Get Involved: Our Committees are Invaluable to MMRMA

by Michael Rhyner
Executive Director

MMRMA SEEKS CANDIDATES
for two of our Standing Committees: the State Pool Committee and the Events Planning Committee.

These vacancies are due to the recent retirement of Jon Bayless from the City of Grand Ledge. Jon has been a long-time supporter of MMRMA and was very active on our committees during his tenure. He made significant contributions to the success of MMRMA, and he will be missed by those who worked with him. Everyone at MMRMA wishes him a happy, healthy retirement.

Jon’s departure is another example of the changes we are seeing in our membership. MMRMA is entering its 34th year, and many of our strongest supporters and committee participants have been with us for decades. By virtue of demographics, we expect to see even more changes as other longstanding members retire.

While we lose considerable institutional memory with such departures, it also creates opportunities for others to lend their voices and ideas to MMRMA.

Many Ways to Contribute
MMRMA is a member-governed organization that offers many ways for member employees to participate. The Board of Directors adopted a Committee Policy stating: “Drawing on the expertise of its membership, it is the policy of MMRMA to develop and implement a committee structure to assist the Board of Directors in policy development and the Executive Director in policy implementation and management.”

Our policy establishes four Standing Committees and seven Risk Control Advisory Committees, with a total of 137 committee seats.

These committees have a hands-on, meaningful role in the governance of MMRMA. The Board of Directors relies heavily on their advice and recommendations for action. In addition, committee members have the opportunity to further enhance their knowledge of risk management.

Serving in this way is also an excellent chance to network and collaborate with peers. The relationships that individuals have developed by serving on MMRMA committees have helped them throughout their entire working careers.

A Rewarding Commitment
Each Standing Committee meets four times per year, and MMRMA reimburses committee members for travel and provides a meeting allowance. Of the four meetings, one is held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting at the Grand Traverse Resort and another with the March Risk Management Workshop in Lansing. The other two meetings are held at central locations across the state.

I encourage those who are new to MMRMA, as well as those who haven’t yet served on a committee, to become involved. I am confident that you will find it to be professionally rewarding.

Committee vacancy notices are posted on mmrma.org.
A Rewarding Transition
Those responsibilities ultimately led to what would become his life’s work. The City of Eaton Rapids hired the CPA firm to do its budget, and Knizacky was assigned to the task. Eventually, city officials wanted someone with financial experience on staff, so they created the job of finance director. They offered the position to Knizacky, and he accepted.

“I felt I could actually implement some of my recommendations,” he explains. “Plus, I wanted to get away from all the travel that went along with my auditing duties.”

Two and a half years later, Eaton Rapids created a city manager position and gave Knizacky the job. Then, about a year later, he learned that Mason County had established a new position: county administrator.

Knizacky had grown up in the county, and his wife Vicki was expecting the couple’s first child. Returning to Mason County seemed like a good move, so he applied—and started as county administrator on February 1, 1994.

As a municipal administrator, his political science education proved beneficial. “As I made the shift into government, it was good to have studied the dynamics of different types of political entities,” Knizacky says. “County government is a lot different than city or township government, and my background helped with the transition.”

An Honored Athlete
Knizacky’s willingness to change likely helped, as well. It was not the first time in his life that he had shifted gears and embraced a new challenge. As a college student, he took up a new sport in order to participate in an indoor track and field meet.

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“I ran cross country in high school,” he says. “In my freshman year at Aquinas, I couldn’t compete in my distance race [at the meet] because each school was limited to two participants per event.” The coach told Knizacky he could compete in another event—race walking—if he was willing to learn how to do it.

Knizacky was in his element with race walking, and the rest, as they say, is history. He went on to be a five-time All-American and, after college, lived at the Olympic training center in Colorado Springs for two and a half years. He finished ninth at the 1984 Olympic trials and was part of a 10-man team that set a world record for the 24-hour relay in race walking. (See sidebar).

Shortly after those achievements, Knizacky retired from race walking, but the resilience he displayed as an athlete has remained vital to his life and career. As with his work trajectory, his decision to change gears and try something new allowed him to find his calling and thrive. His athletic successes returned to the spotlight earlier this year, earning him a spot in the Mason County Sports Hall of Fame.

Embodiment of Service
Knizacky is committed to his family and to Mason County, and has never stopped working to ensure their vitality.

