

N.C. county gets quick start on ARP investment

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Even during the peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic, counties have kept vital services running, a feat that made officials feel like they'd been rubbing their stomachs while patting their heads. New Hanover County, N.C. gave itself a new set of hands.

Introducing a pandemic operations team will give the county's Health and Human Services Consolidated Agency the flexibility to respond to residents' needs without taking staff away from their responsibilities. It's one part of the county's robust and multi-faceted response to the pandemic using funding from the American Rescue Plan, the first approved by a county Board in the United States, roughly three weeks after the legislation passed.

"We have school nurses — not every county has that — those nurses were available to us for vaccination clinics when the kids were in school remotely," said Donna Fayko, the agency's director. "When schools returned to in-person learning, we lost those nurses and we had to pull resources from clinic operations."

When hiring is complete, the county will have several personnel dedicated entirely to pandemic operations, including testing, vaccination, booster administration, contact tracing, outreach to historically marginalized populations and communications.

"We didn't have an epidemiologist on staff anywhere in the county," Fayko said. "Soon we'll have someone who can follow the science, make sure they're aware of all the changes coming down from the [experts] and be proactive. They can look at our trends and forecast what we can expect from the pandemic."

Though the pandemic operations team will initially be funded from the \$45.4 million allocated to the county by the American Rescue Plan, Fayko hopes that the team will demonstrate its value and become a permanent part of the county's budget. The 2021 American Rescue Plan provided \$65.1 billion in direct, flexible aid to every county in America and the U.S. Treasury Department released its Final Rule on ARP implementation Jan. 6.

County Manager Chris Cou-

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Donna Fayko, director of New Hanover County, N.C.'s Health and Human Services department, speaks to *County News* Senior Writer Charlie Ban about aspects of the county's spending plan for American Rescue Plan funding. NACo Digital Communications Manager Hugh Clarke records the interview for NACo's 'Untold Stories' campaign. (See story, left.) Photo by Alex Riley

Omicron surge tests counties

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Counties continue to meet new challenges amidst a surge in cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant nationwide. The latest wave in COVID-19 cases has counties facing test shortages, vaccine hesitancy, staffing problems, housing issues

and skyrocketing infection rates. They're meeting those challenges with mobile vaccine clinics, housing accommodations, school programs and finding ways to reduce transmission.

The country is experiencing the highest infection rate (a 216 percent increase in the two-week period between

Dec. 27 and Jan. 10, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and hospitalization rate (83 percent in the same time period) since the pandemic began.

DuPage County, Ill. is fighting back with proven techniques. "The challenges are

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'Good Government Show' debuts podcast with county bright ideas

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

For many Americans, it can be difficult to grasp the duties of local government. What does a county commissioner do? How does local government impact our daily lives? Journalist David Martin once asked the same questions.

Martin and his fellow podcasters aim to showcase local government at work and enlighten their listeners with their new podcast "The Good Government Show."

To create the show, Martin and co-host Carol D'Auria embarked on an ambitious project to travel the country showcasing programs, collab-

orations and success stories of local government best practices "providing solutions to real world problems."

With decades of experience in journalism, the two have scoured the country and brought to light 11 unique programs for their first season.

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Illinois county keeps kids in school with ‘test-to-stay’ program during pandemic

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the same,” said Karen Ayala, executive director of the DuPage County Health Department. “We know what we need to do to reduce or mitigate the risks related to Omicron...testing, staying home when people are sick, wearing masks in indoor settings and getting vaccinated are pillars of our ongoing COVID-19 response.”

“I think the challenge is that everything is needed in greater supply,” she noted. Through their efforts, the county has one of the highest vaccination rates among 5–11-year-olds, protecting some of the most vulnerable in the state.

The county is battling against vaccine hesitancy in their suburban communities by creating a mobile vaccine clinic called the CAREVAN, meeting residents at schools, community centers, grocery stores, churches, and more



locations. Many residents have chosen to take the vaccine when it is made readily available to them, Ayala said, noting that the mobile clinic

is a “key strategy for densely populated suburban communities.”

According to Chris Hoff, director of the county’s Community Health Resources, the key to victory lies with the community taking action to reduce transmission.

“In the short term, the focus is on ‘What can I do right now to help bring transmission down so my kids can stay in school, so I can safely go to work, so my community can get back to normal?’” he said.

With the surge heavily impacting staffing everywhere, Hoff said the “next few weeks will be a challenge in almost every sector.” He said these surges come in waves and that when cases are high, the community must take action to reduce the spread by reinstating prevention methods that work.

“I think people have a sense of futility,” Ayala said, “that ‘Regardless of what we do, it’s just going to happen anyway,’ and I don’t think that that is the case.”

‘I think each county needs to respond to it with what works best for them. One size doesn’t fit all.’

— Commissioner
John Espy
Carbon County, Wyo.

In neighboring Lake County, Ill., the county became an early adopter of the Test-to-Stay program, which has led to an increase in students being able to safely stay in school after a potential exposure.

The program was tested over a three-month period, showing no increase in cases, saving in-school learning days. Emily Young, the marketing and communications manager for the Lake County Health Department, said instead of quarantining, any students who are exposed to COVID

are instead tested on days 1, 3, 5 and 7 while remaining in school. They are also required to wear a mask and social distance.

The county is proud of the program and its success. Ayala encourages other counties to adopt Test-to-Stay; however, she warned it is not without its own difficulties. Test-to-Stay is a resource-intensive program, requiring space, training, and staff as well as tests that can be difficult to procure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has released guidance on the program, describing Test-to-Stay as “another valuable tool in a layered prevention strategy.”

