

Managers Strengthen Iraq's Representative Government

by Margaret Rogers

In a country where most news coverage has been of bombings and deaths or, more recently, of the decline in murders of innocent civilians, it is easy to overlook everyday heroes making a difference in Iraq's provinces. City managers and ICMA members Jerry Calhoun, Paul Sharon, and Jim Gleason are classic examples of these unsung heroes.

Although the managers' lives vary greatly, they have several things in common. Each accepted a one-year contract to provide technical assistance to local Iraqi government officials. Each left behind family, friends, and a comfortable home in the United States. And each sees his contract as an opportunity to serve his country as well as Iraq's nascent representative government.

Jerry Calhoun, city manager, Port Richey, Florida, thinks of his work in Iraq as a chance to teach Iraqis "to be their own masters." Working with the Iraqis helps him serve his own country. "I love my country. I'm proud to be an American and hadn't had a chance to serve. I decided this was it! I want to give back."

Based at Al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq, Calhoun trains leaders in five districts and their subdistricts, which are the "equivalent of counties and cities in the United States. Sometimes the results are evident immediately. This work is so exciting to me because I have seen firsthand the light turn on when the Iraqis learn something. They want more and more training; they are so eager to learn from us."

Paul Sharon accepted his contract after retiring from a 35-year career in city management and serving as an ICMA Range Rider. He is assigned to Salahaddin Province. "To other ICMA members in the U.S., I say there are a lot of newly elected Iraqi officials whose skills we can enhance, teaching them processes to organize government, develop policies, and deal with the mundane day-to-day issues. What we deal with every day in the U.S. cities we serve uniquely qualifies us to teach Iraqis."

"We need to empower the Iraqis to govern themselves," said Jim Gleason, city manager, Woodstock, Georgia, who felt a personal calling to help Iraqis attain self-sufficiency after serving his local community as an elected official and city manager.

IRAQIS LEARN TO BUILD STRONG LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

These three ICMA members work with Iraq Strengthening Local and Provincial Governance (LGP), a project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through a contract with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and subcontracted partners that include the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The mission of the project is to assist the people of Iraq by building the capacity of local and provincial governments and increasing citizen participation during Iraq's transition to a democratic system.

LGP began in 2003 and was expanded in 2005. From its headquarters in Baghdad, LGP oversees operations of regional offices in Erbil, Hillah, Basra, and Baghdad, which serve all 18 Iraqi provinces. The program currently has a staff of 120 international employees representing 28 nationalities as well as more than 450 Iraqi national employees working throughout Iraq. LGP staff members are currently assigned to provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in the provinces of Ninewa, Tamim, Babylon, Anbar, Diyala,

Salahaddin, Thi-Qar, Basra and in the city of Baghdad.

Thanks to LGP, Iraqi municipal leaders are learning from practiced city managers from the United States. Manager advisers are especially critical now in Iraq. The U.S. government is increasingly focused on building capacity from the ground up, making local and provincial governments work in light of the challenges the central government in Baghdad is having being effective.

ICMA members Calhoun, Sharon, and Gleason are indispensable to Iraqi officials learning how to serve their local populations. Under Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime, the central

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government controlled all decisions. Now, under the burgeoning new representative system, local leaders are gaining a voice in the decision-making system. But they have little experience of their own on which to build.

LGP AND PRTS IMPROVE IRAQ'S STABILITY

LGP supports the PRTs' and embedded PRTs' efforts across Iraq by providing technical advisers who work alongside the military in governance, electrical utilities, public finance, agriculture, urban planning, water engineering, policy reform, economic

development, and geographical information systems.

PRTs are joint civilian-military units that support local leaders and empower provincial authorities by working closely with the communities they serve. They are the primary interface between U.S. and coalition partners and provincial and local governments throughout Iraq.

Under the president's "New Way Forward in Iraq" announced in January 2007, the PRT program has expanded from the initial 10 PRTs established in 2006 to 25 PRTs now. Ten of the new PRTs are embedded with U.S. brigade combat teams. These civilian-led teams work hand in glove with brigade combat teams or regiments (of the U.S. Marine Corps) to support the military surge in Anbar Province and the greater Baghdad area.

