

Rural funding is critical in keeping healthcare afloat in maternity ‘deserts’

From USDA page 1

businesses and affordable housing — all of which would have been “out of reach” for the community without USDA funding, Heimel said.

USDA Rural Development programs provide one of the highest returns on investment of any federal initiative serving rural America, noted Bette Brand, president and CEO of Strategic Consulting LLC and a former deputy undersecretary for Rural Development at USDA, who also participated in the congressional hearing.

“Rural Development programs don’t just provide funding, they transform communities,” Brand said. “They’re the difference between a hospital staying open, a small business hiring instead of closing and a farmer finding a new market for their products.”

The hospital that serves Pot-

ter County recently closed its birthing services and maternity care and announced the upcoming closure of its nursing home. There’s now a “maternity desert” across seven counties in North Central Pennsylvania, Heimel said.

Funding rural development is critical in keeping healthcare afloat in rural communities, Heimel said, noting that USDA’s Community Facilities loan and grant programs helped keep another rural hospital in Pennsylvania, located in Jefferson County, open by funding a new emergency department. Eligible projects and facilities for Community Facilities funding include hospitals and health clinics, schools, libraries, community gardens, food pantries and fire and police stations.

“When it comes to straightforward investments, we need to resist the temptation of add-

ing a program to solve every problem,” said Xochitl Torres Small, former deputy secretary and undersecretary for Rural Development at USDA. “And instead, double down on grant investments in bread-and-butter programs, like Community Facilities, that can fund a lot of different things.”

From 2014 to 2022, USDA’s Business & Industry (B&I) Loan Guarantees program created more than 750,000 jobs in rural America, at a federal cost of \$438 per job. The program helps increase access to business capital in rural communities through loan guarantees — there’s generally a 60-80% federal guarantee, depending on the size of the loan, according to the USDA.

Counties with B&I investment saw sustained employment growth, higher wages and a stronger GDP per capita for years after the initial investment, Brand said. In 2023 and 2024, more than 90% of the B&I program budget authority was utilized — the highest on record — demonstrating both efficiency and an unmet need, she noted.

“Rural development programs may finance a hospital, a meat processing plant or even a coffee shop, but the purpose is the same — expanding opportunity in rural America,” Brand said. “They revitalize communities, create and sustain jobs, modernize essential services and give farmers and entrepreneurs the chance to compete and succeed. Most importantly, they ensure that economic opportunity is not defined by zip code.”

Many of the rural communities that need USDA Rural Development funding the most are those that are least able to access it, Heimel said. Coun-



Potter County, Pa. Commissioner Paul Heimel (left) speaks with Rep. Don Davis (D-N.C.), ranking member of the House Ag Rural Development Subcommittee. Photo by Owen Hart

ties often must pay up-front for costs such as site selection, feasibility studies and environmental review before using USDA funding, which “creates steep barriers to entry,” he noted.

Congress can better support counties by allowing pre-development costs to qualify as eligible expenses under grant and loan awards, Heimel said.

Another way to make Rural Development dollars more accessible would be to create a single online portal to stream-

funding for that in the next farm bill is key, he added.

“We face in our rural county, an individual who may be tasked with three or four major responsibilities. In larger counties, they could have four or five people doing those three or four responsibilities,” Heimel said. “It’s simply impossible to navigate the bureaucratic process sometimes when you’re not properly staffed, and we can only afford so much staffing.”

It’s also “very important” for the committee to oversee USDA’s internal reorganizational efforts, which must preserve Rural Development’s field-based network and staff capacity, Heimel said.

“Field staff are trusted partners,” Heimel said. “They’ve been that way for decades. Their knowledge, their relationships, cannot be replaced by consolidation. We must preserve what makes USDA effective — its field offices, its local partnerships and its deep understanding of rural America.”

To best serve rural communities, Congress should be investing in technical assistance, working to simplify applications and reporting and considering multi-year funding that gives counties a “longer

‘We must preserve what makes USDA effective — its field offices, local partnerships and deep understanding of rural America.’

— Paul Heidel,
Potter County, Pa.

line the process, which would “cut the red tape, improve transparency and better serve” rural communities, like Potter County, that have limited staff, according to Heimel. Local governments can’t leverage federal resources without staff, along with planning, capacity and partners, so building out

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SNAP/STATS

States with most Medicaid recipients, per capita

New Mexico	33.5%
Louisiana	32.4%
New York	28.5%
Kentucky	28.3%
West Virginia	28.2%

Source: Census Bureau (2022 report)

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Federal government shutdown hits funding, services, staff — affecting counties

From SHUTDOWN page 1

ing will be halted for thousands of Western firefighters. The Forest Service will not be able to pay for contracts for the equipment needed. No federal employees will be working to reduce dry “fuel” that feeds catastrophic blazes.

Full closure or partial staffing presence at federal lands sites will lead to canceled trips, reduced tourism and public safety issues (such as illegal campfires) on federal lands.

Search and rescue or law enforcement operations will be curtailed, forcing counties to take on a greater share of the burden.

Permits for projects on public lands, including applications for permits to drill for oil or gas, will be backlogged even further.

New USDA Rural Development loans, grants and guarantees will be suspended, and most state and field staff will be furloughed.

Only limited functions — servicing existing loans, managing escrow accounts, and carrying out legally required tasks — will continue to protect federal property and obligations.

Counties should expect immediate delays in USDA RD-backed projects awaiting approval, technical support or financial closing.

Although existing loans and rental assistance contracts may continue to be serviced if funding is available, county staff and residents will lose access to most on-the-ground USDA staff, making it difficult to receive guidance or resolve issues during the shutdown.

Routine Food and Drug Administration inspections, guidance development, staff training and technical assistance programs that would otherwise support local health inspectors will be curtailed.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) administrators will not be able to access new funds.

Operations will continue, however, at least through October 2025 using multi-year carryover funds and contin-



The National Park Service’s Great Falls Park in Fairfax County, Va. was closed Oct. 1. Some national parks remain as accessible as possible during the government shutdown. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

gency reserves. USDA did not release a contingency plan for 2025.

A discretionary program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children’s Federal contingency funds will only sustain benefit delivery for a few days, when states will need to rely on their own funding streams to keep the program running in the short term.

