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McGinley begins MACo presidency

Mike McGinley, former MACo First Vice President, ascended to the position of president at MACo's 99th Annual Conference, held Sept. 21-25, in Hamilton. The following is his acceptance speech.

First of all, it's a tough act to follow with that Cyndi Johnson. She's been a great president to follow around this past year, and she's done MACo and NACo one heck of a job, so Cyndi, I do really thank you. Thanks to Ravalli County for the hospitality this week, especially Betty Lund and all who put this convention on; it's a great thing.

A few of you are new commissioners here, so here's a quick history of myself: I've been a commissioner since January 2000, and it was one of those deals where I was appointed off-cycle, but I've served five years of that was term, then I was re-elected. I have a wife, Colette, and like Harold says, this is a big commitment to the family. We have four kids and they're finally all grown this year. We just sent our youngest son to Montana Tech. My lovely wife, when you do get the chance to meet her, I'll always affectionately tell everyone she works in the cathouse in Dillon. Seriously, it's the small animal hospital, but it's just easier to call it the cathouse, so if you do ever get a chance to meet her, you might not mention that I introduce her that way. She wanted to be here tonight, and one of the special parts of my life is family, but one of her vet techs had an operation the other day, so she couldn't make it. That's sort of a quick history of where I came from.

Mike McGinley, MACo President and Beaverhead County Commissioner

As I got involved in commissioner work, I could see MACo, with no government experience at all throughout my career, was a valuable resource, so I started hanging around there. As they began giving training lessons in the first elected official training, somebody came up with the idea of actually certifying county commissioners. I thought that was a great deal, so I enrolled in the classes and was the first certifiable county commissioner. That's great training and a good way to get people onboard with MACo, so they can see the resources that comes with it and how valuable it is.

Shortly, I got on the first economic development committee, just after MACo started it, and the rest is history. I got involved in the NACo board, and I could see the involvement of the leadership that's gone ahead of me. I thought it was my turn to step up and try to give back whenever I was able to do it.

It was especially meaningful this year with NACo 1st Vice President Teresa Altemus coming from the national organization to Montana and hearing how much she enjoys it. That is truly great; the relationships between the Montana counties and the national level are where the effectiveness of the MACo organization is so valuable, as is the whole MACo team.

One thing to explain, though, was what she was talking about up here: I've always had to make sure I check my suitcases and coat pockets when I come home because NACo passes out Restore the Partnership pledge buttons because it is trying to revitalize the relationship between the federal government and the local governments. After I come back from D.C., I make sure that button comes off before I come back to Beaverhead County, because Beaverhead County, Madison County, and now Jefferson County have a little bit different relationship with the partnership in Montana. It's sort of a southwest Montana thing regarding partnership strategies of the Beaverhead National Forest.

Please see "McGinley…" on page 7

Johnson's MACo presidency ends with tribute to others

Cyndi Johnson, former MACo President, handed over the reigns of the position at MACo's 99th Annual Conference in Hamilton. The following is her final speech to MACo.

There is not one among you,
I'm not honored to call friend;
And here we are together
Too near to the end.

Of service often cherished,
to those who make me proud.
Thank God and this great nation
I've even been allowed.

This Association is a family;
We feel it while we grow.
The familiar fight of siblings
And the bond that makes it so.

Our causes cause us frustration,
Our victories make us glad.
We lean on one another through
tough moments...just a tad.

Harold guides us onward,
Herding Tiggers, if you will.
At times, I'm sure he feels
headed ever - uphill.

You'll always be my hero, Sir,
With Montana Code at hand,
Blackberry at your fingertips,
and answers on demand.

Sheryl gives us balance,
Carries out the plan we made,
Reminds us of the pitfalls and
Calls a spade a spade.

You'll find none better suited,
to lead when times are tough.
She'll motivate and love you,
And push you just enough.

Karen keeps us organized,
And well trained as we are able.
Thank goodness for her presence,
As we all seek someone stable.

