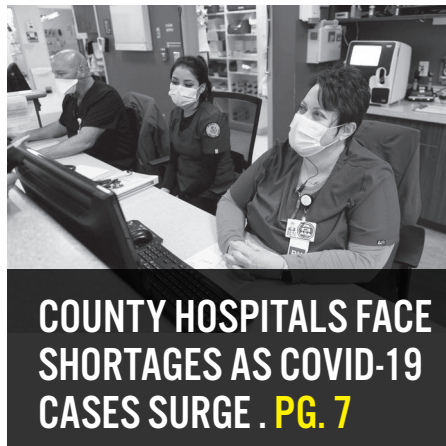




COUNTY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL BUSINESSES. **PG. 4**



COUNTY HOSPITALS FACE SHORTAGES AS COVID-19 CASES SURGE. **PG. 7**



COUNTIES CREATE SAFE HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES DURING COVID-19. **PG. 9**

Vaccine development progresses to final steps

by **Blaire Bryant**
and **Sarah Gimont**

Pfizer and its partner BioNTech became the first COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers to apply for an emergency use authorization (EUA) last month from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The application came days after Pfizer announced that its vaccine showed 95 percent efficacy at the completion of its Phase 3 clinical trial.

While Pfizer was the first to apply for an EUA, Moderna quickly followed with an EUA application Nov. 30, after final analysis of its vaccine showed it is more than 94 percent effective. These recent updates in vaccine development present serious implications for counties, which will play an integral role in coordinating vaccine distribution logistics for a process that could start as early as this month.

The results from Pfizer's Phase 3 trial provided the data needed to seek FDA approval, the final step in the vaccine development process. The FDA grants EUAs during national emergencies, when the known benefits of a product outweigh

See **VACCINE** page 2



President-elect Joe Biden speaks to members of the NACo Board of Directors Dec. 4 during the group's Fall Board Meeting. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and Julie Chavez Rodriguez, who will direct Biden's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, also spoke to Board members. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

President-elect Biden, county government vet, addresses NACo Board of Directors

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

If faith in government is going to be restored, it's going to happen at the county level, with federal help, President-elect Joe Biden told the NACo Board of Directors Dec. 4 at its Fall Board Meeting. And working closely with county officials will be a priority, he told them.

In addition to Biden, a two-year veteran of the New Castle County, Del. Council, Vice

President-elect Kamala Harris also spoke to members at the remote meeting. Harris served for two terms as district attorney in San Francisco County, Calif.

In addition to hearing from the incoming administration,

the NACo Board, called to order by NACo President Gary Moore, judge/executive for Boone County, Ky., also approved a proposal to adopt a remote format and expanded schedule for the 2021 Legislative Conference, approved na-

tional policy priorities for the new year and outlined the process and timeline for selecting a South Region representative.

"You are the single most consequential government

See **NACo Board** page 3

NACo urges Congress to act on direct funding, CRF deadline extension

by **Eryn Hurley**

NACo is urging bipartisan agreement on a new round of direct flexible funding to local governments of all sizes in the next COVID-19 response package.

In a Dec. 2 letter to congressional leadership, NACo also highlighted the need for Congress to immediately pass

legislation that would extend the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) deadline. The letter can be viewed here: <https://www.naco.org/letter-covid-relief>.

The letter highlights the devastating fiscal impact of the pandemic on America's counties, which could total a combined \$202 billion through fiscal year 2021. These costs are compounded by the con-

tinued job loss in the local government sector. In October 2020, local governments experienced the largest decrease in employment — with non-education jobs ranging from law enforcement officers to health care practitioners, social workers, maintenance crews, construction workers

See **LEGISLATION** page 2

Vaccine distribution could strain local budgets

From VACCINE page 1

its known and potential risks. To date, the FDA has authorized 289 COVID-19 tests and five treatments via EUA, however, Pfizer and Moderna are the first to request approval for a vaccine.

EUAs differ from biologics license applications (BLAs), which involve a lengthier and more substantial process of FDA approval that requires significant evidence of both safety and effectiveness. Despite differences in these approval processes, the FDA has firmly maintained that EUA approvals for the COVID-19 vaccine, a two- to four-week process on average, will be transparent and adhere to scientific integrity.

The transparency of the EUA approval process is critical to counties' ability to create public confidence in a vaccine. The information provided will be important to the messaging strategy employed by county public health officials who are responsible for ensuring equitable vaccine uptake.

The Pfizer vaccine will need to be stored at the extremely cool temperature of minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit. While all the vaccines in development will need to be stored at very cool temperatures, including Moderna's, Pfizer's vaccine



appears to be the only one that requires storage temperatures below normal freezer or refrigerant levels. The storage requirements will pose unprecedented technological and logistical challenges to county governments and local points of dispensing sites, which will need to help facilitate travel and storage of vaccines.

Additionally, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, like most others in development, will require two doses, further underscoring the need for supply, staffing and technological resources to support these efforts in local communities.

The FDA has announced that it has scheduled meetings of its Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee Dec. 10 to discuss the request for EUA of a COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer and on Dec. 17 to discuss the Moderna vaccine. If granted EUAs, the two companies are likely to begin rapid distribution of

the vaccine. Pfizer expects to produce globally up to 50 million vaccine doses by the end of 2020 and up to 1.3 billion doses in 2021, while Moderna is set to produce 20 million doses for U.S. distribution by the end of the year and up to 1 billion doses globally in 2021. Distribution of a vaccine will be resource-intensive for state and local governments and is likely to strain county budgets. Although the CDC has granted states roughly \$200 million for vaccine planning purposes, given the logistical and supply needs, state health officials have estimated that over \$8 billion will be needed for successful distribution of a vaccine.

Counties are an essential component of any vaccine distribution strategy and, as the development of vaccines continues to progress, support for county governments and for local public health will be critical.

NACo will continue to advocate for additional federal aid for counties while also monitoring, tracking and reporting on COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution updates.

For more information and resources visit NACo's COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Toolkit: naco.org/covid19/vaccine-distribution-plans. **CN**

Blair Bryant is an associate legislative director and Sarah Gimont is a legislative assistant in NACo's Government Affairs department.

Contact your Senators, Reps

From LEGISLATION page 1

and administrative support, remaining 354,000 below its February 2020 level. In total, local governments have lost 1.2 million jobs since the outset of the pandemic.

Over the past several months, members in both chambers of Congress have introduced several proposals that would address the immediate needs of local governments, including counties, in pandemic response activities.

The HEROES Act (H.R. 6800), as passed by the U.S. House, would allocate \$187.5 billion in direct, flexible relief to counties of all sizes based on population.

HEROES Act funding could be used both for tremendous public health expenditures and the catastrophic losses in county revenue, both of which are key county priorities in the next round of COVID-19 relief.

Most recently, on Dec. 1, a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators unveiled its \$908 billion coronavirus aid proposal, aiming to help break the gridlock on the latest COVID-19 negotiations. This framework contains broad objectives for a

future relief bill but not any legislative text.

The "COVID-19 Emergency Relief Framework" contains many county priorities including increased food assistance and emergency funding for childcare, re-upping the Paycheck Protection Program, reviving unemployment benefits and providing \$160 billion in aid to state and local governments.

The framework also includes an extension of the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) Dec. 30, 2020 deadline, and new funding for vaccine development, distribution, testing and tracing and the U.S. Postal Service.

As Congress considers next steps on these proposals, NACo urges county leaders to contact their U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives to support direct and flexible funding for counties of all sizes.

To facilitate this process, NACo has multiple, customizable advocacy resources available at <http://www.naco.org/covid19>. **CN**

Eryn Hurley is an associate legislative director in NACo's Government Affairs department.



