MCMA
Minnesota City/County Management Association
A State Affiliate of ICMA

MCMA Newsletter

FALL 2008

President's corner

Kris Busse, President

Cities are faced with skyrocketing costs, dwindling resources, and an ever increasing demand for services. Most people would agree that it is not a great time to be a city or county manager. Not me. I think it is a great time to be a manager. However, to get through these challenges and others that will surely follow, we need to focus on Civic Engagement. This will be my emphasis this year. We need our citizens to be informed, to help us set priorities, and look for alternatives. When the public is truly part of the process, they can support and advocate for the city.

In my own city, we are partnering with the Chamber and have formed a budget efficiency task force. The goal of the task force will be to review city processes for improvements and efficiencies. Recommendations will be provided to me, the department heads, and then to the City Council for their consideration. We will review three departments this first year: Finance/Administration, Parks and Recreation, and Police. The remaining departments will be reviewed the following year.

We plan to examine in depth the various processes used to deliver city services. Process maps will be utilized to document all the activities that make up a process. Mapping processes contributes directly to performance benchmarking, performance improvement, and service redesign. It encourages managers to ask why. Why do we do this? Why do we do it this way? Why do we do it in this order? Why do we not do it differently?

Since this is the first year of the task force we have had to spend much time defining the scope, formulating the assessment process, identifying roles and responsibilities, and recruiting committee members. The task force and I are working hard to avoid negative perception by participants and have clearly communicated that the purpose of the review is to improve operations rather than to find something wrong.

Once we have completed our review, we will have mapped important city processes, identified ways to improve and streamline them, redesigned existing processes to take advantage of technology changes, identified needs of service users, and increased the committee's knowledge of city operational issues and challenges. All important and necessary tasks but even more importantly, we will have established a framework that the city can continue to use to insure efficient and effective services.

The Board and committees will be completing our work plan for the three primary objectives identified in the strategic plan of Professional Development, Member Support, and Civic Engagement. I want to thank all of our committee members who have devoted their time and effort to achieving many of the objectives identified in the plan. As a result, I am also preparing to revisit our strategic plan with the Board members to update and revise the plan as necessary. Our organization is blessed to have such a hard-working and professional board. I am honored to be your President and would urge anyone to contact me with any concerns or questions about the Minnesota City County Managers Association.

The Professional Association of Appointed Administrators Serving Local Governments in Minnesota

2009 Annual Conference

Just a reminder that the 2009 MCMA Annual Conference will be held at Grandview Lodge in Nisswa, May 6 – 8. The Annual Conference planning committee will begin meeting soon to develop the conference program.

Your Range Rider is here to help:

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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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New Board Member Tim Houle

Tim Houle is currently the Crow Wing County Administrator, where he just began employment on July 14. Prior to that time, Tim served as the Morrison County Administrator for 14 years. Tim's experience also extends to the private sector, having worked for the Star Tribune in Minneapolis for 8 years as a Regional Manager in the Circulation Division. Tim has a Bachelor's Degree, a Master's Degree, and is currently working on his doctorate, all from Hamline University in St. Paul.

Tim has been actively involved in the Minnesota Association of County Administrators serving as the President in 2000 and currently serves on the Executive Board. Tim has also been actively involved in MCMA as well having served as a member of the Annual Conference Planning Committee from 2006-2008, co-chairing the group in 2007. Tim is passionate about the profession and the continuing professionalization of public administration throughout the state at both the city and county level.

Tim has two teenage children and a black lab, any one of which, by Tim's own admission, have more energy than he can muster on his best day! While trying to keep up with them, Tim currently resides in Little Falls. His hobbies include boating, reading, gardening, walking, and the occasional trip to see a play or listen to some orchestral music.

Tim feels honored and privileged to serve the profession on the MCMA Board and will do his best to help advance the profession through solid networking and professional development opportunities.

Board Meetings Recap

The MCMA Board of Directors met at Grandview Lodge on May 7 and at the Owatonna Arts Center on August 1st. Highlights of the meetings were:

- Adopted a '09 operating budget of $84,575, which includes costs of the annual and mid-winter conferences. The budget is up substantially from the prior year due to the cost of speakers at the annual conference, which should return to more historic levels for the 2009 conference.
- Approved a five-year renewal contract with the League of MN Cities for secretariat services.
- Received a report on the 2008 annual conference, which had one of the highest attendance level of 185, once of the largest in years. Overall the conference was highly rated by those attending, although there were a few minor glitches with the first year at Grandview Lodge.
- Decided to hold a strategic plan review session in December, 2008, including financial implications
- Endorsed the proposal of the Next Generation Committee for an MCMA co-sponsored internship in a Minnesota city or county; encouraged the Committee to pursue opportunities for private sector funding
- Approved plans for an MCMA hosted dinner at the September, 2008 ICMA annual conference in Richmond, Virginia
- Reviewed a request from ICMA for pledge to the Fund for the Profession; reiterated plans to contribute another $5,000 in the current fiscal year and to review additional contributions as part of future years budgeting
- Received a report on the ICMA Strategic Planning Process, which is beginning to coalesce around the concept of environmental, financial, organizational, and personal sustainability.

