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Greetings from Greg



Greg Kelly

Greetings from Greg "You Can't Make This Stuff Up"

My job as Town Manager for Abingdon began at midnight on October 31, 2006, ten years ago on a crazy Halloween night. So trick or treat, the Town got me and I got this largely responsible job. Equally true, at 12:00 midnight it became "All Saint's Day", so I'd like to think that Abingdon didn't get tricked but got a Saint instead. I'm sure that's wishful thinking on my part and is up for discussion among the residents. Believe me, I'm no Saint but I do strive to do Saintry things for my Town and I thoroughly enjoy that role. I like to think of my role as leading my community in a "Saintry" direction without "Trickery".

All of that said, what is "Community", really? Personally, I think it's about embracing not just yourself, the past and your present. Rather, it's about embracing change and the future and recognizing that just as our Country has changed and become great by its immigrants, so our communities change and hopefully grow to be greater in the same way. The best example of that is close to home for me, so here's what I think is a great story that defines "community". It's about openness, sharing and caring.

The year was 1961 when a young man applied for a job in Abingdon. There was a requirement that he had to live in the "community" in order to be hired, so he didn't exactly tell the truth on his application and informed the Town Manager that he was a Town resident. Truth be known, he was not financially well off and desperately needed to get his first paycheck to move himself and his family to

Abingdon. So this man, "hitch-hiked" 120 miles each day trying to make it to that first paycheck and a chance to be a part of a new "community". Before his first two weeks were up and he received that first pay check something unexpected happened. As this young gauntly looking and exhausted man walked to the nearest road to try to flag down a ride on his way back to his family home, a stranger appeared from a used car lot and stopped him. The stranger asked if he was new to Abingdon, to which he replied that he was and was trying to make it through the first two weeks so he could get paid and move his family here. He stated that he was a new police officer and the Town required its police officers to live in the "community". He also asked the stranger to please not tell anyone about his story for he feared that he would be fired. The stranger told him his story was safe and he took him to the local café and bought him a hot meal and chatted. As it turned out, this stranger had been the roommate of the Oscar award winning actor, Ernest Borgnine, who was one of Abingdon's Barter Theatre's actors' years earlier. As they finished, the stranger gave the newcomer \$100 and told him who to go see to rent a place in the "community". He told him to not worry about the loan and he said he could pay him back when he could afford to. Now, to me, that's "community".

Well you may have surmised by now, but that story is where my roots began in Abingdon. The young man in the story was my father, and that story has always taught me just how valuable that "community" is, especially in local government. It taught me that we should always be willing to accept not just newcomers but new ideas. In retrospect of telling this story, I sure hope that my dad paid the \$100 back. Actually, I jest, in that I know, my dad indeed pay it back and he further paid it forward many times over to many other newcomers in need. I'm thankful for many reasons that Abingdon had such a community steward when my father passed through to help grow his and my "community spirit". That said, lets always keep an open mind and be willing to accept the future of our communities. For what it's worth my dad went on to serve the Abingdon as a police officer, ultimately as Chief, for 43 years. Now I serve in his footsteps in our community as Abingdon's Town Manager trying to pass on the same community spirit that he exuded for so many years.

Last month I left you with a statement that I would tell you more about my mystique in music. In the interest I brevity I will entice you to wait until next month, except to say, my father was also a musician..... Hence, my love for the same. That said another "community" story about music is coming in December.

Until next time, please join me in welcoming Gary B. O'Connell, Executive Director of the Albemarle County Service Authority and Scott Zaremba, Deputy County Administrator of Chesterfield County as our newest members to the VLGMA fold. I hope to meet each of you in person in the near future. That said, let's keep growing the membership and keep growing the next generation. So, please, enroll some of your staff in the Certificate Program. We can be better and continue to grow and pay it forward. If Abingdon, town of 8400, can put 8 people through the Certificate Program, I challenge all others of greater size to match or beat me. Whose up to the challenge? And smaller communities should think of a least one.

Until next time, enjoy what each of your respective communities have to offer and take pride in your contribution to the same.

Position Changes

October 2016

- Joseph Quesenberry, director of tourism and marketing for Patrick County, has been appointed town manager for Warsaw effective November 7th.
- Christopher Martino, deputy executive and currently interim executive for Prince William County, has been appointed county executive there.
- Kim Alexander, city manager for Manassas Park, stepped down from that post. John Evans, police chief, is serving as acting manager.
- Steve Cover, fire chief for Virginia Beach for the past nine years, has been appointed deputy city manager there.
- Jonathan Sweet, Grayson County administrator, has been appointed Pulaski County administrator effective January 16th.
- Marcus Jones, Norfolk city manager since 2010, has been appointed city manager for Charlotte, NC.
- Mandy Belyea, finance director for Shenandoah County since 2014, has been appointed deputy manager for the town of Woodstock.
- Dironna Moore Belton, interim city manager for Petersburg, has returned to her former post heading up the area's transit system, and Tom L. Tyrrell, a financial consultant from Connecticut, has been installed as interim city manager by the Robert Bobb Group, consultant to the city.