SNAP/STATS

TOP 5 MOST POPULAR CHRISTMAS TREES



Balsam Fir
Douglas Fir
Fraser Fir
Scotch Pine
Colorado Blue Spruce

Source: Farmer's Almanac

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Biden calls for greater intergovernmental coordination on pandemic response, relief



Vice President-elect Kamala Harris addresses members of NACo's Board of Directors Dec. 4.

From NACo BOARD page 1

officials," Biden said. "You represent more people, other than governors, and you have responsibility for things that aren't as clearly understood by the public. That's exactly what you're supposed to do and are doing. You're also the basis on which people have faith or don't have faith in the government — it's all local."

Though the U.S. Supreme Court gets a disproportionate amount of attention, Biden added, the actions and functions of local county courts will show much more immediate results for most Americans, who also know when the services they need aren't provided.

"What you do, whether you're responsive or not makes them wonder whether government is responsive or not," Biden said. "I think, with all due respect, you sometimes underestimate your consequence."

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be the prism through which people will view how much they trust the government, and the actions by Congress and his administration, the support they give state and local governments, will be paramount, he said. Biden is urging Congress to pass a \$900 billion relief package during the lame duck session, noting it would have to be the first of several such relief packages.

"The economy is stalling, it remains in the midst of one of the worst economic job crises of modern history, but it

doesn't have to stay that way," he said. "If we act now, we regain the momentum to start to build back a better future, and I don't think there's any time to lose."

"The sooner we pass the funding, the sooner we can turn the corner on COVID-19, but any package passed during the lame duck session won't be enough, it will just be a start."

Biden's address to county leaders was the latest in a series of his transition team's consultations with state and local leaders.

He sees a clear consensus, calling for better intergovernmental coordination on dealing with the pandemic, on the medical front as well as on the economic front.

"There's a strong sense of common purpose, a real desire for bipartisanship between the cities, states and counties and the federal government," he said. "There's a strong consensus that we need to move forward in a coordinated way on implementing what works, including federal guidance on universal masking, expanded testing, delivering economic relief to counties, cities, states and their communities sooner, rather than later and with greater flexibility for you all to shore up your budgets and meet your needs — this includes clearer guidance for reimbursements on COVID testing and treatment."

Biden recognized the role counties have been playing in handling local health functions during the pandemic, which include COVID testing, contact tracing, administra-

tion of hospitals and long-term care facilities, coroners' and medical examiners' offices and more.

"You haven't made it a partisan issue, it's about the health of your residents," he said, promising to take the same approach in aiding local governments, when he introduced Julie Chavez Rodriguez as his designee for director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. "It doesn't matter if you're from a blue county or a red county, it doesn't matter a bit to us. Every American community deserves the full support of the American president as a true partner."

Biden also acknowledged the anonymity in which county officials often operate. As he campaigned for the New Castle County, Del. Council in 1970, he imagined the reaction from the residents when he knocked on their door, asking for their votes.

"They'd look at me and I knew what they were wondering — 'What the hell does the county council do?'"

In addition to hearing from Biden, Board members also took care of NACo business. With the continued stress on county officials during the pandemic likely to continue through next March, a public health order limiting gatherings in Washington, D.C. and the host hotel temporarily out of operation, the Board voted to hold the 2021 Legislative Conference remotely. The format allows for an expanded schedule, broken down as follows:



NACo President Gary Moore helms the NACo Fall Board Meeting.

• **Late February:** Policy steering committee meetings

• **Early March:** NACo Board meeting, with the Board sitting in as the Resolutions Committee

• **Early March:** Federal policy conference, workshops, plenary sessions and networking opportunities. This includes virtual advocacy with congressional leaders and committees, and senior White House and federal agency officials.

NACo's Virtual Federal Policy Summit in October served as a successful rehearsal for a larger remote conference.

With a vacancy on the Executive Committee, NACo's South Region will select an interim representative Jan. 14 to fill six months of Person County, N.C. Commissioner Ray Jef-

fers' term.

National policy priorities

The Board approved 10 national policy priorities for 2021:

- Advocate for additional federal COVID-19 relief in the form of direct, flexible aid to counties of all sizes
- Restore the balance of federalism and optimize intergovernmental partnerships
- Promote county infrastructure priorities
- Promote mental health and substance use treatment and address essential criminal justice reforms
- Boost advanced broadband deployment and accessibility while preserving local decision-making

See NACo BOARD page 5

OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS

Ikaika Anderson
Honolulu County, Hawaii

Cindy Bobbitt
Grant County, Okla.

Ken Borton
Otsego County, Mich.

Cindy Bulloch
Iron County, Utah

Richard Cecil
Delaware Association of Counties

Greg Cox
San Diego County, Calif.

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Bryan Desloge
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G. Riki Hokama
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David Landis Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Alaska

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Cheshire County, N.H.

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Summers County, W. Va.

James Zwetzig
Morgan County, Colo.

Colorado county program helps local businesses

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The numbers in Mesa County, Colo. held steady for three months at 200. Then, in November, 400 more. But these weren't coronavirus cases, they were businesses signing on to demonstrate their commitment to safe operations during the pandemic.

Now, the county's "Five Star" certification program, through the county health department and the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, has more than 600 local businesses following strict guidelines and the county's groundwork during the first eight months of the pandemic is helping support the program even as infections rise.

The buy-in, according to Chamber President and CEO Diane Schwenke, has been dramatic.

"Early on, we didn't have many people wearing masks, and there was some lip service being paid by some of our establishments because the overall risk factor was perceived as low," she said. "We've wanted to approach this with a carrot, rather than a stick."

Jeff Kuhr, executive director of the health department, has appreciated the help in opening a "second front" on the war against the pandemic with the chamber's help.

"Public health cannot always be the face of what we're doing," he said. "You've got people who want your community to be completely open and you've got people who want your community to be completely closed, but this is a perfect middle ground because we have assurances that the businesses that are opening with the Five Star certification are operating responsibly."

"It was driven by people who wanted us to tell the community about them because they were doing everything they were supposed to, based on the guidelines."

The program debuted in July, as restrictions began lifting to 30 percent of capacity, then 50 percent. As businesses opened up and requested variances, the health department brain-



Staff at the Hot Tomato Cafe proudly display their business' Five Star certification from the Mesa County, Colo. Health Department. Photo courtesy of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce

stormed with the Chamber of Commerce on how to make the process more fluid.

"We were trying to figure out how we could get businesses to comply with best practices without inspecting every business and how to attract customers back into brick-and-mortar stores," Schwenke said. "This was right about when the governor's mask mandate was starting, and that seemed like the best first step."

It was an opening to direct businesses to the best practices promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state department of public health.

"There's always a little hesitation in inviting a government entity to come and inspect your business," she said. "Making it voluntary was key, and businesses didn't have to pay or be a member of the chamber to participate."

Participating businesses submit business safety plans, including the best practices, then submit to an inspection by county public health staff. If they score greater than 45 out of 55 on the inspection, with several mandatory criteria tailored to different industries, businesses are given a seal of approval for display on their windows and will be includ-

ed in a comprehensive list of qualified businesses published daily by the county health department, chamber of commerce and the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. Businesses that lose their certification are also listed.

But that isn't all. As COVID cases increase in Mesa County, these Five-Star certified businesses have some insulation from tightened restrictions by virtue of their safety measures. They might not all be able to continue operating at the 50 percent of capacity at the county's peak of relaxation, but restaurants can still offer limited on-premises seating.

"Mesa County held off the pandemic as long as we could," Kuhr said, helped in part by the county's inland location, a cocoon, as he put it, that provided a geographic buffer for the county and a head start to learn from first-wave counties' experiences.

"We protected the nursing homes, the jail and our homeless population, and we had the staff to do vigorous contact-tracing to clamp down on community spread."

