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Greetings from Greg



Greg Kelly

Greetings from Greg "You Can't Make This Stuff Up"

As this will be the last of my quirky Newsletters as your President, I thought I would take Molly's advice for a change. You see, Molly always asked for short articles, but, as a lawyer and a music junkie, I am just not equipped that way and so I gave her long articles and technological craziness intertwined. In all seriousness, as most of you really know from your own experiences, you can't make this stuff up, so the best we can hope for is to learn from each other as we journey through our professional careers. I do

hope that many of you found something of essence in some of my stories along the way. Regardless, today I will try to honor Molly's request by being short, especially since I have another article in this month's newsletter VLGMA's 30th anniversary. So here goes.

It's been a great honor for me to have been the President of VLGMA for the past 15 months. While I took over the spot a few months early to accommodate Becky Dickson, who, by the way, was a great President and an extraordinary human being and friend, I was ready and willing to serve when called upon. I dearly miss Becky much and I learned much from her over the years. Her legacy lives on in VLGMA and always will.

As I leave as President, rest assured you are in great hands with my good friend and colleague, Maurice Jones, as President- Elect. He has already done great things in VLGMA and he continues to do so. His revised video project is but one classic example of moving this organization forward.

So, now let's cut to the chase. You have all accepted me graciously and I am most appreciative. I will ask you one last favor before I depart. Send one or more from your respective cities, counties and towns through the Graduate Certificate Program in Local Government Management. I was in the inaugural class of this program and it was the best professional experience I could have ever hoped for. I am now fortunate to teach one of the classes and it is one of the most rewarding things that I can do to "pay it forward" to the next generation.

I will conclude with one last music link from one of my all-time favorites, Jimmy Buffett, that says it all and keeps this article shorter than usual. The song is entitled, [Lovely Cruise](#).

Friends and colleagues, it has been indeed been a lovely cruise. Thank you all for the calls, emails and in person support throughout the years. I'm always here for you should you need me and I will continue to stay involved and contribute in some way to this great organization.

Please join me in welcoming Michael T. Mason, County Administrator, Accomack as our newest member of VLGMA. I look forward to greeting him in person soon, perhaps at the VLGMA Summer Conference.

Best Always,
Greg
[Contact Greg Kelly](#)

Position Changes and Other Events

May 2017

- Zach Trogdon, Charles City County administrator since 2012, has been appointed executive director of the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority effective mid-June.
- Ed Long, Fairfax County executive since 2012, and a County employee for almost 40 years, announced his retirement effective September 15th.
- Wyatt Pearson, planning and zoning administrator for the town of Strasburg since 2014, has been appointed manager there.
- Lee Catlin, assistant executive for Albemarle County, and a 25 year county employee, has announced her retirement effective November 1st.
- Alex Vanegas, public works director for the town of Purcellville, has been appointed interim manager there.
- Robert (Rob) Ritter, former Chincoteague town manager, has been appointed manager for the town of Dumfries effective May 15th.
- Laszlo Palko, Lovettsville town manager for the past 2.5 years, has been appointed city manager for Manassas Park.





Tedd Povar

Germany - kickin' butt!

I spent the first full week in May in Berlin and Cologne, Germany, as a guest of the Aspen Institute - Germany, participating in their German-American Dialog program. Two of my workmates from the Weldon Cooper Center were also part of the 15-person cohort from the US. While it is impossible to fully describe the program and the resulting takeaways, here are some highlights.

