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Leading Communities

"I came away enlivened, refreshed and ready to let our township residents know that they make a difference."

"Attending Conference is like a shot in the arm—it helps you find strength and new ideas to do your job better!"

If comments on the evaluation forms were any indication, MTA's 2006 Annual Educational Conference, held January 24-27 in Grand Rapids, was "one of the best ever!" More than 1,500 elected and appointed township officials and employees filled the halls of DeVos Place® and the Amway Grand Plaza, accepting the challenge to learn, grow and lead their communities into the future.

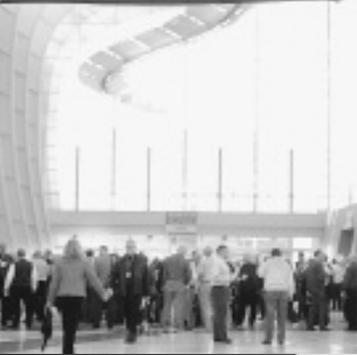
'A Valuable Experience'

Following a Tuesday featuring pre-Conference seminars for township officials, attorneys, auditors and assessors, the Conference officially kicked off Wednesday, January 25 with the Opening Session, a motivating and inspiring start to the week.

Following the presentation of colors and 2006 Parade of Flags, 2005 MTA President **Don R. Hilton Sr.** reflected on his year at the helm of the Association and spoke of challenges township officials confront on a regular basis. He said, "One of the key challenges facing townships is asserting ourselves and making known the values that we represent—not only to those who represent us on the legislative front but also in the eyes of the public that we serve."

Continuing with the theme of values and how townships can position themselves in the future to better their communities, and the state as a whole, MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill focused on the importance of integrity when serving as a township official. "Collectively, we need to forge a new code of conduct for township government that transcends what is merely legal," he said. "Insist on integrity not only for yourself, but throughout your entire township government."

Following the graduation ceremony for the 2006 Township Governance Academy class (*turn to page 11*), Keynote Speaker Dr.



Into the Future

"This is the best way to make contacts with officials from across the state."

"A great opportunity to network and gather information!"

Sheila Murray Bethel presented ideas and strategies on how to be "the best leaders you can be." She said, "The challenge of leading today is a challenge of continual growth. Leadership never ends—it's an ever-evolving process of skills and talents and abilities that are effective right now."

'Timely, Informative and Well-Presented'

Other highlights of the week included:

- More than 50 workshops, including two plenary sessions.
- An indoor carnival at Par-Plan Fun Night, hosted by the Michigan Township Participating Plan.
- A 136-booth Trade Expo—MTA's largest Expo to date!
- An elegant, fun-filled Annual Banquet, including a performance by two-man musical impersonation group Brinnon & Marks. The following awards were also presented: **Brad VanHaitsma**, Past President Award; **Grayden Slowins**, MTA Life Member Award; Rep. Phil LaJoy (R-Canton Twp.), 2005 Legislator of the Year.
- Presentation of the "Excellence in Township Government" awards (see pages 19-20).
- Adoption of MTA's 2006 Legislative Policy Platform (see page 5) at the MTA Annual Meeting.
- Election of MTA President Arlene Hill (see page 14) and other MTA officers.

For those who felt it was "the best Conference yet—can't wait for 2007!", be sure to mark your calendar for next year's Conference, January 23-26, at the Marriott Renaissance Center in Detroit! ■

And the Winner is ...

Congratulations to **Deborah Cooley, Kimball Township** (St. Clair Co.) trustee! Her completed Conference evaluation form was randomly drawn in February, as the winner in the contest to receive a free registration to the 2007 MTA Annual Educational Conference. All those who completed the 2006 Conference evaluation were entered into the drawing. ■



Meet Arlene E. Hill, MTA's 2006 President

*"Jackie Kennedy once said if you haven't raised your kids well, you have missed your most important job," noted MTA's newly elected President **Arlene Hill**. "So family—my husband, kids and grandson—are the primary objects of my energy."*

Hill, however, is just as passionate about her township government family. She firmly believes that township officials are closest to the people they represent, and as such, have a real responsibility to listen and respond to the needs of their constituents. In fact, she urges all officials to truly listen to both constituents and colleagues.

*First elected to the MTA Board in 1993, Hill succeeds 2005 MTA President **Don R. Hilton Sr.** Hill recently spoke with the Michigan Township News about her beginnings in local government and her ideas on the future of township government.*



How did you become involved in township government?

