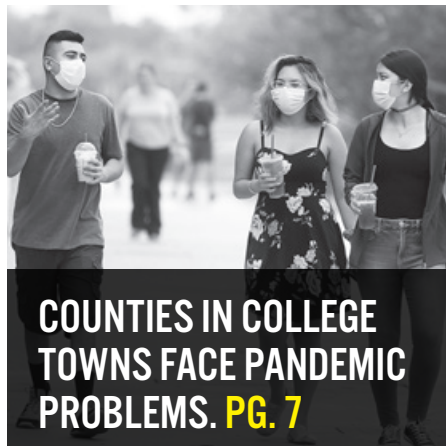




COUNTY FAIRS SEE ZOOM LIVESTOCK SHOWS, VIRTUAL PIE-EATING. **PG. 6**



COUNTIES IN COLLEGE TOWNS FACE PANDEMIC PROBLEMS. **PG. 7**



COURTS SPLIT OVER BUSINESS CLOSURES RELATED TO COVID. **PG. 9**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

VOL. 52, NO. 18

SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

REMOTE, EARLY VOTING OPTIONS RANK HIGH AMONG COUNTY NEEDS

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Parents spoil their kids by taking them to Disney World in Orange County, Fla. This year, Disney World is spoiling Orange County, among many others.

While National Basketball Association teams play in the “Disney bubble” during the COVID-19 pandemic, their empty home arenas will aid in county election offices’ efforts to give voters a spacious place to cast their ballots at a time when safe indoor public spaces are at a premium.

With the efficiency of the U.S. Postal Service in doubt by some, on top of coronavirus

concerns, making voting accessible to residents means offering early voting options and opportunities to drop off ballots in person.

For Orange County, the Orlando Magic’s Amway Center atrium will play host to two weeks of early voting, keeping downtown Orlando voters, including University of Central Florida students, out of the county’s comparably cramped elections offices. It’s one of the county’s 20 early voting sites.

“Hopefully it will help us reach a lot more people and make it even more convenient for people to vote,” said Danaë Rivera-Marasco, spokeswoman for the Orange County Supervisor of Elections. “We know that

it’s probably a one-time opportunity because in a normal, non-pandemic election season, the Amway Center would normally be booked for Magic home games and concerts and other events that would not allow us to be there for the two weeks that are necessary for early voting sites.”

That agreement resulted from negotiations between the league and the players’ union following a mid-playoff work stoppage following the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha County, Wis. With many of the league’s arenas opting in across the country, the deal could give counties 29

See **VOTING** page 2



Fairfax County, Va. residents last week wait in line to vote in the presidential election, wearing masks and social distancing.

Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Counties to play role in vaccine program

by **Blaire Bryant**

Counties will play a large role in the implementation of a COVID-19 vaccination program, as a number of the community sectors that have been identified as critical to the execution of this strategy are county owned or operated — including emergency management agencies, local health departments, hospitals and health systems, com-

munity health centers, rural health clinics and long-term care facilities.

On Sept. 16, HHS announced its COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. The plan was developed in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Defense (DoD). The agencies released the plan in

See **VACCINE** page 3

New guidance spells out CRF reporting requirements

by **Eryn Hurley**

Counties have new guidance on reporting requirements for the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

The new guidance follows the recent release of an updated frequently-asked-questions document by the U.S. Department of Treasury’s Office of Inspector General.

The Sept. 21 clarifications will help counties with payroll expenses for a number of employees, including those in public safety, public health and human services employees addressing the impacts of COVID-19.

The Coronavirus Relief Fund provides \$150 billion in aid for state, county and municipal governments with

populations of over 500,000 people to address necessary expenditures incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The updated guidance addresses concerns made by the bipartisan organizations representing state and local governments, including NACo, regarding additional reporting and record retention requirements for counties using CRF payments.

The new document addresses contradictions pertaining to new requirements associated with reporting and tracking payroll expenses for public safety, public health and human services employees who are “substantially dedicated” to addressing and mitigating

the impacts of COVID-19.

New requirements in the inspector general’s Aug. 28 guidance were more extensive than what was required under the department’s Aug. 10 guidance that focused on flexibility for local governments to ease administrative burdens.

Counties have expressed concern that these late additions to Coronavirus Relief Fund reporting requirements may prevent counties from receiving reimbursements for payroll expenses incurred during the pandemic, severely impacting budget forecasts. **CN**

Eryn Hurley is an associate legislative director in NACo’s Government Affairs Department.

Counties get creative to help residents vote in election during pandemic



Fairfax County, Va. residents line up to vote early in the presidential election. Most voters were wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

From VOTING page 1

large, centrally located facilities in heavily populated cities to use for elections.

Additionally, the Live Nation entertainment company announced in September it would explore partnering with local governments to use its more than 100 concert venues as voting centers, along with offering some staff to work the polls.

With postal delays at issue, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court recently extended the deadline for counties to accept mailed ballots, and while it forbade third-party collection of

ballots, it allowed for the use of drop boxes.

Allegheny County, however, decided not to leave the decision up to the court and the county's board of elections approved staffing for additional offices, with four additional options open for eight hours a day, in addition to the board's central office.

Ohio counties are still waiting to find out if they can deploy more than one ballot box at the county elections office, a position the secretary of state is defending in the courts.

"We're doing a lot of marketing to push absentee voting and until an order comes down, we're not making any other plans," said Steve Harsman, deputy director of the Montgomery County Board of Elections. "We're in limbo."

The county's drop box, first used during the primary, drew 1,000 ballots on the last day.

"With all the concerns with the post office, it added a lot of comfort for voters, especially the last-minute voters," Hartford said. "There's a lot of value to the drop boxes."

With six weeks to go, Montgomery County, Ohio has registered more than 85,000 applications for early ballots, compared to 55,000 in all of the 2016 general election. The county is hoping for 150,000

mail-in voters, which would be more than half of the typical turnout of 272,000.

"That would take a lot of pressure off of our polling places," Hartford said. "With 30 people in line, with six feet between them, that's 180 feet. Most polling locations don't have that kind of space."

Rivera-Marasco said Orange County was planning its election sites to take measures to defend against COVID-19, but the Amway Center was a major boon to the effort.

"Having such a large, well-known, central facility ensures people will know where they can go," she said. "It helps put the public's mind at ease. Maybe the Magic will see the enthusiasm and keep this going in the future."

Louisville's KFC Yum! Center will serve as one of Jefferson County, Ky.'s early voting sites, along with three others. Renting out space for large voting centers wasn't part of the county clerk's budget, but it's what spokesman Jordan Kelch said was necessary to follow CDC guidelines around the virus to make voters feel safe.

Kentucky is allowing no-excuse absentee voting for the first time, removing some onerous restrictions for accessing a ballot.

"You could get one if you



or your spouse were due for surgery on Election Day, or if you're in your third trimester of pregnancy or you're deployed overseas," Kelch said. "Eligibility requirements are usually pretty strict."

When those requirements were lifted for the primary, the number of requests skyrocketed. Once, an election drew 1,500 requests. This year, it was 100,000.

"We had to really work to make sure our infrastructure and manpower could meet those challenges," Kelch said. "[The demand] really changes the game for us. We have to be ready to accommodate not just a 12-hour Election Day, but now it's a three-week marathon."


Orange County staffs its early voting sites through a temp agency, but many of its Election Day poll workers are part of the county's 22-year-old Adopt a Precinct program.

"Instead of us recruiting 10 individual poll workers, we just find an organization and

they do the recruitment," Rivera-Marasco said. "We pay one organization for each polling place, rather than individual workers and that ends up being a fundraiser for a lot of groups."

She said roughly 100 of the county's 247 polling places are staffed through the program, which allows organizations that have been successful in the past to take on additional polling places.

"You get groups of young professionals doing it, and we have a fraternity alumni association that handles about nine polling places," Rivera-Marasco said. "It's a public service, it takes some of the work off of our hands and that money usually winds up back in the community in the form of scholarships."

As for Orange County's other 150 or so polling places? Training and orientation classes are full, with a few hundred people on the waiting list, eager to work for 14 hours on Election Day. 

