

Engagement and Legacy

A PROFILE OF PRESIDENT BILL ELVEY

By Alan Dessoiff



Top: Elvey & President-Elect Polly Pinney at the SFO Summit. Bottom: Alan Bigger passes the presidential gavel to Elvey at APFA 2008.



When Bill Elvey became APPA's new President at the association's conference in San Antonio in July, he was at home in more ways than one. A native Texan, he grew up in San Antonio and met his wife-to-be there—in the seventh grade. Last fall, after an absence of 31 years, he came back to Texas as director of facilities management at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), a young, dynamic research institution on the cutting edge of science, technology, medicine, business, and the arts.



Bill Elvey is at home in APPA, too, where his years of active involvement in the association, combined with his extensive career experience in the public and private sectors, the last 11 in higher education, have prepared him well for the top leadership post. Now he is embarking on responsibilities that he hopes will help keep APPA, like UTD, on the cutting edge—in this case, of changes in the profession as well as in APPA itself.

"There is no doubt that facilities management is changing and the rate of change is increasing. It is ten times more complex today than it was even ten years ago," Elvey says, citing technology as an example. "The use of technology has had a tremendous impact on teaching and education. As professionals, we have to incorporate that technology into our facilities and we have to know how to do it right."

Facilities managers also are aware of increasing attention being paid to sustainability and "hopefully have a philosophy of incorporating sustainable practices in their work," he continues. "The pressures to do that are greater today than they were even just five years ago."

The current condition of the economy and its impact on educational facilities management does not unduly concern Elvey. "I've been around long enough to know that it's cyclical in nature," he says. "Most of us feel that we'll never have enough resources to do everything we want to do, so typically we're all very good at identifying and prioritizing needs and efficiencies and making sure we're always addressing the most important ones. We're pretty good at working in an under-resourced environment so I wouldn't expect that to change. I tell my facilities team that it may not always be possible to do more with less — there are, after all, limits. However, in the spirit of continuous improvement, we should always be able to *do more differently*."

APPA's own financial position "has historically been a source of great strength and pride and this continues to be the case today," Elvey says, and he wants to keep it that way. "I cannot in good faith bring forth a new program or initiative that will only serve to undermine the sound fiscal management currently

in place," he says, asserting that he will work with APPA's Board and executive staff to present a balanced budget "if at all possible" for the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

An issue that concerns Elvey and underscores his presidential goals has to do with people. A large number of the people in facilities management positions at educational institutions, both in trades practices and in administrative positions, are "senior folks" who will be reaching retirement age in the next ten years, he says, and it's vital to recruit, train, and retain young professionals to succeed them.

Similarly, in APPA itself, although "we have a lot of people who are actively involved and understand the values and benefits of their membership," there are others who do not, Elvey says. "There are members who perhaps don't take advantage of the opportunities as much as they should," he asserts.

THE YEAR OF ENGAGEMENT

Elvey has determined that the theme of his term as President will be "engagement." That means "reaching out to younger professionals" to become more involved in APPA and also "keeping our senior facility officers engaged, since they are the leaders of the profession and can help us with the training and development of their successors and younger professionals."

"It's really up to us," he declares. "Are we going to actively participate in the activities of APPA or not? Only through the collective engagement of every member at every level of the organization can we seek to transform APPA into the association that we all want it to be: an association serving its members the



way they want to be served; an association helping to focus and prioritize the delivery of programs and services with a sense of urgency and attention to detail that can surely lead to a successful and great association for many years to come."

As he begins his term as President, Elvey believes APPA is "doing quite well." In the third year of implementing its 7 Key Strategies, the association has made "tremendous progress" on three of them, including rebranding. By dropping "higher education" from its tag line, the association is moving actively to recruit members from within the community college and K-12

sectors because “they face many of the same challenges that higher education facilities managers face,” Elvey says.

He hopes that professionals from those sectors will join “the very capable individuals we already have at all levels who are continuing to improve APPA and its delivery of programs, products, and services. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we’re going to continue to move it forward and make sure we can be flexible and meet the needs of our members as the environment changes around us.

“The Year of Engagement means that as members of APPA,

it is our shared responsibility to inspire, motivate, persuade, and cajole our currently unengaged members or potential future members to become engaged in APPA at any level,” Elvey says.

A FOUNDATION IN EDUCATION

Before returning to Texas to take the position at UTD, Elvey spent ten years at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia as assistant vice president of facilities and director of physical plant. At Virginia Tech he managed an operating budget of \$98 million and a workforce of more than 600.

“Bill had an area of huge responsibility and never let me down,” says Kurt Krause, who, as vice president for business affairs, was Elvey’s direct reporting senior for three years at Virginia Tech. “He demonstrated his professionalism from the first day I met him. We became wonderful partners and developed a great friendship. His staff enjoyed working for him. They knew his vision, where he wanted to go, and how he wanted to go there,” Krause says.