My husband, Ken, is a banker. With each place we moved to, it was natural for us to think about the government arm of the community. One of my first jobs was as a deputy city clerk. When Ken's job took us to **Forsyth Township** (Marquette Co.), the township was looking for a part-time deputy clerk, and I was fortunate enough to get the job. Then Ken's job moved him to **Chocolay Charter Township** (Marquette Co.)—and me to another clerk's job.

How do you stay passionate and energetic about your work in township government, and on the MTA Board of Directors?

With every job, whether in my township or at the state level, there are some wins and some losses. I refuse to let the losses get me down. Every time we help a group of people or an agency, I really feel fortunate to be involved. Making things happen is what it's all about!

What is the most effective way to connect with MTA's membership?

Our MTA Board members are all ordinary people. We have the same dreams and disappointments as our neighbors. We need to communicate with our members that we've gotten

through some tough spots and they can do the same. Life is like that. We get over some hurdles so that we can help someone else in the same spot. It's when we say "that's their problem" that we take ourselves out of the game.

How can we engage the public in the efforts of township government?

Township government used to be the kids out in the country who didn't have all the conveniences and weren't up on how to get things done well. Now, we are the preferred way of life, with a government run by the people and for the people. When we step up to the plate and take our place in the batter's box, we are in the game for the good of the people. We don't want to get too far away from that simpler life!



Chocolay Charter Township Director of Planning and Community Development Dennis Stachewicz presents Arlene Hill with a plaque upon her election as MTA president.

Many different groups have joined together to fight additional budget cuts during the past couple of years. How do we maintain that momentum and cooperation?

Before we complain that someone else is taking funds away from us, we need to take our own inventory to be sure we have cut our wish list down as far as we can. Then we need to see if there are other groups we can partner with to further cut costs. Then move forward, spending each township dollar as conservatively as we would in our own personal budget. Collectively, we can provide more things for our township families than we could if we were in the battle alone.

What issues will the Association and its members face in the upcoming year?

We will constantly be in a battle to provide what our residents need and find the funds to do it. We must remember to be fair and not take more out of the storehouse of supplies than is our fair share. Remember that America is a great country because we believe in ourselves, work hard for what we need, and care about our neighbors!

After your term as president concludes, what would you like the membership to remember about you?

That I am a fair person. That every opportunity I get to help someone, I do it to the best of my ability. That as a team member we can provide more help for the most people. Each of us is talented to some degree. If we pool those talents together, we can do the most good for the most people.

When I was 35 years old, I was diagnosed with a tumor in my spinal column. From that point, I've had three back surgeries. None of them was fun, and it seems like my walking gets worse with each surgery. The last time I went in, it was because I had a screw loose. I could feel it in my throat. I'm probably the only

politician you know who admits she had a screw loose!

I'm not in a great deal of pain. I just walk slowly and carefully. What we are doing is important enough to just keep doing it as long as we can. For this reason, I am thankful to be your president and work another year on township business. ■



2005 President Don Hilton affixes the President pin on Arlene Hill at the MTA Annual Meeting.

Personal Profile: Arlene E. Hill

Family:

My husband, Ken, is a retired banker and my right-hand man! We have two adult children: Beth, who lives in Florida, and Kevin, who lives in Wisconsin.

Our grandson, Geric, brings real joy—and noise—to our household!

Community Involvement:

Over the years, I have done many interesting things. For 20 years, I managed a senior citizen housing complex. I have been involved in my church, Christian women's clubs, and camp work with women and children. I am very interested in libraries, elections and committees that form to assist these types of causes. I do believe the squeaky wheel gets the oil—and I don't mind doing the squeaking!

A Day in the Life of Arlene Hill:

Chocolay Charter Township provides a good staff to accomplish the work of the township. None of our board members works full-time at the office. I try to go in three or four days a week from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. I'm always happy to have colleagues call me at home. About six times a month, I have committee meetings, some during the day and a few at night. The work of the Michigan Townships Association brings me to Lansing almost every month. In the past, I have been active in the state clerks' association.

If my grandson comes over, I can be busy for hours! That's fun work. My husband and I are active in our church, and I am the church clerk. So, I take minutes for fun.



Arlene Hill and husband Ken.

2006 MTA Executive Committee



Arlene E. Hill, President Clerk, Chocolay Charter Township (Marquette Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 1993

◆ Elected clerk in 1986;

Forsyth Township clerk for six years; deputy clerk for two years

Larry T. Rutledge, First Vice President Supervisor, LaSalle Township (Monroe Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 1996

◆ Elected supervisor in 1988; clerk, 1984-1988; trustee, 1980-1984; treasurer, 1975-1978



Gary Cramer, Second Vice President Supervisor, Kalamazoo Charter Township (Kalamazoo Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 1999

◆ Elected supervisor in 1996; trustee, 1980-1996

Colleen Schwartz, Treasurer Clerk, Milford Charter Township (Oakland Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 2001

◆ Elected clerk in 1996; deputy clerk, 1977-1996



Linda Towsley, Secretary Clerk, Windsor Charter Township (Eaton Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 1997

◆ Appointed clerk in 1988; deputy clerk for one year

Don R. Hilton Sr., Immediate Past President Supervisor, Gaines Charter Township (Kent Co.)