At the Department of Health and Human Services, the Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments cut for FY2026 will be \$8 billion and went into effect on Oct. 1.

The program will be scheduled to be reduced by another \$8 billion for each of FYs 2027–2028 (\$24 billion total over the next three fiscal years).

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program’s reauthorization was tied to the funding extension, so the program will be unable to issue first-quarter payments. States may use unspent funds or Maintenance of Effort dollars to continue the program.

Title IV-B (Child Welfare Services) also expired and is unable to issue first-quarter payments. States may be able to bridge the gap using their own dollars.

County governments play

an important role in the operation of Head Start and Early Head Start programs by directly serving local grantees or by contributing supplemental funding to support the program. Eight grantees serving an estimated 7,500 children had grants beginning on Oct. 1, so the ability of these programs to stay open will vary by

New USDA Rural Development loans, grants and guarantees will be suspended and most staff will be furloughed.

grantee.

Most of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will continue operating, as many of its functions will relate to the protection of life and property and will be exempt from the shutdown.

During the federal government shutdown, counties will continue justice and public safety operations, but the grants that fund these programs will be affected.

As part of the shutdown impacting DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), federal agency grants staff will be unavailable to provide the tech-

nical assistance that counties will need to comply with grant requirements.

Grant applications from DHS will not be processed due to the shutdown. This will present fiscal uncertainty for counties as they work to continue critical public safety services. FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund will not be affected by a shutdown, and activities funded through the fund will be allowed to continue.

The State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program’s authorization expired Sept. 30. Without reauthorization, the discretionary grant program ceased to have new resources available to counties.

Approximately 65% of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s workforce will be placed on non-duty, non-pay shutdown furlough, potentially limiting the capacity of the agency to support counties through agency resources and programming on cybersecurity needs.

Funding for flagship Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs such as the Community Development Block Grant program and the Home Investment Partnerships program will typically remain available due to advance

funding, but these programs require HUD approval of a grantee’s consolidated plan prior to receiving awarded funds. Unapproved plans may see processing delays due to reduced agency capacity.

The administration of Section 8 Housing Vouchers will generally remain operational when funding is available. Priority will be given to existing commitments rather than approval of new recipients or projects.

Federal Housing Administration (FHA) processing will typically be limited to single-family mortgage insurance processing. HUD may pause processing of FHA-endorsed transactions.

The Department of Labor outlined a roughly 75% reduction in force. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Grant funding will remain available through advance funding and Job Corps centers will remain operational in all locations that involve housing of students.

Counties operate a third of the nation’s public airports. Transportation Security Administration agents working without pay may not report to work, creating congestion and safety concerns.

Thousands of Federal Aviation Administration employees who are not air traffic controllers or safety inspectors will remain out of work.

This includes personnel who conduct facility security inspections, evaluations and audits; capital planning for facilities and equipment; financial operations; law enforcement assistance support and most administrative support functions.

Funding for Clean Water/Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs and brownfields grants through the Environmental Protection Agency will be halted. Most inspections of hazardous waste management sites and chemical facilities will be stopped.

To find out more about the federal shutdown, scan the QR code below: 

Teams build trust to lead mentally ill to get services they need

From CRISIS page 1

sis response continuum, law enforcement officers undergo crisis intervention team (CIT) training, which is 40 hours of training on de-escalation and how to effectively respond in a crisis, bringing together first responders, mental health and substance abuse systems and mental health advocacy groups.

“We were missing the mark with our mental health calls and concerns and brought all of our teams in as equal partners,” said Salvatore Mulé, Henrico County Police Division’s community services captain. “It was really a redevelopment of the standard national training methodology ... A lot of what drives our prevention services methodology is calls for service.

“We knew early on, if we did [crisis intervention training] right, it would kind of be the ‘Field of Dreams’ effect — ‘if we build it, they will come.’ And we’ve definitely seen that.”

The STAR team meets weekly to identify people who often need crisis help and are likely to need it again. They add these individuals to a shared database, so they can regularly check in and connect them with the right support, noted SB Shapiro Jr., Henrico County Police Division’s prevention services unit officer.

“We’re more efficient,” Mulé said. “Because we’re getting them the resources on the front end, instead of always at the ER.”

Through STAR, the county established a mobile response team to create touchpoints between the team and high utilizers of 911, who might otherwise fall through the system and not get help, according to Alys Morgan, manager of Henrico County Department of Emergency Communications. Callers may clearly have mental health needs, but aren’t recognizing that them-

selves, and that’s where the mobile response team comes in, she noted. The mobile response team has three peer specialists, one of whom specializes in working with veterans.

“They may be calling, because someone’s breaking into their attic every night, and they want help with that,” Morgan said. “They don’t want mental health [support], but someone’s not really breaking into their attic, so this team would go out and see individuals and try to engage them in services.

“We played the long game of engagement, of going out and if they needed food, we’d bring them food. If they didn’t have [air conditioning], people actually took money out of their pocket and would get them fans or a window unit or something like that, and built the trust so that they could see that policemen and mental health were working together to help them, and they’d be much more trusting to come in and get services.”

After an individual experiences a mental health crisis, the STAR team helps ensure that they have longer-term

support, including having access to medication and assistance with housing and employment, Ruby said.

The team continues to see an increase in mental health calls, which Mulé said he attributes to people knowing they’ll be treated with dignity and respect and providing the “least traumatic avenue” for crisis response.

Henrico County has also implemented the Marcus Alert System, which diminishes the role of law enforcement in behavioral health emergency response, shifting



Members of the Henrico County Police Division discuss how they collaborate to help keep mentally ill people from continual jail visits. Photo by Meredith Moran

the primary crisis response to behavioral health professionals. The system establishes coordination between 911 and regional crisis call centers to provide response during crisis and puts law enforcement through specialized training for handling a behavioral health crisis.

In Virginia, 67% of people live in localities that have implemented the system, which was created in response to the death of Marcus-David Peters, a young teacher who was fatally shot amid a men-

will refer to 988 regional call centers, where a trained behavioral health professional will speak to the individual and provide referrals to services within 72 hours.

In the case of a moderate call (where there may be minor self-injurious behavior, but no suicide plan or direct access to lethal weapons), in-person behavioral health support is deployed.

