

County's groundwork helps set the stage for energy breakthrough

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Aside from some water towers and a flock of turbines making the best of a windy situation, there aren't many tall structures in Beaver County, Utah. Among those turbines, a few drilling rigs are opening up a whole new world, underground.

But while high-level agreements between the U.S. Department of Energy and the University of Utah made cutting-edge geothermal energy operations happen in this 7,000 person community, the work Beaver County has done to prepare the region made it possible. In 2026, a power plant here could lead the way for 24-hour clean energy generation throughout the country thanks to new technology.

"It's a pocket of land that most people would drive by and not think anything of it," said NACo President James Gore, who visited the county last month. "You wouldn't think that what they do here could produce enough power for an entire state."

FORGing ahead

"I think this is the right time," for geothermal energy, said John McLennan, a chemical

engineering professor at the University of Utah's Energy and Geoscience Institute. "This is a renewable energy that makes sense."

The Department of Energy is funding the institute's Frontier Observatory for Research in Geothermal Energy — Utah FORGE. Utah FORGE is applying multi-stage hydraulic fracturing, common to natural gas extraction, to its drilling, a new facet in geothermal energy. The result — enhanced geothermal systems (EGS) — creates more surface area for water to encounter the hot rock in the earth's crust, creating steam that spins the turbines in a power plant to generate electricity.

The Department of Energy estimates that enhanced geothermal systems could generate power to 65 million homes throughout the United States.

Geothermal energy was once limited to locations closer to fault lines, but enhanced geothermal systems could open the map entirely, though McLennan noted that it would likely exclude urban areas.

"I don't think you'll see it happening in Seattle or San Francisco. You might see it in more remote parts of those

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California county, non-profit help launch child-care startups



Children play under the supervision of a child-care worker in Stanislaus County, Calif. The county has teamed up with a non-profit to help create much-needed child-care businesses in the county. Photo courtesy of Stanislaus County

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Adrianna Segura, a Stanislaus County, Calif. mother of two, was licensed to be a home-based child-care provider, but she didn't know the first thing about starting a business. She knew how to take care of chil-

dren, but she wasn't sure how to file taxes, create contracts or what her rate should be.

She turned to a county Family Resource Center for answers, which is where she learned about the In-Home Child Care Expansion Project, a 12-week cohort program Stanislaus County created with Nurture,

a nonprofit that helps users launch home child-care businesses. Participants take training on the basics of marketing, budgeting, record keeping and parent communication through Nurture's app and attend virtual weekly meetings where they

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Counties scramble after FEMA scraps disaster mitigation funds

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Following the cancellation of a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant program that was helping counties build disaster mitigation infrastructure, local governments are working to find alternative funding sources and implement

planned projects on a smaller scale.

Earlier this month, FEMA announced it is no longer allocating \$750 million through its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program this year, and will stop funding previously approved projects. In many counties, including Napa Coun-

ty, Calif., BRIC-funded projects were already underway.

Napa County had already awarded \$27 million in contracts for wildfire prevention work, and is in the process of recalling them, according to Holly Dawson, the county's chief communications officer. Wild-

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County program on track to create 230 home-based child-care businesses

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receive hands-on coaching and connect with peers in their cohort.

“When I first opened my day-care, I didn’t know I had to have a 1099 form, I didn’t know how to put taxes to the side, because ‘Uncle Sam’ was going to collect at the end of the year — all of those tedious things that should be common sense,” Segura said. “But they didn’t teach this to us in college or in high school.

“They didn’t say, ‘When you run a business, this is how you should run it.’ And I feel like that’s what Nurture is — it’s an extension.”

Before teaming up with the county, Nurture worked with the workforce development department of Stanislaus County’s neighbor, Merced County, to develop the curriculum through conducting “empathy interviews” with local home child-care business owners to find

out what people wish they knew when they were first starting out, according to Jennifer Brooks, executive director of Nurture.

Stanislaus County and its city of Modesto devoted American Rescue Plan Act funding to the In-Home Child Care Expansion Project, which has already created 536 licensed childcare spots and is on track to help launch roughly 230 home-based child-care businesses in the county over the course of two years.

The funding goes toward the training itself, and each participant receives \$2,500 to help get their childcare business off the ground. Segura used the funding on marketing her home childcare business and to purchase an outdoor play set, which she said has helped set her apart from other local home childcare businesses.

“For low-income people, [that funding] is essential for opening their door,” Brooks said. “It costs money to get licensed — you

have to buy equipment, you need to have some basic supplies, and the people that we’re working with are often like, ‘I can’t do this right now, because I don’t have the \$35 to pay for the orientation that I’m required to take,’ and those are the people we’re targeting, so this start-up money is critical.”

The project is part of the broader “Stanislaus 2030” initiative, a public-private partnership working to create more quality jobs, reduce the number of families struggling and focus on growth in the county. The Stanislaus 2030 plan involves growing the supply of child-care providers and building awareness of subsidies.

According to a Bipartisan Policy Center report, in California’s Central Valley, the economic impact created by each new child-care space is \$34,000 — contributing factors include increased productivity and parents’ ability to go to work in the first place.

“Quality child care is the most impactful anti-poverty strategy out there,” Brooks said. “It has generational effects on health and wealth, incarceration, etc., that if we can get that right, then we’re really going to make a difference.”

Prior to the implementation of Stanislaus 2030, only 17% of working parents in the county had access to licensed child-care, according to county data. A major obstacle in childcare for the county is that it’s never recovered from the 2008 recession, according to Tony Jordan, executive director of the Child and Family Services Division at the Stanislaus County Office of Education.

“People lost their housing in just outrageous numbers, and a lot of those people had to close their family child-care businesses,” Jordan said. “So, we’ve never really recovered from where we were at back then — we are still



Adrianna Segura pauses for a photo at her home, where she operates her child-care business, after participating in Stanislaus County’s In-Home Child Care Expansion Project.

running short.

“... Laying on top of that economic downturn, job loss, pandemic, we were really at a low point, so this partnership, I think, came at the right time, with the right heads, with the right investments.”

Stanislaus County discovered through its economic development assessment with the Brookings Institution, a research foundation, that it needs 36,000 more child-care spots for children ages 11 and under in order to meet workforce demand — meaning the county needs to incubate an average of 150 new childcare businesses each year from 2020 to 2030, according to Brooks.

“We’re starting with this 36,000, but that is a number that you can’t even get your hands around in any way,” Brooks said. “So, we did an analysis where we looked at ‘Where is the greatest shortage of child care?’”

Research showed that seven ZIP codes had the worst “child-care deserts” in the county, particularly for infants and toddlers. “That’s the age group that’s on

fire in terms of the shortage,” according to Brooks.

To help bridge those gaps, Nurture does targeted outreach in the seven ZIP codes, which has included partnering with the school district to reach elementary school parents and presenting information at farm worker fairs, to promote the availability of child-care subsidies and create more awareness around the opportunity to create a home child-care business.

A county report found that a lack of awareness surrounding eligibility for child-care subsidies led to them being underutilized, particularly among non-English speakers, according to Brooks.

“Child care is expensive for everybody, but subsidies are essential to making this broken market work, particularly in low-income communities,” Brooks said.

Nurture initially partnered with community organizations to share information on social media, but it was only effective

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SNAP/STATS

May Is Mental Health Awareness Month

STAT	FACTS
1 in 5	U.S. adults experience mental illness each year
1 in 20	U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year
1 in 6	Youth have a mental health condition; only half receive treatment
50%	Of lifetime mental illness begins by age 14

Source: National Council for Mental Wellbeing

Counties can foster relationships among potential partners to ensure energy success

From ENERGY page 1

states,” he said. “After hydraulic fracturing, and when you’re circulating and operating the plant, many plants have low-level background earthquakes. A plant near an urban area is going to need a more significant monitoring system for seismicity, it’s going to need a more significant hazard analysis for seismicity. And you will have cooling towers; people might not like that.”

Next door to Utah FORGE, a private company, Fervo Energy, is following in the wake of the successful tests and is working to commercialize the technology. The power generated by their planned Cape Station plant will be sold to customers in California. Fervo’s contract with Google is the first instance of an enhanced geothermal system supplying energy to a data center.

But with a smaller footprint, McLennon sees opportunities for enhanced geothermal systems to fit in new places, particularly in a way that will meet the needs of one of the driving factors in energy demand.

“Transmission is a big deal, but then you start to look at who our future users are going to be,” he said. “They’re going to be things like data centers, and what you need to do is site them close to an EGS plant. It’s an opportunity to get around a transmission bottleneck.”

He sees the West as being the proving ground for enhanced geothermal systems for at least the next decade, and once this new technique is commercially viable, it will likely see adoption throughout the country. Currently, the vast majority of U.S. geothermal plants are in California, Nevada and Utah.

“Truthfully it would be nice to just see something east of the Mississippi, but that’s going to be a matter of time, I think,” McLennon said. “Once we see this can work, it’ll just be a matter of drilling deeper.”

Preparing the groundwork

Although Utah FORGE and Fervo’s Cape Station are located on private land — rare in Southern Utah — the county’s role has been and will be criti-



John McLennon shows off a capped geothermal pipe that Utah FORGE drilled in Beaver County, Utah. Photo by Charlie Ban

cal to their successes.

“You really do have to be user friendly and willing to look at all of the different issues,” said Beaver County Commissioner Tammy Pearson. “Aside from approving conditional use permits and road maintenance agreements, our job is to do the facilitation and coordination work between the federal agencies, landowners and the management.”

That effort has involved lobbying both the Department of Energy and the state Legislature, which allocated \$300,000 on top of the \$140 million grant DOE provided to the University of Utah.

The county also plays a crucial role in building out the workforce that will build and run the plant.

“Although counties may seem insignificant in the role that they can play (in energy generation), their influence really comes from their affiliations and relationships with others,” said Jen Wakeland, a business development director for the state of Utah who served as Beaver County’s strategic development director throughout Utah FORGE and Fervo’s development in the county.

