

## Catching Up with Bill Healey

### Who was that guy and why are you here?

I am inspired to begin this article with an *ending*. On February 1, 2024, the MAAO and Maine Chapter of the IAAO co-sponsored a reception to honor Bill Healey for his successful campaign to become the next Vice President of the International Association of Assessing Officers. The reception was held at the Green Ladle in Lewiston. At the conclusion, I spoke to one of the host students from the Lewiston Regional Technical Center. I thanked him for the excellent service, facility, food, and support. Apparently impressed by the ceremony he asked me, "Who was that guy and why are you here?" A very simple question, but for a moment I struggled how to best explain the significance of Bill's achievement to this young, non-resident of the assessing world.



*Bill Healey, at the Feb 1 Reception*

We assessors are accustomed to explaining the deep mysteries of valuation to taxpayers, managers, boards of review and so forth. Who is Bill Healey? That is a good question with many answers and incidentally the subject of this article. The 'why' was a little more difficult to answer. Ostensibly we were there that night to celebrate. But why does Bill's achievement even matter? A sports metaphor might help to clarify it to the uninitiated. If the rest of us are competing in high school football, Bill just won the Superbowl. Of course, we are not simply Bill's triumphant fans; we are his constituents who finally feel represented on an international stage. That is why we were there. The celebration may have ended, but his tenure is just beginning, and we are all rooting for him.

That brings me to the **who** part of *Who is Bill Healey?* Such questions can take a lifetime to answer, but in January I sat down with Bill to ask.

### Who is Bill Healey?

William "Bill" Healey III was born and raised in Lewiston, Maine where he has lived his entire life. Bill's mother is Janice Healey, more about her later. His father, William Healey II has remarried and lives in Florida.

Bill grew up with three sisters, his younger sister Lisa and older sister Debi currently live in Maine. His sister Sue lives in Florida.

His family is small; according to Bill he has few relatives in Maine. Bill can also claim family in the Cleveland area as well as Minnesota and Florida.

As a teenager, Bill attended High School at St. Dom's when it was still in Lewiston. There he played hockey, winning a state championship with his team. His team then went to the New England finals but fell short.

After high school Bill began his post-secondary education at the University of Connecticut. When things didn't quite work out there, he came back to Maine and went to Central Maine Vocation and Technical Institute (CMVTI), now known as Central Maine Community College in Auburn, Maine.

While at CMVTI, Bill took some appraisal and business classes. He didn't go into real estate right away, instead he helped at his father's business. There, he did a lot of mechanical work, discovering that he was pretty good at taking stuff apart and putting it back together again. Something that has come in handy over the years.

Bill is married to his wife Johanne; they have been together for an incredible 42 years. They have two children. Their son William "Billy" Healey (the fourth) lives in Nahant, Massachusetts. Their daughter Roxanne lives in Auburn, Maine.

He has three grandchildren, all of whom are currently in Auburn. His son and daughter-in-law are expecting their first child. This will be Bill and Johanne's fourth grandchild, the proudly anticipated William Healey (the fifth).

His children did not follow him into the Assessing world; his daughter is an occupational therapist for the Lewiston School department. When I asked Bill if Roxanne had any interest in the assessing field, he said, “None whatsoever.”

Similarly, Bill had no interest in the assessing field until, by chance, his real estate appraiser mother Janice signed him and his sisters up to take an appraisal class in the early nineties. Bill’s mother challenged her children to “just see” if they liked it. Fortunately for the assessing community, Bill did.

After becoming a licensed State of Maine appraiser, he worked as a fee appraiser for six years until the savings and loan crisis. As fate would have it, Bill’s first assessing assignment came when he was an appraiser doing a revaluation project for the Town of Windham. Bill and his partner at Paris Appraisal Service were hired to list properties. The Windham Deputy Assessor at the time? None other than his mother, Janice Healey.

The financial crisis proved to be a tumultuous time; appraisal assignments were scarce. With a young family to support, he took a chance on an appraiser position with the town of Old Orchard Beach in 1997. After three years there, Bill was hired as the assessor for the town of Cumberland. He stayed in Cumberland from 2000 to 2013. After Cumberland, Bill ended up going to the town of Scarborough.

Bill was also interested in working in his hometown of Lewiston and kept his eyes on potential openings. He had a relationship with then Lewiston Assessor Joe Grube. Joe was close to retirement and encouraged Bill to join the team as a Deputy and his eventual successor.

In the meantime, Bill continued working in Scarborough believing the experience would be beneficial. When Joe Grube decided to retire from Lewiston in 2015 at 62, Bill was hired as his replacement.



Bill outside Lewiston City Hall

For Bill it was a joyous *sort-of* homecoming. It was ‘sort-of’ because he never truly left. Bill lived in the same home in Lewiston for 35 years, all the while commuting to his other jobs. He went from driving about an hour each way to work to a seven-minute ride to the office, eight minutes tops in heavy traffic!

