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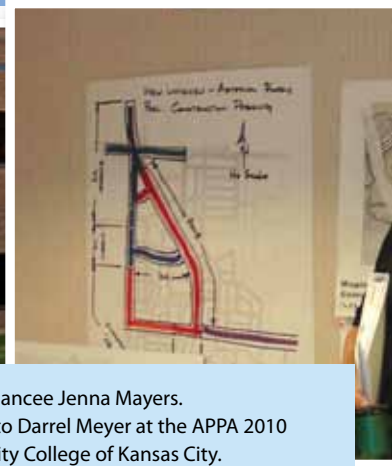
PRESIDENT DARREL MEYER

BY ALAN DESSOFF



**W**hen Darrel Meyer was hired by Metropolitan Community College (MCC) in Kansas City, Missouri as facility services superintendent in 1990, he knew a lot about construction but little about facilities management. Meyer had spent the previous ten years with two construction companies. “I knew how to build buildings and manage people,” he says, “but I really didn’t have a great background in how to maintain and operate buildings.”

So he joined APPA and began learning quickly what he needed to know to function effectively in his new job. “By plugging into the APPA system, I was able to attend seminars and network with other professionals. I would call people and ask, ‘how do you do this?’ and they would tell me how to do it. APPA is a vast resource,” Meyer says.



Far left photo: Darrel & Jane Meyer with son Marc and his fiancée Jenna Mayers.  
Far right photo: Polly Pinney passes the Presidential gavel to Darrel Meyer at the APPA 2010 conference. All other photos are of Metropolitan Community College of Kansas City.

He grew comfortably into his job at MCC, where he was promoted to director of facility services, his present position, in 1998. He also grew comfortably in APPA, rising through a number of committee, task force, and leadership positions. A graduate of the APPA Institute for Facilities Management, he served at the state, regional and international levels and on APPA's Board of Directors and Executive Committee before becoming President-Elect last year. He received APPA's Pacesetter Award in 2005 and Meritorious Service Award in 2008.

Now, with 20 years of hands-on facilities management experience at MCC as well as learning and leadership experience at APPA, and with a record of significant achievements at both, he has assumed the ultimate leadership position in the profession as APPA's President for 2010-11.

#### A LOOK AT MCC

At Metropolitan Community College, Meyer directs facility services at five separate campuses across the Kansas City metropolitan area, with 2.1 million total gross square feet and 568 acres of grounds. The Physical Facilities and Public Safety Department currently includes about 200 full-time and part-time employees. Annual enrollment of 50,000 students includes about 412,000 college credit hours.

Meyer has been involved with almost every MCC building project since 1986, including the four years before he joined the institution, when he was working for J.E. Dunn Construction Company in Kansas City as project superintendent. Over the last ten years, he served as primary leader of a \$110 million capital improvement program for MCC, working with administration and faculty in the funding, planning, design, and construction of new educational facilities at the five separate campuses. He has planned and coordinated MCC district maintenance and repair projects with an annual budget of approximately \$3 mil-

lion and developed physical facility annual budgets within guidelines and managed an annual operating budget of \$13 million.

Among other achievements, he developed and implemented a public safety reorganization plan for the college that included assuming responsibility for overseeing that department. He also initiated and implemented an energy management program that reduced utility costs more than \$4.4 million over ten years while improving the physical environment for education.

Meyer describes his management style at MCC as "firm," but he also is accessible to his staff. "I am effective with the staff largely because I communicate openly with them," he says. He and other administrative services directors are "teammates, jointly focused on the success of MCC," he adds. "Throughout my career, I have believed that customer satisfaction is paramount, and I strive at all times to achieve that end. My ability to analyze a situation, define problems, and reach a reasonable, thought-out solution to act upon has helped me develop a reputation for caring that the job is done well."

"He is an impeccably detailed person. He has a lot to oversee and consistently does a great job of it," asserts Dr. Jacqueline Snyder, who retired in June after five years as MCC's chancellor. "He has totally transformed the appearance of the institution. The attention to detail and the appearance of our campuses have impressed people who have been on the campuses," she says.

Snyder also cites Meyer's interest in energy efficiency. "He has led our green energy program. I found him a delight to work with and really willing to do what a customer asks," she says.

"He is a terrific guy all around. He takes great pride in what he does and leads by example. He treats people the way you'd want to be treated," says Allan Tunis, a former MCC vice chancellor for administrative services.

"I'm very proud of what Darrel has been able to do for us. He's always bringing us new ideas and suggesting the long-term benefits of considering different solutions," declares MCC Board President David Disney. While he is speaking about Meyer from his MCC perspective, they have known

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PHOTO BY RHONDA HOLE

each other since Meyer was at J.E. Dunn Construction, where Disney now is senior vice president, and they worked together on MCC building projects. "Having a long-term relationship like that with these facilities and responsible now for managing them, he has a lot of personal pride in them," Disney says.

Meyer says he is proud of his impact on the growth and development of facilities for MCC, including construction or renovation of more than 40 buildings. He links that to one of the reasons he is excited to become APPA's President. "It's an opportunity to leverage visibility for MCC and also for community colleges in general, which are undergoing incredible growth," he explains. In the past year alone, he says, many community colleges have grown more than 20 percent, driven largely by

economic factors, as students unable to afford four-year colleges enroll in two-year institutions instead, along with individuals seeking new training after being laid off from their jobs.

