

MLGMA

www.mlgma.org

MICHIGAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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The Manager

The official newsletter of the Michigan Local Government Management Association

Affiliated with the Michigan Municipal League

Spring 2011

Note from the President

Steve Brock, City Manager, Farmington Hills, MI

“Oh, the times they are a changing.” Just as our previous MLGMA president used to quote famous historical figures, so shall I but from Rock n’ Roll. This famous line is by Bob Dylan, who turns 70 this May. YIKES!

The last state election brought a change in leadership that offers an opportunity to do things differently. You may not like the force or feel of it, nonetheless, the opportunity is here.

The state has structural financial problems that the governor is trying to address in the mid to long term. School districts are part of this mess. Counties are struggling to make ends meet given the rise in need and the reduction in funding. And of course, we at the local level are arguably the worst off. So, what to do?

If you have a medical marijuana card, you can “sit around the house, get high watching tube,” as Steve Miller sings (who hails from Milwaukee, WI, home of this year’s ICMA Conference 9/18–9/21).

Or you can keep at the good work of making your organization fit the new normal.

By now you have probably seen the governor’s best practices guide. I like its style but hope there is still room for adjustment, particularly on the healthcare percentage component. I think we’ll be in pretty good shape on the other two legs of the stool. We’ll be working on this directly and through the Michigan Municipal League, and one of our own, Roger Fraser, CA of AA, is going to work for the State Treasurer. I believe Roger will provide insights that will aid in our common cause.

While we shouldn’t count on too much money coming from the state, I believe we can push them to remove barriers, impediments, and obstacles to achieving the kinds of reform the governor seeks. Please let your state representatives and senators know we can’t do much with one arm tied behind our back and they certainly shouldn’t heap any more on us without the money to pay for their big ideas.

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Next Gen helps new government professionals begin careers By Julius Suchy, City Manager, Vassar, MI

The Next Gen group looks forward to continue working with members of MLGMA to grow the profession.

What is Next Gen and who is it for? The group was formed for new local government professionals who are seeking professional development and opportunities to learn alongside other early career professionals. The group is for managers, assistant managers, students interested in the field, and anyone else who is beginning their career path in local government. Many new managers and employees will face the same issues that established managers do, but they don't yet possess the same level of problem solving experience as those who have already been seasoned in the profession. Next Gen's main focus is bridging this gap with networking, mentoring, and professional development.

Members face unique challenges. There are fewer opportunities for new people to join the profession. Once they are in, there are limited positions available for advancement. Tough economic times have led to the elimination of many assistant positions and other early career opportunities that were previously available.

Note from the President *continued from page 1*

Finally, in my humble opinion, we are at the bottom of this recession and coming out of it, albeit slowly. The glass is half full and it will fill more.

It's an exciting and meaningful time to be in our profession. We have a chance to really make a difference. Keep on educating and informing both your civic leaders and the populace about the revenue and expenditure aspects of your entity.

Keep up the great work out there, and "don't let the bastards grind you down," as U2 says (coming to East Lansing 6/26).

Thank you and God bless!

Steve Brock

President, MLGMA

City Manager, Farmington Hills

Before, it was not uncommon to be an assistant to the city manager and then move up to manager or another department head position. Now you have new faces jumping right into city or village manager positions with limited experience. Another challenge is limited training in college that directly relates to local government. Many public administration programs focus on non-profits or state and federal governments but pay less mind to local municipal governments. The curriculum is lacking focus on properly training the next generation of municipal employees.

The group's activities to date include networking opportunities at the Summer and Winter Conferences and multiple professional development workshops held in Lansing. These workshops have included presentations on the ICMA Emerging Leaders Development Program, ICMA Credentialing, personal thoughts from a manager on the experience of going through the search process, and a presentation by the Michigan Municipal League on what its search process is.

The Next Gen group aims to become a formalized group associated with MLGMA and to continue working on a statewide mentoring program in association with MLGMA's Professional Development Committee. By formalizing the group, its casual structure will move towards providing more real responsibilities and leadership to those who serve on the committee. Once a formal committee is in place, the Next Gen group will be able to continue working on their statewide mentoring program. This program will allow local government members to search a database and find willing mentors who are interested in sharing expertise with up-and-coming government professionals.