“Maintaining relationships gives these projects the opportunity to thrive, whether it’s with universities, chambers

of commerce or the community. It’s incumbent on staff to really dig in and ask how they can think about it differently, if the vision doesn’t match the market, and how can we work together to make that happen.”

By cultivating and maintaining relationships with the state and associations of governments, a county can adopt a more regional mindset and open their network to reach those of its partners.

“That allows us to deploy certain things like incentives in case a company faces some of them financial challenges or even being able to reach out to venture capitalists,” Wakeland said. “Those relationships and how you build and maintain them become the most important thing when you’re trying to set the groundwork for good solid economic development, regardless of who the developer is.”

Cooperation with universities will be critical in developing workforce training, particularly if employers in a new field plan to hire from the community. Utah Tech University and the University of Southern Utah, along with Utah State Extension, have local options.

“In rural settings, you really rely on [others],” she said. “Anytime we’ve had a rise of industry in Beaver County, we

have been able to reach out to those university partners and foster the relationship to a point where we could get programs in place to help develop the workforce. Yes, we’ll need some geothermal 101, but we’ll need electrical engineering, and for managers, bachelor’s and master’s programs. We lay out the growth we anticipate and focus on the pieces we’ll need to complement that growth.

“I would say it’s equally important, in addition to all the work that needs to be done by counties, maintaining relationships probably should be up there with all the other work.”

The influx of workers will also require Beaver County to stimulate its housing supply.

“We’ve been really thoughtful about how we can temporarily house people because we know that the folks that are out here building the power plant are going to eventually go away,” Wakeland said.

The nearby city of Milford has played host to some recreational vehicles housing workers, and those parks will become recreational RV parks when the workers depart.

“The other way to address housing is just to bring in developers and say, ‘Here’s the opportunity, here’s what it’s going to look like, here is what

the market will hold,” Wakeland said. “We’ve been pretty clear with our developers that single family homes are what is going to make the most sense. We have some duplexes, and we have some fourplexes. Townhomes might be a nice option as well, because they’re cheaper to build than standalone homes, but we were really transparent with the developers about what the market will really hold. They can’t come in and think they’re going to build \$400,000 houses. They’ll never sell.”

Wakeland said Beaver County has also been straightforward when advising companies like Fervo how to integrate into the community.

“There’s a road map to success for businesses to come into a rural place like Beaver County,” she said. “You join the Chamber of Commerce, you sponsor booths at the county fair, you volunteer your time to coach Little League and you make sure you’re having community meetings and town halls, where people can come in and ask questions. When you hire key influential members of the community to take key influential roles within your business, you gain credibility. You need credible community voices to lend credibility to your project.” **CN**

Lack of child care can impact local economy, workforce, families and employers

From CHILD CARE page 2

in reaching the county’s English-speaking population (and its childcare deserts are primarily low-income rural communities with a large Latino population), so the nonprofit altered its approach to be more “word-of-mouth,” according to Brooks.

“It was that personal experience, sharing one-on-one, or having the flyer hung in the bodega, with the tear-off phone numbers — not the QR code — that’s next to the handwritten flyer of, like ‘Room for rent,’ that’s where we were going to get people,” Brooks said. “So, we found that we really had to get into the community.”

Nurture also now has an ambassador program, which incentivizes people — like Segura — who have graduated from the course to share their experiences with others interested in creating a home childcare business.

Segura had spent roughly a decade working in dentistry when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Working from home for the first time, she realized how valuable the additional time with her two young children was, and she decided to investigate what it would take to launch a childcare business.

“I did the leap of faith, and I took the jump,” Segura said. “My children were the ones that

inspired me, because I came to understand the first five years are so important in their life, and I wanted to create that safe environment for them.”

During her 12 weeks in the Nurture cohort, Segura learned what it takes to run a home childcare business, including what she needed to document throughout the process and the importance of keeping contracts up to date and building out a waitlist. She also took trauma-informed classes, which she said has helped her become a better childcare provider. While Segura already had a childcare business license prior to joining the cohort, participants are walked through the licensing



Children play at a local child-care business created with help from Stanislaus County, Calif. Photo courtesy of Stanislaus County

process during the program and the majority get licensed upon completion.

“I feel like it’s important for

providers to take a business class,” Segura said. “Because as daycares, I feel like we get looked down upon only because it’s like, ‘Oh, you just stay home and watch children.’ And we should move from that point of view into ‘No, I’m a business.’”

Segura said Nurture taught her how to advocate for herself as a childcare business owner.

“I have to break it down to the parents,” Segura said. “I’m like, ‘When we watch children, you expect me to watch a child at \$5 per hour, and you don’t expect yourself to work at \$5 per hour at a regular corporate job.’ The [cohort] gave me the tools where I’m able to communicate with the parents instead of shutting them down or having myself feel like I’m putting myself last, because I want to make this parent stay with me.”

After Stanislaus County found success with the program, San Joaquin County also adopted the Nurture model, devoting roughly \$400,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding toward implementing it, according to Amanda Hughes, executive director of Stanislaus 2030.

“I love how our three counties are learning from each other around a shared issue that’s hurting our economy,” Hughes said.

Nurture “isn’t just an app — it’s a community,” Segura said. After completing the cohort program, Nurture graduates keep up with each other through a group chat, which includes providers across Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. The chat acts as a way to share best practices or seek advice, and is a great resource because “childcare is

WORD SEARCH

CHARLOTTE COUNTY, FLA.
Created by Mary Ann Barton

A H Z G A W A K S N K A R R F B P N V T
L R M M J E S F A L Y T C O L W F E P S
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AFFORDABLE: Charlotte County’s cost of living is 4% lower than the national average; housing costs are 17% lower.

CHARLOTTE: The county is named for Charlotte Harbor.

CITY: The only incorporated city in the county is Punta Gorda.

COASTLINE: The county features 219 miles of coastline.

COURTHOUSE: The county’s first courthouse was built in 1928 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

GASPARILLA: Gasparilla Island is part of Charlotte and Lee counties and is home to Gasparilla Island State Park.

HISTORY: Charlotte County was officially created April 23, 1921, becoming a separate entity from DeSoto County.

HURRICANE: The county was hit hard by at least two major hurricanes — Hurricane Charley in 2004 and Hurricane Ian in 2022.

MEETINGS: The County Board of Supervisor meetings are held at 1 p.m. in odd-numbered months and at 6 p.m. in even-numbered months.

NEWSPAPER: *The Daily Sun Punta Gorda* began publishing in 1893. It is a daily newspaper published in print and online.

POPULATION: The county’s population as of the 2020 Census is 186,847.

RECYCLING: The county achieved the highest traditional recycling rate in Florida in 2021, exceeding the state’s mandate.

RIVIERA: The oldest restaurant in the county is the waterfront Riviera Bar & Grill, which got its start in the 1950s.

SOUTHWEST: The county is located in southwest Florida.

STAGGERED: The county holds staggered Board of Supervisor terms to ensure a degree of continuing experience on the Board.

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Kentucky county looks to ‘get creative’ to identify ways to replace BRIC funding

From FEMA page 1

fire protection projects underway included defensible space and ignition-resistant construction, environmental permitting and public education and outreach — a hazardous fuels reduction initiative was also in the planning process, according to Dawson.

According to FEMA, any grant funds that haven’t been distributed will be returned to the Disaster Relief Fund or U.S. Treasury. Napa County had submitted roughly \$250,000 in reimbursable work before the BRIC program was canceled — it’s unclear if the county will be reimbursed, according to Dawson.

“For Napa County, the federal investment was central to our mitigation strategy,” Dawson said. “And it’s not political — it supported real, measurable work that was already underway and protects lives, homes and infrastructure.”

The BRIC grant program was designed to support proactive planning and infrastructure upgrades ahead of disasters. There’s a \$6 return-on-investment for every \$1 of public funding spent on up-front mit-

igation, according to a 2019 National Institute of Building Sciences report. The cancellation is part of a broader evaluation of FEMA grant programs and priorities under an Executive Order signed by President Trump last month.

FEMA’s press release announcing the cancellation of the program, noted, “The BRIC program was yet another example of a wasteful and ineffective FEMA program. It was more concerned with political agendas than helping Americans affected by natural disasters. Under Secretary Noem’s leadership, we are committed to ensuring that Americans in crisis can get the help and resources they need.”

Napa County’s fire administration team is working with the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services to identify potential alternative funding opportunities to see if some of the work it’s done can be “reshuffled” into shorter-term fire resiliency projects with less finances attached, Dawson said.

The county’s \$35 million BRIC grant was set to be matched by \$15 million in county funding. Napa County will no longer dedicate the 30% match

in funds toward the projects, which have been halted, according to Dawson.

“A lot of this preliminary work, some of it is going to be useful and helpful, and we’ll use it for future efforts,” Dawson said. “But, without the end product — like doing the outreach to get everybody on board to do the right of entries, if we’re never going to need the right of entries, because we’re not going to do the home hardening project — it doesn’t make sense.

“If you’re making a cake and you’ve got the flour and the butter and I’ve got the eggs, having just the eggs doesn’t work because it’s missing other ingredients. That \$15 million only made sense if it was leveraged with that \$35 million to do the actual project.”

There have been 26 major wildfires in Napa County in the past decade. Over 60% of the county’s land has burned since 2017 and more than one-third of the county’s population lives in designated wildfire hazard zones.

“It’s real and it’s a constant threat, and we were making real progress,” Dawson said. “This was really exciting, because we’ve been sharing this with the

community, and the response has been phenomenal that we might get ourselves to a position where we’re really in shape to be able to address that next fire, which isn’t an ‘if’ — it’s going to happen.

“And this just takes us 20 steps backwards.”

Jefferson County, Kentucky was dealing with “historic” flooding when FEMA announced that the grant program had been cut. With the help of BRIC funding, the county was set to upgrade its 70-year-old flood infrastructure, through improvements to the West Woods Creek Basin and Western Flood Pump Station, which help protect more than 200,000 people, nearly 80,000 structure and billions of dollars-worth of property from flooding, according to Wes Sydnor, Louisville Metro Sewer District’s chief of government and public affairs.

Now that the federal funding is no longer available, the city-county government will work to set aside funding to address its most critical infrastructure needs in its next fiscal year budget and its five-year budget, according to Sydnor.