◆ Elected to MTA Board in 1996

◆ Elected supervisor in 1992



Five Townships Honored for 'Excellence in Township Government'



The success of any association is dependent upon the success of its members. MTA recognizes that township government thrives because of the courage, commitment and vision of township boards throughout the state. To reward and highlight the outstanding achievement of dedicated townships, MTA created the "Excellence in Township Government" awards program.

The winners of the third annual award programs were announced to more than 1,700 township officials and guests attending the Annual Banquet during the Association's 53rd Annual Educational Conference in Grand Rapids.

Applications were accepted in seven categories: Boardmanship, Constituent Communications, Fiscal Management, Human Resources Management, Land Use, Community Services and Intergovernmental Relations. Awards were given in five of the seven categories.

EXCELLENCE IN CONSTITUENT COMMUNICATIONS Kinross Charter Township 'Kinross.net'

When **Joe Paczkowski** was appointed deputy supervisor of **Kinross Charter Township** (Chippewa Co.) in 2004, he was given the assignment of evaluating and possibly updating the township's aging Web site.



While he found the site contained a lot of useful information, he quickly became convinced that the site was difficult to navigate and in need of a redesign.

Each department director was asked to determine what information on their pages needed updating, and an online poll asked site users what they wanted from the site. All of that data was compiled, and a new site was designed.

The site's mission is to provide timely, accurate information and services to township residents, as well as other users searching for information on the area's popular snowmobile trails. Updates are made at least weekly, sometimes daily, to ensure users always find something new when they return. The new site receives 3,000 hits per day from more than 150 unique visits, a 400-percent increase from the same period just a year before.

"Kinross.net doesn't just represent a government," said Paczkowski. "We are a community that has made a comfortable place for itself in a small corner of the World Wide Web."

EXCELLENCE IN FISCAL MANAGEMENT Roscommon Township 'New Hall from Current Revenue'

With a township hall that was more than 100 years old and in need of repair, the **Roscommon Township**



board knew a new hall was necessary. Supervisor and MTA Board member **Diane Randall** took the lead on an ambitious project to pay for the construction of a new hall with current revenue.

As road repair was a major drain on the township's budget, these costs were shifted from the general fund and funded by the passage of a road millage. The township's recycle transfer station was also moved out of the general fund and was instead funded by a special assessment. The township board froze wages or accepted less than the cost-of-living adjustment to help accumulate funds. No new furniture or technology was acquired for several years to provide more cost-savings.

In 2001, with more than half of the anticipated costs on-hand, the township was able to contract for the construction of a new township hall. Over the next several years, continued attention to careful budget management yielded sufficient funds to pay for the new construction.

"Remarkably, this project was completed ahead of schedule and on budget, and included all technological advancements needed for the future," said Trustee **Dick Pastula**.

EXCELLENCE IN INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS
Blackman Charter Township
 'Urban Cooperation & Wastewater Service Agreement'



In 1998, the City of Jackson, along with many of the county's townships and the drain commissioner, began discussions for implementing a regional sewer authority. In 2000, a draft proposal was presented and accepted in principal by the townships. However, the city had second thoughts on some issues and tabled the matter.

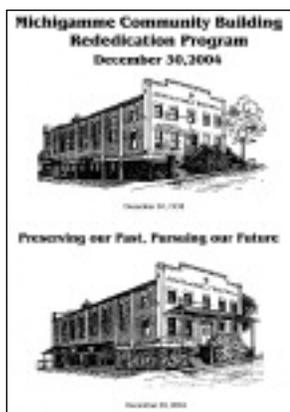
In late 2003, the **Blackman Charter Township** (Jackson Co.) board formed a negotiating committee, as the township was nearly out of contracted capacity, and several projects were on hold. Those negotiations proved unsuccessful.

In 2004, a new board was elected, and newly elected officials made the sewer agreement their top priority. A new committee was formed with a goal to have a model agreement with the city in 90 days.

This time, the negotiations proved successful. On March 16, 2005, the township approved a wastewater service agreement and an urban cooperation agreement. The city approved both agreements just six days later.

"The outcome of these successful intergovernmental sewer and urban cooperation agreements will have positive long-term effects on all of our communities," noted Supervisor **Raymond Snell**.

