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Paesel plans to retire from South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association



Ed Paesel plans to retire from the South Suburban Mayors & Managers Association. (Courtesy of South Suburban Mayors & Managers)

By **Erin Gallagher**
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Giving the Southland a voice when major decisions are made in Chicagoland was a big reason why Edward W. Paesel helped form the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association in 1978.

By December, he plans to end his service to the group. He will retire after serving as the group's executive director for 17 years.

Forty years ago, while Paesel was mayor of Sauk Village, mayors gathered informally for dinners. From those meetings, officials formed the SSMMA, which includes 44 municipalities in southern Cook and eastern Will counties.

"Generally, municipalities are generally very willing to cooperate and are more regionally minded than back when the organization was first formed," Paesel said.

Formalizing as a group, the SSMMA has received "tens of millions of dollars" in grants under Paesel's leadership, largely due to state and federal agencies being more willing to give money to groups over individual municipalities, he said.

For example, the SSMMA received a \$4 million grant to help create the Chicago Southland Fiber Network and another \$3 million from U.S. Housing and Urban Development Geographic Information System "so that every community doesn't have to buy expensive equipment," he said.

Also, the group helped South Suburban Land Bank — which started with three communities and now includes 18 — receive millions of dollars that Attorney General Lisa Madigan redirected from the state's portion of a federal foreclosure settlement in order to purchase and rehabilitate vacant land in individual communities, he said.

"Ed Paesel's service to the communities of our region has been extraordinary," said Park Forest Mayor John A. Ostenburg, who is the current SSMMA president, in a statement. "Through his good work, an unprecedented amount of grant money has flowed into our region, providing assistance to all the member communities."

"It's more than getting grants and funding; it's getting communities to cooperate, getting mayors to cooperate," said Paesel.

Paesel has served on numerous boards, according to a SSMMA statement, including Metra, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

He was a commissioner for the Northeastern Illinois Plan Commission. Due to his expertise in transportation, he was appointed to the transportation transition teams for former governors George Ryan and Rod Blagojevich.

"The importance of that is that the south suburbs have a seat at the table when a lot of these larger decisions are made," he said. "It's gotten better; there's much more south suburban representation besides me, but that wasn't always the case."

Prior to Paesel's 17 years as the SSMMA's second executive director, he served 12 years as mayor and four years as a trustee of Sauk Village, in addition to 11 years as director of the Third Airport Clearinghouse.

The SSMMA is seeking a firm to conduct a candidate search to replace Paesel, who expects to retire by the end of the year.

"We recognize that Ed Paesel's shoes are big ones to fill," Ostenburg said. "As such, we are going to engage in the widest search possible to assure that we find someone who can carry on in the excellent tradition that Ed has established."

Paesel, 66, does not have any specific plans for retirement. He said he will play a little more golf, and volunteer to keep busy.

"I plan to stay in Sauk Village and the south suburbs," he said.

Erin Gallagher is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.

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