“We just went through this historic flood event — we had

every station on, and yet we had pumps and electrical equipment and different things that failed, and it put a lot of stress on the system and our facilities,” Sydnor said. “... So, we saw with the rains and the flooding in April how critical these assets are, and how important this work and these facilities are to our public health and safety, our economy and our environment, here in Louisville.”

The city-county is now working to share stories of how essential the flooding infrastructure is with its representatives in Congress and looking at ways to “get creative” with identifying state and federal funding pathways for different projects, so that that financial burden can be alleviated from Jefferson County’s ratepayers, according to Sydnor.

“This news came when we were in the middle of this event, and we’re talking about projects that would support the work we’re doing to keep people safe in that system,” Sydnor said. “So, the first thing that we’re going to do is make it understood that the projects we were pursuing here and using this funding for are very needed — it’s critical infrastructure.” **CN**



Workers in Napa County, Calif. use controlled burns to manage brush. Cancellation of BRIC funding leaves millions of dollars for mitigation work there in jeopardy.

SPONSORED CONTENT

REBUILDING PUBLIC TRUST WITH SMART TRANSPARENCY

Building trust is at the heart of effective governance, but it's a growing challenge for many counties today. Trust in local governments is becoming increasingly fragile, presenting serious challenges for governance and community engagement. Maintaining public confidence is essential for implementing effective policies, securing funding and fostering civic participation. Yet, with 45% of Americans viewing their local governments as untrustworthy, counties face an uphill battle in rebuilding this critical foundation.

For counties, this erosion of trust creates significant challenges, including:

- Policies may face resistance, even when well-intentioned. For example, zoning changes for affordable housing might spark skepticism about hidden agendas or potential harm to property values.
- Long-term projects can stall. Municipal bonds for infrastructure improvements like road repairs become difficult to secure without public trust.
- Civic engagement declines. Reduced voter turnout and public forum participation lead to decisions made by a less representative group.
- Bureaucracy slows down. Budget approvals and routine processes are delayed due to increased scrutiny and demands for detailed justifications.
- Talent attraction becomes harder. Counties struggle to recruit and retain skilled public servants, who may opt for private sector jobs or more trusted public entities.

These challenges don't just hinder immediate goals but can create long-term obstacles, such as reduced economic growth and weakened community bonds. Without trust, counties struggle to effectively serve their residents and meet evolving demands.

The Promise of Transparency (and the Pitfalls of Data Dumping)

Transparency is often touted as the answer to reverse this



erosion of public trust. When citizens understand how their tax dollars are being spent and when it's clear that decisions serve citizen interests, they're more likely to trust their local leaders. However, transparency isn't effective when it can't be understood.

Financial literacy among U.S. adults has hovered at around 50% for the past eight years, according to the Personal Finance Index. If the average citizen struggles to understand their personal finances, how can we expect them to comprehend complex government financial data?

Unfortunately, many local governments fall into the trap of believing that sharing lots of data means they're being transparent. Data dumping can backfire because it often confuses people instead of clarifying things – especially when there's no context to help them understand the data. Additionally, difficult-to-read PDF documents can be hard for some people to access, and too much information without clear communication can exacerbate confusion.

Even more concerning is when data is intentionally obscured. As Marc Holzer, a well-known academic and author of *Rethinking Public Administration*, points out:

"We have a lot of data out there and a lot of performance

measures. But most citizens don't have access to that because it's not communicated to them. And in many cases, it's deliberately hidden by management because they don't want to put themselves in the line of fire."

Holzer highlights a critical issue: true transparency isn't just about having data available somewhere. It's about how a government shares the data and takes accountability for it to ensure citizens understand — the good, bad, and ugly.

Enter "Smart Transparency"

This is where the concept of "smarter transparency" comes into play. Even the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), in a report titled *Transparency: A Means to Improving Citizen Trust in Government*, maintains that, "'Transparency' does not mean just making financial data available to those who have an interest in it. Governments must go beyond open and accessible data strategies in order to build trust."

This report highlights several key factors that influence how citizens form trust in their local government, including

- Citizens assess competence (the ability to achieve goals) and values (the motivations behind decisions).
- Open communication about values like fairness and integrity ensures they align with actions.

- Perceived fairness in the decision-making process encourages acceptance, even of unfavorable outcomes.
- Accessible, easy-to-understand tools like dashboards and reports foster trust.
- Demonstrating how tax dollars provide tangible benefits connects contributions to real-world impacts.

Taken together, these elements illustrate how transparency isn't just about providing data; it's about fostering a shared understanding and accountability that can rebuild trust even in strained relationships.

Putting Smart Transparency into Action

Counties can embrace smart transparency by making financial and operational data more accessible, understandable, and impactful. Modern tools, including AI-driven solutions, can play a vital role in automating processes and enhancing data presentation. Here are some steps counties can take to enhance their transparency efforts:

- Simplify complex information using plain language, infographics, and dashboards to make financial data digestible. AI-powered tools can also assist by automatically generating summaries and visuals.
- Provide context for decisions by explaining the reason-

ing behind projects or budget priorities, helping citizens understand resource allocation.

- Engage the community through surveys, public forums, and interactive platforms that invite feedback and collaboration.

Transparency is an ongoing process, and maintaining regular updates ensures that residents stay informed about projects and financial statuses. By focusing on clarity and accessibility, counties can strengthen the connection between public funds and community benefits, fostering trust and understanding.



How ClearGov Achieves Smart Transparency

ClearGov is dedicated to helping counties foster trust through smarter transparency. With tools like Digital Budget Book and Transparency, ClearGov simplifies how counties communicate financial information and connect with their residents.

The benefits of using ClearGov's solutions include:

- Effortless accessibility: ClearGov's tools meet ADA and WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards, ensuring all citizens can access and understand important information.
- Real-time updates: Counties can keep financial data current, making it easy for residents to stay informed.
- Engaging visuals: ClearGov's dashboards and reports simplify data presentation, helping residents see how funds are used and their impact.

By leveraging ClearGov's innovative tools, counties can move beyond traditional approaches to transparency and embrace a modern, accessible way of communicating with their communities. This not only enhances trust but strengthens the relationship between counties and their residents, setting a new standard for smart governance.

NATIONAL
COUNTY
MONTH
APRIL 2025

| National County Government Month in Photos



(L-r): Vigo County, Ind. Commissioner Mike Morris and Commissioner Chris Switzer celebrate NCGM.



Students in Lancaster County, Neb. learn how county government operates.

Mesa County, Colo. celebrates “the dedicated people who keep our county moving.”



County Commissioners Association of Ohio Executive Director Cheryl Subler; Knox County Commissioner Barry Lester; Administrator Jason Booth; Commissioners Bill Pursel and Drenda Keesee and CCAO Asst. Director John Leutz celebrate NCGM.



Leavenworth County, Kan. Register of Deeds TerriLois Mashburn (second from right) and staff celebrate NCGM.



Somerset County, N.J. Library System Deputy Director Lynn Hoffman and Director Brian Auger educate residents about county programs available to them.

Colorado Springs, Colo., tweeted out this photo of El Paso County, Colo. commissioners to help them celebrate National County Government Month.



PROFILES IN SERVICE

GORDON WATKINS

NACo Board Member

Forsyth County, N.C.
County attorney

Number of years active in NACo:

Six. My first conference was in Clark County, Nev. and I appreciated the opportunity to connect with county attorneys from across the nation.

Years in public service:

25
Occupation: Forsyth County, N.C. attorney

Education: Davidson College (BA in Economics); MIT (Economics); University of Virginia School of Law (JD)

The hardest thing I've ever done: Attending the PhD program in Economics at MIT.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: My grandfather, who was a seminary professor and missionary in India from the 1920s to the 1960s; my mother, who grew up in India in the 1930s and '40s, during the push for independence and partition and Gandhi. It would be fun to hear them reminisce about India.

A dream I have is to:

Sail and snorkel in the Galapagos Islands.

You'd be surprised to learn that I:

Started my career as an assistant economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.



WATKINS

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Hike the Inca Trail.

My favorite way to relax is:

I walk a couple miles every day. Some favorites are the seven-mile path around Salem Lake or in the nearby mountains.

My favorite movie is:

"Casablanca."

"I remember every detail. The Germans wore gray; you wore blue."



I'm most proud of: Professionally, being a key negotiator and drafter of the North Carolina Opioid Memorandum of Agreement, which provides 85% of \$1.6 billion in settlement funds directly to North Carolina counties and provides a framework for the 18-year lifespan of the agreement. Because of this agreement, North Carolina is a leader in addressing the opioid epidemic.

Personally, raising two amazing daughters who will graduate medical school this year and who love to travel the world with my wife Lynn and me.

Every morning I read: The Winston-Salem Journal and any other news I can find.

My favorite meal is: In D.C., I love a Bolognese Parmesan sandwich from Bub & Pop's on M Street or a bucket of mussels from Bistrot du Coin on Connecticut Avenue.

My pet peeve is: The answer, "We've always done it this way," without any analysis or critical thought.

My motto is: "Solvitur Ambulando" — "It is solved by walking."

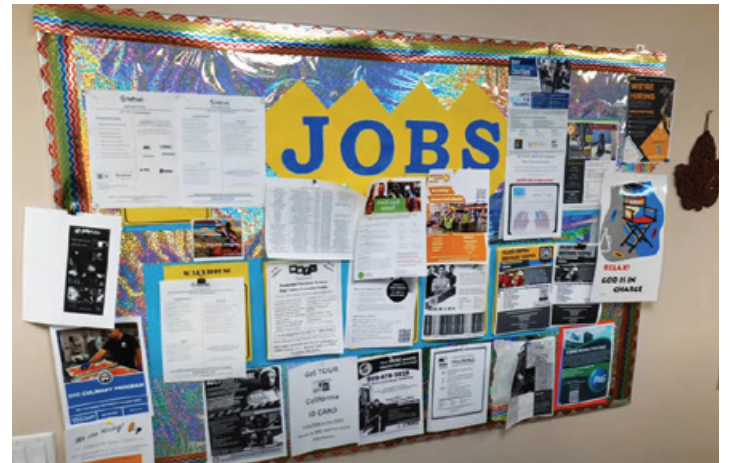
The last book I read was: "Wolf Hall" trilogy by Hilary Mantel.

