PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By: Art Pertile, IMLA President



Thank you, Municipal Lawyers, for all that you do for the citizens in Cities, Villages, Counties and Provinces across the United States and Canada.

"Thank you, for being here to support us during this hurricane. It means a lot to know that you care about us."

In late August as I was sitting in the Emergency Operations Center of one of my client cities, wondering if I should change my name to "Noah" as it appeared that Hurricane Harvey's rain was never going to end, the Chief of Police sat down next to me and said, "Thank you for being here to support us during this hurricane. It means a lot to know that you care about us." His statement summed up why I have represented governmental entities and officials for the totality of my 31-year legal career. It is important that municipal lawyers be caring people.

"Always remember the shoes."

Municipal lawyers affect the daily lives of people in ways that most people do not understand. My mentor, William Earl Bracken, Jr., who served the City of Waco, Texas and its citizens as City Attorney for 33 years, told me, "Always remember the shoes." In one of his mentoring conversations with me, also known as butt-chewing sessions, he explained how important our advice is to the lives of people. He explained that a simple call from a department head regarding allegations of employee misconduct can result in a recommendation from the legal department of placing the employee on leave with or without pay. Although a "routine" decision, I needed to realize that leave without pay will result in the employee going home and having to explain to her son that his mom will not be able to buy him new shoes this week because she does not get paid while off without pay.

My "take away" was that in every situation it is the municipal lawyer's job to anticipate the unintended consequences of each decision you help your client in making. The decision is the client's but it is our job to make sure that the decision is an informed decision.

"I hear them saying you'll never change things and no matter what you do it's still the same thing. But it's not the world that I am changing, I do this so this world we know never changes me. What I do is so this world will know it will not change me." –Garth Brooks

It has been my experience that municipal lawyers are caring people. We are the ones that help cities and townships after a natural or manmade disaster has damaged their community. The municipal lawyer is the person that guides the City through the reams of paper and the maze of regulations regarding what purchases may be reimbursable and which are clearly not, a Herculean task, but we do it with passion, commitment, and dedication to excellence. I have worked on both sides of a hurricane event-the impact side, Hurricane Ike and Hurricane Harvey, and the receiving side, Hurricane Rita and Hurricane Katrina. Hurricanes and similar disasters are life-changing events for many of us and will affect not only the way we live, but the way we practice law. This wonderful area of law that we practice, municipal law, should get more recognition for what we do in assisting people. IMLA sits in the unique position to be able to show people across the U.S. and Canada that, yes, we are lawyers, but we are lawyers with heart.

I will be asking those of you that can and are willing, to participate in a *Habitat for Humanity* or *Keep Houston Beautiful* event during the IMLA's 83rd Annual Conference October 17-21, 2018. The event will allow people to see municipal lawyers and their families doing what we do best - Helping People! Prior to the Annual Conference you will also receive a request from me asking for a photo of you or a member in your office or firm participating in a community event, for example, cancer walk, house construction, neighborhood clean-up, etc. We will use the photos as screen savers during the Houston Annual Conference.

IMLA's priority is to educate and promote our members. What better way to do this than to serve on a committee? In 2008 IMLA President Susan Rocha, appointed a committee to: 1) review the makeup of the Board of Directors; 2) provide guidance on moving the Board of Directors forward regarding diversity on the Board; and 3) ensure that representatives of all backgrounds had an opportunity to serve on the Board and to potentially lead the organization. Ms. Rocha appointed me as Co-Chair of that Committee and I am forever grateful to have had that opportunity to serve. (Thank You Queen!) I believe that anyone looking at the racial and gender diversity of the current Board of Directors in relation to our membership will say, "Job well done!" However, one area that needs more diversity, both on the Board and in our membership, is Young Lawyers. The more young lawyers we can attract to the organization, the more effective we will be. I have appointed a young lawyer to co-chair on all member committees. Having young lawyers taking active roles in the committee structure will enable deeper interaction with more seasoned lawyers, and that collaboration will generate new approaches to solving old and new challenges. Co-chairs working together will invigorate the Board and member committees. The energy will propel the entire organization into the next millennium. Speaking of the next millennium – what about our Millennials? Any organization that is not preparing to deal with the changes that the Millennial generation is bringing to the workplace and the legal profession will shortly be irrelevant. With that thought in mind, I have appointed a new committee, the Social Media Committee, to advise the membership, committees and the Board on the most effective ways to communicate the IMLA message to the public and to our members. I look forward to the report from this new committee.

A heartfelt "Thank You!" to the IMLA staff and Chuck Thompson, our Executive Director, for the wonderful job that you do. ML