

### In This Issue

Brenda's Bytes

Tedd's Take

Position Changes

Certificate News

Mel's Poetry Corner

A DAO in the Life

VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee Newsletter Article

Trio of Local Leaders have Shared History

Certified Public Manager Program(CPM)

Calendar of Upcoming Events

### Brenda's Bytes

### Brenda's Bytes



**Brenda Garton**

We euphemistically call it "Member in Transition", aka MIT. It's that weird place where managers sometimes live when a majority of the members of one governing body decides we are no long a good fit for their locality and pushes us out the door, or when we decide an exit is wise and leave on our own steam. I don't know if there exists any data to prove my instinct, but I'd guess it happens most often soon after an election, when there is a change on the governing body. It's what we are called during that period

while we search for a different governing body who may see us as a great fit for their community. Member in Transition.

Who can understand this unique aspect of the Chief Administrative Officer role except another CAO? We work through a rigorous application and interview process, eager to find a locality where we can make a contribution to the community and the organization, where we feel that we can develop a trusting working relationship with the various members of the governing body, where there exists an excellent staff and the potential to sustain it, where we feel that our families can call the place home -- essentially where we fit.

And yet, how do you describe to someone how complex it is to report to a group of people? That is, we report to a governing body as a whole, and yet that governing body is comprised of a group of three, five, seven, nine, as many as fifteen or more diverse individuals. On any given issue, our role is to take direction from the majority of the body, which means that we may be moving in a

direction with which the minority does not agree. In those matters where we make the decision, which do not require action from the governing body, there are just that many different opinions as to whether or not we made the right decision, often without benefit of the detail behind the decision making process we went through to select a course of action.

While folks who select a career path in other sectors -- say the non-profit sector -- may also report to a Board, there is no place that I can think of where every single decision and discussion of the governing body and the manager is so public and often so subject to detailed scrutiny and Monday-morning quarterbacking than government. And, at the local government level, it's personal. Our critics are friends and neighbors, they go to our church, they see us at the grocery store and the soccer game.

So, why do we choose this path, you ask? Well, I can't speak for everyone who has chosen to be a local government manager, but based on my non-scientific research and somewhat anecdotal observations of the managers I know well, it stems from a fundamental drive, desire, perhaps even need to serve, to make a contribution, and to improve the lives of the citizens who live in the microcosm where we've chosen to work.

I would guess that this same motivation is what drives most elected officials to run for office. Without exception, also in my humble non-scientific research and somewhat anecdotal observation, they, too, seek to serve, to make a contribution, and to improve the lives of the citizens who call their communities home. We're not really so different, then, are we - the managers and the governing body?

So, how does the individual hired to serve as the manager of an organization and the group of people elected to govern a locality establish and enhance the relationship that will make the organization function efficiently and effectively and that will ensure that both can do what they have chosen to do?

It's all about trust. The members of the local governing body have to trust its manager to make good decisions, keep the members informed, execute and implement their policies and decisions, and in general, be the vehicle through the staff to make their vision for the community happen. And, the manager has to trust in the members of his or her governing body to be the voice of all the citizens, to support the staff in efforts to serve the community, and to take the best interests of the citizens and the overall good of the locality into consideration in setting policy, making funding decisions, and considering land use and other decisions impacting the community.

It's really fundamentally easy, isn't it? Trust. We just have to trust each other and move forward together for the overall common good.

Once trust is broken - in either direction -- then we are in the job market again, either as a manager in transition or as one who finds a position and moves on to another community before becoming an MIT. We pull up stakes, move our family to a new community, and optimistically start all over again.

Thank you to all our families who sometimes get dragged around, who love and support us, and who believe in us.

Remember to stay in touch with members in transition you may know. A quick phone call or email means more than you know.

Reminders of upcoming events:

VML Legislative Day Meeting Space for VLGMA

Date of Meeting: 1/28/2015

Time of Meeting: 1:30 PM

Location: 8th Floor West Conference Room -- House

VACo Legislative Day Meeting Space for VLGMA

Date of Meeting: 2/5/2015

Time of Meeting: 1:30 PM

Location: 5th Floor West Conference Room -- House

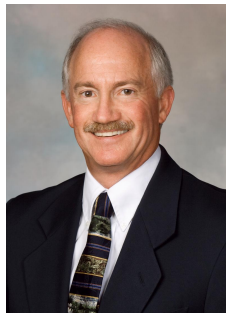
Please don't forget to register for the VLGMA Winter Conference, held February 11-13, 2015 in Staunton. And bring folks from your organization!

I would like to take a moment to recognize our new VLGMA members:  
Angela K. Clem, Woodstock Assistant Town Manager for Administration and  
Noah A. Simon, Lexington City Manager.

