

2006 Achievement Awards

Stafford County

*Organizational
Development*

BEST Values

Stafford County's BEST Values resulted from several months of hard work by employees who volunteered to help define and celebrate Stafford's organizational values. A volunteer group of employees interviewed more than 400 of their co-workers and asked them 10 questions that were designed to elicit stories that demonstrated positive experiences while working for Stafford County. Interviews were completed over a course of two months, after which the volunteer group met during a two-day session to review the stories and start defining the common values held among employees. Four specific values came out of these interviews: balance, empowerment, service and teamwork. To formally roll out the values to the workforce, a BEST Fest was held in October that included music, games, employee participation, a video where employees talked about how they practiced the values at work, and the unveiling of a new logo reflecting the BEST values.

This quest to identify organizational values marked the beginnings of a new workplace culture in Stafford County. Employees were given the opportunity to help shape the county's future through the interviewing process and many employees who would not usually work together had the opportunity to do so during the project. As a result, teamwork is on the upswing and working within one's own departmental silos is becoming a thing of the past. Identifying the values by looking at what worked well in the past and works well in the present has enabled Stafford to lay the foundation for even more success in the future.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the Virginia Association of Counties' 2006 Achievement Awards!

VACo received 41 entries from 20 counties in the Association's fourth annual statewide competition honoring county programs. Fifteen entries were selected to receive an award.

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. This year's judging panel included Kandy Hilliard, former Stafford County Supervisor; Tedd Povar, associate director of the Virginia Institute of Government; and Ellen Davenport, assistant vice chancellor of the Virginia Community College System. VACo would like to thank 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. This brochure highlights the award winning programs and can be used as a resource for other counties. You may find that your county is facing a similar problem or situation.

Award recipients will be recognized at VACo's Annual Conference after the General Session on Tuesday, Nov. 14. A display featuring the Achievement Award submissions will be available during the conference.

Look for the 2007 award application in early spring. All counties are encouraged to participate!

2006 Achievement Awards

Bland County

Information Technology

Wireless Broadband Deployment Project

The local government leadership of Bland County was faced with a county-wide challenge of limited broadband accessibility for its businesses, visitors and citizens. Even in the few areas where private sector broadband service exists, the cost is prohibitive to many of the county residents and small business owners. Because Bland County is rural, with low critical mass and challenging topography, private sector investments in communication technology are not scheduled to take place nor will they be likely in the future. This leaves only the local government leadership to provide an innovative solution to the problem.

Bland County had to conceive a vision, set priorities, locate the needed technology, develop a scope, devise a plan, carefully budget and then pursue implementation. The county researched and sought the latest in Wi-Fi communications. The system used is called Mesh Networking and is considered to be the industry's most sophisticated and intelligent Wi-Fi system. The county is using a business class DSL connection to host the system until the Trans-Atlantic Fiber Project reaches the county and provides greater bandwidth.

The Board of Supervisors made a long-term commitment to fund this project using county general funds. No state or federal dollars were used. Bland County has successfully created the model for rural communities who wish to offer broadband internet services to its citizens. Technology exists, and has now been tested and proven to work in one of the most topographically challenged, rural communities in Virginia.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Roanoke County

Communications

Communicating with the Media: A Winning Approach

Almost anyone who interacts with the media will tell you writing an effective press release is no easy feat -- unless you use the system developed by the Roanoke County Police Department. The county has devised a unique approach to this often challenging task -- one that has been overwhelmingly embraced not only by the officers, detectives and administration, but the local media.

The department has templates available for the officers to work from when writing their press releases. The templates are stored on the department's hard drive and can be easily accessed by the employees who insert the appropriate information and simply email the finished document to the media.

The department has developed three different press release templates for the officer to choose from: a template for traffic accidents; a general crime template that would cover most routine criminal cases; and a free text template for unusual situations that do not fit in the framework of the first two templates.

The templates are great for newer employees or those who are not accustomed to interacting with the press because they contain the questions most frequently asked by the media. All the staff has to do is insert the correct information. In 2005, the department issued 60 press releases using the template system. The easy-to-use templates have drawn much praise from the local press and could easily be adopted by other law enforcement agencies looking to improve media relations.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Roanoke County

Community/Economic
Development

Preserving the Blue Ridge Parkway Viewshed: A Team Approach

What do you expect to see when you drive through a National Park? Wildlife, beautiful scenery and historic structures probably come to mind. What about subdivisions, car dealerships and strip malls? In Roanoke County, where the Blue Ridge Parkway traverses 28 miles of the Valley, the views along the National Park are rapidly changing and deteriorating. Roanoke County and the National Park Service identified this issue in 2003 and joined forces with two non-profit organizations to develop solutions and implement strategies to solve the problem. Recognizing that this problem did not develop overnight and was not going to be solved quickly or single-handedly, these four groups put together a three-pronged Scenery Conservation Plan with each group handling its area of expertise.

