

## A year after the Camp Fire: Rebuilding a challenge

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Nearly every step Butte County, Calif. takes in recovering from the Camp Fire means stepping on a splinter. Up close, they are the charred, dead trees the flames left behind.

As of Dec. 4, 2019, roughly 55 weeks after the Nov. 8, 2018 fire that killed 85 people and destroyed more than 18,000 buildings, only 24 homes were rebuilt within the burn area, with 742 building permit applications issued. Nearly three-quarters of rebuilt homes and permits are in the town of Paradise, where 95 percent of buildings were damaged or destroyed.

“What saddens me is when you look at Sonoma County

See **RECOVERY** page 3



**Santa Claus and Smokey the Bear lead the parade in front of the 2019 Capitol Christmas Tree as it leaves the Carson National Forest in Taos County, N.M.** Photo courtesy Taos County Sheriff's Office

# New Mexico County delivers Capitol Christmas Tree to DC

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

Dressed in safety gear with a helmet on his head and a chainsaw in his hands, Mark Gallegos, who chairs the Taos County, N.M. Commission, stood underneath a 60-foot Blue Spruce tree in the Carson National Forest.

While Gallegos has a family background in logging, this tree was not headed toward what was once his family's sawmill. Gallegos was cutting down the 2019 Capitol Christmas Tree that will stand on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. this holiday season.

“They just said make a nice, clean cut and stay as flat as you can and make sure it doesn't swing back and hit you,” Gal-

legos said.

Gallegos, who also serves as mayor of Questa, a small village within Taos County, said this year's Capitol Christmas Tree is from the Questa Ranger District of the Carson National Forest in a community called Red River.

“They said, ‘Mayor, we have this problem.’ I'm like, oh boy,

what happened? ‘We need you to cut this down,’” he recalled. “I'm like, I'll do it right now don't even worry about it.”

The Capitol Christmas Tree, also known as the People's Tree, has come from the U.S. Forest Service since 1970. This year, the U.S. Forest Service found 12 “candidate trees” from the

Carson National Forest in New Mexico. This is the third time the Capitol Tree has come from New Mexico and the second time the tree was taken from the Carson National Forest.

Jim Kaufmann, director of Capitol Grounds and Arbore-

See **TREE** page 2

## Blueprint aims to reduce poverty

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

A blueprint is guiding the future for Franklin County, Ohio, but not to construct new buildings. The Rise Together Blueprint for Reducing Poverty is a plan to lower the county's poverty rate through setting goals and establishing action steps.

In the fall of 2018, Franklin County commissioners launched an initiative to analyze the causes of poverty in the county. Community leaders formed a steering committee comprised of individuals from different economic backgrounds, including those experiencing poverty, to establish a plan to reduce poverty in the

county.

The committee collaborated with commissioners to write the Rise Together Blueprint for Reducing Poverty in Franklin County which includes 13 goals and 120 action steps. The goals and actions steps are based on interviews with 200 county res-

See **BLUEPRINT** page 6



# 'It feels amazing ... to know the tree came from our county'

From *TREE* page 1

tum at the Capitol, visited the forest and selected the tree that would make the nearly 2,000-mile journey across the country to the nation's capital.

The tree not only has to fit the landscape of the Capitol, Kaufmann has noted, but it must be full without a bad side because it will be viewed from all angles.

The tree also needs to have flexible branches to survive being packaged and transported to Washington and must be capable of holding thousands of ornaments.

Taos County Manager Brent Jaramillo said trees from the Carson National Forest are

sturdy, hold up well in different areas of the country and require less water because of New Mexico's dry climate.

"It's a great honor," Jaramillo said. "It feels amazing to be in the national spotlight, to know the tree came from our county."

The 68-year-old tree grew in a prime location close to the roadway and in a flat spot which made it easier to access with cranes, Gallegos said.

Before making the cut, the tree was secured with a cable and a strap to prevent it from falling and breaking branches.

Gallegos said he was shocked that he was asked to cut the tree down, but said it was fitting for the town of Red River to ask him as the mayor of neighboring



**Taos County Chairman Mark Gallegos cuts down the 60-foot Blue Spruce tree before it travels nearly 2,000 miles to be placed on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C.** Photo courtesy Morgan Timms/Taos News taosnews.com



## TOP HOLIDAY SONGS

1. "All I Want for Christmas Is You" .....by Mariah Carey/2010
2. "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" by Brenda Lee/1960
3. "Last Christmas" .....by Wham!/1984
4. "Jingle Bell Rock" .....by Bobby Helms/1957
5. "A Holly Jolly Christmas" .....by Burl Ives/1965

Source: Billboard

Questa because it meant both communities could participate in the event.

"It's kind of hitting me now about how significant [it is] being a part of the whole ceremony and actually cutting down the tree," he said. "It is a big deal."

The communities held a ceremony with a group from a nearby pueblo blessing the tree before it was cut down.

Santa Claus and Smokey the Bear led a parade to Red River where a bigger celebration took place and attendees could take photos with the tree.

A company built a special truck and trailer to transport the tree.

Once the tree left Red River, it was taken to a local contractor's barn in Questa that was large enough to fit both the tree and the truck. Crews worked overnight to prepare the tree for its official send-off.

On its route to Washington, D.C., the tree made more than 25 stops across the country in-

cluding Albuquerque, El Paso, San Antonio, Nashville and Atlanta.

Gallegos said he's watched videos of people lining the streets in different towns and cities to catch a glimpse of the

**"It just intensifies  
who we are,  
what we do out  
here to not be  
forgotten."**

Capitol Tree.

"It gives a little bit of hope to people around the country. It gives our community a little bit of recognition," he said. "It just intensifies who we are, what we do out here to not be forgotten."

Taos County employees and their families made Christmas ornaments for the tree along with school districts throughout the state.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham held a Capitol

Christmas Tree essay contest that was won by Asher Dean, a fourth grader from Taos County.

Dean was invited to join Grisham and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi at the tree-lighting ceremony in Washington D.C.

"Maybe D.C. might see this tree and think about small rural communities when they're making these decisions that may affect other places," Gallegos said. "The heartbeat of America is always going to be the small communities because there's so many of them."

The county is planning to put a plaque on the tree's stump to mark where the 2019 Capitol Christmas Tree was cut down.

"For the next 30 days, we can say we have a little footprint over there in D.C. and anybody that wants to know where this tree came from, they're going to find out what these little communities are about," he said. "I think that's what makes the story so cool." **CN**



# County supervisor talks challenges of rebuilding 1 year after devastating wildfire

## From RECOVERY page 1

and only 30 percent have rebuilt after two years (following the 2017 Tubbs Fire)," said Supervisor Doug Teeter, whose district includes Paradise and the unincorporated part of the county, Magalia, which was also burned. That's kind of sad because that community is so much closer to jobs and higher density communities, you'd think people would just clamor to rebuild there. We're quite far even from Sacramento, so it's going to be tougher for us."

Teeter narrowly escaped the fire himself and sees those trees as one of several roadblocks in rebuilding efforts that has consequences for the rest of the county and a harbinger of fires yet to come.

"I can't say there's one single issue that is holding up rebuilding," he said. "Some of it is clearing what is left, some of it is the massive cost to rebuild, some of it is hesitation — whether or not people want to come back."

But as he drives around the more than 150,000 acres the fire burned, the trees stick out to him. After evaluating all 155 miles of county-owned roads, 6,649 trees have been identified for removal. As of Dec. 2, 2019, 603 have been removed.

"There are so many dead trees," he said, before even addressing the trees that would fall on private property. "Even if people have had theirs removed, they might not have control over their neighbor's property, and they don't want to rebuild because this tree could potentially fall on their property."

On top of that, the presence of heavy machinery on county roads is preventing serious investment in repairing the county's thoroughfares until they won't be taking sustained abuse.

The state-coordinated debris removal is nearly complete, and Butte County and Paradise have passed ordinances requiring the removal of trees on private property that could fall onto public roads. Those

that don't threaten public infrastructure, though, are not yet eligible for FEMA reimbursement, and the cost is roughly \$2,000 each to remove.

"The cost to rebuild is ridiculous and it's pretty limiting for most folks," Teeter said. "I'm curious if people lost their jobs and homes, are they going to move back to Paradise? I think the longer they're gone, the more likely they are not going to come back."

## The threat of trees

Teeter isn't going anywhere. He literally wasn't going anywhere on Nov. 8, 2018, either. Shortly after his wife returned from dropping their daughters off at school, they heard the evacuation order — the fourth since they moved to Paradise in 2005. She went on ahead while he talked with neighbors.

"She maybe got out 10 minutes before I left, but a quarter-mile down the road, it was bumper-to-bumper," Teeter said. "You think... this might be it."

Shortly after that, the flames

appeared. He abandoned his car and caught a ride with an off-duty Cal Fire employee and they had to bail out of the road into a nearby field, directing others to come with them.

"I had seen a guy mowing the grass here all the time, the field has to be about 200 feet in diameter," Teeter said. "I always wondered why he did that."

That mowing probably saved Teeter's life, along with the others who joined him. Now Teeter looks at potential fuels as immediate threats.

"My friend in the Army Corps of Engineers talks about 'flood amnesia,' when people rebuild in a flood plain thinking it won't happen again," Teeter said. "I think we might have to fight 'fire amnesia.' It seems like people move to the woods because they want the woods and they let it grow back, but my takeaway, making it a quarter mile away from my house, is that we need evacuation routes to have wide, cleared areas so cars don't burn up in the middle of the road."

That's complicated by the

narrow rights-of-way with county roads and the cost of private property along those roads, plus the maintenance costs to keep the right-of-way clear.

"Everyone wants this forested utopia, but the new normal is higher winds, and a longer fire season and that can equate to a super-fast-moving fire," he said. "If you don't remove the fuels next to the roads, you're going to have people die in their cars trying to get out."

## Where they are now

Chico gained the distinction of being the fastest-growing city in California in 2018 by virtue of its location. Just eight miles from Paradise, it was the destination for most of the 50,000 fire evacuees and has become a temporary home for up to 20,000 displaced residents.

Like the extra water that flows downhill via the Camp Fire burn scars and floods the lower-lying areas, the fire affects more than just Paradise and Magalia.

Supervisor Deborah Lucero said Chico, in her district, has seen a 77 percent increase in traffic since the fire. Property values, too, have jumped.

"If you had a house that was worth \$300,000 on Nov. 7, on Nov. 8 it was worth \$100,000 more," she said. "(Available) housing was so tight before this. Now it's almost nonexistent."

That is problematic for many of the displaced residents, of which about one-third were renters and one-quarter were 65 years and older. Roughly a quarter of Chico's workforce lived in Paradise.

"A lot of these people were living in houses they built in the 70s," she said. "It was one of the more affordable places to live. Now they're pushed into an area that had seen rapidly inflating housing prices. It's wearing on people."

Teeter sees a lot of variation among his constituents. He sees doctors living in RVs, and others with even less. He lost

See RECOVERY page 4



Dead, burned trees remain a threat to falling in public roadways in Butte County, Calif., following the 2018 Camp Fire. Photo by Doug Teeter



# Feds to begin measuring county GDPs

by Teryn Zmuda

A new county economic measure will be released this week, providing an in-depth and detailed look into county economies — allowing county leaders to identify areas of strength and opportunity within the county lines.

The measure is a county-level estimate of gross domestic product, or GDP, which will be released by the Bureau of Economic Analysis

(BEA) on Dec. 12. The GDP measure will estimate the goods and services produced within the borders of each of the 3,069 counties, for years 2001 through 2018 — and will include a detailed-breakdown of contributions to GDP by 34 industries.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis released prototype numbers in December 2018 and has been working to refine the estimates to represent an accurate geographic dis-

tribution of the nation's economic activity.

"This is a major expansion of the nation's economic knowledge, down to the local roots of growth," said BEA Director Brian Moyer. "For the first time, data users will have a rich picture of how each county's economy is faring and the industries that are contributing. They can compare counties to each other, to states, and to the nation. And, they can look at trends over

time. Combined with BEA's data on people's incomes in each county, these statistics will help business owners, county officials and other policymakers make decisions about allocating resources, spotting growth opportunities, planning investments, and devising economic development strategies."

What does this mean for county leaders? Simply put, publicly available data can help with strategy, planning

and a deeper understanding of the local economy. NACo will enlist this data in upcoming research reports, taking a closer look at local economies — and the GDP detail for each county will be available on NACo's County Explorer, [ce.naco.org](http://ce.naco.org).

Visit NACo's County Explorer Dec. 13 for a look into your county GDP. **CN**

*Teryn Zmuda is director of Research and Data at NACo.*

## GET TO KNOW...

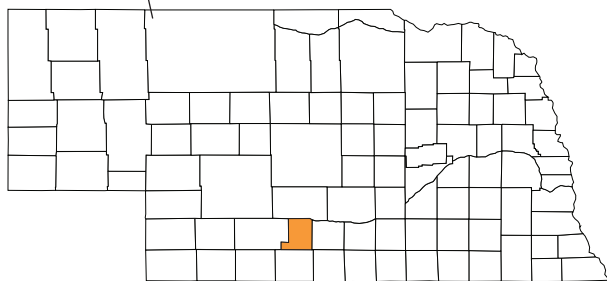
### Gosper County, Neb.

