

The AMM welcomes new board members

During the 2007 June District Meetings, the AMM membership elected three new members to the AMM board of directors. *The Leader* interviewed Eileen Clarke, George Harbottle, and Oswald Sawh to find out what prompted them to run for a seat on the board, and what they hope to accomplish over the next two years. Here is what they had to say:

A year of firsts for Gladstone's Mayor

The Town of Gladstone's mayor of one year, **Eileen Clarke**, is no stranger to breaking new ground. The former successful business owner (not to mention Manitoba Women Entrepreneur of the Year for 1998) started Clarke's of Gladstone, Manitoba's largest gift shop, 33 years ago. After selling the business in 2005, Clarke took a year off, a move that resulted in a significant adjustment to her formerly hectic schedule. "I'd always worked at least six days a week as a business owner, so that was a huge, HUGE change," stresses Clarke. "That one year was plenty long enough with no activity – I needed something else."

Coincidentally, the public appeared to be looking for new leadership, and in the months leading up to the 2006 municipal election, Clarke received a great deal of encouragement to run for the mayor's chair. "I've been very active in the community in the years I was in business, so I guess people were confident that I could fill the position," she says.

Being voted directly into the top spot on council would be enough of a challenge for most people, and in most cases, elected officials tend to run for AMM directorship only after serving their local council for a number of years. In Clarke's case, she ran – and won – during her first term on council. Again, Clarke points to the encouragement of others as a driving force in that decision. "I was approached by people who asked me to consider it. At first I was apprehensive because of personal commitments – I had a daughter getting married in September, and when I took office in October,

we were just beginning to plan our town's 125th celebrations and I knew that would be a huge time commitment." So even though she was interested in the position, she declined to run.

"Initially, I was asked to let my name stand at the 2006 AMM Convention (when former Midwestern Urban Director Shirley Kalyniuk was elected Urban Vice-President, creating a vacancy on the board), and I absolutely turned it down. It was actually just two weeks before the June District meeting that I decided I would run. A lot of the issues that we were facing within our community and that were quite urgent, we had resolved – some of them very, very successfully – so that gave me the confidence that I could fill the position and have ample time to devote to it."

When asked what she thinks some of the challenges of her position on the AMM board will be, Clarke notes that the recent round of municipal visits in her district were somewhat of an eye-opener for her. "As the mayor of a town, although I work closely with our own rural municipality (the RM of Westbourne), it became evident to me that the RM's issues are very different from urban issues. My challenge is to learn a lot more about those rural issues." While that fact did not surprise Clarke, what did surprise her was realizing that each municipality has issues that are relevant to their municipality.

"It's not province-wide, or even region-wide – some of the issues are unique within each municipality," she explains, citing the RM of Westbourne's flooding issues as a perfect example.

Clarke looks forward to learning more about some of these issues directly from the source – the municipalities within her region. "I've checked with some of the municipalities in my area and asked if I could attend some of their regular monthly meetings to listen in on their discussions on these issues, and they actually seemed very pleased. They are happy that I'm interested enough to attend, but for me that's going to be my education – my learning tool," she says.

Clarke's husband, Bob, is a licensed Funeral Director who also owns his own business, Clarke's Funeral Services. They have two grown children.



L to R – Oswald Sawh, Councillor, City of Thompson Northern Director; Eileen Clarke, Mayor, Town of Gladstone, Midwestern Urban Director; George Harbottle, Reeve, RM of Alexander, Eastern Rural Director

AMMM

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– Eileen Clarke, Midwestern Urban Director

‘Round Two’ for outspoken Eastern Director

George Harbottle has a broad range of experience in local government, health care, economic development, aboriginal concerns, drainage and watershed management, justice, and science and research issues. And that’s just for starters.

Reeve of the RM of Alexander since 1998, George’s experience as an elected official began back in 1968 when he was elected Mayor of the Village of Powerview. He has also served as Chair of the Winnipeg River Planning District and as a Director with the Association des Municipalités Bilingues du Manitoba.

