



The TML Risk Pool is committed to providing risk management services and a full suite of liability, property, and workers' compensation coverages to Texas cities and other local governments. The Pool's Board of Trustees is comprised mostly of municipal officials from across the state of Texas.

For the latest installment of "Meet a Trustee," Pool Staff interviewed City of Lancaster City Manager and Texas City Management Association President Opal Mauldin-Jones, who holds Place 9 on the Pool's Board of Trustees.

Quiet confidence, a steadfast resolve to excel, and recognition of her mentors and family. That's Opal Mauldin-Jones. Her rise to city manager and Texas City Management Association President is borne from those things and more.

Opal grew up just outside of Tyler in Overton, Texas, on a 500-acre farm where her family still resides and her grandfather served as a Baptist minister. She originally planned to be an accountant, but then she received an assignment in her first-semester political science class at the University of Texas at Arlington – write a paper about a politician.

Opal chose then newly-elected Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson because she "wanted to interview and write about someone who looked like me." Opal went to Johnson's office, without an appointment. The Representative just happened to be there and agreed to be interviewed. She was so impressed, she offered Opal an unpaid summer internship. Opal, who was working retail to pay for her full time college course load, decided to quit and go for it.

At the end of that summer? Johnson offered Opal a full-time job, but on the condition that she stay in school and make her grades. "I got the [public service] bug working for her," Opal said. And the rest – as they say – is history. She put herself through school and supported her young son by working there until she graduated.

After a brief move to California, Opal returned to Texas and went back to work for Johnson, who encouraged her to attend graduate school. She enrolled once again at U.T. Arlington. Her first M.P.A. class was taught by former Arlington Mayor Richard Greene. Professor Greene's class opened her eyes to how nice it might be to work for just *one* city (as opposed to the *eight* in the congressional district).

While still working in the congressional office, a delegation from the City of Lancaster came to visit with the congresswoman about an airport grant they were seeking. Representative Johnson's flight was delayed, so Opal handled the meeting. The city manager was so impressed, he told her she should apply for an open assistant city manager position. She applied and explained to him why – even though she had no city experience – she could do and was the best choice for the job. That was in 2003, and she didn't make the cut.

Not long after, however, she was offered the job of Community Relations Coordinator at the city. It was a pay cut, and she was then also raising her daughters on her own. But Opal had been "bitten by the city bug" and excitedly took the position. In the role, she "really got out into the community." She attended neighborhood meetings, council committee meetings, and got to know the ins-and-outs of every city department. "To me, that role was the most valuable piece of my career...I was able to build relationships with residents, councilmembers, and others," she said.



"Twenty years later, here I am [still with the city]." She told then city manager Jim Landon, "I want to be your assistant city manager, and then I want your job." She made good on her words. In 2005, she was appointed as assistant *to the* city manager and one year later as *assistant city manager*. Landon left the city in 2007 and was succeeded by city management legend Rickey Childers.

"I attribute my success as a city manager to being Rickey's ACM. Jim Landon gave me the opportunity, but Rickey trained me. He'd give me situations and say 'whatcha gonna do?' He literally allowed me to make important decisions for the city." Opal had first met Childers through the Texas City Management Association's mentor program in 2006.

Her personality test said she was "too emotional and not analytical enough" for the job. She was matched with Childers because his test was the opposite. "When we began working together, we balanced each other perfectly," she said. He showed her that she could be emotional and empathetic, but still make sound decisions and tell people no when she had to. "You need to have a tough skin to make the right decision for the right reasons, in the right way, and just keep going forward."

Opal threw herself into TCMA. She held regional offices, chaired committees, and more. This year, she's following in Childers' footsteps as TCMA President. They also serve together on the Risk Pool Board of Trustees. In fact, Childers still lives in Lancaster and has a son – James Childers – who is also a city manager currently serving in Flower Mound. "I tell James – I know he's your dad – but he's like a father to me, as well." When asked about Opal's career, Rickey had this to say: "I've rarely seen someone with the quiet confidence that Opal has – I'm so proud of her success in the profession, I'm so glad to call her a friend, and I'm honored to serve on the Pool's Board of Trustees with her."

Opal is now herself mentoring up-and-coming city employees. "I believe in paying it forward. Johnson and Childers changed me – I had no idea what could be accomplished in these roles until I actually saw them doing it."

What does she enjoy outside of work? Her family means everything – both her "work" family and her real family. She's the oldest of six siblings, and she has two daughters and a six-month old grandson who live with her. "Seeing my grandson makes every day a joy," Opal said.

She's also studying for a doctorate degree at Dallas Theological Seminary. Her father was a Baptist minister, and she remains active in their church in Overton. In fact, she drives home every weekend to attend. During the pandemic, her father had a stroke, and Opal spent a great deal of time at home helping with his recovery. She's proud of helping him buy a tractor with an air-conditioned cab so he can keep farming.

How did Opal come to serve on Risk Pool Board? Her mentor Rickey Childers told her to go for it. When asked why the service is important, Opal said because it's not profit-driven like an insurance company. "We understand cities and the services they provide." Taking care of cities during a catastrophic loss means the city's officials can focus on taking care of the community.



"I always try to remember the *why*? It's always about the "why" – whether with my family, my city council, my community, my faith, and my Board of Trustees service. My passion and my purpose *is* city government."

We're glad Opal changed her mind about being an accountant. On that paper she wrote about Eddie Bernice Johnson? She got a C-plus, but she's earned an A-plus in public service ever since. Oh, and the City of Lancaster got that airport grant after all!

The Risk Pool's Board is comprised of Trustees who work in local government, are dedicated to public service, and understand the day-to-day challenges of governing. To learn more about your Board Members, [visit the Risk Pool website](#). Other editions of Meet a Trustee can be found on the blog located in the "News" dropdown at the top of the page.