What the county's data has pointed to during its first wave of infections this fall, was informal but sustained gatherings of family and friends indoors.

"The state orders to close down businesses that are not the source of the infection was not the answer," Kuhr said. "Why punish the businesses? We knew the sources of infection because we had been tracking it."

Even as the number of participating businesses has increased, the county health department and the chamber of commerce have dedicated more personnel to managing the program and streamlining the inspection process.

"The underlying integrity of the program is valid," Schwenke said.

"This has to be so hands-on; you also have to make sure you have capacity in the local health department [and] the local chamber to partner on the ground so they can do the work."

The program has offered both continuity during the up-tick and promotion for small businesses.

"We have a lot of small, mom-and-pop businesses and they don't have the resources for marketing that the chains do, so we wanted to preserve as many of those as we can and the only way we do that is to make customers feel as comfortable as possible," Schwenke said, noting the county's

recycling centers were full of cardboard boxes from internet retailers when businesses were initially restricted. "If you have this certification, you're among the best of the best, and that means a lot to people when they are worried about if they'll be safe while shopping."

The Five Star program faced opposition in late November when the state government warned Mesa County that the program would not be viable under tighter restrictions. Kuhr, Schwenke, county commissioners, hospital CEOs and the Daily Sentinel publisher all lobbied Gov. Jared Polis (D), which not only changed his mind, but has sparked more interest in adapting the program statewide. Larimer and Douglas counties have inquired about implementing the program.

Mesa County is not in the clear yet, and the state health department still has the program on its watch list, but Kuhr remains confident the Five Star program is the right approach.

"We have some counties that have said 'we're not closing anything down, regardless of what the state orders,'" he said. "But I ask wouldn't you rather have businesses open under a controlled environment rather than everyone going rogue?" **CN**

In-school testing programs combat COVID-19 spread in classrooms

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

It's been a rollercoaster ride for schools across the United States as they work to match the ebb and flow of increased COVID-19 cases by closing, re-opening and often using a hybrid model somewhere in between.

Counties are taking steps to keep school doors open and provide a place for in-person learning by launching in-school testing initiatives to find and isolate cases of the virus.

Onondaga County, N.Y. Executive J. Ryan McMahon said the county has held multiple initiatives to protect school communities since students returned to school in the fall.

The county launched a back-to-school testing initiative at the end of the summer which tested over 6,000 faculty members to find and isolate positive cases of the virus.

After school started, McMahon said the county launched a second asymptomatic saliva screening initiative in school buildings to test individuals each day and identify those who had the virus with no symptoms.

As cases began to increase throughout the state, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) enacted micro-cluster restrictions that impacted New York schools. Areas of Onondaga County were first listed in the yellow zone and some moved to the orange zone at the end of November.

For schools to remain open in the yellow zone, 20 percent of the in-person school community (which includes students, faculty and staff) must be tested per week. Schools in orange zones must close for four days and ensure that all students and school personnel receive a negative test before returning to in-person classes. Upon re-opening in the orange zone, 25 percent of the school is required to be tested per week.

McMahon said the county has over 70 school buildings which require multiple testing teams to meet the state's re-

quirements.

The county emergency management team is leading eight groups with team leaders from each county department. The teams are also targeting specific ZIP codes that have higher positivity rates in addition to testing within schools.

"Our priority was to keep kids in school for in-person learning," he said.

Parents have to opt-in for their child to be tested and according to McMahon, almost all parents opted to have their children tested. School personnel also opt-in to the testing program.

"We saw tremendous participation from our teachers and our faculty," he said.

The county uses BinaxNOW rapid tests to test asymptomatic individuals.

McMahon said these tests produce results in a timely fashion. Onondaga County also established a symptomatic testing site outside of school buildings where there is one line specifically for students and school

personnel.

"We do asymptomatic screening for schools looking for hidden pockets of the virus," McMahon said. "Then for symptomatic cases, we set up our own testing site where we're doing at least 200 symptomatic tests per day so that parents can quickly get their children back into the classroom."

McMahon said as of Nov. 24, the county has seen "very little spread" of COVID-19 in classrooms.

"Kids going to school is the right thing for kids, but it also helps keep the economy open," he said. "Your continuity of care issues aren't disrupted."

With Onondaga County just being under the population requirement for CARES Act funding, county dollars are funding the testing initiatives.

McMahon said they have received testing kits through the state that were passed down from the federal government, which has been helpful despite the remaining personnel costs the county has to cover.

"We know for many of our kids when they're in school, we know they're safe, we know they're learning and we know they're getting fed," he said. "These are all important things for our community overall."

Officials in Suffolk County, N.Y., where certain areas have been designated in the yellow zone as of Nov. 23, also partnered with school districts to establish a school-based testing program.

County Executive Steve Bellone said during a Nov. 19 press conference that the targeted testing program's main goal is to keep schools open to allow for in-person learning.

"Testing is one of our most valuable tools in combatting the virus," he said.

The county's first free, school-based testing initiative launched in Hampton Bays where the county provided 400 rapid tests to students, teachers and faculty at the Hampton Bays school district.

Suffolk County Health Department nurses were on site at the Hampton Bays middle school to assist the school's nursing staff in administering tests.

Bellone said the school districts held a series of parent webinars to discuss the program and the school district determined which individuals will be tested.

"Our goal in launching this free school-based testing program is to be proactive in our effort to get control of these numbers in the county and to keep school open," he said.

According to Bellone, the Hampton Bays area has recently seen increased COVID-19 positivity rates.

Within a five-day period, the Hampton Bays rate was around 6.5 percent, compared to the overall 3.5 percent rate throughout the county.

"We're going to be proactive which is what this testing program is about," he said. "It's a part of our larger comprehensive effort to get our arms around these numbers and stop the surge in the county." **CN**

Board meeting

From NACo BOARD page 3

- Support full funding for Payments in Lieu of Taxes and the Secure Rural Schools program
- Promote county priorities in future Environmental Protection Agency and other federal rulemaking
- Strengthen election security and safety
- Enhance community resilience through regional and local disaster preparedness
- Promote workforce opportunities and supportive services for county residents in changing economies.

Candidates for NACo second VP

Candidates who wish to run for the office of NACo second vice president should notify Executive Director Matt Chase in writing of his or her intent by Jan. 31, 2021. Contact Jenny Hilscher at jhilscher@naco.org to do so and for a full accounting of guidelines related to campaigning.

New Board members

- **Dan Eggleston**, chief, Alameda County Department of Fire Rescue, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), Affiliate
- **Judd Freed**, director, Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Ramsey County, Minn. and president, International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), Affiliate
- **Robert Gelder**, commissioner, Kitsap County, Wash.
- **Brent Johnson**, Assembly member, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska
- **Joey Manahan**, councilmember, City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii
- **Alexander Mirabella**, Freeholder chairman, Union County, N.J.
- **Greg Puckett**, commissioner, Mercer County, W.V.
- **Tom Tombarello**, commissioner, Rockingham County, N.H.
- **Jonathan Vlaming**, associate superintendent, Three Rivers Park District, Minn., National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO), Affiliate
- **Clay Walker**, mayor, Denali Borough, Alaska **CN**



An individual receives a COVID-19 test as part of in-school testing initiatives in Onondaga County, N.Y. Photo courtesy of Onondaga County

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QUESTIONS?

Contact awards@naco.org



As COVID-19 surges, county hospitals face staffing challenges, space shortages

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Nationwide hospitalizations for COVID-19 patients reached an all-time high at the end of November.

Over 90,000 individuals were hospitalized across the United States with the coronavirus in the last week of November, setting a record-breaking number for hospitalizations during the pandemic, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the overall weekly hospitalization rate is now at its highest point in the pandemic.

