



Citizens Above Self

By: Christopher Rath,
NJMMA Treasurer

The Rotary motto is, "Service Above Self." As a Rotarian, I have taken the liberty to revise that motto for this article to "Citizen Above Self." What do I mean by this?

Over the past 30 years as a manager, I have observed many instances, when perpetuating the municipal institution has superseded providing core services to our customers, the citizen. Most citizens do not care about the latest union grievance, a new payroll system, police department vehicle types or that the New Jersey pension system is in serious disarray. The majority of residents worry about their families, jobs and personal issues far beyond their concerns for the municipality. That is, unless they hit a pothole, drive on unplowed streets, feel unsafe in their neighborhood or school, or just received their tax bill. Nor will they differentiate that the Township's portion of the bill which is substantially less than the school's portion.

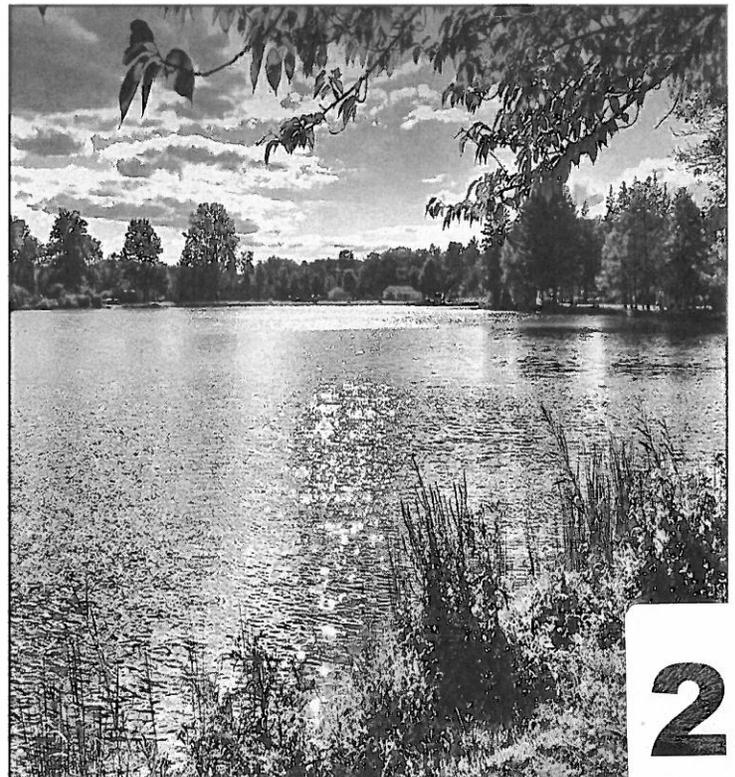
While no professional would dispute the need for a well-run organization and supporting employees within the organization, it is imperative that we focus on the communal good rather than personal issues or "Citizens Above Self." That leads me to observe that the NJMMA has spent a great deal of time focusing on the issue of the deplorable condition of the state's pension fund. We have spent much less time on the deplorable condition of the Transportation Trust Fund.

The infrastructure is the backbone of any strong society and it is crumbling. The Society of Engineers recently gave the State of New Jersey Infrastructure a "D" rating. The

continued underfunding of the state's infrastructure will lead to the demise of any competitive economic advantage New Jersey maintains over other states. I also contend that we, as professional managers, have the expertise and experience in financing and budgeting for capital items. That makes us uniquely qualified to devise and promote a more public position and the fair and appropriate way to finance New Jersey's infrastructure needs.

Development of such a united position will require deliberation and effort. It will also require outreach to our elected officials to develop support in the state legislature. Such effort and positioning will be far better received by our customers/citizens than the continued effort to save our own pensions. In closing, citizens are more concerned if a bridge collapses than if our pension or retirement health benefits are changed; and therefore, my strong opinion is we reconsider our focus to community issues and away from individual concerns.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article as well as those previously written in this column during calendar year 2016 are solely those of the author. They are meant to stimulate discussion and assist the Executive Board when evaluating potential policy positions.



Mark Your Calendars

September 15th – New Brunswick Joint Meeting w/ GFOA

November 15-17 – League of Municipalities Convention, Atlantic City