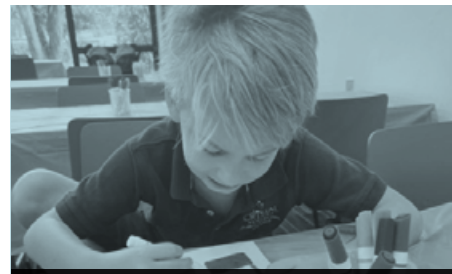




RURAL COUNTIES HURDLE ZONING CHALLENGES FOR AGRITOURISM. PG. 4



OHIO COUNTY LOOKS AT CHILDCARE SOLUTIONS FOR WORKFORCE. PG. 6



FLA. COUNTY LIBRARIES OFFER SENSORY-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS. PG. 9

Federal, county officials swap ideas at public lands forum

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Following a busy day of Capitol Hill visits by county public lands officials, those leaders offered a sampler of the ideas that could help their peers and the federal government meet their goals.

The inaugural Intergovernmental Forum on Public Lands held Sept. 13 followed a torrid day of visits to members of Congress during NACo's annual PILT fly-in supporting the Payments in Lieu of Taxes

program, and served as a prototype of some of the collected knowledge and experience the National Center for Public Lands aims to aggregate.

Counties with significant amounts of publicly owned lands are at the mercy of the federal appropriations process to receive payments through the PILT and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs, most of which fills holes in county budgets that include provide services in and around federal

See **PUBLIC LANDS** page 2



Wilmington, N.C. Fire Department Captain Dale Lamb carries a dog through floodwaters Sept. 17 in the Kure Beach area of New Hanover County, N.C., where county Board Chair Bill Rivenbark declared a state of emergency. The area, including Brunswick County, received more than 18 inches of rain within a 24-hour period. Photo courtesy of Wilmington, N.C. Fire Department

Agritourism helps boost rural counties

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Farmers used to look forward to rain. Now, they hope for a steady stream of visitors.

As the bulk of food production shifts away from them and toward corporate agriculture, small- and medium-sized farms are diversifying their business models, aiming to share the rural experience with neighbors and use their land in new ways.

That means hayrides, corn mazes, farmers markets or a

chance to pick your own apples, pumpkins or berries. In the middle of the country, large properties play host to hunting retreats and dude ranches. When looking for a wedding venue, couples increasingly seek out barns for their ceremonies and receptions.

"It's pretty amazing what some farmers and ranchers have been able to pull off to stay viable and keep farms and ranches running when all other economic indicators would

See **AGRITOURISM** page 5

Making history: Black women lead Georgia urban counties

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Starting in January, Black women will be at the helm of five counties in the Atlanta metro area — all of which, a decade ago, had never elected a Black female chair.

Three of the Black female chairs — Cobb County Chair Lisa Cupid, Henry County Chair Carlotta Harrell and Gwinnett County Chair Nicole Hendrickson — were elected in 2020, amid a pandemic and social upheaval.

"It was evident that peo-

ple were craving change," Hendrickson said. "They were craving leadership that demonstrated compassion and commitment for community."

After being sworn in as chair, Hendrickson announced, "We're going to be a Gwinnett that's for everyone, that represents people from all walks of life." A Jewish rabbi, Islamic imam and Christian preacher offered prayers at the ceremony, and Hendrickson invited prominent voices in Gwinnett County's Latino and Asian-American communities

to speak.

Diversity — not just in gender and race, but also in thought and lived experience — leads to a stronger county commission, because it more fully represents the population it's serving, Hendrickson said.

Before becoming county chair, Hendrickson served as associate director of the Gwinnett Coalition for Health and Human Services and led the Gwinnett County Community Outreach Division, which gives underrepresented com-

See **HISTORY** page 3

Intergovernmental Public Lands Forum seeks to shore up collective knowledge

From PUBLIC LANDS page 1

lands. The SRS program remains unauthorized.

“A lot of the county officials who have been working on PILT for decades are getting a little long in the tooth,” said Joe Briggs, a Cascade County, Mont. commissioner and NA-Co’s West Region representative, illustrating the need for resources to limit the loss of knowledge that comes from turnover among county officials.

forestry personnel drew road maps during the forum for how they broke through bureaucracy and bad habits and set new standards. Despite the millions of acres of U.S. Forest Service land, the agency’s staff is overwhelmed by the magnitude of maintenance required for fire mitigation and infrastructure work. Shared stewardship allows county personnel to work on federal lands, and those agreements have gathered steam since being introduced in the 2018 farm bill.

Capturing the collective knowledge of those officials, along with documents including contracts, agreements, natural resource plans and original research will figure into becoming the go-to resource for public lands counties, who will ensure the center’s independence through its endowment financed by county contributions.

But Idaho County, Idaho Commissioner Skip Brandt initially blanched when personnel from the Clearwater National Forest approached the county about doing fire mitigation work in the forest for which the U.S. Forest service was understaffed. Though the county already had a program for private lands, the master plan agreement was a nonstarter.

For some ideas like shared stewardship, county commissioners and state and federal

“It was full of Forest Service processes, the same processes



Intermountain Regional Forester Mary Farnsworth (third from right) describes the range of agreements that shared stewardship represents. (L-r) Idaho Association of Counties Executive Director Seth Grigg; Beaver County, Utah Commissioner Tammy Pearson; Idaho County, Idaho Commissioner Skip Brandt; Farnsworth; Stevens County, Wash. Commissioner Wes McCart and Jamie Barnes, Utah state forester. Photo by William T. Gallagher

that prevent the forester from getting stuff done,” Brandt said. “They were going to require us to have all of our contractors get federal training on how to run a chainsaw.”

get down in the weeds and sort of [explore] ‘What do we want to really affect? And how are we going to do that work?’ she said. “Throughout the country, shared stewardship agreements are different. It’s not one thing, it’s not one definition, there’s not one way of doing it.”

beauty of our county because you have to cross tribal trust land to get there.”

The Forest Service relented and let the county name its terms, which produced a participation agreement that fronted the county \$200,000 for work the county was able to do in three weeks.

While one size rarely fits all in county government, county officials often borrow from each other and can find inspiration in a kernel of any of the complications counties face.

Public land county leaders often praise the relationships they enjoy with local rangers and officers representing federal land management agencies but notice a distinct disconnect with the federal bureaucracy. That goes for Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon (R), too.

“We still had over half that money left, so they said ‘Well, keep going,’” Brandt said. “By the end of the year, we will have done over \$1 million of land treatment for the Forest Service. ... we’ve wrapped up everything that they’ve really thought would take us a couple of years to do because if their processes.”

“Because of our isolated nature, we’ve struggled to diversify our economy and really we don’t have a tourism economy,” said Commissioner Greg Miles. “We have to educate visitors to avoid trespass issues, we try to let people know to be respectful of tribal land and we haven’t been able to capitalize on opportunities to share the

“We’ve seen a real evolution in land management away from what’s on the ground more and more towards D.C. and D.C. agencies,” he said. “I do believe that folks that are drawn to national service are dedicated, they want to see things happen, they want to do the right thing, but somehow in that effort to try to do the right thing, we’ve paralyzed ourselves.