Knizacky joined the MMRMA Board in 2009 and has lent his measured, resourceful perspective to its strategic initiatives and policy decisions.

In his role as county administrator, he oversees many functions—developing budgets and policy, managing human resources, handling employee benefits and the county’s many insurance and risk management needs, among a host of other responsibilities.

Still, his busy schedule doesn’t stop Knizacky from helping his fellow government officials and the organizations that support them. He is an active contributor to the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers (MACAO).

And, of course, there is his long-term participation with MMRMA. He sat on the Finance Committee for 10 years before joining the Board of Directors in January 2009. Since then, he has lent his measured, resourceful perspective to the Board’s many strategic initiatives and policy decisions.

“As a former member of the Finance Committee and now the Board, I’m very proud that we implemented the Net Asset Policy,” he says. “Members value MMRMA for many reasons, and the net asset distribution is certainly a big component of that.”

Knizacky also cites the new underwriting rating and pricing system and new services like data breach coverage as highlights of the Board’s work. “MMRMA has always provided stability and personalized service,” he notes. “But it’s important to seek new ways to serve the members and meet their needs.”

Family Matters
While Knizacky no longer runs or race walks, he stays active, gardening in the summer and making syrup from the plentiful maple trees on his property every winter.

“And obviously, Vicki and I enjoy dancing,” he says with a smile. Readers who have attended MMRMA’s Annual Meeting have likely seen the pair (as well as their two daughters) cutting quite a rug on the dance floor.

Jessica, the child they were expecting back in 1994 when Knizacky started at Mason County, just turned 20. A sophomore at St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, she is considering a biology major. Meanwhile, Theresa, 17, a senior in high school, is active in 4H. “I, too, was involved in 4H growing up,” Knizacky recalls of life on his family’s farm in Free Soil, a small community in Mason County.

Knizacky may now live close to where he was raised, but he’s always made the most of his life and circumstances.

Marathon Man
In the 1980s, Fabian Knizacky (center) was one of America’s best race walkers, finishing ninth in the 1984 U.S. Olympic trials. He was also a member of a 10-man team that set a world record for the 24-hour relay in race walking. His team covered more than 195 miles, besting the previous record by more than 15 miles.

By striking a balance between his sense of adventure and the value of family and history, he has found a formula for personal and professional success.
New Deadlines Set for RAP Grant Applications

Since the inception of the Risk Avoidance Program (RAP) in 1997, MMRMA’s Membership Committee has reviewed more than 2,700 grant applications. We fund projects and equipment in many areas of municipal responsibility, including law enforcement, fire and EMS, public services, parks and recreation, and administration. The most frequent awards have gone to projects involving TASERs, in-car cameras, security camera systems, and push cameras for sewers.

Over the past two years, MMRMA has received about 75 RAP grant applications per quarter. Due to the high volume of requests, the Membership Committee adjusted the quarterly application deadline at its August 2013 meeting.

Rather than setting static deadlines throughout the year, the committee decided to establish each quarterly deadline for 30 days prior to the date of its next meeting. This allows enough time to accurately review and process RAP grant applications.

Current RAP grant deadlines are updated and posted on mmrma.org. Please visit the site regularly to keep abreast of the next RAP deadline as well as other program details and risk management news.

For questions about RAP grants and the application process, contact Cara Kowal, Manager of Risk Management Services, at 734-513-0300 or ccowal@mmrma.org.

MMRMA Meeting Planner Repeats as Michigan’s Best

Association Guidance has been named 2014’s best meeting planning company by Michigan Meetings & Events magazine. This marks the second year in a row that Denise McGinn and her team have taken home this honor.

Co-founder and co-owner of Association Guidance, Denise brings her extensive education and experience to the table for her clients. As the magazine noted, her company has planned nonprofit meetings for more than 20 years. The value of that longevity and experience is recognized by MMRMA as well. “For nearly a decade, Denise has demonstrated excellence in planning our meetings,” said Executive Director Michael Rhyner.

For her part, Denise thanked MMRMA for its role in the company’s success. Association Guidance coordinates MMRMA’s signature events: the Risk Management Workshop and the Annual Meeting. The latter is held every August at the Grand Traverse Resort, which earned repeat honors from the magazine in 2014.

These awards highlight the fact that MMRMA is successfully meeting its goal of providing the best possible services and events to its members.

Please join us in congratulating Denise McGinn and Association Guidance for this richly deserved recognition.