County health workers continue to battle fatigue as the pandemic enters its third year. “I think that my whole agency would echo the fact that so many of our folks continue to work so hard even though we’re going into multiple years of this [pandemic]...the fact that folks are showing up and

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SNAP/STATS

JANUARY IS CBD MONTH

MARIJUANA STATE TAX REVENUE COLLECTED IN 2020

STATE	TAX REVENUE
CALIFORNIA	\$1 BILLION
WASHINGTON	\$474 MILLION
COLORADO.....	\$387 MILLION
OREGON.....	\$158 MILLION
NEVADA	\$105 MILLION

*CBD stands for cannabidiol, an active ingredient in marijuana.
Source: Urban Institute

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still giving their all is really impressive and not to be underestimated,” said Young.

‘Navigators’ help get homeless vaccinated

In Minnesota, Hennepin County Administrator David Hough and Director of Housing Stability David Hewitt knew that the early response to the pandemic would dictate how well the county fared throughout the crisis. One of the strategies they employed was to rework their entire homeless assistance program. Overnight, shelters transitioned into 24/7 care, quarantine centers were established for the those showing symptoms, separate spaces were found for the medically vulnerable, hotels and motels

were leased. Plans took shape overnight to house, care for and reintroduce the homeless to a more stable situation. Hough said housing the critically in-need residents helps prevent them from relying on limited hospital services. To that end, the same day the county signed their disaster declaration was the same day they signed a lease for temporary housing. Hough said they also vaccinate individuals coming to the shelter, with more than 3,000 individuals vaccinated.

Paired with increased housing support, Hennepin County created the housing navigator program, a forward-thinking strategy to exit “crisis mode.” Navigators are housing-focused case managers able to support the homeless and get them the specific assistance

they need, beginning with seniors and the medically at-risk.

“Navigators are critical in wrapping around and helping them get to self-sufficiency and stability,” said Hewitt.

He said having vision and clear goals throughout the disaster response helped the county focus and “deliver better outcomes for the folks that we’re serving.” Hewitt says homelessness should be “brief, rare, and nonrecurring,” a slogan his team has put into action.

‘One size doesn’t fit all’ in rural counties

In rural communities, despite the high infection rate of Omicron, residents have the space to distance and keep themselves safe. Commissioner John Espy of Carbon Coun-

ty, Wyo., said residents of the state often joke that they invented social distancing.

“We’re so spread out that it takes a lot for these things to really spread through the community” said Espy.


That does not mean the county is taking the situation lightly, they continue to encourage masking and vaccination to prevent the spread while keeping schools and other public facilities open and as safe as possible.

Espy said there are 15,000-16,000 people spread across 10 municipalities and 10,000 square miles allowing residents to remain distant, stay with their families and weather the surge. “I think each county needs to respond to it [COVID] with what works best for them. One size doesn’t fit all.”

County Administrator Jason

Berry of Washington County said his rural area of Virginia is experiencing a surge akin to the early days of the pandemic. The region has experienced a surge from 19 percent around New Year’s Day to barely below 26 percent in a two-week span. Berry said the county has gone back to a mask mandate and social distancing.

The county has purchased enough rapid tests to keep staff in the office working and “keep the wheels of government rolling.”

Berry said he is hoping the surge will be as brief as it appears to be in other countries like in Africa when omicron first emerged. “We’re looking at the end of January, early February before things start getting better. That seems to be the trend we are on, but only time will tell.” 

FEMA offers support to combat latest COVID surge

Funding under FEMA’s Public Assistance Program continues to support counties for COVID-19 testing, vaccination administration, expanding hospital capacity and surge staffing.

Testing

FEMA will fund testing to detect COVID-19 infections. This includes both in a medical setting (primary medical care facilities, temporary medical care facilities, and community-based testing sites) and testing needed to safely open and operate public facilities, including schools and government offices. Funding may be used to support both diagnostic and screening protocols.

In general, FEMA will fund diagnostic and screening testing to determine if an active coronavirus infection is present and if an individual should take steps to quarantine or isolate from others.

This funding may include costs for:

- Laboratory testing materials and test kits including antigen self-tests.
- Contracting for testing support by a third party.
- Testing facilities, including temporary facilities or expansion of space used for testing.

- Staffing to administer tests.
- Training for individuals to administer tests.
- Signage and other communication materials.
- Personal protective equipment and other administrative supplies to conduct testing and technology to register and track testing results.
- Mobilization and demobilization of testing activities.
- Facility operating costs (equipment, supplies, security, cleaning/disinfection).

Hospital capacity

FEMA will fund medical care to treat people suffering from COVID-19 infections. This includes medical care in primary care facilities such as hospitals, and funding for temporary and expanded medical care capacity. This funding may include costs for:

- Medical care for COVID-19 patients.
- Surge staffing for medical care personnel.
- Expansion of hospitals and medical facilities, such as conversion of unused or other space for clinical care.
- Establishing and operating temporary medical facilities, including lease, purchase, and construction costs.
- Mobilization and demobilization for setting up and closing temporary or expanded medical capacity.

bilization for setting up and closing temporary or expanded medical capacity.

- Operating costs, including equipment, supplies, staffing, and wraparound services.
- Funding may be based on ongoing and projected needs regarding continuing operations at a temporary or expanded medical facility.
- In most cases, permanent renovations are not eligible, except where the work is completed in time to meet COVID-19 capacity needs and is cost-effective. Permanent renovations are also subject to real property disposition requirements.

Vaccinations

FEMA will fund the administration of vaccinations for COVID-19. This includes carrying out vaccination administration for people of any CDC-approved age and boosters. This funding may include costs for:

- Vaccination facilities, including community vaccination centers, mass vaccination sites, and mobile vaccinations, including necessary security and other services for sites.
- Medical and support staff, including contracted and temporary hires to administer vaccinations.



