

PEER KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SERIES

# MISTY CROSBY

Over a dinner of pizza and wings during a NADO meeting in Washington, DC earlier this year, Misty Crosby shared insights into her career with Buckeye Hills Regional Council and her upcoming retirement.

Misty began working at Buckeye Hills Regional Council (BHRC) in 1991 when she was 17 as part of a work-study program with her high school. She went on to earn an associate degree while working part-time as a secretary. A tiny bit of BHRC trivia: Misty was the recipient of the first computer at BHRC!

Misty was promoted to Development Specialist in 1998 and began administering state and federal grants for the Council's members (HUD CDBG, FEMA Hazard Mitigation, Ohio Public Works Commission). Misty reported directly to Development Director Frederick Hindman, who remains a colleague and a long-serving member of the Council's management team.

After another promotion in 2004, to Assistant Executive Director, Misty was responsible for working across departments and overseeing the budget and financial operations of the organization. "I was mentored by Boyer Simcox who was Buckeye Hills' long standing executive director. Boyer provided a lot of support to me and encouraged me to build a professional network and learn from others outside of the Council," said Misty. It was clear that Simcox was prepping her to become executive director upon his retirement. In 2004 she also received a bachelor's degree in organizational management.

Misty was promoted to Executive Director in 2007 and has held this position ever since. She recalled some of the challenges transitioning from being a peer to the boss. According to Misty, it took time to gain the confidence of staff and to continue to build trust and strong relationships with the board and the community. "I had to figure out what I did well and to not try to do everything myself," she shared. She also worked hard to define what the region needs and ensure that BHRC was working to address those needs. She acknowledges these challenges will exist for BHRC's executive directors that come after her.

With support of the BHRC board, Misty announced her plan to retire in July 2022 after 32 years with Buckeye Hills Regional



## **Buckeye Hills Regional Council**

*Executive Director, 2007 – 2022*  
*Assistant Director of Finance, 2002*  
*– 2007*  
*Development Specialist, 1998 –*  
*2002*  
*Secretary, 1991 – 1998*

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

- Understand what your region needs and ensure your organization is addressing them
- Executive Directors need to fully understand their organizations finances
- "You can never network enough"- travel to attend conferences, expand their network, and bring back current ideas
- To succeed you must both love the work and be skilled at working with your board, elected officials, and employees
- Figure out what you do well and don't try to do everything yourself

Council. She began the conversation with the board about her decision to retire in June 2019, leaving them plenty of time to develop a strategic recruitment plan for hiring her replacement. She has also been very candid with BHRC's staff about her retirement plans and has lived up to her assurances to them that she would remain committed to the organization throughout the transition process and until her last day.

Misty shared her belief that to succeed as executive director you must both love the work and be skilled at working with your board, elected officials, and employees. It can be deeply rewarding but also present many challenges. "I am proud of the organization and the work of BHRC staff and hope they can find a replacement who is even better than me," she told us.

The onboarding process has been organized to hopefully allow overlap with the new executive director, which will include meetings with the finance director. "I can't stress enough the importance of the executive director to fully understand the organization's finances: where the money comes from, how it is spent, and how it benefits staff, because the buck really does stop with the executive director," she said.

Misty encourages all new executive directors to travel to attend conferences, expand their network, and bring back current ideas. According to Misty, "you can never network enough." As executive director, Misty made regular trips to the statehouse, and participated actively in the Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC), Southeast Regional Directors Institute (SERDI), the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA), and NADO.

As we concluded our conversation, Misty reflected that "as an executive director, you never know when a new opportunity will arise for the Council and your region, and you need to be networking, making connections, and working to be ready to seize them."