My favorite music is: Beatles; '80s music; opera

My favorite U.S. president is: Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: NACo offers us innovative program ideas, the ability to learn from others across the nation and rigorous analysis of federal government programs and law.

Counties support youth with a second chance opportunity



A job board at a Riverside County, Calif. day reporting center keeps participants aware of opportunities.

by Chris Chung

Riverside County, Calif. Supervisor Yxstian Gutierrez developed a one-of-a-kind program to address a gap in his community.

In his previous occupation as a teacher, for 14 years, Gutierrez noticed his students who entered the juvenile justice system had little to no opportunities after they were released. Gutierrez recalls students asking, "Dr. G, is there anything out there?" and he never had sufficient answers. Having personally seen his former students never get a second chance motivated the supervisor to establish a new program.

NACo recognizes April as Second Chance Month. This monthlong observation is a reflection on the importance of supporting individuals after time spent incarcerated.

In December, Riverside County launched the Second Chance Program, which offers employment and wraparound services to youth who are either in the juvenile justice system or at risk of going into the system. The program partners with employers to hire formerly incarcerated or justice-involved individuals from ages 16-24 by subsidizing wages for up to 90 days. Participants work for \$16 per hour, 20 hours per week for the community-based employer. Mentors help them navigate challenges and reach self-sufficiency, job training and wrap-around services tailored to their specific needs.

The Second Chance Program

has seen positive community support and has a participant retention rate of nearly 90 percent. The goal of the three-month program is for participants to continue with their employer or find new employment with the newly acquired experience.

Long term, Riverside County is a program that will improve public safety by reducing recidivism. Gutierrez said the program is really changing kids' lives. "Some of these kids didn't have an opportunity and this program is giving them that opportunity" he said.

"I believe that with the right mentorship and support, our misguided youth can rewrite their story for the better," he said. "By empowering justice-involved youth with opportunities for employment and reintegration into society, we can show them that their past does not decide their future. We can not only help them change their lives, but also improve the safety and resilience of our communities."

Counties are positioned to support residents by providing opportunities for growth and development. Opportunities give individuals the best chance to achieve better outcomes. Thus, counties have excelled at filling gaps of opportunity that exist within their communities to best serve their residents. For example, counties can offer justice-impacted individuals a second chance that would otherwise not exist.

See YOUTH page 9

finally!

NACo swag is now available online!

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES NACo

CountyNews

HOT topics

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

BRECC helps coal
counties pivot. pg. **H2**

Youth have say in coal
counties' new future. **H4**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

APRIL 28, 2025

COAL COUNTIES' NEXT THING

Finding more growth opportunities beyond the mines



BRECC FIRES UP COAL COUNTIES TO FIGURE OUT THEIR FUTURES

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Communities rose all over the country to help build modern America. And somewhere along the way, those places became home for the people who made that work possible.

And then the world changed.

“Our resources that are in the ground haven’t changed — we still have the critical minerals that were used decades ago,” said Makayla Gordon, executive director of the West End Economic Development Corporation in Colorado. Montrose and San Miguel counties lost half of their property tax base after a power plant and mine closed, and residents left town. “We can still develop that energy for America, but choices have been made for our community, without our community, and now we have to put those pieces back together.”

Coal as a keystone industry

Gordon’s team was one of 15 to participate in NACo’s Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) Action Challenge over the last two years — eight in 2023 and seven in 2024. Those teams received technical assistance and one-on-one coaching from economic development consultants to help them find a new way forward, diversify their economies and fight for a chance to keep their counties vital. Places like Somerset County, Pa., which has lost more than 1,000 jobs.

“It’s a constant race to find replacement jobs and business development efforts and attraction,” said Debbie La Rue, senior planner, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, representing Mason, Tazewell and Peoria counties in Illinois.

Even well into a coal community’s maturity, extraction and energy production are keystone industries. That means they’re vulnerable to changes that could undermine entire financing systems.

“Many of our state funding models for public education and healthcare and essential services are heavily reliant on Campbell County coal,” said Kristin Young, Campbell County, Wyo.’s deputy director of administration. “We have had

a decline of 20% in direct coal jobs, and we know that when we have one job in the coal industry that’s worth two more jobs in the service and adjacent industries.”

Campbell County is the top coal-producing county in the country, but even the leader isn’t immune to the changes in the market when less expensive energy sources take hold. For Campbell County, along with other BRECC teams, the coal downturn has been an impetus



ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

to analyze what the region has, what it needs and how to pivot. Campbell County has plenty of existing infrastructure, but it needs more connections and more dedicated resources to support new enterprises, like air service to

the county seat of Gillette. And its population has been far from complacent, ready to apply what they’ve learned to a new environment. It’s up to the county to give them the tools to succeed.

“We’ve had a lot of people really jump into that entrepreneurial spirit and start their own businesses and work in oil and gas,” said Brandi Harlow, Northwest regional director of the Wyoming Business Council. “But we do not have an industrial park, and we need one to help those businesses grow.”

Outdoor recreation fuels economy

For a West Virginia county, the numbing duration of one trauma was shaken away only by a much more abrupt shock that offered an opportunity to adapt to a new economy. Grant County had long been home to outdoor recreation opportunities, but rarely topped lists of getaways in the state’s eastern panhandle.

“It’s taken us a long time to refocus because we have lost so much with the coal and timber jobs in that industry,” said Susan Park, communications director for the Potomac Valley Transit Authority in Grant County. “The people of Appalachia can take a really long time to embrace change, if at all, and grasping non-traditional businesses and business ideas can be even more difficult, but COVID opened our eyes to amazing opportunities. It kick-started our imagination.”

Grant County’s lodging rates averaged 98% for months when city dwellers fled for the country, and local merchants adapted and thrived. One restaurant turned a normal window into a drive-through service window and added rolls of toilet paper to takeout orders for campers.

“Outdoor recreation became huge for us, we were safe, and it was a great opportunity to come get away from the COVID restrictions, raise a family, grow a family,” she said. “COVID helped us refocus on our downtown area, giving us the opportunity to focus on art and things like that.”

The county visitor’s bureau has worked to further integrate outdoor recreation options into the town of Petersburg. They are working with the Monongahela National Forest to establish a “Main Street to the Mountains Trail,” along with river trails, making the outdoor options more user-friendly for visitors.

Participating in BRECC’s Action Challenge helped connect coal counties, and demystify some of the challenges they face.

“I don’t think we’re as unique as we thought we were,” said Abby Peters from nonprofit Pennsylvania Wilds, representing Forest County, Pa. “Our biggest problem is we have limited people in different areas that are remotely located. We want to go from a timber community to an outdoor recreation community and we would like to bring in some more businesses.”

Leadership makes the difference

Some participants bucked the trends. Despite a loss of tax revenue and jobs when one of its coal-fired power plant units closed in 2021, Monroe County, Ga. found itself in an interesting position.

“Our problem in Monroe County is not that people are moving away, they’re moving in,” said Tammy Selman, the county’s grant specialist. “We need money for these expansions, we need to continue working on our workforce development.”

Back in Montrose and San Miguel counties, the West End team stresses five elements in their communities’ redevelopment, many of which echoed across the BRECC teams: Fostering a healthy livable community; offering workforce, business and education development; building strong town foundations; targeting industry expansion and providing resources and opportunities for leadership and capacity development.

“To bolster our local capacity, we must develop the leadership skills within our local community to help guide our community through future change and transition,” Gordon said. “We have to put the people in the seats that will catalyze the change while also honoring our legacy.”



The West End team from Colorado prepares to take the stage at the BRECC Action Challenge capstone in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 27. From left: Makayla Gordon, Melissa Lampshire, Amanda Pierce and Sue Hansen. Photo by Charlie Ban

THIS LAND IS MINE LAND

RECLAIMING AND REPURPOSING LEFT-BEHIND EQUIPMENT AND GROUNDS

by Grace Blanchard

Counties historically reliant on the coal industry from across the country are repurposing mine land and industrial assets from the coal industry for new economic opportunities. When mining companies or coal-fired power plants depart from a community, they often leave behind vacant administrative buildings, rail systems, loading docks or even major utility facilities.

Counties and partnering economic development organizations are taking

a closer look at these sites, whether they are an empty plat of land or an equipped industrial site. They are turning remaining artifacts into strategic building blocks for future projects.

Floyd County, Ky. is more than familiar with left-behind mine land. Home to more historic company-owned coal towns than any county in Eastern Kentucky, Floyd County has thousands of acres of land and abandoned coal assets waiting to be repurposed and reused.

After completing NACo's BRECC

Action Challenge, NACo's technical assistance program — resulting in community-driven economic diversification plans for team participants — Floyd County secured a \$100,000 award from the U.S. Department of Energy's Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets program.

As part of its participation, the team also developed the Floyd County Coal Asset Map, which is an interactive online tool that helps local officials, planners and investors understand how to reuse and reimagine more than 24

former coal-mining sites for modern development.

The county partnered with BitSource, an eastern Kentucky-based software firm launched to retrain laid-off coal miners as coders. BitSource applied its technical skills and deep regional knowledge to build a custom map that integrates Geographic Information Systems into a user-friendly website that showcases site characteristics, infrastructure proximity (like rail

See RECLAIM pg H5

An abandoned mine site in Lincoln County, Nev. includes a headframe and hoist building. Photo courtesy of Nevada Division of Environmental Protection



YOUNG VOICES FUEL COAL COUNTY TRANSFORMATIONS



Somerset County, Pa. high school students take part in the county's youth engagement session for an economic diversification plan. Photo courtesy of Somerset County

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Rural counties are working with their youth to create economic diversification plans and build a community that young people want to stay in. Floyd County, Ky., Forest County, Pa. and Somerset County, Pa. — communities that have historically been reliant on coal production — involved high school students in their work with NACo's Building Resilience in Coal Communities (BRECC) initiative, which helps rural counties revitalize and diversify their economies amid a declining mining industry.