2009 Mid-Winter Seminar and Social

The 2009 Mid-Winter Seminar and Social is set for Friday and Saturday, February 6 and 7 at Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center in Alexandria. While program details are still under construction, the two topics will ethics and environmental sustainability.

The seminar will run from 1:00 p.m. Friday through noon on Saturday. Mark your calendar now for this MCMA Mid-winter get together, watch for further information and registration materials in the late fall.

Reaching the MCMA Secretariat

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Appointments and other professional news

- **Ron Morris,** formerly City Administrator, Orono, has been appointed City Administrator, Arden Hills
- **John Remkus,** formerly Director of Finance, West St. Paul, has been appointed City Manager there
- **Brian Hecht,** City Administrator, Lauderdale, has been appointed City Administrator, Shorewood
- **Al Roder,** City Administrator, Northfield, has been appointed City Administrator, Norfolk, Nebraska
- **Tim Houle,** County Administrator, Morrison County, has been appointed County Administrator, Crow Wing County
- **Jerry Bohnsack,** City Administrator, New Prague, has retired
- **Mike Johnson,** former City Administrator, Marshall, has been appointed City Administrator, New Prague
- **Mike DeRosia,** City Administrator, Pierz, has been appointed Assistant City Administrator, Minnestrista
- **Dennis Coryell,** City Administrator, Baxter, has retired
- **Dwight Johnson,** former City Administrator of Plymouth and Shoreview, has been appointed City Administrator, Rosemount
- **David Pokorney,** City Administrator, Chaska, has resigned to start a consulting practice in developing community assets
- **Christopher Heineman,** Executive Director, Lake City Economic Development Authority, has been appointed City Administrator, Kenyon
- **Joel Peck,** MCMA Intern, has been appointed City Administrator, Crosby

Memorandum from the edge

Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

The value of an organization is found in its members and leaders, but the wealth of an organization is the combination of historic fact and fiction that is handed down from generation to generation until the lines between the two are blurred, fudged and, eventually, erased. I grew up with the notion that mythology was a naïve, fantastic description of things that the science of a time could not explain. But college, which has a mythology all its own, taught me that myth is not defined by factual reality, but by the meaning it illuminates for those who share its context and interpret its symbols (Humanities 9B – Spring 1977). It is truth in colorful clothes. It has more depth than the literal and more honesty than the most profound oath. It is the place where meaning lives – truer than true and more real than reality itself. Actual history is only part of a myth.

So when it comes to the Horns of Dilemma that we know today, I could tell you that they are a second-hand hunting trophy that we use as an oversized symbol of the preparation the Minnesota City/County Management Association's 1st Vice Presidents are to do in the year leading up to their terms as President. They need to decide whether they are ready to assume the responsibility of that position and what they will do when they have it.

I could tell you that the oldest of our current members claim to remember an earlier set of horns that disappeared along the way through disintegration, neglect or purposeful disposal. And that Dan Donahue bought the horns we now shuttle from Vice President to Vice President when a New Hope hunter liquidated his collection of mounted mementos. I could tell you that some members of the organization suggested discontinuing the tradition a while back, but relented under threat of violence by Jim Antonen, a former President and mythological creature in his own right. I could tell you all of those things, but they are only part of this myth.

To understand the meaning of the Horns of Dilemma, you have to go back to 1951, when Earl Wagner of Wayzata was the first President of the Minnesota City Managers Association. One day, Earl was collecting slip fees at the municipal marina, when the owner of a boat named The Lady of the Lake offered him a sword as collateral against a late payment. Earl held it up to get a better look, to see whether it was a real sword or some cheap knock off from one of the carnie stands at the Excelsior Amusement Park. It felt real enough – heavy and well balanced – so he took a swing at a dock piling, which splintered with a satisfying crack.

After that, two things happened. Slip fee collections got a whole lot easier and, for reasons that are about to be explained, his legend in Minnesota's fledgling government management community grew.

Three young men on the beach were moved by what they saw that day. Two of the boys, Bob Schaefer and Bill Bassett, recognizing the Anglo-Saxon symbolism in what had just happened, set out to learn more about the man on the dock. The third, Irwin Jacobs, set out to build a boat works. History would determine which quest was the richer. But, unless history is really dumb, it would realize that owning a boat works on the most popular recreation lake west of Minneapolis is a license to steal. That's pretty obvious, whether you're talking mythology or simple math.

Meanwhile Bob and Bill followed the man back to Wayzata City Hall and, summoning all of their courage, they knocked on the door. The door opened wide and they found themselves in the presence of Earl Wagner.

"We saw what happened at the lake," they said, "and we have to know, what must we do to follow your example and become like you?"