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE
Michigamme Township
 'Preserving Our Past, Pursuing Our Future'



On March 20, 1936, **Michigamme Township's** (Marquette Co.) hall was destroyed in a fire. Less than two years later, the township dedicated a new community building to replace it. Sixty-five years later, many memories have been made in the building. However, 65 years of use will take its toll on any structure, and it became apparent that the building needed repair.

Rather than demolish the building that had become so tied to community spirit, the township board chose to renovate the current structure. It now houses township offices, but will also be used for all types of community activities.

In 1938, the original project cost \$38,000. The \$750,000 renovations were paid for by the overwhelming approval of a millage by the township's 377 residents.

"This is truly a building renovated to meet the many needs of a growing, community-minded township," said Clerk **Jean Howe**.

EXCELLENCE IN LAND USE
West Branch & Churchill Townships
 'Junior Citizen Planner'

West Branch Township (Ogemaw Co.) Supervisor **Steve Steinhauser** and **Churchill Township** (Ogemaw Co.) Clerk **Gayle Miller** recognized an opportunity to get the students in their communities

more involved, while also educating them about the challenges of wise land use. With the help of Michigan State University Extension's Citizen Planner program, they put together the Junior Citizen Planner program to promote land use education. The program will begin this spring.

The Junior Citizen Planner program emphasizes fun and creative teaching strategies, including experimental and hands-on components; easy-to-follow materials and flexible lesson plans; an unbiased introduction to controversial land-use issues; and much more to help young people understand the complex issues facing communities. Students receive a certificate of completion upon finishing the program.

"Earning the certificate is a great achievement for young people to list on an award and scholarship application," noted Steinhauser.



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Nearly 60 Townships Kicked Off Conference with 2006 Parade of Flags



Officials from 59 townships and 32 counties proudly waved their township flags during the 2006 Parade of Flags, kicking off the Conference's Opening Session on an inspirational and patriotic note. Led by MTA Immediate Past President **Brad VanHaitsma**, **Clam Union Township** (Missaukee Co.) supervisor, the township flags were paraded across the stage, following the impressive 12-person presentation of colors comprised of military officials based out of West Michigan and arranged by Bill Campbell, a veteran from the Grand Rapids area.

Thank you 2006 Parade of Flags participants!

Ada Township (Kent Co.)
Allendale Charter Township (Ottawa Co.)
Alpena Township (Alpena Co.)
Alpine Township (Kent Co.)
Arbela Township (Tuscola Co.)
Big Prairie Township (Newaygo Co.)
Bloomington Charter Township (Van Buren Co.)
Bridgehampton Township (Sanilac Co.)
Broomfield Township (Isabella Co.)
Brownstown Charter Township (Wayne Co.)
Buena Vista Charter Township (Saginaw Co.)
Cedar Creek Township (Muskegon Co.)
Chikaming Township (Berrien Co.)
China Charter Township (St. Clair Co.)
Chippewa Township (Isabella Co.)
Chocolay Charter Township (Marquette Co.)
Columbia Township (Van Buren Co.)
Commerce Charter Township (Oakland Co.)
Cottrellville Township (St. Clair Co.)
Courtland Township (Kent Co.)
Croton Township (Newaygo Co.)
Dalton Township (Muskegon Co.)
East China Charter Township (St. Clair Co.)
Edenville Township (Midland Co.)
Escanaba Township (Delta Co.)
Flushing Charter Township (Genesee Co.)
Frankenlust Township (Bay Co.)
Georgetown Charter Township (Ottawa Co.)
Highland Charter Township (Oakland Co.)

Homer Township (Midland Co.)
Ingersoll Township (Midland Co.)
James Township (Saginaw Co.)
Kinross Charter Township (Chippewa Co.)
Lake Charter Township (Berrien Co.)
LaSalle Township (Monroe Co.)
Leslie Township (Ingham Co.)
Lincoln Township (Midland Co.)
Lincoln Charter Township (Berrien Co.)
Macomb Township (Macomb Co.)
Manistee Township (Manistee Co.)
Millington Township (Tuscola Co.)
Oshtemo Charter Township (Kalamazoo Co.)
Otsego Township (Allegan Co.)
Oxford Charter Township (Oakland Co.)
Pavilion Township (Kalamazoo Co.)
Pere Marquette Charter Township (Mason Co.)
Plainfield Township (Iosco Co.)
Plainfield Charter Township (Kent Co.)
Redford Charter Township (Wayne Co.)
Sebewa Township (Ionia Co.)
Sebewaing Township (Huron Co.)
St. Charles Township (Saginaw Co.)
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