Former NACo President Harvey Ruvin dies at 85

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

When Metro Dade Commission-er Harvey Ruvin ran for NACo leadership in the early ‘80s, his campaign parapher-
nails from the Florida Associ-
ation of Counties proclaimed him "a man for all counties."

And while he gladly fought on behalf of all as he worked his way up to his term as presi-
dent from 1987-1988, his heart was in South Florida. Five years after his tenure as NACo presi-
dent concluded, he pursued a new job as the county's clerk of courts, a role he held for 30 years until his death Dec. 31 at age 85.

"It was a tremendous benefit to Miami-Dade County to have the president representing us in Washington and elsewhere," Merrett Stierheim, the former Miami-Dade County manager, said at Ruvin's memorial ser-
vice.

Demonstrating that he was a man for all counties meant communicating how his pas-
tion for environmental pres-
ervation would not alienate the majority of Florida’s rural counties, while not compro-
mising the values that drove his 1972 county commission candidacy. It was an opportu-
nity for him to exhibit his pow-
ers of persuasion.

"Environmentalists were not well perceived by most county officials and Harvey was very much an environmentalist," said John Thomas, who served as executive director of the Florida Association of Counties when Ruvin was running for NACo office and executive di-
rector of NACo during Ruvin’s presidency.

"It took a while to help a lot of the commissioners in Flori-
da understand why — that even if it wasn’t important in their own counties — it was important in some counties and particularly large urban counties. But he did."

Ruvin's environmental-
ism, which included a push for renourishment of Miami Beach, also provided a win-
dow into his fairness, Stierhe-
im said. When artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude planned a project to surround 11 islands in Miami’s Biscayne Bay with 6,499,800 square feet of pink polypropylene floating fabric, Ruvin said. When artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude planned a project to surround 11 islands in Miami’s Biscayne Bay with 6,499,800 square feet of pink polypropylene floating fabric, Ruvin was sternly opposed to it. But he eventually took a meeting with the pair and, convinced it would not harm the marine life, "helped sway many naysayers."

Ruvin was motivated to purs-
eue NACo leadership following what he saw as an inadequate

city roads in the future. For the second time in two months, the county declared a driving ban to reduce unnecessary travel. Drivers abandoned hundreds of cars, including tractor-trailer rigs and buses. Poloncarz said he was nearly hit by a car driving through

Erie County, N.Y. faces deadly ‘Blizzard of the Century’

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Counties throughout New York rushed to help Erie Coun-
ty navigate a snowstorm that killed 38 people in late Decem-
ber, more than half who died nationwide during storms that dumped four feet of snow on the Buffalo area and spread
dangerously cold tempera-
tures throughout much of the country.

Erie County, meanwhile, took over some responsibility for clearing more than one-
third of Buffalo’s roads of more than four feet of snow, and County Executive Mark Po-
loncarz is exploring trying to take responsibility for clearing

city roads in the future. For the second time in two months, the county declared a driving ban to reduce unnecessary travel. Drivers abandoned hundreds of cars, including tractor-trailer rigs and buses. Poloncarz said he was nearly hit by a car driving through

Getting the band back together:
County defenders rock the holidays

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

A cartoon fox and hound spend all day chasing each other around, but when the clock hits 5, they clock out and say, “See you tomorrow!”

That’s how Leo Masursky looks at the relationship he and his colleagues in the Pima County, Ariz. public defend-
er’s office try to strike with their rivals, the county’s pros-
secutors.

After a two-year hiatus forced by the COVID-19 pan-
demic, the “Misfit Toys” got the band back together in December 2022 and were out again on the county court-
house yard, playing a selection of holiday tunes for the benefit of all. Especially the prosecu-
tors.

See STORM page 3
See BAND page 5
Harvey Ruvin focused clerk terms on increasing modernization, accessibility

From RUVIN page 1

I understood that, because optical scanning technology was still new, but it was possible," Ruvin told County News in 2018. "We just had to demonstrate that it was more efficient and served the public better. We wanted to serve people online, not in line.

We wanted to serve people online, not in line.

His innovation and drive to constantly improve services was remarkable to former Commissioner Sally Heyman, who was charged with bringing him copious notes from NACo Board of Directors meetings when he couldn’t attend conferences. "There are so many people who don’t want to do things because it’s extra work or it’s not their job or they don’t like change, but Harvey was a ‘possibilities’ kind of guy and that, you gotta love," she said.

His last run for the clerk’s office came at age 82, and while speakers at his service acknowledged that his dedication meant he wasn’t spending as much time with his wife Risa and sons Zach and Eric as most men his age, Risa recognized the role public service played in his life.

"Harvey’s dedication to the clerk’s office, to Dade County, to the state of Florida, to the United States, to the world we live in, was the fabric of over a 50-year legacy of service," she said at the service. "He always felt like it was an honor and a privilege to serve his community. He leaves all the places that he touched better than he found them."
the snow near his house while he tried to get into his own car. He had high praise for the county call center personnel who responded to emergency calls from people trapped in their homes. Many of those call center personnel were taking calls routed to their homes to keep them from having to travel.

“When you’re talking to people for [several] hours who think they’re going to die, it reminds me of the beginning of the COVID crisis, when we set up our COVID hotline and people were calling, crying, ‘I have a cough, does that mean I’m going to die?’” he said during a Dec. 28 briefing on the snowstorm.