#### Welcome, Gosper County, Neb.

Gosper County, Neb., is located in the southern part of the state and has a population of around 2,000. The 450-square-mile county was named after Nebraska Secretary of State John J. Gosper. In 1873, a petition was filed to have an organized county government and a proclamation issued the county's organization. It wasn't until eight years later that the county's organization was legalized and its boundaries were officially established. When the county first formed, Daviesville, the site of the area's first post office, was named the county seat. Between 1873 and 1889, the county had three different county seats as populated areas changed.

Commissioners authorized the construction of a courthouse, but there was no funding at the time and it was never built. County officials stored county records and books in their homes. The current county seat of Elwood was established when the Burlington Railroad was built. At this time, local government offices relocated to Elwood. In 1939, the current county courthouse was constructed in Elwood.

The 1,300-acre Elwood Reservoir attracts campers and fishing enthusiasts who reel in everything from largemouth bass to yellow perch.



## 18,000 buildings destroyed in fire

From RECOVERY page 3

his home, his wife's business and several rental properties, though all were insured.

"A lot of people didn't have enough insurance, or they didn't have renter's insurance," he said. "And there were people living in informal arrangements where they didn't have their name on paperwork, they were sleeping on couches before the fire."

Those people have largely ended up in non-congregate shelters, and the county has played a role in serving as a safety net providing shelter. The state parks system turned over the Lake Oroville campground to the county to serve as an RV park, with the county providing water service and wastewater pumping. The county also provides a security guard for the camp.

Pacific Gas and Energy turns over a "day use" area to serve as a campground.

The fire has dominated Teeter's life, both as a homeowner and a county supervisor.

"Our role is as much as you make it," he said. "We can do nothing or we could do a lot. I spend so much of my time either attending meetings trying to take in as much information as I can or presenting what I know to other meetings. It was all consuming."

"The community was just dying for information, and due to social media, there was a lot

of misinformation. I wanted to be someone that people knew they could rely on."

By doing so, Teeter could grease the wheels of rebuilding progress by getting as many people informed about the right-of-entry paperwork to remove debris. He also just tried to internalize as much as he could.

"I hung out in the EOC, making sure I had a grasp of what was going on with all the departments and agencies," he said. "You go to a lot of meetings as a supervisor but after an event of this magnitude, it seemed like every day you were switching gears to tackle another topic. I'm still hesitant to say I have a handle on it."

He said there's some clamoring from residents about how insurance companies will handle policy renewals.

"There are a lot of things out of control by government that folks want government to control," he said.

Butte County itself will receive \$252 million to resolve claims against Pacific Gas and Electricity, which owned the faulty power line that started the fire and has now filed for bankruptcy.

One thing Teeter could control was the excavator that cleared the remains of his and his mother's houses. Both were built by his grandfather.

"It was closure for me to tear out my grandfather's work," he said. **CN**




# WHEN A MISTAKE DOESN'T JUST END UP IN AN EXPENSE REPORT, BUT A NEWS REPORT.

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# County outlines ambitious plan to move the needle on poverty levels

From BLUEPRINT page 1

idents who were living in poverty, according to Joy Bivens, director of the county's Jobs and Family Services.

"Those goals within that plan actually come from the residents in the constituency that our commissioners serve," she said.

Franklin County Commissioner John O'Grady said Franklin County is expecting to see an increase of one million residents over the next 20 to 30 years. Currently, the county's population is 1.3 million residents and although the county's unemployment rate is low at 3.5 percent, the poverty rate is 16.7 percent as defined by 2018 federal poverty level income numbers. This is slightly higher than other counties of comparable sizes, he said.

"We couldn't continue to be what we thought was a very prosperous county or prosperous into the future if our poverty

rate was that high and we needed to do something about it that would be very transformative," O'Grady said.

With a large number of goals and recommendations listed in the report, county commissioners selected starting points that could be completed, such as raising the minimum wage paid to county employees to at least \$15 per hour. According to Bivens, of the 13 goals, the county is currently working to address three.

The first goal focuses on increasing employer engagement in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty through the creation of a living wage and high-paying jobs for residents.

"This was important to residents because the jobs that they saw that were livable wage jobs were not stationed within their neighborhoods," she said.

Bivens said the second goal relates to increasing access to training for credentials that meet local demands. Addition-



Franklin County Director of Jobs and Family Services Joy Bivens presents the Rise Together Blueprint for Reducing Poverty to the Columbus Urban League. Photo courtesy of Columbus CEO Magazine

ally, employer commitments are needed to hire and promote members of the community. To reach this goal, the county created Building Futures, a 12-week program where individuals may obtain commercial driver's licenses and construction licenses.

The third goal is to ensure graduate rates are high for students at or near the poverty level and ensure they are performing

well academically to prepare for the future workforce, Bivens said.

The blueprint involves the creation of an Innovation Center, which Franklin County has committed up to \$2.5 million in annual funding. O'Grady said the commissioners hope that as the center becomes successful, it will be able to raise money from other partners.

The Columbus business com-

munity agreed to partner with the county and is providing office space, matching the county's dollars and helping with the creation of a 501(c)(3) organization for the center.

O'Grady said the innovation center is a place where big ideas will be vetted and piloted.

"What's the latest, greatest, newest idea or thing that we can

See BLUEPRINT page 8

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Latah County, which was officially formed in 1888, adopted the current county seal in 1988 in celebration of its centennial. The current seal replaced a simpler design. Latah County is the only county in the United States that was created through an Act of Congress.



Timber and wheat are included in the seal and represent historically significant exports of the county.

The foreground of the seal features the hills of the Palouse, a geographic region that is a major agricultural area in the northwest. The Palouse hills encompass much of the county's landscape.

The upper portion of the seal includes mountains and coniferous trees that are found in the northern portion of Latah County.

During the 1860s and 1870s, the earliest, non-native residents to the county mined in the Hoodoo Mountains, a mountain range located in the northeast. The green and gold colors of the seal represent the colors found in the mountain vistas throughout Latah County.

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

# County LGBT group supports equality for all



Members of the National Association of County LGBT Leaders and Allies meet during the NACo 2019 Annual Conference in Clark County, Nev. Photo by Julian Wolff

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

The National Association of County LGBT Leaders and Allies (NACLGBTLA) is planning an official launch to bring together county officials and ensure all county residents are treated fairly and equitably.

The mission of the group, which was formed in 2016, is "to be a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of equality, non-discrimination, fairness and justice for all persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity in the sphere of county government..."

Michael Daniels, director of Justice Policy and Programs in Franklin County, Ohio, serves as vice chair of the group and said the organization formed out of the realization that there were still many issues with regard to employment, public accommodations and law enforcement that were impacting the LGBTQ community.

"We thought an affinity group made some sense to just be able to put it together," he said. "We want to make sure as we are having these ongoing discussions that the LGBTQ population is not left out of the conversation."

Daniels said the group gives

elected county officials the ability to show their support and commitment to equality for every resident they serve. With other groups such as Mayors Against LGBTQ Discrimination supporting equality at different levels of government, the county group hopes to give elected officials on the county level the ability to stand up for equality.

"We [county officials] are on the front lines of dealing with all of those issues regarding social justice and the social safety net system," he said. "If anyone is going to stand up and say that equity for all people is critical, it should be the officials who are in charge of protecting folks who are the most vulnerable."

Deputy Chief of Staff for D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser Tomás Talamante, who also serves as NACLGBTLA's treasurer, said the group wants to bring together county leaders from across the country who are working to promote inclusive policies for LGBT communities.

"I think it's so important for county officials to show that they are not only supportive of the community but are going to be working to promote policies that are reflective and important," he said.

Even with legislation legalizing same sex marriage and eliminating the "Don't ask, don't tell" military policy, Daniels said these steps forward are not the end to equality issues.

"There are still no protections in most states for employment discrimination, for discrimination in housing, for discrimination in a variety of other ways," he said. "These issues are not yet settled and it's important that folks of like minds stand together and speak out."

Talamante added that an important aspect of the group is to educate county officials from counties across the country who may not be aware of the detrimental impacts of policies for members of the LGBT community.

"We want to see people continue to want to promote LGBTQ inclusive policies," he said. "We just want to see it continue to grow and engage and to educate."

At the 2019 NACo Annual Conference in Clark County, Nev., the group launched an effort to get county officials to sign a pledge.

The pledge reads: "... As elected county officials, we support inclusive non-discrimination, equality and

equity laws, policies and programs that explicitly include coverage for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) residents in all areas of policy and specifically in the realms of housing, human services, employment, public accommodations, healthcare, education, public safety, administration of justice, credit, jury service and federal funding."

"They can add their names to what we hope is an ever-growing list of county-appointed and elected officials to support equality for everyone," Daniels said.

The inaugural set of the names of supporters will be published at the official launch of the group at the 2020 Annual Conference in Orange County/Orlando, Fla. The group is working to set up a collaborative event with the onePULSE Foundation, which was established after the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando.

"I think it's going to be pretty impactful to be there to be able to honor the folks who died that day but also to reinforce that commitment to equality for everyone," Daniels said. **CN**

Individuals interested in signing the pledge can visit [NACLGBTLA.org](http://NACLGBTLA.org).



## Plan to banish poverty 'lives' at new center

From **BLUEPRINT** page 6

try? Something that's a game changer. Something that's being done somewhere else, but we've never tried here," he said.

Bivens said the innovation center also serves as a place for the blueprint to "live" so it doesn't become a report "sitting on the shelf."

"The idea of an innovation center came up and its goal is basically like [the TV program] 'Shark Tank'. If policy wasn't an issue and money wasn't a factor, what big idea could we test that could really move people up the economic mobility ladder?" she said.

Bivens said the business community wanted to make sure they were involved with the blueprint, adding that businesses play a significant role in



**O'Grady**

establishing livable wages. The business community is working to develop a technology platform where jobs are posted online and young people can apply by working with the school district.

"The commissioners wanted to make sure that every system was touched and included on

what role they play in assisting people moving up that economic mobility ladder," Bivens said.

She said she thinks collectively, all 13 goals and 120 action steps will work together to reduce poverty in Franklin County.

"This plan is not a silver bullet or a kryptonite against poverty," she said. "It is an opportunity for us to collectively work together on these goals and moving the metrics and then that way we will see some of our successes."

O'Grady said the blueprint is not Franklin County's "cure" for poverty, but said he hopes the plan gives people the opportunity to find a path to mobility.

"I think there's a lot of people in this community who are excited by this work and are very interested in where we're headed," he said. **CN**

## ..... ON THE MOVE .....➔

### NACo STAFF

• **Ashley Gallagher** has joined NACo as a Technology Programs support associate. Prior to joining NACo, Ashley worked as an administrative associate for Enders Insurance and earned a Bachelor of Science in Recreation and Leisure Studies from Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, W.Va.



**Gallagher**

• Executive Director **Matt Chase**, Director of Membership **Kim Hall** and Chief Technology Officer **Rita Reynolds** attended the County Commissioner's Association of Pennsylvania Fall conference, held Nov. 23-26 in Dauphin County, Pa.



**Hall**

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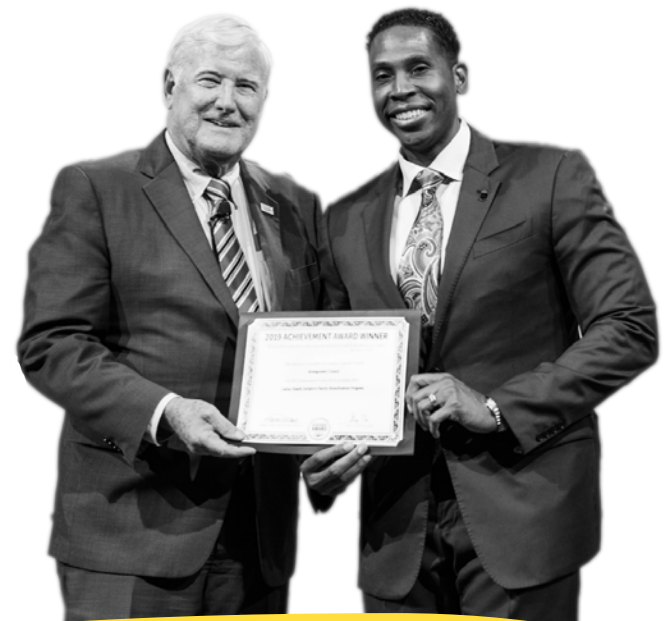
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A PRESCRIPTION FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION, **PG. H3** TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS, **PG. H6**

CountyNews

# HOT topics

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

DECEMBER 9, 2019

## AMERICA'S AGING POPULATION:

Counties are finding solutions for the challenges facing this rapidly growing demographic.







