

\$1 trillion infrastructure bill victory for counties

by Jessica Jennings

President Biden is set to sign the bipartisan Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684), a \$973 billion comprehensive infrastructure package Nov. 15 after it was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives Nov. 5.

It includes \$550 billion in new investments for transportation, water, power and energy, environmental remediation, public lands, broadband and resilience. Passage of the bill follows over six months of negotiations between Congress and the White House and represents a major victory for America's counties that will help rebuild the nation's infrastructure and economy.

"Counties applaud the U.S. House and Senate for passing this much-needed, bipartisan infrastructure bill," said NACo Executive Director Matthew Chase.

"We appreciate our House and Senate partners who worked with us to develop this comprehensive legislation. It will help rebuild our nation's infrastructure and economy by investing in locally owned infrastructure and preserving

See **BILL** page 2



COUNTY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE CLASS OF 2021

The County Leadership Institute Class of 2021 celebrates on the roof at NACo's office following completion of course work. From left to right: Liz Hausmann, Fulton County, Ga.; Mimi Cowan, Will County, Ill.; Ed Valenzuela, Siskiyou County, Calif.; Felicia Franklin, Clayton County, Ga.; Rachel Seeber, Warren County, N.Y.; Todd Patzer, Lac qui Parle County, Minn.; Bill Novotny, Johnson County, Wyo.; Mark Stahl, Ottawa County, Ohio; Ted Mercer, Miami County, Ohio; Helen Askim, Williams County, N.D.; Greg Miles, Duchesne County, Utah; David Zimmerman, Tazewell County, Ill.; James Gore, Sonoma County, Calif.; Renee Couch, Comal County, Texas; George Dunlap, Mecklenburg County, N.C.; Jonathan Delagrave, Racine County, Wis.; Kate Dean, Jefferson County, Wash.; Cassie Hall, Mineral County, Nev.; Albert "Chip" Abramovic, Venango County, Pa.; Jason Strouf, Custer County, Mont.; Frank Williams, Brunswick County, N.C.; Phil Kuyers, Ottawa County, Mich. and Vivian Thomas, Henry County, Ga. Photo by Hugh Clarke

Operation Green Light eases shifts in military life

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Waiting to jump out of a military aircraft, servicemembers wait for a red light to turn green, signaling that it's time to go.

His or her training made that process automatic. Being back on the ground at the end of a military career, anticipating a transition to civilian life might create more anxiety.

"The military trains people

very well, and the training helps you trust in your equipment and your leadership," said Jason Skinner, president of the New York State County Veteran Service Officers' Association. "What the military doesn't do is train you for the transition."

Skinner and various organi-

zations in New York are working to make those transitions easier for both service members and their families. He is pushing to end residency requirements to take civil service exams in a county where a veteran plans to move as a civilian and create a pilot program with the federal

government to create mentorships in counties.

"Counties, and first responder agencies specifically, are the employers of so many veterans," he said. "We want to make sure there's no gap in their abil-

See **VETERANS** page 2

Holistic approach shapes park use

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Chester Ellis has seen "Field of Dreams," but he firmly leaves that story in the fiction section and refuses to use it for inspiration.

As chairman of the Chatham County, Ga. Board of Commissioners, he sees a lot more value

in tailoring recreational facilities placed where they'll have demonstrated and immediate impact, rather than hoping that if the county builds it, residents will come.

"If we have a community where 95 percent of the people are over the age of 50, it doesn't make sense to put a new gymnasium there," he said. "We'll get a

lot more value out of a walking path or tennis courts."

That's one of the conclusions he has reached as he leads the county through a more comprehensive planning process, dubbed One Chatham, which views the county in its entirety and aims to distribute its re-

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'We want to make sure there's no gap in their ability to provide for their families'

From VETERANS page 1

ity to provide for their families. When you leave the military, you're losing your job essentially."

Skinner, who is the county veterans service officer for Livingston County, said allowing service members to take their exams in advance of their discharge would streamline the employment process, helping both applicants and counties.

Operation Green Light, a collaboration among Skinner's organization, the New York State Association of Counties and the New York State County Executives' Association, worked to illuminate as many public buildings as possible during the week of Nov. 7, which included Veterans Day. That has included participation from New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Gov. Kathy Hochul (D), who had Niagara Falls illuminated in green.

"We wanted to do something special this year to honor the service and immense sacrifice



Operation Green Light illuminates the Livingston County, N.Y. courthouse the week of Veterans Day.

of all our veterans, especially those who served over the last two decades in our nation's fight against terrorism," said NYSAC Executive Director Steve Acquario.

"Operation Green Light gives individuals, businesses and government leaders a way to

reach out and let members of the veteran community know that we're with them and that we appreciate all that they have done to protect our country and our way of life," he said.

In addition, the ETS Sponsorship Program, a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense, will serve as a pilot program sponsoring

service members through the transition process from military to civilian life, serving as a point of contact and introduction to the federal veteran bureaucracy.

"I know a friend who had 27 postings in 30 years of his military career," Skinner said. "Whenever he was transferred, if he needed to know what was available for his wife to ease her

transition or to help find soccer teams for their kids, they got an answer. He didn't have that when he left the service. There was nobody to answer their questions."

The ETS program will begin contact with a discharging veteran starting as early as a year out from the end of service to help make a smooth transition. The sponsors will receive training to help them work with servicemembers and navigate the Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network.

Sponsors will flesh out a profile about the servicemember's family, help them settled in to their new home and help them receive VA benefits.

Skinner sees this as a timely innovation, given the impending influx of veterans with ties to New York following the de-escalation of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years.

"Veterans make excellent community members, employees and volunteers," Skinner said. "Whatever we can do to make it easier to join our communities will be good for everyone." **CN**

SNAP/STATS



5 TOP TURKEY PRODUCING STATES

STATE	NUMBER OF BIRDS
MINNESOTA.....	40 MILLION
NORTH CAROLINA.....	31 MILLION
ARKANSAS.....	30 MILLION
INDIANA.....	20 MILLION
MISSOURI.....	16.5 MILLION

Source: USDA

Infrastructure bill fulfills many county priorities

From BILL page 1

local decision-making."

The bill would accomplish many longstanding county priorities, including:

- A new, long-term surface transportation reauthorization for highway, bridge and transit systems
- Meaningful commitments to transportation safety and project streamlining
- Critical new investments in water, stormwater and broadband projects
- Increased investments in off-system bridges – including county owned bridges that are not part of the federal-aid

highway system

- Raising the cap on Private Activity Bonds, which will facilitate the construction of infrastructure projects, and
- An extension of the Secure Rural Schools program for timber harvest counties for three years.

While the legislation will invest heavily across the nation's core infrastructure sectors, just over half of the bill's new investments — roughly \$284 billion — will go toward all modes of transportation. In addition to providing authorizations for a number of programs, the legislation will also make supplemental — and in

some cases, multi-year — appropriations to several federal agencies, including just over \$100 billion in competitive grant opportunities that counties can apply for directly through the U.S. Department of Transportation.

NACo played an integral role in securing many provisions included in the final bill, which will help counties fulfill vast infrastructure responsibilities.

Even after passage of the bill, infrastructure remains at the forefront of the legislative agenda in Washington, D.C., where lawmakers are addition-

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Program to segue from shelter to housing

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

While the pandemic has touched all aspects of our lives, making struggles that were difficult before seem almost impossible, many counties have stepped up to solve food and supply shortages, childcare affordability, communications problems and much more.

In Pierce County, Wash., the County Council has found a new way to face an old issue exacerbated by the pandemic: Homelessness, which counts nearly 600,000 nationwide, according to a pre-pandemic federal study.

In Pierce County, which has more than 3,000 homeless, councilmembers decided the county would take part in purchasing a hotel to provide shelter for the homeless. The county has long been looking for solutions, programs and services that can help ease the burden and recently partnered with the Non-Profit Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) as well as the cities of Lakewood and Tacoma to purchase a 94-bed Comfort Inn.

“We watched the successes

others experienced and decided it was something we wanted to pursue here in Pierce County,” said Heather Moss, director of human services. Discussions on how to tackle this complex issue have been going on in the county for years.

The search for a suitable facility began in the summer of 2020 and progressed on a tight schedule. The council hoped to have a plan set to address the crisis by November 2021.

Ending homelessness “is probably one of the most challenging tasks our county — and others across the nation — face,” said Councilman Ryan Mello.

With a few modifications and repairs, the hotel-turned-homeless shelter is expected to open in December as an emergency shelter that can house 120 residents. Long term, the council expects the facility will become Permanent Supportive Housing. Funding from the American Rescue Plan played a large part in the ability for the group to purchase this property.

Pierce County dedicated \$5 million to the initiative.

Talks are already underway to purchase another hotel,



The Comfort Inn purchased partly by Pierce County will undergo repairs before opening in December as a homeless shelter.

as well as increase the available emergency housing in other ways like camping, tiny homes, motels and more.

Mello said he encourages other counties to reach out to non-profits in their communities to rely on their expertise and become funding partners to groups whose sole focus is providing “services and connections” to those in need.

“Homelessness is not unique to our county,” he said. “It is not confined to one city, town or our unincorporated areas...we know through communication, coordination and the pooling of resources with

our municipal and local non-profit partners we will have a higher success rate of tackling this crisis.” **CN**

WORD SEARCH

PITT COUNTY, N.C.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

- BEACH:** The county is 87 miles from the Atlantic coast.
- COURTHOUSE:** The Pitt County courthouse was built in 1910, designed in the Classical Revival style.
- FOUNDED:** The county was founded in 1760 under the British Colonial government.
- GEOGRAPHY:** Pitt County covers 651.58 square miles in eastern North Carolina.
- GREENVILLE:** The county seat, named in honor of Revolutionary general Nathanael Greene.
- HISTORY:** The county counts more than 30 homes and buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.
- HOSPITAL:** Vidant Medical Center is the only level 1 trauma center east of Raleigh.
- MANUFACTURING:** One of the county's largest industries is manufacturing including textiles and pharmaceuticals.
- MUSEUM:** The Greenville Museum of Art features events, education and rotating exhibits of multiple art forms.
- RIVER:** The Tar River is a 200-milelong recreational waterway running south-east through the county.
- PITT:** The county is named for William Pitt, an English statesman and orator and earl of Chatham.
- PIRATES:** The East Carolina University Pirates football team has a large following.
- POPULATION:** The county population is about 175,000.
- TAYLOR:** The late jazz legend Billy Taylor hailed from the county; a jazz festival in his name is held at the university each spring.
- UNIVERSITY:** East Carolina University, located at the county seat, includes a medical school, dental school and engineering school.

