



PRES. BIDEN, VP HARRIS' ROOTS LIE IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT. PG. 4



HOW COUNTIES ARE COMMUNICATING VACCINE EFFORTS . PG. 5



INDIANA COUNTY SCORES "DARK STORE" VICTORY. PG. 6

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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RELIEF PLAN: \$350 BILLION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

by Nicolette Gerald

President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan, designed to get the country back on its feet after a yearlong battle with the pandemic, focuses on rescue and recovery that includes \$350 billion in aid to state, local and territorial governments.

"The federal resources proposed would enable county leaders to make strategic investments in the immediate task of vaccinating our residents and mitigating the spread of this deadly, destructive virus," said NACo Executive Director Matt Chase.

As Biden begins to tackle many issues important to counties, he will be working with a Democratic-controlled Congress, a scenario Washington has not experienced since 2009.

In addition to COVID-19 relief, other top issues for counties during the 117th Congress will include health care, infrastructure, Payment in Lieu of Taxes, Secure Rural Schools and rebuilding the economy.

Health care

As counties continue to grapple with the stresses of COVID-19, they can expect to

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Lights surround the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, placed as a memorial to COVID-19 victims, Jan. 19, on the eve of the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden. Photo by Alex Brandon/AP

Counties enhance security protocols following Inauguration Day threats

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Last week, Allegheny County, Pa. Executive Rich Fitzgerald arrived in Washington D.C. one day prior to Inauguration Day to a very different atmosphere than the last ceremony he attended in 2013.

This time, Fitzgerald saw an abundance of armored vehicles and bomb-sniffing dogs in addition to the large presence of law enforcement officials and National Guard members who

were stationed in the nation's capital following the Jan. 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol.

With COVID-19 numbers reaching all-time highs and reports of potential threats of violence on Inauguration Day, health and safety concerns

were a priority for both President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris's swearing-in ceremony and in counties nationwide.

Fitzgerald received a COVID-19 test before attending the ceremony with Penn-

sylvania Rep. Conor Lamb, who was only allowed to bring one guest.

"I thought it was important for me to be here representing southwestern Pennsylvania

See **INAUGURATION** page 2

Counties' BBQ contest boosts Georgia election turnout

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

When Putnam County officials in Georgia and Florida get philosophical, they muse, "What's in a name?" When early voters showed up for the Georgia U.S. Senate runoff one December morning, they were

wondering "What's in this barbecue sauce?"

A group of Florida county officials had driven up the night before, equipment and all, for a barbecue battle Dec. 19 to serve as an incentive to help boost voter turnout and see how their recipe compared to their counterparts.

"All the time, we get messages from people thinking we're in Florida," Putnam County, Ga. Board Chair Billy Webster said. "They're thinking they're reaching their commissioners, and there are times we carry on a two-way conversation for

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Safety key for inauguration

From INAUGURATION page 1

and the peaceful transfer of power,” Fitzgerald said.

As an added precaution, Fitzgerald brought his security detail to D.C.

“I’ve never really taken them on an overnight trip to D.C. or Harrisburg... but this time it was recommended that I take them with me,” he said.

Back home in Allegheny County, Fitzgerald described the collaborative efforts among the FBI, U.S. Attorney’s Office, state, city and county police and sheriff’s deputies to monitor potential threats, develop intelligence and review social media posts to address any safety concerns.

Other county law enforcement agencies also had a presence at Inauguration Day to assist with security efforts during the event. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) requested assistance ahead of the ceremony and 40 deputies from the Mecklenburg County,

N.C. Sheriff’s Office responded.

“We are proud to be called upon for this prestigious event and have been coordinating and planning with MPD before sending our team to Washington D.C.,” Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden said.

Other county public safety officials took precautions in their own communities including in Buncombe County, N.C., where members from the sheriff’s office participated in a briefing offered by the FBI to determine if there were any threats to the county.

Buncombe County law enforcement officials agreed on an enhanced community security plan which included heightened presences at the courthouse and other city and county locations.

Right outside of D.C., Arlington County, Va. closed its courthouse and government center as well as government offices, courts, libraries and facilities for Inauguration Day.

The Arlington County Police Department also deployed increased resources throughout the county, collaborating with local, state and federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies to stay connected and informed about any safety concerns.

In Polk County, Iowa, home to the state capital of Des Moines, officials took extra precautions and boarded up windows of the historic courthouse, Polk County Sheriff’s Office Public Information Officer Ryan Evans said.

With the historic courthouse currently under renovation, the sheriff and board of supervisors decided to take the precaution in the case of any incidents.

“It’s better to be prepared than surprised,” Evans said. **CN**



(L-r): Putnam County, Fla. Commission Chairman Larry Harvey, Putnam County, Ga. Commission Chairman Billy Webster and Putnam County, Fla. Administrator Terry Suggs. Photo courtesy of Putnam County, Ga.

Putnam County, Ga. takes on Putnam County, Fla. in BBQ battle, turns out voters, builds friendships

From BBQ page 1

a while before we figure out if they’ve reached the wrong state.”

Friendships developed across the state line and Putnam County, Fla. Board Chair Larry Harvey offered a suggestion. Though he did not want to be seen as interfering in someone else’s election, he and his Floridian colleagues wanted to help out and leave a good taste in voters’ mouths. While Georgians went to the polls, a panel of barbecue judges, including a state representative, would cast their own ballots for Best Chicken Barbecue. They even had a poultry expert from the University of Georgia on hand, though he acknowledged he specialized in live birds.

“We said we would find the equipment they needed, but they were insistent on bringing their own up here,” Webster said. “They paid their own way and everything.”

The northern climate didn’t agree with the visitors initially — the overnight low of 25 degrees slowed them in the morn-

ing, but before too long, the two sides cooked 150 chicken halves.

“They were somewhat limited as to what they could make given how long it takes to cook pork and beef,” Webster said. “They brought some meat that was already cooked, but we focused on chicken.”

The blind taste weighed in on Georgia’s side, a decision the visitors accepted gracefully.

“We’ll see how things go next year when they visit us in Florida,” Harvey said.