The Last Chance Landscape Program is a partnership between Roanoke County, the National Park Service (Blue Ridge Parkway), FRIENDS of the Parkway and the Western Virginia Land Trust. The objective of this program is to provide a mechanism for citizens, developers and the county to work together to ensure that land use changes complement rather than detract from the scenic quality experience of visitors driving the Blue Ridge Parkway through Roanoke County.

Never before has a coalition of groups along the parkway come together with a single-minded objective-- protecting the viewshed. This group has set a model for other communities along the parkway and beyond to provide a format by which they can work together to solve land use challenges.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Caroline County

Community/Economic
Development

Dawn Wastewater Project

The rural community of Dawn is well established and its residents have deep genealogical roots in the area. Well-worn homes with no indoor plumbing are found next door to brick homes with all the conveniences of modern life. Household income varies widely, as does the value of homes in Dawn.

The potential and future of the community were severely limited by the lack of adequate wastewater treatment facilities in the area. Poor soil conditions have caused drainfields to fail and threatened the health and welfare of residents. County government recognized the urgency of the problem long ago and has been working for more than a decade to secure the grant funding necessary to construct a public sewer system. After years of applying unsuccessfully for federal and state grants, the county and its consultants decided to use a new approach called a *decentralized wastewater treatment*. The system provided the versatility and cost-effectiveness needed to make the project feasible.

With the help of Sen. John Warner and former Gov. Mark Warner, the county obtained grants totaling \$1 million for the Dawn Wastewater Project under the new approach. More than 150 households and businesses have committed to hook up to the new sewer system and construction is expected to start in early February. The estimated cost to install the sewer system is \$2.8 million. As part of the project, 25 substandard homes will be replaced or significantly rehabilitated and indoor plumbing will be installed. A diverse set of stakeholders including county officials, consultants and the finance and public works directors have met monthly for more than two years to keep the project on track.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Chesterfield County

*Health/Human
Services*

Crash Fatality Referral Program

This program is a collaborative project between two county departments, Chesterfield Police and Chesterfield Mental Health Support Services. When a fatal vehicular crash occurs in the county, the crash investigation team supervisor notifies the family of the death. During the notification visit, he/she also provides the family with a pocket brochure containing information on the medical examiner, contacting the officer investigating the crash and relevant community resources, including mental health grief services. He explains the nature of the grief services and offers to forward the family's contact information to the grief specialist at the mental health department.

Once mental health receives the contact information from police, the grief specialist schedules an appointment with the family as soon as possible. While situations vary, the specialist usually provides considerable support, information and referral to other services such as support groups. Many parents are particularly concerned about the impact of a sudden loss of a loved one on their children and often request assistance in helping their children deal with this difficult situation.

During 2005, there were 26 fatal vehicular accidents in Chesterfield County. At each death notification, after hearing a description of the referral program by the crash team supervisor, all 26 families gave the supervisor permission to pass their contact information on to the mental health grief specialist.

Neither department incurred any additional costs in implementing the program. The grief specialist absorbed the referrals from the police department into her normal workload.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Prince William County

*Criminal Justice/
Public Safety*

Be Aware

The Prince William County Police Department has been committed to working with the local school division to safeguard young children. The department has taught the DARE program for the last 15 years. In recent years, classroom time has become more valuable because of state and national standards of learning, making it increasingly difficult to free up weeks worth of time for police instruction. The school administration requested more flexible officer presence.

The police department stepped up to this challenge in early 2005 and sought to come up with a new elementary school based program that still provided an opportunity for officers to interact with students, yet would not cause an overbearing burden on the schools. The department created the Be Aware program, a proactive and preventive lesson plan designed to educate children on the dangers they will face as they grow older. Components of the program include instruction on bullying, Internet safety, gangs, etc. The program allows officers to stay within the elementary schools, where they interact with students in grades K-5 instead of just the fifth grade. The program meets the desires and objective of all partners. The police department still presents its crime preventative message, the schools continue to receive expert instruction and the students now get to interact with police officers at a younger age.

The program was implemented in September of 2005 and has received inquiries from around the country. It's a great example of how cooperative efforts can work when groups rise to the challenge with open minds.

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2006 Achievement Awards

New Kent County

Parks & Recreation

Fit 4 Life

The Fit 4 Life program is a fitness, self-esteem building, educational program that was offered to children ages four to middle school. The program was started by Sportsbackers, a sporting event organizer in Richmond. Working with Sportsbackers and a local running group, New Kent in Motion, incentives were added to the program that enhanced the children's experience.

