



News Release

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Virginia Counties Recognized for Model Programs

The Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2007 Achievement Awards recognizing model local government programs.

The counties and program titles are listed below:

- **Chesterfield County:** Integration of County and Defense Supply Center Fire Department Operations
- **Chesterfield County:** Wastewater Supply Agreement with Dominion Virginia Power
- **Caroline County:** Carmel Church Community Plan
- **Fairfax County:** Community Connections
- **Fairfax County:** Tax Relief Outreach Program
- **Isle of Wight County:** Social Service Work Redesign
- **Isle of Wight County:** Rural Economic Development Program
- **Loudoun County:** Canine Companion Readiness Program
- **Loudoun County:** A Partnership Model for County Pandemic Influenza Planning
- **Prince William County:** Intensive Pretrial Supervision Program
- **Prince William County:** Universal Design Education Program
- **Prince William County:** Partnering With Communities
- **Russell County:** Information Technology Project

VACo received 43 entries for the statewide contest. Tedd Povar, associate director of the Virginia Institute of Government; Jack Edwards, former James City County supervisor; and Susie Hampton, former Prince Edward County administrator, served as judges for this year's statewide awards program.

“This is not just an awards program,” VACo Executive Director James Campbell said. “These projects represent innovative ideas with positive results that can be replicated throughout the state and the country.”

The VACo Achievement Awards is a competitive program open to local government members of the association. Held annually, it recognizes local government programs in nine categories. Awards criteria include innovation, collaboration and model practices.

Representatives from each of the award-winning counties will receive a certificate at an official ceremony during VACo's 2007 Annual Conference in November.

Program Descriptions

Chesterfield County: Integration of County and Defense Supply Center Fire Department Operations

The Chesterfield County Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (CFEMS) and the Defense Supply Center Richmond Fire and Emergency Services Department (DSCR) developed a unique working partnership that allows each department to gain positive operational benefits from the other. As a small fire department protecting a federal military institution, DSCR did not have the emergency response and training resources maintained by the surrounding CFEMS. Conversely, CFEMS needed to add additional response resources to a highly industrial and populated section near the military installation.

In 2005, the two departments began to integrate a number of organizational and operational aspects of each department. This included automatic mutual aid apparatus response by both departments to each other as well as integrated training and organizational communications. The CFEMS "adopted" the DSCR fire department as one of its stations. The DSCR now has additional response and training opportunities through the CFEMS. Personnel from both organizations have been able to work with each other in controlled environments to better understand the capabilities and limitations of each department. This level of understanding and familiarity is invaluable during emergencies.

Chesterfield County: Wastewater Supply Agreement with Dominion Virginia Power

Chesterfield County is experiencing rapid growth, increasing the demand for water resources. Both of Chesterfield County's wastewater treatment plants are classified as significant point source dischargers by the Department of Environmental Quality and have been assigned annual nutrient load caps. This means that the plants are required to achieve specific limits on its end-of-pipe discharges of nitrogen and phosphorous.

The Proctors Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility is located adjacent to Chesterfield Power Station, a Dominion Virginia Power facility that generates electricity. The station was using a large amount of water from the James River in an air emissions control system. Chesterfield County and Dominion Virginia Power teamed up so that the treated water from the Proctors Creek facility could serve as a reliable, consistent, high quality process water source for the emissions control system. The county now benefits from reduced pollutant values, in particular, the nutrient content that will no longer be discharged into the James River. The volume of wastewater redirected from the James River is projected to be approximately 9.5 million gallons per day by the year 2010. This project represents the largest wastewater reclamation and reuse project in Virginia.

Caroline County: Carmel Church Community Plan

The Carmel Church Community Plan was developed in one year by a hard-working citizen committee with the assistance of the Caroline County Planning Department. The Board of Supervisors appointed 12 committee members that represented all socio-economic groups in the community. The committee struggled with numerous questions regarding the Carmel Church Community and had lengthy discussions about each viewpoint during the plan's development. Numerous specialized topic sessions were held on issues such as sign control and buffers, neo-traditional development, transportation and much more. This quest for knowledge led to innovative concepts that were incorporated into the plan. When presented to the board during a public meeting, no one spoke in opposition to the plan. Approximately 25 speakers praised the efforts of the committee and the county staff for creating a balanced comprehensive plan.

Fairfax County: Community Connections

In Fairfax County, demographics are shifting with new immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East adding new diversity to communities. More than 100 languages are spoken and minorities now account for more than 40 percent of the population. As the face of Fairfax County continues to change, the Park Authority will be challenged to adapt its facilities and programs to diverse user groups.

