

N. Dale Wright Distinguished Alumnus Award 2013

By **David Oyler**

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I would like to thank Dr. Facer and the members of the MPA faculty and staff for this honor and recognition. There are many MPA Alumni way more deserving than myself to receive this honor.

I thank Dale Wright for the beautiful painting. Part of my youth I grew up on the Idaho side of the Tetons and was able to see the mountains every day, so the painting has special meaning.

I would like to recognize my family here today: my wife Susan and most of our seven children and their spouses along with my 87 year old mother. I recognize Mayor Anderson and his wife Melanie and my assistant city manager Seth Perrins and his wife Jill. Thank all of you for your support. I thank Scott Aylett our BYU intern, for his help with the pictures.

One of the questions I am frequently asked is how were you able to stay in one city for your entire career since city managers usually have a little shorter tenure. There are two reasons City Managers leave their jobs: they are asked to leave by the elected officials, commonly referred to as being fired, or they think the grass is greener on the other side and they voluntarily leave. Neither of these situations occurred during my tenure. I was fortunate to have worked for some excellent elected officials and city staff during these past 38 years and was never asked to leave. And I am blessed to have a very supportive family, who enjoyed living in our small community as it grew and matured so the grass was never greener. The scary thing about working your entire career for the same city is that you have no one to blame but yourself for the end results of the quality of the city you live in. And since my seven children and 20.5 grandchildren all live in Spanish Fork, they are going to see the results of my efforts - good or bad. Fortunately I feel our city has focused through the years on maintaining a great quality of life for its citizens and still having that small town feeling where it is affordable to live.

Let me take a few moments and explain how I feel we have been able to maintain this great quality of life in our small community. Whether we are running our household or managing a city, we must always live within our means and where possible stay out of debt. In Spanish Fork we have followed that philosophy. We have arranged our finances so that we go into debt for things that are essential and pay cash for niceties of life. Thus we bonded for vital services such as water, sewer, broadband and electric utilities and buildings and paid cash for the construction of our swimming pool, golf course and fairgrounds. The necessities of life should always take precedence over the niceties of life.

I've also learned that there is no such thing as a free lunch. If you want quality you have to pay the price. Now that doesn't mean it has to be the most expensive or elaborate system or program, but it needs to be quality. Our elected officials have realized that sometimes you have to bite the bullet, raise the rates and rebuild infrastructure before it falls apart. When your electricity goes out every other day, your sewer starts backing up into your basements and you run out of water in the summer to water your lawns, it's time to do something. Fortunately Spanish Fork City has been able to look into the future enough to solve many of these problems

before they became catastrophes. In the 70's and 80's the city council raised the electric rates and rebuilt the entire electric system. In the 80's the sewer rates were increased and many improvements were made. In the late 90s the water system came to the forefront so we installed a citywide pressurized irrigation system. Also at the turn of the century the city was having difficulty getting quality telecommunication services. Our existing telecommunication provider was unwilling to upgrade the service in Spanish Fork in a timely manner, so we established a new Broadband utility called the Spanish Community Network. We felt back then that quality telecommunications would be an essential service that our citizens would want in the future, just as important as streets, electricity and other utilities.

These were difficult political decisions and some elected officials didn't survive the next election but they did understand the importance of maintaining essential services in order to preserve the quality of life for future generations.

That brings me to another area our city has been willing to do in order to maintain a good quality of life and save money. That is we've been willing to be creative and look for innovative ways to solve problems.

One of these creative concepts is the unique relationship we have established with our local school district. The City uses the schools gymnasiums and auditoriums and they use our ball fields, swimming pool, golf course and tennis courts. It's a lot cheaper to share than duplicate these expensive facilities. We keep a ledger so that one entity is not taking advantage of the other. This allows us to put more money into recreation programs and less into facilities. Spanish Fork City, in my opinion, has one of the best city recreation programs in the state if not the country. Years ago Paul Harvey on his radio program supposedly stated that Spanish Fork has more baseball players per capita than any other place in the country. Come to the ballparks in the summer and you can see for yourself if that is so.

