



*IPMI Board Chair
David Onorato, CAPP,
on parking, mobility,
teamwork, and those
Pittsburgh sports teams.*

Looking

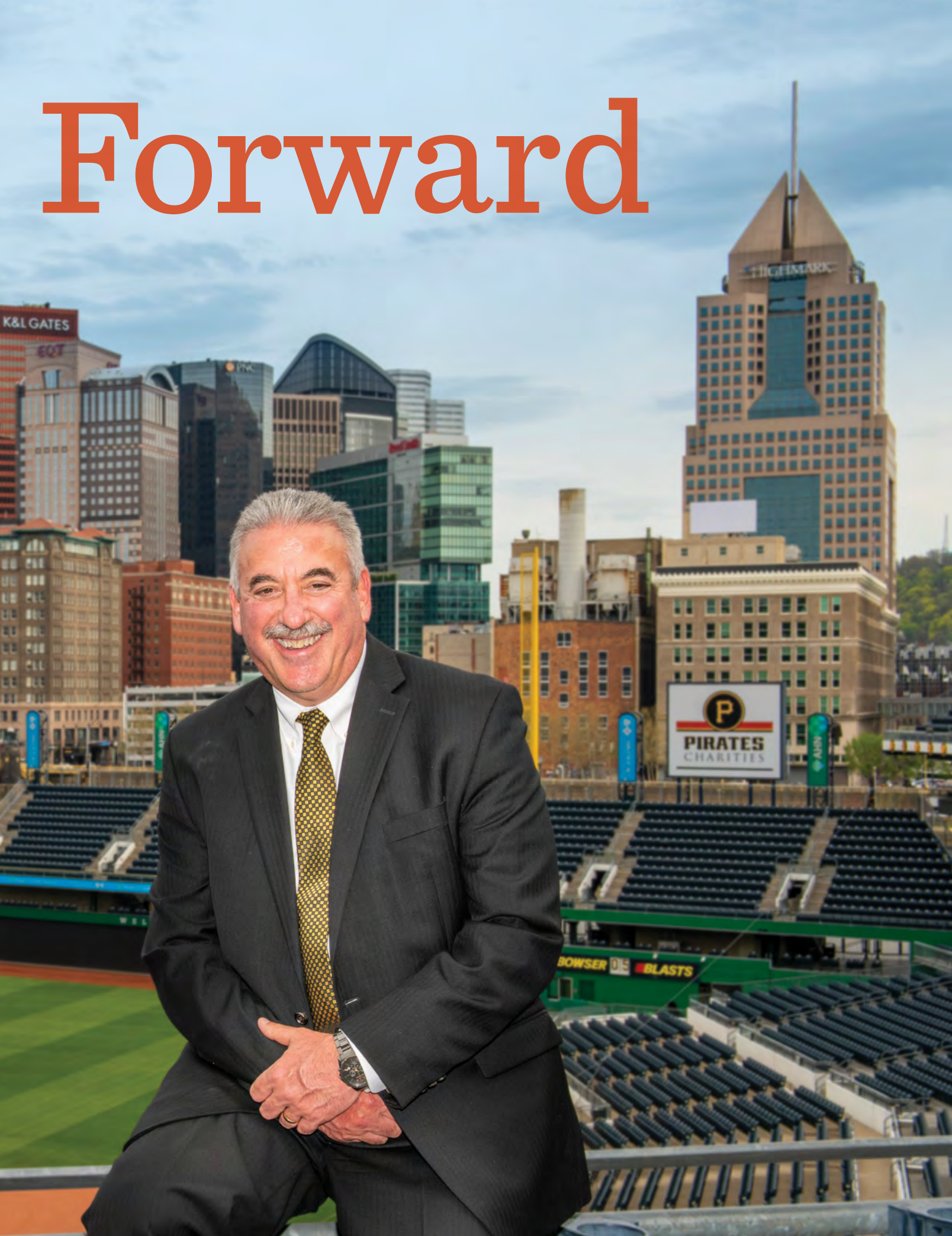
LIKE SO MANY INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS, David Onorato, CAPP, sort of fell into parking. “It was by luck,” he says. “I was working with the [Pittsburgh] city finance department and there was an opening in the parking authority. I was asked if I wanted to move there and I said yes. It’s parking—how hard can it be, right? Little did I know.”

