

Anniversary of 9/11 attack highlights veteran suicide issue

by Rachel Mackey

During the last two weeks of August, veterans reached out to the Veterans Crisis Line at far higher rates than during the same period last year, with the hotline receiving 98 percent more texts, 7 percent more calls and 40 percent more online chats. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs officials attribute the increase to multiple factors, including the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

**The Vets Crisis Line
got 98% more texts
for help in August.**

Counties across the nation planned commemoration ceremonies and community events to honor the victims and first responders who lost their lives. However, the uptick in veterans seeking mental health assistance suggests a need for increased support for the veterans, military and their families who were and are affected by the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror.

The NACo Veterans and Military Services Committee brings together more than 100

county officials who together develop and highlight county best practices and policies to promote innovative programs, services and benefits for our nation's military, veterans and their families. This includes veteran mental health and suicide prevention programs, many of which are operated in conjunction with community-based organizations and partners at the state and federal level.

For county leaders interested in developing community-based veteran suicide prevention models, resources and examples abound. The Carbon County, Pa. Veterans Affairs Office is collaborating with the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to adopt a Together With Veterans model for rural community-based veteran suicide prevention. The key elements of the plan are identifying service members, veterans and family members and screening for suicide risk; promoting connectedness and improving care transitions; and reducing access to lethal suicide methods and enhancing safety planning.

In January, the Los Angeles County, Calif. Department of Mental Health launched a joint

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Arlington County, Va. Fire and Police Joint Honor Guard members help mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks at a ceremony held Sept. 10 at Fire Station 5, near the Pentagon. Counties across the country marked the anniversary of the attacks that took place in Arlington, New York City, and Somerset County, Pa. Photo courtesy of Arlington County, Va.

Counties lend a hand to Afghan refugees

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

President Biden's Aug. 31 deadline for the withdrawal of American personnel in Afghanistan is bringing thousands of Afghan refugees to the United States.

The United States relocated 124,000 people from Afghanistan to safety including 6,000 U.S. citizens, according to a release from the Department of

State.

County officials across the country are working with county departments to prepare for the return of American personnel and welcome refugees who will be entering the country.

Commissioners in Union County, N.J. held drop-off donation drives at various locations to collect items for Afghan interpreters, their families and

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False vaccine info a 'public health crisis'

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

San Diego County, Calif. was the first to declare a state of emergency over COVID-19, and now it's the first to formally recognize the threat that misinformation can have and prescribing steps to combat it. And other counties are getting

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'People sometimes forget in this country that we're all immigrants'

From REFUGEES page 1

other refugees evacuated from Afghanistan.

Supplies collected included clothing, school items and baby formula. Donation locations stayed open throughout September.

County Board Chairman Alexander Mirabella said once commissioners heard families were coming to the county, they wanted to help by collecting a few items.

"People sometimes forget in this country that we're all immigrants and we all are escaping one thing or another to come to a better life," he said. "We need to do something to help these people."

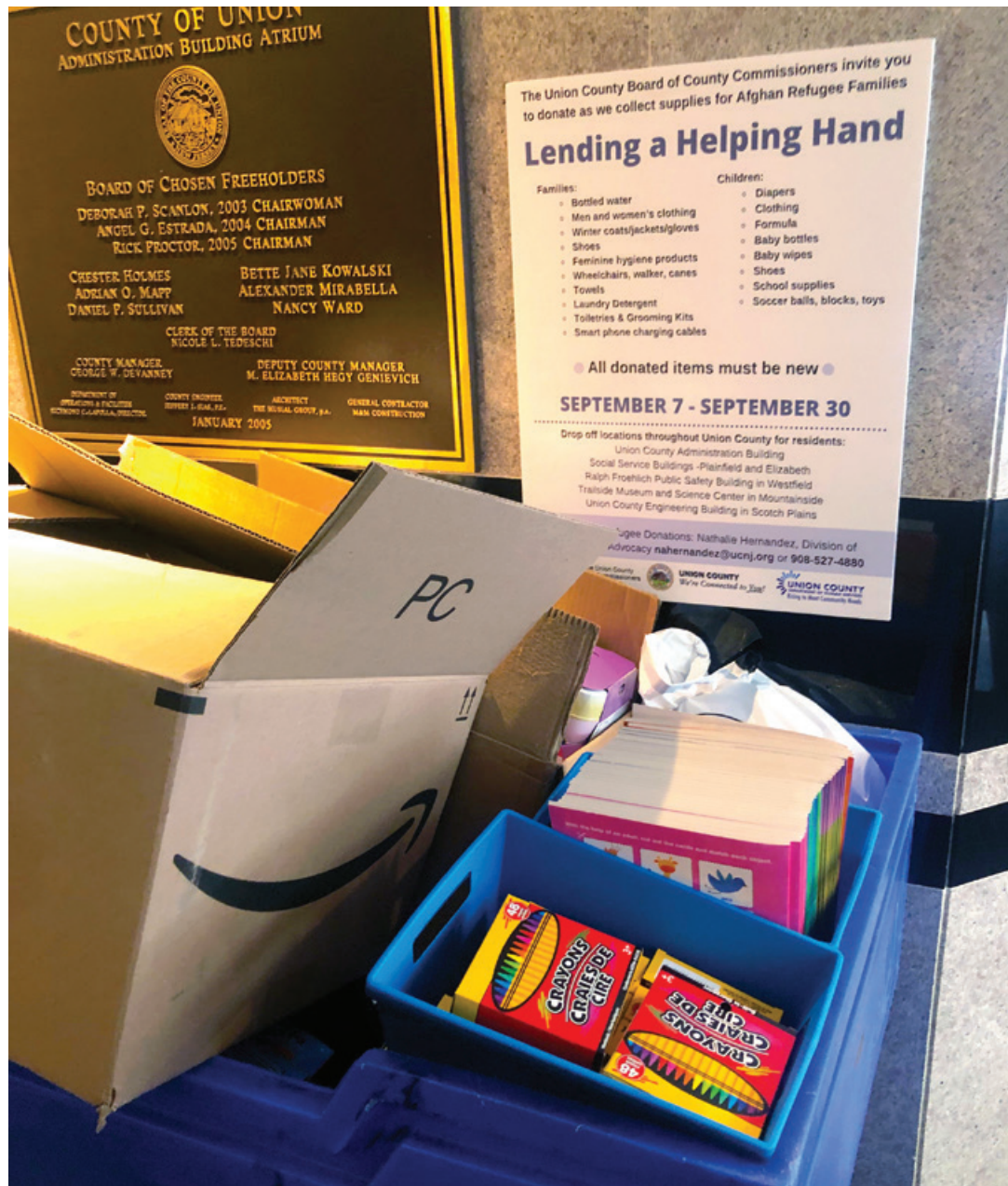
He said around 20 Afghan refugees have come to the county as of Sept. 10.

