

NACO National Association of Counties

CountyNews

The Voice of America's Counties

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N.C. counties make switch to digital TV

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Five North Carolina counties got the jump on the rest of the nation this month, when TV stations serving them switched from analog to digital broadcasting.

While the transition is a federal one, counties may wonder, "Why should we care?" One need only ask Mark Boyer, New Hanover County's public information officer. Just days before the change was to

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QuickTakes

Counties with Highest Median Household Income

Loudoun County, Va.	\$107,207
Fairfax County, Va.	\$105,241
Howard County, Md.	\$101,672
Somerset County, N.J.	\$97,658
Morris County, N.J.	\$94,684

Source: 2007 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau



Counties and their interests were well represented at the recent Democratic and Republican national conventions. At the DNC in Denver (top photo), Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell is pictured with (l-r) Immediate Past President Eric Coleman; President-Elect Valerie Brown; Kathie Novak, first vice president, National League of Cities; Rendell; and Susan Burgess, councilmember, Charlotte, N.C. At the RNC in St. Paul, NACO officers, members and staff pose at the convention center: (l-r) Ed Rosado, legislative director; Ken Mayfield, commissioner, Dallas County, Texas and former NACO president; First Vice President Teresa Altemus; Second Vice President Glen Whitley; and Larry Naake, executive director.

Congress is back – For What?

By JEFF ARNOLD
DEPUTY LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Congress has returned from its summer recess to a very uncertain future. Very little, if anything, of interest to counties will be passed before it adjourns for the November elections. The target adjournment is the first week in October.

The only required action that Congress must take is to fund the federal government for FY09, and other than possibly passing the defense appropriations bill, all the other agencies will have to be funded through a continuing resolution or an omnibus appropriations bill. A continuing resolution would essentially fund agencies at current levels to a date certain next year, and the omnibus approach would fund the agencies at a proscribed level for the entire year.

Even getting this done may

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From 'sporks' to 'spudware,' counties going green

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Until recently, San Mateo County, Calif. jail inmates were blowing through 3,000 disposable plastic spoons per day — used once then off to the landfill.

But that was before "Capt. Spork" took command of the enterprise known as the Maguire Men's Correctional Facility. Spork, actually Capt. John Quinlan, introduced reusable, recyclable combination spoon-forks — sporks — to the jail. He's picked up other green monikers

along the way, such as Capt. Carbon and Capt. Green.

San Mateo is among the latest crop of counties that are stepping up their environmental efforts. Churchill County, Nev. is adding solar panels to a recreational building in hopes of meeting all of the facility's energy needs. In Harris County, Texas, a new tax abatement program is providing incentives for developers to construct LEED-certified "green" buildings.

In Quinlan's jail, even some of the most hard-nosed inmates are taking notice. Ken Watson, 37, a

convicted murderer, told the *San Mateo County Times*, "...[A] lot of people say they'll want to go green, and the jail isn't just putting out a bunch of rhetoric. They did it."

In an interview with *CountyNews*, Quinlan said: "What we're teaching them is a little civic responsibility in protecting the environment, and some of them find it a really cool thing to do."

Sporks are 14 times more expensive than plastic spoons — 14 cents a piece versus a penny each, but

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Realtors, NACO plan Chicago housing conference. » Page 3

NACO's geographically diverse 2008-2009 leadership team. » Page 4

Counties recognized for arts and culture contributions. » Page 5

Conservation Awards open for entries

BY JAMES DAVENPORT
PROJECT MANAGER

NACo is now accepting nominations for the County Leadership in Conservation Awards program. The awards recognize leadership, innovation and excellence in local land conservation and park creation by counties.

Now in its fifth year, the program is a collaborative effort with The Trust for Public Land, National Association of County Planners, and National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials.

Awards are presented to NACo member counties in three population categories: small (under 150,000); medium (150,000 – 499,999); and large (more than 500,000). Applications will be judged based on a broad range of criteria including leadership, innovation, benefits to underserved populations, and benefits to quality of life and environmental quality.

Last year, five counties received awards for their leadership, innovation and excellence on local land conservation and park creation initiatives across America.

The deadline for submissions is Nov. 21, and the awards will be presented at NACo's Legislative Conference in March 2009. Additional information, nomination forms and descriptions of past award-winning counties can be accessed on the Web at www.naco.org/conservationawards or by contacting James Davenport at 202/661-8807 or jdavenport@naco.org.

Counties Invest in Open Space

Since 1996, 152 counties have prioritized land protection with new or reconsidered conservation programs. In that time these counties have passed 261 ballot measures, generating more than \$14 billion for open space, parks, watersheds, recreational lands and wildlife preserves. More than 76 percent of all county conservation ballot measures in the last decade have won voter approval. These numbers show that increasingly both voters and counties are acting locally to address issues that really matter to them, such as the protection of land and water resources. For more information, go to www.landvote.org.

Analog-to-digital switch comes six months early for counties

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occur, Hurricane Hanna had the coastal county in its crosshairs. The FCC even considered postponing the transition.

"We rely heavily on area media to get hurricane information out," Boyer said. If the switch-over had left residents unable to receive TV signals, the county's ability to disseminate emergency information would have been hampered.

On the day of the transition, 226 viewers called the area's four commercial TV stations with questions about the changeover, according to *Mediaweek.com*. The five-county area has a population of more than 402,000. Only one caller was unaware of the switch, *Mediaweek* reported. The other counties in the market are Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus and Pender.

The Wilmington area volunteered to be the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) guinea pig and make the transition six months before the mandatory nationwide deadline of Feb. 17, 2009. Since the test market was announced last spring, county officials have been working with the FCC to get the word out.

"We've had people on the ground there since April," said Clyde Ensslin, an FCC spokesman.

"The first overtures were made to local government organizations. They were able to introduce this (transition plan) to local grassroots organizations that had communications infrastructure in place, that had been well established [and] were organizations that people in the community trusted." These included libraries, social services and public safety agencies, and schools and faith-based organizations. Boyer estimated that "300 or so" public meetings were held in the five-county area.

In addition, New Hanover devoted a section of its homepage to the digital TV — or DTV — transition. It links to a page filled with information about the switch and toll-free telephone numbers to contact the FCC or to find about government coupons to purchase converter boxes.

William Kopp Jr. is a New Hanover County commissioner and president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. "We've been

SpeedRead » » »

- » National digital TV transition Feb. 17, 2009
- » Counties have a stake in a successful DTV transition
- » Outreach to low-income and non-cable/satellite households key
- » FCC analyzing data from N.C. pilot to improve nationwide switch-over

actively involved from the very beginning," he said. "Our Human Relations Department has been working with some of the poor in the county to get them informed."

Low-income households without cable or satellite TV were a key target audience. If they didn't have

information sessions in its lobby to inform clients how to apply for converter vouchers, according to LaVaughn Nesmith, DSS director. Each U.S. home is eligible for up to two \$40 coupons to purchase two converters, regardless of income. "Staff and public officials went out to adult care/nursing homes to explain the digital conversion process and available waivers," Nesmith wrote in an e-mail.

Boyer said the county's Human Relations Commission arranged dozens of forums at local churches.

