

MAP names Mary Beth Schmidt as CEO

Mary Beth Schmidt has been named CEO of Midwest Assistance Program, Inc., a nonprofit technical assistance and training organization headquartered in New Prague, Minnesota. Midwest Assistance Program (MAP) serves small, rural communities in a nine state area in regard to managing, operating, upgrading or replacing water, wastewater and solid waste management facilities.

MAP Board Chair John Woodwick said that Mary Beth's knowledge, leadership style and skills were key factors in the 18-person board's decision. "Mary Beth exemplifies the leadership skills our members want running this organization," he said. "She has impressed the members of the board. She is the right person to address the challenges and opportunities we face in the future, and we have a great deal of confidence in her."

Mary Beth has 15 years of experience supporting community development. Prior to joining MAP, she was the vice president for Minnesota Housing Partnership. She has a Masters of Arts degree from Georgetown University in



Mary Beth Schmidt

Washington, DC, and a Bachelor of Arts from the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota.

"The Midwest Assistance Program has been assisting small towns for more than

25 years to protect public health, enable businesses to expand, and help sustain the quality of small town life," Mary Beth said. "MAP has a very impressive track record of helping communities access scarce dollars to overcome infrastructure bottlenecks and to create facilities that are cost effective for the long term. I look forward to working with MAP's staff and local leaders, community by community, to tackle and overcome difficulties," she added.

Last year, Midwest Assistance Program provided technical assistance, training and loans to 760 communities in its nine-state region. MAP's support helped communities leverage over \$55 million in federal, state and local funds to finance new community infrastructure improvements and expansion. MAP focuses on water and wastewater facilities, solid waste management, and helping local leaders build their capacity to maintain basic services for their residents, thereby improving the quality of life. MAP is one of six regional organizations making up the national Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP).

McGrath, Minnesota Mayor is Honored

Mayor Gloria Westling, McGrath, Minnesota was recognized at the national Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) conference on August 24, 2005, in Washington, D.C. for outstanding leadership and commitment to improving the

quality of life in rural communities. She was one of six community leaders in the nation chosen for their leadership in addressing community needs.

Gloria was recognized for helping

McGrath solve its infrastructure problems while working with the Midwest Assistance Program, the Midwestern RCAP. Bill Wilde, rural development

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Letter from MAP's new CEO

I am writing to introduce myself as the new CEO of Midwest Assistance Program. You read in the last edition of WaterLog that longtime CEO, Ken Bruzelius, has retired.

Prior to joining MAP, I served as the vice president of Minnesota Housing Partnership, a statewide nonprofit supporting communities to plan and construct affordable housing. At MHP, I worked with many small towns dealing with the effects of aging infrastructure and demographic shifts while struggling to retain and expand a tax base and hold on to what they value most as a small community.

For eight years I worked for the World Bank, which is part of the United Nations system, to assist urban and rural communities in poor countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Countries struggling to overcome high rates of poverty and poor service delivery were my initial training grounds in working alongside local governments and community leaders to improve water, sanitation, solid waste management and other essential community services.

I grew up on a farm in one of the poorest counties in Iowa and opted to attend an all women's college in central Minnesota –

College of Saint Benedict – for its emphasis on women as leaders in business, government and social justice. I mention my formative years because like you, my family, community and education shape who I am and who I want to be. They also help you understand why MAP's mission to "assist rural communities improve their natural environment and quality of life and to be self-sustaining" is so important to me.

I am extremely fortunate to work alongside the staff and board of MAP as they join with Midwestern community leaders to assess and transcend infrastructure troubles. We are committed to sharing our talents, energy and passion to do good work every day. If we have not met your community's infrastructure needs yet, give me a call and let's get to it.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Beth Schmidt
CEO



K. Bovee

It Is Not Easy Being a Small Community

New and more stringent federal and state regulations require greater levels of technical expertise and place greater financial and technical burdens on small, rural communities. Grant funds are becoming more difficult to obtain so communities look for creative methods of financing projects.

