

City of Cedar Park City Manager Brenda Eivens Nomination for the ICMA Award for Career Development in Memory of L.P. Cookingham

Terrell Blodgett, Nominator

I consider it a privilege to nominate Brenda Eivens for this year's Cookingham award. I knew Mr. Cookingham; he is still revered in our profession for his development of young talent and thus this ICMA award is aptly named. In my 70 years as a local government administrator and in related fields, I have rarely known a city manager who carries out his mantra as Brenda does. The following more clearly enunciates her distinguished record in this most critical area of city management.



Brenda Eivens is an outstanding local government administrator who has a strong record of making significant contributions to the career development of new talent in professional local government management. Whether it is by example of her own non-traditional career path to city management or her commitment to nurturing young talent, Eivens is challenging stereotypes and changing minds about who city management professionals are - one statistic at a time. She truly embodies the ICMA's Next Generation and Women in the Field initiatives, as evidenced by her many protégés who have navigated from entry-level positions to the top rungs of the career ladder, within the organization she leads and beyond.

A career that has defied the odds

Eivens' own career is remarkable, considering that she defies the startling and disheartening statistics about city managers: only about 20 percent are women and the typical tenure is just under seven and a half years. Eivens has been with the City of Cedar Park for more than 20 years, serving as City Manager for the past decade. When Eivens first joined the City in 1996, Cedar Park was a small suburb of Austin, Texas with a population of just over 16,000. The community was about to take off and experience massive growth. The population has since quadrupled to 67,500 and in recent

years Cedar Park has been twice ranked by the U.S. Census Bureau as the fourth fastest-growing city in America. Eivens joined as the City's Human Resources Coordinator, after starting her career in H.R. with The University of Texas, one of the largest university systems in the country. She would work her way through Cedar Park's ranks to become the City's Director of Human Resources and Civil Services, Assistant City Manager, and by 2006, City Manager. At the time she and her husband had two small children. Eivens is well aware that her career path to city management is unique, which is why she is committed to maintaining and expanding the culture of recognizing young talent and nurturing it.

City of Cedar Park Business Services Director Daron Butler, who served as Cedar Park's City Manager from 1990 to 1994, says, "I would match Eivens' talent to any management team in the U.S. Together they managed rapid growth with skill and aplomb. Cedar Park has successfully managed a high-growth, high-energy economy with a team developed and led by Eivens. Her skill and commitment to developing talent are the cornerstone of the City's success."

Teaching the Profession

Eivens is keen to the quiet crisis of not enough new qualified professionals to step into the shoes of the generation of experienced executives who are retiring from the municipal government field at an alarming rate. That is part of why her unwavering commitment to developing new talent goes far beyond the foundation and walls of City Hall and into the classrooms of the prestigious Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, where each semester she teaches a new generation of aspiring government professionals. Eivens openly discusses her experiences about leading local government, covering as many operational topics possible. She shares both the rewarding and challenging aspects of her job. By doing so, she makes many young people aware of the deep career satisfaction and personal fulfillment that can come from leading a local government an exciting time of innovation and change.

One of Eivens' Masters of Public Affairs students, Roger Gonzalez, says that before taking her class he had not considered local government as a place to start his public service career.

"I had only a faint idea about what a city manager does," Gonzalez said. "Theory is great but I what I wanted was a candid discussion of what it takes to successfully manage a city. I can honestly say that Brenda changed my life – academically and professionally. Here, we had a practitioner who didn't tell us what city management is like but showed us through real-world examples and experiences. Brenda's guidance and mentorship was invaluable. Because of her, I looked into local government fellowships and am now part of the ICMA Local Management Fellowship. I hope I can make her proud when I am at the helm of a city. I can't thank her enough for all of her lessons and for being the best role model for us newcomers."

Changing statistics - one person at a time

In addition to opening young minds in the classroom, Eivens is especially opening doors to young women. Just one example is now-Assistant City Manager Katherine Woerner Caffrey, who came to the City of Cedar Park as an Assistant to the City Manager from a Management Analyst position in Little Rock, just two years out of graduate school.

"When I left the City of Little Rock, the opportunity to work for a female city manager was very appealing since there are so few," Caffrey says. "The field of city management is a tough one—and the opportunity to learn from another woman about her perspective in this field was too good to pass up." Within a few years with the City of Cedar Park, Eivens promoted Caffrey several times to take on increased responsibility. She largely credits Eivens' mentorship for growing her into her current position.