# COUNTIES PREPARE FOR AGING POPULATION

Fifty years ago, the median age in the United States was about 29. Today, it's nearly a decade older.

By the year 2026, 17 states will be in what Fitch Ratings calls a “super aged” category, meaning at least 20 percent of their populations will be 65 or older. And by 2030, all baby boomers will be older than 65, expanding the size of the older population so that one in every five residents will be retirement age.

“The aging of baby boomers means that within just a couple decades, older people are projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history,” said Jonathan Vespa, a demographer with the U.S. Census Bureau.

As this population gets older, counties must prepare and find solutions to their challenges.

In this special issue of *County News*, we hear from county officials and experts from around the country on how they are tackling some of these often-intertwined problems, including health, social isolation, transportation and dementia.



# GREAT OUTDOORS CONNECTS SENIORS IN LOUDOUN COUNTY

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Yelling “bingo” has a different meaning for this group of seniors.

It’s probably someone making a joke because they saw a Palm Warbler, a Scarlet Tanager, a Brown Thrasher and a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

That, and a free space. They’re meandering around Loudoun County, Va.’s Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve as part of the county’s Senior Adventure Camp, which offers a four-day schedule of activities for adults ages 55 and up.

“A lot of our participants never did summer camp when they were kids,” said Deborah Williams, the county’s senior services manager.

“A lot of them also have never been out to the nature preserve. It feels like it’s out in the middle of nowhere even though it’s pretty close.”

Drawing inspiration from a commercial trend in adult summer camps, the Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging and the county’s parks, recreation and human services department got to work planning their own hybrid program to offer an active social outlet for their seniors.

The county’s pairing of parks and recreation and human services proved prophetic and has made planning simple for the three years the county has run the camp.

“We asked what kind of camp we want to have, and it just made sense to use one of our county parks,” Williams said.

Most importantly, the county wanted to provide a fun activity for the county’s seniors to combat social isolation and its effects on their quality of life and health. Research by the National Institutes of Health has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease and death.

The Administration for Community Living’s Administration on Aging of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that about 28 percent of older adults, or 13.8 million people, live alone, but many of them are not lonely or socially isolated while at the same time, some feel lonely despite being surrounded by family and friends.

America’s Health Rankings’ 2018 Se-

nior Report saw a 12 percent increase in the suicide rate among Americans 65 years and older since 2014, to 16.6 deaths per 100,000, a slightly higher increase for the total population of 13.7 deaths per 100,000.

The report found wide variation in the risk of social isolation among seniors within states, with high risk areas in the Central South, the Southeast Atlantic coast and parts of Texas and New Mexico.

Colorado showed the greatest variation in risk of social isolation between the top and bottom 20 percent, and Iowa and Vermont showed the least variation.

The most common drivers of social isolation are widowhood, divorce or separation, poverty, disability or having never married.

Retirement and subsequent moves by friends also decimate older Americans’ social networks.

Although the Health Rankings report highlighted technological innovations, particularly the internet, for encouraging communication among seniors, those 20 or so Loudoun County seniors every year are meeting new friends and staying active.

The partnership works well.

“Banshee Reeks has a naturalist,” Williams said. “I pull in the people; she puts together the program.”

The roughly 700-acre preserve incorporates grassy paths throughout, bodies of water, vegetation and wildlife. It also offers a meeting room that can play host to the guest speakers who start off each day’s programming and provides respite if the August heat wears campers down.

The county transports participants from a senior center by school bus.

“Sure enough, they’re singing songs on the rides back and forth,” Williams said. “That’s how you know they’re having a good time.”

The program’s \$75 fee compares favorably to the more inclusive sleepaway adult camps, and includes lunches, camp shirts and those bus rides.

The inaugural camp in 2017 coincided with the total solar eclipse, which was preceded by a scientist’s lesson about astronomy. Biologists, botanists and ornithologists lecture on the specialties, and lepidopterists top that off with their knowledge of butterflies.

“We have a lot of retired professionals who have spent a lot of their time in

their field, but this is a chance for them to learn some new things that might have gotten lost in their adult lives,” Williams said. “They didn’t have the time to learn bird calls or find bugs. Now they do.”

It’s not all learning. A ride in a wagon full of hay bales harkens back to time on the farms that once dominated an urbanizing Loudoun County.


One of the camp’s four days includes a catch-and-release fishing trip.

“You should hear them whooping it up fishing,” Williams said. “It’s a time they can really make some new friendships.”

The camps also feature a “pollinators’ lunch,” to drive home the importance of all of the plants that bees pollinate.

Outside of the summer camps, Loudoun County maintains a more traditional network of “well and active” senior centers, all of which emphasize social interactions and lifelong learning, often with a nod toward maintaining and building relationships. And serving a hot lunch.

“We have seniors who come in every day, or a few times a week,” Williams said.

“A lot of the time, you see people who wouldn’t have met otherwise becoming friends. I’ve seen a lot of great friendships formed at our senior centers.” 



Loudoun County, Va. offers a Senior Adventure Camp that gets people exercising outdoors and forming new friendships. Photo courtesy of Loudoun County



# ADVOCATE FOR THE AGING GIVES VOICE TO OLDER ADULTS

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

For older adults in Henrico County, Va., it only takes one phone call to the county's advocate for the aging to access a "one-stop shop" of services and resources to help meet their needs.

The number of citizens 65 years and older in Henrico County is projected to increase 61 percent from the year 2000 to 2020. With the anticipated change in demographics, the county surveyed citizens in 2014 to identify the needs of older adults. The survey found many individuals were unaware of the services the county provided for the aging population.

Henrico County formed a task force on aging and recommended to the board of supervisors the creation of an Advocate for the Aging position to be the voice for older adults and serve as a liaison between county departments, according to Paula Reid, director of Human Services at Henrico County.

Sara Morris, Henrico County's current Advocate for the Aging, said her position focuses on three areas: Care coordination, outreach efforts and educational events.

She works with county residents 65 years and older, their families and caregivers to help navigate county resources and connect them to helpful resources within the community.

Morris said the top three phone calls she receives relate to housing issues, affordable in-home care and assistance with exterior home maintenance.

"I think the neat thing about this position is it's a one-stop shop," she said. "People don't have to go through being transferred from department to department and maybe not finding out about something that could be useful."

Reid said the advocate for the aging


position does not establish new services, but instead works to educate older adults on services the county already provides to find programs that meet their needs.

As the advocate for the aging, Morris said she finds out about community organizations and partner agencies to share those resources with others. She holds focus groups twice per year to listen to members of the community and tailor programming to county residents.

Reid said the county worked to inform residents about the position through town hall meetings, the county's public relations department, a website, a newsletter and through posts on social media.

"We really tried to make the position known through a variety of different formal communication ways as well as that grassroots effort," Reid said.

Morris and Reid both agreed that a key factor to establishing the advocate for the aging position involved pulling together services and resources the county already provided to meet the needs of older adults.

"I think it adds a lot of value to have one person that's focused on the aging community because it helps the county as we're thinking strategically," Reid said. 



**Henrico County's Advocate for the Aging Sara Morris provides care coordination, outreach efforts and educational events for the aging community in Henrico County, Va.** Photo courtesy Henrico County



NACo President Mary Ann Borgeson opens a session on how counties support our nation's aging population. Photo by Denny Henry

## COUNTIES CAN HELP ELDERLY POPULATIONS

by **Mary Ann Borgeson**  
NACo president

We know that counties provide critical services to all our residents, from the time they are born to the time they grow old. But by 2035, for the first time in our nation's history, the population of adults 65 and older will outnumber children younger than 18. As our aging populations grow, counties will face new challenges in providing services and resources that help our older adults live independently and remain active parts of our communities.


Not only will counties see growing demand for direct services to the elderly in coming years, but we will also be confronted with the need to support their caregivers. As the caregiver for my own two parents — one of whom suffers from Alzheimer's dementia — I know firsthand just how emotionally, financially and even physically demanding this role can be. For so many of us, caring for older adults and their family members is not just a county issue but a personal reality.

Thankfully, counties are uniquely positioned to provide real support. We operate or provide funding for area agencies on aging to offer transportation, nutrition, home-based care and other services to our seniors. We provide, purchase and administer long-term health care. And of course, we identify challenges on the ground and pursue innovative solutions to address them.

In my home of Douglas County, Nebraska, we know our seniors too often face barriers to accessing the services and care they need, from confusing applications to lack of transportation.

In November, I organized the first-ever Douglas County resource fair for our older residents and their caregivers, allowing them to access information, apply for services, ask questions and receive assistance in one convenient location. Unsurprisingly, the turnout was overwhelming. It reminded us of the important county role in filling gaps in service delivery and providing person-centered outcomes for our residents.

Beyond the services to the elderly we provide on the ground, counties are an essential voice for the aging in the federal policy process. This year, NACo has strongly advocated for legislation like the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, which increases flexibility and resources so that counties and those we partner with can better understand and meet the needs facing our older population and those caring for them. We have especially highlighted the need for more targeted research funding to combat and prevent diseases like Alzheimer's and other dementias and mental health conditions.

It has been an honor to champion this important issue as the president of NACo, and I look forward to continuing to do so with your partnership in the coming months. 

# HOT TOPICS

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**Charlie Ban** senior writer

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# BECOMING A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY COUNTY

by Supervisor Dave Cortese

As a Santa Clara County, Calif. supervisor, I was honored to become the first Dementia Friend when I announced at the January 2017 Seniors' Agenda Network Summit that the county would join the National Dementia Friends USA Initiative. Santa Clara County was one of the first of 67 Dementia Friendly Communities in the United States.




Cortese

Since then, 882 others in the county have become Dementia Friends out of a total of 1,654 in the state. To be a Dementia Friend, you view a series of online videos to learn about dementia and then turn that understanding into action. The action can be spreading the word about our Dementia Friendly Program or visiting someone who is living with dementia. Santa Clara County is also an Age-Friendly County.

Through our Office of Aging and Adult Services, the county has stepped up its role in organizing and supporting activities, including Dementia Friendly work-

shops, tours of art exhibits for those with early-stage dementia and providing information at senior centers.

Training employees to offer age-friendly customer service has also been provided to front-line customer service employees at cities in the county, a YMCA and a community center. Some of them became Dementia Friends.

On June 21, the Alzheimer's Association and the county hosted a Dementia Friendly Communities Summit to learn about how others are creating better communities for those living with dementia. Besides the Office of Aging and Adult Services, our county campaign was joined by my colleague on the Board, Supervisor Susan Ellenberg, the Senior Center Staff in San Jose, Milpitas, Morgan Hill, Sunnyvale and Gilroy, as well as advisory board members and San Jose State University nursing and social work students. 

To learn how your county can become a Dementia Friendly County, visit [dementiafriendsusa.org](http://dementiafriendsusa.org).



# ASSISTING THE ELDERLY IN A DISASTER

by Jenna Moran

The elderly are particularly vulnerable to disasters given the increased likelihood of having physical or mental health conditions or being socially isolated due to a lack of a support network. After Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the 2013 Colorado floods and other disasters, older adults accounted for more than half of all disaster-related fatalities. With 20 percent of Americans set to be 65 or older by 2050 and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme-weather events and disaster declarations, it is important for counties to assess the needs of and have plans in place to assist their elderly populations in the event of a disaster.

According to NACo's 2018 survey on "Emergency Management in County Government," just over 85 percent of county respondents have plans in place to address the needs of individuals in nursing homes, and just over 70 percent have plans in place to address the needs of individuals in hospitals. Under the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018, the Federal Emergency

Management Agency must provide guidance and training on an annual basis to state, local and tribal governments, first responders and utility providers on the need to prioritize assistance to ensure certain facilities — like these — remain functional and/or return to functional operations as soon as practicable during power outages caused by natural hazards.

In Florida, these types of critical facilities are required to have backup generators in the event of disaster. To help ensure support to these facilities during a disaster, Palm Beach County, Fla. has created a map of the county using state data to identify the places most in need.

Many individuals chose to age-in-place, however, so it is not enough to just identify critical facilities. Counties must also assess the needs of aging residents who live on their own that need help in the event of a disaster. A 2018 study on "Improving Disaster Resilience Among Older Adults" recommended that public health departments align and extend their preparedness activities with local aging-in-place efforts and tailor part of those activities to older adults.

Additionally, counties can and often do use special needs registries and/or partner with local faith-based organizations, HOAs or other community-based groups. Working with their partners, counties can ensure elderly populations have access to senior evacuation kits and have someone set to check on them.

One program that can be used to assist this process is the Map Your Neighborhood (MYN) program. MYN trains residents to identify and create lists of their neighborhood's homes with elderly, disabled or children, natural gas and propane tanks locations and helpful skills and equipment each neighbor has, in order to work together as a team during a disaster. This support is vital to seniors on living on their own with limited support networks, as county provided support services are often unavailable for a period of time immediately following a disaster.