"Including young people in community work is essential, because those are the people who are going to be living the reality that we're trying to create," said V Konopka, a West Virginia Community Development Hub community coaching coordinator participating in BRECC. "Those are the people who are going to be pushing the work forward, and if they don't have

a say in it, why would they want to stay in the community or stay engaged with that community?"

A driving force behind rural communities seeking youth input in community planning is the prevalence of "brain drain" — which is when highly trained and educated people leave a community to find better pay or opportunities — in Appalachia, according to Konopka.

"Retaining youth is important," Konopka said. "Because if you don't have people, you don't have a community, you don't have an economy."

Somerset County held two youth engagement sessions related to economic diversification in which students provided feedback on what young people want to see the county build into its development planning.

In one of the engagement sessions, young people involved with the county's technology center provided input on the community's efforts to expand broadband access and use artificial in-

telligence, and in the other, students in leadership roles at the local high school identified big-picture issues that matter most to youth.

"You can't look backward," Somerset County Commissioner Pamela Tokar-Ickes said. "You have to always look toward the future, and the only way to do that is to engage our youth."

Third spaces, apprenticeships, outdoor recreation

Olivia Hay, a junior at Somerset High School, was one of 10 Youth Government program students who provided feedback on what young people value in the community. Priorities identified in the youth engagement session included creating more education-to-employment pipelines and apprenticeships, establishing safe "third spaces" and investing in mental health resources, outdoor recreation and public transportation.

"One of the biggest things is the need for 'third spaces' — places for students to hang out with other young people, but still

be safe in their community, that aren't at home or at school," Hay said. "Public transportation is also something that we really lack in Somerset County."

"If you live far away from the school, your access to things in town is almost nonexistent, so the community of students outside of school is rather nonexistent, and I think that's something that really needs to matter in a small town."

Increasing access to healthcare and mental health and substance use disorder resources have consistently been identified as youth priorities across the rural communities Konopka has worked with through the West Virginia Commu-

'Young people and students are the foundation for the future... we're the backbone.'

nity Development Hub and BRECC, they said. Youth wanting to see more work-force opportunities is another common sentiment, they added.

"They were really straightforward and really vulnerable in those sessions, which I deeply appreciated," Konopka said. "But we talked a lot about depression and anxiety, and substance use disorder in the communities that they experience, either in their families or out in the community, so there's a deep awareness of that."

"And a lot of the high schoolers said that they wanted to be able to stay where they lived in their communities for a variety of different reasons, but the challenge is that they couldn't see a pathway to staying there, in terms of job opportunities that they cared about or they were interested in. They were acutely aware of the kinds of jobs that were disappearing from their communities."

Somerset County held a program last fall raising awareness for suicide prevention that highlighted resources for youth seeking help — the county needs more of that kind of work, Hay said.

"I think that we should be having more opportunities like that for people to engage with mental health topics and talk about them," Hay said. "Because it's something that's a growing issue throughout all of America, but especially in small towns where people might not be willing to talk about it, and I think that opening those spaces is very important."

Creating a youth advisory committee

That type of input is what Somerset County wants more of, which is why it's creating a Youth Advisory Committee for

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**ECONOMIC
DIVERSIFICATION**


From YOUTH pg H4

the county's Board of Commissioners. The committee will launch in the fall and will include students across the county's 11 public school districts and private schools, according to Tokar-Ickes. Forest County is also working to create a youth advisory council, according to Cynthia Crytzer, Tionesta Borough's manager who is involved with the county's participation in BRECC.

"I do think that that youth voice has been missing," Tokar-Ickes said. "I look around the rooms that I'm in, and the average age is probably skewing higher than it used to be, because we don't have younger people in the room, and we need to."

"We need to engage kids at a younger age, especially today, so that they can learn the importance of being engaged in their community, and the importance of knowing what's happening in the world around you."

Hay is one of the student leaders informing the creation of Somerset County's Youth Advisory Committee. She's eager for the community to build out more civic engagement opportunities for youth.

"Young people and students are the foundation for the future ... we're the backbone," Hay said. "And there seems to be this kind of disconnect in between different generations. I think it's important to bridge that gap, and the best way we could do that is by bringing a consistent flow of students into something like an advisory board to bring our ideas into fruition to make our town better." 

WATT'S NEXT? A GUIDE TO REENERGIZING COAL COMMUNITIES

by **Mackinzi Taylor**

Downturns in the coal industry have presented an enormous economic challenge for counties where coal mining and coal-fired power plants are part of the economy. For decades, coal communities have excelled at producing energy, but as coal leaves these areas, these small, rural counties face the loss of jobs, significant revenue decline and a shift in their identity and culture.

Many coal communities would like to continue to function as energy communities. Their transmission grid infrastructure is a key advantage in attracting new energy development, but transmission capacity is not endless and not every energy type is the right fit for every community. How do communities decide which types of energy development to pursue with their limited capacity and resources? Community Builders, a partner on NACo's BRECC initiative, designed a tool to help.

Identifying a need

In the world of energy development, there's no shortage of specialists and detailed studies, but it doesn't speak directly to the factors that matter most to counties. Permanent local job creation, revenue potential, timing and feasibility are often jargon or are addressed indirectly.

To bridge this gap, Community Builders gathered and distilled the information that communities need most when evaluating different energy options. The resulting Power Generation Comparison graphic is a starting point for conversations within these communities to help identify their baseline and future options. The analysis does not advocate for one technology over another. It does provide a neutral, fact-based comparison so that coal communities can identify energy choices that best align with their unique needs, values and resources.

Technologies explored

The analyzed technologies are a range of renewable and non-renewable energy options, including wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, nuclear and fossil fuels that are paired with carbon capture and storage technology (CCS). Data on emergent technologies like green and gray/black hydrogen provide some context on each technology's readiness for deployment. Information on each energy type includes:


- Geographic and siting needs: The criteria communities need to determine if they are a good fit for an energy technology, like ideal climate, siting needs, attractors and potential for coal plant conversion.

- Key characteristics: These are the

simpler fact-based specifications for various energies, including capacity, cost, land usage and readiness.

- Potential benefits: Perhaps most importantly, these are the potential assets a new energy technology can provide communities like estimated jobs, wages and revenue. This section also includes a pros and cons list, compiled from the criteria throughout the graphic.

Ultimately, the Community Builders' graphic serves as a guide and starting point for coal communities exploring their energy futures. Although much of the decision-making power around energy projects lies with energy developers, utilities companies and public utility commissions, counties have their own levers they can pull, from local resolutions and incentives, to shoring up community infrastructure and marketing themselves to energy developers.

Counties can use the Power Generation Comparison graphic to gain a clear understanding of both the opportunities and the limitations of each energy type. Based on their local priorities and conditions, counties can then lead informed discussions, raise questions and engage with key stakeholders in planning their futures. 

Taylor is a project manager at Community Builders.



Counties repurpose mine land, industrial assets for new economic opportunities

From RECLAIM pg H3

and electric substations) and potential reuse scenarios. Map users can explore site suitability for such new projects such as industrial redevelopment, solar energy siting, tourism and flood-protected housing.

Floyd County maps potential sites for new community assets, like a Resilience Hub that will provide essential services and resources during emergencies and higher-ground neighborhoods that can withstand future flooding events. This initiative not only reclaims land — it reclaims opportunity. With leadership from local government, support from federal programs and the ingenuity of a tech company born from the coalfields, Floyd County is turning its coal past into a digital blueprint for the future.

Wise County, Va. also leverages reclaimed mine land for

economic development opportunities, including commercial and utility-scale solar projects and industrial sites for target industries. Wise County is home to the first commercial-scale solar development on abandoned mine land in Virginia, which members of the BRECC Coalition had the chance to tour. The Mineral Gap Solar Array is a 20-acre, 3.46-megawatt solar development on reclaimed mine land that provides behind-the-meter power to the Mineral Gap Data Center, a 65,000 -square-foot Tier III co-location facility located on an adjacent site to the region's shared business and technology park.

To accomplish this project, Wise County took the following key steps. The county conducted feasibility and site studies for renewable energy project potential. Then, the county leveraged funding from the federal Abandoned Mine Land Economic



Revitalization program for site preparation. It also established partnerships with key stakeholders.

The county partnered with solar developer Sun Tribe to lead engineering, site prep and construction. It coordinated with the local electric utility to inter-

connect with existing service. And it cultivated a public-private partnership with a data center via a public land lease arrangement. The county's successful development of its solar-powered data

See RECLAIM pg H8



FOR COUNTIES FACING COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT CLOSURES, LEARN FROM LEWIS COUNTY, WASH.

by Jack Callahan

Lewis County is home to the only commercial coal-fired power plant in the state of Washington. The Big Hanaford Power Station opened in 1972 and is slated to be closed Dec. 31, 2025, among 173 U.S. coal-fired power plants scheduled to close over the next five years.

The economic impacts of these closures significantly alter the local property tax base for county governments and results in high-paying jobs being lost. Lewis County's experience provides important lessons for communities working with utilities to manage these closures.

Lewis County Commissioner Sean Swope grew up in the county and over the past two years, he dove into economic diversification as a member of NACo's BRECC Commitment Coalition. Below is a Q&A with him on the subject.

Can you provide background on the Big Hanaford Power Station and how it has shaped Lewis County?

Lewis County sits in the middle of the I-5 corridor between two major population hubs. We've always been more of a tourist

destination. TransAlta has operated the coal-fired power plant since the 1970s and has been a huge asset for the community. The plant provided 300 people with well-paying jobs and contributed millions [of dollars] in property taxes to the county annually. I graduated from Centralia High and went to school with a lot of peers

whose parents worked there. When the news of the power plant closure came in the early 2000s, there was a shift in the culture. We saw a thriving school district and community within months turn into a Depression-like era. The first

couple of years after the announcement, our fire districts had to merge because of the lack of revenue and families were leaving the county to find employment.

What did the county do well to prepare for the power plant closure?

