

Mayor's Column for the October 3, 2012 Review

I recently attended the second annual Lean Government Conference, organized by the Wisconsin Center for Performance Excellence and held in Stevens Point. I had also participated in last year's Conference at Monona Terrace.

Keynote speaker for this year's Conference was Michael Levinson, former City Manager of the City of Coral Springs, Florida. Under his leadership, Coral Springs received the Baldrige National Quality Award, presented by President George W. Bush in an Oval Office ceremony. Coral Springs, a community of 130,000, was the first state or local government to be so recognized for performance excellence.

I also attended a breakout session lead by Levinson where he amplified his keynote comments. Levinson also participated in a panel discussion on "change leadership" facilitated by Christine Smith, a principal at the Baker Tilly management consulting firm.

A master's degree in economics was the foundation for Levinson's management and leadership skills and successes. Levinson implemented best practices and lean techniques to deliver top-notch customer service to residents. The lofty mission statement of Coral Springs: To be the nation's premier community in which to live, work, and raise a family. The bar was set high. The results are noteworthy. The community has been honored with recognitions, including designation in Money Magazine's "Best Places to Live", the Excellence in Financial Reporting Award for 29 years, and the presidential Baldrige Award.

The Baldrige Program identifies a number of core values and concepts that are the building blocks of high-performing organizations. They are: visionary leadership; customer-driven excellence; organizational and personal learning; valuing workforce and partners; agility; focus on the future; managing for innovation; management by fact (metrics); societal responsibility (ethics); focus on results and value creation; and systems perspective.

I will highlight a few of the important points discussed by Levinson.

- Leaders must serve as role models through their ethical behavior, encouragement of innovation, adaptability to change, and development of future leaders. Credibility is the currency of leadership.
- Through strategic planning, Coral Springs developed strategic priorities with associated measurements. The top priority was customer-involved government, with measures including number of volunteer hours donated to the City, overall quality rating for City services and programs, and overall satisfaction rating of City employees. Another priority was financial health and economic development, with metrics such as bond ratings, percentage increase of the operating fund mill rate, and percent of plan reviews completed within fifteen days.

- Engage customers. Points of contact include website, social media, surveys, citizen members on boards and committees, fliers and brochures, and front-line employees.
- Empower employees. Provide training and learning opportunities. Encourage innovation.
- Create a clear picture of what success means. Celebrate successes and learn from mistakes.
- Service is a public trust. Without high ethical standards there is no trust. Transparency is essential.

Levinson was asked to summarize the Coral Springs approach to economic development. The community has a written, transparent policy for economic development assistance. Consistency in messaging means that prospective businesses know that they are treated fairly and reasonably. Coral Springs does not incent retail business. Development assistance will be considered for eligible office building and industrial developments within stated financial parameters. Levinson reported that an incentive “will not exceed 10% of the present value of the net revenue impact on the City general fund.” He explained that this financial limit is not negotiable, and the City will not engage in the detrimental practice of competing for business with municipal neighbors. He gave an example of how their economic development policy provided financial protection for Coral Springs when a company that had received development assistance prematurely considered moving out of the community.

As I drove home after the conference I thought about information and ideas that were presented. I was immediately struck by the relevance of the conference to activities and efforts underway in Evansville.

The Evansville Common Council, Department Heads, and professional staff have participated in three Committee of the Whole meetings, totaling more than eight hours, since April. We reviewed local government basics like open meetings requirements and budget development. We looked at completed projects, ongoing activities, and future infrastructure necessities. We discussed our vision for our community and residents. There was consensus that we want to provide top-notch service, excellent quality of life, and appropriately improve and maintain community assets and infrastructure. An important goal of these meetings was to strengthen teamwork, an essential component to maximizing effectiveness.

In our focus on customer service, we are undertaking efforts to do more and better, with less. The Common Council has been and remains committed to organizational and personal professional training and development. The Evansville Water and Light Department is working toward national RP3 certification; the application was submitted last week. The Evansville Police Department has been undertaking WILEAG (Wisconsin Law Enforcement Accreditation Group) accreditation activities the past few years; on-site assessment is scheduled for fall 2013. Our City Clerk has obtained clerk certification.

