

New executive

After three years with the same executive, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities recently elected a new President and Urban Vice-President. Following is a profile of all three members of the AMM executive for the coming year.

AMM President Ron Bell, Mayor, Town of Birtle

For Ron Bell, Mayor of the Town of Birtle and President of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, a team effort is only the first part of what makes a successful organization. Acknowledging that effort is even more important.

“My leadership style is to pull everyone into working together, but also to make sure everyone feels involved by recognizing their contributions,” he says. “In my community, the first thing I do when presenting a specific award, is to praise the whole community for their contribution – not just the people who are being awarded. I truly believe a successful community is the result of a community-wide effort, not just the effort of a few people.”

That’s good advice from a 15-year council member and nine-year mayor – even if he occasionally has to attend Council meetings via conference call. “The hard part of being Vice-President of the AMM for the past three years was the time away – from family, from my farm, from my Council.” However, Bell has had plenty of practice in making sure he communicates with those he needs to, which will make the transition into the President’s role less difficult. “The Town staff and other Council members do a great job when I can’t be there due to AMM business. We have arrangements that allow us to stay in touch when I’m on the road, and my son James manages the farm when I’m away.” (Younger son Devon currently attends Red River Community College). Bell also makes sure he and wife Brenda Evans, with whom he celebrated 25 years of marriage this year, communicate at least once each day when he is away.

When asked why he chose to run for President, Bell explains, “I wanted to make a difference and be really engaged in the process of moving things forward. Politics continues to fascinate me and motivate me every day, and by running for President I knew that I would be able to not only contribute to the betterment of our members, but to grow as a person.”

What are Bell’s goals as President? “I’m the first to embrace new technologies, but I

don’t believe in change for the sake of change. I believe in looking for ways to do business in a better way, whether through new ways of lobbying, communicating, or by just giving municipalities the tools they need to be successful.” On the lobbying front, Bell’s priorities aren’t surprising: “The education tax is still the big issue – we need to continue to move ahead with reductions across all property classes. A federal new deal is coming out and local planning issues are going to continue to be very important. Whatever the issue, we need to make sure municipal and local interests are being respected.”

Bell cites helping citizens embrace Birtle as a great place to live as one of the highlights of his local municipal career. “It’s easy for a small community to think they are going to fade away – many have. Our community succeeds because everyone who lives here works together to make it succeed.” A good example of that teamwork is the fact that Birtle is the recipient of not one, but *two* Communities in Bloom awards, something Bell attributes in large part to the high percentage of community volunteerism in the Town. “Every community has the potential to be successful, as long as they have the tools to work with. That’s what the AMM’s job is – not to make decisions for communities, but to provide them the tools and framework they need to make good decisions for themselves.”

AMM Urban Vice-President Lorne Boguski, Mayor, Town of Roblin

Lorne Boguski often compares municipal politics with his career in teaching. “The rewards are great,” Boguski says. “You get to see a lot of the positive developments that you have been a part of. Whether it’s a student who has gone on to achieve success in their career, or a community project that has improved the quality of life for your citizens, it is rewarding.”

Boguski has been Mayor of the Town of Roblin for the past 18 years. He taught for 32 years, retiring in 1991 and spending the next seven years as Director of Teacher Certification for the Province of Manitoba.

Now fully retired, Boguski felt the time was right to take a step up from AMM Director to Vice-President. “I feel I have something more to offer. I want to be a part of a strong executive team that will move our municipal agenda forward. AMM needs a strong lobby team. I like a challenge and being on the executive provides me with that opportunity. The status quo in our association is unacceptable. As part of the team, I want to make our association stronger.”

One example of making things better in Roblin is the town’s effluent irrigation project that utilizes engineered wetlands for wastewater management – the only one of its kind in western Canada. Boguski says the project lends itself to some of the many water concerns facing Manitoba communities right now. The willingness to try new systems may be part of the reason that, under Boguski’s leadership, the population in Roblin has remained stable while many other small urban centres are losing people. That’s not to say it isn’t a constant struggle, though, as Boguski sees some critical issues first-hand from his mayor’s chair. “Issues like the education tax, a new deal ... I can see in my own community how we could manage our resources differently, if we had more resources at our disposal. Small urban municipalities are especially finding resources to operate increasingly diminished, which threatens community viability.”

When asked about his priorities over the coming year, Boguski says the priorities of the AMM should mirror the resolutions passed at Convention. “The resolutions reflect municipal concerns, and it’s very important to ensure we are working in partnerships with other levels of government. Building trust in one another is so important to working together, because without trust it’s difficult to accomplish our goals.”

Boguski, whose family is comprised of Linda, his wife of 38 years, and sons Jeff and Jason, also enjoys the personal rewards of public life. “The numerous and valuable friendships that one builds are what makes it all worthwhile. To have friends in all corners of the province is, to me, the greatest accomplishment.”

line-up for AMM

AMM Rural Vice- President Garry Wasylofski, Reeve, RM of Armstrong

When asked whether his 12 years as Reeve of the RM of Armstrong have ever been contested in an election, Garry Wasylofski says with a laugh, "Always!" Wasylofski feels his reputation for always being up front and honest with people are the keys to his ability to come out ahead in those elections. "The fact is, the hardest part of municipal politics is having to say 'no' more often than you can say 'yes.' At the end of the day, though, you simply have to make good decisions and stand by them."

Wasylofski's reputation for operating with integrity and commitment may also be why he was recently re-elected, for the fourth time in the position of AMM Rural Vice-President – giving him the distinction of being the only member of the AMM executive not new to his post. This places him in the enviable position of not facing the learning curve Bell and Boguski will experience, and making him the mainstay of the trio.

It does beg the question, though – what prompted him to stay the course? "Every day is still a learning experience," he explains. "Over the past couple of years, a number of interesting decisions have been made that have raised the profile of municipal issues and the work of the AMM. I personally have spent a lot of time on watershed management issues, and I want to continue on that path

and see where *Bill 22* is going. I think we are at a point in time where we will see some significant change in the way municipalities will do business. Everybody believes in the concept of watershed management, but we need to make sure that the local politicians who are closest to the people have a say in how those types of issues are dealt with. It's important that decisions for communities are made *in* and *by* communities."

Long a strong advocate of local decision-making, Wasylofski's early days in the Reeve's chair were spent spearheading the Armstrong/Fisher Municipal District that ultimately resulted in the LGD of Armstrong becoming the RM of Armstrong. A cattle farmer in what he describes as the "centre of the Interlake," he has been married to Debbie for 24 years. They have two children, Brent

and Felicia. While echoing Bell in describing the demands of a position on the AMM executive, he too credits a supportive council who are willing to accommodate his busy schedule with the reason he missed only one council meeting last year.

Wasylofski anticipates another busy year, as the AMM continues to push the education tax issue forward. "We've seen progress, but there is much more work to be done," he explains. "We are getting into the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government in terms of funding education. I think we've blurred the lines a bit between the roles of all three levels of government, to the point where it's easy to pass costs down to municipalities. We need to start defining more clearly where those lines are." ❧

AMM Executive:
(L-R)
Urban Vice-
President, Lorne
Boguski, Mayor,
Town of Roblin;
Rural Vice-
President, Garry
Wasylofski,
Reeve, RM of
Armstrong;
President, Ron
Bell, Mayor,
Town of Birtle



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