

A DAY IN THE LIFE ...

In 2014, The MML Review is featuring insights from local government officials across the state in the series, "A Day In The Life." In this issue, The Review asked several Missouri City Clerks to share what inspired them to serve in their community and other questions to provide a glimpse into their role as city leaders.

Dana Louderbaugh, City Clerk, City of Fair Grove

Ruth Baker, City Clerk, City of Manchester

Georgia Fox, City Clerk, City of Pleasant Valley

WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Louderbaugh: I was very involved in my children's school, volunteering and meeting a lot of people. I became president of the PTA for several years. I had attended several school board meetings. The position was posted so I wanted to work for the community ... our school and city work well together.

Baker: One evening some time ago, the doorbell rang and standing outside was a man who advised that he was a candidate for alderman of our ward. His wife was with him, and the three of us talked about issues in the City for a few minutes. A couple weeks later at the polls, I saw the energy, activity and excitement in these local elections, and learned the next day that the man, who had campaigned in our neighborhood, had been elected as one of the City's aldermen. Then, at an event in early 1999 with my husband, the local fire chief at the time, I met the mayor of Manchester who I realized was the same person who had stood on our front porch a few years before, and I had an excellent opportunity to talk at length with him and his wife. At that time, I became more aware of local government, which is often taken for granted, and found it intriguing.

Fox: Honestly, I answered an ad in the paper for a "bookkeeper" for the city of Alba. The job was presented to me as an accounts payable position and some secretarial work. Within a short time of starting I realized that there was a lot more to this position than "secretarial work." Fortunately Alba was a member of

MML. I met Richard Sheets of MML and the rest is history. I often say Richard knew me when I was a baby clerk. But really, no person was more instrumental in my training than him. Between Richard and our auditor, Matt Mense Sr., of Mense, Churchwell and Mense, they gave me all the training I needed to get through that first year. Once I figured out what I was doing, I was hooked! The satisfaction of knowing you are helping your community is something that no other administrative job can give you.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY?

Louderbaugh: Everything ... We have a small community compared to most with a population of 1,393. But that makes us special ... we come together when there is someone in need. For example, our community built a house for a family because their child could not get around his house in his wheelchair. The family was one of the finalists for "Extreme Home Makeover" several years ago, but was not selected. The local community came together had fundraisers, people donated time, money and skills to build them a new house. It took time but the project was completed.

Baker: Having been a long-time resident of the area, I appreciate the historical background, as well as all the new development and activity. I have seen this area grow from a country-like setting to that of a vibrant community with high-quality services and excellent parks and recreational opportunities.

Fox: The community I work in now is Pleasant Valley. I love that Pleasant Valley is a small town surrounded by big cities but has not lost its small-town feel or values.

I also worked for the communities of Butterfield and Alba. In Butterfield, I loved that all the council, department heads and other community organizations were so dedicated and worked tirelessly to make their town a better place to live. I also loved the history of the city. Alba was blessed with so many residents from professional fields. They have a highly educated population and it was obvious they had many dedicated professionals responsible for making sure the city had all of its needs.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT SERVING AS THE CLERK IN YOUR CITY?

Louderbaugh: I enjoy knowing I do the best I can for my community. I try to save money every chance I get. I like the feeling I get when I know it is a job well done.

Baker: No two days are alike; there is much variety and many challenges. The fast-paced position of the city clerk includes much diversity and often gives the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Fox: Again, I would have to say serving my community in a direct and tangible way. I've also worked in larger cities, in their finance department, where I felt like I was just a cog in the wheel. I had no influence over policy and no ability to find cost-saving measures to help the city. It was basically a data entry job. This really helped bring home what I truly love about being a city clerk. When I find a way to save the

MISSOURI CITY CLERKS

city \$1,000 or \$10,000 or \$100,000 dollars a year, I like to put that into tangible terms by thinking of the little old lady down the street on social security who is counting on me to help reduce her tax or user fee burden. It gives me a great deal of joy to think I can help someone like that.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN YOUR POSITION?

Louderbaugh: Trying to stretch the most benefit out of a small amount of money.