Mirabella said counties are closer to local communities and can be advocates for those resettling.

"I think that part of it is raising the awareness of the importance of helping Afghan refugees, but it is also dealing with and helping as best we can the people that present themselves in Union County," he said.

Los Angeles County, Calif. Supervisor Hilda Solis introduced a motion unanimously supported by the board to assist returning American personnel and new arrivals from Afghanistan.

Solis called for coordination



Donated items arrive at the county administration building in Union County, N.J. following the decision by the Board of Commissioners to hold donation drives for Afghan refugees. Photo courtesy of Union County, N.J.

among the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, the Department of Mental Health and other county and state departments to coordinate avail-

able resources for Afghans and military personnel entering the county.

Solis said there were around 75 Afghan nationals as of Sept. 10 who arrived in Los Angeles County.

"I have always felt that no matter what, we should be welcoming to refugees and immigrants," she said.

Solis, a daughter of immigrants herself, said the county can always provide support to refugees, referring to Los Angeles County's previous work with the state Department of Health and Human Services to house unaccompanied minors

found at the border.

Solis said she has been championing immigrants and understands the support and tools needed for immigrants to navigate the essential services counties can provide.

The county's efforts also focus on helping American personnel who are coming back to the country, she said, and the county is providing them with services such as counseling, housing and fulfilling medical needs through county agencies.

The county will also assist with the identification and coordination of services with

other county departments, she said. These efforts will come out of the Office of Immigrant Affairs, where staff can speak different languages and coordinate with public health, social services and the Office of Education to provide services for Afghan nationals arriving to the county.


"Our effort here is really just to coordinate with our county departments and some of our philanthropic groups as well and help provide assistance in creative ways to these families and help provide that welcome for them," she said.

Commissioners in Franklin County, Ohio also reaffirmed the county's commitment to ensuring it is a welcoming and inclusive community for Afghan refugees.

"We wanted to make sure that we let our community and other communities know that we are very supportive of the refugees from Afghanistan, especially those who have been so supportive of the American effort and the American troop effort over the last 20 years in Afghanistan," Commissioner John O'Grady said.

Franklin County is an international community, with over 100 languages spoken and representation from many nations, he said.

O'Grady said large urban counties are uniquely positioned to deal with refugees arriving from other countries by providing social service organizations and safety net organizations.

"There have been many folks that have been doing all they could to support our efforts there [in Afghanistan] and we want them to know and understand that Franklin County is welcoming to them," he said, "and supports them in their time of need just as they've supported us in our time of need." 

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Published by:
National Association of Counties
Research Foundation, Inc.
660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400,
Washington, D.C. 20001
202.393.6226 | FAX 866.752.1573
E-mail cnews@naco.org
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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to County News, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001

(USPS 704-620) n (ISSN: 0744-9798)
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Counties remember 9/11 on 20th anniversary



Nassau County, N.Y. Executive Laura Curran helps unveil the county's new 9/11 Responders Monument at Eisenhower Park paying tribute to first responders and volunteers who lost their lives to illness years after joining rescue efforts at Ground Zero. Nassau County photo

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

Counties around the country this month remembered the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place Sept. 11, 2001 in New York City, Arlington County, Va., and Somerset County, Pa.

"Most of us alive that day will never forget where we were," said Matt de Ferranti, who chairs the Arlington County Board, in a ceremony Sept. 10 remembering the 184 victims who died at the Pentagon and 2,977 lost their lives in New York and Pennsylvania.

"I was at my kitchen table, listening to the radio...and getting ready for work," he said. "I'll never forget looking up from that table and running to turn

on the TV., shocked. Today we honor those we lost, the efforts of the many Arlington first responders who risked their own lives to respond to the attack on the Pentagon and to remember our shared experience as a county government and as a community."

Nine county fire stations sent firefighters to the scene in Arlington County. James Schwartz, who retired this year as Arlington County's deputy county manager, was deputy fire chief 20 years ago and led the Unified Command effort at the Pentagon. The Arlington County Fire Department was the lead agency for the response to the Sept. 11 attack at the Pentagon.

In Somerset County, Pa., where the third hijacked plane

crashed, killing all aboard, county coroner Wally Miller was responsible for the scene. He is retiring at the end of 2021 and is hoping to spend what he calls, the fourth quarter of his life, rediscovering who he "really is," he told WPXI-TV in an interview.

"I had to be that public guy for a long time and you kind of lose touch with who you really are, and now I finally have the time to rediscover that person with the ability and privilege of having all those years of experience to make yourself better," Miller said.

That day will always be with him, he told the TV station. He's stepping down, hoping that morning never loses its influence on history.

"I think it's a mistake not to learn lessons from history," he said. "I think as long as it's presented factually, I guess, and in context with what the prevailing thought was at the time, it's going to be valuable for people moving forward," Miller said.