"Our hospital is full," said Dr. John Fankhauser, CEO of the Ventura County, Calif. Medical Center.

The county-run hospital is beyond capacity for adult medical surgical space and is holding patients in the emergency room each day as the facility experiences an uptick in emergency room visits, he said.

The Ventura County Medical Center is utilizing an overflow area in a vacated facility that used to serve as the former hospital.

Over a 12-day span, the number of COVID-19 patients jumped from one to 16.

"We've restored one floor of that hospital, so we have been using that throughout the crisis for overflow and it's currently 100 percent capacity, so we're looking to staff additional beds in that overflow unit," he said.

The medical center has nine ICU beds, nine telemetry beds, 12 definitive observation unit beds and 48 general medical/surgical beds.

Fankhauser works with other hospitals throughout Ventura County to discuss capacity challenges.

He said the Ventura County Medical Center is one of the hospitals that will expand capacity if needed.

"We're prepared to bring more patients in and we purchased more beds for that space," he said.

The hospital's greatest chal-



The Minidoka Memorial Hospital is a county-run facility located in Minidoka County, Idaho. Photo courtesy of Minidoka Memorial Hospital

lenge is staffing.

"We have a really significant challenge finding the staff that are needed to staff the ICU and the medical surgical units," he said.

In anticipation of an increased number of COVID-19 cases through the winter, the hospital has a surge plan that includes contracts with registries and visiting nurse agencies to provide more staffing and the repurposing of vacant space if necessary.

"The surge is real and this is something that can affect all of us," Fankhauser said.

Erica Murray, president and CEO of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems, said county-run hospitals throughout California are seeing a sharp uptick in cases and preparing for rises in hospitalization numbers.

"There's typically a lag between a spike in cases and hospitalizations, so I would characterize the situation for California's county hospitals as 'braced,'" she said.

Murray said one of the benefits of being a county hospital is the strong connection to other

county departments to coordinate supplies.

She agreed with Fankhauser that the greatest challenge is with staffing. Earlier in the pandemic when there were high numbers of cases throughout California, other locations had relatively low numbers which allowed for flexibility with staffing.

"Now with everyone in crisis mode and nurse registries drying up, the potential for health care workers themselves to get sick and just the very understandable fatigue and burnout of a marathon and not a sprint, staffing levels are a huge concern," she said.

Murray said county hospitals are prepared for a potentially larger outbreak this winter from the experiences they had with surge preparation in the spring. The situation has left many county hospitals planning for the worst, but hoping for the best.

"What we're seeing are numbers and the greatest fear is that those numbers are going to translate into patients and that we're soon going to be overwhelmed," she said.

In Minidoka County, Idaho,



Nurses work at the Minidoka Memorial Hospital in Minidoka County, Idaho, a county-run critical access facility seeing an increased number of COVID-19 patients. Photo by Drew Nash, Magicvalley.com

Emergency Management Coordinator Kim Vega also serves as the emergency management director for Minidoka Memorial Hospital, a county-run critical access facility.

Vega said the hospital has been seeing an increase in cases over the last few months with an average of three to four COVID-19 patients each day at the emergency room department.

With 17 beds and three specifically for COVID patients, Vega said the hospital can treat COVID patients unless they need a ventilator, in which case they will be sent to other hospital facilities located 40 miles away.

However, Vega explained that other hospitals in the area are facing their own capacity challenges and are sometimes unable to admit additional patients.

"With all of south central and eastern Idaho being hit so hard, it's getting to the point where it's harder and harder to find places to send patients," she said.

Staffing has also proven to be a challenge for the hospital.

"It's hard to run a small community hospital when so much of your staff is out," she said. "Our biggest issue hasn't been that we don't have enough room, it's been we don't have enough staff." **CN**

NACo launches student art competition for NCGM

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

As part of NACo President Gary Moore's LEAD initiative, we are building on the core themes of Leadership, Education, Action and Development. We are magnifying educational programs that help enrich the public's understanding of county government.

NACo is spreading the word about how counties operate to children and young adults across the country by inviting them to create artwork for a 2021-2022 "Counties Matter" calendar to celebrate April as National County Government Month.

The goal is to start a dialogue with students to help them learn about county responsibilities and leadership. Students are 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 will have access to an online toolkit on the National County Government Month web page (www.NACo.org/NCGM) that will include artwork ideas, social media posts, a customizable press release and more so you can share information about the art competition with schools and communities.

Winning artwork, 18 entries in all, will be selected and featured in a glossy 18-month NACo calendar, which will be distributed to NACo members nationwide. Winners will also be announced in *County News* and their artwork may be featured at NACo events and at NACo headquarters in Washington, D.C. Winning students will receive pizza parties for their class from the calendar sponsor.

Before submitting any artwork for consideration, students must make sure that they are eligible and able to adhere to all of the competition guidelines.



Eligibility

- Only students living in the United States, who are 18 years of age and younger in grades 1 through 12 during the 2020-2021 academic year are eligible.
- Each submission must be original artwork created in the current school year by one student.

Artwork guidelines

- Submitted artwork must present a county activity that shows how "Counties Matter" and inspired by the sentence "I love my county because..."
- The artwork must reflect some aspect of a county government function, service or program, to celebrate National

County Government Month.


- The artwork must be horizontal 11" x 8.5" (PDF or JPEG). The most important elements of the artwork must not extend beyond 10.5" x 8" to account for trimming during the calendar production process.

Judging criteria

- Technical skill: The artwork must display artistic skill in painting, drawing or digital art.
- Creativity: The artwork must be original in its expression of a personal vision or voice. It must be the student's own work and cannot be plagiarized or in violation of any copyright.
- Artist's statement: Along with the artwork, each student is required to submit a statement that explains how "Counties Matter" in their community or complete the sentence "I love my county because..."
- Each entry must include the artist's name, grade, school, county and contact information (for the student, a parent or guardian's email address and phone number) and a teacher (email address and

phone numbers).

Deadline and submission requirements

- The competition submission period opens Dec. 7, 2020, and closes May 31, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. ET.
- Students must submit their artwork for consideration via NACo.org/ncgm.
- The artwork must be submitted as a PDF or JPEG. (Winners will be notified and asked to mail their original artwork to NACo.)
- The artist's statement including name, age, grade level, school, teacher or art teacher and contact information for a guardian or teacher must be submitted as a .doc or .docx file.
- For digital art or graphic design submissions, the design must be 300 dpi and RGB color.
- Only one submission per student is allowed.
- There is no entry fee. 

For more information, visit naco.org/ncgm.



Inspiration Overload!

NACo Knowledge Network

www.naco.org/education-events

Counties adapt holiday events to meet COVID-19 restrictions

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

For the Parks and Recreation Department in Watauga County, N.C., this year's holiday event is being called a "cheer spreader."

Following a year dominated by a global pandemic filled with sickness, unemployment and economic turmoil, COVID-19 has not stopped county parks and recreation departments from celebrating the season in pandemic-friendly ways while keeping all involved safe.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation is hosting a drive-through Christmas parade to encourage residents to get into the holiday spirit.

Recreation Specialist Keron Poteat said all of the annual parades in the area were cancelled because of the pandemic, which encouraged the county department to provide a safe event for the community.

"Folks who are typically driving down the road as the parade marchers, they're going to be stationary in parking spaces and the public will be driving through our parking lot to see all of the different exhibits that will be participating," she said.

Dancers, bands, businesses, the fire department and of course, Santa, will be among 30 vendors participating in the parade while people drive by and a DJ plays Christmas music.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation Director Stephen Poulous said the parade will be held in the parking lot of the county's new \$40 million recreation center, where construction has been delayed because of COVID-19.

"We're not open yet, but the parking lot lends itself to this venture," he said.

The department is hoping to make the parade an annual event.