- Training and technical assistance for storing, handling, distributing, and administering of vaccinations.
- PPE, other equipment, supplies, and materials required for storing, handling, distributing/transporting, and administering vaccinations.
- Transportation support, such as refrigerated trucks and transport security, for vaccine distribution as well as reasonable transportation to and from the vaccination sites.
- Onsite infection control measures and emergency medical care for children and families at vaccination sites.
- Communication efforts that keep the public informed, including messaging campaigns, flyers, advertisements, websites, translation services, community engagement, and

call centers or websites to assist with appointments or answering questions.

Frequently asked questions

How soon can funding be available?

Organizations should immediately take action to save lives and protect public health and safety. If applicants have an immediate need for funding, FEMA can expedite up to 50 percent of funding needs for medical care and expansion in hospital capacity to eligible applicants with limited documentation required. All entities can apply for FEMA funding through the COVID-19 Public Assistance Simplified Application. Applicants can begin their application by contacting their emergency management office or visiting [grantee.fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov).

Is there a cost share?

FEMA will fund 100 percent of eligible COVID-19 costs and will not require non-federal matching funds through April 1, 2022.

Can the National Guard assist?

States may continue to uti-

Palm Beach County student's winning artwork shows deep love of pets

The seventh-grade winner of the NACo "I Love my County Because" contest is Courtney Jones, a young girl proud of her county for saving her best friend. Jones drawing highlights her and her dog sitting on a bench.

The goal of the competition is to start a dialogue with students to help them learn about county responsibilities and leadership. Students were invited to complete the sentence "I love my county because..." with an accompanying creative work of art depicting an aspect of what counties accomplish in their community.

Palm Beach County is a larger county with 1.5 million residents and leads the nation in sugar and sweet corn production. The lush area is well known for its beaches and palm trees; the tourism industry employs about 70,000.

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 is featured in the 2022 NACo calendar and in County News.



SEND US YOUR MASTERPIECE.

2022 "I Love My County Because..." Art Competition now accepting entries.

Our annual NACo Student Art Competition in conjunction with National County Government Month (April) is now open. Students in grades 1-12 are encouraged to enter the competition with the theme "I Love My County Because..."

For more information, visit: naco.org/art

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'Speed to market' motivates New Hanover County, N.C. ARP investment plans

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driet sees a permanent pandemic operations team as a possibility.

"We've been in a constant state of response and recovery now for several years," he said, noting Hurricane Florence's damage to the county in 2018. "We were wearing our people out, across the enterprise."

That timeline figures into Coudriet's approach to expect COVID-19, its variants and its copycats, to be an ongoing concern for years to come.

"COVID is not going to go away, as much as we'd planned and hoped," he said. "There's going to be another form we don't yet know. I worked in emergency management and I appreciate redundancy, teams dedicated to certain functions. We'll be dealing with COVID six months from now, a year from now, but in a very different context. We're going to continue to operate and deal with the consequences and the consequences to come."

In a year when hiring has been a challenge for most county departments, the county has received multiple applications for each position on the team.

"People see this as an opportunity to serve," Fayko said. "This team can stop, drop and roll for any health-related emergency."

The pandemic operations team has already shown the public what it could do, conducting a drive-through testing site that saw 600 people in six hours, all done by its four nurses using the annex the department has rented.

Fast cash

New Hanover County's guiding principal has been to get its American Rescue Plan funding out into the community as fast as possible.

"In the ARP, we saw help was on the way and we immediately began to formulate a plan of how we could help our citizens with these funds," said Julia Olson-Boseman, chair of the Board of Commissioners. "We didn't want to put the money away, now was the time to see it out in the community."

The county watched the bill's



New Hanover County, N.C. commissioners meet during a Jan. 6 agenda session. From left: Rob Zapple, Deb Hays, Bill Rivenbark and Julia Olson-Boseman. Photo by Hugh Clarke

progress in Congress and adjusted a loose framework for spending while the legislation developed.

"We followed it closely from day one," Coudriet said. "Our intergovernmental affairs efforts were very proactive."

Talking with nonprofits, the chamber of commerce and businesses helped the county determine spending priorities.

"We're grateful for the help we've gotten, and we hope to see our community recover a lot faster because of help that we've received in this bill," Olson-Boseman said. "I'm very proud of our staff for being one of the first in the country to get a plan in place."

Internet expansion

The county is looking to expand high-speed internet access to more than 500 homes. The program identifies families with school-aged children who are already receiving economic assistance services to connect and pay for service for two or three years.

"It connects them to school and gives them access to quality education, said Tomashia Robinson, a county IT project coordinator. "If they're quarantined at home, they're still able to participate in class."

What is different about New Hanover County's approach is that the internet service providers do business directly with the county, circumventing legal challenges to the families' access.

"We're the customer, we pay the bill," Robinson said. "We've taken on that burden and that responsibility. They don't have to do anything except be home when the installer comes to set up."

Small business relief

Ordinarily, the dining rooms at Port City Java locations invite customers in and encourage them to make it a home away from home. In March 2020, the coffee houses had an identity crisis on their hands.

Drive-up and walk-up service was all they could offer, all while trying to maintain adequate physical distancing.

"Normal plans for business and long-term planning all went out the window," said Kevin Welch, the business' director of operations.

"Our executive team met remotely and made daily, sometimes-hourly decisions based on finances that were extremely limited," he said. "But even though business volume was significantly depressed, our fo-



New Hanover County, N.C. residents meet for lunch at the county's Senior Resource Center in Carolina Beach. Photo by Hugh Clarke

cus was on our employees."

The chain of 13 locations in New Hanover County employs 150 people, and many stayed away from work as they figured out the coronavirus' threat. The coffee shops held their jobs open until they were ready to return.

"Our customer base was largely essential workers, and we were essential workers," Welch said. "It was an emotional challenge because we had such a close connection with our community, but in the meantime, that grant funding

from the county gave us more strength and more resources to combat those challenges and rise above the obstacles.

"It's difficult to tell what things would be like without that funding from the county," he said, "but we felt a definite sense of relief when we were approved."