Lewis County developed a piece of industrial county-owned property called the Industrial Park at TransAlta (IPAT) in 2008, during the early phases of closure. The county invested \$10 million into infrastructure improvements for the site and had that ready to go as we embrace an 'all of the above' energy strategy, embracing

oil, natural gas, and simultaneously every other form of energy production (wind, solar, nuclear) to meet domestic energy needs. Establishing Lewis County as a federal Opportunity Zone and zoned as a port attracted power-producing industries into this area. The decision to invest in IPAT all the way back in 2008 allowed Lewis County to embrace the future.

What kinds of economic opportunities is Lewis County embracing?

There is a regional revitalization that's happening right now. The director and commissioners with the Port of Centralia have focused on attracting different types of businesses, manufacturing and distribution businesses, to the region to spur development of the I-5 corridor. To complement this commercial development, Lewis County, through the creation of the Public Facilities District, has built a 110-acre sports facility that has eight full-size basketball courts and numerous ball fields. The Northwest Sports Hub has since hosted hundreds of tournaments across different sports, with families spending three to four days in Centralia for these tournaments. The kids don't travel alone, parents and siblings often come along. Having these tournaments has re-

ally allowed us to build up our restaurant and shopping district.

What is one recommendation you have for fellow county leaders with coal-fired power plants in their counties?

Continue to build relationships with people everywhere. Part of Lewis County's success is due to the great relationship that we've had with our state's congressional delegation – who helped us secure our federal Opportunity Zone designation. Working alongside TransAlta [which owns the Big Hanaford Power Station] and partnering with our local economic alliance organization have been invaluable; as well as our representatives and state senator partnership, has really helped us to move forward. Success will come if you have the partners. I would also not give up on the coal infrastructure, specifically your transmission grid infrastructure, in your community. The question you should ask now is "What can you do now to pivot away from coal but still be able to produce energy in your area and your community?"

Callahan is a program associate for economic development in NACo's County Programs and Innovations department.



ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION



A big job: Lewis County, Wash. Commissioner Sean Swope shows off a utility vehicle at his county's TransAlta power plant that is being converted to run on electric and hydrogen power.

BUILDING RESILIENT ECONOMIES IN COAL COMMUNITIES

About BRECC

The NACo Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) initiative serves coal communities seeking to revitalize and diversify their economies. Supported by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, BRECC connects coal community leaders across the nation and shares strategies for economic development. Through peer exchanges, site visits, virtual learning sessions and technical planning assistance, BRECC prepares coal communities to advance new approaches and projects for economic diversification. Learn more about BRECC's activities at www.naco.org/brecc.

BRECC Activities

■ BRECC National Network is open to all coal community leaders representing local governments, regional organizations, community nonprofits, education



BUILDING RESILIENT
ECONOMIES *in*
COAL COMMUNITIES

and workforce providers, utilities, private businesses and any other interested stakeholders. Reaching more than 1,000 participants, the BRECC National Network provided 13 virtual learning sessions featuring expert guidance on economic diversification with community case examples and critical resources available to coal communities. Visit www.naco.org/brecc to view recordings.


■ Commitment Coalition is a peer network of 20 local, regional and state leaders serving coal communities across the United States. Through in-person peer exchanges and virtual workshops, the Commitment Coalition members deepened their knowledge of economic diversification projects, identified promising

practices for coal communities overcoming economic downturns and continue to share their experiences to improve economic opportunity in coal communities nationwide.

■ Action Challenge is a technical assistance program that empowered local leaders in 15 coal communities to create a locally-driven economic diversification strategy and prepare funding-ready projects. Each cross-sectoral team received individualized coaching support over 12 months and presented their strategies to federal and policy partners at BRECC Capstone events in Washington, D.C. Read their economic diversification plans at www.naco.org/brecc.

BRECC Partners

NACo partnered with three economic development organizations to provide technical assistance to coal communities:

The West Virginia Community Development Hub, Community Builders and EntreWorks Consulting. Each organization works with rural and coal-impacted counties across the country and provided valuable coaching expertise to help BRECC communities advance economic diversification projects. 

BRECC is operated by the National Association of Counties using federal funds under award ED22HDQ3070080 from the Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.



Podcast: Add eggs to a county's basket

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

When Melody Villard and Sasha Nelson were in high school, many of their Moffat County, Colo. classmates aspired to earn good grades and after graduation, a job at the local coal-fired power plant.

In 2020, that plant announced its impending closure, and the future was suddenly uncertain for the northwest corner of the state. That closure would mean a dramatic loss in property tax revenue and local jobs.

"Having all of those eggs in one basket for that long and not really having a diversified economy has put us into a position where now, those closures are taking everything all at once," said Villard, who a year later was sworn in as a Moffat County commissioner.

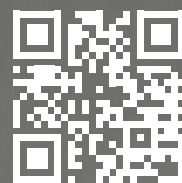
When she was sworn in for her

second term earlier this year, it was in a new county courthouse that was the first project completed in Moffat County's plan to transition away from its coal dependency. It's been done with assistance from Nelson, who is an Economic Recovery Corps fellow, providing Moffat County and its neighbors Routt and Rio Blanco counties with technical assistance. Moffat County was a member of NACo's Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) initiative. She conducted annual surveys of coal miners to determine what they need and how to help

them transition into new careers.

In addition to the courthouse project, which renovated a vacant Kmart and returned the previous courthouse to the tax rolls, Moffat County is developing an indoor multi-use area, part of an effort to establish the county as a destination for business and athletics.

Villard and Nelson spoke to the County News Podcast to further illustrate the economic situation Moffat



County is facing, how the economy is transitioning and how both the county and Nelson are communicating with county residents, who will be part of the transformation.

Listen to the podcast at www.naco.org/podcast or scan the QR code.

Moffat County, Colo. Commissioner Melody Villard presents to the BRECC Commitment Coalition during NACo's 2025 Legislative Conference. Photo by Charlie Ban



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Counties redevelop industrial real estate

From RECLAIM pg H5

center and industrial park has encouraged the surrounding community to lean into their energy-producing identity. Wise County's economic development team is conducting studies on other former mine land for additional energy opportunities, including solar, geothermal and small modular nuclear. Beyond mine land, coal-impacted counties are redeveloping industrial real estate. Webster County, Ky. partnered with Madisonville Community College to retrofit a former mining company administration building into an educational campus. The county and college used funding from the Delta Regional Authority, a HUD Community Development Block Grant and the Kentucky Local Government Economic Development fund that uses coal severance tax revenue. Together, they transformed the administrative building into classrooms and a workforce development center for utility linesmen and commercial driver's licenses.

Counties are also supporting efforts to repurpose retiring coal-fired power plants. A retired coal-fired power plant in Coconino County, Ariz. is now the manufacturing site for modular style homes. The modular home manufacturer, ZenniHome, retrofitted the power plant's interior into a manufacturing line and product show room; it also uses recycled steel from part of the plant's demolition for the construction of the modular homes.

Several other counties are also repurposing power plants for other energy production. Pike County, Ind. is being converted to a natural gas power plant. Lincoln County, Wyo.'s coal-fired power plant is being converted to a small modular nuclear plant. A Sherburne County, Minn. coal-fired power plant is being used for energy storage.

There is no doubt that coal communities are getting resourceful and creative when it comes to repurposing prior assets. In rural and remote communities, the coal industry has left behind valuable infrastructure that counties are putting to practical use. Whether it is built-out sites for new industry, transmission connections for alternative energy or historic artifacts to attract new tourism, coal-impacted counties are leading the way in pursuing productive futures for their industrial footprints. **H**

Blanchard, now an associate membership director at NACo, previously served as program manager for resilient economies.

Child care

From CHILD CARE page 4

very lonely for providers,” Segura said. It’s also a practical way to make connections for clients, she added.

“If I have a parent that lives in Patterson, but needs childcare in Modesto, I can easily go on the chat and say, ‘Hey, providers, I’m looking for a provider in Modesto with these hours, does anybody have availability?’ It’s also an easier way for parents to feel a connection, because when I tell them, ‘Oh, I found somebody in Modesto, and she did this cohort, and I can trust that if you like my setting, you’re going to like her setting too, because we were basically taught the same thing’ — it’s that connection, it’s community, networking.”

Access to child care is a key element in building a “thriving and economically sound community,” and the county’s work with Nurture through “Stanislaus 2030” and getting more people licensed is helping to make that a reality, according to Jordan.

“The work of young children is to be in a safe, nurturing, loving environment where they can learn, grow, explore, thrive,” Jordan said.

“So, when we don’t have quality childcare, when we don’t have people that are licensed, that have some type of child development in their background and in their repertoire, the quality is not as great as it could be.” **CN**

Second Chance

From YOUTH page 8

The period immediately following incarceration can be challenging for an individual. Justice-impacted individuals can often face barriers such as housing insecurity, inability to access health care and social services, financial strain, food insecurity and difficulty finding employment. During this time of instability, a county lifeline can make the difference to ensure successful reentry. **CN**

Chung is a program manager for behavioral health and justice in NACo’s County Programs and Innovations department.

GET TO KNOW...

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Established in 1851, Guthrie County, Iowa is named for William Guthrie, the captain of a company of infantry volunteers Iowa sent to the Mexican-American War. The county seat is the city of Guthrie Center, which has a population of roughly 1,579. Just outside of the city is Spring Brook State Park — which has 12 miles of hiking trails, a 14-acre lake and 118 campsites.

The city of Panora, Guthrie County’s original county seat, is the oldest community in the county. The name “Panora” is said to have come from the word “panorama,” after pioneers exclaimed “What a beautiful panorama!” when viewing the city from its hillside, according to the Iowa Guide, published by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s during the Great Depression. When the town was later platted, the word “panorama” was shortened to “Panora.” Guthrie County is roughly 60 miles from Des Moines, Iowa’s state capital and its most populous city, and around 100 miles from Omaha, Nebraska’s most populous city and home to the College World Series baseball tournament.

The Raccoon River Valley Trail was once the route of the old track of the county’s first railroad. The annual Bacocon Ride (combination of Raccoon and bacon) includes numerous stops throughout the 71-mile trail for cyclists to enjoy a variety of bacon dishes and drinks.

