



**NACo 2ND VP CANDIDATES PRESENT THEIR PLATFORMS. PGS. 6-8**



**'FAIR CHANCE' EMPLOYMENT OFFERS OPTIONS FOR COUNTIES. PG. 10**



**COUNTY OFFERS NUTRITION HELP TO MEDICAID RECIPIENTS. PG. 13**

## NACo Annual Conference to drop anchor in Florida

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The 2024 NACo Annual Conference will draw more than 3,000 county officials July 12-15 to Hillsborough County, Fla. where they will swap solutions and address the challenges facing local governments.

With four mobile workshops and three programming summits, attendees will have the opportunity for in-depth discussions about how best to effectively serve their counties in challenging times.

Three or four spots on NA-

Co's executive committee are at stake, with the second vice presidency up for a vote July 15 during the Annual Business Meeting.

Cascade County, Mont. Commissioner Joe Briggs, Mecklenburg County, N.C. Commissioner George Dunlap and Charlotte County, Fla. Commissioner Bill

Truex are facing off, and you can read their candidate platforms beginning on Page 6. Regional caucuses will choose their representatives in the Northeast and Central re-

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Children cool off at the Washtenaw County Rolling Hills Water Park in Michigan. Counties around the country last week opened cooling centers and canceled some outdoor events due to record-breaking high temperatures. Photo courtesy of Washtenaw County Parks

## Maui County residents rebuild their lives after deadly 2023 fire

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Clifton Akiyama, an 80-year-old Lahaina, Hawaii native, and his wife took a bag of potato chips, a couple of apples, some hand tools and their 13-year-old toothless chihuahua Buddy and drove away from their house of 35 years, which they would never return to. The Akiyama's was one of the more than 4,000 homes destroyed across Maui County in the August 2023 Lahaina wildfire, which resulted in more than 100 deaths, making

it the deadliest U.S. wildfire in over a century.

"I try not to think about what we don't have," Akiyama said. "But we lost a whole bunch, about 60 years of building up my so-called assets, my wealth, it was wiped out in one night."

For six months after the wildfire, the Akiyamas were staying in a hotel through a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) non-congregate sheltering program. Since then, they've been living in an abandoned house.

"Right now, we're technically

homeless," Akiyama said. "But I found a friend of a friend who knew of an abandoned house that no one was living in, and the owners allowed my wife and I to stay here with our dog ... I got lucky, so we have a roof over our head for now."

In November 2023, Akiyama realized that it would be "a while" before they were able to rebuild their home on their property (it could take several months for the waste and water systems in Lahaina to be fully restored, according to the Maui Department of Water Supply) so he went to "the other side of the island," roughly 22 miles outside of the fire zone, and entered a housing lottery through Towne Realty of Hawaii for one of the 164 single-family homes it was developing in the community of Kehalani.

See REBUILD page 3

## Exchange program opens doors for county staffers

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

When Mitchell Wilkins and Stevie Mirrop joined the Pasco County, Fla. staff, they had no indication their utility and veterinary work would involve much travel, if any.

But in May, the pair found themselves working in Germany as part of a three-week exchange program through Rotary International that broadened their professional horizons and offered them a chance for personal growth. The county paid them during the trip — they worked five days a week — and the local Rotary club covered most of their expenses, which totaled \$3,000 per participant.

It wasn't exactly a direct exchange: Mirrop, a veterinary tech for Pasco Animal Services, worked for a private veterinary hospital and Wilkins, who

works for Pasco County Utilities, worked for a private utility provider, but both came away with ideas and approaches they hoped they could import into their roles back in the Florida public sector.

"I've already talked to my boss about things I'd like to try to implement here," Wilkins said. "Their main goal for sending me over there is to see how Germany's infrastructure works and then when I come back, try to see what we can improve on and bring it over here to the U.S."

Likewise, Mirrop saw how her host veterinary hospital dramatically limits waste, which she thinks her agency, which operates on donations, could benefit from.

"Anything we can do to cut down on the supplies we have to purchase will help," she said.

See EXCHANGE page 2

# County employees learn from their counterparts in German exchange program

From EXCHANGE page 1

But the opportunity also offered them a chance to explore a new country and immerse themselves in a foreign culture, all qualities prized by Pasco County Commissioner Kathryn Starkey, who is a strong advocate for international trade and exchange.

During years of travel to Germany, Starkey developed relationships with local officials that blossomed into a high school exchange program, and later, a friendship agreement.

“It’s like being sister cities, but we can’t truly be sister cities because Pasco County is mostly unincorporated,” she said.

Three weeks away from work is a small price to pay, Starkey said, for the knowledge they brought home.

“Cultural exchanges strengthen both communities,” she said.

“When you learn how other governments work and societies work, it just broadens your horizons and I think there’s much to learn from other countries.”

“To have two of our young county workers be able to go and experience the business culture in Germany will only improve our culture,” she noted.

### It’s the little differences

Mirrop is an avid traveler. Wilkins had never been away from home for more than four days. She worked in Germerheim, in southwestern Germany near the French border, he was roughly an hour away in Landau.



Mitchell Wilkins drives a Mercedes Unimog truck, drastically different from the vehicles in Florida, while working for EnergieSüdwest. Photo courtesy of Mitchell Wilkins

“I had only been outside of Florida a few times and had never been on a plane before,” Wilkins said.

“The cultural immersion was my favorite part, and seeing buildings that are older than the United States really showed how they build things to last over there.”

Mirrop had not yet been to Germany, but her grandfather had spent time there after World War II, where he met his wife. And thanks to her visit, Mirrop was able to connect with a childhood friend of her late grandmother.

“It was a connection to my family I never thought I’d be able to make,” she said. Wilkins was struck by the difference in the built environment, particularly roads.

“They’re so narrow and people drive small cars,” he said. “In Florida, about 70% of people drive trucks, so that’s a real adjustment you make when you’re looking around.”

Mirrop had interacted with German exchange participants before, but Wilkins had not, and he got a lot out of interacting with a new culture.

“One thing that stood out to me is that when someone in Germany offers you something, it’s rude to turn it down, even if it’s just a glass of water,” Wilkins said.

“It’s like you’re telling them something must be wrong with the water if you won’t accept it, so I made it a point to say ‘yes’ to everything. But it also showed me how generous everyone was.”

As for the work, Mirrop was able to scrub in for surgeries, watch dental examinations, perform pre-surgical protocols and perform CT scans.

What impressed her most was the resources the hospital had to be able to bring different elements of care together in one place to expedite various processes.

“It was like human medicine in a way,” she said.

“There were a lot more resources because it was a private hospital, and they were



Pasco County, Fla. employee Stevie Mirrop visits the Strasbourg Cathedral de Notre-Dame. Photo courtesy of Stevie Mirrop

able to perform elaborate surgeries and orthopedic medicine that is not an option for a shelter. Most of the time, we’re trying to get rescuer operations to fund care for animals. It makes us innovative out of necessity, but it’s amazing to see what’s possible when clients are able to pay at a private

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**SNAP/STATS**

**HAPPY 4TH OF JULY!**

FACT	STAT
Oldest 4th of July celebration	Bristol County, R.I. (239 years)
No. of fireworks displays	15,000
No. of hot dogs eaten	150 million
No. of stars on first flag	13
No. of stars today	50

Sources: Smithsonian Institution; National Hot Dog and Sausage Council; American Pyrotechnics Association; Fourthofjulybristolri.com

# Summits, mobile workshops offer in-depth exploration of topics at Annual Conference

From ANNUAL page 1

gions, with the potential for an election in the West region, to boot.

Attendees will hear from magnetic speakers during General Sessions, including Tareq Azim on Saturday, July 13. A personal development expert, he created the Afghan Women's Boxing Federation after returning to his homeland more than 25 years after his family fled.

Also at Saturday's General Session look for a report from the NACo Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing.

