

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 Missouri finance officers to share what inspired them to serve in their community and other questions to provide a glimpse into their role as city leaders.

Joan Jadali, Director of Finance and Administration, City of Webster Groves

Lori Helle, Finance Director, City of Hazelwood

WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Jadali: I began my career with the Missouri State Auditor's Office where I audited third and fourth class county governments. I enjoyed the challenges of not only identifying those internal controls that were weak but to give recommendations to staff on how to improve these areas. This experience sparked my interest in the daily operations of local government and I have been working in this line of work now for 14 years.

Helle: I had thought about being an auditor for the state or working for the federal government while in college, but then shortly after college, I saw an ad for Finance Officer and decided to go that route.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT MANAGING THE FINANCES IN YOUR CITY?

Jadali: I enjoy managing the finances of Webster Groves because I work for a very well-managed city. The city manager and city council are very respectful and let the staff do what they are trained to do. I am respected and considered a valuable resource, and that makes my job extremely rewarding. I am allowed to continue my goal of continuously educating myself, and improving processes that are sometimes less transparent. To

that end, we have benefitted by getting a very high bond rating, and have earned consecutive annual awards from the Government Finance Officers Association for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and the Distinguished Budget Award and just earned our first Popular Annual Financial Report Award.

Helle: The City is facing some really difficult financial decisions, which does not create a very pleasant situation; but I believe I have the resources and experience necessary to assist management staff/council in making a more informed decision on deciding what is the best solution for the community and for the employees. I like being a part of figuring it all out and working the numbers. I don't necessary like being part of the unpleasant and tough decisions, but I like being able to educate those that do make those tough decisions and helping them understand the finances so that they can make the best decision for all those involved.

WHAT PROJECT HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED?

Jadali: This is a difficult question to answer, as I have enjoyed many of the projects that I have overseen. However, two of the most important projects that I have had the opportunity to work on include the purchasing of \$13 million in Street Improvement Bonds through a referendum passed

by our voters by more than 80 percent in 2011, and the pension conversion from a defined contribution plan to a defined benefit plan that took place in July 2013.

Helle: I love the budget the most. I like putting spreadsheets together and figuring out what can and can not be done financially and then charting or graphing it for others to see visually.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN YOUR POSITION?

Jadali: One of the biggest challenges is to ensure that I am always able to provide a structurally balanced budget. In Webster Groves, we have a predominantly residential community with limited retail, so sales tax growth is not significant, even in years of a recovering economy. It is difficult at times to balance the general fund budget when expenditure growth outpaces revenue growth.

Helle: Managing a variety of personalities is probably the most challenging part of my job. As a manager and a leader, it's my job to make sure everyone is working together and being productive, especially as we don't fill vacant positions and are forced to do more with less. I need to be positive, compassionate and understanding, while building a relationship that will create trust and respect. The more I can flex my managing style,

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the more effective I am at getting the results I need to help the City remain successful.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW FINANCE OFFICER, OR SOMEONE CONSIDERING THE FIELD?

Jadali: Because only a short amount of time is covered on non-profits (including governments) at the university, it helps to either work as an intern to get some work experience in this field or get a certification such as the Certified Public Finance Officer. The certification is an in-depth self-study course on five main areas covered by most finance officers in their day-to-day positions.

Helle: I would recommend starting out in a smaller municipality and really getting to know all of the functions and duties of the department ... be

more involved and actually do some of the work yourself (even if its just a few weeks each year), such as accounts payable, payroll, utility billing, etc. Then as you move up, you will have more experience and knowledge which will allow you to be a better manager/leader because you understand how it all works.

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

Jadali: When I was a child, I wanted to be a veterinarian. I grew up on a farm and loved animals and always wanted to care for them when they were injured or ill. However, my love for numbers and respect for the accounting profession grew on me and that is why I am now where I am.

Helle: A CPA or auditor.

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

Jadali: I would like to travel to Australia and New Zealand because these two countries have a combination of deserts, mountains and reefs that would be an absolute treat to enjoy visiting.

Helle: I would love to visit Europe. I have traveled to all 50 states as well as Mexico and Canada, so I would really like to now travel to Europe to see Rome, Paris, London, Barcelona, Berlin, Venice, as well as many other well-known tourist cities. □



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