

Chapter 1

"YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY..."

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The popular advertising slogan -- "You've come a long way, baby" -- can very well characterize the history and progress of the Louisiana Municipal Association since its humble beginnings in 1926. From the era of Model Ts to the Space Age and now the age of microcomputers, the Louisiana Municipal Association has endeavored to fulfill its mission of service to the villages, towns, and cities of Louisiana.

In 1926, the officers of Louisiana cities organized the Louisiana Conference of Mayors. The record of that gathering shows that 29 towns and cities of the state believed it important to join together in a program to promote better municipal government. However, this first attempt at organization lasted only three years, due to the dark days of the Great Depression in 1929. Mayor F. J. Foisy of Alexandria was the first president; Mayor L. E. Thomas of Shreveport, the second. After that, despite relatively encouraging growth in some of the towns and cities, no effort was made to create any kind of cohesive municipal front until 1937.

On October 5, 1937, a handful of mayors of Louisiana cities met in Alexandria to revive the efforts of 1927 to 1929. Thus, the conference of mayors was revitalized and a constitution and bylaws were adopted. Under the able leadership of Mayor S. S. Caldwell of Shreveport as president, eight vice presidents, and Leon Booth of Shreveport as secretary-treasurer, the conference laid the groundwork for an ambitious and effective program. In 1938, with Mr. Booth as editor, the organization's journal, the *Louisiana Municipal Review*, was launched to "provide news of interest to mayors and other municipal officials."

Two years later, in 1939, the Louisiana Conference of Mayors -- wishing to admit all municipal officials into its organization -- changed its name to the Louisiana Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials.

Having embraced a more powerful segment of municipal thinking and prestige, the Conference advanced at a lively clip, so much so that it became healthy enough to advance to a greater level of importance, a new era.

In 1941, Joseph W. Reid, Jr., the first executive secretary of the organization, wrote, "But the Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials could never be a genuinely successful organization as long as it continued to operate on a budget that was little more than negligible. At no time during its existence did the Conference raise as much as \$700 in annual dues..."

Therefore, the membership approved a drastic reorganization which accomplished three major changes: (1) the organization ceased to be one of municipal officials and became an association of municipalities of the state, to be called the Louisiana Municipal Association; (2) the Association's former dues schedule (which admitted the officials of smaller towns without a charge and which exacted only \$55 from the largest city in the state) was revamped to provide for the collection of dues at a minimum of \$5, rising by graduated scale to a maximum of \$300 for the City of New Orleans; and, (3) the Association hired a full-time executive secretary.

One by one, innovations were inaugurated to enhance the effectiveness of the Association for its member municipalities. For example, in 1941, the concept of "regional meetings" was launched to bring officials of each area of the state together for a discussion of common problems, legislation, and the need to work against federal and state intrusions on local authority (an issue that's still around today!).

The Association's early leaders discovered that united towns and cities could get things done on a statewide scale. For example, LMA was successful in securing legislative approval of a bill to require insurance companies doing business in the state to allocate two percent of their gross payments to municipalities instead of one percent. And, to cite another example, LMA secured passage of a bill enabling cities and parishes to levy a special tax on beer. The leadership of LMA officers -- particularly Commissioner John McWilliam Ford of Shreveport and Mayor Edward S. Hardy of LeCompte -- was instrumental in attaining legislative achievements through which villages, towns, and cities were able to realize bountiful revenues.

The aggressive guidance of Commissioner Ford and Mayor Hardy, who each served two terms as LMA president during the stormy 1940s, had a lasting influence on the history of the young association. It was Mayor Hardy who led, for the first time, a vigorous drive to boost LMA's membership to 124 municipalities, the largest ever since 1926.