The children were given speeches about nutrition/health, running techniques, proper footwear/attire, warming up/cooling down and the benefits of running and walking. They were required to finish 26 miles in a six-week period, ending at Richmond's Monument Avenue 10K Kids Fun Run. After the Department of Parks and Recreation collected the registrations, the participants were registered for the race and provided with t-shirts.

Sportsbackers offered incentives for finishing small goals toward the total 26 miles. New Kent in Motion offered the coaching and activities while local gym teachers helped the children after school.

The Fit 4 Life program exceeded all expectations, with 30 children finishing the program. An additional 50 children have signed up to participate in a second session. Participation in other related activities, such as the Hershey Track Meet, have increased.

Fit 4 Life has helped the county battle the problem of less active youth and is hopeful that the program will lead to a lower obesity rate in children. This is a great program the county will continue to offer and that any county recreation department can implement.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Chesterfield County

Health/Human Services

Real Time Book Discussion Group

Completion of the Chesterfield County Detention Home's new facility in 2003 provided an opportunity to enhance library service to the incarcerated youth. In 2005, in collaboration with the detention home's administrator, staff and the detention school's principal, the Real Time Book Discussion was born. Library Director Michael Mabe and Outreach Services Coordinator Sherie Parker co-facilitate the hour-long discussions held twice-a-month at the facility.

During each session, the facilitators actively engage the teens in lively, thought-provoking discussion about the fictional characters in the books. By giving voice to young people immersed in the angst of being teens, the program provides an avenue through which they can explore how others have overcome challenges. The teens gain insight and understanding of the ways their own choices and actions affect themselves and others. As these at-risk teens move closer to realizing their potential through reading, discussion and reflection, the librarians have the distinct possibility to make a difference in their lives.

Implementation of a book discussion group can be accomplished fairly easily and inexpensively. Over the past ten years, the library has built a solid partnership with the detention home by providing services on a weekly basis to faculty, staff and the incarcerated youth. The program has been popular with the youth and has been well received by the detention home staff. This innovative program provides an opportunity for the Chesterfield County Public Library to reach beyond the confines of a traditional library setting to bring books to life.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Chesterfield County

Public Safety

Partnership Between Police & Mental Health Professionals

The Chesterfield County Police Emergency Response Team (PERT) responds to emergencies that often involve citizens in crisis that threaten their lives and the lives of others. The PERT team has both a tactical component and a negotiation component and has worked successfully in the county since its origin 30 years ago.

The Mental Health Advisors Team (MH) is a new component that has recently been added to the Police Department's Hostage Negotiation Team. This represents an original cross-departmental collaboration to help reduce risk and maximize the chance of a positive outcome whenever there is a barricade situation.

The mental health advisors are able to provide information that may include the suspect's current mental status, diagnosis and involvement in psychiatric or other mental health services. Additionally, the advisors can often gather information from other health provider's that might not be as easily accessible to the police. Successful outcomes often hinge on having as much relevant information as possible during negotiations.

Based on data for the last two years on training costs and compensation for call-outs, the county has spent less than \$3,000 for the MH advisors to participate. Since the addition of the advisors to the negotiation team, the team's professional judgement and experience has decreased decision-making time within the police command during crisis situations, decreased stress on negotiators during incidents, and increased training and emphasis on mental disorders, mental illnesses and psychological communication techniques.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Mathews County

Information Technology

"Getting Connected" Computer Training

Mathews Memorial Library offers free computer classes to citizens, training people of all ages in basic computer skills, email and use of the Internet. The program is made possible by a grant of \$9,800 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and a partnership with a non-profit organization, TechRiders, who developed a computer training program primarily designed for adults. Library volunteers serve as trainers, assisted by a dedicated and knowledgeable technical support staff, who provide setup and maintenance support.

The Library program addresses the growing disparity between those citizens in the county who are computer literate and those who are not. The goal is to assist people of all ages to begin to use computers and the Internet to positively affect their lives, personally and professionally. It teaches proficiency in skill areas that are required in many jobs in today's economy and enables individuals to participate in communicating in an electronic world.

Classes are offered at the library in a computer lab composed of 10 laptops and a wireless network. Employing the mobile capabilities of the lab, courses are also offered in neighboring communities where computer classes are not available. The type and frequency of classes offered are very flexible and dependent on patron response.

