

The IMLA Municipal Attorney List – A Water Cooler Awaits

by Warren Kraft

The New Year is a distant memory, far enough in the rear-view mirror for us to have forgotten the celebrations and to have let those annual promises of change fade. For some, the "sheen" simply wore off as they moved through the work-week.

My own "happy" lasted a day and a half into the New Year, until I received a Saturday afternoon phone callfrom my municipality's Public Works Director. The police chief had advised that a city employee had some driving issues early on New Year's day, which would eventually impair his ability to drive for the city. New month; similar challenges.

An Electronic Place to Socialize

Many of our colleagues recall their early office days, when a free-standing water cooler became the impromptu place to talk about all things work- and non-work-related. A little cone-shaped paper cup, holding a thimble-full of cool water, offered brief refreshment and an opportunity to chat with a co-worker who might also be taking a break. Sometimes, work was the topic; oftentimes, that which happened out of the office became the subject du jour. It became a means, beyond the coffee break and the lunch room, for a quick break from office tasks. Where else did Monday morning quarterbacking of the "big game" last weekend take place? In some offices, the water cooler has returned, though, perhaps, not with the same social impact.

Thanks to the Internet, there is an electronic gathering place where the municipal attorney can seek a similar socializing experience with trusted colleagues, most of whom became acquainted with each other through the Municipal Attorney List-Serve, co-sponsored by IMLA and the Municipal Code Corporation. Called the Water Cooler, this discussion group offers opportunities to learn more than black-letter law from the participants, and from a broader spectrum of experiences.

"Rock Chalk, Jayhawk" is Not a Recipe

Many have fond memories of their alma mater, whether based in sports events, academic experiences, or social recollections. How about the "old college cheer" at the basketball game (at least something more novel than "Go, team, GO!")? What about the phrase "Rock chalk, Jayhawk, KU"? Blissfully unaware of Big-12 conference goings-on, many Water Cooler participants learn a bit of history. The cheer, attributed to the Kansas University science club in the 1880s as "Rah-rah Jayhawks, KU," the thrice-yelled cheer morphed into "Rock Chalk," a transposition of a type of limestone that exists in Kansas, similar to the coccolith-bearing chalk of England's white cliffs of Dover. President Theodore Roosevelt called the cheer the greatest chant he ever heard, and Kansas soldiers used it as a battle cry. To this day, the Jayhawk cheering sections use it as part of the pre-game ritual (and, when they believe their teams are safely ahead to a victory, the cheer is slowly repeated for their athletes). In contrast to this rich background, "Go, team, go!" sounds a bit bland.

If this tidbit of nice-to-know information is not helpful, a delightful new food option for the next social gathering at one's abode just might be. Whether it's a changed ingredient in a widely recognized recipe, or a regional delicacy that can be duplicated with a minimum of effort, the Water Cooler expands one's access beyond the in-office gathering place. For example, it might be brown-sugared salmon instead of trout almandine, or, perhaps, a chocolate mousse recipe first experienced when one was a high schooler and mom stopped at a little brasserie on Rue de la Madeleine in Paris. (Mom had asked for and received the recipe, now safely stored in the archives or on hard drives.) Or, perhaps, it refers to a jambalaya that doesn't come from a box (whose scintillating scent, wafting from a scout campsite, tends to draw unofficial taste-testers all afternoon).

Of course, lawyers will still grab the phone to call a colleague whenever the opportunity for friendly conversation arises. Sadly, those "free times" become fewer and farther apart. Oftentimes, a quick e-mail to the Water Cooler can provide a much-appreciated break—and one never truly knows which direction that "thread" of conversation will take.

For those of you who still haven't joined the listserv and would like to, here's how: 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. Fill it out and hit *Subscribe*. To sign up for the Water Cooler, send an e-mail to MunicAttyWaterCooler@yahoogroups.com and identify yourself and the local government that you represent. You will get a response asking if you want to join, and respond to the message as directed.

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