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Lift *as you* CLIMB

A Profile of *President Mary Vosevich*

“My thumb got me into this!” declares the new APPA President Mary Vosevich when asked how she entered the field of educational facilities management. It was 1984, and Vosevich, a Midwest native, was working at Monsanto in St. Louis as a research biologist, having earned her B.S. in horticulture/agriculture from the University of Missouri, Columbia. But she was looking for something else.

“You know how you read a newspaper—holding it up with both hands, thumbs facing you,” she says. “As I was reading the want ads, I saw that my thumb was right on top of an ad for manager of campus landscaping operations at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. It was a perfect fit for my horticulture degree.”

Her career took off as she assumed more responsibilities—transportation, custodial services, special event management. After five years, she was promoted to manager, environmental services of the Facilities Services Department. One of her initiatives was to establish a facilities services preventive maintenance program. As it was the early 1990s, both technology and environmental issues were growing in importance, and she took initiatives there, too. She implemented a support services management software program and also initiated and carried out a campus environmental program that included recycling and composting, reducing by one-third the amount going into landfills.

GROWING A CAREER, THANKS TO APPA U

Vosevich became interested in APPA during her

first years at the University of Missouri. In the early 1990s, she attended the Institute for Facilities Management and the Leadership Academy, known collectively as APPA U. “They certainly helped me—the Institute programs in technical areas, and the Leadership Academy in sound leadership and management principles and practices,” she says.

Vosevich explains that APPA’s education function is of particular importance because “the majority of us in the educational facilities management field kind of fell into it. So APPA educational programs amounted to our university. It really is ‘APPA U.’”

“The added benefit of the programs that cannot be understated is the wonderful networking opportunities,” Vosevich says. “When you are with class members, working with them for a week, you create relationships that are enduring. This has been the case for me; I have APPA colleagues around the country and world that are friends and professional resources when I need assistance.”



PHOTO BY RHONDA HOLE

Vosevich, seated at center, and the APPA Board recently met with representatives of a proposed Mexico APPA.

THE MOVE TO UNM—MORE RESPONSIBILITIES, MANY MORE HATS

In 1994, Vosevich became the associate director of environmental services of the Physical Plant Department at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She reorganized her division to give it a more efficient reporting structure while still focusing on customer service. For example, over a two-year period, she oversaw the transition in custodial services from individual to team cleaning, which included training programs for 195 custodial, supervisory, and managerial personnel. Not only did the level of cleanliness rise appreciably, but there were savings in costs of labor and energy as well.

She also focused on training for staff health and safety and included switching from upright vacuum cleaners to the ergo-

nomically preferred backpack vacuums, introducing stretching exercises for staff, and eliminating numerous chemicals. The training reflected the UNM philosophy of instilling in all employees a sense of their value to the organization.

In 2000, Vosevich was promoted to her current position of director of the Physical Plant Department. Today, UNM covers 11.5 million square feet and 783 acres. Vosevich manages human and financial resources in a department of 500 with an annual budget of \$70 million. Initiatives here included closer alliances with other departments and groups, such as the university’s business officers, and expansion of technology, with energy management, work order, and work control systems.

Vosevich wears a second hat as vice president of Lobo Energy Inc., a UNM corporation created in the late 1990s under the Research Park and Economic Development Act. “Lobo Energy allows us to function more efficiently in utility projects, with different ways of purchasing equipment and services,” she says. Under this act, she implemented the Lobo Energy \$63 million business plan to update the campus utility infrastructure.

Over the past decade or so, energy/environmental/sustainability issues have become core concerns of facilities management and of the wider university community. Vosevich chairs the UNM Sustainability Committee and oversees UNM’s Office of Sustainability. Originally, the committee worked to set policies for the university. Today, wide-ranging activities include a green purchasing policy, a sustainable approach to pest management, and policies/programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency, reduce energy use, conserve water, and recycle traditional and electronic waste, and many other efforts.