“We had individuals working in those call centers who weren’t trained for that [emotional support] and it was a very mentally exhausting task and I want to thank each and every one from the Erie County team who are manning those calls and I’m very proud of what you did. You have saved lives.”

The county’s complement of 72 high lifts and 119 dump trucks were part of the armada of county, state and private vehicles working on snow removal.

Every year, the county replaces five dump trucks to continually modernize its fleet, Poloncarz said.

EMS personnel completed door-to-door visits of homes that couldn’t be reached by phone to do wellness checks for 911 callers. The National Guard also visited homes, completing wellness checks at every house, Poloncarz said.

“Thank you, to all of the people who have gone above and beyond, who have shoveled, who have delivered food, who have helped their neighbors, who have helped strangers who have been stranded — because that is what’s going to get us through all of this.”

Mutual aid from other New York counties was diverse and came from far afield.

Dutchess County sent eight crew members, a front-end loader and dump trucks. Members of the Otsego County Special Operations Team worked 15- to 16-hour shifts to help with a backlog of more than 1,000 EMS calls.

“The people we did actually make contact with were genuinely very appreciative that we were there,” said Cooperstown Fire Department Captain Michael Simons.

“The city basically shut down for a brief period of time and these calls were backing up and piling up. They were very grateful someone was there to come check on them.”

A team from the Onondaga County Health Department traveled to assist with recovery efforts.

Oswego County supplied six crew members, five dump trucks, a service truck and mechanic and one front loader to help with cleanup efforts.

The Madison County 911 call center has fielded calls for Erie County remotely, thanks to advanced technology. Frank McFall, director of Madison County’s Emergency Communications department, led the initiative.

“I’ve been here 19 years and 19 years ago, we would have never been able to do this,” McFall said.

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Harris County, Texas expands pilot program that employs homeless

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Jazarus Williams had been sleeping under a bridge for about three years when he joined Employ2Empower, a Harris County, Texas program that pays those experiencing homelessness $15 an hour in exchange for services like graffiti abatement and restriping parking lots, as well as time devoted applying to housing, healthcare and permanent employment.

“When I first got into the program, I was still sleeping on the streets, I was drinking. I was using drugs, I was suicidal,” Williams said. “Without this program, I don’t know where I’d be right now to be honest.”

Employ2Empower functions through three stakeholders — the sheriff’s office and the non-profit organization Career and Recovery Resources, Inc. run the program and county commissioners secure funding for it.

The sheriff’s office provides the participants with job mentorship, as the deputies involved with the program are chosen partially for their range of skills outside of law enforcement, like plumbing, carpentry and the ability to troubleshoot equipment, according to Sgt. Theodore Perez, while the county’s Career and Recovery Resources provides participants with referrals to supporting services.

Williams joined in September 2022 after hearing about the program through Perez and Career and Recovery Resources case manager Belinda Flores, who were looking for new participants at The Beacon, a non-profit organization serving Houston’s homeless population, where Williams would wash his clothes, shower and eat, he said.

Since then, Williams said that he has stopped using drugs and his mental health has drastically improved. Employ2Empower helped him with transportation to doctor’s appointments, provided him with clothing and got him temporary housing. He is now in the process of getting into permanent housing and receiving his GED, he said.

“It’s been basically homeless my whole life … I had a real rough childhood growing up and I always just prayed that somebody would come in my life, because even my own family pushed me away — now I don’t have nobody but this place,” Williams said. “And I still need them now, so I feel like this can be something that can change the whole world for real — it’s been a great help for me.”

Employ2Empower started off as a six-month pilot program in Precinct 2 funded through Commissioner Adrian Garcia’s budget and expanded county-wide in July 2022 after the Harris County Commissioner’s Court unanimously voted to devote $2.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding toward the program.

Garcia’s experience as a police officer and Harris County sheriff shaped his perspective and priorities as a county commissioner, he said, particularly in understanding how important it is to treat those experiencing homelessness with dignity.

“Get the sheriff’s office out there and make them go away,” Garcia said.

Garcia said he knew that arresting those experiencing homelessness wasn’t the answer and had the idea to re-purpose an initiative he put together while on Houston City Council, District H Cares, which provided food and a recommendation letter in exchange for doing tasks like cleaning out weeded lots, picking up trash and clearing out drainage culverts.

‘I feel like this can be something that can change the whole world for real...’

- Jazarus Williams, Employ2Empower participant

Recruitment for the program comes from numerous sources, but one of the primary ways is through peer mentors. Employ2Empower enlists the help of those who have personally benefited from the program to spread the word, Garcia said.

“We ask them to help us by going back into the encampments they’re familiar with or the encampments they’ve identified — no one can speak the language better than someone who’s been there,” Garcia said. “The other part is through the sheriff’s office homeless outreach team — these are a group of specially trained deputies, and so when they get calls or complaints from the commu-
“Everyone has court at 9 a.m., so we went out early in the mornings on the plaza and started playing,” Masursky said.

“There were a few grumpy people, but most of the prosecutors were smiling and laughing. We would really hope to get a laugh out of people. We are adversaries and we really do have very serious things going on, but we’re also county employees and we’re people and we just try to bring in some humanity whenever we can.”

Masursky credits colleague Chris Lynch with getting the band together in 2016, after Masursky, who taught himself to play the trumpet, saw his previous band, the Goats, fall apart.

Lynch, a keyboardist, suggested they start playing at an office party as a bonding exercise. It turned out, they could actually play pretty well.