All told, Bill has 27 years of assessing experience beginning in OOB in 1997. Add in his six years of fee appraising Bill has been valuing property for 33 years. Along the way, he collected some impressive mentors.

When I asked him who his role models were, of course his mother ranked among the top. Janice Healey launched Bill into the world in more ways than one. In

addition to the most important title of mother, she was also the Deputy Assessor in Windham and the Assessor for the Town of Winthrop. Clearly, Bill is not the only one in his family with impressive Assessing credentials.

Another formative presence in Bill’s career was Mike Austin. Bill recalls that in the early days of his career, he “didn’t know anybody” except for a handful of people he worked with. That changed the day he walked into a meeting of assessors at Martindale Country Club in Auburn. That’s where he met Mike Austin, who made him, “feel like I was just part of the group”.

Mike’s inclusiveness stuck with him, and he adopted the mantra, “I want to be like Mike.”

As it turns out, Bill is very much like Mike. Twenty-five years after being convinced to sign up for the IAAO, Bill Healey is its new Vice President on track to be the President. The only other IAAO President who is from Maine, Mike Austin.

A career that began in semi-isolation quickly evolved to one of meaningful connections as Bill's professional circle continued to expand. He was encouraged by Bill Shane, the Town Manager in Cumberland to "get involved". Manager Shane championed the benefits of belonging to a professional organization, warning that disconnection could lead to stagnation.

With this encouragement, Bill began reaching out further, attending more conferences and meeting more people. Bill met George Donatello, a past President of the MAAO, who encouraged him to reach ever higher. George connected Bill Healey to Bill Carroll, then President of the IAAO. Bill accepted committee assignments from President Carroll and continued to be involved when in 2019, Bill ran successfully for the IAAO Board of Directors where he served from 2020 to 2022.

Past President William "Bill" Carroll passed away this year on January 7, the day before my interview with Vice President, Bill Healey. His legacy of service left an indelible mark on Bill Healey and the IAAO as a whole.

After serving on the Board at President Carroll's encouragement, Bill was then eligible to run for an IAAO office. As Bill put it, "You can't be Vice President if you haven't been on the board."

If anyone has paid their dues to the assessing profession, it's Bill Healey. From his beginnings as a member of the Maine Chapter of the IAAO, to serving in many executive capacities at the MAAO, and even serving the Northeastern Regional Association of Assessing Officers (NRAAO) as their Vice President in 2010. Many an assessor has benefited from Bill's leadership, and now many more will.

As impressive as Bill's background is, becoming the Vice President of the IAAO is about more than having the experience and qualifications. There are politics involved as well, so campaigning was a high hurdle in the process. Bill served as a Board representative for Region Three, which is the same jurisdiction as Florida and North Carolina. As Bill put it, "It's hard when you go against these large jurisdictions that have eight, nine hundred members." Armed with a penchant for relationships, Bill was able to pull off an improbable David versus Goliath win against jurisdictions with many more voting members than his own.

#### **IAAO Board, Duties of the Vice President and Beyond**



*Bill Healey (right seated) with the IAAO Board*

The IAAO Board structure consists of nine regional Board members. In addition to the reps there's one associate member on the board, usually a vendor or an industry representative. Then there are the officers who consist of the past-president, president, president elect and vice president.

When I asked Bill what his duties would be as Vice President, he told me, "So it's to learn the process really. It's preparing me for president elect." To that end Bill will be trained in all aspects of the IAAO's administration, including taking leadership training through the IAAO in Florida.

With an organization as large and diverse as the IAAO, any President must have good budgeting and financial skills for its successful operation. As vice chair of the finance committee, all the budget processing goes through him. Bill is there to watch the process because the president elect is also the treasurer of the association.

While the vice president year is a learning year, Bill's role is about more than just preparation. Whenever the president elect and president are absent, Bill is the de facto president. He is an ambassador and advocate for all assessors.

After his term as Vice President, Bill will campaign to be the President Elect. Fortunately, in order to run for President elect, a candidate must have first served as Vice President. Since nobody else in the running has held that office, I like Bill's chances. As he put it, "After that there's no election...after president elect, you're president. Then you're past president and then done".

Concerning his travel schedule, Bill reports that he has about fifteen commitments in 2024. These include board meetings, the leadership training in Florida, and a meeting with government officials in DC in February. In March Bill travels to 'leadership days' in Kansas City. When Bill was a committee member, he participated in this event, now he is overseeing the committees. In April, he has a site visit for future conference. He rounds it off with board meetings in and in May, August, and December.

Bill was also happy to tell me that one of the scheduled IAAO board meetings will be decidedly closer to home, "For the first time ever, there's going to be a board meeting in *Portland, Maine*." This meeting will be first weekend in August, and it will be the *other* board members who will be traveling great distances to attend a meeting. Regular members of the IAAO are also encouraged to attend.