-Brenda

[Contact Brenda Garton](#)

### Tedd's Take



Tedd Povar

It's the new year! Time for good cheer and a fresh

start. The economy, for most, is improving, and the press is saying the United States will be the world's engine in 2015. Time for some cautious optimism?

This is also a good time to take stock, and to remember those that are no longer with us. The networks have all run their year-end summaries that list the celebrities and other major figures who have passed on. Sometimes it feels like "who's left?".

In our Virginia local government world, here are the 2014

### A DAO in the Life

I have worked in Virginia local government 23 years now. That is as long as I was old when I first started in Buckingham County. A sobering realization! When I think back over my experience and, particularly, about what skills I have found most useful to try to hone, a few things come immediately to mind.

The first, is trying to understand those I serve: their values, relative strengths and weaknesses, what motivates them, their aspirations and goals. As I develop that understanding, I try to imagine myself in the other's position (be that of my boss, my board, a community organization or the general citizenry). What does he/she (do they) need? What are likely questions? Unlikely questions? What values will he/she/they apply to this matter? What information will be most meaningful to him/her/them? By going through this mental exercise, my work is more complete, more objective, and more helpful for all concerned.

The second thing that comes to mind is the ability (and willingness) to think wildly. A former boss of mine used to roll not only his eyes but his entire head when I would walk into his office and announce that I had an idea. He gave me the space to imagine and throw out some real doozies. A surprising number of what even I thought were pretty outlandish ideas we fleshed-out and implemented with good results. Others did not survive due diligence or simply failed, but we learned something from every effort that made us the better for having tried. Thinking (and,



David Moorman

losses we recall with reverence:

Ellen Posivach, Hopewell assistant city manager from 1990 to 1999, died at the age of 62.

James "Mac" McReynolds, York County administrator, left us at the age of 59.

Hugh Cooper, former Bristol and Emporia manager, passed on at the age of 85.

Marvin Milam, Harrisonburg city manager from 1969 to 1988, died at the age of 84.

Life is precious and finite. We will miss these peers, these friends, these highly dedicated public servants. Their careers provide motivation for all of us to do our best each and every day because no one knows how many more opportunities we will get.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

Position Changes



December, 2014

Judson Rex, town manager for Strasburg since 2010, has been appointed assistant city manager for Denison,

for some of us, training ourselves to think) wildly and big enables us to think creatively and strategically. It not only stimulates, but forces imagination and gives no quarter to the status quo. It is what allows and leads to invention - sometimes without necessity.

Third, I have learned that the power and necessity of clarity cannot be overestimated. I am convinced that the essence of leadership is clarity. Our CAOs need clear direction and priorities from our elected officials. Our staff members need - and deserve - clear instruction and expectations from us. It does not have to be autocratic. Clarity is defining not dictating. But clarity is also seldom auto-generated. It is, usually, something we have to create. It requires that we know what we want, that we care about results, and that we make whatever effort is necessary to effectively communicate what we want. Providing clarity takes work, but it is the difference between impediment and empowerment.

Lastly, I have discovered the importance of learning the art of appreciation. Genuinely recognizing and expressing appreciation for the contributions of others is a skill that comes more naturally to some than others. It is a discipline in which everyone who works with anyone needs to become proficient. It is simply the act of giving credit where credit is due. It is a transaction in fairness that builds confidence, trust and loyalty. Its fruit includes respect, dedication and devotion from those to whom it is given.

At the end of my career, if I can look back and be honestly satisfied that I did my best to really understand those I served, to think wildly and big, to empower others by providing clarity, and to give others the gift of genuine appreciation, I will consider my time and effort worthwhile.

[Contact David Moorman](#)

VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee Newsletter Article

April 2015 Local Government Education

Week: Let's partner with K-12 students to learn what we are about!



Cindy Mester

Prepared by Cindy Mester, Civic Engagement Committee Chair

In 2012 the General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution #93 proclaiming the first week of April as Local Government Education week in honor

of the formation of the Council-Manager form of

Texas.

- George R. "Jay" McKinley, director of public works for the town of Strasburg, has been appointed acting manager there.

- Rashad Young, city manager for Alexandria for the past 3 years, has been appointed Washington, DC administrator.

- Johnnie Roark, director of community development for Appomattox County, has been appointed town manager for Appomattox effective January 20th.

- Cellel Dalton, administrator for Wythe County since 1995, announced his retirement effective August 31, 2015.

### Certificate News



The holidays are over, and a new year has come. Rather than curl up for a long winter's nap (or focus on the myriad other professional tasks at hand), a number of local government professionals will be donning their student caps for the next few months. Our students are sure to shine and make their localities

government in the City of Staunton, VA. The VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee has been developing tools to help spread the word of this honor in order to acknowledge good community building work, educate on all local government services provided at the local level, and to increase student's awareness of career opportunities in local government. This will help us strengthen interest in local government management/public service as a viable career.

