

THE ADMINISTRATOR

A RECORD-BREAKING WINTER SEMINAR

Annual event continues to grow in size and impact.

A record 659 people made the way to Winston-Salem February 5-7, 2025, for the N.C. City & County Management Association (NCCCMA)'s Winter Seminar. The total number of attendees included 504 attendees and 155 sponsors – shattering last year's numbers of 493 and 128, respectively (and 621 total).

And why wouldn't people show up to the MC Benton Convention Center? After all, year in and year out, the NCCCMA Winter Seminar delivers on content, education, and networking opportunities for managers, assistant managers, administrators, sponsors, students, and more.

The seminar is also a great chance to celebrate the leaders of the industry, in addition to the usual number of professional development opportunities and workshops.

CONNET RECOGNIZED

Among those celebrated during the Thursday President's Luncheon was **Pete Connet**, who was recognized with the John Whitehurst Service Award. The John E. Whitehurst Service Award honors retired NCCCMA members who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to supporting NCCCMA, the local government management profession and local government

managers. This award celebrates those who have dedicated themselves to NCCCMA, advancing the profession and uplifting fellow local government managers.

Connet has had a stellar career in North Carolina local government, having served in Smithfield; Statesville and Clinton; along with Kingsport, Tennessee, in addition to interim roles.

He is also an ICMA Life Member and Past President of NCCCMA. Connet has also served as a Senior Advisor.

"I don't think I've ever been in a conversation about a manager struggling when someone didn't say, 'Pete reached out to him or her,'" Past President Lane Bailey wrote in his nomination

letter. "Local government in North Carolina is better because of his 50 years of service to our profession."

Craig Honeycutt, another Past President, said of Connet's eagerness to serve in interim capacities: "His experience and leadership allowed these communities to maintain confidence in the council-manager form of government."



“Having known Pete for over 35 years, I have observed his kindness, integrity, professionalism, and strong commitment to public service,” wrote Past President Scott Hildebran. “I have personally valued his advice and counsel.”

NEW LIFE MEMBERS HONORED

A number of new esteemed managers joined Connet as NCCCMA Life Members during the business meeting. Congratulations to each and every one of them and their families for this tremendous honor and recognition:

Bob Boyette, Manager of the City of Marion

Tony Caudle, Manager of the City of Wilmington

Rodney Dickerson, Manager of the Town of Garner

Grant Goings, Manager of the City of Wilson

Joe Moore, Manager of the Town of Zebulon

John Ogburn, Manager of the City of Asheboro

Tim Owens, Manager of the Town of Wrightsville Beach

Wanda Page, Manager of the City of Durham

Chris Rollins, Manager of the City of Mebane



Newest NCCCMA Life Members (from l-r): Grant Goings, Rodney Dickerson, Joe Moore, Tony Caudle, John Ogburn, Chris Rollins and Wanda Page.

MPA SCHOLARSHIPS ANNOUNCED

The longtime stalwarts of the profession weren't the only ones recognized at the President's Luncheon. As always, the future of the industry was close at hand as NCCCMA recognized the 10 recipients of the Master's of Public Administration (MPA) scholarships for each of the public universities that offer MPA degrees. Congratulations to the following 2024-2025 MPA scholarship recipients:

Tripp English, Appalachian State University
- Matt W. Williamson Scholarship

Katherine Wagner, East Carolina University
- Donald B. Hayman Scholarship

Brandy Briza, N.C. Central University,
Gordon Whitaker Scholarship

Destiny Barr, N.C. State University – John
“Jack” Vogt Scholarship

Caitlyn Wilson, UNC-Chapel Hill – John
Milton Gold Scholarship

William Gibson, UNC-Charlotte – Albert &
Gladys Coates Scholarship

Edgar Rodriguez, UNC-
Greensboro – Marvin
Hoffman Scholarship

Zachary Roupe, UNC-
Pembroke – NCCCMA
MPA Scholarship

Paige Shepard, UNC-
Wilmington – NCCCMA
MPA Scholarship

Ann Thomasson, Western
Carolina University – Jake
Wicker Scholarship

ASSISTANT MANAGERS OF THE YEAR

One of the other annual highlights of the Winter Seminar President's Luncheon is the awarding of the Assistant Managers of the Year. In 2001, the NCCCMA's Executive Committee authorized the annual recognition of one or more Outstanding Assistant Managers from our member jurisdictions. Nominees can be long-time assistants or outstanding newcomers to the profession.



Jimmy Harrison (left) with NCCCMA President Mary Furtado.