The shared stewardship program is in the eyes of the beholder, according to Mary Farnsworth, the Forest Service Intermountain Region forester. “Shared stewardship has such a broad framework that there’s not a rule set associated with it, we’ve been able to just

“I’m going to argue that we need to recalibrate away from these; it is important that we have the sort of national opportunities to work together, but it is very, very important

“I’m going to argue that we need to recalibrate away from these; it is important that we have the sort of national opportunities to work together, but it is very, very important

See PUBLIC LANDS page 7

SNAP/STATS

Hispanic Heritage Month

SEPT. 15-OCT. 15

SUBJECT	NUMBERS
U.S. population:	65.2 million or 19.5%
Growth since 2010:	26%
States with 1 million or more:	13
Median age of Hispanics in U.S.:	31
County with highest population:	Los Angeles County, 4.8 million

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

CountyNews

President
James Gore

Publisher
Matthew Chase

Public Affairs Coordinator
Alyxa Hawkins

Editor and Senior Writer
Mary Ann Barton

Digital Editor and Senior Writer
Charlie Ban

Junior Staff Writer
Meredith Moran

Design Director
Leon Lawrence III

ADVERTISING STAFF

Job Market/Classifieds representative

National Accounts representative

Mary Ann Barton
202.942.4223
FAX 866.752.1573

Published by:
National Association of Counties
Research Foundation, Inc.
660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400,
Washington, D.C. 20001
202.393.6226 | FAX 866.752.1573
E-mail cnews@naco.org
Online address www.countynews.org

The appearance of paid advertisements in County News in no way implies support or endorsement by the National Association of Counties for any of the products, services or messages advertised. Periodicals postage paid at Washington D.C. and other offices.

Mail subscriptions are \$100 per year for non-members. \$60 per year for non-members purchasing multiple copies. Educational institution rate, \$50 per year. Member county supplemental subscriptions are \$20 each. Send payment with order and address changes to NACo, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to County News, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001

(USPS 704-620) n (ISSN: 0744-9798)
© National Association of Counties
Research Foundation, Inc.

We are committed to getting County News on your desktop ASAP. Send your address corrections to cnews@naco.org.

Gwinnett County Chair Nicole Hendrickson: 'I didn't run to be first, I ran to make change'

From HISTORY page 1

munities the opportunity to be more involved with local government and provide feedback on policies. Those roles, along with her career as a social worker and personal experience with housing and food insecurity as a child, have all informed Hendrickson's leadership, she said.

"At the end of the day, we are in the business of service delivery, but we're also in the business of the human welfare of our communities," she noted. "... It goes back to the saying 'A rising tide lifts all boats.' You want to make sure that the 'least' of us has everything they need to survive and thrive, and when they do, that's a benefit to everybody in the community."

Hendrickson is the first Black person and woman of color to serve as chair in Gwinnett, the most racially diverse county in Georgia. Being "first" comes with a lot of pressure and can feel like a burden, she said, albeit a positive one that she is happy to bear, knowing that she's helping "lay the foundation for somebody who picks up that torch after [her]," she added.

"I didn't run to be the first, I ran to make change," she said. "But being the first is a heavy weight. Not only is it very lonely being in a top leadership position, because there are so few of us, but you are expected to alleviate the burden of all Black people in the history of civil rights. It's a heavy lift, and people expect you to deliver the 'promised land' overnight."

"... And being the first [Black chair], I have to also be the person who gets all of the front-facing daggers — the criticism, the looks, the vitriol that comes my way. 'You don't deserve to be in this seat,' 'You're a DEI candidate,' 'You're only about racial politics,' and nothing could be further from the truth."

Harrell and Cupid have also faced harassment surrounding their identity as Black female government officials; in 2021, Harrell was granted a stalking protective order against a woman who had repeatedly harassed her on social media



(From l-r:) Henry County, Ga. Chair Carlotta Harrell; DeKalb County, Ga. CEO Michael Thurmond; Cobb County, Ga. Chair Lisa Cupid and Gwinnett County, Ga. Chair Nicole Hendrickson pause for a photo at Liberty Plaza in Fulton County, Ga.

and in 2015, when Cupid was a county commissioner, she was followed and racially profiled by a Cobb County police officer in an undercover vehicle.

Cupid shared her story publicly and called for a review of the police department's policies, a situation that initially caused local backlash for her. However, the county has since created a Real-Time Crime Center that "targets the criminal instead of criminalizing communities," Cupid said. The center takes video footage and uses technology to pinpoint specific details, such as whether a car has a particular dent in it or if the suspect is wearing a specific brand of shirt, instead of relying on a broad suspect description, which often includes race and can lead to profiling.

"I can't express in the amount of time that we have just how difficult of an experience that was for me and for my family," Cupid said. "What I can tell you is that I have seen paradigmatic shifts within our police department to be more community facing and to be sensitive to the unique experi-

'We are a supportive network for each other at the beginning and end of the day.'

ences that people of color have in interacting with the police."

Prior to serving in Henry County government, Harrell was a police lieutenant and spent 20 years in law enforcement. It's important, particularly in local government where it can sometimes be overlooked or underfunded, to invest in public safety and make sure that officers are properly trained and engaged with the community, she said.

"Public safety is here to serve the community," Harrell said. "...There've been so many incidents nationally, and we always see what law enforcement is not doing right, but we never see the 99 times that they get it right."

"I'm real big on community policing and being in the community, so that the community can get to know their

law enforcement officers and firefighters. You have to make sure that everyone is working together, and I think that builds that sense of trust within the community, so that way, if something happens, they're not hesitant about picking up the phone and reporting it."

Harrell's time as a police officer and her family (her parents were civil rights freedom fighters and her father was a pastor) have shown her how essential community is, which is why she's in local government, she said.

Harrell is Henry County's second Black female chair — the first, June Wood, was elected in 2016. Wood "opened doors for people to look at the fact that Black women can lead," in Henry County, Harrell said. While Harrell is a Democrat and Wood is a Republican, Harrell values Wood's opinion and experience, and she reaches out to her for input, she said. The two also "connect quite often" with B.J. Mathis, Henry County's first female chair, who is white and a Republican.

"Being able to do that re-

gardless of the party [is important]," Harrell said. "For them, it was about service. For me, it's about service. It's not about party, it's not about the politics, it's about how we can serve the community."

As Black female chairs in neighboring counties, Cupid, Harrell and Hendrickson have all become close and often call each other up to bounce ideas off one another, Harrell said. All three women expressed gratefulness for the support system they've found in each other.

"We were able to create and develop this bond, and we continue to support one another," Harrell said. "For women in leadership — Black, white, or whatever — I think it's important that women support women."

"We know that if we might need advice or an opinion, 'What are you doing over here in Cobb County for this situation?' 'What are you doing in Gwinnett County for this situation?' We can reach out to one another and have those genuine conversations."

While there are things the three discuss that they could talk about with any other chair, Cupid acknowledged, the fact they are all Black women allows them to be more comfortable being open with each other about vulnerabilities, as well as ambition, she said.

