

COVID-19 crisis: County budgets may see \$144 billion hit

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

Counties nationwide could see a \$144 billion hit to their budgets through the end of 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new report “Running on Fumes: Impact of COVID-19 on County Finances,” released by NACo.

The estimate includes anticipated increases in expenditures, lost sales tax revenue, lost revenue from charges and fees, lost business license tax revenue and lost income tax revenue. The estimate does not include potential lost revenue from property taxes or from state sales or income taxes that are shared with counties.

An additional \$54 billion in property tax revenue is at risk in states where counties have not yet collected any or all property tax revenue.

Meanwhile, county budgets are being stretched to the limit, fielding 911 calls, overseeing emergency operation centers and administering human service programs for millions of newly unemployed residents.


Even before the novel coronavirus pandemic began, counties invested in community health services and hospitals — nearly \$100 billion each year.

Now, county budgets are being stretched thin as they work with nearly 1,000 county-supported hospitals and 1,900 local public health authorities to fight the virus.

Preliminary estimates from NACo show counties could expect a nearly \$30 billion increase in expenditures, should the pandemic last through FY2021.

This would translate into the median county spending 8 percent of its resources responding to COVID-19, with some counties spending more depending on their responsibilities. NACo estimates that 76 counties could spend half of their budgets fighting coronavirus.

Furloughing employees to help stem losses is all part of the mix. Due to the rising costs of battling COVID-19 and revenue losses, many counties have had to furlough or lay off employees, on average laying off about 6 percent of the workforce, although some counties are seeing even higher numbers. Franklin County, Pa. has furloughed 25 percent of its workforce or 2,000 of about 8,000 employees.

Read the full report here: <https://www.naco.org/resources/running-fumes-impact-covid-19-county-finance>. 



Dutchess County, N.Y. Executive Marcus Molinaro discusses how his county is handling the coronavirus pandemic during an appearance last week on C-SPAN. Molinaro lost his father, 67, to COVID-19 on April 10 (see story, Page 6). Molinaro is one of many county officials getting the word out about how counties are seeing a strain on operations and budgets across the board due to the pandemic.

Counties make plans to reopen

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

As Washington County, Wis. residents walked back into parks and onto golf courses on an April weekend, County Executive Joshua Schoemann was cementing some goal posts.

During a weekend of protests in state capitals and major cities, he was one of many county officials working to create a plan amid emotional expres-

sions and desires to bring their communities back to normal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On April 21, Schoemann announced the county's roadmap to resuming normal operations for private businesses. Washington County shares a health department with neighboring Ozaukee County, and the plan will apply to both.

“What our plan aims to do is acknowledge that ‘safer at

home’ is going to be around for a while, that the guidelines are going to be around for a while, that the culture has to change in Wisconsin and across the country for a while, and yet, we can balance that and being sensitive to public health while also being sensitive to economics and beginning to open up some of the things that make sense and allowing

See REOPEN page 2

‘Preparation is key’ for county coroners during pandemic

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

Ada County, Idaho Coroner Dotti Owens is on call for the first time in four years. She is alternating every other week as a backup along with her investigative supervisor. She is working around the clock to complete prep work and prepare for the unknown.

“It’s an all hands-on-deck situation,” she said.

County coroners are used to dealing with the deceased, but while doctors and nurses are making every effort possible to save the lives of those diagnosed with COVID-19, coroners are facing new challenges working to prevent the spread of the virus and making preparations for a significant increase

in caseloads.

In Ada County, which encompasses the state capital of Boise, the coroner's office operates as part of a regional facility that serves 36 jurisdictions for forensic services.

Owens said her office, with a team of 10, is working to overcome obstacles such as body

See CORONERS page 3

Washington County, Wis. sets health standards to meet before businesses reopen

From REOPEN page 1

people freedoms and respecting their individual rights,” he said. “I don’t think that balance existed and we’re hoping to get closer to that with this plan.”

The county’s plan, based on guidance by the American Enterprise Institute, sets four benchmarks for the county to reach before businesses can reopen. It also shares many themes with Gov. Tony Evers’ (D) “Badger Bounce Back” plan, but Schoemann emphasizes the specific goals detailed in the county’s plan.

“I think dates, largely, are arbitrary, so throwing out May 26 (as an opening date) without any metrics, without having any hope for what that actually means was extremely disheartening,” he said.

The county’s standards include:

- 14 days of decreasing positive COVID-19 cases in the county (a criterion in federal reopening guidelines)
- capacity to test everyone who needs it
- the health department staff capacity to do contact tracing within 48 hours for every person who tests positive and
- a decrease in hospitalizations to the point where hospital operations can return to normal, also a federal requirement.

At that point, the county and its businesses can seriously start reopening.

“Once those four items have been met, we think that there are pieces that can be reopened,” said County Health Officer Kristen Johnson. “We’re

following the governor’s guidelines but one of the immediate policy pieces that has to be in place is that everyone who needs to be tested in Wisconsin should be.”

Johnson said the county does have the contact tracing capacity and its hospitals have returned to their normal capacities. She said this was the time businesses should start integrating physical distancing standards in their operations, including limiting occupancy and allowing for adequate space among customers.

The county’s plan sets basic safety parameters for several types of businesses and events, including factories, bookstores, restaurants, fitness facilities, beauty parlors and large gatherings.

“We have relationships with many of our businesses within our communities, and we feel part of our responsibility and part of our response is to help them through this and work closely with them,” Johnson said, noting that health department staff were available to consult with businesses. “We have something for our communities to respond to. Whether the safer at home order stays until May 26, whether it’s lifted May 11, whenever it happens, we wanted to be in a position where we could give people guidance that we’ve thought about it.”

“Calls to extend this lockdown without a more detailed plan for truly dialing up and reopening is just as reckless as calling to simply open without any enforceable guidelines, social distancing and those types of things,” Schoemann said. “This blueprint is specifically designed to provide guidance for people and industries and most importantly, to give our citizens hope for the bright future that lies after this pandemic.

demical.

“This isn’t a call to flip a switch and open everything up tomorrow. This is a call to use common sense and balance it with science.”

Sheriff Martin Schulteis was on board with the plan, though he worried warming weather might provoke less social distancing compliance.

“This pandemic is a challenge that we’ve never seen,” he said. “It’s a very, very delicate balance between individuals’ rights and public health, but (the plan) protects those individuals who are most vulnerable while also protecting those individuals who need to provide for their families.”

“The worst thing that could happen is that we got overwhelmed and have to re-shut down,” Johnson said.

Meanwhile in Texas, Parker County Judge Pat Deen strongly disagreed with Gov. Greg Abbott’s (R) timetable for reopening the state, which he thought to be too broad for 254 counties. Parker County, west of Fort Worth, has 20 cases and zero deaths in a county with 140,000 people.

“The governor’s order...essentially sucked the hope out of our community by taking away local control from mayors, city councils and the Commissioners Court,” Deen wrote on Facebook. “Parker County, like our neighboring counties, Wise and Hood, is predominately a rural environment and we have all been extremely proactive to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We do not have the same density as Dallas, Tarrant or Harris counties and should have been given the authority to make decisions that best fit our rural counties.

“I respectfully ask that Governor Abbott reconsider his position on setting restrictive parameters for cities and coun-

ties to follow and allow local decisions (to) be made based on our respective communities/densities and the localized spread, or lack of spread, of the virus.”

In San Luis Obispo County, Calif., the county relaxed restrictions to allow non-urgent surgery and outpatient practice, construction, dog grooming and recreational fishing, provided participants follow the county’s personal protection guidelines. The county is moving toward a more general phased re-opening and wrote to Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), asking permission to implement the county’s “Roadmap for Reopening.”

The county’s “order allows for a local interpretation of essential business services where the governor’s overlapping order lacks specificity,” Supervisor Lynn Compton said April 20. “We’re...going away from the essential business services definition and moving more toward businesses that can operate safely and sustainably without affecting others and changing our curve.”

“And it’ll be over a period of months, and it will come with ongoing surveillance, ongoing contact investigation, I mean, case investigation, contact tracing.”

And in Eagle County, Colo., once a hot spot for COVID-19 cases thanks to skiers visiting Vail, county leaders sent a letter to the state, asking to loosen restrictions on the county, including stay-at-home requirements, travel prohibition, gatherings limitations and business restrictions.