Marc Ott's Speech During His 2016 ICMA Conference Introduction



Marc Ott's speech during his 2016 ICMA conference introduction.

If you have not seen the moving tape of ICMA Executive Director Marc Ott's first presentation at the conference, here's the link below.

As a minority, and with his experience as Austin, TX city manager, Marc brings a unique professional perspective needed in our diverse communities and urban areas.

http://icma.org/en/icma/newsroom/highlights/Article/107586/Marc_Ott_Addresses_Membership_at_ICMA2016

Tedd's Take

Our Electoral Process

All of us in local government know the pains taken, and hours of personnel time dedicated, to ensure that each election is fair and beyond question. Whether it's the registrar and staff, or the numerous volunteers who man the polls on election day, each is



Tedd Povar

dedicated to the premise that they will be part of an honest and open process that guarantees that each vote counts.

As someone who has been a direct participant in the effort to certify properly operating voting machines, that voting locations are accessible and properly staffed, and that party operatives are the specified distance from precinct entrances, it is painful to listen to the declarations of "rigging," including voting graveyards and illegal registrants.

Many have spoken to these reckless charges and debunked their credibility. Many have also expressed how inciting doubt in the electoral process is chipping away at our country's foundation, and disrespects those that originated our democratic principles. But it is the absurdity of what it would take to truly manipulate an election, precinct by precinct, locality by locality, state by state, to pull off anything close to a rigged election that hits home here.

So many good people would have to be involved, with not one divulging the plan. So many credible people (my wife included) who serve as polling officials would have to compromise their core values. So many people would have to act against their fundamental ethical standards they formed throughout their lives.

Bottom line - it's insulting, and it's dangerous.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

Certificate News



It is hard to believe that the semester is already a little more than half over. As November arrives, many of those final projects that seemed so far away in August are now just on the horizon. Our students will be working hard in the next month to ensure that they finish the semester strong. While they are certainly up to the task, now is certainly the time to encourage them.

As we continue to look ahead, it is important to remember that the Certificate program only flourishes with the dedicated support of the local governments across the state. Passing along information to employees, holding recruitment sessions, and recognizing Certificate alumni greatly support the program and helps us build up the next generation of local government leaders. We see batons passing every day as managers and administrators transition or retire, and we want our students to be there, ready for the handoff.

To assist with these efforts, Stephanie Davis is always out recruiting and sharing information about the program. The deadline to apply for the spring is January 1, so the time is now to start thinking about taking that step. Moreover, Stephanie is eager to schedule recruitment sessions for the spring with interested localities. For any questions, she can be reached at sddavis@vt.edu or 804-980-5549.

A DAO in the Life - Cody Sexton

One of the best parts about working in local government is the community of professionals we have that is always willing to support and uplift others. In October, the DAOs had another opportunity to come together to learn and to fellowship with each other. Botetourt County hosted the fall DAO meeting, allowing people from across the state to come see a little bit of the beauty of western Virginia.



Another great DAO meeting

While the highlight of every DAO event is the time spent with our fellow professionals, the meeting also focused on a topic of growing importance: regionalism. It has been widely recognized, in both practical and scholarly circles, that few local governments will be able to face the greatest challenges of the future by going it alone. Coming together with other localities, whether they are next door or in the next state, is the way of the future.

The morning session of the meeting looked at those regional answers. Beth Doughty, Executive Director of the Roanoke Regional Partnership, spoke about three key regional projects that have set the Roanoke Valley on a strong path for the future. These efforts have focused on regional water supply, broadband, and industrial site development. With strong relationships and structures in place, the region is set.

The afternoon session sought to help participants plan for the issues facing local governments in the next 20 years. Using the Next Big Things from the Alliance for Innovation, Stephanie Davis from Virginia Tech led a discussion of the trends. The group then divided into small groups to develop potential solutions to each of the major trends using a regional perspective. The groups were quite creative and seemed well prepared to engage with the future of their communities, ready to take those solutions back home.

Overall, the day left the participants rejuvenated and prepared. With the support of this great professional community, there is nothing that can stop our local governments.

Thank you all for everything you do, and specifically thank you to Cindy Mester, Vivian McGettigan, Sheri Neil, and Sandy Harrington for their leadership and support to the DAOs.

[Contact Cody Sexton](#)

Civic Engagement Best Practices - City of Lynchburg

Submitted by Tom Martin, AICP, City Planner and Alex Johnston, Cities Reimagined

America's most famous Urbanist, Jane Jacobs, once said, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody." Jacobs touches on a point that we often forget as planners: the only way we can create spaces and

places that touch every citizen is by engaging all citizens. No matter how experienced or educated, every planner is limited to their own life experience and perceptions.

