



#CAMA50

INTERVIEW WITH CAMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JENNIFER GOODINE

For over 17 years, Jennifer Goodine has been at the centre of the Association. One of the first people to jump on board when CAMA moved from Ottawa, ON to Fredericton, NB in 2005, Jennifer started as a volunteer and is now the full-time Executive Director.

Hailing from Taymouth, a rural community north of Fredericton with a population of 600 where “everybody knows your name”, Jennifer worked for 27 years at the City of Fredericton, as a Committee Clerk in the City Clerk’s Office, and then on to be the Office Administrator for the Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer, where she retired in April 2021 to focus just on CAMA. She had the privilege to work under five Fredericton Mayors, two CAOs and four Deputy CAOs.

Since the beginning of CAMA’s “modern-day” existence, Jennifer has been there to foster relationships, build the membership, plan and execute the Annual Conference, and support the Board of Directors in making CAMA the strong, sustainable, and valued Association it has become.

As part of the #CAMA50 Project, and celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Association, we wanted to take a look back with Jennifer, and get her perspective on her municipal career and how CAMA has grown and prospered over the years.

Take us back to the early days of CAMA’s transition to Fredericton. How did you come to be part of the CAMA team?

In 2005, then CAO Paul Stapleton was the CAMA President and brought the National Office to Fredericton as it was going thru some difficult times in Ottawa. I along with several other City staff volunteered to help bring CAMA back to life, and in 2006 the Board hired me as their Executive Assistant, and in 2009 as their full time Executive Director. Local government is my passion and CAMA quickly became my “baby”.

How was it possible to work two very busy full-time jobs over the past 17 years?

I was asked that question repeatedly over the years. Working 18 hours a day – seven days a week, I loved every minute of it, however I never had a work life balance. Burning the candle at both ends is not sustainable for anybody over a long period of time even when you are young. With the CAO and Deputy CAO retiring, and an election just around the corner, the timing was right in April 2021 to slow down. I now have the opportunity to focus just on CAMA, and my municipal experience has truly helped me excel at this job. A huge bonus is that I still get to work with CAOs from coast to coast.

Tell us about some of the highlights of your career with the City of Fredericton.

Jennifer chuckles and says that she is going to write a book some day about some of her experiences and adventures working on the front lines as the gatekeeper in political chaos. The Mayor would entertain appointments from all walks of life - from Royalty, the international visiting dignitary, to the business man or woman, to the event planner, to the homeless person that was having a lonely day. Everyday was different and exciting and I learned that sometimes the simplest gestures meant the most - taking that 20 minutes out of your day to listen truly made the difference in someone's life and was a reminder to have gratitude everyday. Did I cry along with some of the people on the other end of the line? You bet I did.

The City of Fredericton was a wonderful employer and I am blessed to have had the opportunity to work there for the first part of my career. It has taken me on an additional professional journey with CAMA that I am incredibly grateful for.

Municipalities are the most rewarding level of government because we are closest to the people. To be able to solve somebody's problem immediately is truly gratifying. Being an employee in the public service was an exciting and amazing adventure. When I drive around the community I see the many projects, parks, patched potholes, etc. that I had a part in simply because I helped with the budget, took the call of the citizen who complained, wrote the speech, helped plan the grand opening of the Convention Centre or new arena, set up that meeting for the Mayor to get grant funding, etc. I am thankful that I was able to contribute to the quality of life to the citizens in Fredericton.

What are some leadership tips that you would give to an Executive Assistant in local government?

The administrative profession is a very important role, however sometimes it is not respected, and is taken for granted by our colleagues, our elected officials and our citizens.

The Executive Assistant to the CAO and/or Mayor is a wonderful opportunity as they rely on you to be the gatekeeper, their confidante, and the ears and eyes of the organization. You have to remain calm, collected and smiling at all times.

Its important to view your career path as an opportunity to make it exactly what you want it to be and start before you are ready. Here is some advice that I would give anybody starting the role or already in the role:

- Find a mentor.
- Ask for more responsibilities.
- Work at any job.
- Adapt to change quickly along with taking on any new challenges with a positive attitude.
- Be seen as a problem solver and not a roadblock.
- Always own it – admit to your mistakes and shortcomings.
- Remember promotions follow leaders – leaders don't seek promotions.
- Always be helpful.
- Keep learning.
- Have a work life balance.
- Be professional inside and outside of the office.
- Know the importance of confidentiality.
- Create a positive corporate culture.