Julius Suchy has served as city manager of Vassar, MI since June 2009. Prior to Vassar, Julius worked as the zoning administrator for the City of Big Rapids MI, assistant to the city manager in Ferrysburg MI, intern for the Village of Spring Lake, MI and a graduate student for the Community Research Institute (CRI) at Grand Valley State University. Julius attended Grand Valley State University for both his undergraduate and master's degree in public administration. Email him at citymanager@cityofvassar.org

In Service to the Profession

By Darnell Earley, City Manager, Saginaw, MI

I am finishing what has perhaps been the pinnacle of my 30-plus year career of public administration here in Michigan. In 2008, I was elected president-elect of ICMA, the International City and County Management Association. I served as ICMA President from 2009–2010, and I am completing my term as past president. I will end my service on the ICMA Executive Board in September of this year. I must say that it was truly an honor to represent Saginaw and MLGMA as the president of our professional association and I thank the MLGMA membership for its support.

As the old Hank Snow country music tune from the sixties goes, “...I’ve been everywhere, man!”

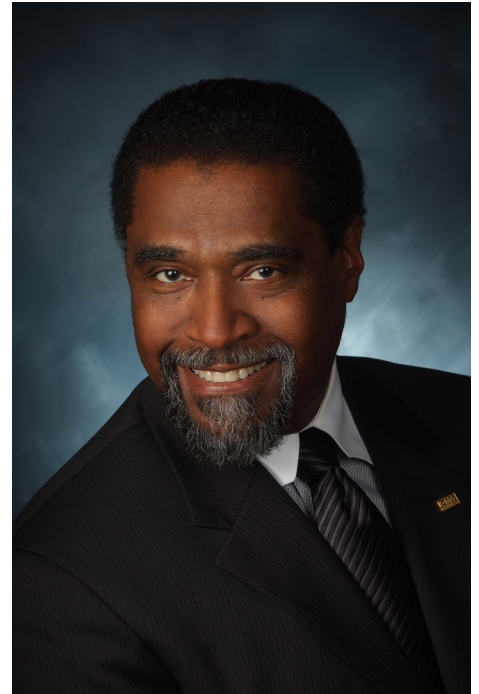
My ICMA presidency took me to 20 states and two foreign countries including England and Australia. One of the highlights of my tenure was attending the SOLACE Conference in Brighton, England where I recall standing on the beach looking out over the English Channel. It seemed surreal at first, but then it hit home that I had accomplished something far beyond my days growing up in 1960’s Muskegon Heights, Michigan.

I was representing not only my profession but America’s cities as well. Given the historic significance of this location, I was humbled by the receptiveness to professional management in the U.S. expressed by our counterparts in Great Britain. I still maintain contacts from that meeting, and we share updates at the ICMA Annual Conference. My foreign travel also took me to Adelaide, Australia where I was a speaker at the LGMA Annual Conference. I golfed with the mayor there and had a terrible time determining distances, but I did prevail, nonetheless!

The past year brought many challenges, but like any good manager, I approached them as opportunities. One such challenge was meeting in town hall settings in Detroit and Cleveland (two traditionally strong mayor cities) to discuss professional local government management. I used these opportunities to carry forth our message on the value of the profession as both communities are exploring alternatives to their present form of government. Needless to say, old ways die hard in many of our urban core cities. While not necessarily hostile towards the idea, I got the sense that it was going to be difficult to convince the politicians that failing municipalities need to try something different. However, at least two of the members of the Detroit City Charter Commission have moved forward with introducing some form of professional management as part of their charter revisions. Stay tuned for that one.

MLGMA members are effective messengers of the value of professional management

Without a doubt, MLGMA is one of the strongest state associations in the country. Our professionalism and commitment to that professionalism are second to none. Even though Texas and California are very large state associations, I enthusiastically touted the fact that MLGMA is very active and quite effective in its support of professional management, ICMA, and its own network of resources. MLGMA has been very good in that regard, and our collaborative work with the Michigan Municipal League results in well-organized and consolidated efforts to make cities work more effectively and efficiently in Michigan.



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In Service to the Profession

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These difficult times make it easy to appreciate the value of professional management. Having spoken with managers nationwide, a common theme that emerges is that now, more than ever, their management training and skills are put to the test. Conversely, cities that do not employ a professional manager are struggling with the politics of the economic downturn and escalating deficits. And this is due in part to a reluctance to make the difficult management-based decisions. While a community's financial health and well-being may not rest solely on its form of government, the presence of a professionally trained manager in the bureaucratic equation almost always insures more organizational stability and a greater likelihood that the municipality will emerge from its difficulties stronger and better prepared to meet its future challenges to long-term sustainability.