As part of this effort VLGMA asks each locality's governing body to adopt a proclamation honoring this week and a template is provided on the Civic Engagement webpage on the VLGMA website

[http://icma.org/en/va/resources/civic\\_education](http://icma.org/en/va/resources/civic_education)

However, adopting a proclamation is not enough to really engage in a partnership with the local school district and the young people of our community. So we hope each locality will develop an engagement plan that meets your local need. To aid in this effort the Civic Engagement Committee has pulled together several resources that are also posted on the website that include a great elementary school level book, high school teachers' resource guide with lesson plans and a report of various civic engagement best practices used by VLGMA members.

Additional local activities could include:

- 1- Provide for all school and public libraries the elementary school level book, Out and About City Hall, which is available at:

<http://www.capstonepub.com/product/9781404811461> This

is a great illustrated story that describes what services a locality provides and is affordable at about \$20 each in hard cover (paper back also available);

- 2- Conduct guest readings of the Out and About City Hall book to elementary classes;

- 3- Share the Teacher's Resource Guide, includes sample lesson plans designed for upper middle/high school students, to be used as part of the curriculum for meeting civics/socialstudies standards of learning; and/or

- 4- Be a guest speaker to middle or high school students regarding your career as a City or Deputy Manager and/or discuss community projects (e.g. annual budget, redevelopment effort or capital infrastructure improvements) that the students will see occurring or read in the news

Also check out this website link

<http://www.capstonepub.com/library/>

for great resources and feel free to contact me with questions or to share additional ideas.

better because of their hard work and studies. [Contact Cindy Mester](#)  
Trio of local leaders have shared history

Whether the students are new or returning this semester, we know that everyone needs encouragement (especially in the winter) to keep going. Some recent students shared their thoughts of previous classes that may offer some help. One student said, "It was an honor to be part of the program. It was extremely valuable in prepping me for being a city manager. I learned so much and met incredible people." Another student stated, "Throughout the class we have reviewed making decisions based on if it is in the best interest of the community, and to make decisions that will serve the community well in the long run."

Lastly, Tim Baroody, Deputy County Administrator in Stafford, summed up the program best saying, "The program creation, the scholarships, the participation of Stripling, Tuttle, Payne, Stalzer, Stephenson, and others, made for an excellent real world,

## Trio of local leaders have shared history



Jay Stegmaier, Becky Dickson  
and John Vithoulkas

Posted: Monday, December 1, 2014

By TED STRONG Richmond Times-Dispatch

The pit was, to hear it now, a bit of a pressure cooker, but it must have been a pretty good training ground, too. Two decades ago, the budget pit, as the Chesterfield County budget office's bullpen of cubicles was known, played host to three officials who now are among the most prominent local government officials in the Richmond area.

James J.L. "Jay" Stegmaier, now 61, ran the budget office, while Rebecca T. Dickson, now 54, and John A. Vithoulkas, now 47, worked for him in the pit itself. Vithoulkas and Dickson inched their way up the hierarchy, from the dark cubicles at the back to desks nearer the windows from which they could see at least a little of the outside world.

Today, the three are top-level government executives, heading administrations in counties with a combined population of more than 650,000.

Stegmaier and Dickson are the county administrators of Chesterfield and Goochland counties, respectively, while Vithoulkas is the manager of Henrico County. Another budget office employee, Carolyn Bishop, was administrator in Powhatan County for a time.

Each of those positions is the highest non-elected office in the county, answering directly to their boards of supervisors.

Brought together to recall their days in the pit, the three were quick to tell tales about each other. All the stories seemed to end with a compliment for the story's subject.

Stegmaier started working in the office in 1979 and began running it in 1987. Dickson joined in 1990, and Vithoulkas in 1993.

Virginia focused, academic experience. I can honestly say that I am a better manager because of the experience." So, whether the focus is on professional relationships, community-focused decision making, or personal growth, these students all attest to the strengths of the Certificate program and give support to this semester's students.

If you think that you are ready for the Certificate program, there is still one last chance for this semester. Although the official deadline has passed for filling out an application to join the Certificate program for spring courses, if you are interested, give Bob Stripling a call before January 15th, and he might be able to squeeze you in. He can be reached at [chars08@vt.edu](mailto:chars08@vt.edu) or 540-448-1102.

Find the Certificate online:



Mel's Poetry Corner

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Stegmaier said. Dickson walked in wearing a navy blue suit, "all blond hair and 95 pounds of her," he said.

"I remember the first few developers ... you could just see it on their faces when they met Becky. It was like, 'Oh, this ought to be easy.' And then they would walk out with their heads in their hands a couple of hours later."

And he remembered the time when the county budget office and the school budget office were invited by a local business group to give dueling presentations on a topic about which they disagreed with each other. Vithoukaskas was preparing the county's presentation.