On Sunday, July 14, three-time Olympic gymnast Dominique Dawes will address attendees.

On July 12, members of 10 policy steering committees will determine the direction that NACo will take its advocacy in the coming year. They will hear from high-level speakers who represent leading schools of thought in their issue areas,

giving county leaders the most informed perspectives to drive their work in the field.

July 13 will see NACo's Large Urban County Caucus, Rural Action Caucus and Western Interstate Region gather to compare notes on emerging trends. NACo's Artificial Intelligence Exploratory Committee will release its county toolkit, following more than a year examining the rapidly spreading technology's potential, and threat, to county management.

Three educational summits and four mobile workshop tours will headline July 14.

**Charting the Path Ahead: A Blueprint for Economic Prosperity:** This summit will examine growth and decline factors and how county leaders can capitalize on those trends to



DAWES

build more resilient and innovative local economies. Experts and county leaders will discuss how to bolster their workforces, strengthen local industries and develop effective planning mechanisms for sustainable business growth.

**Investing in the Future of Our Youth:** This summit will offer practical approaches for supporting youth of all ages and increasing the likelihood that they become lifelong advocates in shaping the future of their communities, with an emphasis on prenatal to age 3. Counties can close the gaps in assistance to young people and families, and these speakers can help county leaders position their resources to do so effectively.

**Navigating Current Global Trends Across Western Democracies:** Democratic systems around the world

face new and pernicious challenges and local governments are not immune — including misinformation and disinformation, erosion of public trust and misaligned incentives for political polarization. Participants will explore strategies to boost effective public engagement, align community values, improve civic education and build trust in the public sector — a must-have for county governments. Mobile workshop tours will include:

**Apollo Beach Nature Preserve:** Over the last 28 years, the county and its partnering agencies have restored native habitats, including estuarine marsh, tidal creeks, beach dunes and upland islands and added amenities, including nature trails, picnic pavilions, beach access and an ADA-accessible observation tower.

**Hillsborough County Resource Recovery Facility:** A waste-to-energy facility incinerates garbage — up to 1,800 tons

a day — to produce renewable energy to power adjacent Hillsborough County infrastructure, with the excess power sold back to the grid.

**Hillsborough County Veterans Memorial Park and Museum:** The park's Veterans Resource Center is a one-stop shop showcasing the teamwork of local, state and federal partners dedicated to serving those who served.

**University of South Florida's Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation:** One of the world's largest, free-standing simulation facilities exclusively dedicated to training healthcare professionals is also a key player in the development of the region's economy.

Attendees will also network with county professional staff who compose NACo's affiliate groups and find fellowship in affinity groups who will meet and discuss their organization's plans for the coming year.

## Maui County boosts funding for housing, emergency management after Lahaina fire

From REBUILD page 1

Construction began in January on Akiyama's new home. It is almost finished and he hopes to move in later this month. He said he's luckier than most. Ten months after the wildfire, thousands of people are still displaced, and expect to be for the foreseeable future. That's why the county's new expedited permitting process is so important for people, "to compress the time so they can get in quicker," Akiyama said.

Maui County contracted 4LEAF, a development services firm that specializes in Fire Recovery Services, to operate its new Recovery Permit Center, which was created to expedite permitting specifically for people affected by the wildfire. 4LEAF has also operated fire recovery permitting programs for the California counties of Sonoma and Santa Cruz, the town of Paradise, Calif. and Jackson County, Ore.

The plan review for the permitting process now takes roughly 10 business days, according to Mike Renner, 4LEAF's

director of development recovery services.

Akiyama will go through the expedited permitting process for a duplex unit on his Lahaina property, where he is set to house two sets of neighbors who don't have long-term housing. He also plans to rebuild his primary residence on the same

property eventually, he added.

Atom Kasprzycki, a Lahaina architect, co-owns Kasprzycki Designs, which is creating design plans for residents affected by the wildfire, including Akiyama, and helping them with the permitting process, at no cost.

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**Homeowner Gene Milne shows off his homesite June 26 in Lahaina at a press conference. He is one of the first property owners to start the rebuilding process after his newly built home was lost in the fire last year.** Photo courtesy of Maui County

## MAUI COUNTY BOLSTERS 2025 BUDGET FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT, LANDFILL AND MORE

Last month, Maui County Council approved a \$1.7 billion budget for 2025, prioritizing aid to the ongoing recovery of



SUGIMURA

Lahaina, upgrades to wildfire mitigation, social services and housing solutions for the 12,000 residents displaced by the Aug. 8, 2023 wildfire that killed 102 people, Honolulu Civil Beat reported.

The budget includes a \$36 million loan for a low-income rental housing project in Lahaina.

The county council also beefed up the Maui Emergency Management Agency, increasing its overall number of positions to 22 from nine and providing \$300,000 in an updated emergency operations center plan and

incident management team development.

The Maui Fire Department was given more than \$1 million for 18

new positions in the fire and rescue operations program, along with funding for four positions in the fire prevention program and money for new vehicles and a station in Haiku.

The council also put \$33.4 million in the budget for a permanent landfill site for fire debris, as a temporary landfill is filling up.

The budget bill was shepherded by Council Member Yuki Lei Sugimura, vice-chair of the Council and chair of the Budget, Finance and Economic Development Committee.



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# Randolph County, Ill. turns unused part of nursing home into state-of-the-art behavioral health center

by Jack Callahan

From coal mining to the operation of a coal-fired power plant, the coal industry has historically driven Randolph County, Ill.'s economy.

As the coal industry has declined in southern Illinois, Randolph County recognized the downturn's effects across the community, especially on community members' behavioral health. As a member of NACo's BRECC Coalition, a peer learning network of 20 coal community leaders who deepen their understanding of economic resiliency, Randolph County Commissioner Marc Kiehna has taken a proactive role in the development of the behavioral health center and has advice for other county officials looking to do the same.

More than 100 well-paying jobs were lost in 2019, when one unit of the Randolph County power plant closed.

"We saw our citizens seeking out other forms of employment, either going to St. Louis or working a lower-paying job in a prison or something else in our area," Kiehna said. "We saw people struggling to stay in our rural area and make the money that they had been used to making before."

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the impact of the unit closure on the community. Crime rates and illegal substance use spiked during this time, with nearly 50% of arrests occurring in the county being drug related, Kiehna said. Patient needs quickly overwhelmed the county's three hospitals.

"It starts to hit people when their parents can't get in for gall bladder surgery because the hospital is overwhelmed by overdoses," he said.

Public safety officers began arresting repeat offenders, but the nearest behavioral health center was more than an hour away.

"Sometimes, our citizens don't travel well when they have those types of issues," Kiehna said, adding that long trips even more perilous.



Randolph County, Ill. renovated unused space at a county-owned nursing home, using grants to create a behavioral health center.

The growing need to expand the county's service capacity in the behavioral health sphere caused the community to look within its lines for a solution: A nursing home with empty beds. The 70-year-old facility in Sparta had not recovered from a drop in population during the pandemic, but, as Kiehna said, it had "good bones."

Half of the facility would remain a nursing home, while the other half would be able to support long-term behavioral health care.

"It became a way to breathe new life back into this facility," he said. "Instead of closing down a county nursing home, we're sprucing it up and we're making it available for more citizens to get the help they need."

Before construction could start, the community needed to buy in to the idea of a behavioral health center within their county. Community members objected to the idea initially, worried that the center would increase addiction rates and drug trafficking. Some residents questioned whether the county should take a larger role in health services, despite successfully operating the nursing home for more than 50 years.

"Sometimes, people can be naïve, and they don't realize their next-door neighbor is having drug issues or mental problems or whatever," so there is no lack of suffering in the community already," Kieh-

na said. "The needs are there already, and it's not uncommon for you to have residents who have dementia issues, who have Alzheimer's issues and historically, your care centers or your nursing homes have worked with the doctors to deal with these types of residents and help the families work with them."