Mike, Mike and John, you're mentors
far more than I deserve.
The world, it is a better place,
And richer yet, the ones you serve.

Victor, you inspire me,
to do the stuff of dreams.
I only wish I could show you,
just how much that means.

Cyndi Johnson, MACo Past President and Pondera County Commissioner

Gary H. and Gary M. - you amaze me at,
what you are able to do.
Your knowledge, deep and boundless,
and I am beholden to you.
Patrick, Thanks for the humor,
at every single turn.
It is indeed my honor to
Say, from you, I learn.

Jamie, you're our superstar,
A splendid fashion sensation,
An astounding political mind
and my extraordinary inspiration.

Kathy, you are the standard,
to which we all aspire.
I owe a debt of gratitude,
that you helped light this fire.

Connie, Carol, and Maureen,
Greg, and Jim, and Bill,
You move us always forward,
And stronger for it still.

Joe, and Carl and Arnie,
Richard, Mark, and Don,
Nancy, Rita, and Andy;
The list goes on and on.

Sandra Jane and Joseph,
there's nothing I can say
to thank you for your encouragement
And love along the way.

Yes, MACo is a family,
strong and tightly bound,
An amazing band of musicians
With an awesome magnitude of sound.

And I have had the honor,
of standing on the stage,
and singing to the rafters
As I get you to engage.

You serve the many and the few,
From Montana, East and West.
You fight the fires worth fighting;
Together, you do it best.

You serve as you were chosen;
You serve because you care;
Always with integrity as you
Change the things you dare.

And here we are together
Too near to the end.
There is not one among you,
I'm not honored to call friend.

By Cyndi Johnson

MACo News

2007-2008 MACo Executive Committee

From left to right:
Fiscal Officer Allan Underdal, Toole County; *Urban Counties Rep.* Greg Chilcott, Ravalli County; *Past President* Cyndi Johnson, Pondera County; *2nd Vice President* John Ostlund, Yellowstone County; *1st Vice President* Carl Seilstad, Fergus County, and *President* Mike McGinley, Beaverhead County

Seen at the Conference

Photos by Mike Harbour

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Commissioners, elected officials to also benefit at 2009 Midwinter Conference in Helena

The 2009 edition of the annual MACo Midwinter Conference, set for Feb. 9-12 in Helena, will be a great chance for county elected officials of all offices to learn more about state and local government issues.

The four-day event is full of educational seminars that will focuse on many timely and critical subjects relevant to every participant.

For more information about the Midwinter Conference, call MACo at (406) 444-4360, visit the MACo site at http://maco.cog.mt.us or watch *MACo News.*

MACo was fortunate to have several state leaders attend the 99th Annual Conference in September, including Gov. Brian Schweitzer, who entertained and informed the crowd at the Annual Banquet.

In their absence, Sen. Max Baucus and Rep. Denny Rehberg were kind enough to send the following letters to the conference. We've reprinted them here for your enjoyment.

Letter from Sen. Max Baucus

Hello friends!

I'm sorry I can't be there with you.

Local governments are instrumental in getting things done in our communities, and I would like to thank MACo and each person here for their commitment and hard work. Every one of our 56 counties is unique, but we are all Montanans. And as Montanans, we have a common goal — to keep Big Sky Country the best state in the Union, to live, work, and raise a family.

My top priority is creating good-paying jobs. Montana's economy is going strong, and I'm committed to doing everything I can to keep it that way. Earlier this month, we saved 3,500 Montana jobs by reauthorizing the Highway Trust Fund — bringing in cash for highways and making sure our airports and train depots are full of business people and tourists.

I'm always working to bring more federal funding to economic development projects and important services in every community. I've added a provision to the energy tax bill that will nearly double Montanans access to Secure Rural Schools funding and reauthorize SRS and PILT for four more years. That bill is making its way through the Senate right now and you can be sure I'll fight like the dickens until it's a done deal.

So folks, enjoy your meeting, and keep up the good work. Montanans are counting on you!

