

N. Dale Wright Distinguished Alumnus Award 2011

By **Francine Giani**

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There are a lot of people here today. My job calls for me to hang out with a lot of politicians but you've heard I'm from New York City where the "only thing that brings New York City politicians together is an arraignment." And being from New York City... you know when it's Thanksgiving weekend when all the pigeons start to look nervous.

In the words of one of my favorite professors, "Listen up scholars!" That is from Dale Wright. If you didn't have him, you missed out.

I am honored. I say thank you to Dr. Hart and Dale, for introducing me. I am honored and humbled to have been chosen as this year's recipient of the Dale Wright Distinguished Alumna Award. When Professor Hart called me months ago, I turned down his humble offer with a counter offer to provide names of other more worthy recipients. He was at an out-of-state conference at the time and I encouraged him to discuss the matter with Professor Cornia for which he responded, "I am with Gary Cornia." Obviously no one checked my GPA because I clearly would have been eliminated as a candidate for this award had that happened.

In all seriousness, I am honored to represent the George Romney Institute of Public Management graduating class of 1991, otherwise known as 'the best class ever.'

As was mentioned, I am currently wearing several hats in state government these days. First as the Executive Director over the Utah Department of Commerce where I oversee with wonderful managers 240 employees and manage an almost \$23 million dollar budget; and also more recently as the interim Executive Director at the Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control where I am using my MPA tools on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. At the Alcoholic Beverage Control department, there are 593 employees and during fiscal year 2011, we had alcohol sales totaling more than \$295 million dollars with a gross profit of \$136 million dollars.

When Governor Herbert's Chief of Staff, Derek Miller, another MPA alum, called me in mid-August with a request that I extend my job responsibilities beyond Commerce, I was reminded of another difficult task I accepted a few years ago. Before I concluded that conversation with Derek, I must have said several times, "This is temporary, right?" and he said, "yes." And it has been a few months here and it's still temporary. A few years ago, then-Governor Huntsman asked me to investigate increasing gasoline prices. You may remember that period of time several years ago. I spent considerable time discussing that issue with my staff and attorneys, especially considering that not a single person could identify any legal authority I had to do anything about gasoline prices. When all was said and done though, the assignment resulted in a summer project that helped educate the public about many issues related to gasoline. I have always believed that an educated consumer is a better consumer.

I have tried to approach my recent DABC situation in the same way, looking for solutions instead of focusing on obstacles. While the DABC is clearly a troubled agency with a lot of problems, it also has some of the right people in place to better serve the public interest going forward. And one of them is here today, I appreciate that. I have to assume that not many in this crowd consider themselves regular customers of the DABC – but you might be surprised. And no, I don't mean what you are thinking I mean.

We all benefit when any government agency, operates the way Utah's citizens want it to operate. You might be surprised at what aspects of your lives are affected by the DABC operations. School lunches statewide are funded. Crime and impaired driving are reduced when the DABC properly enforces its standards. DABC's Parents Empowered is nationally recognized as the premier youth alcohol education program. It has been eye-opening for me to discover how much I can serve the public through

an agency that sells alcohol. Now, I am not asking you to become customers but I am trying to make you aware. In the words of this program's founder, Stewart Grow, "Enter to learn, go forth to serve." And that was the attitude I had when, after living in Utah almost 30 years and never entering a liquor store, in one recent month, I entered 5 liquor stores. I was a bit nervous that someone who may have seen me on television might report me to my Bishop- so far, so good. I haven't lost my calling of teaching youth in my ward.

One thing I have learned that has helped in my career is that you can't be afraid to look for problems close to home. I'm a "what you see is what you get" kind of person. That kind of personality is not always popular. For example, I was little surprised to learn of this award considering the number of times that Neil has had me down to BYU, and about how many of Utah's schemes and scams originate from Utah County; a proven statistic. There has been nothing more troubling in my career than when I learn about countless victims losing their life savings, their retirements, their jobs, their homes, to a Ponzi scheme. Unfortunately, jail time for the scammer rarely brings anything back to the victims.

One "close to home" scam I can remember happened a few years ago. A church located about one block from the Department of Commerce offices had built a small homeless shelter in its basement. We discovered they were also running a telemarketing operation, requiring the homeless occupants to run the phone lines in exchange for their shelter. Kind of a novel idea, we thought it was unique. The church is still there, but the telemarketing operation is gone.

Scammers are not afraid to try to come across as "close to home" to make their victims feel more comfortable. That happens in a lot of scams. One of the scams from my career that had one of the highest number of Utah victims involved a credit counseling agency. Thousands of Utah-ns who already had financial problems got caught up in the scam, and just ended up with more debt and even worse credit scores. When we brought the scam to light, the fraudster even created fraudulent paperwork naming me as a board member of his company. That was also unique.

