

2004 Achievement Awards

Wise County

DEVELOP: Digital Earth Virtual Environment
Learning Outreach Project

During the past three years, over 20 area students created a nearly 100-layer digital map of geographic features in Wise County. The effort was part of the county's plan to modernize its outdated paper maps to digital maps without massive labor costs.

Using the NASA DEVELOP program as a model, the Wise County Clerk of Court Office teamed with Mountain Empire Community College to accredit web-based Environmental Systems Research Institute ArcView courses that enabled students to learn the skills necessary to create the maps. As a result of the program, 18 students have earned certificates in GIS from the community college and the GIS allows citizens and county employees to have an enhanced view and knowledge of their own community, leading to better decision making.

Students and their mentors within the Clerk of Court Office gained access to data and cooperation from numerous organizations that rarely share information. The result is a digital mapping database unique to Virginia and most of the nation. Wise County has learned from its own youth how to build an enterprise model GIS while breaking down communication barriers among local government agencies.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the Virginia Association of Counties' 2004 Achievement Awards!

VACo received 45 entries from 17 counties in the association's second annual statewide competition honoring county programs. Eleven entries were selected to receive Achievement Awards.

An independent panel of judges with expertise in county programs and challenges had the monumental task of reviewing the entries, all of which exemplify that Virginia counties are striving to provide citizens with innovative and cost-efficient services. The judges this year were Former New Kent County Supervisor Becky Ringley, Local Government Specialist Mike Chandler and Tedd Povar of the Virginia Institute of Government. VACo sincerely thanks our judges for their time, dedication and enthusiasm.

The difficult selection of winning programs was based on innovation and collaboration, as well as the potential for the program to provide a model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities. This brochure highlighting award recipients may be used as a resource for ideas about improving services in all counties.

Award recipients will be recognized at VACo's annual conference during the General Session on Tuesday, Nov. 9. Virginia counties can be proud of their exemplary programs and the people who have contributed to their success!

In the coming months, look for next year's award packet. VACo would love to see entries from all 95 counties!

2004 Achievement Awards

Augusta County

Customer Service

Valley Libraries Connection: Cooperation in Action

Augusta County's Valley Libraries Connection program demonstrates teamwork and public service. Under this program, Staunton, Waynesboro and Augusta County libraries (less than fifteen miles apart) joined together to offer their community one shared automated system. The new system offers shared web-based information that has not only updated the technology in all three libraries, but is also saving time and money.

Citizens have access to all three libraries with just one card and can access the web-based system from home. Patrons also have the option to pay fines, reserve materials or check out and return materials at any location within the three localities.

The migration of the three separate systems into one took just six months. The staff bonded through months of meetings, training sessions and phone calls. They unified as many policies and procedures as possible and adopted the tagline, "Three times the resources, three times the choice, three times the power." The Valley Libraries Connection went live on April 24, 2003.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Rockingham County

Parks and Recreation

Plains District Community Center

For three years, Pilgrim's Pride Corporation used a portion of the former Rockingham Cooperative Farm Bureau and grocery store building for storage. The corporation, which owned the building, allowed Broadway-Timberville Little League to use it as an indoor training area referred to as the Strike Zone.

Seeing the opportunity and potential for creation of a community center, the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors initiated discussions with Pilgrim's Pride about transforming the building. Pilgrim's Pride agreed to donate the building and the new community center opened in 2004. The center still houses the Strike Zone on the lower level and also offers two activity rooms, a kitchen and a teen activity center. Equipped with everything from air hockey to shuffle board courts, the center is an object of pride for the county and will serve the community for years to come.

The Plains District Community Center is a prime example of the positive results that can occur when private businesses, local government and the community work together. Pilgrim's Pride disposed of a building that provided limited use in a manner that was financially attractive and beneficial to the community. In turn, the county was able to reduce the cost of development by at least 30 percent and improve the condition of an existing parcel.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Roanoke County

Criminal Justice/ Public Safety

C.I.T. - A Caring Solution to a Community Issue

Dealing with citizens who are mentally ill is a challenge for law enforcement agencies across the United States. Without proper training, police officers may not recognize the symptoms related to mental illness and may mistake disorderly behavior as criminal in nature. That's why Roanoke County established a Crisis Intervention Team (C.I.T.), a group of about 20 police officers specially trained to deal with citizens suffering from mental illness.

Using a similar program in Memphis, Tenn., as a model, the county established its own C.I.T in the spring of 2000. By providing officers with the skills necessary to identify mental illness, they are able to diffuse more situations quickly and without struggle. In some instances, talking with a trained officer is all that is needed to calm the person, eliminating unnecessary arrests and hospitalization. However, C.I.T. officers are now better able to identify a person who does need treatment.

Mental illness can influence a person's ability to understand commands, make decisions and communicate. But it is not a crime. Roanoke County's officers recognize this and want to ensure that other law enforcement officers in Virginia are also given the tools to improve service to these citizens.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Botetourt County

Public Safety

A Cooperative Team Model for Successful Volunteer Emergency Services Planning and Implementation

Botetourt County's rapid growth and development has dramatically changed the nature and complexity of its emergency services needs. In response, the county created a committee that includes one member of the board of supervisors, three key members of county staff, two members of the county firefighters association and two members of the county rescue squad association.

The Fire and Rescue Steering Team (FARST) held its first meeting in June of 2003 and now meets every six weeks. With a consistent process in place, Botetourt's volunteer emergency services immediately became more efficient by minimizing communication misunderstandings between volunteers, county employees and board members. The group follows a consistent agenda, reviews completed projects, discusses current projects and sets long and short-term goals.

