

A Look Back...

Kris Busse, President

As 2008 winds down, it is a natural time to look back and take stock of the year's accomplishments, a performance review if you will, for MCMA. The MCMA Board went through a strategic planning process in December of 2006 to focus on an overall vision for the organization. We developed goals and action plans to achieve those goals, and I am very pleased with the progress we have made since 2006. I want to recap the highlights of our activities. The Board identified three major areas of concern for our organization: Professional Development, Member Support, and Civic Engagement.

Under the professional development area, we have increased the number of credentialed managers from 22 in 2006 to 31 in 2008. (I hope to join the ranks of the credentialed managers soon). The board has also jump-started the internship program with a \$5,000 stipend offered on a competitive basis to one city or county for an internship beginning in May/June 2009. We are accepting proposals through January 16. The Next Generation Committee will also pursue private sector fundraising to continue and possibly increase the program.

Great strides have been made in the member support area as well. The member in transition program is totally re-energized, thanks to the efforts of Dan Donahue, MIT coordinator, and the MIT committee! We now have a monthly MIT report sent to the MCMA list serve, which encourages member support and facilitates utilizing those members in transition for special project assignments. Work has begun on updating the 1996 transition packet, which will be placed on the MCMA website. Dan is also creating better linkages between the League's Ambassador program, the ICMA's Range Rider program, the League's list of available professionals for temporary assignments, and the wealth of knowledge and insight from our retirees. Plans also include additions to the MCMA web site to include more information on MIT issues and materials.

Another new program initiated is a mentoring and coaching program. Thirty-one experienced MCMA members have volunteered to serve as mentors. We have added a "Coaches Corner" to the MCMA website, which provides information that will assist in establishing a successful coaching relationship and provides a list of available mentors. Several mentor relationships have already been established.

The third area of concentration for the Board included is civic engagement. The Educational Initiatives Committee has been hard at work and has placed a number of educational materials on the MCMA website. The offerings include lesson plans appropriate for elementary grades through high school. The lesson plans are interesting and provide students with valuable insight into the workings of local government. Last year's annual spring conference included a workshop on encouraging citizen engagement. The workshop provided information on overcoming barriers to getting citizens involved, creating a citizen academy, and the benefits of having engaged citizens. Future plans include preparing a PowerPoint presentation on local government that can be used for classroom presentations.

Through the hard work of the Board and committee members we have made significant strides in the three areas of concentration identified as Professional Development, Member Support, and Civic Engagement. At our meeting in December your board reviewed and began updating the strategic plan; we'll continue the work at our February meeting. We need to keep the strategic vision sharp and attainable. Although we have accomplished a great deal, we still have much exciting work to do. Most importantly, we need your continued support and involvement to make that happen! Thank you for a great year and all of your hard work and support! ◻

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The World as Seen Through Other Eyes

I had the good fortune to relinquish my singleness on Sept. 27th, when I married my former college sweetheart after a nearly four year LDR (Long Distance Relationship). Sheila has lived in a Chicago suburb most of her life; the wedding in her hometown was therefore an “away game” for me.

Months ago, we planned an 18 day honeymoon in Italy, which would combine the passions of the both of us--travel for her, and bicycle touring for me. We started with a week-long bike trip along the coast of the Adriatic Sea, in the “bootheel” part of that country, called Puglia. We chose this area because it was relatively uninfested by mountains. That produced less angst for Sheila, as she had not cycle-toured previously. We biked by ourselves over scenic routes, and stayed in pre-arranged places each night.

Traveling through the Puglia reminded me of bicycle touring through my home state of Iowa--small towns, friendly people and very agricultural. One difference was that we cycled through groves of olive trees and vineyards, rather than corn and soybeans. The other difference was that hardly anyone speaks English in Puglia. Sheila loved the experience, as did I!

One thing that Sheila noted about traveling with a city manager husband—we look at the world differently. In addition to doing the normal tourist things, I would inquire as to how Italians provide police services, how they do their tax collection, and compare traffic signage. I’d gleefully point out to her how most of the cities through which we traveled did not have storm sewer systems, but instead relied upon pervious surface cobblestone streets that were easily removed and replaced to facilitate utility construction.

She said that she learned things listening to my observations; maybe she enjoyed that, but I suspect that the overall concept will take some getting used to. I think that most city and county administrators with partners have had the same experience.

We were fortunate to share the subsequent non-cycling part of the Italian trip with MCMA-inspired Swedish friends. Stig Alund and his wife, Evy, hosted me when I was part of the 2002 Sweden exchange, and since then we have reunited four times. Stig refers to me as his “American brother.”