We are shaped by our own experiences inside public spaces, the neighborhoods we grew up in, and the type of human interaction that adds value and resonates within us. An individual's utopia rarely looks like anyone else's - much less a whole community. When plans are made in a silo according to best practice and statistical evidence, but absent from the input of people who bring the city to life, we miss the chance to create a space that brings joy to all types of citizens.



City of Lynchburg

After many months of planning and revisions, the City of Lynchburg adopted its new zoning ordinance in the Spring of 2016. While the existing Ordinance had been revised periodically, a comprehensive rewrite had not been completed since 1978. The city was a much different place in the 70's. Disco, bell bottoms and suburban sprawl were the norm. The city had doubled in size from annexation and a suburban style ordinance was adopted to fill the space.

With a renewed interest in Downtown/Neighborhood revitalization, walkability, bicycling and a growing population, it was obvious that the existing Ordinance was not fulfilling the Vision of the City's Comprehensive Plan. In 2012, the city embarked on a four year journey of completing a diagnostic of existing ordinances and plans, updating the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Throughout the process of drafting and revising the comprehensive plan, our planning staff learned a great deal about the process of citizen engagement. We learned what worked and brought citizens to the table, and more importantly, what didn't work and needed to be adjusted.

Here's what we learned and what our process entails:

First: Observe the problem in the wild. We needed to see how a parcel or area was being used before we made a decision about it. It would have been errant for us to decide on the future use of an area without observing it in its natural state.

Second: Perform in-depth research. Garnering background knowledge about a neighborhood or area gave us the cultural context we needed to make decisions.

Third: Develop a public process. After the first two steps, we had an idea of how the public may approach the areas based on their history. Engaging our citizens at every turn was critical to creating a plan that served everyone's needs, not just own ideas of what it should look like.

Fourth: Build a coalition. This is critical. Without cheerleaders and public support of your project and process, it won't get far during public hearings.

Fifth: Document lessons. Beginning with the end in mind, we committed to documenting our takeaways and lessons during this process. The next time we

revise the comprehensive plan or zoning ordinance, we will know what went wrong, how to adjust it, and implement the things we know went well.

Last: Repeat. This process of civic engagement helped us to create a plan that was a community driven, citizen focused document designed to serve the needs of our residents.

At the core of every city lives a dynamic mix of ideas, culture, and individuality. As city planners, the peak of our success is when we create a system that allows these characteristics to thrive organically. The marks of our success are when we see a citizen using a newly laid sidewalk, a family playing together in a park that was designed by the community, or someone sitting beneath a newly constructed bus shelter, protected from the rain. Although it is always more difficult and much messier, bringing members of the public into the planning process makes the end product richer, more inclusive and more "right" than what we could create on our own.

[Contact Tom Martin](#)

Mel's Poetry Corner



Mel Gillies

In-lightened Decisions

This traffic light, green, yellow, red,
will I be able to go or have to stop instead?
Green, the affirmation to simply go
harmoniously moving in Life's flow.

Red, the chance to stop and reflect
which direction I might go next.
Maybe turn right or even left
the chance to take a different step.
Then again, perhaps straight ahead
is the way I'm being led.

But yellow catches me unawares.
Be cautious or take an impulsive dare?
Choose conformity or revolt?
Which impulse will I invoke?
With green or red, the response is almost habitual
while yellow is much more unpredictable.

Next time a traffic light arises on your drive
perhaps recognize
that green is symbolic of the choice
to express gratitude and rejoice.
And if red interrupts the day,
in peace, take a mini holiday.

But if attuned to our inner voice,
yellow can be a pivotal choice.
A moment in which to awaken

to the road, life has unexpectedly taken.

Even a prophetic chance to be aware of the purpose of our journey.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)

Innovation Edge

Big Ideas was held in Dublin, Ohio over the past weekend with the subject of Digital Disruption. Engaging provocateurs got attendees out of their comfort zones to think about what if, when, and how. More info to come with the comprehensive report that will come out early next year.



About the Alliance for Innovation: The Alliance for Innovation is inspiring innovation to advance communities. As the premier resource for emerging practices in local government, we are building cultures of innovation and connecting thought leaders in the profession with the help of our partners International City/County Management Association and Arizona State University. We are accessible and valuable to all levels of an organization. You can learn more about the Alliance at www.transformgov.org or contact me at saburnett@transformgov.org

Calendar

Upcoming Events

VLGMA Winter Conference - February 15-17, 2017 at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton. Look for more info coming soon.

[More Dates](#)

Future Newsletter Articles



A goal of this e-newsletter is to keep you informed on activities relative to our profession. As with any membership-based organization, contributions by members are welcome and encouraged. Topics can range from a recent achievement in your locality to an upcoming event with networking potential to human interest stories about current or retired members. To contribute simply send your brief e-newsletter content (~5 sentences or less) via email to [Molly Harlow](#).

Future Newsletter Articles

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