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Dakota County, Minn. student a winner in art competition



Izaac Ibarra's drawing he entered in NACo's student art competition tells the story of the coronavirus pandemic. His depiction, using color pencils, shows the COVID-19 vaccine superimposed over a mask and an outline of his county.

"He has always enjoyed surrealist and modern style art, especially artist René Magritte," said his mother,

Elia Gomez of her son, who is now an 11th-grader at Rosemount High School in Dakota County, Minn.

"He draws, but not on a regular basis — when he does, he likes to draw abstract."

When he isn't drawing, Izaac enjoys science and playing on his junior varsity soccer team.

Taking part in the art com-

petition, Izaac learned more about Dakota County. "He realized all the steps that are taken to make important decisions that will affect his community," his mother said.

After high school, she said her son hopes to study civil engineering "but that can always change."

Dakota County is the third most populous state in Min-

nesota, counting more than 439,000 residents. The county is named for the Dakota Sioux tribes who settled in the area.

The art competition is sponsored by Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit arts organization, which serves, advances and leads a network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote,

sustain and support the arts in America. They have partnered with NACo for almost 25 years to educate and inform county elected leaders about the importance and value of the arts to their community, both culturally and economically. **CN**

Winning artwork will be featured in a 2022 NACo calendar and in County News.

Bill provides \$100 billion in DOT grants

From BILL page 2

ally considering critical pieces of legislation, such as the bipartisan S. 3011/H.R. 5735, the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure, and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act (S. 3011/H.R. 5735) and an FY 2022 reconciliation package.

S. 3011, which passed the

U.S. Senate unanimously earlier this month, would provide additional flexibility for the \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund authorized under the American Rescue Plan Act for use toward transportation and infrastructure projects.

Specifically, the legislation would allow counties to allocate up to \$10 million of Re-

covery Funds for government services and the greater of \$10 million or 30 percent for transportation and infrastructure projects and to address natural disasters. **CN**

Jessica Jennings is NACo's associate legislative associate for Transportation and Infrastructure and liaison to the Rural Action Caucus.

READ NACo's EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE BILL HERE:

Executive summary: <https://www.naco.org/resources/legislative-analysis-counties-infrastructure-investment-jobs-act>

See the latest federal transportation and infrastructure policy proposals impacting counties here: <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/federal-legislative-actions-transportation-infrastructure-counties>.

Learn more about NACo's transportation and infrastructure priorities here: <https://www.naco.org/topics/transportation-infrastructure>.

One Chatham initiative aims to decrease provincialism among municipal leaders

From PARKS page 1

sources more equitably. Whether that means better locations for projects or more efficient funding, Ellis hopes a comprehensive look at the county's needs and resources, informed strongly by community engagement, will help map out the best way to plan for the future.

"We've divided the county into quarters, and we look at putting places in common spaces so they're accessible to people from any district, whether you're coming from the north, south, east or west," he said. "We have a military airfield in one part of the county, so we know they have different needs and resources and that kind of changes our map."

One Chatham also seeks to break down barriers between local governments and approach planning from a more holistic perspective, involving inter-governmental agreements and memorandums of understanding between the county and mu-

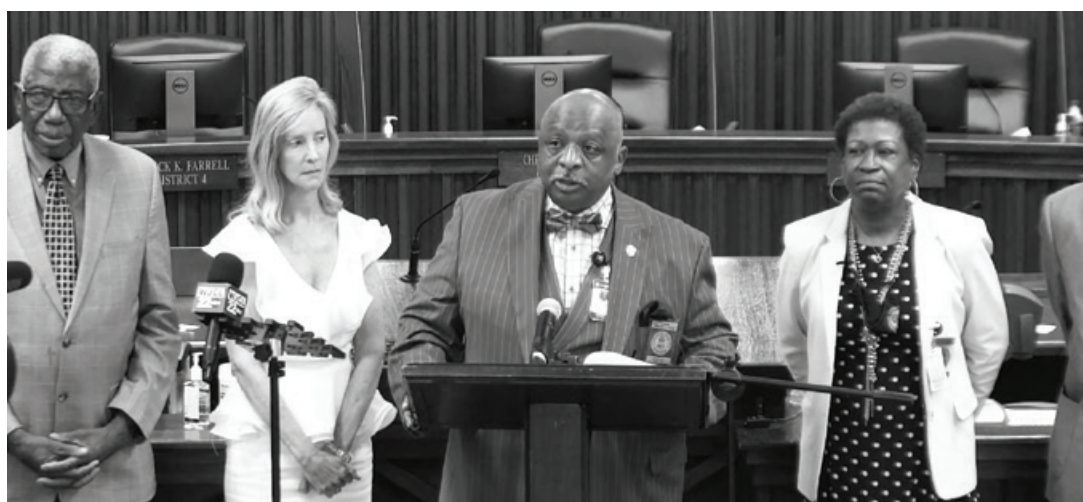
nicipalities or school districts to make use of their resources and facilities.

"We've had school facilities that are locked up at 4 p.m. and open up again in the morning in time for school," Ellis said. "Those are walking and running tracks that residents could be using, and the county won't have to build duplicates of to serve the same people."

Parks and recreation facilities are just the first of many topics Ellis hopes to reach with the initiative, but also the most visible.

"It's a quality-of-life issue, and one people can recognize," he said. "If people don't have to drive deep into a neighborhood to access a park, they'll feel more connected and less isolated. These parks are for the whole county to use."

Working with commissioners to bring community events to each district, One Chatham has already facilitated discussions about what climate change and sea level rise mean for coastal Chatham County, and discus-



From left, Chatham County, Ga. Commissioners Bobby Lockett, Helen Stone, Chairman Chester A. Ellis and Tanya Milton. Photo courtesy of Chatham County, Ga.

sions will soon center on how the county can help mitigate the transportation challenges residents face against the increasing freight backup at the port of Savannah.

Ellis sees the initiative as a chance to unify elected officials in the county, which he'll be doing with a summit in mid-November. The provincialism that guided both municipal and county leaders is starting to erode, he said, in the face of what's possible in both cost sav-

ings and collaboration.

"We had a 10-mile stretch of road that went through two municipalities and unincorporated Chatham County," he said. "All three got bids on repaving the road, and it all came out to \$16 million. If all three had worked together on one plan, they could have cut out a lot of that work and gotten it done for \$8 million."

"We have commissioners in eight districts and eight municipalities, but we forgot that the commissioners still represent

the municipalities, so it's time we started acting like that and planning that way. Working in silos isn't helping anyone. We're serving the same people, and these jurisdictions are half a step away from each other."

"It's the first time anything has been done like this in Chatham County," he said. "This is the most exciting project I've been involved in since joining the commission, and it's something I think will bring our community closer together." **CN**

PROFILES IN SERVICE

DEIRDRE ARAÚJO

NACo Board Member

Affiliate representative from the National Association for Volunteer Programs in Local Government (NAVPLG)



Araújo

Number of years involved in NACo: Six

Occupation: Manager, volunteer engagement at NAVPLG.

Education: Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Wells College, Aurora, N.Y.

The hardest thing I've ever done: What I'm doing right now and I still find joy and beauty around every corner.

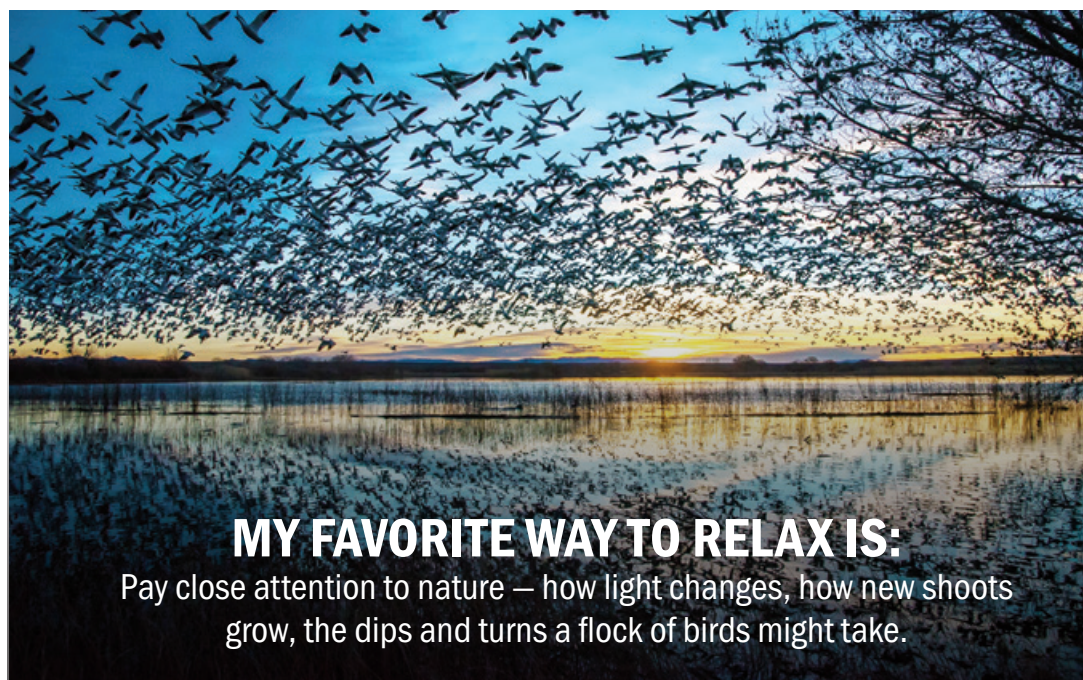
Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: John A. Powell, Sylvia Earle and Oliver Sacks (and all of their friends).

You'd be surprised to learn: I brought a Brazilian-Portuguese phrasebook along on a first date

30 years ago. It served us well.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Jump from Castle Rock into Lake Waccabuc. It didn't go well and taught me the importance of having a plan.

I'm most proud of: The bittersweet bookends of delivering someone's first "yes" when seeking a volunteer role and carrying forward stories of service and caring for those whose time with us has come to an end. Even more proud of the NAVPLG community for supporting each other throughout the pandemic closures, pivots to frontline work, creative adaptations for maintaining physical and emotional lifelines for the isolated and for



MY FAVORITE WAY TO RELAX IS:

Pay close attention to nature — how light changes, how new shoots grow, the dips and turns a flock of birds might take.

embracing the learning demanded by our national reckoning on social justice.

Every morning I read: A new entry from Alice Wong's "Disability Visibility" blog, Justin Ray from the *Los Angeles Times*, Brookings brief and try to add to my growing but elementary Korean vocabulary list.

My pet peeve is: Confusing volunteer with voluntold.