I would love to see the day when my job is no longer necessary. That could only happen if potential victims start to keep their eyes open, no matter how "close to home" the opportunity may seem.

My MPA degree at the Romney Institute taught me that each role you take in life, learn from, and grow from, prepares you for the next challenge that may be waiting around the corner. Thanks to the tools, education and perspective that I gained through the Institute's Master of Public Administration program, I have been able to confidently meet each new challenge with real world knowledge under my belt.

As I stand before you, distinguished faculty, current MPA candidates, alumni from last year to decades past, my family and friends, I am reminded of the incredible experience that I was afforded from my days at the Romney Institute. I have fond memories: the professors who inspired me, the homework that challenged me and the satisfaction that came when I finally completed my degree. Each professor lent their experiences which in turn gave me a broader understanding of how different organizations, teams and governments tackled tough policy issues. I valued my professors who had worked in the trenches and who generously shared their knowledge and vision. Their leadership backgrounds from local and state government to international government and development helped give us a broad scope as well as lessons learned from day to day management in different organizations.

When I began the MPA program, I was then the Director of the Division of Consumer Protection which was a new role for me after working as the press secretary and policy advisor for Governor Bangerter. At the time, I shared a lot in common with many current MPA candidates today; I was single, working full time, I was on the Centerville City Council and trying to juggle coursework with many other responsibilities including trying to find a husband which I was unsuccessful in doing up until a few years after my graduation.

This past week I contacted several of my classmates who I keep in touch with and I would like to share their perspective of a few professors.

While I was not a certified public accountant, the finance classes under Gary Cornia helped me learn the bread and butter basics of managing a large scale budget so now I understand, mostly, what my budget director is telling me when we are preparing for the legislature's review each year. My classmates remember Professor Cornia always talking about being the lone democrat in Utah County. I was always proud to say, given his wealth of experience at the Utah Tax Commission and other places, and regardless of politics, that he was my professor.

While I had tackled some policy during Governor Bangerter's two terms, I was not a policy expert. Classes with Doyle Buckwalter, Dale Wright and Bob Parsons helped me tackle tough issues and understand what was required. One classmate who was not LDS said of Professor Buckwalter, "he was always welcoming, understanding of differences, fair...an awesome guy." I have to agree. She indicated that she once wrote an analysis on the differences between the Republican and Democratic platforms in Utah; a brave girl. Her conclusion was that the Democrat platform was better. She said she got the highest grade and extra credit as well. Doyle ran for elective office during that time and this gal, who was a Democrat, supported him.

"Now listen up scholars!" Dale Wright was the mother hen who kept us in line. He was the shepherd. He taught us the principles, policies but most importantly he taught us how to work together; encouraging us to be ethical, to be leaders, to be good teams. Thanks Dale. I still remember that today.

Bob Parsons was another favorite. One friend recalled that Professor Parsons was always open to new ideas when discussing economic solutions and organizational behavior. He was always available. Bob is not here today but he dropped me a line last week. He is attending a baptism in Las Vegas for his granddaughter. But to him, I say thank you, Bob.

While I was not a statistician, I really did try to become one and understand the need why we had to take Stats. Professor Gloria Wheeler, ever patient, helped me get through it. Her expertise is internationally known. And I am honored to have had a class with her. Thank you, Gloria.

Now, I never had Neil Brady as a professor but I only know students who had him and they loved him. But he was always kind to invite me to down here so I could be more familiar with the campus because I completed my education in Salt Lake. So thank you, Neil, for giving me that opportunity.

Even though I considered myself to be an excellent communicator – being from New York and all, I can share this humble opinion – the MPA program helped me gain a better understanding of how to get my message across to a vast audience, whether it be employees, stakeholders, fellow Cabinet members, legislators, the Governor, or even the Alcohol Beverage Control Commission. Now I am working on that one and I have not yet figured out how to do that well.

The coursework was challenging, the classroom discussions were stimulating and as a working student I was often left thinking how am I going to cram all of this all into one weekend? Somehow, as all working students do, we made it work and looking back I am so grateful for all of the tales from the trenches.

In conclusion, I would like to offer some advice from President Ronald Reagan who once remarked, "Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere as long as the policy you've decided upon is being carried out!" I have been lucky enough to surround myself with wonderful people at work and at play; some who are here today who I call my friends who are really my family, a wonderful husband who has been so supportive over the years and of course my wonderful daughters who complete me.

I am deeply touched to be recognized by my peers with this award. I salute present students who are working on their MPA degrees. Today it may seem like getting to graduation day may be your main goal, but you never know where that degree will take you or how you will use your MPA tool kit until the phone rings and you answer, "Yes, Governor! I am happy to help."

Thank you again for this kind honor.