"It creates an immediate safe space and no judgment zone, as we each are going into this new territory," Cupid said. "... We are a supportive network for each other at the beginning and end of the day."

In January, two more counties in the Atlanta metro area — Clayton and DeKalb — will be led by Black women for the first time — Alieka Anderson and Lorraine Cochran-Johnson, respectively. Cupid, Harrell and Hendrickson have made a commitment to extend their close bond and support to the two women, Cupid said.

"It's my hope that they know that they do not need to enter this territory alone," Cupid said. "And that there are other women around them who are proud of them, who champion them and are here to support them." **CN**



cultural land, including agricultural experience education — demonstrating how farms work, picking your own food or riding a tractor or hay trailer or business operations on a rural property — including wineries, distilleries, breweries and bed and breakfasts. The extent to which counties have authority over zoning or code enforce-

‘The pick your own vegetable patch has evolved to Friday night concerts.’

ment varies dramatically, but there is generally some point at which counties can apply control over land use.

Ann Mallek grew up on a farm in Albemarle County, Va. in a district she now represents on the county’s Board of Supervisors. State law restricts county control over winery operations, but the county still has use of its noise ordinance and zoning control over other farm-related businesses.

See ZONING page 12

by Charlie Ban senior writer

These days, it’s a coming-of-age moment for wedding guests to show up at a farm. Call it a “barn mitzvah.”

But what’s a wedding without guests? Those guests mean traffic. And nobody drives out to the country without dinner and dancing, so now there’s music. And if nobody’s getting

married some weekends, how about concerts, since the infrastructure is in place and there’s an opportunity for landowners to make money?

But back to that barn — it was built to store things, not hold people.

Does it pass fire codes? Counties often find themselves in-between landowners who have grand visions for their property and neighbors who

expected, thanks to zoning, to be living in a quiet agricultural community.

Counties also help entrepreneurs work within their zoning to bring their farm businesses to maturity. And in some cases, all they have at their disposal is a special use permit.

“The old ‘pick your own apples’ orchard, that’s a pretty innocent use, but the ‘pick-your-own vegetable patch’ has

evolved to Friday night concert series, or ‘we want to have weddings.’ We want to support that kind of development in the county, but also make it safe,” said Brian McDonough, Polk County, Iowa’s land use planning coordinator, during last year’s Iowa State Association of Counties’ Annual Conference.

Agritourism generally refers to operations related to agri-



SAVE THE DATES

Upcoming NACo Conferences

2024 County Crossroads Symposium

December 4-7 • Sonoma County, Calif.



2025 NACo Legislative Conference

March 1-4 • Washington, D.C.



2025 Western Interstate Region (WIR) Conference

May 20-23 • Pennington County, S.D.



2025 NACo Annual Conference & Expo

July 11-14 • City and County of Philadelphia, Pa.



Agritourism economic impact may be closer to \$13 billion a year, expert says

From AGRITOURISM page 1

suggest there are higher uses for that land and water,” said Dawn Thilmany, an agricultural economist and professor at Colorado State University. “It’s really great to see some people keeping it in agriculture.”

Agritourism was a \$1.26 billion business in 2022, representing 1.5% of domestic agricultural operations among 28,617 farms, according to the most recent Census of Agriculture, released in February by the Department of Agriculture. Those measures, Thilmany said, severely undercount the sector’s economic impact. She estimates it may be closer to \$13 billion a year, because of a combination of inconsistent data collection, misconceptions about what qualifies as an agritourism business and insurance issues.

“We’re trying to track the apples-to-apples, but we don’t believe the definition has been consistent enough,” she said.

Those complications have also made it hard to compare the sector’s growth over the years, because each Census of Agriculture, compiled every five years, defines terms differently. The two most recent censuses, for example, did not include wineries in their totals.

USDA found 29% of farms reporting agritourism income took in between \$1,000-\$5,000 and 23% earned more than \$25,000.

“We know it also under-captures all of those ripple effects of tourism,” she said. “If people come out to go see wine country, they’re going to stay at hotels nearby, they’re going to go to restaurants nearby, but that isn’t measured consistently.”

If it seems like a growing number of wedding photos feature distressed wood and pastoral backdrops, your friends and family are likely trendsetters. According to The Knot’s 2023 Real Weddings Study, farms, barns and ranches were selected most often (chosen by 17% of couples) as the venue choice for the ceremony and the second most popular choice (chosen by 18% of couples) for the reception venue, behind banquet halls (chosen by 20% of couples).

Also left unmeasured are the local employment impacts, with expanded operations opening the door to local hiring.

Counties can support their local agritourism efforts financially and programmatically. Onondaga County, N.Y. identified support for agritourism as a priority after revising its comprehensive plan and has issued grants to 53 farms through a competitive process, awarding a total of \$790,000 in 2024.

“We asked, ‘How do we cre-

‘I think ag tourism helps strengthen communities from a retention standpoint.’

ate an agritourism trail that we can market broadly?” said County Executive Ryan McMahon. “You need viable businesses that have something worth marketing and these tourism grants have certainly helped with that.”

The skill that made farmers successful, he said, applies beyond the practice of agriculture.

“I don’t think people look at farms as small businesses,” McMahon noted. “You see the innovation, the efficiencies that these farms have gone through in losing some of their most valuable workforce. There are a lot of kids who aren’t doing what their parents did. Family

farms are struggling, particularly dairy farming, so how do you diversify your offerings? And I think many of our different farms have done that.”

McMahon said the presence of a robust agritourism environment makes a region more attractive to potential residents of all ages.

“You develop, recruit and retain a workforce, and entertainment infrastructure is a part of that,” he said. “Families need things to do, your workforce needs something enjoyable to do on their days off, and in our case, you can go to Crazy Daisies or 1911,” referring to a family farm and a distillery in Onondaga County.

“You’ll see kids playing with parents and you’ll have 20-somethings having drinks and dinner with their friends. I think ag tourism helps strengthen communities from a retention standpoint and it certainly helps make you a more interesting community to market.”

The kind of agritourism that succeeds in different areas depends on the proximity to urban areas and infrastructure, with urban “collar counties” showing success. If they’re located more than an hour or two from population centers, agricultural businesses can suffer when lodging options don’t match visitors’ needs. Hunting getaways, on the other hand, thrive on the remoteness, and cater to smaller groups., and

SPEEDREAD

States with the most agritourism operations:

Texas	4,816
California	1,245
North Carolina	982
New York	947
Colorado	909

Source: Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

those properties are typically relegated to 12 states in the Great Plains, Mountain West and Texas.

Farmers are just as excited to offer a look at the agricultural lifestyle as customers are to immerse themselves. David Morgan is planning to turn his passion into an agricultural experience. A first-generation farmer, Morgan got into regenerative agriculture to ensure the integrity of the food his family ate. Seven years later, he’s managed to hold his own selling livestock because he is not at a disadvantage buying feed because his family grows it on his Lawrence County, Tenn. farm. He is now the county executive,

An hour-and-a-half from the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore areas, Washington County, Md. employs a business specialist for agriculture in its Business and Economic Development Office. Kelsey Keadle spent her first month on the job meeting with farm-

ers in the county and learning about how they’d like to grow their businesses. Like Morgan, local farmers voiced a desire to enter the short-term rental market, this time with camping sites, which were recently first allowed by state law and local ordinance.

