

Dennis Steen Remembered As MISA Founder and Friend

MISA FOUNDER and visionary Dennis Steen passed away on October 7, 2009. Known for his humanity, sense of humour and dedication in both his professional and personal lives, he was devoted to his family, a good friend to all and a tireless supporter of his community.

For his extraordinary efforts on behalf of MISA Ontario, he received the John Cushing Award of Merit in 1988. He effectively shaped the initial Municipal Information Systems Association in Ontario and ultimately the national organization that MISA/ASIM Canada has become today.

Here are a few tributes from his many colleagues.

David Laneville

*Director, Information Technology Department
City of Timmins*

MISA owes a great deal to Dennis. His enthusiasm, foresight and the very essence of the man himself pushed, prodded, and guided us to where we needed to be to support our municipalities and the citizens of Ontario. I am extremely proud to have known him and will forever remember him.

I first met Dennis in the mid 1980s when he was working for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. It was Dennis who thought I could benefit from joining MISA. I can't remember what his official title was, but his branch worked with municipalities that didn't have an IT department and helped them procure and make effective use of technology. The simple fact is that during that time Dennis was the IT department for a large number of small municipalities.

(As a side note, the ministry subsequently got out of that business – and now MISA is looking at ways to aid and support that exact group!)

Patrick McDade

MISA Ontario life member, formerly with the Region of Peel and City of Scarborough

My first introduction to Dennis was at a MISA program in North York, where he was a guest speaker. Dennis was running a little late and came bounding into the meeting room with his presentation material in several folders under his arm.

I extended my hand to welcome him and the folders went flying in every direction. Unfazed by this misfortune, Dennis didn't miss a beat and delivered his usual upbeat and informative presentation.

He never had to be asked to volunteer; he was usually the first to offer. In fact, I don't think there was a committee ever struck for which Dennis did not volunteer to serve.

At one meeting when, again, the Executive was soliciting volunteers and of course Dennis, the social butterfly, raised his hand, we had to remind him that he already sat on five other committees and perhaps he was taking on too much! Dennis, being Dennis, suggested that if we could not find another he would be willing to fill the void.

At MISA Executive meetings Dennis balanced his sense of humour with his wealth of knowledge of municipal government, understanding how MISA could improve its profile and offerings to its members.

Dennis worked diligently to ensure that Municipal Affairs was informed about MISA initiatives. When MISA needed funding or resources to undertake some initiatives, Dennis was the guy who usually presented the case to his colleagues at the ministry, and I don't think there was a time that funding and resource requests were denied. He was a tireless worker on behalf of MISA and certainly deserving of the MISA awards bestowed on him.

He was a very gracious person who respected everyone's point of view and, as a voice of reason, was willing to make concessions in his thinking when it served a greater purpose.

During my term on the MISA Executive, I realized how fortunate I was, and MISA was in general, to have Dennis as a member. He was totally committed to our mandate and provided wisdom and professionalism to our team. He was a team player in every sense and held in high regard by everyone, especially me.

Lou Milrad

*MISA Counsel
Associate Counsel, Miller Thomson LLP, Toronto*

Dennis Steen was a man of many interests and talents. As a founder of MISA, he was instrumental in shaping the municipal IT profession as we know it today.

I first met Dennis in the early 1980s when he was with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs, in charge of the grant program encouraging municipalities to invest in IT infrastructure. Together we travelled across most of the province – from the Sault to Nepean – talking to municipalities about the complexities of purchasing IT services and products.

I often joked with Dennis, an exceptionally jovial person, that he was like Santa with his moustache and his sack, happily doling out presents in the form of government IT grants to waiting municipalities!

At that time MISA was a small group of IT professionals, and Dennis was a proud member of the Board of Directors. Throughout his career he continued to contribute, helping to organize conferences, meetings and trade shows, and never asking for or expecting credit for his efforts.

Following his retirement and up to the very end, Dennis always provided a heads up that he planned on attending MISA's upcoming annual conference, and he did make it out to a couple of them, the last one being Waterloo in 2007.

With his philosophy of collaboration, collegiality and pragmatism, Dennis was adept at rising above any potential politics and getting the job done. When the board ran into difficulty in incorporating MISA under its correct legal name, the Municipal Information Systems Association (due to provincial administrative resistance to allowing MISA to use the term "Association" in its name rather than "Aggregation" or "Alliance"), Dennis stepped in, made a quick phone call, and came back with approval – all in about 15 minutes!

Dennis was an exceptionally proud family man, a teacher and, along with his devoted wife Marilyn, always contributed to his community, profession and the arts. He'll be missed.

Fred Snelling

*IT Strategic Planning
City of Hamilton*

Ironically, Dennis was probably the one who received the least professional value from MISA because he was not a municipal employee – yet he was a tireless supporter. He also became friends with many members of MISA, and he valued these friendships.

There was a time when MISA didn't have conference host cities lined up three years in advance. There were times when no city stepped forward. On these occasions, Dennis and a team of volunteers devoted an incredible amount of personal effort to ensure that a conference was held.

Two such events took place in Fern resort and were very successful. Having hosted a MISA conference, I know how much planning goes into pulling it together, and Dennis did this with no expectation of special thanks or recognition, but simply because he believed in MISA. In



Dennis Steen, left foreground, chats with MISA Ontario counsel Lou Milrad and others at a party at Baranga's on the Beach during the MISA Ontario Annual Conference in Hamilton in June 2003.

spite of the effort required, you could tell from his stories that Dennis enjoyed his involvement in planning the Fern events largely because of the camaraderie.

I know that, when it was time to move the MISA office function to AMCTO and store all of our records there, Dennis showed up with boxes and boxes of MISA records that he had stored in his home. Again Dennis gained little professionally, but that never stopped him from being the first one to step up and volunteer to assist MISA in any way possible.

Dennis is a very important part of MISA's history and, for those of us who had the opportunity and pleasure to work with him and enjoy his hearty laugh, his sense of humour and his devotion, he will not be forgotten.

Roy Wiseman

*Chief information Officer
Regional Municipality of Peel*

I knew Dennis for many years as both a colleague and a friend through his work with MISA in Ontario. Dennis participated in MISA from the very early days of the association. He was "introduced" as the new representative from the Province (Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs, or TEIGA) at the meeting of January 29, 1976, and was a regular participant until his retirement in 1995, when he was also named a Life Member of MISA Ontario.

For many years, Dennis was MISA and MISA was Dennis. He kept the organization alive through his persistence, personality and networking. MISA is now a strong national organization that has benefited in countless ways from his contribution. Dennis' daughter Andrea also told me that "our family knew how passionate and dedicated he was about MISA. He truly believed in its value." ■