Couple those hurdles along with aging infrastructure, aging and decreasing populations, part-time or volunteer workers, and inadequate technical expertise, small, rural communities need help. Effective solutions in one state may be transferable to another state.

Collaborative Partnerships Work in Nebraska

The Nebraska Environmental Partnerships (NEP) found that collaborative partnerships are the cornerstone of success in working with small communities.

NEP was created in 1994 through the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ). It is a unique, state-coordinated program aimed at helping small towns meet environmental challenges through a team process. By providing resources and technical assistance, communities prioritize risks and find technically and financially feasible solutions. In contrast to the typical governmental approach of establishing mandates and expecting citizens to comply, NEP, a non-regulatory program, establishes partnerships with communities to find customized solutions that will benefit all.

The team members vary depending on the issues being addressed by the com-

Nebraska Facts:

Nebraska is home to 1.7 million inhabitants, and covers approximately 77,358 square miles and two time zones. Of the 532 communities that make up this agriculture-based state, only two (Lincoln and Omaha located in the far eastern part of the state) have populations exceeding 50,000. Of the remaining 530 communities, 499 have populations fewer than 5,000; 417 of these communities have populations fewer than 1,000; and 326 have populations fewer than 500. Six of Nebraska's 93 counties have only one town.

munity, but generally include community officials; consulting engineers; representatives from state and federal agencies; and rural community assistance providers like the Midwest Assistance Program.

Recommendations made by the team are based on the individual community's needs. All meetings are held at the request and convenience of local community leaders. The local leaders determine the extent of the team's involvement, and all decisions remain in the hands of the local community leaders.

A second example, the Water Wastewater Advisory Committee (WWAC), was created in 1997. Its members include the USDA Rural Development, Health and Human Services Regulation and Licensure, Department of Economic Development and Department of Environmental Quality.

WWAC optimizes resources and uses of funding for water and sewer projects; provides the best funding package to a community; and works with communities as a team to assist them in building a project. WWAC members streamlined the

funding process for water and sewer projects by developing a common pre-application for projects under consideration. The community submits one common pre-app to any one of the listed agencies. The funding agencies review the pre-applications and determine the best funding source for that particular project, usually at one meeting. This approach reduces the time required to review and approve projects, and eliminates the community's confusion as to whom to apply to for funding.

These approaches are effective for helping small communities in Nebraska; they might work in your state too. For more information, contact Jackie Stumpff, NEP Coordinator, at 402/471-3193 or Jackie.Stumpff@ndeq.state.ne.us.

*Written by: Jackie Stumpff
NEP Coordinator*

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Midwestern Rural Policy Survey

Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), one of six members of the national Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) network, recently conducted a survey of small, rural towns in its service area to verify infrastructure financing needs and evaluate the severity of the financing gap.

The survey was conducted in the summer of 2005 and covered nine Midwestern states (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming). Mayors, clerks and public utility staff were asked to respond to a set of questions about their community infrastructure needs and the availability of human and financial resources to undertake improvements. Midwest Assistance Program staff continues to mine the data and formulate recommendations for policy makers, but key messages are emerging.

Small towns perceive many needs for infrastructure improvement

Survey results suggested local officials have the greatest concern for meeting water and wastewater system improvement needs. Street improvements ranked as the third most frequently identified unmet need. The fourth ranked priority was economic and business development. Housing ranked fifth in priority among survey respondents.