To address community concerns, Randolph County held stakeholder meetings with hospital administrators, public safety and emergency response personnel, non-profit organizations and local elected officials to create a consensus around the development of a behavioral health center. The united front and careful planning successfully swayed public opinion in favor of moving the project forward — reflected by a ballot initiative that voters approved.

"Having it on the ballot really prompted people to look into the issue, to think about it practically and invest their time in it," Kiehna said. "Once an issue gets to referendum, it has some legitimacy, and it moves beyond hearsay and rumor."

Because the projected cost of the behavioral health center was slightly higher than \$10.5 million, Randolph County pursued several different funding opportunities. Federal funding for coal communities provided much needed cost relief for the

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## Palm Beach County Public Auction (Thrift Store)



Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners

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## NACo Second Vice Presidential Candidates

## CANDIDATE PLATFORM



## Joe Briggs

Commissioner  
Cascade County, Mont.

Dear Colleagues,

When we gather at NACo events I am struck by some seemingly contradictory observations. We differ in the regions we choose to live in and the population density of our areas. We vary in our religious beliefs, politics, our ethnic makeup, and every other demographic under the sun... and yet we come together as a community to solve problems and learn from one another.

Our greatest strength is this “togetherness” we share as an organization as well as our individual commitments to serve our communities. I believe that at the core of this commitment lies hope for the future, faith in humanity, and a passion to make things better for our citizens.

The issues we face in each of our communities are the same throughout all the counties, boroughs, and parishes of America. Even when one of

our counties lack the authority to deal directly with an issue, we still can affect change by using third party organizations and gaining knowledge of what has succeeded elsewhere. That is one of the many strengths of NACo—we can learn successful solutions from our colleagues and adapt those solutions to the operating environment in which we function.

Sustaining and expanding membership is one of the key elements of my focus in NACo over the last few years and one that I hope to expand as an officer of the Association. In my role as West Region Representative to the Executive Committee, I have made membership in the fifteen states of my region a priority, and currently fourteen of those fifteen states are 100% membership states—only three counties in those states are not members of NACo. The membership staff, membership committee, and I proactively worked with the State Associations and NACo members across the region, reaching out to non-member counties as well as those considering dropping out.

NACo provides each of our member counties with a wide array of services at a very cost-effective level; but at its core, NACo is held together by our individual passion for finding solutions for our communities and understanding that we must look past our differences and learn from each other.

I have been a full-time County Commissioner for 19.5 years,

and it did not take long for me to discover that the existing toolset I had within county government was not able to address all the issues holding back my county. In an effort to learn from my fellow Montana county officials, I became immersed in the Montana Association of Counties and eventually rose to the position of President within the organization.

About twelve years ago I became active in NACo, so I could find out how counties across the country were overcoming those same issues that we had at home. As I did within my State Association, I immersed myself in NACo, and by learning from all of you, I have become a more effective commissioner at home.

I have served NACo as the Telecommunications and Technology Chair for three years, a Vice Chair of the IT standing Committee, a member of the Membership Committee as well as the NACo Ambassadors, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, and the RAC and the PILT lobbying teams; and as mentioned previously, I am the West Region Representative on the Executive Committee.

The value of volunteerism on behalf of NACo cannot be emphasized enough, but it requires staff support to be effective. For example, the efforts that brought ARPA funding to every county, borough, and parish in America required a superb lobbying team along

with engaged members in every state. A second great illustration is PILT and SRS; we maintain that funding through active members nationwide, alongside our NACo staff and financial resources.

Maintaining membership and establishing long-term financial stability are currently critical challenges for NACo. The ARPA funds represented a very tangible direct return-on-investment for our members and fueled an increase in membership. So how do we sustain that gain and momentum post ARPA? We must keep in mind that most of our member counties do not attend NACo conferences and therefore do not take advantage of the invaluable information exchange, so we must demonstrate our ongoing value in another fashion.

### Joe's Goals

As a candidate running for NACo 2nd Vice President, my primary goals revolve around ensuring the financial resilience of our Association, fostering unity, and sustaining our record membership levels.

**To address the financial challenges** from the US Communities sale, we have been working as a board and Executive Committee to develop a robust Financial Resilience Plan emphasizing transparent communication and creating alternative revenue streams. If elected 2nd Vice President, I would be able to continue this work and see it through to the end.

**Additionally, my NACo Unity Campaign** would seek to maintain a non-partisan and professional environment, encouraging open dialogue to bridge differences among our diverse membership as well as setting an example for our federal partners.

**Finally, the Association is strong, but there is greater strength in greater numbers,** and there is only so much our dedicated staff can do. Elected officials who are active in the Association are the best Ambassadors to their peers, advocating the importance of both staying involved with NACo and joining NACo. It is our stories of how our counties, boroughs, and parishes have benefited from our involvement in our association that will carry the day, which is what my **Membership Engagement and Sustainability Program** intends to do through a national outreach system, materials, coordination team, and more.

It is my passion for NACo and County Government that has convinced me to run for 2nd Vice President. There is more work needed to sustain NACo, and I can best continue those efforts as an officer of NACo. Together, these initiatives aim to strengthen NACo's influence and uphold its vital role in county governance and operations.

Very Respectfully,

Joe Briggs

NACo 2nd VP Candidate

**Go For Joe**

NACo Second Vice Presidential Candidates

# CANDIDATE PLATFORM



## George Dunlap Commissioner Mecklenburg County, N.C.

My fellow colleagues, my name is George Dunlap - I am running to be the next 2nd vice president of NACo to elevate and advocate for both the common and unique priorities of all our members regardless of geographic location. I am running on a record of being an experienced leader, bridge builder, problem solver, and advocate for the issues and opportunities facing local governments across our nation. In addition, I look forward to directly assisting the president and NACo leadership to advance our organization to the next level.

### George Dunlap - An Experienced Leader

Throughout my sixteen years as a NACo member and commissioner, which includes six years chairing my county board I believe there is no greater institution to represent the needs and work of counties across this country. My goal in serv-

ing as the 2nd vice President is to support the national leadership in the pursuit of achieving our priorities using my decades of experience that includes the following.

- Current Chair, Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners
- North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) Board of Directors
- NCACC Current Chair, Health, and Human Services Steering Committee
- NCACC Former Chair, Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee
- NACo Current Chair, Justice and Public Safety Policy Steering Committee
- NACo Former Vice-Chair, Large Urban County Caucus
- NACo High-Performance Leadership Academy
- Former County School Board Chair
- Retired Law Enforcement Officer and Veteran

### George Dunlap - A Bridge Builder

During my career and public service tenure, I have stood on the front lines with NACo members and their respective counties and states in our collective efforts to address and overcome many challenges. I have traveled across the nation on behalf of our members including providing Congressional testimony to preserve and increase the availability of federal disaster relief funding. I understand the unique needs of our rural and urban members. As the chairman of

one of the largest counties in the Southeast which consists of both rural, suburban, and urban areas, I understand what it takes to help both large and smaller localities to prosper.

Since announcing my candidacy, I have had the pleasure of connecting with both old and new friends through our policy work and interaction. Our many conversations served as a reminder of just how critical the 2nd Vice position is when it comes to elevating both the common and unique priorities of all of our members. I am proud to have engaged with all of our regional organizations to learn more about the issues.

I am running because we have work to do - in Congress, in our regulatory agencies, in our regions and with each other.

One of the key issues facing NACo's officers, executive committee and Board of Directors is how to ensure that we are equally advocating for the unique priorities of both our rural and urban members, while also cultivating bipartisan support for direct federal investment in counties. This is important because our diverse priorities are instrumental in moving our organization forward.

The communications that we get from each member are crucial in helping to shape the organization's overall mission. Like many of our members, I think it's critical that we pay attention to all parties involved when they express their needs and desires—especially when

those needs or concerns are directly tied to specific priorities.