Stig and Evy met us in Rome. We spent several days together there, and later in the Amalfi coast region south of Rome. The latter is an area that includes Capri and historic Pompeii (with its exciting 2000 year old water distribution system—whoo-hoo!)

Sheila was quite taken with Stig and Evy. Getting to know people well from a different culture exposes you to many new experiences—both personal and global. Sheila said that she hadn’t expected to be drawn into conversations about the pros and cons of Poland entering the European Union on her honeymoon, but she said that she was glad for it. I think.

All in all, it was a great honeymoon with a great lady. And once again, I was reminded that my involvement with MCMA has paid dividends far beyond listservs and training opportunities. ☐

The Wisdom of Our Kids

Michael Guttman, City Administrator of West Chicago, Illinois, reports experiencing one those all-too-frequent problems of local government managers – running into elected officials at the store who want to stop and discuss city business. As the father of young children, Michael faces the added challenge of keeping his 3 or 7 year old “companion” happy and occupied during the sometimes prolonged conversation, especially after the snacks are gone.

But Michael recently learned how observant children can be! When he went to his daughter’s 2nd grade class he was asked what he does for fun on the weekends. His daughter Alyssa promptly rose to answer for him - “my dad has fun talking to his bosses and making them feel better..... because if he doesn’t, they will be crabby on Monday.” ☐

Reaching the MCMA Secretariat

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Mid-Winter Professional Development Seminar

**February 6&7 –
Arrowwood Conference Center, Alexandria**

Think ahead!! The economy is just getting worse and despite global warming, this winter promises to be d---- cold. To survive, you'll need to get re-energized around important professional development topics that look to the future, while basking in the warmth and support available only by networking with colleagues. Your Solution, of course – the MCMA 2009 Mid-Winter Professional Development Seminar. The location, Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, will be hard to beat as a venue for everyone – members, partners, and children! Yep, it's got a water park. And the seminar topics promise to be timely, engaging, energizing, and just plain fun for members and partners alike.

On Friday afternoon, we'll start with the timely and emerging topic of local governments and environmental sustainability. Sustainability – just what is it anyway??? Well, it can mean a lot of different things in different communities. MCMA 1st Vice President Heather Worthington will share her own experiences in Edina and then moderate a panel of experts and all of the seminar participants in a lively discussion. Panelists will include:

- Sean Gosiewski, Alliance for Sustainability
- Michael Fischer, AIA, Director of Community Design Studio at LHB Corp.
- Karen Lauer, EDP, EDA Director/Planner, City of Barnesville
- Brian Gramentz, City Manager, City of New Ulm
- A yet-to-be-named representative from the Minnesota Project

Then, after a great dinner, an evening of socializing, and a good night's rest, get ready for Saturday's "Survivor Wobegon" ...extreme skill, extreme ethics...extreme cold!!!" with ICMA Sr. Advisor and former Minnetonka City Manager Dave Childs. Dave promises an engaging approach to ethics that will keep members and partners on the edge of their seats!

For registration and housing information, check the MCMA website at www.mncma.org. ☐

Board Meetings Recap

The MCMA Board of Directors met at Delano City Hall on October 24 and at League of Minnesota Cities offices on December 5.

Highlights of the meetings were:

- Reviewed and approved plans presented by Dan Donahue for re-energizing the Member in Transition program. Appointed Dan as the MIT Coordinator
- Approved an amendment to the MIT policy to go from one year of dues and conference fee waiver to three years upon annual recertification of status.
- Approved expenditure of up to \$7,500 from the current MCMA budget to provide a match for an internship in a Minnesota local government
- Endorsed the proposal of MSU-Mankato Professor Tony Filipovitch to write a high school level local government civic textbook, and to pursue whether ICMA Press would be interested in partnering on this project.
- Worked on an updated strategic plan to guide the work of MCMA.

Continuing high priorities are:

- ICMA Credentialing
- Ethics
- K – 12 civics promotion
- Members in Transition
- Mentoring
- Citizen Engagement

New priorities are:

- More support for regional members groups around the state
- Updating the website as a form of information and interaction for members
- Promoting more ethnic diversity within the profession

The Board will continue developing work tactics during the spring and will present the new strategic plan at the annual conference in May. Watch for ways you, as a member, can get engaged. ☐

Bonjour Montreal!

Heather Worthington, MCMA 1st Vice President

Planning is underway for the 2009 ICMA Conference in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Your input was very helpful in beginning our planning of the educational sessions for the conference, which will be held September 13-16, 2009.

