

# THE VOICE OF ETHICS

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# Summer Hiring and Summer Jobs

It's almost here! The season of picnics, community festivals, sunshine, and ice cream – summer! But before you pull out your flip-flops and beach umbrellas, make sure you know some of the Ohio Ethics Law issues that can arise during the upcoming dog days. Two ethics dilemmas often encountered in the summertime include hiring family members and outside employment. Let's dive into both!



## Summer Jobs and Family

Simply put, the Ethics Law prohibits public officials or employees from authorizing a family member's employment or using their public position in any way to obtain a public job for a family member. This includes direct hiring, but also encompasses trying to indirectly influence the hiring process for a family member, such as recommending or requesting a job interview.

Securing a job or job-related benefits is sometimes referred to as "nepotism" and often comes up in the summer when during high school and college breaks since students understandably seek summer jobs. Many cities, villages, school districts, and other public agencies offer seasonal full-time or part-time jobs, such as lifeguards or camp counselors.

If your adult child (18+ years) is job-hunting and is considering a public position, wish him or her well and then stay away! Don't authorize, recommend, advocate for, or take any other action to help secure the seasonal position. Even obtaining an unpaid internship with your agency is problematic under the law. See [Informal Opinion 2001-INF-0727-1](#)

If, however, your minor child is pondering summer public service, the restrictions are even more stringent. It's important for public employees and officials to understand that the Ohio Ethics Law generally prohibits their minor children from obtaining a job with the same agency, municipality, or office.

The only way in which the minor children of public employees or officials can work for the same agency as their parents is if four things can be demonstrated:

- The hiring process was fair and open;
- Broad opportunity to apply was provided for qualified and interested applicants;
- All qualified and interested applicants who are not related to agency officials or employees have already been hired; AND
- Vacancies still exist.

If you need additional information, check out [our website](#) or give us a call. Doing the right thing when it comes to hiring family members is "s'more" than a good idea, it's the law.



See the [Public Contracts Fact Sheet](#) for more information.

## Public Servants & Outside Employment

Hoping to pay off a mortgage early? Considering how to build your child's college fund? Saving for your dream vacation? Summertime often prompts plans for extra income; for those in public service, that part-time "gig" requires an understanding of the Ethics Law to ensure legal "juggling" of public roles and outside employment.

In general, the Ohio Ethics Law does not prohibit public employees and officials from having outside jobs or businesses, but it does restrict certain practices or behaviors. For example, the law prohibits public officials or employees from:

- using public time, facilities, personnel, or resources on outside businesses jobs
- using official titles or identification on private business cards or other written materials to solicit business
- appearing in a public uniform while conducting demonstrations for clients
- using public service relationships to secure a favorable decision or action regarding private interests
- discussing, deliberating, or voting on any matter involving a private business
- performing public duties in a manner to realize personal financial gain
- charging clients fees for the same services that they are required to provide in public service
- participating in decisions or making recommendations regarding competitors
- using their public position to benefit an outside employer or business interest.

Additionally, before securing that second job, public employees and officials are encouraged to confirm whether their public agency has policies even more stringent than the Ethics Law. The unique nature of some public positions may offer challenges in pursuing outside employment; checking in with your agency's human resource or legal office can save you time and concern later.



Need more information? Review [Advisory Opinion 96-004!](#)



# Book Review: Sesqui! Greed, Graft, and the Forgotten World's Fair of 1926

**Book Review by the Ohio Ethics Commission's Susan Willeke:  
"Sesqui! Greed, Graft, and the Forgotten World's Fair of 1926" by Thomas Keels**

At a recent gathering of friends where a "get to know each other better" activity took place, I was asked the quintessential party-game question: "If you were a superhero, which power would you choose?" My answer? Time travel! Oh, to wander unobserved through time and witness the moments that changed the world...that beats invisibility and the ability to fly any day.

Historian Thomas Keels allowed me to engage in quasi-time travel through his book *Sesqui! Greed, Graft, and the Forgotten World's Fair of 1926* which provides a compelling glimpse into Philadelphia's spectacularly failed attempt to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Poor planning, short timelines, budget shortfalls, and rampant political fraud resulted in a loss of nearly \$10 million (equivalent of \$106 million by today's standards, with labor costs, closer to \$410 million) and fewer than five million paying customers, though they had anticipated upwards of 30 million.

This mesmerizing book provides a clear (if unfortunate) picture of late 1920s Philadelphia. Keels does not shy away from painful historical truths such as racism, misogyny, and even the promotion of eugenics. For this reader, though, the book was primarily hard to put down due to the depiction of wide and unabashed government corruption. What began as the desire of a department store owner and philanthropist to showcase the city he loved resulted in a corrupt political machine hijacking the fair, plunging Philadelphia into massive debt, and making a laughingstock of the city.



The book is gripping and provides clear mental images (not to mention effective illustrations scattered throughout the chapters) of the haphazard planning and shabby construction of the world fair setting. Congressman William S. Vare, a construction contractor and so-called "Duke of South Philadelphia" who headed up the crooked "Organization" that ran the city, quickly moved the fair from its proposed location near the center of the city where extensive improvements were already underway, to a swampland in his own congressional district. Money that had been earmarked for infrastructure in highly populated areas of Philadelphia was instead spent on the filling of wetlands and the construction of streets, trolley tracks, landfills, and water and sewer lines.

To add injury to insult, most of the construction companies retained were owned by Congressman Vare or one of his allies. Vendors were expected to provide kickbacks to members of the Organization and did – extensively. When it was all said and done, the fair's buildings were half-completed by opening day and built so shoddily that they were quickly razed when the fair concluded. The city of Philadelphia shouldered a debt so staggering that it took decades for a semblance of recovery, especially when the Great Depression hit a few years after the fair.

Sesqui! is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of political greed and misuse of power. If I were to find fault with any part of the book, it would be that the early chapters are unusually thorough, sometimes encouraging this reader to do a bit of skimming over pages. Readers who enjoy a deep dive into construction details and entire orations may find these chapters a quicker read than this nascent reviewer. However, as the story evolves, it would be easy to forget one is reading an historical account, rather than a white-collar true crime novel.

Something I would have liked Keels to explore more would be any impacts and costs to Philadelphia that potentially continue to this day. This shameful chapter of history occurred at a time when other major cities were building subways. Today, Philadelphia is an endlessly fascinating city, but one must wonder “what could have been” had the misdirected funds not delayed infrastructure during such a critical point in history.

These are relatively minor criticisms, however. Sesqui! is an excellent read, certainly for those who strive for governmental integrity, but also for anyone who occasionally appreciates a bit of time travel.



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