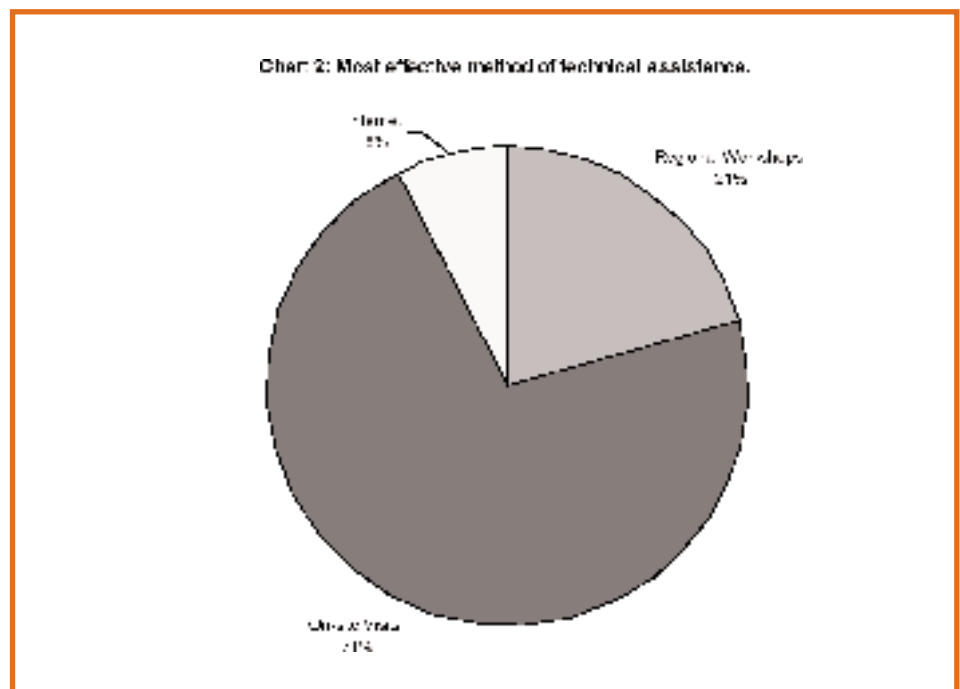
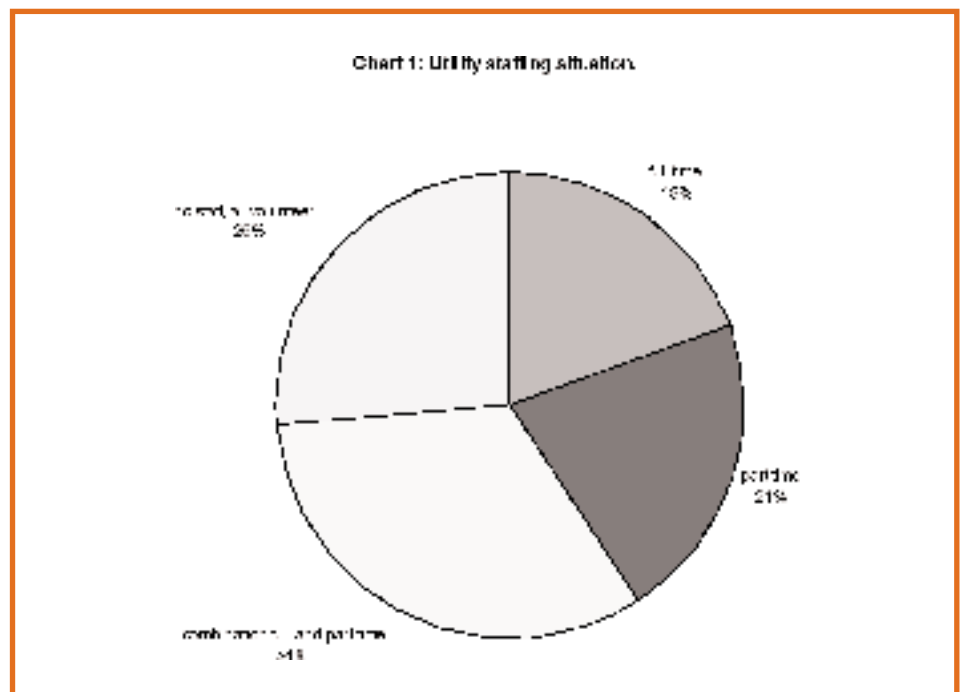
Strong interest in training and technical assistance

Survey responses indicated a strong interest in training and technical assistance prior to launching infrastructure projects. For instance, when asked if local officials or staff would welcome technical assistance on subjects like "availability of financial assistance," "how to get a project started," and "funding for preliminary engineering services," the answer was "yes" from 96 percent of respondents.