“It was also important to address how the facilities department was going to support this sustainability effort,” Vosevich says. “An aggressive energy conservation program was established that to date has resulted in energy savings since 2008 of 18 percent—the equivalent of 1,276,855 MMBTUs, a reduction of 179,084 metric tons of carbon dioxide, 4,580,601 tree seedlings grown for 10 years, or 32,143 passenger cars not driven for one year.”

Saving on all fronts is more important than ever with the severe budget cuts of the past few years. “I don’t know of any educational organization that has not been impacted by the downturn in the economy,” Vosevich says. “All the challenges facing facility managers are exacerbated by budget cuts. This has required facility managers to be more efficient while still being effective. Many have reduced services and response time, and unfortunately many have been forced to lay off staff. Everyone is being challenged to do more with less to support the ongoing education and research missions of their respective organizations. Our effort to reduce energy has allowed our institution to face the budget reduction head on.”

Another role Vosevich fills is logistics sector chief for UNM emergency response. “My FEMA certifications are for the National Incident Management System (NIMS),” she explains. “This is not a requirement for facilities managers, but at UNM

we recognized the value of this training, and the members of our emergency management team have been certified. Emergencies come in all shapes and sizes. We have experienced our fair share, and depending on the size or scope of the ‘event,’ we activate our emergency operations center. All training is provided by certified instructors.”

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL—AND EXPERIENCING CHANGES FIRSTHAND

It is well known that, over the past couple of decades, the needs of students and the delivery of courses have changed radically. Vosevich saw this for herself when she went back to school for an executive MBA in 2002. It was far cry from her memories of undergraduate study.

“The first thing we did,” she recalls, “was to break into groups, and we worked in these groups for the entire 25 months, sometimes even taking group exams. Being in class gave me a different perspective about maintenance and what we should be doing, as well as a different perspective of the way contemporary students learn. The course’s approach gave an indication of how infrastructure needed to evolve because it affected space planning. New types of courses needed different layouts. Even that old standby, the tablet desk, might no longer be the seating of choice.”

PLUS ÇA CHANGE... (THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...)

In the midst of this constant change, Vosevich finds several satisfying aspects of her work that remain the same. “Working in higher education is an incredible environment,” she declares. “There’s an energy on the campus that is wonderful to be a part of. And every year, new students arrive. There are opportunities to collaborate with various departments and schools within the university, such as the School of Engineering. Their research can benefit us, and we provide the environment for various engineering classes to learn from us, such as engineers interested in facilities. In fact, our power plant is next to the school of engineering, and we are exploring opportunities to provide engineering internships.

“In addition,” Vosevich says, “the facilities organization has almost become like family, working together through good times and bad. You know they have your back and you have theirs.”

MOVING UP IN REGIONAL, INTERNATIONAL APPA

Once she arrived at UNM in 1994, Vosevich’s participation in APPA quickly grew because the director of the department was Don Mackel, 1992-93 president of APPA, who encouraged his staff to get involved. Vosevich became active through the Rocky Mountain Region, eventually becoming its president. Moving to the international level, she was APPA senior representative, participated in the APPA Thought Leaders Series, and was the region’s representative to the committee that became the Profes-



PHOTO BY JOHN SUMROW

Vosevich reviews a boiler control panel with UNM utilities staff Rhonda Anfinson, John Fitzgerald, and Ben Dziczek.

sional Development Committee.

“In 2002, Charlie Jenkins [who had been APPA president in 1994-95] tapped me to get involved as the Dean of General Administration for the Institute for Facilities Management,” Vosevich says. “He was stepping down from the position of dean and spent a lot of time mentoring me as I assumed the role. Although Charlie is no longer with us, my memories of him and lessons learned are part of my toolbox and guide me in my professional and personal life.”

Also, Vosevich was a member of the APPA/Regional Relationship Task Force, which APPA convened to determine member needs and who consistently provided those needs, to identify overlap in meeting the needs of various members/constituent groups, to investigate best practices of engagement and participation, and to define roles and requirements of International APPA, regions, and chapters in an effort to avoid competition and unnecessary duplication of services. “The work of this task force will enhance the relationship and alignment between APPA international and regions,” she says.