Since that move in 1995, Onorato has built a reputation as an industry leader, and his parking authority has been credited with helping transform Pittsburgh’s reputation from steel town to technology leader, tourist destination, and popular place to live and work. Now, he’s looking ahead to industry changes, how they’ll affect his operation and his beloved hometown, and how they’ll change things

for members of IPMI, where he was installed as Board of Directors chair in June.

“The industry is unique,” he says. “Both in its field of operation and in the co-workers and peers you meet. Everyone is very willing to share information, and we’re all in the same boat together. The networking is stronger in this industry than any other industry I’ve seen.”

Forward



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Getting There

Onorato and his wife, Cathy, have been married for 34 years and have three children, David, Lauren, and Matt. Onorato grew up on the north side of Pittsburgh with a brother and three sisters. His dad, Geno, was a machinist, and his mom, Vivian, taught grade school. Onorato says his parents always emphasized education as the path to success.

Growing up in a large Italian family meant weekly Sunday dinners. “Our parents always gave us comfort in that we felt we had everything we needed.” The family, all 33 members, vacationed together every year for 30 years. “People would wonder how we survived the vacations,” he says with a laugh. The extended family is still close-knit.

Onorato earned a bachelor’s degree from Clarion University and a master’s from Robert Morris University (both in Pennsylvania), worked for the city finance department, transferred to the parking authority, and soon got involved with the Pennsylvania Parking Association and IPMI, earning his CAPP certificate in 2010.

It wasn’t long before the Pittsburgh Parking Authority started making headlines as a forward-thinking municipal organization.

Pittsburgh Parking Grows

“I was involved with the regional association and IPMI in 2010, and that’s when the public-private partnerships (P3s) were being considered,” he says. “The mayor asked me to run a P3 to evaluate the options.” A successful bid was received but was rejected for political reasons. Onorato calls the process eye-opening.

“The private operators were doing it, and they gave us a blueprint,” he says. “The larger value was in on-street parking, and I remember saying that if we do nothing, we can’t be upset if we’re not here in five years. We knew what had to be done.”



The city’s meters were single-space, 30-year-old devices. Onorato’s team hired a consultant to evaluate what was available in the market, and they issued an RFP for multi-space meters. Ten bids were received, and five companies were interviewed. Then pay-by-plate came onto the scene. “We decided to reject all the bids and go with pay-by-plate,” Onorato says. “We did our due diligence. We knew it had never been done in the U.S., and we knew we didn’t want a major capital improvement that would be obsolete in three years.”

Pittsburgh installed pay-by-plate and launched it in 2012, carefully educating the public along the way.

“They were very accepting,” Onorato says—so much so that two years later, the city began offering pay-by-phone. Today, 50 percent of parking transactions are conducted that way, and Pittsburgh has hosted about 10 cities whose officials visited to see how similar setups could work for them.

The city was named IPMI’s Parking Organization of the Year in 2015 and earned Accredited Parking Organization (APO) status, becoming

one of the first municipalities to be accredited. “IPMI set the standard with APO,” Onorato says. “When they launched it, we were excited and wanted our organization to apply. It proved more beneficial than I first realized. It established where we

were at as an organization and set the bar for the goals we needed to reach. It was a great learning tool for the entire organization.



“APO helped us evaluate our operations against established industry standards,” he continues. “We used it as an educational tool for internal processes—we were doing things and took them for granted.”

The process, he says, made authority staff better at what they were doing, and the recertification requirement helps keep them focused on continual improvement. “We keep it in our vision,” he says. “We always think about what we need to do to meet the APO requirements moving forward. It puts us—the parking industry—on a playing field with other industries that have standards, so we’re recognized as leaders and as professionals.”