"My relationship with Brenda has been one of the most meaningful and influential relationships of my professional life. To say she is a 'mentor' for me is an understatement—she is so much more. She is a mentor, a teacher, a guide, a friend, a leader and a supporter. My growth as a professional manager has largely been driven by Brenda's influence."

Caffrey adds that Eivens' openness and strong sense of self have been the most rewarding part of their relationship.

"As someone young and relatively new to the profession, learning from Brenda, who is incredibly self-aware and open about her successes, challenges, and struggles as a manager, has

been invaluable. Her candid sharing of her experience has taught me a great deal—about guiding communities, working with elected governing bodies and leading a large staff.”

Yet another member Eivens added to her large staff years ago has turned out to defy startling statistics about ethnic minorities in the city management profession: 95.5 percent of city managers are Anglo and less than seven-tenths of a percent are Hispanic. Jose Madrigal is now Deputy City Manager for the City of McKinney, in the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex and was recently named a Young Rising Latino Leader in Dallas by Latino Leaders magazine. It was Eivens who recognized Madrigal's leadership potential early on, when he was serving as Assistant to the City Council for the City of Lubbock. Like Caffrey, Eivens hired Madrigal as Assistant to the City Manager and worked his way up to Assistant City Manager. From Cedar Park he went on to serve as Strategic Services Team Director/Assistant City Manager for the City of Irving – also in the DFW Metroplex – as well as completing the highly competitive Public Executive Institute at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin.

Yet another example of a young person who went on to become a City Manager following Eivens' mentorship is Josh Selleck. Eivens hired him from the City of Kerrville, Texas, where he had held his second municipal government position after finishing graduate school. While he served as the City of Cedar Park's Finance Director, Eivens recognized Selleck's talent and passion for the field. She eventually promoted him to Assistant City Manager, a position he held for more than three years before accepting an opportunity to be City Manager of Kilgore, Texas.

Eivens truly understands that she, as a city management professional, has a great responsibility to develop mid-career and senior-level talent, too. She knows how to leverage experienced professionals to benefit the individual and the entire organization. The most shining example of this is Texas State Fire Marshal Chris Connealy, who previously served as Cedar Park Fire Chief. Eivens was not intimidated that he had recently retired from leading one of the largest fire departments in the country. Instead, he says she challenged him more than what he had experienced as Houston Fire Chief.

"When I retired from the Houston Fire Department, I had a desire to live in Central Texas and Cedar Park had an opening for Fire Chief," Connealy says. "While the desire to live in the Austin area guided me to apply for the position, the decision to work for the City of Cedar Park was due primarily to Brenda. She was HR Director at the time, but I knew that she was destined for bigger things. I was very impressed with her commitment to public service and her passion to make Cedar Park a model city. She is extremely smart and challenges you to be better. I learned quickly that I had to do my research and be prepared for numerous questions to convince Brenda in supporting any project. She challenged me more than what I had experienced in Houston. Her mentorship made me a better leader and manager. Her intellect and excellent human relation skills have served her very well in her career. The decision to leave Cedar Park was very difficult. I was fortunate to previously have the experience of being a big city fire chief before coming to Cedar Park. However, the lessons I learned from Brenda's leadership has taken my skill sets to another level that has served me well as the Texas State Fire Marshal. I have been very blessed to have learned so much from Brenda."

A legacy of teambuilding and teamwork

The examples of talent Eivens has poured into the pipeline over the years and continues to add to it goes on. And while she has demonstrated her commitment to ensuring the next generation of skilled local government executives, she knows that having good people at the helm of our cities benefits not just the Profession but ultimately the communities we serve – and that will be her legacy for the City of Cedar Park, and for the Profession.

MPA student Roger Gonzalez adds, "In a time of immense political polarization and gridlock at the federal and state level of government, local governments are continuing to press forward. At the core of local government is serving others and making each day better for the community. Brenda embodies this essence. At the end of the semester, I approached Brenda and admitted that I hope she would continue to teach the course. Why? Because she is the real deal. She practices what she teaches and understands the importance of bringing along the next wave of public servants. Look at those around her and they are inspired to be better and do good. She does that to people."