

ANNUAL REPORT: MARYLAND MUNICIPAL LEAGUE 2001-02 BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

By Scott A. Hancock, Executive Director, Maryland Municipal League

Diversity! It's the word "in-vogue" these days. We are celebrating it, experiencing it, assuring it and planning for it. MML's 2001-2002 President, Bladensburg Mayor David C. Harrington, desired to emphasize the many benefits of diversity for our association but sought a better way to describe one of the primary missions of MML. He chose the word "inclusiveness." What a great choice!!

Building Inclusive Communities became President Harrington's message and MML's theme during the entire year and presented an exciting and rewarding challenge for MML's membership, Board of Directors and staff: How do we help our member cities and towns seriously contemplate, appreciate and work harder to achieve inclusiveness? Inclusiveness not only within our diverse city populations but also within our association's population from the Allegany Mountains of Frostburg to the shores of Highland Beach on the Chesapeake Bay. Each region in Maryland is comprised of very different people and different beliefs, but we are, as Maryland Speaker of the House of Delegates Casper R. Taylor, Jr. likes to say, ONE MARYLAND!

Mayor Harrington began his presidential year by "hitting the road" attending meetings of all nine MML chapters. He carried his inclusiveness message to each chapter he visited. The membership responded positively to the President's contagious enthusiasm, which culminated with MML's annual convention in June with the theme *Building Inclusive Communities*.

It Was The Largest Convention Ever!

MML's 2002 convention in Ocean City, June 23-26, boasted the largest number of attendees, municipalities represented and exhibitors in MML's 66-year history. The inclusiveness theme allowed the Convention Planning Committee, chaired by former Capitol Heights Councilwoman Charlotte Price, to experiment with ethnic meal menus, exciting convention workshops and a thought-provoking keynote speaker - community activist and actor Edward James Olmos whose address was entitled "*We're all in the Same Gang.*" The annual inaugural dinner on Tuesday evening of the convention featured a talented singing group, *The Young Columbians*, performing a history of America through song and dance. The standing ovation presented to the youth group at the conclusion of their performance was proof of the sincere appreciation of Maryland municipal officials attending the event.

Another of the many highlights of this year's convention was the unveiling of the *Building Inclusive Communities* tapestry. Beginning with chapter visits in

July, President Harrington asked each MML region to utilize a 44 square inch piece of cloth, provided by MML, to create a quilt-like square depicting the diversity of their region of the State. Other than a sample provided with the instructions, each chapter was on its own to interpret diversity and inclusiveness for their region and to display it on their piece of fabric. At the end of the year, the chapters submitted their contributions and MML contracted with a seamstress to join the pieces together to create a huge 12 x16 foot tapestry, which we proudly hung in the main foyer of the Ocean City Convention Center during MML's 2002 convention. The finished product truly epitomized the yearlong MML theme of *Building Inclusive Communities*. We hope to be able to again display the tapestry in the lobby of the Loews Hotel in Annapolis during the 2002 fall conference in October and in the Maryland State House rotunda next year.

“If I Were Mayor, I Would...” Contest

The MML Communications Committee, chaired by Seat Pleasant Council President Bettie Jeter, repeated their highly successful essay contest this year, and also used the inclusive communities theme. Maryland fourth grade students were encouraged to write a short essay relaying how they would work to build inclusive communities if they were mayor. Over 2,100 essays were submitted to the judging panel made up of members from the Maryland Mayors' Association. Eleven winners were selected within each of the MML regions. Each of the award winners, along with family and school officials, journeyed to Annapolis in early April to receive recognition from Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, MML President David Harrington and numerous dignitaries including two dozen Maryland mayors. Contest winners were also invited to attend one of the three Municipal Night at the Ballpark baseball games scheduled for late April in Bowie, Frederick and Salisbury. Cool temperatures did not chill the excitement as municipal officials and employees from across the state came together to celebrate municipal government, the many fourth graders who participated in the 2002 essay contest and the *Building Inclusive Communities* theme.

There Was Also a Challenging Legislative Session

In what was accurately defined as a “roller coaster” session, MML came out of the 2002 Maryland General Assembly session well in the plus column with two of the three adopted legislative priorities passed by both houses and signed by the Governor. A bill that directed the Maryland Department of the Environment to perform several studies on wastewater treatment plants over the coming three years passed on the final night of the session. Despite the State's horrendous financial constraints, MML was also successful in securing state funding to pay for the required studies. The other priority that received positive action by the legislature sought to establish a utility undergrounding task force to make recommendations to the General Assembly on the mechanics of

making this good idea a reality in Maryland. MML was able to fend off a last minute attempt by the electric utilities on the final day of the session to stack the task force with representatives from their industry.

The only unsuccessful MML priority for the 2002 session, which sought passage of enabling legislation to permit municipalities in Prince George's and Montgomery counties to perform their own planning and zoning function, ran out of legislative time after being held in a subcommittee well beyond the deadline for release of bills to the full committee. On a positive note, MML did obtain a commitment from the Prince George's House delegation, which had stated strong opposition to our bill, to study the issue over the interim in hopes of developing a course of action that might be acceptable to municipalities in both urban counties.