These teams include U.S. diplomats, military officers, development experts, and other specialists in local government management, law, engineering, industrial development, urban planning, and agribusiness. The individuals come from many U.S. government departments and the private sector. The Office of Provincial Affairs within the U.S. embassy in Baghdad provides policy guidance and support to the PRT program.

The overarching goal of LGP and the PRTs is to empower Iraqi citizens and local and provincial authorities by helping them:

- Develop a transparent and sustained capability to govern.
- Increase security and the rule of law.
- Promote political and economic development.
- Provide the administration needed to meet the population's basic needs.

Managers are uniquely qualified to fulfill the mission. Their experience in organizing public meetings, operating city and county budgets, obtaining federal funds, and running essential services is invaluable to newly elected Iraqi leaders.

ICMA Members Make a Difference in Iraq

ICMA members who help strengthen local governance in Iraq help elected leaders improve governmental management and administration, understand the roles and functions of government officials and agencies, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, and train civil servants. Why do they do it?

“To be a part of history. To make a difference in the lives of the Iraqi people.”

—Jerry Calhoun, city manager, Port Richey, Florida

“To enable. The opportunity to help teach the Iraqis to govern themselves and to make their lives better was irresistible.”

—Paul Sharon, ICMA-CM, former local government administrator and ICMA Range Rider, Jacksonville, Florida

“I felt a personal calling. I think I can make a difference as a city manager helping empower Iraqis to make decisions.”

—Jim Gleason, ICMA-CM, city manager, Woodstock, Georgia

To his fellow ICMA members, Jerry Calhoun says, “These skills will carry on for future generations and the value in that is incalculable. How can one put a price on the value of teaching local government officials how to hold public meetings? The importance of public participation? Transparency in all levels of government? And how to lobby and work to compromise with the national government to achieve funding for local projects?”

The advice managers provide at the local level is especially crucial now, given the difficulties the central government in Baghdad is having serving its public. “City management is most important now in Iraq because the central government is not functioning optimally,” Calhoun said. “We need to create capacity in the Iraqis to run effective local governments and sustain them over the long run. As a result of the efforts of the

New Guide Outlines Iraq Government Structures, Responsibilities

A two-volume handbook published in December 2007 provides the first comprehensive overview of the organization and workings of Iraq’s government systems. The *Republic of Iraq District Government Field Manual* describes Iraq’s federal and local government structures in simple language, including information on Iraq’s constitution, the roles and functions of various government structures, and information on public finance and economic development.

The handbook was developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Iraq Local Governance Program (LGP), which has supported efforts to strengthen government in Iraq at the local, municipal, and provincial levels since 2003. LGP is being implemented by RTI International, with assistance from ICMA and several other organizations.

The 48-page first volume and the 100-page second volume of the manual are available for free download in both English and Arabic on the “Reports and Publications” page of LGP’s Web site at <http://www.lgp-iraq.org>.

For more information, contact the RTI Office of Communications at 919/316-3596 or news@rti.org.

LGP program, we are starting to see local governments work.”

City management requires skills in communication and conflict management. Paul Sharon learned both from his father, a former city manager who taught him the occupation is a “noble calling.” It’s better to improve the lives of others than seek personal gain, Sharon said. “My father told his sons ‘if you ever have a chance to step in and change the lives of others, take it!’”

It was that motto and a line from a Bonnie Raitt song—“Life gets mighty precious when there’s less of it to waste”—that led Sharon to work in Iraq after retirement. “Even though I am still young, I don’t have as much time as I did 50 years ago. Anything one can do to enhance that precious time is going to be fulfilling and rewarding.”

PERSONAL SACRIFICE, UNIVERSAL REWARDS

With the U.S. government’s increasing focus on building capacity in Iraq from the ground up, the work that technical advisers like Sharon, Calhoun, and Gleason provide is even more important. The rewards of strengthening a democracy, however, don’t come without costs.

When Gleason departed for Iraq, he left behind friends, colleagues, and a wife of 27 years. At first, his friends didn’t understand why he would go to work in a war zone. They responded with the typical “Are you crazy?”