When it is determined that evacuation is necessary, counties must have plans in place for residents who are unable to evacuate themselves. Some counties have created special needs shelters to

address the particular needs of senior citizens and those who have medical dependencies. As space is limited and based on greatest need, it is often required that individuals register in advance.

These facilities are typically staffed by medical personnel, social workers, and administrative staff. However, they are not full-service medical facilities and, like regular shelters, require individuals to provide their own medications and supplies. Medical items are often ones left behind in the rush of an evacuation.

To address this issue, following the Tubbs, Pocket and Nuns Fires in 2017, Sonoma County, Calif. made sure that they had staff in all evacuation shelters to help older adults and those with chronic conditions get new prescriptions written and filled, which is often hard to do with many pharmacies closed or not delivering.

Post-disaster is when older adults are particularly vulnerable due to the stress of being displaced and the recovery process. The loss of support networks and

See PREPARE pg H11



# COUNTIES PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES FOR OLDER ADULTS

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

With the number of Americans 65 and older projected to nearly double by 2060, counties are facing challenges in providing services to meet the transportation needs of this growing demographic. Counties are working to establish programs and services to fill the needs of older individuals who often struggle when they can no longer get behind the wheel because of physical and mental disabilities. Older adults face difficulties finding transportation alternatives, which may lead to loneliness and social isolation especially for those with few transit options where they live.

## Mobility managers

The Department of Transportation defines mobility management as an approach to deliver coordinated transportation services to customers including older adults, people with disabilities and individuals with lower incomes.

In Montgomery County, Md., Transportation and Mobility Manager Shawn Brennan said she works to promote transportation options, improve and expand services and tap into the county's transportation options to help older adults.

In Montgomery County, most older adults want to drive for as long as possible and do not want to explore alternative options, Brennan said. For individuals who have lived their whole lives without using a bus and then need to stop driving for medical reasons, it is often difficult to learn how to use public transportation.

Brennan said she advocates for older adults and stays connected to those who use different programs to listen to their needs and create a transportation system that is easy to navigate.

With Montgomery County offering a variety of programs including a public transit system, taxi system, volunteer programs, escorted transportation and a paratransit system, Brennan said it is difficult for older adults to be informed about each program.

"That's part of what mobility management is about — being clear on what all the players are doing, having an understanding of whose needs will be met through the various programs and helping to direct them," she said.

Mobility management is different depending on the setting, she said.

In some communities, mobility managers have to create services if there are none and in other areas, the job focuses on helping people use existing programs.

"I am doing things that hopefully are improving the whole mobility picture for older generations and people with disabilities," she said.

In Dane County, Wis., the Dane County Transportation Department is managed by a certified mobility manager who oversees 18 diversified transportation programs. Jane Betzig is the transportation coordinator, an equivalent position to a mobility manager.

"A mobility manager has the goal of getting them [older adults] where they want to go regardless of what it takes to get them there," Betzig said.

## Volunteer programs

Neighbor Ride, a volunteer program in Howard County, Md., has grown from 20 volunteers in 2004 to 400 volunteers who provide 1,500 trips per month and fill 96 percent of ride requests.

Neighbor Ride's Community Outreach Coordinator Colleen Konstanzer said the program originated from a 2001 Office of Aging study that projected a rapid population growth of the aging population. Transportation was one of the top concerns for older adults.

The Neighbor Ride service is available to Howard County residents who are over the age of 60 and can navigate on their own to a volunteer driver's car.

Older adults can call the Neighbor Ride office or visit the website to request a ride three business days in advance. Ride requests enter an online system where individuals or their adult children can log on to request rides, check the status of rides or make payments.



Neighbor Ride Volunteers Cathy and Donald Jones pick up passenger Vernice Smith in Howard County, Md. as part of the Neighbor Ride program. Photo courtesy of Neighbor Ride

When a client calls, ride coordinators find available drivers. Clients choose their destination and volunteer drivers typically take them round trip. Konstanzer said half of the ride requests are medical-related, but others include trips to get haircuts, go shopping or see friends.

The service provides up to 12 round trips per month.

"That's the way to make sure we're available to everyone and not just serving a very small set of clients with huge, huge transportation needs," Neighbor Ride Executive Director Bruce Fulton said.

Each volunteer receives a criminal background check and a driving background check.

"That's so wonderful about the model, too, I mean driving — everyone can inherently do," Fulton said. "There's no special skillset or set of aptitudes or qualifications that you need to have."

Neighbor Ride uses a "good neighbor" fund and does not have fees for clients whose income is 120 percent of the federal poverty level, Fulton said. For other clients, there are fees for the service based on mileage.

Through the Neighbor Ride service, Fulton said clients form relationships with volunteers. He said many older adults find comfort in knowing a few days early that their trip is covered.

"The population knows what they

want to do and we're just enabling them with the transportation piece to do that, using volunteers which is kind of an engaging experience," Fulton said.

Brennan said in Montgomery County, she hears the fewest complaints about volunteer transportation programs. Montgomery County has a volunteer program called Senior Connection which also creates social connections between older adults and volunteer drivers.

"When people can't drive anymore... their next best thing is to just slide over and be in the passenger seat," she said.

## Call centers

The Dane County Transportation Department established a call center in 2008 as a one-stop shop for transportation information for older adults and people with disabilities.

The call center operates using funding from a grant which supports its operations, two travel training programs and a full-time mobility manager, which is Betzig's role in the community.

The call center offers information on all available transportation options including public transit, human services programs and volunteer driver programs.

Many of the human services programs specifically help transport the elderly and people with disabilities, but

See MOVE pg H11





# SUPPORTING AGING RESIDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Group member Greg works with a volunteer horticulture specialist to plant flowers in the Johnson County Developmental Supports garden. Photo courtesy of Johnson County, Kan.

**by Melissa Oribhabor Reeves**

Government officials, community leaders and gerontologists have discussed for years the best way for social service organizations and local governments to meet the support needs of the aging baby boomer population. But those discussions can often exclude how to best serve aging individuals with intellectual

and developmental disabilities (IDD). A developmental disability is a chronic disabling condition present before age 22 due to physical and/or mental impairments such as intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism or Down syndrome.

According to research published by the Institute on Disability and Human Development, by 2030, the number of

people over the age of 60 with developmental disabilities will increase to 1.4 million, up from 850,600 reported in the 2010 Census. Due to medical advancements, individuals with IDD are living longer and require specialized care in retirement. Local governments that offer aging services must take these needs into account in order to adequately serve all residents of advanced age.

Johnson County, Kan. is located in the Kansas City metro area and is home to more than half a million people. The Community Developmental Disabilities Organization oversees the 73 public, private and non-profit IDD service providers in the county. Johnson County Developmental Supports (JCDS) is an

See SUPPORT pg H8



# County program helps aging residents with intellectual, developmental disabilities

From SUPPORT pg H7

agency within the county government and is the largest provider of IDD services in the county. Approximately 550 people receive residential, employment, case management and life enrichment services from JCDS.

JCDS utilizes regional transit, micro-transit services and a rideshare partnership. Many individuals also rely on family for transportation to the Mark D. Elmore Center. Direct support professionals (DSPs) also provide transportation for the individuals who receive services.

The retirement program is open to individuals who are over the age of 55. The program has 13 full-time staff members. Staff coordinates activities, dispenses medication, assists individuals to meet personal goals as outlined in their person-centered support plans, and advocates alongside them in their day-to-day lives.

Staff is supplemented through a robust volunteer base. The diverse group of volunteers are recruited through county events, volunteer fairs, the website, social media, newsletters, local media articles and more.

At an estimated annual cost of \$600,000 to run the retirement program, funding comes from two sources: Home and Community Based Services waiver/Medicaid, which is facilitated through the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services, and the county government. Grants are always evaluated and assist with the program.

"When we first started the retirement program, we had about 12 or 13 individuals and those folks were between the ages of 50 and 60," said Tiffany Hanna, activity coordinator for the retirement program. But since the program began in 2010, it has slowly expanded to 34 people as of July 2019.

The JCDS retirement program is divided into three groups: Sage, Active Agers and Dementia Supports. The retirement program is structured so participants can maintain integration in the community while benefiting from therapeutic intervention and daily in-house leisure, health and wellness and educational activities.

The Sage group does primarily in-house activities that are provided along with a daily activity around Johnson County, such as volunteering with a food pantry.

The Active Agers group currently receives services offsite at a building



The Active Agers Group decorate a wreath as part of a volunteer project with KC Art Angels and Starfish Project. The wreath was donated to the Johnson County Christmas Bureau. Photo courtesy of Johnson County, Kan.

leased from Starfish Project, which is a local non-profit. Participants in this group enjoy a range of daily activities such as sporting events, plays and music therapy.

In August 2017, Dementia Supports started with eight participants. Currently, 14 people with Alzheimer's and Dementia participate in the retirement program and a total of 24 people with those diagnoses receive services from JCDS.

"We realized that the folks who were starting to present with dementia were needing to be more or less supported in place, where they were at," said Hanna. "Their day is not as defined as the other two groups."

One of the underlying reasons for growth in this group is the prevalence of those diseases among some individuals with IDD. On average, people with Down syndrome have a more than 50 percent chance of an Alzheimer's or Dementia diagnosis, and it tends to present at an earlier age, often in their 50s or 60s, according to the National Institute on Aging.

Dementia Supports are provided in service areas where lighting, activities, sounds and decorations are more conducive for success for a person with those conditions. DSPs receive special-

ized training in order to give the highest quality of care. Staff is offered training on compassion fatigue, coping with grief and other issues that may arise from this specialized line of work.

In-home support is also a vital part of the services the county offers. JCDS does not own any residences, but staff does offer residential support to more than 100 adults living around the county.

Friends of JCDS is a non-profit that provides housing and special assistance for individuals served by JCDS. They own 14 homes in Johnson County and are expanding to include more homes. They currently have one home designed specifically to support individuals with dementia, and dementia supports are considered as they renovate the additional homes.

"We spent last year bringing [the other] 13 homes up to that standard — where we could — so flooring is continuous, we've prepped for ceiling lifts, we've added additional accessible bathrooms, etcetera," said Janel Bowers, chief development and operations officer for Friends of JCDS.

Funding for Friends of JCDS comes from private donations, charitable foundations, city and county distribution of

Community Development Block Grant funding and affordable housing grants.

JCDS is currently considering whether to lower the qualifying age to enter the retirement program to 50 to capture an increase in individuals who would like to stop working and access retirement services.

Additional considerations will need to be made for space accommodation and programming for a larger number of participants.

"In order to secure the necessary funding, JCDS staff, people served and other advocates in the state are meeting with elected officials to communicate the need for appropriate funding for IDD services in Kansas," said JCDS Executive Director Chad VonAhnen.

"Low Medicaid reimbursement rates and a lack of funding for the IDD waiver waiting list from the State of Kansas make it harder for people with IDD to access services and live independently throughout their lives." ■

*Reeves is the community relations manager for Johnson County, Kan. Developmental Supports. For more information about JCDS, visit them online at [jcds.org](http://jcds.org) and follow them on Facebook and Twitter @JoCoJCDS*



# Area Agencies on Aging address elders' health needs where they live

by **Sandy Markwood and  
Marisa Scala-Foley**

County governments play a lead role in meeting the health and human services of all of their citizens, especially the most vulnerable. Health happens in the home, and our health care system is increasingly recognizing and responding to that by paying attention to what are called the social determinants of health or SDoH, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as “conditions in the places where people live, learn, work and play.”

Eighty percent of health outcomes are driven by the physical environment in which a person lives — socioeconomic factors such as nutrition, income and social supports — and other behavioral factors including diet and exercise, substance use and more.

Addressing these factors and better meeting the needs of older adults and their families requires community-driven solutions and cross-sector partnerships between the health care system and community-based social services organizations (CBOs) such as Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), more than 50 percent of which are based in county government or are part of Regional Councils of Government (COG). And there is growing interest and opportunity to forge new relationships between the two sectors to serve the nation's rapidly growing aging population.

There is often a disconnect between the worlds of health care and social services, with each sometimes having different goals, different terminology and different ways of being paid.

But individuals and their families fare better when all of their health needs and preferences are being taken into account, and where older people overwhelmingly prefer to have their health needs met and services provided in their homes and the communities in which they live.

This, along with the need to drive health care utilization and costs down, has led to a movement toward coordination and integration of health care and social services (or long-term services and supports). This movement is increasingly supported by policy such as the new flexibility afforded to Medicare Advantage plans.

