

From the Military to Educational Facilities Management—A Smooth Transition

By Andrew Feick



I have been a proud and active APPA member since 2005, but it's important for me to discuss the value that professional organization membership held for me even before then. I am among the many facilities managers who were in the U.S. military before transitioning to higher education facilities management (FM). It was my good fortune that the U.S. military has a strong mentorship and networking ethic; that is why I was well supported when I decided to leave military service in 1995. My Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) colleagues connected me with several former military engineers who could help me with military transition and employment. It was one of these contacts who gave me an entrance into higher education FM.

In truth, I had no concept of FM as a career at that time, but when I was told, "We are looking for people

with your skills to work on college campuses," I was hooked. I had always had a passion for higher education and academic environments, and so it was fortuitous that a former military employer understood how my skills could transfer to higher education FM. Hence, a 23-year (and counting) career was born.

THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Fast forward to 2005, when I decided to leave contract FM and move to working directly for a college. I was incredibly fortunate to replace the retiring Fred Klee, a former APPA member and ERAPPA President, as facilities director at Ursinus College. Klee strongly impressed on me the value of APPA International, and of participation and leadership within the local APPA chapter and region. Though he was retiring, he introduced me to the institutional chapter members, who embraced me and helped me understand my own institution's place within higher education in the Greater Philadelphia area and helped me navigate these new waters. I have happily returned this favor many times over to new facilities managers in our local APPA chapter.

One of the many rewarding aspects of this profession is that it allows me to help fellow FM professionals of all ages to advance their careers; it is our professional network that offers the most assistance in this area. Just last week I helped connect a former student worker who is a graduating senior from Temple University's FM program with an area institution that I knew was expanding and needing additional FM support. I hope his interview was fruitful! I have also enjoyed informing colleagues about pending retirements at other institutions that will create career opportunities for them—and there are many retirements these days! My own recent transition is a trans-profession networking story.

MOVING FORWARD

I had a lot of hiring to do while at Temple University, and I worked closely with Temple's facilities human resources recruiter. She was an excellent recruiter, and I was sorry when she left Temple to take a position at Swarthmore College. I asked her to let me know if any FM leadership positions would become available there. Swarthmore College is among the finest private liberal arts colleges in the country, and I had known their FM leadership for more than a decade from involvement in our local chapter, Delaware Valley APPA (DVAPPA).

I was excited when she called me two years later to let me know that the facilities VP was retiring and that Swarthmore College was looking to hire an associate VP (AVP) to support the facilities operations and capital program. It was a tremendous advantage that I already had a positive relationship with several of Swarthmore College's facilities department directors through DVAPPA events over the years.

I am genuinely grateful to have been hired by such a fine institution, and it is evident that the positive references from my APPA colleagues and my local DVAPPA relationships helped. The APPA network is the first place I turn when we are looking for top talent to augment our own team.

The rich professional networking opportunities that APPA offers—especially within the APPA network—are what I have chosen to focus on here. They have helped to advance my own FM career, and can certainly help other FM professionals as well. But in addition to those opportunities, APPA membership offers a vast array of professional and personal benefits, from professional development to collegial advice available on the APPA member listserv. Try APPA and find out for yourself!

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