If a call is categorized as urgent (where there’s active self-injurious behavior, such as cutting, with concern for medical risk, homicidal thoughts with no active behaviors or intent and suicidal thoughts with access to lethal weapons), a magistrate-issued emergency order is put in place, if available and requested by law enforcement.

The highest level of urgency for a 911 call, in which there’s a direct immediate threat to life, law enforcement, EMS and/or fire staff are deployed without delay and an emergency custody order is issued.

To determine the framework for each category of urgency and how the crisis intervention tools might be integrated into existing procedures, Henrico County convened stakeholders, including police, fire, EMS, the sheriff’s department and

mental health professionals, according to Sarah Gray, program manager for Henrico County Mental Health and Developmental Services’ emergency services.

“We had to get our heads around how we were going to implement that 911 triage framework, how we would change our processes and procedures and train our people,” Gray said. “... We wanted to make sure that we trained everybody who touched a console, whether they answered a phone, whether they dispatched.”

Roughly 76% of the county’s crisis responses are resolved in the community, without need for hospitalization or arrest, according to Gray.

“Our goals are basically to de-escalate, to provide the best service that we can in the least restrictive setting to individuals, get them linked to services and help them get where they need to go, and that can look a lot different for each individual,” Gray said.

“... Really the strong foundation I think that we have here is our long partnerships together, with all the different agencies and all of us. Instead of pointing fingers, that ‘It’s your issue,’ it’s all of our issues, and how are we going to help this individual?” **CN**

“We...brought all of our teams in as equal partners.”

NACo Behavioral Health Peer Exchange highlights jail diversion

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Henrico County, Va. recently hosted county officials from around the country to showcase its program that diverts people with mental illness into programs that are designed to keep them out of jail.

County officials and people working in the behavioral health space at the local level had the opportunity to sit in on a court hearing through the county's Behavioral Health Docket to learn more about the county jail and diversion services Sept. 10 at NACo's Behavioral Health and Crisis Peer Exchange.

To better serve justice-involved individuals with serious mental illness, Henrico County created a Behavioral Health Docket, which diverts people from jail into a series of programming, including case management services and weekly court hearing check-ins with Henrico General District Court Presiding Judge Lauren Ann Caudill. Ahead of completing the program, participants transition to long-term services to ensure they



Henrico General District Court Presiding Judge Lauren Ann Caudill discusses the county's jail diversion program. Photo by Meredith Moran

receive sustained support.

Behavioral Health Docket participants are linked to psychiatric services, substance use treatment (including Medication-Assisted Treatment) and group and peer support, where participants with substance use disorder work to create a personalized Action Plan for Prevention of Relapse (APPR).

The Behavioral Docket team consists of representatives from Henrico County Probation, the Defense Council, Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services, Henrico County Police, Henrico General District Court and the Judge.

Eligibility for the program is determined on a case-by-case basis, but all participants must be deemed competent and there must be some connection between their mental illness and their crime, according to Sara Tolentino, Henrico County's Jail and Diversion Services' program manager. Sex offenders and people who have been convicted of rape and murder are not eligible, she added.

"The whole point of this is that we're going to be able to rehabilitate, so we can help people recover from their illness and get better," Tolentino said. "So, there's got to be a nexus between the crime and

the mental illness."

Every Wednesday, the team gets together to staff cases, discuss how participants are doing and then the judge leads the Behavioral Court Docket hearing. Caudill goes through some standard questioning with participants — how their employment or employment search is going, what they've been doing in programming and what they feel they've gotten out of it. She shares the feedback she's received regarding each participant from the team. And then she asks them: "What'd you do for yourself this week?" Participant responses from the Sept. 10 court hearing includ-

ed meditation, going on walks and exercising.

That week, one participant had accepted a job at an auto repair shop, which Caudill celebrated. Another participant's hot water heater broke and flooded her apartment.

"I know it feels sometimes like you don't get a break," Caudill said. "But what's so impressive to me is no matter what life has dealt you, you still come in with a smile, you still come in positive, you still come in working on yourself."

Durham County, N.C. Commissioner Wendy Jacobs said she was impressed by how supportive and positive Caudill was with the Behavioral Health Docket participants, particularly in a court setting, "where you don't often see that unique relationship between judges and people in the community."

"The judge is actually seeing those participants and interacting and giving them encouragement on a weekly basis," Jacobs said. "It seemed very powerful, and it seemed that that was a very important part of the success of that program." **CN**

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Nationwide

NACo and counties make strides throughout the '70s

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

As NACo celebrates its 90th year, *County News* is serializing a book commemorating the occasion. You can read it in full and learn more about NACo's anniversary at www.naco.org/90.



In 1970, NACo drew its best and brightest ideas through its new Achievement Awards program, which not only allowed the association to recognize innovative programming by county leaders but helped develop a repository of counties' solutions for problems that many shared. The inaugural cohort included 16 county honorees.

In 2025, NACo awarded more than 1,500 Achievement Awards to almost 200 county members, recognizing 18 best-in-category winners.

The hallways of the New Hanover County, N.C. administration building are lined with years' worth of Achievement Award certificates. If NACo appears in a local newspaper, it's most likely in commemoration of a county's recognition, which often includes details of a winning program's superlative qualities. *County News* features award-winning programs in every issue.

"I'm proudest of the fact that our county recently received a 2022 National Association of Counties Achievement Award because we've put in place some of the best county practices helping veterans in the nation," Cathrene Nichols said in 2022. Nichols is the regional veterans service center director in Spokane County, Wash.

Almost 50 years after the program began, Leon County, Fla. Commissioner Bryan Desloge made those programs a centerpiece of his NACo presidency.

"One of the primary reasons that organizations like NACo exist is to try and share those best practices. We're not com-

peting against each other most of the time, so if somebody else has figured out a better way to build a mousetrap, we ought to 'plagiarize' it," he said. "Any time I was criticized for traveling on NACo's behalf, I would come right back with examples of what I'd learned from other counties that we put to work in Leon County.

"We see a lot of winning programs from large urban counties, but that information can benefit the smaller rural counties that don't have the same staff capacity," he said. "It's a chance to learn from one another."

The 1970s also saw NACo move into a new office at 1735 New York Ave., NW, along with the purchase of the "Hill House" at 115 C St. SE, which NACo would use for lobbying and entertaining members of Congress.