"We're hoping to bring a little bit of normalcy back to 2020," Poteat said.

In Chatham County, N.C., the parks and recreation department is hosting a similar



Santa rides in a Henrico County, Va. firetruck as part of the Henrico Holiday Express Tour where decorated county vehicles visited local communities. Photo courtesy of Henrico County

occasion and modifying its Holiday in the Park event to bring people together from the safety of their cars.

Last year, participants attended the event in person, walking around the park to watch a tree-lighting ceremony, visit different stations, participate in games and sit on Santa's lap.

In the year of the pandemic, families will drive to the park, stay inside their cars and roll down the windows to look at a large Christmas tree, lights and receive gifts including a free ornament kit, a reindeer food kit and candy canes.

Santa will also make an appearance alongside a mailbox where kids can drop off letters to be sent directly to the North Pole.

"We still wanted to be able to celebrate the holidays and do our best to serve our community and give them a reason to get out of the house and come out and celebrate," said Malloory Peterson, Chatham County Parks and Recreation program

supervisor.

To follow CDC recommendations, Peterson said all staff and volunteers will be wearing face masks, gloves and following social distancing guidelines during the free event.

"We knew that we weren't going to be able to have an in-person event, but we still wanted to find a way to get people out of their houses but in a safe way that they could engage and feel like a part of the community," she said.

The department is modeling the Holiday in the Park event after a similar drive-through event held for Halloween.

"We're trying to do our best to bring some holiday cheer to our community," Peterson said. "If one person comes to the event and has a good time, we'll consider it a success."

Community members in Henrico County, Va., didn't even have to leave their houses to get into the holiday spirit.

The department held the Henrico Holiday Express Tour the first week of December

which consisted of decorated county vehicles that drove through neighborhoods during a three-night stint.

Henrico Recreation and Parks Specialist Julian Charity said the department typically partners with the City of Richmond for an annual Christmas parade, which was held virtually this year.

The department wanted to host another event in response to the pandemic to engage the community and keep people safe.

"This is a way to kick off the holidays," he said.

Vehicles from county organizations including police, fire, libraries, public works and public utilities participated in the tour.

"2020 has kind of dealt us a bad hand, so we're trying to make the best of it," Charity said. "It's something that we can do just to meet you where you are and not have to put you into a huge crowd where people could feel uncomfortable." **CN**



WISE COUNTY, VA.

Wise County, Va. supervisors approved the county seal in 1976 as the official emblem for the county. Former County Administrator Joseph C. O'Brien designed the seal using red, spruce and deep gold colors and incorporated symbols to represent the county's history. Wise County registered the seal as its trademark in 2005.

The seal includes the year 1856 to represent when the county was established.



In the center of the seal, a tree is placed in an outline of the county to represent the *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, an early 1900s romance novel set in Wise County and written by John Fox, Jr.

The pick symbolizes coal mining.

The ax represents the timber industry.

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

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Investing for the long term in a volatile market

When investing, you need to be aware of market risk, which is the potential for investments to lose value due to market fluctuation or volatility. Market risk is always there. You can't avoid it.

History shows that investment markets have grown over time despite short-term ups and downs. In fact, these fluctuations can actually create buying opportunities that may lead to greater earnings over time. Investing is all about striking a balance between market risk and return. Rather than trying to avoid market swings, understanding some key principles for long-term investing can help you navigate a sometimes-volatile market.

When investing for your retirement, it's important to have a plan, understand your investment style and contribute regularly. Keep in mind investing involves risk, including possible loss of principal.

Three key principles when investing for the long term

1. Have a plan: It's easier to take a long-term view if you



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is on your side

understand where you want to go. When do you think you may want to retire? How much income will you need in retirement? Nationwide's My Interactive Retirement PlannerSM (available upon log-in) allows you to set your personal retirement goals and model different scenarios to see how you can achieve them. And of course, Nationwide Retirement Specialists are available by phone or even at your workplace to help you create a comprehensive plan for your retirement.

2. Know your investment style and determine the asset allocation that is right for you: How comfortable are you with seeing your portfolio go up and down? Investing for retirement is all about finding an asset allocation that takes into account both your risk tol-

erance and timeline for when you expect to need your money. If you're younger, a more aggressive investment mix may help you gain value over time even if you lose value in the short term. But as you get older, your savings have less time to recover. Using asset allocation as part of an overall investment strategy does not assure a profit or guarantee against loss in a declining market.

Another factor to consider when making investment choices is whether you prefer to be more hands on or hands off in your investment style as explained in this video: <https://www.nrsforu.com/one-rp-pre-auth/resource-center/videos/index.html>

If you prefer to be more hands off, you may want to consider a Target Date Fund

which will automatically adjust the investment mix based on your time to retirement. And if your plan offers it, a managed account option like Nationwide ProAccount® can give you the benefit of professional investment management. There is an additional fee for the ProAccount managed account service. If you prefer to be hands on, you can use My Investment Planner to help you understand your investment style and choose the asset allocation that is right for you. Nationwide recommends that you rebalance your asset allocation at least once a year.

3. Contribute regularly and stay cool when markets become volatile: It can be tempting to change your investment choices or contribution amount based on what you hear in the news but making investment decisions based on hunches or trying to time the market often leads to dollar losses and missed opportunities. Your Nationwide Retirement Plan allows you to contribute regularly from your paycheck, so you never

"miss out" — you'll be buying when the market is low, as well as when the market is climbing. This is called dollar cost averaging and it helps reduce the effects of market volatility over time although it does not assure a profit or guarantee against loss in a declining market.

Investing for the long-term means knowing that you have a plan and monitoring that plan periodically. While there is always potential for investments to lose value due to market fluctuation or volatility, it's important to avoid making decisions based on short-term fluctuations or emotion. When you have a plan, you can invest with confidence and avoid emotional investing.

Nationwide is here to help. Talk with a Retirement Specialist for more information. They can help you establish your plan or answer questions about your investment options.

Nationwide ProAccount is offered through Nationwide Investment Advisors, LLC, an SEC registered investment adviser.

COUNTIES MATTER



Learn more
NACo.org/ncgm

#NCGM



BRIGHT IDEAS | MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Ohio

Ohio County Encourages Green Living with Sustainability Competitions

PROBLEM:

Small businesses and organizations lack resources for sustainable practices and face challenges measuring sustainability performance benchmarks.

SOLUTION:

Create competitions to reduce energy, educate community organizations about sustainability and measure positive outcomes.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

A little friendly competition never hurt anyone in Montgomery County, Ohio when it comes to taking the steps necessary to reduce carbon emissions and save energy costs.

The county launched the Bring Your Green Challenge to engage organizations in sustainability competitions. Using a web-based software platform designed by the county, participants learn about energy use effectiveness, track progress and engage with other competitors throughout the community.

Lamees Mubaslat, Montgomery County sustainability manager and Dayton Regional Green director, said prior to the Bring Your Green Challenge, the county launched a Green Business Certification Program, which serves as a checklist to help businesses become more sustainable and receive enhanced rebates.

Businesses that receive a green business certification can join the Bring Your Green Challenge to increase sustainability efforts for cash prizes. The challenge is inclusive for any organizations with the goal of achieving large-scale energy and resources reductions while educating the community about sustainability.

Mubaslat said she wanted to find a way to engage county employees in more sustain-

ability programs, which led to the county's first Bring Your Green Challenge in 2015.

Through a partnership with Dayton Power & Light, the challenge was available to all of the utility's customers in commercial buildings in Montgomery County and surrounding counties.

"We wanted to do something beyond just a checklist," Mubaslat said. "We know that businesses have done energy efficiency projects because they've received enhanced rebates from the utility company, but we couldn't capture those results."

