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## Departments

### MPA alum returns to Delaware as Newark city manager

When the Newark, Delaware, city manager retired from his position after 21 years of service, it presented a challenge and an opportunity, not only for the city but also for Kyle Sonnenberg.

Sonnenberg was chosen as the clear favorite from three final candidates to succeed Carl Luft as city manager, and he began in his new post on November 1, 2008.

Since receiving his master of public administration degree from the University of Delaware, Sonnenberg had served for 28 years in a variety of municipal settings—from a large metropolitan city (Dallas, Texas) to suburban (McKinney, Texas) to more of a small retirement community (Southern Pines, North Carolina) to a city largely comprising military families (Fayetteville, North Carolina).

One of the things Sonnenberg likes about working in municipal administration is variety, so it seemed only natural to him not to seek a new job within a city of the same or similar community profile. "I always wanted to live in a university community," he says. Having spent his whole career in the south, he adds, "Plus, I grew tired of the heat and humidity, and my parents live in Malvern, Pennsylvania."

What excites him most about being a city manager are the possibilities to make a difference for people. "I've always had an interest in public issues. My father worked for a private corporation his whole career. That would not interest me at all! I value things that governments do. We're impacting people's daily lives, and that's why I'm in this line of work." Knowing what he does about the real need for committed public officials in this country, Sonnenberg wishes more citizens would get involved at this level of public service.

Not that being a city manager these days is a picnic—far from it. Like most other communities in this current recession, Newark faces huge fiscal challenges. But the biggest challenge he sees is more philosophical. "In general, I believe the biggest challenge is the disconnect [in the public's mind] between the cost to provide services and the services they [the public] receive."

Balancing resources and expenditures is becoming paramount. Sonnenberg insists that Newark's resources are not keeping pace with the services the city is providing its residents. So, from his perspective as Newark's city manager, he will be looking to place more emphasis on economic development and building up the tax base and less emphasis on the utility systems paying the bills.

Reflecting on his master's program at Delaware, in which his concentration was Urban Management and Personnel Management, Sonnenberg said the most valuable course he took while here was a land-use law course. "Little did I know at the time that I'd be so involved in land use."

Grateful for the full University Fellowship he received to come here for his graduate degree, he credits several of his



Kyle Sonnenberg is city manager of [Newark, Delaware](#).

professors, including Jeff Raffel, Jerome Lewis, and then–adjunct faculty Henry Folsom for the quality education. He fulfilled his internship requirement at the Philadelphia Zoo, a position that Lewis helped him secure.

Raffel says of Sonnenberg, "He was always a great student. He and another student were instrumental in helping us shape the management decision-making course [in the MPA curriculum]."

Sonnenberg, who has been continually supporting the MPA program since the early '80s, received the CHEP Outstanding Alumni Award in 2003. He has also received three awards from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). He is a 1979 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of The College of William and Mary, and graduated from the MPA program at the University of Delaware with a 4.0 GPA.

He is a member of ICMA, the Delaware Association for Public Administration, and the Congress for the New Urbanism, among others.

When not on the job, Sonnenberg has a variety of hobbies and interests, including mountain biking, stone sculpting, gardening, raising exotic birds, and traveling.

His wife Mary, who's been involved in education, is now an assistant professor at UD's Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood. They have one son, Eric, who recently graduated summa cum laude from William & Mary and is bound for medical school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Mark Deshon  
Assistant Policy Scientist  
Institute for Public Administration  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware  
[deshon@udel.edu](mailto:deshon@udel.edu)

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