The commissioners priced their barbecue to break even and expected to take some home and donate more to the local fire station. Instead, all 500 plates sold out in an hour and 15 minutes.

“We like to make friends all across the U.S., but it’s special with another Putnam County,” Harvey said. “We’re all in the same business, we all have the same stories to share... maybe some different solutions.”

Harvey hopes to gather the other seven Putnam counties, perhaps at a NACo conference. It would be fun and informative,

he said.

“If you don’t start building relationships when you get into office, you’re starting with nothing,” he said. “You might think you have all the knowledge in the world, and you might be the smartest person to ever walk the face of the earth, but unless you can build relationships, you don’t have anything.”

Harvey had some personal gratification when a Georgian introduced himself, explaining that his grandfather founded a boys’ ranch just 10 minutes from Harvey’s home.

“The boys ranch is very special to our county, and it was awesome to meet someone of his stature,” Harvey said. “You find out how small the world really is when you’re out there.”

Some say it was the high-profile Senate race that drove turnout to a county high for a runoff, roughly 1,000 votes shy of the general election. The 500 barbecue fans beg to differ.

As for the recipes?

“We’re all taking that to our graves,” Webster said. “They left us a jug of sauce, but we have no idea what’s in it.” **CN**

SNAP/STATS

TOP 5 ‘SAFEST’ COUNTIES

1. Loudoun County, Va.
2. Chattahoochee County, Ga.
3. City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska
4. Loving County, Texas
5. Kalawao County, Hawaii

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency Natural Disaster Risk Assessment Scale

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Registration now open for NACo's 2021 Legislative Conference

From RELIEF page 1

see a health care agenda from the Biden administration that aims to alleviate the pressures and maintain the safety of residents. This strategy will include the goal of distributing 100 million doses of the vaccine within the Biden administration's first 100 days, expansion of testing efforts for schools and safely reopening businesses.

Biden has expressed a desire to consult with state and local officials as his administration develops a vaccine distribution strategy, provides economic relief, tackles racial and ethnic disparities and reopens schools and businesses. Counties will be critical in these efforts and will play an integral role in continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Infrastructure

This year will hopefully be a banner year for infrastructure investment. Biden has repeatedly voiced support for a ma-

jor infrastructure package and Congress is likely to advance legislation that funds a variety of transportation and infrastructure priorities.

Biden's pick for Transportation Secretary, Pete Buttigieg, has spoken at length about creating a robust infrastructure system. The former mayor of South Bend, Ind., has also stressed the importance of bringing local governments into the national conversation on infrastructure and transportation during his conversation with NACo members during the transition.

Additionally, Congress is likely to include a long-term surface transportation reauthorization bill in any larger infrastructure package that it puts forward. Lawmakers had hoped to pass a long-term surface transportation bill before the 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act expired on Sept. 30, 2020.

However, disagreement over funding mechanisms and dif-

ferences over policy issues including clean energy led Congress to approve just a one-year extension of the FAST Act. While these arguments have not gone away and are likely to carry over into 2021, lawmakers in both parties appear committed to investing in the nation's crumbling infrastructure. It is likely that we will see a long-term surface transportation bill signed into law this year.

PILT, SRS

The Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs are longstanding NACo priorities.

In a win for Public Lands counties, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 allocates one year of full mandatory funding for PILT. Unfortunately, the legislation does not contain language for the SRS program. We hope to see a re-introduction of SRS funding in the upcoming year as counties across the United States expe-

rience budgetary shortfalls. There is currently bipartisan support in Congress for reauthorization of SRS, but no concrete action has been taken.

Legislative Conference

The start of NACo's Legislative Conference is March 8. During the December Board of Directors Meeting, the NACo Board voted to hold the 2021 Legislative Conference virtually due to the ongoing pandemic, a local law limiting gatherings in Washington D.C. and the closure of the host hotel.

The conference brings together more than 2,000 county officials to explore solutions to the nation's greatest problems and share best practices among peers at the county level. This year, we are offering a robust month of virtual engagements including networking events, workshops and opportunities to connect with federal stakeholders.

NACo's legislative confer-

ence will begin with meetings of the 10 Policy Steering Committees. Members will have the opportunity to vote on any interim policy resolutions that the NACo Board of Directors may subsequently adopt. For more information on the interim policy resolutions process, visit www.naco.org/2021Resolutions.

Following the convening of NACo's Policy Steering Committees and Board of Directors meeting, we will host a series of workshops, presentations from representatives of federal agencies and virtual Capitol Hill briefings. Registration is currently open for the 2021 Legislative Conference. For more information, visit www.naco.org/events/conferences. **CN**

Nicolette Gerald is a legislative assistant on NACo's Government Affairs team. Legislative Assistants Aaliyah Nedd and Sarah Gimont contributed to this article.





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MARCH 17-19	Board of Directors and other NACo Governance Meetings
MARCH 24-26	Workshops and Plenary Sessions Virtual Hill Days

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!
visit www.NACo.org/Leg2021 for more information

Biden, Harris’ roots lie in county government

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are one of a few president and vice president duos to both have backgrounds in county government.

Biden and Harris both started their careers in public service as elected county officials working on the local level prior to their new roles as President and Vice President of the United States.

Harris started her career working as the deputy district attorney at the Alameda County, Calif. District Attorney’s Office where she worked for eight years.

As deputy district attorney, she prosecuted cases related to gang violence, drug trafficking and child sexual assaults.

Harris later served two terms in 2003 as district attorney for the City and County of San Francisco. During her time as district attorney, she started a program to give first-time drug offenders a chance to earn a high school diploma and find employment.

Her career then led her to serve as attorney general of California before joining the U.S. Senate in 2017.

Biden also has deep roots in county government.

In 1970, 27-year-old Biden was first elected to public office as the New Castle County, Del. Council Member for the 4th District.



Joe Biden (left) sits next to fellow New Castle County, Del. Council Members Joseph Toner, W. Alva Hollis, C. Douglas Buck, Richard Sincock, Henry Rolsom and Charles Hughs in January 1971.
Photo courtesy of New Castle County, Del.