Between now and Feb. 17, the FCC will be gathering data from the North Carolina pilot, to help improve the nationwide switch-over. "We need to really learn from what you've just experienced," FCC Commissioner

said and receivers," Copps said. "Without some planning, there could be some serious adverse environmental consequences to all this."

For other counties considering doing public outreach, Boyer advises: "Remember that there are people out there who are technically challenged, who may need help even plugging in their converter box."

New Hanover County created a special phone number, 798-4DTV, so those having problems with their converter boxes could call the county Fire Service. Someone from the department would make a double-duty home visit to hook up the converter — and provide general fire safety tips, including checking and distributing smoke detectors.

"It's a good opportunity to get your messages out too," Boyer said.

FCC's Ensslin said, "There's going to be ever-increasing resources available to other communities between now and February 17" — such as public service announcements, and as "efforts by the broadcasters, and the cable and satellite operators ramp up."

He added that FCC plans to send "at least a commissioner and staff" to 81 of the nation's 210 TV markets between now and February 17. "That's one of the lessons that we took away from Wilmington. You can get a lot of leverage from a one-day trip by a commissioner" if they participate in town hall meetings, appear on local radio and TV, and visit with newspapers' editorial boards.

In FCC Commissioner Copps' written remarks, he said of the Wilmington area: "I know being first is not easy. You didn't have a DTV playbook to memorize, or any history to fall back on. That's what makes this test so important. You are actually helping to write the playbook for the rest of America!"

(For more information about the DTV transition, visit www.dtv.gov; to learn more about the converter box program, go to www.dtv2009.gov.)



Photo courtesy of WHQR-FM, Wilmington, N.C.

FCC Commissioner Kevin Martin (r) and Mayor Bill Saffo of Wilmington, N.C. are surrounded by dignitaries as they prepare to flip the ceremonial switch to all-digital broadcasting in the five-county area.

newer digital-broadcast-ready sets — or digital-to-analog converter boxes — their TV pictures would have turned to snow when the transition occurred at noon Sept. 8.

The FCC assigned coordinators to each county to do outreach and education, working with local partners. "Meetings were set up in which the FCC representatives could explain that the first step is to raise awareness that the transition is coming," Ensslin said, "and then the second is to help people identify if the transition will affect them, and if so, what are the action steps they need to take."

New Hanover County's Department of Social Services (DSS) hosted two outreach and

Michael Copps said in remarks prepared for the changeover ceremony. "[T]he FCC has some serious responsibilities to gather and distill and analyze and disseminate far-and-wide the lessons we learn here."

He said areas of interest include the following:

- which messages worked and which didn't
- where residents found helpful information, and
- whether new antennas were needed to receive digital signals.

"Also, for those who bought new digital TVs, what's happened to all those old analog sets, because communities around the country will face the problem, just like you did, of where to put all those old

Corrections

Meryl Zaglin's name was spelled incorrectly in the Model Counties' feature article, "All-access Playground Lets Kids with Disabilities Play, Too," which appeared in the Sept. 1 issue of *County News*.

Academy helps employees develop leadership skills

By ELIZABETH PERRY
STAFF WRITER

Gwinnett County, Ga. is helping its employees develop their management potential and helping the community at the same time through its leadership training programs. Participants in the county's EXCEL (Executive Competence, Excellence and Leadership) class complete a community service project as a way to test what they learned.

Projects from recent years have included beautification of the landscaping at the county Senior Services Center, and upgrading the playgrounds at a battered women's shelter and at a school for children with special needs.

This year's class project benefited the Dream House, a transition facility that provides a homelike environment for medically fragile children moving from hospitals and long-term care facilities back home with their families.

The class redesigned and renovated the house's inaccessible sandbox by turning it into a sandbox pavilion, which could be used by all children regardless of their physical condition. The students raised \$12,500 for the project and did all the labor

themselves on their own time.

"We wanted to provide a quality product to the Dream House that would enhance their ability to care for the children," said Dennis Baxter, EXCEL class project manager.

EXCEL is part of three-pronged Leadership Academy, whose other programs are called LEAD and DRIVE, for Leadership, Education and Development; and Direction, Responsibility, Initiative, Vision and Effectiveness, respectively. Kenneth Poe, Gwinnett County human resources director, said the community service part of EXCEL has taken on a life of its own.

"What they are able to achieve in a relatively short amount of time has been phenomenal," Poe said. "Each class has heard about what classes preceding them have done, and said, 'How can we do one up on them?'"

The Leadership Academy began in 2005, when the county was



Photo courtesy of Gwinnett County, Ga.

Participants in the Gwinnett County Leadership Academy's EXCEL class built this handicapped accessible sandbox pavilion, paved the sidewalk and landscaped the surrounding area for the Dream House, a transition facility for medically fragile children. The project was entirely funded by private business donations.

looking for ways to expand training opportunities to its employees. Jock Connell, county administrator, and his executive staff wanted a new style of management accountability from previous administrations, where decisions were made primarily at the top. Poe said there were not enough training programs for employees that were focused on first-line supervisors, management or advanced management.

"We saw there were some problems or needs that managers had, and we decided to put together a full-blown leadership academy and provide the resources," Poe said.

The academy's funding is provided by the human resources department. The LEAD program is facilitated entirely by county staff, with minimal costs for materials. The EXCEL program includes facilitation by staff from the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government at a cost of \$26,000. The DRIVE program was most recently facilitated by Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Government at a cost of \$30,000.

Deputy County Administrator Susan Lee teaches a Merit Rules and County Administrator Policies course for the academy. She said the county administrator's office is highly supportive of the program, consisting of a mix of management skills and

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Conference focuses on housing issues

NACo, along with the National Association of Realtors and other partners, is holding a one-day conference — *Employer-Assisted Housing: Bring Workers Home*.

Held on Monday, Oct. 6, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Chicago, the conference will focus on education and raising awareness about employer-assisted housing (EAH).

Case studies and models of successful EAH programs from companies and local governments will be highlighted, and also provide a forum for key stakeholders to connect and explore opportunities to work together to address this critical component of workforce housing.

Across the country, private and public sector employers are realizing that Employer Assisted Housing is one way to provide safe mortgage products to first-time homebuyers and also benefit employers and communities. EAH presents a mutually beneficial option for companies seeking to improve employee retention, employees searching for affordable housing, and communities working to revitalize neighborhoods.

Conference speakers include: Sharon H. Douglas, vice president, Human Resources and chief people officer, Aflac; Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, (invited); Carl Guardino, Silicon Valley Leadership Group; Beverly Barnes, national housing consultant; and Cathy Whatley, Buck and Buck Inc., past president,

National Association of Realtors. Breakout session topics include:

- How and Why of Creating and EAH Benefit
- Advancing EAH
- EAH in action and
- Advocacy and Awareness

As the nation seeks solutions to

housing issues, EAH can be a key tool among many, to retain productive, stable workforces and revitalize neighborhoods.

Conference and hotel registration is limited. To see the full conference schedule and to register, please visit www.realtor.org/eahconference.

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Academy aims to develop more effective leadership skills

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SpeedRead » » »

» County Leadership Academy helps employees develop management skills

» Specific parts of academy are customized to meet the needs of the local government

classroom learning and community service.

