

Archive of 2024 President Messages



Find below an archive of all President Messages from 2024 TMCA President Lee Woodward who is City Secretary and PIO of La Porte, Texas.

During 2024 TMCA, Inc. sent monthly news bulletins over email that included topics such as the president's message, upcoming events, and chapter news.

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February 2024

If you don't tell your story, someone else will (and you may not like their version as much). Some may see it as traditional for clerks and secretaries to stay quiet and get work done, but this can make it difficult for accurate performance appraisals or for others to understand all that the individual is overseeing and evaluating in the conduct of their role.

Those who work in the city secretary/municipal clerk's office are charged with great responsibility related to elections, open meetings requirements and restrictions, public information guidelines, proper records and information management, and participating as part of the municipality's leadership team, among other responsibilities. Depending on your role in the clerk's office, you may also be involved with communications and PIO duties, emergency management response, liquor licensing, board and commission management, and municipal court, as well as being generally knowledgeable about notary practices, parliamentary procedure, legislative processes, proclamations, and the proper handling of an incredibly broad array of ministerial duties and other situations both with and without the exercise of personal judgment or discretion. (It also doesn't hurt to be a good creative writer, counselor, coach, cat wrangler, etc.)

The procedural and statutory obligations of the municipal clerk's office are wide-ranging, the implications for failure can be severe. In some cases, the pressure to bend the rules or look away while others act, can be oppressive and dangerous to a municipality.

The work of those in our profession is so important and integral to the overall success of local, democratic, representative government that it cannot be overstated and should not go without recognition, even if you find it challenging to sing your praises. Your elected officials need to know. Your city leadership team needs to know. Your citizenry needs to know.

March 2024

Now into my fifteenth year in our profession, I still love heading off for a seminar. I remember the excitement of my first few times, meeting members and having some fun social evenings.

But most pleasurable, then and now, was learning. I have always loved the feeling of exposure to new ideas and techniques. Even in the tween and early teen years of hating school, I still wanted to know, know, know!

We are fortunate to have an untold wealth of learning opportunities in our own TMCA chapters. Every one of us knows enough of something to instruct others in it. Present at a chapter meeting, ask to be featured on a chapter Zoom call, or just share with chapter members that you're conducting a training in your city or locally. While you're at it, how about inviting other chapters nearby? Or take a page from the TMCA Chapter of the Year, the Alamo Chapter, and invite all the chapters to join you virtually (way to go worldwide there!).

There's no need to wait for a TMCA seminar or webinar to increase your knowledge. Even though chapter events and many other trainings don't earn credit toward certification, they are very valuable. There's no reason not to improve your skill level today (or be reminded of something you learned before and have forgotten - thank you for repeating the notary training on regular rotation, Salt Grass Chapter!).

And guess what happens when you step up to teach? You learn more! Not only do you become better acquainted with the topic of your presentation, you get better at presenting. Developing a presentation, practicing your timing (and attendee management), speaking pace and projection, gaining confidence - the list of benefits goes on!

Don't know where to start? Need a topic? Need some advice on putting something together? Want someone to listen to your presentation and give some tips? Just start throwing it out there - Dr. Holt has links in instruction; I have lots of thoughts (on everything, ha, ha); and there are tons of members all over TMCA ready to help.

I can't wait to hear what you're working on, to see your session announcements pop up in the member portal, and hear that members are even on the road (or online) as featured presenters for meetings at other chapters. Maybe this year's theme should be Share what you know!

April 2024

Have you ever thought about the TMCA Executive Board? No worries if your answer is no. I didn't, either, my first few years in this career. Like many may be, I was focused on the Education Director at the time, the wonderful Dr. Joyce Snay, because I was intent on completing the Texas Municipal Clerks Certification Program. I figured the other decisions and logistics just worked themselves out.

