



VLGMA June eNews

Supporting local government managers
building great communities through
inclusion, innovation and leadership

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Dear Friends,

I am happy to extend a warm welcome to the newest members to join our ranks: Exmore Town Manager Zeke Jackson, Hampton Assistant City Manager James Gray, Marion Town Manager W.T. Rush, Danville Deputy City Manager Ken Larking, Winchester Assistant City Manager Douglas Hewett, Roanoke County Assistant County Administrator Richard Caywood, Staunton Assistant City Manager Steve Rosenberg, Portsmouth Management Budget Administrator Steven Lynch, Grottoes Town Manager Jeff Nicely, Portsmouth Senior Management Analyst Demetrice Wright, Augusta County Community Development Director Tim Fitzgerald and Haymarket Town Manager Brian Henshaw. Molly has a new VLGMA forearm tattoo design for each of them. Please welcome them and introduce yourselves at the conference.

I know it sounds trite, but the year has really flown by. VLGMA has grown, our corporate sponsorships have increased, and thanks to an excellent analysis by Falls Church City Manager Wyatt Shields, we appear to be on a sustainable path and trajectory. I've conveniently forgotten my other goals for the year.

A final piece of serious advice I need to offer is this: Please remember that our Code of Ethics requires us to serve our communities for two years before leaving for greener pastures. This year the VLGMA Executive Board and ICMA have had way more ethics cases than usual to deal with on this subject, which threatens our collective professional reputation. Here endeth the lesson.

It was never my intention to tell stories and have as much fun as I've had with this column. Seems like the more I wandered away from the humdrum, the more encouraging feedback I got from members who were kind enough to contact me. No one has sued me either, although Crazy Don has resurfaced (see February's column) and made a few vague threats. I do know that Uppachuckatuck is not a



real place (April), but Chuckatuck is, and if I've expanded the role of the presidency by making up stuff when I felt like it, who really cares?

Here's a final story to which some of you may relate before I hand the presidency over to the ever-capable Randy Wheeler. During my first few weeks here in Staunton I was touring various departments outside City Hall. At public works, one of the refuse collection guys challenged me to "come out and ride with us some time." Fool that I am, I accepted the dare and asked the director to make it happen.

I later learned that there were bets on whether I would actually show up on the appointed day. And of course, my alarm didn't go off that morning so I really cut it close, arriving with about 14 seconds to spare. The public works yard was full of freshly washed garbage trucks, already idling and ready for an invasion of the west end of the city. Some seriously skeptical refuse drivers and collectors awaited me in the break room, and I noticed more money changing hands as they sized me up and took bets on whether or not I would finish the route. Later I was told some 18-year-olds don't finish; I was 49 at the time. The crew leader said, "Let's roll" and we all walked to our trucks like fighter pilots on the flight deck, amid whispered commentary and some barely suppressed snickering. (I think there's a fine line between paranoia and situational awareness.)

Not one of them told me how aerobic and totally exhausting the job is. Our collectors literally run through their routes because we let them go home when they finish. So I rode standing on the back of the truck with the other collector, hanging on for dear life with each stop and start, and we proceeded to run through our route, grabbing and lifting and getting on and off the truck, hundreds of times. After a while I found myself in a sweaty brain-numbed zone, kinda like overtime in high school football. That's when you get hurt. Impatient citizens trying to get to work zipped their cars around us with casual indifference. Step off the truck in front of a Toyota doing that and you're done. And I quickly learned that when the other collector throws a loaded 65-pound trashcan at you to dump, and her name is Denise, you damn well better catch it. There's far more than 65 pounds of flying refuse at stake.

When the trash truck was full, Denise and I joined Jeff the driver in the cab of the truck for the ride to the landfill. That meant a light breakfast break at the Exxon station: a bag of powdered donuts, Mountain Dews, Slim Jims and a pouch of Red Man. We arrived at the landfill and my crew greeted the landfill compactor operators, Pretty Boy, Pops and The Virgin, with winks and nods at the new guy, me, like it was time to kill the fatted calf.

