

President's corner

Kris Busse, President

A look back ...

As I look back over my year as President, I am amazed how quickly the time has passed. I think it has something to do with the falling stock market, a huge state deficit, and LGA reductions. Like many of you, I have been busy instituting various budget reduction strategies such as hiring freezes, wage freezes, and reducing non-core services.

The MCMA board is keenly aware of the economic challenges facing managers. With this in mind, the board has just completed the new three year strategic plan. Our overall goals remain the same: Professional Development, Member Support, and Civic Engagement. I want to highlight those priorities that best address the economic challenges faced by local governments.

One of our top priorities includes enhancing MCMA use of technology. We want to upgrade the web site to be more interactive and include new features such as wiki, forums, etc. We know in these tough financial times it is not always possible to attend necessary training opportunities. Video and online learning may be a great option for our members. To lead this effort, the Board will be appointing a Technology Task Force. They will solicit input from our members and provide a recommendation to the Board on how to best implement the needed technology.

Another top priority in our strategic plan includes increased support for regional groups of members. Regional meetings provide necessary and cost-effective support and networking opportunities for our members.

We want to identify technology tools for sharing information and connecting these regional groups to MCMA. Board members will be available to attend regional meetings. We will also hold Board meetings at different locations around the state and invite members in the region to attend. In addition, meeting dates will be added to the MCMA calendar.

We will also continue our work on fostering civic engagement. Involving your citizens as you consider the best way to deal with new budget realities is a must. We will develop more web resources for our members and form partnerships with other groups to increase citizen engagement efforts. The Civic Engagement committee will continue to seek input from members on what other resources are needed.

Another key priority is the member in transition program. This program has been revitalized by Dan Donahue, MIT Coordinator and the committee. They have been doing great work in ensuring that our members receive the help and support they need during this critical time.

I want to thank the members for the opportunity to serve as you President. I have truly enjoyed it and learned much from this experience. Our organization has made substantial progress in a number of strategic initiatives. I attribute our success to the tireless efforts of Kevin Frazell, MCMA staff, the exceptional work of the Board members and committee members. Thank you all for an exciting and productive year. ◻

**Your
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is here
to help:**

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Mid-Winter Seminar and Social

Kevin Frazell

22 members and 14 spouses (plus a few other family members) huddled up at Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center February 6 and 7 for MCMA's annual mid-winter event. Yes, it was cold outside, but the camaraderie and educational opportunities inside were warm!

The weekend was divided into two educational topics. Friday afternoon was devoted to the issue of the city role in environmental sustainability. MCMA 1st Vice President Heather Worthington led a delegation of great speakers, both city staff and environmental advocates, who covered specific things cities can and are doing to help meet the global environmental challenge. Perhaps one of the most practical pieces of advice came from environmental architect Michael Fischer, who said his best advice for energy savings in buildings is to avoid constructing them in the first place!

On Saturday morning attendees turned their attention to the ever fun and challenging topic of ethics in local government management. David Childs, former Minnetonka City Manager and now Assistant County Manager, Washoe County, NV and ICMA Sr. Advisor, returned to the Gopher State to lead the workshop while reconnecting with old friends!

After several years in the current format, some questions were raised about the future of the mid-winter educational event and will be addressed by next year's Professional Development committee:

- How long and extensive in content should it be?
- What kinds of topics should be covered?
- How can partners continue to be meaningfully engaged?
- In what type of location should it be held?

If you have thoughts or opinions, please forward them to Kevin Frazell at kfrazell@lmc.org. ☐

And just who was that man?

Kevin Frazell

The winter edition of the MCMA newsletter included the very charming story of a man who had given up his "singleness" to finally reconnect with and marry a former college sweetheart. The honeymoon included a wonderful bicycle tour of Italy.

Just one problem with this story—we forgot to tell our readers the name of the author! Well those who know the folklore of MCMA would have been tipped off by the bicycle part. But for those who don't, the author and recently married member was none other than MCMA Board member and Shakopee City Administrator Mark McNeill.