ICMA changing with the times

This is a time of change for ICMA. The ongoing implementation of the strategic plan calls for modifications in governance, as well as the way in which ICMA interacts with state associations and affiliates. The current president and incoming president will have to steer those changes and communicate the supporting rationale to members and affiliates. ICMA's efforts have been focused on inclusion, and some of the modifications such as the most recent constitutional changes will have to be monitored for effectiveness. Funding is always a challenge as ICMA keeps up with current initiatives being pursued both here and abroad. We are all very fortunate in that the capable leadership of executive director Bob O'Neill and his staff continues to produce adequate resources to keep ICMA on the cutting edge of local government matters around the world.

Passion for public service...

Perhaps the one lesson I will take from my *service* as ICMA president is just that! We are public servants first and foremost. Our purpose is best served when we do the things that will inure to the benefit of the communities we serve. No matter what the location, the management charge is the same. Ours is a noble profession built upon many years of solid, ethical, and effective leadership. Every manager should consider his or her role as a calling. The passion we share for the work that we do is evident in many ways. It helps us rise above the roily discords inherent in day-to-day management in order to make a difference in the quality of life in our communities and in our country. And while it was an honor and a privilege to serve as the President of ICMA, I also count it an honor and a privilege to serve in Saginaw and to commit my career and professional service to bettering the quality of life for our residents. That is a lesson we can all draw something from!

Darnell Earley

Past President, ICMA (2009-2010)

City Manager, Saginaw, MI

Any Suggestions?

Do you have an idea for an article you would like to see in The Manager newsletter?

Do you know of an upcoming event?

Would you like to comment on something you read?

Email ideas to MLGMA
President Steve Brock at
SBrock@fhgov.com

Calendar of Upcoming Events

ICMA Web Conferences

May 12 and May 19, 2011

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) will host numerous upcoming events across the U.S. There are also two opportunities to “attend” an ICMA conference from the comfort of your own armchair or desk. Visit <http://icma.org/en/icma/newsroom/events> for all events.

“Changing the Rules of Engagement to Build Trust and Improve Accountability in the Workplace” May 12, 1–2:30 p.m.

“Innovative Local Government Marketing Strategies that Build Community and Trust” May 19, 1–2:30 p.m.

Michigan Municipal League Regional Seminars

Spring 2011

Each spring, the League hosts seven educational seminars that are tailor-made for Michigan’s seven regions. Communities will present their bids for the “2011 Community Excellence Awards.” Find a seminar in Hamtramck, East Lansing, Ludington, Saginaw, Marine City, Kalkaska, or Houghton, MI. Find out more online; www.mml.org/events/regional

MLGMA

Summer Workshop 2011

St. Joseph, MI
July 26–29, 2011

The Summer Workshop is oriented to individual personal and professional development for local officials. What is fun about this conference; on top of informative sessions on important issues and topics, participants and their families are invited to join entertaining excursions. Its a great time to explore the sights and sounds of a Michigan community. We encourage family involvement in program sessions and workshop activities. Find out more online; www.mlgma.org/events

ICMA Annual Conference

Milwaukee, WI
September 18–21, 2011

ICMA’s 2011 Annual Conference will convene thousands of local government managers and their staffs from around the world. Over three days, members and guests will learn about key local government management issues and leading practices, exchange ideas, and network. Find out more online; <http://icma.org/conference2011>

Michigan Municipal League Annual Convention

Grand Rapids, MI
October 4–7, 2011

The Annual Convention is a premier opportunity to participate in vital discourse and network with government leaders from across Michigan. The nonpartisan organization is invested in discussions about policies and strategies that create a stronger sense of ‘place’ in Michigan communities—a theme that runs through much of what the League sets out to accomplish. Find out more online; www.mml.org/events/annual_convention

MLGMA

Winter Institute 2012

East Lansing, MI
January 31–February 3, 2012

Save the date for the next Winter Institute, MLGMA’s main training workshop. An emphasis on “nuts and bolts issues” is at the heart of the annual event. Join government leaders for networking and learning. Find out more online; www.mlgma.org/events

The Michigan Local Government Management Association is the professional association for local government managers from municipalities, counties, and townships throughout the state of Michigan. The non-profit organization is the Michigan section of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and members follow ICMA’s code of ethics. MLGMA is affiliated with the Michigan Municipal League. *The Manager* newsletter is edited for MLGMA by **Jennifer Eberbach**, a contract writer and journalist in Ann Arbor, MI.

Not yet a member? Take a gander at MLGMA’s membership registration form online at www.mlgma.org/pdf/2011-application-form.pdf or email membership@mlgma.org