The highlight for me came late morning when we were on the outskirts of the city and the truck stopped in the middle of the road, even though there were no trashcans in sight. Denise looked at me with a sly grin and I said, "What"? She replied, "Roadkill, your side." And sure enough, looking down I saw the flattest possum I had ever seen in my life, just waiting for me and the business end of my flat nosed shovel. Apparently, county people coming into the city don't straddle the roadkill, because this poor varmint was a pancake. The two older ladies in the Buick that had stopped behind us looked nauseously amused, like they had just gotten off a merry-go-round.

I finished the route. More money changed hands. Took a long hot shower at home and was back in the office by 2:30 with my head still spinning and a killer

backache. I'll never forget the experience and probably neither will the employees who bet on my performance. I've always heard what doesn't kill you usually makes you stronger. The instant credibility I gained by accepting their dare made me stronger and has served me well. But as a squinting Clint Eastwood playing Dirty Harry once said, "A man's got to know his limitations." The next dare I accept will probably be to let the police department taser me, or maybe I'll just sample the middle school tater tots.

--Steve

[Contact Steve Owen](#)

Tedd's Take



Recent articles about California cities' financial crises and its potential impact on all local government across the U.S. are rattling administrators and elected officials. One

of the latest CA localities to declare bankruptcy is Stockton, a not-so-insignificant city of nearly 300,000. Several dozen more local governments in that state are reported to be lining up to do the same thing in the not-too-distant future.

What makes this scenario seem almost unimaginable to Virginia's localities? What makes California, often said to be the bell-weather of things to come, so different, and not necessarily predictive of local government elsewhere in the country? It may boil down to a list of both manageable and unmanageable circumstances.

Internal Decisions: Many CA localities gave away the farm during the good times. Public safety contracts were renegotiated guaranteeing pay and benefits well beyond reason, sustainable only by continued growth and the fees it would generate. They also paid exploding pension costs by issuing mountains of debt, a suicidal practice. Finally, decisions were made to invest heavily in non-critical public improvements, while again relying heavily on debt and expectations that a never-ending economic boom would pay

A DAO in the Life

Recently two events in the life of this DAO reminded me of the importance of our public service role within the balance of work life framework.

First, I took 8 days leave from work and went to Bermuda with my husband the first extended vacation in seven years. The weather and scenery were restorative and quality time with husband was special after a long budget and winter legislative season. Family time balance.

Second, was attending the city's Memorial Day ceremony, festival and parade. A working day filled with great staff and volunteers ensuring approximately 10,000 participants an organized, clean, fun and safe event honoring all who have died serving our nation's independence and democracy. At every turn I saw quality public service (15+ hours on the holiday for others) in action. Work time balance.

During the Memorial Day ceremony the singing of God Bless America, by a City resident and active Marine in full dress uniform, solidified my thoughts on this issue. Family, friends, military personnel and city government personnel gathered together honoring loss and celebrating the public service. Work and life time balance. "... Land that I love.



Cindy Mester

for it.

External Factors: California's mind-boggling ballot initiative process created a nightmare. Proposition 13, one of the earliest successful questions, limits both real estate taxation and annual increases, binding the hands of elected officials when revenue hikes are fully justified and required. In addition, the relationship between the state and local governments has been and remains amazingly dysfunctional. There is little connection between fiscal and programmatic responsibility in such critical areas as K-12 education and growth management.

In Virginia, while localities may complain about state/local relations, public safety politics, and overall autonomy, those issues pale in light of "what could be". For example, taxing powers, while never sufficient, are reasonably flexible, and long-term pension system health and oversight is taken seriously. The conservative nature of this state, sometimes a hindrance to innovation and initiative, has served both the state and its local governments well when viewed in comparison to the present struggles of several other states and municipalities. Sometimes slow and steady is preferable to being a shooting star. California was that star, but now is left with a growing number of burnt cinders.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)
[Innovation Edge](#)



Anatomy of Cool by City of Durham, NC

In Durham, what might have appeared to be a Herculean task at first (the conversion of a tobacco/mill town whose core businesses had long ago gone by the wayside into a trailblazing 21st century incubator of small

Stand beside her, and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America, My home sweet home."

(God Bless America excerpt/words and music by Irving Berlin, 1938)

So I am grateful for this reminder to ensuring work and life balance for A DAO in the Life.

