

ALABAMA LEAGUE

Municipal government is the level closest to the citizens and is directly responsible for the “quality of life” services they expect and demand.

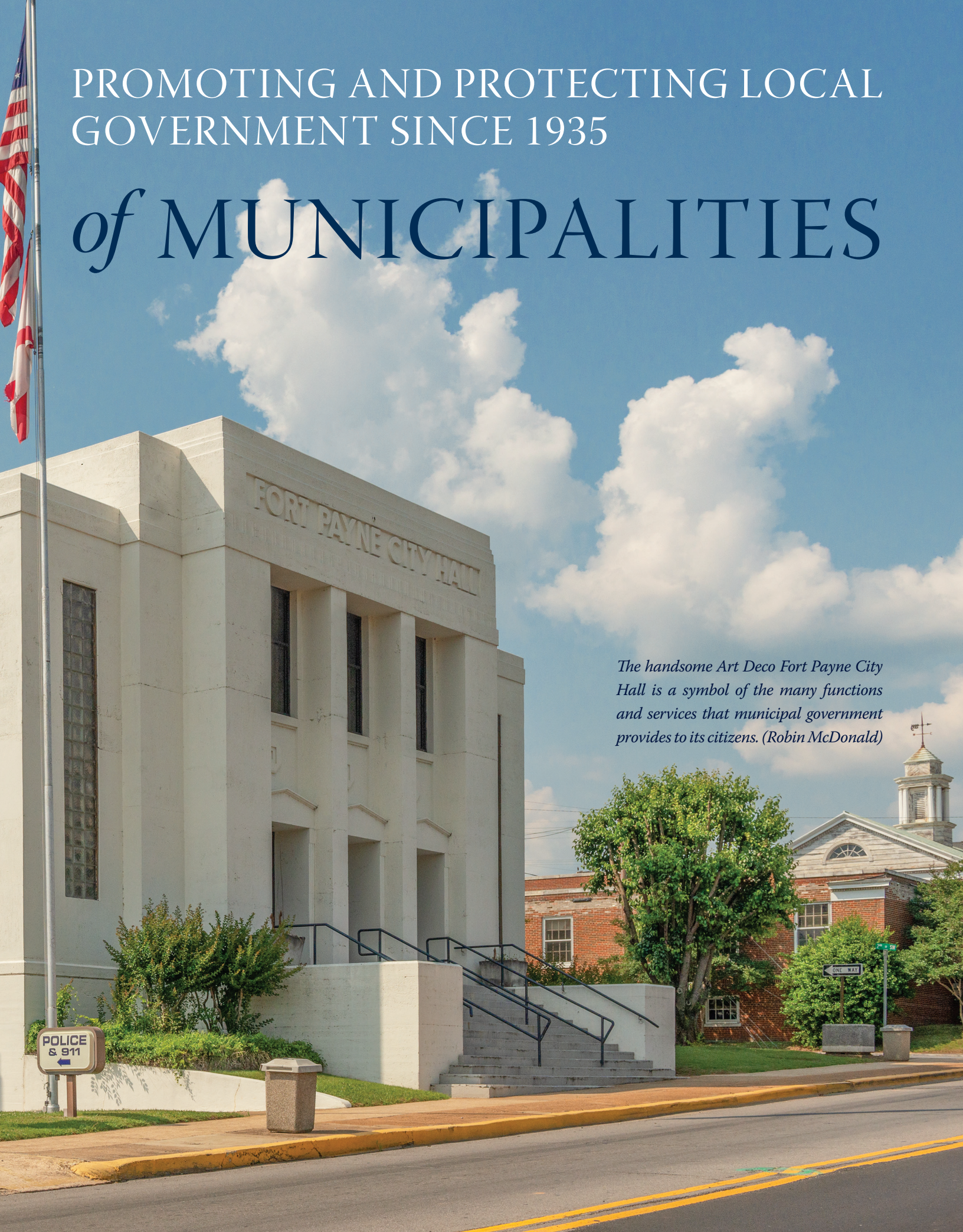
By CARRIE BANKS



PROMOTING AND PROTECTING LOCAL
GOVERNMENT SINCE 1935

of MUNICIPALITIES

The handsome Art Deco Fort Payne City Hall is a symbol of the many functions and services that municipal government provides to its citizens. (Robin McDonald)





