

Spring School a Success - Your Feedback

ISAC would like to thank all of you who attended the 2011 ISAC Spring School of Instruction held in Des Moines on March 23 and 24. Over 750 county officials traveled to Des Moines for this year's spring school at the Des Moines Marriott Downtown and Renaissance Savery Hotel.

The exhibit hall was back this year on the first day of the conference. Three refreshments breaks were held throughout the day allowing members the opportunity to meet with various exhibitors about their products and services. Thank you to the 46 exhibitors that attended and supported the conference. An event of this scale would not be possible without the exhibitors. We also want to thank ISAC's conference sponsors: Platinum Sponsor – County Risk Management Services, Inc. representing ICAP and IMWCA; Gold Sponsors – Cott Systems, Inc. and DEVNET Incorporated; Silver Sponsors – Cost Advisory Services, Inc., Election Systems, and Software and TrueNorth Companies.

Due to the success of the Exhibitor Learning Center debut at the 2010 fall school, the following sessions were offered at the spring school: Host Your Data with Integrity™ - Online Solutions for Countywide Information Management by Midland GIS Solutions; Saving for Retirement with the NACo 457 Deferred Compensation Plan by Nationwide Retirement Solutions; and PaperLESS Solutions by "Solutions", Inc.

ISAC also hosted the following educational seminars on Wednesday morning: My Month of Eating Local - A Journey to the Heart of the American Dream by Rob Marqusee, Woodbury County Director of Rural Economic Development; Financial Needs of Iowa County Roads by Steve DeVries, ICEASB Executive Director; and Spending Taxpayer Dollars: Competitive Bidding and Requests for Proposals by Darin Raymond, Plymouth County Attorney.

During the ISAC Business Meeting and Awards Ceremony also held on Wednesday, the FY 2012 ISAC budget was approved by the membership, and Tarrant County Texas Judge and NACo President B. Glen Whitley gave the presentation, "County Government Works: An Initiative to Raise Awareness and Understanding of Counties."

During the awards ceremony portion, \$3,000 scholarships were awarded to the following eight outstanding high school students: Sara Waid, South Hamilton High School in Hamilton County; Cody Alan Sacquitne, Decorah High School in Decorah County; Luke Peterson, PAC High School in Pocahontas County; Ciara McCarty, Corning Community High School in Adams County; Brandon Honeyman, Muscatine

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High School in Muscatine County; and Aaron Johnson, City High in Johnson County. Dillon Schmidt from West Lyon High School in Lyon County also received a \$2,000 scholarship from the Iowa Counties Information Technology Organization, and Stephanie Fisher from Clear Creek Amana High School in Johnson County received the past president's scholarship in the amount of \$3,000. Stephanie is pictured on the cover of this month's magazine receiving her award from ISAC President Marge Pitts. Scholarship eligibility is limited to children of county officials or county employees. ISAC scholarships are funded through the ISAC Education Foundation. Although not honored during the spring school, the following students will receive runner-up scholarships in the amount of \$1,500: Justin Hagedorn, Carlisle High School in Polk County; Anna Kollasch, Bishop Garrigan High School in Kossuth County; Emilee Berry, OABCIG High School in Ida County; Dray Carl, Corning Community High School in Adams County; Molly Thomas, Centerville High School in Appanoose County; and Bess Fevold, West High School in Johnson County.

Following an afternoon full of affiliate meetings, the ISAC Dance gave members the opportunity to socialize and enjoy music provided by Knight Life Productions. Morning refreshments were available for all affiliate groups meeting at both hotels Thursday morning. All day Thursday was dedicated to the affiliate groups. All registered conference attendees enjoyed a box lunch provided by ISAC. This time was spent networking with county officials from other affiliates.

We look forward to seeing everyone at ISAC's 2011 Fall School of Instruction being held November 16-18 at the Coralville Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. This will be our last conference held in Coralville. Planning is underway to host the 2012 fall school at the newly renovated Veteran's Memorial Auditorium of the Iowa Events Center, located right off of I-235 in Des Moines. Registration and conference hotel room blocks for the 2011 fall school will not open until late summer, so please do not make your reservations until conference details are announced this summer. We appreciate your assistance in this matter.