Harbottle can now add AMM Director – twice – to his list of accomplishments. Initially elected to serve on the AMM board in 2003, Harbottle declined to run for a second term. The reason? “I wasn’t going to run again as Reeve, that’s why I chose not to run again for Eastern Director. Then, I got sidetracked into all these projects again, that I’ve worked so hard on over the years. And, I wanted the deputy reeve to run for reeve, but he wouldn’t. He said he’d run for councillor if I’d run for reeve again, so I did. And I got acclaimed.” That must mean that people are fairly happy with how things are going, and with Harbottle’s leadership - right? “Maybe nobody wants the job,” he laughs.

After being re-elected to the reeve’s chair, it naturally followed that Harbottle wanted his old job on the AMM board back. “There has to be a rural presence in the East and I’d like to represent that,” he explains. While quick to note he wasn’t displeased with the representation previously on the board, he wanted to make a contribution on behalf of the region that he clearly loves. “We’re amongst the fastest growing regions, if not *the* fastest growing, in Manitoba,” he states, “especially the rural areas, and maybe our little urban centres are feeling the pinch too.”

Always direct, Harbottle notes the recreational makeup of his region plays a role in their challenges. “We have a huge recreational cottage presence, and it always boils down to the same thing – education tax on property, and rural infrastructure,” he explains. He is quick to point out that challenges exist all over the province, however, and they are the same for everyone. “It’s the offloading of costs and the disparity in tax revenues. We know that the feds get 50%, the province gets 42%, and municipalities get the rest, which is not really a lot. I think that has to be addressed soon,” he stresses. He is also concerned with infrastructure projects being approved well after being submitted. “They get approved some five, six, seven years later, they’re at a reduced rate, and then there are the increases costs of construction – it’s horrendous.”

“I don’t want to take it from a critical point of view,” he adds. “I just want to work towards improving those issues.”

Harbottle has the support of his wife Suzanne, who “was the

first person to sign my nomination papers to run for reeve again, and she supported me in returning to the AMM also.” The couple has six children and 10 grandchildren. Harbottle, who admits he likes to have the last word, has this to say about his family: “I’m a very fortunate man!”

Thompson councillor seeks more representation for the North

Newly elected Northern Director **Oswald Sawh** has made no bones about his main priority in running for a seat on the AMM board of directors – a second Northern seat. “As a member of council of a northern community I feel that it was important that we have as much representation at the AMM board level as possible,” he explains. *(A proposed change to the AMM bylaw will be discussed and voted on at the 2007 AMM Annual Convention. It is being sponsored by the City of Thompson and the purpose of this amendment to the bylaws is to require that there be 2 representatives from the Northern District on the AMM Board of Directors instead of 1 and that each of the Directors represent part of the Northern District.)*

Enhanced communication is another priority for Sawh. “I feel that it is important for members of the AMM board to be talking to our Northern reps throughout the year, so the second reason I ran was to try an open up better two-way communication between our Northern Members and their representatives,” he explains.

Sawh is looking forward to his time on the board over the next term. “I want to learn more about the AMM as a whole, listen to my fellow Board members and most of all push for some of the things I said I wanted to get done in my two-year term.”

He is also well aware of the challenges of representing a northern seat. “I think the biggest challenge is when you are trying to lobby on behalf of a relatively small population (spread over a large geographical area) and trying to get your members’ message and their issues across when there are so many other people out there trying to do exactly the same thing,” he says. “It is always a challenge.”

In his professional life, Sawh is the Manager of Community Based Programs for CEDF (Communities Economic Development Fund). “Basically, my job is to assist the local Community Development Corporations (i.e., training, special projects) and local individuals who wish to start up a small business. I visit approximately 12 communities on a regular basis,” he explains.

Sawh and Denise Earle, his girlfriend of seven years, are passionate about animal care, with two dogs, two cats, two birds, “and no kids!” Back in 1997 they started the Thompson Humane Society, an organization with which Sawh remains involved. “I am currently the Acting Chair, but my hope is to start to limit my role in the next 12 months to allow some other volunteers and Board members to take on a more active role.” 🐾