In New York, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran helped unveil the county's new 9/11 Responders Monument at Eisenhower Park paying tribute to the first responders and volunteers who lost their lives to illness years after joining the rescue and recovery operation at Ground Zero. The monument is being added to the park's existing 9/11 memorial, which honors the 348 Nassau County residents who lost their lives on 9/11. **CN**

Help for veterans

From VETERANS page 1

program with the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center to identify and track veterans at high-risk for suicidality. The County has also formed the

SPEEDREAD

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Department of Veterans Affairs [Suicide Prevention Landing Page](#)
- Department of Veterans Affairs [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#)
- President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) Task Force
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation: [Support for Veteran Families amid Events in Afghanistan](#)

Veteran Peer Access Network, a veteran outreach program tackling persistent issues like homelessness and unemployment that are often an early marker for suicide.

Counties may also partner with states or directly with the VA and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to participate in the Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families.

Challenge participants work across sectors and agencies to develop and implement state and/or community-wide suicide prevention best practices using a public health approach.

Counties currently participating in the Mayor's Challenge include Montgomery County, Tenn., Hillsborough County, Fla., Mecklenburg County, N.C. and Suffolk County, N.Y.

Alongside these long-term prevention efforts, county leaders can act today to support veterans in crisis by advertising the Veterans Crisis Line. The crisis line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Veterans can get help by calling 1 (800) 273-8255 and pressing 1, texting 838-255 or reaching out by online chat. **CN**

County News: 'We had a deadline to meet'

It was just another Tuesday during "production week" of *County News*, a few days before it was set to go to the printer. *County News* Executive Editor Bev Schlotterbeck had parked her car at NACo, then located at 440 First St.

"It was a beautiful day, as everyone remembers, and I was walking to my office and went past the employee lounge and everybody was around the TV," she recalled.

After she got to her office, "I heard a larger commotion around the TV, and that was right after the second plane had hit."

After the third plane hit the Pentagon, across the Potomac River from the NACo office in Arlington County, Va., "I could look out my window and see the smoke. Everyone was worried and nervous and scared, so we left. The office was closed, and people head-

ed home. We all showed up the next day for work. We had a deadline to meet."

Staff writer Mindy Moretti contacted the affected counties. Graphic artist Jack Hernandez "hit the mall" to take photos. NACo put together a sample resolution condemning terrorism.

"So we pulled it together and pulled it off," she said. "We ripped up the front page and we got it out." **CN**



Sept. 17, 2001 *County News*

Public conversation, myth debunking necessary to fight COVID-19 misinformation

From COVID page 1

on board.

“It’s become clear it’s no longer enough to promote the science — we’ve been promoting the science for 18 months,” said Nathan Fletcher, chairman of the county’s Board of Supervisors.

“We have to do more than that, we have to intentionally combat the misinformation that people are seeing and believing and that are really impacting us all,” he said. “That decision the individuals are making is impacting all of us because when hospitals have to start canceling procedures, then it starts impacting people’s ability to live their lives.”

Fletcher is talking about claims that vaccines cause more deaths than COVID itself, that wearing a mask can cause carbon dioxide poisoning or any other outlandish claim that typically comes from a cousin’s friend.

San Diego County had more than three-quarters of its eligible population fully vaccinated by the end of August and local hospitals survived the case surge in January and February, so the difference between the county’s vaccination ceiling and floor is smaller than others. But Fletcher saw the opening for counties to push back against an onslaught of claims that are limited only by imagination.

“If we’re talking about the issue of health information, people are recognizing that there is another side to the coin,” he said. “The hope is that at least elevating this issue will get people thinking critically and consulting their doctor, not a politician or what they read online.”

San Diego County passed its resolution Aug. 31. On Sept. 14, Sacramento and Monterey counties in California passed similar resolutions, and Clark County, Nev. is also planning to introduce one.

“This is a national problem, but I think it’s really going to take local solutions,” Fletcher said. “The more local governments that get involved, the better. It’s a little different in each community, so you could use local doctors, use local examples of misinformation, use



Nathan Fletcher, chairman of the San Diego County, Calif. Board of Supervisors. Photo courtesy of San Diego County, Calif.

local sources for good information.

“My hope is that we get every jurisdiction tackling this threat of misinformation and we’re at least having the conversation in the right place.”

The plan is more than just a symbolic resolution. The county will respond to health misinformation with its own communications, identify gaps in health information and questions and concerns of hard-to-reach communities and further develop partnerships with trusted messengers to reach those communities.

By understanding the sources of health misinformation,

the county can better address and counter it across mediums and diverse communities. Training health practitioners and health workers to combat health misinformation on the digital battlefield will bring some resistance to what has been a fertile breeding ground for misinformation, including a chance to meet opinion with evidence-based information.

Partnering with federal, state, territorial, tribal, private, nonprofit, research, and other local entities can close more informational gaps and stop the spread of health misinformation. The county will also work with local doctors to de-

velop a website to respond to vaccine-related myths.

Much of the action the county will take was adapted from an advisory issued by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who recognized San Diego County’s resolution.

“The important part is getting people to continue listening to the doctors they’ve known their entire lives,” Fletcher said. “I don’t want them to listen to me, a politician, about whether they should take the vaccine, I want them asking someone who knows the science.”

“It’s clear that this anti-vax, anti-science movement has

grown fairly significantly, and that’s what’s concerning, particularly the speed with which it’s grown. What was once relegated to the fringes of our society is now often openly embraced by people. We’ve done survey research around unvaccinated people and they know the vaccine is available and they know the vaccine is free. The reason that they are not getting it is that they’ve bought into one of these persistent untruths that are out there.”

Fletcher acknowledged that the vaccination drive may be a victim of its own early success, with some on the fence becoming complacent as infections fell early in the summer. Those people may be the best targets for the county to persuade to be vaccinated, because others may dig their heels in too deeply.