Earl smiled. He asked whether their thoughts were pure and their hearts were true. They insisted that they were. He asked whether they would follow a quest tirelessly and vigorously, for no other reward than that of pursuing the quest itself. They insisted that they would. He asked whether they were interested in an unpaid summer internship. Overcome with the generosity of his offer, they accepted on the spot.

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Be sure to check out MCMA's web site:

www.mncma.org

Memorandum from the edge,

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They asked what they needed to do to carry out this internship. Earl's mood turned serious. He told them they would need to rid the City of a great and awful beast. A moose had taken up residence in the woods nearby and it spent most of its time wading along the shore fouling the beach and capsizing boats. Earl explained that the creature was a threat to the natural serenity of the community and, worse, it was bad for business. People coming to the lake to boat and swim were beginning to bypass Wayzata in favor of Shorewood, Tonka Bay and Orono. The moose had to go.

"But how?" the young men asked.

"Here," Earl said holding out the sword, "use this. And bring back some proof that it's gone."

Haltingly, Bob reached forward. Later, in his professional career, he would become accomplished at swordplay, but until that moment, he had never actually held much more than a steak knife. He froze in his tracks. Bill stepped forward and took the sword instead.

"Let me have that thing before you hurt yourself," he said to Bob. "Handling swords is one of the first things the Jesuits teach you."

Earl cleared his throat to get their attention and motioned toward the door. Having an acute understanding of rudimentary hand signals, they gathered that it was time to head to the lake. It didn't take long to find the moose. It was in the process of chasing picnickers up and down the beach when Bill and Bob confronted it, brandishing their sword. The moose stopped what it was doing and stared at the two. Unsure of what to do next, they stared back. The moose raised its eyebrows, they raised their eyebrows. The moose tilted its head, they tilted their heads. The moose spoke, Bob fainted.

"What's this all about?" the moose asked.

After all that had happened that day, Bill considered the fact that the moose could talk to be a small thing. He looked down at Bob and realized that if the situation deteriorated, the moose would likely go after the easier target first. Emboldened by the fact that he could outrun an unconscious person, Bill responded.

- We're here to stop you from harassing the tourists!" he shouted as he waved the sword back and forth.
- Harassing the tourists?!" the moose answered. "I'm lost! All I've been trying to do is get directions back to Brainerd, but before today, no one has let me get close enough to ask."
- Directions to Brainerd?" Bill said. "Well, that's easy enough. You just go straight north from here until you get to Mille Lacs and turn left."
- Thanks," the moose said as he turned and headed up the beach, "I appreciate the help."
- There is just one more thing," Bill said. "We need to be able to convince someone that you're gone. So I'm afraid that I have to kill you and take back one of your body parts as proof."
- Well, before you do something that would force me to trample you to a pulp," the moose asked, "what would you say if I told you that moose shed their antlers each year and that I happen to have a spare set of them in the woods over there?"
- I'd say, how much do want for them?"
  Bill responded, displaying the early evidence of the negotiating skills that would be his legend someday.

"Not a thing," the moose said. "We'll call it even."

The moose led Bill to the spare horns, thanked him again and set off. Bill watched for a moment as it disappeared into the brush, then picked up his trophy and went back to the beach. He found Bob where he had left him and, holding the antlers in front of his face, stuck a toe into his ribs. The boy's eyes blinked open as he came to.

"Mother of God!" Bob howled, thinking he was about to be gored. Then, as things came into focus, he yelled, "Bassett, what in the world is wrong with you?!"

"We did it," Bill answered. "The moose is gone and here's the proof. Let's go back to City Hall. We'll be heroes!"

"We'll be heroes?" Bob was confused, "But how? I don't remember a thing."

"We'll be heroes," Bill said again. "We did it together."

They hurried back to City Hall and, in no time at all, the excited pair stood in front of the City Manager with their trophy.

"Yeah, that's good." Earl told them. "Now I've got some filing for you to do."

"Filing!" Bob and Bill were dumbfounded. "We followed the quest, we defeated the beast, we brought back the trophy, we saved the City and now we're supposed to do filing?!"

"The first lesson you learn in this business, boys," Earl said, "is you don't get into it to get thanked. You do a good job doing good things. You take satisfaction in that and you move on. In fact, I plan to give the Mayor and Council credit for getting rid of the moose at the next Council meeting. That's just the way it goes."

"So what should we do with these?" they asked, holding up the antlers.

"I think that I'll give them to old C.R. Johnson, up in Anoka," Earl answered. "He's the MCMA Vice President and he's not sure that he wants to be in charge of the group next year. He's kind of on the horns of a dilemma and trying to figure out what to do with these things should take his mind off of all of that for a while." And, believe it or not, that is how the tradition was born.

Many years and many quests and adventures later, MCMA became the Minnesota City/County Management Association. Knighthood expanded by gender, race and job title, but the wisdom, honor and spirit of Earl Wagner live on in every one of the Association's members. Oh, and the dues went up, too. ❑