Over time, though, I had questions (about everything, if you know me), which many times had answers that included considerations and decisions of clerks I knew and admired and who served on the TMCA Executive Board. These sages were also recommending serving on TMCA committees and running for office in TMCA chapters.

Why? To spread knowledge among the membership of how our professional nonprofit organization works, to increase awareness of why it is important to the profession and the work we do for our communities, to ensure it continues to be well-run and is always seeking to improve, and more - the same goals we have for our offices, and, honestly, our lives.

It takes each of you to accomplish these aims. If you haven't thought about the TMCA Board much (or ever), now's the time! Trustee and officer applications are due May 1. So, why not

- Review the TMCA bylaws and policy manual on the website.
- Talk to others in your chapter and across TMCA who have applied/served. (Maybe this isn't something you want to do but you know someone who should move on it.)
- Think about what is right for you now - maybe it's conversations, maybe it's chapter board or committee service, maybe it's applying for TMCA committees or the board. (Maybe you didn't get around to reading this until after May 1 and now we're thinking of a little further in the future!)

If you have questions, we've got answers. Please don't hesitate to reach out to the TMCA office staff, to me or any current or former board member, and to your chapter leadership. TMCA is all about education, so educate yourself by seeking out several opinions and perspectives.

We can't wait to hear from you!

If you are interested in serving in a leadership role in TMCA, Inc., applications are being accepted until May 1, 2024.

May 2024

Happy Municipal Clerk's Week 2025! Yes, you read it correctly, I want you to begin planning next year's Municipal Clerk's Week celebration for your office now! You may still be basking in a glow from receiving a proclamation or sharing special moments of appreciation with your team, but that's exactly what makes this the right time to think about next year.

What was recognized and what was not? What got too much focus or too little? This is the same thing that happens to me after my annual review, when I think of another project our office worked on that I could have shared or a Council inquiry I wish I'd anticipated. So, do that now. You're already saving documentation of all the things your office works on and accomplishes in your folder for your next application for the TMCA Office of Excellence award, so why not toss a Word doc or spreadsheet in that folder to keep notes on throughout the year? (Or even start assembling slides for your annual review presentation, too?)

Next April, you'll have a treasure trove to begin producing highlights from in anticipation of the 2025 Municipal Clerk's Week. You can send your Communications personnel (which may be you) some photos and blurbs for social media posts or the utility billing insert or quarterly e-newsletter or share them with your local newspaper. You'll have something to say as you prepare the annual proclamation and something different to say when you accept it. And updating and seeing this list periodically all year will help you and your staff tell your story more naturally and more completely when the opportunities arise - new Council orientation, meeting new employees in other departments, sharing as part of City U., and so on - don't waste such significant moments!

These are all ways of telling the story of our profession to all who perform it, not just ourselves. You're educating those who may interact with the City Secretary's/City Clerk's Office in other communities, so enjoy preparing this gift to them. Happy Municipal Clerk's Week 2025!

June 2024

If YOU Don't Tell Your Story...

In this space in February, we provided some good reasons of the importance of sharing what the city secretary's office is and does, why it's so important, and when and where to share. This month, we're providing some ideas on how to do it!

If you think no one else seems to know what you do all day – you're right! The role of the municipal clerk is made up of hundreds of tasks from the different areas of your duties, with priorities that can change in an instant. Helping your governing body, your coworkers, and especially your community have a better understanding of the responsibilities of your role can be beneficial to you...and for them.

"I'm the Condolezza Rice of Muleshoe, Texas", LeAnn Gallman, retired, former City Secretary and City Manager of Muleshoe – Reducing your career path to three or four sentences can be challenging, especially depending on how many extra hats you wear in your organization. Be able to express these statements in clear conversational language any time you're asked about your job. Put your elevator speech on the back of your business cards for visual learners and later reference. Remember, this is not a motto or mission statement, rather this tells what you do and what you're responsible for.

