To the 2010 ICMA Awards Evaluation Panel:

Not long ago, Rey Arellano, Eric Anderson, and I were debriefing after an evening council meeting as is our usual practice. In our conversation, Eric was reflecting on his career and shared that his proudest accomplishment has been the ability to develop new leaders in City Management. Given Eric’s long and successful career it seemed only fitting that we nominate him for this Award. The most relevant testaments to Eric’s achievements in developing new talent come from the leaders that he has mentored. For this nomination effort, we contacted many of the individuals that have been influenced by Eric and whose words we have borrowed to illustrate Eric’s significant contributions to the development of new management capacity. In their words you will learn how his leadership, management philosophy, and commitment to local government has shaped generations of managers.

**Developing Management Capacity**

This award commemorates ICMA President L.P. Cookingham’s efforts to create new talent, specifically his creation of the local government internship. As a former Phoenix intern, Eric has always valued the legacy of internships and has consistently offered internships and developed internship programs as a city manager. In particular, he developed formal two-year internship programs in Des Moines, Iowa, and Tacoma, Washington, that were designed to provide opportunities that would typically be out of reach and would push interns to develop skills necessary to be successful managers in their future.

Mike Matthes, a former intern and now Assistant City Manager offered, “Eric allowed me to sit in when many other managers would have kept the intern out of the most sensitive sessions. I loved how open he was to teaching me and all other newbies about good government.” Christian Clegg, a former Management Fellow in Tacoma that is now a Management Analyst shared that, “Eric deliberately assigned roles to us working with neighborhood councils, council committees, and Council Members that represented a microcosm for working with a City Council and regularly made time to discuss the lessons and skills we needed to begin developing.” To date, Eric has mentored 19 post-graduate students through these apprenticeship programs despite sometimes difficult financial conditions.

In addition to formal internships, Eric has been diligent in recognizing and developing talent in department heads and other staff and creating a mentoring culture. He continually encourages staff to broaden their perspectives, apply their skills at a higher level, and then makes a safe environment for risk-taking. Gwendolyn Voelpel, a former Assistant to the City Manager who later became a City Administrator offered, “I will always remember Eric telling me that he would rather have to reel me back in than to have to shove me out there… it motivated me to try. He made making mistakes not only OK, but expected as a learning experience.” Mike Matthes added, “He pushed you out of your comfort zone and created a safe place to fall (which I did at least once). Because of that we accomplished some amazing things we didn’t think we were capable of.” Michael Armstrong, a former Information Technology Director, agreed when he said, “Eric helped me discover that I could assume a broader role within the organization (Assistant City Manager) and be confident about it.”

For both interns as well as other new talent, Eric has worked hard to push the limits of learning and mentoring to provide the maximum exposure possible, even to the point of his own vulnerability. In doing this, Eric’s influence has made a clear impact on the leadership ability, management philosophy and values of many whom he has mentored.

**Developing Leadership**

Many in the profession would describe Eric as a change-agent and the exposure to his own leadership abilities has carried forward to many of his employees. Eric recognizes the inherent caution that employees feel around the unknown and ambiguous, but is clear in his belief that it is within the ambiguous and unknown where new possibilities emerge. Gwendolyn Voelpel shared, “he taught me the value of getting something started and building on it instead of waiting for the perfect launch,” and further, “he said that you can’t move a tent if you remove only one stake. You have to remove all stakes and then you are floating the organization for a while but it’s the only way to start real change.”

While Eric teaches staff to embrace the unknown, he tempers risk with good decision-making. The lessons in decision-making remain with many previous employees. Janell Hampton, a previous intern and current Administrative Analyst, offered, “I learned that I don’t know it all and that the insightful person asks for explanations and clarifications. I also learned that it is important to bring solutions to the table, but even more important to be willing to listen.” Jennifer Hengel, a former intern and current Planning and Development Director, added that she learned to “make time to listen and don’t assume that others know what you know.”

In reflection, Michael Armstrong appreciated that Eric taught him to “Keep a sense of humor at work; try not to get wound up over things – keep perspective. Try not to get into the weeds. Conduct yourself as a professional; tell the truth. Make the hard decisions that we’re being paid to do.”