“He didn’t know it at the time he asked me, but I love Christmas music,” Masursky said.

“I’d like to play some different music too, but so far, it’s just been the Christmas stuff. I’d like to try playing at other times of the year, but it’s really a matter of coordinating around everyone else’s availability.”

When the band reformed after the height of the pandemic, they gained drummer Katie Rogers and bassist Tom Knauer. They also have jingle bell ringers who complement the band’s musical stylings: Faith Smith, Kristy Valenzuela and Alyssa Colvin.

“We obviously work really hard and know what kind of legal work we’re all capable of, but it really speaks to the office culture that we have a chance to collaborate with our talents and passions like this,” Masursky said.

“People are willing to sing, and that’s what takes some real courage.”

The work of indigent defense can wear down even the most idealistic attorney.

The long odds and short list of resources many clients face pile up.

“That all adds to the need for relief not just away from the office, but with colleagues. It gives everybody a chance to connect on a different level in a different way and you know we recognize first of all how much we like the job but then also how much you know as human beings we can relate to each other and it really does help your motivation, it helps you just kind of get reenergized, it’s just a great thing all the way around.

“The best thing we can have in Pima County is both prosecutors and public defenders who are on the ball.”

From BAND page 1

SET LIST, A FEW ARE REPRISED WITH A JAZZY TWIST:

• “Christmastime Is Here” by Vince Guaraldi
• “Little Drummer Boy”
• “Silent Night”
• “We Wish You a Merry Christmas”
• “Good King Wenceslas”

Performing at the Pima County, Ariz. Courthouse plaza: The Misfit Toys. From left: Katie Rogers, Kristy Valenzuela, Chris Lynch, Leo Masursky, Tom Knauer. Photo by Sarah Kostick
COUNTY NEWS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES

Six months after launch, how is 988 doing?

by John Palmieri, MD and Chelsea Thomson

Counties across the country play a key role in developing a behavioral health continuum of care to support community members living with a mental health or substance use disorder or experiencing a suicidal, mental health or substance use crisis. As one element of the continuum, counties may operate a crisis hotline or “warmline” for people to call during times of distress. On July 16, counties added another tool to this part of the continuum when the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline transitioned to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The three digits provide an easy-to-remember confidence to local resources.

After the transition, more people across the country dialed, texted and chatted using the 988 number and were connected with services through the Lifeline. Between November 2021 and 2022, the total number of calls, texts and chats increased 33 percent, with the number of texts increasing six-fold. Despite the increase in volume, the overall answer rate improved from 63 percent to 92 percent and average wait time to speak with a counselor decreased from three minutes and seven seconds to 36 seconds. These trends have continued with more than 350,000 routed calls, texts and chats to 988 in September.

Counties and 988

The 988 line offers an entry point into the local behavioral health continuum of care. Local resources play a large role in community members’ long-term well-being and stability. Over the past six months, counties, alongside state, city, tribal, federal and private partners, have implemented various policies and practices to bolster local community services and access to treatment. Building local capacity through increased 911/988 interoperability, added mobile crisis teams, enhanced crisis stabilization units and increased peer-led support is critical to providing people in crisis with the right intervention at the right time and place.

Montgomery County, Ohio
(Pop. 537,309)

Early in 2022, Montgomery County launched Crisis Now, a three-pronged approach to delivering crisis services. The launch included a crisis hotline and mobile crisis response teams. A crisis receiving center will open in early 2023. When 988 launched, the crisis hotline also began taking local 988 calls. Over the first six months of Crisis Now, 89 percent of calls to the hotline were resolved over the phone and 77 percent of the mobile crisis responses were resolved in the community.

(Pop. 1,603,797)

Philadelphia leaders have supported the transition to 988 by offering a “no wrong door approach” so community members can access 988 and related services regardless of the agency they contact. One of these avenues includes embedding behavioral health crisis counselors within the 911 call centers who can join active 911 calls to deescalate the emergency and offer a connection to services. To help ensure callers can access the right intervention at the right time, Philadelphia adjusted the script for 911 call takers to improve the handoff between 911 and 988.

Burlington County, N.J.
(Pop. 461,860)

After the transition to 988, Burlington County Commissioners reminded residents to call, text or chat 988 to receive immediate help during a suicidal, mental health and/or substance use crisis. With an easier-to-remember confidential number, local leaders also hope 988 reduces the stigma surrounding mental health. Last year, county commissioners passed a resolution designating the county as stigma-free in an effort to combat misperceptions about behavioral health and increase awareness of local resources.

Santa Clara County, Calif.
(Pop. 1,936,259)

The Santa Clara County Department of Behavioral Health Services set up a call center with 10 employees and 75 volunteers to support local 988 response. During the transition to 988, the county streamlined the path to connect callers to local services by sending all calls to one line. This centralized process allows call takers to connect callers with the right response, which may include immediate support from the county’s adult, youth or trust teams. Since 988 launched, only three of the more than 1,700 calls to the county’s hotline have been diverted to 911.

Douglas County, Kan.
(Pop. 118,785)

County leaders launched a 24-hour, seven days a week crisis line linked to 988 and new mobile crisis team to serve county residents and support 988 callers who may need in-person support during a behavioral health emergency. Additionally, law enforcement officers who respond to calls requiring a behavioral health response have access to a dedicated call line to access the 988 crisis call center. Prior to the transition, county commissioners also allocated $170,000 to hire four full-time call specialist supervisors to staff the county crisis line. Soon, local Public Safety Answering Points will have the ability to seamlessly connect 911 callers experiencing a behavioral health emergency, without a criminal or medical component, to the 988 call center.