SNAP/STATS



TOP 5 PUMPKIN PRODUCING STATES

1. Illinois
2. Texas
3. California
4. Indiana
5. Pennsylvania

Source: USDA

How to create a health department during a pandemic

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

When the COVID-19 outbreak began to spread in March, county residents in Delaware County, Pa. were met with surprise when they realized their county health department was nonexistent.

Delaware County is one of the most populated counties in the entire country without its own public health department. Many other Pennsylvania counties lack county-run health departments, but none can compare in population size to the 566,000 residents in Delaware County.

Council Vice Chair Monica Taylor described how groups within the county have pushed to form a health department in the past, but the political will to move forward never existed.

Taylor was elected to the council in January 2020 and ran on the fact that the county needed its own public health department, a similar platform to her running mates.

"If we're really looking at social determinants of health, a health department is an amazing way to help with health disparities within the community and there are quite a bit of those in Delaware County," she said.

Neighboring counties rank in the top 10 in health outcomes for the state, a drastic difference compared to Delaware County's continually decreasing ranking

in the 40s, Taylor said.

The county council hit the ground running in January meeting with neighboring leaders, heads of other county health departments and the state to talk about implementing a health department.

"We just kind of started our timeline and kept trudging on and then of course we had a pandemic, but we continue to keep rolling," she said.

The pandemic did not derail the county's plans to create a health department.

"We knew how important it was and with the pandemic, that even exacerbated so many issues," Taylor said.

COVID-19 has helped with public opinion, Taylor said, with more county residents supporting creating the department.

"I think a lot of the public didn't realize that we didn't have a health department so when this came up, it was like hold on, wait, what do you mean we don't have a health department in Delaware County?" she said.

Throughout the pandemic, the county relied heavily on support from the state and formed an intergovernmental agency agreement with neighboring Chester County, which oversaw all COVID-19 response.

"That has helped us significantly," she said of the Chester County partnership.

The southeast region of Pennsylvania has also collaborated



Vice Chair Monica Taylor speaks after being sworn in to the Delaware County Council. Her candidate platform included starting a public health department. Photo courtesy of Delaware County.

throughout the pandemic by holding frequent calls to discuss COVID-19 strategies.

"It's really been a great support system and it's also nice because we're able to talk out different issues that we're having," she said.

However, the collaboration and the neighborly help still left Delaware County with challenges.

Taylor said the county would have been able to better target resources with a public health department in the beginning of the pandemic when cases began to spread. The state's data provided the county with numbers of positive cases, but not exact locations of where cases were reported.

"We would have been able to better target our response in the beginning," she said.

A health department also would have helped better understand health disparities throughout the county to target which communities may be harder hit by the virus, she said.

"We were very reactionary in the beginning and I think that having a health department would have helped us better plan out our line of attack against the virus," Taylor said.

Despite the pandemic, the county is still on track to form a public health department and formed a steering committee that's currently working on a strategic plan that will be done by December. The committee is completing an economic impact study to provide the state with necessary information to form a department.

Johns Hopkins University also completed a needs analy-

sis of the county to show health areas that need to be addressed.

"One of the other parts is data to monitor and evaluate the health of all Delaware County residents and that is something that directly falls underneath a health department," Taylor said. "That way, we can actually put resources where they need to go whereas now, we don't have that information to provide and we can't target our response."

She said the council will be able to approve moving forward and establish a board of health to start to build out the department before going to the state for approval in the fall of 2021.

"I would say that forming a public health department is going to help to provide a more coordinated health response in general for our community," Taylor said. **CN**

CDC outlines preliminary steps counties can take to prepare for vaccine distribution

From VACCINE page 1

the form of a brief report to Congress outlining the strategic overview of the plan, and an interim playbook for state, tribal, territorial and local public health programs to begin operationalizing a vaccination response to COVID-19 within their respective jurisdictions.

The plan outlines four main tenets:

- Stakeholder engagement and communication with the public to improve vaccine confidence and uptake.
- Immediate distribution upon FDA approval (within 24 hours)

- Safe administration and availability of administration supplies.
- Data monitoring through IT tracking systems.

While many elements of the strategy are still in process pending the outcome of Phase III trials and the timeline for FDA approval, CDC's jurisdictional playbook outlines many preliminary steps that states and localities — especially counties — can take now to prepare for vaccine distribution. As stated in the playbook, the CDC is requiring states to submit plans to CDC project officers by Oct. 16.

As frontline providers for health and human services,

and the boots on the ground for local COVID-19 mitigation efforts, counties must work with state governments in the formation of these plans by communicating the funding, administrative resource and technical assistance needs of the local entities that will be distributing the vaccine.

Additionally, as trusted voices in local communities, counties will bear the responsibility of ensuring vaccine confidence through public messaging.

Operation Warp Speed, a multi-agency federal partnership led by the Department of Health and Human Services, has been tasked with organiz-

ing efforts to accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and other countermeasures including diagnostics and therapeutics.

The goal of this initiative as outlined by HHS is to "deliver 300 million doses of a safe, effective vaccine for COVID-19 by January 2021."

The Departments of Health and Human Services and Defense are spending billions of dollars on the development of six vaccines being developed by BioNTech SE/Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca/Oxford, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Novavax, and Sanofi/GlaxoSmithKline. Congress

has allocated roughly \$10 billion to this effort through supplemental appropriations in previously passed COVID-19 relief bills including the CARES Act.

NACo will continue to track and report on new developments on a COVID-19 vaccine, and share resources to aid in the development and implementation of local COVID-19 vaccine programs on our NACo COVID-19 resource hub: <https://www.naco.org/resources/covid19>. **CN**

Blair Bryant is associate legislative director, Health, in NACo's Government Affairs department.

COVID limits shelter space for wildfire evacuees

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

As this year's wildfires force people out of their homes who have a potential need for shelter, the counties that are taking care of them are painfully aware that even as the air outside gets increasingly smoky, the air indoors can be even more dangerous. The added element of the COVID-19 pandemic is complicating emergency responses and density is quickly becoming an issue.

"We're trying to avoid congregate sheltering at all costs," said Bob Jacobs, emergency operations coordinator for Nevada County, Calif.

For most counties, that has meant partnering with the American Red Cross, which has provided hotel vouchers to evacuees in hopes of keeping families together and apart from other residents, in an attempt to prevent cross-contamination.

"We were fortunate with the timing of our Jones Fire (in ear-

ly August) because it was one of the first and we weren't going to tax the Red Cross' system too much," Jacobs said. "It's circulating some money back into the local economy, because we haven't had too many people staying in our hotels this summer."

Emergency response has involved additional planning, but when Colorado's Cameron Peak fire started spreading east through the Roosevelt National Forest, Larimer County emergency managers saw that work pay off.

Preparing to take in some of the 3,000 residents from the mandatory evacuation area and another 1,000 leaving their homes voluntarily, the county had plenty of notice from its most vulnerable residents.

"We have a process where people can self-register if they have mobility issues or they can't self-evacuate and we have been able to reach out and check in and see if they need help," said Lori Hodges, Larimer County's director

of emergency management. "We've had some people say they're immunocompromised or they're homebound because of the coronavirus, so that was something that helped us not take them to the evacuation center. We got them directly into housing."

When Larimer County played host to 800 firefighters during the summer, the county housed them at its fairgrounds, where the Army Corps of Engineers had built an alternative care site for use if local hospitals were overcrowded.

"It was a really good fit, especially at the beginning," Hodges said. "If we had another major evacuation, we'd know we have that option. We're also planning that if we need to, we can operate congregate sheltering in a way to prevent too much cross-contamination among groups."

Uncertainty reigns, when a single lightning strike in a dried forest can set off a fire that could grow to thousands of acres.

"We want to let people know that we have a plan and we still can support them in this environment, so they don't have the fear of going to a shelter and not knowing what the outcome is going to be," Hodges said.

Nevada County's Jones Fire evacuation order came early in the day, and the timing allowed most evacuees to avoid having to stay overnight in shelters. The county turned instead to temporary evacuation points — well-advertised locations where county staff could triage the situation and help residents figure out what to do next.

"We can talk them through the crisis, walk them through their options and hopefully pass the time until they can go back home."

It's also an opportunity to check in and establish understanding of the pandemic.

"We have public health specialists at the evacuation center to check on people to make sure they don't have symptoms and they have informa-

tion about COVID and how it spreads," Hodges said.