He served on the council for two years before making a bid to run for the U.S. Senate where he was elected as the sixth-youngest U.S. Senator in the country’s history. He held this position for 36 years.

Current New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer recalled a story during the December NACo Board of Directors meeting that Biden had told him about his time as council member when a constituent insisted a dead animal immediately be removed from her street. Biden arrived in a pickup truck and removed the animal himself that night.

“We’re so fortunate to have a president-elect who under-

stands what it is like to stand in our shoes as county officials,” Meyer said.

During the same meeting, Biden recalled his county experience and emphasized the difficult positions county officials are often put into and the public’s lack of understanding about the role of local governments.

“I’d knock on the door as a 26-year-old kid when I started and say ‘Hello, my name is Joe Biden, candidate for the county council.’ They’d look at me and I know they were wondering — What the hell does a county Council do?” he said.

Biden said county officials are the “single most consequential government officials.”

“You’re also the basis upon which people have faith or don’t have faith in government,” he said. “It’s all local.”

Current New Castle County Council Member Dee Durham, who serves the district in which the first family lives, sponsored a resolution congratulating Biden on becoming the nation’s 46th president.

The resolution highlights Biden’s accomplishments as council member including fighting against a 10-lane highway project that threatened to pave over Wilmington’s neighborhoods, pushing back on oil companies building refineries on the Delaware coast, and approving plans for housing de-


velopments, commercial real estate, street lights, sanitary sewers and a storm water management system.

Biden’s other legislative accomplishments as a county council member include calling for the reorganization of the Department of Public Works, creating a countywide property tax exemption for residents over the age of 65 and eliminating rodents in the New Castle Correction Institute.

Durham said throughout Delaware, Biden is often referred to as “Joe” and has a familiar presence around town.

“We are all in Delaware very excited obviously to have the next president coming from Delaware and from New Castle County,” she said.

Durham said many people with county government roots in New Castle County continued long years of public service including Delaware Sen. Chris Coons who served as New Castle County Council president and county executive.

“It’s definitely something that can show how to get a start in this political arena and give hope to anyone that they can aspire to their dreams, whatever those might be,” she said. 

WORD SEARCH

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, Maine By Mary Ann Barton

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

- ATLANTIC:** The county sits on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean.
- CAPITAL:** The county seat of Portland served as the state’s first state capital.
- FISH:** The Portland Fish Exchange offers fishermen’s latest catch on a daily basis.
- HISTORY:** Cumberland County was incorporated in 1760.
- KING:** Author Stephen King was born in the county.
- LOBSTER:** The lobster industry in the county is the world leader, hauling in more than 100 million pounds a year.
- MALL:** The Maine Mall is the largest shopping mall in the state and the second largest in northern New England.

- MICROBREWERIES:** The county is home to at least 17 microbreweries.
- NAMESAKE:** The county was named after William, Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II.
- PENINSULA:** The county includes a peninsula near the state’s southern-most border.
- PORTLAND:** The county seat.
- SEBAGO:** Sebago Lake, the deepest body of water in the state, supplies tap water to most of the county.
- SUMMER:** Old Port Festival, held the second Sunday in June, celebrates the beginning of summer.
- TOURISM:** Tourism brings in about \$138 million in local tax revenue a year.
- WABANAKI:** A Native American tribe that first populated the area.

finally!

NACo swag is now available online!

naco.org/store



Communication campaign for vaccines: 'Most important one we're going to do'

A nurse receives a COVID-19 vaccine at the Good Samaritan Medical Center in Boulder County, Colo. Photo courtesy of Good Samaritan Medical Center, Lafayette Colo.

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

As the United States takes on one of the largest mass vaccination efforts in the country's history, counties are establishing their roles in communicating and notifying local communities about the vaccine distribution process.

Officials in Hennepin County, Minn. began thinking about vaccine distribution in the summer and worked to solidify a communications plan within the last month, said Jamie Zwilling, Hennepin County's director and chief communication officer.

The plan pivots from the "Take Care" campaign the county launched in the beginning of the pandemic to educate residents about COVID-19 safety protocols.

Zwilling said the core piece of the vaccination communication plan focuses on trusted messengers, which are non-profits, organizations and individuals within the community.

The county's role in a mass vaccination effort is to promote vaccine campaigns, develop pro-vaccine messages for pri-

ority populations and spread vaccination event information, according to Zwilling. The plan addresses safety concerns and provides specific information for those in high-risk groups.

"None of us expected that we would do this kind of a public campaign in our career when we chose public service and it's the most important one we're going to do," he said. "It's impacting everyone's lives and we have an important role here to play."

The county's communication plan may be altered depending on the timeline for vaccine rollouts. It is broken into categories with specific communication strategies depending on the phase of the vaccine rollout plan.

"We're going to have to continue to be flexible and able to respond to any changes, but so far we're feeling confident and excited that this part of the communication plan has a really good end result," he said.

County communication plans are also focusing on providing answers to the questions on most people's minds: "When and how will I get the vaccine?"

In Lake County, Ill., Jefferson McMillan-Wilhoit, director of Health Informatics and Technology, said officials have also been planning for the vaccine since the summer and have worked toward implementing policies and procedures for a mass vaccination strategy by launching the Lake County All-Vax Portal.

'Our role is to make sure that the information that is going out there is true.'

County residents can register for the portal online or by phone to secure a place in line when vaccines become available, according to McMillan-Wilhoit. Those who register will receive a notification when their vaccine is ready and will be able to schedule vaccination appointments through Lake County clinics or with other providers and facilities.

"We like to refer to it as a shield around our community members that shields them away from all the logistical hurdles and challenges that come

with doing a vaccine at this scale," McMillan-Wilhoit said.

Once an individual receives the first dose of the vaccine, they will receive another notification through the portal seven days before they are due for the second dose and may then schedule the second vaccination appointment through the platform.

Over 200,000 community members have registered in the system.

The data-driven portal also tracks metrics related to vaccine distribution for county health officials to monitor distribution progress.

"The system actually orchestrates all of the communication between the resident who has booked that appointment all the way up to the state, which is tracking the vaccine into the vaccine registry," McMillan-Wilhoit said.