My motto is: Drawn from those untranslatable words like meraki

[a Greek word for doing something with passion] and kintsugi [the Japanese art of putting broken pieces of pottery back together with gold]. I believe we're all doing our best, so put love into your work and if you've broken something, repair it with gold to show the learning.

My favorite movie is: A three-way between *Buena Vista Social Club*, *The Last Waltz* and Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*.

My favorite U.S. president is: Shifting as I learn more.

Trust-busting, preserving the environment, the New Deal and WPA have all resonated over the years, but Carter's enduring civic engagement and humility and Obama's grace remain.

NAVPLG is a NACo member because: We share a commitment to service informed by community-identified priorities and ongoing professional development. We welcome the opportunity to support and celebrate volunteers in all our nation's counties.



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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

NOVEMBER 15, 2021



COVID-19: LESSONS LEARNED AND OUR PATH AHEAD



RURAL / URBAN

COUNTIES REFLECT ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

It's been more than 600 days since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and counties have faced unprecedented challenges in the last 20 months serving on the frontlines to protect their communities.

As the second year of dealing with COVID-19 challenges comes to a close, rural and urban counties across the country are reflecting on lessons learned from the pandemic and how they will be better prepared for a future public health crisis.

URBAN COUNTIES

Maricopa County, Ariz.

Maricopa County was reminded of the importance of collaboration throughout the pandemic.

Jacqueline Edwards, director of the human services department, said it became more apparent than ever before the importance of collaboration and partnership, specifically in human services.

"We already knew to achieve a strong human services system that we want to make sure it is responsive, efficient and effective. The county knew we couldn't do it alone," she said.

Edwards described how the human services department partnered with public health and hotel owners to provide housing options for vulnerable populations.

"Some of the greatest results from those partnerships is Maricopa County really becoming the largest provider of shelter beds that we had ever seen before," she said.

The board of supervisors, through the CARES Act, invested nearly \$50 million into rent and utility assistance. The county also used \$46 million from the Treasury Department for emergency rental assistance. She described how the county went from \$3 to \$5 million per year to \$94 million.

"The only way we could have done that was because of partnerships," Edwards said. "It meant expanding partnerships within local jurisdictions so that we could provide them more funding to get more staff on the ground."

Hennepin County, Minn.

Hennepin County Administrator David Hough said he was reminded of how committed the county's 9,000 employees are and how quickly they adapted to new environments.

"We showed resilience, innovation with a very talented staff overnight and sustained it long term and I think from that, we're better as an organization," he added. He described how the county's previous investments in information technology made an easier transition when switching to working from home.



Hough

"I'm really proud the organization was able to do that nimbly, responsibly, without missing a beat and maintain our level of service to our residents," he said. He also described the "Future Ready Hennepin County" initiative, which involves county employees working in a more hybrid environment to better serve residents.

The county's capacity to innovate has enhanced the organization's ability to serve the public, he noted, adding the crisis has driven significant change in the county's operation and how it will evolve in the future.

In addition to the pandemic, Hennepin County also dealt with the repercussions from the George Floyd murder.

"The resilience that we learned from the pandemic has also helped us with what appears — crisis upon crisis in the justice system and other systems," he said.

King County, Wash.

King County also learned how strong community relationships and trust are key to success in times of crisis. The county learned that these relationships need to be developed prior to emergencies, specifically with public health and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

"We're proud of the fast and nimble work we're doing, thanks to strong coordination with partners, long hours from staff and the tireless work of volun-

teers," said Kate Cole, spokesperson for Public Health Seattle and King County.

The county identified who was not "at the table" and worked to quickly build relationships with those stakeholders, according to Cole.

King County also learned about the importance of funding public health infrastructure prior to an emergency.

Cole said the public health department for Seattle and King County was chronically underfunded for two decades and she highlighted the need for more healthcare system preparedness and surge capacity.

"This chronic underfunding has made it more difficult to respond quickly and effectively to COVID-19, particularly early on in the pandemic," Cole said.

RURAL COUNTIES

Cavalier County, N.D.

Cavalier County Commissioner Stanley Dick said the county learned early in the pandemic about the capacity for reliable Internet and broadband, despite being in rural North Dakota.

But with the technology allowing for more remote options, Dick said the county quickly realized that virtually running government is not the best way to run govern-



Dick

See LESSONS
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COUNTIES, IT'S TIME TO *THRIVE*

by **Larry Johnson**
NACo president

Thanks to the tireless efforts of counties across the nation, America did not allow COVID-19 to break us.

All across the country, counties provided meals to the hungry, helped small businesses that were struggling, provided vital care, testing and vaccinations and kept the focus on our residents, doing our best to protect their health and our communities.

Now, as we edge closer to the end of the pandemic, our goal is not just to survive, but to THRIVE. Just as how it's been in counties' DNA to do the things crucial to battling COVID-19, counties are now set up to not just get back to where we were, but to excel and build the foundation for a prosperous future.

With the vital assistance from the federal government in the American Rescue Plan, which delivered shares of \$65.1 billion directly to counties of every size, and the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, which will help protect and

modernize our infrastructure, counties are being equipped with the resources that we need to succeed.

Counties will do that by focusing on six areas that fortify what we do and allow us to best serve our residents:

‘Congress has made historic investments in our nation’s counties, and it’s up to us to show our representatives that it was a good deal for everyone.’

■ **Technology** – equipping counties to expand broadband access to ensure all residents can learn, do business and communicate effectively

■ **Health** – improving our overall health and well-being

■ **Readiness** – preparing the county workforce to gain the skills they need

■ **Infrastructure** – strengthening resilience and the backbone of our communities

■ **Vulnerable communities** – advancing equity, strengthening the safety net and ensuring that our residents

have the help they need

■ **Economic opportunities** – creating conditions for all of us to compete in the 21st century economy.

That is how we will THRIVE.

This is happening in each of the

3,069 counties across the nation, and I'm seeing that firsthand as I travel the country as your NACo president. I'm seeing it happen at home in DeKalb County, Ga., I'm seeing it in the rural counties of southern Utah. I'm hearing it at state association conferences, the Rural Action Caucus and Western Interstate region. But it's important for everyone to hear what I hear.


NACo's *Untold Stories* campaign is a way to highlight what your county has done to move out of the pandemic and into a prosperous future, and sharing

your story is the best way to guide and inspire other counties.

Congress has made historic investments in our nation's counties, and it's up to us to show our representatives that it was a good deal for everyone. It is a chance for more people to see what we already know: That counties are leaders in safeguarding our residents and building a nation positioned for the future.

You can view NACo's Untold Stories resources at www.naco.org/UntoldStories.

This is an opportunity to showcase and highlight your tenacity, your innovation, your partnerships and the responsibilities that you have accomplished with this federal aid.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, counties have been central to America's resiliency in the face of an uncertain world. We're coming out of survival mode. It's time to thrive. 

Johnson was elected NACo president July 12 at NACo's Annual Conference in Prince George's County, Md. He is a DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner.



NACo President Larry Johnson addresses members at the 2021 Annual Conference in Prince George's County, Md. Photo by Hugh Clarke

COUNTIES GET CREATIVE TO HELP RESIDENTS WITH COVID RECOVERY FUNDING

by Sarah Edwards

The State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Fund, part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which NACo helped to develop and strongly advocated to pass, allocates \$65.1 billion directly to every county across the nation. These funds provide direct, flexible aid for every county, parish and borough in America.

Counties are on the front lines in delivering this aid to residents and are a driving force connecting communities and strengthening the economy. Counties can invest Recovery Funds into a broad range of programs, services and projects

under the following categories to support the public health response: address negative economic impacts caused by COVID-19, replace lost revenue, provide premium pay to essential workers and invest in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure.

Counties have begun allocating ARPA funds toward both short and long-term projects within these categories. A significant portion of counties are utilizing funds to improve broadband infrastructure and expand service to underserved parts of the county, recoup lost revenue incurred over the past year and restore government services that were previously cut or placed

on hold.

Many counties are also utilizing the funds to strengthen local social safety nets, such as expanding childcare provider access, investing in affordable housing, providing additional workforce development opportunities and expanding public health outreach and access to care.

For example, Travis County, Texas has allocated \$250,000 to develop a comprehensive method of tackling the interconnected issues of behavioral health, mental health and substance use disorders that were worsened due to the pandemic. Additionally, Dane County, Wis. invested \$13.2 million to launch and maintain a rehousing initiative

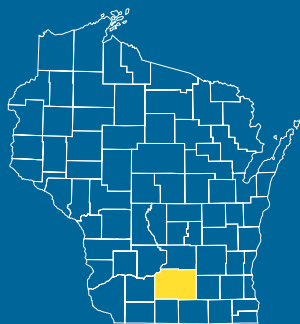
that will transition households into permanent housing through case management and support services.

Furthermore, Nassau County, N.Y. set aside \$500,000 for a new resource center dubbed “Boost Nassau” that will serve as a one-stop-shop for information and guidance on the various programs available to small business owners and non-profits in the county. Lastly, Kern County, Calif. plans to devote \$10 million to outfit all county parks with public Wi-Fi and address technology equity gaps.

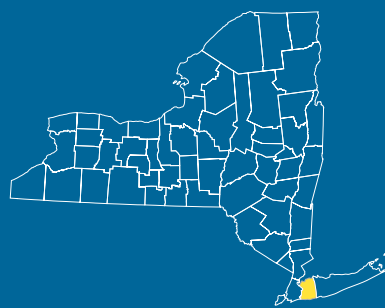
Sarah Edwards is a research associate in NACo’s Counties Futures Lab.



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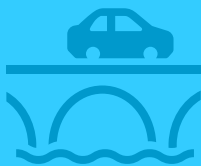


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COUNTIES ARE INVESTING FISCAL RECOVERY FUNDS IN:



TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE



BROADBAND



PUBLIC HEALTH



HOUSING



SMALL BUSINESS
ASSISTANCE



EMPLOYMENT



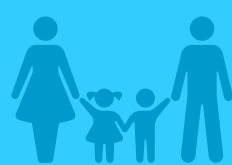
HUMAN SERVICES



JUSTICE &
PUBLIC SAFETY



DIVERSITY, EQUITY
& INCLUSION



CHILDREN & FAMILIES



RECREATION



TOURISM



COUNTY ECONOMIES



LOST REVENUE



TECHNOLOGY

ANNUALLY, COUNTIES INVEST OVER \$600 BILLION, INCLUDING:

\$107 billion
in justice and public safety

\$103 billion
in education

\$100 billion
in community health and hospitals

\$63 billion
in human services

\$60 billion
in transportation

\$23 billion
in administrative services

\$23 billion
in sewage and solid waste
management

\$20 billion
in public amenities

\$16 billion
in utilities

\$13 billion
in housing and community
development

Visit NACo's COVID-19 Recovery Clearinghouse for more information and guidance:
www.NACo.org/COVID-19-Recovery-Clearinghouse

'We're proud of the nimble work we're doing, thanks to strong coordination...'

