70s make for a comfortable destination!
7. “Hackathon” is planned—Boston-area programmers and university students will use input from local government to develop relevant computer applications. Super cool!
6. Channel your inner Barry Manilow . . . extend your visit, and spend the Weekend in New England.
5. Different formats, more interaction, and afternoon featured speakers will complement the daily keynote addresses!
4. It’s walkable, and public transit (the “T”) makes it easy to get around!
3. Keynote speakers—Dr. Amy Cuddy (Harvard professor speaking about communication), Daniel Pink (Pittsburgh ’07 speaker; current book is about marketing and messaging), and John Jacobs (co-founder, “Life is Good” company)—are confirmed! More pending.
2. There may be something going on at Fenway . . . ? Just sayin’!
1. Professional development is always a good value! Invest in yourself!

More information about the conference is available at [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org). ○

## Mid-Winter Seminar Debrief

By Tim Houle, MCMA Second Vice President, Administrator, Crow Wing County, Mid-Winter Conference Planning Committee Chair

Another Mid-Winter Seminar is a wrap, and what a great Mid-Winter Seminar it was. Nearly 55 MCMA members came together at the Depot Renaissance Hotel in Minneapolis on Feb. 21 and 22, and got to hear some wonderful presentations, network with colleagues, celebrate the careers of some of our retiring colleagues, and enjoy social fun at Kevin Frazell’s home.

The conference was held on a Thursday and Friday this year (instead of Friday-Saturday) in an effort to try to attract more attendees, and that effort was successful as attendance was up by 15 from last year.

Conference attendees got to hear some insightful presentations from Joe Mahon, regional economist from the Minneapolis branch of the Federal Reserve; Susan Brower, state demographer; and an ICMA University training session on Moving your Organization Toward Higher Performance, presented by Cheryl Hilvert, director of the ICMA Center for Management Strategies. Taken together, these presentations highlighted the challenges facing local government in the coming years, both economically and demographically, and gave us tools to help us transform our cities and counties into more resilient organizations better adapted to not just weathering the future, but thriving within it. Copies of their presentation materials are available on the MCMA website at [www.mncma.org](http://www.mncma.org).

Mahon described some of the challenges facing the Minnesota economy, especially within the context of the larger Minneapolis-based Federal Reserve region, but also highlighted some of the natural strengths our region possesses and how the Minnesota economy, in particular, has been weathering recent year economic crises. Brower discussed the historic strength of demographic trends, which have made Minnesota such a powerful economic engine within recent decades, and the challenges we will face with the impending retirement of the Baby Boom generation with its attendant decline in total workforce numbers, educational attainment, and health care costs. Hilvert provided tools and strategies to move our organizations from good to great.

As we look to the future for each of the cities or counties we shepherd, there is no question that we face formidable challenges. Each of us plays a key role in preparing our organization to be flexible, faster-moving, and more responsive to the changing demands we will face. Even if you were not able to make this year’s conference, I encourage you to check out the presentation materials posted on the MCMA website as I believe you will find a rich treasure trove of useful information to help us in that role, whether you are a new manager or one seasoned by years in the trenches.

While our challenges are great, I also believe in the power of our profession to help make the communities we serve better through the actions we take and those we steer our organizations to take. The power of positive change is in us! ○

# Memorandum from the edge

By Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

If I have said it once, I've said it six or seven times: those who do not learn from history are doomed to more demanding majors in the science or math departments. One could major, for example, in archeology, which would be cheating because it is part history and part science. But there are opportunities in the field, many of them in serene, peaceful settings like the Middle East and North Africa.

That is exactly where a group of archeologists working in the Valley of the Kings by the Nile River in Egypt have uncovered one of the most revealing artifacts since the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. The discovery is a tablet inscribed with cuneiforms of partial hieroglyphics that, until now, had defied translation. The messages were finally deciphered by the youngest member of the team, who recognized patterns similar to coded messages she applied in communications with other students at her college. The phrase that resulted in the breakthrough was: 𐎎𐎗𐎍𐎎𐎗𐎍𐎎, which she translated to OMG POS or Oh, my gods! Pharaoh over shoulder.

From that, the team determined that this was a kind of shorthand or alternative hieroglyphic form that had been adapted to permit scribes to communicate while engaged in other activities, like managing the inventory in the royal granaries, driving a chariot, or contending with plagues of frogs. Soon the team was making short work of converting the cuneiforms from the original to things like G2G AM/GOE VPO'd, which means Got to go, Amenhotep/God on Earth very po'd. They were also surprised by an apparent example of ancient Egyptian sarcasm—DCLDITB for Do Crocodiles Leave Droppings in the Bulrushes?

Just up the road from Egypt was the Kingdom of Babylon. While the Egyptians were fond of building enormous stone pyramids, the Babylonians were fond of building enormous stone towers, or ziggurats. Ziggurat is a fun word to say, so I will salt it in here and there to combat boredom. Pyramids were the means through which the mummified remains of dead people could be transported to the after-life. The Babylonians figured there was a significant downside to that system, namely you had to die. So they set out to build a really tall ziggurat they called the Tower Unto the Heavens so people could go up to visit the gods without the uncomfortable dying and mummification steps.

According to a number of ancient texts and some paintings by artists from the Middle Ages—who weren't there and were only making things up as they went, sort of like I do—the Babylonians were making substantial progress on the tower when someone from marketing pointed out that every-

one who was anyone was making a big fuss over the Egyptian pyramids, but none of the stone tablet makers so much as chiseled a few picture-words about the Tower Unto the Heavens.

So the promotions people went to work and before you could say Nebuchadnezzar (Nebuchadnezzar was actually the King of Babylon about a thousand years after the tower was supposed to have been built, but his name is even more fun to say than ziggurat, so I had to use it), everyone in the ancient world knew how proud the Babylonians were about their tower. Everyone, that is, including Yahweh, who became so angry at the prideful Babylonians that he issued the mother of all stop work orders.

Now, if you are like me, you learned that the tower's construction was halted by the Confusion of Tongues—that God created and assigned one of the world's languages to each of the construction workers, which made it impossible for them to cooperate. They woke up one day and, instead of speaking Babylonian, they were speaking Aramaic, Greek, German, Chinese, Urdu, Finnish, Esperanto, some Pig-Latin, and the list goes on. My children's picture Bible had an image of a partially finished ziggurat surrounded by some menacing clouds and lots of people in period clothes scowling and shrugging like I do when our IT staff asks what I did to make smoke come out of my computer. Apparently the first thing they said in those languages was, let's leave Babylon and form one of the world's nations where other people who talk like us can live. Followed by, I got dibs on Brunei.

There is another theory that the world's languages were really created by a dragon and a yeti after a night of Jagerbombs and Thai food. Irrespective of that, many scholars interpret the confusion of tongues differently. Without arguing about God's involvement, they contend that it does not take the wholesale creation of new languages to bring a project to a grinding halt. It only takes people who don't understand each other or choose not to, because they believe their approach to tower building, or anything else for that matter, is the only right way.

As proof of their theory, they point to Washington, D.C., and note that, despite nearly every one of them speaking passable English, it is still possible for 537 prideful people to do as much damage to what we think our shared goals are as the Babylonians did to their tower. It will be nice someday, when they begin to listen more closely to each other and make an effort to understand and work together again. And since I doubt they really want to end up like a bunch of confused Babylonians, eventually they will figure out how to do that, IMHO. ◻

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

[www.mncma.org](http://www.mncma.org)