In slightly over one year, more than 300 Mathews citizens and nearly 100 people from other regional locations have taken advantage of the courses.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Loudoun County

Parks and Recreation

Athletic Space Allocation

Loudoun has consistently been one of the fastest growing counties in the country for the past several years. This population growth presented a significant challenge to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) with regard to meeting the athletic space needs of those citizens participating in organized sports programs. With nearly 70,000 participants in organized sports annually, allocating field and gym space was an increasingly difficult task. In addition, with nearly 50 youth leagues and an adult sports program run by the department, competition for field space and allocating field space equitably was a growing problem that had to be addressed.

The department decided to solve this problem of field and gym space allocation by establishing a policy and set of procedures that would be created in cooperation with the leagues and the Loudoun County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. First, the process for allocation of space to sports leagues was defined and written. Next, the presidents of all those leagues were invited to a meeting. The information from the first meeting was integrated into the allocation process. The document was distributed to department staff for an initial review. It was then sent to league representatives and park board members with an invitation to a second meeting to provide comments on the document. The second round of suggestions was incorporated into the final version, to be approved by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The final version incorporated a few minor suggestions and was endorsed by the county board.

The plan has been used for three seasons. Only one appeal has been made concerning a league's perception of space allocation equity.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Fairfax County

Community/Economic
Development

Affordable Housing Preservation Initiative

Fairfax County continues to be one of the most expensive housing markets in the nation. While the real estate market is showing signs of moderation, prices continue to rise. At the same time, the existing stock of affordable housing in Fairfax County is diminishing as rents increase.

To meet this challenge, a new multi-pronged Affordable Housing Preservation Initiative was announced in April 2004. It is designed to preserve at least 1,000 affordable housing units by the end of 2007 and includes a variety of innovative strategies and funding opportunities. The Board of Supervisors approved an allocation of one penny from the real estate tax to the preservation of affordable housing, which generated almost \$18 million in FY 2006 and will generate almost \$22 million in FY 2007.

The board hosted an Affordable Housing Preservation Forum in June 2004 where stakeholders examined successful preservation models throughout the United States. Following the forum, the board appointed the Affordable Housing Preservation Action Committee, which was tasked with assessing the best practices in affordable housing, assessing the ideas generated from the forum, promoting collaboration among the private sector, non-profit organizations and the county government, and developing a set of recommendations that would result in the preservation of 1,000 housing units over the next three years. The Affordable Housing Initiative has already surpassed the anticipated goals and objectives.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Fauquier County

*Community/Economic
Development*

Purchase of Development Rights Program

The Fauquier County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program protects and retains the agricultural industry's critical mass, in particular, farms that are economically viable. Since 2002, 16 farms totaling approximately 4,100 acres have been approved for permanent preservation, making the Fauquier County PDR Program one of the most active and successful programs of its kind in the Commonwealth.

The John Nissley (Still Waters Farm) PDR project represents a model collaborative partnership for farmland preservation. The Still Waters Farm PDR application is the largest and most expensive received in the history of the program. It is a working dairy farm containing 749 acres located in the Cedar Run Watershed in southern Fauquier County. With a total purchase price of \$870,000, partnering was actively pursued.

A cooperative agreement outlining the roles of each entity was developed between Fauquier County and the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), a land trust organization headquartered in Warrenton. In addition, PEC obtained a grant from the USDA's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program to assist in the purchase. The preservation partnership resulted in a 51 percent reduction of the cost of the PDR to the county, or \$442,500. This enables the county to preserve at least one farm and a portion of a second from the 2005 PDR application round. Partnerships for farmland preservation are extremely important in Virginia where there is little or no direct state allocations or funding for this purpose.

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2006 Achievement Awards

Loudoun County

Health/Human Services

Companion Animal Resource Effort (CARE)

The CARE program has become a vital part of Loudoun County Animal Care & Control's mission to serve and protect the public's health and safety and to assure the welfare of animals by promoting and providing for their safe, humane and lawful treatment. Through CARE, hundreds of citizens have been allowed to keep their beloved pets in their homes and the number of animals taken into the Loudoun County Animal Shelter has decreased.

There are four major components of CARE: a Spay/Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP), medical assistance, Habitat for Pets and Animeals. SNAP provides financial assistance for spay/neuter surgery to individuals who would otherwise be unable to afford to have their pets altered. The medical assistance program provides financial assistance to individuals whose pets are in need of medical care that they would not be able to otherwise afford. Habitat for Pets provides free dog houses and other necessities to improve the ways that pets are confined. Animeals, the CARE program's most utilized service, provides pet food to residents in financial need.

By collaborating with other county and volunteer agencies, CARE has provided an innovative, creative and forward thinking solution to a difficult problem. The program has not only reduced the number of animals coming into the municipal shelter, it also maintains quality of life for some of its most valuable citizens.

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