With the flagging economy, many people have asked why they should attend an "international conference" in 2009. Of course, this is a major training expense for many of us, so we brainstormed some talking points for you and your elected officials.

First, you attend these conferences for the educational opportunities they offer—and Montreal will be a great educational conference. We're working on programs that address your concerns about the profession in these tough economic times—sessions about revenue generation, doing more with less money, and reaching citizens in new and innovative ways. We'll also be discussing perennial favorites like retirement and post-retirement planning, working with your assistants in an effective way, and building strong council-manager relationships. Finally, the conference will really focus on "sustainability", and what this means to local governments (you can also get a taste of this issue at the MCMA Mid-Winter Conference in Alexandria, February 6-7, 2009!).

Second, the Montreal Conference will be a good value. The Canadian Dollar (the Loonie) is lower valued than the American Dollar right now (about C\$.75 to US\$1.00). Your money goes further in Canada! Hotel rates will be very comparable to Richmond—but in Canadian Dollars. Transportation options abound as well. Flights directly into

Montreal may be expensive; however, you can fly into Burlington, VT, and drive about 1.5 hours to Montreal, so consider that option. (You will still need a passport to cross the border).

Third, and most importantly, in these tough times, you need all the support and ideas you can find, and there is no better source than ICMA and the assistance you can get at the Annual Conference.

Montreal is a beautiful city, full of history and unique sights. Quebec City, a walled city dating to the late 1600's, is only two hours away. So, it's also a great place to visit with your family. The City is connected by a system of underground tunnels (think the Minneapolis skyway underground), as well as a subway system that runs on rubber tires. Restaurants offer a nice mix of cuisine. And, you don't have to know how to speak French—Quebec is the "bi-lingual" province of Canada, and so everyone speaks both English and French.

Get your passport now—it's required to enter and leave Canada. There aren't long delays in obtaining passports now, but as the deadline nears for the requirement (June 1, 2009), it may be challenging to get them in a timely fashion.

I hope you'll consider attending the 2009 ICMA Annual Conference in Montreal. It will be a great opportunity to grow as a manager, and learn how to better serve your community.

Look for more information on the Annual Conference on MCMA's website. I'll be posting updates and relevant information about hotels, transportation, and other important details throughout the year. ◻

Members In Transition Policy

Dan Donahue

The MCMA membership by now has received several monthly e-mails via the MCMA Listserv entitled "MIT Report." My hope is that this report serves the purpose of keeping the MIT names, policy, and issues in front of the membership. The Report seems to have been well received from the many emails I have received. In this newsletter, I thought I would expound a little further on the MIT Policy on support and on our MIT Guidebook. Regarding the MIT Policy, there are two classes of support: direct and ancillary.

Direct support provides that all members shall be entitled to:

1. Waiver of three years MCMA dues payments.
2. Waiver of registration fees for up to three years at the Annual Spring Conference and Winter Seminar. The manager in transition shall pay for the lodging and meals at both events. (The Board of Directors can determine if additional annual dues and conference fees shall be waived after first three years).

Ancillary support encourages and asks membership to assist the MIT's

1. Member employment of MIT's for special projects.
2. Member hosting MIT for the purpose of providing an office facility through a bartered exchange or similar arrangements.
3. Board of Director's employment of MIT for special projects that would benefit the membership.
4. Networking with public, non-profit and higher education institutions, and private sector consulting firms to identify temporary assignments for MIT.
5. MCMA member personal outreach to MIT.
6. Allowing the use of resources at the Secretariat Office, similar to those contracted by the MCMA.

As you can see, the existing policy does expect much more of the membership than making an occasional phone call to the MIT. Clearly, the policy of the organization asks that the members make the effort to engage those in transition into meaningful activities. Compensation would be nice but not always necessary. I personally think just asking the MIT's to volunteer, help out on special details, or making them part of a real project is a boost. Staying "engaged" in the profession as an MIT is tough as many of you know. So do what you can to reach out in these meaningful ways.