Content is King – Everyone, everywhere, needs content (even this newsletter!). You can find a way to write about what you do or what you've learned from doing it in myriad contexts. Create Did you know...? posts for your city's social media; write short explanatory articles on election topics for the paper; offer to give short talks on the importance of records retention to local non-profits. Share tips on parliamentary procedure, hold orientation sessions to encourage citizens to apply for boards and commissions, go on your local radio station to provide factual information on an action the Council has recently taken (only with their blessing, of course). If you are fortunate enough to have a communications staffer in your organization, become their best friend to help each other produce content.

I just called to say "I Love You"! – You probably have an email every week or month or quarter that informs someone about something related to your job duties, so why not share it with some citizen ambassadors, too? Keep an email contact group of those who participate in City University or Citizen Police Academy. Include those who are suspicious of City government but trust you to fulfill their public information requests. Add former members of your governing body, because your citizens assume they're still

in the know. Email this group some news and information at least quarterly. It doesn't have to be long and exhaustive or in a fancy newsletter (although graphics help).

Let's give them something to talk about – Share the news from the content you've prepared with the group you've assembled. Ask them to share it. Tell them to remind others to come to the source (you or your city's website) when they have questions or hear gossip.

What have you done for me lately? – Don't be shy. Compile this material and be sure to highlight it in your annual review. Discuss the posts and the ambassador group emails during your radio appearance. Highlight them in your newspaper article. Post your elevator speech online and on your page on your city's website and provide links to it in everything! Many people believe something has to be read or heard about three different times to make an impact. So make an impact!

...someone else will tell it for you. Don't let someone less informed control the narrative about the City Clerk's office (or whatever you're called). You don't have to be a Kardashian to have something worth telling and you don't have to write like Hemingway to convey it beautifully. You're a citizen and a public servant and you have a special opportunity to help inform and build relationships between your organization and your citizens. After all, you're the expert!

July 2024

Happy summer! Hope things in your office have calmed enough to spend some time thinking and planning. In our office, we've been having some conversations about imposter syndrome and the ability to trust that we work in a safe space. We are extremely grateful to be a strong team in a very stable organization and know that is not the case everywhere.

This makes me think about the Barbie Dream Gap Project from Mattel, too. Have you watched the video at <https://shop.mattel.com/pages/barbie-dream-gap>? If not, go do it right now, it's only about a minute. I'll wait right here.

The video focuses on the need for girls to see women in all places and roles and to be able to see themselves capable of achieving the same. It notes Mattel's work since 2018 in using the Barbie name to support mentorship and empowerment initiatives to fight bias and stereotyping to help girls develop confidence and reach their full potential. Young people who believe they can be more and do more become adults who feel the same, but we know not everyone comes from environments that met these needs. There's no better time than today to address a possible dream gap in your own workplace.

We can do this in our offices, and it's not limited by gender or age. Providing mentoring and creating opportunities for your team to develop their skill is priceless for them, for you, and for your organization. It increases confidence, adds proficiency and flexibility (and peace of mind when you are out on vacation or at a seminar), and builds the strength of talent in your office.

This doesn't have to be done formally but it is good to talk about so that it can be recognized and promoted. Mentorship and empowerment start as simply as:

- the language you choose when talking about your team members (____ is our subject matter expert on ____; ____ holds a credential in ____; etc.);
- introducing them to others, especially elected officials, department heads, and community leaders, to imply these team members are worthy of being known and connected;
- crediting them by name for their work, ideas, and projects;

- rusting them with new tasks and shepherding these along so they can learn and be successful at them;
- ensuring that they get regular reviews that do not contain surprises because you've worked together throughout the review period to address challenges;
- reminding them that they can create a path to any position or achievement they admire in others - help them recognize and address their own dream gaps; and
- keeping up with progress toward their goals and setting new ones - GOal big.

While you're at it, don't forget yourself! It's important for you to stay current and to look for your own development opportunities and it's a good example for those around you. Someone is looking up to you, even if you don't know it. Help Barbie close the dream gap for all ages!