Alabama is and always has been primarily a state of small municipalities. In 2016 it had 281 towns with a population less than 2,000.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY AT THE municipal level, is the form of government most accessible to the public and, arguably, the most important layer of authority—albeit a complex one. Municipal policies and programs are directly responsible for the quality of public services such as police departments, fire departments, city infrastructure, parks, and economic development programs. However, municipal Home Rule—the power and authority of local governments to run their own affairs—is severely limited by Alabama’s 1901 Constitution, which does not recognize any inherent right of local governments. Section 44 states: “The legislative power of the state shall be vested in a legislature, which shall consist of a senate and house of representatives.” Thus, the Alabama Legislature has complete power to make decisions for local governments, which is generally done on an individual basis through “local acts.” In addition, changes to any local issue originally prohibited by the 1901 Constitution requires a constitutional amendment to be passed by voters statewide, which has resulted in Alabama’s constitution being one of the longest and most amended in the world.

According to US Census Bureau records, in 1820, shortly after being granted statehood in 1819, Alabama’s population was just shy of 129,000. A century later, the population had grown to more than 2 million. In 1930, as mechanized farming was replacing mule teams and wagons, there were 271 incorporated places. By 1940 it had grown to 280, and rural electrification was underway thanks to the New Deal programs of the Rural Electrification Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Following Alabama’s December 14, 2019, bicentennial celebrations, the state had 463 incorporated municipalities throughout its 67 counties—some older than the state itself.

Defined by state law as either cities (places with a population of more than 2,000) or towns (places with a population of fewer than 2,000), Alabama’s municipalities range in size from the state’s largest city, Birmingham, which has just over 212,000 people, to the town of McMullen, which in 2016 only had nine people. Alabama is and always has been primarily a state of small municipalities. In 2016 it had 281 towns with a population less than 2,000. Out of those, 123 had a population less than 500.

Nearly a century ago, local leaders recognized that something had to be done to ensure municipalities had a voice within the Alabama state legislature. That effort finally found its footing in 1935, when the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) was officially formed on May 15, 1935, as a voluntary, full-time association consisting of representatives from Alabama's cities and towns. Throughout its history, ALM has steadfastly served—and been continuously recognized—as the primary legislative advocate for Alabama's municipalities, representing its members at meetings of the Alabama legislature and in numerous state and administrative agencies. Additionally, ALM advocates for its members in the US Congress.

ATTEMPTS TO FORMALLY ORGANIZE representation for municipalities began as early as 1926 with the formation of the Alabama Association of Mayors and City Commissioners, a part-time organization of nearly 100 locally elected municipal officials loosely established at a gathering in Fairfield. Because the organization had no full-time office or staff, it communicated with its membership through the president, Anniston mayor Sidney Reaves, and attempted to address municipal challenges through informal annual meetings. However, representation before the state legislature was not feasible with no dedicated staff or financial resources under this part-time structure.

In a 1928 meeting in Selma, members changed the name to the Alabama League of Municipalities to make it an organization of municipalities instead of officials. However, it wasn't until the 1935 convention in Montgomery that the current association was formally established through grant funds arranged by the American Municipal Association, which was founded in 1924 by 10 state municipal leagues and by 1964 was known as the National League of Cities. This enabled the hire of a full-time director. ALM's first elected president, Jasper mayor John Burton, along with the Hon. M. L. Robertson of Cullman and Birmingham City Comptroller C. E. Armstrong, was tasked with nominating the League's first executive director. For that role, they relied on a recommendation from Gov. Bibb Graves, who was sympathetic to the struggles of local government, and ultimately hired Edgar "Ed" Ernest Reid, a charismatic twenty-five-year-old serving as Graves's legislative liaison. Reid was born in Evergreen, grew up in Georgiana, attended the University of Alabama, and edited a newspaper in Flomaton before em-



