

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

### Catching up with John Flora

I was lucky enough to catch up with John Flora in August between his trip to Hawaii and his trip to Mexico.

John's education and career path were atypical for most public works employees. He graduated from UW-Madison with a degree in light building, earned his bachelor and master civil engineering degrees from Oklahoma State University, and his master's degree in teaching from Pepperdine University.

John served in the Army Corp of Engineers from 1960 to 1980 and was stationed in Korea; Vietnam; Germany; West Point, NY; Virginia; Oklahoma; and Fort McCoy. He credits the army with his ability to get things done with limited resources.

He was public works director for the City of Fridley from 1980 to 2000, and taught classes for the North Hennepin Community College Public Works Certificate Program for many years. John was APWA-MN president in 1986 and served on the Executive Committee for four years. He also served as APWA Director for Region VI for seven years (1989-1995), and was an APWA Top Ten Leader of the Year in 1994.

**What activities or interests keep you busy?** Travel, golf, and skiing. In addition to Hawaii and Mexico, Jan and I have visited the Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, and Germany. We spend time each winter in Bonita Beach, Florida, and get together with other "Fridlians" every Super Bowl party. We see the neighbors more in Florida than in Fridley. We have two granddaughters, 9 and 12, in Columbus, Ohio, and see them as much as possible whenever we need a "kid fix." Jan and I celebrated our 50th anniversary on August 8 in Cicero, Illinois, with our extended family.

**Why and how did you become involved in APWA-MN?** I joined because I believed interacting with others in the field was important. We worked with each other to solve problems. MPWA offered opportunities to make those connections.

**What benefits do you think APWA-MN provided, both professionally and personally?** I met people, grew professionally, and had an impact politically. Members are aware of innovations and opportunities, and have mutual interests that provide for educational and professional contacts. Everyone in public works should be a member. I helped organize MERC (Metro Engineers Racquetball Club). We had team members from BWSR, DNR, Mn/DOT, and cities. MERC provided an opportunity to know people in different organization, which facilitated the exchange of ideas and project accomplishments.



**What are some of your best memories of APWA-MN activities?** Camaraderie at chapter activities and programs. Wives used to participate in activities during conferences, which provided family connections and deeper friendships. Many of our friends today are the couples we got to know at the conferences.

**Do you recall some of the big issues or initiatives?** State aid and watershed issues. Spending state aid money on local streets and setting up the Six-Cities WMO. We also tried to improve the employment and educational opportunities for the Chapter by getting the University of Minnesota to promote public works.

**What was your greatest challenge in public works?** The City Council!

**What was your greatest reward?** Satisfaction of getting things built and getting a job done economically. In Fridley, we started a street reconstruction program and a program to maintain and upgrade water wells, reservoirs, tanks, and our filter plants. We also tried new things, like stabilizing the banks on Stonybrook and Rice creeks by using recycled tires. This was possible because of working relationships with other agencies.

**What changes have you seen in public works?** Better equipment to facilitate public works activities like the Portapatcher. Preventive maintenance being curtailed because of lack of funds.

**What challenges do you see facing public works?** Money. And communicating to the public that maintenance needs to be done.

**How do we encourage public works as a career?** Many people just fall into public works. It needs to be promoted as a career choice in civil engineering programs. Courses could cover public relations, municipal organizations, budgets, funding projects, dealing with state and local governments, and getting things done. Young retirees could become involved in the education process and share their experiences if the colleges offered such programs.

**Any advice for current public works directors?** Be aggressive about getting things done and help people.

Submitted by Kathy Young  
APWA-MN History Committee & Past President