

Special District Leadership Foundation

### **Special District Administrator Certification**

I was asked to write about my experience involving the Special District Administrator Certification Program sponsored by the Special District Leadership Foundation. I was fortunate to pass the certification examination in April of 2001. However, the experience was more than just passing the examination, I enjoyed the entire process.

Other General Managers questioned me on “why would you do it?” And the answer wasn’t to further my career, or to make more money, or to find another job, it was the challenge itself to see if I was capable of earning this professional certification. It wasn’t easy, certainly not “automatic,” and at times I questioned myself, “Why am I doing this?”

The first step in the process is to qualify for the examination. You need to total 400 points in four areas that includes Professional Experience (Years as General Manager or related Management experience), Continuing Education (Attendance & completion of classes, seminars, conferences, etc.), Community Service, and Higher Education (college degrees). I completed the application and submitted a resume. It had been too many years since I last updated my resume and that in itself was a good task to complete.

The most challenging of the above four areas was the Continuing Education element. Since this program is sponsored by CSDA and CARPD as well as other Special District organizations, the training offered by those organizations was accepted. However, the training from other organizations or professional training agencies had to be properly documented and the training justified for acceptance as Continuing Education points. For Submission, this required research and follow-up with various organizations.

The next step was receiving the acknowledgement that I was eligible to take the examination. Along with this came the “Study Guide.” The Study Guide was extremely comprehensive covering the various examination contents including Policy Development, Legal Requirements, Ethics in Public Service, Strategic Planning, Finance, Public Relations, Personnel, Supervision, Budget & Audit, etc. Each of the areas was described in detail in the Study Guide.

The other major element of the Study Guide was the Reference List. This was an excellent list of books, manuals, and reference materials that have been beneficial to me even after taking the examination. For example, the Public Officials Complete Source Book by Wayne Lemieux is an outstanding reference book that I would highly recommend to any General Manager.

Then of course, was the preparation for the examination that brought back those memories of college days, studying for finals. I did spend significant time and effort in following the study guide, however, what made it more beneficial than those “college finals” was that everything was related to your day-to-day work environment. The materials were applicable to managing an independent special district. Certainly I did my share of “stressing” over the test, but it was a very fair, comprehensive examination...nothing trickery, and it was great to receive the “Congratulations” letter that I passed the examination.

Overall, as I said earlier, it was a great experience...I took it as a challenge and making it through the application process, following the Study Guide, and passing the test made it worthwhile and that was the reward for me.

Bob Berggren  
General Manager  
Pleasant Hill Recreation & Park District