

Personal Journeys/Encore Activities

- **Edward G. Wohlenberg – October 2011**

At the ripe old age of 55 years, my full-time, active career as a city manager came to an end, though not of my choosing (you know what I mean). The next several years were filled with part-time work in a regional COG, an interim city manager position, and some consulting services with a company of my own as well as another owned by a prior local government professional. Through it all, I continued my interest in reestablishing myself as a city manager and submitted many applications, but alas, nothing came my direction.

After two years of this fruitless journey, I widened my horizons and sought other local government opportunities that might nourish my desires and skills. Ultimately, I was offered the position of general manager of a single purpose district—a harbor district which was governed by a seven-member board. The opportunity was very interesting to me and, as I suspected, there were many similarities to city management. Possibly the biggest difference was that about 95% of the district's operating revenue was from lease revenues, and many of the tenants' payments tracked their financial ups and downs. But I learned so much from this position; the variety of activities in a marine and recreational harbor was very different. Another positive aspect was that the press didn't find our activities nearly as interesting as those of the local municipal governments.

The greatest challenge in this district, though, was developing a work-out plan from a bankruptcy that preceded my appointment. I accepted the position knowing of this challenge, but came to find out that solving the problem would be both interesting and frustrating. Over three years were devoted to bankruptcy work-out. Lease management, dealing with the Coastal Commission, trying to ensure that tenants' lease payments were received in a more timely manner, dealing with commercial fishing issues, dredging the harbor entrance, working through new development plans and capital projects, and managing labor relations were also key activities. Eventually a bankruptcy work-out plan was accepted by the Federal court and we began the implementation of the plan's specifics, including a bond sale to pay the creditors.

Eventually, the daily nature of these responsibilities left me wanting to pursue other endeavors, and I wound down my full time activities as a local government manager. Without a doubt, this horizontal move into a general management activity in a single purpose district was very rewarding. After leaving the District I provided some consulting services from time to time, and was appointed as the interim or initial city manager in the newly incorporated city of Goleta, in Santa Barbara County. That activity was most challenging, as I had never experienced what it was like to start an organization from scratch—but it was extremely interesting and professionally rewarding.

When that activity was concluded, I filed the papers to commence my PERS pension and Social Security incomes -- for which I am grateful. I also volunteered for a vacant ICMA Range Rider position on the Central Coast and was selected. The Range Rider position is very interesting, as it allows one to maintain

some presence in the career but without the responsibilities that go with such positions. I've also found the one-on-one meetings with active professionals most helpful to them—and to me.

Lastly, both my wife and I joined our church choir and to this day find it uplifting and spiritually nourishing. Our choir has toured in Australia, including a concert in the Sydney Opera House. We sang several concerts on another tour in Vienna. Doubt that I could have done either if I had been a fulltime city manager during that time. Practicing my piano and organ lessons from many years ago also occupies some of my time.

Planning for career change is so important, yet very easy to defer as an active professional. I can't say that I did it all that well, but my shift to another local government position was a great way to downsize the end of my local government career. So far I've enjoyed good health, though both my wife and I are aware of the health challenges that await our aging. Staying physically fit is a part of it. And enjoying our five grandchildren is another helpful and enjoyable pastime.

It took several years before the passion of being a city manager drained from my system, but it surely did. I am most grateful for this career and for the growth that it brought. I am happy that there are so many skilled and energetic managers to follow us in this career path.

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