“Some of the folks who have bought into the idea that this is a big conspiracy, I don’t think you’ll ever reach those folks, but I think there are a lot of people who are influenced by them who can be influenced if provided with the right information.”

For resources on combatting COVID-19 vaccine misinformation in your county, visit <https://www.supervisornathanfletcher.com/misinformation/>.

WORD SEARCH

LARAMIE COUNTY, Wyo.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

CASSIDY: Outlaw Butch Cassidy was housed at the Wyoming Territorial Prison for two years.

CHEYENNE: The county seat is Cheyenne, Wyoming’s state capital and named for the Cheyenne Native American tribe.

COLORADO: The county borders the state of Colorado, located to the south of the county.

DIAMOND: Singer Neil Diamond lived in the county as a child.

FESTIVAL: Frontier Days, held in July, dates to 1897.

FOUNDED: The county was founded Jan. 9, 1867.

JACQUES: Laramie County was named for Jacques La Ramee, a French trapper who disappeared in the Laramie Mountains.

LARAMIE: The city of Laramie is located in Albany County.

LINCOLN: The Lincoln Highway, which runs from New York City to San Francisco, passes through the county.

NEBRASKA: The county shares a border with Nebraska, which is located east of the county.

NEWSPAPER: The local newspaper, the Wyoming Tribune Eagle got its start in 1867.

POPULATION: The county is the most populous in the state, with more than 100,000 residents.

SIZE: The county is 2,688 square miles; .06 percent is made up of water.

SOUTHEAST: The county is located in the southeast corner of the state.

WYOMING: President Benjamin Harrison signed Wyoming’s statehood bill in 1890, making it the 44th state.

Counties pitch broadband needs, input to Congress

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Counties are in a prime position to partner with the federal government to help build out high-speed internet service, offering local expertise and reasons why it is crucial for American health and economic success.

Members of NACo's Broadband Task Force offered their findings and insights to staffers during a Sept. 9 congressional briefing, dubbing it a starting point for local governments and internet service providers (ISPs) to work together. The proposed \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that the Senate passed is awaiting a vote in the House and includes \$65 billion for improving internet access.

"This conversation could not come at a more appropriate time," said Wise County, Texas Judge J.D. Clark, one of the task force co-chairs. "Over the course of the pandemic, the digital divide has widened and the necessity of having broadband access has become especially evident through the rise in telehealth, remote learning and remote work."

Co-chair Craig Rice, a Montgomery County, Md. councilmember, drew on a story that has resonated with him over the past year-plus.

"The image that's ingrained in my head is the child on a computer in a parking lot of a fast-food restaurant where her mother works because that's the only place where she has broadband access and that was her connection to learning, and that's unacceptable," he said.

"That's not something that we can have for America to keep moving forward when it comes to ensuring the education of our children and ensuring the well-being of our country as a whole," he said.

The task force, comprised of four subcommittees, focused on the quality of data that counties had available to them when preparing to expand their access to broadband, identifying challenges to counties' ability to access broadband, identifying groups disproportionately

impacted by the digital divide and exploring how counties are preparing for and applying advanced broadband technologies to address current and future needs.

"County officials play a crucial role not only as policy-makers, but as conveners, data aggregators and partners in pursuing sustainable solutions to broadband access, affordability and reliability," Rice said. "We stand ready to work collaboratively with our federal partners and serve as resources to help guide on-the-ground decision-making for deploying broadband."

Tarryl Clark, a Stearns County, Minn. commissioner who leads NACo's Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee, said broadband access was crucial to rural communities.

She noted that it's increasingly necessary "for the success ... of our agricultural producers and small businesses, for homework and distance learning, for remote work, but also increasingly for healthcare access, access to mental health reducing social isolation, particularly for seniors, as well as maintaining family and social connections and even court hearings."

She singled out the transition to remote education as a wake-up call for many counties and families, particularly as remote instruction grew as the pandemic wore on. "It was a little surprising to figure out we need to look per kid, not just per household," she said.

"The current standards just don't cut it for our kids. Eighty-five percent of what they get now for homework is video, and videos need a faster speed. If you've got more than one child in a home, then you really find some trouble."

A yearslong service mapping project using NACo's TestIT app has helped collect countless data points across the country, rebutting the broadband access

maps that internet service providers have touted for years.

"A key to the strategy is holding ISPs accountable to working with county governments, the collaboration to really understand local level gaps in service," said Paul Sachs, Ottawa County, Mich.'s director of strategic impact. "The best information about access needs, hands down, is obtained at the county level and local boots on the ground level," he said, noting that internet service providers have told him how valuable Ottawa County's data is to them understanding service gaps.

"It's difficult for ISPs to realize a return on investment in rural areas, which is why we're in the quandary we're in today," he said, suggesting there should be more incentive for ISPs to engage in public-private collaboration.

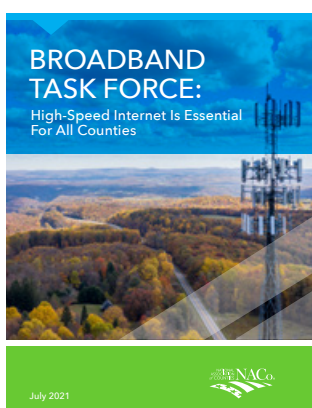
"Without requiring coordination between the public and private sectors, I think those same traditional business practices of the past will continue to leave gaps in access."

John Peters, a Mono County, Calif. supervisor, described broadband access as being as essential as telephone service to each home, and said creating an open middle-mile network would accelerate that process.

"We need to know where all of the bodies are buried, where is the dark fiber, where do the incumbent providers have fiber that is already in the ground," he said.

"We need to know what the true speeds are currently and we have to have them scalable up to at least one GB [gigabyte]. It's not the speed that is delivered to the premises, it's the speed that is [used] by the end user.