In recognition of her contributions over the years, Vosevich has received APPA’s Pacesetter Award and Meritorious Service Award. She has also written several articles for *Facilities Manager*.

“WHAT DOES APPA THINK?”

From the start, UNM has provided Vosevich great support in her APPA activities. “Many institutions recognize the value of APPA for what people bring back to campus,” she says, “and APPA gives the campus department credibility with the university organization and leadership. University leaders ask,

Mary Vosevich Joins the Boy Scouts

In addition to all her UNM and APPA work, Vosevich is involved with the Boy Scouts of America, Great Southwest Council. How did this come about? "I met someone on a plane who wore a Boy Scout patch on her vest," she says. "I mentioned that I knew a few people at UNM who were involved in Scouting. As it turned out, she knew them, too. She got in touch with them; they told her more about me—and a few weeks later, she phoned to offer me the position of vice president of camps and property for the Boy Scouts of New Mexico. My role is to develop a master plan for the regional Boy Scout camp, including renovation." In 2010, she received the Silver Beaver Award for Distinguished Service.

"I am impressed with the very good young men coming out of the program," Vosevich says, "especially the Eagle Scouts, with their discipline, community work, and respect for themselves and others. So when others ask me, 'Why work with the Boy Scouts? After all, you're a woman,' I reply, 'What greater gift to young women than to give them good young men?'"

"What does APPA think? What's going on at other universities?"

In fact, Vosevich says, "One great value of APPA is the annual Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI) survey and report that allows us to see how we compare with other institutions; it helps us finetune our performance. It's a powerful tool because of the number of participants."

Facts and measurable data give heft to requests for more funding. "I can present these facts and figures to the administration along with my request, so even if they cannot act on it at the moment, I have at least planted the seed," she says. "Also, the indicators can show how well we are doing. For example, we can say, 'We're doing something for 10 percent less than other comparable places; that's how effective we are.'"

NEW GENERATION—NEW COMMUNICATION

Vosevich is committed to retaining and enhancing the quality of the organization in the face of workforce change, particularly by recognizing, encouraging, and developing new leaders on campuses and in APPA. "Baby boomers are retiring and taking

with them a huge amount of institutional knowledge," she says. "How will we deal with that? Where will our future employees and leaders come from as we move to a new generation and a much more diverse workforce? That's a challenge for APPA and our institutions.

"We need to spread the message that APPA is a knowledge-based organization that is the go-to source of information for facilities management professionals as well as for general university leadership. We need to stress that, as a member, if you have a query, you can get information and help from anyone, anywhere. Folks want to help.

"But the new generation and new cultures communicate in different ways," Vosevich says. "To reach these new and vital groups, we need the right communication modes. It is presumptuous of the Executive Committee to try to figure this out all by ourselves." She says that the APPA Board of Directors needs help to understand what to do and then how to do it. APPA's Emerging Facilities Professionals Exchange has

recently formed and will be an important resource for APPA now and in the future.

LIFT AS YOU CLIMB— A VISION FOR APPA

Looking forward to her presidential year, Vosevich quotes Maya Angelou: "If I could give you one thought, it would be to lift someone up.... The very idea of lifting someone up will lift you as well." When I think of this quote, I want to focus my year as president with this image: 'Lift as You Climb.' This has many applications for APPA. The most obvious is that that we should mentor people, create opportunities for their growth and development, and bring them along.... lift them up! Inquire what their career goals are and help them to achieve them. But I also think that this is about a thriving membership and the wonderful work that is taking place in APPA International, the regions, and the chapters.

"We need to be enablers of success," Vosevich declares. "We are an organization that supports efforts for educational institutions. What better way to achieve our mission than to provide opportunities through the exceptional programs APPA has to offer." ☪



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Mary Vosevich and husband Jeff Hart. And with Lika the chocolate Lab.

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