A Note from the Chairperson

So many things were happening at the end of this last year school year and over the summer, that we decided to make this a Fall newsletter rather than our usual Spring edition!

As you can read elsewhere in this issue, the last founding member of the Institute, H. Roger Smith, has retired. His contributions were so great that it took two people to fill his shoes — we hired Raymond Asomani-Boateng, an environmental planner, and we received a pre-doctoral fellowship to hire Beth Wielde to teach design courses for this year. Raymond brings additional strength to what is a growing interest in URSI in comparative (international) urbanization. In addition to Raymond’s work in Africa, David Laverny-Rafter visited Corsica this summer, Perry Wood visited Germany and the Low Countries, and Bill Bernhagen has continued his work on Canadian cities.

We received State approval in the Spring, and this Fall we will be offering two graduate certificate programs, one in urban planning and one in local government management. The certificates cover the basic knowledge, skills and values in their areas and are intended for students who wish to develop a local government management or planning focus within a graduate degree program, or for students who have already earned their degrees and wish to prepare for a career shift. We will offer the complete sequence (four courses) for the planning certificate at Burnsville High School over the next two years. We are also considering offering the management certificate in the Twin Cities, if the market is strong enough. If you or your colleagues are interested, more information is available at www.mnsu.edu/ursi/Home/Banner.htm.

Finally, URSI has begun the process of program review for the coming year. This Fall we will be assembling a report on our accomplishments over the past five years and two external reviewers (George Latimer, former mayor of St. Paul and currently urban studies faculty at Macalester; and Craig Waldron, past president of the MCMA) will come to campus in the Spring. The report will be linked to URSI’s homepage (www.mnsu.edu/ursi/), and you will be able to make comments and suggestions from that website.

Our best wishes to you in the coming year! Let us know if there is anything we can do to help you or your city, either with applied research or staff development opportunities. The office phone is still 507-389-1714, and our e-mail is ursi@mnsu.edu.

Tony Filipovitch
Institute Director

Students Cheer as Smith Retires

We pulled it off! About 135 former students and friends (or former friends and students, or something) were gathered in the dining room at Old Main Village (which used to be the library on Lower Campus) when H. Roger arrived on Friday evening, April 30. He hadn’t suspected a thing — even when he was walking up to the door and saw all the cars and heard the murmur inside, he just thought they were having a busy evening at Old Main. It is not often that H. is at a loss for words, but he had no quick comeback as he walked into the room and we all broke into applause.

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www.mnsu.edu/dept/ursi
WHO'S WHO IN THE ZOO

Raymond Asomani-Boateng: Raymond comes to URSI fresh from his Master’s in GIS at Michigan State University (the other MSU). Before that, he earned his Ph.D. in Environmental Planning at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. He has published research on urban agriculture in Ghana, and has earned grants from three national governments. Raymond’s arrival will strengthen our offerings in environmental issues and in comparative (especially African) urbanization.

Beth Wielde: Beth is one of the first recipients of MSU’s new pre-doctoral fellowship program. While she is a doctoral student at Hamline University, she will teach design-related courses for URSI and develop her own program of research (she is interested in the portrayal of local government managers in cinema). She holds her Master’s from URSI, where H. Roger Smith was her advisor.

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There were alumni from all of the classes, and friends from town and from far away (Kermi Mahan got the award for coming the farthest-from California!). We set up a slide show, documenting the theme for the evening — “38 Years of Magnificence!” The slides are available for viewing at the URSI website (www.mnsu.edu/ursi), behind the “People” link. If you recognize any of the people who are not identified under the slides, let us know (ursi@mnsu.edu) — as we age, we are losing our collective memory and could use some help. We also presented H with a framed print of the composite photos he created of the 200 block of S. Front St. back in 1972.

Part of the event was a fundraiser to create an assistantship in H’s name. We raised $10,000 toward that goal, but we need at least $50,000 to create an endowed fund (and we would need to grow that fund to $250,000 to completely endow a graduate fellowship). We have made copies of the print that we presented to H, and are offering them as gifts to friends who contribute $50 or more to the Smith Fund. If you have the means and would like to help us ensure that the memory of H and his love of urban design continue to play a role in URSI, send a gift in H’s name to: Urban & Regional Studies Institute, H. Roger Smith Fund, 106 Morris Hall, Mankato MN 56001

A Note From Aytch

Just a quick note to thank you and all those you conspired with to set up the party you had for me the Institute. It was a total surprise and more than a bit of a shock to say the least. But it was the best time I could have imagined and I must say that I was most honored. It was a terrific conclusion to what we really have been “Thirty Eight years of Magnificence!” I do so very much appreciate the effort and the wonderful feelings of friendship and commitment that came from all those in attendance and the many who simply were unable to be there but took the time to write. Nevertheless this was a party for all of us, not just for me. I was simply in the right venue at the right chronological moment. My leaving was a symbol to the many hundreds of our graduates who have gone on and found success because of something we offered them, not because of me. As I noted. How I wish Bob and Bert and Joe could have been there that evening to feel the love and gratitude and kinship that all those people felt for what was created by so many of us-Bob, Rita, Joe, Rog, Tony, Mary, Mary Ellen (wish she could have been there) and some others who slip my mind for the moment. We created something really unique and though others tried to replicate it, ‘sort of,’” they didn’t have the magic. Without folks like Bob, Bill Webster, Woody Ehrle, et al that magic could not have existed and thrived. There was a “team” that thrived on that magic and made it not an illusion but a reality. We were the sum of the parts that really made the whole.