All the best,
Max Baucus

Letter from Rep. Denny Rehberg

Dear friends:

It is my pleasure to send you greetings as you gather in Hamilton for the 99th Annual Conference of the Montana Association of Counties. I am very grateful to MACo for your long and productive commitment to Montana. You represent the best we all reach for in our personal and professional lives. It is a privilege to be associated with you!

Montana's 56 counties are as unique and diverse as its landscape. That is why it is so important for both rural and urban county commissioners to meet several times a year, to share successes, discuss failures, and exchange new ideas.

The reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act remains a top priority of mine in Congress. This legislation is critical for Montana's rural communities. In many of Montana's western counties, the Secure Rural Schools Act provides vital funding for local schools and transportation projects.

Another area of significant importance has been the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program or PILT. I have personally sponsored two pieces of legislation that would fully fund this program. All 56 counties in Montana have federal public lands and receive PILT payments. When PILT is not sufficiently funded, every single community in Montana is impacted and forced to struggle to adequately provide important local services such as education, healthcare, roads, and law enforcement. This legislation will provide a huge boost in giving Montana communities the PILT funding they were intended.

This administration has not been an advocate for Secure Rural Schools or PILT and I intend to continue to raise awareness in Congress about the vital nature of both of these programs and the services they provide to rural America.

I believe government should begin at the grassroots level and work its way up to Washington. County commissioners represent the very best Montana has to offer. You are the real driving force behind Montana's job creation and economic development.

I thank you for your selfless endeavors. Every effort you have made to serve this state is an effort to improve our quality of life and increase our economic security. Thank you for going the extra mile to help Montana families and businesses.

Sincerely,
Denny Rehberg
Montana's Congressman

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McGinley begins presidency at MACo annual conference in Hamilton

Continued from front page

We have a direct line to the Congressional staff at NACo. It's exciting to see what's going on back in D.C. and we and the staff stay on our cell phones so we'll know how the votes are coming out in D.C. on issues important to us like Secure Rural Schools.

Andy Hunthausen's name has been mentioned a lot here of late, and he talked the other day about leadership. When I was moving through the commissioner training and Leadership Montana classes came up, I went through that first class. It's sort of structured the same way as the one Andy went through in New York, and I think Cyndi Johnson went through one the year previously. Leadership Montana is a nine-month project and I went through it, shortly afterward Cyndi Johnson went through Leadership Montana, a year ago Jean Curtiss went through it, and right now Jamie Doggett's going through it.

Like Andy was trying to say, it's not that I'm necessarily the leader, but it's the attitude that we carry of what leadership really means. I guess I've always boiled that down to trying to stay grounded. It's not necessarily about who I know in a leadership role, but it's actually who knows me. That's connects the relationships of other people in the state and national levels who are trying to get something done and they know they need the local level and who to call on there. It's not so much about "I" as it is "us." I really believe that's leadership and I'm proud to work with this leadership team here.

Two years ago, I was literally running for the job of 2nd VP. That's the year I turned 50 and ran a marathon on the day the convention started. Like Carol Brooker says, this is an exhausting job, it really is; with the time and effort it takes, I can't believe I actually had time to train for a marathon. I don't think have time right now to run to the bathroom. So two years ago, I was a marathon man; this year, as of today, I go by the Health Care Trust and get my pedometer, put it on my belt, and see if I actually walk 100 steps in a day.

I've got some thank you's to do; first of all, I found out one thing in working with MACo and the staff, is the motto of most of these conventions should be "Karen says," because if Karen says, most of these officers and staff people get to moving because Karen says and she pulls off one heck of a convention. Also, the relationship with Harold and Sheryl is remarkable. As an organization, we're really honored to have two people with that quality of dedication to MACo. With the rest of the staff and the trusts there at MACo, we've got one heck of an organization.