“Relief from these provisions will allow Eagle County to tailor its future public health orders to effectively meet the needs of its community, improve be-

See REOPEN page 16

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ANNUAL EXPENSE	DOG/CAT
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Routine visit.....	\$212/\$160
Food	\$259/\$228
Food treats	\$76/\$58
Kennel boarding	\$229/\$120
Grooming.....	\$73/\$43
Toys	\$48/\$31

Source: American Pet Products Association 2019-2020 National Pet Owners Survey

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County coroners seek testing kits: 'We've not been able to get our hands on them'



Employees of the Ada County Coroner's Office assemble testing kits in Ada County, Idaho. Photo courtesy of the Ada County Coroner's Office

From CORONERS page 1

storage, obtaining personal protective equipment and testing kits.

"We've not been able to get our hands on them [testing kits]," she said.

Owens ordered 1,000 kits that are on backorder but will be equally split between the county and the state when they arrive. She purchased the kits in pieces and a group of volunteers will assemble them.

Testing occurs in a triage area located outside the morgue where Owens' staff swabs deceased individuals for the virus. Bodies are held in a trailer until the county receives the results. If the result is negative and there is a need to obtain a cause and manner of death, her office will perform an autopsy. If the test is positive, the office will release the body to the funeral home.

"One of the dangers of swabbing on scene and releasing from the scene is exposure to that funeral home without knowing whether you have a negative or positive," she said.

The county has a small mass fatality trailer that holds 15 bodies. Owens ordered an ad-

ditional 55-foot truck that holds 70 bodies, which is being paid for by the county.

Her staff is taking preventative measures when responding on scene including double-bagging bodies to prevent contaminating facilities.

"What you have to realize is cases are double the work," Owens said. "They are double the time so we're a lot slower on scene because we're trying to prevent exposure to our team."

Her main concern for the future revolves around staffing, specifically for jurisdictions in the state with only one coroner and one chief deputy coroner.

"I know what my staff is capable of, but I also am worried about burning everyone out and getting to the point where we're struggling to cover shifts," she said.

While the country is working to meet the personal protective needs for healthcare workers, Owens said coroners and funeral homes need to be protected as well.

"It's really important that everyone understands that we in this coroner/medical examiner industry are first responders," she said. "We're expected to be on the frontlines of this but yet

the support from our partners, they forget about us and forget about the funeral homes."

Owens said many coroners in Idaho who do not have testing kits are making their own, which Baldwin County, Ala. Coroner Brian Pierce started doing in his office.

Pierce said his staff put together around 15 testing kits that include a test tube with a viral medium for nasal swabs. The swabs are taken in the field where the deceased individual passed away.

The Baldwin County Coroner's Office established an online portal with the state public health office to view results online. The public health office returns the kits and restocks the viral testing medium.

"It's a way for us to track those field deaths," he said. "It should be a small number because most people hopefully show up at the hospital and the hospital does the testing, but this is to catch any cases that may slip through the cracks."

Pierce ordered additional personal protective equipment, disinfectants and a bio seal unit to seal bodies and keep the contagion trapped. His office also changed its body transport

policies.

Pierce explained how the pandemic has impacted the release of information to families and life insurance companies because of the closures of court systems.

"If we slow down grand juries, some of these families may have delays in life insurance claims or even just getting information about what happened to their loved one," he said.

In Luzerne County, Pa., preparation was a key factor in developing procedures when the virus started to spread, Coroner Frank Hacken said.

Luzerne County, located in northeastern Pennsylvania, is a transit community because of its close proximity to New York City.

Hacken said his office prepared for an increase in deaths and coordinated with medical facilities, funeral directors and other stakeholders to ensure they were capable of handling the deceased. He communicates with the Pennsylvania State Coroners Association to discuss challenges surrounding the evolving situation.

If there is a possibility that a deceased individual may have

the coronavirus and was not under medical care, Hacken said his office works with the department of health to obtain test kits to swab the deceased.

Hacken's office established a temporary morgue, a vehicle for transports and a team that specifically responds to COVID-19 deaths.

"Instead of trying to use all our resources, what we try to do is specialize a little bit in breaking up our areas of responsibility and having people ready to go in certain situations," he said.

Hacken has two focuses during the COVID-19 situation: The epidemic itself and the daily operations of the office.

"If you're loved one died of something else other than COVID-19, that's extremely important to you," he said. "Just because we're in a COVID-19 situation right now, we cannot forget about the needs and responsibility to our families and to our communities related to all these other deaths."

Hacken emphasized his appreciation for first responders.

"They're doing an excellent job and by what they're doing, the need for coroners is being reduced," he said. **CN**

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COVID-19: County social services carry on, support abuse victims

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Stay-at-home orders, financial stress and employment stress are all ingredients that combine to make a recipe for disaster for victims of abuse.

Utah County Commission Vice Chair Nathan Ivie said the county's 911 dispatch has reported a 75 percent increase of domestic violence calls.

Ivie described how self-isolation takes a toll on individuals' mental health, which leads to increased tensions in relationships that often result in violence.

"I think it's important we keep a holistic view of effects on public health and that includes physical health and mental health as well," he said.

Ivie said the biggest challenge to providing social services during the coronavirus pandemic is the limitations on personal interactions but emphasized that services are still available for individuals who need help.

Counties need to ensure safety nets are in place through local health departments, local mental health services and law enforcement and are properly staffed and equipped to meet the needs of a community during a time of crisis, he said.

The sheriff's office in Loudoun County, Va., has also seen a recent spike of domestic abuse hotline calls, according to Josephine Gonzalez, program manager of the county's Domestic Abuse Response Team.

Gonzalez said the isolation piece makes this situation worse for victims. Domestic violence is about the dynamics of power and control, she said, and isolation is a major tactic that offenders are using to exert control; financial and economic stressors stemming from the coronavirus are also a factor.

"I do think that many times survivors have to almost choose what they can worry about," Gonzalez said. "Do I choose to stay here with a roof over my head and try to contin-



Members of the Domestic Abuse Response Team in Loudoun County, Va. let county residents know they are still available and encourage them to reach out for help during the coronavirus pandemic.

ue to minimize the violence?"

Even during stay-at-home orders and quarantines, the Domestic Abuse Response Team is overcoming challenges to find ways to help individuals.

"We've definitely had to modify how we deliver our services, but we are here to serve our community 100 percent," Gonzalez said.

The county's Domestic Abuse Response Team is an inter-agency collaboration that includes law enforcement, community corrections, schools, mental health professionals and other advocacy agencies.

Gonzalez said an individual can still obtain a protective order during these times and advocates are available as part of the Loudoun Abuse Women's Shelter, which is offering shelter to survivors during the pandemic.

"What we've been doing is we were looking for a way to continue to provide outreach just so survivors also know that despite these many changes, we're still here and we're still available," she said.

Meanwhile, counties are seeing a decrease of calls to child abuse hotlines. Ina Fer-

nandez, the deputy director of the Loudoun County Department of Family Services, said there has been a "dramatic decrease" in calls to the child abuse hotline. She is attributing this to mandated reporters unable to see children because of the stay-at-home orders.

"It does concern us because we know that just because we're not getting calls does not mean it's not happening," she said.

Family support workers who need to respond to calls regarding child abuse and neglect are taking precautions including practicing social distancing and wearing personal protective equipment.

Fernandez said one of her main concerns is placing a child who may be COVID-19 positive with a family in a foster home. She said many families are afraid to take in a child with COVID-19 because they want to keep their own family safe.

If this situation were to occur, the department is looking at alternative ways to provide services to kids who may need to be brought into care, but can't be placed in a traditional foster home, she said.

She described how this may be "the calm before the

storm." Once children are seen by mandated reporters, there may be a significant increase in calls.

"Please, if you are concerned about a child or domestic violence, call. We're here. This is our job and we want to make sure that the kids and residents of our community are safe," she said.

Albany County, N.Y., Department for Children, Youth and Families Commissioner Moira Manning said the department has also seen a decrease in the number of child abuse reports.

"This is very concerning because child abuse does not stop because of COVID-19," she said. "The problem really being is that mandated reporters are not available to see these students."

Manning encouraged community members to take action and look out for children, who she described as one of the most vulnerable populations.

