



LETTERS FROM THE LEAGUE

League Membership,

We are excited to publish our fourth edition of the *Letters from the League*, a semi-annual digital publication of articles submitted by our CMEC graduates. We currently have 23 individuals who have completed the certification process and have 4 more candidates expected to graduate in January. These candidates have submitted their essays and will complete their interview while at the Symposium. Speaking of the Symposium, we hope you all have submitted your registration to attend the Footing Academy and/or the Symposium which is to be hosted in Asheville, North Carolina on January 19-22, 2020. With the topics scheduled, there is sure to be a good exchange of information during the educational sessions, round table discussions, facility tours and this year there is even an opportunity to visit the Biltmore! Networking with your peers is always a highlight. If you haven't yet registered there is still time. [Click here](#) for the link to the registration form as well as information on hotel reservations and shuttles. Don't forget to factor in the all new *Demo Palooza* which consists of sponsor product and equipment demonstrations when booking your flight!

In this edition, you will find a couple of articles on Professional Development as well as an article on Growing With Your Facility. The first is a review of the Symposium session presented by Amanda Blair and the second is an inspiring article written by Joe LaFollete. The third article presented by Matt Casey discusses his challenges as he moves forward with facility improvements at Wills Park. All provide some great information causing one to think and self-reflect. Professional development and an eye on the future are some of the main reasons we attend conferences such as the Symposium! It's just a few weeks away and we look forward to seeing each of you there! Wishing you all a very happy holiday season!

The League Education Committee

Professional Development by Amanda Blair

By: Jennifer Bexley, CMEC

The 2019 League of Agricultural and Equine Center's Annual Symposium kicked off Monday morning with an inspiring presentation from Amanda Blair, Chief Operating Officer with Expo Square in Tulsa, Oklahoma on Professional Development.

Amanda, who is extremely enthusiastic and passionate about her job, has been with Expo Square since 2005. In that time she has seen quite a few changes. Due to operational

changes, their staff has gone from 108 people in 2008 to 42 people today. The presentation emphasized you can make a difference, motivate your staff and create a team approach regardless of the size of the organization or the size of the budget. A difference can be made even with no budget.

At Expo Square, their professional development is based upon a team approach they call "Link to Last." Every employee is a "Link" in their organization. This program is the foundation of how Tulsa State Fair has evolved. The approach can be adapted to any organization, big or small. Any organization can determine their own name for the program; it need not be "Link," it can be whatever inspires the team. In the end, it all comes down to showing respect for your employees and having the right culture so everyone is willing to do anything. You must believe in your staff.

For Expo Square, Teamwork equals LINK work. The "L" stands for "Listen and Communicate Courteously;" the "I" stands for "Inspire Memories;" the "N" stands for "Never Say No;" and the "K" stands for "Know your Stuff."

Buy-in by the staff is essential for the professional development program to succeed. Not only do the employees need to understand the program, they must also be able to communicate it. Some ideas to keep the program forefront in the mind of staff members can include team badges and signage in key locations such as on doors, elevators, breakrooms and mail room. Training programs and videos can be developed. Regular training sessions are important and can be as easy as a "lunch and learn." Food is always a good motivator. Amanda suggested pizza parties, quarterly lunch and learns, family activities, baseball games and an occasional stipend to employees as excellent motivational tools. The key is to keep building on the program and each year add another layer of focus.

For any organization, it is important to have everyone going toward the same goals. As a leader, you should determine what values are important to you and to your organization. A useful technique to make certain the program is understood by the team is to ask what it means to them. Give your staff something to focus around to move toward those goals.

Of course there are times when some team members lose sight of the goals. Leaders must prepare for disagreement and determine what barriers are causing the conflict. It is important to let the group discuss any issues openly so that everyone is part of the process. Sometimes we all have to take a step back to take a step forward.

At the end of the day, everyone wants to feel respected and they want to feel as though they are treated fairly. With that, employees will be happy, motivated and the work culture will be going in the right direction.

Bottom line...to have a true Team...it starts with you. Amanda's motivational conclusion was "Be Inspired, Be Present and Be Awesome."

Am I giving 100% or just making the doughnuts?

By: Joe LaFollette, CMEC

In this world of time clocks where we punch in and punch out it is easy to become just another spoke in the wheel. A person can easily get stuck in the day to day monotony of work and life. I relate it to the fable of the frog in boiling water. The idea that you become comfortable on your lily pad as the water becomes warmer you settle in. Slowly it continues to get hotter and hotter until you are boiled alive. This can be the same in many facets of our lives, we get comfortable or settled in our positions and don't think outside of the box. If you were to take the time to look around you and realize that maybe a change is needed or is it time to create your own professional development plan.

Years ago, there was a Duncan Doughnuts commercial of the guy that made the doughnuts. He hit his alarm clock and say's "time to make the doughnuts" in a dreary tone, they show this repeatedly over and over again. Eventually he meets himself returning from making the doughnuts as he is leaving. Rain, sleet or snow he "made the doughnuts." The saying, "put in your eight and go home" is a popular term but why would you settle for that. Don't just be

happy to *have* a job, be happy *with* your job. If you are not, then you should try to find a way to make it better or maybe it's time to stop making the doughnuts and start making a better life for yourself.