Employees who are interested in becoming level-one supervisors or managers must first take the Stephen Covey seminar, "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," before they can be nominated by their supervisors to participate in the first-level LEAD program. Unofficially dubbed "Gwinnett 101," the class concentrates on HR policies, budget management, county operations, networking and resources.

Sheila Fowler, resources and marketing specialist with Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation, took both the "Habits" and LEAD courses after hearing about them through coworkers. She hopes to complete the EXCEL program within the next two years and said the classes have helped her to become more efficient at planning and goal-setting.

Employees who complete LEAD can be nominated for the EXCEL class, which takes fewer students. Poe said the class teaches advanced leadership skills, project management, public speaking and group project work.

DRIVE, a program for high-level executives, has been offered in pilot form twice and is still evolving. Students who completed LEAD and EXCEL or came into the county at the executive level as Poe did, are eligible. He said the purpose of the class is to expose students to upper-level, broader issues in county government. It is also where they can go to learn more about strategic planning, developing metrics and get an understanding of the county's goals and mission, and how it all fits together.

"The key component is to get people to go cross-functional," he said. "Our executive team relies very heavily on working groups, where if there is a special project or issue that needs to be researched, we will pull together a working group consisting of people from various parts of the organization."

Meet the 2008-09 NACo Leadership Team

Steering Committee Leadership

Listed are the chairs and vice chairs of NACo's steering committees, standing committees and caucuses, as well as their staff liaisons. Leaders are appointed each year by the new NACo president. NACo's policies and legislative positions are developed and reviewed by the 11 policy steering committees and adopted by the Board of Directors and general membership. For contact information, go to www.naco.org/steeringcommittees.

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NACo recognizes 2008 Arts and Culture award winners

By JACQUELINE BYERS
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

NACo's Arts and Culture Commission presented its annual arts awards to Fulton County, Ga., the Franklin County, Ohio Board of Commissioners and Peter S. Levi, president of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce during ceremonies at the commission's Awards Dinner held during NACo's Annual Conference.

The NACo Arts and Culture Award went to Fulton County, Ga. for its *Tour de 29, a Festival of Cities*. Tour de 29 was initiated by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners in 2005 to enhance cultural programming in south Fulton County. Led by the Fulton County Arts Council, Tour de 29 involves county government, seven municipalities, businesses and civic organizations.

A successful prototype for promoting the arts, community awareness and economic growth, Tour de 29 offers free cultural events and programs in diverse traditional and non-traditional venues, including shops, restaurants, businesses,



Photo by Harry Hayes

Franklin County, Ohio Commissioner Paula Brooks accepts the National Award for County Arts Leadership for her county from Americans for the Arts. (l-r) NACo President Don Stapely; Jay Dick, director of state and local policy, Americans for the Arts; Brooks, and NACo Executive Director Larry Naake.

Award for County Arts Leadership is one of a series of Public Leadership in the Arts Awards given by Americans for the Arts.

Each year, the Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America and a longstanding partner of the NACo Arts and Culture Commission, recognizes county elected officials for their vision and leadership in the advancement of the arts and arts education. The Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) nominated the Franklin County Board of Commissioners for its 15 years of ongoing support for GCAC's Community Arts Education programs.

Recently, the commissioners increased their financial commitment to the council by 270 percent from \$150,000 per year to \$400,000 to support the Art in the House/Transit Arts programs, an after-school and teen art education program, in partnership with the Columbus Federation of Settlements. Since 2005, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners has also provided the GCAC Neighborhood Arts Grants Program with more than \$200,000 to fund \$200 to \$2,000 grant programs for amateur artists.

Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO for Americans for the Arts, praised the commissioners, saying, "The work of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners on behalf of the arts has established Franklin County as a national advocate for arts education. Their exemplary leadership in the state of Ohio has significantly increased funding in the arts and cultural sector, while notably impacting the lives of local residents."

Franklin County Commissioner Paula Brooks accepted the award on behalf of the county.

Profiles in Service



» Margie Gavin Woods

Commissioner
Will County, Ill.

NACo Labor Steering Committee

Years in NACo: 28

Years in public service: 28

Occupation: retired, Caterpillar Tractor, Inc.

Education: Attended Lewis University, Romeoville, Ill.

The hardest thing I've ever done: is raise a family.

Three people (living or dead) I would invite to dinner: Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and John F. Kennedy.

The most adventurous thing I've done: is run for elected office.

My favorite way to relax is: by gardening.

My pet peeve is: someone who does not tell the truth.

My motto is: Let the works I've done speak for me.

The last book I read was: the Bible.

My favorite movie is: *Rush Hour 3*.

My favorite president is: John F. Kennedy.

libraries and other government facilities, parks, nonprofit organizations, schools and churches. The festival begins in September of each year and runs through October. The award was accepted on behalf of the county by Commissioner Emma Darnell.

This year's Arts Advocacy Award was presented to Peter S. Levi, president of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. This award is presented each year to a local arts advocate in the host community of NACo's Annual Conference.

Levi was honored for his work

in helping to launch a successful united arts fund in the Kansas City metropolitan area in cooperation with the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City and the business community. Since its inception, the fund has generated more than \$1 million in grants for the local arts community. Levi, who is active in numerous community and professional organizations in the Greater Kansas City area, has served as Chamber president since 1990.

The third award was presented to the Franklin County, Ohio Board of Commissioners. The National

Partisan split means indecision in Congress

CONGRESS from page 1

be difficult because Republicans have signaled they will oppose any continuing resolution that includes a moratorium on offshore oil drilling. Such a moratorium has been included in either the interior appropriations bill, or continuing resolutions for the past two decades. There is some effort to get a limited energy package passed that would allow for some drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf off the East Coast, but that, too, is facing opposition.

Because of the two senators running for president, Sen. Biden's running for vice president, and Sen.

Kennedy not returning to the Senate because he is recuperating from brain cancer surgery, the partisan split in the Senate is 48 to 48, far below what Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) needs for effective control of the Senate agenda.

As for other legislation, Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, has floated a second economic stimulus bill with \$50 billion in funding for a lengthy laundry list of programs and projects. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has also called for a \$50 billion package, but most observers agree that a hefty measure is likely to get traction before adjournment.

Meanwhile, efforts to use general revenue to fund the Federal Highway Trust Fund's \$8 billion shortfall were rebuffed Sept. 8 in the Senate because Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) and Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) objected to the precedent of using general tax revenue to fund road projects. The fund is severely underfunded because gasoline usage has dropped dramatically as prices topped \$4 per gallon. Sen. Reid has said he will try again later in the month.

NACo continues to advocate for its legislative priorities and county funding needs, but in this environment it will be very difficult to accomplish NACo's aggressive agenda.

Keep up with NACo online ...

www.naco.org

'Dean' of commissioners completes 44th year of service

By JASON KING

Vance County Chairman Danny Wright calls him his "mentor." Fellow Commissioner Deborah Brown says he is "everybody's favorite commissioner." County Manager Jerry Ayscue considers him the "epitome of a public servant."

