THE TRAINING AT MMRMA’S 2013 Annual Meeting was top-notch as usual, and guests left with plenty of new tools for success in their kits.

This year’s theme, “Planting Seeds of Change,” underscores one of the few constants we can count on in this world—and the importance of adapting our skills and resources in a proactive way, rather than letting change roll over us or chasing to catch up. With the right approach, we’ll not just cope with these ever-evolving times, but will thrive and make the most of them.

A Creative Twist
The art of reinvention is a passion for Josh Linkner, whose take on creativity goes beyond the basics to reach new levels of innovation. Here are a few of the concepts Linkner discussed in his opening session and Friday presentation, for which he used cutting-edge software Prezi, rather than the tried-and-true PowerPoint:

• Ideas don’t have to be perfect or fully formed right away. Think of ideas as sparks. Too often, we extinguish such sparks immediately, shooting them down out of fear or uncertainty. Why not feed them instead and see if they’ll ignite?

• Don’t let imaginary barriers get in the way of progress. People often concoct obstacles out of past experiences or thin air and act as if they actually exist. Why not stop assuming and instead contend with obstacles that may (or may not) arise?

• “From failure we learn; from success, not so much.” This quote from the animated movie Meet the Robinsons illustrates the power that comes from allowing ourselves—and our teams—to stumble. If we always expect ourselves to have near-perfect results, we may be paralyzed into inaction. Why not act, try out new things, and figure out what works and what doesn’t?

Can You Relate?
To Anna Post, etiquette, in business and otherwise, is all about building successful relationships. While we all

Registered members can download copies of Anna Post’s and Ray Saint’s presentations at mmrma.org.

Achieving Greatness
Ray Saint has an important message for each of us: “It’s great to be you!” Saint talked about the power of shifting our attitudes, making a daily gratitude list, and recognizing our role in our own stress, which he said is caused by trying to control things we can’t control.

Saint urged us all to recognize that we can succeed by choosing to put our energy and attention into our goals, rather than on the perceived challenges. By communicating every day, to ourselves and to others, that we are in charge of our life and happy with its direction, we can begin to make huge differences in our results. Saint suggests responding to queries of “How’s it going?” with “It’s great to be me!”

As Saint asked, “What have you got to lose?”

Proper etiquette never goes out of style. The Post family’s trusted advice on etiquette began in 1922 with Emily, and continues today with her great-great granddaughter, Anna, pictured above, and at www.emilypost.com.

Post’s presentation included office etiquette tips for using email, smart phones, social media, and more.
When I came in, we changed the annual budgeting process to a three-year outlook,” LaJoy says. Instead of budgeting one year at a time, they began to look ahead. “It shed light on some issues and allowed us to take the steps that kept us from laying anyone off.”

The township is not only surviving, but thriving. Canton’s public safety department was accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) in 2007 and, under LaJoy’s tenure as supervisor, earned re-accreditation in 2010. Meanwhile, Canton’s leisure services department won a gold medal from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) in 2008, an honor given to just five communities per year. The department is also accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA); only two Michigan communities (and 107 nationwide) have earned this distinction.

LaJoy wouldn’t have it any other way. As he points out, the 93,000 residents of Canton are his customers. “They put me in this job and they keep me here,” he says. Serving the community well is his primary concern. In many ways, his role as supervisor is different than his previous six-year stint in the Michigan House of Representatives.

LaJoy is incredibly proud of his three terms in the house, and recognizes it as a privilege relatively few people have had. But the job itself had its challenges, including trying to balance the concerns of conflicting interest groups and be heard among the many voices and competing forces in Lansing.

Elected as supervisor in 2008 (and re-elected in 2012), LaJoy welcomed the opportunity to return to his home turf, having served on the Canton Board of Trustees from 1989 to 2002. “Here I’ve been able to focus on maintaining Canton’s vibrancy, which we’ve done quite well despite some very difficult times,” he says.

“I remember, as a very young boy, watching the Democratic and Republican national conventions from beginning to end,” LaJoy notes. That early spark never faded.

Although Canton keeps him plenty busy, LaJoy still finds time to share his passion for service with other organizations. He participates not only in the Big Ten and Big Four groups, but also in the Municipal Employees’ Retirement System (MERS), the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), and now on MMRMA’s Board of Directors.

Canton’s public safety and leisure services departments are nationally recognized, achieving excellence despite tough economic times.

LaJoy’s penchant for fostering strong partnerships stems from his early career in human resources management for UPS, Xerox, and eventually his own staffing company, Norrell, which grew to five franchises and $15 million in revenues before he accepted a merger deal and sold his company. It was time to put public service—something LaJoy was drawn to from a very young age—on the front burner.

Sharing Services, Expertise
LaJoy is a strong believer in joint services and cooperation between communities. He helped form the Big Ten, an alliance of Michigan’s ten largest townships, which meets regularly in conjunction with the Michigan Township Association (MTA) to address the unique issues facing these municipalities.

He also attended a Big Four summit at MMRMA’s new meeting/training center. The four largest communities in western Wayne County are seeking to expand opportunities to share services and work together.

“Canton has long been an active participant in shared services. For example, its public safety department is involved in several law enforcement consortiums, including the Western Wayne Special Operations (SWAT) Team and the Western Wayne Criminal Investigation Section, with units that tackle auto theft, narcotics, and other pervasive crimes.”