This year, two outstanding and deserving people were recognized as Assistant Managers of the Year: **Jimmy Harrison**, Deputy County Manager of Caldwell County, and **Giselle Rodriguez-Villanueva**, Deputy Town Manager of the Town of Morrisville.

In the nomination form for Harrison, it was written that “Professionally, no task is too big or too small for Jimmy to do. Throughout his career, he has constantly been willing to help with any project. Since being named Human Resources Director and then Deputy County Manager, he continues to demonstrate a willingness to work with staff to get jobs completed.”

Harrison was recognized for serving as interim Facilities Services Director, for leading several renovation projects, developing a new

personnel policy and implementing a county salary study (the first in 15 years), and leading the organization during the COVID pandemic, among many other attributes.

“Jimmy consistently works with the best interest of the county and our staff in mind,” wrote County Commissioner Robbie Wilkie. “Over the years, his work has saved our county millions of dollars in health plans, ensured our buildings are safe and functional, and restructured multiple departments to improve workflow. But Jimmy is not afraid to get his hands dirty.”

“I could write for days about all of Jimmy’s accomplishments, but I believe his best trait is how he treats employees and citizens of Caldwell County.”

In nominating Rodriguez-Villanueva, Morrisville Town Manager Brandon Zuidema wrote, “Giselle represents the best of what it means to be an ethical, empathetic, and professional leader and is one of the finest individuals I have had the honor to work with in my 31-year local government career. Her contributions in Morrisville are the model for excellence in leadership.”



Giselle Rodriguez-Villanueva

Among her accomplishments, Rodriguez-Villaneuva was recognized for fostering staff and community collaboration, sound decision making, and an impeccably positive attitude. She has completed the UNC School of Government's "Fellows" program, while also encouraging others in the community do take part – something of great value in a diverse community like Morrisville. She has also been instrumental in the development of the Language Access Plan for the community, which led to Rodriguez-Villaneuva establishing bi-weekly in-person and remote conversations around closing the gap in language and cultural barriers in the community, among other key initiatives she has led in the town.

As Zuidema closed, "Giselle is truly an inspirational leader that is an invaluable member of our senior leadership team. She consistently goes above and beyond to support our team, our Council, and her staff and does so not seeking recognition or accolades, but because she knows it is the right and ethical thing to do."

LOTS OF BUSINESS TO BE HAD

The NCCCMA Business Meeting on Thursday afternoon offered up the opportunity to hear from each of the association's standing committees.

Ken Noland, chair of the Retirement Committee, stated that "Things look up for our retirement system with a new [state] Treasurer." Noland stated that the Local Government Retirement System is currently 88 percent funded but that "I do believe we will get back to fully funded."

Joe Moore, chair of the Civic Education Committee, recalled the early days of the association's Civic Education project, which included updates to school curriculums.

"It used to be said by Carolyn Carter that this is 'our little project to save democracy,' and that comment always got some laughs," recalled Moore. "Today it's no laughing matter."

Moore stated that the Civic Education Committee has prioritized teaching children, citizens and educators about the need for local government education in the state, highlighting a number of resources open to all segments.

"We can't do it alone," he said. "Democracy is a team sport."

In membership news, Sustaining Membership & ICMA Relations Committee Relations Chair Brent Trout said the NCCCMA is up to 870 total members, with 58 new members. He also alluded to the Emerging Members category that it is "not just a subcategory, but the future of the organization." In addition, Shawn Pervis with the Collaborating with MPA Programs shared that 115 MPA students were on hand for the Winter Seminar; fewer than 100 had been expected to attend.

Attendees had the opportunity to hear from various NCCCMA partners, including the UNC School of Government, the N.C. League of Municipalities (NCLM), the N.C. Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), and the Councils of Governments (COGs).

School of Government Dean Aimee Wall expressed excitement in new faculty hires designed specifically for local government assistance.

"The people [at the School of Government] care so much about you, the practitioner."

NCACC Executive Director Kevin Leonard expressed awe at how the NCACC, the NCLM and the local governments from all across the state joined together to assist western North Carolina following the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

"Watching the counties and the managers in the east help out the west was something to see. ... We have to remain committed to working together."

In that same vein, Justin Hembree with the COGs provided an update on aid from the Civic Credit Union Hurricane Helene fund, which

raised \$125,000 for local government employees. According to Hembree, 34 recipients who lost homes or primary vehicles received funding, as did the families of two local government employees who died as a result of the storm. In addition, more aid is on the way. (See below.)

“We wanted to give folks enough money to make an impact,” Hembree said.