ABOVE: *Official portrait of Ed Reid, ALM's first executive director, who served from 1935 until his death in 1965. Reid was born in Evergreen and grew up in Georgiana and was only 25 years old when appointed as League director. (All images Alabama League of Municipalities unless otherwise noted)* OPPOSITE PAGE: *Before embarking on a career in politics, Ed Reid edited The Escambia County News in Flomaton. With a population of 1,440 in the 2010 census, Flomaton is classified as a town in Alabama. (Robin McDonald)*

barking on a political career in Montgomery. He had also served as secretary to Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives Robert H. "Harry" Walker (1935–1936) during the first legislative session of Graves's second term. With a fledgling membership of twenty-eight cities and towns, along with a three-year grant obtained by Reid from the Rockefeller Foundation's Spellman Fund, the groundwork was laid for this new service organization to begin providing Alabama's municipalities with legitimate advocacy representation.

The early years of ALM were far from easy. In 1935 Alabama, along with the rest of the nation, was struggling to fight



ABOVE: After moving several times, the League signed a lease in 1946 on a small five-room shotgun-style building located on S. Hull Street in downtown Montgomery. The offices would remain at this location for the next twenty-four years. Pictured are League President Frank Livingston of Tuscaloosa (left) and Executive Director Ed Reid (right) in October 1946. OPPOSITE PAGE: Ed Reid with Gov. George Wallace. Reid worked closely with every governor and earned a nationwide reputation for his expertise in local government issues. He was voted “Most Effective Lobbyist in the Legislature” five times and attended every legislative session between 1935 and 1965.

its way out of the Great Depression. Unemployment was the rule rather than the exception. Revenue sources were scarce, and municipalities were heavily in debt, relying on borrowed money to keep services going. Additionally, salaries for municipal employees were insufficient. ALM’s growing influence was essential in moving Alabama’s municipalities forward during a critical time in the early twentieth century.

Under Reid’s leadership during the late 1940s into the early 1950s, ALM expedited and strengthened access to and interaction between municipal officials and state and federal

lawmakers while shaping key legislation that helped its members establish more solvent and stable operations, including allowing local governments to make some decisions without consulting state lawmakers, enhancing the authority of cities and towns to levy and collect taxes, designating Alabama’s highway department as the entity financially responsible for maintaining state and federal roadways through incorporated areas, and increasing benefit and compensation packages for elected municipal officials.

According to an article by Lee Anna Maynard in the November/December 2012 issue of *The Alabama Municipal Journal*, Reid, a former editor for *The Escambia County News* in Flomaton, had a gift for communication and promotion, which aided him as he traveled throughout the state meeting with local political leaders to encourage ALM membership. He also began regularly publishing the organization’s goals, findings, and accomplishments in the ALM’s first official issuance, *Alabama Municipal News*. In the October 1937 inaugural issue, Reid listed ALM’s current officers, explained the phenomenon of “pressure groups” and their impact on legislative processes, explored the hidden costs of several legislative proposals, and educated readers on the particulars of fire insurance for municipal properties. His goal was to





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Ed Reid was born in the Conecuh County city of Evergreen (above). Shortly after his death in 1965, the Alabama legislature honored him by naming Evergreen's new trade school Ed E. Reid State Vocational Technical Training School (now Reid State Technical College). With a population of 3,944 in 2010, Evergreen is classified as a city in Alabama. (Robin McDonald)

