

Better in Every Way

by Charles Thompson, Jr., IMLA General Counsel and Executive Director

As I write this, we are finalizing the program for this year's Annual Conference. It is one of our best programs ever—in fact, we run the risk of having many members complain that we are not giving them any free time. If you haven't registered yet, do so quickly as space is running out! You can review the program and all of the great topics, and register online, at the IMLA Web site, www.imla.org.

Our Mid-Year Seminar in Washington, D.C. this year was one of our most successful programs to date. One of the many highlights was the presentation by John Hessel, the City Attorney from Kirkwood, Missouri. He gave a chilling eyewitness account of the tragic events that took place when a deranged member of the community entered the Kirkwood council meeting, killing and wounding several people, including the Mayor. The evaluations for this presentation ranged from "spellbinding" to "one of the most eye-opening presentations ever." While such extremely violent events are blessedly infrequent, this tragedy should elevate our consciousness regarding security at municipal public meetings.

IMLA continues to expand its services to members. In early June, we launched the online *IMLA Career Center*, a "one-stop shopping" location for local government legal employment. The Career Center features easy access to local government attorney positions, other job openings, and resumes. Employers pay a small fee for listing jobs, but for job seekers, there's no charge to post a resume. Please take a moment to visit this site—you can get to the Career Center by going to the IMLA Web site and selecting *Careers*, or see http://careers.imla.org.

As the mortgage crisis and escalating gas prices bear down on our economy, many local governments are facing significant budgetary constraints. Often, local governments require percentage cuts in budgets and impose travel restrictions. Obviously, these have an affect on IMLA, as our members cannot afford to attend our events, or question whether they can maintain their membership. We recognize these problems. As most of you know, we have cut our staff to a bare minimum to reduce our costs, and have taken steps to implement a number of productivity improvements. We are looking at a number of other ways to provide you with more services at less cost, but due to our diminished resources, we cannot do everything we want as quickly as we'd like. Let me highlight a few of the cost-saving measures we've taken:

- We now do almost all of our member communications by e-mail. As a result, we are saving about $20,000 on postage. However, we suspect some of you are not getting our e-mails, so please make sure your e-mail address is correctly shown on your "MyIMLA" account and that your IT department doesn't bounce or block us as junk mail. (You can review the contact information we have listed for you by logging in to MyIMLA, on the top right-hand side of the IMLA homepage, www.imla.org, or call us).
- We've changed the weight and texture of the paper used for this magazine. This saves us several thousand dollars each year on printing and postage, yet the magazine looks as fresh as ever, and the content continues to be some of the best you can get.
- We've changed banks, and have negotiated better fees on credit card transactions and better rates on the assets we bank. We have also implemented a "desktop deposit" system that allows us to deposit checks at our desktop through a scanning process, reducing our staff time and eliminating several steps in our accounting process, thereby increasing productivity.
- We have implemented a new "membership management" software system that has allowed us to improve our online presence, and provides our members with an opportunity to register for programs online, and to join or renew membership online as well.



This is just a brief outline—space does not permit for a fuller description of all of the steps we've taken. Needless to say, this helps us to improve our ability to serve you without raising costs, while we continue to seek to

improve our services. Let me mention a few of these service improvements:

- We will shortly make the Model Ordinance Service (MOS) available to our members online. When we cut staff a couple of years back, the MOS was one of our services that was adversely affected. By this fall, the service will be back with several new model ordinances, and will be available online.
- In acquiring our new membership software, we were able to put our archived papers on the Website in a searchable format. Members are now able to search our paper archives and find materials more easily than in the past. Is it perfect? Not yet, but we are working on it!
- We are entering into agreements with other public service organizations to will allow our members to attend their programs at special IMLA member rates—and sometimes, at the organization's member rate. Keep tuned to our Website for more information regarding these programs and affiliations.
- We have held highly successful "stand alone" CLE programs, designed to provide our members with topic-specific educational and networking opportunities.

We need your help in identifying additional services that you want that will make your membership more valuable. Please send me your ideas and suggestions at cthompson@imla.org. I need your help to make our organization better serve your needs.

Let me conclude by mentioning IMLA's legal advocacy program. Local governments around the country often need a friend in court. While we cannot join every case, we can provide support in many instances. Last year, among the national local government organizations, IMLA stood alone in providing support to New York City in a case involving a local government's authority to impose a property tax on the ancillary uses and facilities of foreign missions—ancillary, in the sense that the uses and facilities were not necessary to the conduct of the mission. The Supreme Court of the United States agreed with New York and with us. Similarly, this year IMLA stands alone among national organizations in support of Pleasant Grove, Utah in an important First Amendment case before the Supreme Court. IMLA will consider being an *amicus* in the Supreme Court, the federal circuits, and in the highest courts of each state. In some cases, we will participate in litigation below those levels where the issues are of paramount importance to local governments. To maintain our *amicus* program, IMLA needs the support of its members. We need help in identifying important cases early enough that we can consider whether to join. We need help in identifying brief writers—we would like to keep a stable of brief writers and their areas of interest, so when an appropriate case presents itself, we can call on them. If you are interested in helping in this effort, let me know. ML



MEMBER NEWS

Congratulations!

New York City's Corporation Counsel, **Michael A. Cardozo**, is one of the recipients of the New York City Bar Association's 2008 Diversity Champions Award, which recognizes "the critical role individuals have played in initiating and sustaining change within their organizations and the overall New York legal community." This recognition of Mr. Cardozo's efforts "to facilitate diversity in hiring, retention and promotion of attorneys and in the elevation of attorneys to leadership positions" is a tribute to his leadership and NYC Law Department's staff, who have worked hard to promote diversity. "I am honored to receive this prestigious award," Mr. Cardozo says, adding, "it draws a spotlight to the pressing need to promote a diverse work environment and offer opportunities to all outstanding candidates. Diversity is one of our office's core values, and this award highlights the need for ongoing initiatives. I also thank the Law Department's Diversity Committeee, Women's Committee and others here who play a critical role in these important efforts."

The City Solicitors and Town Counsel Association in Massachusetts has presented the Robert W. Ritchie Special Achievement Award this year to **Christopher J. Petrini** and **Thomas J. Urberlis**, in recognition of their work on *amicus* briefs and, in particular, in the leading case of *Suffolk Construction v. DCAM*, which led to the judicial recognition of the attorney-client privilege in the public sector, which had been under assault. The award recognizes those who have particularly distinguished themselves in the past year by special achievements, and is named in honor of the continued outstanding service to the Association, the legal community, local government, and municipal law by **Robert W. Ritchie**, formerly an Assistant Attorney General and Head of the Attorney General's Municipal Law Unit (and currently the General Counsel of the Department of Agricultural Resources). The Association presented its 2008 President's Award to **Charles J. Zaroulis**, in appreciation for his many contributions to the Association and to the practice of municipal law, and in recognition of his many years of distinguished practice of municipal law. Mr. Zaroulis was recently re-appointed to his 40th term as Town Counsel. ML