“A local farmer was trying to put a couple small cabins on his land, and he had the drawings all done up and everything, until it came to the community hearing for it,” Keadle said. “That’s when there was so much pushback, so that killed the whole idea right then and there.”

Keadle sees the most consistent impact of her role coming as a liaison between farmers and businesses that could carry local produce and helping them conform to local regulations. That kind of work is increasingly prized, because a Penn State University study found that zoning and permitting were significant obstacles in agritourism operators’ daily operations, and the operators sought more assistance from local officials to understand the complexities of these rules.

“I’m doing whatever I can to help farmers with additional income, particularly in the winter, such as with our Groundhog Day celebration in February,” she said, naming an indoor event that showcases local producers and vendors. “Whatever we can do to highlight our agriculture.” **CN**



Onondaga County, N.Y. Executive Ryan McMahon tours Denise Vespa Stables with owner Denise Vespa. Photo courtesy of Onondaga County

Warren County seeks childcare answers for workforce

by Lilly Van Wagenen

A high income cannot necessarily crack the childcare crisis for new parents. Warren County, Ohio demonstrates that even moderate-income families struggle to find high-quality, accessible childcare.

With costs of infant care soaring to \$19,000 a year, parents are exiting the labor force to care for their children. Warren County Commissioner Shannon Jones recognizes that the county's young workforce is vulnerable to this barrier.

"There are life milestones," Jones noted. "Everyone should be able to get married and have families, and childcare is now a hindrance for their ability to either pull up out of poverty or remain out of poverty."

While the inaccessibility of childcare falls hardest on the backs of young parents, this problem reaches everyone once the consequences of those parents leaving the workforce start affecting the local economy.

"We don't recognize it as education or fund it as education," Jones said. "It is the wild, wild west for parents and the wild, wild west for businesses. Local governments stand in the middle trying to do the best for both."

With more and more young parents losing the opportunity to participate in the workforce, key players across sectors are starting to address this problem directly. At NACo's joint Counties for Career Success and Prenatal-to-3 convening earlier this year in Maricopa County, Ariz., county leaders exchanged ideas with peers from across the country and observed how Maricopa County co-locates early childhood and workforce development services.

Leaders from Warren County made the connection that workforce development systems in the county can be a strong partner in childcare initiatives.

"We have to be creative and find those areas for public-private partnership," said Josh Hisle, deputy director of Ohio-MeansJobs (the local American Job Center).

Because of this convening and cross-systems partnerships in Warren County, Hisle has



been able to contribute his efforts in workforce development to making childcare more accessible.

By redirecting workforce de-

velopment funds that were not utilized in the past, Hisle helped pilot the Warren County Workforce Stabilization Scholarship Program with James Ryan, dep-

uty director of the county's Human Services Department. This effort has offered 300 scholarships of up to \$10,000 each, every two years. The inter-department collaboration was a "no brainer" for Hisle, because childcare is such a prevalent barrier in the workforce.

This is just the start of addressing this problem. But having these conversations creates greater awareness that the inaccessibility to childcare is widespread.

"It really doesn't matter if you live in a rural county, a suburban or urban county, or a metropolitan county, it's a chronic

problem and the ability for the county or individual business to address the system failure on its own is unrealistic," Jones said.

This problem requires "real money, real investment and real intention," Jones said.

By getting key stakeholders involved, Warren County has started to build a multi-sector coalition that is looking for solutions that will benefit families and the local economy. **CN**

Van Wagenen is a former intern in NACo's Counties Futures Lab, concentrating on Human Services and Workforce Development.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

• First Vice President **J.D. Clark**, Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Membership Manager **Priscila Chrappah** attended the Texas Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Travis County.

NACo STAFF

• **Ezekiel Bolanle** joined NACo as an IT support specialist. He was previously an IT support technician with Alliance Information Systems. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity Technology at the University of Maryland Global Campus.

• **Emma Conover** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. She was previously an agricultural policy intern with the U.S. Department of State. She earned a bachelor's degree from Washington and Lee University.

• **Melissa Krouse** has joined NACo as a community relations assistant. She previously served as senior marketing manager at The Cook & Boardman

Group and as director of technology marketing and partnerships for the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. She earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Lebanon Valley College and an



Bolanle



Conover



Krouse



Yeung

associate's degree in humanities from Harrisburg Area Community College.

• **Rachel Yeung** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. She was previously a legislative intern for Sen. Robert Casey Jr. (D-Pa.). She earned a master's degree in public policy and a bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University.

• **Miranda Morvay** has been promoted to senior operations manager for the Counties Futures Lab.

• **Annie Qing** has been promoted to senior program manager for substance use disorder and lead for the Opioid Solutions Center.

• **Membership Manager Priscila Chrappah**, Chief Government Affairs Officer **Mark Ritacco**, National Director of Financial Partnerships **Kyle Cline** and Public Affairs Coordinator **Alyx Hawkins** attended the Maryland Associa-



Associate Legislative Director Paige Mellerio (third from right) met with the International Association of Assessing Officers executive committee during the organization's Annual Conference in Denver County, Colo. (From left): Tim Boncoskey, chief of staff to San Diego County, Calif.'s assessor/recorder/county clerk; Patrick Alesandrini, Hillsborough County, Fla. property appraiser; William Healey, Lewiston, Maine's chief assessor, Mellerio, Donna VanderVries, Muskegon County, Mich.'s equalization director and Rebecca Malmquist, Minneapolis, Minn.'s assessor.

tion of Counties Annual Conference in Worcester County.

• Legislative Director **Jessica Jennings** attended the Association of County Commissions of Alabama Annual Conference in Baldwin County.

• Chief Information Officer **Rita Reynolds** attended the County Commissioner Association of Ohio's Summer Symposium in Hocking County, Ohio.

• Associate Legislative Director **Paige Mellerio** and Research Director **Fitzgerald Draper** attended the International Association of Assessing Officers Annual Conference in Denver County, Colo.

• Legislative Director **Seamus Dowdall** and National Program Director of Public Promise Pro-

curement **Cathy Muse** attended the New York State Association of Counties Fall Conference in Sullivan County.

• Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** attended the Council of Southern County Associations in Pulaski County, Ark.

• Associate Legislative Director **Charlotte Mitchell Duyshart** attended the Association of Minnesota Counties Policy Conference in Douglas County.

• Digital Editor **Charlie Ban** attended the Montana Association of Counties Annual Conference in Missoula County.

• Chase and Government Affairs Director **Eryn Hurley** attended the Hawai'i State Association of Counties Conference in Honolulu County.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

CHOKWE PITCHFORD

NACo Board member
Berrien County, Mich.
Commissioner

Number of years active in NACo: I have been active with NACo for one year, starting in the summer of 2023, when Matt Chase found me reading the county asset improvement plan in the lobby of our hotel at the Michigan Association of Counties Conference.