And, finally, attendees at the Business Meeting had the chance to hear from Tanya Ange (County Administrator, Washington County, OR), who is currently the President of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). She, too, commented on the strong collaboration in response to Helene.

“You in North Carolina are putting a framework together that will help communities across the country and the world.”

DONATE TO HELENE AID ... AND WIN \$500

Civic Foundation has teamed with the COGs to help even more.

As North Carolinians, we are bound by a shared commitment to serve, uplift, and empower our communities. In the face of challenges, we come together — not just as public servants, but as a family. Now, we have an opportunity to stand with our peers — our colleagues, our friends — who have been impacted by Hurricane Helene.

In that spirit, Civic Foundation has teamed with the N.C. Association of Regional Councils of Governments to support NC local government employees impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Hundreds of these hardworking heroes are struggling following the loss of homes, vehicles, food and other essentials. Your donation will help them rebuild!

Help others while you enter to win

When you donate \$100 or more to Civic Foundation's hurricane relief fund, you'll qualify to win a \$500 gift card to one of the following brands: REI Co-op, Ticketmaster or Hilton Hotels & Resorts.

Not in a position to donate? You can still make

a difference and enter to win one of the \$500 gift cards! Simply write inspirational messages (500 words or less) to local government employees impacted by Hurricane Helene and submit via email to impact@civicfcu.org. Your messages will be shared with those individuals.

Winners will be drawn live at the credit union's Annual Meeting on March 28, 2025. You don't have to be present to win. [Donate today!](#)

Donation levels

- Local Government Sponsor - \$100
- Local Government Advocate - \$250
- Local Government Champion - \$500
- Civic Leader - \$1,000
- Community Visionary - \$2,000

Through our partnership with NCARCOG, your donation goes directly to local government employees and their families. All donations are 100% tax deductible.

We're grateful for you and know that together, we can help N.C.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: SCOTT HILDEBRAN

*Our “Member Spotlight” offers a glimpse into the personalities and lives of you – the N.C. City & County Management Association member. Our “Member Spotlight” this month features **Scott Hildebran, City Manager of Lenoir.***



Birthplace? **Hickory.**

Any siblings? **Yes, older sister – Beth. She established the parental boundaries so I knew the limits.**

Favorite food? **Fried Chicken.**

Favorite vacation spot? **Sanibel Island, Florida.**

Favorite hobby? **NC State/App State Athletic events and running.**

Childhood dream job? **Police Officer.**

Favorite Book Quote? **“For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.”
Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book – Go Pack!**

First local government job? **Lifeguard – City of Hickory, NC.**

Western or Eastern BBQ? **Eastern.**

Mountains, beach or Piedmont? **I have had the honor and privilege to work in local government in all three geographic areas of NC – love them all.**

Favorite Role Models? **Parents – Daniel & Dorothy Hildebran.**

Favorite local government hero? **The late Carl Dean and App State local government veterans (McCaslin, Emory, Hiatt, Dula, Wyatt, Beasley, et al.) and a couple of ECU Pirates (Archer and Connet).**



Describe your city in 10 words or less. **A city for creators, makers, and innovators.**

OR

Our furniture heritage, known for the creative nature of our craftsmen, makers and artisans, our growing pharmaceutical sector and being the birthplace of the expanding NC Data Center Corridor are encapsulated in the city tagline: “CITY OF LENOIR, NC - CREATE WITH US”

What is one thing most people KNOW about you or would say about you? **He enjoys running and is part of the App State Mafia.**

What is one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you? **I ran a half-marathon on my wedding day.**

ETHICS MATTER: ACTING ETHICALLY IS EASY, UNTIL IT ISN'T

How to avoid failing your ethical responsibilities
when you have a lot at risk.

By Kevin Duggan, ICMA-CM

It's a fair assumption that most people view themselves as ethical. They believe that they will do the right thing when confronted with an ethical challenge. Unfortunately, it is very common for individuals who believe with great confidence that they would always act ethically to fall victim to an ethical misstep.

This can be for a variety of reasons, including not identifying the ethical implications of a particular circumstance; underestimating the likelihood that we can be confronted with an ethical challenge; and generally becoming complacent and therefore lacking sufficient sensitivity to our vulnerability to making an ethical misstep. In their book, *Blind Spots*, Max Bazerman and Ann Tenbrunsel reinforce the notion that it is common for individuals to overestimate how ethical we are (versus how ethical we think we are) and how we compare to others in regard to their ethical conduct.

