

Profile in Public Service: Muleshoe Mayor Pro Tem Irene Mason

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Muleshoe Mayor Pro Tem Irene Mason is an example of the hundreds of hard-working, dedicated city officials serving small cities in Texas. We think it is important to profile these public servants from time to time.



Located in the High Plains of West Texas, Muleshoe is a city of approximately 4,600 residents in Bailey County and is home to Irene Mason, the city's first female mayor pro tem. Irene was first elected to the Muleshoe City Council in 2007, serving as mayor pro tem since 2009. A native of Whiteface, Texas, and a graduate of Texas State

University-San Marcos, Irene is a school teacher by trade and currently teaches fifth-grade reading.

Irene is married to Ray, who recently retired from a career in the health care industry. The couple lived in Lubbock, Midland, Allen, and Hereford before settling in Muleshoe in December 2005. They have three children, three "outstanding" grandchildren, and a "baby," a cat named Lyle. Irene and Ray love to travel and play golf.

Irene serves as second vice president for TML Region 3 and serves on the TML Legislative Policy Committee on Municipal Revenue and Finance. She is also a member of the governor-appointed South Plains Regional Review Committee.

Why did you choose to run for city council?

I had lived in Muleshoe for one year when I was searching for a way to give back to this community for the incredible way they welcomed us and took us in. There can only be one explanation—the good Lord planted a question in my mind: "What do you need to do to be on city council?" I pursued this mission and have never looked back. I have loved serving for three full years and have begun my fourth year. I was overwhelmed and honored when chosen as the first female mayor pro tem.

When I was first elected, some would say that they didn't know whether to congratulate me or offer me sympathy.

I was a little confused, because I was ecstatic at the opportunity, and after all, I made the choice. I say it's a celebration, because it is a true honor to serve.

What makes Muleshoe special?

The citizens of Muleshoe are some of the most giving and compassionate people I have ever known. Their commitment to and pride they feel for the community makes such a difference. I felt that from the beginning and am proud and honored to call Muleshoe my home.

What are the city's recent accomplishments?

The City of Muleshoe developed a capital improvement program and identified the following projects: extension of sewer lines, new police department building, new swimming pool, expansion of wastewater treatment plant, repair of a one-million-gallon water reservoir, and public works equipment replacement. We held two major events to celebrate the new police department building by holding a dedication ceremony, and on May 31, 2010, we had the opening of a phenomenal aquatic center equipped with diving area, slide, lazy river, and zero entry.

I am still in awe of these completions and have learned patience. These projects were first conceived during my first year; I didn't realize that it takes time for them to come alive. It was all worth the wait. The citizens have been so supportive of the decision in January 2008 to take out certificates of obligation in the amount of \$4 million and \$1.5 million from the fund balance.

What are your short-term and long-term goals for Muleshoe?

As a public servant, I feel that it is important to be available at all times, whether in person or by phone, and to remember that I am always representing Muleshoe. Short-term goals include keeping the lines of communication open and maintaining our customer service that is of high quality. There is a large amount of traffic that comes through Muleshoe, and I would love for everyone to stop instead of just pass through.

I am excited to be working with the high school principal to establish a youth advisory council for our city. I feel that it is extremely important that young people have

a voice in their community and learn to develop leadership skills so that some day that may have the desire to become an elected official or work for the city itself.

In the future, I would very much like to see the school district, chamber of commerce, youth council, and the city work together to develop a comprehensive plan to establish goals for Muleshoe's growth and/or additional improvement.

Describe a typical day or week.

What *is* a typical day or week? Every day is unique, and that's part of the excitement. During the school year, I go to work to teach, and even within that realm, you never know what will happen. The school district is so supportive of my elected position that I am able to run to city hall to sign a check or help in any other way. Monthly meetings, quarterly regional meetings, and special events are all part of my responsibility and provide opportunities to learn and enjoy! I have learned so much from serving as an officer for my region and have appreciated the South Plains Association of Governments. No, I don't believe in a typical day—I see it as a daily adventure.

Why is continuing education important to you?

One of the best support systems cities have is the Texas Municipal League. I will never tire of praising this organization and its staff members! I have attended several TML events, including the Elected Officials' Conference, the Newly Elected Officials' Orientation, regional officers' training, Small Cities' Problem-Solving Clinics, and of course, the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition. The networking is incredible, and I thoroughly enjoy meeting so many individuals from all over the State of Texas. Each conference I have attended has just added to my knowledge in order to be able to serve citizens to the best of my ability.

Each time I return, I share what I have learned with my colleagues and city staff, and because our meetings are televised, members of the community also have an opportunity to be aware of what I am doing and learning. Many times, I have also implemented what I have learned in my classroom.

What advice can you offer those starting off in public service?

To someone who is thinking about public service or who is just beginning, I say to you, "Love what you are doing!" Have a passion for serving and be excited about the possibilities for your city. Even in negative situations, look for the positive! Take the position seriously, and give all you can to it and your citizens. Remember that it was a choice, and enjoy the ride! ★



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