I mentioned that the city built a new pressurized irrigation utility to use untreated water for lawns and landscaping and preserve our clean drinking water for inside use. Now a pressurized irrigation system is not unique but what is unique is that we are one of the few if not the only city in the state that meters its irrigation water to each individual house and business. Water conservation is critical in a desert. It definitely encourages conservation by having the customer pay for what they use through the meter. When many cities this summer were rationing water, Spanish Fork City was not, because of good water management.

The other unique aspect of this irrigation project is we didn't just build an old ugly water reservoir and put a chain link fence around it but we built a recreation facility that doubles as an irrigation reservoir. We constructed a 5-acre reservoir with a sandy beach where families can come to enjoy the day of swimming, canoeing, fishing, camping, and walking on the trails. Eventually the water in the reservoir gets into the irrigation pipes and ends up on our lawns but not until the citizens have thoroughly enjoyed the many recreational opportunities it provides.

One of the most unique and innovative projects we have been able to work on is our Community Broadband network. In the late 90's I started to hear about fiber optics. Now I'm not very technical so I had no idea what a fiber optic system really meant. It didn't take me long to learn how this technology could impact our community for the good. The vision started with connecting the city facilities such as electric substations, water wells, and city buildings to a high-speed fiber optic network.

As I mentioned earlier our incumbent telecommunication provider informed us they would not expand high-speed Internet to our community in the near future. That was frustrating. We had businesses in town demanding high-speed Internet services. One business indicated they would have to move north to Provo in order to receive the needed service. Some of our residents worked for technology companies in Provo and Orem that required home access to Internet. One of these employees that lived in Spanish Fork made a comment that it was faster for him to drive back to Provo, download his electronic file and then return to Spanish Fork than it was to use his slow dial up internet in Spanish Fork. So that is when our vision expanded to building a telecommunication network that connected the entire community.

A Committee was created, we visited other cities with broadband networks, finances were secured and soon the first municipally owned full service broadband network in the state was born. In 2001 we started construction, three year later it was finished. To be successful we had determined that we needed 30 to 35% of our citizens take the services within four or five years of operation. We accomplished that goal the very first year of operations and today we have over 80% of our citizens who use a combination of our high-speed Internet, cable TV or telephone service. We save our citizens approximately \$2.5 million dollars a year compared to what they would have paid for the same service from our competition. The good news is the construction debt will be paid off in two more years.

Why has Spanish Fork Community Network been so successful when some others have not? Well, I feel it is because the following: 1. We received the support of the community at the beginning of the project; 2. We kept the price affordable to the customer by using the right technology at the right time; 3. We invested in technology to stay up to date with changes; and 4- we have focused on providing excellent customer service by responding immediately to customer needs because we are the retailer of the service. This project has truly added to the quality of life for our citizens.

There are many other facets that make Spanish Fork a fantastic place to live. Tuesday I received an email from a citizen about a concern. At the end of his email he made the following statement: “. . . thank you again for keeping Spanish Fork the finest place to live in all of Utah County. I never wanted to live here before, but now I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.” I think his statement is indicative of a lot of our citizens' feelings.

These few examples I have shared are some of the reasons I have enjoyed working and living in our small community that grew from 8,000 people in the 70's when I started to 37,000 people today. President Hinckley stated that “Life is to be enjoyed, not just endured” and I have tried to apply that same concept to my work, “Work is to be enjoyed and not just endured”. I can say that I have thoroughly enjoyed working at the local level of government where the things you do on a day-to-day basis have a direct positive impact on the quality of life of all the citizens you work for.

Again I thank my family and associates for your support and I thank BYU for this honor. I invite all of you to take a ten-minute ride south of Provo and visit our little community where, in my opinion, the quality of life is great and affordable.