And some counties with a significant homeless population are planning for their needs too. Clackamas County, Ore. has provided two indoor locations where people without housing could seek shelter from the smoke.

Whether or not residents have to be evacuated, first responders are also part of the equation.

"We are also ensuring the people responding to the wildfires remain safe and limit their exposure to COVID-19," said Dylan Blaylock, spokesman for the Clackamas County, Ore. Board of Commissioners. "First responders are expected to check their symptoms every day before reporting to duty. If they have COVID-19 symptoms, they cannot report to duty and need to contact their medical provider. We are ensuring physical distancing during any briefings or un-

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County evacuates town ahead of wildfires



A drone photo shows the damage from the wildfire that destroyed 80 percent of the town of Malden in Whitman County, Wash. Wildfires have destroyed thousands of acres in counties across several Western states. Photo courtesy of the Whitman County Sheriff's Office

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

A combination of strong winds and dry conditions created a perfect storm for a trio of wildfires that simultaneously burned in Whitman County, Wash. on Labor Day.

The first fire started in the county seat of Colfax.

"Colfax is in a valley with a steep hillside," Whitman County Sheriff Brett Myers said. "It was fast enough and big enough that the local fire departments called in for as many volunteers in the county as available to come help."

Alerts came for a second fire about five miles west of the county seat. The two separate fires required responses from all local fire departments and volunteers.

One hour later, a third fire started north of Whitman County in Spokane County, Wash. This fire, fueled by high winds, headed toward the small town of Malden.

"That fire just took off, so the wind speed and direction basically put that fire on a collision course with the town of Malden," Myers said.

Malden has a population of around 200 and is surrounded by wooded areas, dry grass and fields used for farming. When the sheriff's office learned of the severity of the fire, Myers diverted all resources to evac-

'The truth is rarely do you have this kind of perfect storm and everything was set up for this to be basically a disaster.'

uate the town's residents.

The rural county is largely staffed by volunteers who were already battling outbreaks in the two other locations in the county when the Malden Fire began to spread.

"With resources tied up in Colfax on two fires because this fire didn't exist at the time, response times were delayed," Myers said. "But even had response times not been delayed, this was a big enough fire that had you been there waiting for it, there was very little you could have done."

The fire destroyed 80 percent of the homes and structures in Malden including the post office, city hall, library and fire station. It reduced many homes to piles of rubble.

Myers described the burnt vehicles, smoldering rock, cement foundations and ash from burnt structures that now cover the ground in Malden.

"You have this almost



Smoke from the Malden Fire fills the air in Whitman County, Wash. Photo courtesy of the Whitman County Sheriff's Office

monochromatic waste field — is what the feeling is there," he said.

It remains unclear what started the fires.

"It was the perfect storm," Myers said. "The truth is rarely do you have this kind of perfect storm and everything was set up for this to be basically a disaster."

The Whitman County Board of Commissioners issued a countywide emergency declaration following the fires to aid in expediting recovery efforts.

Commission Chair Michael Largent said the immediate impact of the fire was a severe strain on firefighting resources. Now, the county's efforts will go toward rebuilding.

"The struggle right now is long-term recovery for the communities and we're still

trying to put together," he said.

Largent and Myers both credited a good working relationship with county agencies and departments as well as neighboring counties that sent resources to help fight the fires in Whitman County.

As Malden works to rebuild,

Largent said there are significant challenges that come with cleaning up and disposing of the debris, including the county's budget which cannot handle the cost of debris disposal.

"We'll really need help either from the federal government if we get a FEMA declaration or other sources to clean up the area so people can begin again," he said.

Gov. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.) visited Malden after the fires and said the state is assessing the damage to see if Malden qualifies for federal aid.

"If we don't have some sort of a broader relief, this community cannot recover because the resources are not there," Largent said.

There have been no reported fatalities or serious injuries from the fires. Despite all the damage, Myers said the county is lucky because the disaster could have been worse.

"I'd like to think a lot of it was getting there in time, having the resources to get there and people heeding the call and a lot of luck and maybe a little help from the big guy upstairs, too," Myers said.

The three fires are now contained. The Red Cross provided Malden evacuees with hotel rooms and Whitman County has received donations from across the country as residents return to assess the damage on their homes.

"We have our neighbors and our friends in this small community that are standing by ready to help," Largent said. "There is hope at the end of this no matter how dire it looks at the moment." **CN**

Disaster sheltering proves challenging

From EVACUEES page 4

avoidable group work.

"We also provide masks, hand sanitizers and other personal protective equipment," he noted. "As much as possible, first responders are working staggered shifts to limit exposure."

Fortunate to get through its wildfire without too much

need for shelter, Jacobs said Nevada County is refining its strategies in case another fire drives up demand for shelter.

Beyond that, Hodges is hoping to replenish resources for evacuees.

"If people can donate, we ask them to donate to the Red Cross because they're putting up a lot of money for it," she said. **CN**

Livestock shows on Zoom, virtual pie-eating all part of COVID-era county fairs

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

When Crawford County, Pa. holds its next county fair, residents will still be able to celebrate a milestone — 75 years. It's one of many county fairs that has had to cancel or scale down this year.

But even while some fairs have managed to work around the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on gatherings to do at least some business and minimize the economic consequences, it's harder to make up for the social hole the cancellations and alterations left.

"We had committees working for two years to get ready for this one," said Commissioner Francis Weiderspahn. "They'll just keep meeting and planning, but we were excited for this one. Meadville High School graduate Journey Brown was the MVP of the Cotton Bowl for Penn

State last year, and he was going to be here."

Brown can still come home in 2021, but not fresh off that award. Some residents, including some who have been to all 74 of the previous fairs, may not make it another year.

Although most fairs are run by nonprofit organizations, the opportunity to celebrate a county's identity is unmatched, whether it's as a showcase of agricultural prowess, a presentation of regional delicacies or just a chance to bring people together once a year.

"It's important for the economy and brings a lot of people in," said Elko County, Nev. Commissioner Demar Dahl. "It's an opportunity for people who don't get the chance to get together and visit, your ranching neighbors. There are a lot of people you only see once a year, at the fair."

Elko County was also looking toward a milestone year —



its centennial. Like Crawford County, it will defer it for a year, and like Crawford County, Elko retained a few events, with stock horse, team roping and branding in an event dubbed the "NOFair."

"We wanted to have the horse races, those are usually our biggest event," Dahl said. "We weren't confident we'd get the okay from the governor and the state gaming board."

"Everybody's pretty disappointed, we think we could have safely had the fair," he said.

"When we had the Silver State Stampede [rodeo], we had 1,000 people in the grandstands and maybe 20 people weren't wearing masks."

Crawford County was able to put on a youth show, giving 4H and Future Farmers of America participants a chance to present and market their work.

"They could still show off their animals, their produce and photography," Weiderspahn said. "The kids have been creative, and some of them have been learning to

privately market their animals over Zoom. They might not have been developing those skills otherwise."

Linn County, Iowa is one of many that adapted by holding a virtual fair, complete with art contests, garden judging, wine making and pie eating. Oneida County, Wis. has a few additional wrinkles in its virtual fair, including video crafting with a Girl Scout troop, history presentations and a contest for the sexiest men's legs in a kilt.

None of those experiences can replace the tastes, but many counties have gathered their food vendors in a drive-through configuration so people can still get their FDA-recommended annual allowance of funnel cake and fried foods on a stick.

The promise of a better situation next year is keeping county fairs going. "That just means we have another year to make the 75th the best it can be," Weiderspahn said. **CN**



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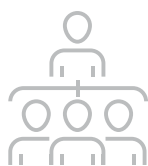
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COVID-19 cases spike in county college towns

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

For counties with college towns, more students mean more pandemic problems.

In 203 counties where students make up at least 10 percent of the population, approximately 50 percent experienced their worst weeks of the pandemic since Aug. 1, according to a review by *The New York Times*.

Many counties are juggling COVID-19 cases among students while working to protect county residents outside of the student community.

At Michigan State University in Ingham County, the county health department issued a mandatory 14-day quarantine for fraternity and sorority houses and large rental properties.

The city of East Lansing, where the university is located, saw a 315 percent increase in total case counts since Sept. 1. An outbreak among students at the university drove the case count and comprises 80 percent of all new cases, according to a release from the county.

