

LISTSERV

Bacon-Savers

by Don Knight

Have you ever been in a situation when you needed an answer, and needed it NOW?! When being wrong could be a career-limiting move? Unlike the leaders of Gotham City, you can't just turn on the "bat signal" and wait for the caped crusader to swoop to your rescue. So where do you turn? I'm glad you asked.

The List That Could Save Your Bacon

I recently asked the IMLA List to share their stories of how it had saved their bacon in those tense moments when you need an answer quickly. One of the first responses I received was from John "Kelly" Addy, the Deputy City Attorney of the City of Billings, Montana:

> This isn't my story, but as I was traveling to the Annual [IMLA] Meeting in Las Vegas last September, I was totally impressed with the way the city attorney for [a small Texas town on the coast] who had just taken the big hit from Hurricane Ike, was sending out emails on the list asking if it would be permissible for the city to use a blown-out hotel as a base of operations for hurricane recovery work. This was on a Sunday and I saw the request go out as I left Billings. By the time I logged back into my Blackberry at Denver, there must have been five to ten responses, with practical advice and where to go for form documents, etc. Sure enough, as I landed in Las Vegas, there was a bunch of more responses... from government employees who were watching and responding to their official email on a Sunday afternoon and evening. It was amazing to me. Awesome, even. Without the list, I wonder how differently the recovery efforts [on the Texas coast] might have gone.

Peggy Lyon (Assistant City Attorney, City of Vero Beach, Florida) was one of the attorneys providing help to Texas attorneys after Ike, and she explained how it works both ways:

> Any small part that we may have played in helping in the Galveston recovery was due in large part to all of practical help we got during the back-to-back 2004 hurricanes that hit our area ... the satisfaction of paying it forward and helping a fellow government attorney is one of the best things about this wonderful list serve.

Bill Kearns, a frequent contributor to the List (and the moderator of the Water Cooler List, in addition to serving as General Counsel for the New Jersey League of Municipalities), had the following observation:

> To me, the interesting thing about the list serve discussions is how much we are alike and how similar are the issues that we confront, even though we are in different jurisdictions with different laws and standards (established by legislators who frequently have no clue about local government). We have also managed to establish real friendships with people whom we have never actually met. The wonders of the electronic age.

Arthur Gutekunst (Sr. Asst. Corporation Counsel, City of White Plains, NY) had a very satisfying experience to relate:

> A little over six years ago, on a Wednesday, I was served with an order to show cause for a hearing that Friday in a bankruptcy proceeding in Nebraska to sell telecommunications property free and clear of liens. When I called the debtor's attorney to explain why, under New York law, that would mean that the real property taxes had to be paid under case law, I was told that it would be a cold day in hell when those real property taxes would be paid. I posted my problem on the list serve, and Leonard Ringler of Newport News, Virginia, sent me a sample objection which I managed to adapt and get barely served in time for the proceeding. Suffice it to say that by the end of the next week, it was a very cold day in Nebraska, White Plains, and hell.

Now You Know Where to Turn

So – whether your city has just been pounded by a Category 4 hurricane, or you want to pound a particularly cocky Nebraska bankruptcy attorney – when you need some help, with no strings attached, turn to the IMLA List.

To Join

For municipal attorneys who are interested in signing up for the List, here's how to join: go to http://www.municode.com and select the *Listservs* link to get the page on *Mailing Lists*. In the first paragraph, click on *Municipal Attorneys* to bring up the subscription page for municipal lawyers. Fill it out and hit *Subscribe*. You'll be sent an email to confirm. That's it!

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