"That's the experience of the mapping that we so desperately need to be accurate in order to effectively and efficiently spend the federal dollars that we hope are appropriated." **CN**



PROFILES IN SERVICE

L. WADE PATTERSON

NACo Board Member
International Association of Assessing Officers
Garfield County, Okla.



Patterson

Number of years involved in NACo: New to NACo this year.

Years in public service: 34

Occupation: County assessor (retired), consultant, owner of Patterson Mowing LLC, Board of Directors for the IAAO

Education: Wyandotte High School, Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College, Missouri Southern

The hardest thing I've ever done: Last June my mom died so the hardest thing was staying positive for my dad and family.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: It is easy to say Jesus, but I hope to see him again someday so I will say Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Jefferson.

A dream I have is to: Travel the world with my wife.

You'd be surprised to learn: I was a referee for 22 years which prepared me well for my county assessor profession!

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Rappelling "Australian style" which is facing forward instead of backward. Or possibly getting a tattoo at the age of 55.

My favorite way to relax

is: Sit by the pool with my wife, kids and grandkids and all the grandparents. (OK, maybe just my beautiful grandkids.)

I'm most proud of: My family.

Every morning I read: The newspaper and my emails.

My favorite meal is: My wife's chicken and noodles or her meatloaf.

My pet peeve is: Glass half-empty people. I do not like wasting time dwelling on negativity.

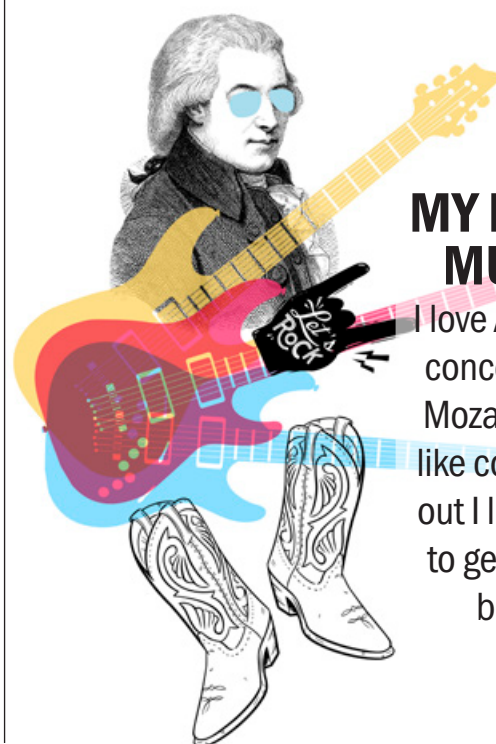
My motto is: Anyone can lead when things are going great, real leaders lead when things are difficult.

The last book I read was: *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein

My favorite movie is: *Braveheart*

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: They are not yet, but I am working on that right now!



MY FAVORITE MUSIC IS:

I love ALL music. To concentrate, I like Mozart, to dance I like country, to jam out I like '70s rock, to get happy I like bluegrass.



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NACo announces winners of Student Art Competition

Whether it's nursing the sick at county hospitals, building bridges, facilitating pet adoptions or lending books, county responsibilities are an integral part of our communities nationwide.

These were also the inspiration behind artwork created this year by students across the country who entered the first NACo Student Art Competition.

Winning artwork for the 2021 contest will be included in issues of *County News* and in a 2022 calendar sponsored by Americans for the Arts, to be distributed to NACo members.

Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit arts organization, serves, advances and leads

a network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain and support the arts in America. They have partnered with NACo for almost 25 years to educate and inform county elected leaders about the importance and value of the arts to their community, both culturally and economically. Americans for the Arts is also a proud long-time sponsor of the NACo Arts and Culture Commission and co-presents with NACo the Public Leadership in the Arts Award to a county leader each year.

Artwork was judged by *County News* staff for its artistic composition and adherence to the 2021 theme "I Love My County Because..."

The goal of the competition

is to start a dialogue with students to help them learn about county responsibilities and leadership. Students were invited to complete the sentence "I love my county because..." with an accompanying creative work of art depicting an aspect of what counties accomplish in their community. NACo members had access to an online toolkit that included artwork ideas, social media posts, a customizable press release and more to share information about the art competition with schools and communities.

NACo congratulates the winners and extends its appreciation to all who participated in the 2021 competition. **CN**

THE WINNERS ARE:

- Grade 12: **Camden Atkinson**, D.H. Conley High School, Pitt County, N.C.
- Grade 11: **Brim Royster**, J.F. Webb High School, Granville County, N.C.
- Grade 10: **Izaac Ibarra**, Rosemount High School, Dakota County, Minn.
- Grade 9: **Ravia Facey**, Palm Beach Lakes High School, Palm Beach County, Fla.
- Grade 8: **Camryn Rash**, Wallseon Middle School, Fulton County, Ohio
- Grade 7: **Courtney Jones**, Palm Springs Middle School, Palm Beach County, Fla.
- Grade 6: **Ella Stahmann**, Woodland Intermediate School, Outagamie County, Wisc.
- Grade 5: **Madilynn Bowles**, Brittain Academy, Montgomery County, N.C.
- Grade 4: **Elizabeth Gibson**, Creedmoor Elementary School, Granville County, N.C. (*artwork to be featured on cover of calendar*)
- Grade 4: **Sophia Elks**, Chicod Elementary School, Pitt County, N.C.
- Grade 3: **Hannah Morrisette**, Chicod Elementary School, Pitt County, N.C.
- Grade 2: **Casey Sumerlin**, Chicod Elementary School, Pitt County, N.C.
- Grade 1: **Mia Wallace**, Chicod Elementary School, Pitt County, N.C.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

- Grade 11: **Sofia Serba Davis**, J.F. Webb High School, Granville County, N.C.
- Grade 9: **Addanley Geffrard**, Palm Beach Lake High School, Palm Beach County, Fla.
- Grade 7: **Katherine Rodriguez**, Palm Springs Middle School, Palm Beach County, Fla.
- Grade 3: **Hanna Hardison**, Chicod Elementary School, Pitt County, N.C.