The Bring Your Green platform allowed businesses to track their progress by using their utility bills and adding data about energy, gas, electricity and water use. The challenge is available to all levels including cities, city organizations, people within organizations and citizens at large.

Through the competition, more efficiency means more points, which are calculated automatically through the platform by completing various

challenges such as installing solar fields, building electric charging stations or having a green fleet of vehicles.

"The more they recycle, the more points they get for waste diversion and the system translates those numbers into greenhouse gas emission reduction," Mubaslat said.

Other competitions involve energy rating tools, energy reduction, rebates and resources, waste and water reduction and employee and citizen engagement.

"It gives local governments ideas of what they could do locally to help their community become more green," Mubaslat said.

Participants are able to see where they stand online at the data-tracking leaderboard.

More than 200 locations from the business and government communities participated in the inaugural challenge where winners received a total of \$80,000 in cash prizes from Dayton Power & Light.

"Competition drives innovation, and it drives participation at the same time," Mubaslat said.

In 2017, the county launched Bring your Green 2.0 which included a Healthy Schools platform targeting environmental standards at schools. More than 100 student teams participated. The latest challenge launched in 2019 and added two additional platforms — green government and green eats.

The sustainability challenges have reduced more than 12.5 million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere and more than 2.6 million tons of waste diverted from landfills. On average, the challenges' participants see \$851,000 in energy cost savings.

These reductions are equivalent to taking 1,700 homes off the grid, 2,500 cars off the road or planting over 350,000 trees, according to the Bring Your Green Challenge website.

Over 400 businesses in total have participated in the Bring Your Green Challenge including local governments, schools, universities and non-profits to engage in sustainability competitions.


Mubaslat emphasized the

inclusiveness of the program for employees, students or other community members.

"We really tried to make it as inclusive as possible to allow everyone in the community to do something to become more green and sustainable," Mubaslat said.

The program is open to any business or community in Ohio. Mubaslat said she is interested in opening the challenge to all counties across the country.

"I would love to see this as the way that different counties throughout the state can track their progress and compete with each other," she said.

For more information about the Bring Your Green Challenge, contact Montgomery County Sustainability Manager Lamees Mubaslat at mubaslatl@mc-hio.org. 

Montgomery County's Bring Your Green Challenge is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the County Resiliency: Infrastructure, Energy and Sustainability category.



Five Rivers Metro Parks is awarded \$1,000 for the Bring Your Green Tenants Award in 2017. Photo courtesy of Montgomery County, Ohio

GET TO KNOW...



Welcome Niagara County, N.Y.

Niagara County is located in northwestern New York across the border from Canada. The county was created in 1808 and its name is of Native American origin. One interpretation of the name means “at the neck,” referring to the Niagara River that joins Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. The county seat is Lockport. The county has 12 towns and three cities, one being North Tonawanda which was once regarded as the lumber capital of the world. Niagara County is now known for its agriculture and tourism industries

with a significant history in manufacturing. With a close proximity to Canada, the county is important to international trade and commerce. Niagara County’s most prominent geographical feature is the Niagara Falls. Millions of visitors travel to the area to see the American side of the falls at Niagara Falls State Park, which is recognized as the oldest state park in the country. Other attractions throughout the county include the Erie Canal and the Niagara Wine Trail. “Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



finally!

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


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LEAD




ORGANIZE



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DELIVER



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



PROFILES IN SERVICE

JONATHAN VLAMING

NACo Board Member
Associate Superintendent of Planning, Design and Technology at Three Rivers Park District
Hennepin County, Minn.

Number of years involved in NACo: This is my first year as the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO) liaison to NACo.

Years in public service: 30

Occupation: Parks and natural resources planning and management

Education: BA in Geography and MS in Forestry from the University of Minnesota

The hardest thing I've ever done: Caregiving of a parent who refused help.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Isaac Asimov, Leonardo da Vinci and a translator since I don't speak Italian

A dream I have is to: Hike the Pacific Crest Trail from end to end in one trip.

You'd be surprised to learn that: I used to play in a punk rock band.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Set up roadblocks on highways and hand out travel diaries to collect tourism data in Idaho. My partner and I fished all of the blue-ribbon streams in Idaho during our off-hours.

My favorite way to relax is: BBQ, beer, a fire, family and friends in the backyard.

I'm most proud of: My sons, my wife, my brother and the shed I built this summer. For work — a nature-based regional trail through four fully developed cities and my staff — they are great!

Every morning I read: The newspaper on my phone.



Vlaming

My favorite meal is: Hot dogs at a baseball game.

My pet peeve is: People who have no understanding of shopping cart etiquette in the grocery store.

My motto is: The best way to predict the future is to create it.

The book I am currently reading: The first book of the

Travis McGee series by John D. MacDonald. There are 21 books in the series, and they take place in southern Florida. Living this far north, you need this sort of thing to help get through the winter.

My favorite music is: Any live music.

My favorite U.S. president is: Teddy Roosevelt, for his conservation vision. Thank you, Teddy.

NACPRO is a NACo member because: Parks, health, the environment, the economy, quality of life are all more successful when packaged together. Counties are agile and adept at moving good ideas forward.



HOLIDAY EDITION

WORD SEARCH

COUNTIES WITH TOWNS BEARING SEASONAL NAMES

Created by: Charlie Ban

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- ADVENT:** Jackson County, W.Va.
- ANTLERS:** Marquette County, Mich.
- BELLS:** Westmoreland County, Pa.
- BLITZEN:** Harney County, Ore.
- CHRISTMASVILLE:** Carroll County, Tenn.
- COMET:** Summit County, Ohio
- EGGNOG:** Garfield County, Utah
- ELF:** Clay County, N.C.
- FROSTBURG:** Allegany County, Md.
- HOLIDAYHILLS:** McHenry County, Ill.
- JOLLY:** Pike County, Ga.
- MISTLETOE:** Owsley County, Ky.
- NORTHPOLE:** Kootenai County, Idaho
- RUDOLPH:** Kenedy County, Texas
- SAINTNICHOLAS:** Duval County, Fla.

ON THE MOVE

NACo STAFF

- Rodney Garner** has joined NACo as an IT Specialist. He previously served as the IT support analyst for Medstar and IT systems specialist/network administrator for Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. He earned a bachelor's degree in Computer Science Technology.
- Andrea Newsom** has joined NACo as a grant staff accountant. Prior to joining NACo, Andrea served as the financial analyst for Maximus Inc. and director of purchasing and budgeting and grant manager for Hendrix College in Arkansas. She earned a bachelor's degree in Mathematics.
- Gozel Holt** has joined NACo as senior administrative assistant. She previously served as program officer and program coordinator for Counterpart International. Gozel earned a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and a master's degree with a concentration in International Peace and Conflict Resolution and Woman Studies.
- Chief Technology Officer **Rita Reynolds** participated in the Digital Communities Workgroup discussion Nov. 17 held by eRepublic and focused on IT modernization for the future.
- Executive Director **Matt Chase** delivered the keynote speech Nov. 18 to the Nevada Association of Counties at its 2020 Virtual Annual Conference and spoke on federal advocacy Nov. 19 at the Alaska Municipal League's 2020 Virtual Annual Conference.

Garner

Newsom

Holt

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



CALIFORNIA

• Health officials in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** initiated a temporary **ban on outdoor dining** as COVID-19 cases continue to rise throughout the state. The ban prevents restaurants, breweries, wineries and bars from serving customers in outdoor settings for three weeks. The California Restaurant Association filed a lawsuit challenging the county's ban, but a judge rejected the plea, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.



• When rising COVID-19 cases prompted **SANTA CLARA COUNTY** to **ban contact sports** within the county for three weeks, it put the San Francisco 49ers out of a home. The team was scheduled to play host to the Buffalo Bills of **ERIE COUNTY**, N.Y. and the Washington Football Team of **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY**, Md. ESPN reported that the Niners could play those games in **MARICOPA COUNTY**, Ariz. or **DALLAS COUNTY**, Texas.