Charleston County, S.C.
(Pop. 408,235)

To ensure callers receive connection to local care and strive for a 100 percent in-state answer rate, state legislators set aside funding in the budget to support a back-up 988 call center in Charleston County. The additional center will not only increase connections to local resources for the 25 percent of calls that are currently routed to out-of-state backup centers but also reduce the wait time to speak with a counselor.

County opportunities

To continue supporting 988 and building accessible and high-quality local behavioral health services, county leaders can consider:

• collaborating with state behavioral health partners to support linkages between state and local planning
• partnering with PSAPs, first responders and law enforcement to educate about and encourage health first responses to behavioral health crises
• promoting awareness of 988 and local services and tailoring the message for under-resourced communities, and
• Working with 988 Lifeline centers to ensure the centers have updated resource information for referral and linkage to county crisis services and community-based care.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON 988 AND RESOURCES, VISIT:

• Behavioral health continuum of care: https://www.naco.org/resources/promoting-health-and-safety-through-behavioral-health-continuum-care
• NACO’s Toolkit for Counties: 988 Crisis and Suicide Lifeline: https://www.naco.org/resources/toolkit-counties-988-suicide-crisis-lifeline
• SAMHSA’s 988 site: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988
• SAMHSA’s partner toolkit: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit

John Palmieri, M.D., M.H.A., is a senior medical advisor at SAMHSA. Chelsea Thomson serves as the senior program manager for Behavioral Health and Justice at NACO.
Families reunite Dec. 1, 2022 at Nicholas County, W.Va.’s treatment court graduation. Photo courtesy of Stephanie Smith

Courts’ substance use programs keep families together

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Counties across West Virginia are implementing family treatment courts (FTC) as a response to the state’s opioid epidemic and foster care crisis. The program, which is in 11 courts across the state, reunites parents charged with drug related offenses with their children after they have completed intensive treatment and counseling.

After she was arrested for a DUI, Mary Beth Leslie entered Nicholas County’s FTC in October 2020 to regain custody of her teenage daughter. Although she’s a resident of a neighboring county, which doesn’t have an FTC program, she was able to participate because she was pulled over in Nicholas County.

Her best friend, who lives in a different county, fought five years for her children. “She was in recovery — she was in rehab — and they took her children,” Leslie said. “Most people give up then — she stayed clean, she fought it. It took five years to see her kids again. So, when you watch stuff like that and you go through those situations, where people have fought and even do the right things and the system still fails them, it’s hard for anyone to have hope.

“We’re in a poor county in a poor state,” she noted. “Most of these people don’t have families or resources, or love themselves enough to fight for themselves, let alone their kids. The family treatment court brings you in with love and open arms and it really shows you that there’s people out there that do care, that will fight for you if you’re going to find the changes — drugs are only a symptom, there are deeper issues going on in why people make these choices.”

Because of FTC, Leslie was also able to see her daughter much sooner and more frequently than she would have otherwise, she said.

Nicholas County was the fifth county in the state to adopt FTC, launching in 2020, and now has the largest program, according to Judge Stephen Callaghan, who oversees the county’s FTC.

Most of the funding for West Virginia’s treatment court programs comes from a 2019 state settlement with McKesson Corporation regarding the opioid epidemic, with the exception of Boone County, which is funded separately through a grant from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and the Nicholas County Day Report Center also help fund Nicholas County’s program, according to Callaghan.

“We competed with some other counties because there’s limited federal funding for that — we have a need for it, and our [State] Supreme Court is the one that says, ‘OK, you get a family treatment court or you don’t,’ and we just stayed in constant contact with them and were persistent,” Callaghan said.

“I think one of the biggest things I did was I already had staff — we already had a team put together, we’d already talked to everybody about it in the county, we just had everything lined up. And the [State] Supreme Court finally just said, ‘OK, fine.’”

The first staff member Callaghan got on board was Stephanie Smith, who at the time worked for Child Protective Services (CPS), and now works as an FTC case coordinator.

“Having come from CPS to family treatment court, I absolutely feel like what we’re able to do with the families and the parents is making a huge difference and [creating] more success,” she said. “None of us like terminating parental rights as a CPS worker, and I think as a judge, it’s not what you want to do, but sometimes you don’t have a choice, and I think that was where we always felt like if we just had more to offer, especially in these cases that involve drug use, and I feel like that’s what we’ve got, and we’re really seeing it work.”

Callaghan said that, prior to the creation of the program, parents involved in abuse and neglect cases would, if they qualified, go through an “improvement” period and would come back to court after 90 days for a check-in. FTC is a much more intensive process, Callaghan said, which includes recovery and life-skill classes, a curfew, drug screenings and weekly treatment court check-ins and counseling.

“I wanted to do everything in a day,” Leslie said. “I was like, ‘I want to get everything done right now, get my daughter back and get this over with,’ so they had to slow me down and

See FOSTER page 16

RON WHITEHEAD
NACo Board Member
Public Works Director, County Surveyor
Washington County, Utah

Number of years active in NACo: Seven
Years in public service: 21
Occupation: Public Works Director/County Surveyor
Education: College Surveying Certificate
Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Two people — my parents
A dream I have is to: Take my daughter back hunting moose in Alaska.
My favorite way to relax is: Spending time at Lake Powell.

