

## Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award in Memory of Buford M. Watson, Jr.



DEE F. BRUEMMER

*ICMA's Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award, which commemorates former ICMA President Buford M. Watson, Jr., is presented to a local government management professional who has made significant contributions toward excellence in leadership while serving as an assistant to a chief local government administrator or department head. Another Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award in Memory of Buford M. Watson, Jr., goes to Dee F. Bruemmer, assistant city administrator of Davenport, Iowa.*

Mightier than the Mississippi. You would think that would be enough to secure the ICMA Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award for Dee Bruemmer. But holding back

the most powerful natural force on the continent in the spring of 2001 is just one of a myriad of reasons why Ms. Bruemmer deserves recognition. A mainstay of Davenport city government for 20 years, Ms. Bruemmer's stellar performance during the flood of 2001 was in reality a drop in a bucket overflowing with professional achievement.

Dee Bruemmer (then Fischer) joined the city of Davenport in 1981 as the administrative assistant to the city administrator. From the start, her extraordinary competency and personal commitment to the highest ideals of governance marked her for a distinguished record of public service.

Through her two decades with Davenport, Ms. Bruemmer rose through the ranks, serving as acting city administrator twice and acting in two positions at once several times. In January 1994, she was tasked with leading the consolidation of nine divisions into a reorganized department of public works, putting her at the helm of a 300+ person department even as she retained all her duties as assistant city administrator.

She was still serving in this dual role when one of the worst floods on record threatened the community of Davenport in May 2001. With a vacancy in the city administrator position, Ms. Bruemmer led Davenport's response. For 35 days, Ms. Bruemmer headed the city's emergency plan, coordinating work among the National Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and several city departments. Armed with years of experience and a purposeful style, she seemed always to be several steps ahead of the river to hold it at bay. She worked with

volunteers sandbagging at night and met with high-level federal officials during the day. One local newspaper account described her role: "She walked the dikes, logged long, weary days and served as the city's spokeswoman, both inside and out, appearing on all the major television networks and in major newspapers across the nation."<sup>1</sup>

As the flood subsided, Ms. Bruemmer almost immediately began an extensive review of the city's preparedness and response in an effort to be even better prepared the next time the river rises.

During her 20 years with Davenport, Ms. Bruemmer has navigated the politics of the city and community through five city administrators, 57 aldermen and mayors, and hundreds of employees. Even while doing double duty, she has excelled. Knowledgeable; focused; determined; creative; energetic; visionary: Regardless of who is writing about her, these are the terms they use. "She is a public servant extraordinaire," says the former Davenport library director. "She's selfless. She puts herself out there, on the line. She has the good of the city of Davenport at heart."<sup>2</sup>

In 1981, in response to a questionnaire the city used as part of its recruitment process, Ms. Bruemmer wrote that she was interested in moving to Davenport because "it would be a place to be proud to be from." Through two decades of selfless dedication, Dee Bruemmer has made Davenport just that kind of place. ♣

<sup>1</sup> Alma Gaul, "Doing the Public's Work," *Quad City Times*, May 16, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Alma Gaul, *ibid.*