From LESSONS pg H2

ment.

"In rural areas, everybody knows everybody," he said. "Good government is based on people and is social and just knowing what people's needs are, what they're talking about, some of the issues and some of the problems that they're dealing with and you can't deal with them when you do it over the Internet."

He said the elderly population specifically did not have access to laptops and felt uncomfortable communicating virtually.

"If we have another one [a pandemic], I'm a little afraid that we aren't going to take it serious,"

— Stanley Dick

The county only held one fully virtual meeting but continued to stream via Facebook Live for months to meet open records laws, despite little participation.

"If we have another one [a pandemic], I'm a little afraid that we aren't going to take it serious," Dick said.

Potter County, Pa.

Commissioner Paul Heimel said the county has learned a lot about the im-



Heimel

portance of disseminating accurate information about COVID-19 throughout the pandemic.

Potter County does not have a county-based public health department, making it more challenging to provide residents with access to information.

Heimel said when the emergency order was lifted in Pennsylvania, the state Department of Health no longer issued community-specific information on positive COVID cases.

"We have a large county with a very spread-out population, and we are unable to inform our citizens because of this," he said.

Heimel, who has a background in journalism, took the matter into his own hands and provided residents with a daily summary of COVID-19 information. He stressed the importance of providing reliable information in terms of vaccines

and case counts in specific pockets where there may be larger incidences of the virus spreading.

"I found myself kind of the clearing-house for information," Heimel said.

He continues to publish daily updates on COVID cases in Potter County.

Eureka County, Nev.

Commission Chairman J.J. Goicoechea said during the pandemic, the county identified that it was lagging behind in some social services.

During the initial stay-at-home lockdown, through the first surge of the pandemic, it became apparent that the county was going to put a strain on senior centers, meal deliveries and assisting vulnerable populations, he said.

EMTs stepped up and went door to door to make visits and hold vaccination clinics, he noted.

"As this continued to strain the resources of the state, we knew we were

going to have to step up and do our own," he said.

Eureka County does not have a county health district structure, meaning it relied heavily on the state and neighboring counties.

"It became just increasingly apparent that we were going to have to do something different," he said. Goicoechea, with a background as a veterinarian and with public health training, said he stepped up to a new role serving as the health officer for the county after the former officer resigned toward the beginning of the pandemic.

"I ended up having to assume that role, because we didn't have anybody else in our county that would be able to do that health officer duty," he said.

Eureka County is now standing up a health district with neighboring counties. The county used American Rescue Plan funds with neighboring counties to create the regional health district.

Goicoechea said he feels confident the county is better positioned to handle a public health crisis in the future.

"We will be in a better place now, beyond a doubt we'll be able to take care of ourselves," he said. **ti**



Goicoechea

UNTOLD STORIES

Together, we can tell the full story of county efforts in responding to the coronavirus pandemic and driving recovery in our communities.

Join NACo's **Untold Stories** campaign to highlight the human impact of county services.

Visit [NACo.org/UntoldStories](https://www.naco.org/UntoldStories) to submit your story and access resources to engage local your local audience, including a letter to the editor template, a media relations guide, social media templates and more.





COVID-19 relief dollars directly benefit residents

by Chris Coudriet

In April, the message I shared with you talked about the commissioners approval of a strategy to utilize the \$45.4 million in federal money from the American Rescue Plan to address the economic and social challenges our community has endured throughout the pandemic.

The goal was simple — help businesses and families that have faced hardships caused by COVID-19 with a variety of assistance opportunities.

Some of these would provide financial relief or help pay for needed services. Others would offer much needed emotional support.

Back then, it was talk, and we all know talk is great, but it must become action. And I'm happy to say, it has become action.

Multiple initiatives were created and are continuing to develop as avenues to help our community. Today, we are seeing that money make its way to our citizens for the relief they desperately need.

Already, New Hanover County has provided around \$2.3 million in funding to 106 locally owned businesses as part of the Hospitality, Retail and Service Grant

Program established in partnership with the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce and City of Wilmington.

The program, all together, granted 192 businesses with over \$4.2 million in funding through our partnership with the city. The grants ranged in size from \$10,000-50,000, with 71 percent of the recipients being minority or women owned businesses.

And it's not just about the businesses, but the workers they'll need to operate. More than 70 individuals have already signed up for job training opportunities through Step Up Wilmington's paid workforce development program being funded by the county, with more chances to learn coming soon.

Details on opportunities StepUp Wilmington is offering can be found at their website, StepUpWilmington.org.

Basic needs have also been addressed as part of our programs, with CFPUA's water bill assistance program already helping families pay their outstanding balances. The program, which is shared between New Hanover County and the City of Wilmington, has already received more than 550 applications. To date, more than \$16,000 in payments

have been made with more requests being reviewed and approved each day. For more information on the program, visit CFPUA.org at financial assistance application.

The Broadband Assistance Program is helping families with school-aged children stay connected, so homework can actually be done at home instead of a community center or another public Wi-Fi location. More than 315 families have been approved so far and they are moving to the next steps of getting connected.

These families will now have in-home broadband service for up to two years to help their students stay connected and be more successful.

There are requirements to be approved, including enrollment in SNAP, Medicaid or Work First, and having school-aged children (5-18 years old) living at home. For more on the program, you can visit NHCGov.com/CovidRelief.

Support of residents so they can stay in their homes has been a key piece of our plan also. The county's Mortgage Assistance Program has provided over \$705,000 in assistance so far to homeowners; and the Workforce Housing Gap Rental Assistance Program is currently working with around 70 eligible residents to provide monthly subsidies of \$200 per month for a single person and \$300 per month for a multiple-person household. This is going to help fill a real need for these residents and ease their housing cost burden so they can live and thrive in our county.


Through ARP funds, we are also providing water and sewer infrastructure to Cape Fear Habitat for two affordable

housing neighborhoods, as well as Eden Village for their tiny home community for the chronically homeless. Commissioners also recently approved using ARP funds for gap financing for the Starway Village affordable housing project, and we are currently in the design stages for water and sewer at Blue Clay Business Park which will aid economic development in the northern part of the county, leading to more, good paying jobs.

The county has also made it a priority to focus on the mental health of our community — specifically children, students and seniors. By adding capacity for our school mental health therapists and other important physical and mental health roles, we are working to ensure our schools and students have the support they so desperately need, and that our seniors have a lifeline for health and wellness.

And we're just getting started.

As I said previously, the goal for this money has always been to help our community respond and begin recovering from the adversities that have manifested in the face of COVID-19.

I believe we are off to a good start, but the work remains ongoing and our commitment to help remains steadfast. This I know is certain — we are grateful for the opportunity to turn words into action and to help our community through this difficult time. 

Chris Coudriet is the county manager of New Hanover County, N.C. You can view many of the county's programs and see an outline of their ARP framework at NHCGov.com/CovidRelief.

COVID-19 RECOVERY RESOURCES

County recovery funds database

This is a collection of more than 187 county plans that describe the investment funds from the \$65.1 billion allocated directly to every county across the nation through the American Rescue Plan Act. 150 of the plans are sourced from the county's performance report, as submitted to the Department of the U.S. Treasury. The plans can be sorted by topic, county size, state and source. Read analysis and trends of county investment priorities, share how your county is supporting your residents and explore our database of county ARPA Recovery Fund investment plans.

www.naco.org/resources/featured/county-investments-american-rescue-plan-recovery-funds

Mental health resources from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Recent data and reports show that fatal drug overdoses in the United States have been increasing before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sub-

stance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:

www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus

Resources for workforce development and jobs training in response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected U.S. employment patterns. The federal government has responded with new initiatives and flexibilities to improve the capacity of workforce development and job training assistance programs to address changing labor market conditions. This Insight describes selected federal assistance programs available to state, local, and tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11423>

Health equity resources addressing disproportionate outcomes for marginalized groups

National Academy of Medicine's

Culture of Health Program advances the scientific underpinnings for progress in health equity and sharing evidence-based strategies to bring about the transformation in policy decision-making and public recognition necessary to dismantle structural racism and ultimately achieve health equity for all – mitigating the effects of the current crisis and safeguarding the well-being of our nation for the future. Resources on health equity in the context of COVID-19 are available:

<https://nam.edu/programs/culture-of-health/resources-on-health-equity-in-the-context-of-covid-19-and-disproportionate-outcomes-for-marginalized-groups/>

Infrastructure resources

The COVID-19 pandemic has made a difficult situation with regards to America's infrastructure worse. A sizable portion of our existing infrastructure systems are supported with user-generated revenue streams. With the onset of the pandemic, commercial water use was down, commuters have been staying off the roads and away from trans-

it, and airports were virtually empty for months. Meanwhile, municipal and state budgets buckled under unprecedented demands, meaning less support is available for parks, schools, and other publicly-owned infrastructure, precisely at the time we should be investing.

The American Society of Civil Engineers adapted its Infrastructure Report Card to reflect construction-ready infrastructure projects covering the categories of dams, inland waterways, clean and drinking water and multimodal freight.

<https://infrastructurereportcard.org/stimulus-relief-map/>

Broadband resources

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration's BroadbandUSA program promotes innovation and economic growth by supporting efforts to expand broadband connectivity and meaningful use across America. BroadbandUSA serves state, local, and tribal governments, industry and nonprofits that need to enhance broadband connectivity and promote digital inclusion.

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/>



HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

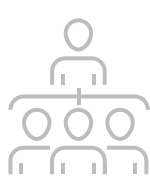


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THE ACADEMY FOCUSES ON FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS:



LEAD



ORGANIZE



COLLABORATE



DELIVER



COMMUNICATE

The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy empowers frontline county government professionals with fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and residents.

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With a curriculum developed by **General Colin Powell** and public and private sector leaders, NACo High Performance Leadership Academy gives students the opportunity to learn from world-class faculty. All content is guided by an expert facilitator.



COUNTIES BEEF UP ONLINE SERVICES DURING PANDEMIC



by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Counties have faced constant struggles to adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Simple procedures once handled in person are now held online as residents seek out forms, search for information and ask questions. Many counties were forced to create new ways to interact with their residents by overhauling their websites or by finding cheaper alternatives.

Offering services on the Internet is also a way to reach those who have difficulty getting to a physical building, even when there isn't a pandemic. "When government is constantly being asked to do more with less, the Internet is playing a vital role in allowing government to better serve all of its citizens" the Department of Justice noted in a report back in 2010, on how local governments with accessible online features are reaching out to the disabled community and others.