Courthouse architecture finds a young devotee in N.C.



Artwork created by **Elizabeth Gibson**, 10, of Granville County, N.C., will adorn the cover of a 2022 NACo calendar featuring works of art created by students across the country, winning entries from NACo's "I Love My

County Because..." Student Art Competition.

Elizabeth created an acrylic painting of the Granville County courthouse, built in 1838. "She said she really liked the architecture," said her mom, Jennifer

Newman. Granville County commissioners honored Elizabeth and two other Granville County student art competition winners, handing out certificates of recognition and coins.

"Elizabeth really likes architec-

ture and is passionate about art," said **County Commissioner Russ May**, who ran for the county board last year after retiring from a career that included 20 years with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.



Artwork created by Elizabeth Gibson, a student at Creedmoor Elementary School of the Arts in Granville County, N.C.

May noted that the three students whose work is being recognized from his county created artwork depicting a government building, a family member and a local business. "You gave them a concept and they reached a conclusion — that's how a community comes together," he noted. "We want people to understand how the government functions and recognize them for what they've done for their community."

Each student winner will be recognized in upcoming issues of County News.

BRIGHT IDEAS | HENNEPIN COUNTY, Minn.

Hennepin County Academy Offers DEI Training to All County Employees

PROBLEM: A diverse community sees racial disparities worsening throughout the county.

SOLUTION: Implement training for county employees to become experts in applying a racial equity impact tool.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

County officials in Hennepin County, Minn., are encouraging everyone to be responsible for addressing racial disparities — including all the county's roughly 9,000 employees.

"We figure everyone has a responsibility," Executive Diversity Officer Tonya Palmer said.

Hennepin County adopted the Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT) in 2019 from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, an organization that works to achieve racial equity.

The organization's tool uses questions to examine how actions and decisions affect racial and ethnic groups. Originally 28 pages, Palmer said the county reduced the tool to two pag-

es to make it less intimidating for employees and ensure the questions pertained specifically to the county.

"We basically took the tool and we 'Hennepin-ized' it," she said.

The tool, for example, could be used when making equitable decisions about building a park, Palmer said. It guides users through various questions such as where the park should be located and how it may interfere with the community around it.

"It really makes people think about equity and what can happen," Palmer said. "A park is a good thing but there's negative things that could happen if you don't think about it all the way

through."

To complement the tool, which the county is encouraging all employees to use, the county launched the Racial Equity Impact Tool (REIT) Champions Academy in 2020. The four-week development program teaches employees about the REIT and creates REIT experts in each of the county's 32 departments.

Palmer said the county's community is very diverse and the racial makeup of residents is quickly changing. The county's population of color in 2019 was around 30 percent of the overall population, according to census data. Ninety-five percent of households at or below the

poverty rate were households of color.

The county adopted the REIT and launched the Champions Academy to address these racial disparities.

The training through the academy includes independent work, self-guided study and four virtual classes with coursework focusing on topics like building community, facilitating dialogue on race and racism and intercultural competence and development.

County employees serve as the facilitators of the academy which aims to build participants' confidence in using the REIT and promote a greater ability to recognize and respond to cultural differences and communications.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultant Andi Banks said the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) team had many conversations when forming the curriculum about what skills and abilities are needed to facilitate conversations on race and racism.

"Those can be tricky and sticky conversations by themselves let alone when you're examining your own work," she said.

Courses focused on strong communications skills and the ability to trust and feel comfortable having conversations about race, racism and diverse perspectives, she said.

Palmer said the county needed "champions" throughout its departments to help put the REIT into practice. In the beginning, department leadership suggested candidates who would be best to complete the

training, but after other county staff showed an interest in participating, the academy became open for everyone.

"We told the county administrator that we'd train anyone who wanted to know how to do it," Palmer said. "We told him 'We will keep training people until we run out of people.'"

Five cohorts from the academy have graduated.

"We want to make sure that our policies and procedures are being equitable," Palmer said. "The best way to do that is to make sure that our staff are educated so they're thinking about it when they go out and do their work."

Palmer highlighted the importance of creating a warm environment where people feel comfortable to discuss DEI without feeling judged or made to feel guilty.

"It's important from a human standpoint that we all understand about equity and how to make each other feel good about what we're doing and to serve our communities the best we can," she said.

Banks said having conversations about racialized outcomes is important.

"Folks haven't been acculturated to talk about race and racism in relationship to their work and being able to normalize that conversation has been really important and I think really powerful in the larger context of the disparity reduction work that counties are doing," she said.

Palmer advises counties interested in using the REIT to start slow and keep the right pace to ensure people understand, absorb and accept the information.

"We just want to make sure that we are serving that community with equity in mind all the time," Palmer said. **CN**

Hennepin County's Racial Equity Impact Tool Champions Academy is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Personnel Management, Employment and Training category.