However, quite possibly the greatest threat to fulfilling our ethical obligations is when we are put in a position to lose or gain something important to us based on the ethical choices we make. Consider the following. What if:

- One or more council members threaten your job if you don't take a personnel action they desire.
- You or the organization makes a mistake that will be embarrassing or detrimental if it becomes known.
- One of your department heads, who is a talented and valued contributor, makes a

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For comments or suggestions, please contact the editor, Matt Lail at 919-819-3979, or email collards12@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2025 NCCCMA Summer Seminar
June 19-21, 2025
Beaufort

MEMBERS IN TRANSITION

If you are looking to keep up with your colleagues in the profession, be sure to check out the Members in Transition page:
www.ncmanagers.org/page/ManagerInTransitionReports

significant ethical misstep that would normally cost someone their job.

- Doing the right thing in a particular circumstance will cost you a long-term friendship.
- Doing the right thing will ostracize you from a group with whom your relationship is important.

Why is it that many organizational leaders fail in the ethical responsibilities? This can be for a variety of reasons, including as previously noted, not being sensitive to the ethical implications of our decisions and actions. However, one of the most common reasons we fail to do what is right is

because we don't want to deal with the ramifications of doing the right thing.

Under such circumstances, it is often easy to rationalize that the issue in question is not really that big a deal and that making a hard decision, taking a difficult action, or confronting someone is not really required of us. Perhaps we convince ourselves that it is someone else's responsibility. We can overestimate the negative impact of acting while underestimating the potential negative consequences of not taking action. Many organizational leaders have permanently damaged their own reputations and the reputations of their organizations by failing to take action that they perceived would be personally or organizationally embarrassing.

A few ideas to help you avoid failing your ethical responsibilities when you have a lot at risk:

Decide in advance where your ethical "lines" are drawn. As noted, it can be difficult in the moment to make the right decision when you have a lot at stake and/or you feel under pressure. If you take the time to consider the types of issues you may face in the future and determine in advance what you are willing or not willing to do when faced with those circumstances, it helps prepare you to make the right decision when confronted with this challenge.

Remain vigilant of potential ethical implications of issues or circumstances you may encounter. Just because you haven't had to confront an ethical issue previously is no assurance that one isn't about to emerge. Resist complacency that can come from having avoided an ethical crisis previously. Rid yourself of the notion that only dishonest or clueless people make ethical mistakes. Being humble in our vulnerability will help us avoid overconfidence and making a bad ethical choice.

Appreciate that many fall into an ethical trap without fully comprehending the ethical implications of an issue they are dealing with. Understand that many ethical dilemmas may not be as apparent as we expect. If we think that all ethical issues are clear "black and white" or "good or bad"

choices, we can fail to identify the many ethical issues that inhabit the "gray areas."

Be vigilant of ethical missteps in your organization. Many leaders fail in their ethical obligations not because they personally did something ethically wrong, but through a failure to either identify or appropriately deal with the ethical missteps of others in the organization.

Recognize that accepting minor missteps makes it increasingly easy to accept more serious ethical lapses.

Rationalizing away what you might consider to be minor ethical violations can reduce your sensitivity to identifying and appropriately responding to increasingly more serious ethical challenges.

Be prepared to accept the consequences. Understand that suffering undeserved negative personal or professional consequences does not absolve you of failing your ethical obligations—particularly as a leader.

Be sensitive to the potential for exhibiting a sense of entitlement when faced with achieving a beneficial outcome. It is possible to convince yourself that you can take advantage of your position for personal benefit. Some unfortunately convince themselves that they deserve some benefit (not otherwise authorized) based on personal or organizational achievements, uncompensated hours worked, lack of appropriate compensation, etc. Such actions can destroy a career or even put you in legal jeopardy.

Understand that the negative impacts of doing the right thing are quite often less than the negative impacts of not doing the right thing. When confronted with a serious ethical challenge, recognize that doing nothing is in fact a decision for which you are

likely to be held accountable.

Enlist the help of others. Take advantage of the perspective of trusted individuals who do not have anything to lose or gain from a particular course of action to help you discern whether your decision-making is being clouded by your perception of how a course of action will impact you.

The true test of our ethical judgement and integrity is not when the issues are clear and have no direct impact on our personal well-being. The true test is living up to our ethical obligations when it is difficult and we have

something important to lose or gain based on the decisions we make and the actions we take. Are we willing to stand up and do the right thing when the end result will quite possibly have a negative impact on us?

True ethical leaders do the right thing when it is hard— not just when it is easy.

KEVIN DUGGAN, ICMA-CM, is a senior advisor for ICMA; former director, ICMA West Coast Region; and former manager of Mountain View, California (kcduggan@katesbridge.com)

TIME TO NOMINATE FOR THE ICMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Nominations are accepted through March 14, 2025.