"I just remember John walking into my office and saying, 'Don't worry about it, Jay. We're going to eat their lunch,' " Stegmaier said.

Dickson and Vithoukaskas said they took portions of the pit's culture with them to their later jobs in other counties. And they both said Stegmaier's office provided a unique learning environment.

"My strategy was always (hire) the smartest, most ambitious people you can find, and then challenge them and give them responsibility," Stegmaier said. They would either flourish in Chesterfield or go on to great things elsewhere, he figured.

That meant a lot of work, a lot of deadlines and a lot of time in the office on the weekends, the three recalled.

"It was very, very high-energy, very high-paced, (with) a lot of deadlines, a lot of expectations," Dickson said.

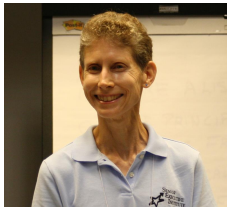
But, both she and Vithoukaskas spoke warmly of working in the office Stegmaier ran.

"He was a great boss," Vithoukaskas said. "Jay created an environment where there was an opportunity to work and to do work you had not done before. He was always coming up with these unique analyses. I mean, who checks behind the state on fiscal stress?" Vithoukaskas said, referring to one of the unusual exercises.

Dickson wound up being deputy county administrator in Chesterfield before taking the reins in Goochland in 2009. Vithoukaskas left Chesterfield in 1997 for Henrico, where he had grown up and his family lived. He joined the county as a senior budget analyst before climbing the ranks to become county manager in 2013. Stegmaier became county administrator in 2007.

The three said that the camaraderie they built in the Chesterfield pit still serves them well.

I go to meetings and run into these two how many times in a given week?" Vithoukaskas said. "And there's a certain confidence in knowing who they are as individuals and

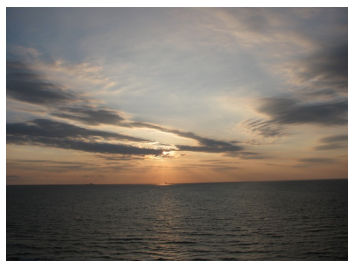


Mel Gillies

### Snowflake Life

A snowflake begins her journey from somewhere high above.  
 She is not alone for all around her float millions more.  
 Each is on their unique adventure to discover now and forever.  
 You might think a snowflake's life is too small to measure at all.  
 Yet a snowflake lives on and on perhaps the inspiration for a poem or song.  
 She may re-appear as a drop of dew, a mirror reflecting to the infinite possibility within you.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)  
[Future Newsletter Articles](#)



A goal of this e-newsletter is to keep

what they're willing to do for this community."

[Contact Jay Stegmaier](#)

[Contact Becky Dickson](#)

[Contact John Vithoulkas](#)

**Certified Public Manager Program(CPM)**  
**School of Policy, Government and International Affairs**  
**George Mason University**



On November 7th, George Mason University's School of Policy, Government and International Affairs (SPGIA) launched the newly-created Certified Public Manager Program (CPM). This program is designed to enhance the careers of those in public service management. The curriculum meets the criteria to be certified by the National CPM Consortium and is calibrated to provide management and leadership theory and practice to all enrollees.

The curriculum will focus on 12 critical topics including strategic management, public budgeting and finance, governance and ethics. Courses will meet in person twice per month for 12 months to enable working professionals to spend meaningful class time with a cohort of peers exploring public administration management theory and strategy. Successful participants will earn the distinction as a Certified Public Manager enabling the use of the CPM following their name.

The first class is being recruited from public safety agencies in Northern Virginia. With the experience gained from administering the first class, GMU will look to expand the CPM Program statewide. It is anticipated that the program will be offered by region when a sufficient number of students register for the CPM Program. The VLGMA Newsletter will be one of several ways of promoting the CPM Program. There is an Advisory Board for the Program and VLGMA has appointed to the Board as its representative [Cindy Mester](#), Assistant City Manager, Falls Church. The Program is being organized by [Tony Griffin](#), Mason's Practitioner-in-Residence and former Fairfax County Executive at Mason's Centers on the Public Service: 703-993-9377 or [psc@gmu.edu](mailto:psc@gmu.edu)

[Calendar](#)

**Upcoming Events**



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).

VML Legislative Day VLGMA Meeting - Jan. 28, 2015 at 1:30p.m. in the 8th Floor West Conference Room - House

VACo Legislative Day VLGMA Meeting - Feb 5, 2015 at 1:30p.m. in the 5th Floor West Conference Room - House

2015 VLGMA Winter Conference - Feb. 11-13 at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton

[More Dates](#)

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### Quick Links

[VLGMA Website](#)

[ICMA Website](#)

[Alliance for Innovation](#)

[Virginia Municipal League](#)

[VA Association of Counties](#)

[Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service](#)

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