Lake County is using social media and community partners to target vulnerable communities and encourage residents to sign up for the portal.

"Our role is to make sure that the information that is going out there is true, accurate and reflects the current state of

things," he said. "We are also really there to make sure that all parts of the community are reached."

In Boulder County, Colo., Public Information Officer Chana Goussetis said the county received an influx of inquiries by phone and email from people asking about the vaccine.

"It became really clear that folks were feeling a bit anxious about being missed," she said.

Goussetis created an online signup form for individuals to fill in their name, email address and select their group based on the vaccine rollout plan. When vaccine information for that group becomes available, Goussetis said they will send an email and let the individual know where they can receive a vaccine.

Around 80,000 people have signed up for the system which the county has promoted with press releases, media interviews and social media platforms.

"I think that local public health has an obligation to share what information they have in all the ways they can," Goussetis said. **CN**

Indiana county notches ‘dark store’ victory

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Boone County, Ind. ended 2020 on a high note, with a favorable New Year’s Eve ruling from the Indiana Tax Court that represented a rare win for a county against the “dark store” theory of tax assessment.

The court affirmed an Indiana Board of Tax Review’s decision that had increased the assessed value of a Meijer Stores Limited Partnership grocery store for 2014-2017, roughly twice of its original assessment. It was a \$500,000, multi-year legal gamble that could have long-reaching consequences for assessments.

“We came to understand that we would not just be fighting for us but for counties near and far,” said Boone County Council Member Elise Nieshalla. “We knew it was going to be expensive, but when we

learned what was at stake and that there were 300 pending cases based on the dark store theory before the Board of Indiana tax revenue, that made it that much more important we win this.”

The dark store theory is an increasingly used tactic by chain retailers, which bases a property’s value on the sales price of comparable vacant stores, regardless of

whether the property in question is being sold. If successful, the argument lowers the property’s tax value and its contribution to the county’s tax coffers, which would benefit from the property being assessed at its “best” use.

In Boone County’s case, the store opened in 2014, the first of four years of valuation at question — \$7.19 million — as fresh of a property as possible. But Meijer challenged that assessment, arguing that a combination of the land and con-

struction costs, minus some depreciation, was the more accurate way to measure value.

“The store was brand new, located in one of the fastest-growing communities in the state,” Nieshalla said. “They had exactly what they wanted from this site.”

Recent changes in state statutes had introduced market segmentation that helped draw a stricter stratification on how to value new stores, according to David Bottorff, executive director of the Association of Indiana Counties. That put new stores more in line with other new stores.

Boone County Assessor Lisa Garoffolo said Meijer balked at sharing its internal numbers in arguing for a lower valuation, but once it was compelled to do so, two days before the hearing, the tax review board raised the assessed value by more than double to \$14.45 million.

“It was not an easy case for them to make,” Garoffolo said of Meijer’s challenge. “If you

have something to show us, show us. If not, that means our assessment is too low.”

“We came to understand why they lost, and if we did things ‘X,Y,Z’ rather than ‘A,B,C,’ we could win this thing,” Nieshalla said. “We were counseled that we were in the best position to turn the tide on this.”

Although Meijer has until Jan. 31 to appeal to the state Supreme Court, the Association of Indiana Counties was skeptical that the court would hear the case.

Winning the case in state tax court gives counties a stronger position in the future, Nieshalla said. “The power of the ruling is that it is much stronger and sets a stronger precedent.

“It was important to stop this now, and I hope this keeps others from what we’ve gone through,” she said. “This could easily spread to warehouses. Who wouldn’t want to compare their operating warehouse with one that’s been vacated years ago?”

Bottorff said the next step would be to have comments from the tax court decision put into law.

“It might reduce the number of appeals that we have to review, which would save money,” he said. “It’s very expensive to try new cases and it takes a few years,” to play out in court.

Boone County had some backup on its \$50,000 legal bill — the town in which the store is located contributed \$150,000 toward legal costs and the Association of Indiana Counties and Indiana County Councils Association each added \$25,000.

“There were a lot of deliberations and we took the decision with great solemn thought,” Nieshalla said. “A potential legal bill of \$500,000 was a lot to commit to with taxpayer money, but it was an investment in ultimately protecting our taxpayers. Now Meijer is paying its fair share and we can tell the county, the town, the library that that ruling will make them stronger.” **CN**



Nieshalla

FINDING WAYS TO INVEST MORE

If you’re like many of us, you’re looking for ways to save a little more to retirement. Often though, you don’t know where extra money would come from. Actually, you may have several options.



- **Avoid late fees:** Pay bills on time. Consider using a bank’s automatic bill-paying service.
- **Save on credit card finance charges:** You can save a lot if you can afford to pay the full balance every month.
- **Take advantage of employee discount programs:** Some employers offer discounts on mobile phone service, airfare, restaurants, gym memberships and more.

Knowing where to look

There are lots of everyday ways to find a few extra dollars to contribute to your retirement. Here are a few to consider:

- **Pack your lunch:** When you create economical meal options, you could save money compared to dining out.
- **Let a new car purchase stall:** Imagine how much more you could contribute if you don’t have a car payment.
- **Buy and sell used on the Internet:** If it doesn’t have to be brand new, websites like Craigslist can be a real money-saver.
- **Stop paying for what you don’t use:** Save money by reducing talk-time and data use or removing premium movie channels you rarely watch.

Reducing debt

By evaluating your spending habits and limiting your credit purchases, you might uncover extra money to invest in your future. Don’t let mounting debt hinder your ability to invest for retirement. Non-profit services, like Consumer Credit Counseling, can help you get your debt under control.

Get the help you need

Talk with one of our Retirement Specialists about ways to find more money to invest in your retirement.

GET TO KNOW...

Tompkins County, N.Y.

Welcome, Tompkins County, N.Y.

Tompkins County is located in south central New York in the central Finger Lakes Region. The county is divided by Cayuga Lake, the second largest of the Finger Lakes. The 476-square-mile county has a population of 102,000. It is named after Daniel D. Tompkins, the fourth governor of New York and sixth vice president of the United States.

