

Rita Trapp Wins CPC Leadership Award

Rita Trapp was recently named one of the winners of the 2017 Chapter Presidents Council Leadership Awards.

A 14-year planning veteran with the consulting firm HKGi, Trapp has been heavily involved in the American Planning Association's Minnesota Chapter for years. She has spent the past six as one of the chapter's professional development officers (PDO), and was also the chair of the merchandising committee for the National Planning Conference in Minneapolis in 2009.

As a PDO, Trapp helped the program transition to online reporting, helping develop a process for submitting sessions and in training to log credits. She also helped expand the position to three PDOs to better support the chapter's need for educational sessions throughout the year, conference planning, and AICP prep. Until her resignation as PDO in fall of 2016, Trapp was largely responsible for guiding the conference program committee so the annual conference sessions meet AICP CM requirements.

Planning Minnesota interviewed Trapp to get her views on planning and on training.

Planning Minnesota: Why did you decide to become a planner?

Rita Trapp: My journey to planning wasn't direct. I have always been interested in architecture and geography but didn't necessarily know about planning. In college I had an opportunity to intern in economic development and was able to find a job doing that right after school. That was followed up with a job in a social service non-profit doing grant administration. Realizing that I missed working in the area of buildings and communities, I explored a variety of careers and found an opportunity with HKGi. What attracted me to the private sector was the ability to learn about and work in multiple communities on a variety of projects.

PM: How long have you been the PDO? How did you get involved in the first place?

RT: In the fall of 2010, Jane Kansier and I became co-Professional Development Officers for the chapter. I originally applied because I had been asked by the Chapter President to consider it as he thought it would be something I would enjoy, be good at, and we would have fun working together (Thanks Lance!). The PDO position interested me because it was about continuing education and it primarily involved organizing behind the scenes.

PM: You've been a strong advocate for continuing education in the planning community. Please talk about the importance of continuing education:

RT: Continuing education can be hard to fit in at times but never stops being valuable because our communities and the people we serve are ever evolving. Being proactive in understanding trends and how others are responding is important given the amount of choice people and businesses have in



where they locate and how fast information, both correct and false, currently spreads. I also find continuing education important because there are so many fields that interrelate with planning. Expanding my knowledge of those areas has been important in improving the level of collaboration with professionals from those fields.

PM: Looking back on your planning career, talk about a project or two of which you are proudest, and why:

RT: This one is tough for me – particularly working on long range planning in so many places. I would say that one of the aspects of working as a private sector planner that I appreciate is the ability to be a part of so many communities' evolution. I love getting to know new places and having an opportunity to be involved in so many different types of projects from comprehensive planning to zoning to park and trail planning to grant writing. I am also grateful for the relationships I have been able to build with fellow planners, other city staff, and my long-standing communities. Every once in a while I am stunned to think back to how many individuals and groups in multiple communities I just worked with in one day.

PM: Any career or development advice for young planners?

RT: More than probably they want. Fundamentally though I think it is be your own advocate. I believe that it is up to me and not my employer to advance my career. I recognize that I have been fortunate to have been with a firm that has supported my growth and development as a planner. I do think, however, that much of it has been about me and my ongoing commitment to myself to seek opportunities, whether they are within or outside of my work. Over the years I have tried to be strategic in identifying ways that what is of interest to me can also be of benefit to the firm. For example, early in my career I really wanted to go to the state conference so I sought an opportunity to be a conference speaker. Also early on I noticed that we had lots of planners in our firm volunteering with the state APA chapter so I decided to become involved with the Minnesota Design Team. Other times though what I have been interested in was not directly applicable to my work and I decided to pursue it on my own time and money.