If only everyone could be so popular. Quiet and unassuming by nature, Commissioner J. Timothy Pegram isn't your typical elected official. But his willingness to stick up for his constituents—whomever the opponent—has made him a successful one.

In December, Pegram will complete his 44th year in office—likely the longest tenure of any North Carolina county commissioner ever. The next longest the North

Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) has been able to identify is Bertie County's C.H. Edwards, who served 39 years, eight months. Pegram isn't finished. This November his name will once again appear on the ballot for the county's District 2 seat. He has no opposition.

In his 44 years of service, Pegram has earned a reputation as a "crusader for the average citizen," according to Ayscue, who has worked with Pegram as county manager since November 1984.

"As an elected official, he understands the responsibilities and privilege of being a representative of the people," Ayscue said. "I consider Mr. Pegram as the epitome of a public servant. He is special."

One trait that makes Pegram so popular is that he values the opin-

ions of others, even if he does not agree with them. His willingness to work to amicable solutions has won him admiration from colleagues and constituents alike.

"I consider all the actions of the governing body to be of importance," he said. "Some may be more important to me and some may be more important to somebody else. That's the reason you have different people and different thinking, so you can have a happy medium."

"I don't think that I have a commissioner that I don't have a good relationship with right now."

Pegram was already a seasoned commissioner when Wright joined the board in 1982. Wright said Pegram commands such respect that if his opinion on an issue differed from Pegram's, "I would always reassess my thinking just to make sure that I wasn't leaving something out."

"He has been the champion of the 'little man' and the poor man more than anybody I've ever met," Wright said.

Pegram was first elected in 1958. After eight years on the Board of Commissioners, however, his district had moved due to redistricting. During the six-year period he was off the board, he lost an election for the only time in his life, falling to longtime NCACC District Director John E. Wilson. He was voted back onto the board in 1972.

While he said he doesn't like to admit that he has lost an election, it was probably for the best that he had a break from public service to be able to focus on a budding business he owned, Henderson Truss Supply. Now retired after selling the business several years ago, Pegram and his wife of more than 50 years, Peggy, follow Southern Vance High School athletics with devout interest: their daughter, Darlynn, who played basketball and volleyball at the University of North Carolina, coaches the volleyball team, and their son-in-law Randy coaches softball. Granddaughter Ashley recently completed her fourth season on the Tar Heels softball team.

As his family has enjoyed success on the field, Pegram has enjoyed it on the county board.

"Sometimes I don't know myself how I am as successful as I am in politics," said Pegram. He is quick to credit his wife, who worked for many years as a receptionist at a local doctor's office, with helping to get his name out to potential voters.

"I think over the years I've been well liked."

Pegram admits he recently had a hard time deciding whether or not to run for another four-year term, but



Photo courtesy of Vance County, N.C.

Commissioner J. Timothy Pegram (r) chats with his colleagues on the Vance County, N.C. Board: Commissioner Deborah Brown, seated, and Commissioner Terry Garrison.

he has no set timetable for ending his historic career of public service.

"I'm guessing this will probably be my last term," he said. "My wife wants me to stay on. If I didn't stay on the board I'd probably sit down at home and dry up."

"But I wouldn't be afraid to run four years from now if I were in good health."

(King is assistant communications director, N.C. Association of County Commissioners.)

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Restore the Partnership

A Campaign to Reestablish the Federal - County Partnership

For decades, county and federal governments have worked together to answer the challenges facing the nation, but in recent years that partnership has diminished.

Whether it is infrastructure, health care, housing, homeland security, environment or justice programs, each level of government has a role and responsibility, but they need to be coordinated for the best use of people and resources.

To foster better coordination, NACO has launched a campaign to "Restore the Partnership" between the Federal government and America's counties.

NACO National Association of Counties
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Learn more by visiting www.naco.org

Nevada county leading the way in green energy production, green building

GREEN from page 1

Quinlan said the payoff comes over time. He figures that in two weeks of use, the costs balance out.

Quinlan also introduced "spud-ware" to the jail for staff meals — biodegradable utensils made from potato starch and soybean oil. Other environmental efforts at the jail include switching to green cleaning products, and recycling pallets and packaging from deliveries, which used to be discarded. The recycling proceeds now go into an inmate welfare fund that helps pay for rehabilitation programs.

Going green in a jail does have some challenges, Quinlan said; inmates can turn anything into a weapon. That's why their sporks are checked twice a day, morning and evening; they must wash and reuse them each day.

The jail also began composting food waste this year — 340 cubic yards in the first month — which brought another potential security threat. The compost bins are large enough for a man to hide in. That's why the bins are probed with long sticks before they're carted off, which is done only after inmate counts have been completed.

A rancher, as well as the jail's major domo, Quinlan brought his personal respect for the environment to the job. "I'm very friendly to the earth because I need it to be friendly back to me," he said.

Nevada county greenlights more green power

Churchill County, Nev., population 26,000, is located in northern Nevada approximately one hour east of Reno and bills itself as "a leading producer of green energy."

Among its current efforts, the county is adding solar panels to a recreation and swimming pool complex, which had already been using solar collectors to heat water for the pool, according to County Manager Brad Goetsch.

Phase One would add 10 megawatts (mw) of generating capacity to the facility, followed by another 30 mw, which "will bring that building pretty close to ... [energy] self-sufficiency," Goetsch said. The county also plans to add 30 mw of solar generation to its water processing plant to help run its pumps.

The solar installation at the recreation complex is expected to pay for itself in eight to 13 years. The panels have a 25-year warranty, Goetsch said; "so if we can get a payoff in approximately 10 years, that gives us 15 years or longer of free energy, basically, from that project."

Phase One is projected to cost about \$110,000, but the county will receive a roughly 50 percent rebate from the local electric utility, Sierra Pacific's SolarGenerations unit.

Goetsch said savings like those allow the county to address other priorities, such as paving roads and building infrastructure — "and the things that people need instead of paying for energy."

He'd like to see the green energy program grow to the point that the county could develop its own energy credit management capability. Instead of receiving credits or rebates, the county could pay the full up-front costs of its projects and market its green credits to other cities in the Southwest that haven't been able to meet their goals to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Harris County's new incentives for building green

Harris County may be best known outside Texas as the home of Houston. But the county is also making a name for itself with a new environmental program to encourage green buildings.

The county is offering a partial tax abatement for up to 10 years for new commercial buildings that obtain certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program.

"If there's a company that's considering a green building development... this is basically an incentive to tilt their decision in favor of going green," said Nancy Powell, economic development director in the county's Community Services Department.

The program applies in unincorporated areas of the county, which includes 34 municipalities. To qualify, the minimum increase in a building's value due to its green features and LEED certification must be at least \$100,000.

LEED certifies buildings at four levels: basic, silver, gold and platinum. Under the county's program, a developer's total investment must be \$10 million for basic, \$4 million for silver, \$2 million for gold and \$1 million for platinum.

The tax abatement begins once the building has been completed and LEED certification has been obtained.

To date, one application is being processed, Powell said — for a \$6 million medical office building going for gold certification. Another is pending.

She said the program was the outgrowth of a strategic planning process involving the county's municipalities. Among the goals that emerged were strengthening the county's tax abatement program and inducing green building. The idea to combine the two came from Powell's boss, David Turkel, director, Community Services.