We greatly appreciated all the feedback that was given on our online post-conference survey. All feedback is taken into consideration when planning and making alterations to future conferences. Please contact me at shorner@iowacounties.org if you ever have any comments or suggestions regarding ISAC conferences and events.

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Conference Feedback

Program changes that are made at past and future ISAC conferences are made in large part due to member feedback. All conference agendas are presented to and approved by the ISAC Board of Directors. We strive to provide our members with the most beneficial and cost effective conferences. I wanted to answer some questions and clear up some confusion out there among our members regarding feedback that was received in response to the 2011 spring school.

Conference Location

ISAC is comprised of 15 statewide associations or affiliate groups that range in various sizes. All 15 of these groups have the opportunity to meet during designated time set aside for affiliates during our two annual conferences, called “affiliate time.” Even though not all 15 affiliate groups usually meet at each conference we must be prepared if they all decide to meet. So, trying to find a conference location with 15 different rooms of various sizes to accommodate all of our affiliate group meetings is very challenging. Simply put, there are not a lot of properties in Iowa that meet this space requirement. When we do find a location to adequately accommodate all of our affiliate groups and members, we usually sign multi-year contracts with the property or properties to get the best possible room rental and sleeping room rates. It’s a lot easier to negotiate lower rates when you can guarantee a property more than one year of business. This in turn keeps your registration costs among the lowest for comparable conferences.

Annually, the spring school must be held in Des Moines because the Legislature is in session. A lot of our members take advantage of the spring school to visit the Capitol and meet with their legislators. We have more location flexibility for our fall conference. Our goal now, and in the past, is to sign contracts about three to five years in advance to get the best dates and rates for our conference attendees.

Conference Agenda

Member feedback and budgetary concerns was the reason behind changing the spring school format from a two-and-a-half day conference to a two-day conference. We received many requests to tighten up the spring school agenda, thus limiting the amount of time needed for travel and overnight accommodations. ISAC took these concerns to the ISAC Board of Directors and the Board agreed to adjust the conference agenda to address these concerns.

Since the conference is hosted by ISAC, the organization does provide a limited amount of conference-wide educational programming, by-laws required business and programming to allow our members to network with other affiliate groups. The majority of the conference is dedicated to affiliate time, which is planned by each individual affiliate group. ISAC is aware of how important affiliate time is to its members. Any agenda revisions made in the past two years have either increased and kept the amount

of affiliate time the same. For example at the 2011 spring school, ISAC provide affiliate groups with (an increased amount of) 11 hours of affiliate time, which was the same amount of time provided at the 2010 fall school. If you have specific concerns with your affiliate time programming, we suggest you contact your affiliate president. Each affiliate is responsible for planning their 11 hours of affiliate time.

Conference Sleeping Room Blocks

In the past, ISAC has received numerous and consistent complaints about not being able to reserve a sleeping room within the conference hotel blocks because it was full within hours or even minutes of opening. The problem was that certain counties were reserving a large amount of sleeping rooms within the conference block at one time. The county then decided not to use all of their rooms and canceled them right before the deadline. Unfortunately, these rooms then would go back into the hotel’s general block and were unavailable to our members at the reduced conference rate. By reserving and then cancelling large amounts of rooms, it didn’t give members who attended the conference the opportunity to stay at the conference hotels. These unused rooms also go against our attrition, which is a percentage ISAC must meet in the number of sleeping rooms actually used vs. the total number originally in the room block. Attrition is used to negotiate our sleeping room rates and the number of rooms available in our conference block.

In reaction to these complaints, we formed a new process in partnership with the Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) and the Iowa Housing Bureau. This free service allows only registered conference attendees to reserve one hotel room at the ISAC rate in the conference hotels. We have been very pleased with the feedback that we have received since the inception of this process in August 2009.

After registering for the conference and reserving your sleeping room through the housing bureau, you receive an acknowledgement email stating your hotel location, room type/rate, arrival/departure date and credit card information. This hotel reservation acknowledgment from the Iowa Housing Bureau confirms your sleeping room for the conference. Closer to the conference date, the hotel (you selected and that is listed on your acknowledge email) will send you a hotel confirmation number. More or less, you are receiving two hotel confirmations; one from the housing bureau at the initial booking and one from the hotel prior to the conference date.

Thank you again for attending the conference and for all of your feedback. We look forward to continuing to offer our members the most beneficial conferences for the best cost possible.