WHITEHEAD

I’m most proud of: My family.
My favorite meal is: A good steak dinner.
My pet peeve is: I try not to let unimportant stuff bother me, so I really do not have a pet peeve.
My favorite movie is: Any good action movie.
My favorite music is: Classic rock.
My favorite U.S. president is: Ronald Reagan.
My county is a NACo member because: They understand the importance of having a national voice for county government concerns.

THE MOST ADVENTUROUS THING I’VE EVER DONE IS:
Hunting moose in Alaska with my daughter.

S ANYTHING ELSE?
No.

JANUARY 16, 2023 7
I LOVE MY COUNTY BECAUSE... 2022 ART COMPETITION

2023 CALENDAR WINNERS GALLERY

Mira Panchuk, 1st grader
Southwest Calloway Elementary School, Calloway County, Ky.

Emily Clark, 6th grader
Brentwood Academy, Johnson County, Kan.

Kason Moore, 3rd grader
Chicod School, Pitt County, N.C.

Lily Rayhart, 4th grader
Windsor Farm Elementary School, Anne Arundel County, Md.

Kesley Robbins, 5th grader
Mountainburg Middle School, Crawford County, Ark.

Kat Brickle, 12th grader
Gatlinburg-Pittman High School, Sevier County, Tenn.
Alayna Garst, 10th grader
Williamstown High School, Wood County, W.Va.

Joshua Centner, 2nd grader
West Street Elementary School, Niagara County, N.Y.

Ciel Williams, 5th grader
Chicod School, Pitt County, N.C.

Kennedy Kirkland, 7th grader
home-schooled, Johnson County, Kan.

Ava Jensen, 11th grader
Gatlinburg-Pittman High School, Sevier County, Tenn.

Sadey Bowen, 11th grader
Harrisburg High School, Poinsett County, Ark.

Emma Boyd, 4th grader
Chicod School, Pitt County, N.C.
Nothing inspires terror quite like public speaking, but Livingston County, New York’s personnel are apparently fearless.

When Communications Director Sean Farnsworth canvassed the county staff to see who would be interested in participating in a speakers bureau, going out to present to local civic groups, the response surprised him.

"Within 15 minutes, the emails started coming in," he said. "People were excited." The speakers bureau, launched in October, features county employees who are available upon request to address a variety of topics to civic groups. The topics include county administration, county history, public information and both administration, county history, public information and both environment as Coyle, given their specialized knowledge. Human resources personnel won’t be expected to answer questions about the latest public health issues to the same depth as those speakers.

"I know people are concerned with the risks of going in ‘blind,’ but it’s been fun, insightful and interactive," Coyle said. "The fact is, we hadn’t had a lot of citizen-first engagement, and now we’re getting a two-way street of dialogue with our residents. We just had to push out into the community, rather than waiting for them to come to us on their time."

It’s been instructive for Coyle, as he found residents are generally supportive and appreciative of county government, and the conversations leave them informed about the diverse number of responsibilities of county government.

"My favorite part is that sometimes, folks are not aware of all the interactions they have with county government," he said. "County government in New York really matches people throughout their life cycles and answering people’s questions gives me a chance to show them how their lives intersect with county services."

There were times when Coyle’s approach forced him to serve as a punching bag. "I got a lot of comments from the public about COVID-19 business classifications, what were and were not essential businesses, and I had to explain that it was the state’s decision, not the county’s," he said.

Getting the feedback from residents has helped Coyle evaluate how the county is doing on many of its initiatives. "Whenever I hear people talking about the need for more broadband deployment, it validates the work that’s already in progress on the county’s part," he said.

The fact that almost two dozen county staffers have volunteered to take the stage is testament to their commitment to the county, Farnsworth said. "I think it just speaks to how passionate they are about serving their community and trying to better the county," he said. "This isn’t a normal job function, but their actions go a long way to telling the story here."
CHEESE: Curry County is home to Southwest Cheese, a manufacturer of cheese and whey protein. Launched in 2005, they now process over 5.1 billion pounds of milk producing almost 600 million pounds of block cheese annually.

CLOVIS: The county seat of Curry County is the city of Clovis, N.M.

COURTHOUSE: The Curry County Courthouse sits in the county seat of Clovis and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The courthouse, built in 1936, sits at three-and-a-half stories tall and is modeled in the Art-Deco style.

CURRY: The county is named after George Curry, who served as governor and convicted murderer. Maryott, who was a baseball player, painter, taxidermist and convicted murderer.

Garden County measures roughly 1,731 square miles and its population is around 1,847, according to the 2020 census. The county is considered to be the third best birding area in the country and birdwatchers can see Great Horned Owls, American Kestrels, Prairie Falcons and Bobolinks, among other bird species, at the Ash Hollow Historical Park and the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The 46,000-acre refuge has 21 wetland complexes and is a big hunting and fishing destination.

Garden County was part of the Oregon Trail and there are nine spots marked throughout the county for its historical significance in the mass migration, including grave sites of those who died in the county on the journey and the location of The Battle of Blue Water, also known as the Harney Massacre, which was the first major clash between the U.S. Army and the Lakota Nation.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

Welcome, Garden County, Neb.