Thanks also goes to the MACo board, particularly Cyndi. You've been an inspiration. Definitely the same way are the friendships you make with the people on the board and the past presidents in particular. I know John Prinkki couldn't make it, but he is not just only a past president of MACo, he's been one of my good friends. Thanks to Bill Kennedy, too, he has a vast amount of knowledge, and thanks to Carol Brooker for swearing us in today.

The biggest thanks goes to my local county commissioners, my partners in Dillon. Tom Rice and his lovely wife Sharon are here as is Garth. You two guys in particular to allow me as a county commissioner to do this and picking up the load when I'm not there is just remarkable. I'll do the best job I can for MACo and the organization, but please realize when you run into those two gentlemen, give them your thanks for me, because I tell you it's because of them I can do this. The real inspiration to me is my lovely wife Colette.

I'm honored to be in this position of leadership for the organization next year. I promise to do a great job and thank you for your support.

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Don't be in the dark — know your health plan provider

By Owen Voigt, MACo Health Care Trust Administrator

Ever been mistaken for someone else? Perhaps you had a good experience. I can recall one that was a bit unusual. My Dad's theory on ranch help, as a good German Catholic, was to raise it. I had five brothers and three sisters. We lived so far back in the boonies, they piped us sunshine. People were always comparing us to TV's Walton family, which really upset Dad. Gee, we lived in the hills, raised farm animals and had a sawmill with kids running all over. I really have no idea why Dad was so upset with the comparison, but while they played nice together and drank lemonade, we drank beer and frequently got into fights.

One evening I was attending a youth event with cultural influence (also known as a kegger with music) when an individual asked if I was a Voigt. I replied yes, whereupon he uttered an expletive and proceeded to reposition my facial features. I immediately performed my usual fighting technique of beating up his fists with my face. After a fairly successful altercation (he was breathing hard, I had managed to slow the flow of my blood to a small stream), I asked him why he was so upset with me. It turned out he was made at one of my brothers!

To some extent there is a case of mistaken identity with MACo's Health Care Trust and the Joint Powers Trust. We both provide health and related benefits to county employees in Montana. The JPT provides these benefits to other organizations in Montana and Wyoming. The HCT provides benefits to Montana counties and special districts only. The HCT is part of MACo; JPT is not.

Frequently, I hear people say we are the same or we are both affiliated with MACo, but that is not the case. Benefits provided by the two entities are different and the two organizations are structured differently.

Vern Peterson, a former county commissioner from Lewistown, is the administrator for the JPT while I am the administrator for the HCT. The HCT offices are part of the MACo organization and we are housed with the other MACo operations in Helena. One of the biggest differences is benefits. To find out the differences, it is best to get a comparison of the plans.

While preparing for the annual conference in Hamilton, there seemed to be some confusion or mistaken identity as to the preventive or wellness benefits provided and whether the individual was covered by the HCT or the JPT. The HCT provides significant wellness and preventive benefits to its individual members, including immunizations, annual exams, mammograms, pap tests and colon cancer testing. While JPT may or may not offer those benefits, too, its plans are different from those at HCT.

Be careful with mistaken identities. Don't confuse an old mule deer steak with a good piece of beef. They may look the same on a plate, but they sure chew different. So next time you are wondering about the steak, just flop a lip over it and give it a taste. If you're thinking about a health care plan, be sure to first get a comparison.

Health Care Trust Calendar of Events

Nov. 1-Dec. 15	January open enrollment period
Nov. 10	Annual MDCR Part D notice mailed
Nov. 14	January renewal rates deadline
Dec. 21-27	2009 Rx formulary mailed

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Cybersecurity: An Overview of Key Issues

Last in a series

Some Final Questions

Here are some final questions to ask:

- Are there simple, yet not so obvious things that could be done to make your network and systems more secure?
- Does top management truly understand and support cybersecurity issues?
- When an employee leaves or is terminated, who should be notified and when?
- Does your new employee orientation include your security and password policies?
- Are security issues a part of your software and application training programs?
- How much control over the configuration of desktop computers are users allowed? How much do they need? Could most of your users get by with server-based applications and diskless workstations?
- Is there someone in your organization dedicated to data and network security issues? Should there be?
- Does your most recent budget reflect a realistic assessment of ongoing cybersecurity costs?
- Are departments allowed to create or purchase their own databases and applications without a set of standards or central oversight to ensure the applications and the data are secure?
- Do you have a process for testing applications for vulnerabilities?
- Does your buy vs. build decision-making process address security issues such as the increasing the number of passwords users must track; off-site hosting for critical data; or back doors the application may require and integration with other databases and applications?

by Randy Land and John Krusemark, City of Scottsdale, Ariz., via PERI

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Terrestrial carbon offset workshop to be held in Bozeman

In partnership with MSU Big Sky DOE Carbon Sequestration Partnership, the National Carbon Offset Coalition (NCOC) will be conducting an ag/forestry terrestrial carbon offset workshop titled "*Regional Opportunities Agriculture and Forestry Carbon Sequestration. . .the Science, Policy and Market*" on Oct. 20 in Bozeman.

The workshop's objective is to discuss with interested conservation districts, RC&D areas, tribal governments, state and federal agencies, legislators, and other conservation-based non-profit corporations, the key design and market issues for agricultural-and forestry-based carbon emission reduction credits (a.k.a. carbon credit offsets). Landowners are encouraged to attend since this issue may affect their practice efforts.

Workshop presenters will present on the science, policies, and market issues for carbon offsets. Conference attendees will gain insight on:

- The latest scientific global warming information.
- The proposed legislative movement afoot at both the state and national level.
- How terrestrial offsets are benefiting other states and tribal government's.
- The voluntary market created to address the reduction of CO2 and how landowners can benefit from the marketplace.

The workshop will be held in the Student Union Building located at Bozeman Montana State University. Pre-registration commences at 7:30 a.m., Oct. 20.

Workshop presenters will include but limited to:

- Anne Schrag joined the World Wildlife Foundation - Northern Great Plains Program as the climate research program officer in 2007, where she is investigating and will share the impacts of climate change on species of conservation concern and agricultural productivity in the eco-region.
- Montana Rep. Mike Phillips will focus on why climate change has been a difficult issue for the Montana legislature and ideas for overcoming the difficulties. The point will be that until we identify and overcome the difficulties, Montana will not be able to make a substantive contribution to discussions about or efforts to sequester carbon.

Registration is available online and via flier registration. The fee is $45 per person. To register online, visit http://www.ncoc.us.

In addition, NCOC has secured blocks of rooms in Bozeman for conference attendees, who include the Holiday Inn-Bozeman, Gran Tree Inn, Wingate Hotel, C'mon Inn, Residents Inn Marriott, and Hilton Gardens.

For more information, please call Ted Dodge, NCOC executive director, at 491-4471, Emily Tafoya, NCOC marketing director, at 491-4472, or MSU's Lindsey Waggoner at 994-3800.

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County News

Grant workshop to be held in Billings

MSU-Billings and Grant Writing USA will present a two-day grant writing workshop in Billings, Nov. 13-14. Beginning and experienced grant writers from city, county and state agencies as well as nonprofits, K-12, colleges and universities are encouraged to attend.

Purchase orders, checks and cards are welcome. Multi-enrollment discounts are available. Tuition payment is not required at the time of enrollment.

Tuition is $425 and includes a workbook and an accompanying 220MB resource CD that's packed full of tools and more than 200 sample grant proposals. Seating is limited, and online reservations are necessary.

For more information, including venue location and maps, graduate testimonials and instant, online enrollment, visit http://grantwritingusa.com/events/write/bimt1108.html.

You also may contact Grant Writing USA's Cathy Rittenhouse at (800) 814-8191 or cathy@grantwritingusa.com, or MSU-Billings' John Walsh at 896-5872 or jwalsh@msubillings.edu.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo), in Partnership with Nationwide Retirement Solutions (NRS), and state associations of counties, provides county employees with a Section 457 Deferred Compensation Program.