General revenue sharing

Richard Nixon had campaigned for president partly on a platform of empowering local governments to do more for themselves. A key element in this platform was General Revenue Sharing, a concept that combined the federal government's prowess in collecting tax revenues with the local discretion in how those funds would be spent. General Revenue Sharing was not new. It had been proposed in Congress in 1958 by Rep. Melvin Laird (R-Wis.). But this time, a motivated administration and an organized collection of county officials made the difference.

General Revenue Sharing meant that the federal government, from its tax revenues, would reallocate a large amount of money to state and local governments in the form of unrestricted grants. The localities could spend this money however they felt proper, in contrast to the long-standing



Past NACo presidents gather with Executive Director Bernie Hillenbrand (bottom) in 1970.

Photo courtesy of the East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana Library



In 1972, Gladys Spellman (above) becomes NACo's first woman president.

category grant programs that restricted spending to specific, approved programs.

Nixon himself mentioned General Revenue Sharing in both 1969 and 1970, but in neither year did the idea leave the congressional starting gate. It had formidable opposition from House leaders such as Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.), chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, who refused to even hold hearings on revenue sharing.

"I now propose that we give our states and our cities, our towns and our counties the tools so that they can get on with the job," Nixon told members of Congress in 1971.

NACo continued to press the idea at any available forum, even when the outcome seemed foreordained. A House Ways and Means Committee hearing in 1970 featured a verbal altercation between Mills and NACo Past President Woodrow Wilson Dumas, mayor-president of East Baton Rouge Parish, La.

"Mr. Chairman," Dumas said, "we know this game is crooked, but it's the only game in town!"

Stunned silence reigned in the huge hearing room as Dumas gazed up at the chairman.

"What do you mean?" Mills nearly shouted.

"What I mean," Dumas replied, "is that your committee has already announced it is opposed to the revenue sharing and that the purpose of this hearing is to kill the idea."

Mills, one of the Capitol's most powerful figures, retorted: "And where do you propose to get the money to fund this program?"

"Well, Mr. Chairman, I have in my hand a copy of last year's budget for the House of Representatives," Dumas replied. "We find places that funds might be better used for aid to hard-pressed local governments. For example, here's an item for a chauffeur-driven car for the speaker, and then there are the free mailings for congressmen under the franking

privilege."

Dumas's exchange with Mills was just one episode in a long struggle to build enough grassroots support for General Revenue Sharing to persuade the House of Representatives. Nixon was pressing for several features in General Revenue Sharing that made it less palatable to the House. He wanted, for example, a five-year authorization for the new program, so this politically sensitive issue would not need to be revisited too frequently.

From NACo's perspective, a key challenge was simply to gain a seat at the negotiating table. The federal sponsors of General Revenue Sharing would be state governments, with some funds also being channeled to cities. NACo needed to create a position for counties as a conduit of revenue-sharing money to local communities. Allocation of General Revenue Sharing funds would be based on the percentage of people living in poverty in a given area, the population of the area and the effectiveness of local tax efforts.

As the government unit closest to local communities, counties were ideally positioned to maximize local eligibility for funds. Moreover, county governments could steer a middle course between preponderantly Republican state governors and the mayors of key cities, who tended to

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be Democrats.

A key ally, and one of the figures most responsible for the eventual success of General Revenue Sharing, was Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. Agnew was friendly to NACo and counties because he himself had been Baltimore County, Md.'s executive and later Maryland governor before becoming Nixon's running mate.

Agnew pressed Nixon to increase the financial commitment he was seeking for General Revenue Sharing, arguing that a modest level of funding individual congressional districts might pass Congress more easily but wouldn't have enough impact at the local level to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. The vice president also committed to working closely with NACo leaders to press hard for General Revenue Sharing at every opportunity.

The key to persuading the House was to generate support at the level of individual congressional districts, a task NACo, by structure and membership, could do more effectively than anyone else. Slowly, momentum grew for General Revenue Sharing.

NACo organized one of the proposal's most successful and visible supporting efforts in mid-1971, when it scheduled a full day of "jet-ins" throughout the country. Each jet-in would gather local officials from a broad area to a

meeting facility near a centrally located airport. NACo and administration allies would fly a team of speakers to several of these airports in a single day to brief these officials on the status of General Revenue Sharing and recruit their active support in lobbying their own representatives.

Stops were scheduled in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Kansas City, Cleveland and San Francisco. Agnew himself flew with the NACo team to Atlanta and Kansas City. The rallies were hugely successful in Kansas

City. For instance, although only 200 people had registered in advance, more than 1,500 turned out. NACo's staff had to scramble to set up closed circuit television links to overflow rooms to enable all attendees to hear the vice president.

NACo backed these occasional high-profile events with a steady lobbying campaign period. Slowly, the opposition was persuaded until both houses passed the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972 in the summer of that year. Harmonizing the different versions of the legislation and conference committee

NACo organized one of the proposal's most successful and visible supporting efforts in mid-1971, when it scheduled a full day of "jet-ins" throughout the country.



County News covered the "jet-in" campaign that demonstrated the popularity of General Revenue Sharing.

proceeded into the fall. Finally, Nixon scheduled a ceremony at Independence Hall in Philadelphia to sign into law the bill he called "the new American Revolution."

In 1972, Hillenbrand had assigned Larry Naake, then 30, to represent NACo in lobbying Congress and the Nixon administration on General Revenue Sharing.

"It was an amazing experience for a young kid new

to the Washington political scene," Naake said more than 50 years later. "It was, at least up to that point in NACo's lifetime, along with that of state and other local government organizations, our most important legislative success."

NACo also saw its ability to do government advocacy work fortified in 1974. Attorney General William B. Saxbe decided that the organizations of the county, city and state officials were not covered by the 1946 Regulation of Lobby Act, which specifically exempted public officials from the regulation. He sent a flood of agents into the offices of the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) and threatened the staff with prosecution for violating the act.