August 2024

Poor Dorothy Gale. Bored on the farm and tired of the same old, same old. What's a Kansas girl to do? As we know, and like many of us, Dorothy is swept up and has a dream of something else. Being somewhere else, finding new friends, indulging in poppies (whether one views that as addiction or simply the act of placidly settling) - while she continues to seeking a way to get back home.

Hijinks ensue, as in any memorable story and as in our own lives. What are all the things that 'prevent' us from accomplishing what we say we've set out to do?

At the end of the day, Dorothy is told she could have gone home all along, because she already had the great power of the ruby slippers (or the silver shoes, as in the original book). She returns and is overcome with happiness at being back on the farm.

I'd like to propose that you don't need the shoes (which is no reason not to buy the shoes, please don't misread that). You don't need to visit the great Oz, either (but do network with him and keep him in your ever-expanding Contacts list, we're not talking crazy here). You aren't limited by being raised wherever you were raised or by your family or by the breed of your Toto.

Will all your aspirations be attained? Maybe, maybe not. Will it be easy? I can pretty much guarantee a no there. But will the effort ensure you end up in a different place and, quite likely, as a different you? Yes, yes, YES!

And therein lies the real reward. A different you isn't automatically better or worse, but is certainly more experienced. We consider this a resource in our office, all the different ways that we have been and things that we have seen and the knowledge and skills we can call on for help.

As the fabulous Nicole Lance (NicoleLance.co) encouraged recently, be a good wanter. Want what you want without worrying about the worthiness of the want. Sometimes we tell ourselves we don't deserve something or that there's not a good reason for wanting it. Just go ahead and want it!

I keep some inspirational items tacked on my office door, including a fun line from Gimli the Dwarf in The Lord of the Rings - "Certainty of death. Small chance of success. What are we waiting for?" Now, I hope the odds are (ever) more in your favor in your office than in the trek in the book or the movie, but I do like his spirit. He is definitely

clear on where he wants to go and what is next to get there and has found the courage to set out and rally other to join him.

The yellow brick road is laid before you and the real power of change is truly within you, so what are you waiting for? Take the first step toward whatever you think you want to do or to become today. It's just one step. And then another. We'll see you - and cheer you! - along the way.

September 2024

Which TMCA chapter is the Chapter of the Year?

Yours! Well, maybe.

Hands down, the hardest thing asked of the TMCA President so far this year is to select a Chapter of the Year. I really do want to just name all seventeen of them at the banquet in October (let's see if I manage to overcome that urge). Okay, just kidding, I have made a solid choice and look forward to your saluting them with me!

Any time one chapter is selected, sixteen others are not, and yet every one of them offers something special to a group of our members. Eight chapters have requested President's visits so far this year and five of those have already occurred, all complete delights. If you are ever in a position to visit another chapter's meeting, I strongly encourage it.

Please forgive my paraphrasing Tolstoy in this way, but each happy chapter is alike and each chapter has its own special challenges. As you can imagine, based on the geography of Texas, these obstacles vary by distances and sizes of municipalities; unmet local and regional needs; levels of harmony or discord among politicians and other subnational entities; issues such as water, workforce, and political will; and the degree to which the clerk's office is viewed, resourced, and supported by its community and its elected and appointed officials.

And yet, despite it all, our chapters thrive! They hear and see each of their members, providing documents, plans, procedures, advice, humor, encouragement, and opportunities for advancement. They connect their members with others outside local government who can assist, they put on trainings in person and virtually to extend the educational goals of TMCA, they share their war stories and lessons learned so no one has to reinvent the wheel, and they remind members that they will already know a familiar face at a seminar.