Education is a key driver for business throughout the county with the county seat of Ithaca home to Cornell University and Ithaca College. Tompkins Cortland Community College, six public school systems and several private schools are also spread throughout the county.

The Ithaca Discovery Trail attracts tourists to the county public library and local museums including the Museum of Earth, the Sciencenter, the Johnson Art Museum and the History Center of Tompkins County. Visitors can also travel to the county’s 150 gorges and waterfalls. The largest, the 215-foot Taughannock Falls, is three stories taller than Niagara Falls.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

215-foot Taughannock Falls

State associations hold virtual, hybrid trainings for newly elected officials

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Steve Dellinger had never been involved in politics or served in public office prior to last year.

The first-time candidate was elected to the Henry County, Ind. Board of Commissioners and started his new role earlier than expected when his predecessor unexpectedly passed away.

"The pandemic has made things a lot more difficult," he said of his timing joining the board.

Thankfully, in mid-December, Dellinger was able to virtually attend the Association of Indiana Counties (AIC) Newly Elected Officials Training where he learned how to use Zoom, conduct business, hold meetings and learn more about his new role working for county government.

AIC Director of Communications Elizabeth Mallers said the Newly Elected Officials Training is normally held in-person over the course of three days.

While the association had already started to record and livestream other events prior to the pandemic, the entirety of the Newly Elected Officials training was livestreamed and recorded this year because of the pandemic.

"The virtual part actually helped me because I was being pulled in several different directions trying to learn my new position," Dellinger said. "If something happened and I had to stop, it was nice to be able to go back and pick up where I had left off."

The association livestreamed and recorded the sessions which were posted online to be accessible at any time.

Mallers said they used YouTube live and an additional software that allowed members to view a split screen of speakers and PowerPoint slides to help identify necessary contacts.

"It puts a name to the face," Mallers said. "There are certain people who newly elected offi-

cials are going to work closely with in their new roles."

While virtual trainings can aid in providing information and education, Mallers said they still lack the in-person connections and ability for officials to connect face-to-face with their friends and colleagues.

Dellinger said the lack of in-person connections as a newly elected official has been a challenge.

"Not getting to know people and their personalities that you're going to be working with — a lot of times it's hard to do that via Zoom," he said.

In addition to livestreaming its Newly Elected Officials Training, the IAC helped record sessions for affiliate groups that would normally meet in person at the association's meetings.

Kosciusko County, Ind. Council Member Sue Mitchell, who serves as president of the Indiana County Councils Association, worked with the IAC to record a series of six videos to help onboard new council

'The fact that you could not reach out to those new people in person has been obviously a horrible challenge.'

members.

"The fact that you could not reach out to those new people in person has been obviously a horrible challenge for every association related to government," Mitchell said.

The Indiana County Councils Association's videos cover a variety of topics including budget approvals, salary ordinances, council appointments, budgets, committees and council liaisons.

With over 170 new county council members elected throughout Indiana this year,

Mitchell said the group wanted to find ways to create connections for new members and establish resources where they could reach out to ask questions and have a place to turn to for help.

"I had a great mentor who did what I hoped this would do for others — told me in the beginning to get all the education you can... go where you can get other ideas from other people and bring them home," she said.

The Indiana County Councils Association started creating videos a few years ago, but held more video sessions and recordings to share information virtually throughout the pandemic, Mitchell said.

"We've just had to be pretty creative," she said. "We have a lot on our plate trying to reach out to be a viable entity for county council members."

Other associations have also switched their in-person sessions for newly elected county officials to virtual platforms.

The Virginia Association of Counties holds the Chairper-

sons' Institute and the Supervisors' Forum each year as training and education events for county officials and newly elected officials.

This year, the Chairpersons' Institute will be held virtually at the end of January and the Supervisors' Forum is planned to be a hybrid event held this spring.

Director of Communications Gage Harter said throughout the pandemic, the association has turned to WebEx to host regional meetings and its annual conference.

Harter said he sees portions of these meetings focusing on communicating during the pandemic and maintaining virtual connections with colleagues, constituents and staff.

The association is also looking for ways to incorporate networking into virtual and hybrid events in ways that feel as organic as meeting with someone in person, he noted.

"I think if associations have an idea, just run with it," he said. "I don't think there are any bad ideas." **CN**



Sue Mitchell (center) Kosciusko County, Ind. council member and president of the Indiana County Councils Association, records a video at the Indiana Association of County headquarters as part of a six-part video series to onboard new council members.

2021 NACo ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



CELEBRATING 51 YEARS OF INNOVATION

SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE:

March 31, 2021 at
11:59 p.m. EDT

NOTIFICATIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

Week of April 26, 2021

HOW TO APPLY

Does your county have an innovative program that improves county government and enhances services for county residents? Apply for the 2021 Achievement Awards! There are 18 categories ranging from information technology, health, criminal justice, human services and many more.

To begin your application visit:

www.naco.org/achievementawards

QUESTIONS?

Contact awards@naco.org



ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- Ron Berry**, a Roane County, Tenn. commissioner, was elected South Region Representative. He is chairman of NACo's Rural Action Caucus, vice chair of the Membership Standing Committee, member of the International Economic Development Task Force and member of the NACo Board of Directors.

NACo STAFF

- Danny Melgoza** has joined NACo as chief strategy officer and chief of staff. He previously worked in various public policy and management positions in San Diego County, Calif., including most recently as chief of staff to NACo Past President Greg Cox.



Berry



Melgoza

PROFILES IN SERVICE

SCOTT SORREL

NACo Board Member
County Administrator
Peoria County, Ill.

Number of years involved in NACo: 10-plus

Years in public service: 27-plus

Occupation: Peoria County Administrator

Education: Bachelor of Science in Community and Regional Planning, Iowa State University; Master's in Public Administration, University of Nebraska Omaha

The hardest thing I've ever done: Having to tell colleagues that their position(s) were being eliminated not because of their performance, but because of budget cuts.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Bobby Jones, Ben Crenshaw and my father.

A dream I have is to: Play golf on every continent.

You'd be surprised to learn that: I could get lost for hours just staring at fine art, especially Jackson Pollock, Gustav Klimt and Ansel Adams.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Ziplining.