In 1941, Mr. Reid became associated with the Bureau of Government Research at Louisiana State University and Mrs. Henry Jastremski was employed as executive secretary. However, because of his background in political science and convenient access to vital governmental research information, Mr. Reid was retained as editor of the *Louisiana Municipal Review*. A casual review of the Association's journal, in 1943 to be exact, shows that state-local government issues are, remarkably and for the most part, virtually the same as in the current era. Witness these titles from 1943 -- "The Dilemma of the Cities," "The State's Obligation to Its Municipalities," "The City of the Future," "Some Common Fallacies Concerning Good Government," "Coordinating Municipal Activities," and "Post-War Problems of Local Governments." The issues of the 1940s -- among them, federal and state taxation, sanitation, flood crises, inadequate local revenues, and labor strikes -- are not drastically different from modern-day municipal issues five decades later. In 1943, due to a reduction of personnel at the Bureau of Government Research at LSU, Mrs. Jastremski assumed the editorship of the *Louisiana Municipal Review*.

By the mid-1940s, the Association engaged the services of a public relations director, Tom Gillen, to develop and coordinate membership affairs and relations with the Legislature. Mr. Gillen's tenure, however, was a brief one. Another slight reorganization in the Association's structure resulted in the selection of Mayor Ivan A. Magnitzky of Bogalusa as the first-ever executive vice president to provide oversight over the Association's affairs.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, the LMA enjoyed slow but steady growth as the quality and scope of services offered to its members persuaded officials of other towns and cities to join the LMA's ranks. Another factor in the growth of the Association was the increasing number of municipal incorporations, which created potential new members for the state's thriving municipal league.

Another significant factor in the Association's expansion was the development of organizations of affiliated professionals with functions related to municipal government. The rise of affiliate organizations for such professionals -- municipal attorneys, municipal engineers, building officials, city clerks, recreation directors, among them -- allowed the LMA to utilize the collective wisdom and expertise of these affiliate members for the betterment of municipal government in Louisiana, while at the same time, enabling these organizations to develop programs and services to improve the lot of their members.

Throughout the late 1950s and the 1960s, an era of phenomenal growth for the state and her local communities, the Association directed its resources to assist municipalities with tourism and economic development efforts. The Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* in June 1961 commented on the definite trend toward rapid and dramatic urbanization, saying, "Only a few years ago, rural interests and rural problems were predominant." Nonetheless, whether a town or city was "rural" or "urban," the LMA demonstrated its concern about the effects of this growth and its related fiscal impact on all of its member municipalities.

From 1951 to 1967, the Association benefited from the public relations expertise of Claude Morgan, owner of a PR firm based in Alexandria. With his wife, Connie, Mr. Morgan "roamed" all over Louisiana, looking for stories to tell about developments in the state's towns and cities and the officials who served in them. His column in the *Louisiana Municipal Review*, easily the most-read words in the monthly journal, largely resembled a society-page feature with numerous photographs and tidbits about people and events related to towns and cities. The *Louisiana Municipal Review*, with Mr. Morgan as editor and publisher, experienced greatly expanded circulation and quickly became the finest municipal publication of its kind in the nation.

At the same time, Mr. Morgan's public-relations staff systematically promoted LMA's important activities before the public and helped boost the economy of towns and cities through strong PR and publicity methods. These PR efforts laid the foundation for the addition of new members for the Association. It can be easily argued that the steady growth of the Association during these 16 years can be attributed to Mr. Morgan's zealous efforts to promote the good work of municipal officials and life in Louisiana's municipalities.

While such growth can be positive, it also can be the root of problems. One such problem was the need to increase the size of the Association's staff to better enable the Association to provide efficient and effective services to its existing and newer members.

Therefore, Sidney Gray, who served as president in 1959-60, was selected by the Association's leaders in 1961 as its first executive director. As executive director, Mr. Gray proclaimed his role as a "two-fold mission -- first, to improve communications between and among municipalities; and second, improve relations with the Legislature." It appears this "splendid speaker with a jovial personality," a former mayor of Lake Charles and member of the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, was the right man for the job.