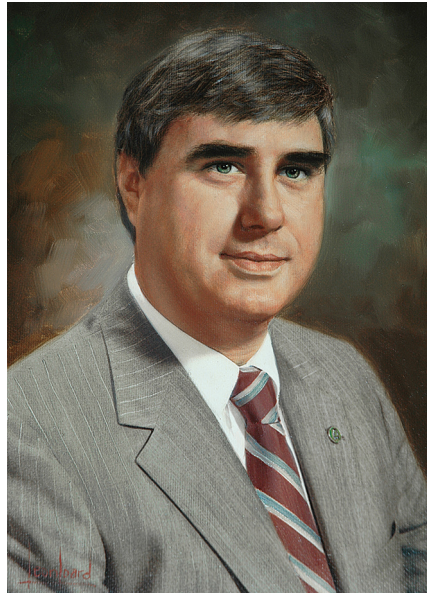
provide accurate information, informed opinions, and practical advice for running and enhancing towns and cities. The organization's publication transitioned over the years from a tabloid-sized layout on newspaper print to a saddle-stitched magazine known as *The Alabama Local Government Journal* that ultimately became *The Alabama Municipal Journal*, which is still published today.

Thanks to Reid's diligence, the League's membership grew steadily within its first decade and expanded to 205 incorporated municipalities by 1945. This growth bolstered the reach and influence of the ALM, and within fifteen years of its inception, ALM was rated in the top five municipal organizations in the nation, with Reid cited by the national association as one of the five "best possible sources of information" on local government. In 1948 ALM began publishing *The Handbook*

for Mayors and Councilmembers every four years to coincide with the statewide municipal election cycle. The publication offered practical guidance to local officials, including proper procedure as well as the duties and responsibilities of the mayor and the council. The publication still exists, and its 2020 issue will be distributed to mayors and councilmembers in November, when officials are sworn into office.

In a circa 1955 *Montgomery Advertiser* article, Reid and the ALM were described as irrefutable powerbrokers on the behalf of cities and towns:

The Alabama League of Municipalities, you might say, is Alabama's 10th Congressional District and its congressman is its director, Ed E. Reid. As Mohammedans to Mecca, politicians at all levels make pilgrimages to the little red brick office building of the League on a Hull Street incline. There, Reid, short, dapper and given to alternating blasts of amiable mimicry and barking truculence, presides. He is one of the remarkable figures on the Alabama scene. Because of his influence over the mayor-members of his organization and his encyclopedic knowledge of practical politics, all politicians crave his help.



Yet, even as Reid excelled in building a solid organization that effectively represented and protected the interests of municipal government, he remained frustrated at the lack of understanding by Alabama's citizens regarding the role of municipal government and the origination of their critical quality-of-life services, like police and fire departments. In a 1955 ALM publication, *Some Facts about Municipal Government in Alabama*, Reid wrote:

It is an alarming fact that many people take their municipal government so much for granted. They become interested in it only when some controversial issue develops and otherwise assume that its routine operations are of little importance to them. They overlook the fact that the whole pattern of their daily life is constantly influenced by their municipal government. It supplies water, sewage service, garbage collection, police and fire protection, streets, traffic control, recreational facilities and countless other functions. Some of these are primarily a convenience, but many of them vitally affect the health, safety and welfare of the municipality's residents. Moreover, they are financed by the residents of the municipality through taxes and other revenue devices. In short, every citizen has much at stake in the operations of his municipality's government and should show a degree of interest which reflects this. Certainly, he ought not simply take it for granted.

Even now, two decades into the twenty-first century, fostering civic engagement and instilling an understanding of the crucial role of municipal government in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens remains a significant challenge.

Since the death of Ed Reid in 1965, ALM has been ably led by three executive directors, all of whom started their careers with the League as staff attorneys (above, from left to right): John Watkins served as executive director from 1965 until his retirement in 1986; Perry C. Roquemore, Jr. served as executive director from 1986 until his retirement in 2011 and remains the longest serving employee of the Alabama League of Municipalities with thirty-seven years; and Ken Smith, who served for several years as the League's deputy director/general counsel before being named ALM's fourth executive director in 2011, retired on June 1, 2020.