Community Connections is a comprehensive outreach and education effort aimed at listening to, engaging and building trust with increasingly diverse park users. It seeks to build bridges between park authority staff and new customers. By creating awareness of recreational resources currently available, increasing access to services by eliminating cultural and communications barriers, and developing new programs and facilities, Community Connections is helping the park authority better serve the population.

Fairfax County: Tax Relief Outreach Program

Fairfax County provides real estate tax and personal property tax relief for residents 65 and older and to the permanently and totally disabled. The county also offers rental grants to eligible seniors and those with disabilities. The tax relief program has been in place since 1974 but recent changes have increased the net asset limit.

The Fairfax County Department of Tax Administration (DTA) expanded its Tax Relief Outreach Program to provide across-the-board tax relief information by targeting eligible residents. DTA developed a strategic plan for a massive outreach campaign providing county residents with onsite assistance and eligibility information regarding tax relief. The county staff contacts residents and schedules personal appointments, makes home visits to incapacitated residents, visits senior and assisted living centers, and attends tax relief workshops hosted by members of the Board of Supervisors. Letters are sent to homeowner and civic associations and local churches offering to provide tax relief presentations. In 2006, the program organized 28 workshops, conducted 31 home visits and assisted more than 678 county residents.

Isle of Wight County: Social Service Work Redesign

In 2006, the Isle of Wight County Department of Social Services identified the need to improve long-term employment, financial self-sufficiency, and home and car ownership among poor families in the county. The department also needed to dramatically improve customer service in delivering benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, child care and emergency services. Recognizing the need for improvements and the unavailability of funding for additional staff positions, the agency successfully redesigned and streamlined its benefits delivery, created “one stop shopping” for customers needing benefits, developed a reward system for employees, and implemented and expanded an educational welfare-to-work program originally created in Hampton.

As a result of the redesign, citizens in need of public assistance and employment services have much easier access to benefits and services, spend less time dealing with government bureaucracy, and invest more time working toward achieving self-sufficiency. A customer satisfaction survey conducted after the redesign revealed that 51 percent of customers were satisfied with their agency visit and 38 percent were delighted. The program has been recognized at the state level and is being used as an example for other social services departments across Virginia.

Isle of Wight County: Rural Economic Development Program

Recognizing that farming and forestry make up 97 percent of the county’s landscape and that the business of farming is vital to the county’s economic success, Isle of Wight created a Rural Economic Development Program (RED) under the local Economic Development Department in 2003. RED is one of only a handful of programs of its type and is the only one housed with a department of economic development in Virginia. This unique placement provides an opportunity for two often opposing philosophies to work together to create a balance in a changing community.

Farming often takes a backseat to residential development. The citizens of Isle of Wight County recognize that a good balance of land uses is necessary to have a viable, well-rounded community. RED provides assistance in diversifying farming operations, creates and promotes agri-tourism ventures, develops farmland preservation programs, recruits agri-businesses to the community, supports value-added agriculture development, educates the public about agriculture, and much more. Through this program, many new partnerships have developed to preserve and protect agriculture in Isle of Wight County.

Loudoun County: Canine Companion Readiness Program

The Canine Companion Readiness Program (CCRP) provides an innovative solution to the difficult problem of evaluating canine behavior to determine suitable candidates for adoption. The CCRP was created to address the challenges of evaluating behavior in dogs in a shelter environment. The process begins when the dog first enters the Loudoun County Animal Shelter. Their behavior is initially monitored, without a lot of interaction from the staff beyond basic care. After this initial acclimation period, the dog undergoes a behavioral assessment to determine not only if they are appropriate for placement, but also what type of environment would best suit their personality. If the dog is not quite

ready for placement in a home or other situation, it is given a remediation program to correct any troubling or problem behaviors. If the dog is slated for adoption, it is given an enrichment plan to ensure that it continues to thrive while in the shelter.

In the first year of the program, dog euthanasia declined by 11.7 percent at the Loudoun County Animal Shelter. The rate of return for adopted dogs decreased by 13 percent. Through the program, staff is able to better understand the dogs that are available for adoption, improving their ability to counsel adopters and make the best matches between people and pets.

Loudoun County: A Partnership Model for County Pandemic Influenza Planning

An influenza pandemic has the potential to cause more death and illness than possibly any other public health threat. Although the timing, nature and severity of the next pandemic cannot be predicted, a planned and coordinated response is critical to minimizing the public health impact, as well as the social and economic disruption within a community. A pandemic can affect many locations at once and hit in multiple waves, straining local, state and federal resources.

