

The Public Services Complex ribbon cutting/open house March 14, 2003 was a great event for Collierville, especially for Bill Kilp, Public Services Director, and the rest of his department. It was also a great meeting for Jerry Collins, TCAPWA West Tennessee Branch Director, City of Memphis PW Director, and the West Tennessee Branch of the TCAPWA. The complex, located at 500 Keough Road, includes a 12,000 square foot Administration Building and a 12,000 square foot Fleet Services Building. The Administration Building houses offices for both Public Utilities and Public Works Divisions, with a conference room, crew-gathering areas and break rooms, a technical support area, and the town's sign shop. The Fleet Services Building includes 10 service bays, an oil change pit, a 2,300 square foot parts storage room, a reference library, and an exterior wash bay.

The event also took an inspirational turn with the advent of the luncheon speakers. Attendees were very fortunate to have the opportunity to hear remarks from guest speakers Richard Ridings, APWA Past President, and Bob Freudenthal, Public Works Director for the City of Paducah, Kentucky, and Region III APWA Director. Both of these long time and well-respected public works professionals addressed the themes of vision, public service, and heroism.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish . . . ” (Pro. 29:18)

Bob Freudenthal related the opening of the new facility to vision, the vision of the leadership of the Public Services Department, and the vision of Collierville's elected leaders. Richard Ridings expanded on Bob's vision theme, relating his public works career beginnings of reporting to work at the “old mule barn” that was the public works facility for his hometown, literally an old converted mule barn, and contrasting it with the state of the art public works facility where we were sitting.

They both remarked on the vision that allows public works to be poised to respond to disasters, both natural and man-made, as well as deliver the every day Public Service that makes our communities livable. Richard called the Public Works employee his “everyday hero.” We know that the fire, police, EMT's, and other “first responders” are spotlighted as heroes, but the public works employee is a hero in his/her own right, also. The other first responders could not be very effective if public works did not maintain passable streets and effective drainage. Further, it was noted that, in most cases, if you put a firefighter or a police officer on a backhoe after a flood or other disaster, odds are, they wouldn't be very effective. That is part of Public Works' mission, usually after the other first responders and the news crews have gone.

Public Works makes other contributions as well. The largest increase to the average human life span in this country is not attributable to the medical profession, but, rather, to Public Works, through safe and reliable public water supply, sanitary sewage service, and proper solid waste collection and disposal. Richard also stated that, as far as contributing to the economy in this country, for every \$1 billion dollars spent on public works projects, 42,500 people are put to work.

Public Works is a calling. Public Service professionals are part of a brotherhood (and sisterhood) that cannot generally be said to be motivated by financial gain or glory, for both of these are usually not abundant, rather, there is that personal satisfaction that comes from public service. Those who feel the call to public service know that satisfaction, and they are the ones that are inspired to stay in the public service arena.

Occasionally that service is recognized and appreciated. Richard said that in Collierville the recognition and appreciation of Collierville's leadership, Mayor Linda Kerley, and the Board of Aldermen, as well as the recognition and appreciation of Collierville's citizenry are reflected in the new Public Services Complex. The elected officials, said Richard, would not have sold the bonds to build the state-of-the-art facility if they did not recognize and appreciate the contribution of the everyday heroes of Public Works. The Citizenry would not have supported the elected officials in this multimillion-dollar financial obligation if they did not also recognize and appreciate the contribution provided by these employees not just in times of emergency, but also the job that they do day-in, day-out, that makes Collierville such a livable community. This appreciation has been translated into a complex that gives these workers a place to report to work at that is a far cry from "the old mule barn", or "the old tractor shed", or the "street garage." The Public Services Complex gives these public servants a wonderful work environment that they can take pride in, as well as a concrete symbol of appreciation from those they serve.

Richard shared that Public Works employees like those in Collierville, rose to meet a historical challenge on and after 9-11 in New York City. In addition to the massive clean up efforts and infrastructure repair and restoration that Public Works responded to, not one scheduled municipal solid waste pick up or street cleaning was missed or delayed. All public works services were maintained during this period in a business as usual manner. Public Works rose to the challenge, and acquitted themselves as heroes also.

And as Richard stated, Public Works professionals are his "everyday heroes," and he saluted them.

These sentiments were echoed at the meeting and are echoed here.

Richard and Bob were both quite inspirational; they both made you feel proud to be involved in public service.

Now, more than ever, our nation will be in need of those who answer the call to public service, both abroad and here at home, every day, in the public works arena.