### George Dunlap - The Advocate

As the 2nd Vice President, I intend to work with our members, the president and 1st Vice President in addressing these challenges and more.

I have been intentional in serving in multiple capacities in order to have an informed perspective of our past, present, and future needs and desires. I am proud to have directly contributed through my work on multiple committees and our various efforts to shape policy especially as it pertains to housing, mental health, workforce, and public safety initiatives. In addition, I have facilitated several sessions at the NACo National Conference and have dedicated my time, expertise, and social capital to the betterment of NACo and all of its members.

At the state level, I have led the Justice and Public Safety Committee under three different State Presidents, and I currently serve as the Chairman of the Health and Human Services Committee. In addition, I was appointed to the NC Sheriff's Training and Educational Standards Committee. My contributions to the state association also include hosting NACo members during their visits to the state/region.

In addition, it is equally important that NACo proactively communicate back to our members how their input informs and shapes the orga-

nizations' work and policies. Especially when dealing with critical issues such as:

- Affordable housing
- Emergency preparedness
- Full funding for the PILT program.
- Mental health and substance misuse
- Workforce and economic development
- Rural development and broadband access
- Revenue sharing and public lands management.

I strongly believe that our members are the backbone of our organization and membership retention and recruitment will be vital to the success of NACo—especially when it comes to shaping policy and our overall lobbying efforts. I am willing to spearhead our retention and recruitment efforts by emphasizing the special role that counties play in the inter-governmental system— while also highlighting the successes our members have been able to achieve as a result of our shared advocacy work.

In my quest to be your next 2nd Vice President, your support will be critical -- your guidance will be instrumental - and most of all your engagement will be transformative in the work ahead. I humbly ask for your vote!

To learn more about my campaign visit my website [GeorgeForNACo.com](http://GeorgeForNACo.com).

**Don't Think Twice - Vote George for Second Vice!**

## NACo Second Vice Presidential Candidates

## CANDIDATE PLATFORM



## Bill Truex

Commissioner  
Charlotte County, Fla.

Like many of you, my journey into public office began with the aspiration to make a positive impact in my hometown. I was born into a small farming community yet serve in the fastest growing state in the nation. Charlotte County, Florida is in southwest Florida, just south of Sarasota. Over the last 20 years, farmlands in Charlotte County have decreased by half, while our population has continued to explode. I understand, like many of you, what it means to be pulled between urban expansion and rural preservation, economic growth and resiliency. But having worked with so many of you, I know that by pooling our expertise, embracing best practices, and fostering innovation we can improve our communities.

While I have indeed been fortunate to serve my community, the rewards I've reaped from this experience have far exceeded my expectations. The relationships forged during my service on the commission, involvement with the state association, and here at NACo have proven to be invaluable,

undoubtedly shaping me into a more adept and effective leader.

I am deeply committed to the principles of public service and the betterment of communities across the nation. Serving as NACo 2nd Vice President will provide a unique opportunity to contribute on a broader scale, working collaboratively with dedicated individuals who share a passion for addressing the diverse needs of counties, parishes, and boroughs.

If elected to serve as NACo 2nd Vice President and eventually president, I hope to make NACo an even better organization – an organization that hears from everyone, increases its influence in Washington and continues to provide critical resources and information to help every local elected official improve their community.

To that end I'd like to see NACo continue to improve in the following areas:

### Fiscal Sustainability and Resource Allocation:

- Counties often face financial constraints in delivering essential services. Economic fluctuations, unfunded mandates, and evolving demographics can strain county budgets. NACo must continue to assist counties in maintaining critical services, infrastructure, and public safety through federal advocacy, education and partnerships.

### Technology and Innovation Integration:

- Embracing and integrating new technologies is essen-

tial for efficient and effective county governance all around the nation. NACo needs to enhance its resources and expand its guidance to counties for adopting innovative solutions that enhance service delivery, cybersecurity, and data management.

### Intergovernmental Relations and Policy Advocacy:

- Counties play a pivotal role in the federal system that includes critical roles for the federal, state, and local governments. Advocating for the counties' interests at the federal level is vital to ensuring strong partnerships for serving Americans. Effective advocacy ensures that county voices are heard in the development of policies that directly impact their communities.

Since becoming involved in NACo eight years ago, I have had the opportunity to serve on several committees, task forces, and the Board of Directors. I have served as Vice Chair for the Programs & Services Standing Committee, the Public Safety Committee, and the Veterans & Military Services Committee.

At the Florida Association of Counties, I have looked for opportunities to support my fellow counties through mentorship and leadership. As President of FAC, I prioritized diversity in representation on FAC Committees and Board Appointments to ensure that each county, in all their diversity, is represented and heard.

NACo provides value by promoting best practices, building leadership networks and effective advocacy. If elected to

serve as NACo 2nd Vice President, I hope to build on these values.

### Promoting Best Practices and Innovation:

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. Counties should share best practices and innovative solutions that benefit counties nationwide. Take opportunities to showcase local projects that provide each other with ideas, big and small, to take back to their communities.

### Leadership Development and Collaboration:

NACo is critical in playing a role in fostering collaboration among county leaders, building strong networks, and contributing to leadership development programs. We are never too old to learn something new. Our environment – business, financial, technological, natural – is changing by the second. It's our job as leaders to keep up with advancements and use them to better our communities. And I believe that NACo can continue to provide us with the resources and tools for our personal growth.

I proudly chaired NACo's Immigration Reform Task Force for three years, navigating a complex and heated issue focusing on the task at hand by steering clear of political rhetoric. Additionally, I've led my own county commission for a decade, chosen for my commitment to timely and inclusive meetings. When serving as chairman, I prioritize efficiency while also giving everyone a voice, I ensure decisions reflect

thoughtful consideration of all perspectives. Grateful for the trust placed in me, I hope to continue my service as NACo 2nd Vice President.

### Effective Advocacy:

As president of the Florida Association of Counties, I have been able to bring, not only my commission experiences, but my experience as a general contractor and small business owner to help shape policy in such a way that it provides flexibility in decision making to Florida's counties while reducing regulation and fees on small business owners. The issue of affordable housing affects us all. I am uniquely positioned to advocate for affordable housing as a county commissioner and a home builder; and I would continue this pursuit as NACo 2nd Vice President.

The challenges and opportunities presented at NACo align with my vision for positive change and effective governance. I am eager to leverage my experience, skills, and dedication to foster collaboration, advocate for impactful policies, and strengthen the bonds that unite counties across the country. By taking on the role of NACo 2nd Vice President, I aim to play a key part in shaping the future of local governance and advancing the collective well-being of our communities.

Thank you for your commitment to public service, and I humbly ask for your vote on July 15th for NACo 2nd Vice President.

## County employees visit Germany

From EXCHANGE page 2

hospital.”

The water treatment process was also dramatic for Wilkins, who noted that 60% of the water is drawn from mountain runoff and Florida simply doesn't have mountains and has to draw from aquifers.

“They do things very differently over there,” Wilkins said. “The American standard is to treat water with chlorine and fluoride, but they run it through a sand filter, then a membrane filter and treat it with ultraviolet light and send it on its way.”

He doesn't think American water treatment plants will make wholesale shifts to the way they operate, but just seeing the way a different system works opened his mind to new ways of engineering infrastructure systems.

Starkey wants to get more county staffers involved in the

program, and get more counties across the United States participating in similar exchanges.

“It's our goal to have more friendship agreements with other parts of the world. We really look at international connections as low hanging fruit for foreign direct investment and onshoring, so having these relationships with local governments there and their business community only helps our business community and our government.”

But for all of his readiness to be open to new experiences, there was one challenge that Wilkins, who had never been outside of the Eastern Time Zone was not ready for — jet lag.

“I couldn't keep my eyes open that first day,” he said. “I was in meetings at work and kept falling asleep. I was trying not to be rude, but I just couldn't do it.” **CN**

## Maui County speeds up permit process to rebuild

From REBUILD page 3

The same services through the architecture firm traditionally start at \$40,000 per project.