This presents unique opportunities for AAAs to contract with health care providers and payers that are looking to address the health-related social needs of the peo-

ple whom they serve. AAAs have unique knowledge of and a mission to serve older adults in your community, and get things done, and as such, health care organizations are increasingly reaching out to them to partner and contract for home and community-based services that can help to meet the needs of their members and patients. For AAAs, these contracting opportunities offer them the chance to further their mission to address needs of individuals and families in their communities, and support the local health care community, as well as to generate sustainable revenue sources.

The good news is that in many areas of the country, contracting between health care entities and AAAs is already hap-

pening. Nearly 44 percent of AAAs that responded to a Request for Information survey of community-based aging and disability organizations done by n4a's Aging and Disability Business Institute indicated that they currently had one or more contracts with health care entities, including health plans, health systems, state Medicaid agencies, Veterans Administration medical centers, Accountable Care Organizations and more.

About 40 percent of those AAAs that indicated that they had health care contracts were part of county government or councils of government. The most common services provided under contract were things like care coordination, care transitions or discharge planning, assess-

ment for eligibility for long-term services and supports, nutrition programs and evidence-based health promotion programs such as fall-prevention programs. And through these contracts, AAAs are able to serve high-need populations such as individuals at risk of nursing home placement or admission/readmission to a hospital. In addition, AAAs and other CBOs are increasingly contracting with health care entities as part of regional or state CBO networks, with over 30 percent of those with health care contracts indicating that they had entered into such contracts as part of a network.

In order to maximize and expand the op-

See AAAs pg H11

## AMERICANS ARE CARING FOR LOVED ONES

**Sixty-five percent** of older adults with long-term care needs rely exclusively on family and friends to provide assistance. (Another **30 percent** supplement family care with paid assistance.)

Care provided by family and friends can determine whether an older person can remain at home. In fact, **50 percent** of the elderly who have a long-term care need but no family available to care for them are in nursing homes, while only **7 percent** who have a family caregiver are in institutional settings.

As of **2011**, some **43.5 million** adult family caregivers were taking care of someone 50+ years of age. Of these, **14.9 million** were caring for someone with dementia. As more people live long enough to experience multiple health issues and dependency, more relatives will be facing this responsibility.

In one Gallup survey, **55 percent** of caregivers reported providing care for three years or more.

Source: Institute on Aging (IOA)





# Older Americans Act crucial resource for counties

by Rachel Merker

While counties provide critical services to residents, they play an especially unique and important role in caring for the elderly. From supporting home-based care and providing nutrition and transportation services to building safe communities and promoting social integration, counties are leveraging local resources to serve the nation's aging population as well as their caregivers. The Older Americans Act (OAA), up for reauthorization this year, is a crucial resource that enables counties to carry out this important work.

First passed in 1965 and last reauthorized in 2016, the OAA provides much-needed funding for programs that help older adults live independently and allow them to remain part of the community. Each year, millions of older adults rely on programs under the OAA for access to nutrition, transportation, caregiv-



ing and many other critical services.

States receive OAA funding according to a formula based on each state's share of the nation's population of individuals 60 and older. However, they are required to pass these funds to area agencies on aging (AAAs), which coordinate programs and services for senior citizens at the local level. Unsurprisingly, counties are a key partner and recipient of these dollars.

In fact, roughly 25 percent of the 625 AAAs across the nation operate within

county governments. An additional 28 percent of the nation's AAAs are housed within a regional government, which means they often have county officials represented among their leadership and partners on the ground. Meanwhile, 56 percent of AAAs rely on counties and other local governments as a non-OAA funding stream to provide additional programs and services.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, counties have had fewer resources with which to serve a rapidly aging population. Funding for the OAA has not kept pace with inflation or with increased demand for services, translating to long waiting lists. And as rates of Alzheimer's disease and dementia continue to skyrocket, supports for this population and their caregivers — not to mention increased resources for prevention research — are increasingly urgent.

Against this backdrop, counties need

tangible updates to the OAA that will increase resources and maximize flexibility to respond to these new challenges. Counties also need targeted funding for research and evaluation that will allow them to identify and correct gaps in services.

Currently, members of Congress are negotiating a bipartisan OAA reauthorization that will capture many of these priorities, the most notable being annual increases in authorized funding levels. However, reauthorizing the OAA is just the first step. Congress must also fully fund this legislation during the annual appropriations process and continue working to empower counties to provide the best possible care to our older residents and their caregivers. ■

*Rachel Merker is associate legislative director for Human Services and Education in NACo's Government Affairs department.*

# How counties can help create 'Livable Communities'

by Danielle Arigoni

Approximately 45 million Americans are now age 65 or older. By 2030, 73 million, or one in five adults, will be older than 65. In fact, by 2035, the United States will — for the first time ever — be a country comprised of more older adults than children. The vast majority of people age 50 or older are highly engaged in their communities and want to live in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

We all know that well-designed, livable communities promote and sustain economic growth and make for happier, healthier residents. And we also know that local leaders are best positioned to turn their communities into great places for people of all ages.

Those realities are just a few of the reasons why AARP staff members and volunteers are working with elected officials, local governments and residents in communities throughout the nation to help make towns, cities, counties and even states more livable and age-friendly for people of all ages.

AARP's goal — in collaboration with national, state and local partners — is to create great places where people can live their best lives at every age. We seek to create more livable communities where myriad transportation choices exist — including for those who cannot or choose not to drive — and a range of affordable

and accessible housing options exist for people at every stage of life. We strive to support the creation of parks and public spaces that are engaging, inclusive, safe, and welcoming, and which can serve as a hub for public life for people across generations.

In partnership with our AARP state offices (there is one in every state, plus DC, USVI and Puerto Rico — find yours at [AARP.org/States](http://AARP.org/States)), the AARP Livable Communities initiative serves as a resource for programs, information, tools and grants that support practitioners, and bring best practices and solutions to those on the front lines of creating great communities.

• More than 400 communities — and seven states — have already joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities which facilitates a multi-year, locally driven, action-oriented process that results in more livable communities. (Check out the member list to see which communities



Danielle Arigoni, director  
AARP Livable  
Communities



have already joined at [AARP.org/AgeFriendly](http://AARP.org/AgeFriendly)).

• Since its debut in 2017, the AARP Community Challenge grant program has awarded more than \$3.5 million in funding to more than 300 projects nationwide. These grants help towns, cities, counties and neighborhoods make immediate improvements and jumpstart long-term change through quick-action grants.

Challenge grant funds have been used to build accessible "tiny houses" for older adults; install artistic crosswalks, murals, benches and directional signage; transform underutilized public spaces and more. The annual application period opens in February; learn more at [AARP.org/CommunityChallenge](http://AARP.org/CommunityChallenge).

• Our website and weekly newsletter provide information and lessons from around the country to community "influencers" — elected officials, planners, municipal staff, placemaking pros, local

leaders, policy makers, citizen activists and residents — to help them affect local change. Subscribe to the free, award-winning newsletter at [AARP.org/LivableSubscribe](http://AARP.org/LivableSubscribe) or explore our feature articles, interviews and news at [AARP.org/Livable](http://AARP.org/Livable).

• Free print publications on topics ranging from how to conduct a walk audit, to understanding how ADUs fit in a livable community, to tools on assessing how to improve your parks are available for download or in print. Check out the ever-growing collection at [AARP.org/LivableLibrary](http://AARP.org/LivableLibrary).

• Just starting out? Learn how livable your county, town or neighborhood is through AARP's free interactive, data-driven tool: The Livability Index. Developed by the AARP Public Policy Institute, the index tracks dozens of policies and indicators to calculate the livability of a state, county, town, city or street. Find a score by entering an address, ZIP code, municipality or location name at [AARP.org/LivabilityIndex](http://AARP.org/LivabilityIndex).

Consider AARP your partner when exploring how to prepare your county for a more age-friendly and livable future for all. The nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization for people age 50 or older is working to improve communities for people of all ages. ■

*Danielle Arigoni is director of Livable Communities at AARP.*



## County wants 'gamut of transportation needs'



Neighbor Ride Volunteer Leo St. Cyr, who has provided over 1,000 rides for the Neighbor Ride program since 2010, picks up Elizabeth Catterton in Howard County, Md. Photo courtesy of Neighbor Ride

From MOVE pg H6

the center also serves Dane County workers, refugees, low-income families, individuals experiencing homelessness and veterans, Betzig said.

The center directs individuals to transportation options tailored to their needs and answers questions about transportation, sets up rides and provides callers with available options.

"The whole purpose is to give them very personalized attention so that not only are their questions answered, they also now leave with options about different transportation opportunities," Betzig said.

The call center is also familiar with public transit that's available to match individuals with programs such as shared-ride taxis.


"It can be very overwhelming especially for the elderly," Betzig said.

"They don't know where to even begin to get help for any form of transportation."

The call center dispatches 48,000 rides per year not including rides through diversified programs such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer (RSVP) Driver Escort Program, which is funded by the county and involves ride coordinators and volunteer drivers providing a door-to-door service to older adults.

Montgomery County has a similar call center called the Connect-A-Ride program where individuals and family members can explain their situation over the phone and have their transportation needs matched to available programs.


"Having one place to send them is really great," Brennan said.

"We really want to have the whole gamut of transportation needs available to help someone," Betzig added. 

## Improving resiliency for elderly

From PREPARE pg H5

their homes can be devastating, and mental health services are a top priority. In the month following the fires, calls to the Sonoma County Department of Health Services Behavioral Health department doubled. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors developed a long-term mental health plan and partnered with local mental health providers to provide free or reduced cost services to affected residents. These are just some

of the strategies that counties employ to improve the resilience of their elderly residents to disasters. For more information on this topic, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults webpage at [cdc.gov/features/older-adult-emergency](https://cdc.gov/features/older-adult-emergency). 

Jenna Moran is associate program director, Resiliency, Transportation & Infrastructure at NACo's County Innovations Lab.

## AGING RESOURCES FOR COUNTIES

### ■ Administration for Community Living:

The Administration for Community Living was created around the fundamental principle that older adults and people of all ages with disabilities should be able to live where they choose, with the people they choose, and with the ability to participate fully in their communities. [acl.gov](https://acl.gov)

■ **Administration on Aging:** An agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The administration carries out the provisions of the Older Americans Act of 1965 and provides services and programs to help older individuals live independently. [acl.gov](https://acl.gov)

■ **Alzheimer's:** The federal government portal to information on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias care, research and support. [Alzheimers.gov](https://alzheimers.gov)

■ **American Association of Retired Persons (AARP):** Interest group empowers people to choose how they live as they age. [aarp.org](https://aarp.org)

■ **Area Agencies on Aging:** Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is a public or private non-profit agency, designated to address the needs and concerns of all older persons at the regional and local levels. [eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov)

■ **Easterseals:** A nonprofit providing disability services and support areas for seniors, caregivers and veterans. [easterseals.com](https://easterseals.com)

■ **Go4Life:** An exercise campaign

from the National Institute on Aging at NIH designed to help older adults keep fit. [Go4life.nia.nih.gov](https://go4life.nia.nih.gov)

■ **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center:** Promotes the availability and accessibility of transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities. [nadtc.org](https://nadtc.org)

■ **National Aging in Place Council:** A senior support network that focuses on helping older adults remain in their homes for as long as possible. [ageinplace.org](https://ageinplace.org)

■ **National Alliance for Caregiving:** A non-profit dedicated to improving quality of life for caregivers and those in care through research, advocacy and innovation. [caregiving.org](https://caregiving.org)

■ **National Council on Aging:** Helps individuals 60+ meet the challenges of aging through offering information on a variety of topics including benefits, home equity, money management, jobs and training for older adults and chronic disease management. [ncoa.org](https://ncoa.org)

■ **Transportation for America:** Advocates for a transportation system that is safe, affordable and connects people of all means. [t4america.org](https://t4america.org)

■ **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:** You'll find information on caregiver resources, Social Security benefits, Medicare enrollment, Medicaid coverage and age discrimination. [hhs.gov/aging](https://hhs.gov/aging)


## Meeting aging needs in the home

From AAAs pg H9

portunity to serve older adults, this work needs buy-in at all levels with the agency and your county — agency leadership, staff, subcontractors and advisory boards and commissions; county executives; county commissioners and other county departments including Legal, Insurance and Compliance. If your AAA and other CBOs in your county don't do this work, health care providers and payers may decide to use national vendors for these services, who don't know your citizens as well and which will also send money out of your county.

But with that in mind, contracting with health care organizations can offer tremendous benefits for both your AAA and your county. For AAAs, it can offer new funding from different sources and increased agency net revenue, expanded

visibility in the community as a valuable health partner and the opportunity to serve more people living in your county.

As an example, the AAA in Chautauqua County, N.Y. saw their income from care transitions work that they were doing with managed long-term care plans and through private pay services grow by more than 500 percent over seven years, which enabled them to serve more citizens. For your county, it can help to increase revenue, reduce waiting lists for services, grow local businesses and create jobs, serve a growing senior population and help them to keep them living safely and with dignity and choices in their communities for as long as possible. 