For IT Director Chet Biggers of Robertson County Tennessee, doing more with less is his specialty. Biggers is the sole IT specialist in charge of supporting 24 Commissioners and every county employee in all departments. When the pandemic hit, Biggers said "It was a challenge in itself, just to get them [County Officials] acclimated to standard protocol." Every experience was new and came with unique challenges.

A well-designed website can be a powerful resource for the community, providing easy access to information about county procedures, COVID testing, emergencies and much more. In 2020, many counties found their online systems were unable to handle county residents' needs and began the process of creating or updating a website. Now in 2021, many have launched their sites through independent contractors or municipal-focused developers.

Pandemic uncovers online struggles

Pike County, Pa. launched a redesigned website after the struggles of the pandemic made their previous website difficult to use.

The cumbersome site, built at least 20 years ago, was redesigned from the ground up to improve the user experience and provide as much information as possible with as few clicks as possible.

Residents can get email and text notifications, quickly find county news and announcements, access county meeting recordings and much more. Pike County has joined a growing wave of rural counties that are finding new ways to interact with their residents.

County launches new site during pandemic

In Prince William County, Va., the county started rebuilding its website in 2019 and launched the new site earlier this year, in April. Director of Communications Sherrie Johnson and the county's IT Department tackled the challenge of crafting an up-to-date website during the pandemic. At a cost of \$1.5 million, the website rebuild was a massive undertaking made easier through extensive grant funding covering more than 50 percent of the undertaking.

Prince William County formed several committees, reviewing more than 100 award-winning websites to narrow down the key features that would best serve their residents and identifying what the old website struggled to provide. Johnson said the old website had "complicated navigation" which was "disorienting to site visitors." The Prince William County website is a .gov site, which the Federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and NACo highly recommend counties utilize for the additional security.

The county was an early adopter of social media and broadcast technology,

allowing for an easier time reaching residents and providing the information necessary during the pandemic, despite the aging website. Preparation before the crisis paid off for the county.

Municipal-focused web developers build websites with the goal of making them easy to use, providing a network for communicating and educating municipal leaders on technology issues and handling the increasingly difficult challenge of online security.

Website development can be expensive depending on what the website needs to accomplish, what laws it must comply with and how many residents it serves. With a price tag that can easily run between a few thousand dollars to well over \$1 million, many counties have turned to alternate means of creating online spaces for residents.

Meetings previously held in person transferred to online platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, prompting many counties to ask critical questions about online security, data storage, online records access and more, after a wave of hackers disrupted online meetings early in the pandemic.

Across the United States, IT departments worked behind the scenes to create safe and secure ways for county officials to work from home. In rural Iowa, IT departments had to adapt quickly to the changes. In Buchanan County, Iowa, IT Director Jason Vandenburg took a program used by the local police department to serve county employees.

Buchanan said they use a Zero Trust Network Access (ZTNA) system to allow for remote access in the field. These programs work by only allowing a user to access information necessary for their position.

Vandenburg said early in the pandemic, a lot of counties discovered how important IT professionals are as everyone was forced to work from home, including the IT department. Vandenburg said it is

critical for counties to begin upgrading their servers with at least a backup solution in case of emergencies.

In Crawford County, Iowa, the IT department was formed during the pandemic and IT Director Jacob Langholz spent his time building infrastructure to maintain security in the county.

Langholz noted that a lot of the typical security concerns were unfounded since the infrastructure was yet to be built. "You can't break a window if it doesn't exist," he said.

Cybersecurity is key

Meanwhile, Langholz has been implementing new online features that will allow for a host of new options, like online streaming of county meetings. He has also been teaching the community about cybersecurity.

"You have to be just as vigilant about a computer as you would a cash register or safe," he said. Iowa counties also received help through the state, which has contracted with cybersecurity companies to further boost computer security.

Some counties have found it easier to live stream and record meetings by using YouTube and Facebook Live, which provide free video storage and is easily accessible and understood by most residents.

Ravalli County, Mont. has a long history of streaming and recording meetings as well as publishing them on their website. Due to COVID restrictions, the public comment part of their meetings went completely online, and residents were encouraged to weigh in on issues via email, telephone and Zoom. Even counties prepared for online participation had to adapt.

Whether through creating Facebook groups, building a website from scratch, or updating old equipment, counties across the country face considerable growing pains as they expand further online to meet residents' needs. ■

California county emphasizes emotional well-being in pivot to preschool distance learning

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Transitioning to distance learning was hard enough for San Bernardino County, California's preschool students, as they looked at the practical aspects of changing their entire way of learning during the pandemic.

The county saw early on that it would need to put as much effort into supporting the emotional needs of the students and their families as it would into academic work. Within weeks, more than 6,000 families spread throughout the largest county in the contiguous United States were receiving instruction and services from a program that saw itself working on a long timeline when many nationwide were expecting a quick resolution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I don't think anyone anticipated 12 to 18 months of services being impacted, but within two weeks, we had our operations in place," said Arlene Molina, deputy director of the county's Preschool Services Department. Once the county had its safer-at-home order, Molina knew her department would have to help families navigate the emotional challenges of an uncertain new world.

On the educational side, the department collaborated with First 5, Children's Fund, and the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools to fund the digital Footsteps to Brilliance reading kindergarten preparatory program. The county supplemented surplus equipment with equipment paid for by CARES Act funding to provide mobile phone hot spots, tablets and Chromebooks to families in need. The Child and Adult Care Food Program made drive-by deliveries of fresh produce to help meet families' needs.

The department conducted 1,270 mental health tele-sessions, distributed more than 97,000 grab-and-go lunches and 5,000 boxes of produce and loaned out 103 mobile hot spots, 642 surplus or used tablets, and 35 Chromebooks.

"In our reimagining of our face-to-face



"We're not only an educational program, we're not only a mental health program — we're a comprehensive social services program, so we have nutritionists on staff, we have behavioral specialists on staff..." — Arline Molina

groups, we mailed materials for the home to replicate the experience," Molina said. "We sent parents weekly routines and materials, books, paper, pencils... links to videos, storytelling for before and after the session.

"We wanted to help create a routine," because the lives these families were experiencing were anything but routine.

The county formed a parent support group, with monthly meetings for parents who didn't necessarily need intensive services but were feeling the effects of isolation. "We talked about things like

parenting fatigue, challenging behaviors and effective routines," Molina noted.

"We had those conversations based on what the parents were saying," Molina said. "They might not need intensive mental health services, but we need a space to talk to other parents, being mediated by someone who has access and knowledge of community resources.

"We work with some of the most vulnerable populations, many who are dealing with additional challenges like children with special needs," she said, so additional guided support was crucial, as was incorporating wellness checks for the parents, in addition to children.

"Countless families lost people who were important to them, so they had to have discussions about that with them, so we offered guidance for that," Molina said. "A lot of families faced the question of 'how to keep your family safe as you start to move outside of the home — what's safe to do in a park?'"

"We consistently communicated with families and changed our messaging as was appropriate."


It wasn't all turned on a dime.

"For the last three or four years, we had a sharp focus on trauma treatment, so it wasn't a huge jump to take our trauma treatment services program and figure out — how do we work together with families and teachers and clinicians to support families who are coping with their own grief and losses?" Molina said. "We took into account their cognitive expectations for a 3-, 4-, 5-year old, talking to them in a way they could understand and process their own grief," not just for lost family members and friends, but lost time and opportunities.

Families gave ample feedback, both directly and sending in photos of the delivered produce in use.

"We're not only an educational program, we're not only a mental health program — we're a comprehensive social services program, so we have nutritionists on staff, we have behavioral specialists on staff," Molina said. "A lot of that comes because the model we're in looks at families holistically. We aim to provide comprehensive services to families."

Molina was quick to credit the flexibility of county staff members, many of whom were dealing with the same issues at the same time as the families they served.

"We were able to do that because we had so many partners and because our staff was willing to make so many adjustments for the needs of our parents," she said. 

San Bernardino County's Distance Learning program won a 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the human services category.



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COVID-19 better prepares counties for next unforeseen emergency

by Marc Molinaro

Every American has been impacted in some manner by the COVID-19 pandemic; I, myself, have experienced the loss of a loved one, my father, as have hundreds of thousands of Americans. This pandemic confirmed what county governments throughout New York State — and indeed, throughout the nation — have known for years: The best, most effective governance comes from the leaders who are closest to the residents they serve. Throughout the pandemic, while mandates have been handed down from Washington, D.C. and state capitals, local governments — county governments, in particular — have been the boots on the ground, providing immediate guidance and answers to residents' concerns.

For those of us with years of public service experience, this was not a new notion. Every county has confronted its own emergencies in the past, though nothing nearing the scope of COVID-19. Still, the lessons learned over decades — effective leadership, communication, collaboration chief being among them — well prepared county governments for this unprecedented and ever-evolving pandemic and the response it necessitated.

While governors handed down

wide-reaching decisions from Albany and Austin to Tallahassee and Topeka, it was up to more than 3,000 county governments nationwide to interpret these directives, rely on their individual community's specific needs, and put these plans into action. Decisive action on the part of county leaders to stop the spread of this novel coronavirus — whether that was suspending social gatherings, closing schools or something similar — have meant the difference between life and death. The difficult decisions made at the county level weren't always popular, particularly as the pandemic has worn on, but county leaders had to make public health and safety their top priorities.

The need for clear, concise, and factual communication has never been more important than during this pandemic. Especially in areas where traditional media outlets have been dwindling for years, such as my own Dutchess County, the importance of keeping our community informed through social media has been elevated. In our county, for example, we innovated by conducting live online video discussions with residents once or twice a week, allowing residents to receive critical updates while allowing them to have their questions answered by local experts. Online events like these


allow county leaders to broadcast live to a vast number of their constituents with just a few keystrokes — providing up-to-date information at a moment's notice and allowing these residents to interact with their leaders, giving them a fuller sense of the situation around them and the decisions being made on their behalf.

Governors often formed the COVID policies that affected millions of residents in their states, but those chief executives were rarely — if ever — available to address the individual concerns of the residents they represent. Rather, it has been the county officials who live among the residents impacted by these actions who have brought real answers to the questions their neighbors raised. The dissemination of information at the local level, though, has only been part of the equation.

Communication among counties has seen a boon during these uncertain times, allowing county leaders to consult with their counterparts next door or across the state to collaborate and bring about their best policies for their respective communities. Every county across the country has its own strengths and weaknesses, potential threats and obstacles which make their community unique. We all, however, have good ideas that can transcend geographic borders and benefit other counties; the ability to share those solutions has been invaluable. From the first day of the pandemic, county leaders through-

out New York, for example, have worked to share strategies and best practices to bring about the best outcome for their individual communities. No county has worked its way through this pandemic by itself; rather, we've all relied on the assistance of our colleagues in other counties to bring about a larger good.

