

## President's column

By Brian Gramentz, MCMA President, City Manager, New Ulm

It is now September, and the question, "Where did the summer go?" crosses my mind. For most of us, we are in the middle of the 2017 budget process and may be a bit disappointed that the governor has decided not to call a special session.

Over the weekend, I came across a saying: "People never remember the million times you've helped them, only the time you didn't." It did remind me of something I heard a long time ago. I have used it numerous times to explain things that occur in life, and particularly at City Hall.

When we meet someone new, we each start our relationship with an empty jar. As time goes by, when we do a good thing, we receive a nickel in our jar from that person. We put a nickel in their jar when they do something we like. Our goal is to have a jar full of nickels. Sometimes we might do something the other person doesn't like, and in those cases, a dollar is removed from the jar. We always want to have enough nickels in the jar to deal with the possibility of having a dollar removed. When your jar has had all the nickels removed from it by three out of five city councilmembers, we typically find ourselves "in transition."

I am reminded of this every time a new city councilmember takes the oath of office. Over time, I may have received a bunch of nickels from the other city councilmembers, but the new city councilmember and I have no history. They have not put any nickels in my jar ... yet. It could even be worse—they have heard negative stories, and my jar already has a negative balance with them. Heck, I might be the reason this person ran for office. Like that would ever happen.

I guess what I am really talking about is trust. People need time to build up trust in our decision-making abilities. This process takes time. At any point in time, each of the city councilmembers/county board members may have varying amounts of trust in us. Sometimes we don't have a clue as to how many nickels are in our jar. We have all heard about the city/county manager that just had a good performance review and is terminated three months later.

Could we have seen it coming? Maybe. But it is a virtual jar with virtual nickels. Sometimes it is a guessing game as to where we really sit.

As for me, I hope that I can keep earning enough trust from the City Council and citizens, so my jar of nickels can weather the storm when a dollar is removed ... because it has happened, and will happen again.

Next event is the ICMA Conference in Kansas City. I hope to see you there! ◻

**"I guess what I am really talking about is trust. People need time to build up trust in our decision-making abilities."**

## New board member profile: Tom Vellenga

Newly elected MCMA board member Tom Vellenga has been the assistant administrator at Carver County since early 2014. Earlier in his career, he spent several years in federal government positions.

In the Clinton administration, Tom was a senior policy advisor to White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta and to Energy Secretary Federico Peña. Earlier, at the Agency for International Development, he managed congressional relations for its programs in Europe and Eurasia just after the fall of the Soviet Union. Still earlier, just out of school, Tom served as a legislative assistant on the staff of Sen. Sarbanes and as legislative director to then-Congressman Panetta. Pressed by Kevin Frazell for "juicy details" on his D.C. days, Tom demurred, saying, "I'll put nothing in writing, but we don't create discoverable data at the MCMA conference, right?"

When their first son was born, Tom talked his wife into the notion that they should raise their kids with his family in Minnesota. After returning to the Twin Cities in 1998, he served as executive director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and managed several programs at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs before leaving to found Heartland Democracy.

Heartland Democracy's core program, Empowering U, is designed to give Somali-American and other disenfranchised Midwesterners the motivation and tools to become productive members of their communities. After declaring victory at Heartland Democracy, Tom settled upon county service as his next challenge. Steered by David Unmacht to David Hemze's staff, Tom wonders today why he didn't make that move a long time ago.

A product of St. Paul's public schools and Williams College, Tom holds a master's degree in international economics and international relations from The Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He is married to Administrative Law Judge Julie Schmid, who directs the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Minnesota and Dakota operations. Yes, he confirms that he lives in fear of her investigations, at the workplace and at home. They are attempting to raise a high school junior, advise a college student from afar, and safeguard an old American mutt who regularly escapes the yard. A past member and staffer of several boards, Tom looks forward to serving you, the members of the MCMA. ◻

## MCMA Newsletter

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Senior  
Advisors  
are here  
to help!**

# MCMA Women in the Profession update

*By GERALYN BARONE, MCMA Board Member, City Manager, Minnetonka*

MCMA's Women in the Profession Task Force has hosted a variety of activities over the past year, with more on the horizon. The focus to date has been on educating both professional and elected officials about the challenges faced by women administrators, and creating informal networking opportunities to foster a climate of professional support.