My favorite way to relax is: Playing golf.

I'm most proud of: Personally, my two sons. Professionally, being the county's project manager for a \$40 million-plus



Sorrel

new multiple-discipline regional museum that was completed on time and under budget.

Every morning I read: Our 911 dispatch center's significant incident report, local newspaper headlines, *The Washington Post*, *Route Fifty Today*, *GOVERNING Daily*, *Crain's (Chicago) Morning 10*.

My favorite meal is: A good filet (cooked medium rare).

My pet peeve is: Dishonesty and laziness.

My motto is: Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood. (Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago).

The last book I read was: *Countdown 1945* by Chris Wallace

My favorite movie is: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

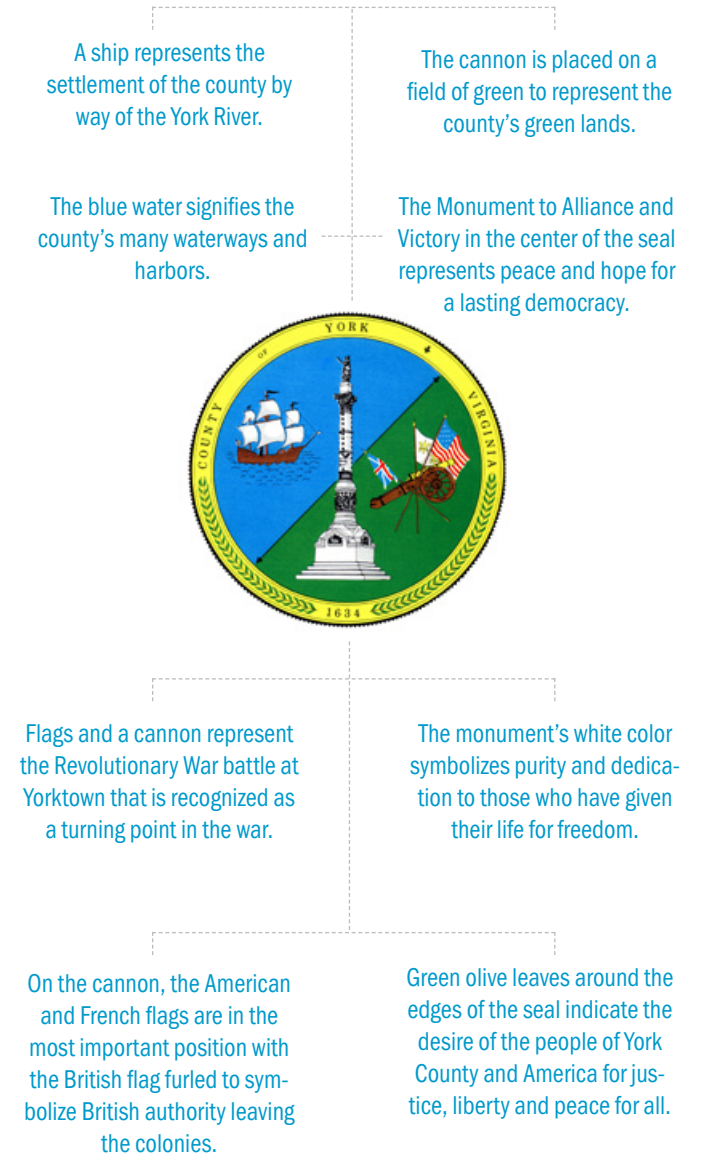
My favorite music is: I listen to a wide variety of music, but have long loved the Seattle sound of the 90s.

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: We value NACo's commitment to being the best possible voice in advocating county-centric issues with federal legislators, promoting the value of county governments to our citizens and taxpayers and being a great resource of data and research to find innovative solutions to the challenges counties face.

BEHIND THE SEAL YORK COUNTY, VA.

Charles Waddell, a former assistant county administrator, designed the York County, Va. seal to represent the county's history. He presented it to the Board of Supervisors in 1969. York County was established in 1634 as one of the eight original shires in Virginia.



If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at rlooker@naco.org.

You'd be surprised to learn that:
I could get lost for hours just staring at fine art, especially Ansel Adams.



Hire Quality Staff @ Jobs Online
www.naco.org/jobsonline

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARIZONA

The **PIMA COUNTY** Department of Environmental Quality launched a 2021 **drive less pledge** to reduce air pollution throughout the county. As part of the department's Clean Air Program, residents are encouraged to skip trips in a motor vehicle and take a "no-drive" day each week by carpooling, walking, combining errands, taking transit or riding a bike. Residents who take the pledge are entered to win a \$100 gift card and other prizes.

CALIFORNIA

• Officials in **ORANGE COUNTY** announced plans for a massive **COVID-19 vaccination site at Disneyland**. The park will serve as the first of five super point-of-dispensing (POD) sites in the county with the capacity to vaccinate thousands daily. County officials established "Operation Independence" with the goal of completing all county vaccinations by July 4.



• Supervisors in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** are considering a proposal that would mandate "**hero pay**" for grocery and retail drugstore employees. The \$5 pay increase would apply to publicly traded grocery store or retail drug companies with at least 300 employees nationwide and more than 10 employees per store, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. The ordinance would last for 120 days.

COLORADO

SUMMIT COUNTY Public Health is **prioritizing full-time residents** in its COVID-19 vaccine distribution process. Health officials will utilize its drive-through clinic vaccination site for permanent residents and work with other partners to provide vaccines for part-time residents. Those living in the county part-time must confirm they have been in the county for 60 days and plan to stay for an additional 60 days when receiving a vaccine.

JUNE teenth

ILLINOIS

Commissioners in **COOK COUNTY** unanimously approved an ordinance **recognizing Juneteenth as an observed holiday**. The day marks an annual Independence Day celebration to remember the emancipation of African Americans who were enslaved in the country. Cook County is the first in the state to declare Juneteenth a holiday.

INDIANA

Large groups looking to get together in a post-COVID world will have a new option for a meeting spot. Officials in **LAGRANGE COUNTY** **repealed a 1971 law intended to block huge gatherings** such as the 1969 Woodstock music festival, *The News Sun* reported. "I called it our anti-hippie ordinance," county commissioner Dennis Kratz said with a smile.

