It was May 7, 2007, when nearly 20 League staff members crowded around a large table, reviewing the scattered papers of potential logos and slogans that would represent us for years to come. “Defenders of Cities.” “Nah, feels like we should wear a cape and carry a shield,” joked one director; “Your Community. Our Help.” “Not bad, but what does it mean?” wondered another staffer; “Making Municipalities Matter,” we liked all the M’s, but try saying that 10 times fast.

One option, however, jumped out at us—“Better Communities, Better Michigan.” It really said it all—investing in our communities will create a more vibrant state. It was simple, decisive, and true.

We didn’t realize it at the time, but picking our new slogan and branding approach was one of the first critical steps we would take in the years ahead. It is a constant reminder of what we are all about and have been since 1899. It gives us direction, guidance, focus, and one clear voice.

This “State of Your League” report provides a snapshot of who we are and how we work for you.
The League

Who Makes Up the League?

523 Cities, Villages, & Townships, 272 Cities, 243 Villages, 5 Urban Townships, 31 Affiliate Organizations, 92 Business Alliance Program Participants, 4,130 Total Elected Officials, 2,848 Councilmembers/Commissioners, 265 Mayors, 241 Presidents, 528 Clerks, 10,000+ Non-Elected Officials, 322 Managers, 62 Economic Development Directors, 84 Community Development Directors, 174 Finance Directors, 178 Zoning Administrators, 53 Public Safety Directors, 374 Fire Chiefs

1 | The Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3)

Creating communities for the next 50 years, not the past 50 years, is what it is all about. The Center focuses on eight identified assets that contribute to a vibrant 21st century community. Research continues to show that “place-making” matters more than ever, as an increasingly mobile workforce seeks out neighborhoods before finding jobs and opening up businesses. The purpose of the Center (generously underwritten by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority) is to help local officials identify, develop, and implement strategies that will grow and strengthen Michigan’s communities in the coming decades. This is done through educational programming, publications, public policy forums, technical assistance, and foundational online resources.

2 | Social Media

The League has always been focused on serving its members, but now, thanks to the wide range of internet tools, we are reaching an even larger audience. The League is actively involved in social media outlets, including the Let’s Save Michigan initiative, our website (mml.org), Facebook, Twitter, Flickr etc., to promote our mission, members, and communities. The numbers speak for themselves and continue to grow daily.

437,110 page views at mml.org so far in 2010

3 | Advocacy

Believing that communities are at the core of Michigan’s turnaround, our Lansing advocacy team is committed to a proactive agenda supporting policies that give our communities the tools to thrive in the 21st century. These issues range from controlling costs through Public Act 312 and revenue sharing to advocating for those things that create strong communities such as transit options, walkability, mixed-use developments, green space, and thriving cultural attractions. If we are going to create the kind of communities that attract an increasingly mobile workforce, then we need to focus on creating quality places that will attract and retain the college-educated and creative people who will help spur our economy.

4 | Educating Our Members

How have other communities handled this new Medical Marihuana Act? What’s the status of our roads—is any more funding coming? The League’s many educational programs and events can help you answer these questions and many more. Our Elected Officials Academy, for example, gives expanded leadership lessons to assist our elected leaders in all aspects of their role in the public’s eye. And our Capital Conference in the spring and Annual Convention in the fall will not only inform you about the issues facing your communities, but they also can connect you to peers that have “been there and done that.” Each year our programs include:

1,400 officials
50+ programs
20 on-site trainings
7 regional meetings
6 Newly Elected Officials trainings
4 affiliate programs
1 Convention
1 Capital Conference

2,000+ listeners per radio program

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5 | A Look Inside the League

Doing More with Less

As our communities make tough decisions about staffing levels, so has the League. Since 2000, we have reduced our workforce by 32 percent primarily through attrition. This means more work with less, making sure the “right people are on the bus,” and better aligning resources with members’ needs in today’s economic climate. By working smarter, we’ve been able to start several new initiatives while also maintaining our core member services.

The League helps its members in so many different ways from networking with businesses and other League members to training and lobbying in Lansing. They make our job as elected leaders much more manageable.”

Jeff Jenks, 09-10 League President, Huntington Woods Mayor Pro Tem

Dues Revenue/Membership

Sensitive to members’ declining revenues, dues were cut by 10 percent in the 2005-06 budget year, frozen for 2009-10, and the League is looking to cut another 12 percent for 2010-11. That’s a total savings of over 25 percent.

6 | Technology

Going Green Makes Sense

The concept in our IT/Operations department was simple: Use the latest technology to do more with less and do it in a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way. In 2009, we saved thousands of dollars by using “virtualization” hardware to combine computer servers and a new “zero client computing” system that allows employees to work from their desk without a desktop computer!

$50,000—anticipated savings in hardware costs in the next three years

7 | League Foundation

“As the chair of the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee, I have worked with the League on a variety of tools that work in communities of all sizes to promote development and investment statewide. I appreciate the League’s professionalism and shared commitment to revitalizing our state.”

Senator Jason Allen (R- Traverse City)

The League’s Legal Defense Fund provides support to LDF member communities in cases that potentially have a statewide impact.

27 Active years

400+ Amicus briefs filed in the Michigan Supreme Court and Court of Appeals

11 Cases for which the Supreme Court requested a Municipal League Amicus brief

80+ Percent participation among League members

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Benzonia President, Village of Carie Fowler-Gehring, 09-10 League President, Huntington Woods Mayor Pro Tem

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“When you for your research. We are in the process of cleaning up many loose ends and it was very helpful in getting things running in the right direction. We love the League and are glad that you’re here to help us!”

Carie Fowler-Gehring, President, Village of Benzonia

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Senator Jason Allen (R- Traverse City)
We Are Your Resource

Are we required to post notices of committee meetings?

We answer thousands of questions like these each year through personal research assistance and direct contact with our members each day. We supply critical information on core topics to our members and serve as an information clearinghouse, helping steer communities through the complexities of local governance. As communities are forced to do more with less, League services help fill the gap. We offer databases, extensive sample ordinances, policies, contracts, handbooks, tool kits, fact sheets, and a myriad of other resources. If you can think to ask it, we can help find the answer!

Ever wonder how the salaries and benefits in your community stack up to those in other communities?

You can find out by participating in our one-of-a-kind online wage and salary survey. This wealth of information provides data for 143 job classifications easily searchable by a number of criteria. There is also a benefits section that can help our members during budget season and contract talks.