

# Experienced Employees Enable Peoria to Weather Downturn

## Pride, Professionalism of City Workers Crucial to Municipal Belt-Tightening

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One of Peoria's local newspapers recently published a nicely written profile of Mike Brewer, the city's construction projects coordinator, who has used his own initiative to help the city save money and reduce its environmental footprint. On top of that, Mike found and obtained grant money so that he and a number of his colleagues can receive advanced training in sustainable construction.

Mike is an exemplary public servant, but he is hardly alone among Peoria's municipal work force. From the solid waste drivers who report when something is amiss in a neighborhood, to the department staffers who organize free classes for the public, to the Fire official who performs free home-safety inspections for the elderly, city employees regularly provide residents with the highest level of service.

As Peoria has tightened its belt over the last couple of years, we are pleased to have found a way to balance our budget without cutting any core services, raising any taxes, resident fees or utility rates, or laying off a significant number of employees. Truthfully, we are in much better shape than many of our neighbors.

And yet I occasionally hear uncharitable voices ask why we haven't laid off more people – as if public employees somehow have been insulated from the tough economic times. Well, they haven't.

For starters, Peoria has eliminated more than 100 positions for fiscal years 2010 and 2011. It's just that most of them were vacant thanks to attrition, retirement or buyout. Of the 59 jobs targeted for elimination in FY2011, 52 were vacant. That left seven people, whom we put in other vacant positions that needed to be filled.

These reductions have been at all levels, including the top, where we've shed a deputy city manager and two department directors.

As these jobs have disappeared, of course, the remaining employees have taken on additional work in order to maintain services to the public – services with which most of you are pretty happy, according to our recent citizen surveys.

Peoria is heavily invested in its employees, whose training, expertise and local knowledge have enabled them to do more with less. In fact, it was these very people who identified much of the savings we have wrung from the city budget in the last two years.

So shed your stereotypes of municipal workers – or your biases from dealing with their federal, state or county counterparts. Local government, by necessity, is much more in tune with its constituents. Most people who work for the city are true public servants, and I am proud to call them my colleagues.

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