So, what if you're not in a chapter? Hie thee to the nearest one! (Or the nearest several, if you're in central Texas or the Metroplex!) Can you live without a chapter? Sure, but why would you, when you could flourish with one? Small or underfunded offices may have a hard time getting away for a meeting, so invite your chapter to your place! Host a brown bag lunch if there are no funds or a kaffeeklatsch online or even on a conference call on the phone if no one has an online account. Meet up for an after hours event or a bike ride or hike or meet at a golf driving range on the weekend. I hear some people in Texas even play something called pickleball...? I can promise that you will not regret

getting to know some clerks in your area a little better, giving and receiving, each to your own abilities.

I know you will enjoy recognizing and celebrating this year's winner of Chapter of the Year with me, they are absolutely deserving. And, at your December chapter meetings, raise a cheer both for them and for yourselves. Thank you to each fabulous chapter for making TMCA such a wonderful and beneficial home for all our 1200+ members!

October 2024

Mary Lynne Stratta, the Clerk of the Future!

Even having recently retired after 34 years, Mary Lynne Stratta still appears to me to be a role model for the city secretary of tomorrow. Like so many of us, she came to this career from other work and set about learning its contours.

Mary Lynne Stratta has a sharp mind and a keen intellect and she set both to the task. As she learned, she taught. At her retirement, one individual after another told how Mary Lynne had helped them follow the law and do their job better. Some were employees or coworkers, but most of them had been, or were, elected officials, thankful for what she knew, but even more appreciative that she had been willing to advise them. Mayors and Councilpersons for cities she has never even worked for spoke of her wisdom, generosity, and guidance.

Mary Lynne Stratta has energy. As the clerk in Bryan, she had responsibility for the Council's proceedings, for elections, for the City's records generally, but also oversaw vital records. As she saw her city grow and develop new needs, she identified them and stepped forward to take on additional roles. The municipal court staff was brought under her supervision. Then she built the communications department. Et cetera. The city has basically been in the process of sharing her job across three or four positions in preparation for her retirement, and not one of the individuals in those posts will be short of work once she's gone.

November 2024

I can be a good citizen by being the best city secretary ever known in history

Julia Rose McGrew has our number. After the October banquet in 2023, clerks were visiting in the hotel recreational beverage area when City of Katy City Secretary Becky McGrew told us about a drawing her daughter made at school. I loved it and asked her to share it (you'll see it reprinted here). This is what Becky sent with the drawing:

The project was for her 1st grade class and the discussion was about being a community helper and how to serve others. They had a writing prompt and a window to illustrate their thoughts...

She wrote (this is a translation because they write/spell independently and her description of the drawing) "be the best city secretary ever known in history." She drew herself working on the computer by the window, her family displayed on the wall and her pug Luna looking out the other window (because when she takes over pets will be allowed in the office).

As a mother, I was very proud, but as a city secretary, I felt so deeply appreciated. As we all know, kids are brutally honest and she sees me, this position, and what we all do as a service to aspire to. It is an honor to share that moment and to remind everyone across all city secretary offices in Texas that you are a good citizen, and that your service impacts the lives of others every day. We are often so busy handling city business that we forget we are a part of the history we write each day for our cities. I hope sharing this inspires someone to be their city's best city secretary "evr now ni hissrey". And, don't worry, we will work on her spelling before she gets there! 😊

Well, just ask anyone I've told about this in the last year, I cry every time I share it. Julia knows best city secretary ever well because she lives with one! And, yes, Julia, I cannot wait for the day the pets come to work.

Another clerk who epitomizes best city secretary ever for me is the inimitable Shelley George of Allen. A long-time leader in TMCA, Shelley served many years on the Board and as President during one of our most trying years, 2020. In TMCA, presidents serve the year after their term as the immediate past president and then typically as the chair of the Advisory Management Committee (AMC) before rolling off and often serving in important non-Board positions such as chair of the Nominating Committee or the Past Presidents Committee. TMCA service is long.