Using the "Millionaire" game show format, "Who Wants to be a City Manager?" was the basis for a luncheon at our mid-winter conference in St. Cloud and a well-attended session at this year's League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) annual conference in June.

Questions posed ranged from the percent of women in chief administrative officer positions (13 percent nationally and 26 percent in Minnesota), to identifying barriers that prevent women from moving into those positions (such as lack of role models and mentors, structural issues with recruitment processes, and self-confidence).

A panel at the LMC conference, moderated by Hamline Professor Craig Waldron, explored the impacts of a shrinking candidate pool and the need to consider qualified applicants whose hiring requirements may differ from those of past applicants.

Recruiter Sharon Klumpp of Springsted provided insight on how changes in the candidate pool have resulted in more dynamic recruitment processes. Willingness of a governing body to be open-minded on non-traditional candidates and contractual agreements can make a difference in finding a compatible hire. Experienced managers Charlene Stevens of Cottage Grove and GERALYN BARONE of Minnetonka shared their perspectives on the profession, and Ed Foley of Olathe, Kansas,

offered a young male professional perspective to round out the panel.

This spring, the task force launched a "Coffee and Careers" series held in the west metro in Minnetonka and the east metro in Woodbury. Hosted by veteran managers, the small-group sessions invited participants to share their stories on career paths and goals. The experienced administrators shared that twists and turns are a natural progression to a career path, with often unrecognized opportunities.

Sample future topics include recruitment processes, transitioning from peer to manager, and balancing a public face in private time. The next west metro Coffee and Careers session will be held on Sept. 20 at 9 a.m. at the Minnetonka Community Center. The next east metro session is set for Sept. 22 at 7:30 a.m. at the Shoreview Community Center. All, both women and men, are welcome. Bring along a colleague if you can.

For those traveling to the upcoming ICMA conference in Kansas City, consider attending the Women in Professional Local Government Management luncheon. Scheduled on Sunday, Sept. 25, the featured speaker is U.S. Treasurer Rosa (Rosie) Gumataotao Rios. In addition to her federal experience, Rios served in local government for the cities of Fremont, Oakland, and San Francisco, California. She serves as a strong role model for women leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions.

Whether you're early, mid, or late in your career, and regardless of gender, please consider joining the Women in the Profession's upcoming activities. The next task force meeting is set for Oct. 28 at 10:30 a.m. at the League of Minnesota Cities building in St. Paul. ◻

# Association of Public Management Professionals (APMP) Update

By Renee Eisenbeisz, APMP President,  
Assistant to the City Administrator, Newport

After taking a couple months off, APMP is getting ready for another great year. I am honored to be president of APMP this year and excited to work with the board to provide valuable learning opportunities and networking events throughout the year.

I would like to thank Rebecca Olson for serving as president last year; I have some big shoes to fill! I would like to welcome new board members Sarah Alig, Woodbury; Maria Carrillo Perez, Coon Rapids; Tim Sandvik, Falcon Heights; and Jared Voto, Richfield. I'd also like to welcome back Chelsea Petersen, Chanhassen, and Jackie Schwerm, Eden Prairie.

The board recently met to begin planning for the year. APMP hosts luncheons the third Thursday of each month from noon to 1:30 p.m., where we discuss a variety of topics. This fall we will have luncheons in September and November at the League of Minnesota Cities building, as well as our annual conference in October. Our annual conference will take place on Oct. 20 at Richfield City Hall and will focus on equity. Make sure to keep an eye out for more information on the conference in September.

In addition to our monthly meetings, we also attend job fairs throughout the year to provide information on APMP to local students. The first job fair this year is the Government and Nonprofit Job and Internship Fair at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, on Oct. 28. If you have information that you would like us to hand out, please email [associationofpublicmanagement@gmail.com](mailto:associationofpublicmanagement@gmail.com) by Oct. 19.

Another task the board is working on this year is getting more members involved in the organization. We are looking for APMP members to help with outreach (job fairs, networking with MPA programs, etc.), promotions (social media, flyers, etc.), and social events. If you are an APMP member and would like to help with any of these, please email one of the board members or [associationofpublicmanagement@gmail.com](mailto:associationofpublicmanagement@gmail.com).

