



michigan municipal league

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## **Farewell address by 2010-11 MML Board President Carol Shafto Delivered, October 6, 2011**

“As President of the Michigan Municipal League Board of Trustees for the past year, I was happy to have the opportunity to travel over 4,500 miles in May visiting every corner of our great state attending all seven of the regional meetings. In my travels I saw communities of all shapes and sizes - urban and rural, north and south, ports and farms - and through this I became re-attuned to how much our challenges are similar – it’s often just a matter of scale. I also saw how friends reconnect, how new friendships are formed, how we learn from each other’s triumphs as well as mistakes. This year taught me – or reminded me - what true leadership is all about. In times of hardship, we are all tested. In times of challenge, great leaders emerge. It’s not about standing on a soap-box, spouting slogans and platitudes. It’s about rolling up our sleeves and making the hard choices – often unpopular choices - to balance the budget and keep our communities afloat. It’s about living to fight another day. I was reminded that local politics are not sexy – but hard work on behalf of people who often do not understand what we are all about. And I was reaffirmed in knowing that we can rely on organizations such as the Michigan Municipal League to help us navigate through these treacherous waters with confidence.

The last time we were together in Dearborn, we didn’t know who would be governor, or who would hold the numerous House and Senate seats that were up for grabs. We now have answers to all of those questions, but many new ones have emerged, and one thing is certain: there has been no shortage of activity in Lansing. In just the first few months of Governor Snyder’s administration we have seen many government reforms and a complete overhaul of the revenue sharing system. Suffice it to say it has been anything but boring. Without doubt it’s been an interesting and active year for Michigan cities, villages and urban townships. Yes, we did lose some significant funding when statutory revenue sharing was scrapped and partially replaced by the new Economic Vitality and Incentive Program, but I should remind you that those cuts were originally a lot worse for our members than the end result. Had it not been for the diligence and persistence of all of you, as League members, and the hard work of our League staff, many more of the cities in this room would have been removed from the program entirely. By working together we were able to preserve the ability to recapture 2/3rds of funding for most of our members. This happened because we were at the table throughout the process. Without access to the decision-makers, we can’t influence state policy and preserve our stake in the critical outcomes that affect us all.

There has been much talk of late about government reforms, and the new administration has certainly been very busy in this area. I hope you have taken advantage of the Legislative Update sessions here at the conference to hear the latest developments.

Some of the highlights of the year include:

- Significant positive changes to PA 312 ( the law governing contract disputes between local units of government and public safety unions);

- Public Act 4 (the new “Emergency Manager” law which broadens emergency manager powers but also strengthens opportunities for communities to independently correct their issues);
- Made significant process toward reforming the Urban Cooperation Act (removing barriers to cooperating and sharing services);
- Adjustments to the health care bills (changing the way local governments pay for health care);
- Transit issues, Brownfield credits, medical marijuana laws and policies, and a host of other issues.

The list goes on and on and changes, quickly and regularly.

I hope you are attuned to these changes through issue advisories, action alerts, Inside 208 the League’s Legislative Blog, media releases and some of the social media advances I will mention later. What I have learned this year, from the inside, is that no matter how I try, I cannot be on top of all the really critical issues that emerge from Lansing (and even from Washington) on a regular basis. Through this tumultuous year of major change, MML has been at the forefront working on our behalf on a host of complex issues – that we, as individual member communities, could not be present for, could not weigh in on, could not, sometimes, even begin to understand. Our top notch teams of lobbyists, analysts and leaders have had our backs on issues that will ultimately filter down to our level and impact local decision-making. On behalf of all of us, my personal hats off to our team. I sleep better at night in Alpena, knowing that they are NOT asleep in Lansing.

All of the hard work of the League’s staff has not gone unnoticed. The League’s Lansing team was recognized last spring in a comprehensive survey identifying the top lobbying organizations in the state. With hundreds of associations in Lansing, just being mentioned in this survey is impressive and shows the growing credibility the League’s outstanding lobbying team has earned. That recognition came on the heels of some individual recognition. League lobbyist Samantha Harkins was also honored in the Inside Michigan Politics Lobbyist Survey in January of this year. She was ranked in the top 20 for *Individual Lobbyist* as well as ranked number 2 in the *Individual Single Interest Lobbyist* category.

In order to keep this staff in place, MML has become a top drawer worksite. In September, the League was named as one the Michigan’s “Cool Places to Work” by Crain’s Detroit Business. The award, as judged by *Crain’s* and the American Society of Employers, recognizes companies and nonprofits that take talent attraction and retention seriously. These organizations acknowledge the importance their workers play in the success of their business and take actions to help those workers thrive. These awards are further validation of what we already know to be true, that we are represented everyday by some of the best and brightest and I am glad they’re on our side.