Loudoun County embarked on its pandemic influenza planning efforts in the spring of 2006 by creating a multidisciplinary taskforce. The taskforce included several county agencies, other public agencies and the private sector. The county's planning initiatives were undertaken in concert with the emergency planning efforts of the Virginia Department of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. First, the taskforce assessed the specific activities that must be undertaken by the health department in preparations for and response to an outbreak. Next, the taskforce addressed how to maintain critical government and public services during a pandemic. The completed plan will be reviewed annually.

Prince William County: Intensive Pretrial Supervision Program

One of the major issues facing Prince William County in recent years has been the severe overcrowding within the Adult Detention Center. In response to that overcrowding, the Prince William County Office of Criminal Justice Services and the Prince William Regional Adult Detention Center partnered to establish the Intensive Pretrial Supervision Program. The goals of this program include the reduction of jail overcrowding and associated costs, the prevention of recidivism, and the assurance that defendants do not evade justice. Many models exist for intensive probation supervision programs but few pretrial programs have been designed, implemented and funded for defendants who might otherwise be detained while awaiting trial.

The program is unique in that it selects its clients only from those that have already appeared before the court during arraignment and subsequently remanded back to a jail pending trial. Staff screen referrals from the active jail population, docket appropriate referrals back before the court, and make recommendations for release conditioned on frequent community supervision three to five times per week supplemented by electronic monitoring. While more costly than traditional pretrial supervision services conducted through weekly office visits, this program has proved successful in offering another

viable option that is far less expensive than incarceration. Most importantly, the program has maintained supervision of defendants within the community without jeopardizing public safety.

Prince William County: Universal Design Education Program

The Universal Design Education Program is intended to educate county residents, developers and the design community on the principles and benefits of Universal Design in housing. The goal is to influence the incorporation of Universal Design features into mainstream single family housing in the county. These homes will offer a convenient and safe lifestyle and will adapt to and accommodate the challenges of temporary or permanent infirmities or disabilities for residents and visitors.

Most consumers buying a home do not seek Universal Design features because they are not aware of the day-to-day convenience and safety they provide. In addition, “accessible” features have developed a reputation as unattractive and institutional, rather than contributing to the aesthetic beauty of a home. The education program shows how these design features are beneficial to buyers of every age, particularly baby boomers. The features offer a good investment and a marketing advantage for both buyers and builders.

Prince William County: Partnering With Communities

Upkeep of residential neighborhoods is vital to ensure that Prince William County remains a desirable place to live and work. There are a large number of older neighborhoods created long before the advent of homeowners associations (HOA). The lack of an HOA structure for these older neighborhoods results in no ready means of enforcing and upholding community maintenance standards. The success of the Property Code Enforcement program has led to a demand for increased services far beyond the available county resources.

Partnering With Communities was developed to enhance the existing Property Code Enforcement program to provide community outreach and education, and develop and strengthen neighborhood associations and community partnerships. Community assets and needs are identified and volunteer leaders from the community work on improving neighborhoods throughout the county. The program supports the many homeowner and civic association groups with an online volunteer HOA database and through educational programs sponsored by the county and the Clean Community Council. Other community partners provide volunteer labor to help homeowners who are unable to fix violations due to age, disability or income restrictions. A bimonthly newsletter contains articles on various community improvement initiatives and events. The program has resulted in an improvement in citizen satisfaction with the county’s efforts to prevent neighborhood deterioration.

Russell County: Information Technology Project

The Russell County IT Project began in the late 1990s with the acquisition of land in Lebanon for a new business and technology park. With help from local governments, state and federal funds, and other public and private partners, the county was able to

complete a list of accomplishments that led to the October 2005 announcement that two information technology giants, CGI and Northrop Grumman, would locate in the county. This would create 733 skilled, high-wage IT jobs. The county had completed a 114 acre business and technology park, deployed 55 miles of fiber optic broadband cable, created a 36-week fast-track technology training program, and renovated an old shopping center into temporary space for CGI. UVA's College at Wise created a software engineering program. Additionally, a unique program called Return to Roots was created to attract displaced Southwest Virginians back to the region.

The project has already produced several benefits to the community and region. Northrop Grumman has provided financial support to the Software Engineering program at UVA-Wise. Three new private market-rate housing projects have been initiated that will provide nearly 250 new homes in Lebanon alone. One of them is adjacent to the Technology Park, creating a live-work-play opportunity for IT employees. Additionally, a private developer has plans for a "boutique" retail development just south of the Technology Park. An 18-hole golf course is also planned.

VACo exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

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