"When there is additional stress and burden on a family, it can really create an unsafe situation," she said.

Similarly, in Goodhue County, Minn., Social Services Supervisor in the Child and Family Unit Kris Johnson said they have not been receiving

the same volume of child protection reports, specifically for the months of March and April, which are traditionally high months with concerns over truancy and educational neglect.

"I think one of the things we're hearing about is a very high level of stress in the home," Johnson said.

She explained how they have increased the number of child welfare responses, such as responding to calls that may not meet the level for child maltreatment but show high levels of stress. Staff from the unit may contact the family to check in and de-escalate problems to prevent a situation from resulting in a child protective order.

Johnson said the majority of contacts are now completed by video conference or phone calls. She said in certain situations when there is concern about the condition of a home, staff may make in-person visits.

"We want people to know that just because our county building is not open to the public, all of our county staff are working and communicating with people and helping problem solve those situations," Johnson said.

Goodhue County Adult Services Supervisor Abby Villaran said on the adult mental health case management side, staff are conducting more phone calls and providing deliveries of items such as food and supplies to individuals who are facing challenges because public transportation is down.

"I think people are saying it's more frequent contact, but shorter duration of phone conversations with clients right now," Villaran said.

She added that the frequency of these calls helps build rapport without face-to-face contacts.

"We would all much rather intervene and provide support before something reaches a crisis and we're continuing to do that as we always have and feel like that's a really important role for counties to take," Villaran said. **CN**

COVID-19 hits close to home for county executive

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

While COVID-19 has upended county budgets and operations across the country, it's also hitting home in a personal way, with some losing loved ones to the virus.

Dutchess County, N.Y. Executive Marc Molinaro saw COVID-19 take the life of his father April 10. Anthony Molinaro, 67, worked for decades in the telecom industry and was still working before he went in the hospital. He held a second job at a casino, which was part of the shutdown.

"It was saddening and surreal, he was a healthy man," Molinaro said of his father, who was one of 11 people who died of the virus in the county at that time, among about 1,500 who tested positive.

"My father would want nothing more than for me to carry on, he was a busy guy, worked two jobs, he knew my responsibility, he'd expect me to keep doing the work I'm supposed to do," he said.



Dutchess County, N.Y. Executive Marcus Molinaro

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who Molinaro ran against in the governor's race in 2018, called to express his condolences. "Here for one moment he paused to recognize a man who was most proud of me when I ran against him," Molinaro said.

Molinaro said he's still coming to grips with the fact that the pandemic has hit him in such a personal way. "It's a strange kind of notion, that 60 days ago, it would never occur to me I'd be dealing with such a personal connection to this," he noted. "It is just heart-wrenching, and I miss my dad."

He said he had "prayed for a miracle," after he got a phone

call from his sister that his father was going in the hospital and had tested positive for the virus.

"I'm a New York Mets fan, which means I suffer every baseball season," Molinaro said. "I became a fan as a young kid. That solidified in 1986. I was on the floor of my dad's apartment with my brother watching the World Series, Game 6. We were all praying for a miracle. We prayed for a miracle then and

now. In my family's case, we didn't get the one we wanted, but it's those moments that really define us. We will get through this."

As hard as social distancing is, Molinaro said "we are doing this for a reason. We are asking folks to live just a little bit longer in this restrictive environment. As challenging as it is, as devastating as it will be, we have to hang on a little bit longer so we can save more lives." **CN**



County Executive Molinaro's father, Anthony Molinaro, is pictured here with members of the family.

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Counties launch rent assistance measures amid COVID-19 crisis

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

While it's a crucial time to have a roof over your head and shelter to self-isolate, there are growing concerns among renters who lost their jobs or received pay cuts because of COVID-19.

On March 18, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) authorized the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to implement a foreclosure and eviction moratorium for single-family owners with FHA-insured mortgages for 60 days.

State and local governments are also taking steps to assist renters and homeowners during these uncertain times.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) issued a statewide moratorium from evicting tenants for non-payment of rent through May 31 if they have been affected by COVID-19. Tenants must provide notice to landlords if they are unable to make their payments. The order also slows foreclosures and protects against utility shutoffs.

Previously, Newsom implemented other measures to help

renters including restrictions on excessive rent increases during emergencies.

In Contra Costa County, Calif., supervisors passed an ordinance expanding upon Newsom's orders.

Supervisor Candace Andersen said the county wanted to add a grace period for after the governor's emergency order was lifted for both residential and commercial tenants.

"What we were hearing was the day after we lift our moratoriums and restrictions, someone could immediately have eviction papers served on them," Andersen said.

Contra Costa supervisors issued an urgency ordinance that includes a 120-day grace period for renters to make their payments or reach a new written agreement with their landlord.

During this grace period, renters cannot be evicted for non-payment of rent.

Andersen said the ordinance also bans late fees if it is a COVID-19-related issue. Individuals will have to provide some level of documentation such as a notice of termination or a pay stub showing a reduction of wages and must notify

their landlord within 14 days if unable to make a payment.

There are 19 cities within the county which have downtowns and small businesses, according to Andersen. The county's ordinance also helps with commercial evictions.

"By giving this additional period of time to work with their landlord, to come up with a payment plan for 120 days and start paying their current rent, we felt that our businesses would be in much better shape than if the day that the courts reopened, they got an eviction notice," she said.

The ordinance allows for evictions for health and safety reasons or if a direct family member of the landlord needed to move into a unit.

She said the county is working on anticipating economic recovery and providing infrastructure so businesses can go back to normal.

"What we used to say 'flip the switch' now it's 'turn on the dimmer going up,' we really want those business to be able to re-open their doors, to re-hire their employees, be able to sell their inventory that is still in there," she said.

Andersen said the ordinance

does not relieve responsibility for renters to pay their rent but is a "forbearance of rent." She explained that many landlords don't have a mortgage on their property where they could be receiving mortgage relief. She said these landlords depend on rent payments as their income.

"You want now more than ever to have everyone living in a clean and sanitary condition and if they are currently housed, now is not the time to remove somebody," Andersen said. "It's in the landlord's interest. It's in the tenant's interest and very much from an economic development in our cities' interest within Contra Costa County."

Across the country, Anne Arundel County, Md. launched an Eviction Prevention Program.

Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman said through the program, money goes directly to landlords when tenants cannot pay rent as a result of loss of income or employment from the coronavirus pandemic.

In Maryland, Gov. Larry Hogan (R) banned evictions during the state of emergency.

The county's Community

Development Services put together the eviction prevention program, which is for households below 80 percent of median income.

The program is funded with \$1 million from the county — \$500,000 from taxes collected by a casino located in the county and \$500,000 that was budgeted for affordable housing and rental assistance but was not spent.

Pittman said the county expects to have the county funds reimbursed through federal funds.

"What's important is getting the program up and running now before the federal funds are available," he said.

The program also provides counseling to those applying to help them plan finances.

"We don't want people to wait for three months and then figure out their finances and they'll still owe rent," he said.

Pittman said it is "absolutely essential" to put money into rental assistance.

"We want people to keep their homes, pure and simple," Pittman said. "We don't want to end up with an increase in our homeless population as a result of this." **CN**

Lockdown exceptions drive demand for county parks

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Mike Riley spent a good five minutes on a Friday morning doing the kind of public outreach he rarely expected to do in his duties as director of Montgomery County Parks in Maryland. He replaced the robotic voice in a motorist’s GPS navigation system.

The driver had nearly driven into the gates blocking Beach Drive, in the county’s Rock Creek Regional Park. Minutes before, the county closed nearly seven miles of parkway roads in the county for the next three days, aiming to allow pedestrians and cyclists room to spend time outside, which Riley expects more of as county residents rack up weeks in their homes.

Most COVID-19 safer-at-home orders allow for exceptions to let people exercise outdoors, and while county parks and recreation departments have been forced to close playgrounds, their open spaces are becoming even more valuable.

“As the weather gets warmer, and they’ve been cooped up longer, the need to get out just increases,” Riley said. “About a month ago, we started getting some concerns about social distancing on the trails.”

The county’s extensive pedestrian trail system was getting clogged as more and more people took advantage of the exercise exception. Despite the county’s social media push to publicize the system’s lesser-known trails, its main arteries, including one trail that leads right into Washington, D.C., were mobbed.