Every county executive in New York has unique stories to tell, detailing how they responded to the challenges they face; multiply that by 50 states and the individual county perspectives on this pandemic seem endless. One thing is clear, however: Each of us will be judged on the lessons we learned during this unparalleled time. Every story is important, each perspective valuable in its own way.

Sadly, there will be another pandemic that reaches our shores; the only question is when — it might be a year, a decade or a century from now. Though we can't predict its severity or effect, we can harken back to the lessons learned during COVID-19 and the response of our counties nationwide. County leaders throughout the United States can rightly be proud of the role they played keeping their communities as informed and safe as possible — confident in the knowledge their experiences during COVID-19 have better prepared their counties and this nation for the next unforeseen emergency. 

Molinaro is the county executive for Dutchess County, N.Y.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION LENDS MORE FLEXIBILITY TO RECOVERY FUND SPENDING FOR COUNTIES

by Jessica Jennings

Across the country, counties are continuing a frontline response to the devastating effects of COVID-19, as well as beginning to look toward economic recovery. As county officials consider how best to utilize the historic investments in local governments made by Congress through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), recent bipartisan action in both the Senate and House of Representatives could provide counties with additional flexibility to use ARPA funds to meet many public infrastructure responsibilities.

Last month, the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act (S. 3011/H.R. 5735), unanimously passed the Senate and now awaits consideration in the House of Representatives. This legislation would provide additional flexibility for the \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (Recov-

ery Fund) authorized by ARPA.

Specifically, if enacted, the bill would collectively allow counties nationwide to utilize the Recovery Fund for roughly \$27 billion in new transportation and infrastructure projects and over \$17 billion in Treasury-defined government services.

The Recovery Fund, which NACo helped develop and strongly advocated for its passage, is a historic investment in our nation's counties. These funds provide direct, flexible aid to every county, parish and borough in America. The legislation would strengthen the Recovery Fund by providing counties with the flexibility to invest funds in transportation, infrastructure and other vital public services.

Infrastructure continues to be at the forefront of the legislative agenda in Washington, D.C., where lawmakers are currently considering critical pieces of legislation, such as S. 3011/H.R. 5735, the FY 2022 reconciliation package and the bipartisan infrastructure bill. A time-

line remains unclear for passage of the latter two, whose fates have been tied together by Democratic leadership in both the House and Senate.


Meanwhile, progress is being made on other fronts. This week, the House released the text of H.R. 5376, the Build Back Better Act (BBBA), a \$1.9 trillion reconciliation package for FY 2022. A mostly social spending package, the BBBA would also provide additional investments in transportation aimed at curbing carbon emissions, increasing equity and expanding accessibility to underserved communities.

Once passed by the lower chamber and scored by the Congressional Budget Office, the BBBA is likely to face significant amendments in the Senate before being sent back to the House to resolve differences between the two — a process that could take anywhere from weeks to months and one likely requiring additional Continuing Resolutions into 2022 to

keep the federal government operational.

At present in the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) can only lose three votes, inconsistent priorities between progressives and moderates within the Democratic caucus are threatening to delay the timeline on a simultaneous vote once again for the BBBA and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684).

Nov. 5 is the most recent date the House was poised to consider both bills and failed to do so. Holding up the support of some Democrats is the lack of CBO score, which could come as early as the middle of November or as late as Thanksgiving.

NACo continues to advocate on behalf of America's counties, owners and operators of a vast amount of the nation's infrastructure, for the final passage of the critical investments in local infrastructure that are currently awaiting votes in Congress. 

the **HR** **DOCTOR** | with Philpot & Winkeler

Pandemic: Seeing the Stars in the Darkness

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Only in the darkness can you see the stars.”

Over the last 19 months, we have been in a darkness different from others we have known, but there have been stars. There have been moments of success, collaboration and service and we would like to share with you 12 things we learned about public service and the proud employees who protect the vulnerable members of our communities with dedication and passion.

We hope you will take this moment to reflect on these lessons, pause and see if they ring true for you, or if you know others that don’t appear on our list. As we enter the season of thankfulness, let us be reminded of the silver linings we have found among extraordinary challenges.

1. We are capable of great things.

While some may have thought government was synonymous with bureaucracy, we knew differently, and the pandemic allowed us to prove it. We pivoted quickly, taking our desktops, monitors and chairs home and redefined the workplace. We worked harder, found solutions we hadn’t had to look for before, grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve our community.

2. We can meet customers where they are. While the world changed, our customers’ needs changed too, and we found new ways to meet them where they were. Online portals, drop boxes, drive up windows, shopping mall locations, lobby appointments. We worked diligently to find ways to meet customers and keep each other safe.

3. We can learn technology quickly. We learned faster than ever before, virtual meetings, electronic files, portals, channels, one directional interviewing, webinars, virtual conferences, asynchronous learning, docking stations and cloud-based phones. Previously, we might have learned these new things over months, after pouring over an implementation schedule and in-person trainings with a manual. We might have even done it grudgingly. We won’t underestimate technology’s abilities again. We also honor Information Systems staff everywhere for rolling technology out quickly and supporting it tirelessly.

4. Everyone can contribute to sustainability. We went paperless, drove less, and found ourselves in fewer parking lots. We found ways to lessen the footprints of our buildings as we thought



about what the workplace of the future may now be. Plans for building expansions were scrapped and parking was better than ever before.

5. Remote work is a tool in our toolbox. Instead of wondering how remote work would function or how we would supervise remote workers, everyone was instantly an expert. We didn’t over-think it, we just did it. We communicated effectively as we navigated the new space and adjusted as we went.

6. We honor the whole employee. Rather than only seeing employees in work mode, we took work to where employees are whole. We saw kids and dogs, cats and partners in virtual meetings and our sense of connection was deepened. We saw into the heart of people’s homes, their bookshelves and family pictures in the background. Employees were able to be more vulnerable in their communication in the comfort of their safe spaces. The virtual distance gave individuals courage to have crucial conversations, gave them the ability to momentarily stop sharing their video when emotions were overwhelming and allowed them to connect more deeply than ever before.

7. Structured flexibility is crucial. Communicating structure and expectations was critical as the word “normal” didn’t exist. Employees navigated between staggered schedules, flexible schedules and remote work. They

participated on mini teams and knew who was working when to ensure operational effectiveness.

8. Periodic resetting of boundaries is important. The pandemic blurred the lines between work and home as work hours became too flexible, employees had to articulate their boundaries and make them explicit.

9. Remote work and mini teams compel us to rethink culture and belonging. How do we onboard new employees and communicate our mission, vision, values and purpose? What is our onboarding plan when a new employee doesn’t tour the office and meet everyone, when they can’t shadow someone for a few days?

10. Cliques have less influence when we remote work, stagger work and work in mini teams. This makes the larger group more effective and more cohesive. We needed to make time for “water cooler talk” and it involved larger groups.

11. Employees can stay home when sick, regardless of the illness, rather than sharing their cold. We are wary of our coughing and sneezing, not so confident that it’s “just allergies.” We can use our leave time, particularly sick time, to keep each other safe.

12. Creativity allows us to shine brightly. Our creative ideas combined with our willingness to try new things gave

failure a new, less frightening definition as we refined and tried alternative ideas. While in unknown territory, all things are new and creative, many things need to be refined.

We also learned the value of epidemiologists and the strength of employees who had to work in-person every day of the pandemic. We found new depth of meaning to the words “communication” and “transparency.” We found passion and purpose in our service roles. We worked with authenticity and heart. We emphasized the importance as mental health as we could sense in ourselves and in others the strains that the pandemic was placing on all of us. We were the right people, in the right place at the right time to maintain the integrity of public service.

Twenty years from now, when someone asks what your pandemic experience was like, perhaps you will say it was a time of great teamwork, innovation and change. Or you will say it was one of the most rewarding times of your career, that a common experience brought us together in the darkness and we saw the stars. **HR**

From Coconino County, Ariz., HR gurus and contributors, Erika Philpot, human resources director and Rose Winkeler, deputy county attorney, address common and critical HR questions from their “boots on the ground” perspective.

Helping America prepare for and enjoy retirement

A message from NACo CEO/Executive Director, Matthew Chase

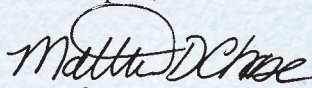
The National Association of Counties (NACo) is passionate about advancing excellence in public service to help people and places thrive across America. We pursue our mission by strengthening the leadership skills, knowledge and wellness of our nearly 40,000 county elected officials and more than 3.6 million county workforce. The most important asset across America's county governments are our people, with an amazing diversity of heritage, experience and talent.

That's why since 1981, we have partnered with Nationwide Retirement Solutions to help enhance the overall financial wellness and retirement security of our nation's county workforce and their families. Nationwide continues to innovate and create new and improved solutions that allow county employees to save extra money and plan effectively for their future. As a U.S. Based Mutual Company, Nationwide is one of the most progressive and caring corporate citizens in the country and their values align with those of NACo. They also have the proven experience, financial strength, corporate integrity and public sector focus that serves our state associations, county governments and county workforce best.

I encourage you to take advantage of the strength, resources, tools and services of our proud Partner, Nationwide Retirement Solutions. There is so much information in this brochure (www.naco.org/nationwidecapabilities) that can provide your county employees with sound financial strategies to a more secure financial retirement. Lastly, please share this information with other colleagues who may be able to add these services to their employee benefits.

We are steadfast in our pursuit to enrich our membership value exponentially, guided by the belief that stronger counties result in a stronger America.

With respect,


Matt Chase,
CEO/ Executive Director
NACo



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2022 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 12-16, 2022 | WASHINGTON HILTON | WASHINGTON, D.C.