Established in 1909, Garden County, Neb. was named for the Garden of Eden. Its county seat, Oshkosh, was at one time known as the “Sawdust Capital of the World” for its lumber industry. Oshkosh has two museums, the Rock School Museum, which houses a large collection of arrowheads and local historical artifacts and the Silver Hill Theater Museum, which was originally an opera house and now holds the local collection of local celebrity Miles Maryott, who was a baseball player, painter, taxidermist and convicted murderer.

On the Move

NACo Staff

- Executive Director Matt Chase and Strategic Communications Director Nicole Weissman attended the Maryland Association of Counties Winter Conference in Dorchester County.
- Elizabeth Ward has joined NACo as a program associate for the Opinion Solutions Center in the Counties Future Labs. She previously served as a Lab intern and did communications and community relations work in the Salt Lake County mayor’s office. She earned a bachelor’s degree in Political Science with minors in Economics and Environmental and Sustainability Studies from the University of Utah and is pursuing a master’s degree in Applied Economics at George Washington University.
- Edgar Freytes joined NACo as a staff accountant after a stint as a finance intern at NACo. He is pursuing a bachelor’s degree at George Mason University.

Chief Information Officer Rita Reynolds has written the forward for a chapter in the book “Securing the Nation’s Critical Infrastructure.”
American retirement security has been under increased pressure as market volatility and inflation have ravaged the retirement confidence of millions of Americans in the wake of the pandemic. Recent Nationwide Retirement Institute® surveys found one-in-five older Americans have delayed or canceled their retirement due to the pandemic and one-in-10 report reducing contributions to their 401(k) to help manage expenses in today’s inflationary environment.

The SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 passed by Congress on Dec. 23 as part of the FY 2023 omnibus package could make a meaningful difference in helping more Americans address this adversity and improve their retirement outlook. Leaders at Nationwide — one of the largest insurance and financial service providers in the United States — are applauding this bipartisan legislation as a significant step forward for our retirement system and powerful continuation of the momentum created by the SECURE Act of 2019.

“SECURE 2.0 provides significant enhancements that will create greater access to workplace retirement plans, which is a leading indicator of retirement preparedness and critical to retirement security,” said John Carter, president and COO of Nationwide Financial. “This legislation removes barriers that keep American workers from having access to savings plans or contributing to these benefits due to complexity and competing priorities like student loan debt repayment or the need to set aside emergency savings. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle should be commended for coming together to help this important legislation cross the finish line at a time when it’s urgently needed.”

Nationwide was supportive of the entire package of legislation, highlighting several key provisions which are likely to deliver immediate impact:

• An enhanced start-up and employer match tax credit that increases the tax credit allowance to 100 percent of employer retirement plan startup costs to be utilized in the year of credit for employers with 50 or fewer employees. This represents a 50 percent increase over previous state. The provision also provides a new, additional credit for small employer contributions made to a qualified plan.

• The Enhancing Emergency and Retirement Savings Act that enables workers to tap into retirement savings for emergency expenses without penalty. This provision addresses a key reason why some workers choose not to participate in their workplace retirement plan — the fear that they won’t be able to access their money if they need it for a short-term emergency.

• Removal of antiquated administrative roadblocks to offer greater flexibility for 457(b) government plan participants by allowing them to adjust their deferral elections.

“We’ve seen firsthand how the current environment is impacting participants in retirement plans we support,” said Eric Stevenson, president of Nationwide Retirement Solutions, which administers nearly 34,000 plans, protecting more than 2.6 million participants.

“Our public sector participants are exhibiting a significant increase in ‘negative behaviors’ which can threaten long-term retirement security. Specifically, contribution decreases are up 31 percent, contribution stops are up 17 percent and withdrawals due to unforeseen emergencies are up 25 percent year over year. Elements of SECURE 2.0, which improve access and reduce leakage will help address these negative trends.”

1 Nationwide Retirement Institute Inflation Flash Poll, Feb. 2022
2 As of Dec. 2021
3 Nationwide Retirement Solutions participant data, May 2021-May 2022

Mike Switzer is the public relations director for Nationwide Financial.
Santa Barbara County's ReSource Center, a first-of-its-kind facility in California, converts commercial and residential waste into resources, generating renewable energy and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

The ReSource Center is projected to increase the county's recycling rate to over 85 percent and divert 60 percent of its waste from the landfill, but landfill reduction is just one of the numerous environmental benefits of the self-sufficient project. Other benefits include litter reduction and reducing dependence on petrochemical soil amendments through generating compost, according to Carlyle Johnston, the center's project leader.

"When it's fully operational, it will create enough energy to power around 3,000 homes," Johnston said. "There's no good place for a landfill, they're all terrible, but one of the arguments I think that won the day on this is you can export your problems like waste somewhere else, but that doesn’t magically transport it there," Johnston said. "So, the further away you send your trash, the higher environmental and financial cost that's going to be, especially in an isolated community like Santa Barbara County, which is 100 miles from L.A. and kind of in a remote area of California, relatively speaking."

Because of the scale of the project, the county's public works department knew that establishing community dialogue around the center and its goals was essential for success, Johnston said. So, they created a comprehensive public outreach program and held more than 150 presentations to receive input from elected officials, neighborhood associations and environmental non-profits, including national organizations like the Sierra Club and Channel Keeper as well as local ones, including Heal the Ocean and the Community Environmental Council, Johnston said.

"One of the challenges that’s common for all counties is that this was done in coordination with four cities within the county, so anytime there was a change or a concept or an idea floated around this project, it had to go not just to the Board of Supervisors, but also to all four city councils as well for approval," Johnston said. "So that process took a long time and when there was contract negotiation, it had to be negotiated with the cities and the private vendor and going back between all of those entities made it a really long iterative process, plus we had a full environmental review process which took several years."

