



From Your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

Dreaming of genies, wishes and 'hot dogs'

THIS PAST SUMMER, my youngest daughter, Kelcie, saw someone she thought looked like a "genie". When she told me this, it made me think of a story I read 20 years ago.

Imagine Bryan, a township official, taking a stroll along the Illinois River. It's a beautiful day, not too hot, not too humid, and there's not a cloud in the sky. It's just a great day to be alive and enjoying the outdoors.

Bryan nearly stumbles over something laying on the riverbank at his feet but with that special agility and sure-footedness possessed only by township officials, Bryan manages to recover his balance and stoops to look at this "object" lying in his path. As he picked it up, he said, "Why, it's a brass vase or lamp. It's covered with dirt and years of grime but clearly, it's not just another piece of junk; it's worth investigating, perhaps even keeping!"

Bryan begins to wipe the dirt and grime off and as the lamp's luster and true color appears, so too does a ghostly but smiling figure, the genie of the lamp. This is not the ordinary genie found in tales about the Arabian Nights or some other figures mentioned in East Indian lore. No, this genie, Bryan's genie, is a real, live American Indian genie made in America, by Americans, and ready to grant three All-American wishes to whoever released him from the lamp. In this case, Bryan.

The genie says to Bryan, "Well Bryan, you've released me from captivity after many hundreds of years and you will be rewarded with three wishes. There are no strings attached, you will be granted anything you request, but remember, once a request has been made, you can't change your mind." This is clearly serious business requiring serious consideration, so Bryan sat down on a rock, pulled his copy of the *Laws & Duties Handbook of Township Officials* out of his pocket and began searching for some kind of suggestion. Well, as you know, if you've read a copy of that book, there's nothing in it that provides any information regarding genies. However, Bryan did find a reference in the book that says for some purposes, township officials are advised to consult with their township attorney.

There weren't any attorneys handy, but Bryan did remember that some of the attorneys he knew had money, so he said to the genie, "my first wish is for an

unlimited supply of money." Wham! Pow! A crash of thunder and Bryan was deluged with money that never seemed to stop coming, and he was delighted. "For my second wish," Bryan said, "I want a bright, shiny, fancy new convertible with all the trimmings, gadgets, bells and whistles." Wham! Pow! A crash of thunder and there's Bryan tooling along the highway in his gorgeous new convertible, thinking to himself, "I'm not going to make my third wish too soon. I want to think about it for a while. I'm too smart to throw it away on something foolish; after all, my mother didn't raise no dummy."

So Bryan rode along with the top down, the wind blowing through his thinning hair, and at peace with the world. What a feeling of euphoria and satisfaction, he thought, as he turned on the car's radio and began to whistle along with a commercial. "I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener" and Wham! Pow! A crash of thunder and? you guessed it, mustard anyone?

Circumstances and conditions for local governments are changing rapidly and on a daily basis. Township officials can be in the forefront of making those changes to benefit them and their constituents. Those officials who refuse to recognize that change is inevitable will ultimately be left behind with their "we've always done it that way" attitude.

As you will read elsewhere in this magazine, technology with the use of the Internet and websites is changing how officials communicate and relate to their constituents. The township official of the future is the one who accepts today's challenges and prepares for those still ahead.

Township government and township officials can't afford to stagnate and refuse to recognize that we've entered a new "information" age. Most certainly, township government can't afford any "hot dogs"!