..... ON THE MOVE➔

NACo OFFICERS AND STAFF

- **Sarah Edwards** has joined NACo as a research associate. She previously served as an American Rescue Plan fellow at NACo, as a graduate research assistant with the Metropolitan Policy Center and an interim program director for Girls on the Run San Diego. Sarah earned a bachelor’s degree in politics and is a master of public policy candidate at George Washington University.
- **Cara Hackett** has joined NACo as senior manager of corporate relations. She will be responsible for leading NACo’s Corporate Premier Program. She previously worked as a government affairs senior specialist at the Comcast Corporation. Hackett earned a bachelor’s degree in rhetoric and public advocacy with a minor in political science from Towson University.
- **Dakota Hendricks** has joined NACo as a junior staff writer for County News. He previously wrote for the Pike County Dispatch in Pennsylvania and he earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania.
- **Jereme Hines** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. He served as the chief of staff to South Carolina state Rep. Marvin Pendarvis and worked as a research analyst with Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities. He earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and government from the University of South Carolina.
- **Jennifer Kuiper** has joined NACo as an associate program director for Resilient Economies & Communities. She previously worked as senior director of policy and evaluation for District Bridges and executive director of Woodley Park Main Street. She earned a bachelor’s degree in American studies from Stanford University and a master’s of public policy from University of California Berkeley.
- **Zoey Shipley** has joined NACo as a corporate relations assistant. She previously worked as a paralegal for Krooth & Altman, LLP and as a public affairs specialist with the U.S. Attorney’s Office. She earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Iowa State University.
- Membership Director **Kim Hall** attended the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas Annual Conference in Williamson County.
- Northeast Region Representative **Mark Poloncarz**, Government Affairs Director **Mark Ritacco**, Associate Membership Director **John Losh** and Membership Associate **Maxx Silvan** attended the New Jersey Association of Counties Annual Conference in Atlantic County.
- Past President **Mary Ann Borgeson**, Chief Strategy Officer **Danny Melgoza** and **Losh** attended the Kansas Association of Counties Annual Conference in Johnson County.
- Associate Legislative Director **Jessica Jennings** attended the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma Fall Conference in Cleveland County.
- Executive Director **Matt Chase** attended the New Hampshire Association of Counties Annual Conference in Carroll County.
- President **Larry Johnson** and **Losh** attended the Tennessee County Services Association Fall Conference in Shelby County.
- Immediate Past President **Gary Moore** and **Hall** attended the Kentucky Association of Counties in Louisville-Jefferson County.
- **Losh** attended the County Officials Association of Tennessee Annual Convention in Hamilton County.
- **Johnson** and Associate Legislative Director **Jonathan Shuffield** attended the Arizona Association of Counties Annual Conference in Maricopa County.
- **Johnson, Moore**, Central Region Representative **Ron Berry, Hall** and **Losh** attended the Association County Commissioners of Georgia Annual Conference in Chatham County.
- **Johnson, Chase** and Program Director **Spencer Bridgers** attended the Virginia Association of Counties Annual Conference in Norfolk, formerly Lower Norfolk County.



Edwards



Hackett



Hendricks



Hines



Kulper



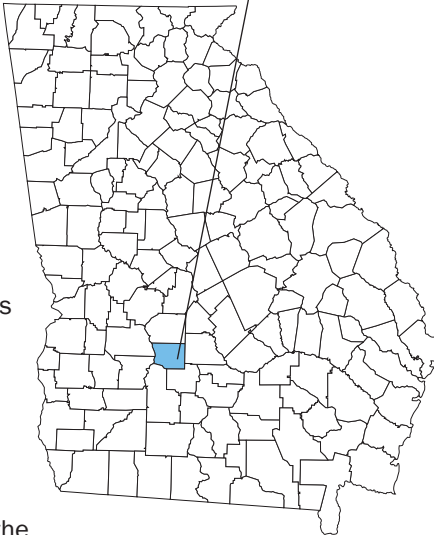
Shipley

GET TO KNOW...

Crisp County, Ga.

Welcome, Crisp County, Ga.

Located in central Georgia, Crisp County was formed in 1905. The county is named after Georgia Congressman Charles Frederick Crisp, who also served as Speaker of the House from 1891 to 1894. Its current population is around 23,000.



The county seat is Cordele, also known as the “Watermelon Capital of the World.” Cordele has held the Watermelon Days Festival each July for more than 70 years.

Crisp County is the first county in the United States to own and operate its own hydroelectric power plant in the county seat of Cordele. The project formed Lake Blackshear in its backwaters, which serves as the center of the Georgia Veterans State Park. The lake provides recreational activities for visitors and the area features two golf courses.

The Cordele Railroad Diamond is a railroad structure found in the county seat and marks the three different railroads that intersect within Crisp County. The county’s current largest employment sectors are health and social services followed by manufacturing, retail trade and agriculture.

Jazz singer Joe Williams was born in the county seat of Cordele.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



Joe Williams

BRIGHT IDEAS | ALASKA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

PROBLEM: An increase in online shopping diminished the local sales tax base in a state that does not impose a state sales tax.

SOLUTION: Create a remote sellers' tax commission to coordinate sales tax collection for remote sales.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

The Alaska Municipal League brought together a number of jurisdictions throughout the state to target a new tax base by standardizing sales tax collection for remote sellers.

Alaska is one of four states that does not have a state sales tax. Communities only have the authority to levy sales tax on businesses with a direct connection to the state.

"I think Alaska is in a unique position as a state without a state or a state level sales tax but with local governments who have the independent power to enact sales taxes," said Nils Andreassen, executive director of the Alaska Municipal League and the Alaska Remote Sellers Sales Tax Commission.

As more people switched to shopping online, specifically through the COVID-19 pandemic, the local sales tax base diminished.

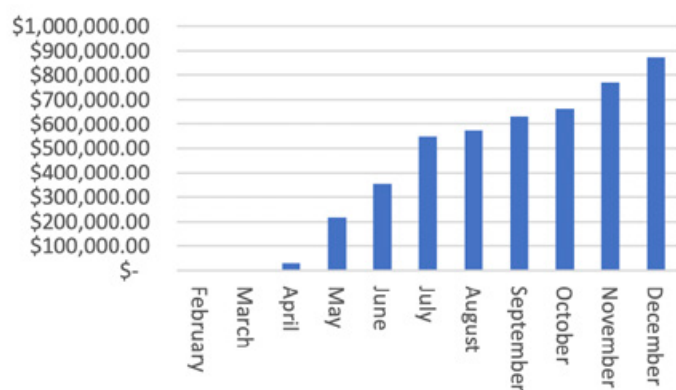
The Supreme Court ruled in the 2018 decision *South Dakota v. Wayfair, Inc.* that certain companies can be taxed on remote sales delivered into a taxing jurisdiction.

The Alaska Municipal League explored ways it could apply the decision to Alaska and formed the Remote Sellers Sales Tax Commission. Prior to the Supreme Court decision, national sellers were not required to collect sales tax on orders shipped to Alaska. The previous taxation standard only allowed sales tax to be collected from businesses with physical presence in the taxing state.

The commission administers sales tax collection for remote sales in Alaska communities, allowing communities to create a level playing field between



Collected Funds February - December 2020



local sellers and remote sellers and tap into a new tax base. Andreassen said it is governed independently of the Alaska Municipal League with members voting on the board of directors which then elects officers.

The commission formed with 14 member jurisdictions and is now approaching 40, according to Andreassen.

He explained that a seller that has \$100,000 or 200 transactions coming into any area of the state within one year has to comply with the remote sellers' tax collection in Alaska.

The seller registers with the commission and collaborates with the commission's staff to incorporate software into their online checkout pages that allow for tax collection. The software uses GIS coordinates to determine a buyer's address to see if they correspond with one of the member jurisdictions, which then correlates to the specific tax rate if the item is not exempt.

The Remote Sellers Sales Tax Commission provides an API code which automatically finds the rates. The sales tax is paid by

the buyer at checkout, then collected by the seller, which then submits to the commission what they've collected each month.

According to Andreassen, the commission had around 300 sellers registered at the end of June 2020. They now have 1,400 sellers. The commission collected \$300,000 in its first fiscal year to just under \$10 million in the most recent fiscal year.

Andreassen said the commission allows local communities to regain some of their sales tax base and continue to fund necessary municipal services.

"It's really spurred, I think, a lot of innovation within ALM [Alaska Municipal League] to be thinking differently about 'What kind of services can we provide members?'" he said.

Local governments can join the commission by signing an intergovernmental agreement. A total of 33 jurisdictions have adopted the code and combined, represent 83 percent of the taxable population in Alaska.

Alaska Municipal Sales Tax Program staff also engage in sales tax education on the national level and assist jurisdictions with sales tax edification, regulations and other trends. Staff also provide training on the tax filing system, the tax lookup map and on how to develop a tax filing portal.

Andreassen advised other counties with local governments that independently collect remote sellers' tax to not wait for the state to provide a solution.

"If we didn't work together, it wouldn't have come together," he said. "That would be our advice for other states and counties — is to really think about what is a collaborative process that gives you some control over all things that are important to you." **CN**

The Alaska Municipal League's Alaska Remote Sellers Sales Tax Commission is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Financial Management category.

ARIZONA

MARICOPA COUNTY has launched a new program to provide **low-interest loans to small businesses**. The county partnered with Prestamos CDFI, a division of nonprofit Chicanos Por La Causa, to provide \$13 million in total to small businesses. Maricopa County's Small Business Resilience Program will provide loans that range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 to eligible small businesses at 1 percent interest for up to five years, the *Phoenix Business Journal* reported. The county is also providing funds for up to five hours of business coaching for 2,500 small businesses to help owners with finances, strategic planning and marketing.

CALIFORNIA

SAN DIEGO COUNTY is helping provide county youth with green jobs through a **workforce partnership program**. The county estimated there are 31,000 county youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not in school or are unemployed, the *Times of San Diego* reported. The San Diego Workforce Partnership's County Youth Internship program will provide 40 youth with paid training through work placements at county departments that focus on the environment. The Board of Supervisors in March approved \$500,000 for paid employment opportunities for youth.

COLORADO

The **BOULDER COUNTY** District Attorney's Office has launched a pilot program for a **lawyer well-being program** that is now being implemented statewide. The county participated in the Colorado Supreme Court's Well-Being Recognition Pilot Program last year to recognize and incentivize

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

legal employers to adopt coping strategies. The county was one of 26 other participants in the program that proved it was successful and should be implemented statewide, *Daily Camera* reported.



FLORIDA

• **LEE COUNTY** may be getting a new name thanks to a petition looking to **rebrand the county** as "Bruce Lee County," NBC News reported. Lee County is named for Civil War Confederate General Robert E. Lee. A local arts organization is calling for a change to the county's name in an effort to "stop idolizing Confederate soldiers," according to the group's Change.org petition. To avoid the expensive cost of changing the name, the group suggests making a smaller change to have the county named for actor Bruce Lee.

