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Maurice's Musings



Maurice Jones

Maurice's Musings

There is nothing like the feeling of relief that pours over me when, after eight months of work, six work sessions, two public hearings, one public forum and one retreat, we have finally passed our budget. There's also great pride in putting one of these puppies behind us. I believe budgets are truly a reflection of your community's values. For us this year that meant significant new investments in our schools, affordable housing, public housing redevelopment and public safety. Another area of importance to us? Taking care of our employees.

For FY 19, we were able to offer a 3% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for employees. I've been City Manager since 2010 and during that time we have offered either a 2% COLA each year or a bonus of some sort - either \$750 across the board or 3%. Even when our budget was reduced one year we still recognized the hard work of our staff with a monetary reward. Annual raises or bonuses are just one way we can demonstrate our support of our employees. Another is by communicating with them on a regular basis.

Our most recent employee survey proved just how important communication is and how much work we needed to do to improve that particular area. Folks were dissatisfied with communication from just about every corner of the organization from my office to department heads to their supervisors. As an old communications professional I was a little defensive at first. But after a while I realized we had to do a deeper dive on this problem. So I tasked our Innovation

Team (The I Team) with further examining the root causes of this disconnect and developing innovation solutions for strengthening connections with employees. They provided enlightening revelations on why we were stumbling, and offered some unique ways of addressing our shortcomings.

The I Team discovered that what had been our tried and true way of communicating, via email, was just not cutting it in this new digital age. (Okay, I know email is a digital form but it is no longer a cool way for folks to share information. Kind of like how "cool" isn't a hip way to describe something new and exciting. Sigh ... just like "hip" isn't ... you get the picture.) What it boils down to is people receive too many emails and unless one looks *really* important, they aren't going to read it. In response we are not planning to jettison email as a way of communicating but we are exploring alternative ways to connect with each other like creating our own internal social media platform where all of us can post pertinent information.

We're also developing innovative ways to offer follow-up on critical issues. We started with the results of the employee survey results. Instead of just emailing the results or holding a series of meetings to discuss them like we did three years ago, the I Team came up with the idea to hold an Employee Bazaar, where we discussed the findings of the survey but also offered employees the opportunity to get to learn more about other departments in a fun and interactive way. The event was well attended and well received.

In today's hyper critical environment, it's more important than ever to let our employees know we care about them. Offering fair pay and benefits will only take us so far. So we should always take time to keep our staff informed of the issues that will affect them on a day to day basis and to reserve time to listen to their concerns. Being responsive to those concerns can go a long way in building trust and ultimately morale within the organization.

[Contact Maurice Jones](#)

Position Changes and Other Events

March 2018

- Katherine (Katie) Nunez, former Northampton County administrator, has been appointed deputy director of planning and zoning for Accomack County.
- Matt Lawless, former Boones Mill town manager, has been appointed town manager for Scottsville.
- David Mekarski, former manager for the Village of Olympia Fields, Illinois, has been appointed town manager for Purcellville.



Tedd's Take

Excellence in Customer Service

We all know that a certain level of customer service is appropriate and expected in our day-to-day lives. When we go to



Tedd Povar

a retailer or contact a service provider, we want to be attended to in a timely manner by someone willing and able to help. It seems that the level of service we have come to expect is better measured by the efficiency of the transaction, while discounting the degree to which the experience is pleasant.

My wife and I recently returned from a Caribbean cruise on a Holland America ship. Simply put, it was a re-introduction to what customer service can and should be. Every crew member, from the wait staff and cabin stewards to those folding towels or polishing the brass handrails, had a ready smile and salutation for every passenger in their midst. There was a sincerity in their voices and faces that was impossible to fake. It was real and natural and ingrained.

Holland America recruits its non-officer staff from Indonesia and the Philippines. They have formal training schools in each location, and all recruits must successfully complete the program before signing a work contract. I'd love to have a chance to review that curriculum because it works!

Wouldn't it be wonderful to experience that level of customer service in a local government office? A citizen walks into the municipal building, and every staff person they pass smiles and says, "good morning!" The same would happen when they enter an office, as though the greeter(s) is sincerely happy to see and serve them.

Some local governments may foster this level of customer service, but I don't think it's common. Maybe we all need to go on a cruise if for no other reason than to relearn the art of superior customer service.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

Spring DAO Meeting - Updated

On April 13, 2018 from 9am-3:30pm, Arlington County will host the 2018 Spring DAO meeting at the Department of Human Services Village at Sequoia Plaza, 2100 Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA. 22204.

Theme: "Building Capacity Through Innovative Models & Community Partnerships"



Featured Speakers:

1. Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager ****Newly Confirmed**
2. Deborah Warren, Arlington County Department of Human Services Deputy Director
3. Maimoona Bah-Duckenfield, Arlington County Area Agency on Aging Director
4. Wendy Zenker, Arlington Neighborhood Village Executive Director
5. Vivian McGettigan, York Deputy County Administrator
6. Cindy Mester, City of Falls Church Assistant City Manager
7. Sherri Neil, City of Portsmouth Intergovernmental Affairs Director
8. Keynote Speaker: Katie Cristol, Arlington County Board Chair ****Newly Confirmed**
9. Tara Palacios, Arlington County Economic Development BizLaunch Director

10. Alex Held, Arlington County Chamber of Commerce Engagement Manager

Keynote speaker: Katie Cristol, community advocate, public policy professional, and Arlington County Board Chair who has been recognized as one of Leadership Arlington's "40 Under 40," will talk about her path, provide insight into emerging local government leadership, and provide advice on how leaders can support county administrators as our cities, towns, and counties prepare for future challenges.

