✨ Member Spotlight: Michelle Hawkins



We're honored to spotlight this month's SGMP member, **Michelle D. Hawkins, M.A., CGMP Emeritus**, Office Manager & Administrative Operations Coordinator with Virginia State University's Department of Agriculture.

Meet Michelle

Michelle is based in **Ettrick, Virginia**, and brings more than 25 years of experience in administrative operations, program coordination, and event planning. A dedicated SGMP member for two decades, Michelle has built a career centered on service, professional development, and creating meaningful opportunities for others.

5-minute read

SGMP Involvement

How long have you been a member of SGMP?

Michelle has proudly been a member of the **Society of Government Meeting Professionals (SGMP) for 20 years**. What began as a professional development opportunity has evolved into two decades of leadership, learning, service, and lasting friendships she affectionately describes as her "SGMP family."

What inspired you to join the Old Dominion Chapter?

Michelle initially joined SGMP to strengthen her meeting planning skills, expand her network, and connect with professionals who understood the unique demands of government and public-sector meetings. What inspired her to stay, however, was the people. The Old Dominion Chapter became more than a professional association; it became a community of mentors, colleagues, and friends.

What roles have you served in?

Michelle has held numerous leadership and volunteer roles throughout her SGMP journey, including:

- First Vice President and Education Committee Chair
- Planner Director and Membership Committee Chair
- Education Conference Chair and Co-Chair
- Conference planning and special event committees
- Educational programming and professional development initiatives
- Membership engagement and networking activities

Her dedication has also earned significant chapter recognition, including:

- Planner of the Year (2011 and 2019)
- Member's Choice Award (2018)

A favorite SGMP memory?

After 20 years of involvement, choosing just one memory is nearly impossible. Michelle especially treasures planning and supporting chapter education conferences, networking events, and leadership initiatives. While the events themselves have been rewarding, she says the friendships formed along the way remain the most meaningful part of her SGMP experience.

Professional Background

How long have you worked in meetings, events, and hospitality?

Michelle brings more than **25 years of experience** in administrative operations, program coordination, and event planning, including over **20 years working within the government meetings industry**.

What do you love most about your current role?

After retiring, Michelle recently returned to higher education as the **Office Manager & Administrative Operations Coordinator** for Virginia State University's Department of Agriculture.

After more than 22 years at Virginia Commonwealth University, she was excited to begin a new chapter. She especially enjoys serving as the person who "connects the dots," bringing people, processes, and resources together to support faculty, students, and organizational success.

As Michelle jokingly shares, "*Retirement was wonderful, but apparently, God wasn't finished with my professional journey just yet!*"

How did you get your start in this field?

Michelle's career began in state government and higher education in 1992. Along the way, she discovered a passion for organizing events, coordinating logistics, solving problems, and creating positive experiences for others.

Over time, she realized successful meetings aren't just about logistics. They're about building relationships, sharing knowledge, and creating opportunities for growth. That realization ultimately led her to SGMP.

A professional accomplishment you're proud of?

One accomplishment Michelle is especially proud of is developing and managing the **ICA Student Opportunities Workforce Development Program** at Virginia Commonwealth University. The

program provided students with experiential learning opportunities, professional development, and exposure to future career pathways.

She is also proud of earning her **Certified Government Meeting Professional (CGMP)** designation and later achieving **CGMP Emeritus** status, reflecting years of dedication to professional excellence and lifelong learning.

Fun Facts & Personal Interests

What do you enjoy outside of work?

Outside the office, Michelle enjoys spending quality time with family and friends, fishing, running, traveling, attending social and cultural events, volunteering, and seeking out new experiences.

She is the proud mother of **two sons**, grandmother to **six grandchildren**, and devoted owner of **one fur baby**. She also serves her community as an **Officer of Elections** and values opportunities to give back.

Favorite travel destination?

Michelle enjoys destinations that offer cultural experiences, historical landmarks, beautiful scenery, and great food. Her ideal trip combines adventure, relaxation, and lasting memories, especially when shared with family and friends.

Something people might not know about you?

Michelle's love of fishing helped her reel in a unique accomplishment. In **2021**, she earned **First Place in the Governor's Fishing Challenge (Adult Shore Division)**. As it was the final year of the competition, she proudly notes that she still holds the title!

Favorite quote?

"When the replacement from God arrives, you will forget what you lost."

The quote reflects Michelle's belief in resilience, growth, and embracing every season of life. Her personal philosophy is:

"Never stop learning, never stop growing, and never underestimate the power of a second chance."

Final Thoughts

What advice do you have for newcomers to SGMP or the meetings industry?

Michelle encourages new members to get involved, stay curious, and step outside their comfort zones.

Her advice is simple:

☑ Attend meetings
☑ Volunteer for committees
☑ Ask questions
☑ Build relationships
☑ Take advantage of learning opportunities

According to Michelle, SGMP is much more than professional development. It is a place where members can discover mentors, develop leadership skills, build lifelong friendships, and create opportunities that can impact both their personal and professional lives.

Anything else you'd like to share?

Reflecting on 20 years of SGMP membership, Michelle says she is filled with gratitude for the experiences, opportunities, and relationships the organization has provided. As she begins this new chapter at Virginia State University, she remains committed to supporting the Old Dominion Chapter, mentoring emerging professionals, and celebrating the success of fellow members.

With gratitude, plenty of SGMP pride, and just the right amount of sass, Michelle looks forward to continuing to learn, serve, and build meaningful connections for years to come.