• **TULARE COUNTY** launched a **COVID-19 Testing Incentive Program** for county workers to help slow the spread of the virus. County employees who take four COVID-19 tests between November and the end of December and submit a verification form will receive

a personal holiday to use by June. Employees can be tested during the workday. The program is modeled off a similar incentive program in **KERN COUNTY**.

FLORIDA

Officials in **ORANGE COUNTY** participated in a ceremony to break ground on what will be the **world's largest White Castle**. The restaurant will have indoor and outdoor seating and two drive-thru lanes. County officials anticipate it will bring more than 100 jobs to the area, as well as help with tourism in the county. It is expected to open in 2021.

ILLINOIS

Officials in **COOK COUNTY** launched a **free legal services program** for those facing evictions. The Early Response Program provides legal assistance, counseling, pre-court mediation and case management for residents and landlords experiencing evictions and aims to prevent cases from landing in court, the *Chicago Tribune* reported. The program is part of the Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt initiative.

KANSAS

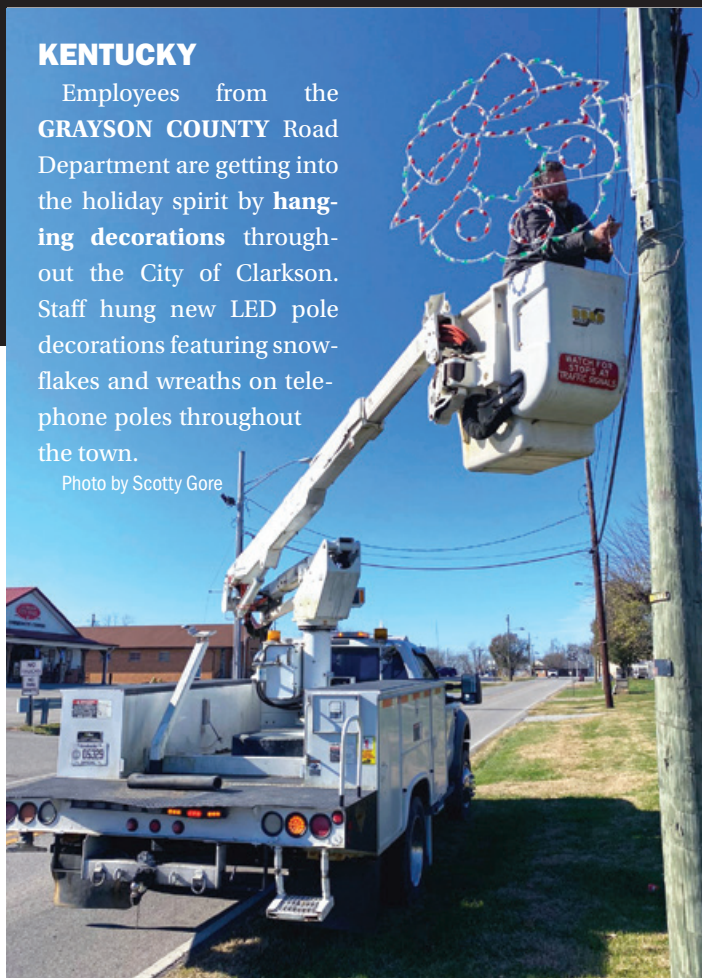
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report on the **impacts of a mask mandate** on the spread of COVID-19 cases in Kansas counties. Gov. Laura Kelly (D) issued an executive order in July requiring masks to be worn in public spaces, but allowed counties to opt out of the mandate.

Of the 105 counties in the state, 24 counties initially followed the mandate. The CDC found that COVID-19 cases decreased by 6 percent in the 24 counties that followed the mask mandate but increased in 81 counties that opted out by 100 percent per 100,000 people.

KENTUCKY

Employees from the **GRAYSON COUNTY** Road Department are getting into the holiday spirit by **hanging decorations** throughout the City of Clarkson. Staff hung new LED pole decorations featuring snowflakes and wreaths on telephone poles throughout the town.

Photo by Scotty Gore



MARYLAND

• **Speed camera ticket citations** are on the rise in **BALTIMORE COUNTY**, with a 10 percent increase compared to last year. *The Baltimore Sun* reported that speed camera revenue has increased by nearly 38 percent in 2020. The increase in speeding is attributed to the COVID-19 lockdown when

there was minimal traffic and individuals exhibited more dangerous driving behaviors. Reported violations spiked in the county in July.

• Council members in **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** opposed a state bill that **limits their participation in certain land-use and zoning cas-**

es. The bill states that council members who receive contributions of \$500 or more would be unable to take part in planning decisions for land-use and zoning cases involving the individuals who made the contributions, *Bethesda Magazine* reported. Council members say there are inconsistencies with a county law and confusion over the bill's language.

MICHIGAN

WAYNE COUNTY launched an **online marketing tool to help small businesses** during the holiday season. Businesses can sign up for free on the county's website to be added to the directory where shoppers can filter the list by type of business. The county used CARES Act funding to create the online marketing tool.

MINNESOTA

Commissioners in **HENNEPIN COUNTY** approved funding for a **social worker position at the county jail**. The health and human services social worker will work alongside a deputy and records staff to identify individuals who may need services that are not available at the jail, 5 Eyewitness News reported. The social

MARYLAND

• Officials in **WICOMICO COUNTY** revealed plans for a new **inclusive playground** that will include a sensory trail and expand upon a recent project designed to provide individuals with physical and mental disabilities a place to play baseball. The regional project will allow children of all levels of ability to play together. Photo courtesy of Wicomico County



worker will collaborate with the county's Behavioral Health Center to fast-track individuals arrested for low-level offenses through the pre-booking process to receive services at the center.

federal governments in the enforcement of laws or investigations regarding firearms.

Regulations that cannot be enforced per the measure include taxing firearms and firearm accessories, any restrictions relating to the ownership of non-fully automatic firearms and registering, tracking and background-checking related to firearms.

Willamette Week reported that it wasn't clear if they would be enforceable, because the attorney general has not asked for a formal opinion and the issue has not come up in a lawsuit to which DOJ is a party.

PENNSYLVANIA

The state Department of Health will offer **free COVID-19 testing** in counties without their own health departments. Five teams will provide regional testing over 12 weeks for people in the 61 counties, based on the total number of confirmed cases per 100,000 people and in counties where outbreaks are happening, *The Tribune-Review* reported. The testing sites will work as drive-through and walk-in facilities and can serve 450 people per day. The new testing sites will not replace pop-up testing locations.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The **HORRY COUNTY** Council is considering rewriting its

zoning code for mines, allowing mines in all zones in the county, requiring only minor setbacks from property lines and wetlands. Mines larger than 5 acres would still need a county certification to operate. The sand and dirt from mines are crucial for concrete production, especially when raising structures above sea level, the *Myrtle Beach Sun News* reported.

TEXAS

BEXAR COUNTY is lobbying the Legislature to sponsor a bill allowing a broader range of non-violent, low-level offenses to be eligible for **cite-and-release programs**.

San Antonio police officers and Bexar County Sheriff's deputies can issue citations for certain misdemeanors, like marijuana possession, rather than arresting the person on-site, and the Commissioners Court would like to add offenses, including prostitution, possession of a wider array of drugs and higher-level criminal mischief charges. KSAT News reported that between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, the Bexar County District Attorney's Office received 2,481 citations, which it calculates avoided nearly \$1.9 million in booking costs.