During Mr. Gray's tenure, the Association accomplished much -- relocation of LMA's headquarters office from Baton Rouge City Hall to more spacious quarters at The Jack Tar Capitol House Hotel in downtown Baton Rouge; expansion of office staff and capabilities, including the appointment of Charles L. Smith as LMA's first assistant director; the premiere publication (in 1966) of *Louisiana Municipal Laws*, which contained over 600 pages of legal information pertaining to municipal government; transformation of the *Louisiana Municipal Review* to a news journal focusing on municipal problems and solutions; and institution of the LMA Achievement Awards Program to replace the antiquated "Mayor of the Year" selection process. The new awards program, begun in 1968, recognized the winning municipality itself and its mayor and each councilmember, alderman, or commissioner in three population categories.

The LMA, throughout Mr. Gray's directorship, maintained a strong presence in the Legislature. Rare was the occasion when cohesiveness among the Association's members did not exist to exert positive influence on municipally-related legislation.

Mr. Gray's persistent efforts to strengthen the Association's capabilities enabled LMA to better cope with the demands of a predominantly urban state. According to the 1960 national census, the state's urban population officially increased to "something like 65 percent." It was because of these endeavors that LMA was generally conceded to be among the nation's most progressive and unified state municipal government organizations -- attaining heights that the 29 original mayors of 1926 would never have dreamed of.

After serving in public office for eight years and as LMA's head for seven-and-one-half years, Mr. Gray resigned in January 1969 to become executive director of the Capital Region Planning Commission, based in Baton Rouge. Mr. Gray's LMA experienced significant progress and growth, expanded convention planning, broader legislative planning and representation, stronger district participation in Association affairs, improved technical and legal advisory services, innovative publications for LMA members, and a more genuine spirit of recognition for municipal achievement through institution of the LMA Achievement Awards and the LMA Service Awards. Mr. Gray, whose contributions truly modernized LMA, died in February 1999.

Perhaps none of these accomplishments is more significant than the appointment in 1963 of the highly-esteemed attorney, R. Gordon Kean of Baton Rouge, as LMA's legal counsel. Mr. Kean, for many years city attorney for Baton Rouge, provided legal assistance for a great many towns which had no other source to obtain legal representation. Member municipalities had only to contact Mr. Gray to gain access to Mr. Kean's expertise and knowledge in municipal law. Until his death in April 1992, Mr. Kean rendered uninterrupted and dedicated legal service to the Louisiana Municipal Association, and in so doing, made a lasting contribution to the betterment of the state's towns and cities.

From 1969 to 1973, the LMA, under the executive directorship of Marvin L. Lyons -- formerly of the Public Affairs Research Council -- exhibited consistency in organizational growth and in the quality of services for towns and cities. The first individual to serve as LMA's director who had no prior experience as an elected local official, Mr. Lyons' distinct insight and untiring efforts and accomplishments helped elevate LMA to a new level of excellence, and served as the catalyst through which elected and appointed municipal officials became more closely involved in the affairs of the Association.

In 1973, a new figure occupied the executive director's office -- Charles J. Pasqua, who prior to this appointment was serving his third term as mayor of Gonzales. Mr. Pasqua, who also led LMA as its president in 1971-72, possessed the energy and drive that would steer the Association toward the greatest membership growth and program expansion it has ever witnessed.

Under Mr. Pasqua's administration, the LMA realized numerous accomplishments indicative of its continued growth and which enabled municipal elected officials and town and city administrators to engage in a greater participation in political affairs, to improve the relationship of municipalities to each other, parish governments, and the state and federal governments. The LMA expanded its training programs for municipal officials; created an ambitious self-insurance and risk management program for municipal governments and their officials and employees; and spearheaded efforts to plan and build, in the late 1970s, an office building for the Association, and in the early 1990s, a new versatile, multi-faceted, four-story office building that has come to symbolize the Association's phenomenal growth over the 20-and-a-half years of Mr. Pasqua's directorship and municipal-government advocacy and leadership.

