

MISSION IMPERATIVE

Harnessing and Transferring Knowledge

By Anita Blumenthal

An 18-year-old boy, just graduated from high school, once took a job as a custodian at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor. His sister, who worked there as well, told him about the 75 percent tuition reimbursement plan for college courses. So began the career path of Christopher Kopach, the 2017-18 President of APPA.

Kopach, who was born in Detroit and grew up nearby, worked full-time while carrying a full load of classes, earning first his associate degree from a community college and then his bachelor's degree in business administration from Eastern Michigan University. By the time he was 28, he was manager of environmental services at the University of Michigan Medical Center, developing the philosophy and processes that he would hone over the next two decades and beyond—practicing Total Quality Management teachings and developing a team atmosphere among all staff members. Even from his first management experiences in his early twenties, Kopach says he learned that “the main thing is that it’s important to treat people as you want to be treated, and also that you make sure to take care of all details, no matter how small.”

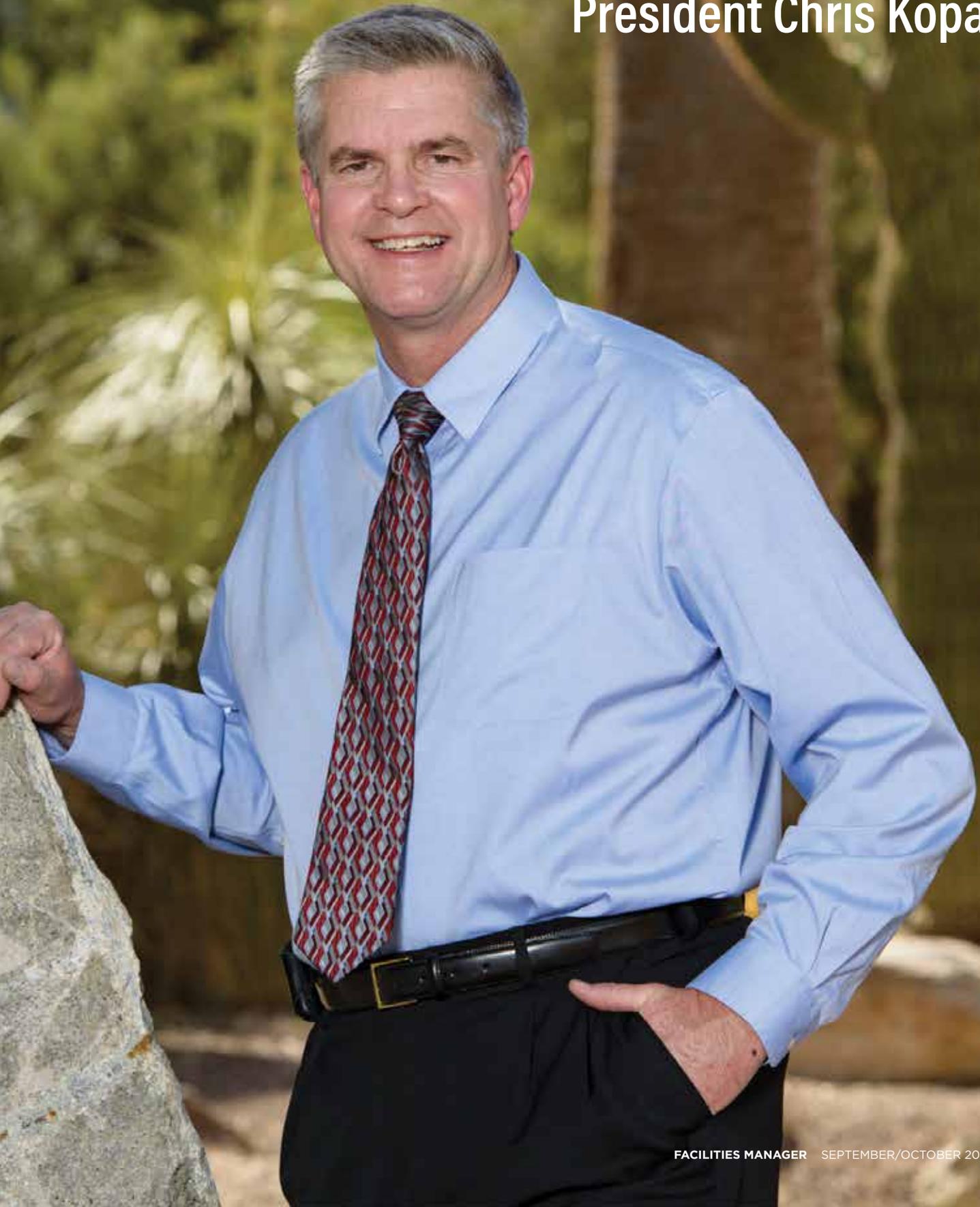
Kopach literally arrived where he is today because in 1992, he and his wife Lynda (now married 31 years),

decided to pay a visit to his father, who had moved to the Southwest. “I immediately fell in love with the region,” he says. That’s when he hiked the Grand Canyon for the first time. This year—2017—will mark his 20th hike. In 1994, Kopach moved to Tucson, taking a position as regional director of Jani-King, the world’s largest commercial cleaning franchiser.