ILLINOIS

COOK COUNTY Treasurer Maria Pappas handed out personal care items as part of her

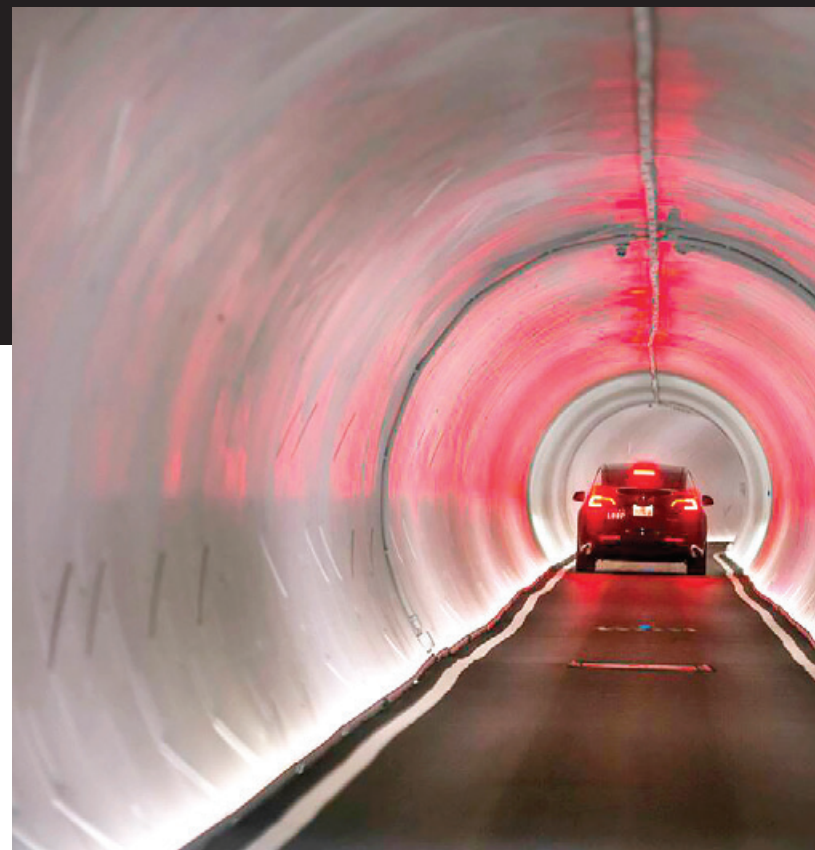
mission to partner with local organizations for **random acts of kindness**. The event was the third held this year. She distributed 1,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, 1,000 packages of disinfectant wipes and 1,000 face masks. Pappas' other acts of kindness included distributing roses on Mother's Day with a local floral company and distributing boxes of truffles on Father's Day with a local food company.

INDIANA

The **ELKHART COUNTY** Sheriff's Office is providing **in-carcerated individuals with computer tablets** to access free re-entry and educational resources. The county partnered with Securus Technologies to provide inmates with the tablets. They can also use them to connect with loved ones, read books and search for jobs. "If we are going to meaningfully address recidivism rates, then we need to get serious about providing state-of-the-art technology to the incarcerated community," Elkhart County Sheriff Jeff Siegel told WBND-LD.

MARYLAND

• **HOWARD COUNTY** is using \$500,000 for a **grant funding program** targeting non-profits in the county. The Transform Howard Innovation Grant program assists non-profits related to students, infrastructure, residents, cybersecurity and the environment. Grants are expected to range from \$5,000 to \$50,000, accord-



ing to the Maryland Association of Counties. "These grants support projects that will benefit our residents of all ages and abilities but will also foster a culture of inventive ideas throughout our non-profit community," County executive Calvin Ball said.

• **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** launched a pilot program to **give 300 low-income families \$800 each month**. The council approved a \$2 million appropriation for the program and will select families to receive the \$800 for 24 months to use for any purposes. At least 100 of the families will have experienced homelessness or being on the verge of homelessness. The county is the first in the state to provide direct cash payments to low-income residents, according to WUSA-TV.

NEVADA

• A plan to build a "smart city" that would eventually take a huge chunk out of **STOREY COUNTY** to **form its own government** is dead. Blockchains LLC has asked state lawmakers

to withdraw a proposal starting that process, which had been referred to a legislative study committee, The Nevada Independent news website reported. Storey County officials had previously spoken out against the proposal.

NEW YORK

NASSAU COUNTY has created a **disabilities advisory council**. The 15-member Advisory Council on People with Disabilities will include members with disabilities and people representing organizations that serve and advocate for those with disabilities. It will provide recommendations to the county executive and legislature on how best to help Nassau's differently abled residents. It will review county policies, procedures, practices and programs, and will also recommend legislation. It will advise the county executive and the legislature about funding priorities and capital projects, Patch reported.



FLORIDA

• **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY** is offering **free Pfizer vaccine booster shots** to residents. The county established targeted vaccine areas and drive-through sites to administer free booster shots and first and second doses of the vaccine. Residents arrived, some by golf cart, to receive their boosters.

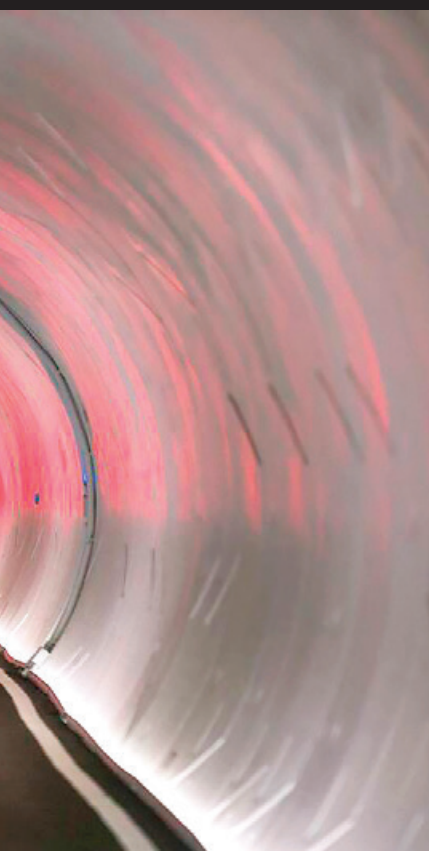
Hillsborough County residents arrive via golf cart to the county's vaccination site to receive a free COVID-19 booster shot.

Photo courtesy of Hillsborough County



OREGON

• **LINCOLN COUNTY** residents recently voted to **phase out vacation rentals** in unincorporated areas over five



NEVADA

CLARK COUNTY commissioners recently approved a special use permit and franchise agreement for the Boring Company's plan to expand a network of **underground tunnels**, dubbed the "Vegas Loop" beneath the Las Vegas Strip, connecting to Allegiant Stadium and the University of Nevada-Las Vegas with 51 planned stations. The franchise agreement allows the company to operate the system, collect fares and oversee advertising and partnerships.

years and halt the issuing of new licenses. Originally licensed in 2016, commissioners at the time did not place a cap on the number of rentals and the enforcement system for violations was unclear, Oregon-Live reported.

- An unexpected windfall of business tax revenue led to a \$38 million **expansion of homeless shelter capacity** and campsite cleanup and removal by **MULTNOMAH COUNTY** and the city of Portland. Part of

the surplus will fund homeless services, outreach teams, trash pickup and new shelter beds.

- Worried that Gov. Kate Brown's (D) vaccination mandate for teachers, health care workers and public employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 would prompt many to leave their jobs, several counties declared **states of emergency**, asking for more time to encourage employees to receive vaccines, rather than mandating them.

The latter, **MALHEUR COUNTY** Judge Dan Joyce said, conflicted with the independent attitude that characterizes the rural West. In addition to Malheur County, **BAKER, CROOK, HARNEY, JACKSON, JEFFERSON, UNION** and **YAMHILL counties** also passed declarations.

UTAH

The **UTAH COUNTY** Board of Commissioners passed a resolution asking the state Legislature to **eliminate the death penalty**. The current county attorney had previously announced he would not seek the death penalty, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported. Commissioners cited the cost in hiring investigators, prosecutors and public defenders, arguing no county retains staff with the expertise to hold a trial with the possibility of execution.

VIRGINIA

Worried about aiding immigration enforcement, the **FAIRFAX COUNTY** Police Department has stopped publishing a **weekly arrest blotter**. The *Washington Post* reported that it violated a policy restricting the dissemination of information, but the police department will still release details of arrests in serious crimes, including homicides, shootings and offenses committed by those in positions of trust. Virginia residents will still be able to file Freedom of Information Act requests to get details of other arrests but will have to pay a processing fee.

WASHINGTON

Roughly 300 **THURSTON COUNTY** residents may soon become residents of a city, if that city succeeds in **annexing plots of unincorporated land**. The Tumwater City Council will hold a joint public hearing with the Board of County Commissioners in January to discuss an inter-local agreement to allow for the annexation. Earlier annexations created "islands" of unincorporated land when property owners objected to the annexations, *The Olympian* reported. A 2020 law allows cities and counties to agree to new annexation guidelines.

OREGON

- The **WASHINGTON COUNTY** Board of Commissioners has passed the state's first **ban on flavored tobacco products**. That includes menthol cigarettes and vape pens. Oregon Public Broadcasting reported that the move prohibits the sale of any tobacco or synthetic nicotine product to anyone under 21; prohibits sales of any flavored tobacco or synthetic nicotine product in any retail establishment and prohibits coupons, discounts and price promotions for any tobacco products.



WISCONSIN

DANE COUNTY is considering a proposal aimed at determining what options lawmakers have to regulate airport construction in areas where the soil is contaminated with **PFAS**. The measure also seeks more public reporting on PFAS levels.

The toxic chemicals are found in firefighting foam commonly found at airports. They have been shown to increase the risk of cancer and other ailments.

The resolution asks county staff to provide legal opinions on "any and all ways" the county can regulate airport activities and the work to clean up PFAS. The measure would also require public reporting on all PFAS tests and results though a website managed by the county and Public Health Madison, the *Wisconsin State Journal* reported.

News from Across the Nation was compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org or dhendricks@naco.org.



MADISON COUNTY, Va.

The Madison County, Va. seal was designed in 1974 by Dena Wilcox Dean, who created the seal as a project of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. The commission was formed to pay tribute to the historical events leading up to America's independence.

The original drawing of the seal is on display by Madison County at the Kemper Residence museum in the county seat of Madison.



The seal includes the county courthouse and features mountains and trees in the background.

The 15 stars that encircle the courthouse represent the number of states in the country in 1792, the year the county formed.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Dakota Hendricks at dhendricks@naco.org.

GEORGIA

The Sheriff's Office in **PAULDING COUNTY** is using an international **search and rescue program** to help public safety agencies find individuals who are missing. Project Lifesaver provides participants with a wearable transmitter the size of a watch. The device allows law enforcement to track a missing person, Patch reported. The sheriff's office received the equipment at no cost after receiving donations from the Northwest Georgia Area Agency on Aging's Polk County office and "Emma's Embassadors," a local nonprofit.



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