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ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS AND STAFF

- **Julia Cortina** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Government & Politics from the University of Maryland.
- **Brittney Gilardian** has joined NACo as a technology program associate. She previously worked as brand coordinator with Dentons LLP and earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Communications from American University.
- **Michael Matthews** has joined NACo as an associate legislative director and liaison to the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Steering Committee. He previously worked as government relations manager at the Association for Career and Technical Education and as a legislative assistant in the U.S. House of Representatives. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's degree in Public Administration from Wilmington University.
- Executive Director **Matt Chase** and NACo FSC Program Director **Spencer Bridgers** attended the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference in New Hanover County.
- President **Larry Johnson**, Digital Editor **Charlie Ban**, Senior Program Manager **Jack Morgan**, Associate Legislative Director **Jessica Jennings** and Administrative Coordinator **Marc Chavez** traveled to Utah for a congressional briefing with the Fifth and Sixth Counties.
- **Chase** spoke at the SafeAmerica Think Tank forum in New York City.
- Chief Financial Officer **Anna Amselle** spoke at the Presidential Forum for Association Executives event with other non-profits on "Association Technology System Implementations and Upgrades – Best Practices and Issues."
- Associate Program Director **Nastassia Walsh** presented on a Vera Institute of Justice webinar on Using ARPA Funds for Equity.
- **Jennings** attended the Association of County Commissioners of Alabama Annual Convention in Baldwin County.
- Associate Membership Director **John Losh** and Associate Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** attended the Iowa State Association of Counties Annual Conference in Polk County.
- Program Manager **Arabella Pluta-Ehlers** and Associate Program Director **Rashida Brown** were in Franklin County, Ohio to help the County Commissioners Association of Ohio launch its PN3 Peer Learning Community for elected county commissioners.
- Membership Director **Kim Hall** and Program Director **Spencer Bridgers** attended the Association of Arkansas Counties Annual Conference in Benton County.
- **Johnson**, Immediate Past President **Gary Moore**, **Brett Mattson**, associative legislative director, **Chase** and **Hall** attended the Texas Association of Counties Legislative Conference.
- Government Affairs Director **Mark Ritacco**, Losh, NACo FSC Director of Technology Partnerships **Brandon Natsuhara** and NACo FSC National Director of Strategic Partnerships **Kyle Cline** attended the Maryland Association of Counties Summer Conference in Worcester County.



Cortina



Gilardian



Matthews



Bridgers



Chavez

GET TO KNOW...

Habersham County, Ga.

Welcome, Habersham County, Ga.

Habersham County is located in northern Georgia, within the Blue Ridge Mountains, a portion of the Appalachian Mountains. The county is 90 miles north of Atlanta. Formed in 1818, Habersham County is named after Joseph Habersham, a postmaster general and Revolutionary War hero. Its county seat is Clarkesville.

Four major rivers run through the county: the Chatahoochee, Soque, Tallulah and Tugaloo. Agriculture is the top industry, with peaches and apples as the main crops.

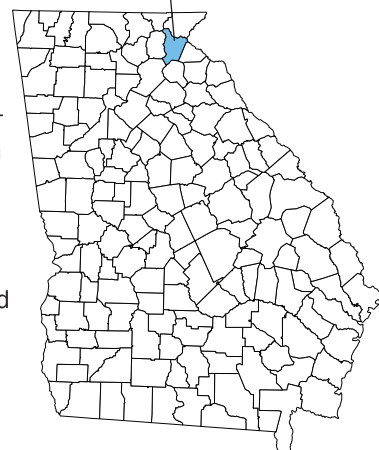
Home to the Tallulah Gorge, or "Grand Canyon of the East," visitors have been traveling to Habersham County since the 1880s to view the 1,000-foot deep gorge with six waterfalls referred to as the "Niagara of

the South."

Fieldale Farms, one of the largest independent poultry producers in the world, operates in the county and serves as the county's largest single employer.

The 2012 film *Wanderlust*, starring Paul Rudd and Jennifer Aniston, was made in Habersham County.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



Tallulah Gorge

finally!

NACo swag is now available online!

naco.org/store



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



GEORGIA

BALDWIN COUNTY added a new feature to one of their outdoor recreation areas with a nearly **1,300-foot splash pad**. The Harrisburg Park Splash Pad introduces some young children to water before they learn how to swim with spray nozzles and shower attachments. Visitors simply press a button and water flows continuously for 20 minutes. The splash pad was created to be accessible to all.

Photo by Carlos Tobar

ARIZONA

PIMA COUNTY's Department of Transportation launched a poster contest for young people to **prevent and control the spread of graffiti** on all properties throughout the county. The contest is held through the Taking Action Against Graffiti Program and allows young artists to use their art skills to create an anti-graffiti poster. The artwork will be distributed on calendars and at schools, libraries and community events. County staff will select five finalists and a panel of community leaders will select the final winner.

CALIFORNIA

• The District Attorney's Office in **YOLO COUNTY** is using software to **remove any bias when deciding whether to file charges**. The software creates "race-blind" charging by removing names, location and race from police reports, *Governing* reported. District Attorney Jeff Reisig said the system is part of the office's efforts to train prosecutors about implicit bias.



COLORADO

Commissioners in **DOUGLAS COUNTY** voted to **form a single-county public health agency** and leave the Tri-County Health Department that also consists of **ADAMS** and **ARAPAHOE** coun-

ties. Officials will appoint five members to the health board which will include two commissioners and three community members, *KUSA-TV* reported. Arapahoe County

officials expressed concerns about Douglas County's sudden departure, citing financial and service impacts.

FLORIDA

The Sheriff's Office in **BREVARD COUNTY** is giving **people with disabilities an opportunity to be a law enforcement officer** for the day. Through the "Dream for the Badge" program, participants will receive a uniform, duty belt and other equipment while going out with field training officers on non-dangerous calls. Participants will also receive a tour of the aviation unit, go out in an airboat, see the agricultural and marine unit and watch K-9 demonstrations, *Hometown News* reported.

INDIANA

The election board in **TIPTON COUNTY** is one of many throughout the state that voted to become a **vote center county**, allowing residents to vote at any vote center location in the county. The decision removes the electoral precinct system where residents were required to vote at a

ALABAMA

If you run into **MORGAN COUNTY** Sheriff's Office Lt. Eric Fields, you may have to do a double take. Fields has been recognized throughout the county as bearing a very similar resemblance to Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, *WHNT-TV* reported. A TikTok video of side-by-side comparisons of Fields and The Rock went viral and was even noticed by The Rock himself who tweeted about the resemblance. Fields is using his newfound fame to **bring awareness and raise funds** for fellow Sgt. Chris Dillard who was recently diagnosed with ALS one year from his retirement.

