

Utilizing retired professionals to help solve today's challenges

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All of us face challenges each day to achieve more, improve performance, and solve a wide variety of public works-related problems with limited resources. Although we can justify the need for more resources, due to the poor economy many cities, counties and government agencies have faced deep cuts in capital improvement programs and operational budgets, as well as reductions in their workforce. This has compounded the difficulty with staying current with the ever-growing demands for providing services and addressing our aging infrastructure repair and replacement issues.

Despite the difficulty, public works officials realize that we must find ways to continue to overcome these challenges even in a bad economy. Some local government agencies have broken new ground with a unique approach to capture the talent and experience of retired professionals to help them solve today's challenges. They have realized that just because a person has retired does not mean that all their expertise is lost or their desire to share it has evaporated. These retirees can still contribute in a meaningful way.

Many retired professionals have worked hard throughout their careers and have chosen to retire and move out of high-pressure environments that result in 60- and 70-hour workweeks, which limits the time they spend with their families and friends. However, many now find themselves uncomfortable taking a seat in the bleachers when they could be on the field as a team player. The chance to participate again on a limited basis is appealing.

Most communities have retired professionals who possess unique experience and knowledge, which in some cases could equal or surpass current staff members. To tap this resource and direct it toward assisting the community in addressing a major challenge or a complicated issue can be rewarding for all concerned. This approach can save a community time and money by providing problem-solving suggestions that could help further stretch limited resources. Let's face it—you can't play golf or go fishing all day every day.

The Department of Public Works in Salina, Kansas, is one of a number of organizations to utilize retired professionals. Our group is called the Infrastructure Advisory Team (IAT) and has been working with the Public Works Department staff since January 2008. The team is made up of six retired

professionals as well as the Salina City Engineer and Director of Public Works. Past experience ranges from a former city engineer, transportation engineer, soil and water conservation engineer, hydraulic/civil engineer, water resources engineer/consultant, and a residential developer. Each has had a distinguished career and is respected within our community.



Members of the Salina Department of Public Works Infrastructure Advisory Team discuss language changes to the City of Salina's Standard Construction Specifications. Right to left: City Engineer Dan Stack, Charles May, Lawrence Wetter, John Reh, Ron Chandler and Douglas Hill.

Our team of retired professionals has volunteered their time to meet once a month to assist City staff with rewriting the City of Salina Construction Standard Specifications. This is a 29-chapter document that outlines how new infrastructure will be constructed. It provides specifications for the construction of streets, storm sewers, water and sanitary sewer lines, curb and gutter, and sidewalks. Many of these specifications are outdated, inconsistent, lacking in detail, and in some cases, provide unnecessary information.

In addition, the IAT is assisting City staff with the review and analysis of the engineering scope of services for a proposed Master Plan for a seven-mile, old river channel redevelopment project. The old river channel, which runs through the city, was replaced around 1960 by a diversion channel that routed the river away from the city. The old river channel now serves as part of the stormwater collection system inside the flood control levee system. The proposed plan envisions the reintroduction of running water from the Smoky Hill River through the old river channel, and the development of the adjacent land next to the channel for recreational purposes with hike and bike trails and possible future downtown retail improvements and expansion. The



project is intended to provide connectivity and better utilize community resources. This concept has captured the interest of many residents. However, there are a number of complicated issues and challenges associated with the proposed plan that need to be investigated and analyzed prior to a decision on the feasibility of this major community project.

It has been exciting and rewarding to watch the chemistry between these retired professionals and our younger professional City staff as they work together to analyze, discuss and debate the technical and procedural issues surrounding alternative courses of action, as applied to engineering design and construction principles. The energy and enthusiasm produced by our team of volunteer professionals in reviewing infrastructure projects is inspiring.

There are other organizations that have invited back retired professionals with certain skills and abilities to handle a specific project, assist educating staff, serve as an advisor, provide support in an interim capacity, or even work part-time on various tasks. Some positions and roles are voluntary and others may be paid. These persons may work several days a week or only a few days a month. Typically, the cost to taxpayers for utilizing retired professionals is much less than hiring a full-time person with benefits or hiring a consultant.

One of the rewards of recruiting local retired professionals from your area is that these persons have a vested interest in the success of your community as well as in the projects and services provided. They take extra pride in contributing their expertise and feel appreciated for being offered the opportunity to once again contribute.

The use of retired professionals in addressing current issues and challenges opens a new door in discovering additional resources for public problem resolution teams. These persons offer extra added value in expertise and experience, which is sometimes difficult to acquire on certain types of projects or where experience is limited. In these times when departmental staffs are being reduced, work hours are limited, and consulting budgets are cut, considering the use of retired persons could help to keep projects on track with a successful conclusion.

APWA has recognized the importance of creative thinking and the value in sharing ideas with others in our public works field. Over the next year the APWA Diversity Committee, Subcommittee on Generational Issues will be working with chapter leaders and Association members to develop a strategy to help our membership tap into this resource and develop opportunities for retired professionals who might be interested to rejoin the team and get back into the game. Your input on this endeavor is greatly appreciated.

If your APWA chapter, department or community has a program designed for retired professionals, please let us know. We would like to hear from you. I can be contacted by e-mail at mike.fraser@salina.org.



2010 Editorial Calendar

The topics for the APWA Reporter's 12 issues in 2010 are presented below.

- January:** Emergency Management
- February:** Water Resources
- March:** Solid Waste Management
- April:** Facilities and Grounds; Annual Buyer's Guide
- May:** Sustainability; Top Ten Public Works Leaders of the Year
- June:** Engineering and Technology
- July:** Transportation; Public Works Projects of the Year
- August:** Congress Show Issue; Utility and Public Right-of-Way
- September:** Fleet Services
- October:** Congress Highlights
- November:** Winter Maintenance
- December:** Leadership and Management

Columns & Features:

- President's Message
- Washington Insight
- Technical Committee News
- International Idea Exchange
- Back to the Basics
- Ask Ann
- Education Calendar
- APWA WorkZone
- Products in the News
- Professional Directory
- World of Public Works Calendar

