



AN INTERVIEW WITH

# William Homa

**Chief Financial Officer  
and Tax Collector,  
Township of Cedar  
Grove, New Jersey**

BY ELIZABETH FU

Cedar Grove (pictured above) has consistently been named as one of New Jersey's Top 100 Towns by *New Jersey Monthly* magazine.

In any conversation with William (Bill) Homa, you can sense his enthusiasm and love for working in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. He has been with the town for 37 years and he attributes his fondness for it to a good working environment. That environment, he explains, was created by the two town managers he's worked with during his tenure, both of whom have also established a strong council manager form of government.

Bill didn't initially plan to work in local government. "I originally wanted to be a math teacher. That was my dream," he said. What changed his plans? The 1973 recession. Seeing that tenure was increasingly difficult to obtain, he switched from math and teaching courses to accounting.

After graduating with an accounting degree, Bill was looking for a job. Shortly after graduating, he attended his cousin's wedding, where he learned of an opening at the accounting firm

Samuel Klein and Company. During the process of submitting his resume and interviewing for the position, Homa was asked whether he wanted to focus on commercial or municipal work. He laughs as he recalls his response, since it has defined his career. "I don't care," he said. "It doesn't matter." Homa was assigned to be a municipal auditor, starting his first of 43 years in public finance.

At Samuel Klein and Company, Bill audited municipalities in New Jersey. He learned a lot about government operations and was moving up the career ladder, but after six years, he was looking for something different. He saw his colleagues moving to municipal governments, working as treasurers, so he applied for an open position at the Town of Cedar Grove. He happily recalls getting the job on April 11, 1983.

Cedar Grove is located in northern New Jersey, 20 miles west of New

York City. It's a small community, with about 13,000 residents, but it provides a variety of services. The town operates water and sewer, solid waste, and a swimming pool. Keeping track of those five budgets gives Homa plenty to do.

### Getting into Position

Reflecting on his career, Homa talks about his love of learning. After starting at Cedar Grove, he recognized that he wanted to become a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). CFOs in New Jersey have to be certified, requiring completion of courses at Rutgers University. After becoming a CFO, Homa wanted to build his knowledge and became a Certified Public Accountant—but he didn't stop there. In New Jersey, a Registered Municipal Accountant (RMA) is required to sign off on a municipal audit report. Getting the RMA certification requires passing a state-certified exam, which Homa did in 1987.

These certifications placed Homa in a unique position. When the town's tax collector suddenly passed away, the town manager reached out to Homa to gauge his interest. The role would require taking three courses and passing the state certification exam to be a Certified Tax Collector. In the interim, the town hired a part-time tax collector, who mentored Homa into the role. By 1987, Homa added tax collector to his title, enforcing the collection of taxes and water and sewer payments for Cedar Grove.

### Education and Growth

While taking courses at Rutgers towards his CFO certification, Homa was reminded of his love for teaching. After receiving his CFO certification, he began teaching as an adjunct at Rutgers, and he still teaches evening classes on how to prepare annual financial statements.

Bill's love for education prevades his work. Homa is active in New Jersey GFOA and became its president in 2009. From 2010 to 2011, his focus



was raising funds for the New Jersey GFOA's scholarship fund, helping organize and teaching seminars, with the proceeds going to the scholarship fund. During these two years, the initiative raised \$20,000.

Homa's passion for education also extends further. In 1993, he co-founded a company with New Jersey GFOA past president and retired CFO/Town Manager Camille Furguele to provide continuing education seminars to meet various New Jersey state certification requirements. Yet, he is the first to say, "I don't know everything. Other CFOs have great ideas, so networking is one of the things we've got to do."

When talking about networking, mentoring comes to the forefront. When GFOA announced its first-time conference attendee mentorship program for the 2017 conference in Denver, Homa immediately signed up and offered advice to his mentees on how to maximize their time at conference. In fact, he's still in touch with his mentees from 2017, and he continued to participate in the program for the following conferences in 2018 and 2019, and in the New Jersey GFOA's mentorship program.

When talking about networking, Homa mentions GFOA's annual conference, having attended annually from 1989 to

"When I went to William Paterson College in 1973, I wanted to be a math teacher in college. I took senior college math, trigonometry, geometry, you name it. I loved the math, and I wanted to be a math teacher."

2019. He fondly recalls the first GFOA annual conference he attended in 1985 in Chicago because it changed his perspective about the different types of governments a finance officer could support and the operating challenges that they may have. For Bill, the annual conference provides an opportunity to make new connections and to build a professional and personal network. He recalls Tom and Brenda Wright from Stillwater, Minnesota, who Homa and his wife, Angela, became friends with and meet regularly during the conferences. He also expresses disappointment about not being able to go to New Orleans for the 2020 annual conference as he had planned to catch up with Glenda Dees, a retired public finance officer in Louisiana, and her husband, Neil—more friends he had made many conferences ago. For Homa, networking is vital for any public finance officer.

When asked about what advice he would give to fellow finance officers given the various macroeconomic challenges he has seen in his career, Homa offers a simple and practical message: "Be active. In times of uncertainty, reach out and ask others, and find ways in which we can learn from one another." ■

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