

## **A Tribute to Robert Kipp**

### **By Fellows: Beth Kellar and Don Borut**

Bob Kipp personified the ideals of public administration. He was centered, creative in managing the complexities of public service challenges, and respectful and forceful in supporting full transparency.

He was a wise, reflective, gentle, and unpretentious leader whose advice and wise counsel was valued by his local government management peers, elected officials, and private sector executives. He served as ICMA President in 1978-79 when ICMA released its Future Horizons report with its vision of society and local government in the Year 2000. His speeches were peppered with references to luminaries like Thomas Mann, Charles Kettering, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, John Stuart Mill, and James Madison.

He quoted Thomas Jefferson in one 1978 speech to the National Public Employee Labor Relations Association: "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past."

In his presidential address at the 1979 ICMA Annual Conference, Kipp ruminated over the different philosophies of democracy, saying, "Now democracy means many things to many people. I am not sure what it means but I do know it means far more than some form of public abacus or its approximation." He challenged the profession to recognize that "whatever we consider our future role, it must be suited to a complex, not a simple, concept of democracy."

Before agreeing to serve as the Chair of the ICMA Retirement Corporation, he spent days meeting with an attorney to establish clear operating procedures designed to change the organizational culture. He was explicit about his intentions, stating that board members should engage as if all their meetings were on C-Span. He personified the highest ethical standards and was committed to establishing a culture that adhered to those standards. He described his work as being 'an agent of democracy.'

By every measure he was a Renaissance person; inquisitive with eclectic interests, especially for classical music and opera, annually attending performances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and promoting and bringing world famous performers to Kansas City.

One of Bob's most remarkable skills was his ability to pull together the threads a discussion and articulate recommendations or forge a consensus that was affirmed by all participants. He had exceptional listening skills, never dominating a discussion, but always framing issues in a pragmatic, realistic way so groups could move forward with an action-oriented agenda.

His remarks at ICMA's 1979 Conference can inspire as much today as they did then. "Complex social institutions of urban life require the best talents available if democracy is to prevail."

His concluded, "Take the present and the past and make something better of it."