I am so glad I was a part of that time. I learned so much from all of you (not that it always showed). I was fortunate though because I had had a history that made teamwork in the context of the Institute simply a natural consequence of my training and service for seven years as a fireman. I came from Antioch which really taught me the meaning of what interdisciplinary thinking really was and what an imperative it is to the learning process. I was fortunate to have been mentored by people who saw “the bigger picture” and impressed upon me that there were no “simple answers.” I was allowed by Bob and others to have the freedom to explore far and beyond my reach and go off and study Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Historic Preservation and Downtown Revitalization at institutions like Cornell, Harvard, Pratt, etc. I think I was gifted to be a good teacher. Fortunately I recognized that gift and acted upon it. But I was sort of an empty candy jar and it was only after I began to fill it with the jelly beans of seeing and knowing that I really became a part of our team. Wow! What a ride it has been. Thank you. Thank you, so very much.
Staff Updates

David Laverny-Rafter returned to the URSI faculty in Fall, 2004 after being on leave for two years and conducting evaluation research for the U.S. General Accounting Office in Washington, D.C. This research allowed him to concentrate on his area of specialization which is transportation (specifically transit “New Starts”) and to explore new areas like homeland security. Back at Mankato, David is now working on a research project examining sustainable transportation indicators and teaching courses in program evaluation, sustainable communities, planning process and long-range planning. Furthermore, he continues to be involved in community organizations such as Transit for Livable Communities and his neighborhood organization in the Twin Cities neighborhood where he lives.

Faculty member Miriam Porter was on sabbatical leave during the academic year 2003-04. It was an opportunity to pursue scholarly activities and professional development. Miriam has stated how thankful she was for that opportunity. Some of her more notable accomplishments during her sabbatical were updating her civic education research and presenting it at the International Conference on Civic Education which was held in New Orleans. Her paper was published online and can be read at civiced.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/paperload2003.

Miriam also put her civic education in practice and worked on group leadership skills with a youth advisory commission for the City of Norwood/Young America. Another project she worked on was conducting focus groups with Minnesota city managers to gain insights into their needs in their professional credentialing process. Credentialing is a professional opportunity for city managers provided by the International City/County Management Association.

Miriam felt that her favorite activity was stretching her teaching skills. She regularly volunteered at a kindergarten center, the Early Childhood Center in Chaska. There she worked with her youngest son’s class. They covered topics such as the planets, bread from around the world, and cities (of course).

Staff Updates Continued

Dr. Janet Cherrington [aka Dr. J.] continues working to bring public awareness to the importance of careers in professional city management. In September 2003, she recounted the use in her URSI 653 graduate classes of the “Building Communities...It’s No Small Chore” tool kit at the ICMA conference in Charlotte, NC. The graduate studio project included students customizing public service video clips, developing a community brochure and a phone guide for the city of Saint Peter and was featured in MSU’s spring 2003 Today magazine. At the League of MN Cities conference in September 2004, Jan also talked about the studio project in the “Spreading the ‘Good Word’ About your City” session. She plans to repeat the project again in her spring 2005 URSI 653 graduate class. In May 2004, Jan participated in the “Recruiting, Mentoring, Educating Future Public Administrators” panel at the MN City/County Management Association’s spring conference.

Engaging in civic activities is another of Jan’s passions. During the year she served on the Historical Homes Tour Committee which planned a tour of the interiors of some of Mankato’s most treasured homes. Committee members included area business people, students and faculty from Minnesota State University, Mankato and South Central Technical College. Students from Jan’s MSU Learning Community actually researched the social histories of the homes, graphic arts students from SCTC took the photographs and assembled a full color tour booklet, and SURSI (Students for Urban and Regional Studies) acted as tour guides. The event raised $1500 for YMCA Youth Leadership Programs.

Over the summer, Jan toured four U.S. cities as part of a Faculty Improvement Grant to research the theme “Pop Music in Urban America” and incorporate it into her Introduction to the City class. In the fall of 2004, she will be teaching a new URBS 651 finance graduate course which will provide students with the “nuts and bolts” of non-profit, fund accounting. The course syllabus will be posted on Jan’s personal web page at www.intech.mnsu.edu/cherrington under “syllabus”.

In 2004, Jan was nominated for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences’ Distinguished Professor Award for the second time. She served on the Center for Applied Social Science (CASS) Board at Minnesota State University for the 2003-04 academic year and was on the ICMA Steene Scholarship Committee in 2003.

L to R: Chris Boyce, YMCA; Sonja Jacobsen, Jacobsen Metal Fabrication; Judy Arzuffi, Harry Meyerding Center; Janet Cherrington, Minnesota State University; Neil Nurre, South Central Technical College.