NACo's Green Government Initiative

To find out what other counties are doing, check out NACo's searchable online database of county green programs, policies, plans, staff descriptions and more at www.naco.org/greencounties. To add information about your county, submit it by e-mail to Kelly Zonderwyk at kzonderwyk@naco.org.

Green Government Webinars 2008 Schedule



Register today to participate in FREE green government webinars through the NACo Green Government Initiative. Participants will learn valuable background information on each subject, discover new resources and hear case studies from various counties. To register visit www.greencounties.org and click on webinars and upcoming events. All you will need is a computer with Internet access and a phone line. For more information contact Kelly Zonderwyk at kzonderwyk@naco.org or 202.942.4224.

September

m Energy Efficiency in County Buildings: Western Region

Thursday, September 18
2:30 – 4:30 p.m. EDT

m Energy Efficient Server Rooms in County Buildings

Thursday, September 25
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. EDT

m Greening County Fleets 101

Tuesday, September 30
2 – 4 p.m. EDT

October

m Playbook for Green Buildings and Neighborhoods Project

Tuesday, October 7
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. EDT

m Energy Efficiency in County Buildings: Southeast Region

Thursday, October 16
2 – 4 p.m. EDT

m Linking Renewables and Demand Response

Tuesday, October 21
2 – 4 p.m. EDT

m Biofuels: What They Mean for County Fleets

Wednesday, October 29
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. EDT

November

m Wind Power: Turning a Breeze into Cash for Your Community

Monday, November 3
2 – 4 p.m. EST

m Landfill Gas to Energy

Thursday, November 13
2 – 4 p.m. EST

m Energy Efficiency in County Buildings: Mid-West Region

Monday, November 17
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. EST

December

m Energy Efficiency in County Buildings: Southwest Region

Thursday, December 4
2 – 4 p.m. EST

m Strategies for Purchasing Renewables

Monday, December 8
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. EST

m Solar Power: Lighting Up the Value of the Sun

Thursday, December 11
2 – 4 p.m. EST

m Greenopolis

Wednesday, December 17
2 – 4 p.m. EST

Past Webinars available online at www.greencounties.org



Financial Services News

Counties Assess NACo's Deferred Compensation Program

(NACo hosted a meeting in June 2008 at Nationwide Retirement Solutions' home office to explore what can be done to help counties boost participation in the deferred compensation program as well provide plan sponsors with other resources. The following is the second in a series of articles based on discussions from that meeting.)

Education, or a lack thereof, can often be the deciding factor in why an employee participates in a deferred compensation program. "Education will increase participation," said Terry Tallent, director of personnel services for Tulsa County, Okla. "Deferred compensation is a benefit we tout when we are doing employee recruiting."

Get them at the get-go

Another way to harness participants is through aggressive new hire orientation meetings. Everyone admits this time period can be overwhelming, but it's also when staff has the new hire's full attention.

In Monmouth County, N.J. the deferred comp representative is at

new employee orientation meetings to answer specific questions immediately, noted Mark Acker, the county's CFO. Often, these are technical questions that county staff does not have the answers to. Snohomish County, Wash., which is switching to Nationwide as its exclusive provider, plans for a representative to attend its weekly new orientation meetings, said Sandi Cook, the human resource analyst in the county.

Not only is the education component critical at the time of hire, but having the paperwork there for people to sign is crucial. Frequently, employees take information home and may never read it, and therefore never sign up.

One-on-one interaction

Bringing people in to educate staff is another critical component. "You need the ability to have seminars at offsite locations so the guy who works out on the road crew has the opportunity to hear about what the plan is about," said Jonathan Kadlec, manager of the revenue and debt divi-

sion for Sonoma County, Calif.

He said it's critical for workers who don't have a computer to do research or access their account be provided adequate resources to educate themselves.

Counties also recognize the importance of educating older workers that it's never too late to get started. "You need to leave them with hope and not be so doom and gloom," Tom Motes said.

Group meetings

Motes is the human resources director for Volusia County, Fla. His experience in the county and with other organizations has shown him that when the employer assists with the education seminars the meetings have a more authentic feel, compared to vendors solely doing the presentation because then it can feel like a sales presentation.

Ada County, Idaho staged an open house in January to educate workers. Another is planned for this fall. All 1,600 employees are encouraged to attend to hear firsthand what

the providers have to say.

These are some of the innovations put in place by Karen Watkins' division, which is new for the county. Watkins, manager of the employee benefits division, and a coworker are solely dedicated to employee benefits. Last spring she circulated a benefits survey for the first time to the county's employees, asking what they liked and didn't like and what they would like to see. "The employees wanted more financial

information, more planning for retirement, planning for the future."

Feedback also led to Ada County's commissioners voting to increase the county's matching contribution for employees in the deferred comp program.

(Next issue: Financial Services News will focus on areas where counties can improve their deferred comp programs. Financial Services News was written by Kathryn Reed, who writes for NACo.)

How Counties Get the Word Out

- Use the county's intranet to post information about the plan, upcoming seminars, when the plan's representatives will be in town, phone numbers and any other resources.
- Include blurbs about deferred comp in newsletters. Use anecdotal information, profile employees to make it more real. Use charts and graphics to demonstrate how savings plans work.
- Use photos of blue collar and white collar employees.
- Send deferred comp information with paychecks or pay stubs a couple times a year.
- Have written material available at all county sites, not just in the human resources office.

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TECHNOLOGIES

News From the Nation's Counties

► ARIZONA

MARICOPA COUNTY Board of Supervisors approved an **upgrade to sheriff's deputy cars** in an effort to speed response times to 911 calls, the *Arizona Republic* reported. The cars will be equipped with systems similar to laptops that will replace police radios. The computers will enable officers to access data immediately about outstanding warrants, license plate numbers and file reports, instead of having to call dispatch for the information. The system will cost \$2 million initially, and \$850,000 a year to maintain.

► CALIFORNIA

• **FRESNO COUNTY** Sheriff's Department released 22 inmates charged with nonviolent misdemeanors from the county jail in response to a **\$2.8 million budget cut**. Sheriff Margaret Mims told the *Mercury News* she will need to release 800 inmates and lay off 50 correctional officers. The department will release 40 inmates a day until Sept. 22, when two floors of the jail will close. This isn't the first time the jail has released inmates from the 3,478-bed facility because of overcrowding.

• **SOLANO COUNTY** has a new **whistleblower hotline** for employees and vendors to report incidents of waste, abuse and fraud, the *Times Herald* reported. Other counties with whistleblower hotlines are **LOS ANGELES, ORANGE, SANTA CRUZ, VENTURA, SAN MATEO and SAN BERNARDINO**.

In an announcement about the program, Auditor-Controller Simona Padilla-Scholten said it would help the county promote proper accountability of resources.

"The opportunity to raise a red flag already exists. We wanted to streamline the process and to reinforce the public's confidence in our ability to use taxpayer dollars appropriately and effectively," she said.