“The trails are eight, nine feet wide, and you can give social distance on trails, but not everyone plays by the rules,” Riley said.

The county already closed one section of a parkway on Sundays during the summer, so those closures were expanded to Fridays and Saturdays. Feedback from residents prompted the department to look for opportunities.

“Our situation is unique because we have these parkways with trails alongside and because they’re parkways they’re



Montgomery County, Md. Parks Director Mike Riley and County Planning Board Chair Casey Anderson help close Beach Drive to traffic.
Photo by Charlie Ban

not considered part of the transportation network,” Riley said, which makes it easier to close them. “We just make sure we give people a way in or out of their neighborhoods.”

Riley said the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, though he gets a few naysayers.

“Some people say we’re going to push cut-through traffic into the neighborhoods,” he said. “What traffic? Who’s going anywhere right now? The knee jerk reaction is “Oh my God, you’re

going to encourage people to gather in big groups.” We’re trying to give people a safe way to get out and get exercise and not force them all onto a trail.”

St. Johns and Duval counties in Florida reopened their beaches in mid-April, restricting use to exercise in off-peak times.

Residents can walk, run, bicycle, fish, surf and swim at the beach. Law enforcement patrolling the beaches caught a man lounging on a Duval Coun-

ty beach, found he was wanted in a Pennsylvania murder.

“We didn’t have much of a problem when we reopened,” said Doug Bataille, director of St. Johns County Parks and Recreation. “Yeah there were people waiting when we opened, but once they got out there they got out of their way. I think people know how this is going to be: If you play by the CDC guidelines, this will work.”

Jefferson County, Colo. is striking that balance.

After hitting what the Department of Open Space believes to have been an all-time high in visitorship, the department had to close some of its parks recently to additional visitors by the afternoon. Parking lots were full, people were circling looking for a place to park and, as Community Connections Coordinator Matt Robbins put it, being creative with parking.

“We had people parking on

See PARKS page 16

WORD SEARCH

BALDWIN COUNTY, Ala. Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

AEROSPACE: The aerospace industry is a large part of the county’s economy.

APPLE: Apple CEO Tim Cook was raised in Robertsedale, in the county, where he delivered the local newspaper and worked part-time at a pharmacy.

BALDWIN: The county is named for U.S. Sen. Abraham Baldwin of Georgia. Some of the first settlers in the county, which was created before Alabama became a state, were from Georgia.

BEACHES: The county is known for its white sand beaches in Gulf Shores and Orange Beach.

COURTHOUSE: The county courthouse was built in 1900 and remodeled in 1955 and 1996.

DINING: There are lots of great restaurants in the county, including local favorite Felix’s Fish Camp. Be sure to try the crab soup and fried green tomatoes.

ECONOMY: The county’s metropolitan statistical area is ranked seventh in the country.

FAIRHOPE: The largest city in the county, it was named the best small town in the South by Southern Living in 2016.

GUMP: Author Winston Groom, who wrote the novel, “Forrest Gump,” later turned into the award-winning film, is from the county.

INTERSTATES: Interstates 10 (Florida to Los Angeles) and 65 (to Chicago), run through the county.

LARGE: The county is the largest geographic county in the state.

MINETTE: The county seat is Bay Minette on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay.

MISSISSIPPI: Established in 1809, 10 years before Alabama became a state, the county was a part of the Mississippi territory until 1817.

POPULATION: Baldwin County saw an increase in its population in the latest Census data available, gaining more than 5,000 new residents, totaling more than 223,000 in all. Since 2000, the county has seen a 51 percent population growth.

PORT: The Port of Mobile is the 10th largest port by volume in the country.

Coronavirus shutdown doesn't stop Supreme Court



by Lisa Soronen

The Supreme Court is known for its ceaselessness. Government shutdowns, snowstorms, anthrax and vacancies haven't slowed down the High Court. But it has not been spared by this global pandemic.

This term the Supreme Court is expected to issue about 56 opinions — about the same number it issued in 1864 — the fourth year of the Civil War, and the last time the Supreme Court was significantly slowed down. The court also took about a month-long recess during the 1918 pandemic.

The Supreme Court will issue fewer opinions this term because it cancelled oral argument for its March and April sittings. Recently, it announced it would hear oral argument over the phone in 13 cases in May. Ten other cases which were supposed to be heard this term (ending around June 30) will be heard next term (starting the first Monday in October).

The May oral arguments will be accessible to the public live. This is a significant deviation from normal court practice where a transcript of the argument is made available same day and a recording at the end of the week. A current SCOTUS blog series reveals many Americans want to attend Supreme Court oral arguments in person but are unable to do so because courtroom space is limited. Despite having an abbreviated docket, the Supreme Court will

decide numerous, high-profile cases this term. The most prominent cases involve congressional committee and grand jury authority to subpoena the President's tax returns and financial documents. The most significant cases for states and local governments to be decided this term include:

- *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. City of New York* — whether New York City's ban on transporting a handgun outside city limits is unconstitutional
- *Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California* — whether the decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program is lawful
- *Zarda v. Altitude Express and EEOC v. R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes* — whether employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity violates Title VII
- *June Medical Services v. Russo* — whether Louisiana's law requiring physicians performing abortions to have admitting privileges at a local hospital conflicts with Supreme Court precedent
- *Colorado Department of State v. Baca and Chiafalo v. Washington* — whether states can force presidential electors to vote for the winner of the state's popular vote for president
- *Little Sisters of the Poor Saints Peter and Paul Home v. Pennsylvania* — whether the conscience exemption to the Affordable Care Act contraception mandate may be expanded

The most significant case for next term involves whether the Affordable Care Act individual mandate is unconstitutional now that the shared-responsibility payment is \$0, and if so, whether the entire law is unconstitutional. But this case has always been on next term's docket. The court moved the following cases of interest to states and local governments from this term to next term:

- *Torres v. Madrid* — whether a "seizure" has occurred when police unsuccessfully attempt to restrain someone using physical force.
- *Carney v. Adams* — whether requiring that state courts be balanced between the two major political parties violates the First Amendment.
- *City of Chicago, Illinois v. Fulton* — whether a local government must return a vehicle impounded because of code violations upon a debtor filing for bankruptcy.

It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court will be able to issue all the opinions for this term by the end of June and whether the Court will hear more cases next term to make up for this term. **CN**

Lisa Soronen is the executive director of the State and Local Legal Center (SLLC). Prior to joining the SLLC, Soronen worked for the National School Boards Association, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards and clerked for the Wisconsin Court of Appeals.

NACCHO launches COVID-19 Data Lab

Accurate, timely and localized data are vital resources for local health departments' response efforts against COVID-19. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the voice of the country's nearly 3,000 local health departments, launched its COVID-19 Data Lab last week, powered by Esri, to showcase available data that is geared toward the specific needs of health departments.

NACCHO's COVID-19 Data Lab (<https://covid19-naccho.hub.arcgis.com/>) will evolve over time. In this first iteration, users will be able to use the interactive COVID-19 Dashboard to explore the extent of COVID-19 tests, cases and deaths in their communities and counties. Additional data points will be included, as available, to provide clearer, more nuanced information critical to supporting the COVID-19 response at the community level. "Minutes count in accessing the most accurate data possible to make decisions," said NACCHO CEO Lori Tremmel Freeman.

"NACCHO's new COVID-19 Data Lab will provide our health departments with a vital resource where they'll be able to customize and track the latest data at the local level in their efforts to best serve their communities. It will also highlight needs at the local level to help inform national prioritization and action. Over time,



the lab will continue to grow, as we develop more resources to assist local-level planning and response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Additional information on NACCHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found here: <https://www.naccho.org/programs/our-covid-19-response>.

The data for this dashboard is updated multiple times a day and is created and maintained by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at the Johns Hopkins University and supported by Esri Living Atlas team and JHU Data Services.

The Data Lab will also house ESRI's impact planning reports for U.S. states, territories, counties and municipalities. These reports help local health departments understand the demographics of the communities being impacted, the number of cases, and the average number of hospital beds.

