

International Award in Memory of Orin F. Nolting



JOHN W. LAWTON

ICMA's International Award, established in memory of Orin F. Nolting, recognizes a local government and its chief administrator for furthering the cause of international understanding and cooperation by successfully adopting a program from another country; becoming actively involved in exchanges, sister-city activities, or educational/cultural activities with another country; or establishing a relationship with a local government from another country that resulted in innovative, concrete management improvements. The recipient of this year's International Award is John W. Lawton, city manager of Great Falls, Montana.

In the summer of 1999, John W. Lawton, city manager of Great Falls, Montana, received a call from ICMA inquiring whether he would be interested in participating in ICMA's Resource Cities Program. ICMA was looking for a U.S. city to match with the city of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. That telephone call dramatically changed two local governments located on opposite sides of the globe.

Mr. Lawton not only convinced a doubtful staff and lukewarm governing body of the benefits of participating in the Resource Cities Program, he also opened the minds and hearts of Great Falls to a people as distant culturally as they are physically. Mr. Lawton became totally immersed in the prospect of making a difference in a city struggling with serious health and safety issues, high unemployment, and numerous social problems.

Despite the communication challenges fueled by geographical distance, economic vitality, and political outlook, the city of Great Falls made many strides in achieving the objectives of the Resource Cities Program: building the capacity of the local government, establishing and strengthening access to information and expertise, and accelerating the development process.

The tangible outcomes included the completion of a water supply plan, a wastewater treatment plan, and a multiyear solid waste collection and disposal plan. In a process unprecedented in most Kyrgyzstan communities, the plans were reviewed and discussed at an open meeting attended by 250 citizens. As part of the tasks outlined in the

plans, several open dumping sites in Naryn were cleaned up and replaced by centralized containers. Showing support for its new partner city, the community of Great Falls raised funds to purchase two garbage trucks to help Naryn's efforts.

In addition to the formal outcomes of the partnership, the relationship between Great Falls and Naryn led to other opportunities for members of the two communities, including a student exchange program between the University of Great Falls and the University of Naryn, ongoing correspondence between elementary school classrooms, and the invitation for Great Falls Symphony Chinook Winds Quartet to visit Naryn in 2003.

Local government professionals recognize that they learn from other communities. Mr. Lawton plans to continue his commitment to this ideal by accepting a six-week assignment in Kazakhstan. His curiosity and motivation to learn from others has enriched his leadership abilities, as well as those of the people he works with at home and halfway across the globe.

Mr. Lawton's leadership not only resulted in teaching the process of democratic government to the city of Naryn, it also fostered personal relationships built one person at a time. Cheryl L. Patton, assistant city manager of Great Falls, writes, "We learned that a smile means the same thing regardless of ethnicity or religion; that a joke can build bridges across language barriers; that a shared song or dance crosses all borders; and that human beings sharing this planet have more commonalities than differences." ♣