The ReSource Center has created 100 permanent living wage jobs, some of which include mechanics, heavy equipment operators and compost specialists and since its opening in July 2021, thousands of people have toured the facility, Johnston said.

"We always wanted to make sure, because this is a publicly owned facility, that the community had access to it and wanted to promote it — not to brag about the county’s accomplishments, but so that people become more aware of the environmental impact they have in day to day living," Johnston said. "... Because Santa Barbara is an environmentally conscientious community, there’s always been an interest in waste.

"Waste is an excellent starting point for any environmental issue or topic that you want to talk about, because from
ARKANSAS
The PULASKI COUNTY Quorum Court recently approved a $1.3 million budget for its 12-week Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant and Substance Abuse Program, which will help provide training and counseling to detainees re-entering the community, including a class on trauma and post-traumatic stress recovery and their connection to addiction.

The funding will allow the sheriff’s office to hire additional staff including a substance abuse counselor and two additional peer recovery support specialists, as well as provide numerous services for detainees, including transitional housing upon release and medication-assisted treatment for those with opioid use disorder.

CALIFORNIA
The LOS ANGELES COUNTY Board of Supervisors has approved a new program that will pair shelter dogs with L.A. youth in the juvenile detention system. The county is partnering with Paws for Life K9 Rescue on the program, which aims to both provide companionship for incarcerated youth and socialize the shelter dogs to make them better candidates for adoption.

“It’s about time that programs like this be brought to these facilities and Paws for Life could not be a better program to start with,” Chris Murray, a Paws for Life trainer, said to news station KTLA-TV. “It teaches maturity, which is what these young men and women need before they re-enter our society. It will help them to be safer, more productive citizens. It most certainly teaches empathy, kindness, compassion and remorse and actually gives them an entryway into showing what making amends looks like.”

FLORIDA
● ALACHUA COUNTY is launching an Energy Efficiency and Weatherization Grant Program that will support at least 15 families in making their homes more energy efficient and cost-effective. The pilot program, which will run from Jan. 16 to Aug. 18, has $338,000 in American Rescue Plan Act dollars devoted toward it and is expected to expand to serve homes more energy efficient and cost-effective. The pilot program, which will run from Jan. 16 to Aug. 18, has $338,000 in American Rescue Plan Act dollars devoted toward it and is expected to expand to serve

IOWA
JASPER COUNTY is expanding a pilot program that trains reserve sheriff’s deputies as paramedics through American Rescue Plan Act funds to solve its lack of emergency services personnel. In Iowa, emergency medical services (EMS) are not considered essential and there is no guarantee that an ambulance will show up when someone calls for an emergency, leaving a gap particularly from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. when the county’s volunteer EMS workers are at their day job and can’t respond to calls. The program currently has two sheriff’s deputies trained and is expected to expand to six and cover 24-26 days each month during the 18-month trial.

MARYLAND
The HARFORD COUNTY Health Department is launching a new program, “Free to Be,” this month for local LGBTQ+ kids ages 12-17. The program, which will take place at the county health department’s Bel Air location, will meet monthly and serve as a safe and supportive environment for Harford County’s LGBTQ+ teens to socialize and organize. “It is important to give teens a place to go, where they will find like-minded individuals and feel like they belong,” said Julie Stancliff, medical director of behavioral health for the Harford County Health Department. “We are excited to be hosting Free to Be to give teens an affirming space where they can feel comfortable and share their feelings.”
From NEWS FROM page 14

ing SHELBY COUNTY, and participants will be paid $25 in exchange for each beaver they harvest during trapping season, which ends April 25. “Beavers can place a lot of stress on many areas of our infrastructure, with dams preventing water to flow to designated areas,” said Board of Supervisors Chairman Brian Shea. “Pottawattamie County is responsible for maintaining many roadways and drainage ditches in our area, and some of these dams can end up causing a lot of damage, costing our county a considerable amount of money to repair. We hope this program helps in minimizing the possibility of that happening.”

NEBRASKA

HALL COUNTY is considering taxing games of skill to provide property tax relief. Most casino slot machines are built on chance but in skill games, the outcome is more dependent on the skills of the user, KSNB-TV reported.

NEVADA

CLARK COUNTY businesses with a beer and wine license will now also be allowed to serve packaged “spirit-based sense to serve packaged “spirit-based

OREGON

MULTNOMAH COUNTY’s Wood Burning Device Exchange Program will help residents remove their older, smoky wood stoves and fireplaces and replace them with cleaner heat pumps for a healthier home and cleaner air. Participating homeowners will receive a financial incentive for replacing their wood burning device, ranging from $3,000 to full cost replacement, depending on eligibility and household income.

Pennsylvania

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients in ALLEGHENY COUNTY are eligible for a study probing how low- or no-cost public transportation could help low-income families. The Department of Human Services will survey participants and those results will be used to analyze people’s habits using the bus and light rail system. County officials tell WESA-FM News they intend to use the results of the pilot to assess the potential for a permanent program.

Wisconsin

PIKE COUNTY’s new Temporary Rental Subsidy Program will offer monthly subsidies to limit housing costs to 30 percent of residents’ monthly income — up to $500 per month for 12 months. Participants will receive case management services and develop a financial wellness plan. A 2020 housing study found Pike County has the highest fair market rents in the state.
Courts help foster system

From FOSTER page 7

be like, ‘Listen, you have to take this step-by-step, you’ve got to rebuild back.’”