The ICMA Local Government Excellence Awards celebrate the visionaries who are revolutionizing local government service, communities, leadership, and the profession. Share your story of transformation and join the ranks of past Local Government Excellence Award recipients by **submitting your nomination**.

The following award categories are open through March 14, 2025:

Professional Award Categories (nominate an individual)

- Career excellence.
- Development of new talent.
- Excellence in leadership as an assistant (regardless of title).

- Academic contributions to the profession.
- Early career leadership.
- Advocacy for the profession.

Program Award Categories

- Community Equity and Inclusion.
- Community Health and Safety.
- Community Partnerships.
- Community Sustainability.
- Strategic Leadership and Governance.

Recipients receive year-round recognition, including a feature in ICMA's award-winning *Public Management Magazine*. To ensure that talented peers and innovative programs are publicly recognized, **submit a nomination today! Deadline March 14, 2025.**

NOVAK NAMED NEW ICMA CEO/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

New role effective February 24, 2025.

Julia D. Novak, ICMA-CM, has been named the newest CEO/Executive Director, effective February 24, 2025. Novak was selected through an extensive search and selection process, which culminated with a unanimous vote of the ICMA Executive Board.

Wrote ICMA President Tanya Ange to the membership: “Julia brings a wealth of local government experience along with a deep passion for public service and for the profession of local government management and administration. Julia has been an ICMA Credentialed Manager since 2002. She served as a city manager and a deputy city manager. As a successful business owner and senior executive, Julia applied her insights and entrepreneurial drive to build a thriving consulting practice where she and her team have become trusted advisors to counties, cities, villages, towns, townships, boroughs, and special districts with populations ranging from 8,000 to 1.3 million people.”



“Her background and proven ability to lead demonstrates that she not only understands the unique role our members serve in local government, but that she also has the entrepreneurial vision to help ICMA continue to evolve and grow. The executive board is confident in her ability to lead ICMA, to serve our members, and to advocate for the important work each of you do every day.”

“I am honored to be selected as ICMA’s CEO/Executive Director, and I look forward to working with the talented team of ICMA staff to serve and support our members’ efforts to build thriving communities around the world,” said Novak. “I’ve been fortunate to be an ICMA member and to work with ICMA members throughout my career. They do important work that impacts the lives of the people they serve, and I am proud to stand with them and support them in serving their communities and delivering on the promise of democracy at the local level.”

ICMA OFFERING SHELEADSGOV VIRTUAL FORUM

Event will take place March 5.

The 2025 SheLeadsGov Virtual Forum, “Innovate, Inspire, Impact,” features powerhouse speakers. Keynote Brooke Smith, local government leaders Stephanie Lucash, Jennifer Poirrier, Monica Spells and more, will empower and inspire leaders like you who are passionate about driving innovation and making meaningful impacts in your organization and community.

In addition, members are encouraged to host a SheLeadsGov Watch Party. Enhance your virtual forum experience by gathering colleagues to watch and learn together. One registration allows your

whole team to participate, creating an engaging blend of virtual content and in-person networking.

To learn more about the 2025 SheLeadsGov Virtual Forum, or to register, [click here](#). Registration is free.



TO THE VICTORS GO THE SPOILS



Congratulations to the Black Team, which won this year's Tobacco Road Basketball Tournament, which took place on the Wednesday of the Winter Seminar. Past President **Elton Daniels** (left) hoists the trophy during the President's Luncheon on Thursday. Members of the winning team included: **Will Doerfer**, Assistant Manager, Town of Youngsville; **Jae Kim**, Assistant Manager, Village of Bald Head Island; Elton Daniels, Assistant Manager, City of Rocky Mount; **Adam Lindsay**, Assistant Manager, City of Fayetteville; **Jimmy Harrison**, Assistant Manager, Caldwell County; **Eric Marsh**, Manager, Town of Rolesville; **Mark Biberdorf**, Manager, Town of Fletcher; and **Scott Kidd**, Manager, Town of Liberty.



MPA Scholarship recipients.



John Whitehurst Award winner **Pete Connet** (center) with members of his family.

WANT TO BE SHOWCASED AS AN EMERGING MANAGER?

The Sustaining Membership Committee's Emerging Manager Subcommittee is excited to announce a new opportunity for you to shine. We have created a web form for Emerging Managers who are interested in being featured in an upcoming Emerging Manager Spotlight in the Administrator newsletter.

If you would like to be considered, please submit your information through [this web form](#). We look forward to showcasing the incredible talent and dedication within our community!