- 1) Germany practices the art of political compromise to move the public agenda, perhaps a result of having to build coalitions just to form a governing majority.
- 2) They still trust their governmental institutions, including their national leadership, and are not tax averse. That was refreshing, to say the least.
- 3) The Green Party's agenda (environmental stewardship) is fully mainstream. Compare that to the US where that political party is still seen as "fringe" and "on the outside looking in." Example: A special fee is paid on each electric bill to support renewable power expansion, steadily reducing dependence on nuclear and coal-fired plants.
- 4) In virtually all aspects of infrastructure - highways, electric grid, public transportation - Germany is light-years ahead.
- 5) Germany's attitude toward immigration is generally accepting, even in light of huge challenges represented by accepting nearly a million Syrian refugees.
- 6) They support their version of NPR/PBS, paying a separate fee of \$17 per month per household.
- 7) Students are separated into college and apprenticeship tracks, both of which are HIGHLY respected, helping to maintain a skilled workforce and strong middle class.
- 8) Health care, while not perfect, is universal.

A sector where the US has a significant advantage is in higher education. Our quality and quantity of colleges and universities is seen as vastly superior to Germany's.

While these takeaways do not reflect deep analyses that could expose weaknesses in their systems, Germany has some extremely impressive programs and capacities. We'd be smart to replicate several of them.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

Greg Kelly has been the Town Manager for the Town of Abingdon for the past eleven years and is the current President of VLGMA. He is an ICMA Credentialed Manager and he is both a graduate of and a current faculty member of the Graduate Certificate in Local Government Program at Virginia Tech. Prior to becoming Town Manager he was the Town Attorney for Abingdon for seventeen years, both in private practice and as the Abingdon's first full time Town Attorney. You can reach him Greg at gkelly@abingdon-va.gov



Greg Kelly

30 Years

When I became Abingdon's Town Manager in 2006, I came from a background of years of practicing law in a well-established private law firm to becoming Abingdon's first full time Town Attorney on staff. Little did I know that the "powers that be" were sizing me up to be put in the top slot once the, then, current Town Manager decided to retire. As I often quip, and many of you have heard, they ultimately tricked me into thinking I was being promoted. So as I traded one stress for a new one, I remember feeling like I was lost in the woods. I knew immediately that I needed additional education and guidance from people well versed seasoned professionals in public administration. While I have always had Abingdon's former Town Manager living just a quarter of a mile away from my home, I have tried to resist calling him every time a new problem or challenge arose. Thus, I tried to search for and create my own style of management that suited me best. After all, I was now the next generation of my predecessor. In short, I had tremendous respect for the past administration, but I did not want to simply be a clone for the past.

To gain the knowledge I needed and escape the past, I reached out to several of the regional administrators in Southwest Virginia at the time. Actually, many of them reached out to me to offer any help that I might need. Mark Reeter from Washington County, John Clark from Marion, Paul Spangler from Bristol and Wayne Sutherland from Wytheville all come to mind, and they were all genuinely helpful and encouraging. Shortly thereafter, I discovered that VLGMA existed and this organization seemed to be an excellent opportunity to create new networking opportunities to share ideas and challenges. However, I must say, that, initially, I feared that VLGMA was geared more toward large localities and metropolitan areas and not small Southwest Virginia towns. Man, was I ever wrong! As I fearfully went to my first summer conference with my family in tow, I quickly found out that VLGMA was a very welcoming and caring organization to all willing to join, regardless of locality size, geographic location, educational backgrounds or personal ideologies. It was an organization full of diversity and all were treated courteously and professionally with equal respect. I was quickly put at ease when several people welcomed me and even stated that they knew a positive thing or two about Abingdon.

Given the positive impact from my very first experience, I chose to hit the ground running. I immediately got involved and I tried hard to contribute my experiences to others in the same way that they did for me. Ethics always seemed to be one of the focal points of most networking conversations, and, as such, I quickly found a strong moral compass with VLGMA that I have to this day tried hard to instill in new VLGMA members as well as in my staff and my governing body. In short,