Sandy Markwood is CEO of n4a and Marisa Scala-Foley is director of the Aging and Disability Business Institute at n4a.



# INTERGENERATIONAL SOLUTIONS MAKE SENSE, SAVE DOLLARS

by Donna Butts

*"I will never stop doing what I am doing when I see the difference it has made for young people — and for me."*

Intergenerational programs can be win-win-wins for counties enriching the lives of people at all ages and stages of life.

While recent nationwide surveys conducted for Generations United and The Eisner Foundation found the overwhelming majority of adults (77 percent) wish there were more opportunities in their community for people from different age groups to meet and get to know one another, very few say they know how to make these connections happen.

While people understand the value, they don't have easy access to the venues that make intergenerational interaction possible.

As our population ages and diversifies, intergenerational shared sites and programs are a no-brainer we've made too complicated to easily replicate in counties around the country.

It's time to revisit the rules and regulations that make it harder, not easier, to connect generations.

Why are there so few options when interest is so "high?"

A new brief by Generations United, by Dr. Shannon Jarrott of The Ohio State University and The Eisner Foundation, "Piecing It Together: What We Know About the Funding Puzzle for Spaces that Connect Young and Old," tackles one piece of the puzzle. It aims to share what we currently know about funding and financing as well as the potential for cost savings from these programs.

It includes the findings from a 2008 preliminary study commissioned by Generations United that found programs cost less when older adult, youth and child services share expenses.

Intergenerational shared sites (places



Butts

**'Studies have shown older adults in intergenerational programs feel more optimistic.'**

life terms as well.

Studies have shown older adults in intergenerational programs feel more optimistic, take better care of themselves, score better on memory tests and find joy in the purpose they provide.

Younger participants also benefit from a sense of purpose and extra attention as well as learning soft skills like patience

and spaces that serve and together engage young and older people) appear to have an economic advantage when it comes to staff recruitment and retention.

Several elder care facilities have opened on-site childcare as an employee benefit and quickly learned what a positive effect the children had on the older participants. Staff retention rates are considerably higher than in facilities that only serve an aging population.

Given the cost of staff recruitment and training, keeping staff longer helps the bottom line.

The financial benefits can be viewed in quality of

and tolerance.

Communities benefit as well, completing the win-win-win design.

For example, the Northland Foundation's AGE to Age — an innovative, rural, grassroots program — uses a guided planning process designed for adults age 55 and older, along with youth.

Together, they identify unmet local needs and devise their own solutions. Along the way, bonds of friendship form and civic engagement grows by leaps and bounds.

So, what can counties do?

■ Start small. Look for opportunities that exist. For example, several counties have co-located aging, family and children services yet the staff have never met to identify overlapping intergenerational intersections or opportunities in their work.

■ Incorporate intergenerational language in funding opportunities, reports and community discussions. For example, the Dignity in Aging Act to reauthorize the Older American's Act incorporates specific intergenerational language including calling on the Assistant Secretary for Aging to give preference to shared site programs such as co-located childcare and long-term care facilities <https://www.gu.org/resources/intergenerational-opportunities-in-the-older-americans-act/>

■ Establish an intergenerational advisory council or host an intergenerational dialogue focused on envisioning our future county. Explore developing a "Community for All Ages" plan <https://www.gu.org/creating-an-age-advantaged-community/>.

■ Consider supporting innovative housing models like Generations United's "GrandDorm" that supports older adults aging in place through intergenerational homesharing or grandfamilies housing <https://www.gu.org/resources/a-place-to-call-home-building-affordable-housing-for-grandfamilies/>

Our country's changing demographics — both in age and race — can be a community's greatest asset.

Only by breaking down the artificial age silos, often created by funding and policy restrictions, can we turn the conversation about these changes from burden to benefit. If we do, counties will benefit because we are stronger together. **H12**

*Donna Butts is the executive director of Generations United. NACo has been a member of Generations United with a representative on the board for more than 20 years. The Honorable Gerry Hyland, retired Fairfax County, Va. supervisor, currently serves as NACo's representative.*





## Health officials: Ban flavored e-cigarettes

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

As county health departments investigate a growing number of cases of lung disease associated with vaping, the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO) reiterated its strong support for action to curb youth vaping in a letter last week to President Trump.

The letter was signed by NACCHO CEO Lori Tremmel Freeman and Big Cities Health Coalition Executive Director Chrissie Juliano.

“As the youth e-cigarette epidemic continues to grow and over 5 million children are currently using e-cigarettes, the time for action is now,” the letter said. “We urge the Administration to swiftly implement its plan to clear the market of all flavored e-cigarettes, without any carve-out for particular retailers.”

As of Nov. 20, 2,290 cases of lung injury related to e-cigarette use had been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and 47 related deaths had been confirmed.

Trump announced in September that he would endorse a Food and Drug Administration proposal to ban the sale of non-tobacco-flavored e-cigarette products, but has backtracked since then.

The letter comes as many

county governments restrict the sale of flavored e-cigarette cartridges and others’ sue manufacturer Juul. Montgomery County, Md., Los Angeles County, Calif. and King and Skagit counties in Washington have filed suits along with the states of California and New York. The suits target the company’s marketing practices, which they allege to be deceptive and specifically targeted at youths.

“Juul was well aware that their products would appeal to youth — driving an ever-increasing epidemic of nicotine addiction and severe lung illness, King County Executive Dow Constantine said in a statement. “The taxpayers of King County must not be stuck with the tab for a public health crisis that has lined the pockets of Juul and their shareholders.”

Other counties are pursuing bans on the sale of vaping products in stores.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified a thickening agent used in THC-containing e-cigarette, or vaping, products as a common finding among fluid samples from 29 patients with vaping-related lung disease in 10 states.

The CDC reported that this was the first time that it had detected a chemical of concern in biological samples from patients with these lung injuries.

“These findings provide direct evidence of vitamin E acetate at the primary site of injury within the lungs.”

County health departments did not mince words when aggressively warning residents about the dangers of vaping. In early September, the Summit County, Ohio Public Health Department told residents to “stop using any vape and/or e-cigarette devices immediately.”

“We’re choosing to be very direct with our messaging and not dance around the issue,” said Cory Kendrick, policy and legislative affairs manager at Summit County Public Health. “We need to say what we mean. It’s a dangerous situation and it’s time we did something about it.”

He said that approach had been much more fruitful than a more general warning the department had released two weeks before.

“We knew this was going to be a problem, so we’ve been sounding the warning bells for some time,” Kendrick said. “Nobody picked up our first warning, then over the next few weeks, the cases doubled and we took a more direct approach.”

“It definitely made a big difference being more deliberate in our messaging rather than just issuing a general warning.” **CN**

## Speaker reveals plan for \$1 trillion infrastructure package

by **Zachary George**

Talks of a major comprehensive infrastructure package have reemerged on Capitol Hill after negotiations between House Democrats and the White House stalled in May.

On Nov. 13, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said House Democrats plan to propose a \$1 trillion infrastructure package by bundling major legislation that typically moves separately. The plan would combine a surface transportation reauthorization bill and a new Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) authorization, both of which expire Sept. 30, 2020. The proposed package would also include items related to broadband and pipeline safety.

Surface transportation reauthorizations and WRDA provide significant funding for county-owned and operated infrastructure, and the two packages are traditionally authorized every five and two years, respectively.

The FAST Act was the last surface transportation reauthorization signed into law in 2015, and it included \$305 billion over fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for highway development and maintenance, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail and research, technology and statistics programs.

Congress has already begun work on a new surface transportation reauthorization that will impact counties. In July, the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee unanimously passed a five-year, \$287 billion surface transportation reauthorization measure spanning FY 2021 through 2025. The bill

is currently awaiting floor action and the addition of other titles related to rail and safety, mass transit and funding from other Senate committees of jurisdiction, including the Commerce, Banking, and Finance Committees, respectively. The House is expected to unveil companion legislation in early 2020, which will need to be conferenced with the Senate version prior

Congress has already begun work on a new surface transportation reauthorization that will impact counties.

to the president signing the measure into law.

Unlike the surface transportation reauthorization, WRDA legislation is authorized on a two-year cycle with the last authorization passed in 2018. WRDA bills authorize water resources studies and projects and set policies for navigation, flood control, hydropower, recreation, water supply and emergency management for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

This legislation addresses county interests related to ports, inland waterways, levees, dams, wetlands, watersheds and coastal restoration.

Congress is in the process of drafting new WRDA legislation. The legislation is expected to be released early 2020 in the Senate.

Counties invest \$122 billion annually owning and operating public works. **CN**

*Zach George is a legislative assistant in NACo's Government Affairs department.*



# Counties support libraries in e-book pricing fight

by Susan Benton

The nation's county libraries are engaged in an uphill struggle to ensure everyone can benefit from equitable access to e-books, regardless of their income or physical ability. Major publishers have severely ramped up restrictions to their e-book sales for public libraries, which widens the digital divide in counties of all sizes. Now, county government leaders from across the country are taking a stand to support libraries in their fight for fair e-book pricing models from publishers.

"Public libraries represent the values of cooperation and sharing by offering resources to all residents — regardless of income, race, gender, age or ability — that can inform and entertain," said Erie (N.Y.) County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz. "Providing access

to e-books and other digital learning materials at local libraries ensures that everyone in Erie County has equal access to valuable tools and further advances my belief that public libraries are community assets that produce economic benefits to our community."

Poloncarz is one of 84 North American county and city leaders who have signed the Statement on Equitable Public Access to E-Books, developed by the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) and Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC).

Leaders from other counties have also signed on, including those from the following: Bexar County, Texas; Contra Costa County, Calif.; Multnomah County, Ore.; Hamilton County, Ohio; Lucas County, Ohio; Stark County, Ohio; Richland County, S.C.; Fairfax County, Va.; Baltimore County, Md.; Anne Arundel County, Md.;



Poloncarz

Howard County, Md.; St. Louis County, Mo., and Mecklenburg County, N.C.

ULC and CULC issued this statement in direct response to Macmillan Publishers' latest restrictive policy, which launched on Nov. 1. Macmillan's new policy prevents library systems from purchasing more than one copy of any


Macmillan e-book for eight weeks following the title's initial publication.

This follows other severe restrictions to library sales that have been implemented over the last year by the other "Big 5" publishers. These restrictions exacerbate the long-standing challenges caused by unreasonably high prices for e-book sales to libraries. For example, libraries pay \$55 for an e-book license for Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls* (Penguin Random House), while individuals can purchase the Kindle edition for \$14.99, according to a recent Toledo Lucas County Library blog post.

The people who will be hurt most by the publishers' policies are those who already face the greatest risk of being left behind in the digital age, including children, low-income families and people living with disabilities. Many individuals

from disadvantaged communities rely entirely on their local library for access to books in any format.

Communities are strongest when public libraries can provide opportunities for all residents to learn and grow. County leaders know this well. By signing the Statement on Equitable Public Access to E-Books, they are sending a powerful message to e-book publishers about the urgent need for fair, transparent and flexible lending models for libraries.

County leaders who are interested in adding their name to this statement should contact ULC Director of Communications Curtis Rogers at [crogers@urbanlibraries.org](mailto:crogers@urbanlibraries.org). 

*Susan Benton is the president and CEO of the Urban Libraries Council, an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems.*

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## PROFILES IN SERVICE

### AMY HALE MILLIKEN

**Board Member**  
Attorney  
Warren County, Ky.



Milliken

**Number of years involved in NACo:** Two

**Years in public service:** 23

**Occupation:** I am the county attorney (an elected position) for Warren County government.

**Education:** Western Kentucky University, BA, 1993 and Northern Kentucky University—Salmon P. Chase College of Law, JD, 1995

**The hardest thing I've ever done is:** Make sure all three of my daughters are becoming strong, healthy, kind, self-sufficient and hard-working women while maintaining a more than full-time career. I have three daughters — Abby, 22; Chloe, 18; and Ruth E., 10.

**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:** My grandfather, Rex Hale, Susan B. Anthony and Abraham Lincoln. I never had the pleasure of meeting my grandfather. He died in a car accident before I was born. I would love to talk to him. He served our country in WWII and liberated Dachau. Susan B. Anthony is so inspirational to me. Love her girl power! Abraham Lincoln, a man with vision who stood by his beliefs to do what is right. What a conversation we would have together!

**A dream I have is to:** Make a difference in my community for our children. I see so much suffering. I would love to remove hunger and abuse and work every day to see that the children in our county are fed and educated so that they will have a brighter future.

**You'd be surprised to learn:** I love to lift weights. It helps me manage my stress and I really enjoy not only the weightlifting, but the tone I get from doing it. It is a passion.

**The most adventurous thing I've ever done was:** Jump off a high ropes course during a leadership conference. I am not one for "free falling" and this was a free fall until the latch pulled you up. I was so scared, but I was so proud of myself when I did it!