The law regulated large gatherings of more than 500 people that lasted more than 12 hours. The county has made a recent effort to repeal longstanding ordinances that have no practical use.



PENNSYLVANIA

• Liz Dippold shows off one of her **storm drain murals**. Thanks to a grant from the **ELK COUNTY** Council of the Arts and PA Partners in the Arts, the Elk County Conservation District commissioned four storm drain murals by two local artists. The murals aim to help raise awareness about storm water and where it goes.

MARYLAND

BALTIMORE COUNTY has **eliminated fees for individuals on home detention**. County officials said court delays following the suspension of jury trials has resulted in people spending longer time in home

detention, *The Baltimore Sun* reported. The decision aims to reduce the financial burden for those individuals during the pandemic. Most people on home detention "are individuals not convicted and awaiting adjudication of non-violent crime charges," County Execu-

tive Johnny Olszewski said.

MICHIGAN

• The Sheriff's Office in **GENESEE COUNTY** launched an **inmate education program** to end generational incarceration. The Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education (IGNITE) program

GEORGIA

Officials in **DEKALB COUNTY** launched **mobile wellness units** to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and other health issues throughout the community. The DeKalb County Board of Health Mobile Wellness Clinic's two walk-in vans and six mobile units contain examination rooms and medical equipment and will allow the board of health to expand telehealth services. The walk-in vans will also expand the mobile farmers market program and provide nutritional and healthcare services to vulnerable populations.

Photo courtesy of DeKalb County, Ga. Board of Health



provides inmates with the ability to take classes for a GED, obtain a high school diploma, enroll in college courses, earn food and beverage safety certifications and obtain a commercial driver's license, MLive.com reported.

- The Prosecutor's Office in **WASHTENAW COUNTY** will **no longer seek cash bail** in criminal cases. Prosecutor Eli Savit said in a release that cash bail is unjust, socioeconomically inequitable and forces individuals to remain in jail before they have been convicted of a crime. He said he will ask judges to issue restrictions on defendants that are based on public safety, not the ability to pay.

NEVADA

The **NYE COUNTY** Sheriff's office has nearly cut in half the price of **patrol vehicle decals**. The old decals feature a long blue stripe across the entire vehicle, while the new ones feature only the logo of the Sheriff's office, covering just the front and back doors. The difference works out to \$562.50, which went back into the county's Capital Expenses budget.

OREGON

MULTNOMAH COUNTY has upgraded its outdoor short-term homeless shelters, once tents, to **sleeping pods**. Each of the 100 pods, spread among three outdoor shelters, has windows, a bed, shelving, electricity and heat to help keep people warm through the winter months.

PENNSYLVANIA

- A two-year pilot project will pair **BUCKS COUNTY social workers with officers** from the county's largest municipal police forces to divert people

MICHIGAN

- The Road Commission in **MONTCALM COUNTY** launched a pilot program to use **liquid-only de-icing agents** instead of salt on county roads. The commission purchased a truck with a liquid-only tank to disperse the anti-icing pre-treatment, which creates a liquid barrier that makes it easier to remove ice and snow. The program aims to improve the county's roads and help with conditions during colder temperatures, the *Greenville Daily News* reported. *Photo by Brandon Schreur, Greenville Daily News*



in need of social services away from the criminal justice system and reduce the amount of time police spend on social services-related calls. The county will fund the project's \$400,000 cost and analyze results to determine whether to continue it, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported.

SOUTH CAROLINA

CHARLESTON COUNTY Environmental Management will randomly inspect recycling cans to check for **non-recyclable contamination**. If staff members find materials that don't belong, they will tag the non-compliant cans with educational information for the resident, Charleston's NBC affiliate reported.

TEXAS

A graduate student is making three-hour round-trip drives to provide **in-home COVID-19** testing in a partnership among **FAYETTE COUNTY**, which provides his vehicle and personal protective equipment, CPL Labs, which covers his salary and a local health clinic that allows him working space. The program aims to reach those who may be homebound, lack transportation or may have been exposed to the virus, KXAN News reported. In a little more than two months, the program has tested more than 100 people.

VIRGINIA

- **FAIRFAX COUNTY** has **reformed sentencing policies** to stop using mandatory minimum sentences in plea deals and charge people who commit minor offenses with felonies. County prosecutors will also no longer seek cash bail. In cases involving probation, prosecutors now must carefully customize how long it

lasts to meet the needs of each person, WTOP News reported.



- The **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** Office of Tourism debuted a new **digital passport** with discounts to area shops, craft beverage venues, attractions, restaurants, hotels and other busi-

nesses. The program is a component of the county's economic recovery effort and has already recruited more than 85 businesses.

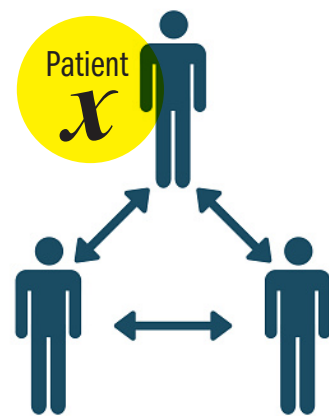
The digital passport is free for both consumers and businesses to join and is supported by a "spend local" advertising campaign to encourage consumer spending in the county.

WASHINGTON

A new **KING COUNTY** restorative justice program will use public money to **pay restitution to crime victims**. It will be offered to first-time non-violent defendants as a way to prevent the downside of having a felony conviction on their records. Prosecutor Dan Satterberg believes the program will provide better outcomes for both victims and offenders, who could be constantly com-

ing back to court because they can't pay their restitution.

"Sometimes it can take years before restitution is paid to a victim and the person responsible may repeatedly come back to court when they don't pay," Satterberg said. "The reality of the situation right now is, victims are not being taken care of. This will help us take care of their immediate needs



to a cap of, say, \$500."