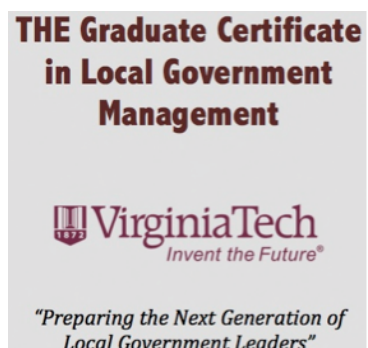
VLGMA has been my professional foundation that has given me the skills and confidences to feel comfortable in my own skin. It's been a group of people that cared about me as a person and about me professionally. Some of us have shared ideas, problems, laughter, tears, prayers, and a strong belief in the future of this great organization. VLGMA is a second family, of sorts, where many of us have watched our children grow up and where we have all been greatly impacted personally and professionally. My overall experience gives me a strong sense of security in knowing that in its thirty (30) years of existence VLGMA has led the way among many other state organizations across the country in preparing the next generation for the future leadership of local government. These thirty (30) years of knowledge that this organization has collected and passed down has allowed each next generation to improve and make better decisions for the overall betterment of local government as a whole.

I have indeed grown professionally in my journey through public administration thanks to VLGMA. My advice, as I leave as VLGMA's current President, for anyone reading this, is to get involved and stay involved. Your knowledge and experiences are important to the organization's future (the next 30 years and beyond). Knowing what I know about the first thirty (30) years, if I had to attach a line from a song to the future of this organization it would be from Herman's Hermits, I'm *Henry VIII, I Am...* "Second verse, same as the first". Stick to a good thing. Why change what works? In my opinion, the key to the current success and the future success is to continue to prepare the next generation through up to date continuing education/career development opportunities, mentoring or coaching and sharing our experiences along our journeys through local government.

Thirty years strong and growing! Happy 30th Anniversary to VLGMA and to all of its current, past and future members and leaders that keep it moving forward for future generations to come. Thanks to those who started this organization and had the foresight for its greatness. You really knew how to "pay it forward".

[Contact Greg Kelly](#)

Certificate News



While summer offers a break for many school programs, the Certificate program staff are extremely busy this summer. The program is offering a full course load, giving our students the opportunity to double up or catch up on their studies. Moreover, we are planning for the fall semester as we anticipate more students joining us. If you are interested in the program, the deadline to apply for the fall semester is August 1st.

We are also always looking for ways to support our students. In addition to hosting internships and recruitment sessions, one of the key ways that VLGMA members and localities can support the program is through scholarship donations. Since the program's inception, scholarships have been used as a way to encourage mid-career professionals to become a part of the next generation of local government leaders. Any support to this program is greatly appreciated, and the benefits reaped will be innumerable in the years to come.

Program Director Stephanie Davis will be attending a number of conferences and programs this summer to help with recruitment. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact her at sddavis@vt.edu or 804-980-5549.

Special Outreach for VLGMA Summer Conference



This is a special outreach effort to our managers, deputies, assistants and others (DAOs) inviting you to our annual summer conference, which is right around the corner! Hosted at Virginia Beach's Sheraton Hotel, beginning on Wednesday, June 21, and ending on Friday, June 22nd.

We would love to have you join us!

The sessions offered are designed to provide you with relevant information regarding pertinent issues impacting our profession today. While there, you will also enjoy the benefit of networking with old friends in the profession, and the opportunity to make new ones. Sharing experiences and knowledge is an essential benefit of being a member of VLGMA. But if you are not a member yet, this is a prime opportunity to learn about our organization, and meet your peers in the profession.

The 30th Anniversary Celebration Reception is a first of its kind for our organization. It will be held at the lovely Virginia Beach Museum of Cultural Arts (MOCA). This event begins at 6 p.m. and ends at 10 p.m. You will be able to peruse the art galleries between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., dine on a delicious dinner buffet from 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m., and dance to the sounds of one of the best top 40 bands in the Hampton Roads, Strickley Bizness! Want to bring your children? We will even have children's movies offered in the theater area. Don't miss out on this once in a life time event! **Registration has been extended until June 5th.**

There are several very reasonable registration options which all include Thursday evening's 30th Anniversary Celebration:

