



# An APPA Journey—Start Yours Today

By Kevin Austin

**M**y APPA journey started about 30 years ago and has supported me with the professional development and contacts that have shaped my career. My first entry-level position in facilities management was on a small liberal arts campus. I reported to a physical plant director who was not particularly invested in APPA. Because the facilities department was small, contributions were not limited to those with a job title but were available to willing volunteers. As a result, I volunteered often and gained more experience and greater opportunities. I met a small group of local vendors who offered expertise and information. They assisted me in developing programs for onsite training and introduced me to new products and services. Unfortunately, because there was no APPA involvement, our small department missed the valuable opportunity to share its knowledge and experience outside the four walls of the institution.

After four years, I moved on to a larger public institution where I reported to a director of physical plant who introduced me to APPA. My supervisor enrolled me in the Institute for Facilities Management and placed me on the host committee

for the Pacific Coast APPA (PCAPPA) Annual Conference in the early '90s. While my first job gave me the opportunity to volunteer for tasks outside my normal role, this job provided me with the path to grow professionally through APPA.

This involvement introduced me to many of the leaders of APPA on the West Coast. Those connections directly influenced the next 30 years of my career; they also expanded my network to vendor partners and consultants who helped me to gain a deeper appreciation of the value of my business contacts. They shared innovative ideas and products and also supplied me with an expanded group of experts whom I could rely on for advice, goods, and services. It was the experience I acquired in collaborating with them that now influences how I work to engage my team and many of our young leaders in APPA.

## **EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND INFLUENCE**

Whether you joined APPA several decades ago or last year, your membership offers you a unique opportunity to expand your knowledge and influ-

ence beyond your campus. APPA membership furnishes resources and training opportunities for career development. The APPA Institute for Facilities Management includes a broad range of offerings and covers four core areas:

- General Administration & Management
- Maintenance & Operations
- Energy & Utilities
- Planning, Design & Construction

At the University of Chicago, our team has been very active in hosting the Leadership Academy on campus. This series improves staff leadership skills and gives facilities leaders the tools to be successful and move ahead in their careers. The least expensive way to engage in professional development through APPA is with the monthly online webinars, which offer a wide variety of topics and continuing education credits.

Once you have some of these skills, the Pathway to Professionalism (P2P) is a great way to earn your Certified Educational Facilities Professional (CEFP) designation. Our team has put more than a dozen members through the CEFP program using a team approach. We found success in placing a group in a cohort, where they could support each other through the process. They went into the process as colleagues and came out as a team because of their shared experience. We were able to secure regional scholarships to fund much of the effort, which controlled the cost and saved our institution a significant amount of money.

#### **CAREER GROWTH THROUGH TRAINING AND NETWORKING**

Training is an important component of APPA, and professional networking with peers and resource partners is the perfect complement for career growth. The APPA Annual Conference is an excellent opportunity for training while developing connections and important relationships with peers and vendor resources from around the country. If you cannot travel to an annual conference, the APPA regional conferences are generally closer to home and offer similar opportunities for engagement. State and local chapters are growing across the country, and provide a closer option for everyone on

your team to engage in the APPA experience. Lastly, you can engage from your desktop with the APPA Online Community Platform to share resources, ask and answer questions, and meet peers with similar issues, concerns, and interests.

If you want to develop your leadership skills further, engage as a board member at the state or regional chapter level, write and submit articles, or volunteer for a committee. Your membership in APPA is only as valuable as your willingness to engage and promote it to your organization as a resource. Associate membership is available to all staff of member institutions; it only takes a few minutes for your primary representative to add names online. The associate membership makes all of APPA's resources available to you. Your investment in APPA is the best commitment you can make toward developing yourself. Start investing today! 💰

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