Children's mental health

Through a joint partnership with the school system, the county doubled the number of the licensed clinical therapists to 32, allowing each school to have one therapist to target children with severe or mod-

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County offers blueprint plan for how to use ARP funding across the board

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erate issues interfering with learning processes. Three new supervisors will join the existing one.

“We’re able to meet the enhanced needs that we’re seeing from children who have been isolated through COVID when they were doing remote learning – we’re seeing a lot of anxiety and depression from school-aged children,” Fayko said. “If child shows behavioral needs, they can refer to the school-based mental health program, with no out-of-pocket expense.”

The only string attached is the family’s involvement.

“If we want to see a change in the child’s behavior, the family has to be engaged so that there’s some continuity from different interventions — we’re also teaching the parents.”

Senior resource center

For 395 days, the New Hanover County Senior Resource Center closed for in-person activities, putting a community on hold while health officials got a handle on what was a deadly virus for older adults in a county with a quarter of its residents 55 or older.

That didn’t stop the cen-

ter’s services, with nutrition services pivoted to drive-up and drop off and the addition of virtual social events. The county debuted a long-term master aging plan in 2020 that accounted for results of a community needs assessment.

Director Amber Smith noted a 276 percent increase in the need for meal services throughout 2021, and the American Rescue Plan funding made it possible to meet that demand, with supplies and the opportunity to open additional food distribution centers.

“If we didn’t have that [funding] from the ARP, we wouldn’t have our mental health program, we wouldn’t have been able to provide the amount of nutrition services that we have,” she said.

Social Work Supervisor Andrew Zeldin pointed out that mental health counseling was a genuine need that isn’t being addressed elsewhere locally.

“Licensed clinical therapists, especially for older adults, is really nonexistent,” he said. “We’d been doing makeshift counseling. As good as I feel like I am listening and talking to people, we want a licensed clinical therapist who has the tools to help these older adults.”

Post-incarceration

“It doesn’t cost you any [money] when you come here, but it does cost you blood, sweat and tears,” Executive Director Frankie Robinson said about Leading Into New Communities.

“The centerpiece of the program is that people will be able to build a resume while they’re here.”

The 45-person residential facility offers job training, counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy and a safe place to stay, thanks in large part to the county’s grant from the American Rescue Plan.

“It helped us stay in business,” Robinson said. “It provided us an opportunity, when the road got rough and we had to quarantine people, we were able to put them up in hotels. This allowed us to keep our residents safe. It helped up deal with unforeseen consequences of the pandemic.”

Housing assistance

As New Hanover County residents encountered financial challenges during the pandemic, Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity worked to increase the amount of available affordable housing.

But the organization relies on volunteer workers, many of

whom were examining their risk tolerance.

“We’ve tried to evolve our volunteer experience with folks who might not be comfortable going on a job site,” said Executive Director Lauren McKenzie. “We build walls here and transport them out to the work site.”

“We didn’t want the pandemic to detract from what we’re doing here, in fact we wanted to expand our services.”

The American Rescue Plan funding has allowed the organization to purchase more land for housing, though it also helped cover the 20 percent increase in infrastructure and materials costs.

“We were able to build 25 homes, where historically we’d have been able to build eight-to-12,” McKenzie said.

Job training

The American Rescue Plan allowed Step Up Wilmington to offer stipends to job-training participants.

“I had a part-time job, but the stipend was instrumental in helping me survive in the four-to-five weeks to get ready for the new job,” said Jimmy Smith, who recently started a job as a behavioral health specialist working with people with substance abuse issues.

The program focuses on af-

firmative messaging in programming to help people prepare for new jobs, gain hard skills or master the soft skills that are fundamental to selling themselves to an employer.

“They need that support, they need those job training skills, but they need to put some money in their pockets,” said Alicia Hardy, talent manager for Step Up Wilmington. “They still have bills. They can focus on their training.”

She notes that the restaurant and tourism industries were particularly affected during the pandemic.

And for many, like Smith, the program imbues its participants with the confidence to work past what would be perceived as weaknesses.

“Looking for work can be lonely, it can be isolating,” she said. “Here, you receive a community of support and realize that you are valuable.”

Smith was apprehensive about finding a new job.

“I had been out of work for a very long time, so I was concerned about how to present that,” he said. “They helped me face that challenge.”

“I hope I’d be doing this work if it wasn’t for Step Up Wilmington, but I think it would have taken a lot longer and been a lot harder to get here.” **CN**

NACo’s UNTOLD STORIES CAMPAIGN

County News recently visited New Hanover County, N.C. as part of NACo’s “Untold Stories” campaign. We met with county officials who were crucial in crafting the county’s spending plan, talked to leaders of nonprofit organizations that received aid through the plan and heard from members of the community who benefited directly from the American Rescue Plan.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, counties have served on the front lines, working to protect the health and wellbeing of residents and driving economic recovery in their communities. Together, counties have highlighted their critical role and the key services counties provide, demonstrating to the public and federal partners that counties matter.

Counties have an opportunity to tell the full story of their efforts and how they have made differences in the lives of their residents through the American Rescue Plan Act. NACo’s Untold Stories campaign demonstrates how counties are helping residents stay in their homes and keep food on the table, how counties support small businesses, how they are steering their communities into the future and helping residents thrive.

At naco.org/untoldstories, you can submit your story and access a letter to the editor template, a media relations guide, social media templates and resources to engage your residents to help them share their own untold stories.