Nature lovers can canoe and kayak on the Middle Raccoon River, which is located near the Guthrie County Historical Village, where thousands of artifacts can be found that mark the county’s history from 1850 to the early-20th century.

With 1,160 acres of lake surface and more than 30

miles of shoreline, Lake Panorama is the largest private lake in Iowa. The Lake Panorama Association manages the lake and its amenities which include private beaches, boating and access to the Panorama West Golf Course.

The Guthrie County Agricultural Society has hosted the county fair since 1858. The first fair was a celebration of local agriculture and rural life — today, the fair includes a rodeo, amusement park rides, BMX race, parade and live music.

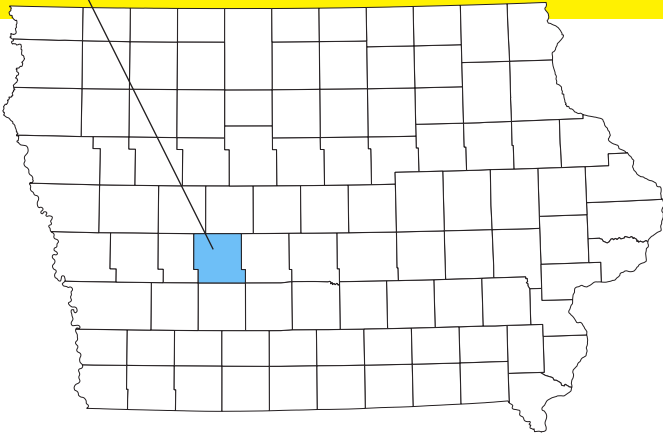
Native son James Ellison, a prolific actor who was primarily in Westerns, is a Guthrie County native. Between 1932 and 1962, Ellison was in nearly 70 films,


in which he starred alongside film icons such as Jimmy Stewart, Ginger Rogers and Lucille Ball.

During the height of the Cold War, the county played host in 1959 to Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who made a stop in Coon Rapids, the largest producer of hybrid seed corn, to learn about American agriculture.

Coon Rapids is also home to the Whiterock Conservancy, home to the annual Iowa Star Party, in which visitors stargaze at some of the darkest skies in the state, camp, horseback ride, canoe and bird-watch.

Guthrie County, Iowa






BEHIND THE SEAL

CLEAR CREEK COUNTY, COLO.

Named after Clear Creek, which runs down from the Continental Divide, Clear Creek County was created Nov. 1, 1861 — one of Colorado’s original 17 counties, but one of two — along with Gilpin County — to retain their original boundaries.

Owing to its mineral deposits and the industry that arose there, the county seal includes a miner

A coat of arms bearing a pickaxe and shovel and a silhouette of the Rocky Mountains are in the bottom center



On the left is a stamp mill, a machine used in mining to crush ore, primarily for the extraction of valuable metals like gold, silver and copper. Gold and silver drew prospectors and miners to Clear Creek County, and several mining structures remain a part of the county’s landscape.

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.



Scan to learn more



May is

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH



In honor of **National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week**, Onondaga County, N.Y. Executive Ryan McMahon (center) tours the county emergency operations center and thanks workers. Every year during the second week of April, the telecommunications personnel in the public safety community are honored. This weeklong event, which was launched in 1981 by Patricia Anderson of the Contra Costa County (Calif.) Sheriff's Office, is a time to celebrate and thank those who dedicate their lives to serving the public. It is a week that should be set aside so everyone can be made aware of their hard work and dedication.

Photo courtesy of Onondaga County, N.Y.



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..... **ON THE MOVE**>

NACo OFFICERS

- President **James Gore** and CIO **Rita Reynolds** attended the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania Spring Conference in Dauphin County.
- Gore and Managing Director of Public Promise Insurance **Alex Herrera** attended the California State Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Sacramento County.
- Central Region Representative **Kurt Gibbs**, supervisor, Marathon County, Wis. and Membership Manager **Priscilla Chrappah** attended the Iowa State Association of Counties' Spring Conference in Polk County.

NACo STAFF

- **Elizabeth Daigneau** has joined NACo as director of digital communications. She previously served as executive editor at Route Fifty, chief operating officer at Vote.org and managing editor at Governing. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and literature from American University.
- **Abby Davidson** has joined NACo as director of research. She previously served as director of research and impact for the Aspen Institute's Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs. She earned a master's degree in economics and bachelor's degree in international economics and business from the University of Arkansas.
- **Humaan Khalid** has joined NACo as a help desk specialist. He previously served as a zone lead at Amazon and earned a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity and networking from the University of Maryland Global Campus.
- **Destiny Boston** has been promoted to program manager for mental health.
- **Chris Chung** has been promoted to program manager for behavioral health and justice.
- Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Digital Editor **Charlie Ban** attended the Michigan Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Ingham County.
- Chase and Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement Director **Rick Hart** attended the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia Annual Conference in Chatham County.
- Managing Director of Communications **Nicole Weissman** attended the Kansas County Commissioners Association Annual Conference in Riley County.
- Hart and National Center for Public Lands Counties Director **Gregory Nelson** attended the Association of Oregon Counties County College Program in Marion County.
- Associate Legislative Director **Charlotte Mitchell-Duyshart** attended the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma Spring Conference in Cleveland County.



Daigneau



Davidson



Boston



Chung



Hart

NOW I KNOW

...Getting the Public's Attention Is Hard

by John Taylor
Kalamazoo County, Mich.
commissioner

After I was elected, I found out people didn't really know who I was or what issues I was fighting for. They generally vote along party lines and that was discouraging. I was a college student then, so I was pretty idealistic.

The public didn't seem to know their commissioners' names unless they had done something wrong; that's just the level of awareness we had 20 years ago.

I felt like we had a big victory over that after my first year. We were building a new jail, and I started asking questions about how we would lower the recidivism rate, what services we would provide and I finally got the sheriff to agree with me that these were real concerns. We were able to put some educational programming in place, and help people get certifica-

tions so they have employment opportunities when they were released.

It would have been easy to be jaded in the face of public antipathy, but I decided to just take one issue at a time, maybe two. Solve this, accomplish that and then you move onto a new issue. The most important way to get people to understand what was at stake was to make it clear to them what the county commission could do to change things.

Fiscal sustainability doesn't really get people excited when you are planning for it, but they appreciate it when it pays off for them. Now we're 130% funded after taking a long-term, conservative approach to investment in our defined benefit plan. We took whatever assumptions the actuarial tables gave us and we made them even more conservative, making that dollar stretch and stretch. Now we can lower the employee contributions and we can give a cost-of-



Kalamazoo County, Mich. Commissioner John Taylor. Photo by Rod Sanford

living increase for retirees.

We were able to make our parks system completely self-sustaining, with the help of some public-private partnerships. We're boosting our overnight stays in the parks and that's bringing in more money

and increasing the use of our campgrounds.

Now I'm trying to cultivate the next generation of people that come up and do this. There will come a time that I will want to do other things, and I want to make sure whoever replaces me

will appreciate this opportunity for what it is. That means finding people who are here for the right reasons first, that they'll stick around and not just see this as the next step, but seeing the opportunity for progress in this role. That means giving them the tools and understanding connections and helping them learn how things really move in our community so that they can be successful.

I have to make sure they don't get discouraged, but also don't get overly optimistic. And what I have found is that character is not limited to ideology, and learning that, in comparison to the environment I saw when I was first elected because of the letter next to my name, means things have changed in those 20 years **CN**

Now I Know explores experiences that have shaped county officials' approach to their work, as told to Senior Writer and Digital Editor Charlie Ban.

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BRIGHT IDEAS | SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CALIF.

California County Program Helps Spark Student Careers, Fills Gap in Child Support Services Staffing

PROBLEM:

Counties need to fill open staff vacancies and college students need real-world work experience.

SOLUTION:

San Diego County created a win-win program to fill those gaps and help students get experience to launch their careers.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

San Diego County, Calif. Child Support Services' student worker program is helping the department fill in workforce gaps and giving youth real-world experience to help jumpstart their careers.

Safeen Akrawi, who now works as a staff development specialist for Child Support Services, was a rising senior majoring in communications at San Diego State University — unsure what he wanted to do with his career or where to start — when he was hired as a student worker for the department's communication team, where he helped people navigate the department's resources and worked community outreach events.

"We'd go to local libraries, and then I would send out text messages to participants we have in that area, letting them know that we're in their neighborhood and if they have any needs with child support or [connection to] resources, they can go to that library and get that addressed," Akrawi said.

After graduating college, Akrawi was hired to work full-time for Child Support Services. He started off as an office assistant and then worked as a child support officer and an analyst before assuming his current position, in which he oversees onboarding for new hires and trainings for existing staff.

"There's so much room for growth in this department, and I just have had so much support from my direct supervisors



San Diego County's Child Support Services student workers help staff at an outreach event for the department.

to the executive level," Akrawi said. "... They let me wear a lot of different hats to see which one I enjoyed the most, which is why I enjoy the student worker program so much. They were really big on asking what my interests were and what I wanted to be involved with."

The department's student worker program coordinator helps each participant create a career roadmap, identifying potential career interests and making sure that the student can get what they're looking for from the program.

Student workers receive an hourly rate, depending on their level of education and previous job experience, as the program is available to students ranging from high school to graduate school. The department has student workers in "just about every area — they're scattered throughout the workforce," including legal, human resources, information technology, communications and staff development, according to Andrea Cooley, San Diego County Child Support Services' assistant deputy director.

"They fill those [workforce]



San Diego State University students get work experience in the county program.

gaps for us, for sure," Cooley said. Akrawi is one of many participants of the student worker program who have gone on to work full-time for Child Support Services, according to Cooley. The program has been a great way for young people, whether they continue to work for the county or go on to pursue a different career pathway, to learn essential job skills, she added.

"We're seeking students throughout the community with diverse backgrounds and

talent and getting them ready for future employment — whether it's here or not, it's just been a great thing for us," she said. "To be a part of someone receiving what we can share, as far as being loyal to their craft, dependable for a job assignment and just gaining some extra skills that help them down the line, has been really fulfilling on our side."