*Founded in 1968*

*Serves Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington counties with a population exceeding 260,000*

*15 member board of directors*

*Marietta, OH*

## **KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE:**

- Area Agency on Aging for the eight country region
- Designated Southeast Ohio Aging & Disability Resource Network
- Broadband
- Local workforce development through the Innovation Gateway Network
- Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for businesses in the manufacturing, service, and retail sectors
- Strategic planning and technical assistance for local communities
- Serves as a designated Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organization

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# TOM KENNEDY

Tom Kennedy's passion for community development has been a guiding force through his entire career. After college, he served in the Peace Corps in southern Africa and continued working internationally as a contractor with USAID. Upon returning to the United States, he completed a master's in international agriculture before moving to Connecticut to work at a regional planning commission as a Transportation Planner. He left Connecticut in 1989 to become a planner at Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC). A short 17 months later he was named acting director and was hired on full time after 1.5 years.

During a recent breakfast conversation with Tom, he shared a bit about his 33 years with MARC and how his transition from Executive Director to Director of Community Development evolved.

When he joined MARC, the organization had a staff of three and a budget of \$74,000. "My work was guided by the questions 'what do the communities we serve need' and 'what does the organization need to succeed'", reflected Tom during a recent conversation.

Tom aggressively pursued grant funding based on the region's needs. The organization became particularly skilled at brownfields development and soon had the largest program in Vermont. MARC maintains a Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and also contracts with local towns to assist with their CDBG grants, including writing the grants for free, and managing grants for a small fee if they are successful. Tom fondly shared that the first grant he wrote for a local parent child workshop paid him with four boxes of Girl Scout cookies.

MARC continued to grow and have an impact on the communities it serves under Tom's leadership, evolving from an organization largely concentrated on traditional planning, to responding to Hurricane Irene, developing a strategic plan, and eight years ago, beginning working with local solid waste districts.

As Tom began thinking about retirement, he realized that while he was ready to scale back on the responsibilities of an executive director, he was not ready to leave the work he began



## **Mount Ascutney Regional Commission**

*Director of Community  
Development, 2022 - present  
Executive Director, 1990 – 2022  
Planner, 1989 - 1990*

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

- Guide your work with 'what do the communities we serve need' and 'what does the organization need to succeed'
- Experienced executive directors should reach out and offer advice to their newer counterparts in their state and region
- Network with your peers, including on the subject of retirement and succession planning; the transition process and retirement are different for everyone- find what works for you

at MARC. With full support of the board, he stepped down from the Executive Director position and became the Director of Community Development beginning in January 2022. In his new role he is working specifically on Build Back Better, ARPA funds, government affairs, solid waste, and brownfields.

“My contract is for three years, and if I decide to continue working once its complete, I hope to reduce my time in the office to 20 hours a week and focus exclusively on MARC’s solid waste program”, said Tom. His successor was an internal applicant, so the organization arranged both individuals to overlap as executive director for three months assuring continuity in programs and a smooth transition.

When speaking about his last few years as MARC’s executive director, Tom would have benefited from the opportunity to attend in person events that were cancelled due to COVID-19 to hear from his peers in person about strategies for the transition/retirement process. “It would have been beneficial to share ideas, suggestions, tips for succession when working with both in house and external candidates,” he said. He also encouraged experienced executive directors to reach out and offer advice to new counterparts in their state and region. Tom feels that the transition process and retirement is different for everyone, saying “it may be difficult to know when the time is right to retire and to have an answer to ‘and then what?’”.

Tom’s decision allows him to move out of the executive director role and continue doing meaningful work at MARC, while helping the organization make the leadership transition with experienced staff.



*Founded in late 1960s*

*Serves a region containing 10 municipalities in southeastern Vermont.*

*26 member board of commissioners*

*Ascutney, VT*

## KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Brownfields assessments and clean up
- Community development including the CEDS process
- Emergency management: preparedness planning, securing funding for towns to respond to emergencies, and helping towns meet state goals for resiliency
- Energy planning assistance to towns
- GIS mapping and land use planning
- Transportation planning

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# LAURA LEWIS MARCHINO

When Laura Lewis Marchino was hired as a Program Manager in 2005, she was under the direct supervision of Region 9's executive director, Ed Morlan. From the onset, he encouraged her to pursue professional development training and become engaged in national economic development organizations. His commitment to her professional growth and development included Region 9 paying for and encouraging her training as she successfully became a Certified Economic Development (CEcD) through the International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) Certified Economic Development program.

