

Brenda Chance – League of Municipalities

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Overland Park, Kansas. It's time for the big annual meeting of the League of Kansas Municipalities. The President of the organization is calling the meeting to order. Interestingly, the chairman of this meeting is not a man – it's a woman. In fact, this woman is the first female city clerk to ever hold the office of President of the League of Kansas Municipalities – and she comes from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Brenda Chance is the city clerk of Phillipsburg in northwest Kansas. In addition to her community duties, she serves President of the League of Kansas Municipalities, the statewide association of city governments.

Brenda is a Phillips County native. She helped with her father's custom harvesting business, attended Colby Community College, and worked as a parts manager in a John Deere dealership.

In 1981, she joined the City of Phillipsburg as a waste water treatment facility operator. Over time, she gradually worked her way up through the city organization.

"One day in 1987, the mayor called me into his office," Brenda said. "He told me that I should be city clerk. I told him no thanks, but he had been a drill sergeant in the Army and he told me: I should be city clerk!" With his encouragement and the support of her husband, Brenda agreed to give it a try.

She was appointed to the position on April 1, 1987. Two days later, a massive snowstorm hit western Kansas, dumping a big load of snow on communities including Phillipsburg. "We couldn't get out our front door or our back door," Brenda said. "We had to go through the garage and dig our way out from there." Of course, the phone started ringing off the hook about city business.

"When the phone rang about the tenth time, my husband answered and said grumpily, 'What do you people expect?!' It was a city councilman," she said. Fortunately the city survived the blizzard and so did Brenda's career.

She went on to a distinguished career at the city. Sadly, the mayor passed away from cancer that first fall.

Brenda was active in her professional association, the City Clerks/Municipal Finance Officers Association. She served that organization as President and was named Clerk of the Year in 2008.

When a friend of Brenda's stepped down for health reasons from the Board of Directors of the League of Kansas Municipalities, the friend recommended Brenda Chance for her unexpired position.

Brenda joined the Board of the League of Kansas Municipalities in 2005 and then became an officer, being elected President in fall 2012. Brenda is one of only eight women to have held that position since the organization was founded in 1910. Wow.

She is the first city clerk to be elected president of the organization since 1937 and the first female city clerk ever to be elected president. That's quite an accomplishment for a young woman who grew up near the rural community of Glade, population 112 people. Now, that's rural.

“I’m very honored,” Brenda said. “Our city officials across the state are an amazing bunch. The mayors of Overland Park and Wichita have problems on a different scale, but when we get to talking, we find we still have a lot of the same type of issues.”

League meetings are also a time to share a lot of ideas. “We like to pick up ideas and think, how could we do that back home?” Brenda said.

What does Brenda like about being city clerk in Phillipsburg? “I love my job,” Brenda said. “I love to see a project come through to completion. We just opened our new aquatic center in Phillipsburg. It was great to see the delight on the faces of those kids, as well as the adults in the therapy pool,” Brenda said. “It’s about service and being there to help.”

It’s time to leave the annual meeting of the League of Kansas Municipalities, where the presiding officer is the first female city clerk ever to hold that position. We commend Brenda Chance for making a difference with service – not just to her community, but to her state.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.