**Imbuing Management Philosophy**

Though it is clear that Eric made a significant impact on the leadership abilities of the staff that he has managed, his most meaningful contribution is passing on his management philosophy to those he has mentored. This ability is admired by John Naldandian, faculty member in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Kansas.

“Eric is one of those people who we as faculty trust implicitly to help educate our students. It is clear from just the briefest of conversations with him that he cares about the future of the city management profession, and he cares about the students whose practical education we are entrusting to him. Over the years, I have grown more and more to respect him as a teacher. He not only is an exemplary city manager – one of the very best in the business – he is able to transfer what he has learned to others in a way that encourages students to seek him out, ask questions, and not be afraid to reveal their self-doubts. That transference is not just in skills that he models, it is in his attitude and indeed in the very person that he is that others admire. He is the model city manager; but more than that, he is able to convey to others his approach to the profession that he has chosen as his life work.”

The primary importance in Eric’s management philosophy of unfailing respect for the City Councils for whom he has worked has been ably passed on. Gwendolyn Voelpel shared, “He taught me to always respect the council for the work that they do and being willing to put their necks way, way out there. He taught me how not playing favorites with the council can lead to incredible successes.” Justin Miller, a former intern and now City Manager added, “I think Eric is a classic example of a strong city manager who helps his councils find their preferred outcome by being an active participant in their discussions. He was never hesitant to share his opinions, but also knew in the end that decisions were made by the council and he knew when to step back and let them take the credit.”

Alongside his respect for the Council, Eric’s recognition of the value and power of the community is a hallmark for his past and current staff members. Stephanie Bray, a former intern and current Pierce County Washington employee shared a key lesson she learned, “In order to make a change(s) in the community, start where the people have a vested interest, in their own neighborhood. And build from there.” Previous staff shared an understanding of the deep importance and difficulty of truly including the community in a meaningful way. When Allyson Griffith, a former intern and current community engagement staff member, shared a recent conversation with Eric, she said, “he reminded us that the on the ground work where philosophy meets practice is really the work that matters and that makes a difference to our citizens.” Justin Miller elaborated on how he is still influenced by Eric’s leadership, noting that Eric “required that meetings be on the community’s turf – not at city hall. It is a strategy that I frequently use today and has helped me achieve successful outcomes in several projects.”

The most consistent theme that emerged from former and current employees from Eric’s management philosophy is his vigilant adherence to guiding values. Eric’s commitment to integrity, respect, teamwork, accountability, and public service are core values that all former and current employees expressed a desire to emulate within their own careers. This commitment to values is demonstrated by Eric’s investment in the personal success of those he mentors, both as professionals and individuals. Shane Pettit, a current intern commented that “Eric’s genuine concern for his employees is neither confined to the workplace nor to just his words; it is in his actions. Among staff he attempts to create a familial environment where employees support one another. For example, each year Eric invites our office employees, such as myself, that have to family nearby to eat Thanksgiving at his house. It is this action-oriented caring for others beyond the workplace that I hope to fully develop in my own professional life.”

There is no doubt that this commitment to values and level of personal investment has helped to cement the commitment of public service in those who have had the opportunity to work for him.

**Leaving a Legacy of Commitment**

The most notable evidence of Eric’s commitment to developing local government leadership is the dedication to mentoring and development that he has created in many of those that he personally mentored.

Mark Rothert, now an Economic Development professional attributed much of his philosophy to Eric, “First, fire good people who are coach-able, eager to learn, want to do good and will work well on a team. Second, mentor these people, give them the knowledge, tools, and responsibility necessary to succeed; give them an opportunity to fail, as failure is not a bad thing but rather another learning experience. Third, instill the value to continually learn so that interns continue to improve when you or they move on. Our careers are a process of life-long learning and I was always so impressed with Eric’s own drive to keep innovating in the ways he managed and lead the community. Last, encourage interns to pass on the knowledge to future generations when ready.”

Allyson Griffith further credits Eric with her understanding of the importance of investing in staff: “He would constantly emphasize that it is the people that matter more than any other tool or resource available to you. I try to keep that foremost in my mind.”

We know that the selection committee will have many individuals who deserve recognition. We hope that you will help us, and all of the others who have been touched by Eric’s leadership, recognize the invaluable contributions that he has made to the profession.