A big MCMA congratulations to Mark and Sheila! ☐

Reaching the MCMA Secretariat

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Board adopts new Strategic Plan

Kevin Frazell

MCMA's current strategic plan was adopted by the Board of Directors in late 2006 and has guided the work of the association for the past 2½ years. With significant progress having been made on the priorities identified in that plan, this year's MCMA Board decided it was time for an update. After three meetings worth of effort, a new strategic plan was adopted in March. The new plan continues to emphasize the three themes of Professional Development, Member Support, and Civic Engagement.

The top three priorities in the new plan are:

- Increasing MCMA's support for the regional groups of members operating around the state
- Enhancing the association and members' use of technology
- Promoting increased diversity of all types in the profession

Continuing ongoing association priorities that will also receive attention include:

- Increasing member participation in the ICMA Credentialed Manager program
- Ethics
- Continued work on the K-12 curriculum and relations with social studies teachers
- Support for the re-energized Members in Transition program
- Mentoring
- Fostering citizen engagement
- Next Generation initiatives, including internships
- Expanding and revitalizing the Range Rider program
- Pursuing international opportunities as they arise

Most of the priorities have been assigned to a specific member committee for study and implementation. A new Technology Task Force is being formed. Members will have the opportunity to sign up for next year's committees at, and shortly following, the annual conference. ○

Board meeting recap

Kevin Frazell

The MCMA Board of Directors met on February 6th at Arrowwood Conference Center in connection with the mid-winter seminar. They also met at LMC offices on March 27. Highlights of the two Board meetings were:

- Awarded the first-ever MCMA local government internship to the City of Hugo in the amount of \$5,000. Hugo will match the MCMA dollars to employ an intern to work on economic development, parks and recreation, and other projects during the remainder of 2009. The MCMA internship is part of MCMA's Next Generation initiative.
- Worked extensively on development and adoption of a new strategic plan to guide the work of the association and its committees over the next few years (see separate article).
- Met with League of Minnesota Cities communications staff to discuss alternative approaches to development of a new upgraded MCMA web site and other technology enhancements.
- Discussed some of the strengths and challenges of the mid-winter seminar and social event.
- Approved an additional contribution to the ICMA Fund for the Profession in the amount of \$2,500 to support ICMA's planned public relations campaign to educate the public about professional local government management and attract more people into the profession.
- Approved a 2009-10 budget in the amount of \$88,400, which includes the cost of the annual conference and appropriates \$10,000 for development and implementation of a new web site. ○

ICMA Midwest Regional Summit

Kevin Frazell

President Kris Busse, 1st Vice President Heather Worthington, and Secretariat Officer Kevin Frazell joined colleagues from the other midwestern states for the ICMA Regional Summit in Oak Brook, Illinois, April 2 and 3. Coon Rapids City Manager Matt Fulton also attended in his role as incoming ICMA Midwest Vice President.

Highlights of the two days included:

- An overview of the Alliance for Innovation white paper on "Navigating the Fiscal Crisis; Tested Strategies for Local Leaders."
- An inspirational presentation by the management team of Montgomery, OH on how they have implemented the concepts of Daniel Pink's "A Whole New Mind" into their day-to-day city operations.
- An ICMA University workshop on the concepts of "A Whole New Mind – The Manager's role in Moving Our Organization from the Informational to the Conceptual."
- A discussion among the midwest state associations about programs, particularly those to support members in difficult economic times. Delegates from Michigan explained how their state has been in recession since 2002; so many of the painful adjustments being considered in other states have already been implemented in Michigan.