Saxbe argued that while city, county and state officials were exempt from the lobby law, their associations were not - a key pillar of today's intergovernmental framework. NACo, the National League of Cities and USCM went to court. On Dec. 17, 1974, U.S. District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell issued his declarative judgement in their favor:

"Involvement of cities, counties and municipalities into the day-to-day work of the Congress is of an increasing and continuing importance. The court must recognize that the voice of cities, counties and municipalities in federal legislation will not be adequately heard unless through cooperative mechanisms such as the plaintiff organizations. They pool their limited finances for the purpose of bringing to the attention of Congress their proper official concerns on matters of public policy."

"There can be no doubt that all officers and employees of the plaintiff organizations are engaged in lobbying solely for what may purposely be stated to be the 'public will' as conceived by those in government they represent, who are themselves officials solely responsible to the public and acting in their official capacities." CN

'There's no limit to what rural America can accomplish'

From USDA page 2

runway" to adjust to the challenges of federal grants, Torres Small said.

The people who best know what a rural community needs are the people who live in that rural community, Torres Small noted.

They have the ideas, they just need the funding, staffing and a straightforward application process to succeed, which is where Congress can implement support, she said.

"For years, rural Americans have been telling us they don't believe government serves the

people working hardest to get by," Torres Small said. "Today, and while I was in office, rural people have higher rates of suicide, fewer doctors, less treatment for addiction, lower wages and higher mortgage costs. That's why this committee is so crucial."

"I have to admit, my soul is just happy seeing this bipartisan effort, because the rural way of life is worth fighting for. If we listen to the rural people we depend on for food, fiber, energy and land stewardship, if we invest in their ideas, there's no limit to what rural America can accomplish." CN

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WORD SEARCH

HANOVER COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

AMUSEMENT: Kings Dominion amusement park is located in the county, opening in 1975.

CHICKAHOMINY: The Chickahominy River serves as part of the eastern border of the county.

CHURCH: Slash Church dates to 1729 and is considered the best-preserved wooden colonial church in the Commonwealth.

COLLEGE: The county is home to Randolph-Macon College, the oldest continuously run Methodist college.

COURTHOUSE: The courthouse was built between 1737 and 1742, which is still in use for ceremonial functions.

GEOGRAPHY: The county is 474 square miles.

GERMAN: The county was named to honor King George I, who was from the German House of Hanover.

HISTORY: The county was founded in 1720 and features 39 sites on the National Register of Historic Places.

LOCATION: The county is located about 12 miles north of Richmond and 90 miles south of Washington, D.C.

NEWSPAPERS: The county was served by the *Hanover Herald-Progress* for more than 100 years and is intermittently served by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

PATRIOTS: The county is home to Founding Father Patrick Henry and statesman Henry Clay. The Patrick Henry High School sports teams use that nickname.

POPULATION: The population of the county has steadily grown over the years to more than 115,309 today from 37,479 in 1970.

SCOTCHTOWN: The only original standing home of Patrick Henry, famous for his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech.

TAVERN: Hanover Tavern is home to the nation's first dinner theater, Barksdale Theatre, founded in 1953. The oldest section of the structure dates to 1791.

TOURISM: The county recently appointed its first tourism director, Rachel Smith, who previously worked in a similar role for nearby James City County.

GET TO KNOW...

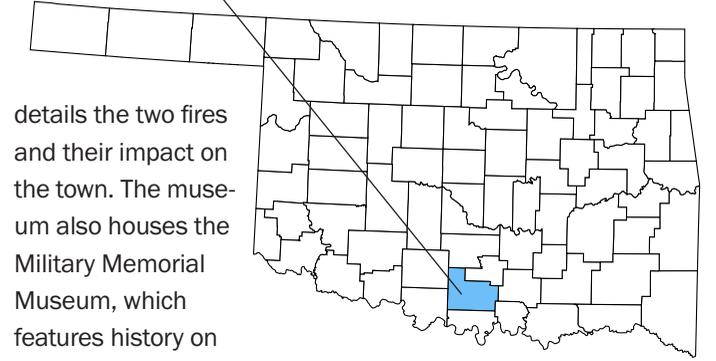
Carter County, Oklahoma

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Carter County, established in 1907 at Oklahoma's statehood, is named for Charles David Carter, a Chickasaw and Cherokee congressman. Its county seat, Ardmore, began with the creation of a ranch in what was the Chickasaw Nation and grew around the Santa Fe railroad. By the 1890s, Ardmore was the largest inland cotton market in the world.

Ardmore is the birthplace of the shopping cart, which was invented by Sylvan Goldman, the owner of the Humpty Dumpty supermarket chain. Another notable Ardmore native is the actress Rue McClanahan, best known for her role as Blanche on "The Golden Girls."

In 1895, nearly the entirety of Ardmore burned down, and its business district was largely destroyed again in 1915 following a gas explosion that killed 49 people. It was able to rebuild, with funding thanks to the recent discovery of oil in the area. "From the Ashes," an exhibit in the Greater Southwest Historical Museum located in Ardmore,



details the two fires and their impact on the town. The museum also houses the Military Memorial Museum, which features history on U.S. combat spanning from the American Revolution through the Iraq War.

Gene Autry, an actor and musician who garnered the title of "America's Favorite Singing Cowboy," was born in Texas, but later purchased a ranch in Carter County. The town where the ranch is located was previously named

Berwyn, but was renamed Gene Autry in his honor. Autry is best known for his hits, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and "Here Comes Santa Claus," and was one of the best-selling Country and Western musical artists of his time. The county has a Gene Autry Oklahoma Museum

which houses memorabilia from his life and career, as well as collectibles from other famous "Singing Cowboys" from the 1930s through the 1960s.

The Eliza Cruce Hall Doll Collection, which is housed in the Ardmore Public Library, features porcelain, wax, wood and leather dolls, including some of Marie Antoinette's own hand-carved French dolls. **CN**



Sylvan Goldman

BEHIND THE SEAL

GLACIER COUNTY, MONT.

Glacier County's seal prominently features the landscape of its namesake Glacier National Park, which occupies the 21% western portion of the county.

The tepee represents the Blackfoot Tribe, which has called Glacier County home for more than 400 years. The Blackfoot Reservation makes up 71% of the county.

The pump jack represents the county's oil and gas resources.



Would you like to see your seal featured in *County News*? Contact Charlie Ban, digital editor and senior writer, at cban@naco.org.