Getting Involved

Onorato attended his first IPMI (then IPI) Conference & Expo in 2005, looking to get more immersed in his industry. “I was impressed and knew I wanted to get involved,” he says. “My first thought was to earn CAPP.” He and Christopher Speers, CAPP, the authority’s director of parking services, both earned their certifications in 2010 and aimed for more involvement at the next year’s Conference—in Pittsburgh.

“I got to know the staff,” he says. “I liked what the organization represented, and I decided this was the path I wanted to take.” Having the Conference in his hometown, he says, offered him a great perspective into the behind-the-scenes work and allowed him to witness firsthand how everyone in the organization worked together.

“I decided to run for the Board,” he says. “It took several times, but I got there. And I am very impressed with the Board and their knowledge and background and skill and the way they get things done. There’s a lot of teamwork there.”

He eventually became treasurer and then chair-elect and was installed as chair last month, in Anaheim, Calif.

Goals

“I want to keep the organization on the path it’s on now,” he says. “We’ve had great leadership in past years that has established our path for the future. I want to continue to build upon our past successes.” Onorato noted that adding “mobility” to the organization’s name last fall was a major decision in keeping parking organizations relevant, ensuring they are key players going forward. “Mobility is a major factor. It has to be a key aspect of our



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vision, and we have to stay on that path as far as transportation network companies, electric vehicles, bikes, shared rides, and transit. It's not just about parking, but we have to maintain parking as a vital role in the industry. It's up to us to keep the seat at the table now that we have it."

Data is also top-of-mind. "All users want to see data," he says. "We have the technology today to collect mass volumes of data, and it is what we do with the data that will determine the future of the industry. Data has the potential to enhance the industry and the end user's experience. And with that, and mobility,

the thought has to be how we keep people satisfied with changing needs. We have to set the trends and decide what the future of parking and mobility is going forward."

Onorato remains grateful to past Boards and their members and says the mentors he met at the beginning of his parking career remain so and have since become great friends.

"There are two past chairs to whom I'm very grateful to. I met them early on at the then-IPI conferences, and they have been my sounding board for vetting my strategies. Those two are Roamy Valera, CAPP, and Kim Jackson, CAPP, who are recognized as industry leaders. They always have given me good advice that was a basis for my decisions."

Back to Pittsburgh

Onorato says he can't wait to welcome IPMI members back to Pittsburgh for the IPMI Leadership Summit in October (parking-mobility.org/100).

"My first role as chair of the organization will be to host the meeting in Pittsburgh, and I'm very excited about that," he says. "I'm looking forward to welcoming everyone to the city and would encourage them to get out and see the city. We have restaurants, theaters, and lots to see right in the CBD. The perception of Pittsburgh is different than the reality once you get here, and I'm going to encourage first-timers to take the time to enjoy the city."

The Pittsburgh Parking Authority enjoys a great, productive relationship with the mayor and city council. Onorato says that comes from time spent building trust.

"We have a great relationship, and we work as a team," he says. "We had some learning curves—we're an authority and separate and self-sufficient, but without the city, there is no authority. So we work hand-in-hand, helping fund some operations and different organizations. We understand our relationship with the city, and they understand theirs with us. They see us as a team player, and our individual success comes from our joint success."

During his free time, Onorato enjoys following Pittsburgh sports teams, which showcase the city on a national level. He is a frequent spectator at games and has been fortunate enough to attend three Super Bowls and one Stanley Cup Finals. He also enjoys time at his lake house with his family. It's frequently visited by their children and their friends. "I see them more up there on the weekends than I do at home," he laughs. ♦



ALREADY SIGNED UP for IPMI's Leadership Summit in Pittsburgh this October? Dave Onorato, CAPP, can't wait to show you around. He already has a list of suggested restaurants for your nights in town:

- Sienna Mercato
- Bakersfield—Tacos, Tequila & Whiskey
- Eleven
- Revel + Roost
- Gaucho
- Meat & Potatoes
- Pork and Beans
- Lastly, everyone must try the famous Primanti's sandwich.

Looking for more advice on what to do in Pittsburgh? We know who you can ask!