

A Tribute to Bernard Hillenbrand

By Charles F. Bingman

Bernie Hillenbrand was a person of exceptional insight. He was one of the first of his generation of leaders to recognize the rising power and range of American governance, and he was remarkably prescient about the emerging role of counties as central to our government system. Hillenbrand correctly understood that counties linked the system together, dealing upward with states and the federal government, and downward with cities, suburbs, and a rapidly changing rural and small town world. Under his leadership, counties blossomed from often overlooked bodies, and became a major force in the determination of most of the significant political and managerial issues of our time.

The nature of Hillenbrand's leadership was crucial. He always felt the power of counties and the other levels of government as sources of unity and collaboration, and not opposition and compulsion, and thus, he always sought to make the whole range of governments more valuable and achieving.

And Hillenbrand exhibited a whole added dimension. One of his academic degrees was in theology, and he was greatly motivated by a strong sense that government is a calling, and must be greatly motivated by a strong moral obligation, and in his later years, he served as an active Methodist minister. He was a great human being; a true Renaissance Man", even in our modern electronic world.