"I do not take this lightly, but there is an outbreak centered on Michigan State University and it is quickly becoming a crisis," said Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail in a statement.

Cases within the student community at the University of Arizona in Pima County also continued to increase throughout early September leading to similar self-quarantine recommendations for students.

Pima County Health Department Director Theresa Cullen worked with University of Arizona officials to issue the shelter-in-place self-quarantine recommendations for students within certain geographic areas near campus.

"We felt fairly strongly, especially when we looked at our census track data and the longitudinal tracking, that we were having significant escalation," Cullen said.

Pima County's public health department works closely with the University of Arizona through an academic public health partnership. Cullen is part of a public health advisory task force that advises the uni-



Students walk by a sign on the corner of College and Allen streets on Penn State University's campus in Centre County, Pa., reminding individuals to wear masks as part of the Centre Strong campaign. Photo by Dan Gleiter/PennLive.com

versity in terms of pandemic response. Her office collaborated with the president of the University of Arizona, the county mayor and county administrator.

"Our concern — and it's still a concern — is we can use the term 'leakage' to describe leakage of the pandemic into the surrounding neighborhoods," Cullen said.

The New York Times previously labeled Centre County, Pa., home of Penn State University, the second fastest-growing county in the country with COVID-19 cases. Nearly 100,000 students attend the university in Centre County each year.

Centre County Commission Chair Mike Pipe said the county is working with the university, the state department of health and other stakeholders to launch the COVID-19 Response for Emergency Assistance to Counties Team (C-REACT), a task force to reduce positive cases on campus and in the surrounding community.

"That C-REACT team is basically going to be coming in and working specifically on actionable things that can occur — crunching data, looking at tests and it's going to be a focus group and reduce approval times," he said.

Pipe said the county has also been involved in an initiative

created by the chamber of commerce and the university called Centre Strong, which created procedures for students moving back to campus and helps relay information regarding university cancellations.

"I think our challenge right now is to stop the spike and get to the plateau. Then if we are plateauing or just even decreasing, just really hammer that home and make sure we are not seeing continued spread," Pipe said.

In Albany County, N.Y., officials traced the vast majority of new cases back to the University at Albany, part of the State University of New York school system. Over a recent five-day span, the county reported 105 new positive cases with 75 of those associated with the university.

Albany County Executive Daniel McCoy said the county is in constant communication with the university. He has worked with the university's president and chancellor to announce pooled COVID-19 testing to administer tests rapidly.

"One of the things we saw over the summer and more recently once the fall semester started at the University at Albany, is that large gatherings can easily become disastrous with just a few people carrying the virus," McCoy said.

To protect the rest of the coun-



Albany County Executive Daniel McCoy (right) and University at Albany President Havidán Rodríguez (left) discuss an increase in COVID-19 cases among students.

ty community, McCoy said the department of health has identified and isolated positive cases among students to protect the rest of the county's residents. If the University at Albany sees more than 100 positive cases within a 14-day period, in-person classes will be suspended per state guidelines.

In Illinois, McLean County Health Administrator Jessica McKnight said the county saw a 2 to 3 percent positivity rate throughout the summer, but when students returned to Illinois State University in early August, the rolling seven-day positivity rate increased to 11 to 12 percent.

The Illinois State Department of Health offers a mobile testing program available to counties upon request which McKnight said the county asked for to bring increased testing to the

university's campus. The county has also been working closely with the university in regard to contact tracing efforts.

"The need obviously is showing to be a little bit greater than we anticipated with the number of cases that came in at the beginning," she said of the contact tracing efforts.

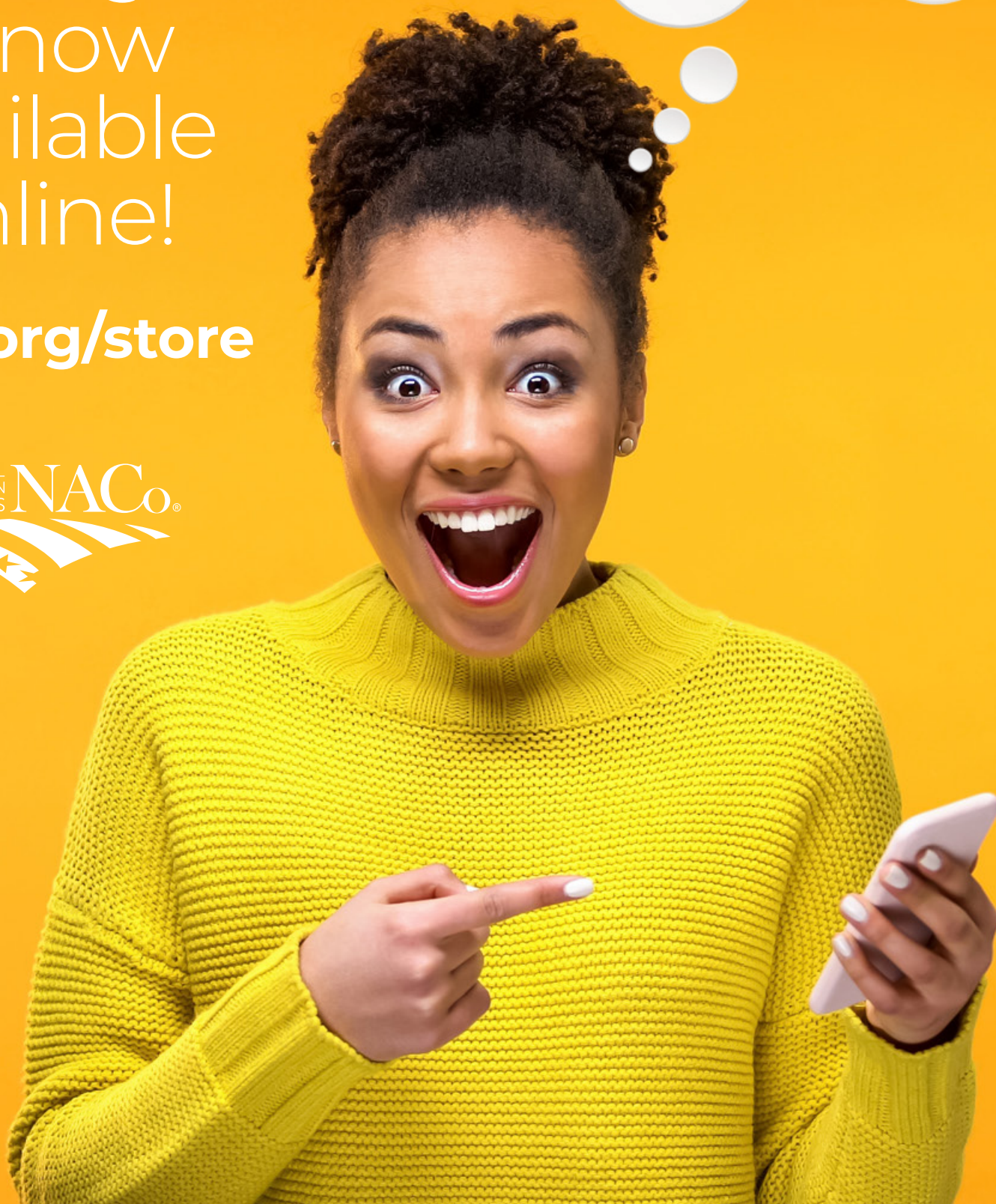
McLean County has worked with the university, the town of Normal and the City of Bloomington to institute ordinances related to bars and large gatherings of over 10 within a certain geographical area near the campus.

"My message for students is that they're members of our community as well, and we look to them to be the future and help us," McKnight said. "It's going to take all of us working together to help our community move forward." **CN**

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Courts split over COVID-19 closures

by Lisa Soronen

Courts across the country, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have had to resolve legal challenges to stay-at-home orders issued during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Different aspects of stay-at-home orders have been challenged under different legal theories, including governors' decisions to close businesses.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, courts, including the New Mexico Supreme Court and a federal district court in Pennsylvania, have come to different conclusions in these novel cases.

In *Lujan Grisham v. Romero*, the New Mexico Supreme Court held that the temporary closure of indoor dining at restaurants and bars wasn't arbitrary and capricious. For about six weeks, New Mexico allowed in-door dining at 50 percent capacity but then disallowed it with "increasing evidence linking indoor dining at restaurants to a higher risk of infection."