ON THE MOVE

NACo STAFF

● **John A. Matelski** has joined NACo as Chief Information Officer, Managing Director of County Technology Programs. His most recent position was with the Center for



Matelski

Digital Government, serving as its executive director. John earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and an MBA with an emphasis in computer information systems from Arizona State University.

● Associate Legislative Director **Julia Cortina** and Membership Manager **Priscilla Chrappah** attended the Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Conference, held Sept. 21-23 in Sauk County.

● County News Digital Editor **Charlie Ban** attended the Montana Association of

Counties Annual Conference, held Sept. 21-24 in Cascade County.

● Government Affairs Managing Director **Eryn Hurley** and Data Analytics Associate Director **Ricardo Aguilar** attended the Nevada Association of Counties conference in Clark County, held Sept. 23-25.

● **Craig Holmes**, national director of Executive Relationships for EDGE, attended the NACo and NOBCO CBC reception Sept. 25 in Washington, D.C.

BRIGHT IDEAS | ORANGE COUNTY, CALIF.

County Library Cooks Up Interest with Chef Series

PROBLEM: Some county residents didn't often visit the library.

SOLUTION: The library created a chef cooking series that attracted an entire new audience.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Orange County, Calif. Public Libraries' Food Literacy Project uses Charlie Cart mobile kitchens and guest chefs to introduce library-goers to healthier, more diverse food options.

The library system had had its Charlie Cart mobile kitchens, which provide equipment for hands-on cooking in small groups, for years when Mitch Albom, the best-selling author of "Tuesdays with Morrie," came to give a talk at one of the county's library branches.

It was a cold night, and people were lined up down the block, so library staff had the idea to serve hot chocolate from the Charlie Cart. It was such a success that they served scones and tea from the mobile kitchen at another event, with Julia Quinn, the author of the "Bridgerton" series.

Many were people who weren't regular library-goers and weren't aware of all the services the libraries offer, so the Charlie Cart became an access point for engaging the community, said Samantha Smith, library administration programs manager at Orange County Public Libraries. In 2024, when it launched, Orange County Public Libraries saw a 13% increase in community engagement.

"It was allowing people to come up and ask library questions in a really non-threatening way," Smith said. "You're getting a scone, you're getting tea. You're also getting a QR code to sign up for a library card. It really became another place of connection that sparked this whole project."

The Charlie Carts were previously used for cooking



Jocelyn Ramirez cooks up cauliflower ceviche at an Orange County library. Photo by Sofia Riascos Gonzalez

demonstrations solely led by library staff, with sessions such as how to make tortillas and the process of baking and decorating Christmas cookies. Through the creation of the Food Literacy Project, that evolved into the library inviting chefs and cooking influencers to show participants how to recreate their recipes using the mobile kitchens.

Around 300 people (some of whom said they'd never been to the library) came to see Jet Tila, a Food Network star, make a recipe that was made with one of the library's Charlie Carts — which include a convection oven, induction cooktop, electric griddle and a blender — in the initiative's first event. In 2024, Orange County libraries held 77 food literacy events, which were attended by 2,456 people.

Many of the chefs who participate in the Food Literacy Project specialize in a specific cuisine. During recipe demonstrations, they also share their cultural heritage and the role food plays in that culture, with library-goers, some of whom are members of the community themselves, while others may have never tried the food before, Smith noted.

"It's about nourishing their minds and nourishing their bodies," Smith said. "And we try to be diverse in who we

select to be our authors, wanting to make sure we represent Orange County and all the different communities and all the different people that live here."

Jocelyn Ramirez, a chef specializing in vegan Mexican food, was one of the highlighted chefs.

'There's a loneliness epidemic so it's a great place to come out and just talk.'

— Samantha Smith,
Orange County, Calif.

"Her mission is very much maintaining these cultural flavors and cooking from your roots, but also with a healthy and sustainable spin on it," Smith said. "... We had people lined up who were there saying, 'Oh, I'm here because it's an event, but at the same time, I don't like vegan food.' But then they left [saying], 'I had no idea vegan food could be so delicious,' so I think it kind of changes people's perspective."

Duff Goldman, a pastry chef and TV personality, held a cooking demonstration class for children, showing them an easy way they could make gummy bears at home. Another demonstration created for children included a recipe

with plums. One of the kids said they thought they hated plums, but loved the recipe they tried.

"That's just a simple story from a kid, but at the same time, it also shows me we're encouraging people to try new things," Smith said. "We're encouraging people to try more healthy food that maybe they thought they wouldn't like."

The Food Literacy Project has helped build community at the library — many people attend numerous events, and it provides an opportunity to socialize, according to Smith.

"There's a loneliness epidemic in our community, so it's a great place to come out and just talk," Smith said.

The cultural events have been particularly special, inspiring intergenerational community building, Smith said. At one event, Vietnamese-American chef Tu David Phu demonstrated a recipe from his cookbook and shared stories about his family and Vietnamese culture.

"We had families that brought their kids saying, 'Oh, this is so great. We don't normally see events that are focusing on Vietnamese culture, and I'm Vietnamese, and my kids were born here, but we want them to know about this culture,'" Smith said. "And so, they would bring them specifically, because they wanted to

showcase an author or speaker that was relevant to them.

"We had people saying, 'This flavor reminds me of home,' and sharing stories about how it reminds them of their mom or their dad and cooking with their grandparents, so that was very heartfelt."

Other events have included a demonstration on how to make mocktails, with the speaker sharing their sobriety journey, and social media cooking influencers Jenny Martinez and Owen Han demonstrating quick and easy recipes.

Event attendees get to take home a copy of the author's cookbook, so they can recreate what they've done with the Charlie Cart in their own kitchens, which is funded through the nonprofit Friends of the Library. Other funding streams for the initiative include grants from the Office on Aging, which is focused on promoting healthy eating, and Lunch at the Library, which helps fund programming adjacent to the free lunch it provides for children ages 18 and under throughout the summer at the library.

According to the California State Library, about 28% of adults in the state read below a third-grade level and 36% have a similar level of numeracy. OC Read, a literacy program at the library, incorporates food literacy into the project, as well, which has been a great way for people who might feel intimidated or uncomfortable going to a workshop targeted at people who are low literacy to improve their reading ability.