Photo: Fields (left) stands with Alabama Rep. Scott Stadthagen.

Photo courtesy of the Morgan County Sheriff's Office



See **NEWS FROM** page 11

From NEWS FROM page 10

specific location close to their residence, the *Kokomo Tribune* reported. The unanimous decision will go into effect this spring.

IOWA

CEDAR COUNTY Emergency Management is distributing free weather radios to **encourage emergency preparedness**. Residents can complete a family emergency plan and present it to the agency to be eligible for a free radio, *Iowa's News Now* reported. The agency received a grant for the program to encourage families to prepare for emergencies.



MARYLAND

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY Animal Control has been trying to **track down a pack of zebras** that escaped from an exotic animal collector's farm.

After initially trying to persuade the zebras to return to their pen, animal control built an eight-foot-tall corral around a meadow where they have been grazing, WRC-TV reported, which they will then close on the zebras when they come to eat.

The county's library system, however, made a joking suggestion that the zebras could be lured with compelling literature.

MICHIGAN

OTTAWA COUNTY launched a **food compost pilot program** that provides residents with access to the composting process. Residents and businesses can purchase compostable bags and return them to two of the county's Environmental Sustainability Centers, *The Holland Sentinel* reported. The food waste is then broken down and used to fertilize soil.

MINNESOTA

An embedded **social worker program** in **HENNEPIN COUNTY** is expanding to provide social workers for a total of 21 police departments. Social workers will now assist law enforcement officials in more suburban police departments with helping callers who are in crisis, WCCO-TV reported. Officers have the option to refer a resident to a social worker when responding to mental health and substance abuse calls.

NEW YORK

• **LIVINGSTON COUNTY** is expanding its initiative that gives **veterans** discounts on goods and services using a mobile app. The app includes a Livingston County Thank a Vet Discount Program interactive map, and the joint effort with the County Clerk's Office, Veteran Services and Chamber of Commerce hope to have it ready by Veterans Day on Nov. 11.



• **MONROE COUNTY** is debuting a new **"vax van."** The 32-foot long, 300 square-foot van includes chairs for two people to be vaccinated at the same time and an accessible room large enough

to accommodate a wheelchair for a third person. Two refrigerators and a freezer on board each have separate temperature control gauges for storage of vaccines that may require different temperature settings. State and federal CARES Act funding covered its \$219,500 cost. It will also be used to deliver flu shots and for other screenings the Health Department provides.

• **RENSSELAER COUNTY's** new Restaurant Protection Law will prevent **third-party food delivery services** from unauthorized advertising of a restaurant's menu and charging additional ordering fees, particularly those services that have been advertising menus on their online platforms without a restaurant's knowledge. The law will require third-party food delivery services to have contracts with restaurants that feature written agreements eliminating unauthorized charges.

• **ALBANY and RENSSELAER counties** have mandated that pharmacies hand out **opioid deactivation products** with every prescription. The products can neutralize unused prescriptions and make them safe to dispose of in a landfill. Albany County Executive Dan McCoy said a full measure through the Legislature is in the works.

OHIO

FRANKLIN COUNTY commissioners approved nearly \$2 million in **financial assistance** to minority-owned businesses and another \$1.5 million in rental assistance funding. That will include \$1 million for grants to help small businesses still struggling as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and another \$950,000 for low-interest loans to assist businesses that have been unable to secure conventional financing for new or expanding operations. The Columbus Urban League will administer both programs, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported.

SOUTH CAROLINA

LANCASTER COUNTY has updated an ordinance aimed at getting rid of **derelict or abandoned vehicles** on private property. The ordinance limits storage to two vehicles outside

an enclosed structure. It would limit the storage to five vehicles if they are parked behind an opaque fence and out of view. The two vehicles that are outside must be covered by a tarp. Race and stock cars are exempt from the ordinance.

WASHINGTON

• **KING COUNTY** will require some non-essential indoor businesses to implement a **vaccine verification policy**, asking customers to present proof of vaccination before they are allowed inside. The vaccine verification program is still being developed by Public Health - Seattle & King County with input from community organizations, labor unions, businesses, faith leaders and cities. A similar program was introduced in **CLALLAM** and **JEFFERSON counties**, requiring restaurant and bar patrons to present proof of vaccination.

• The **Klickitat County** sheriff will be allowed to continue deputizing hound handlers to **track and kill cougars** he considers a public safety concern after a judge declined to stop the program, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

The county's prosecuting attorney defended a lawsuit by a wildlife advocacy group, arguing that the policy does not go beyond the sheriff's authority because sheriffs generally have significant discretion about how and when to enforce the law.

WISCONSIN

FOND DU LAC COUNTY is offering a cash incentive to individuals who **relocate to live and work** within the county. The program provides businesses with the ability to offer prospective hires an incentive of up to \$15,000. The employer would be reimbursed half of that amount if the employee stays with the employer and resides in the county for a year. The county is working with Envision and Fond du Lac County Capital Resources to fund and administer the program.

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 and rlooker@naco.org.



Council members adopted the Jasper County, S.C. seal in 1973 after sponsoring a seal design contest in collaboration with the Jasper County Resources Conservation and Development Committee and Clemson Extension Service. Judges selected two winning entries and used features from both for the official seal. A Clemson University artist and the South Carolina Governor's Beautification Committee designed the final version.



The seal's border includes two South Carolina and American flags.

Pine cones depict conservation and timber production, a major industry in the county.

The inner circle depicts the stripes of a sergeant to represent the county's namesake of Sgt. William Jasper, a Revolutionary War soldier.

Two dogwood blossoms represent the official county tree.

The date of 1912 is the year the county formed.

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



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