Since its inception in 1980, NACo's 457 Deferred Compensation Program has grown to become the largest supplemental retirement program available to county employees.

Carbon County voters pass resort sales tax

By John Prinkki, Carbon County Commissioner

Carbon County held a special mail ballot election in late September for the implementation of the Red Lodge Mountain Area Resort Tax. The tax will be levied against all retail sales, except for lift tickets, at the rate of three percent for the first three years. Starting in year four, lift tickets also will be taxed, but at the rate of two percent.

The revenue generated by the sales tax will be used first for improvements, including right-of-way acquisition, to the West Fork Road and Ski Run Road, which provide access to the Red Lodge resort. Then, revenues can be used for other infrastructure and public safety funding.

Of the 201 ballots mailed to eligible voters, 66 percent were returned; of those who voted, 88 percent were in favor of the resort tax, while 11 percent were against it.

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Saving early for retirement is critical for government employees

For many governmental employers, autumn is benefits season. As governmental defined contribution plan participation levels suggest, employees often leave their retirement decisions for last, often after the dollars they think might be available for plan contributions are gone.

Because it recognizes America's public employees need help with promoting their supplemental retirement plans, the National Association of Governmental Defined Contribution Administrators (NAGDCA) created and sponsors National Save for Retirement Week. Set for the third week of October, National Save for Retirement Week reminds plan sponsors and providers to offer their employees what they need — the information to act.

NAGDCA recommends governmental employers become highly visible champions for their defined contribution retirement plan. Here's what you can do:

Give your supplemental retirement plan or plans a high-profile promotional effort.

Use e-mail, fliers, etc. Get the word out.

Be visible. Talk it up. Make sure employees know your personal commitment to the plan.

Encourage employees to learn how they can use plan participation to prepare for financial security in retirement.

It's easy to see why some county employees frequently don't put a priority on saving for their retirement. Most counties offer a very good traditional pension plan, often with a cost-of-living adjustments clause (COLA), that provides a solid foundation for employees' retirement-income needs. "Why do I need more?" goes the thinking. Indeed. Why do your employees need to do more for retirement? One reason is longevity.

In 1900, the average American woman could expect to live to be about 51 years of age. The average man could expect to blow out at least 48 candles on his cake. In 2006, the average American woman is likely live to age 80 and a half while a man, almost 75 and a half.

Meanwhile, as a new report from the Pew Charitable Trusts documents, we're living longer in retirement

A 2005 study from Wisconsin's Legislative Services Council noted of 87 public plans studied across the 50 states, 85 allowed retirement with full benefits at age 62 or earlier for individuals with long service, and 57 offered retirement at age 62 or lower with 10 years of service.

NACo sponsors meth forum in Idaho

NACo and the Idaho Association of Counties is sponsoring a methamphetamine prevention forum on Oct. 22 in Ada County (Boise), Idaho.

The forum is part of a series of regional training events supported from the U.S. Department of Justice designed to educate county elected officials and their community treatment and prevention partners on effective strategies to reduce methamphetamine use. The event is open to a variety of county elected officials, including local substance abuse professionals, sheriffs, law enforcement professionals, probation and court personnel, and other related staff.

For more information and to register, visit www.naco.org or contact Kati Guerra at kguerra@naco.org or 202/942-4279.

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California jail takes on environmental challenge to be green

By Charles Taylor, NACo 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.

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

Quinlan also introduced "spudware" 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.

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North Carolina counties get early taste of digital broadcasting

By Charles Taylor, NACo senior staff writer

Five North Carolina counties got the jump on the rest of the nation in September 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 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 send 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 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 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 on Sept. 8.

For more information, visit www.dtv2009.gov.

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Around Our Counties

Zoning

FLATHEAD COUNTY commissioners saw their decision to approve the Haskell Mountain Ranch subdivision near Kila overturned by a district judge in late August. The judge ruled the application was deficient in several state-mandated areas, as well as the county's own regulations and growth policy. A lawsuit was filed against the county after commissioners approved the 530-acre, 74-lot subdivision in October 2006.