Elvey was introduced to APPA when the university hosted a conference of the Southeastern Region of APPA (SRAPPA) in Roanoke. At the time, Spencer F. Hall, assistant vice president for facilities at Virginia Tech and Elvey’s immediate supervisor for five years, was in line to become regional President. “But I decided that I wouldn’t be in the business forever and Bill ought to be the one to get into the loop,” relates Hall, who retired from Virginia Tech in 2003.

So Elvey became SRAPPA President and began his active involvement in the wider APPA organization. His other professional affiliations include the American Society of Civil Engineering, the American Public Works Association, and the American Society of Military Engineers.

“I think Bill is a great guy. He’s an outstanding manager and an outstanding individual, too,” Hall says.

Elvey was at Virginia Tech when the tragic shootings that claimed the lives of 32 students and faculty on campus on April 16, 2007, captured the attention of the nation and the world. “I had a great team at Virginia Tech and I am very proud of our response and our recovery operations and everything we did to help the university restore normality as quickly as possible,” he says.

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A key lesson for facilities managers that he learned from the experience, he continues, is that “we can never be complacent. We must always be prepared for anything that could happen.”

That means having in place and practicing an emergency management plan that addresses “all potential scenarios, not just weather-related incidents or hazardous chemical spills, things of that nature.”

In his short time so far at UTD, “we already have conducted a tabletop exercise” in emergency facilities management in conjunction with the University of Texas System, Elvey says. In addition, Elvey has been appointed as APPA's representative to the National Campus Safety and Security Project, a new research initiative led by the National Association of College and University Business Officers.

ENGINEERING AND THE NAVY

Elvey graduated from Rice University in 1976 with a Bachelor of Science



degree in environmental engineering and received a Master of Environmental Engineering degree from Rice the next year. In 1996, he earned a Master of Business Administration degree from George Mason University. He is also a registered professional engineer.

Before entering higher education facilities management at Virginia Tech, he spent 20 years in various positions in the U.S. Navy Civil Engineer Corps, starting in the customer service department at the Naval Submarine Base in Bangor, Washington and ending as director of business management in the Public Works Directorate in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Alexandria, Virginia. There, he programmed, budgeted, and allocated resources for a \$2 billion per year, 14,000-person

APPA's 7 KEY STRATEGIES

to promote leadership and growth in educational facilities management.

1. Develop and execute a “brand” initiative.
2. Develop and implement an enhanced website to become the “go to” resource for facilities questions.
3. Expand research to build credibility and visibility by senior institutional officers.
4. Engage in symbiotic and collaborative partnerships.
5. Engage young facilities professionals.
6. Provide targeted cutting-edge educational programs.
7. Establish credible and valued credentialing programs for individuals and institutions.

organization consisting of ten Navy Public Works Centers worldwide and the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center in Port Hueneme, California.

"I have done a lot of things. I have traveled all over the world and worked in a number of diverse environments, with different people in terms of their cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. One thing I have learned that has helped me grow professionally is to be flexible and able to adapt quickly to changing situations," Elvey says.

A LEADER'S LEGACY

Elvey says he had decided to move to UTD from Virginia Tech before the tragedy there and it did not change his plans. "In some respects, I'm sorry I left. On the other hand, coming back to Texas allowed me to align my personal desire to be closer to my family and my wife's family with my commitment to devote more time to APPA and give back to my profession. This is a



Bill and Deborah Elvey

great time for me personally and professionally," says Elvey.

His wife, Deborah, is a teacher and they have three daughters, all college graduates. In his spare time, Elvey says, he likes to "jog, play golf, and do projects around the house." He hopes to become as involved in community activities in the Dallas area as he was in Blacksburg, but for now he's just "glad to be back in

Texas, be able to stay in higher education at an emerging tier-one research university, be closer to family, and very happy to be able to give back to my profession through APPA."

Elvey says he was "lured" to UTD by Rick Dempsey, assistant vice president for facilities management. "He's a facilities professional of the highest order. He knows the business and he's able to make things happen," says Dempsey who, it happens, also was raised in San Antonio. "So we have a connection there," says Dempsey. "We both have come home."

Elvey recounts that when he was President-Elect, APPA Executive Vice President Lander Medlin had asked him to start thinking about his legacy as President. "I don't typically think

about such things," he says, "but ever since that brief conversation, I have tried to do some really deep thinking about the subject. Then I read the book *A Leader's Legacy* by Kouzes and Posner, and I personally agree with the points they made.

"Their message is that the legacy you leave is the life you lead. I may never know what changes we might initiate within APPA this next year and what impact they might have. I may never know when that critical moment might come. But what I do know is that my legacy may be nothing more than just the satisfaction of knowing that I will try my very best to leave APPA a better organization than before the time that I became President.

"So," says Elvey, returning to his theme of engagement, "I strongly encourage everyone to actively participate in APPA. §"

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