Kasprzycki, whose father was killed in the wildfire, is calling the initiative “Ho'ola Lahaina Project.” In Hawaiian, “Ho'ola” means “to revive” or “to heal.” Akiyama heard about Kasprzycki's free assistance through what he refers to as “the coconut wire,” or word of mouth, while he was in the FEMA program.

“We're working with our neighbors and our friends and the community and it's definitely a different process a little bit,” Kasprzycki said. “We're seeing a lot of people be kind of uplifted with hope.”

“I lost my dad in the fire — he didn't make it out — so that was a hardship for our family and a traumatic experience, and there's a little healing coming out of helping the community and just getting back to our roots.”

The Kasprzycki Designs Team has finished over 42 schematic designs for 25 client groups; the majority of the remaining plan sets are expected to be completed over the next several months.



Clifton Akiyama cleans up after the fire. Soon, he'll move into a new house.

One of Kasprzycki's clients is the first person to start rebuilding in the disaster zone. He poured his house slab on June 14.

The Permit Recovery Center has issued 23 rebuild permits so far, according to Renner.

“We're the unfortunate experts in this business,” Renner said. “It's not something you seek to do, but the permitting process is a small piece of people losing their homes, everything in their homes, their lives, their memories, so if we can help ease the process and make permitting a little quicker and a little more transparent and personalize the process a little bit, that's what my goal is.”

“It's the most fulfilling work I've ever done in my career,

when you get people back in their homes and they invite you to their blessing or barbecue.”

Permit applications are submitted and reviewed online, but 4LEAF staff are there to guide people through the process, according to Renner.

“What we're seeing the most of right now are just walk-in folks that want to sit down and talk about their project, about the process,” Renner said. “What are my zoning regulations? What can I build back? What are my next steps?”

Speeding up the permitting process is one small way Maui County is helping residents rebuild their homes and lives, according to Renner. For Akiyama, a new home won't just mean finally having a long-term roof over his, his wife and Buddy's heads, but also a place to park his new fishing boat, which he recently bought after his was destroyed in the wildfire.

“I ordered a fishing boat,” Akiyama said. “It's on the island, because I have no place to park it yet, but when I move into my house, I'll be building the homes I plan to build and I'm going to start fishing, and I'll get started with the rest of my life.” **CN**

## ON THE MOVE

### NACo OFFICERS

- NACo President **Mary Jo McGuire**, Executive Director **Matt Chase**, National Program Director of Employee Benefits **Carlos Greene** and National Director of Financial Partnerships **Kyle Cline** attended the Florida Association of Counties Annual Conference in Orange County.
- Chase also attended the Association of Oregon Counties Board of Directors meeting in Marion County.

### NACo STAFF

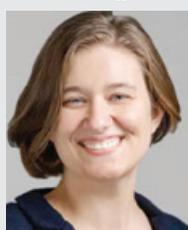
- Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** attended the National Sheriff's Association Annual Conference in Oklahoma County, Okla.
- Health and Human Services Program Manager **Annie Qing** attended the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Tax Time Initiative Convening in St. Louis.
- Senior Program Manager for Behavioral Health **Kat Patterson**, Mental Health Associate Destiny Boston, Counties Futures Lab Director **Ashleigh Holand** and Behavioral Health Policy Intern **Ruby Laine** attended the Familiar Faces Initiative Peer Exchange in Orange County, Calif.
- NACo Chief Information Officer **Rita Reynolds** attended the Multi-State Information-Sharing and Analysis meeting in Orlando, Fla.
- Associate Research Director **Jonathan Harris** and Program Associate Jack Callahan attended the 2024 SelectUSA Investment Summit in Prince George's County, Md.



Mattson



Qing



Patterson

## Grant dollars help create behavioral health center

From COAL COUNTY page 5

county, and the American Rescue Plan Act funds provided \$3 million alone.

Creating a separate paved entryway to delineate the nursing home and behavioral health center was projected to cost the county \$500,000. Kiehna applied for a grant from the Delta Regional Authority that covered this cost. Funding from the City of Sparta, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and opioid settlement funds provided an additional \$2.5 million. These funds combined covered the plumbing, electric and other interior remodeling costs of the nursing home.

One of the largest project costs was replacing the heating and cooling system of the nearly 80-year-old nursing

‘I would tell others the time is right, especially if they're a coal community.’

home. The cost of outright replacing a conventional heating and cooling system would cost the county \$3.5-\$4 million. Inflation Reduction Act funds reduced the cost by nearly half. How? Tax-incentives for projects incorporating alternative energy methods, such as a geothermal heating and cooling system being placed in a behavioral health center.

The health facility's heating and cooling system will operate fully off the earth's naturally occurring tempera-

ture fluctuations, assisted by a glycine-like material to transfer the energy. More than 200 holes were dug 150 feet deep, pressurized, and connected to one another to form an underground grid. This grid is then connected to the traditional heating and cooling system of the building —incorporating the old infrastructure with the new technology. Kiehna hopes the alternative-energy aspect of the project will bring a sense of pride to the former coal community as it faces changes.

“I would tell others the time is right for them, especially if they are a coal community,” he said. “There are more dollars in grants than we have seen in a long, long time.” **CN**

Callahan is a program associate in NACo's Counties Futures Lab.

# Fair chance employment offers opportunities

by **Matt Joyce**

The local government workforce experienced a significant disruption in spring 2020 totaling more than 1.3 million jobs lost. The pandemic's consequences continue, with nearly 800,000 jobs yet to recover. These positions include healthcare practitioners, sanitation workers, transit employees, utility workers, maintenance crews and construction workers, all of which provide essential services and resources to communities.

As counties look for creative solutions to recruit and retain employees, they have an opportunity to partner with local criminal justice and workforce agencies to build and adopt "fair chance" talent strategies.

By expanding opportunities for jobseekers with past convictions, counties can tap new talent pools and help drive public safety and community stability. Research shows that justice-impacted populations experience unemployment at five times the national average. Despite stigma and misperceptions about their qualifications for work, employees with past convictions show high rates of retention and advancement once they secure a job. We also know that a stable



job is the most effective deterrent of future arrests and incarceration — meaning fair chance practices can reduce crime and lower jail populations.

Several counties have taken steps toward adopting fair chance strategies. Forsyth County, N.C. has developed and pub-

lished HR policies that encourage and enable more people with past convictions to compete for jobs.

Monroe County, N.Y. adopted legislation to ensure candidates with past convictions do not face discrimination in its hiring process.

Los Angeles County has taken a cross-departmental approach to fair chance employment. Its human resources agency has a dedicated page outlining its fair chance strategy for jobseekers and guiding them through the employment and background screening process. In addition, its Department of Economic Opportunity has resources and incentives for local businesses that hire candidates with past convictions.

So, what are the elements of a county-led fair chance employment strategy?

- Counties can review their hiring policies to ensure they are not unintentionally disqualifying or discouraging great candidates due to conviction histories that are not relevant to the job.
- Counties can build recruiting partnerships with local reentry and workforce initiatives — or their own correctional agencies — to support candidates with past convictions to navigate the county workforce and apply for available opportunities.
- County HR teams can partner with programs that help address retention and job stability challenges for people returning to the workforce, such as transportation, housing, healthcare,

recovery and childcare.

- Counties can leverage their vendor and supplier relationships to ensure that companies doing business with the county align with their fair-chance strategies.
- Counties can consider policy and regulatory changes that minimize risk for fair chance employers and creative incentives to hire candidates returning from the justice system.

With a combined workforce of 3.6 million public servants, counties can take a national leadership role to drive fair chance employment and encourage the private sector to follow suit.