Probably more important to Maryland cities and towns during the 2002 session was the amount of time devoted to defeating or amending bills that had detrimental effects on municipalities. 2002 was the final year of a four-year term of the entire General Assembly. Traditionally, bills are introduced in the final year of a term that legislators hope will buy them recognition and votes at home in the upcoming election. Many of those bills are detrimental to municipal home rule principles. Ultimately, **all** such legislation introduced this year was either defeated or amended so as not to adversely affect our members. Special thanks go to Bel Air Mayor David Carey, who chaired the 2002 MML Legislative Committee, for a job well done!

We Created a New Strategic Plan

The MML Board of Directors embarked on a multi-year effort in 2001 to create a "Blueprint for the Future" of MML, commonly referred to as a Strategic Plan. The adopted process took us through focus groups, individual interviews and a statewide survey. Information gathered was forwarded to the Board of Directors in September and became the focus of the annual Board Workshop/Retreat held at Rocky Gap Resort near Cumberland. President Harrington called upon MML First Vice President Lynn Raufaste, Mayor of Kensington to chair a Strategic Planning Committee. That committee held a series of meetings in the late fall and early winter and ultimately presented a comprehensive plan to the Board during their winter meeting in January. The draft plan proposed a three-year effort to strengthen MML's overall effectiveness for its membership. The Board adopted the plan along with a new mission statement: Strengthen and Support Municipal Government Through Advocacy and the Development of Effective Leadership. The Board also adopted six goals for the organization which included placing greater emphasis on educational and training opportunities for members, a focus on increasing member participation, strengthening our legislative development process and promoting the value of municipalities in Maryland. The first year implementation plan was developed by MML staff and adopted by the Board in April. That plan will provide MML's

leadership with a blueprint for action during the coming year. Each subsequent year, the Board will review the goals and objectives of the adopted Strategic Plan and create a new implementation plan for the year. There are exciting days ahead for MML but it is imperative that all members be engaged. Cooperatively, we can achieve much!

We Are All Together Now!

Early in the 2002 Board year, MML was pleased to welcome its 159th member, the Town of Templeville. The membership of this small Eastern Shore town had an enormous impact on MML as Templeville held the distinction of being the only non-member incorporated town in Maryland since 1998. MML now boasts of serving as the association of **ALL** 157 Maryland incorporated cities and towns, along with two special taxing districts!! Welcome, Mayor Helen Knotts and the Commissioners of Templeville. We are all together now!

In Good Times and Bad

Several MML member municipalities experienced devastating weather conditions during the past year that brought out the very best of municipal government in Maryland. When a deadly tornado touched down in College Park and Laurel in September, neighboring communities were on the scene within minutes with equipment and manpower to assist with recovery efforts. But the property devastation experienced by those Prince George's County cities paled in comparison to the category 4 storm that touched down in La Plata in late April. Millions of dollars in property were destroyed by the Sunday evening tornado. By Monday morning, municipal crews and equipment from across the state were in route to the Southern Maryland town of 7,000. MML was pleased to serve in the capacity of information disseminator from La Plata officials to the many other MML member communities who wished to assist La Plata with the catastrophe. Daily, for nearly two weeks, MML published an e-mail bulletin to member towns letting them know what type of assistance was needed by La Plata and to whom volunteers were to report. Over 30 Maryland cities and towns offered assistance from small Eastern Shore towns to the largest urban cities. An emotional La Plata Mayor Bill Eckman offered sincere thanks from the citizens of his community to his colleagues from across the state at the 2002 convention opening session. The response: La Plata, we were pleased to assist you! We know you would have been there for us!

MML is a National Player

MML has been active on the National scene with over 30 Maryland mayors and council members participating in committees of the National League of Cities (NLC). I am personally pleased and proud to be serving a two-year term on the

NLC Board of Directors, joining MML Past President Glenn Steckman who is serving the second year of his two-year term on the Board.

NLC is a highly credible, progressive organization that serves as cities' collective voice in Washington. Just as it is important for Maryland municipalities to be engaged in the activities of MML, so, too must there be active participation in NLC from our state. Call MML for more information about NLC.

We Made History ... and We Had Fun!

MML welcomed its first African-American President in its 66-year history last year. Mayor David Harrington brought phenomenal enthusiasm and excitement for municipal government to the position of MML President. Thank you, David for being such a great role model and for your dedication to MML!

MML embarked on a journey that is much longer than the one-year presidential term allowed by the MML By-laws. The *Building Inclusive Communities* theme is a long-term commitment and one that MML is excited to embrace. The direction provided by the new Strategic Plan will keep us focused for years to come as we strive to make MML a stronger, inclusive voice for Maryland cities and towns. We need your help, though. If you are an active MML member, stay active. We need you now more than ever! If you have never been involved in your association, now is the time. Involvement in your local MML chapter is a great place to begin to learn about the Maryland Municipal League. Contact MML to learn more!

As always, thank you for your commitment to your association and for allowing us to serve you!