The economy also is having a broader impact on facilities management in general, Meyer says. "Like everybody else, facilities professionals are being asked to do more with less as our institutional budgets are shrinking, and we are being asked to come up with a large share of the solutions for these budget reductions," he declares. "You either have to reduce expenditures or increase revenues, and on the facilities side, we can't increase revenues."

Instead, in his department at MCC, "we try to work more efficiently," Meyer continues. Without having to lay off anybody, "we have either frozen or held a lot of positions, and I think



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## “APPA IS A STRONG, DYNAMIC ORGANIZATION THAT RIGHT NOW HAS A UNIQUE AND IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY.”

we’re going to see that at almost all educational facilities. To a large extent, departments are not backfilling positions. We’re doing everything we possibly can to maintain our building standards, our level of cleanliness, while keeping our equipment maintained and operated with fewer people,” he says.

In his two decades in facilities management at MCC, says Meyer, technology has driven most of the changes he has seen in “the way we educate students and the way we operate buildings.” These days, he says, buildings are operated through sophisticated computer management systems that include digital controls of heating and air conditioning systems as well as lighting and other systems.

“Anywhere I can log into the Internet, I can get online and turn lights on and off, turn building temperatures up and down, and control rooftop units. You couldn’t do that 20 years ago. If somebody in a building complained about heat, you’d send somebody out there and they would go in with their gauges and tweak the thermostat and hopefully everything would be okay,” Meyer says. Now, technology can handle that, as well as other issues like security, with integrated security systems, card access to buildings, and sophisticated fire alarm and notification systems, he adds.

### MEMBER INVESTMENT GOALS

As he looks at how facilities management has developed over the 20 years he has been involved in it, Meyer also looks at how APPA has developed and where it stands today. “APPA is a strong, dynamic organization that right now has a unique and important opportunity,” he says. While the strategic plan that the association developed in 2006 led to development and implementation of seven key strategies, “now it’s time to develop new objectives for this year and beyond,” he declares.

He outlined them in his President-Elect’s Report in May, in which he identified “Investing in Your Future” as the theme of his presidency. “APPA’s greatest resource is its diverse membership and the vast amount of knowledge associated with them. It is an organization that exists for its membership and as such should strive to provide the resources for members to identify and take full advantage of their potential as facilities professionals,” he asserts.

Meyer says he plans to focus as President on “the critical challenge of the economic

crisis” that facility professionals are facing. He also will promote “the need to expand the availability” of programs that would engage young facility management professionals; create programs that encourage synergy among the international, regional, state, and local chapters; and develop “a strong membership recruitment initiative.”

He points out that an APPA/Regions Task Force has been formed to define and identify joint international APPA-regional association goals with regard to mission and roles, program content and delivery, and overall leadership development. “This will result in a new and refreshed synergy between international APPA and the regions and chapters, thus keeping APPA as the association of choice for educational facilities professionals,” Meyer says.

Another initiative already underway is a group that will strive to increase APPA membership in underserved areas such as community colleges, small colleges, K-12 schools and HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) and “look at ways that APPA can better engage these institutions.”

“It is more important than ever for APPA to be resolute and continue to develop programs based on its strategic plan in these uncertain times. Facility professionals need to provide new and effective leadership now more than ever. The broad impact of facilities on an educational institution’s success provides an unprecedented opportunity for facility professionals and also new skill set opportunities,” he stated in his report. “APPA must take the leadership role in identifying the most critical facility issues and quickly respond with focused and targeted initiatives that will provide members with the resources they need and demand.”

### THE PERSONAL SIDE

Meyer, who holds a Bachelor of Construction Science degree from Kansas State University and a Master of Project Management from the Keller Graduate School of Management, also sees his year as APPA’s President as an opportunity to “give back” to the organization that helped him get started in facilities management in the first place. That reflects his personal philosophy and practice as well. “I’ve always felt driven to be involved in something that gives back to society,” he says.



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He and his wife, Jane, have long been active youth sponsors in their church, involved with the youth choir and on many mission trips. Working with their youth group and with Habitat for Humanity for 12 straight years, they have built more than 30 homes in Pensacola, Florida.

Their son, Marc, an Eagle Scout, is a senior at Kansas State University. A daughter, Erin, married with a daughter, has a doctorate in physical therapy and works in that field. Another daughter, Lisa, also married, has a master's degree in architectural engineering and designs building and lighting electrical systems. They also have a granddaughter, with two grandchildren on the way.

Away from MCC, Meyer likes "anything that has to do with the outdoors," particularly camping, fishing, and hunting with his son.

He also admits that he is "kind of known" for his barbecue talents. After collecting "a whole display case full of ribbons" in competitions, he now barbecues as a hobby, often at charity fundraisers and community events. "Baby back ribs, beef brisket, smoked pork shoulder, sausage, I don't have a specialty. We make a lot of our own rubs and sauces," he says. "I've tasted his barbecue and I've been really impressed," adds former chancellor Snyder.

Now Meyer looks forward to cooking up a successful year for APPA as well. ☞

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