This July, at its Annual Conference, NACo and its collaborators from Envoy will hold a panel discussion to examine practical steps counties can take to expand fair chance employment as a talent solution and work across agencies to drive employment opportunities for candidates with past convictions. To learn more about developing a fair chance strategy, you can visit [envoy.us](http://envoy.us) or explore resources from leaders like the SHRM Foundation or the Second Chance Business Coalition.

*Matt Joyce is a partner at Envoy.*

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## TRINITY COUNTY, CALIF.

The Trinity County, Calif. seal features a combination of trees, water and mountains found throughout the county's 3,200 square miles. Resident Buck Steele designed the seal in the 1980s.

Administrative Officer Trent Tuthill interpreted the seal.

Nearly 80% of the county is national forest land. The Trinity Mountain range is visible throughout, as are bodies of water, including Trinity River, Trinity Lake and the Lewiston River.



Mining drove settlers to Trinity County, and two-thirds of the county's mines are gold mines, represented by the pickax and shovel.

The symbols at the points of the triangle are Chinese words for love, peace and hope. Chinese labor was a big part of the county's gold mining days.

Would you like to see your county seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at [cban@naco.org](mailto:cban@naco.org).

## GET TO KNOW...

## Mercer County, Ohio

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Mercer County, Ohio, established in 1820, was named for Revolutionary War General Hugh Mercer. The 13,500-acre Grand Lake St. Marys, which is the largest inland lake in Ohio, sprawls across the county. It was dug by hand in the 19th century to create a feeder for the Miami and Erie Canal and was the largest reservoir in the world when it was built.

The county seat of Celina hosts an annual three-day Lake Festival that features live music, a kiddie tractor pull and fireworks. This year's theme is "Christmas in July" and will feature a gingerbread house-building contest and a visit from Santa.

**The largest gathering of Amphicars, which are convertibles that can operate on both land and water, was on Grand Lake St. Marys.**

On the bank next to the lake is the Celina Lighthouse. The lighthouse is functional, but is used more as a lookout for vis-

itors than for a lighthouse's traditional purpose — navigational aid — since it's located on a man-made lake.

Celina was established in 1834 by James Watson Riley, who named the city after the lakeside town Salina, N.Y., when noting the similar landscapes. He changed the spelling to "Celina" to avoid confusion. Ohio Magazine named Celina one of the five best hometowns in Ohio in 2023.

The eight-mile dairy farm, MVP Dairy, in Celina has been owned by the same two families for four generations. The farm practices regenerative farming, hosts events about environmental care and visitors can meet the cows.

Langsdon Mineral Collection, a department in the Mercer County District Library, houses more than 900 minerals from around the world, including jade and peacock-colored bornite.

The village of Fort Recovery in the county was the site of two well-known battles of the



best known for his "It Happened Last Night" gossip column, was born in the village of Rockford; he played himself in six movies and hosted his own variety show. Another notable Mercer County native is comic book artist Dan Davis, who has worked on iconic characters such as Superman, Batman, Scooby-Doo, The Simpsons, The Jetsons and Garfield.

Rockford, which today has more than 1,000 residents, was originally named Shanesville and was the first Mercer County seat. Shanesville was one of the sites where John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, planted apple trees. In celebration for what would be Johnny Appleseed's 235th birthday, the Johnny Appleseed Foundation planted two apple trees in Rockford that were propagated from the only Johnny Appleseed tree known to exist today.

*Get to Know features new NACo member counties.*

Northwest Indian War, when the United States established settlements north of the Ohio River, an area where Native Americans were living. The village of Chickasaw, named for the Chickasaw tribe, was the last stop on the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War.

The small town of Maria Stein is home to the Shrine of the Holy Relics, which houses 1,200 Catholic relics of the Saints and True Cross and is the second largest collection in the country. The town was named for the Maria Stein Convent located in it, which was the first permanent Motherhouse in the country. Earl Wilson, a journalist



**WORD SEARCH**

**ACCOMACK COUNTY, VA.**

Created by Mary Ann Barton

U V S D G E W Q T J S Q E N D A I Q P T  
 R G Q V O Y O A Y M O E O S C Y E G I H  
 I K L K V U L V L Z E I L C H J W F G Q  
 D J F K E W G Q R L T W O H R C C T I D  
 G A N R R U A A M A O M S H C S M T W C  
 Z E B S N E W C E V A P I E C B E O D H  
 T Q O D O E E R V C Y S S D I T V Y N W  
 E Z A G R L C M K U T H X J F N I B O B  
 X S B R R E E S U O H T H G I L O W I A  
 M I U B R A C U R P T Z W U K G L P T R  
 F R V O E S P I D W E S P L O L G W A C  
 W C S U H X C H C L Q R M H T N J D L A  
 R M E A O T A I Y K F Q M D M G Z W U W  
 Q Z M F A R R G P W C M K C T S Z J P P  
 Z F X R X J N U S C F Y N V F M U T O O  
 E B X P H I H U O C K O L G I G J D P Q  
 W M I E L V X H I C N F U A U B E N B X  
 E U O C E B S P W A L K O U B I L K Q B  
 L F Y F J Y U F E R R Y S H I R E E M P  
 C C N Z I H O V X J U T R O P R I A S I

**ACCOMACK:** The county's name comes from a Native American word meaning "the other shore."  
**AIRPORT:** The Accomack County Airport is located in the town of Melfa.  
**COURTHOUSE:** The Romanesque Revival and Victorian courthouse was built between 1899-1901. It was renovated in 1968.  
**CRAB:** Tangier Island, a fishing village about an hour from the county seat of Onancock, is dubbed the "soft crab capital" of the nation. It is said that residents have a unique accent.  
**CYCLING:** The Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commissions holds numerous cycling events annually in the county, including the Le Tour de Shore.  
**FERRY:** Residents and visitors can take a ferry from the county to Tangier Island.  
**GEOGRAPHY:** The county has a total area of 1,310 square miles of which 65.25% is water. It borders the Chesapeake Bay on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east, constituting one of the largest unspoiled wetlands habitats in the world.

**GOVERNOR:** Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam hails from the county.  
**HISTORIC:** The towns of Accomac, the county seat, and Onancock are designated State Historic Districts featuring restored Colonial architecture.  
**LIGHTHOUSE:** The Assateague Lighthouse was completed in 1867 and stands 154 feet above sea level. Its twin rotating lights can be seen 19 miles out to sea.  
**PONIES:** Chincoteague Island, part of the county, is known worldwide for its wild ponies, featured in the novel "Misty of Chincoteague" by Marguerite Henry.  
**POPULATION:** The county population as of 2022 was 33,191.  
**RECREATION:** Visitors will find fishing, boating and plenty of beaches in the county.  
**SHIRE:** Established in 1634, Accomack County was one of the first original eight "shires" or counties of Virginia.  
**WALLOPS:** The county is home to the Wallops Flight Facility, operated by NASA. It is one of only three commercial rocket launch facilities in the United States.

**PROFILES IN SERVICE**

**TODD PATZER**

**NACo Board member**  
 Commissioner  
 Lac qui Parle County, Minn.

**Number of years active in NACo:** Five years of attending NACo events.

**Years in public service:** 20 years as a county commissioner.

**Occupation:** Farmer

**Education:** North Dakota State University - Engineering

**The hardest thing I've ever done:** Go through a divorce.

**A dream I have is to:** Magically become musically gifted (I have zero musical gifts to offer).

**You'd be surprised to learn that I:** Like to cook



**PATZER**

**The most adventurous thing I've ever done is:** Run for public office.

**My favorite way to relax is:** Drinking a beer next to a campfire.

**I'm most proud of:** My two successful and outstanding sons.

**Every morning I read:** Minnesota and national news headlines and ESPN sports scores.

**My favorite meal is:** Fried side pork wrapped in lefse (a Norwegian flatbread).

**My pet peeve is:** All forms of social media.

**My motto is:** Very few things are as good, or bad, as they initially seem (very Minnesotan I know!!).

**The last book I read was:** "Omnivore's Dilemma" by Michael Pollan

**My favorite movie is:** "Armageddon," starring Bruce Willis and Billy Bob Thornton

**My favorite music is:** '80s "hair bands"

**My favorite U.S. president is:** Abraham Lincoln

**My county is a NACo member because:** NACo gives a very small county like mine a strong voice in national policy and advocacy work in D.C. The value we receive far exceeds the price we pay.