He joined the University of Arizona (UA) in 1996 as manager of custodial services, and over the next decade he earned a master’s degree in organizational management and completed what he calls “a slew of certificates and training programs,” including the APPA Institute for Facilities Management in 2002. Remembering his first APPA experience, he recalls enjoying the networking opportunities and camaraderie he found, and being impressed with the quality of the talent of all the APPA instructors, including Lander Medlin, Bill Nelson, and Gary Reynolds.

However, with his major focus on custodial services, Kopach spent his first few years at UA involved in such organizations as the International Sanitary Supply Association and the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA). He served as president of IEHA’s Sonoran Desert chapter. His articles on the effective and efficient

A Profile of President Chris Kopach





The University of Arizona facilities team.

practices of the UA custodial services unit appeared in *College Planning & Management* magazine and the IEHA magazine.

RUNNING A “FAMILY BUSINESS”

A number of promotions at UA expanded his scope and brought him in 2010 to his current position as assistant vice president of facilities management, responsible for the management of 300 buildings, 11 million square feet, 490 acres of landscaping, a team of 600 employees, and a budget of \$80 million to \$100 million. The numbers might be large, but Kopach's approach, he explains, is “to work as a family business. We have people with good hearts who want to work hard. They need a can-do attitude, to look at a challenge and say, ‘There must be some way we can work things out.’ Above all, this is a customer-service business.”

Kopach believes in a **One Team** approach, which means he keeps in constant touch with his staff, meeting with all of them regularly. He does seven walkabouts or staff communication meetings a month, involving 30 to 40 employees—just himself and his staff talking about what's working and what's not—and what to do about it. For example, he says, “The 900 meters of the metering system were not all being read accurately. So we installed a software program that reads all the meters in real time to see any data issues.”

In addition, he says, “We routinely want to be more efficient,” noting that the budget cuts since 2008 have posed challenges at UA and everywhere else. But he managed to trim \$10 million over the last three years while laying off only three employees. His efficiencies ranged from assigning more footage per custo-

dian to renegotiating a gas contract from \$8.60/therm to under \$3.00/therm.

Kopach meets with his utility group three times a week to look at opportunities for savings and for reducing the university's carbon footprint. Given that UA spends \$34 million a year on utilities, it is vital that operations be as efficient as possible. He projects a much larger IT function, with computerized and automated operation of facilities and utilities.

For example, Kopach explains that out of UA's 22 chillers, three chillers produce 328,000 gallons of water to 2.7 million pounds of ice every night at its central plants. “This allows us to run fewer chillers during the day when energy costs are higher. But we need real-time data from software to spot failures or variances, and we need to ensure that staff understand key performance indices.” The group's initiatives are paying off. “Taking the base line year of 2012-2013,” Kopach says, “we are now saving \$1.5 to \$2 million a year in utility bills.”

MOVING AWAY FROM THE “OLD WAYS”

“I've always been a process person,” says Kopach. He is someone who works out how to do things more efficiently and moves away from the “we've always done it this way” mentality. For example, he says, “Our basketball arena holds 15,000 fans. It used to take eight hours to clean one concourse by hand. Now we use automated equipment. All three concourses are cleaned by one person on a riding auto scrubber in 90 minutes—and the employee is still fresh when he gets off the machine.”

In another case, Kopach recounts that, for decades, two workers maintained the six-plus miles of tunnels under the campus. “They

kept all information in their heads—and then they left,” he says. “Then we did a building information modeling analysis, and we found that some tunnels dated from 1930, and some were not insulated. We added insulation and saved a million dollars.” No wonder Kopach constantly stresses the need to transfer knowledge.

Given the desert climate of Tucson, water conservation should be a priority. Yet Kopach remembers that when he became associate director of environmental services in 2002, groundskeepers were still watering with garden hoses. He allocated funding for a computerized irrigation system to use the least amount of water to



Photo by Renee Coia



Photo by Rhonda Hole

Above: The Kopachs with international guests—APPA 2017.
Right: Kopach and Associate Director Luis Rocha.