• A decline in the poverty rate in **LOS ANGELES, ORANGE, RIVERSIDE, SAN BERNARDINO and VENTURA counties** is bucking a national trend, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. While national levels have risen over the past seven years, some localities have experienced a drop, most noticeably in Los Angeles County, where the percentage of **residents living below the poverty level** dropped from 17.9 percent in 2000 to 14.7 in 2007. The new data comes from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Analysts say the decline can be attributed to an increasingly older, more affluent population, including those who immigrated a while ago, and that the highest rates of poverty can be found among recent immigrants.

► GEORGIA

HOUSTON COUNTY commissioners approved a measure to save as much as \$100,000 a year on **inmate health care**, the *Sun News* reported. While most county jail inmates are treated by Houston Healthcare under a pricing agreement with the county, 1 percent of the most serious inmate health problems are treated at the Medical Center of Central Georgia in **BIBB COUNTY**. The new measure will enable the county to contract with Blue Cross Blue Shield to negotiate prices with the medical center. The total cost to the county will be a fee that adds up to 8.5 percent of the bill.

► MARYLAND

WORCESTER COUNTY is considering joining **SOMERSET and CARROLL counties** in allowing its residents to erect **wind turbines in their yards**. Planning officials are looking at adding provisions for small wind energy systems into the county's comprehensive plan, according to the *Daily Times*. No state legislation on residential wind turbines exists, however counties can decide their own policies.

Unlike Carroll County's ordinance, which allows for turbines no taller than 150 feet and producing no more than 50 kilowatts, the Worcester provisions would call for shorter, smaller turbines producing 1.8 kilowatts.

► MISSOURI

In an effort to increase awareness of the meth problem in **JEFFERSON COUNTY**, the sheriff's department recently began listing the **addresses of methamphetamine labs** it seized in 2007 and 2008 on its Web site, www.jcsd.org. The site also includes the addresses of buildings where officers found materials used to make meth illegally. The Associated Press reported there were 770 meth lab incidents statewide in the first six months of 2008, with 108 of them in Jefferson County.

► NEVADA

Planning officials in **WASHOE COUNTY** are reviewing an energy company's plans for what would be the state's **first large wind farm**. A Las Vegas firm, Nevada Wind, wants to build 20 to 30 turbines

above Warm Springs Valley north of Reno, the *Review Journal* reported.

The company said if the county approves its plans, the \$300 million project could break ground next year and be operating by 2010. The wind farm would generate 150 megawatts of electricity, enough to power an estimated 125,000 homes.

► NEW JERSEY

MONMOUTH COUNTY'S Board of Chosen Freeholders has created an advisory panel to **explore "green" issues**. The committee is intended to steer the county and its municipalities toward environmentally friendly policies and programs, such as purchasing hybrid vehicles and more energy efficient lighting.

The move was prompted by a state mandate requiring a 20-percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, according to the *Asbury Park Press*.

"We will be able to make an inventory of emissions from county operations and then set reachable targets, and ways to achieve the targets," said Freeholder John D'Amico Jr., who introduced the resolution to create the panel.

► NEW YORK

• **ONONDAGA COUNTY'S** lawmakers, by a narrow margin, recently passed a measure to **ban the sale of cigarettes** to customers 18 and younger. Current state law allows 18-year-olds to buy tobacco.

This was the County Legislature's second attempt to enact such a law, according to *The Post-Standard*. It includes an exemption for 18-year-old military service members. The measure must be signed by the county executive to take effect.

• And the winner is... **YATES COUNTY** Sheriff's Department. It took first place in its class in *Law and Order* magazine's **International Police Vehicle Design Contest** for its patrol car markings.

The judges said: "Yates County's unique color combination is bright and immediately catches your attention. The emblem coming out of [the image of] the state makes this car really pop. It is a clean, bold, well-rounded package," *The Chronicle-Express* reported.

Yates County won in the category for departments of up to 25 members in the eastern United States. Its competition included Blackford County, Ind.; Polk County, Ga.; Clay County, Ill.; Hampton County, S.C.; and Powell County, Ky.

► NORTH CAROLINA

The **MECKLENBURG COUNTY** Department of Social Services (DSS) will contribute \$250,000 to a regional Urban League program that helps **at-risk youth become self-sufficient**. The program trains 18-21 year olds for the workforce.

Mary Wilson, DSS director, said: "It is our firm belief that when we collaborate with successful programs, we can leverage county dollars efficiently and effectively to deliver a wider range of services to our citizens."

The program has an 80 percent success rate of having participants enter job placements, job training, enrolling in college or enlisting in the military, the county said.

► TEXAS

BEXAR and PARKER counties were honored recently for their **cooperative efforts with cities** by the **Texas Association of Counties** and Texas Municipal League.

The city of San Antonio and Bexar County received a City-County Cooperations Award for collaborating on a preventative public health care service system, the *San Antonio Business Journal* reported. The localities consolidated

the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District and Bexar County Hospital District.

PARKER COUNTY and the city of Weatherford were honored for their joint animal shelter.

► WASHINGTON

Fifty young adults, ages 16 to 21, spent part of their summer vacation learning about **"green jobs"** — those related to environmental and social responsibility — in **KING COUNTY'S** Opportunity Greenway pilot.

The six-week "earn and learn" program provided paid internships while students built practical job skills. It exposed young adults who have had previous experience with the court system to living-wage jobs in a variety of environmental fields — ranging from water quality protection at King County Waste-water Treatment Division to public transportation jobs such as hybrid bus maintenance at King County Metro Transit.

(*News From the Nation's Counties* is compiled by Charles Taylor and Elizabeth Perry, staff writers. If you have an item for *News From*, please e-mail taylor@naco.org or perry@naco.org.)

Word Search

2008 Hurricane Names

T K G V M E O R D G P V X H P P T V D W
 G H W T Y O C U P P G W B G T I B K Y Z
 Q L U U J V Y R G B A I M S J U V W S Q
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| Cristobal | Ike | Omar | Wilfred |
| Dolly | Josephine | Paloma | |
| Edouard | Kyle | Rene | |
| Fay | Laura | Sally | |

Created By Matthew Fellows

Research News

Interlocal Agreements — An Option for Cooperative Service Delivery

By **ALEX WELSCH**
ASSOCIATE RESEARCH DIRECTOR

Many counties in the U.S. continue to turn to interlocal agreements as they face budget constraints and a growing number of cross-boundary challenges such as emergency preparedness and environmental management.

At a basic level, interlocal agreements allow county leaders to assemble resources regionally while sharing both risks and benefits. With a focus on smaller scale initiatives, this Research News highlights several cases of county governments using interlocal agreements in both cutting-edge and more traditional applications.

A large number of agreements can be in place simultaneously. For example, in 2004, Pinellas County, Fla. counted 366 existing or proposed agreements between the county government, local cities, and/or districts.

Economic development and technology

Wireless Washtenaw illustrates an agreement that was critical to implementing a technology-based economic development project in Washtenaw County, Mich. The county uses a master participation agreement (MPA) whereby local governments and others agree to provide access and rights of way to rooftops or other facilities. The county can, in turn, use the rights of way in its own agreement with a provider of wireless Internet services. Participants from urban, suburban and rural communities generally receive no compensation, but are entitled to the benefits of the wireless network. The MPA is structured to assemble the disparate resources required for the system to achieve economic development and other community objectives. Network coverage currently spans 100 square miles.