- Full conference - \$375
- First time attendee - \$300
- Thursday only - \$150
- Thursday only first time attendee - \$100
- Students - free Thursday and Friday

We are so excited about this conference and want our members to share in this celebration, that our Executive Board has authorized us to offer a special rate of:

- Thursday evening - 30th Anniversary Celebration Reception only - \$40 per person

Special rates for guests, and children can be found on our conference website. Due to ICMA's revamping of their website, the normal method of accessing our webpage, and the conference information is currently inactive. Consequentially, for more information and to register for the conference use click [here](#). You can also contact Mrs. Molly Harlow at: (434) 987-0331 / mjh3a@virginia.edu

See you at the beach! Sherri Neil and Sandy Harrington, Summer Conference Chairs

A DAO in the Life - Mandy Belyea



Mandy Belyea

A DAO in the Life Mandy Belyea, Deputy Town Manager Town of Woodstock, Virginia

As I walk in the parking lot after leaving the office, I often see a vehicle parked near me with a bumper sticker that reads: *Don't Believe Everything You Think*. It has become my weekly dose of humility. It sparks my thinking and enables a more mindful drive home to mentally synthesize and reflect on the decisions - and resulting outcomes - in which I have been involved. We all have diverse beliefs, opinions, and biases, but in our leadership roles, how do we ensure that we do not believe everything we think? How can we challenge our existing beliefs and opinions to ensure that they do not impede innovative idea creation and informed decision-making? How can we be more adaptive and actively open-minded - or in other words - *more persuadable*? Some of my most treasured managers are those who have modestly admitted to not knowing it all and who have taken others' perspectives and expertise as part of their leadership approach.

I have only been in Town administration for six months, but having spent the other 15 years of my career in local government finance, I am no stranger to the power of persuasion; however, in most cases, there has been a focus on being more *persuasive* - presenting information that supports or influences a particular viewpoint or belief - rather than more *persuadable* - actively seeking out new information or data that challenges existing beliefs. As explained in his book, "Persuadable: How Great Leaders Change Their Minds to Change the World[1]" (Persuadable) the author, Al Pittampalli, states:

"Persuadability is the genuine willingness and ability to change your mind in the face of new evidence. Being persuadable requires rejecting absolute certainty, treating your beliefs as temporary, and acknowledging the possibility that no matter how confident you are about any particular opinion - you could be wrong."

While it seems to defy the traditional leadership model, having a sincere willingness to change your mind in the face of evidence, even if it refutes your most long-held belief, is a great strength - especially considering how quickly our political environment can change; we have the potential to see a wave of newly elected leaders every two years, each with different opinions, assumptions, and viewpoints, and as much as we desire for them to be persuadable, we too should practice persuadability. Further, by adopting a more persuadable approach, if (okay, when) we are met with varied criticisms from our citizenry, we may be in a better position to more objectively assess those criticisms and update our beliefs accordingly. As I continue my career in local government administration, I hope to

embrace persuadability in my leadership style, and if I happen to forget, I know that ever so often there will be a friendly reminder in the parking lot.

If you are interested in reading more about this topic, there is an excellent article, "Reasonable People May Disagree, But They Also Change The World," in the December 2016 Government Finance Review[2], that succinctly summarizes the many key themes of Pittampalli's "Persuadable" book.

[1] Pittampalli, Al. *Persuadable: How Great Leaders Change Their Minds to Change the World*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2016. 261 pages.

[2] Kavanagh, Shayne. "Reasonable People May Disagree, But They Also Change the World." *Government Finance Review*, December 2016: 43-45. <http://gfoa.org/GRF-articles/14656>.

[Contact Mandy Belyea](#)

Civic Engagement - Budget Development

Civic Engagement in Budget Development

This year's budget development and adoption process has come and it has passed. Cross off another year of going through this annual tradition we all love. The Emporia City Council approved its FY18 budget earlier than in years past, with official adoption coming May 2nd. The legally required public hearing was held April 18th.