Keating Bioresearch Building



Left: UA's McKale Memorial Center; below: Arizona Stadium's North End Zone.



Photo by Kevin Korczyk

greatest effect. Now UA uses reclaimed water and partners with students on sustainability systems, such as harvesting water from roofs and creating water retention basins around trees (for use during the monsoon season of July-September, when Tucson gets nearly all of its 12 annual inches of rain in the form of super-intense downpours). And the desert blooms: From cacti to palm trees to century-old olive trees, UA's 490 acres of landscape represent the largest continuously maintained green space in the state. The entire UA campus was designated an arboretum in 2001, and in 2010 was named a "Tree Campus USA" by the Arbor Day Foundation.

THE APPA CONNECTION

As Kopach branched out from custodial service management, he became more involved in APPA, joining local and Rocky Mountain APPA (RMA) events. He attended his first RMA regional conference in 2005, and he dates his intensive involvement from 2009, when he chaired the regional conference held at UA.

From there, he rose in the RMA region in 2012 to become president and then moved to positions on the APPA Board, ultimately—and successfully—running for APPA President-Elect. Of his APPA activities, Kopach says, "I've always felt it very important that we give back to regional and national members, sharing best practices with new and current members, using webinars or presentations to spread information on what works. The goal is to learn from each other so that members can reduce their own learning curve."

As he became more involved in—and impressed by—what APPA had to offer, Kopach introduced APPA resources and programs to his staff. He has brought all four tracks of the Leadership Academy to his leadership team, presented onsite at the Tucson

campus by APPA faculty. As of June 2017, at least 50 members of his staff had graduated from the Academy. Now, he has begun a second round, with a new set of leaders taking Track One.

Many members of his leadership team have attended or are currently attending the Institute for Facilities Management, and he has encouraged their involvement in APPA. One 19-year veteran of his staff, Luis Rocha, is the incoming president of RMA. Jenna Elmer, also from the UA facilities team, will join the RMA Board this fall in charge of professional development. Another staffer, Kathia Perez, is on the international APPA Board and works with young and transitional professionals, developing a bilingual Spanish/English Supervisor's Toolkit, and assisting in the Mexico initiative.

PLANS FOR THE YEAR—OUTREACH ACROSS BORDERS

Kopach has also been involved in APPA's international outreach, and he proposes during his presidential year "to further enhance the Mexico initiative and the Los Amigos Project, partnering with all APPA regions and our friends in Mexico." Kopach has been active on the UA Amigo team for several years. In 2014, his team led an RMA Los Amigos Project workshop that introduced effective energy and operations practices to a



The UA facilities staff.

small group from the Tecnológico de Monterrey system schools in Mexico. This helped plant the seed for the system to further engage with APPA.

Since then, Kopach has worked with six universities in Mexico City, building relationships and sharing best practices. He proudly notes that, while UA won the APPA Award for Excellence in 2013, one of the 2017 recipients is the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City. One major project of the Mexican initiative, he says, is a symposium on best practices, to be hosted within the next year by the University of Guadalajara (part of the Universidad Panamericana group) and to be attended by university presidents, rectors, and facilities management leaders from Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

As APPA President, Kopach also wants to further the initiatives and accomplishments of his predecessors. First, he wants to continue implementing the strategic plan developed under Randolph Hare, focusing in particular on giving back to all APPA members. Also, he aims to continue Chuck Scott's push toward reinventing ways to be more efficient in the face of continued budget cuts. Vital to this effort, Kopach says, is the need to analyze efficiency and insist on transparency, communication, and the sharing of information.

DEFERRED MAINTENANCE MODERNIZATION AND REINVESTMENT

Tackling the most troublesome of line items, Kopach wants to lead an effort to rebrand and repackage the task of deferred maintenance, using instead a more accurate term to make the function more marketable: "modernization and reinvestment" or "revitalization." As he explains it, "Our job is to work with senior administration so that they all understand the issue of aging buildings and utilities infrastructure and distribution systems, and how reinvesting in these facilities plays a key role in the

overall academic mission." He makes it clear that APPA should "understand the full gamut of the responsibilities of the chief financial officer (CFO) and other senior leadership in order to partner and support their efforts in overseeing our universities, colleges, and schools. This is another instance where members need to share what works. APPA needs to share knowledge on how to work with CFOs, providing detailed information so that members can speak the language of business and partner with CFOs in the stewardship of our universities."

Related to the importance of understanding the big picture, according to Kopach, is the need for APPA to continue the program of collaborations begun by Past President Pete Strazdas, which offered 20-plus opportunities to work with such associations as NACUBO, ASHRAE, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), and the Society of American Military Engineers.