Again, the New Mexico Supreme Court has yet to issue a written opinion in this case. During its brief oral announcement of its ruling, the court noted that recently U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts stated that the U.S. Constitution "entrusts safety and health decisions to the political branches of government," not the judiciary.

Previously, a federal district court ruled New Mexico couldn't close indoor dining at bars and restaurants. The New Mexico Supreme Court overturned this decision.

In *County of Butler v. Wolf*, a federal district court in Pennsylvania held that the governor's decision to close all "non-life sustaining" businesses during the pandemic violated the U.S. Constitution's Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses.

Specifically, the court concluded the closure decision was arbitrary in its "creation, scope and administration."

The Commonwealth had no "set, objective definition in writing" of what constitutes "life-sustaining," and businesses shut down as "non-life sustaining" were often selling the same products as "life-sustaining" businesses.

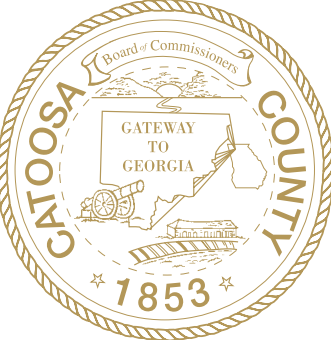
According to the court, it wasn't rational to close down a furniture and small appliance store to limit personal interactions but keep Walmart open. This decision didn't keep people home; it just sent them to Walmart. **CN**

While County of Butler v. Wolf was brought by four counties, the court concluded they, as creatures of the state, had no standing to sue the state.



CATOOSA COUNTY, GA.

Catoosa County, Ga. was created from neighboring counties in 1853 and is located in northern Georgia. Its county seal can be seen depicted on the wall of the county administration building in a painting drawn by a former inmate.



The county seal includes the phrase, "Gateway to Georgia," which is depicted in the seal within an outline of the shape of the county. Catoosa County is located along the I-75 corridor at the Georgia-Tennessee state line.

The seal incorporates mountains, the sun and a stream to represent the county's land area.

A cannon symbolizes the battles fought in the county during the Civil War. The Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park is located partially within the county and preserves the sites of the Battle of Chickamauga and the Siege of Chattanooga.

The seal depicts a railroad and its depot to represent the Ringgold Depot, which is located in the county seat of Ringgold. The depot represents the train traffic that is critical to the region and county.

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

..... **ON THE MOVE**➡

NACo STAFF

- Chief Technology Officer **Rita Reynolds** was recently named to StateTech's 2020 State and Local Government IT Influencer list.
- Associate Legislative Director **Daria Daniel** spoke about the federal housing policy outlook Sept. 24 at the American Planning Association's Policy and Advocacy Conference.

Reynolds

Daniel

WORD SEARCH

MINNEHAHA COUNTY, S.D.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

- ANDY:** Andy's Acres is an unincorporated community.
- AUGUSTANA:** University in Sioux Falls.
- BENCLARE:** A local community named for its founder's two sons, Ben and Clarence.
- BOE:** Baltic native Niles Boe was governor of South Dakota in the late 1960s.
- EASTERN:** The county is on the eastern border of South Dakota.
- FALLS:** The county is home to Falls Park, a 123-acre park featuring waterfalls averaging 7,400 gallons dropping 100 feet.
- HAGAR:** Hagar the Horrible cartoonist Chris Browne lives in Sioux Falls.
- HISTORY:** The county was created in 1862 and organized in 1868.
- LESUEUR:** Pierre-Charles Le Sueur was a French fur trader and the first known European to explore the Minnesota River valley.
- MINNEHAHA:** The name for the county comes from the Sioux word Mniha, meaning "rapid water."
- MUSEUM:** The county's first courthouse, built in 1893, is now a museum. One of its most striking features is 16 murals detailing early life, painted by Norwegian immigrant Ole Running.
- QUARRY:** Quarrying is a chief industry.
- SIOUX FALLS:** The county seat is Sioux Falls, the state's largest city.
- SIZE:** The county is 814 square miles.
- SOUL:** Starsky & Hutch co-star David Soul grew up in Minnehaha County.

CAPITAL LOOP



The bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus unveiled a new \$1.5 trillion “framework” earlier this month to help break the gridlock on the latest COVID-19 negotiations ahead of the November election. This framework contained only broad objectives for a future relief bill.

The “March to Common Ground” contains many county priorities, including increased food assistance and emergency funding for childcare, re-upping the Paycheck Protection Program, reviving unemployment benefits and providing new aid to state and local governments. The framework also includes new funding for virus testing and tracing, elections, the U.S. Postal Service and extends the 2020 Census.

Along with \$1.5 trillion in proposed new spending, the framework accounts for \$130 billion in unspent CARES Act funds and includes potential spending increases (of roughly \$400 billion) or reductions (of roughly \$200 billion) based on the ongoing severity of the pandemic. The metrics for triggering these provisions involve hospitalizations and vaccine progress, but the framework does not include additional details.

NACo developed an in-depth analysis highlighting key provisions included in the “March to Common Ground” framework and their impact on

county governments, which is available at <https://www.naco.org/resources/covid19>.

NACo to hold an inaugural Virtual Federal Policy Summit Oct. 20-21

NACo’s 2020 Virtual Federal Policy Summit will connect county officials, members of Congress, federal agency partners, and other key decision makers and thought leaders.

The two-day summit will feature informative speakers with practical advice on a range of policy issues and updates on the federal policy landscape, including broadband, health care, infrastructure, COVID-19 relief, public lands, disaster assistance and more.

With ongoing challenges related to in-person meetings, NACo’s Virtual Federal Policy Summit is a prime opportunity to connect, learn and share practical information and resources to help strengthen your county.

USDA extends WIC COVID-19 flexibility

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is extending flexibilities for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) through the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to

the Sept. 21 announcement, they were scheduled to expire Sept. 30.

The extension will allow for the continuation of modified WIC service delivery through curbside pickup programs, telephone, video conferencing or other online platforms.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act gave the USDA the authority to waive statutory physical presence requirements and other regulatory barriers to access as a result of COVID-19. Since March, every state has obtained a WIC program waiver to modify service delivery. As state and local governments continue to grapple with the economic impacts of the pandemic, WIC and other nutrition services have played a key role in helping families across the country. USDA’s extension of waivers and other flexibilities help to maintain the health and safety of our residents, WIC participants and staff.

The USDA did not extend certain flexibilities in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is county-administered in 10 states. NACo and the National Association of County Human Service Administrators released a joint letter in support of The Emergency SNAP Flexibilities Act (H.R. 7794), which would extend useful waivers for county human service

agencies during the pandemic.

CMS withdraws Medicaid financing regulation

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid withdrew the proposed Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Rule from the regulatory agenda, Administrator Seema Verma recently announced.

The rule, first proposed in November 2019, was set to be finalized this fall. It would have made substantial changes to Medicaid’s financing structure and supplemental payments. The Medicaid program operates as joint federal-state-local partnership, with counties across the nation delivering Medicaid-eligible services and, in many instances, helping states finance and administer the program.

The rule would have capped two flexible funding mechanisms used by state and local governments to finance their non-federal shares of Medicaid payments: intergovernmental transfers (IGTs) and certified public expenditures (CPEs). An IGT is a transfer of funds from a government entity (such as a county) to the state Medicaid agency that, when used to meet the non-federal share of a Medicaid payment, is eligible to receive federal matching funds.

Meanwhile, CPEs are used by government entities (including health care providers) to receive

federal matching funds for health care services approved under a state’s Medicaid state plan. In FY 2018, supplemental funding sources such as IGTs and CPEs, as well as other local funding sources, made up 37.5 percent of all Medicaid spending.

The proposed regulation would have also created new reporting requirements for Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments, and placed limitations on supplemental payments to certain health care providers, while also implementing an extensive review process for the addition or renewal of supplemental funding sources under Medicaid.

In February, NACo submitted comments on the proposed rule, which emphasized the potentially burdensome impacts of these proposed provisions on counties. The creation of new reporting requirements, for instance, would require additional time and resources without providing additional federal funding to meet this obligation. Furthermore, the proposed changes to Medicaid’s financing structure could challenge counties’ ability to provide essential health services to vulnerable populations and plan our budgets strategically.