Leading up to, during, and after the April 18th public hearing I began thinking more about civic engagement (or lack thereof) in our budget development process. I sent my proposed budget to City Council on March 3rd. The proposed budget was put on the front page of our website for citizen review and perusal. No citizens called me to ask any questions regarding what was in or not in the budget, nor did I receive any calls or emails from citizens signaling their approval or disapproval of the numbers I had put together for Council's consideration. Council held several budget work sessions to review the budget. No citizens attended those meetings either. The April 18th budget public hearing was held. No citizens spoke during the public hearing. Council adopted its budget on May 2nd without any major fanfare.

Was the lack of citizen participation attributed to me not proposing any tax or fee increases? Was the lack of participation attributed to a general apathy amongst citizens as it relates to local government? Was the lack of participation attributed to the increased use of social media by citizens to voice public concerns in the privacy of their own home, on their phone, etc. without the accountability required in a public setting? Does the City offer viable alternatives for citizen participation to the legally required public hearing? The answers to these questions all factored into the lack of citizen participation during the FY18 budget development process.

In researching ways to increase citizen participation during budget season, I found an article written by Maureen Berner, UNC MPA Professor, titled "Citizen Participation in Local Government Budgeting." You can find this article at

<http://sogpubs.unc.edu/electronicversions/pg/pgspr01/article3.pdf>. In this article, Berner examines the most effective and least effective methods of involving citizens in the budgeting process according to results obtained from surveying North Carolina cities and counties. Other than the legally mandated public hearing, local governments created other opportunities for interaction through special open/town hall meetings, citizen advisory boards, coffeehouse conversations, telephone surveys, mail surveys, websites/email, and visits to local civic groups. All of these methods provide alternatives that can be used to supplement our mandated public hearing requirements. The article also supports the need to involve residents early in the budgeting process for meaningful input.

Next year I plan to reference back to this article and the alternative methods discussed in order to elevate the level of public participation in our budgeting process (or at least create some dialogue). I hope you do the same!

[Contact Brian Thrower](#)

Mel's Poetry Corner



Mel Gillies

Miracle Workers

A miracle can perhaps be defined
as an awakening insight to blind eyes.
The revelation that the world isn't round or flat
but spiritual, in fact.

What potential to demonstrate good
if we but remember our spiritual Selfhood.
Forming a powerful, radiating beam
when on the sustaining Infinite, we lean.

There is no limit to what consciousness can express
and into form manifest.
What to human eyes appears miraculous
is to Spirit, gracefully spontaneous.

We are all miracle workers, in deed,
far easier than we are led to believe.
By choosing gentleness, love, empathy,
we express the qualities of our divinity.

As our daily activities and thoughts unfurl,
let us be the miracle seers and doers of the world

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)

Innovation Edge

Innovation Academy

The Innovation Academy is the tested framework to strengthen the culture of innovation in your organization and provide support for developing an innovative project in your community. Forty-four organizations have graduates from the

Academy, including Charlottesville, Loudoun County, and Virginia Beach. "Being part of the Innovation Academy has been a great investment for the City of Charlottesville. The Academy provided us with the resources, and more importantly, the knowledge to improve efficiencies and engagement in our community." Jason Ness, Business Development Manager, City of Charlottesville, VA.



Enrollment for the Class of 2018 is now underway. Learn more about the Academy [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

Calendar

Upcoming Events

VLGMA Summer Conference - June 21-23, 2017 at the Virginia Beach Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel. [Registration](#) extended to June 5th.

[More Dates](#)

Update Email Address



Making a change? To continue to receive the monthly eNews and other VLGMA notices, please email [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](#).

Future Newsletter Articles

[VLGMA Website](#)
[ICMA Website](#)
[Alliance for Innovation](#)

[Virginia Municipal League](#)
[VA Association of Counties](#)
[Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service](#)
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