Public safety and emergency response

Interlocal agreements also have been central in developing regional emergency services. Jefferson County, Wash. uses an interlocal agreement to manage access to an emergency communications dispatch center for local public safety, fire and emergency medical providers within Jefferson County. The initiative, named "Jeffcom," uses an allocation formula

based on usage to calculate required payments for services. Jeffcom illustrates the case of a county assuming a central role in providing services to local cities and districts. However, an intergovernmental administrative board and several technical advisory committees are structured to assure diverse views in management.

Mutual aid in traditional fire and emergency services has a long history, but agreements are periodically updated. In a King County, Wash. mutual aid agreement, parties agree to respond to emergency requests and determine whether equipment and personnel resources can be rendered to the emergency site. If so, resources are dispatched, without compensation.

The local fire department, with "command control" of the situation, assumes liability or claims that may arise from command decisions. However, all parties agree to insure their equipment and personnel, covering their operation. The King County agreement also permits cooperation on purchasing equipment. Any party to the agreement may seek bids, so long as the supplier honors the same bid for other parties to the mutual aid agreement.

The concern for effective emergency and disaster response has been especially strong since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast. The Capital Area Shelter Hub Plan developed by the city of Austin, and Travis and Williamson counties in Texas shows that interlocal agreements can play a key role in response strategies. The plan is an organizing document for disaster relief services, and it spells out city, county and other governments' roles in providing

shelter for hurricane evacuees. The Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department, for example, has responsibility for special medical needs shelters.

Interlocal agreements—between outlying coastal communities and the shelter-hub—are required in pre-arranging shelter spaces for special-needs evacuees. The plan recognizes the need for flexibility in different emergency situations, but is firm on the need for formal pre-disaster agreements.

Parks and Recreation

A case from Clark County, Wash. shows that cooperative arrangements can result in a substantial merging of services in county parks and recreation programs. Clark County and the city of Vancouver have combined parks administration and management for the city and unincorporated areas of Clark County. An agreement, which has been in place since 1997 but was recently amended and renewed, describes a gradual convergence of many city and county goals.

In the earlier agreement, the city had administrative authority for all capital projects. However, when residents in urbanizing, unincorporated areas voted for more comprehensive parks development, the county role became more prominent in the combined department. Coordinated collection of a parks impact fee and a real estate excise tax supports the agreement as well as progress on a recently approved comprehensive plan for city-county parks.

Health care

Another interlocal agreement on

hospital services facilitates cooperation across two districts. The City of San Antonio and Bexar County recently won an award for cooperation from the Texas Association of Counties and the Texas Municipal League. The award commended consolidation of the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District and the Bexar County Hospital District. An interlocal agreement covered joint prenatal care in community-based clinics, collaboration on joint grant applications for breast and cervical cancer screening, and shared electronic information processing for patient appointments. Health districts were an important consideration of the area Citizens' Commission on City/County Service Integration, which issued a report in 2004 (see link below).

Interlocal agreements are not particularly new, but their potential as a tool for government innovation has received considerable attention in

recent years. Leading administrators and scholars have both commented on strategies for structuring agreements. According to one report, careful crafting of agreements includes attention to governance and operating structures, financing mechanisms, personnel commitments, duration and reporting. A specific duration or a sunset clause for renewal may be particularly important, since problems, roles and rules change over time.

Some of the examples above also suggest that interlocal agreements can be combined effectively with more comprehensive plans. When multiple jurisdictions are involved, the plans outline a comprehensive but flexible strategy, while the agreements provide for the specific commitments needed for success.

(Research news was written by Alex Welsch, associate research director, awelsch@naco.org)

NACo on the Move

» NACo Officers and Elected Officials

Glen Whitley, second vice president, and **Jeff Arnold**, deputy legislative director, spoke at the Association of Arkansas Counties during its Aug. 13–14 conference in Pulaski County (Little Rock), Ark.

» NACo Staff



Chris Johnson

Chris Johnson has joined the Public Affairs Department as the editorial assistant for *County News*. Previously, Johnson was a copy editor/editorial assistant/reporter for the *Fairfax County Times*. He graduated from George Mason University with a bachelor's degree in communications-journalism.

Matthew Fellows has joined NACo's Legislative Department as the grassroots coordinator after more than a year as the editorial assistant for *County News*. He will work with NACo's lobbyists to support NACo policy campaigns and refresh the Legislative Action Network by using online activism tools for grassroots development and mobilization.



Matthew Fellows

» Coming Up

Andrew Goldschmidt, **Jeff Arnold**, **Jacqueline Byers** and **Jim Sawyer** will speak at a special joint mini-conference with the Illinois Counties Association and NACo in Cook County, Ill. Sept. 17–18. The conference will explore the benefits of NACo membership. Goldschmidt is membership/marketing director; Arnold is deputy legislative director; Byers is research director; and Sawyer is director, NACo Financial Services Corp.

Goldschmidt will also exhibit at the Association of Indiana Counties Annual Conference in Switzerland County, Ind. Sept. 22–24 on behalf of NACo membership recruitment and retention.

(On the Move was compiled by Matthew Fellows.)

Featured Interlocal Agreements

- **Washtenaw County, Mich.**
<http://wireless.ewashtenaw.org>
- **Kirkland/King County, Wash.**
www.ci.kirkland.wa.us/dynamic/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4515
- **Vancouver/Clark County, Wash.**
www.cityofvancouver.us/upload/contents/732/Interlocal%20Parks%20Agreement.pdf
www.ci.vancouver.wa.us/parks-recreation/parks_trails/planning/parkplan.htm
- **San Antonio/Bexar County, Tx.**
www.bizjournals.com/sanantonio/stories/2008/08/25/daily5.html
www.sanantonio.gov/integration/pdf/PreliminaryReportSummary.pdf
- **Jefferson County, Wash.**
www.jeffcom911.org/Interlocal.htm

The H.R. Doctor Is In

The Inner Receptionist

Who is often the very first human being directly encountered at your office? No, it is not the armed police officer or security guard, although increasingly it might be. It is the receptionist.

This person is the direct agent of your organization and your direct representative. This is the person who must be knowledgeable in order to provide help, advice and directions to people. She or he must be able to engage with the person standing in front of them or on the other side of the counter while talking on the phone, filing paper, monitoring events on the computer screen and dealing with two or three other people hovering in the background, including possibly you.

For many visitors to the Human Resources Department, or to almost all other organizational offices, including building and permitting, a hospital or medical office, the behavior and the demeanor of the receptionist is a metaphor for the entire orientation of the organization. A rude receptionist who never makes eye contact, is busy trimming his nails, or chatting about dinner plans with another employee while the client is waiting and waiting. He or she conveys a negative message — and a lack of focus, caring or respect for clients.

A message is also carried in a very positive way by the smart attentive receptionist who, with a smile on her face or a smile in his voice on the phone expertly represents the organization. This behavior creates the “wow experience” missing from many business encounters. It can do a great amount of good for the agency and for coworkers.