In less than one year, the FARST model has succeeded in saving money through group purchasing, developing a peer review committee, adding a number of paid EMS staff, and implementing a new emergency operations plan that is faster and more coordinated.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Caroline County

Parks & Recreation

Fellowship of Christian Athletes Sports Camp Collaboration

As a result of collaboration among parks and recreation, social services and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), Caroline County sent 35 children to the FCA Sports Camp in Fredericksburg. The camp provides the opportunity for attendees to learn values such as honesty, discipline, sacrifice and concern for others.

The Department of Social Services' monetary contribution made it possible for the children to attend the camp. Many of the participants selected came from underprivileged households that lacked the means to pay the camp fees.

Funding the FCA Sports Camp is a chance to reach at-risk children and break the cycle of poverty in Caroline County. The camp is a vital segment to the county's Caroline's Promise program, which has already seen tangible results benefiting community children.

The summer camp project demonstrates that the possibilities are endless for those with an open mind and overriding desire to help children lead better lives with brighter futures. By combining a positive message with athletics and other activities, the likelihood of reaching kids is increased significantly.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Loudoun County

Information Technology

EPayStubs (Electronic Paystubs)

Every two weeks, Loudoun County's Department of Financial Services printed thousands of paper pay stubs for employees. They were then separated by department and wheeled down three floors to the Treasurer's Office. There, representatives from each department would pick up the pay stubs and then drive back to their office to distribute them in employee mailboxes.

In January 2003, a workgroup was established to discuss the possibility of EPayStubs. After consulting several different entities and opening the lines of communication for feedback, a pilot group of five departments was chosen to test the idea. The program was an overwhelming success.

The service provides a high level of security and employees receive step-by-step instructions on using the program. EPayStubs was also added to the employee orientation program and procedures manual.

Loudoun County now saves more than \$25,000 a year in employee time and supplies. Out of 3,000 employees, only 30 opt to receive a paper check. The county has enhanced the program by providing an e-mail notification with a link to EPayStubs.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Isle of Wight County Community/ Economic Development

Benn's Church Activity Center: A Roadmap for Growth

In mid-2003, Isle of Wight County became aware of three property owners who were interested in developing large tracts of land located in and around "Benn's Church Intersection." Located in the high growth northern section of the county, the development area also housed three historical landmarks including Historic St. Luke's Church, the oldest brick church of English foundation in America.

Instead of following the traditional planning process of looking at each case separately, the county took a proactive approach. The property owners were asked to "speak with one voice" to approach the development in a way that would complement all of the land tracks. County staff invited the public to get involved in a design "charrette" process so the final product would carry public support. Finally, a consultant was hired to prepare the plan.

To date, the plan incorporates a pedestrian friendly neighborhood that mirrors traditional rural village and historical architecture. The up-front process creates less frustration during the planning process for county officials and citizens regarding appropriate development.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Chesterfield County Communications

Hurricane Isabel Public Information Campaign

Last September, Virginia endured one of the worst natural disasters in recent history, Hurricane Isabel. However, Chesterfield County employees fought back by implementing their finely tuned emergency response plan.

The primary communications goal involved helping county residents cope with and recover from the after effects of the hurricane. Chesterfield County employees used every available resource to keep citizens informed of services. An Emergency Operations Center was available 24 hours a day while over 60 press releases were posted to the county website and faxed to local media. Interviews were coordinated with county staff in English and Spanish. Radio, television, newspapers and residential mailings were used to report recovery information.

Employees worked around the clock to make sure residents were informed about recovery efforts, the status of drinking water, debris removal, ice distribution, etc. In the weeks after the hurricane, the county continued to release safety information including tips on chain-saw use, fraud prevention and health-related issues. Even though the hurricane created many challenges, it was apparent that Chesterfield County was well prepared to weather the storm.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Chesterfield County Health/Human Services

Youth Suicide Outbreak: A School System

Chesterfield County faced a public health crisis in 2003 when three teenagers from the same middle school committed suicide. Recognizing that this cluster, or “contagion,” event is rare for suicide occurrences, local government and school system leaders created a Coordinated Response Steering Group.

The steering group assessed the situation, consulted experts and recommended a plan of action for the 30 days following the incident (acute phase). Their five objectives were to:

- ▶ Reduce suicide risk among vulnerable students
- ▶ Reduce community distress and “blaming”
- ▶ Address stress and anxiety among school staff
- ▶ Promote student coping and peer helping skills
- ▶ Reduce the possibility of media-induced contagion

In the eighteen months after the start of the coordinated response, there were no additional youth suicides. The program identified at-risk youth and provided intervention, reduced public anxiety through meetings, developed a *talk-listen-tell* series for all middle school students, and distributed media guidelines for suicide reporting from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

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2004 Achievement Awards

Fairfax County Transportation

Seniors On-The-Go!

In 1998, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the county executive identified transportation for seniors as a significant issue that required research and review. A project team of county employees along with members of an executive intern program found that seniors were having difficulty finding and using available transportation.

In March 2001, the county implemented a start-up program that provided seniors with the option to travel 24 hours a day through a taxicab program. Eligible seniors had to be a county resident 65 years or older and meet the income requirements. Under the program, seniors received coupon booklets for a cost of \$10 but a value of \$30. Taxicab vendors established a public/private partnership with Fairfax County.

The pilot program had a tremendous effect on the lives of seniors that participated, allowing them to remain independent. Participants could even stretch their coupons by riding with other program members for an additional cost of only \$1. In August 2002, the board of supervisors approved the expansion of Seniors On-The-Go! to include all of Fairfax County. In a survey distributed to participants at the conclusion of the first year, seniors responded that the program had enriched their lives by enabling them to take control of some of their decision making.

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