“Once I explained my reasoning and that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, they understood,” Gleason said. “The irony is that if it were anywhere other than Iraq, say Paris, they wouldn’t have hesitated in their support. But non-challenging places are not where our expertise is needed.”

His long overseas assignment would mark the first time he and his wife would be apart for more than a couple of weeks. It would mean missing anniversaries, holidays, and birthdays. But perhaps it was the strength of the marriage that gave Gleason the courage to take on a challenge that would enrich both lives.

“If your marriage has lasted this

long and withstood all the usual trials and tribulations, it will survive this year." Jim added with a laugh, "This might make our marriage last longer, giving my wife a break from me. I'm pretty intense to live with!"

Aside from a few trips to his wife's native country of Colombia and a short trip to Brazil, Iraq is Calhoun's first international experience. Now he regularly travels by helicopter between the Al-Asad Air Base, where he is assigned, to LGP headquarters in Baghdad. He is used to wearing the necessary body armor, a helmet, and a fire-resistant jumpsuit each time he travels.

Back home, Calhoun's family understands and supports his mission. "Without my wife's 100 percent support, I wouldn't be here," Calhoun said. "Lupe is Colombian and a naturalized citizen. She loves the U.S. and believes in serving her country, in giving back. As Americans, we take for granted everything we have."

Sharon's wife and children were sad to see him leave for Iraq, but they support his decision. "My wife said, 'I know you can make a difference. I don't want you to go, I'll worry every day, but I am proud of you!' My children are proud of me even though they are unhappy with the U.S. approach toward Iraq," he said.

Working in Iraq gives Gleason the opportunity to advise Iraqis how to build foundations for managing local representation and to learn from U.S. mistakes. "To my colleagues in the U.S., I would say we all work in challenging environments, even if we

take our democratic form of government for granted. If they come to Iraq they could have an opportunity and unique challenge to actually advise Iraqis how to create city management that would work efficiently and avoid some of our mistakes made over the past 250 years. We can teach them best practices and use the many ICMA resources in our work here."

"My goal is to leave the leave a city a better place than when I arrived," Gleason said. "You need to be a bit of a risk taker; think outside the box rather than have the don't-rock-the-boat attitude or be someone who doesn't want to get out of their comfort zone. You have to be willing to fail; you won't like it but we learn so much from our failures. Life is full of lessons; we learn more from setbacks than successes."

HOW TO SERVE IN IRAQ

The work being performed by ICMA members Jerry Calhoun, Paul Sharon, and Jim Gleason is helping to create efficient and responsive local government in Iraq and is furthering the country's slowly emerging stability. If you want to serve in Iraq and experience firsthand this unique opportunity to teach Iraqis to build the foundation of strong local governments, contact ICMA's Ross Mallory for more information at rmallory@icma.org. **PM**

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UPCOMING EVENTS

March 13-14

2008 Southeast Regional Summit
Grand Hotel Marriott® Resort, Golf Club & Spa, Point Clear, AL

March 26-27

Midwest Regional Young Professionals Leadership Institute
Radisson Plaza Hotel, Minneapolis, MN

March 27-28

2008 Midwest Regional Summit
Radisson Plaza Hotel, Minneapolis, MN

April 1

ICMA's Voluntary Credentialing Program Application Deadline

April 2-3

Northeast Regional Young Professionals Leadership Institute
Hyatt Regency Cambridge, MA

April 3-4

2008 Northeast Regional Summit
Hyatt Regency, Cambridge, MA

April 17-18

2008 Mountain Plains and West Coast Regional Summit, Hyatt Regency Resort, Lake Tahoe, NV

April 24-25

The Managers Role in Moving Community from Good to Great, Leading Practices ICMA in conjunction with TCMA
Corpus Christi, TX

May 3-10

ICMA SEI Leadership Institute
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
(Open to ICMA-CMs only)

May 5-7

Brownfields 2008
Cobo Center, Detroit, MI

May 14-17

ICMA Gettysburg Leadership Institute
Gettysburg Hotel & Battlefield, Gettysburg, PA
(Open to ICMA-CMs only)

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