In 2007, Laura was elected to the NADO Board of Directors, a position she continues to hold today. "Being part of NADO was great for making connections to rural regions with similar programs, which was especially important when I became the Executive Director," Laura mentioned during a recent conversation about her transition to Executive Director. Laura spoke of the importance of always trying to meet someone new at each NADO event she attended, as well as at other organizations' events.

Laura was named the Executive Director in 2016, after nearly a decade of mentoring and support from Ed. When Ed retired, he was intending to stay on as a consultant and Laura was relying on having access to his experience and expertise. Unfortunately, Ed passed away soon after leaving Region 9, which was a personal and professional challenge for Laura and the organization's staff. "I'd say it was about three years before I felt I had fully learned the position, while understanding the responsibilities of each position and department at Region 9," reflected Laura.

Since becoming the Executive Director, funding for the organization has increased from \$3 to \$9 million and the staff has grown from five to twelve. Previously, Region 9 was the only area of Colorado with a separate EDD and Council of Government. The EDD is absorbing the Southwest Colorado Council of Governments (SWCCOG) that serves the same geographic area and the EDD will work to continue to align their priorities and programming.



## ***Region 9 Economic Development District of SW Colorado***

*Executive Director, 2016 - present  
Program Manager, 2005 - 2016*

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

- Take the time to build trust with your Board Members and Community Leaders
- Always highlight the impact of your District to stakeholders
- Focus on your personal and professional development- there will always be competing priorities
- Tailor succession plans to the organization and individual
- The job of the Executive Director is to make everyone else successful

Laura feels that the key to her and her organization's success is its reputation and relationship in the community. She maintains close relationships with local stakeholders and members of local government. The relationships are built through trust, frequent communications and knowing individuals' communication styles and preferences.

Every year she has lunch with each board member. Region 9 maintains three office locations, which allows the organization to better serve communities within its 6,584 square miles. Laura has made sure that Region 9 shows the value of its work to stakeholders and has availed of marketing training provided through NADO. As part of this work, Region 9 produces Annual Performance Reports for each county they work with to measure their local impact.

Since becoming the executive director there has been no staff turnover. Laura continues to conduct 360 evaluations of herself and key staff including feedback from funders, the organization's board, and staff. Her contract is reviewed and renewed annually. Laura says that Ed taught her that the job of the Executive Director is to make everyone else successful.

When asked about advice for other executive directors, Laura offered that "they should continue to focus on their personal and professional development, despite the many challenges the position presents." Additionally, acknowledging how much she has benefited from attending NADO events, she recommends that others take the same opportunity, even though there will always be competing obligations back at the office. She also addressed the different challenges a new executive director would face, based on whether they were an internal or external candidate. An internal candidate should work with the existing executive director to address their existing strengths and weaknesses, ensure that they understand the entire structure of the organization, and help address how their relationship with staff will change once they're promoted. The executive director should take the time with an external candidate to introduce them to everyone, show that you're taking the time to welcome them to the organization, and build buy-in with staff and key stakeholders.

While she has no immediate plans to retire, Laura says that the Board is aware of the difficulties of finding an individual who has the leadership qualities and skillset needed. Just as she was promoted from within the organization, it is important to hire staff that have potential for growth and advancement and the potential to eventually serve as executive director.



*Serves Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San counties and the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes with a population of 99,000.*

## KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE:

- RLF for small business gap financing
- Southwest Accelerator Program for Entrepreneurs (SCAPE)
- Administers the Colorado Enterprise Zone Tax Credit program
- Strategic planning and technical assistance for local communities, including the CEDS
- Broadband
- Transportation

Founded in 1989  
26 member board of directors; 17 represent local governments, nine represent the private sector

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