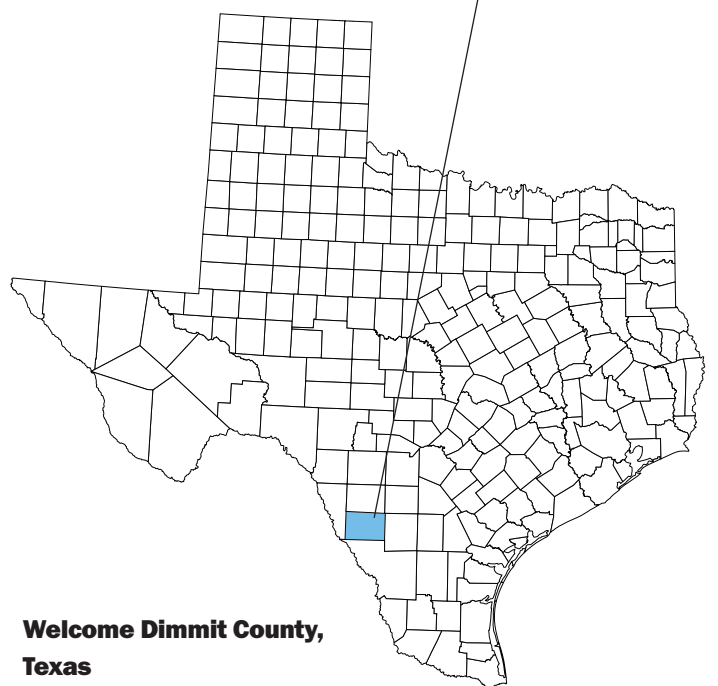
You can view highlights of counties’ efforts on Twitter @NACoTweets and on naco.org.



NACo’s Hugh Clarke (left) and Charlie Ban (right) interview Jimmy Smith at Step Up Wilmington’s offices in New Hanover County, N.C. Photo by Alex Riley

GET TO KNOW...

Dimmit County, Texas



Welcome Dimmit County, Texas

In the southern portion of Texas lies Dimmit County, a rural county with a long history of cowboys, onions and oil. Dimmit County was formed in 1880 out of parts of four other counties from what was once called the Wild Horse Desert zone, although it had loosely existed since 1858. The county flourishes as part of the Winter Garden Zone, a lush area that grows an abundance of fruits and vegetables.

Dimmit County is well known for its oil and gas production as well. Prospectors discovered oil there in the late 1800s while searching for water. Dimmit County ranchers began growing Bermuda onions in the area as early as 1898, becoming the premier staple crop in the area for many years.

The county is named after a Pennsylvania adventurer and captain, Phillip Dimmitt, who fought for independence in the Texas Revolution. Even though he spelled his name with two "ts," the county is spelled with just one. The county seat, Carizzo Springs, was named after a type of wild grass that once was common in and around the spring.

Football legend John Ayers was born in the county seat of Carizzo Springs. Ayers played for the San Francisco 49ers and the Denver Broncos as a lineman from 1977-87 and participated in two Super Bowls, XVI and XIX.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



Football legend John Ayers



NACo renews Live Healthy prescription savings program

NACo is proud to announce the renewal of our member-exclusive benefit, the Live Healthy Discount Program. Since 2004, Live Healthy has delivered over \$725 million in savings on 51 million prescriptions to county residents.

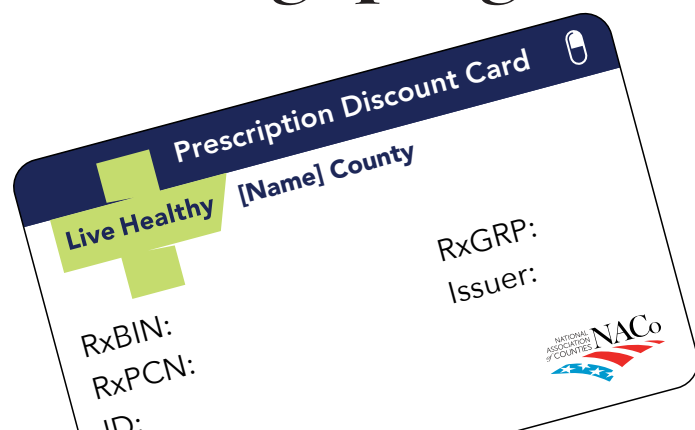
This impactful discount program continues to deliver more than \$10 million in annual prescription savings. This renewed partnership reflects our commitment to our members as we reinvest in the health of our communities.

Revitalizing the Live Healthy Discount Program is a key component of NACo President Larry Johnson's presidential initiative, Counties THRIVE. Learn more about Counties THRIVE by visiting NACo.org/THRIVE.

"Your health is your wealth and the renewal NACo's Live Healthy Discount Program will ensure county residents across the country can save money while improving their health," said President Johnson.

At no cost to the county, NACo members can offer residents:

- **Prescriptions** – Save up to 80 percent on generic and up



to 40 percent on name-brand medications for residents and their pets at over 65,000 pharmacies nationwide.*

- **Health costs** – Access 24/7 telemedicine service and discounts on vision care, LASIK & PRK vision procedures, hearing aids & screenings, prepaid lab work, diabetic supplies and more for a small monthly fee.*

- **Dental costs** – Save on most dental procedures, including check-ups, cleanings, x-rays, fillings, root canals, extractions and dentures for a small monthly fee.*

- **MinuteClinic** – Save 15 percent at the medical walk-in clinic located in select CVS Pharmacy® stores using the Live Healthy Prescription Discount Card.*

The Live Healthy prescription discount card works for

residents without insurance or where medications aren't covered by insurance.

It will also work if insurance covers less than the Live Healthy Discount Card or for residents with a high deductible plan looking to lower the cost of their medications.

Help your residents save money and enroll now at NACo.org/health. If you have questions, please contact NACo at livehealthy@naco.org. **CN**

**The Live Healthy program is not insurance. Prescription savings may vary by drug and pharmacy; discounts are only available at participating pharmacies. Health and dental discounts are subject to coverage and are available in every state except Washington. MinuteClinic discounts are available in 33 states and the District of Columbia.*



Build Your Community with a Trusted Digital Construction Management System.