Years in public service: I was first elected in the fall of 2022 as County Commissioner for District 3 in Berrien County. To date, I have served for two years.

Occupation: Executive director of Berrien Forward and Berrien Connection, a pair of sister non-profits in Berrien County.

Education: I earned my associate's degree in political science from Lake Michigan College and am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

The hardest thing I've ever done: Running for state representative when I was 20 years old (I was not constitutionally eligible when I announced). During that campaign, I raised \$250,000 and was endorsed by Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris and so many more amazing leaders; however, the public attacks, digital and television attack advertisements and threats on my life were unbearable for my family and loved ones. However, I am still convinced, as I always was then, that we will only move forward together if we harness our collective experiences, ambitions and desires for a more prosperous world into a crucible of change.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Nelson Mandela, George Orwell and Barack Obama.

A dream I have is to: Unite this country under the banner of unity and prosperity and lift the forgotten and disenfranchised



PITCHFORD

out of poverty and into the promised land. To rid the world of the bile and hatred that permeates our body politic and to enshrine the creed: One nation, under all, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all upon the halls of our discourse so that we never fall so low again.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Went to school initially for theatre. I wanted to go to Juilliard, study screenwriting and acting and become a director in Hollywood.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: I have terrible thalassophobia (fear of water); recently, I have begun to fight that fear by kayaking, swimming and going for boat rides on Lake Michigan – pray for me.

My favorite way to relax is: I am an avid jogger, reader and video gamer. If I am not working, I am probably doing one of those three things; my favorite books are "1984," Nelson Mandela's biography, "Brave New World" and the Hunger Games series.

My favorite way to relax is:
I am an avid jogger, reader and video gamer.



I'm most proud of: My family. My mother and her tenacity and love, my sisters and their unique ability to make me laugh at any given turn and my wife and her unrelenting forgiveness and love have held me during the darkest times in my public service career thus far.

Every morning, I read: *The Herald-Palladium*, WSJM-FM and other local newspapers and publications.

My favorite meal is: Steak. Medium rare. If you eat well-done steak, I will judge you.

My pet peeve is: Uninformed, opinionated people who cannot seem to think that the other person, issue or cause may be rooted in lived experiences.

My motto is: It's only impossible if you say it is.

The last book I read was: "The Infinite Game," by Simon Sinek

My favorite movie is: "The Irishman"

My favorite music is: I have a diverse musical taste. My top three genres are alternative, hip-hop and pop and my top three artists are Kendrick Lamar, Twenty One Pilots and Beyoncé.

My favorite U.S. president is: A tie between Barack Obama, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Jimmy Carter.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo stands for the empowerment of all 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs and since they were shires, counties have been the original form of government. We stand with NACo because they stand with us!

New public lands center offers resources

From PUBLIC LANDS page 2

that we have people like yourselves engaged in that process."

"What's exciting about what you're doing today is you're bringing not only political will and force but practicality through the argument that will make a difference that people will have to listen to."

Gordon sees potential for counties collectively to operate more efficient regional energy co-ops.

"If you look at what's happening to large utilities and ... the liabilities that are associated with that, I believe we're at an advent of a kind of a change of how we're going to do power distribution, and counties are going to be right in the middle of that."

View video of three panel discussions and Gordon's address at <https://www.naco.org/event/2024-naco-intergovernmental-forum-public-lands>.

WORD SEARCH

FICTIONAL COUNTIES

Created by Charlie Ban

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

ABSOROKA: Absoroka County, Wyo. – Craig Johnson "Longmire" novels

BEECHUM: Beechum County, Ala. – "My Cousin Vinny"

CARSON: Carson County, Md. – "Veep"

GREENBOW: Greenbow County, Ala. – "Forrest Gump"

GURT: Gurt County, Sideburn State – "The Adventures of Pete and Pete"

HAZZARD: Hazzard County, Ga. – "Dukes of Hazzard"

HEIMLICH: Heimlich County, Texas – King of the Hill

HILL: Hill County, Calif. – "Back to the Future"

MAYBERRY: Mayberry County, N.C. – "The Andy Griffith Show"

MAYCOMB: Maycomb County, Ala. – "To Kill a Mockingbird"

MIST: Mist County, Minn. – "A Prairie Home Companion"

PORTAGUE: Portague County, Texas – "Smokey and the Bandit"

SCHWARTZWELDER: Schwartzwelder County – "The Simpsons"

TWINPEAKS: Twin Peaks County, Wash. – "Twin Peaks"

YOKNAPATAWPHA: Yoknapatawpha County, Miss. – William Faulkner novels

finally!
NACo swag is now available online!

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

Clay County, Iowa faces generational flood effects

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

During National Preparedness Month, the County News Podcast is examining the challenges that Clay County, Iowa faced in June during major flooding there.

In an interview for the podcast, Clay County Supervisor Barry Anderson describes the first major flood of the Little Sioux River in more than 70 years, and the damage it caused in the county seat of Spencer.

“There was nothing that we could do to withstand that,” he said. “It was just Mother Nature at her finest.”

Then the sewer treatment

plant went out of commission, sewage was sent back up into people’s homes. The stress and exhaustion from the chaos of the flooding took a toll on residents, causing a mental health crisis.

The county responded during the crisis and afterward, aiding and feeding displaced residents and is now trying to figure out the best mitigation strategies. But planning for future floods can mean making hard decisions on how to change the county seat to be more resilient.

Anderson also touches on the support and insights he received from other NACo members who have faced similar challenges.



Clay County, Iowa Supervisor Barry Anderson gestures toward trees damaged in the June 2024 flooding. Photo by Rachel Bennett

Legislative Director Brett Mattson joins the conversation to offer recommendations for exercises to prepare a county for a potential natural disaster, along with mental health resources for not only affected residents but the county staff who work long hours to mitigate and

recover from disasters. He also describes the federal advocacy efforts around disaster mitigation and response that NACo is taking on behalf of counties. **CN**



Scan the QR code or visit www.naco.org/podcast to listen to the County News Podcast.



OSWEGO COUNTY, N.Y.

The Oswego County Legislature sponsored a county seal design contest in 1976 as part of its Bicentennial Celebration seal. Madelyn Schmidt’s winning design represented the county’s background.

The five-pointed shape framing the seal mirrors the design of Fort Ontario.

The smokestack and energy symbol signify the numerous industries in the county.



The plow represents the county’s agriculture, including dairying and farming of fruit, vegetables and other crops.

The graduation cap symbolizes education, ranging from Head Start programs up to the State University of New York at Oswego.

The sailboat and fish represent outdoor recreation throughout the county’s waterways — its ponds, streams, rivers, Oneida Lake and Lake Ontario.

Would you like to see your county seal featured in County News? Please contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

GET TO KNOW...

Johnson County, Kansas

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Johnson County, Kan., founded in 1855, was named for Rev. Thomas Johnson, a Methodist minister who served as a missionary to the Shawnee Indians. It’s the most populous county in Kansas, with roughly 609,863 residents, according to the 2020 census.