**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:**

Princess Diana,  
 Neil Armstrong,  
 Raymond E. Wallace



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**jobs.naco.org**



**BRIGHT IDEAS** | COOK COUNTY, ILL.**Cook County FoodCare Program Offers Healthy Food, Nutrition Services and More to Medicaid Recipients****PROBLEM:**

Medicaid members were underreporting their food insecurity and other basic needs.

**SOLUTION:**

Cook County created FoodCare to increase food access and nutrition services for Medicaid members.

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Recognizing the importance of taking a holistic approach to healthcare, Cook County, Ill., is increasing access to healthy food and nutrition services for its Medicaid members through its FoodCare initiative.

FoodCare is a Cook County Health program in its CountyCare plan, which helps connect Medicaid recipients to housing, transportation and food.

Within the roughly 430,000 people in Cook County that CountyCare serves, at least 6% are food insecure, according to health risk screenings. However, that number is likely much higher — with some estimates skyrocketing up to 50% — because food insecurity is underreported, according to Aaron Galeener, Cook County Health's chief administrative officer of health plan services.

"It's hard for an individual to take care of their asthma or diabetes when they're focused on where their next meal is going to come from," Galeener said. "So, we've tried to develop programs that are aimed at addressing some of these other needs that members have so that it frees them up to be able to better take care of their health."

FoodCare works to increase health equity and food access through three programs.

- Emergency home-delivered meals for Medicaid recipients who have recently been discharged from a hospital stay or were referred by their care coordinator or dietician for food insecurity.



- A FoodCare interactive digital platform that connects Medicaid members with their own registered dietician for unlimited dietician visits and helps them with meal planning, shopping on a budget and food delivery.

- Medically tailored meals for Medicaid members with specific conditions, and pregnant members with gestational diabetes and hypertension.

As of April 2024, roughly 13,000 meals have been delivered through FoodCare, according to Cook County Health data; more than 43,000 people have enrolled in dietician and nutrition programming and roughly 1,400 Medicaid recipients have enrolled in the medically tailored meal programming, as well.

"We know that food nutrition underlies a number of significant chronic diseases, like diabetes, obesity, individuals who have gestational diabetes when they're pregnant," Galeener said. "So, we really started there, with 'What are the health outcomes we want to impact?' and then, 'What are some of the significant needs or challenges that we want to

address?'"

If someone who's diabetic, for example, is enrolled in FoodCare, they receive access to a dietician who guides them on food choices that can best help them manage their diabetes. They then receive that food, which could include low glycemic index and high protein foods, through the medically tailored meal program, according to Galeener.

Foodsmart, a nutrition organization with the largest network of registered dietitians in the country, partners with Cook County Health on FoodCare. Foodsmart offers education on nutrition through its online platforms for Medicaid members and also pays them \$50 in grocery money for completing their first dietician appointment, and \$15 for every follow-up afterward.

"There are a series of things that they could offer more immediately than we would be able to if we were to try to build something completely new," Galeener said. "And we wanted to ensure that we can scale the program to the right level."

CountyCare also partners with local businesses — many

of which are owned by women and minorities, Galeener noted — to prepare the meals delivered through FoodCare. Both medically tailored meals and emergency meals are delivered to members' homes. If someone is housing insecure and might not have a permanent address, the meals can be delivered by care coordinators, according to Galeener.

According to Cook County Health data, since FoodCare launched roughly a year and a half ago, 56% of its obese users have lost weight (with an average of nine pounds lost) and 66% of people enrolled have seen an improvement in Nutriscore. Nutriscore is a nutritional rating system that calculates "positive" points, which are healthy foods such as protein, fruits, vegetables, nuts and fiber, from "negative" points, which include foods with high salt content, saturated fatty acids and sugar content.

"We're already seeing some significant results in terms of individuals seeing weight loss, seeing more controlled diabetes, and all of that eventually leads to cost savings for us over time," Galeener said. "So, there

is a return that we expect from investing in these programs."

Cook County Health receives roughly \$600 per Medicaid member each month from the state of Illinois (the number varies, depending on age and sex). That \$600 pays for medical plans, utilization, administrative costs and programs, such as FoodCare. Cook County Health creates programs like FoodCare because they not only serve Medicaid recipients better, but it also reduces an individual's medical costs over time by how much they improve health outcomes, Galeener said.

"We're serving a very underserved population," Galeener said. "And that's really aligned with the history of Cook County Health, which has been serving this population for almost 200 years now. We know that beyond the standard health issues that people face, a lot of the main drivers related to their health care are these other social risk factors." 

*Cook County, Ill.'s FoodCare initiative won the 2024 NACo Achievement Award in the Health category.*

# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## CALIFORNIA

The Post Fire, which started in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** and spread into **VENTURA COUNTY**, consumed at least 15,600 acres as of June 19. Strong winds and steep terrain hampered efforts to put out the fire. About 1,200 people were evacuated from an RV park. The cause of the fire was not yet determined. It was one of 20 wildfires burning across the Western United States last month.

## ARIZONA

With a unanimous vote last month, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors has taken action to **wipe out all its unfunded pension debt** for retiring law enforcement employees.

In recent years, the cost of employee pension plans has risen dramatically in the government sector, limiting discretionary spending.

Starting with the fiscal year 2023 budget, the Board took advantage of low interest rates to pay down unfunded pension liabilities, directing \$500 million into the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System and Corrections Officer Retirement Plan.

## FLORIDA

• After a “seniors for seniors” program offering **free cats and dogs** (age 6 or older), to residents ages 60 or older was launched in January by the **SEMINOLE COUNTY** Animal Services Department, it has been “pretty successful,” according to Bree Burkett, a program coordinator at the

The County is using financing to pay down the pension debt because repayments are exempt from Arizona’s constitutional expenditure limitation. The County anticipates a short repayment period.

As a result of this funding strategy, the overall cost to the taxpayer is less than if the Board had taken no action, the Board noted.

## COLORADO

**BOULDER COUNTY** last month announced a \$500 rebate plan to help homeowners

**fireproof their homes from wildfires.** Homeowners who follow at least one recommendation to fire-proof their homes are eligible for the rebate. Those recommendations include replacing fences with noncombustible material; replacing highly flammable juniper trees and replacing the first five feet around the house with noncombustible landscaping material. Learn more at <https://wildfirepartners.org/rebate>.

## FLORIDA

• **MANATEE COUNTY** Public Safety has joined forces with public safety telehealth provider MD Ally to **improve healthcare for residents** and create a stronger and more resilient public safety system.

This partnership — known as Manatee Telehealth — will help increase the range of services available to 911 dispatchers, allowing them to connect non-emergency callers with a healthcare professional trained in emergency medicine via telehealth.

This will enhance healthcare options for the community and improve access to care.



shelter. “There have been quite a few we’ve been able to help.” The usual cost of adopting a dog is \$80 and for cats it’s \$60, which includes spaying or neutering.



## MARYLAND

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY** will be home to the nation’s largest **self-sustaining bus depot** starting in 2026. Plans call for on-site green hydrogen production powered by solar energy, plus battery energy storage, Axios reported. By 2035, the depot is expected to accommodate 200 zero-emission buses, most of which will be powered by hydrogen fuel. Read about the county’s plans at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/climate>.