In this area as elsewhere, Kopach says, "the issue is how to harness and transfer knowledge. APPA has so much to offer its members, and we want to be sure we are packaging that information most effectively, sharing best practices—expressed in terms of ROI—and using effective mediums, such as webinars."

Another crucial issue, Kopach says, is succession planning, given the waves of retirement in the baby boom generation (even the youngest are approaching their mid-50s). "How," he asks, "are we transferring knowledge and skill sets, sharing these practices with members?" He believes that institutional, regional, and international organizations must stress programs for young professionals, mentoring, and student internships, as well as for transitioning professionals entering the field from other careers. One overlooked but important facet of succession planning that UA considers is how—and whether—its contractors are doing that planning. "The fact that we depend on contractors means that they have to continue to be qualified," he says.

FOCUSING ON THE APPRENTICES

One knowledge-transfer (and career-building) program that Kopach is especially proud of and wants to share with APPA members is the in-house apprenticeship program that he and his senior leadership developed. This is a nationally recognized program, approved by the U.S. Department of Labor and encompassing HVAC, plumbers, and electricians. The first class graduated in August 2017, and 12 new in-house apprentices

Photo by AEP Services



Photo by Rhonda Hole

Aerial view of the Arizona campus; McClelland park solar array in foreground.

have just begun their program. Kopach proposes to offer APPA members a template or road-map for their own apprenticeship programs, and he'll share the details throughout the year and at APPA U in January 2018. For him, history has come full circle: His grandfather from Detroit took the Henry Ford apprenticeship program in high school in the 1920s—now he wants to help young people build their careers in facilities management.

Lending his organizational skills to the community, Kopach is longtime chair of the annual Goodwill Golf Tournament, whose proceeds go to providing free health care for Tucson children. "Over the past 15 years, the tournament has raised \$150,000," he says. In addition, he is chair of operations for the annual Tucson Festival of Books, the third largest book festival in the United States.

Today, Kopach not only works at UA, but two of his three children are students there (Go Wildcats!). Ashley, a junior, hopes to enter the nursing program, and Adam, a freshman, hopes to study engineering. Alyssa plans to attend UA in two years. "Lynda and I could not be more proud of our kids," he says.

Kopach has traveled a long way, from being a high school grad in Michigan, to his current post at UA, to becoming president of APPA. How does he view this process? He explains, "My first experience hiking the Grand Canyon made me realize that we are here for a short period of time. Enjoy the journey." ☺

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APPA's Facilities Drive-In Workshop offerings are an excellent way for APPA member institutions to encourage networking and professional development among educational facilities professionals within their local vicinity. These workshops are ideal for professionals who might not normally have access to training and professional development opportunities, due to operating budget restrictions or similar constraints and are a great way to introduce these professionals to APPA, its regions, and chapters.

How are APPA's Drive In Workshops Planned and Organized?

Each workshop is organized with the support of APPA, an APPA Business Partner, and a host educational institution.

Responsibilities of the Host Institution:

- Provide adequate meeting space plus tables and chairs (conference room plus adjoining registration area, as well as separate seating in adjoining area for sponsored luncheon).
- Supply audiovisual equipment (typical requirements are a podium, one or two mics, a projection screen and LCD projector).
- Arrange for parking if needed for attendees.
- Provide menu options to the sponsor (if the host location site has a kitchen or works with required caterers). The sponsor picks up the cost of lunch and all breaks.
- The person coordinating on behalf of the host institution (typically the institution's facilities officer) is present during the workshop to welcome attendees and provide some introductory comments on APPA.

Responsibilities of the Sponsor:

- Works with APPA and the host institution to identify suitable session content and speakers, and firms up the program. This also ensures that the content is fully educational in nature, i.e., does not advocate a particular product or service.
- Manages on-site registration on the day of the workshop, distributes badges and distributes/collects evaluation forms.
- Pays sponsorship fees, cost of food/beverage at the workshop.

Responsibilities of APPA:

- Manages event promotions (produces flyer, email invitations and distributes these promotions).
- Creates list of prospective attendees (from both APPA member institutions and prospective institutions). Shares this targeted attendee list with the host and the sponsor.
- Creates an online registration link and sends regular attendee registration reports out to the sponsor and host prior to the event.
- Works with host institution's facility officer to prepare any comments, supporting materials, slides describing APPA, benefits of becoming involved with APPA, etc.

For more details about sponsoring or hosting an APPA Drive-In Workshop, please contact APPA's Associate Director of Professional Development, Corey Newman at corey@appa.org.

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