The high affirmative response rate for technical advice could be explained by the fact that many small towns rely on all volunteer or a combination of full time and part time employees for operating and maintaining facilities and planning for capital improvements. Hence, they do not have the availability of highly skilled full-time professionals to identify and advance new projects and locate the financial resources to bring projects to fruition. See Chart 1.

When asked about receiving technical support on a project through workshop training, respondents indicated travel expenses and time away from work impede attendance at one-time events, even though such gatherings foster valuable learning and networking.

A majority of respondents indicated a strong willingness to seek one-on-one technical assistance. Seventy-one percent identified "on-site visits to their community" as the most effective means of helping them prepare and launch their project. See Chart 2.



vey Verifies Financial

Information on federal and state infrastructure financing is in short supply

Survey responses indicated a need for additional information on federal and state financial assistance programs. Over half of the respondents were not certain their local leaders knew of federal and state financial assistance to help with improving or expanding community infrastructure.

Another survey question specifically sought out knowledge of the availability, state by state, of early-on financial assistance for planning, such as partial funding for preliminary engineering. The majority of respondents (59 percent) were not sure if such assistance was available and 93 percent of respondents indicated they thought such financing was reasonably or very important.

Rural communities say they can afford small, low interest loans to finance infrastructure projects

On a question designed to identify what would be considered a reasonable local cost share of an infrastructure improvement or expansion, greater than half (59 percent) of the respondents chose "less than 25%" (of the project cost via a low interest loan), while another third (33 percent) indicated "25-50%" would be an acceptable local share through a low interest loan. The survey responses suggest rural residents will accept a feasible local monetary share and contribute in-kind toward self-improvement.

Small communities value – but lack – long-range planning

Long-range or capital improvement planning is valued by small communities. However, seventy-five percent of respondents indicated their community did not have--or were unaware if they had--a five, ten, or 15-year plan for meeting community needs. It is possible that such a plan existed, but the respondent did not know of it. Interestingly, almost every respondent agreed that long-range planning is helpful.

Telecommunication lends economic and educational benefits to small town life

Appreciation of telecommunications (Internet) in rural communities is high. A significant majority of respondents rated telecommunications as "highly useful" or "moderately useful" to the economic and educational advancement of their community.

The Midwest Assistance Program will continue to analyze responses and compare its findings with results from similar surveys being conducted by other regional RCAP members. Nation-wide conclusions and recommendations are expected in 2006.

*Written by:
Midwest Assistance Program's
Rural Policy Committee*

Gas Prices Put Budgets 'Over a Barrel'

With consumer gasoline prices soaring above what most utilities had bargained for last year when they wrote their annual budgets, many rural water and wastewater systems wonder what the future holds. There is no easy solution, but these tips may help your system conserve vehicle fuel and money.

- A well maintained vehicle, like a properly managed system, will operate smoothly and efficiently well into the future. Stick to a routine vehicle maintenance schedule.
- Slow down. The faster a vehicle travels the more fuel it burns. Each 5 mph over 60 mph is like paying an additional \$0.15 per gallon for fuel.
- Use air conditioners sparingly.
- Check the air pressure in tires regularly. Over or under-inflated tires dramatically reduce fuel efficiency. An Automobile Association of America (AAA) study shows that under inflated

- tires can cut fuel economy by as much as two percent per pound of pressure below the recommended level.
- Make every trip count.
- Lighten the load. Remove unneeded items from your vehicle.
- Idle the engine as little as possible.
- Accelerate slowly when taking off from stop signs.

- Carpool when possible.
- Use the most fuel-efficient vehicles when possible.
- Drive smoothly. Research suggests that good driving techniques can influence fuel efficiency by as much as 30 percent.
- Consider purchasing fuel in bulk when the price is low.

Higher Gas Prices = Big Pain in the Budget

The best way to combat high fuel prices, and other unforeseen expenses, is to review and strengthen your system's financial planning. Then, your system is not overwhelmed when unplanned financial needs arise. Many state and federal sources are recommending that utilities cushion their fuel budgets by an additional 20 to 30 percent over the next year to meet the rising cost of fuel.