City staff members are attending customer service trainings and safety seminars. There is cross-over training of job duties. We encourage additional skills and leadership development. These efforts bring best practices to work activities, benefitting our community.

The City has looked for innovation and lean opportunities. Integration of separate City and Water and Light accounting records into one system is nearly complete, eliminating work duplication and streamlining effort. The Public Works Department has altered plowing techniques; use of brine and a change to plow equipment has produced better efficiency and effectiveness. The Council is using the close timing of the Finance Director resignation and the impending departure of the City Administrator to consider a re-alignment of leadership duties with purpose. This unanticipated situation is a tremendous opportunity to be future-oriented.

As we focus on maintaining our strong City financial position, we have adopted a number of written policies to assist in decision-making, including a purchasing policy, donations/fundraising policy, investment policy, debt management policy, and fund balance policy. Our long-time financial advisor, Ehlers, recommended that we take advantage of our financial strength by securing a bond rating with our next bonding. The Council has indicated their interest in doing so. The City has carefully considered changes in the general fund mill rate with yearly budget development. During my tenure, Councils have never considered “taxing to the max.”

Efforts have been made to bring new residents onto committees. Fresh ideas bring vitality to initiatives. The City has discussed undertaking a community survey as a part of the upcoming Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan update as a cost-efficient method of obtaining information for multiple uses. There has been preliminary discussion of brief point-of-contact surveys. Many improvements have been made to the City website and there are additional suggestions for providing timely information to residents.

The Council has indicated its desire for transparency in economic development matters. The Project Plan for Tax Incremental District #6, a mixed-use district created in 2006, includes the most recent written information regarding City incentives for commercial businesses. The Plan states that if a commercial development achieves the “desired goals of the City including, but not limited to, higher paying job creation, greater construction value than would be necessary to comply the City’s commercial design standards (if any), or retail diversification,” the City may provide financial incentives. Recent developer agreements in Evansville are drafted with provisions to protect the City from a variety of unforeseen economic circumstances.

A number of Wisconsin communities have been negatively, and some severely, impacted by stalled industrial parks and faltering development projects during the recent economic downturn. Our Council is committed to careful, thorough consideration of economic development opportunities, making sure to protect the financial interests of Evansville while encouraging economic activity.

Our City government will not be complacent. We will be future-oriented and willing to adapt to the changes coming our way. We have opened lines of communication to allow informed decision-making. You will be seeing additional examples of “doing more and better, with less.”

Community Announcements

This week, October 1-5, is the last curbside yard waste pick up of 2012. The yard waste site on Water Street will remain open on Wednesdays, 5-7 p.m., daylight permitting. Saturday hours are 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. until Thanksgiving.

1970 EHS grad John Olson will speak about his book, “Down John’s Road,” on October 4, 6-7 p.m., at Eager Free Public Library. His book describes his recent experiences following the same journey that is the subject of John Steinbeck’s “Travels With Charley,” written in 1960.

The Creekside Place Senior Health Fair will be held on Friday, October 12, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Evansville Chamber of Commerce is hosting the Evansville Area Business Expo on Saturday, October 13, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Creekside Place.

Creekside Place Oktoberfest will be held on October 13 from 6-10 p.m. For ticket information, call 882-0407.

The Evansville Fire district will hold their annual spaghetti dinner on Sunday, October 14, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Evansville Farmers Market is hosting an autumn arts and craft fair as part of the Market on Saturday, October 20, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Artists and crafters interested in participating, call Marie at 882-9032 or e-mail through Evansvillefarmersmarket.com. Vender spaces are \$10.00.

Trick-Or-Treat hours for Halloween will be 5-7 p.m. on Wednesday, October 31.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

Congratulations to Megan Becker on her appointment as the new Library Director at Eager Free Public Library! Stop by and welcome her to her new position.

Congratulations to Ruth Ann Montgomery on her retirement as Director of the Arrowhead Library System! We thank Ruth Ann for her years of dedicated service to Rock County, and especially Evansville. Ruth Ann is our treasured local historian and an invaluable resource on all things Evansville.