The county seat of Olathe is 20 miles southwest of Kansas City, Mo. which is known for its jazz, barbecue and professional football team, the reigning Super Bowl champions, the Chiefs. Olathe was established because of its location on the Santa Fe Trail, and it was the fastest-growing city in Kansas in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The city was named for the Shawnee word for “beautiful.”

The Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm Historic Site in Olathe was built as a stop along the Westport Route of the Santa Fe, Oregon and California trails. It’s the only stagecoach stop on the Santa Fe Trail that has been preserved as a public historic site. Horses, sheep and chickens live on the farm today, as they

did in the 1860s, and visitors can ride in a reproduction of the original “mud wagon” style of stagecoach.

The county’s Museum of Deaf History, Arts and Culture, which features exhibits on the history of deaf culture, a series of interviews with deaf community members and a collection of work from deaf artists, is located across the street from the Kansas School for the Deaf.

The county’s 166-acre Ernie Miller Park & Nature Center

features a 500-gallon aquarium and three miles of hiking trails across prairies, forests and a stream. Overland Park, the county’s most populated city, hosts the Prairiefire Summer Music Series featuring a variety of local music acts on Thursdays throughout the season.

Actors Paul Rudd, Rob Riggle and Jason Sudeikis grew up in Johnson County and all attended Shawnee Mission High School. The three created “Big Slick,”

an initiative that raises money for Children’s Mercy Hospital with the goal of eradicating pediatric cancer. “Big Slick” has raised more than \$21 million for the hospital, during its annual weekend of events, including a celebrity softball game, comedy show and poker tournament. **CN**

Would you like to see your county featured in County News? Please contact Meredith Moran at mmoran@naco.org.



(L-r) Eric Stonestreet, Jason Sudeikis, David Koechner, Paul Rudd and Rob Riggle pose with Johnson County youth and Sluggerrr the lion during the Big Slick Celebrity Weekend, which benefits Children’s Mercy Hospital.

BRIGHT IDEAS | MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Miami-Dade County Libraries Offer Sensory-Friendly Programs

PROBLEM:

Libraries offer lots of programs, but usually not for neurodiverse residents.

SOLUTION:

Miami-Dade County now offers sensory-friendly programs at all of its branches.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Miami-Dade County Librarian Miriam Quiros-Laso reads “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” to a crowd of children, some of whom are fixated on fidget toys, playing with puppets or blowing bubbles. Story time is one of the dozens of programs the library system has revamped to be more sensory-friendly for neurodiverse residents.

Quiros-Laso’s 18-year-old son is on the spectrum, and she created sensory friendly story times at the Coral Gables library branch before Miami-Dade County passed a resolution to make its systems “autism-friendly and neurodiverse inclusive,” which expanded sensory-friendly programming to all of the county’s libraries.

“I was thinking about, ‘I love doing story time. How can I make my son comfortable in story time? What would he like? What wouldn’t he like? What would trigger him?’” Quiros-Laso said. “And it was thinking outside the box and thinking of things that we could incorporate within our story times to make it more enjoyable [for people on the spectrum].”

Staff in all 50 of Miami-Dade County’s libraries go through training (Autism Spectrum Disorder and Strategies for Inclusivity training), which is provided by the University of Miami and the Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD). The library’s sensory-friendly programming includes initiatives geared toward those on the spectrum, including social clubs for young adults with intellectual



Siena Dann, a Crystal Academy student training to be a library volunteer, poses with Coral Gables Library Branch Manager Brent Capley. Photo courtesy of Maria Palacio

and/or developmental disabilities and a sensory pop-up art experience, as well as clubs such as Junior Environmental Rangers and Cosplay DIY, which are for both neurotypical and neurodiverse youth.

Programs are often created out of feedback from library-goers who make suggestions about what they want out of the space, Quiros-Laso said.

“They’ll come in and hang out and it’s like, ‘Well, what do you like? What do you want to see at the library?’” Quiros-Laso said. “And then we cater the programming to that.”

“... So, do they like to play board games? Do they like to just chill? It’s just giving them the space where they’re comfortable being themselves, and they’re not singled out.”

The goal wasn’t to completely reinvent what the library offers, but to make adjustments to existing programming so that a broader range of people could participate, Quiros-Laso said.

“With enhancing story time, it was just reworking the way we do things and looking at the bigger picture of everything ... and being more aware

— considering light, considering sound,” Quiros-Laso said. “Maybe some sounds are too loud, some pitches are too high, so you need to adapt based on the kids.”

“[You have to think about] how you’re going to introduce a puppet, how you’re going to introduce bubbles — things that are super simple to us, but you can have a child that can have a meltdown because they’re afraid of the bubbles, which has happened before, so it’s how you introduce different things and transition between them.”

Library sensory kits, which include fidget strings, squeezable toys, noise reducing earmuffs and other objects that are intended to soothe neurodiverse individuals, are available at all of the county’s libraries and are often used during story times, according to Quiros-Laso.

The Miami-Dade County Library system also posts on its website “social narratives,” which are online brochures structured like a picture book, to give neurodiverse people a detailed breakdown of what to expect before going to the

library. The “social narratives” give a tour of each library branch, showing locations such as the computer area and quiet space, and providing explainers for how to get a library card and how to check out books.

The Doral, Key Biscayne and South Dade Regional library branches are building separate autism-friendly spaces, which will have special lighting as well as furniture designed with those on the spectrum in mind, according to Ray Baker, director of the Miami-Dade County Library System.

Students at Crystal Academy, a Miami-Dade County therapy center and school for children with autism and developmental delays, have library cards and attend story time at the Coral Gables branch.

“They’re really taking into consideration many things,” said Maria Palacio, a co-founder of Crystal Academy who also has a child on the spectrum. “The interaction, the music, the sensory part of it, it shows that they have really committed to understand the public and who actually goes to the library and how to cater to different personalities and needs.”

Four Crystal Academy stu-

dents are set to volunteer at the Coral Gables Library, where they will gain experience shelving and organizing books, to give them job experience and prepare them for the workforce. Each student will undertake tasks that cater to their personalities and interests, Palacio said. One student is adept at building things, so they might help build bookshelves or chairs for the library. Another student is very verbal and social and will help set up the library’s story time. Therapists from the school will accompany them, according to Baker.

“I’m very grateful for the opportunity and the energy that we got,” Palacio said. “It’s not, ‘I’m doing a favor, because we have to do it, and we have to be inclusive.’”

“They’re giving the neurodiverse population a chance to succeed and have self-worth, which we all want to actually feel that we’re valuable — I think that’s a beautiful thing. And if it can be done in one library, it can be done in all of them.” **CN**

The Miami-Dade County Library System won the 2024 “Best in Category” Achievement Award in the Library category.