Download our guide to get your roadmap to the Infrastructure Bill for Digital Transformation Funding

Learn more at e-builder.net/infrastructure



Season 1 of 'The Good Government Show' available now

From PODCAST page 1

From a small-town economic revival to supporting veterans through music, the two discuss how the programs came to be, hear from community leaders with behind-the-scenes details and speak with locals who benefit from the projects. "We want to let folks know, 'if it works here, it can work there,'" said Martin.

Some of the shows are based on *County News'* Bright Ideas column, which highlights winners of the NACo Achievement Awards.

For the podcast, the co-hosts split the reporting work and then interview each other about the various local governments they have visited.

The podcast segments cover the gamut, from environmental protections, programs fighting recidivism in the criminal justice system, homelessness, women veterans' struggles and much more.

"Every single day, across this

country, government helps people in ways large and small and we wanted to tell that story," Martin said.

He is already getting excited about the next chapter of the podcast. For Season 2, one of

the topics Martin is looking forward to is a report on the nationwide shift in libraries as they take on more of a community center role, providing access to Wi-Fi, showers, information and unique programs

to underserved communities.

Season 1 of "The Good Government Show" podcast is available online and includes 11 episodes that can be found on podcast platforms Spotify, Stitcher and Apple Podcasts.

Look for Season 2 of the podcast to be released sometime in mid-2022 with 10 episodes.

For more information or if you have a story in mind, contact the team at goodgovernmentshow.com. **CN**



"The Good Government Show" co-host David Martin (left) conducts an interview about reading revitalization in Berks County, Pa.



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BRIGHT IDEAS | LEON COUNTY, Fla.

County Holds Hard Conversations to Strengthen Their Community

PROBLEM: Community members have a hard time discussing race, asking questions and interacting in discussions about uncomfortable topics.

SOLUTION: Create an annual forum for discussing racial equity and more.

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

In western Florida, Leon County leads the charge against racial inequality through a powerful tool: Communication.

Leon County holds an event called “Created Equal” once a year, when residents gather to hear from experts on race and harrowing tales from people who lived through tumultuous times.

“For years, the county’s ‘Created Equal’ program has asked necessary, tough questions about racial inequity in our community and throughout the nation,” said Bill Proctor, chairman of the Leon County Board of Commissioners. “Difficult but civil conversations like these bring us together and move us forward. This is more important than ever now, as we live in a country unwilling to talk and therefore unable to change.”

Beginning in 2015 with a partnership with the nonprofit “The Village Square,” the Created Equal program has tackled racial issues that are “tough to talk about” but are important to address. The event includes a variety of performances, plays, singers, and panelists. In the past, Created Equal has discussed topics like the lunch counter sit-ins, Florida Emancipation Day and the loss of lives to violence.

The most recent in-person event was attended by around 600 residents while the virtual event reached more than 100,000. At previous events, attendees gathered in small



Panelists discuss the triumphs and challenges of the lunch counter sit-ins during the 2020 “Created Equal” event in Leon County, Fla.

groups for a performance or panel followed by a conversation about what transpired.

The Created Equal program holds events in non-traditional settings, preferring to shift from a boardroom-style meeting to an area that fosters more diverse discussion. To that end, the county has hosted events in a nightclub, university hall, online and more.

Volunteer Services Manager Royle King said the program is “geared toward creating a better, safe, fun and more vibrant solution-filled county.” King said these conversations are important to help grow the community. To that end, the county partnered with a small group of planners working with the Village Square to bring together experts as well as residents who have lived through the events Created Equal wants to highlight.

After the panel concludes, participants are asked to engage with each other in a discussion with questions like “How important is cross-racial cooperation today?” and “Do you think it is better to assume the best about those you disagree with...does the spirit of good will increase one’s chances of being taken advantage of?”

After the program, grants have been awarded to participants through The Five-Foot Challenge, to complete projects in a similar style to what the Created Equal event focused on. In 2020, attendees competed for a \$500 startup grant with ideas about bridging the racial divide in their communities.

The Village Square is a national nonprofit educational organization working to create conversations and events like “Created Equal” across the

country. The nonprofit started in the county seat of Leon County. The organization is devoted to recreating traditional American town hall discussions, where “the constant clashing of opinion” reduces extremism.

The county is no stranger to the struggle for racial equity. Leon County celebrated the lunch counter sit-ins as well as the jail-ins and bus boycotts, calling attention to the inequalities of segregation.

The county has also hosted several prominent civil rights leaders who helped inspire other communities to tackle the barriers of racial inequality. The Created Equal program highlights the accomplishments, the difficulties and the barriers torn down by past leaders while seeing where the current situation can be improved.

Leon County looks forward

to hosting another Created Equal event called “A Conversation about the Right to Vote,” which will be the seventh event held in the county.

“Since 2015, the county has been engaging hundreds of citizens in frank conversations about race and racial equity,” said Leon County Administrator Vincent S. Long. “Through our partnership with The Village Square, each year we innovate the program format, from symphonies to local stories to the 60th anniversary of Tallahassee’s most famous civil rights sit-in. We are eager to host our seventh Created Equal in 2022 with a focus on voting access and equity.” **CN**

The Leon County Created Equal program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Culture category.

NEWS FROM

ACROSS THE NATION



ALABAMA

MADISON COUNTY has recently awarded grants toward battling food insecurity. WHNT-TV reported that the county has awarded three \$20,000 grant contracts to non-governmental organizations providing food to the communities most at risk. “These grants will go directly for providing food to those in need,” said Madison County Commission Chairman Dale Strong. With the rise in food and gas prices, more residents have turned to food banks for aid. “These agencies provide support to untold thousands of men, women, and children all across the Valley,” Strong noted.