Phil LaJoy Brings Love of Public Service to MMRMA Board

FOR PHIL LAJOY, BEING
Charter Township of Canton Supervisor is a 24/7 job. “This is a big town, but I’ve been around for a long time, so I know a lot of folks,” he notes. “When I go to church, or to Kroger, people see me and they often want to talk.”

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Phil LaJoy: Board Profile

“It’s wonderful to be involved and have a voice in an organization as important as MMRMA.”
— Phil LaJoy

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Board Embraces Visionary Thinking and Plans Strategically

by Michael Rhyner
Executive Director

THE 2013 ANNUAL MEETING highlighted MMRMA’s recent accomplishments and previewed initiatives planned for the upcoming year. The theme, “Planting Seeds of Change,” set the tone for addressing future opportunities and challenges. It would be shortsighted to believe we are insulated from, much less immune to, the forces of change.

We are all keenly aware of the rapidly evolving climate for local government. Shrinking revenues have forced all municipalities to operate under more austere conditions. Cooperation, consolidation, and efficiency are requirements as former standards of service delivery quickly become outmoded.

Visionary Planning
Each September, MMRMA’s Board of Directors holds a strategic planning meeting. Such planning is of paramount importance, not only for MMRMA, but in the entire pooling industry. Pools have matured into large, complex organizations that manage hundreds of millions in contributions. The challenges and opportunities are far different than those we saw in the formative years of risk pooling.

The Board reviews MMRMA’s policies for content and compliance, and updates, adds, or deletes policy to ensure we are governed by current, relevant guidelines.

Beyond policy, our goal in strategic planning is to consider how we can go beyond our fiduciary and strategic roles to embrace a visionary mode of governance that dynamically engages the tableau of the future.

Often, someone’s tendency to focus on one thing at a time leads them to overlook something they should be seeing. With visionary thinking, we look at various future scenarios and challenge our existing norms and assumptions. This allows us to better plan ahead and position the organization for the years—and decades—to come.

Without question, we can expect continued austerity in local government. Increasingly, decision-making will be driven by market dynamics such as transactional ease and low costs. For many years, MMRMA has enjoyed member interactions built upon common interests and partnership, but continued limitations on local government budgets will not allow for any inefficiency.

MMRMA’s challenges and opportunities are far different than those in the formative years of risk pooling.

In the future, MMRMA must compete with traditional commercial insurers for local government business. This clearly underscores the need for us to sustain our net asset distribution program. When we have outstanding performance results, this success will continue to flow back to our members in the form of distributions.

New Generation of Leaders
Another important factor is demographics. Each year we lose hundreds of years of institutional memory through retirement, turnover, and attrition as a new generation of leaders begins to take the reins. This new generation will learn from the mistakes and successes of the past while bringing fresh energy, innovation, and the desire to foster positive change.

On the other hand, new local government leaders may challenge the status quo, including participation in MMRMA.

The next generation of local government leaders does not have a firsthand perspective on the historical circumstances that gave rise to pools and may not feel the same sense of loyalty to MMRMA.

We must evolve to meet their needs and use events like our Annual Meeting as part of an ongoing communication strategy to highlight the benefits of MMRMA and its vision for addressing current and prospective member issues.

Technology-Driven Services
The pace of technological growth is exponential, as illustrated by the proliferation of the internet, wireless communication, cloud computing, and social media. Local governments will continue to enhance technology-driven services to the public.

As in other industries, the bulk of services, such as paying property taxes, utility bills, permit applications, and vital statistics, are moving online.

Local governments will continue to enhance technology-driven services such as payment of property taxes and records searches online.

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“As a former HR manager and business owner, I know the importance of risk management, and MMRMA does so much for its members,” LaJoy says, adding that Canton’s director of public safety serves on MMRMA’s Lower Peninsula Law Enforcement Advisory Committee.

LaJoy does manage to make time for his family. “I love my three grandchildren dearly,” he says. His sons, Chris and Todd, have followed in their father’s entrepreneurial footsteps, owning and operating an HR and staffing firm.

While and his wife of 46 years, Jean, travel when they can, “even on vacation, the job isn’t far from my mind,” says LaJoy. “That’s been true for a long time, even when I owned my business.” Perhaps his training as a United States Marine prepared him for such an active life. Or maybe it’s that he is a self-described “high energy, glass half full” person.

Whatever the case, LaJoy likes his busy life and plans to keep it that way. “I’m excited to be a part of the MMRMA team and a member of the Board,” he says. “I look forward to working with everyone and creating new opportunities for our future.”

The future city hall, county courthouse, and township hall will likely be much different than what we know today. The need for this costly infrastructure and, most importantly, its personnel, may diminish.

Several MMRMA members are already exploring the option of “virtual service delivery.” The Board will address the new loss exposures that will arise from these technology-driven local governments. MMRMA’s coverage and services must evolve to address these emerging risks.

While these are some of the obvious issues we address in our strategic planning process, the challenge is to identify scenarios that have not yet been imagined and craft responses to meet them.

This is an opportunity for us to look ahead and identify the key issues, opportunities, and challenges facing MMRMA. The results may include strategic initiatives such as new services, innovative programs, or even modifying the organizational structure to better serve members’ needs and expectations. Our goal, as always, is to provide you with relevant, timely, value-added service.