### **The Future of the IAAO**

As Vice President and heir apparent President of the IAAO, Bill's influence in the next three years looms large. So we discussed the priorities and future of the IAAO.

One trend Bill sees clearly is international growth. Bill said, "...there's a lot of growing internationally because *we are* an international association. They (the IAAO) want to grow the membership internationally. There's a lot of interest in Europe right now. So they're actually meeting with us."

While Bill is all for expanding the membership abroad, he also wants to look out for the smaller jurisdictions, like our own State. Bill commented that, "Maine is unique. Northeast is unique. We don't have 500 people working in our (assessing) offices."

What does he see as important to the smaller jurisdictions? One thing is the availability and affordability of education. Bill explains, "I want to continue to be able to find ways to make education more affordable. You know, for people that don't have a couple million-dollar budgets. We don't have that...so when we take a six or seven hundred dollar course, that's expensive and that hurts. And also throw on top of that, your travel, lodging, if you have to. Now you're talking a couple of grand. I want to try to continue to find ways to make (education) more affordable."

Another priority of the IAAO is expanding the membership. Bill explains, "I also want to try to increase numbers in the U.S. There's some 80,000 odd assessors in the United States. And we have about 7,500 members. So there's a huge amount of people that I would like to tap to get to join. What I'd like to find out is why don't (they) join?"

We discussed how many assessors believe they get everything they need at the local level. Bill believes that membership in the IAAO can offer more. One example is IAAO Connect, the message board that is comparable to the MAAO's listserv here in Maine. Other useful IAAO resources include the extensive research library and all the publications the IAAO has to offer. From Bill's perspective, if the IAAO can help "get one question answered, is it not worth 250 bucks (for membership)?" In truth, membership offers a great deal more.



Bill hopes to reach those many assessors, typically from smaller jurisdictions, that may not even know what the IAAO can provide them.

He further elaborates, “You can get the white papers. You can get the information you need and go on IAAO Connect and type, *what are you getting for heat pumps? Are you assessing solar?* And you're likely going to get a response and it'll be fairly quick. So to me, if you wanted to hire a consultant to get that information, how much is that going to cost? So that's what I want. That's the point that I want to drive home.”

### Other Challenges in Assessing

When I asked Bill what he saw as the biggest challenge to the profession right now, he said, “It's clearly people leaving and not enough coming in. I think that's going to be a problem everywhere.”

It's certainly a problem in Maine. We talked about the general state of the profession, the abundance of (ahem) graying assessors and the lack of new people entering the field. The fear of course is that we might not have enough qualified people to replace all the soon-to-be retiring assessors. We commiserated together that the L/A areas have seen their share of challenges recruiting new talent. The good news is that our fortunes changed recently when both Lewiston and Auburn each hired talented assessors. Unfortunately, other cities and towns have not had their own ‘jackpot’ hiring moments. We know that many municipalities across Maine continue to struggle with recruitment.

They are talking about the talent shortage at the IAAO as well. Bill's been part of conversations about potential leadership vacuums when senior members move on. The good news, so far, is that others have been stepping up to answer the call when senior vacancies happen.

### Get Involved

What is Bill's advice to new and up-and-coming assessors? He said, “Get involved. Don't be afraid to get involved.”



*Bill Bowling at MAAO Conference, Sebasco*

If anyone knows the advantages of involvement, it's him. Bill recalled that Ken Allen from Casco encouraged him when he was hired in Cumberland, “(Ken) reached out to me and says, I want you to be on the Maine association board. He was a president at the time.” Bill answered the call and his involvement in the MAAO opened opportunity after opportunity.

Are you seeing a common theme yet? By now Bill's trajectory in the Assessing world follows a familiar pattern. It takes a first step, a risk that is easier because of the encouragement from others. It's a testament to the value of nurturing relationships and Bill was good at forming many.

By the time he attended the IAAO conference Reno Nevada *involvement* was Bill's second nature. There he was noticed and lauded by then IAAO President Wayne Trout simply for participating in a session. In other words, Bill was noticed for being himself.

And the experience in Reno resonated with Bill, bringing him full circle to Bill Shane's original encouragement.

Bill Shane told him involvement was going to help his career and that he was going to enjoy it. “And it did. And he was right.”, Bill recalled. “And matter of fact, I emailed him recently. I said, thank you. You know, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be vice president.” Therein is the payoff for taking that first step and the ensuing years of involvement.

This article began by talking about an *ending*. I'll leave it to contemplate the many beginnings ahead thanks to Bill. Of course, I am talking about his new role at the IAAO. There are also the new beginnings he inspires in others. Whether it's

someone joining the IAAO, a local chapter or an affiliate - Bill Healey has demonstrated that belonging is the right first move. His next lesson is *'be involved'* and Bill's example provides us with the masterclass. Years ago, Bill wanted to 'be like Mike' Austin. It's time for the rest of us to be like Bill.

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