In 1961, thanks to Reid's political savvy and his passion for developing and providing guidance to local officials throughout the state, he was successful in shepherding the legislative charge that led to the first comprehensive municipal elections laws enacted in Alabama. He was such a dynamic and influential presence—a respected innovator and thought leader—it seemed his energy would never ebb. Sadly, however, in July 1965, at age fifty-five, the man who built ALM from the ground up succumbed to cancer. For over thirty years, Reid strategically and methodically transformed an organization originally run out of borrowed office space in Alabama's capital city into a nationally recognized powerhouse. He was described by US Sen. Lister Hill as “a man of political foresight and political courage” who “brought honor not only to himself but to the organization and State he served so well until the day of his passing.” The entire August 1965 issue of *The Alabama Municipal Journal* was dedicated to his memory and included numerous municipal resolutions and tributes

from statewide newspapers as well as personal testimonials from several prestigious politicians, including Alabama governors George Wallace, John Patterson, James E. Folsom, and Chauncey Sparks; United States senators Lister Hill and John Sparkman; and former US Congressman Albert M. Rains.

Reid was admired by many. Not only had Reid attended every legislative session from 1935 until 1965, he was also voted “Most Effective Lobbyist in the Legislature” five times. Many sought his service in additional capacities, including his attendance (at Governor Graves’s request) at the Pan-American Congress of States and Municipalities in Havana, Cuba, in 1938; being named by Pres. John Kennedy to serve on the National Water Pollution Control Advisory Board of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; traveling to Tel Aviv, Israel, in 1960 as the American delegate to the International Conference of Local Authorities; and often appearing before congressional committees on behalf of the National League of Cities to testify about legislation supported by the organization.

His leadership and political acumen resulted in the passage of key legislation that changed and improved the way municipal government functions in Alabama. Shortly after Reid’s passing, the Alabama Legislature unanimously adopted a resolution naming a new trade school located in Evergreen as the Ed E. Reid State Vocational Technical Training School, now known as Reid State Technical College. The resolution noted that the school, which began offering classes in October 1966, would serve not only Evergreen, where Reid was born, but also nearby Georgiana, where Reid was raised. It remains an uncommon distinction for an Alabama institution of higher education to be named for the director of an advocacy association.

IN THE WAKE OF REID’S PREMATURE DEATH, THE membership voted staff attorney John Watkins to become the League’s second executive director. Many landmark pieces of legislation for the betterment of Alabama cities and towns were passed during his years as director, particularly legislation allowing municipalities to determine salaries for officials as well as a constitutional amendment that designated royalties and revenues from off-



ABOVE: Birmingham attorney Nina Miglionico was the first woman to serve on the Birmingham City Council. In 1981 she became the first woman elected League president. (Birmingham, Ala., Public Library Archives) LEFT: In 2007 Madison City Council President Cynthia McCollum became the first municipal official from Alabama elected to serve as president of the National League of Cities (NLC).



shore oil and natural gas drilling into a permanent trust fund, a portion of which is distributed to Alabama’s cities and towns. Under certain conditions,

these funds are mandated for capital improvement projects when the interest on the fund exceeds \$60 million in any given year. Watkins also created a critical member program, the highly successful Municipal Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. (MWCF), which has continually provided workers comp insurance to municipalities, water and sewer utilities, housing authorities, and gas and power utilities since its 1976 inception. It is the second-oldest municipal league insurance pool in the nation. He also led the membership in acquiring property on Adams Avenue in Montgomery, a block from the State Capitol and the Alabama State House, where a permanent headquarters was constructed in 1970. The original building was expanded in 1992 and again in 2001 to accommodate additional staff.



ABOVE: *In 1970 ALM moved into a brand new headquarters building near the State Capitol. (Elmore DeMott)* OPPOSITE PAGE: *With a population of 212,237 in 2010, Birmingham is Alabama's largest municipality. (Robin McDonald)*

In 1981, under Watkins's tenure, Birmingham Council President Nina Miglionico became the first woman elected ALM president. A lifelong Birmingham resident who later became one of the first female lawyers in the state, Miglionico was the first woman elected to Birmingham's city government, serving on the City Council for twenty-two years (1963–1985). From 1978 until 1981, she served as council president—the first woman to hold that title. Miglionico's ascent to ALM's highest leadership position was an unusual occurrence—one that would not repeat itself until 1994 with the election of Rainbow City Mayor Sue Glidewell. With Guntersville Mayor Leigh Dollar's term beginning June 1, five female presidents have led ALM during its eighty-five-year history.

