

**Award for  
Career Excellence  
in Honor of  
Mark E. Keane**



*Jennifer D. Sparacino*

*Established in honor of former ICMA Executive Director Mark E. Keane, the Award for Career Excellence recognizes an outstanding local government administrator who has fostered representative democracy by enhancing the effectiveness of local government officials and by consistently initiating creative and successful programs. Candidates must have a minimum of ten years of executive, senior-level service to the profession. This year, ICMA presents the Mark E. Keane Award to Jennifer D. Sparacino, city manager of Santa Clara, California.*

As city manager of Santa Clara, California (pop. 105,800), since 1987, Jennifer Sparacino has led the city through a crucial period of growth and discovery. Under her management, the city's population increased by more than 16,000; its budget grew from \$258.5 million to \$442.2 million; and the city invested \$1.25 billion in capital projects designed to improve the city's infrastructure and quality of life. Under Ms. Sparacino's tenure, Santa Clara is now a recognized leader in municipal government.

Santa Clara is a full-service city with a wide span of municipal, planning, and community services; nearly 450 acres of parks and open space; busy libraries; recreational programs and facilities; 247 miles of streets; three utilities; and a city-owned convention center. The city's diverse population, many members of whom are professionals in Silicon Valley's high-tech industry, demands a municipal government as innovative, productive, and service-oriented as the corporations that define the area.

Ms. Sparacino has created an environment conducive to positive, collaborative relationships among elected officials, city staff, and the community. In 1999, when 300 acres of a former state facility were made available for development, many community residents held strong and opposing views on how the property

should be used. Ms. Sparacino oversaw an extensive and open public participation process to help the community reach consensus. What was once a blighted area now houses the corporate headquarters of Sun Microsystems; restored historical buildings that are available for public use; a carefully preserved open space and wildlife habitat; day care facilities; shelter for homeless families; housing for seniors and low-income residents; and Rivermark, a new neighborhood that will include 3,000 single- and multifamily homes, a commercial center with a full-service supermarket, a hotel, a new school, a fire station, a library, and a park. In 2001, because of its successful resolution of community issues through the collaborative efforts of government, local businesses, schools, and nonprofit organizations, the National Civic League named Santa Clara an "All-America City."

The city of Santa Clara owns and operates its electric, water, and wastewater utilities and maintains the lowest combined utility rates in the nine Bay Area counties. When deregulation of California's electric market in 1996 caused major financial upheavals for investor-owned and municipal utilities, Ms. Sparacino's prudent and strategic approach allowed the city's electric utility to grow and prosper. It was the only California municipi-

pal utility recently evaluated by Fitch Ratings to receive a "positive" (as opposed to "stable") business outlook, and its innovative and successful programs have won awards from such organizations as the American Public Power Association and the California Municipal Utilities Association.

Ms. Sparacino has been instrumental in bringing together elected officials, community representatives, and staff to develop a code of ethics that provides guidelines and strategies for addressing the ethical questions that arise daily in municipal government. The city's ethics program won Santa Clara the prestigious Helen Putnam Award for Excellence from the League of California Cities.

Perhaps Ms. Sparacino's most enduring legacy to the community is her commitment to affordable housing in one of the nation's most expensive housing markets. As executive director of the city's Redevelopment Agency, she has spent or committed more than \$73 million for below-market new homes, first-time home-buyer loans, rehabilitation loans for existing properties, residences for seniors and the disabled, assisted living and dementia care homes, transitional housing for homeless families, and shelters for homeless teens and battered women. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Renewal ranked Santa Clara "#1 in California" and "#2 in the Nation" for its performance under the Home Investment Partnership Act Program.

Throughout her 26-year career in municipal government, Jennifer Sparacino has effectively met and surpassed the challenges of a growing, changing community while exemplifying personal integrity and creativity. She is clearly a shining example for others in public service. ■