All 3,220 reports are currently available and provide unique information to assist in the planning and response to COVID-19. **CN**

ON THE MOVE➔

NACo STAFF

- **Ashleigh Holand** has joined NACo as director of Programs and Practices in the County Innovations Lab. She previously worked for eight years at the Pew Charitable Trusts, where she managed grant-funded projects on evidence-based policymaking in states and counties. She earned an M.S. in Criminology from Florida State University and a B.A. in Psychology from Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.



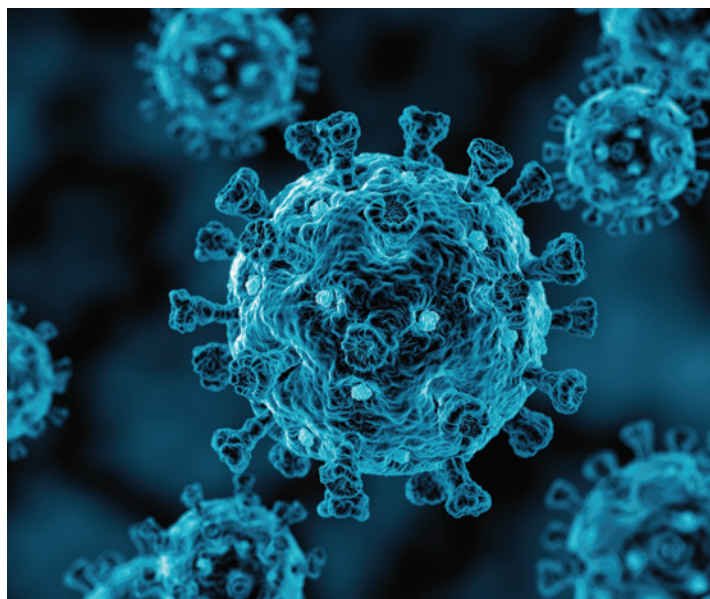
Holand

Visit NACo's COVID-19 resource web page

With counties operating more than 1,900 public health departments, nearly 1,000 hospitals and more than 800 long-term care facilities, they play key roles battling the coronavirus pandemic.

To provide county officials with up-to-date information during this public health emergency, NACo has created an online hub to track rapidly evolving situations and help keep county officials informed during these unprecedented times.

NACo's COVID-19 webpage



can be found at www.naco.org/coronavirus and includes key coronavirus-related resources for county officials.


Users can view federal policy resources, webinars, events, *County News* coverage and other partner resources via the hub.

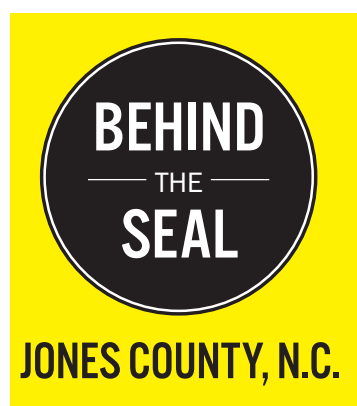
Information on a variety of topics related to COVID-19 is accessible on the page including county finances, technology, justice, county economies, human services and community health, among others.

The hub features NACo's

County Explorer, which provides interactive maps and current data related to the coronavirus such as the number of cases in counties across the country and areas that have issued emergency declarations or shelter-in-place policies.

The COVID-19 hub is updated daily.

You can visit the landing page to subscribe to receive updates from NACo including a regular digest of key coronavirus-related topics, tools and news. 



The Jones County seal was developed out of a 4-H contest held in 1982. Melissa Spivey's entry was selected by the county commissioners as the winning seal.

The main feature of the seal is the historic Brock Mill Pond, located in the county seat of Trenton. A mill house built in the 1700s is located on the 132-acre pond and was used to generate electricity for Trenton and later used to grind corn. When the seal was created, the pond was privately owned by the Brock family. The Brock Mill pond is now a county-owned property and is being preserved by the Friends of Brock Mill Pond.



Around the edges of the seal, a tobacco leaf and a loblolly pinecone represent an agricultural theme.

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

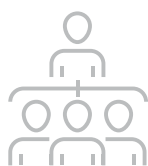


The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy is a 12-week, online course that connects your staff with practical leadership training.

THE ACADEMY FOCUSES ON FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS:



LEAD



ORGANIZE



COLLABORATE



DELIVER



COMMUNICATE

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

Find out more at NACo.org/Skills

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



GET TO KNOW...

Henry County, Mo.



Welcome, Henry County, Mo.

Henry County is located in western Missouri and was founded in 1834. The county was originally organized as Rives County, but later renamed after Patrick Henry, known for his “Give me liberty, or give me death” speech.

The county seat of Clinton was founded in 1836 and named after DeWitt Clinton, a former New York governor who oversaw the construction of the Erie Canal. The town square in Clinton is the largest in Missouri and the fourth largest in the country. Eighty-foot wide streets surround the courthouse in the town square.

Henry County features the Katy Trail, the longest recreational rail trail in the country. The 225-mile trail is built on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad bed.

President Harry Truman made frequent visits to the county to visit his parents who lived in a house in Clinton. Truman also stopped in the county when he was campaigning and after his presidential terms.



Harry Truman and his mother, Martha Ellen Young Truman. Image by Time Inc. Photo by Jack Wilkes for LIFE magazine

PROFILES IN SERVICE

JOY ESPARSEN

Board Member
Deputy Executive Director
New Mexico Association of Counties



Esparsen

Number of years involved in NACo: 16

Years in public service: I have worked in the public service sector in one form or another for the past 31 years.

Occupation: Deputy executive director, government affairs director and executive liaison at New Mexico Association of Counties.

Education: Master of Business Administration, Strategic Management Policy, University of New Mexico Anderson Business School; Bachelor of Science in Business, Public Policy from the University of Phoenix.

The hardest thing I've ever done: I was a young single mother living on my own in my teens. It is interesting to look back at my life and wonder how exactly we managed. I worked two full-time jobs, money was always tight and we lived on the edge of homelessness. That being said, I met so many wonderful people who cared and took the time to help us in countless ways.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Audrey Hepburn, Lady Diana Spencer and George Washington.

A dream I have is to: More than anything, I want to look back on my life and know that I have done something significant. Whether it is making a differ-

ence in New Mexico or leaving a legacy through my daughter and granddaughter, I want to make sure that a part of me lives on.

You'd be surprised to learn: Growing up, my first two loves were books and horses. When we moved to New Mexico, I worked at a stable in Ruidoso. I spent an average of nine hours a day on horseback during the summer, which roughly equates to 36 miles a day.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: My life. I never expected it to be the journey that it has turned out to be.

My favorite way to relax is to: I am rarely home, so any time that I am able to just putter around the house, cook and simply relax with a movie or a book is heavenly. I find organizing things to be extremely relaxing. I also have become quite a junkie for Korean dramas this past year. It is a wonderfully relaxing indulgence.

I'm most proud of: Going back to school at 41 to get my bachelor and master degrees. I have had so many wonderful mentors in my life and one of them knew me well enough to know that if he required a degree for my professional position, I would do it.

My favorite meal is: I have really enjoyed trying foods from other countries so some of my favorite dishes at the moment include chicken tikka masala and tom kha gai soup.

My favorite movie is:
I love anything by Jane Austen, but *The Joy Luck Club* is probably my favorite movie of all time. It has reverberated with me throughout my life.



My pet peeve is: Mean people! Seriously, what a waste of energy.

My motto is: If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.

The last book I read was: Although I should read to expand my understanding of history or knowledge that would be useful in my profession, I read solely for escape. My last few series include mindless romantic junk food I am not willing to disclose in public.

My favorite music is: I have everything on my playlist from Bing Crosby to Ozzy Osbourne. At the moment, I am reveling in Korean music. I can't understand most of the words, but the music itself is beautiful.

My favorite U.S. president: I spent part of my childhood in Independence, Mo., and grew up appreciating Harry Truman. He was a local hero and a working man. We used to catch the bus at the corner near his house and his wife Bess would wave at all of the kids through the window. That made him a sentimental favorite for me.

My state association is a NACo member because: NACo provides a great deal of support for state associations. They enable us to be proactive on federal initiatives by relying on their expertise to understand advocacy positions and expand our resources for our county members.

BRIGHT IDEAS | KITSAP COUNTY, Wash.

Video Showcases Careers in County Government

PROBLEM:

Counties struggle to recruit applicants and fill county government positions.