How do you want to be represented? Why is it that in many agencies the most dreaded assignment in an organization is the front counter receptionist? Why is it that often employees can't wait for turnover so the newest clerical employee — the least senior one — can be stuck with exile to the Siberian Wilderness of the front receptionist area? That way, the more senior employee can move to a more comfortable and less engaging back office location closer to the coffee pot and the break room.

Something serious is lost when an organization does not regard the receptionist function among its very most critical roles. The best employee should be the receptionist. The most knowledgeable and the



Photo courtesy of the H.R. Doctor
Doris Thomas (l) and Bernice Becher are receptionists who work for the city of Miramar, Fla., which is in Broward County.

best trained, should be the highest visibility representatives of the top executives, including elected and appointed officials in government.

Being assigned to receptionist duties should not invoke a feeling of despair and lost opportunity, but rather a lottery win for gaining valuable experience of a very diverse nature in a short time. As

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a leader you have a duty to create the atmosphere of appreciation and recognition of the value of the receptionist's function.

One of the critical but undervalued roles of the receptionist is to be the early warning system for the presence of an anomaly. An irate customer, a threatening or bullying employee, a whiner. Behavior reflecting acute sadness or depression is likely to surface right across the counter from the receptionist before appearing elsewhere.

Training in the recognition of anomalies and the proper procedures to deal with them safely, rapidly and respectfully is part of every receptionist's duty even if the organization is foolish enough to never provide training for them.

Inside each one of us, whether we recognize it or not, is also an “Inner Receptionist” who fulfills all

of the duties already described in this article. In that sense, every one of us is a receptionist. We project to others, including our family members as well as coworkers, by our behavior and attitudes a sense of representing ourselves. The behavior of a bully, of a bigot or of another type of human with low emotional intelligence is a direct reflection of how we will behave at other points in life, especially during times of stress. Conversely, when we project to others a sense of calm, assertive respect and knowledge, we deliver a message of positive role modeling.

Our Inner Receptionist is our number one anomaly detector. In a shopping mall parking lot, late at night, when someone comes up to us and asks if we know the time, our Inner Receptionist can sense danger or a person in need of help. At work, the anomalies of dealing with a colleague in distress or a person acting out is something first observed by our own Inner Receptionist. Do we ignore that receptionist panic alarm or do we respond to it?

The more arrogant we are personally, the less likely we are to respond to anomalies with the result that we are more likely to suffer negative consequences or miss great opportunities. The “real” front counter receptionist in our office and the Inner Receptionist inside each of us, both desire to be appreciated and celebrated. Pay attention to both.

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor • www.hrdr.net



What's in a Seal?

» San Diego County, Calif.
www.sdcountry.ca.gov

The first seal of the county of San Diego was originally designed in 1933 by Sidney Jenkins, a student at Grossmont Union High School. However, in 1937 the county adopted a new seal that is still used today.

The official seal of the county of San Diego was adopted by the Board of Supervisors as a result of the construction of the Civic Center, known today as the County Administration Center. The seal was designed by architect Samuel Hamill as a plaque to adorn the Civic Center. On Feb. 11, 1937 the Board of Supervisors approved the design of the plaque and adopted the design as the official county seal.

The seal encompasses many different elements, representing the diversity of San Diego County. In the center of the seal is a fasces, a symbolic rod that dates back to use in ancient Rome. At the time the Board adopted the seal, the fasces was described as representing the motto, “In union there is strength,” because the axe is surrounded by a bundle of sticks, carrying the thought that the “people though individually weak are, collectively, strong.”

Besides the fasces, there are five major elements in the seal. First, in the bottom left, there is a faint depiction of a dolphin that stands for the county's reliance on the waterfront as a major industry. To the right of the dolphin is a cornucopia, representing “the bounties we receive from old mother earth.”

On the upper left, the seal holds a view of San Diego Harbor with a clipper ship and an airplane. The clipper ship recalls San Diego's historic background of the sea and the “modern clipper of the air looks into the glorious future.”

On the upper right there is a back country scene of Palomar Mountain crowned with the giant 200-foot telescope, a world renowned achievement in science at the time. The Board stated that the “ultimate achievement is not in the telescope itself, but rather is the new era of astronomical exploration to be ushered in. San Diego stands on the threshold of scientific history.”

Finally, in the center, behind the fasces, is a depiction of the flag of the United States. The architect sought to encompass the presence of the federal government in the many military installations throughout San Diego County.

Circling the seal is the county's motto, a quote by the ancient Roman poet, Virgil, “The noblest motive is the public good.” The quote was chosen by the Building Committee as the motto to adorn the Civic Center building.

At the bottom of the seal is the date the county was founded, inscribed as MDCCCLI, or 1851. San Diego County was one of the first counties in California. It is interesting to note that a seal designed more than 70 years ago continues to solidly represent the diversity of San Diego County today.

(If you would like your county's seal featured, please contact Chris Johnson at 202/942-4256 or cjohnson@naco.org.)



County News invites Letters to the Editor

Do you have a compliment, complaint or different point of view? ...
LET US KNOW.

Please include a phone number with your letter. Mail, fax or e-mail to: County News, NACO, 25 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202/393-2630; cnews@naco.org.

Counties in Pictures

Photo Contest

A picture is still worth a thousand words, even in the age of digital photography. Share the moments when your county was at its finest through the 2008 Counties in Pictures Photo Contest. *County News* is now accepting submissions!

You'll be able to vote for your favorite photos online in the NACo members-only Web site this fall. Finalists will be featured in a special spread in *County News*. Twelve exceptional pictures will be selected by NACo staff to appear in a 2009 Calendar that will be available online for purchase.

Submission rules & guidelines:

- Submissions become property of NACo / *County News* and may be used in NACo materials and publications.
- Deadline for submissions is Sept. 30. Photos must have been taken after August 2007 to qualify.
- All submissions must include the following information:
 - name of photo or filename of digital photo
 - county and photo credit
 - category and brief description
 - contact phone number and/or e-mail
- The subject of your photo must fall into one of these categories:
 - Public Works
 - Special Programs / Community Outreach
 - Celebrations
 - Emergency and First Response
 - Local Sights
 - Green Government

Please keep number of submission between 1–3 per category.

■ Digital and printed media are acceptable as long as they adhere to the following specifications:

Digital Specifications:

- Digital images must be in color and of quality resolution (at least 1,500 x 1,000 pixels).
- They should be saved in jpeg format and be no larger than 3 MB in file size.
- Upload your digital images online at <https://naco.sharefile.com>
Login Email: naco@naco.org / Password: ftpnaco
Save your image in the folders ... "To NACo > Photo Contest."
- Remember to e-mail us the file name of your image and complete submission information to cn-photos@naco.org. **Please don't e-mail your images.**

Printed Photo Specifications:

- Photos should be professionally printed or developed
- No slides or negatives will be accepted
- Photos should be at least 5" x 7" in size (8" x 10" preferred)
- Send all printed photos with complete submission information to: National Association of Counties, Attn: Jack Hernandez, 25 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001.

■ Any questions about the photo contest and submission guidelines should be directed to Jack Hernandez at 202/942-4250 or jhernandez@naco.org.