Nicholas County requires a minimum commitment of a year for its FTC participants, but if someone goes through the program without any issues, they can finish in nine months, according to Smith.

“It’s a lot of pressure, it’s not easy — you don’t want to get up every day and go there and do all that, but if you want a better life, sometimes you’ve got to fight for yourself — that’s what it comes down to,” Leslie said.

“I know that the children are the bottom line here, but if these people don’t fight for themselves and love themselves, they’re not going to be good parents anyway.

“I’ll see a lot of people that skip through the system and just check the marks and do what they do to get their kid back and then they’re in the same system again, because they relapse six months later, because they’re not doing the real work on the inside so that they don’t make those choices again.”

FTC helps its participants get connected to housing, transportation and employment. Leslie said it helped her pay three months of rent while she got her footing in a new job.

“That’s where the team comes in, because we all talk — ‘This participant needs housing,’ so there’s 28 people sitting there and five of them will know a landlord,” Callaghan said.

“Our team is our resource and if somebody needs baby clothes or furniture or a starter for their car, we will assess what everybody needs on a day-to-day basis.

“It’s a network of people working with the community — we know landlords, we know secular rehab groups, we have churches that help us. We have a great team.”

Since Nicholas County has adopted FTC, it’s placed 63 children back into drug-free homes, including Leslie’s daughter, after Leslie graduated from the program in August 2021.

Employment program doesn’t boot participants if they falter

From EMPLOY page 4

nity about homelessness in a particular area, these deputies are dispatched, they engage them, then they’ll make a call to Career Recovery and then they start the process of engaging and trying to get them into the Employ2Empower program.

“Not everyone jumps at the opportunity, obviously, and not everybody is a success story on day one.”

Employ2Empower is what Garcia calls a “low barrier employment program,” so participants can work on and off with the program and you’re not “out” if you don’t show up for a period of time.

“We know that people have been out of touch with work discipline, so we don’t expect miracles on day one,” he said.

While Texas’ minimum wage is $7.25, all Harris County employees make $15, as the basic living wage in Houston has been identified as $14.33, and it was important that standard was held to Employ2Empower, Garcia said.

“When I came in as county commissioner, not all county employees were working at a livable wage, so we made a county policy that all employees would start at at least a livable wage, and then we made sure that our contracts reflect that as well, and then just recognizing, ‘Hey, if we want to end homelessness and we talk about how we’re going to achieve all these goals, but it’s still going to take some time.

“So, having a better understanding of public infrastructure in America and how and what it impacts our lives and the environment — it’s just an important education that I think most Americans lack.”

While the center’s running and processing, Johnston said it’ll still take another year before it reaches its goals. It’s just one piece of what the county needs to do moving forward in its environmental efforts.

“The materials recovery facility has literally over a million moving parts,” Johnston said.

“[It’s] a hugely ambitious program,” Spiegel said. “It’s going to take another year before we can continue to support and help them continue to move forward.”

County education center offers insight into waste-sorting

From WASTE page 13

there, you can talk about greenhouse gases, climate change, linear economy, renewable versus non-renewable resources, pollution and its many different aspects — plastic pollution in the ocean, air pollution, groundwater pollution.

The materials recovery facility houses an education center, where visitors can witness everything that goes into the behind-the-scenes of trash and recyclable sorting operations.

Students from all age ranges, from kindergarten to college, tour the facility. Johnston said he thinks it’s important that people understand the process — of where trash and sewage go, where water comes from and how power is generated.

“People should have an understanding of the infrastructure of America and how dependent they are on it, because in a lot of ways, we made these things out of sight, out of mind, and that’s challenging because we have in the United States a strong streak of libertarianism, and a lot of people think, ‘I don’t need government,’ but they don’t realize how much it impacts their lives because they take it for granted. ‘I put my trash out on the curb, it vanishes. I ride [on] roads, I turn on my sink every day and the water comes out — I don’t think about it.’

“So, having a better understanding of the Arpa dollars cover participant wages, programming, administrative and salaries for case managers from Career and Recovery Resources and deputies from the sheriff’s office in the expansion. The county’s four precincts are at varying levels of implementation, according to Scott Spiegel, Garcia’s senior press secretary.

“We need a little bit of a push from the individual precin the support the sheriff, to support Career and Recovery on their own end, because there’s still things like vehicles and tools that are needed — the paint doesn’t just appear out of thin air to paint new roads and whatnot,” Spiegel said. “We’re pretty confident that over the course of this next year it’ll be more like a well-oiled machine across the county.”

The pilot program served 79 participants — 36 of whom received additional employment support and 47 of whom were assessed for housing — including Williams. The program currently has 42 participants, according to Career and Recovery Services data.

While Garcia recognizes there’s not a one-size-fits-all approach to tackling homelessness, he’s proud of the program’s success, he said.

“I’m not naive enough to think that we can end homelessness, but I do believe that this is by far the most effective way to deal with it,” Garcia said.

“If we can get an individual into permanent supportive housing and then if we can get to be self-sustaining by their willingness to work, that’s a great thing ... We pay them for their work and for their time, so that we can continue to support and help them continue to move forward.”

The Santa Barbara County, Calif. program earned a 2022 NACo Achievement Award in the Resiliency category.

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