When the League staff is not fighting for us in Lansing, they’re at the forefront educating our members about how the changes in laws, policies and procedures affect us back in our hometowns. In the past year the League has offered training on everything from medical marijuana to the new Economic Vitality Incentive Program, more commonly known as EVIP. We have had topic specific training workshops offered at central locations; annual regional education seminars; and formal training opportunities through the Elected Officials Academy. As elected officials, we are all eligible to participate in and progress through the 3 levels of the academy (Education, Leadership and Governance). I completed all three levels, several years ago, and I don’t know how I would have led my community over the past decade without the knowledge acquired and partnerships forged. I can assure you that participating in this program renders both knowledge and confidence and will help to make you the best local official possible. Times do change.

We have found that it is not always effective or efficient or affordable to attend seminars in person – travel costs and time away take a toll - yet we recognize a need to be on top of things. In response, the League IT Operations has worked with Education staff to provide webinars and other online educational opportunities. Perhaps not as rewarding as the networking that happens one-on-one, but we still can get low cost training and education, so essential in these times of change on every front.

While the focus on assisting League members remains the No. 1 priority, the League continues to reach out to a broader audience – the general public. In recent years the League has realized that if we truly want to influence change; we need to raise the awareness of our message beyond the individuals in this room or around Council tables across the state. The League was the first group in Michigan to advocate the economic value of place. What was once viewed as a radical concept is now accepted as fact around the nation. Place matters, and we cannot have a strong vibrant economy without strong communities. We need to continue to restate the obvious of our motto – that better cities will result in a better Michigan. That is the driving force behind our 21C3 or Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communities initiative and the eight assets that make for vibrant communities and which are at the heart of a new vision for Michigan. Alpena, was one five cities this year to complete pilot projects through this 21c3 program. Our asset area was Cultural Economic Development and an isolated, rural, up- north town, 100 miles from the freeway, recognized its assets, rallied its partners and became a model for art and culture as economic drivers for the entire region; Creating a destination for cultural tourism as a critical part of economic growth and stability; Adding dimension to that sense of place that underlies Michigan’s economic recovery.

As your outgoing President, I am very proud to be able to say that during my time leading the League we have published an amazing book which is based on all of our place-based economic strategies. This book, *“The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People”* will further spread our message and influence policy makers at home and around the country. Hopefully you got your copy yesterday at our “give-away moment” and if you want additional copies you can get them at a discount here at convention, or you can order them anytime on Amazon.com or through our Executive Director Dan Gilmartin’s blog, [www.economicsofplace.com](http://www.economicsofplace.com).

This book, as well as Dan’s related website, are major steps for the League in reaching out to a national and even global audience and achieving national credibility. We really hope this book and blog elevate the conversation about why place matters and how our politicians, when proposing legislation and casting votes, need to start thinking about creating and sustaining vibrant communities.

To aid in the effort of expanding our reach, the League is using a mix of social media and traditional media, particularly Facebook and Twitter.

For example, on September 13, the League and Let’s Save Michigan hosted our first ever live Twitter Talk where we assembled a panel of experts to discuss the future of transportation in Michigan. It was pretty neat to see officials from the League, Michigan Chamber of Commerce and Michigan Environmental Council sitting at the same table Tweeting the same hymn. In this one event alone, we had more than 60 individuals and groups with a combined network of nearly 77,000 followers participating. For perspective, if we put that potential audience together in one room they’d fill up the Pontiac Silverdome. The interesting thing about the Twitterverse is they tend to be more active and will work on causes they believe in. We believe that this will provide long term benefits in helping move our agenda forward.

While we are on the topic of social media, I hope you all have already used the free social media pavilion to learn how to get on Twitter and follow the League on both Twitter and Facebook. Many of you may question the need to learn about this, but like it or not there is a large part of our communities that use this as their primary communication tool. And best of all, it's easy to learn. If you think you're not tech-savvy enough to do those things? Trust me when I say, if I can do it – so can you! Although I may have been dragged into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century kicking and screaming, I am proof positive that old dogs CAN – and indeed – MUST learn new tricks.

I'm happy to report something that positively impacts your community's pocketbook. Hopefully your community participates in the League's Liability and Property Pool and the Workers Compensation Fund, because if you do you have seen a real financial benefit of membership. The League returned \$17.1 million in dividends this year to members of the League-sponsored risk management programs." If you are not members of these programs, you owe it to your community to check them out.

My formal time in service to the League draws to its close this evening completing ten years – which have literally flown by. My journey began simply – completing credits for EOA and the desire to be more involved on the State level to benefit not only the League, but my hometown. Honestly, working to put us on the map a bit more. And I was encouraged, prodded and downright nagged by my close friend and mentor Jim Sinclair. So three years on the EOA Board; three years as a Region 6 Officer; four years on the Board of Trustees.... And now I toss the challenge out to you – to participate. You will benefit yourself, your hometown, your League and your state. You can and you will make a difference. So, in closing, let me once again thank you for the honor of leading you through this tumultuous yet exciting year as your president. It will always be one of the highlights of my public service career."