

**2010 ICMA AWARD FOR CAREER EXCELLENCE
IN HONOR OF MARK E. KEANE**

Name of Nominee: Peter H. Vargas, City Manager, City of Allen, Texas

Successfully leading the transition of a rapidly growing city requires vision, patience, passion, and expertise; Peter Vargas exudes these qualities. Throughout his career, Mr. Vargas has established a proven track record of turning fast growing municipalities into high-quality sustainable communities. Everywhere he has served, Mr. Vargas has enhanced the quality of services delivered to the public, increased the financial stability of the respective organizations, implemented infrastructure expansions, planned for the future and empowered employees through his balanced management style.

Mr. Vargas has been the City Manager of the City of Allen since 1999 and has led the City through an unprecedented period of growth and discovery. Allen has been transformed from a semi-rural suburb into a gem of the Dallas Metroplex and one of *Money Magazine's* 20 Best Places to Live in America. During his tenure, the population in Allen has increased almost 95%--from 43,686 to its current 85,000. The city's budget has grown from \$44.9 million in fiscal year 1999 – 2000 to \$142 million in 2009 – 2010. Under Mr. Vargas' management, Allen has invested over \$300 million in capital projects (self-funding over \$45.7 million of those projects), all designed to improve the community's infrastructure and quality of life.

As a full-service City, Allen boasts a wide array of municipal, planning, and community services; over 1000 acres of parks and open space; a busy library, recreational programs and facilities—including a 27-hole golf course, Natatorium, and one of the largest skate and BMX parks in Texas; over 300 miles of streets; and a City owned event center. Additionally, Peter's leadership and vision have resulted in the City being able to weather the affects of recent economic down turns in such a way that the City was able to balance its budget, end each fiscal

year with the targeted level of reserve funds, and lower the tax rate for a 17th straight year without cutting back on any city services.

Mr. Vargas has forged effective working relationships with elected leaders and community members resulting in a clear vision and direction for the City. His uncanny sense of timing and meticulous preparation has enabled him to seize those opportunities that best meet the Council's vision. Some of his more significant accomplishments in Allen include:

- Creation and implementation of a comprehensive land development code, which established clear standards to better manage growth. The improved development standards outlined in the land development code have ensured quality development that reflects the desires and vision of the City Council. As a result, the City of Allen received the "2003 Community of the Year Award" from the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) for the sound planning principles in the Land Development Code, the City's Comprehensive Plan, the Six Cities Trail Plan, and the Parks Master Plan.
- Creation of effective public/private partnerships and use of innovative financing tools to establish Allen as a leader in local economic development. Under his leadership the City has partnered with a number of public and private entities to obtain over \$32,000,000 to privately finance the public infrastructure for Watters Creek, the first resort-style mixed-use development in the State of Texas to be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. (Note: Watters Creek is a Silver Certified LEED building that has received national attention appearing in the *New York Times* and *Women's Wear Daily*) The partnerships and innovative financing ideas have proven scalable as similar incentives have been used to obtain over \$43,000,000 to privately finance the public infrastructure for a second project, The Village at Allen and Allen Event

Center, which are part of the largest commercial development project currently in progress in the U.S. The City of Allen is truly one of Texas' premiere leisure and business destinations.

- Implementation of a strategic planning process which allows the City Council to determine the City's goals and objectives on an annual basis. The goals and objectives then drive the City's budgetary process and priorities. Mr. Vargas is well-respected for his sound fiscal management. During his tenure, the City's General Obligation bond rating has improved from a "BBB+" to an "AA+" and the City of Allen has received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association for eleven consecutive years (and counting).
- To meet the needs of a rapidly growing City, Mr. Vargas has built a responsive, professional organization focused on delivering exceptional customer service. Mr. Vargas has formed a world-class management team that respects him for his calm, direct and consistent management style. Mr. Vargas has empowered his executive team to find and implement innovative practices that effectively realize the City Council's vision while addressing the needs of the citizens they serve. Additionally, he implemented the *Serving with P.R.I.D.E.* Program, an employee reward and recognition initiative that promotes the City's organizational values of **People first** – giving priority to others; **Respect** – treating others with courtesy and dignity; **Integrity** – serving with honesty, trust, and hard work; **Deliver** – fulfilling our commitments while exceeding expectations; and **Excel** – creating an innovative work environment. This program combined with Mr. Vargas' steady leadership has resulted in an atmosphere where employees strive to deliver high quality work and exceptional customer service because they are dedicated to living the P.R.I.D.E. values. People truly love to work for the City of Allen.

Before joining the City of Allen, Mr. Vargas served as the Executive Director of the City of Dallas' Trinity River Corridor Project. In that capacity, he established the new Trinity River Corridor project office reporting directly to the City Manager; collaborated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in developing a plan to reduce costs by \$25 million for the Dallas Floodway Extension Project; and developed the Trinity River Corridor Plan that was adopted by City Council calling for the issuance of \$246 million of General Obligation Bonds. The measure was approved by Dallas voters in May 1998.

Prior to his Dallas experience, Peter served for seven years as the City Manager in Laredo, Texas. Designated as an “All America City” during his tenure, Laredo experienced an average annual growth rate of 24.2% and was the fastest growing city in Texas. Mr. Vargas is credited with improving the city’s financial condition, raising its bond rating and actively improving the city’s capital infrastructure program including significant upgrades to the roads (few streets were paved), sewer, water, and wastewater systems.

During that time, the city embarked on a five-year Capital Improvement Program in 1990 that totaled more than \$55 million for much needed infrastructure improvements. One of the most significant projects included an international bridge called the Laredo-Northwest crossing which involved negotiating an \$11.3 million revolving loan agreement with the Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Turnpike Authority, and the Federal Highway Administration. Mr. Vargas developed cooperative development agreements with regional governments in the United States and Mexico; working with the City of Nuevo Laredo and the state of Tamaulipas on joint projects that improved both cities.

Mr. Vargas began his local government career in the state of Colorado as an Administrative Assistant and later Assistant to the City Manager for the City of Arvada,

Colorado. He later served seven productive years as Assistant City Manager for the City of Englewood, Colorado, before receiving his first appointment as a City Manager in Laredo. Mr. Vargas earned a BA in History and Education from the University of Northern Colorado in 1972 and a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Colorado in Denver in 1978. Mr. Vargas has been an active member of ICMA throughout his career serving from 1987 – 1989 as an At-large Vice President on the ICMA Executive Board and on the 1994 – 1995 Conference Planning Committee. He has also served in various capacities as a member of TCMA. Additionally, Mr. Vargas served twice on the board of directors for the International Hispanic Network.

Prior to his local government service, Mr. Vargas served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, South America, where he worked with the Ministry of Health in environmental sanitation and community development. While in Paraguay, Mr. Vargas developed a dental hygiene program, built a four-room school house, and developed a sanitary well construction program.

Throughout his life in public service Mr. Vargas has been an example of selfless devotion to the ideals of representative democracy and professional management. During his 32-year career in local government, his leadership style has earned him the trust, confidence, and respect of city councils, his peers, employees and the citizens he has served. He has continually met and surpassed the challenges of growing communities with honor and integrity. Mr. Vargas' recent selection as "Public Administrator of the Year" by the North Texas Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration is an acknowledgement of his sustained excellence. Please award Peter H. Vargas ICMA's "Award for Career Excellence in honor of Mark E. Keane."