## IOWA

The **DALLAS COUNTY** Health Department is **helping out older residents** with a farmers market program. Community Health Educator Natalie Peters tells Raccoon Valley Radio that the health department is teaming up with Aging Resources of Central Iowa to

recruit older adults for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program. The program provides \$50 to income-eligible seniors at participating farmers markets and roadside stands. Nearly 200 seniors have registered for the

*See NEWS FROM page 15*



## NORTH CAROLINA

**BLADEN COUNTY** recently commemorated **Juneteenth** with a series of vibrant celebrations, culminating in a spectacular parade, BladenOnline.com reported. The celebrations in Bladen County began June 15, with various events in the Mt. Olive Community aimed at honoring African American culture and history. The days leading up to the parade featured educational workshops, cultural performances and community gatherings that highlighted the significance of Juneteenth and its impact on American history.

**From NEWS FROM page 14**

program in Dallas County so far. “Our department has signed up over 160 people for the program so far this year, and will continue to do so throughout the summer, so there’s been a pretty good amount of interest in our community,” Peters said.

**NEW MEXICO**

More than 8,000 residents were evacuated last month due to **wildfires** that engulfed 1,400 structures in **LINCOLN** and **OTERO** counties, the governor’s office said, in a request for assistance June 19 for the counties. A water treatment facility was partially destroyed and 911 communication services were down across 20,000 acres.

**PENNSYLVANIA**

• **DELAWARE COUNTY** will be adding three **healthcare kiosks** as early as this summer, WHY-FM recently reported. The kiosks will dispense tests for free and provide results for RSV, flu A/B, Covid-19, STDs, STDs and HIV for residents. The 1,200-pound kiosks are equipped with refrigeration and internet connectivity. They will also be stocked with naloxone, drug supply test strips, first aid kits, condoms and feminine hygiene products. The kiosks are



**OHIO**

Late last year, **ATHENS COUNTY** created “friendship benches” to **combat loneliness**. The county offers training to anyone who would like to become a “listener,” offering peer support and problem-solving to residents in need. In a community health assessment, one-third of survey participants cited social isolation as a concern, even before the COVID pandemic. Social isolation impacts a person’s mental and emotional wellbeing as well as their physical health, linked to higher risks for heart disease, diabetes and dementia.

funded by leftover pandemic grant funding.

• **LACKAWANNA COUNTY** has put a call out to **local artists** so it can display local artwork in the county courthouse. The county is offering artists \$100 if their artwork is chosen and will transfer the artwork onto canvas for display. The county is seeking “uplifting” artwork that embraces a theme, including civic duty, historically im-

portant moments, landmarks, architecture and industry and land and recreation.

**VIRGINIA**

• The **GILES COUNTY Trail Center** recently opened at Mountain Lake Lodge close to the Appalachian Trail. The center connects visitors, hikers and the local community to a network of trails spanning more than 20 miles. The Trail Center is a \$1.2 million project

funded through a 2016 Appalachian Regional Commission POWER grant with funding administered by Giles County, Giles County Industrial Development Authority, Friends of Southwest Virginia, Appalachian Regional Commission, portation and other entities.

*Do you have news to share? Send your news and photos to Mary Ann Barton: [mbarton@naco.org](mailto:mbarton@naco.org).*

**VIRGINIA**

• **National S’mores Day** is coming up later this summer, Aug. 10 and the county’s Dorey Recreation Center in **HENRICO COUNTY** is ready. Their invitation to the public reads: “Come join us to make and eat one while you discover a bit of s’mores history trivia. You bring the sweet-tooth and we’ll bring the wipes.”



**County Executive David Crowley holds up signed legislation June 17 that provides funding for an affordable housing development.** Photo by Graham Kilmer/Urban Milwaukee, Inc.

**WISCONSIN**

A new 50-unit complex will soon break ground in **MILWAUKEE COUNTY**, thanks to a grant that will build a **housing development for people with autism and other developmental disabilities**, WTMJ-TV reported.

County Executive David Crowley said the multi-million dollar funding (\$2.5 million in federal funds) will directly tackle housing concerns that can impact the disability community.

“We want to welcome anyone and everyone as long as they’re contributing to the success of this community. And that’s what we have to wrap ourselves around. That’s what affordable housing is,” he said. Groundbreaking is expected to begin this summer.

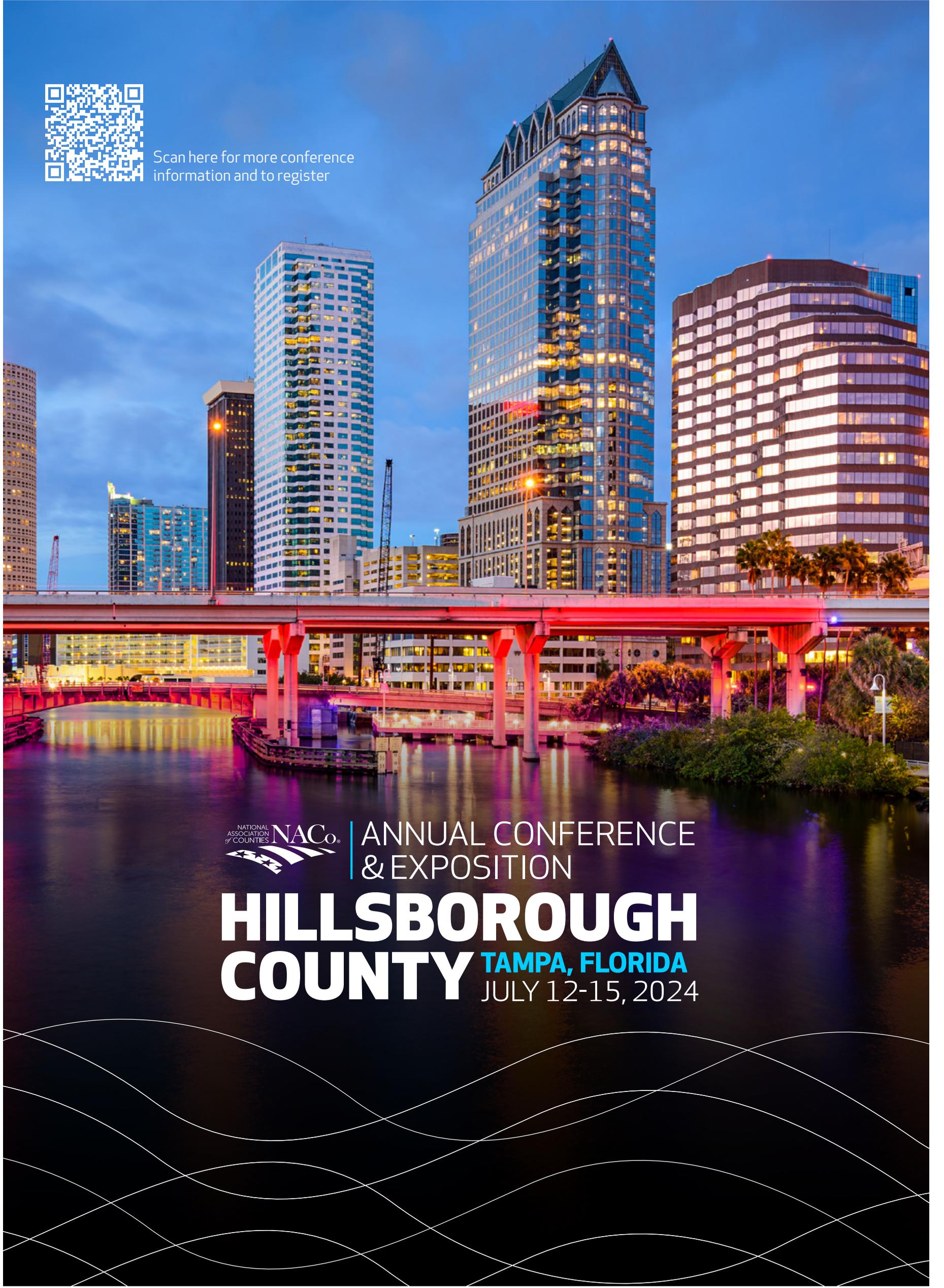
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