How do you do this? Start by evaluating what you do each day. Do you find value in what you are doing? There is value in every position even if it doesn't seem like it; once you look for the value instead of complaining it can change your entire perspective. Your attitude change can even help your health and the happiness of everyone around you. Poor attitudes are a disease in the work place; it can bring the entire staff down. No one wants to be around the complainer or the person with the bad attitude.

Do not settle, look for positive change. Are you happy with your job but there are aspects of it that you don't like? How can you take the aspects you do not like and make them better? As an employer you should keep an eye out for slumped shoulders and poor attitudes. Engage these employees and ask if they are happy, or at least fully understand their job so you can "walk in their shoes" so to speak. You might be surprised how easy it can be to bring moral up by some simple changes. Help your staff cross train or help them with continued education in what they are doing or would like to do. Maybe they can move up to a position they didn't know was a possibility. Zig Ziglar once said, "The only thing worse than training employees and losing them is not training them and keeping them." The potential loss of dollars invested in employee development pales in comparison to the certain productivity loss inflicted by a mediocre workforce.

Are you giving 100% or are your employees giving 100%? Imagine a place where everyone was happy to be there at least for the most part. Make changes for the positive if you can. Always try to make the best of your situation whenever you can. I never understood why people settle and assume that this is all there is for them. Just look forward to Friday and quitting time. If you feel this way, then it IS quitting time! What do you really want to do? Go for it, make a professional development plan, you might find that in the process you find happiness in what you do. You might find a new lease on life knowing you are changing your course in a direction that works better for you. No more punching in and checking out! Make goals, challenge yourself to achieve them, never settle or hang your head in defeat. You will get bucked off from time to time like the saying goes. Dust yourself off and get back on, never quit trying to succeed.

What if, instead of accepting your lot in life, you took your development into your own hands? What if, instead of sliding back and settling in, you took the initiative and began to grow *yourself* as a professional? What if you could set yourself apart from the rest of the field with little more than a few hours per week of intentional self-investment? Ask yourself, am I giving 100% or just making the doughnuts?

Growing With Your Facility

By: Matt Casey, CMEC

I have always enjoyed my contacts and common stories shared at The League symposiums. I would always look forward to the presentation of new facilities being designed or older ones receiving some much needed improvements throughout the years. Equestrian center redesign was always a wish for Wills Park but not quite a reality once the budgets were approved. Or so I thought.

The City of Alpharetta's downtown area has continued to grow at an incredible pace. The newest challenge for me was to focus on connectivity from the City's downtown district to the park. This tremendous growth has led to a big push to not only to embrace the parks history but prepare us for a new standard of event facilities moving into the future. It was determined that it was time to update the Master plan for Wills Park to include the Equestrian center.

And so the journey began. We enlisted the help of a park design firm as well as Populous. The knowledge I gained from the League helped guide me in the right direction.

From that knowledge I insisted that the design of the Equestrian center needed to be completed by an Equestrian venue specialist. We had one shot at getting the Equestrian center redesign correct and I didn't want to mess it up. We knew we wanted to update stabling, add an additional show arena, and focus on enhancing the overall user experience at our events. At the end of the day our property footprint was not going to grow allowing for a vast expansion. We also couldn't shut down operations and events for a lengthy construction overhaul. I thought to myself "How am I going to navigate through this process alone?"

The truth is you have to enlist some help which believe it or not was difficult for me. As the facility manager I felt like I knew best for the park and how improvements need to be made. I realized pretty quick that was the wrong approach and needed to get out of my own way. I had to adjust and be more flexible in my thought process. When dealing with the local political climate, business owners, and general public you will soon realize your need for an advocacy group. I was able to form an Equestrian Advisory Committee which consisted a few selected members of our local equine community. I had a member of our City Council and Recreation commission on the committee as well. We also formed a Foundation in which proceeds raised would go specifically to the Equestrian center and not the overall General Fund. This Foundation is to be the private fund raising arm for Wills Park Equestrian center.

Through multiple public meetings, focus groups, and design studies I was able to get our Masterplan concepts approved by our City Council prior to the first of the year. These concepts will be instrumental in fundraising and promoting that Public/Private partnership to grow the facility. I have only made it through the design phase of the process. I'm looking forward to the hurdles of construction but that's another story. Moving into 2019 we as facility managers should feel excited on what the future holds for our industry. I speak for myself when I say great things are yet to come.

Thank you for taking the time to read our fourth edition of the
Letters from the League!

[Click here](#) for more information about the CMEC Program.

SEE YOU IN JANUARY!

The Winter League Footing Academy 101 - January 17-18, 2020

The League Symposium 2020 - January 19-22, 2022

[Click here](#) for the Tentative Footing Academy/Symposium Schedule

Looking to explore Asheville while you are there? [Click here!](#)



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