[Contact Cindy Mester](#)

Certificate News

A common map is the quintessential tool of summer planning. As people sit down to plan vacations and short trips, the map is useful for either exact directions or wishful dreaming. In similar ways, people also attempt to create a map for their careers and plan for future changes. The Certificate program can be one such map, but the plans can often be surprising.

One recent Certificate student, Anthony Lizan, took Bob Stripling's class hoping to get some direction in the world of local government. Instead, Anthony now works at Virginia Tech's Office of International Research, Education, and Development. This surprising turn in career paths now has Anthony and his supervisor designing a university from scratch in Oman. They have put together a group of experts from around the world and with a myriad of backgrounds to assist them, and Anthony serves as the main liaison for the group. Anthony gives Bob's class the credit for his preparation for this unique opportunity.

"Bob taught me a lot of transferable skills that I apply regularly...I have to advise groups of people who may not share the same values as I do," said



businesses specializing in high tech and bio tech innovation with downtown as a destination full of dining and entertainment) is actually a story of good investment, planning, and partnership. In a city made famous by a movie celebrating its baseball (Bull Durham and the Durham Bulls) it is another baseball film - Field of Dreams - that best sums up its story- "If you build it, they will come."

Durham has a history of renovating and repurposing buildings, mills and warehouses (Brightleaf Square in the 80's, Carolina Theatre in the early 90's, Liggett and Myer's warehouses in the early 2000's) but the City center still languished. Parrish Street, once nationally known as America's Black Wall Street had become emblematic of the neglect and lack of interest for which Downtown Durham had become known.

[Keep Reading.....](#)

Visit the [Alliance for Innovation](#) for more information or contact Toni Shope, East Regional Director at tshope@transformgov.org

2013 SEI Alumni Program



Save the Date and Budget for the 2013 SEI Alumni Program.

August 5-8, 2013 is the date of the expanded SEI Alumni Program. In addition to being more like the much loved SEI program, the SEI Alumni program qualifies for ICMA credentialing credits. **The schedule and registration forms are online.**

[Click here for more info.](#)

Calendar

Upcoming Events



Anthony. "I learned how important it is to know when to tailor your advice to fit your clients' needs, as well as when it's necessary to disagree with and challenge your clients when you feel they may be going in the wrong direction." So, while Anthony's path may be radically different than most, it shows that the world truly is the limit for Certificate students.

Anyone willing to broaden his or her horizons should meet with Bob Stripling as soon as possible. He will be in Henrico County at its training center on Wednesday, June 12 at noon to meet with anyone in the Richmond area interested in the Certificate program. To attend, you must RSVP with Sheryn Holinsworth at (804) 501-7207. Bob is also willing to go just about anywhere else in this great commonwealth if you contact him at chars08@vt.edu or 540-448-1102.

Find the Certificate online:



Local Government Virginia News

VLGMA's Virginia Local Government News Facebook group had a busy month in May, posting 75 articles relating to local government administration and policy. This follows an April heavy with budget season news and 117 articles.



The top posters for the months of April and May:

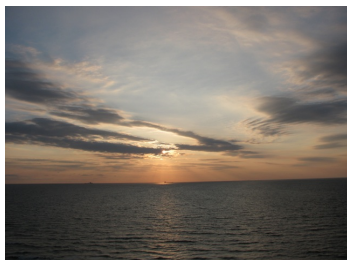
Name	April	May
Range rider Bill Rolfe	42	23
Matt Hankins, Rocky Mount	28	35
Mary Jo Fields, VML	24	16
John Edwards, West Point	15	1

[Summer Conference](#) -

June 19-21, 2013 at the Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel, Virginia Beach

[More Dates](#)[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](#).



Tom Harris, Hanover County

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Help us out by adding content of interest to your fellow local government managers and employees. Join the group, paste in links to the Virginia local government stories you're reading anyway, and help create a richer knowledge base for all of our Virginia colleagues.

May's articles averaged approximately 28 readers, so the Communications & Networking Committee encourages you not only to post news from your community but also to read the articles to determine whether the insights of another community can help you in your daily management activities. Happy posting!

Stay connected via Facebook with relevant stories from our group called "Local Government Virginia News" - simply request to be a member of this group (it is a closed group so only other accepted members participate). Once you're a member, feel free to comment on postings and post stories from your local government to share with others. This new communications tool is designed for us to share, network and learn.

Quick Links

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