**My favorite way to relax is:** Kicked back on our boat, at the lake, music playing with the sun shining and the wind blowing. I grew up on the lake and we start our lake season in March and finish up in November. The months in between are count-down months!!

**I'm most proud of:** My career accomplishments and how they show my daughters that hard work, treating people fairly and loving what you do is the combination to success.

**Every morning I read:** The jail intakes, emails from work and text messages from the night before to be on top of the day. I wake up early and feel like this keeps my day on track to be ahead.

**My favorite meal is:** A cheeseburger and a milkshake. Something about that combination. I don't get it much, but LOVE it when I do!

**My pet peeve is:** When someone says, "this is the way we have always done it." No one likes change, but I do my best to embrace it and work hard to make sure we change the way "it has always been done" if it will help make things better.

**My motto is:** Just keep smiling... you can't have a bad day with a smile on your face!

**The last book I read was:** *Dancing Alone Without Music* by Larry Gildersleeve. Larry is a native of Warren County, Ky., and he is a self-published author. The characters are from Warren County and the setting is in Warren County. I loved it!

**My favorite movie is:** This is a hard one.... it is between *Sweet Home Alabama*, *Steel Magnolias* and *Pretty Woman*. I adore all three!

**My favorite U.S. president:** Abraham Lincoln.

**My county is a NACo member because:** We are stronger when we are together and my county wants to be a part of an organization that makes counties a priority, works hard to make the lives of our citizens better and works hard for us in D.C. We love being a part of NACo!

**My favorite music is:** Country. Love it. Grew up with it. Listen to it all the time.



## Capitol Roundup



Mayor Stephen Prysunka from the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, makes the case for critical county payment programs during a recent congressional hearing. Photo by Chris Wathen

### A LOOK AT KEY ACTIVITIES IMPACTING COUNTIES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

#### PILT, SRS hearing on Capitol Hill

Mayor Stephen Prysunka, City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, told members of Congress Nov. 21 that "losing [Payment in Lieu of Taxes] PILT would result in the loss of important and vital services." Prysunka traveled to D.C. to make the case for long-term mandatory funding for PILT and reauthorizing Secure Rural Schools.

#### President signs continuing resolution

President Trump signed a continuing resolution Nov. 21 to fund the federal government through Dec. 20. The stopgap measures ensure the continued operation of government programs and averts a government shutdown as legislators continue negotiations on FY 2020 spending bills. The legislation provides continued funding authority for National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

#### Barriers to affordable housing

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Develop-

ment wants your ideas on how to knock down barriers to affordable housing. Comments are due to HUD by Jan. 21 and may be submitted by mail or online. Contact NACo's Daria Daniel at [ddaniel@naco.org](mailto:ddaniel@naco.org) for assistance.

#### U.S. House committee passes PFAS legislation

The U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce on Nov. 20 approved the PFAS Action Act of 2019 (H.R. 535). PFAS are a family of human-made "forever chemicals" that can contaminate water supplies. The legislation, if passed, would authorize millions of dollars to address PFAS in water supplies.

#### U.S. DOT awards \$900 million

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently announced \$900 million in grant funding to 55 projects in 35 states through the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) discretionary grant program. Eighteen of the projects went directly to county applicants or projects.

For more information, visit [naco.org/blog](http://naco.org/blog).



LEADERSHIP EDGE

Enjoy the Journey

**by Tim Rahschulte**

Often, when on a journey, we likely focus on the end. Rarely do we think about the planes, trains and intermediate stops along the way; instead, we keep our eyes on the final destination. Leadership's not too terribly different. Many times, we're staring at the launch date of a product or the close date of a big deal rather than the many stops and points of connection along the way. Why wouldn't we? There usually aren't big celebrations or awards given out in the middle of a journey. Those ceremonies are reserved for when the destination is reached, and the goal achieved.

The best leaders, however, know the importance of the journey itself. It's the journey that's remembered. The awards, launches and celebrations are joyous, and while plaques and trophies serve as reminders, it's the journey that's important. It's the journey and the work with others along the way that make pos-

sible the awards and launches — and yes, the celebrations.

Robert Hastings understands this because of the way he wrote *The Station*, from which the following is an excerpt:

*Uppermost in our conscious minds is our final destination — for at a certain hour and on*

“We must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all.”

*a given day, our train will finally pull into the station with bells ringing, flags waving and bands playing. And once that day comes, so many wonderful dreams will come true. So restlessly, we pace the aisles and count the miles, peering ahead, waiting, waiting, waiting for the station.*

“Yes, when we reach the station, that will be it!” we promise ourselves. “When

we're 18...win that promotion... put the last kid through college...buy that 450SL Mercedes-Benz...have a nest egg for retirement!”


From that day on, we will all live happily ever after.

Sooner or later, however, we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy in life is the trip.

It's the trip, the journey, that matters most. While the awards and launches and celebrations are joyous, the journey is the real joy. Hunter S. Thompson, the journalist and author best known for writing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, also understands this perspective. He said, “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out and loudly proclaiming, ‘Wow! What a ride!’”

Indeed! Leadership principles stress the importance of

vision, goals and future states. But the most exciting part of being a leader is the journey you take with others — those people who follow you on that path and who enable the vision, goals and future states to be realized.

Enjoy the journey! 

*Rahschulte is the CEO of the Professional Development Academy and chief architect of the NACo High Performance Leadership Program (naco.org/skills). He is co-author of “My Best Advice: Proven Rules for Effective Leadership.”*

WORD SEARCH

PITKIN COUNTY, Colorado  
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

D S U E M C P Z S M O G M X X E V D G H  
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- AIRPORT:** The Aspen/Pitkin County Airport is owned and operated by the county.

**ASPEN:** The county seat is located in Aspen, a resort and former mining town.

**CASTLE:** The county's highest elevation is 14,265 feet on Castle Peak, on the border with Gunnison County.

**COURTHOUSE:** The Victorian-style brick county courthouse was built in 1890. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

**JEROME:** An Aspen landmark, Hotel Jerome was built in 1889 and one of the first buildings west of the Mississippi to have electricity.

**LAND:** The county land area is 970.7 square miles.

**LONGEVITY:** Residents have a life expectancy of 86.5 years for men, 88 for women, ranked second in the nation. (Neighbors Summit and Eagle counties rank #1 and #3.)
- MOUNTAINS:** The county is nestled in the central Rocky Mountains.

**NEWSPAPERS:** The *Aspen Times* was founded in 1881; the *Aspen Daily News* was founded in 1978.

**ONION:** The Red Onion is the oldest restaurant in Aspen, opening in 1892.

**PITKIN:** The county is named for the late Colorado Gov. Frederick Walker Pitkin.

**POPULATION:** The county population, according to the 2018 Census, is 17,148.

**SILVER:** Mines located in the county produced nearly \$100 million of silver ore.

**SMUGGLER:** Smuggler Mine was once responsible for one-fifth of the country's silver production.

**UTE:** The town of Aspen was once named Ute City, after the Ute Indians who inhabited the area. The name was changed in 1880.



## BRIGHT IDEAS | CLACKAMAS COUNTY, Ore.

# Phone Line Reduces Senior Loneliness

### PROBLEM:

Older adults are at risk for social isolation and loneliness which may have harmful physical and mental health impacts.

### SOLUTION:

Create a free phone line that gives members of the aged community the opportunity to connect and talk with another person.

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

For older adults who find themselves isolated and feeling lonely, an eager voice to talk to is just a phone call away in Clackamas County, Ore.

The Clackamas County Senior Loneliness Line provides a personal connection for older adults experiencing loneliness and isolation. The line provides a friendly person to talk, listen, give emotional support or even provide resources and referrals, counseling or suicide intervention.

To establish the senior loneliness line, Clackamas County Older Adult Behavioral Specialist Kimberly Whitely said the county partnered with Lines for Life, a non-profit organization that has several different crisis lines including suicide, veteran and youth lines.

The senior loneliness line launched in 2018 and is a confidential, free service funded by Clackamas County for any older adult who needs to talk with another person. The county spent nearly \$12,000 for the Lines for Life call center and \$61,000 on outreach, promotion and education.

The majority of callers are between 65 and 74 years old. There is no time limit per call, but calls last about 20 minutes on average, according to Whitely.

Staff members at Lines for Life answer calls from all different phone lines and are



**Lines for Life volunteer Alexis Hilliard takes notes at the Lines for Life call center.** Photo courtesy Lines for Life

trained to handle a variety of phone calls and situations. When the senior loneliness line launched, volunteers completed additional training on issues specific to older adults and loneliness. County staff worked with Lines for Life to create a connection to its senior services so volunteers at the call center would be familiar with resources available to older individuals.

Whitely explained how volunteers' versatility in handling different types of phone calls benefits older adults because if someone who calls is identified as being in crisis, the volunteer is able to intervene.

"The beauty of it is if someone is in crisis, that same person they're talking to is also trained in that, so they don't have to switch off to someone else," she said. "There's no sort of break in that conversation."

Since the line launched in May 2018, there have been nearly 4,700 calls through Sep-

See more  
on social  
isolation  
solutions  
for seniors,  
page H3.

tember 2019 with calls coming from 24 counties throughout Oregon. According to Whitely, out of all the lines Lines for Life has launched, the senior loneliness line has been the most successful.

Loneliness has impacts on both physical and mental health when it comes to older adults and contributes to higher risk factors for dementia, Whitely said. Specifically in rural areas of the county, transportation issues contribute to social isolation for those who may have poor health.

"Just them being able to call in to give them that connection and although they may not physically be in someone's presence, it's at least that social connection they have," she said.

Many callers form relationships with the volunteers and ask when they are working their next shift to speak with them again. Others call in at the same time because they've built a relationship with the person on the other end of the phone.

Volunteers at the Senior Loneliness Line will occasionally make calls out to individuals, although Whitely said most older adults like to control when they want to talk. Volunteers also offer to send postcards to callers after they speak with them on the phone.

The concept for Clackamas County's senior loneliness line started through the state of Oregon's older adult behavioral health initiative that launched in 2015. The initiative focuses

on complex case consultations, training and education and improving collaboration and coordination between agencies to make services more accessible for older adults.

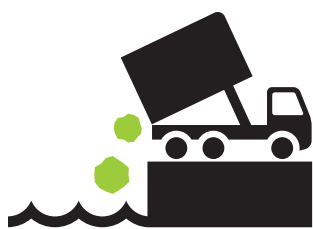
Whitely said through outreach efforts with this initiative, it became clear that members of the aged community shut down discussions around mental health or behavioral health. However, when they would talk in terms of loneliness, individuals were more likely to engage.

Whitely attributed the success of the line to it being "low barrier" and promoted for anyone who may just need someone to listen.

"It's marketed as the senior loneliness line so not as a crisis line because there's so much stigma still around mental health issues," she said. **CN**

*Clackamas County's Senior Loneliness Line is the recipient of a 2019 NACo Achievement Award in the Health category.*





## CALIFORNIA

• Officials in **ALAMEDA** and **CONTRA COSTA** counties have announced new strategies to prevent **illegal dumping and waste**. A one-year pilot program will increase law enforcement efforts to stop illegal dumping with both counties using funding to have at least one full-time officer enforcing illegal dumping laws, *Pleasanton Weekly* reported. Commercial haulers and individuals contribute to the illegal dumping problem by disposing of construction debris, mattresses and other trash that impact the environment.

• Across the country, more than half a million people experienced homelessness on a single night last year, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Supervisors in **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** are considering establishing a **regional funding pool** to help those struggling to pay rent. The initial funds for the pool would come from a \$2.5 million grant awarded to the county's Health and Human Services agency, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reported. The funding pool will involve cities and other agencies to create a regional effort to combat homelessness.

## COLORADO

• A program in **BOULDER COUNTY** is helping to **reduce social isolation** for LGBTQ+ individuals who are 60 and older. The Boulder County Area Agency on Aging piloted the Rainbow Connections program which paired volunteers with a member of the LGBTQ+ community, *Daily Camera* reported. The volunteers, who are trained and screened, spend time with elderly community members by going to the movies, getting food or helping them with other tasks such as working on setting up a computer.

• **GRAND COUNTY** is launching a program to **address the county's housing needs** by supporting the maintenance of existing properties. The Community Development Block Grant program, through the state Department of Local Affairs grant, offers county residents loans to repair their homes, according to *Sky-Hi News*. The program helps to preserve the housing stock.

## GEORGIA

The Sheriff's Office in **TROUP COUNTY** is working to help inmates keep connections to their family through a **Family Reunification Program**. Inmates at the Troup County Jail who meet certain requirements and have



children under state Division of Family and Children Services custody can meet with their children in a space that once was a former courtroom and was remodeled to make families feel more comfortable, WSAV reported. The program aims to help children who have an incarcerated parent.