SOLUTION:

Create a video to highlight the variety of career opportunities in county government.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

When it comes to career options in county government, there is something for everyone.

As some counties look at freezing hiring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there will still be some jobs that need to be filled now or in the future.

A recruitment video in Kitsap County, Wash. highlights the wide variety of careers available in county government by following Holly, the main character in the video, as she looks to find her perfect job.

"I was looking for a job in Kitsap County and somehow I ended up here in jail," she says in the beginning of the video.

Viewers follow Holly as she tries over 29 jobs including roads supervisor, technology specialist, deputy sheriff, court clerk, assessor, deputy fire marshal and marine patrol, among others, as a parody song of Johnny Cash's "I've Been Everywhere" plays in the background with the lyrics changed to "She's Tried Every Job."

"She's tried every job man, she's tried every job/She didn't know the county had so many different jobs man," the lyrics read.

Kitsap County Public Communications Manager Doug Bear said with an aging workforce preparing to retire, the county faces challenges recruiting and retaining quality applicants.

Specifically, in the public works department, 50 percent of employees are eligible to re-

tire in the next decade.

"That got us thinking of how do we reach out to potential career employees for county services when they don't even understand that any job you would do in the private sector, we have a comparable job in the public sector," Bear said.

In anticipation of losing knowledge and expertise from retired employees, the county conducted a survey at a local college's job fair to see which students, specifically in the millennial and Generation Z demographic, have considered a career in government.

Bear said the survey revealed most students had not considered a career in government and there is a misconception of local government work and the career options the county offers.

"One of our goals was to figure out: 'How do we let young people know that there are viable career opportunities in government service?'" Bear said.

The video, a unique outlet beyond conventional ads and jobs fairs, aims to raise awareness of county job options, educate viewers on county career paths, support staffing needs and dispel the myth that government work is boring and stale.

To increase employee engagement, current county employees are featured in the video, including an engineer in public works who played the guitar and sang the parody song.

"While there were a little over 50 employees credited at the end of the film, it probably involved well over 100 county employees in putting it together," Bear said.

The county's HR analyst, who served as the producer of the video, scheduled background checks to allow non-county employees into the jail, worked to get uniforms and props and oversaw logistics for the video. Bear wrote the lyrics for the

parody song, directed the video and oversaw the post-production.

"Even the employees involved in the production crew learned about things the county does that they have no idea," Bear said.

The videographer, an intern from a local community college, edited the video with an additional videographer and the actress who played Holly.

The county's "Love Where You Work" slogan is a tagline for recruiting efforts to show candidates the community they would serve working for Kitsap County.

Bear said the county has a lot to offer with its proximity to Seattle (16 nautical miles), location across from the Puget Sound and rural environment.

"We constantly have to compete against bigger cities to try to get the best talent we can for our county," he said.


For the premiere of the video, the county held a staff launch attended by over 90 employees.

For the official launch, they streamed the video on Facebook Live.

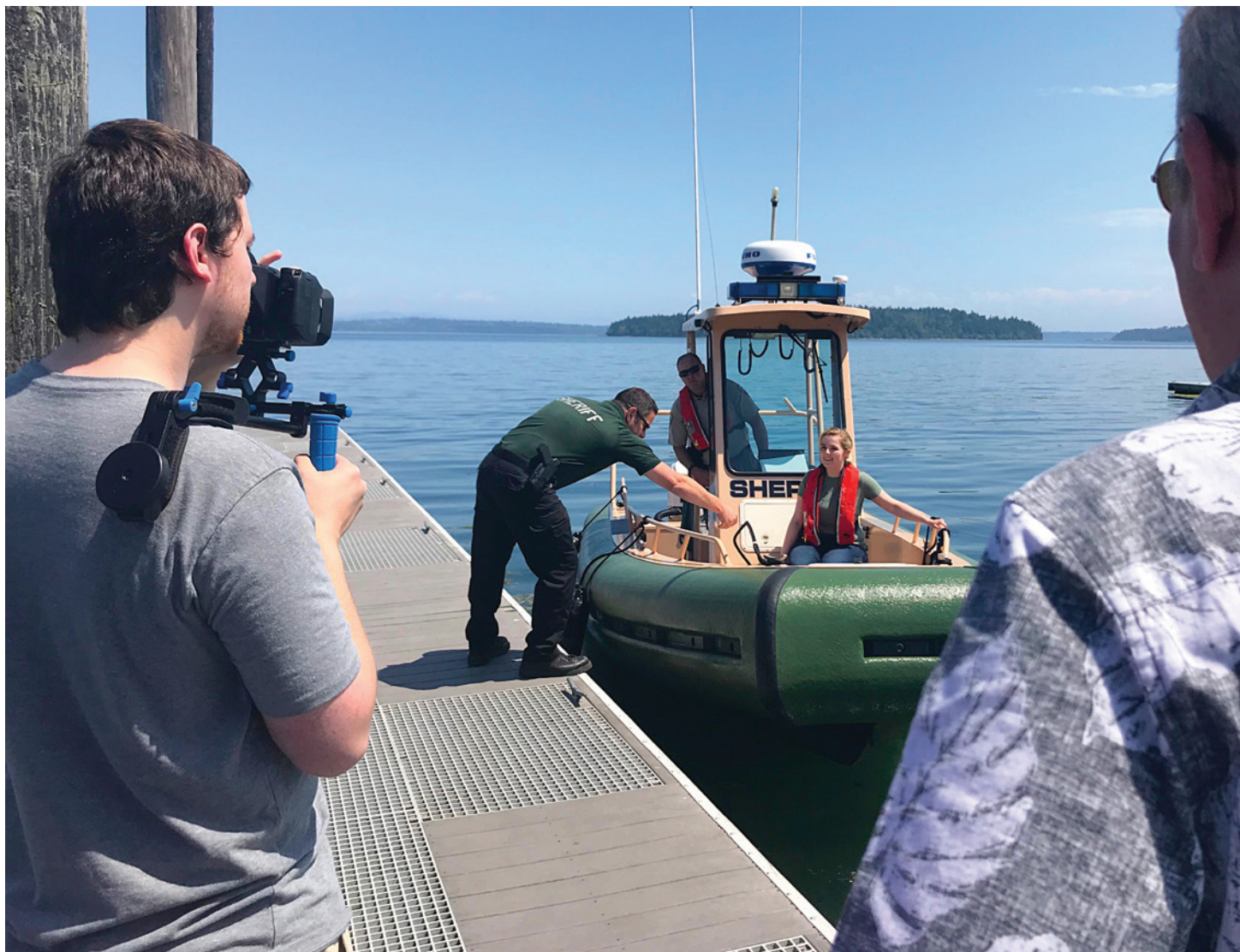
The video was also shared on the county's LinkedIn page, YouTube page and website. County officials show the video at job fairs each year, and at local high schools and colleges.

"I think one of the nicest things we saw through this is the pride that employees have in what they do," Bear said.

"By providing our employees with an opportunity to share that with perspective employees or with our community," he said, "I think helped them value their position and helped us to look at how what we do relate to the future career choices of the young people in our community."

The video can be viewed here <https://youtu.be/NyZz-R61MXEQ>. 

Kitsap County's (Wash.) "She's Tried Every Job" video is the recipient of a 2019 NACo Achievement Award in the Personnel Management, Employment and Training category.



Behind the scenes during the making of the video, production chief for the film crew, Jacob Hollis, films the "She's Tried Every Job" video in Kitsap County, Wash. Photo by John Rutherford

the HR DOCTOR

by Stephenie Overman

Turning Internships into Virtual Work Experiences



County governments are finding ways to turn traditional internships into virtual work experiences this summer, making changes on the fly to cope with the constantly evolving coronavirus pandemic.

“Local government doesn’t stop,” said Joy Ruff, executive director of the Local Government Academy, based in Pittsburgh. “Interns are eager to provide benefits, to learn about communities. They are very interested” in working at this time.

County governments need the benefits those interns provide, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, said Erin N. Stwora, deputy director, Physical Development Division, Dakota County, Minn. “Interns are an important part of our staffing scenario. We’re trying to maintain our workload.”