NACo Government Affairs staff Eryn Hurley, Nicolette Gerald and Blaire Bryant contributed to this article.

Counties face economic recovery challenges



by Katie Sullivan

Over the summer, NACo surveyed and interviewed county leaders across the country to assess how counties are recovering economically from the impacts of COVID-19. Across geographic, demographic and political lines, the needs are clear: Funding opportunities emerged as the top need for counties, closely followed by critical partnerships.

Eighty percent of survey respondents indicated that identifying funding sources is a top concern. Other concerns included meeting spending restrictions that may hamper long-term recovery efforts. Counties reported that funding support from the federal government via the CARES Act has been beneficial but insufficient.

Concerns remain about loss of revenue and the capacity to serve their residents. “We’re supposed to spend the CARES Act funding by the end of this year,” one county leader said. “What happens next year? This is a long recovery effort with short-term financial support.”

County leaders have also said they feel left out of conversations about how money could be well-spent and that their federal funding has come with too many strings attached. Notably, counties also identified a desire for funding for their key non-profit partners.

Counties reported that federal loan programs for small businesses through the CARES Act and the Small Business Administration have not met the needs of their residents.

Some counties, such as DeKalb County, Ga., have responded by implementing their own small business relief programs; many counties do not have the resources to employ such a strategy, however, while others have tried and faced legal challenges. Counties reported that minority- and woman-owned businesses were the least successful in securing loans from these federal programs.

NACo’s findings show that most counties are equally concerned with public health as they are with the economic threats of COVID-19. However, when ranking among concerns such as health, unemployment, education and housing, counties indicate that financial relief for both individuals and small businesses are top priorities. Small business owners and the elderly were identified as the most vulnerable. Counties are also burdened with the exacerbation of long-standing crises, such as insufficient broadband, particularly in rural counties and communities of color.


Public health concerns expand beyond the virus, including interactions with the opioid epidemic and mental health crises. Mercer County, W. Va. reported spikes in overdose cases and methamphetamine usage. Counties have also found themselves challenged with food shortages and upticks in social service applications. Housing and homelessness were also concerns for counties, which expressed varying capacities to address the issues.

County leaders remain concerned about unemployment

rates and want to help their residents navigate complicated unemployment benefits systems. “Most of these jobs are never coming back,” one county leader said. Counties reported devastating impacts of the reduced operations of key businesses, such as airports. Many leaders anticipate that the job loss in their counties is not over.

Counties were found to be largely satisfied with the information that they have access to in planning economic recovery, and value partnerships with NACo and similar organizations that are disseminating resources and establishing platforms for sharing knowledge. However, they want information about how to support vulnerable residents, share best practices and find out about COVID-19 breakthroughs.

COVID-19 has some bright sides. In its survey, NACo found that counties were encouraged by the sharing of best practices, as well as the swiftness they’ve seen as they rebuild and streamline previously clunky government operations, which will be key to ensuring recovery is equitable for all county residents.

Look for the release of NACo’s full county needs assessment report, generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, later this fall. 

Katie Sullivan is program manager, Resilient Economies and Communities, in NACo’s County Innovations Lab.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

JAYNE SABAITIS

NACo Board Member
Administrator, Maple Lawn Medical Care Facility
Branch County, Mich.



Sabaitis

Number of years involved in NACo: 3

Years in public service: 16

Occupation: Nursing home administrator

Education: Bachelor’s degree in business administration from Western Michigan University

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Tell our residents and family members that they can’t visit each other in person during this time of COVID-19.

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Barack and Michelle Obama and Garth Brooks

A dream I have is to: Retire and travel with my husband.

You’d be surprised to learn: I will not eat fruit with anything else. It has to be separate unless it’s in pie.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done: Went snorkeling in St. Croix. (I’m not very adventurous as I focus on all of the things that can go wrong.)

My favorite way to relax is: Sitting by a campfire on the lake.

I’m most proud of: My children, ages 11 and 9.

Every morning I read: The daily weather.

My pet peeve is: Handwritten signs and inside-out laundry.

My motto is: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

The last book I read was: I’m reading the Janet Evanovich Stephanie Plum series. I’m on book 6 out of 26.

My favorite movie is: *Remember the Titans*

My favorite music is: Country— Garth Brooks and Darius Rucker

My favorite U.S. president is: John F. Kennedy

My favorite meal is: TACOS.

I could eat them every day!



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**GET TO
KNOW...****Cuyahoga County, Ohio****Welcome, Cuyahoga
County, Ohio**

Cuyahoga County is located in northern Ohio and borders Lake Erie. The county was established in 1810 and named after the Native American word “Cuyahoga,” which means crooked river. The county seat of Cleveland, home to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame museum, prospered as a successful industrial site and trade center after the completion of the Ohio and Erie Canal on Lake Erie.

As one of the most populous counties in the state, Cuyahoga County averages over 3,000 residents per square mile. Many county residents work in the service, manufacturing and shipping industries.

Cuyahoga County was home to both John D.



Rockefeller and President James Garfield. The county has three major league professional sports franchises — the Cleveland Browns, the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Cleveland Indians — increasing tourism in the area.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

**CN SPOTLIGHT****Hurricane Watch in St. Bernard Parish, La.**

St. Bernard Parish, La. officials attend the Sept. 14 Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness meeting to get the latest updates regarding Hurricane Sally’s impact to the state. Sally’s storm surge overtopped a series of ring levees.

St. Bernard Parish President Guy McInnis told the local CBS affiliate: “What happened was once that wind turned just a little bit that water started trying to get out of here and it came over the road and it just filled up that area between the road and the levee,” McInnis said. “So, that water is going to be sitting there a long time. The pumping capacity to get that water out, we just don’t have it. So, depending on the tide and how long it takes for the tide to fall, we’re going to have to cut the levee and let the water go out on its own. Our crews worked their butt off for the last three days to prevent this, but sometimes Mother Nature wins.”

Inspiration Overload!

NACo Knowledge Network | Coming Fall 2020

naco.org/education-events

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES **NACo**
NACo Knowledge Network

BRIGHT IDEAS | TRAVIS COUNTY, Texas

Evacuation Planning Enhanced by Neighborhood Fire Drills

PROBLEM:

Communities are dealing with more weather-related disasters as climate change is leading to extreme weather events.

SOLUTION:

Hold drills to practice how individuals can respond during real weather-related emergencies.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

For one community in Travis County, Texas, the best way to prepare for future disasters is with practice.

Surrounded by preserved land, the Comanche Trail community is at high risk for a wildfire. Residents live in 200 homes within the community, which sits at the end of a long, narrow road that is the only way in and out of the neighborhood.

The Austin-Travis County region and its 1.4 million residents ranked fifth in wildfire risk for urban areas, according to the 2019 Wildfire Risk Report by Core Logic, a financial services company.

The county experienced the impacts of wildfires in September 2011 when a fire destroyed more than 1,600 homes and killed four in the town of Bastrop.

That same day, the Steiner Ranch Fire threatened more than 4,000 homes while 10,000 residents attempted to evacuate on a one-way-in and one-way-out road system.

Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea, who has worked on climate issues for more than three decades, created the neighborhood-based fire drill pilot project to help prepare county residents for future fire disasters.

"That's why you do a fire drill in school, so you don't have a bunch of school-aged kids running around screaming and



Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea (center) and county public safety staff meet after the neighborhood fire drill at the Comanche Trail Community in Travis County, Texas. Photos courtesy of Travis County

crazy if there's ever a disaster," she said.

Officials held the first drill in March 2019 at the Comanche Trail community, which is located in Shea's precinct.

A planning team consisting of Comanche Trail residents, the county public safety staff, the Travis County Emergency Service District 6 fire department and other community members met for over a year to create a model for community wildfire preparedness and plan for the drill.

Additionally, a block captain on each street within the neighborhood conducted evening home meetings prior to the drill where residents were educated about wildfire protection methods, preparing for disasters and recognizing the importance of evacuating.

"I think because of their heightened awareness of their vulnerability to wildfire, they were interested in doing it," Shea said.

During the drill, Comanche Trail residents received alerts about a wildfire threat and practiced evacuating their

neighborhood.