## MARYLAND

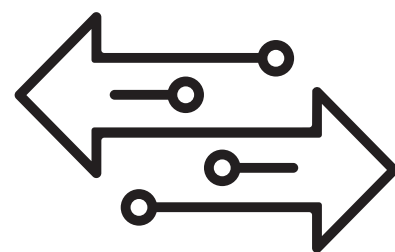
**MONTGOMERY COUNTY** unanimously **passed a racial equity bill** that will establish a countywide racial equity program and require equity impact statements for new bills and budgets, *Bethesda Magazine* reported. With the passing of the bill, county offices will now be required to submit plans for reducing inequality and establish a new Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice in the executive branch. The bill also mandates racial equity training for all county employees.

## MICHIGAN

• County clerks throughout the state are challenging a proposal

that would **allow phones and electronic devices in court-houses**. County clerks believe this change will result in a loss of revenue for counties because electronic devices can make copies of public documents for free. Currently, individuals are charged to make copies, **WOOD TV8** reported. Additionally, clerks argue that phones would allow individuals to take notes, go online or send and receives text messages in the courtroom. The state Supreme Court is considering the change. Law enforcement groups have also raised concerns about individuals taking photos or recording in the courtroom, Michigan Radio reported. Currently, local judges are allowed to decide whether cell phones can be brought into court.

• Commissioners in **HURON COUNTY** voted to sign an agreement for a **data exchange** with the Michigan Department of Technology and Budget. The agreement allows the county to acquire aerial photos taken



by the state in 2016 and share data between both entities, according to *Government Technology*. The photos will be used to identify water features and map forests as well as help with road and construction projects, zoning laws and emergency response.

## MINNESOTA

• County officials in **HENNEPIN COUNTY** agreed to pay for additional help to **review 1,700 rape kits** that were never tested, the *Associated Press* reported. Some of the rape kits date back 30 years. The county will fund an additional DNA analysis position at the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. The city of Minneapolis discovered the untested kits during an inventory.

# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## ARIZONA

Aerospace company Boeing is planning to use a dry lakebed in **COCHISE COUNTY** as the **landing site for a manned space capsule**. Boeing is developing the Starliner crew capsules for NASA under its Commercial Crew Transportation Capability program, the *Arizona Daily Star* reported. The plan is for the spacecraft to land in the county at a site owned by the U.S. Army and the state. Boeing officials briefed the county's Board of Supervisors on requirements for supporting the landing operation which involves Cochise County's Emergency Services Team. The county is working with Boeing on getting reimbursed for county services.

Boeing's Starliner spacecraft pictured outside NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Photo courtesy of NASA/Cory Huston



- **ANOKA** and **WASHINGTON** counties are working with regional partners to launch the **Minnesota Technology Corridor**. The initiative aims to attract companies to the area. The region is targeting businesses in the technology industry by offering high bandwidth and power capacities, available land and access points to fiber-optic lines. The area includes five “premier sites” that range from 10 acres to more than 250 acres.

## NORTH CAROLINA

- Residents fleeing domestic violence in **MECKLENBURG COUNTY** can now use a new electronic **system to get protective orders**. The eCourts Civil Domestic Violence System allows a victim to file a petition, be heard by a judge and receive signed orders remotely via live video feeds with judges, clerks and sheriff’s deputies. All of this can be done away from the courthouse, where county officials aim to reduce the risk of violence resulting from an abuser knowing where a victim would go to receive an order. Safety planning, housing and childcare from the domestic violence agency can all be planned and conducted from a domestic violence service agency. **ALAMANCE COUNTY** was the first in North Carolina to launch an electronic system, and Mecklenburg is the 11th out of a planned 16 counties, WFAE News reported.

- A program aiming to help **WAKE COUNTY** residents on the **verge of homelessness** is offering rental assistance and case management services.

“Wake Prevent” serves residents earning at or below 50 percent of the area median income level (\$46,350 for a family of four) and less than 30 days to homelessness. The program has a \$900,000 budget.

Families also have to meet at least one of these criteria: currently fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, doubling up (couch surfing) and told to leave the unit, notified by

the property owner or manager that they must vacate a leased property, paying for a hotel/motel without assistance or exiting an institution (mental/physical health, prison) with no resources or support system to assist upon release. Raleigh’s ABC-TV affiliate reported that Wake County rental rates are up 35 percent and the county’s stock of affordable housing units is dropping by 900 a year.

## OHIO

Following the partial collapse of a downtown Cincinnati building, the **BUTLER COUNTY Technical Rescue Team** responded and worked overnight as crews continued efforts to recover a missing person, the *Journal-News* reported. The team included 25 first responders from across the county.

## OKLAHOMA

**TULSA COUNTY** has opened a \$32 million **Family Center for Juvenile Justice**. The 151,000 square-foot facility is four times the size of the old one and houses juvenile courtrooms, a new forensic interview room, training rooms and offices for counselors and juvenile attorneys. Several areas are designed for children who are victims of neglect or abuse and others serve as play areas or classrooms to provide families access to therapists and nurses, News On 6 reported.



## NEVADA

**WASHOE COUNTY**’s Regional Transportation Commission is launching a pilot demonstration of a **double-decker bus**. The RTC will evaluate how the bus operates on a rapid bus line and as a regional connector to Carson City. Bus drivers will conduct test runs to ensure safety and viability, while considering its height and weight for different routes — the bus must be able to clear overpasses and not strain roadways not designed to handle the extra weight, *Mass Transit* magazine reported.

## NEW YORK

Two recent nor’easters have already washed away a lot of the **SUFFOLK COUNTY** coastline, leaving the county to look for help **controlling erosion and restoring its beaches**. The county is dredging and shoring up what it can, but that may not be enough on its own. The county can dredge about 90,000 cubic yards, but the area’s ABC-TV affiliate reports that that is roughly 11 percent of the 800,000 cubic yards needed.

“It is certainly not something that we can continue to handle on a local level,” County Executive Steve Bel-



lone said. “And that’s why the partnership is so important with our federal government.”

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said he is cautiously optimistic that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will use powers outlined in federal law to dredge and pump all along

the barrier islands between Fire Island inlet and Shinnecock, where two ongoing projects desperately need the emergency boost.

“If we don’t make it as strong as possible, the next time there’s a major storm, all this can be undone,” Schumer said.

## UTAH

The residential development of thousands of acres of private land and a state land trust could **double the population** of **SAN JUAN COUNTY**, and the County Commission passed ordinances and zoning maps allowing that to go forward.

## WASHINGTON

- The **homeless shelter pilot program** in the **KING COUNTY** jail may expand to a second floor. The County Council’s supplemental budget includes \$4 million for construction upgrades and operational costs for the shelter expansion that would add 60 beds. The ex-

isting shelter can house up to 40 homeless men at one time, with lockers, facilities, a kitchen, and a washer and dryer, along with services for substance treatment and mental health, KOMO News reported.

- **PIERCE COUNTY**’s **Sustainability 2020** plan is getting more manpower after the County Council earmarked two new positions in the next two years to oversee it. The county will hire a planner in 2020 and a manager in 2021. Pierce County set 15 goals in 2015 to save money by using less energy, gasoline and paper in operations. The goals set benchmarks for 2020, such as reducing the natural gas used in county operations by 50 percent of 2009 levels and growing the agricultural economy by 10 percent, the *News Tribune* reported.

- The **SAN JUAN COUNTY** Council voted to join a statewide **lawsuit against Initiative 1-976**. The measure, approved statewide by voters, limits the annual license fees for vehicles; bases vehicle taxes on the Kelley Blue Book value; and repeals authorizations for regional transit authorities to impose motor vehicle excise taxes. All of that cuts funding for state transportation, including the ferry system, *Islands Weekly* reported. San

Juan County voted against the measure, by 71 percent.

## WISCONSIN

- **DANE COUNTY** formally joined the Climate Reality Project’s initiative, which supports the standards set forth in the **2015 Paris Climate Agreement**. By signing on to the County Climate Coalition, Dane County agreed to continue working toward the United States’ commitments under the Paris Agreement by continuing to implement results-oriented strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Dane County has committed to 100 percent renewable energy for city services by 2023.

- Although the **MARATHON COUNTY** Board of Supervisors’ Executive Committee decided not to advance a measure that would cut the entire body in half, it did set up a task force to make recommendations about **shrinking the 38-supervisor body**. The task force will look into other counties that have downsized as well as seek public input on the issue, WSAU News reported.

*News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Do you have an item for us to include? Contact us at [cban@naco.org](mailto:cban@naco.org) and [rlooker@naco.org](mailto:rlooker@naco.org).*



## the HR DOCTOR

with Philpot & Winkler

It is time for the annual work holiday or New Year's Eve party. Maybe this fills your staff with excitement and anticipation. But for many, the office holiday party involves too much stress, obligations and expectations.

When asked about some of the most awkward work holiday or New Year's Eve celebrations people have ever attended, here are some remembrances people shared. They serve as reminders of pitfalls to avoid when planning your work gathering, so that the event may be joyful rather than stressful.

**Have the party during work hours:** "Everyone was talking about having a work holiday party, but no one wanted to host it. So, I volunteered my house. When everyone arrived at the party, it was so awkward and tense and everyone just wanted to be doing something else. That made the person who had volunteered to grill the burgers feel rushed to get everyone food and undercook the meat. Everyone ate raw burgers just so they could hurry up and leave."

It might be time to try something new. Have the party during work hours and have a potluck rather than dropping hosting duties on any one person. Or maybe the answer is no party at all. Participate in a community service project together. See if the group wants to have an "Ugly Sweater Day" at the office with a funny award for the ugliest. Attend a local parade together or go bowling.

**Don't eat and run:** "I am the supervisor of several divisions. All of my divisions were having separate parties and I was invited. I felt obligated to attend so no one would think I was playing favorites. But when I got there, I felt they had invited

me only as a gesture, and it was uncomfortable. I said hello to everyone and snuck out as soon as I felt I could." Attending a holiday party is optional. It is okay to say you are unable to attend. If you plan to make an appearance, try to stay for more than 20 minutes. Don't eat and run.

**Dress appropriately:** "The department party is at the same house every year and that house has a hot tub. It is an annual tradition for folks to get in the hot tub, but I don't want to be in a hot tub with my co-workers or boss." It is safest to think of holiday parties as an extension of the office.

If it wouldn't be OK at work, you probably do not want to do it at the party. This includes professional attire. "Someone was dressed inappropriately for our work party. They were 'watercooler' talk for days after. It was horrible." Just because it's a work party doesn't mean everyone has to be in business clothes, but dress should be appropriate.

**Set expectations:** "I offered to host the holiday party. Lots of my co-workers have little kids. I don't have any kids and don't feel like my house

is child-proof. Also, I have dogs that are not used to kids. So, I said 'no kids at the party — employees and spouses only.' Some of my co-workers were so upset about getting babysitters and not having a family party that they didn't come. There was tension in the office." It is best if the host sets expectations prior to the event, including whether they will be serving alcohol at the party and if there is an end time.

**Mind your manners:** "One of the people at the party ate something that didn't agree with them. They spent the entire time in the host's master bathroom, making the host feel uncomfortable. Then the person in the bathroom blamed their illness on the host's food."

Good manners are important at any party, and particularly around the people you work with each day. Thank the host for welcoming everyone to their home, offer to bring a dish to share, and offer to help clean up.

**A word about gift exchanges:** "We have a white elephant gift exchange at our party with gag gifts. One year, a coworker got a gift they hated, and

they were really vocal about it. They didn't take it home and the host collected it. The host brought it back as their white elephant gift the second year and the same person ended up with the gift. They were so mad. They never came to another holiday party after that."

If you plan to have a gift exchange at the party, set the rules. If this type of gift exchange creates issues, try something new, like a cookie exchange or a salsa contest.

One creative idea is to draw names and buy a toy you think the person might have enjoyed as a child. Put all the unwrapped gifts in a pile and have people take turns picking out the toy that they think was bought for them. The person who bought the gift can explain why they purchased the toy for that person. After the party, donate all the toys to a toy drive.

**Limit alcohol served:** "I hosted a party that was really fun and there was drinking. It went really late. Someone found some lotion under the sink in the bathroom and threw it over the fence into the neighbor's pool. The neighbors came by to complain about the

noise, I don't think they had found the lotion yet, and I was embarrassed because they knew where I worked." Seriously consider the appropriateness of alcohol at the party. If there is alcohol, there should be a limited amount so that people don't overdo it. Things can get uncomfortable quickly if people drink to excess.

**Survey employees for party ideas:** If you are considering what to do this holiday season, ask some co-workers, send a short electronic survey and include some new ideas this holiday season.

Remember the reason for the party is to demonstrate your appreciation of one another, celebrate a successful year, and honor the team. If you remember the reason you are gathering, it is easier to align the celebration accordingly.

May the year ahead bring teamwork, collaboration, innovation, engagement and the fulfillment that comes with public service. **CN**

*Erika Philpot is the human resources director and Rose Winkler is the deputy county attorney for Coconino County, Ariz.*

# Holiday Office Parties: The Ugly (Sweater) Truth