WYOMING

Following the November announcement that the state would stop calling the contacts of people who test positive for COVID-19 to let them know they may have been exposed to the virus, **TETON COUNTY**'s two dozen county health department employees and volunteers are the **state's remaining contact tracers**, *High Country News* reported. Those workers have joined with firefighters, EMTs and the police department to transport COVID-positive people using sheriff's vans with enclosed cabs. The sheriff's office has also picked up and delivered prescriptions to quarantining residents.

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



UTAH

The **SAN JUAN COUNTY** Commission passed a resolution asking then-President-elect Joe Biden to take immediate action to **restore the Bears Ears National Monument**. President Barack Obama designated the 1.35 million-acre national monument at the request of five Native American tribes in December 2016, a move that was opposed by nearly every elected leader in Utah, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported. President Donald Trump reduced Bears Ears National Monument to 15 percent of its original size the following year, citing local opposition to the monument as one of the leading reasons for his decision.



BRIGHT IDEAS | SAN DIEGO COUNTY, Calif.

Program Provides 'Fresh Start' with Criminal Record Relief

PROBLEM:

Criminal convictions act as barriers to employment, education, housing and other civic opportunities.

SOLUTION:

Provide free legal representation to individuals seeking conviction relief.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

For those with a criminal record in San Diego County, Calif., there are options to seek conviction relief through the Office of the Public Defender.

The Fresh Start Criminal Record Relief program advocates for community members in all areas of conviction relief by providing individual, no-cost legal representation to clients.

Katherine Braner, chief deputy of Development and Training for the San Diego County Office of the Public Defender, said the program launched in response to the rapidly changing conviction relief laws in the state.

Braner saw a need for a coordinated unit of paralegals to analyze clients' records for all avenues of possible conviction relief.

Prior to the program, she described the process for seeking relief as "haphazard" with paralegals not efficiently communicating with one another and not analyzing records in their entirety for all possible relief in which an individual would be entitled.

"It was up to the client to reach out to us and say 'Hey, can you help me with an expungement?' and that's all that would happen," she said. "To me, that did not seem to be the most efficient use of resources, nor did it seem to be the most beneficial for clients."

The department piloted the program in 2017 and Braner



Staff from the San Diego County, Calif. Office of the Public Defender consult with potential clients on conviction relief services at the Project Homeless Connect Fair in February 2020 in San Diego County, Calif. Photo courtesy of San Diego County, Calif.

proposed the formation of a team of lawyers with expertise specifically in conviction relief law.

Through the program, attorneys order a client's Department of Justice criminal history report and search for records that provide insight into a client's past.

After reviewing the record, attorneys develop the "Fresh Start" plan for each case. Many clients are eligible for multiple types of relief including expungements, reducing felony convictions to misdemeanors and sealing adult arrest records, among others.

Clients are then represented in court by one of the program's attorneys.

The Fresh Start Criminal Record Relief program is available at no cost to anyone with San Diego County arrests or convictions.

Potential clients can apply online to request assistance.

Braner said with rapidly changing conviction relief laws, many individuals are unaware of the criminal justice relief that is available or face challenges completing the process without legal advice which is often too expensive.

"Every time there is a new law that's passed in California that allows for some innovative conviction relief, our unit analyzes it and then incorporates that into our practice," she said.

Braner said the office has developed strategies to inform the community about the program and launched a website with a list of all available conviction relief services and a detailed frequently asked questions format for interested applicants.

Over 5,000 applicants have utilized the program since its

pilot in 2017. Since April 2018, there have been more than 4,500 conviction relief-related petitions.

This fiscal year alone, the program received more than 1,000 applications.

"It has been more successful than I've ever dreamed," Braner said.

In addition to providing services to clients seeking conviction relief, Braner said the program emphasizes education and partners with county departments, community colleges, non-profit organizations and other community groups to hold clinics and outreach events related to conviction relief.

The Office of the Public Defender also collaborates with justice partners to find ways to streamline the conviction process and improve efficiencies in post-conviction work.

Braner added that the office's attorneys aid in pushing forward legislative and county policy changes by consulting with various entities to ensure comprehensive conviction relief legislation.

She advised other counties looking to launch a similar program to coordinate with their justice partners, district attorney's office and court to receive buy-in from partners who would help in providing conviction relief for community members.

"Helping people remove the barriers to reintegration in the community is a win-win for everybody," she said. "By removing these barriers to reintegration, what we're doing is reducing recidivism and that is a really, really powerful benefit to the entire community." **CN**

San Diego County's Fresh Start Criminal Record Relief Program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Criminal Justice and Public Safety category.

CN JOB MARKET

DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

SCHUYLER COUNTY, NY

Salary: up to \$262,242

Application deadline:

February 12, 2021

Schuyler County, NY is seeking to hire a Deputy County Administrator. Schuyler County is an attractive, growing community in the Finger Lakes Region of NY state. The County is internationally recognized as a destination location, as the home of Watkins Glen International (NASCAR), Watkins Glen State Park and a burgeoning wine and craft beer industry. The County population is just under 18,000 residents who welcome over 3 million visitors annually. This is a key administrative position under the general supervision of the County Administrator. This position requires a high level of independent judgment in planning and carrying out the details of the work and includes supervising the delivery of County services with the goal of improving efficacy and efficiency, in compliance with all laws, rules and regulations. This position has been created as part of succession planning, in anticipation of the retirement of the Schuyler County Administrator in 2021. The successful candidate need not be a resident of Schuyler County at the time of hire but shall become so within ninety days of appointment and remain so during the term of employment. Salary commensurate with experience plus excellent benefit package. Successful candidates must have the following minimum qualifications: Either 1) Masters Degree in Business or Public Administration (preferred); AND two years of management experience in Public Administration; or 2) Bachelor's Degree in Business or Public Administration, AND Three years of management experience in Public Administration. All candidates must submit a Civil Service application, along with a resume, and three (3) professional references. Information must be submitted to the Schuyler County Civil Service office.

HOW TO APPLY: Interested candidates may visit the Schuyler County website (www.schuylercounty.us) for the application form and job description or contact the Schuyler County Civil Service Office, 105 9th Street, Unit 21, Watkins Glen, New York 14891. Phone: 607-535-8190