Watkins retired in May 1986 after nearly thirty years of service and was succeeded by Perry C. Roquemore Jr., who had been hired as ALM staff attorney in 1974. During Roquemore's twenty-four-year tenure as executive director, additional ALM member programs were added, further cementing ALM's ability to develop and provide invaluable resources necessary for municipalities to provide "quality of life" services to Alabama's citizens.

The Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) was founded in 1989, during Roquemore's tenure, as a re-

sponse to a "hard" insurance market when many municipalities were unable to secure liability insurance or were charged outrageous rates. That same year, ALM elected its first African American president, Tuskegee Mayor Johnny Ford, who was one of the first Black mayors in modern-era Alabama, leading a city of more than 10,000.

The League formed the Alabama Association of Municipal Attorneys (AAMA) in 1992 to benefit municipal prosecutors and attorneys by providing educational conferences on the unique aspects of municipal law. In 1994 ALM became the sec-

ond municipal association nationwide to establish a voluntary continuing-education curriculum designed specifically for elected officials. ALM's extremely popular Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program offers several certification levels and has served as a model for other organizations, including the Mississippi Municipal League and the Louisiana Municipal Association. ALM launched its official website in 1998; developed a joint Loss Control Division between AMIC and MWCF in 2002 to provide risk-management services to its members; founded the Alabama Municipal Funding Corporation (AMFund) in 2006 to help cities and towns implement local projects via low-cost financing; and created the Alabama Municipal Judges Association (AMJA) in 2007. Also in 2007, Councilwoman Cynthia McCollum of Madison became the first, and thus far only, Alabama official elected president of the National League of Cities.

By the time Roquemore retired in April 2011—the longest serving League employee to date with thirty-seven years—membership stood at 444 municipalities and ALM staff had tripled. On October 3, 2019, ALM presented Roquemore with an Honorary Certified Municipal Official Emeritus designation, the first of its kind, in appreciation for his dedicated service to municipal education—which has expanded well beyond his retirement.

Deputy Director/General Counsel Ken Smith was named ALM's fourth executive director in May 2011. During his nine-year tenure, the League's membership reached an all-time high of 454 out of 463 incorporated municipalities; technology was expanded to include in-house servers, cloud



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resources, electronic publications, and social media. Additional member services were developed as well, including the expansion of the Certified Municipal Official Program; a debt-intercept program, Municipal Intercept Services (MIS); and League Law, an online municipal legal-research system. Notably, ALM elected its first African American female president, Lincoln Councilwoman Sadie Britt, in 2015. Smith, along with the twenty-member core ALM staff, continued the mission of ALM's founding fathers to empower municipal government through advocacy, education, and the advancement of effective local leadership while remaining the voice of Alabama's municipalities.

ALM's executive director position transitioned for the fifth time on June 1, 2020, when Deputy Director Greg Cochran, a twenty-four-year employee adept in advocacy and governmental relations, was named Interim Executive Director by ALM's nominating committee following Smith's retirement. He will be voted into the position by the mem-

bership at ALM's Annual Business Session later in the year. With Cochran's ascension to executive director comes a deeper focus on advocacy as well as additional concerted education and outreach efforts. ALM has added two new positions to its advocacy team, has begun exploring new programs, and is developing and expanding its strategic narratives to further position the organization as the expert in and voice for municipal government, while also expanding its reach to include citizens, thought leaders, and strategic partners who can assist the state's cities and towns as Alabama continues to evolve.

Regardless of economic challenges or shifting political dynamics, citizens expect critical services to continue—services derived through municipal policies and programs. Therefore, strong, proactive municipal government will remain paramount. And the Alabama League of Municipalities will continue to promote and protect this form of government closest to the citizens. ah