Shelley has a passion for TMCA like you wouldn't believe. She loves our organization and its members and I think she physically hurts if she thinks we're headed the wrong way. Fortunately, she's not shy about telling us when she's concerned, but too often (to my mind) she couches those comments with something like It may not be my place to say this. or I know y'all are tired of hearing me. or Y'all shouldn't let me speak any more today.

I think part of that is being Southern, part of it is being kind, but part of it, I think, is Shelley not acknowledging how incredibly valuable her perspective is. Her comments often make me consider a new angle or realize restraint or delay might be a better course of action or convince me that I need to make a better argument. But I am NEVER sorry to see her seek recognition to speak.

And it's not just talk. Shelley is one of those special people (lots of these in TMCA, too, fortunately) who asks in advance how they can be of help. She is willing to pitch in for projects and connect others and do a little research. Shelley is friendly and welcoming and happy to share our story where it needs telling. She's a woman with opinions but also with a heart for the clerk's office and hands seeking to assist and a willingness to show up and time to listen.

Shelley, you are ending your time on the Board (again) this year, after so generously coming back as AMC Chair. I would not be surprised if more presidents call on you in the coming years and I hope you will still have the availability and energy you have always given. TMCA, Julia Rose McGrew, and a ton of Texans who don't yet realize that the city secretary's office is in their future are already beneficiaries of your wisdom and example. Thank you for your service.

December 2024

It's December? It's almost 2025? That seems impossible. Well, this space is a potpourri for the holidays, so here we go!

This is a crying office.

This is one of the sayings in the La Porte CSO. It's our way of signaling that we want to be kind to and take care of each other, even when things get one or another of us down or we make a mistake. We spend so much time at work and together and we know we will need to see each other gracefully through life's challenges. That requires hard work, patience, and tolerance.

Knowing how incredible, accepting, and supportive TMCA is overall, it has broken and enraged my heart to see clerk's offices where some have turned against others, driving them out, disrupting their careers, and attacking their confidence. Imagine going through this. No one has to like everyone, but we need to be able to safely bring our real, entire, opinionated, flawed, mental and emotional health-challenged selves to work (while, yes, also complying with the employee manual).

This holiday season, if you work with someone 'difficult', please keep an eye out for them, especially if they are not able to do so very well themselves. Encourage bullying team members to take time to put themselves in the difficult person's shoes when they disagree. Help everyone get curious about other perspectives. Let everybody rant a little and also tell them how you view the situation. Offer them some undivided attention if they need an ear. If you see it happening to someone else, please speak up. HR policies are in place to protect against injustice and true harm, not to make every minute of every day unobjectionable or align with only a single outlook on life. (And if that someone difficult is me, please say so!)

Ichi-go ichi-e

This is a Japanese reminder to treasure the unrepeatable nature of an instance; to realize this only happens once, right now, and to notice it. As the world gets colder and darker over the winter months, we can resolve to enjoy special moments. Think about what the words awesome and wonder really mean and let yourself experience them regularly. Driving the 400 miles to and from Padre for the banquet in October provided time for my mind to wander a bit and, as always, to wonder why I'm here and what's next. I hope you get some moments to yourself before the new year begins, to quietly breathe and reflect.

Grateful tidings

Many, many heartfelt thanks to Miriam, Amy, Kathleen, and Allee, whose hard work has made the last twelve months so easy and such a pleasure. My sincere appreciation both to the fine members of this year's Board and to all those great clerks I have had the pleasure to serve with on the past years on the Board - it's been an amazing learning experience. I heartily applaud and stand ready to support our incoming president, Alicia Richardson, who is going to roar through 2025 and knock our socks off with her passion for service and our association.

And, to you, the 1230 members of TMCA, thank you for doing what you do all year for the citizens of Texas - continuing your educational training and professional development, providing excellent resources to your communities, and caring for the democratic process and integrity of elections. The depth and breadth of your dedication, sacrifice, and grittiness may never be truly known, and yet they improve lives every day. It is an honor to represent you. Thank you, and I'll see you at Election Law!