If your system would like assistance in budgeting, rate setting or financial planning, call the Midwest Assistance Program rural development specialist nearest you. See the directory on page 7.

Quietly Helping Rural Communities Across the Nation

Editor's Note: The following article is submitted by the Community Resource Group, Midwest Assistance Program's sister agency and southern partner in the national Rural Community Assistance Partnership. Their service area includes Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.

Having ordered an extra practice following an especially humiliating loss, Vince Lombardi held aloft the pigskin-clad ball and announced to some of the most successful players in the country, "Gentlemen, this is a football."

Sensing that his team had become distracted from what wins games, he sought to remind his defeated players of the very basics of the sport. Having spent a lifetime on the gridiron, he recognized that it would require a firm grasp of the fundamentals to achieve victory, leading the legendary coach to urge his team—take the ball and run with it—don't stop until the goal line is behind you.

No one knows the full extent of the loss faced by the farming and fishing communities that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. But within hours, the national Rural Community Assistance Partnership's (RCAP) network of assistance providers was quietly dedicating their time and resources to help these struggling communities.

First, by helping restore water and wastewater systems to operational status before turning their collective resources toward the effort to provide permanent shelter for the thousands of rural families who were left homeless by this devastating storm.

With more than 1,000 water systems knocked offline and federal officials predicting that it might take weeks, if not months, before drinking water would be restored to the hardest hit regions of the nation's Gulf Coast, RCAP took its cue from Lombardi's playbook, quickly huddling its team and devising a play.

Take to the field—do what it takes to help these communities recover. Whether



Photo by Bruce Darr, CRG

Hurricane Katrina nearly completely destroyed this home owned by Fay Lee in southeast Pearl River County, Mississippi. Lecil Lee (Fay's brother) with Kendall Lee (Lecil's son), and Neal Miller (Lecil's nephew) are removing salvageable items. The house was built by Fay and Lee's parents. Fay took shelter at a neighbor's home during the storm.

in the form of short-term financial assistance or expert technical and managerial help for rural utilities damaged by the storm, the RCAP network was in the game.

Within hours of Hurricane Katrina's landfall, field staff from across the RCAP network were in the field helping rural water systems survey storm damage, assess needs and begin the painstaking job of returning to service.

Working outside of the media glow that surrounded the region's metropolitan areas, members of the RCAP network reached out to hundreds of community water and wastewater systems. The teams provided whatever help they could from technical assistance to electrical generators to an understanding shoulder to lean on in communities from Dauphin Island, Alabama to St. Tammany parish, Louisiana.

Armed only with sleeping bags and a trusty can of "bug dope," RCAP's Mississippi State Coordinator, Tommy Ricks, and his staff spent the days fol-

lowing the tragic storm providing assessment and sampling services for 82 rural water systems that the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) had not heard from since the storm--systems that the MSDH knew did not have access to emergency generators.

In addition to the expert technical assistance, managers from RCAP's southern partner, Fayetteville, Arkansas-based Community Resource Group, Inc, answered the call of state officials to assist in the relief coordination effort across the state of Mississippi.

While many systems across the storm-ravaged area remain damaged and will not be able to make a final run into the end zone for many weeks to come, the RCAP network is committed to helping rural communities across the nation and will remain on the field, offering technical, financial and managerial assistance until the final play is completed.

Submitted by: Matt Gergeni, Community Resource Group

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McGrath, Minnesota Mayor is Honored

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specialist with MAP, said, "Through the entire wastewater project, Gloria has remained determined, resolute, gracious and honest."

Gloria has been working on a wastewater collection and treatment facility for McGrath for more than six years. Project milestones ranged from reviewing RFPs, hiring an engineer, securing financing,

receiving final design plans and specifications, to project construction and, finally, an operational facility.

Gloria has a history of service. As a registered nurse for more than 35 years she provided home care for the county public health department and as a surgical nurse for local hospitals. Also, Gloria is a foster parent for 30 children. Gloria has been mayor of McGrath for nearly six years.

McGrath is a small rural community located about 100 miles north of the Twin Cities. It was a logging/lumbering town and is now home to about 80 households.

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