"If you're learning to measure, if you're reading a recipe, interpreting different types of measurements — those are all literacy skills," Smith said. "I think it's just such a meaningful thing to see people learning to read, improving their skills and removing that stigma." **CN**

Orange County Public Libraries' Food Literacy Project was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in Libraries.

ALASKA

The Isberg Recreation Area, owned and managed by the **FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH** is nearly doubling in size thanks to a **309-acre donation** from the Interior Alaska Land Trust, KTUU-TV reported.

First beginning discussions over the winter, "Interior Alaska Land Trust called us to ask to set up a meeting because they had this parcel," said Tom Hewitt, special assistant to the borough mayor. "It was adjacent to the existing Isberg Rec. Area." He explained that the Interior Alaska Land Trust had been managing the area for the last few years, acquiring the area as a part of a private purchase.

ARIZONA

Former **PIMA COUNTY** Supervisor Adelita Grijalva won a special election to Arizona's 7th district **House of Representatives** seat, succeeding her late father Raúl, who also served on the county Board prior to winning a congressional seat.

ARKANSAS

POPE COUNTY recently held a ribbon-cutting for its new **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) facility**. The new facility was built on Arkansas Tech University property because of a land lease agreement authorized by the ATU Board of Trustees and the Pope County Quorum Court.

ATU leased 4.29 acres of ATU property to Pope County. The new central station replaces a facility that has served Pope County for more than four decades.

Pope County Judge Ben Cross said the new Pope County EMS headquarters was constructed with American Rescue Plan funds and did not require any local taxpayer support. He expressed his appreciation to Arkansas Tech for its partnership in making the new EMS facility possible during his remarks at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

CALIFORNIA

• In an ongoing effort to assist communities affected by the January wildfires, **LOS ANGE-**



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

GEORGIA

The **CHATHAM COUNTY** fair recently turned 75 years old. The annual event is one of the **longest-running African American fairs** in the country, and this year's helped celebrate both the legacy of Chatham's Black farmers and how today's fairground aims to be a welcoming space for everyone.

Located near downtown Pittsboro, the 75th Annual Chatham County Agricultural and Industrial Fair featured rides, food and live music. County Board of Commissioners Vice Chair Katie Kenlan helped open the four-day event, describing it as a day of celebration and coming together.

"This is a very special institution that we have in our community," Kenlan said. "We are so lucky to have this in our backyard."

LES COUNTY has raised 23 billboards encouraging patrons to show their **support for small local businesses** that were impacted, lamag.com reported. The billboards are a mix of digital panels, printed panels and physical bulletins. The signs are simple yet effective, reminding patrons that each purchase

made at a local establishment helps businesses and families recover from losses suffered during the tragic wildfires.

COLORADO

A Colorado man recently pleaded guilty to aiming a high-powered **laser pointer** at a **FRESNO COUNTY** Sheriff's Office helicopter, Reuters

reported.

The man admitted in court that he aimed the beam of a laser pointer at a sheriff's helicopter while it was on routine patrol, according to court documents and a statement from U.S. Attorney Eric Grant.

The laser's output of 92.8 milliwatts was more than 18 times the legal limit for laser pointers, officials said.

The Federal Aviation Administration warns that laser exposure can cause visual impairment and poses a serious hazard to aircraft. In 2024, the FAA received 12,840 reports of laser strikes, with California reporting the highest number at 1,489 incidents.

The accused faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

FLORIDA

PASCO COUNTY wants to find out how **homelessness** is impacting neighborhoods, communities and businesses. The Board of County Commissioners is working on their 2025-2030 strategic plan and the goal is to make homelessness rare, brief and non-existent. The county has held town halls and asked residents to fill

out online surveys.

"I hope to see education around the topic of homelessness so that we can create a response external to county government, local county government, but all-inclusive with our citizens, our not-for-profits, our public safety sector," says Brian Hobin, Pasco County director of Community Services. "It needs to be an all-hands-on-deck response for us to be able to make a difference in homelessness."

HAWAII

To address its **homelessness** situation, **HAWAII COUNTY** marked a milestone with a blessing ceremony held Sept. 26 for the construction of the Kukuiola Emergency Shelter and Assessment Center in Kailua-Kona, Spectrum News reported.

The project will include 16 emergency shelter units, a manager's unit, a 2,000-square-foot assessment center, community restroom facilities with showers, a 1,400-square foot community center, shared kitchen and office space for case management services and resources,

See NEWS FROM page 11



CALIFORNIA

• The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) recently announced that the **MONTEREY COUNTY: Books and Ballots** program was selected to be honored for excellence in election administration with a national Clearinghouse Award for Innovation and New Practices in Election Administration, the Salinas Valley Tribune reported.

Also known as the "Clearies," the EAC presents the awards program annually to celebrate the hard work of election offices across the country. Now in its ninth year, this year's Clearie Awards honored programs that took place during the 2024 presidential election year.

From NEWS FROM page 10
as well as open areas for community-building activities. There will also be overnight parking available for unsheltered individuals sleeping in vehicles.

“Today is about bringing hope, care, and aloha to our people,” said Mayor Kimo Alameda in a news release. “These facilities will give families and individuals a safe place to rest, get help and start rebuilding their lives.”

LOUISIANA

A **widespread 911 outage** recently impacted much of Louisiana and parts of Mississippi, leaving emergency agencies scrambling to provide alternate numbers for residents in need, KNOE-TV reported.

The **DESOTO PARISH** Sheriff’s Office said the outage, which began shortly after 1 p.m., was caused by a major fiber cut. By around 4 p.m., parishes began reporting service restoration. In **POINTE COUPEE PARISH**, officials linked the failure to a “technical issue with AT&T.” The **ORLEANS PARISH** Communication District reported the fiber cut occurred in Mississippi.

NEBRASKA

The University of Nebraska Lincoln is seeking ways to address a budget shortfall of \$28 million possibly by cutting programs. **JEFFERSON COUNTY** Commissioners ex-

pressed their support for one of the degree programs potentially on the chopping block: **The Community and Regional Planning Program.**

“Eliminating CRP would harm Nebraska’s ability to prepare planners, weaken community partnerships, and undercut UNL’s commitments to research, teaching, and service,” Board Chairman Mark Schoenrock wrote in a letter to the school on behalf of the commissioners. “At a time when communities face urgent challenges — from flood recovery to rural healthcare and aging populations — the CRP program is more vital than ever.”