DELAWARE

To get more competitive about hiring new employees, DELAWARE COUNTY has removed residency requirements on some jobs. The county removed the requirements for some health professionals, correctional officers, the county medical examiner and employees in the Department of Planning, according to the Delaware County Daily Times.

FLORIDA

Conservation is a key priority for the commissioners in MANATEE COUNTY. According to the Bradenton Herald, the county voted to contribute

up to \$3 million to help the state turn Rattlesnake Key into a state park. The roughly thousand-acre mangrove forest island in Tampa Bay will cost the state roughly \$30 million to preserve. The area is a popular destination for boaters and travelers.

HAWAII

A coalition headed by HAWAII COUNTY has received \$500,000 and is in the running for up to \$100 million as part of the U.S. Economic Development Administrations’ Build Back Better Regional Challenge. The Center Square reported that Hawaii’s plan to restructure part of its economy has earned it a place among 60 finalists. The plan is designed to better support local food production by diverting funds that typically go to importing food. Twenty to 30 of the finalists will earn the additional funding.

Other counties in the running include ALAMEDA COUNTY, Calif., HOWARD COUNTY, Md. and OSCEOLA COUNTY, Fla.

ILLINOIS

COOK COUNTY is one of many counties tightening restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID. The Chicago Sun-Times reported that the county will require proof of full vaccination to enter bars, restaurants, gyms and entertainment centers. Full vaccination may include the booster shot if the



VIRGINIA

ARLINGTON COUNTY and PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, Md. are designing “traffic gardens” to help kids learn about traffic safety, with the aid of \$35,000 grants. The gardens simulate transportation networks where children can learn the rules of the road and practice their transportation safety skills. ArlingtonNOW reported that the counties hope the project and the consulting services being granted will help develop universal guidance and templates so that schools can build their own gardens on “any budget” using a number of different materials and equipment.

CDC changes their recommendation, with discussions about a potential fourth shot looming.

KANSAS

In JOHNSON COUNTY, officials are using a powerful joint database to analyze trends in the criminal justice system. KSHB-TV reported that the county’s new criminal justice coordinator, Mike Brouwer, is using a joint database of “law enforcement, corrections, court and social service agencies” to analyze trends in the system to better support the community. Brouwer

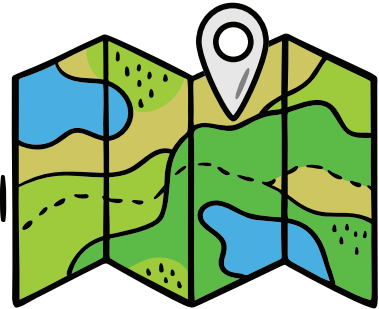
would like to begin focusing on the mentally ill, getting them help they need and getting them out of the system. “The data is going to allow us to be much more proactive in getting people help, which produces better outcomes,” said Brouwer.

WYANDOTTE COUNTY and Kansas City have partnered to create a resiliency grant program. The county has set aside American Res-

cue Plan funds to create 35 \$10,000 grants for small businesses to help ease the burden imposed by the pandemic. These loans can be used for renovation, web design, hiring and more and are designed to help the small businesses that are the heart of the community.

MICHIGAN

The commissioners and municipalities of MANISTEE COUNTY are working together to preserve and expand parks in their community. The coun-



ty has joined 20 municipalities in a park expansion plan from 2022-2027 in the hopes that jointly they can apply for grants and begin projects expanding and connecting trails and waterways, according to the Manistee News Advocate. The plan includes an overarching

OKLAHOMA

The MUSKOGEE COUNTY Sheriff’s Office recently named sixth-grader Davyon Johnson an honorary deputy after he performed the Heimlich maneuver on a classmate and later that evening helped a woman from her house that was on fire.

Muskogee County Undersheriff Greg Martin presents Davyon Johnson with a certificate, naming him an honorary deputy. Photo courtesy of Muskogee County Sheriff’s Office.



ing goal of an interconnected, countywide trail system as well as individual goals for the municipalities.

MONTANA

Commissioners in **MIS-SOULA COUNTY** recently launched “Tip of the Spear,” a **podcast** about the people, policies and programs of county government. Each week, the commissioners interview other elected officials and local government staff to help residents learn more about public sector projects. The county works with the local community access station to produce the podcast, which is available on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher and Spotify.

NEW YORK

The **ERIE COUNTY** Legislature recently approved plans to establish a new county-controlled corporation to oversee and manage the creation of a **county-sponsored fiber-optic network**. ErieNet could involve up to 500 miles of fiber cables reaching every local government in the county, an effort *Governing* reported could use \$34 million in American Rescue Plan funding in addition to \$20 million allocated to the plan in 2019.



OREGON

• **MULTNOMAH COUNTY** set a timeline to **phase out gas-powered leaf blowers** and transition to electric and battery-powered alternatives. The Board approved four actions: Transitioning county leaf blower use from gas-powered leaf blowers to electric models before 2025; ensuring

adequate charging infrastructure for electric leaf blowers; using awareness campaigns to educate the public about the impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers; and developing a work group, in partnership with the City of Portland, exploring an equitable, community-wide transition to sustainable alternatives.

• Public defenders representing impoverished clients in Oregon will no longer pay district attorney’s offices to **access discovery evidence**, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported, a fee those prosecutors use to fund their operations. The Office of Public Defense Services estimated it had paid up to \$6 million per biennium in discovery to district attorney offices across the state.

• **WASHINGTON COUNTY** and two of its cities have launched an initiative to determine gaps in the domestic semiconductor chip industry’s regional **supply chain**. *The Oregonian* reported that the pilot project is the first step in an effort to promote the industry by improving local governments’ knowledge of the chip industry’s regional supply chain and its growth requirements.



PENNSYLVANIA

• After seeing a rise in credit card debt cases, **LANCASTER COUNTY** has introduced a **credit card debt diversion program**, pairing residents with counselors to address their debt and prevent liens and bank account garnishments.