Baker: Each day can present a new challenge, especially in effectively completing numerous projects within deadlines while being interrupted often by citizens, elected officials, business owners, or other employees during the workday.

Fox: City government, like private industry, continues to try to operate leaner and leaner. There are a great deal of responsibilities and very little time. There are many projects you have identified but have not found the time or the resources to pursue. I have also found what is unique to this position is that you never feel like the work is done. There are always more things you should do or wish you were doing, always more projects that you know you should seek out and address. Simply stated, the job is never done. It might help to state and put into context, my experience is in smaller cities where the city clerk often acts as city administrator without the title (out of necessity). Since the clerk does not have the title, they have to be very diplomatic about how they lead the city, most of the time it is done by coaching the elected officials and encouraging them to take up various issues that need to be addressed.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW CITY CLERK, OR SOMEONE CONSIDERING THE FIELD?

Louderbaugh: Get involved with the city clerk organization and training, training training. You will learn something new everyday in this position. It is a high stress profession but it is worth the feeling you get when you know you have benefitted your community.

Baker: Having come to the city from the private sector, I would recommend that a new city clerk become a member of the local organization(s) of city clerks, as the collective knowledge and networking of that group of individuals is invaluable.

Fox: Use the resources available to you! I have never met a city clerk that was unwilling to help another city clerk with some advice or information (MOCCFOA). Never. MML is a huge resource. Your city's auditor/accountant also can be a huge resource. As I said before, Matt Mense, Sr., was a huge influence on me. He taught me government accounting 101. The lessons I learned from him I still use today, 14 years later. And of course, we all get to know the city attorney pretty quickly. They will help steer you out of any potential legal trouble.

WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD, WHAT DID YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GREW UP?

Louderbaugh: Teacher or nurse and a wife and mother. I got to be a teacher and a nurse by being a wife and mother.

Baker: As a young child, I dreamed of being a nurse and caring for people. I later decided I wanted to be a teacher and help children learn. In 1999, I started working at the City of Manchester, taking on the responsibilities of a city clerk, including among many other things, caring for people and helping people learn!

Fox: When I was 5 years old, I wanted to be a singer. I wanted to move people with my voice and be able to influence others with my songwriting skills. The only problem is that I have a horrible singing voice and I'm not really good at poetry! I guess God knew that my mission in life was going to be to help others through good, ethical, responsible government. I could not be happier with the "disappointment" of the outcome of my career choice.

MOST PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO LEARN ...

Louderbaugh: I have traveled a lot.

Baker: During the week, although I am seen behind a desk enjoying my career in

local government, on weekends, for years, my therapy has included working in the yard, especially digging into the soil and planting. Also, in connection with my son's fascination with classic vehicles, I have been drawn into a world of nostalgia and enjoy seeing him restoring his classics. In contrast, I have had season tickets to the St. Louis Muny for years and totally appreciate the theater and concerts with my daughter.

Fox: I am a huge heavy metal rock fan. I kind of giggle to myself just thinking about how those two things, local government official and headbanger, seem very, very different. I find it very therapeutic after particularly stressful days, though.

A fact less shocking, is that I took 4th in a national competition when I was in 6th grade for a writing assignment. First prize got to meet the President (Jimmy Carter at the time). That probably should have been an indication to me that I was going to go into some form of professional writing.

TO WHAT LOCATION WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO TRAVEL, AND WHY?

Louderbaugh: With my laid-back ways I think Alaska or Canada for the views.

Baker: I have three dream United States vacations and two dream vacations abroad. Having both German and Irish heritage, I would, of course, like to visit Germany and Ireland, the birthplaces of my great grandparents and grandfather, and hopefully have an opportunity to find and visit with some of my relatives who are still residing in their homeland. The United States vacations I would like to take would include the northeast to see the beautiful, colorful fall foliage, a trip through Canada to Alaska and a trip to a Hawaiian paradise.

Fox: I would like to travel to other city's council meetings. This is not my private interest but my professional one. I would like to get out and see more, firsthand, about how other cities operate and determine if there are things that we can do better. I constantly wish there were more hours in the day, more days in the week, that I could pursue learning from others. □