Kris Busse also participated with the other state presidents in interviewing candidates for this year's ICMA Midwest Vice President seat, which is designated for an assistant. Candidates Pam Antil, Assistant City Manager, Novi, MI and Michelle Crandell, Director of Administrative Services, Dublin, OH were both endorsed for consideration by the ICMA Nominating Committee. □

Appointments and other professional news

- **James Antonen**, former manager in Minnesota and California, has been appointed city manager, Maplewood.
- **Brian Beeman**, former city administrator, Melrose, is in transition.
- **Melinda Coleman**, Target Corporation, and former assistant city manager, Maplewood, has been appointed city administrator, North Oaks.
- **Bart Fischer**, assistant city administrator, Newport, has been appointed assistant city administrator, Chaska.
- **Sara Folsted**, city administrator, Clara City, has been appointed county administrator, Renville County.
- **Julie Kleinschmidt**, Finance Director, Ramsey County, has been appointed county manager there.
- **Lynn Lander**, city administrator, Hermantown, has been appointed city manager, Aberdeen, SD.
- **Sack Thongvanh**, city administrator, Sherburn, MN, has been appointed city administrator of Eagle Lake.
- **Dave Unmacht**, county administrator, Scott County, has been appointed sr. vice president for HR and organizational management, Springsted.
- **Mark Winson**, former CAO, Duluth, has been re-appointed to that position.

Memorandum from the edge

Jon Hohenstein, Community Development Director, Eagan

Information comes at us so fast today that I need to have a system for sorting and absorbing as much of it as I can, knowing full well that I am only skimming the surface. I have made peace with that, though, because I took a speed reading course in college in which we were taught how little a person actually needs to read to understand a substantial portion of the content of a story, an article, or a book.

To make the point, the instructor put up a title like *Bill's Spring Break in Southern Florida*. He then handed out a quiz on the supposed content of the story. True or false?—Bill went to Florida to visit historic sites. True or false?—Bill and his friends spent most days at the beach. True or false?—Bill drank too much at least once during the trip. It should be no surprise, with no more than the title, everyone in the room aced the quiz. He also taught us to read the first and last pages first, to go through chapter summaries before the chapters, to use titles and headings in the body of the document to determine what you may already know and what is worth reading more closely and useful things like that.

That is how I read the news. Headline first, then first paragraph and conclusion, followed by section headings and then, if there still seems to be any content missing, I'll read the rest of the article. More and more lately, I've found myself needing to read the rest of the article, because it seems that newspeople, or at least those writing headlines and subheads, can't bring themselves to be satisfied with a positive story these days.

It took us a long time to actually admit that we are in a recession and, now that we have, it seems almost more difficult to believe that there is any good news that doesn't have a "yeah, but" in it. A recent headline read, "February Home Starts Exceed Same Period in 2008." Yeah, but the sub-headline read, "Still at Historic Low." And around the same time, the story titled "Stocks Gain for

Fourth Straight Day" had the subhead, "Economists Predict Sell Off in Days Ahead."

I know it's hard not to be skeptical with all that's been going on lately. We're dealing with two wars, continued threats of terrorism, frozen credit, major industries gushing red ink, people saving when they're supposed to be spending and vice versa, recalled peanut butter, and the list goes on. So why in the world would anyone feel hopeful right now?

Well for starters, that's what we are made of. We can be hopeful because we have weathered worse, because adversity breeds invention, and because, despite all of the bad news, we are still standing. Whether you agree or disagree with most of what Bill Clinton says, he was absolutely right earlier this year when he said it's a mistake to bet against this country over the long run.

So how are we going to turn things around? A lot of people like to prescribe common sense. As long as it works, I'm all for it. If the tried and true methods work, great, but if they don't and you end up running through the maze to the same dead end, it's time for a different approach. Besides, in some cases, it was something that passed for common sense that created the problem in the first place.

When common sense fails, maybe we should try some uncommon sense. Give some of the best minds the problems and the parameters and see what they come up with. Expose the outcomes to critical analysis by others of the best minds. Put the marketplace of ideas to work solving the problems in the economic marketplace. It's dangerous stuff. It may require us to admit that people who hold different perspectives than ours can have good ideas. But, uncommon sense built railroads and interstate highways and rockets to the moon. It's time for some more of that, I think. And with any luck, if it works, the media will write an article about it that doesn't include a "yeah, but." ◻

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

www.mncma.org