STILLWATER COUNTY has completed its growth planning survey, which polled county residents on a variety of topics, including wildlife and economic development. Results of the survey will serve as a tool to allow planning staff to identify and preserve resources valued locally. The survey, launched in June, follows a similar survey conducted in 2002 that was used to compile the county's growth policy.

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY commissioners in September gave a preliminary OK for a 10-year tax break to GE Commercial Finance operations center in Billings. While the value of the break isn't known since the facility is not finished, the county treasurer estimated the company could save half a million dollars yearly for the first five years. The tax-exempt Big Sky Economic Development Authority owns the land and will own the building when it's complete in 2009.

MINERAL COUNTY commissioners unanimously approved the county's growth policy in September. The policy does not create zoning restrictions, but instead clarifies how the county will develop its wildland urban interface with regard to fire safety. It also allows access to community development block grants that otherwise aren't available to entities without a growth policy.

Personnel

BROADWATER COUNTY Commissioner Jim Hohn resigned in early September after serving almost 20 years. Hohn, who's lived in the county for 61 years, said he left because he was tired of the job. The commission chose to leave Hohn's seat vacant until voters determined a replacement in a fall election.

BEAVERHEAD COUNTY commissioners laid off the county road manager in September due to a loss of federal funds. The commission had a choice of laying off either the manager or the road department's two equipment operators; cutting the latter from the payroll would've meant roads may not get plowed or graded in the future. Commissioners plan to take on road supervisory duties.

RAVALLI COUNTY officials were given 30 days, beginning in September, to resolves its differences with a developer proposing the largest subdivision in county history. A district judge told the two parties to re-evaluate the 393-acre, 671-home Aspen Springs project, which was initially denied by the commission in 2006.

Miscellany

CUSTER COUNTY is drafting a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that includes a formula for financing a city-county health board. The MOU must be reviewed by the city; once the two bodies agree on the board's formation, they will determine its financing. The board would be composed of both county– and city-appointed members.

ANACONDA-DEER LODGE COUNTY commissioners narrowly approved an expansion of the Mill Creek Tax Increment Finance District board to seven members in September. The 3-2 vote means the additional two members could represent either engineering or construction industries, and either business accounting or financial sectors. The district, recently created by the commission, encompasses 300 acres owned by the county, NorthWestern Energy and Arco between Montana 1 and the Mill Creek Highway.

BUTTE-SILVER BOW COUNTY's former facilities manager pleaded guilty in September for bilking taxpayers and non-profits organizations from 2003 to 2006. Gary Lean was ordered to pay almost $38,000 in restitution and was sentenced to a four-year suspended term that will allow him to avoid prison time. An investigation revealed he stole almost $40,000; he was charged eight felony counts.

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Announcements & Reminders

Mark Your Calendars

October

1-3	County Magistrates Annual Meeting, Helena
1-3	Governor's Conference on Workers' Comp, West Yellowstone
8-9	Western Interstate Region Board Meeting, Susanville, Calif.
4	Energy & Telecomm. Interim Committee*
15	District Court Council Meeting, Whitefish
15-18	NCCAE Annual Fall Meeting, Cody, Wyo.
14	Children, Families, Health, & Human Services Interim Committee (tentative)*
27-29	AGRIP Governance & Leadership Conference, New Orleans, La.

November

Nov. 18-20	MACo Joint Ins. Pools Trustees Retreat, Forsyth

Upcoming Events

Dec. 1-5	Elected Officials Training/Commissioners Certification*

2009

Jan. 13-15	MACo Risk Management Loss Control Conference*
Feb. 9-12	MACo Midwinter Conference*
Sept. 20-24	MACo Annual Conference*

*All meetings are held in Helena unless noted.

To Advertise in *MACo News,* contact Mike Harbour, Communications Officer, at macopb@maco.cog.mt.us or (406) 444-4380

Don't forget Columbus Day is Monday, Oct. 13!

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