Since the outbreak of the virus, U.S. employers have slowly begun moving internships online, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported. Only 2.4 percent of employers polled by NACE at the end of March said they planned to conduct internship programs virtually. The preliminary results of NACE’s April Coronavirus Quick Poll released April 10 found that 36 percent of employers that are making changes to their internship programs are moving them to a virtual work environment.

Twelve percent of the respondents said they were revoking their offers to summer 2020 interns and 22 percent said they were considering revoking their offers.

The Local Government Academy was planning changes to its municipal intern program before the pandemic struck, looking for ways to expand development opportunities for students, Ruff said. But it hadn’t anticipated that it would have to cancel its Mu-

nicipal Intern Fair for the first time in 25 years when universities closed due to the coronavirus.

The fair was set for March 26, so the academy quickly shifted gears and began having students apply to the program directly on its website.

“We worked with career services departments to let them know that the program was still on,” she said. “We got a good response. We’re going through the interview process. Some are conducting phone interviews, some are doing video. It’s moving forward.”

The traditional fair was a great way for people to meet each other and to interact, Ruff said, but the online fair also has had its advantages. “It really did streamline the process.”

The Local Government Academy is funding 19 projects in southwestern Pennsylvania. Interns usually start working in early June and work 400 to 480 hours during the summer. “It’s a great opportunity for people who are involved in geographic information systems, urban planning, public policy,” she said. “Our projects are very diverse.”

The academy has been moving training and development online “just naturally across the board,” Ruff added. In addition to the internship pro-

‘Good mentors are especially important for interns who are working virtually.’

– Mary Scott,
president,
Scott Resource Group

gram, the academy delivers educational workshops to local governments. “We’re looking at our online strategy. We’re figuring ways to do it on the fly.”

Dakota County, south of Minneapolis-St. Paul, currently has a part-time graduate student working as a land-use planning department intern and an International City/County Management Association (ICMA) fellow.

ICMA’s Local Government Management Fellowships are designed to attract recent graduates in Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Policy or a related program who can be placed in full-time, 12-months-long management-track local government positions around the country.

“The current cohort is currently going forward,” said Rebecca DeSantis, ICMA assistant program manager, Career and Equity Advancement. “They

usually finish between May and June. And the next cohort is still going forward. We’re still doing active recruiting. Our program is pretty flexible.”

Stwora praised the work of the county’s intern and ICMA fellow. “Without them, we would not be in a position to deliver some of our key planning tasks. They are playing an important role and getting incredible experience, real-world experience... I hope in their careers they don’t have to do this again.”

The two join the approximately 80 percent of county employees who are now working remotely, according to Stwora. “We’re making teleworking arrangements. We’re using Zoom, Skype, videos. There’s a lot of ‘train the trainer.’ We’re taking advantage of everything to keep in contact with our staff.”

At first, it was hard for people not to see each other every day, so initially there was a virtual meeting each morning “to touch base. Now it’s two days a week. It’s working great,” she said.

One of the big pluses of virtual internships is that today’s intern is so comfortable communicating online, according to Chegg Internships.

“Generation Y connects, learns and socializes via a


computer or portable digital device; because of this, blogging, tweeting and Facebooking from their couch or favorite coffee shop simply feels familiar. Meanwhile, suiting up for corporate life in a traditional office setting may seem incompatible with their more mobile way of living,” the company said in a statement.

For employers that want to continue to make the most of their intern programs — and their college recruiting efforts — the key to successful virtual internships is to transfer the benefits of the traditional approach to a remote format, according to NACE research.

The aspects of the programs that are most important to students “are meetings with senior leadership, professional development and skills training and project presentation to management, all of which can be reworked for virtual implementation,” said Mary Scott, president of Scott Resource Group, who conducted the research for the association.

Students are seeking “to strengthen their skills, to make bigger and better contributions to their assignments, and to validate the contributions they do make to management. These can all be replicated in the virtual workplace,” according to Scott.

Good mentors are especially important for interns who are working virtually, she said.

“The mentor has to be somebody the intern can trust as a ‘safe zone.’ Take all of the uncertainty that we are going through and add an order of magnitude to it for students, many of whom are participating in their first full work experience. Mentors can provide guidance and will have a very important responsibility in making sure these remote internships are successful.” 

Stephenie Overman is a writer who specializes in workplace issues and has written for publications including HR Magazine and Employee Benefit News.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



ALABAMA

Commissioners in **HENRY COUNTY** got some fresh air by holding their **meetings outside** to provide easy access to members of the public during the COVID-19 outbreak. Led by David Money, commission chair and president of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama, the commissioners sat around tables outside to practice social distancing.

CALIFORNIA

- The Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** organized a **free home delivery service** for seniors and individuals with disabilities who are unable to obtain supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, CBS Los Angeles reported. County residents can pre-pay for the items, which may include groceries, household items or other vital necessities, and call to schedule a delivery.

- RIVERSIDE COUNTY** is deploying specialized “SOS” teams or “**Skilled nursing facilities Outreach and Support**” teams, who will bring sup-

plies and information to the county’s 400 nursing homes, which have largely been locked down to prevent COVID-19 contagion among vulnerable residents. The SOS teams will demonstrate proper safety techniques, provide personal protective equipment like masks, gloves and eye goggles and educate people with facts about coronavirus.

- The **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY** Department of Public Health established a **nursing facilities task force** to help stop the spread of the coronavirus among the elderly in nursing homes. The acting county health officer issued an order that requires nursing facilities to take precautions to protect

residents, *Victor Valley News* reported. With 171 state-licensed nursing facilities in the county, the task force will focus on supporting and preserving the safety of senior living facilities.

COLORADO

The health department in **LARIMER COUNTY** launched a **questionnaire** for those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 by a healthcare provider but were never tested. The survey asks participants about the onset of illness, types of symptoms, travel history and whether a participant’s job includes contact with populations who are at risk, the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* reported. The questionnaire responses aim to better understand and track the spread of the virus.



MARYLAND

WICOMICO COUNTY Recreation, Parks, Tourism and Civic Center launched a **chalk campaign** challenging the community to cover sidewalks and driveways in chalk to spread positive vibes during the COVID-19 outbreak. The movement allows neighbors to enjoy art when out for a walk. The county is encouraging residents to use the hashtag #ChalkWicomico and post creations on social media that may include inspirational or supportive messages, fun and interactive paths and positive drawings.

FLORIDA

- School resource officers and community relations deputies from the **PASCO COUNTY** Sheriff’s Office are holding **virtual bedtime story sessions** on Facebook for children during the coronavirus pandemic. Each evening, deputies and officers are reading books to help keep children calm, WTSP reported. Like many students across the country, students in Florida have been out of school since March.

Hawaii Farm Bureau’s **Farm to Car program** to provide county residents with fresh, local farm products during the COVID-19 pandemic, KITV reported. Customers are able to pre-order and pick up fruits and vegetables during the stay-at home order. Within five hours of the program’s launch, more than 3,000 people signed up for the service and placed over 200 orders.

MICHIGAN

All workers in **OAKLAND COUNTY** who have contact with the public must now **wear face masks** to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The re-

FLORIDA

- Like many animal shelters across the country, **PALM BEACH COUNTY** has **emptied one of its three kennels** for the first time in history. The Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control now has one emp-

ty kennel, which is typically filled with more than 48 dogs. The pets have gone to foster homes, adopters and to part-

ner rescue organizations. The shelter attributes the empty kennels to a combined effort from the community and a decrease in incoming animals. For Palm Beach County residents, there are still animals available for adoption in the main adoption center such as dogs, a cat, horses and chickens.



quirement also goes for anyone entering a grocery store within the county, Click on Detroit reported.

MINNESOTA

Officials in **HENNEPIN COUNTY** amended an ordinance that will **improve the county's recycling rate** of trash and food waste. The ordinance requires businesses that produce large amounts of waste, such as hotels and restaurants, to compost and use it for gardening projects or food rescue programs, *Great Lakes Echo* reported. The ordinance aims to help the county recycle or compost 75 percent of trash and food waste by 2030.

MISSOURI

The historical society in **NODAWAY COUNTY** is **going online to provide its collections and historic information** to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Content including military history, rural health and medicine and community celebrations will be posted on the historical society's website and on social media, the *Maryville Forum* reported. Posts include lesson plans that parents can use for children. The historical society is also planning a virtual event, such as a group discussion.