On January 1, 1994, a new era began as L. Gordon King – the Association's deputy director since February 1988 – assumed the executive director's position. Possessing broad legal knowledge and skills and intimate experience in the state government and the Legislature, the very perceptive Mr. King began the process of redefining the Association as an organization seriously dedicated to providing service, more responsive to its members' needs, and more focused on the promotion of innovativeness as a key to municipal advancement in the mid-1990s and beyond.

The LMA's service component, during Mr. King's tenure, escalated with the establishment of new programs designed to assist municipalities with financing and technological needs.

The Louisiana Local Government Environmental Facilities and Community Development Authority, or LCDA for short, created by legislation, gave the public finance industry in Louisiana a major jolt by creating a new, substantial alternative for municipalities, parish governments, and school systems seeking financial assistance for their project and infrastructure needs. Originally established by state statute in 1991 and expanded in 1997, LCDA has become a proven leader in promoting competition among professionals eager to provide legal counsel and underwriting services to political subdivisions, with significantly lowered issuance costs.

As traditional federal and state funding sources continue to decline and existing infrastructure systems endure further erosion, current public-finance sources are woefully inadequate to meet the huge demand for financing of system upgrades and capital improvements. The LCDA's entry into the public-finance arena presents new opportunities for political subdivisions – through state revolving funds, refinancing of existing bonds, economic development initiatives, equipment financings, local capital-outlay projects, and international trade and commerce – all of which will benefit municipalities and other local entities well into the New Millennium.

The Louisiana Municipal Advisory and Technical Services Bureau, Inc., or LaMATS for short, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of LMA activated in 1997 to help municipalities understand and grasp new and emerging advances in information technology. LaMATS specializes in these key areas – telecommunications management, revenue recovery, financial assistance, group purchasing and bid-data collection, and management and organizational assistance for municipal governments. Current endeavors of LaMATS are the highly successful Full Insurance Premium Tax Collection Program and the Computer and Internet Technology Assistance Program, the latter of which is managed by Mike Walker, LMA's first information technology services director appointed in October 2002. The CITAP program encompasses the participation of more than 65 municipalities and gives them access to the benefits of Internet and electronic-mail technology.

Seeking greener pasture to secure his family's needs, Mr. King ended his illustrious 13-year LMA career on November 30, 2000, having given the LMA's members the utmost in dedication, vision, integrity, and service during very challenging times for municipalities.

In 2006, the LMA marked its 80th year of existence as Louisiana's premier local-government organization under the executive directorship of Tom Ed McHugh. Mr. McHugh, who immediately prior to accepting the position (in 2001), concluded two decades of elected public service – as mayor-president of the City of Baton Rouge and Parish of East Baton Rouge for 12 years and metro councilman for eight. Mr. McHugh brings to the job a desire to strengthen the ties that bind municipal governments to the state and federal levels of democratic government, yet ensuring every municipality the flexibility and autonomy it needs to accomplish self-sufficiency and provide optimum quality in management, delivery of services, and citizen satisfaction in local government.

What a long way the LMA has come since the days of Model T cars. What phenomenal growth this Association has revealed since the Space Age. And, in this present age of microcomputers and informational super-technology, what lies ahead for the LMA? The answer to that question must be explicitly tied to the history you've just read and what we know about the relationship between people and their government. Probably nothing affects the people of Louisiana in a more direct way than their local government. The public knows this, and municipal leaders know this. And the LMA, ever mindful of its past accomplishments and alert to the challenges of future years, will continue to provide the kind of discerning leadership that the officials of every village, town, and city in Louisiana must have to fulfill their sacred responsibilities in public service at the municipal level of government.

Thomas B. Darensbourg, Jr.
Director of Communications and Managing Editor, *Louisiana Municipal Review*
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