SOUTH CAROLINA

The **SPARTANBURG COUNTY** community recently came together on to remember the nine lives lost during Hurricane Helene with a remembrance breakfast, WCSC-TV reported. Spartanburg County Emergency Management said more than 100 people were in attendance including family, first responders, volunteers and recovery partners. During the breakfast, first responders were thanked and ongoing recovery that continues one year later was recognized.

TEXAS

• Voters will soon decide on upgrades to **BEXAR COUNTY**-owned coliseum grounds. The November election won’t



TEXAS

• **DENTON COUNTY** recently announced the launch of a **podcast** as a new way to keep citizens informed and help them understand how county government functions, the *Cross Timbers Gazette* reported. It is a project that has come to fruition after lots of collaboration between Denton County’s Director of Community Relations Dawn Cobb and Commissioner’s Court.

“This is something Dawn and us have been talking about for a while,” said Denton County Judge Andy Eads. “We know print media still plays a vital role in this area, but this is a new and different way to communicate with our existing and possibly a new audience.”

just be about whether voters want to help pay for a **new Spurs arena downtown**, KSAT-TV reported. Voters will also decide whether to use the county’s venue tax to fix up the county-owned facilities around the team’s current East Side home, the Frost Bank Center. The \$240 million worth of work is mostly focused on constructing and renovating buildings on the grounds, though work on the Frost Bank Center and a new roof for the Freeman Coliseum is also included. **UTAH**

• A **SALT LAKE COUNTY** program unanimously passed last year, called the **My County Rec Pass program** grants

more than 78,000 local youth free year-round access to county-operated recreation centers, pools, ice and skating rinks, gyms, and climbing walls.

This no-cost program is funded by revenue from a tourism-related sales tax called the Tourism, Recreation, Culture & Convention. The \$2 million program removes financial barriers and promotes physical and mental health, fosters social connections and opens access to recreation facilities. The program has welcomed many first time users of County facilities. Seventy-six percent of pass holders reported they’d never previously had a rec pass and 62 % cited cost as a key obstacle.

UTAH

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VIRGINIA

This October, **ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY** will be featured on Virginia Farm Bureau’s TV program “Real Virginia” as part of segment titled “County Close-up,” according to the nonprofit.

For each month, a part of the program focuses on a different county of the Commonwealth and gives viewers an in-depth look at the area from an **agricultural** perspective. The content creator and host interviews local farmers and other residents to explore the role agriculture plays in the county as well as which sectors prosper and how the area adapts to the changing industry, said the nonprofit.

WISCONSIN

In response to growing concerns from property owners, **WASHINGTON COUNTY** officials are challenging new state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) **floodplain regulations** that could severely impact dozens of homes. County Executive Josh Schoemann and County Board Chair Jeff Schleif joined residents in signing a resolution opposing the DNR’s recent reclassification of parts of a shoreline as “flood storage” zones.

The resolution urges the state to amend administrative rules to permit the use of modern building methods like helical piers and to align substantial improvement thresholds with FEMA’s market value standards. The resolution also calls for a broader review of state floodplain regulations and will be sent to Gov. Tony Evers, the Wisconsin Counties Association and state legislators.



MONTANA

Attendees at the Montana Association of Counties Annual Conference dressed in blue jeans, crisp white shirts and cowboy hats in honor of late **YELLOWSTONE COUNTY** Commissioner **John Ostlund**, who died in a plane crash in June. Ostlund was remembered as a mentor to many and a father-like or brother-like figure to Montana county commissioners, whose advice, perspective and encouragement helped shaped the service of many of his peers across the state. He was elected in 2002 and served as the state association’s president.

Do you have news to share? Send your press releases, photos and news tips to Editor Mary Ann Barton.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

TERRY BURROUGHS

NACo Board Member
Okeechobee County, Fla.
Commissioner

Number of years active in NACo: My county has been a member for a number of years, but I have only been active in NACo since March 2019.

Years in public service: 11

My first NACo event was: The 2019 Legislative Conference

Occupation: County commissioner/retired telecommunications executive

Education: Tampa Technical Institute

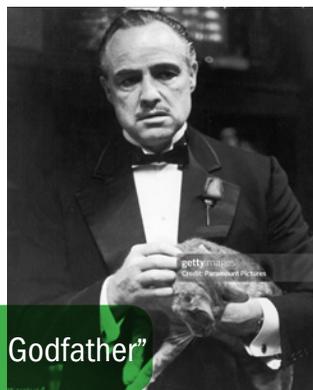
The hardest thing I've ever done: The hardest, but most rewarding, was becoming a Mason.



BURROUGHS

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: George Washington, Ronald Reagan and Dan Marino

A dream I have is to: Succeed in everything I set out to do in service to my community.



My favorite movie is: "The Godfather"

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Have a very soft side in my disposition.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: River-rafting in the Royal Gorge in Colorado Springs.

My favorite way to relax is: Playing golf with my friends.

I'm most proud of: My daughter, Lana.

Every morning, I read: Excerpts of Leadership First

My favorite meal is: Tomahawk Pork Chop with French fries

My pet peeve is: Disorganization

My motto is: Order out of chaos.

The last book I read was: "Unstoppable"

My favorite music is: Country

My favorite U.S. president is: Ronald Reagan

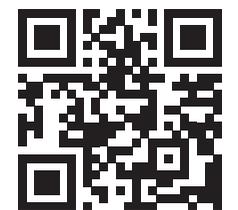
My county is a NACo member because: We believe our collective voice is our best opportunity to be heard and acted upon given the current environment in Washington.



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Post your job listing on NACo's new career site!

Get a 15% discount now through Dec. 31, 2025 by using the code: **CountyNews15** when you place a job posting!

jobs.naco.org



SAVE THE DATES

Upcoming NACo Conferences

2025 NACo Fall Board of Directors Meeting

December 4-6 • Wise County, Texas



2026 NACo Legislative Conference

February 21-24 • Washington, D.C.



2026 Western Interstate Region (WIR) Conference

May 5-8 • Maui County, Hawai'i



2026 NACo Annual Conference & Expo

July 17-20 • Orleans Parish/New Orleans, La.