Some thoughts on the MIT Guidebook. This was last visited in 1996 by the Membership Committee and the Board. It is in need of a serious update. My goal as the MIT Coordinator is to engage the MIT Committee and have an updated draft ready for the spring conference. I will get on this (gainfully employed or not) after the holidays. I will be updating the membership as I undertake this in the monthly MIT Report. A related goal adopted by the MCMA Board is to get our web site updated so we can provide the MIT information and other timely info for the membership. Look for future MIT Reports, and, take to heart the MIT Policy. Suggestions for the MIT Committee and Report are always welcome. Thanks for your support. ☺

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Appointments and other professional news

- **Steve Stahmer**, City Administrator, Long Lake, has been appointed City Administrator, Rogers
- **Noah Simon**, Assistant City Administrator, Arden Hills, has been appointed Community Development Director in Forney, Texas
- **Sack Thongavnh**, City Administrator, Sherburn, has been appointed City Administrator, Eagle Lake
- **Matt Podhradsky**, Assistant City Administrator, Chaska, has been appointed City Administrator there
- **Scott Sommers**, Assistant City Administrator, Savage, has been appointed City Manager, Reedsport, OR
- **Michael Brethorst**, City Administrator, Barnesville, is leaving to work in administration at the Veteran's Administration hospital in Fargo
- **Susan Hoyt**, City Administrator, Lake Elmo, has been appointed to the Community Development Staff of the Metropolitan Council
- **Craig Dawson**, former City Administrator, Shorewood, has been appointed Interim City Administrator, Lake Elmo
- **Craig Clark** has been appointed City Administrator, Worthington
- **Sarah Friesen**, City Administrator, Spring Lake Park, is in transition

Memorandum from the edge

Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

It was about this time of year, thirty-five years ago, when our English teacher, Mrs. Gjerde, was trying to get us to decipher and appreciate Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Eddie Swenson didn't care much for modern English and he was enjoying Middle English even less, so he said, "I already know I'm going to be a farmer. Why do I need to know anything about Goffry Chesher?"

Those of us who had done the homework were interested in having Mrs. Gjerde explain the Wife of Bath's Tale and wanted him to pipe down. That tale is so lusty and graphic that many scholars believe it was actually written by Chaucer's teenage son, Skip. Mrs. Gjerde's response to Eddie combined her commitment to educational excellence and her insights into adolescent motivation and was punctuated by a promise that some of the material would be on the next test. Good teacher. Good answer.

But why do you need to learn anything more than the basics you will need to do what others you know have always done? What's wrong with a good vocational education and some hands on learning?

I mean farmers grow food and people will always need to eat, won't they? And since we planted windbreaks after the thirties and started balancing uneven commodity demand with price supports, the farm economy has done pretty well. Besides, if worse comes to worst, you can buy more land. Real estate always appreciates. And even if you get behind on payments a little, your farm is too big to fail. The bank will never foreclose on you. As long as that doesn't change, you'll never have to compete for a town job. That's what we grew up calling what most of us do now. Town jobs.

But there's a strange thing about the world we live in. About the time you convince yourself something's impossible, it happens. If all of that can't fail talk sounds familiar, it should. After people said it about farming before the farm crisis, they said it about savings and loans before the S&L crisis and about dotcoms before the dotcom crisis and about housing before the housing crisis and about the credit market before the credit crisis. So impossible or not, we've heard it a lot lately.

In Thomas Friedman's latest book, *Hot, Flat and Crowded*, he says that for the last thirty years, the people of the United States and our leaders have been satisfied being "as dumb as we want to be," happy to ask why we need to know anything about Goffry Cheshire? Or a lot of other things for that matter.

Aside from being able to earn a living in a number of ways, in case your economic reality changes around you, why do you study morality plays from the middle ages? Why do you study the heroes and anti-heroes of ancient mythology? Who needs to understand compound interest? Or economic theory? Or the history of nations? Or the migrations of cultures? Or the philosophical bases of political systems? Or the causes of wars? Or the consequences of treaties?

Well one good reason is because you get to vote and voting is like having kids. Although each has significant consequences, we understand both to be rights, with few if any prerequisites for participation. So whether you know anything about any of that stuff or not, your vote counts the same as the next person's, so it's better for all of us if everyone knows the basics.

It was about this time of year, thirty years ago, when our American Elections professor, Gary Orren, was trying to get us to accept and appreciate the fact that party affiliation and candidate name recognition had as much, if not more, to do with voters' choices and election outcomes as candidate qualifications or actual policy positions. For young idealists, this was harder to understand than Middle English.

These were study findings and he was not saying that party affiliation and name recognition shouldn't be factors a person considers in the voting booth. Nor, as an ICMA member, am I recommending one party or person over another. Before the next election comes around, though, it's good to remember that it's where you go from party and name that defines whether you will make sound, informed decisions. Simply put, since values and economics and history and philosophy and culture and the rest of those things help define where we are going as a country and a society, it's better if everybody knows something about Goffry Chesher. ◻

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

www.mncma.org