Looking to hire county staff?
**Post your job listing on
NACo’s new career site!**



jobs.naco.org



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



CALIFORNIA

- Tickets for concerts at the famed county-owned Hollywood Bowl in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** can soar to more than \$80 per person. But the concert venue also offers thousands of \$1 seats each season, as well as a \$7 shuttle to the concerts. To make sure that residents are aware of the deal, Supervisor Kathryn Barger recently introduced a motion for the county parks and recreation department to **create a media campaign promoting the affordable concerts.**

CALIFORNIA

- **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** has a new tool to help people find **affordable housing.** An interactive website and map is now available to search for affordable housing developments built with the help of county funds. The County-Restricted Affordable Housing Map shows existing developments and those under construction.

People can search by location and learn details about each property like income limits and the eligible population served by each property such as veterans, older adults, fam-

ilies and individuals or transitional-age youth like those who were in foster care.

FLORIDA

SEMINOLE COUNTY firefighters are being trained to **put out electrical vehicle fires,** WKMG-TV reported. "The lithium-ion battery car fires are a bit different than a regular gasoline car fire, in the fact that there is the lithium available, so it burns and won't be put out by water. So it burns hotter, faster and is more difficult to extinguish than a normal car fire," Asst. Chief Tod Zellers



told the TV station.

IOWA

POLK COUNTY plans to expand a county **down payment assistance** program, Axios recently reported. Administrators want to expand the program after it was exhausted within weeks due to demand. The expansion could help address housing bias, Neighborhood Finance Corporation (NFC) Director Stephanie Murphy told Axios, given that the program's inaugural recipients were disproportionately people of color. Polk County supervisors allocated \$5 million from federal pandemic allocations to launch the program through NFC, a local lending group focused on neighborhood revitalization.

MARYLAND

The number one cause of preventable death after injury is bleeding, so **HOWARD**



COLORADO

EL PASO COUNTY Public Health is launching an innovative new **digital behavioral health platform** with the goal of increasing access to early intervention behavioral health resources. The platform, known as Pikes Peak Rising 360, is a pilot project which supports regional efforts to enhance the mental health and well-being of all county residents. Pikes Peak Rising 360 is an online, web-based platform which provides thousands of expert-vetted resources and scientifically validated assessments, all of which are adaptable to different learning styles.

COUNTY has created a **"Stop the Bleed"** training program for Howard County Public Schools. "This innovative program is not just about responding to emergencies," said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. Howard County was one of the first counties in the nation to implement a community wide "Stop the Bleed" program. All police and fire personnel were trained in the program, and bleed control kits were included in all county-owned automated external defibrillators (AEDs).

MICHIGAN

OAKLAND COUNTY is getting the word out to residents to beware of mosquitoes after three birds tested positive for **West Nile Virus.** Mosquitoes are infected with the virus by biting an infected bird. The virus is then spread to humans

See **NEWS FROM** Page 11

CALIFORNIA

- The **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY** Solid Waste Management Division recently completed a special project to safely and economically close a landfill, the Colton Sanitary Landfill. The landfill covers 113 acres, with 88 acres used for waste disposal from 1964 to 2014. The plan to **close the landfill** in 2014 required covering the 88 acres with a 4-foot-thick layer of soil. There wasn't enough suitable soil on-site and 600,000 cubic yards of soil were needed.

Instead, the county chose a material with a synthetic grass top layer for the final cover. More cost-effective than hauling in dirt, the material was environmentally friendly, prevents soil erosion and reduces future maintenance and costs. The project took 21 months to complete and included installing the turf and improving onsite roads and stormwater drainage. This is the first project of its kind for the county and one of the few in California.



NEW YORK

STEBEN COUNTY is tallying up the damage from Hurricane Debby and it looks to be more than **\$50 million for fixing damaged roads**. Heavy flooding hit the area Aug. 9 due to the storm. Jack Wheeler, Steuben County manager, said he is hopeful that the roads badly damaged by the storm will be passable by the end of September, he told *The Evening Tribune*.

“The work will not be totally completed but the roads will be passable,” Wheeler said. “We have a couple areas where bridges are completely out but there are detours to be able to use those roads. Detours may still be in place after September but the road system in general will be passable. Things have been restored but there still may be detours in place.”

Steuben County volunteers clean up debris last month after heavy flooding caused by Hurricane Debby. Photo courtesy of Steuben County

From NEWS FROM page 10

through the bite of the infected mosquito. Most people who are infected with the virus have either no symptoms or experience a mild illness such as fever, headache and body aches.

However, in some individuals, a more serious disease-causing inflammation and swelling of the brain can develop. People over the age of 50 are more likely to develop serious and potentially life-threatening symptoms if they become ill. “These test results mean that West Nile Virus is present in Oakland County and the best way to prevent getting diseases spread by mosquitoes is to avoid being bitten,” said Leigh-Anne Stafford, Oakland County’s director of Health & Human Services. “As we enjoy outdoor events in summer and fall, it’s important to protect ourselves against mosquito bites.”

NEW JERSEY

MORRIS COUNTY’s approach to dealing with the **opioid substance use** problem? Since 2017, they’ve connected with 50,000 people using what they call the Hope One recovery vehicle, WPIX-TV reported. The van, staffed with certified peer recovery specialists travels across the country, stopping in locations like food pantries.

While parked, they offer residents snacks, free samples of Narcan and fentanyl test strips. Hope One has placed more than 1,500 people in programs. “They might not know where to turn or where to start,” said

Al Shurdom, a certified peer recovery specialist. “We can sit down and literally draw a blueprint for that individual on how to go forward, based on whatever services they require. And, we can also make those connections right from here.” For more information email hopeone@co.morris.nj.

OREGON

Preschool for All and BuildUp Oregon recently announced the launch of a new facilities fund aimed at supporting **early childhood education** providers in **MULTNOMAH COUNTY**. These resources are available to fund and guide early childhood providers in preserving, improving, and expanding their childcare facilities. The county is a funding partner with Oregon Housing and Community Services for the BuildUp Oregon program. These resources are designed to help early care and education facilities providers expand their sites at or next to affordable housing developments. The funding is available state-

wide to affordable housing developers partnering with early childhood education providers.

PENNSYLVANIA

• After working to keep drugs outside of **CRAWFORD COUNTY** Correctional Facility walls, Warden Jack Greenfield will soon be welcoming some in, the *Meadville Tribune* recently reported. The facility is one of many county jails to implement a **Medication Assisted Treatment program** to help incarcerated individuals with opioid use disorder.

Crawford County commissioners are using a payout from national opioid settlements to fund the program, the newspaper reported. Commissioner Eric Henry said they are investing \$100,000 in the first year. Medication Assisted Treatment uses medications and behavioral interventions to treat a patient with opioid use disorder.

TEXAS

The **EL PASO COUNTY** Economic Development Department and Augment El Paso recently unveiled a high-tech digital upgrade bringing new life to the “Our History” **courthouse mural** with an augmented reality experience, the *El Paso Times* reported. In 1995, El Paso County commissioned El Paso artist Carlos Callejo to paint the mural inside the Enrique Moreno County Courthouse to display the history and culture of the region. “We love stories,” El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego said at the upgrade unveiling ceremony last month. “We love to be able to talk about our community in



TEXAS

The historic **POTTER COUNTY** Library building, built in 1922 and vacant for the past 10 years, may be **repurposed into a museum and community center**.