If you know of anyone who you think would benefit from joining APMP, please encourage them to do so. They can learn more about APMP by going to [www.mncma.org](http://www.mncma.org) and clicking on the "Affiliated Groups" link on the top. ☐

## Appointments and other professional news

- **Nathan Burkett**, county administrator, Aitkin County, has been appointed assistant city administrator, Shakopee.
- **Sara Folsted**, county administrator, Renville County, has been appointed county administrator, Rice County.
- **Michael Hanson**, intern, Le Sueur, has been appointed city administrator, Madison Lake.
- **Crystal Johnson**, city manager, Dawson, has been appointed city manager, Granite Falls.
- **Bill Lavin**, city manager, Granite Falls, retired Aug. 1.
- **Joe McCabe**, city administrator, St. James, has announced his retirement for the end of the year.
- **Michael Redlinger**, former city manager, Moorhead, has been appointed assistant city administrator, Fargo, North Dakota.
- **Jonathan Smith**, city administrator, Frazee, has been appointed city manager, Perham. ☐

## Reaching the MCMA Secretariat

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Both Kevin and Kate can be reached at (651) 281-1200.

# We laugh so we don't cry

By Logan Martin, City Administrator, Bayport

**Note:** After nearly 15 years, “Memorandum from the Edge” and its author, Jon Hohenstein, have retired! The MCMA board is inviting new voices to join in bringing a bit of personal insight and humor to the newsletter, and our first contributor is Bayport City Administrator Logan Martin. Thank you, Logan! If you would be interested in contributing a tongue-in-cheek article for an upcoming edition, please contact Secretariat Officer Kevin Frazell at [kfrazell@lmc.org](mailto:kfrazell@lmc.org).

I would be remiss if I didn't start this article by acknowledging the brilliance of Jon Hohenstein's “Memorandum from the Edge.” Like all of you, I looked forward to reading Jon's words every quarter, and I found much value in them. Congratulations on your retirement, Jon, and thanks for years of inspiration and laughter!

Laughter—that's the key. I think the reason we were all drawn to Jon's articles is the power of laughter, and I'm convinced that if we could bottle up some ice-cold laughter, it'd sell faster than the waters of White Bear Lake (and it may even get the DNR off our backs). Now, I know what you're all thinking: “Oh great, we'll just laugh and all our problems will go away. Do you have any more earth-shattering wisdom, Mr. Helicopter-Parented Millennial?”

I do think laughter can diffuse a lot of situations, like the time I received a call as an intern from a lady who was convinced we needed to help get the ducks unstuck from the mud. Or the time I was called by a gentleman living on “Goose Pond Park” complaining about the goose population. (It's literally in the name! And they're ducks; if they got there, they'll get out!) I do, however, realize there's more to it than just laughing away our struggles or masking our stresses in an unhealthy passion for collecting miniature horse figurines.

Some of you know that I enjoy performing improvisational comedy (think: “Who's Line is it Anyway”) in my spare time. Many foundations of improv are directly applicable to leadership and management, and can be easily implemented with positive results. The foundational rule of performing improv is the theory of “yes, and.” In a world where a scene is being made without a script or rehearsal, teammates must say “yes” to any offering made, while expanding on the idea and furthering the plot (the “and”).

If at the start of the scene, your scene partner (or councilmember) establishes that you're both cowboys on the moon, as much as you wanted to do a scene about squirrel taxidermy, you must drop that dream and become a cowboy on the moon. This is a revolutionary form of listening and immediate idea acceptance that can unlock creativity, idea generation, and innovation. A “yes, and” mindset has direct applicability into our world, which often defaults to the “no” or “it costs too much” or “who let the intern speak?”

To jump on a stage with two other people, no script, and simply the word “banana” as a suggestion for a 5-minute scene requires significant trust, which Dr. Waldron has labeled as the “closest thing to a silver bullet in public administration.” Our work in the public sector requires high amounts of trust within our team, our councils, and our citizenry, and that trust can take years to establish.

Some of us had our trust broken via seemingly rock-solid middle-school relationships, but more importantly, I would imagine that many of us have enjoyed relationships founded on a deep level of trust. That type of relationship is extraordinarily powerful and effective, and can make these difficult jobs a little easier.

So, as the Memorandum from the Edge enters the next chapter, let's all work to be better improv comedians—striving to respond to ideas and the challenges of the future with a “yes, and” mindset, and working to build, protect, and grow the bank account of trust within our relationships. My father always reminds me that “we laugh so we don't cry” as we stumble through life. While I think there's more to the power of laughter than that, let's at least start with a lack of crying. ○

**Be sure to  
check out  
MCMA's  
website:**

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