

DEPARTMENTS

Opinion



Our Legacy: The Next Generation

I was a 19-year-old college student majoring in political science and needed to find a place close to home to work for the summer. Fortunately, my fellowship was flexible enough so that all I needed was an appropriate place to work. Without much thought, I decided to stop by the Hampton, Virginia, City Hall to see if I might find something there.

Hampton didn't have a personnel department at that time, but I was told that the assistant city manager handled that function. For some reason, when Assistant City Manager Wendell White heard me asking about a summer job, he came out of his office to talk with me. By the end of the summer, I was working on personnel policies and all kinds of new federal grant projects, such as the Public Employment Program, a precursor to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

Hampton Mayor Ann Kilgore also took an interest in me, inviting me to go with her to the Virginia Municipal League, National League of Cities, and Conference of Mayors meetings, where I met people like John Lindsay, who was mayor of New York City at the time. It was an exciting world for someone not yet 20, and before I knew it, Wendell had convinced me to transfer to a nearby university and keep working for the city while I went to school.

When I graduated from college, Hampton offered me a stipend to go to graduate school if I would agree to work for the city for three years on completing my degree.

This was an attractive offer, as jobs weren't easy to find in the early 1970s. I worked in Hampton for 18 years, so the city's investment in my education paid off! I tell this story because each of us can remember the people who give us a hand. They see something in us that we can't see in ourselves at the time.

A large number of city and county managers are approaching retirement in a few short years: only 27 percent of the CAOs who responded to ICMA's 2002 State of the Profession Survey were between the ages of 30 and 45, while 72 percent were age 46 or older. We "senior" managers know we have a responsibility to help the next generation make the connections that we needed ourselves. "Bringing along" our successors is one of the most important functions of our profession, and as ICMA Vice President Frank Benest would say, it's fun and rewarding.

Because preparing the next generation also is a priority for the ICMA Executive Board, we have a number of initiatives under way:

- A resource guide, *Preparing the Next Generation: A Guide for Current and Future Local Government Managers*, was published on ICMA's Web site in September as a joint project between ICMA and the City Managers' Department of the League of California Cities. Frank Benest, city manager of Palo Alto, spearheaded the project and served as the editor for it, working closely with ICMA staff members Michele Frisby, Beth Kellar, and Mary Marik. It's chock-full of ideas, stories, and suggestions about ways you can help shape the future of the profession.

- An “Internship Tool Kit” that also is available on ICMA’s Web site gives tips on ways to build successful internship programs in your communities.
- We are promoting careers in local government through a partnership with the academic community and a coalition that includes the National Association of Schools of Public Administration and Affairs, the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, and the Hispanic Network. We’ll be encouraging you and your staff to participate in career days on college campuses and to get to know their public administration and policy analysis faculties. To spread the word about careers in professional local government management, ICMA also has partnered with the Public Policy and International Affairs Program (PPIA), which is cosponsored by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, to sponsor two public service career fairs, one on October 25 at the University of Southern California and one on November 8 at Georgia State University. PPIA a grant-funded program created to address the underrepresentation of minorities in public service.
- ICMA is creating an inviting presence at <http://icma.org> where students can find career information, young-professional profiles, and ICMA student-membership information.

Another study recently conducted by ICMA revealed that, while roughly 75 percent of responding undergraduate and graduate students viewed a career in local government as somewhat-to-very appealing, nearly 55 percent had never considered a career as a city, town, or county manager, largely because they simply hadn’t thought of the possibility. In light of these statistics, there’s probably nothing more important or rewarding that we can do as a profession than to attract, retain, and develop top-flight talent for the future well-being of our communities. This can be our most significant legacy and is our most important responsibility.

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