• Citing the time involved, the **WESTMORELAND COUNTY** Board of Commissioners will no longer **read emailed comments aloud** at the start of each public meeting, a practice the commissioners adopted when holding meetings remotely early during the pandemic. Emailed comments will be printed and made avail-

able for public viewing at the meetings and will be added to formal minutes of each session and uploaded to the county website, *The Tribune Review* reported.

VIRGINIA

• Aubrey “Bucky” Stanley, the **longest-serving county supervisor** in commonwealth history, died Dec. 31 after 38 years representing **HANOVER COUNTY**.

WISCONSIN

• The **BROWN COUNTY** Sheriff’s Office participated in the **rescue** of 40 ice fishers who were stranded in Lake Michigan’s Green Bay after a large chunk of ice broke off from the shoreline. By the time everyone was rescued, the floating ice was about a mile from the shore, WBAY News reported.

The Brown County Sheriff’s Office responded to the call around 10:17 a.m. near Point Comfort along the east shore of the Bay of Green Bay.

• The **DANE COUNTY** Board of Supervisors has launched an independent evaluation of **equity and access in its parks system and zoo**. A contractor will conduct focus groups and surveys to evaluate how accessible and inclusive county parks and the zoo are, Madison365 reported.

The process will include in-depth qualitative and quantitative research to form a better understanding, particularly in relation to issues of equity and access, of the demographics of who is and is not using Dane County’s public spaces via interviews, surveys, onsite visits, focus groups and other means.

ACROSS THE NATION

The opt-in deadline for the pending multi-governmental **settlement with opioid manufacturer** Johnson & Johnson and three major medical distributors has been delayed to Jan. 26.

News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Dakota Hendricks. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and dhendricks@naco.org.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

RICHARD C. SANDERS, PE

NACo Board Member
County Engineer
Polk County, Minn.



Sanders

Occupation: County engineer for Polk County, Minn.

Education: Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of North Dakota.

The hardest thing I’ve ever done is: Watching my 18-month-old daughter go through a medical emergency.

A dream I have is to: Officiate an NFL game; play golf at Augusta National.

You’d be surprised to learn that I: Officiated high school and college football, curl and drive a sugar beet truck every fall.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Went on a mission trip to Bolivia in 1990.

My favorite way to relax is: Sit by the campfire.

I’m most proud of: 36 years of marriage to my wife Ruth, and my kids Jacob, 32 and Rachel, 30.

Every morning I read: The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s* Packers section online.

My favorite meal is: Steak and baked potato.

My pet peeve is: If you have something important to say... call, don’t text.

My motto is: “Everything happens for a reason...”

The last book I read was: “When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi,” by David Maraniss

My favorite movie is: I can’t decide... “Rambo” or “Die Hard.”

My favorite music is: Late ‘70s or early ‘80s pop/rock

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: Legislative priorities and the ability to learn from other counties regarding their successes and failures.

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

My father (Ramon Sanders), who passed in 2009,

Vince Lombardi (Go Pack Go!), Jack Nicklaus.



FEMA programs support community safety

From FEMA page 3

lize National Guard resources under Title 32 authorizations to support COVID-19 medical care, testing and vaccination activities. FEMA will fund 100 percent of National Guard costs through April 1, 2022.

How is FEMA ensuring that testing, medical care and vaccination efforts are equitable?

President Biden’s Executive Order on Ensuring an Equitable Pandemic Response and Recovery requires all states and local governments to focus the use of FEMA funding on the highest-risk communities and underserved populations. State, tribal nation, and territory recipients of FEMA funding are required to ensure that all state, tribal nation, territorial, local, and private non-profit subrecipients are adhering to applicable federal civil rights and non-discrimination laws and equity data requirements.


The DHS Civil Rights Evaluation Tool provides an overview of what is required to meet civil rights requirements. Each Recipient’s FEMA-State Agreement includes specific conditions related to these responsi-

bilities.

What if states, tribal nations and territories have outstanding needs for assistance?

Local governments that have outstanding needs or gaps in what they need to address for the ongoing surge in Omicron variant COVID-19 infections should contact their FEMA Regional Office.

How can applicants learn more about FEMA PA Funding?

To learn more about FEMA PA’s program, eligibility, and how to apply for funding, visit fema.gov. 

WORD SEARCH

MILWAUKEE COUNTY, Wisc. Created by: Dakota Hendricks

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ACTOR: Actor Gene Wilder, born in Milwaukee, was known for his work as an actor, writer and comedian with iconic roles in films like “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.”

AIRSHOW: The Air and Water Show is one of the largest and best-attended air shows in the country, attracting about 400,000 people each year.

BREWERS: The county is home to the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team, named after the many famous breweries in the area.

BROWN: Milwaukee County was carved out of Brown County when it was founded in 1834

COURTHOUSE: The first county courthouse was built in 1836 and replaced in 1870.

DISTRICT: The county is split into 18 districts, each with their own county supervisor.

GEORGIA: The work of artist and Wisconsin native Georgia O’Keeffe can be seen at the Milwaukee Art Museum.

MUSEUM: Milwaukee is home to many museums, including the Milwaukee Art Museum which has been collecting artwork for 125 years.

MICHIGAN: The county borders Lake Michigan, one of the five Great Lakes.

PABST: One of the major brewing companies is located in Milwaukee.

POPULATION: Milwaukee County is the 45th largest county in the country, with a total of 939,489 residents according to the 2020 census.

SIMMONS: Hall of Fame baseball player Al Simmons was born and raised in Milwaukee.

SUMMERFEST: One of the largest music festivals in the world, Summerfest, has been hosted in downtown Milwaukee for more than 50 years.

WARD: The Third Ward is a historic district of Milwaukee City created in 1984.

ZOO: The Milwaukee County Zoo was founded in 1892.



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