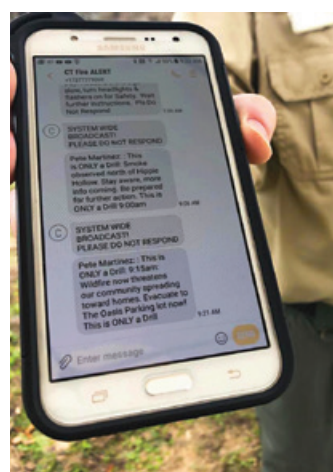
They traveled to a nearby shelter area where they registered and received post-evacuation information.

Halfway through the drill, officials informed residents that the "fire" blocked the one escape road and directed residents to an alternate safety zone.

"I think there was an excitement that was building around being part of an experiment that could not only help them, but could be expanded to be of use to neighborhoods all across Texas and nationally," Shea said.

As part of the drill, Shea said officials advised residents to prepare a bag with essential documents and medications to practice what they would need to take with them in case of a real fire-related emergency where they couldn't return home for several days.

"We need to be doing that in our neighborhoods, in our coastal communities, in areas that have experienced flooding," she said. "People need to know what to do and I think



Text messages alert residents during the fire drill.

there's going to be more and more of a demand for it."

The county created the "How to Plan a Neighborhood Fire Drill" template with an application form for other communities who are interested in replicating the drills.

"We know every place on the planet is going to see more and more intense and potentially deadly weather extremes and so there simply aren't enough first responders to rescue everyone which means we better figure out what we need to do to get ourselves out of harm's way," Shea said.

A University of Texas professor helped conduct a post-drill survey to determine the value of the fire drill. The survey found that all respondents gave the drill the highest value score and agreed that it would be beneficial for other neighborhoods.

"Every season that passes we see more and more climate-related catastrophes and anything that we can do to help people be better prepared, I think we have an obligation as elected officials to do," Shea said.

View the Neighborhood Fire/Evacuation Drill Application at <https://bit.ly/3ciAGAg>.

Contact Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea at brigid.shea@traviscountytx.gov for more information about Travis County's neighborhood fire drills. **CN**

Travis County's Preparing for a Wildfire with Neighborhood Fire Drills is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Risk and Emergency Management category.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

CALIFORNIA

Residents in **SULLIVAN COUNTY** may soon have access to a **countywide wireless internet network**. County officials voted to create the Broadband Local Development Corporation which received federal grant funding to build two LTE wireless broadband communications antennae towers, the *Times Herald-Record* reported. The system is expected to cost \$2.5 to \$3.5 million and county officials are seeking federal grants to build the additional 10 towers by the end of 2023.



The **VENTURA COUNTY** Health Department is **prohibiting door-to-door trick or treating** to prevent the spread of COVID-19 this Halloween. The county released guidelines that prohibit Halloween gatherings, events or parties, carnivals, festivals, live entertainment, haunted houses and trunk or treating, according to KEYT-TV. Drive-by parades, online parties, pumpkin patches, drive-in movies and decorating houses are allowed.

COLORADO

LARIMER COUNTY joined with Fort Collins to **preserve more than 3,500 acres of ranch land** as open space. Commissioners approved the first phase of the Laramie Foot-hills Mountains to Plains 2020 Expansion Project and agreed to buy a ranch for \$3.5 million, the *Coloradoan* reported. The project will preserve wild-life habitats and the viewshed from the Red Mountain Open Space's trail system.

Colorado voters will now **receive text messages and emails** with updates on their mailed ballots for the 2020 election. The expanded BallotTrax system notifies a voter when a ballot has been mailed, arrives at the county clerk's office and has been processed, Colorado Public Radio reported. Only four counties in the state have previously offered the automatic tracking.

FLORIDA

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY hosted the **Drive and Drop Gun Swap** for county residents who have firearms they no longer want. Through the program, sheriffs take the rifles and handguns, check if they were stolen and then destroy the firearms, WFLA reported. Residents who drop off guns receive cash or other incentives. The goal of the program is to keep unwanted firearms off the streets.

HAWAII

Voters in Hawaii will decide this fall on **caps for term limits** for officials in the City and **COUNTY OF HONOLULU, HAWAII COUNTY** and **MAUI COUNTY**. The questions on the ballot will refer to the term limits for the prosecutor in the City and County of Hawaii, council members in Hawaii County and the mayor and council members in Maui County, according to the *Honolulu Civil Beat*.

The **COUNTY OF KAUAI** established the **Rise to Work program** to provide short-term employment for individuals displaced by the COVID-19 outbreak. Funded with \$2 million of CARES Act funding, workers will be hired for full time and part time temporary positions in September and work for up to 12 weeks. The program will also help employers looking to expand their team or hire employees with



GEORGIA

HENRY COUNTY Commissioner Vivian Thomas is inspiring future leaders through the Government and Me Engaged (GAME) On Initiative to **engage youth in county government**. Students learn about civic education and the role of local government through the program. These "junior commissioners" participate in leadership and development training programs, meet local and state officials, visit the state capitol and receive a budget to learn how decisions impact the community.

new skills.

ILLINOIS

The board in **ADAMS COUNTY** finalized plans to construct a **new facility to store a surplus of personal protective equipment**. The building will store pandemic-related resources such as masks, gowns and other equipment that has been taking up space in the county's current buildings forcing other resources such as ambulances to be moved outside, WGEM reported. The costs for the new building will

be covered by COVID-19 funds.

MINNESOTA

The council in **ST. LOUIS COUNTY** voted against two bills that would **limit the powers** of County Executive Sam Page and the county health department. One bill would have required approval of more than two thirds from the council to extend a state of emergency declared by Page. The other bill would have required two-thirds of the council to approve to extend orders from the health department director.

Some county residents have been protesting Page's decisions including one to limit competitions for youth sports.

NEW YORK

With supplies still at a premium during the pandemic, **ULSTER COUNTY** Executive Pat Ryan has signed a bill **prohibiting price gouging** on personal protective equipment. Businesses would be prohibited from increasing prices on hand sanitizer, toilet paper, sanitizing wipes and other items of necessity during



the pandemic or other items of necessity in the event of a declared emergency.

- With big drops in their populations, counties are lobbying the state **to loosen minimum staffing requirements for their jails**. New state bail restrictions have cut county jail populations by 43 percent compared to July 2019, but revenue losses due to the pandemic have led counties to want to cut overtime and, in some cases, personnel, *The Leader* reported. The three-member Commission of Correction decides how many posts a jail must staff based on its layout, provisions in its employees' contracts and other factors besides fluctuating inmate numbers.

- Looking for more opportunities to **get people outdoors**, the **WARREN COUNTY** Soil and Water Conservation District and the Planning and Community Development Department have debuted the Warren County Tree Challenge.

The tree mapping smartphone app encourages residents to learn about tree identification in public recreational areas.

The app will prompt users to answer questions about the trees, including whether a species is unique to the area and if it is historically significant.



OHIO

In a stomach-churning twist of fate, some motorists in **CUYAHOGA COUNTY** won't feel their wallets get lighter when a **county law enforcement officer** approaches their car. Fifteen law enforcement agencies will be handing out 1,000 "golden tickets" to drivers "caught" wearing their seat belts. Prizes include gift cards for coffee, ice cream, movie and music downloads and a chance to win \$50 or \$200 gift cards, Cleveland's ABC affiliate reported.

TENNESSEE

The **WILLIAMSON COUNTY** Board of Commissioners accepted a task force's recommendation to **remove the Confederate flag** from the county seal.

A nine-member county seal task force studied business and public impacts of the flag's presence on the seal, which was adopted in 1968 and depicts a Confederate flag draped over a cannon. Research showed the flag's presence threatened tourism, business recruitment and retention, *The Tennessean* reported.

"To some in our community, the Confederate flag is seen as a symbol of treason, white supremacy, racial terror, exclusion and the inhumane enslavement and debasement of Africans in America," the task force report said.

Removing the seal from the courthouse's tile floor would cost \$15,000, but it has been temporarily covered up with a \$20 rug. If the state historical commission approves the flag's removal, the commission



East Aultman Street, the main street through the White Pine County seat of Ely. Photo by Charlie Ban

NEVADA

Noting the onerous time commitment needed to apply for CARES Act funding and the limited staff of many of its members, the **NEVADA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES** will **administer grants for eight counties**.