Student workers — many of whom are tech-savvy — have been particularly helpful in the "locate" process of find-

ing a non-custodial parent when their whereabouts are unknown and they aren't paying child support, according to Cooley.

"In child support, you're always dealing with a large group of cases that need 'locate,' so we can't find either parent perhaps," Cooley said. "And you don't always have the resources to have staff do that on a full-time basis, so we thought, 'Hey, this younger generation can find just about anything or anyone — using social media, using different locate tools, just using a Google search.'

"They have been instrumental in helping us move some of these locate cases along, by finding individuals that maybe had gone off the grid for a while."

When Akrawi applied to be a student worker through the county, he was asked to mark certain departments he wanted to work for. He had expressed interest in working in Child Support Services, because his sister had previously worked as a child support officer, and he's continued to work for the department because he finds it rewarding. Akrawi said he feels there's often a misconception that Child Support Services is merely a collections agency, but the department works to make people's lives better and help break "the cycle of inter-generational poverty."

"Seeing people walk out of the office with a smile, and having their needs addressed, is really a rewarding feeling," Akrawi said. "Because a lot of times, people come into our office or call us and they're going through a rough time in their life, and it's really nice to be able to make that moment a little easier and try to get them through that obstacle together." 

The program earned San Diego County NACo's "Best in Category" Achievement Award for personnel management, employment and training.

NEWS
FROMACROSS
THE NATION

CALIFORNIA

• **SONOMA COUNTY** has launched its free residential curbside wood-chipping program early again this year to reduce wait times, expand service and **lower wildfire risks**, Patch.com reported. The program is available to residents in unincorporated areas and is part of the county's ongoing wildfire prevention efforts.

Run by the Permit Sonoma Fire Prevention Division, the program serves about 800 residents annually, helping them clear vegetation and create defensible space. Eligible properties can receive up to two hours of free chipping, with a possible second visit, scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. "By reducing vegetation and creating defensible space around structures, property owners play an active role in helping their communities stay safe," said Fire Marshal Steve Mosiurchak.

CALIFORNIA

• The **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY** Elections Office recently launched a 2025–26 **Student Election Ambassador Program**, designed to inspire young leaders to engage their peers in the democratic process. This new program, debuting this fall in partnership with the League of Women Voters SLO, aims to cultivate a new generation of civic-minded leaders by providing students with the tools, training, and support needed to carry out

impactful voter outreach and registration efforts. Ambassadors will gain hands-on experience in civic engagement while earning community service hours.

COLORADO

• A bill that recently passed the Colorado state legislature and headed for Gov. Jared Polis' approval would raise the cap on **lodging taxes** that counties can propose to voters in unincorporated areas, increasing it from the current 2% limit to

up to 6% — matching the cap already available to towns and cities. In addition to raising the cap, the bill would also give counties more flexibility in how they use the revenue generated from these taxes.

Supporters of the bill say it aims to help counties, especially rural resort areas, diversify their revenue sources to better meet growing community needs. These needs include infrastructure improvements like local road maintenance and expanding affordable housing for the tourism workforce.

FLORIDA

• **ALACHUA COUNTY** is expanding its free legal assistance program to support more tenants facing **housing-related legal challenges**, the county reported. Funded by the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), the initiative offers no-cost legal aid for issues such as eviction, background-related housing barriers, child support and credit problems. Previously limited by income eligibility, the program now serves all county tenants regardless of income until it ends in September 2025. Since its launch in 2021, the program has helped over 550 households and 1,300 individuals.

Tenants can access legal aid through Florida Legal Services' Eviction Prevention Helpline or Three Rivers Legal Services and attend monthly legal workshops for guidance on landlord-tenant issues. While ERAP no longer offers direct financial aid, the county continues to provide legal support as a critical resource to help residents maintain housing stability.



**CONSUMER
CONNECTION**
A Podcast by the Montgomery County
Office of Consumer Protection

MARYLAND

The **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) recently released its Consumer Connection podcast titled "**Out of Work, Not Out of Options: Your Financial Game Plan.**" This episode offers listeners practical advice for managing finances during periods of transition, such as job loss, relocation or retirement.

The episode features host Michelle Escobar, an OCP investigator, and guest Ira Rheingold, executive director at the National Association of Consumer Advocates. Together, they discuss strategies for: Budgeting and managing expenses; reducing debt; improving financial literacy and recognizing and avoiding scams. The episode also addresses scams that target individuals during vulnerable times, including fake job offers, moving scams and retirement-related fraud.

Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Purchase Assistance Program, Hoodline Miami reported.

The program offers up to \$100,000 in financial assistance for home purchases, including costs related to acquisition, construction, down payment and closing costs, according to the Palm Beach County website. The program will operate as a deferred loan, meaning the funds must be repaid later.

MARYLAND

• Families in **WORCESTER COUNTY** are invited to take part in the county Health Department's **Strengthening Families** program, a free nine-week series aimed at helping youth and their parents or guardians develop healthier habits. The program is designed for children ages 7 to 17 and their families, offering weekly two-hour sessions that include group learning, interactive activities and a free family dinner at each meeting.

The sessions focus on topics such as improving communication, managing stress, establishing healthy routines and understanding emotions. In addition to gaining valuable life skills, families can earn prizes and other incentives for their participation.

The program provides a supportive and engaging environment to strengthen family bonds and promote long-term wellness.

MINNESOTA

A bipartisan bill in the Minnesota Legislature would offer **scholarships to police officers** and their dependents to study

See NEWS FROM page 15



COLORADO

• **BOULDER COUNTY** commissioners recently voted 2-1 to approve new owners for 14 of 16 **residential properties damaged in a 2013 flood** and later acquired through federal disaster recovery grants. The county received 228 applications for the properties, purchased using funds from HUD and FEMA, which require the land to be permanently returned to its natural state. Ten HUD-funded properties were open to all applicants, but FEMA rules limited eligibility for six others to state or local governments, tribal entities or qualified conservation groups, disqualifying 39 applicants. Although offered for free, the new owners must maintain the land and pay property taxes.



TENNESSEE

• The **MAURY COUNTY** Regional Airport has begun work to **transform its longstanding airport terminal** into an upgraded destination for flights and state-of-the-art technology, *The Daily Herald* reported. A ceremonial groundbreaking took place recently to mark the terminal project's beginning, which was attended by many Maury County leaders, workers and builders.

"It's going to be two stories, all the fixings," said airport manager Paul Turner, who has been overseeing daily airport operations for the last 17 years. "We were once the oldest terminal in the state, and now we are going to be the newest, one of the biggest and one of the nicest."

The new terminal will feature an observation deck, a new speaker system and other technological upgrades.

From NEWS FROM page 14

Law Enforcement or Criminal Justice at Minnesota State and University of Minnesota schools, KTTC reported. Supporters say it will help boost officer retention and open new opportunities.

Olmsted County Sheriff Kevin Torgerson praised the bill in an interview with KTTC, noting it could help detention staff advance their careers.

"Many have families and want to earn degrees, but funding is a challenge. This would be huge for them," he said. The bill has support from both parties and is expected to pass, though lawmakers are waiting on finalized budget targets before setting a funding amount.

NEW YORK

To address a sharp **decline in volunteer firefighters**, **NIAGARA COUNTY** Fire and EMS is launching a recruitment campaign throughout April. At a recent press event, local leaders stressed the urgent need, noting volunteer numbers have dropped by over 20,000 statewide since 1990.

"We're looking for people who care, people willing to step

up and make a difference," said Jonathan Schultz, head of Niagara County Fire and EMS.

Edward Tase, former president of FASNY, added, "We need everyone to come forward — there's a job for everyone in the volunteer fire service."



OHIO

SUMMIT COUNTY residents aged 16 to 18 can work at a **summer job** for eight weeks starting June 9 and earn up to \$2,400 in sectors such as health care, information technology, marketing and construction, among others, Signal Akron reported. Applications for the county's annual Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) opened April 1. Residents are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. To help applicants connect with the right summer employment opportunity, Summit County's Department of Job and Family Services teamed up with Youth Success Summit and Jobs for Ohio's Graduates (JOG) to create a universal application for several programs.

TENNESSEE

• The state Comptroller's Division of Local Government Finance, in collaboration with the State Board of Equalization, has launched a new interactive map and dashboard that highlights

how local governments use **economic incentive tools** to attract industry and jobs. The dashboard details how entities like industrial development boards utilize payment in lieu of tax agreements (PILT), tax increment financing plans (TIFs) and debt to promote job growth and economic development. The information is based on annual reports submitted to the Comptroller's Office.

Currently, 68 of Tennessee's 95 counties use at least one of these economic tools. **SHELBY COUNTY** leads the state in PILT agreements, reporting 528 in fiscal year 2023 alone. Users can explore data on these incentives directly through the dashboard.

VIRGINIA

A **CUMBERLAND COUNTY** newsletter went out for the first time earlier this month. County staff members have also been working on upgrading the county website, setting up text alert programs and increasing the county's social media presence, *The Farmville Herald* reported. All of that's being done with one goal in mind: **To get more people engaged with the**

county.

"Over the past couple years, we've been trying to make strides in how we engage and communicate with the general public," Cumberland Administrator Derek Stamey told his board during a recent meeting. A county annual report will also be going out each year to residents.

Other engagement tools in the works include a monthly radio interview, a biannual community guide and live-streaming of county meetings. Another initiative will feature "Conversation with the County Administrator" program — where groups can invite the County Administrator to an event, program or gathering



WASHINGTON

The **KING COUNTY** Sheriff's Office has become the latest law enforcement agency in Washington to adopt a GPS tracking technology that enables deputies to attach tracking devices to **fleeing vehicles**, KOMO-AM reported. The system provides a safer alternative to traditional high-speed pursuits, which have come under increased scrutiny in recent years due to changes in laws and shifting public sentiment.

The move reflects a broader trend among Washington police departments to prioritize community safety and innovation in law enforcement practices. The sheriff's office says the use of the GPS tracking device is allowed under the law and has already been vetted through court cases in Washington. to share County information.

Send your news releases and photos to Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.

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