

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



J. ROLANDO BONO

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. This year, J. Rolando Bono, deputy city manager of San Antonio, Texas, is one of two recipients of the Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award.

Every organization wants a “go to” person: someone with negotiating skills, an ability to troubleshoot, and a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. Someone who appreciates technology and how it should—and should not—be used to enhance efficiency, productivity,

and effectiveness. Someone who has a sincere interest in the professional development of staff and the ability to motivate others.

Someone like J. Rolando Bono.

Since joining the city of San Antonio as assistant to the city manager in 1977, Mr. Bono has been promoted to assistant city manager in 1980 and to deputy city manager in 2001. There are few departments he hasn't supervised during his 24-year tenure. Between 1991 and 1998, he had day-to-day operational oversight over the entire city organization. He currently has direct or indirect oversight of a number of key departments, including police, fire/EMS, emergency management, parks and recreation, environmental services, and housing and community development. He also provides staff support for the city council and its committees, and serves as acting manager in the city manager's absence.

In August 2000, Mr. Bono began the process of developing the Council Action Team (CAT), a new program designed to address council members' concerns about service delivery and accountability. Made up of five talented individuals who had exhibited exceptional customer service skills and a broad knowledge of interdepartmental skills, CAT aims to facilitate communications between neighborhood groups and city departments. Team members respond to calls from citizens, attend neighborhood association meetings, and take proactive steps to anticipate and resolve problems.

Rather than holed up in a city office, CAT members spend most of their time in the neighborhoods they serve. Cruising the neighborhoods in city vehicles and armed with cell phones, wireless laptop computers, PDA's, alpha-pagers,

and digital cameras, the CAT team reports on problems regarding traffic signs and signals, graffiti, dead animals, potholes, code compliance, and a host of other issues that affect community quality of life.

Mr. Bono's accomplishments go beyond his work with the city government. His commitment to the community he serves translates into ongoing volunteer work with a number of community organizations. In 1979, he played a key role in establishing the Urban Management Assistants of South Texas (UMAST), which continues to provide educational opportunities for professionals in local government and to assist them in the pursuit of their career goals.

Mr. Bono also has served in a number of leadership positions at ICMA, the Texas City Management Association, and other professional associations.

Today, Mr. Bono continues to perform his duties with distinction and professionalism. When the federal government closed Kelly Air Force Base, Mr. Bono played a key role, successfully overseeing the transition of the base into a new, private-sector “multimodal” distribution and industrial center. He also has been instrumental in improving emergency preparedness and response, a particularly daunting responsibility in the aftermath of September 11 and subsequent reports about San Antonio's vulnerability to terrorism.

Mr. Bono has been recognized numerous times over the years for his achievements. Most notably, he has received the San Antonio Start Award for his dedication to customer service and the 1997 UMAST Public Service Award. The 2002 Assistant Excellence in Leadership Award can now be counted among his long list of honors. ♣