NACO staff will handle the administrative work that goes with pursuing those grants, including paperwork, screening applications and follow-up with businesses. Counties will reimburse the association for work done by a contractor to vet applications.

"It would take at least a couple of weeks of a staff person's time, and most counties wouldn't have had the capacity to do it," Executive Director Dagny Stapleton told *Associations Now*.

would decide whether to leave the existing cannon in place of the flag, retire the seal or redesign the entire seal altogether.

TEXAS

The **HARRIS COUNTY** Commissioners Court created a corporation to take over the work done by the county's **toll road authority**. The corporation will manage the county's toll roads and contract with the county, with the commissioners court as the corporation's initial board of directors.

Supporters argued the restructuring allows for more discretion at the local level of how revenue from tolled highways can be spent, Click2Houston reported, because state law limits how money can be used from revenue generated by tolls. The agreement says the corporation would pay the county an initial \$300 million franchise fee to manage toll roads and an additional \$90 million annual franchise fee.

VIRGINIA

The **FAIRFAX COUNTY** Board of Supervisors have **prohibited firearms** and ammunition in county buildings,

Shooting Center, among other entities and activities.

Local governments have had the authority to regulate weapons and ammunition in public property since the 2020 legislative session. **ARLINGTON COUNTY** also passed a similar ordinance.

WASHINGTON

CHELAN COUNTY is considering establishing a **water bank** to ensure there are no barriers to future development. Areas in the Methow Valley, **SPOKANE COUNTY** and **KITTITAS COUNTY** have faced moratoriums on new construction because of a lack of groundwater.

All of the available water in Lake Chelan has already been applied for, the *Wenatchee World* reported, so this effort will focus on the Lake Chelan Basin. The plan at this stage would require people to pay fees when they buy water rights and, potentially, the county could acquire more water rights to allow for more development.

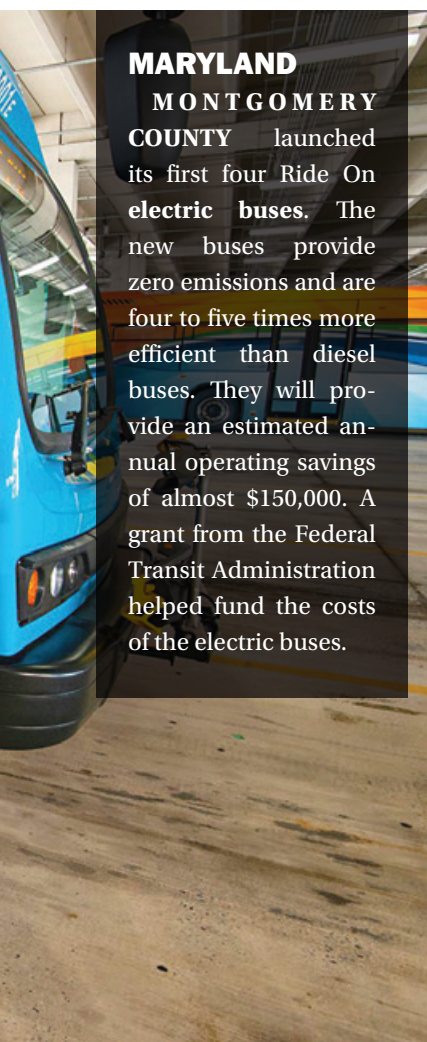
Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker scour the 50 states for News From Across the Nation. If your county has news we should see, contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.



VIRGINIA

This rendering shows from an aerial perspective what the Freestate Farms facility on Balls Ford Road will look like when there is compost in each of the various processing stages.

A **new composting facility** is projected to extend the life of the **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** landfill by 15 years, doubling the county's yearly composting capability for food and yard waste. The facility is part of a public-private partnership built by Freestate Farms on county land but financed by the company, Insidenova.com reported. It will divert an anticipated 80,000 tons of waste each year, nearly a 200 percent increase.



MARYLAND

MONTGOMERY COUNTY launched its first four Ride On **electric buses**. The new buses provide zero emissions and are four to five times more efficient than diesel buses. They will provide an estimated annual operating savings of almost \$150,000. A grant from the Federal Transit Administration helped fund the costs of the electric buses.

the HR DOCTOR

by Nick Gibiser

Cohesive County Operations During the Time of COVID-19

On March 12, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in Virginia. The threat of COVID-19 cast a shadow over the Commonwealth, and Chesterfield County officials knew major operational adaptations would be needed to continue serving a population of nearly 350,000 residents.

At that time, approximately 530 employees of Chesterfield County Government — 11.7 percent of the workforce — regularly worked remotely. But Chesterfield County's workforce was about to undergo a change.

A mass shift to telework would be necessary to help protect workers' health; leading that shift would be two departments whose relationship has proven to be symbiotic throughout the pandemic: Human Resources (HR) and Information Systems Technology (IST).

On the surface, both departments play vital, yet disparate, roles. In Chesterfield County, HR is responsible for developing, maintaining and improving the foundation upon which the workforce operates.

Under normal circumstances, HR's work ranges from hiring and managing employee compensation and benefits to resolving disputes and ensuring compliance with state and federal employment regulations.

Meanwhile, Chesterfield's IST Department governs the county's information technology and security, manages the technological infrastructure and operates at the forefront of technological solutions delivery.

As the threats of COVID-19 became apparent — and even before Gov. Northam declared a state of emergency — these responsibilities of empowering employees and advancing the county's technological capabilities began to coalesce, and HR

and IST had to align their priorities to ensure success.

For example, one of the first steps taken by HR was amending the county's Telework Program Packet, which establishes guidelines for a consistent application of telework practices across county departments.

In doing so, the packet provided departments needed governance to help ensure the security of county information and systems.

The amendments recommended Chesterfield County to minimizing the risk of exposure and transmission of infectious diseases through the workplace and outlined how employees may be required to perform their job functions in cases of mass-teleworking.

These enhancements to the telework guidelines may shift how the county issues office closure messaging for winter storms in the future.

For example, instead of being closed for adverse weather, the county now has the ability to be "opened virtually" with employees having the ability to provide customer service re-

motely.

As HR developed these new guidelines, IST identified a key component of the mass-telework shift: mobile workstations.

Many employees did not have a county-issued mobile computer, and some who did required reconfiguration of

Mindful of employee health, IST scheduled employees for staggered appointments to pick up their needed equipment.

their mobile workstations for at-home use or for access to the county's virtual private network (VPN).

A solution was quickly developed.

Mobile computers originally scheduled to be distributed as part of the county's Desktop Refresh Program were instead

deployed to employees on loan.

The year-old Desktop Refresh Program was initially established by IST, the Department of Budget and Management and county leaders to annually replace 20 percent of the county's computers with newer, mobile computers that would improve worker flexibility.

In addition to the 200 computers that were deployed as loaners, IST loaded needed software and configured an additional 800 computers.

This software installation included loading "softphone" technology on some mobile workstations, enabling employees to remotely manage the county's Emergency Operations Call Center and assist residents needing clarification on county services during the pandemic.

In addition, this technology allowed HR to continue serving Chesterfield County employees and operate its front desk telephone line in real time. Due to IST's implementation of DocuSign software, new and

emergency hires were able to complete necessary paperwork while staying at home.

Mindful of employee health, IST scheduled employees for staggered appointments to pick up their needed equipment, setting up four stations in the IST parking lot that abided by social distancing guidelines.

The department then deployed software installations and upgrades remotely to allow employees to connect to the county's network from home.

During this time, IST constantly monitored and expanded the systems used to connect the employees from home to the systems they needed within the enterprise.

Connections were monitored each day and IST staff worked to keep the home connection experience as close to the at-work experience as possible.

Because of a willingness to embrace this new relationship, HR and IST were responsible for a massive increase in telework capabilities in the county. As the departments continue to work to improve these capabilities, approximately 1,600 employees — around 40 percent of the county's active workforce — are now able to work from home.

Any successful response by a local government to such a disruption as a global pandemic will, of course, require the cooperation, flexibility and innovativeness of administration as well as every single department.

When the situation requires the enablement of mass-teleworking and a fundamental shift in a government's operating paradigm, the departments of Human Resources and Information System Technology (or their equivalents) must be prepared to work together, often in new ways. **CN**

This guest column was written by Nick Gibiser, public information officer for Chesterfield County, Va.