NEVADA

WASHOE COUNTY held a **virtual town hall** to address the community's concerns

regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, This is Reno reported. Elected officials from the county, Reno, Sparks and representatives from area hospitals answered questions sent through an online form. There was an American Sign Language interpreter and the live stream also had subtitles in Spanish.

NEW JERSEY

In most places, if you think you have COVID-19, testing is tantamount to poking your brain to see, given how far testers stick a cotton swab up your nose. **MIDDLESEX COUNTY**, however, along with Rutgers University and RWJBarnabas Health, is playing host to the **first drive-through saliva test** for COVID-19 in the country. The test was developed by the university's UCDR Infinite Biologics and was granted emergency-use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration. It will screen a broader population than nose and throat swabs and help with the global shortage of swabs for sampling and increase testing of patients and allow quarantined health care workers to more swiftly and safely get back to work.

NEW YORK

ULSTER COUNTY is serious about its requirements to practice physical distancing, and the county executive's and sheriff's offices have created a "New York on pause" task force that will look into **social**

distancing complaints and can issue summonses or make arrests. The sheriff's office has received a number of complaints, ranging from reports of non-essential businesses operating to people not following social distancing measures on a rail trail to issues at supermarkets, *The Daily Freeman* reported.

OREGON

- The **COOS COUNTY** Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution to join other counties statewide in working to find funding and develop programs to help treat **addiction**. The Coos County Local Alcohol and Drug Planning Committee wrote the resolution to increase communication with local government at the Legislature. Gov. Kate Brown released an executive order in 2018 that acknowledges addiction as a public health crisis. More than 65 percent of children in foster care in Coos County have a parent with diagnosed substance use disorder, *The World* reported. The resolution orders support of Brown's executive order, monitoring of the work of the Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission and advocacy to state and federal elected leaders to develop and implement a comprehensive statewide addiction recovery continuum of care.

- In an effort to boost public awareness, **MULTNOMAH**



COUNTY is asking people to take photos of their pets along with their completed **census forms**. The county had planned to participate in outreach programs targeting traditionally undercounted communities with group meetings and door-to-door canvassing, but the COVID-19 pandemic put the kibosh on those plans. Entries will be eligible for prizes, including gift certificates from local small businesses and restaurants. "Who knows, maybe you'll become an internet sensation!" Commissioner Lori Stegmann said.

PENNSYLVANIA

With COVID-19 concerns and an aging poll worker roster, **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** will send **no-excuse mail-in ballot applications** to every registered voter in the county who has not already applied for a mail-in or absentee ballot for the June 2 primary election. The mailings will include prepaid postage. County Executive Rich Fitzgerald called for an expansion of Pennsylvania's emergency declaration to allow Allegheny County to mail a ballot to all registered voters, but the most the county can do is send applications.

TEXAS

State prisons have **stopped taking inmates** from county jails to slow COVID-19. "Correctional facilities across the country find themselves in a similar situation in which they are battling a faceless enemy that does not discriminate between jurisdictions," said Bryan Collier, executive director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), in a letter to county sheriffs, according to KXAN News. "Halting the intake of new inmates will allow the TDCJ to fight this virus without further exposing both county and state inmates."

WASHINGTON

- A partnership between Seattle Flu Study scientists, Public Health-Seattle and **KING COUNTY** has offered **home testing kits for COVID-19**, in a project funded by local billionaire Bill Gates and implemented by the Brotman Baty Institute. The first round of "swab and send" testing kits totaled 4,092 county residents, *The Seattle Times* reported. Of that first round, 2,700 people had reported having COVID-like illness and 44 tested positive.

- Health care workers in **SNOHOMISH COUNTY** are fanning out, **looking for homeless residents** and testing them for COVID-19. SAFE teams are composed of physicians, community paramedics, social workers and law enforcement officers. They visit encampments where people are known to congregate to assess individuals for COVID-19 symptoms and connect them to services as needed. In the process, they hand out essentials like soap and toothbrushes.

WYOMING

For a month, the **Casper-Natrona County** Public Safety Communications Center will test software allowing them to **video chat with people who call 911**.

The service is available on cell phones with both Android and iOS systems. Telecommunicators or dispatchers will be able to see live video from the phone while determining how to deploy resources, Wyoming News Now reported.

"It's just a link that gets texted to you and then you are asked to accept a privacy waiver, which grants access to your camera and microphone, then it's able to share that video with a telecommunicator on the other end of the screen," Casper Police Department spokesperson Rebekah Ladd said. Police will securely save and store the video.

News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have an item that we should consider? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.



VIRGINIA

The **LOUDOUN COUNTY** flag will be flown at half-staff at county facilities until further notice in honor of county residents who have died of COVID-19 and in recognition of the many essential workers who are responding to the pandemic.

The challenge of reopening

From REOPEN page 2

havioral health of citizens, and begin economic recovery for businesses and workers alike,” Public Health and Environ-

ment Director Heath Harmon wrote. “As Eagle County sees the COVID-19 curve flatten and the number of cases decrease because of the county’s early and aggressive social distancing restrictions, and sees the impact of the counties substantial restrictions on residents, I have determined

that the community now will receive greater health benefits from incrementally loosening restrictions as disease activity continues to recede.”

Other states, such as South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, are being more aggressive. Tennessee will allow the majority of businesses in 89 of

the 95 counties to reopen on May 1, with South Carolina and Georgia aiming to open before the end of April.

Knox County, Tenn. Mayor Glenn Jacobs released a six-week plan for reopening that gradually increases business capacity following linear improvement in positive case-

load.

Restaurants and bars would gradually increase capacity, barber shops and hair and nail salons would be open by appointment only to limit capacity, and gyms and health clubs would limit occupancy to five people per 1,000 square feet and limit visits. **CN**

County parks balance popularity, social distancing during shutdown

From PARKS page 8

the side of the county roads that get really cramped and narrow,” he said. “These parks were saturated. A lot of people were coming out on a trail to find peace and solace and what you find is it being crowded, walking in a conga line up your favorite trail.”

So the county has deployed rangers and deputies, along with volunteers, to hammer home messages about safe conduct in the park.

“We want to flatten the visitation curve,” Robbins said. “Get them to come before 9 a.m. or after 3 p.m.”

The business of providing

open spaces to residents is booming. The county staff are cleaning restrooms much more frequently and adding hand washing stations, to go along with additional signage teaching visitors how to practice physical distancing.

“We’re finding visitors that rarely came to our trails beforehand,” Robbins said. “There’s an educational opportunity, we might have people who show up to hike with flip flops and a big mug of coffee. There’s a good chance they’ll come back out this summer, I only think this is going to increase from here on.”

Maricopa County, Ariz. has had to institute a “one-in, one-

out” policy for its parking lots to regulate park use.

Sometimes counties have had to close up when residents show they can’t have anything nice.

Rockland County, N.Y. had to close its parks by April 7, once Allan Beers, coordinator for the Division of Environmental Resources, saw attendance and activity growing too fast.

“Part of the influx came because Bergen County, N.J. closed its parks,” he said, adding, “we had people coming in from other places in addition to our regular increase.”

The shutdown was gradual, as the department closed pavilions, removed benches and

picnic tables, closed rest rooms and limited interactions with staff.

“For the most part, the public understood that we were trying to stay open,” Beers said. “Then we started seeing the signs torn down and people thinking ‘I can’t get the virus, I’m in fresh air.’”

Now, snow fencing blocks trailheads and parking lots are closed. A few days of sheriff’s vehicles parked outside gave people the idea.

“We’re not arresting anyone, we’re just discouraging people from coming,” Beers said. “This is a learning curve for everyone. We’re all adapting.”

Reopening will be a science,

more than an art.

“Medical professionals will tell us when it’s OK to reopen the parks and gradually, we’ll phase in amenities,” Beers said.

Back in Maryland, Riley was aware of the national implications for his department’s policy. “It’s a nationwide discussion, opening up streets,” he said. “It’s something that is right for us and will benefit our residents.”

Montgomery County Planning Board Chair Casey Anderson was looking past the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This is definitely something we’d like to do more of, regardless of whether there’s a pandemic going on.” **CN**



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NAHB is proud to work with county officials to keep Americans safely sheltered and safely working in this challenging time.

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