VIRGINIA

• **ARLINGTON COUNTY** is

considering establishing a **collection service for food scraps and yard trimmings**. Trash audits found that food scraps make up more than one-fifth of the residential waste stream. The county is trying to divert up to 90 percent of waste from incineration by 2038, *Arlington-Now.com* reported. The county has collected grass clippings, cut flowers, brush, hedge trimmings and leaves year-round since 2016, and residents can drop off food scraps.

• **HENRICO COUNTY** Manager John Vithoulkas is proposing the county-funded creation and construction of a \$14-million **detox and recovery center** that would be managed by Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services but ultimately operated in partnership with one or more non-governmental entities, the *Henrico Citizen* reported. The center would be a 24-hour, in-patient, medically supervised detoxification and recovery center with an initial capacity of 12 to 16 beds.



• **ROANOKE COUNTY** may create an advisory board to **regulate towing companies**.

When police officers require a tow, the emergency communications center contacts a company from a list of companies. Tow fees are inconsistent between different companies, with no consistency with regard to fee schedules or mechanisms for the county to manage those discrepancies, *The Roanoke Times* reported.

WASHINGTON

• **KING COUNTY** approved funding for a groundbreaking criminal justice diversion program that will **let community groups decide on punishment** for a select group of accused felons.

Community Restorative Pathways will involve a non-profit community panel to decide how the accused person can be held accountable for their non-violent crime. If the offender fails to follow through with the community group's recommended punishment or accountability, the original criminal charges could still be pursued in court. The program would focus on low-level felonies, primarily property offenses, KOMO News reported, and could not include domestic violence or sexual assault cases. The \$6.2 million budget for the program was diverted from the Sheriff's Office.

• **PIERCE COUNTY's** new **Restaurant Rally program** will reimburse nearly 300 local restaurants 100 percent for gross sales, excluding alcohol and third-party orders, for the two-week period that ended Thursday, Nov. 19. Previously, the reimbursement was 50 percent, *The Suburban Times* reported.

Indoor dining was suspended under Gov. Jay Inslee's (D) new COVID-19 guidelines, but a number of restaurants had ordered supplies, had food on hand and had incurred expenses for in-person dining.

Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker scour the country for news about county governments. Does your county have news to report? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.



NORTH CAROLINA

Looking to meet the demands of a genealogy research boom during the pandemic, the **BUNCOMBE COUNTY** Register of Deeds is launching a new **cemetery finder**. The website combines tax records, Old Buncombe Genealogical Society records, recorded documents and FindAGrave.com. Tax information has also been incorporated so that a user can find the contact information if it is available.

"The Cemetery Finder is another example of how information can be more accessible, especially if all you know is the road name or an alternate name to a cemetery as several have changed over time," Deputy Register of Deeds Miranda Stewart told the local ABC affiliate.

Previous lists were very basic and often had duplications without verification.

OREGON

Two counties passed ballot measures Nov. 3 that make local officials criminally liable for **enforcing most local, state and federal firearm regulations**.

Voters in **COLUMBIA** and **UMATILLA counties** passed the measures, making it a class A misdemeanor for county officials to participate in the enforcement of any laws or regulations regarding firearm use. They also prohibit local officials from using county assets or funds to aid the state or



NORTH CAROLINA

The **ONSLow COUNTY** Health Department and the Jacksonville Onslow Council for the Arts have partnered to commission a **mobile mural** to promote the "3W" campaign to reduce the spread of COVID-19: Wait, Wear and Wash.

The mural, by local artist Edith Graves, is also part of a social media project to interact with community members.

"We felt like the messaging was getting stagnant," said County Health Director Kristen Richmond-Hoover. "We wanted to do something different and still be interacting with our community during a time when community interaction is limited to virtual interaction."

the HR DOCTOR

with Philpot
& Winkeler

The end of the calendar year is often a time of closure, looking ahead and resolutions. It is a time of change by its very nature. This year, which has been full of so much change, is no different. Some organizations are seeing high rates of retirement as we head into the new year. Some retirees may be moving closer to family, focused on what is important in their lives as the result of the pandemic. Yet others have underlying health conditions and feel it necessary to leave the workforce. Some retirees may be taking advantage of high home prices as they downsize. Whatever the reason, they take institutional knowledge with them. The loss is felt by the colleagues, who during this time of disconnection and distance, may feel that loss differently than previous retirements. One department director said of a colleague retiring with over 20 years of service, "He's earned it, but we've worked together every day of my career, so I am wistful."

Upon those retirements, new supervisors, managers and directors come to fill vacant leadership roles and must evaluate the culture of their workforce. They may be internal or coming to the county from another jurisdiction or from the private sector. Likely, these new supervisors will speak with their employees to learn about the culture they are entering. Talking to staff, meeting colleagues and identifying leaders is important, but there is also data that can assist in assessing culture. Here are several data points incoming directors or supervisors can gather from Human Resources when putting a finger on the pulse of culture:

1. Look at an internal equity report of your team. It should include staff names, titles, hire date, date in current position and pay rate. This report will show you longevity but also pay inconsistencies

and pay progression. Who is your most senior employee? Are a lot of employees new in their roles? Good follow-up questions might include: Who are the leaders in this department? Who do you go to when you need assistance? Who trains new employees?

2. Review the organizational chart. The organizational chart can tell you a lot about the team. Are the direct reports balanced between the supervisors or have staff been moved to or away from a certain supervisor? What is the average number of direct reports? Are their staff who supervise one staff member? Organization charts may evolve to capitalize on the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of individuals. If a new supervisor compares the actual department structure to structures they have seen elsewhere, it can tell them a lot about the people. It is also good to know when the organizational structure was last updated and when the structure itself last changed.

3. Consider the job descriptions of all the team members. What are the titles of the staff? Are the roles specialists

or generalists? Good follow-up questions with employees might include whether the job description and/or title reflect what the employee does. Does there appear to be support if a person is out? Who supports you if you are out or need help? Who is cross-trained to be your backup?

4. Dig up the most recent applications of your staff. Reading the applications will allow you to see work history. Perhaps an employee has worked in a different public sector agency and has strong relationships with that agency. What are the skills each employee brings to work each day? Knowing the skills and strengths of your employees can help you engage those skills. It is also a great conversation starter when you meet with each person individually.

5. How much vacation, sick or PTO does each person have? Are there staff that are losing vacation because they are up against an accrual cap? This report can give you insight as to whether staff feel they can take vacation or if they feel the workload is so high they can't step away.

6. What is the turnover rate on this team or in this department? Are there some positions that churn consistently? Perhaps an entry-level job has high turnover. Is that due to the position being an effective bridge to a promotional opportunity and a portal to a new career? Is this a position that people either really love or don't feel a connection to the work? Is the position low paying? What has been done to address turnover in this role?

7. Look at the number of temporary employees the department hired in the last year. Does the department use seasonal temps? On-call temps? Interns? This data can not only show when the workload is at its peak, but how reliant the department is on temporary staff. It is also important to get a list of independent contractors the department utilizes as those do not run through payroll and may need to be obtained from Finance.

8. Review the current vacancy rate. In addition to the number of vacancies, do staff have alternative schedules, flexible schedules or telecommuting agreements? What is

the staffing picture?

While culture can be hard to measure, there are multiple data sources that can help a new manager have a better understanding of the culture. These data points can be clues to unlocking information about the culture that are not just anecdotal or the result of perception alone. This information combined with information about budget and policy can provide a strong foundation to the success of a new leader. Accepting a new position is exciting and having the information you need when you start that journey makes the transition smoother and more effective. And, if you aren't new in your position, looking at your data and seeing what it would tell you if you were new to the position can be enlightening as well. Wishing you a happy and fulfilling 2021. **CN**

From Coconino County, Ariz., HR gurus and contributors, Erika Philpot, human resources director and Rose Winkeler, deputy county attorney, address common and critical HR questions from their "boots on the ground" perspective.

The Data of Culture