One of the most important values to me was to provide great customer service and have a bias to saying “yes” as long as I wasn't breaking any policies or rules.

Fredericton was not only a wonderful place to work but is a beautiful place to live and I was truly blessed to have been part of that legacy. There wasn't a day that I went to work that I didn't love my job because every day was different. My heart is full.

CAMA has been alive and well for 50 years! What do you consider to be the key drivers that makes CAMA the respected and valued Association it is now known for?

CAMA is the only national Association for CAOs and senior managers, and the fact that our membership has continued to grow means that people are seeing the value in the quality resources and networking opportunities that we are offering. We are known for our Annual Conference so I, like everybody else, am very excited to get back to meeting in person again in 2023.

Is there a specific memory, or experience with CAMA, that holds special meaning for you?

Hosting the 2018 CAMA Conference in Fredericton was very special to me. One would think that it would be easier hosting in your own hometown, however that year with the brand-new Hilton Hotel not being ready in time for our event, it took an extra amount of work to ensure that everybody had a room, but everything worked out perfectly. It was wonderful to see the smiling faces eating lobster, singing by the firepit at sunset for the Casual Night Out, and our members experiencing Fredericton's small-town hospitality.

It takes a village to organize an event of this magnitude, and I am so proud of our rockstar small but mighty team that comes together every year. Most of these individuals worked as students for Fredericton at one time and now have their own professional careers but take their vacation every year to come and work at the Conference.



After 15+ years, what keeps you dedicated and driven to help this organization grow and prosper?

It's the people. I love getting to know the members by name and where they work and being able to provide great customer service. This Association is one where connections and friendships are created across the country and if I can help a CAO find a best practice or solve a problem that has already been experienced by another member then it's a successful day. The CAO profession is "Lonely at the Top" and knowing that we can help our members and their communities succeed by providing that personal connection is truly gratifying.

Status quo is never the answer – the Board is always thinking ahead to what we can do next to assist the profession.

In your own words, what are the benefits of joining CAMA?

Who wouldn't want 650 friends in Canada that you can call on at anytime? Once a member goes to our Conference and sees the camaraderie in the room – they always return. Besides this premiere professional development opportunity, we now have seven toolkits and are getting ready to launch the next one at the end of this month (CAO Human Resources Toolkit). These resources are for the newly minted CAO or a well-seasoned veteran, or the community of 500 or 1 million. It's a very unique group.

Do you have a particular mentor in local government that encouraged you throughout your career?

In the early days of my career, I had the opportunity to take a Leadership course and this quote resonated with me and stayed on my desk:

“Epic things start with small humble steps. Pay respect to your beginnings. And if you're just starting out, know that it's OK to be sucky. To be small. To be messy and chaotic. Just make sure to never stop dreaming” (by Vishen Lakhiani).

Over the years my confidence grew especially when I surrounded myself with great mentors who were my CAO bosses, many colleagues, and my elected official bosses. I listened and learned so much especially about political acumen and how to read between the lines and be ahead of the curve – the grey area. Political acumen is a skill that is best learned through coaching, observation, and experience so its always great to have mentors. Every decision that I made I always had to ask myself these questions: How is this going to affect the Mayor or CAO? How is this going to affect the organization/City? Is one simple decision going to turn into a mess? There is always a grey area that has to be navigated, and you try to ensure that all of those questions are covered before you move forward.

Having a mentor in your career is an invaluable asset and I had many over my career and still do, including learning from CAMA Boards with all different leadership styles.

Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for CAMA over the coming years?

With the upcoming launch of our new Strategic Plan, I am very excited for the next five years. One of the initiatives that the Board will be undertaking is a CAO Executive Learning Program that is a networking/professional development event for a small group of members to be held in western, central and eastern locations.

I look forward to working with the current Board and future Boards to continue on the journey of being the best that we can be to our members in promoting excellence in local government.

Thank you for the opportunity.