“We’ve been looking for the right opportunity for our organization for a while,” Scott Metelko, the executive director of Santa Fe Historical Railway Museum, told the *Amarillo Globe-News*. “This one came up, and it’s a bit of a sidestep for us as an organization, but I wanted to pursue it because I think it will help us build our capacity for fundraising and putting together a project like this.”

terms of a story because it’s our nature and who we are as individuals, especially from here in El Paso.”

UTAH

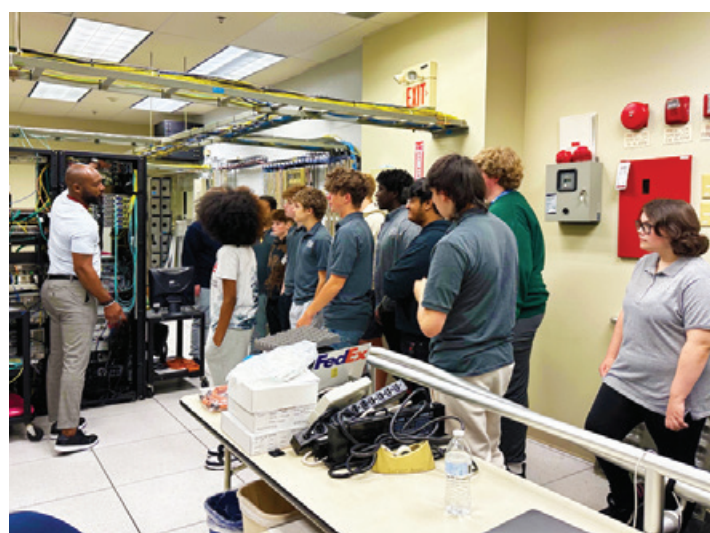
SUMMIT COUNTY is proposing a [0.5%] one-half percent sales tax increase on the November ballot to **help pay for search and rescue**, along with emergency medical services, law enforcement and expansion of a landfill, radio station KPCW-FM reported. That equates to 50 cents on applicable purchases of \$100. Gas, medical prescriptions and groceries would be excluded from the potential sales tax increase. The county estimates about 65% of sales tax revenue is generated by nonresidents.

VIRGINIA

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

is considering offering **tax relief to its senior citizens and disabled neighbors** after a presentation by Budget Director Mark McGruder. McGruder said the current program will expand eligibility for real estate tax relief by increasing the annual income cap. The proposed limit for 100% real estate tax relief would be \$45,000, which is up nearly \$2,000 from last year’s income limit. The county reports currently, nearly 500 people qualify for that 100% relief. A public hearing will be held Oct. 15, when the board will vote on the ordinance. The proposed relief could take effect Jan. 1.

Do you have news to share? Send your news tips, press releases and photos to Mary Ann Barton at mbarnton@naco.org.



PENNSYLVANIA

• Interns in a **CHESTER COUNTY** workforce training program are getting a chance to work alongside Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU) employees. Two years after its launch, the internship program designed for students in the Computer Information Systems (CIS)- Networking Program and developed by the CCIU and the Technical College High School continues to yield results in equipping students with the skills and experience necessary for a smooth transition into post-secondary education or careers, the *Chester County Press* reports. This year, interns earned an hourly wage thanks to a grant from the Chester County Department of Workforce Development.

New agritourism businesses present challenges, opportunities for rural counties

From ZONING page 4

“We have occasionally had to ask people if they want to be the one responsible for shutting down all outdoor amplified music and ruin it for everybody,” she said.

“That has been a fairly compelling message.”

Her biggest concern has been the addition of businesses with a tenuous link to agricultural use and their negative externalities.

“We have had several applications for brewery licenses, but there’s nothing agricultural particularly about a brewery because they can’t grow the barley, they can’t grow the hops and to me it’s not a justifiable link to have a few elderberry bushes and therefore call yourself a farmer when you’re importing industrial amounts of stuff over very narrow country roads and great big tanker trucks,” she said.

Local outcry tends to prompt county action. Skagit County, Wash. is in the middle of set-



ting policy for events in agricultural areas.

The Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission and Agricultural Advisory Board have been collaborating on a plan to cut the number of events held on agricultural zones by half, to 12 per year. After 200 people showed up to a planning commission public hearing, the Board of Commissioners declared a moratorium on new events in agricultural

areas.

“We’ve had a special use permit available for 10 years that allows you to hold 24 events per year, but only two people have applied,” said Commissioner Ron Wesen.

“Right now, we’re looking for voluntary compliance agreements with the previous [events] that were there,” he said.

“We want to make sure that they have the critical area re-

views of their property: The structural integrity of what’s there, floodplain design, fire protection, health regulations. Those are things we’re looking at. It’s not fair if somebody new comes in ... and they go through all the rules and these other people have never gone through the rules.”

In Miami-Dade County, Fla., the new Miami-Redland Agritourism District will allow expanded uses of land for weddings, hayrides, corn mazes, food trucks and other businesses to operate without certificates of use, though limiting the size of buildings, in an agricultural boundary.

Other counties have streamlined permitting and conditional use permit processes related to various uses.

Counties closer to population centers typically have more involved zoning ordinances.

When Lawrence County, Tenn. Executive David Morgan, a farmer, follows through on his plan to add tiny homes to

his land to serve as short-term rentals, he’ll face no resistance from local regulations, because his rural county has none. But he doesn’t consider that *carte blanche*.

“We live by the Golden Rule here — we can work things out among ourselves without government having to oversee our conduct,” he said, noting that property sizes in his county also tend to provide a buffer for noise.

Morgan wants to give visitors the agricultural experience, specifically a close look at the regenerative agriculture he practices.

But as the Nashville exurban area expands, he anticipates some friction with people who are accustomed to a more structured system.

“There are a lot of people moving here from other cultures, other ways of life,” he said.

“They come from cities and counties that have zoning laws that are as long as your arm.”

CN

Changing the narrative around fleet safety

Mastering the art of a safer fleet
Your ultimate guide to building a best-in-class fleet safety program.

The FMCSA found that 87% of collisions are due to avoidable driver error. It should come as no surprise then that fleet safety has quickly become the number one priority for agencies large and small. Many of these agencies are turning to telematics to both guide their fleet safety strategies and lay the foundations of their programs. Some of the ways that telematics have been shaping safety programs include:

- Gaining insights into key fleet safety metrics.
- Major and minor collision detection.
- Identifying the drivers that need additional safety training.
- Post-incident reconstruction reports.

But the world of AI has reached the industry in the form of predictive analytics. When applied to fleet safety, its capabilities allow for collision risk forecasting. We are including the QR code for a short reach on developing a safety program with telematics:



Mastering the Art of a Safer Fleet is an ebook brought to you by Geotab, a telematics provider with safety features that have helped organizations see [collision rates reduced by 40%](#). With over one million government subscribers and 20+ years in the industry, they are experts in fleet safety.

Scan the QR code to unlock the ebook

GEOTAB