



Calling All Emerging Facilities Professionals

By Kristie Kowall

As an individual recently labeled an “Emerging Facilities Professional,” I was asked to share what my membership to APPA/MAPPA means to me, and also what it could mean for each of you.

I am lucky enough to be living the “perfect” facilities career. I began as a student worker at Illinois State University with the Facilities Department, and then stayed on full-time after my graduation (which was a little longer than most as I was on the five-year plan!). Back then, I was content to complete my daily work and create

new ideas/processes, but would not have considered myself to be a career-motivated individual.

After about eight years in my department, I was given an opportunity to attend my first MAPPA Conference in 2005. At the time, I was a training assistant for the facilities department. I appreciated the chance to learn about all the different aspects of facilities, networking with others in the same field, and getting to spend quality time with my director. Little did I know that this would be a career changing event in my (and my department’s) life. My hard work, dedication, and positive attitude were noticed, and I was given opportunities to begin branching out in the department and in supervising others.

From that October date in 2005 until now, I have been on a fast-track to become a better leader by getting more involved at work and in APPA/MAPPA. I have been promoted multiple times to my current position as director of administrative services at facilities, and have served on many committees within our university. I have also been given many amazing opportunities within the APPA/MAPPA organization, such as:

- Professional Development Committee member

- APPA Institute graduate
- MAPPA Membership Chair
- Selected to participate in the brainstorming meetings for the current APPA Strategic Plan
- APPA Pacesetter Award recipient
- APPA Leadership Academy attendee (two tracks left until graduation)
- co-chair of the Emerging Facilities Professionals Exchange
- co-presenter for the emerging facilities professional findings at the APPA Board meeting in July 2011
- voted MAPPA President-Elect in October 2011

I did not accomplish all of this on my own. I am where I am today because of my director’s value in professional development; the autonomy and trust from my leadership; the support from my staff and family; and the mentorship I received from my department and APPA/MAPPA.

Those who know me well know that I share my story not to brag, but to let all of the emerging professionals know that the door is open. Wide open actually! If you have a desire to get involved, there are many avenues for you to pursue. APPA leadership seeks the new ideas and perspectives that we have to offer and are excited to have that “splash” of new people involved in the organization.

The future of APPA is in our hands, but we have to step up and get involved. Step up. Volunteer to serve on committees and/or to serve in elected positions. As we enter a time when the baby boomers will be exiting the workforce, we need to jump in and learn from them before they leave. Find a mentor, ask questions, and value all the



The author, right, receives the APPA Pacesetter Award from EVP Lander Medlin.

time and effort these individuals have given over the years. This is how we will continue to grow together as an organization.

I spoke of the many opportunities that APPA has to offer, but I also wanted to highlight some of the benefits that may be more attractive to the emerging professionals:

- **Job Express** gives you access to see postings in the field and also the ability to post your resume.
- **Networking** through conferences, training, drive-ins, discussion lists, Facebook, etc., all provide access to so many professionals in the field. The transfer of knowledge is unlimited, and you meet many people that may think of you when future opportunities arise.
- **Professional Development** is so important. Many of us did not come directly from a degree related to facilities, and APPA offers the **APPA Institute** where you can learn about the four core areas of facilities, the **Supervisor's Toolkit** and the **APPA Leadership Academy** to gain both basic and advanced leadership skills. Through these sessions, I have made lasting friendships. These are the people you can count on and call when you have a question about anything.
- The **Emerging Facilities Professional** (individuals, regardless of age, that are progressing in their career, seeking involvement, with fresh, new ideas to share) is a priority to APPA. In support of the new APPA Strategic Plan, a cohort of emerging facilities professionals was formed to discuss what membership means to us and what we would like to see modified/added to APPA to make membership more meaningful. And this is just the beginning.

I also share my story for those of you who are often referred to as "seasoned" facilities professionals as well. Please continue to support and guide us so that we can learn and lead in the best ways possible. Know that you are our role

models, and we look up to you. Now is the time, if you haven't already, to find someone to mentor so that the facilities profession and the APPA organization will continue to grow and flourish. Remember that as we spend time together, you will likely grow and learn something from us as well. We often hear of those individuals who are just counting down the days to retirement.

We also hear of those who are focused on leaving a legacy. I challenge each of you to take advantage of this opportunity and make mentoring a priority in your legacy as well. Take the time to pass on your knowledge and expertise so that the department will grow even more in the future.

I leave you with a quote by Henry Ford that I keep on my desk, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." APPA in its entirety (the organization and the people) is here to promote your growth, knowledge, and success. If you want more, now is the time. Reach out and you will be inspired by all of the amazingly supportive people, and the amount of work that is accomplished by this organization.

As APPA prepares to enter its centennial celebration next year, I am excited to see what the future holds for this great organization of remarkable individuals. I've been told that you get much more out of the organization than you put in. I know this to be true from my experience so far. Be encouraged and inspired for your future in facilities, and continue to encourage and inspire others as well.

To all of my APPA/MAPPA friends, I thank you for the incredible journey I've enjoyed so far. To those I have not yet met, I truly hope that our paths will cross someday. ☺

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