Sincerely,
The County of Arlington Planning Team

Certificate News

At long last, the weather may be brightening up as spring finally begins to arrive. As our students finish their semester and prepare their final assignments, the prospect of the coming summer keeps spirits high.

Certificate Director Stephanie Davis continues to work on recruiting the next classes for the program. She has been planning information sessions and attending conferences to get the word out about the Certificate. As the deadlines for registering for the summer and fall semesters are quickly approaching, now is the time to seek out information about the program.



If you are interested in any of the Certificate's courses or programming, Director Stephanie Davis is always willing to answer questions. For any questions, feel free to contact her at sddavis@vt.edu or 804-980-5549.

Civic Engagement - Frederick County



Jay Tibbs

Civic Engagement at the Middle School Level

By: Jay Tibbs

Deputy County Administrator
Frederick County, VA

Over the past month as I looked out into the audience gathered for our last two board of supervisors' meetings, I noticed something about those present. Yes, we had many of our regulars, the usual crowd.

They have their "assigned" seats, just like in church. However, as I scanned the seats there were new faces, faces that appeared too young to care about tax rates or the budget, faces that appeared too young to vote.

Soon, it was time for citizen comments and I watched as each of these young people come forward to the podium, remarks prepared and practiced. Remarks that were practiced ensuring they could be delivered within the three-minute time limit. Unlike the young people that I have seen on the news who chose to make their points heard through marches, signs, bullhorns, and, at times, profanity

laced speeches, these young people were soft spoken and respectful, yet confident in the story they were telling.

What makes these young people willing to give up a Wednesday evening and sit through a two or three-hour government meeting just to have three minutes to address their elected officials? The answer: a new middle school.

As each student spoke, they told a story. They talked about the lack of electrical outlets to accommodate their Chromebook. They talked about the poor air quality within the building. They talked about the constant beeping of CO2 monitors in their classrooms and how distracting it was to their learning. Each one had a different experience, a different concern, but all wanted the same outcome: a new school. Not once during the flow of speakers was there a raised voice, a profanity laced tirade, or a threat to unseat the elected governing body. No, there was only civil discourse, mutual respect, and a lesson for these young people - no matter one's age you have the right to engage your elected officials, to make your voice heard, and to try to influence the process.

In this age of instant gratification, when we are quick to respond to a differing opinion with a reactionary tweet, like or dislike, or other quick response that makes us feel good in the moment, it is refreshing to see young people taking the time to get off of their electronic devices, prepare handwritten remarks, attend a meeting, and deliver those remarks in a respectful manner.

It appears, in Frederick County, that the seeds of civic engagement are taking root in the next generation and if the first few sprouts are any indication, we have potential for a bountiful harvest.

[Contact Jay Tibbs](#)

Innovation Edge

Recognizing the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County



The City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County have recently teamed up and joined an elite cohort of cities and counties participating in SolSmart, a national program that guides localities in lowering the costs and barriers for the community to go solar and encourages solar energy development. To receive a SolSmart designation, communities must take action to reduce solar "soft costs," which are non-hardware costs that can increase the time and money it takes to install a solar energy system. Examples of soft costs include planning and zoning; permitting, interconnection, and inspection; financing; customer acquisition; and installation labor. Reducing these costs will lead to savings that are passed on to consumers. Read more [here](#).

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.

Mel's Poetry Corner



Mel Gillies

Music of a Rainbow

A moment of sheer ecstasy,
this sight of such transcendent rarity.
Union of the earthly and the divine,
the rainbow is God's halo sign.

The sky plays its music inaudibly,
notes of color in symphony.
A harp with strings of light,
each color fills a unique height.

Red reaches most high,
this bass note of the sky,
while violet, of this aerial piano,
plays the highest soprano.

Music and color within us flow,
our life, a spiritual rainbow.
The pastel beauty of our love uplifts
whenever we share unconditionally our gifts.

Can you see in a stranger's eyes
this arch of possibility decorating the sky?
A photo-synthesis of eternity
unveiled in a moment of serendipity.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)

Calendar

Upcoming Events

Spring DAO Meeting - April 13, 2018 in Arlington County. More info [here](#).

Summer Conference - June 20-22, 2018 at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront Sheraton Hotel. More info in the Spring.

[More Dates](#)

Update Email Address



Making a change? To continue to receive the monthly eNews and other VLGMA notices, please email [Molly Harlow](mailto:Molly.Harlow) to update your contact information.

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](mailto:Molly.Harlow).

Future Newsletter Articles

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[Alliance for Innovation](#)

[Virginia Municipal League](#)

[VA Association of Counties](#)

[Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service](#)

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