

# The Iowa County

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to Protect  
Iowa's Land?

April 2007

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Iowa State Association of Counties

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<b>Open Spaces</b>	4
<b>Capitol Comments</b> <i>John Easter</i>	5
<b>Legal Briefs</b> <i>David Vestal</i>	6
<b>Case Management</b> <i>Dan Vonnahme</i>	7
<b>Technology Center</b> <i>Tammy Norman &amp; Robin Harlow</i>	8
<b>Health Check</b> <i>Sandy Longfellow</i>	9
<b>ISAC Meetings</b> <i>Jerri Noboa</i>	9-10
<b>ISAC Brief</b>	11-14
<b>NACo News</b>	14-15
<b>Classified Ad</b>	16
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	16-19
<b>Calendar of Events</b>	23



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### ISAC's Mission:

To promote effective and responsible county government for the people of Iowa.

### ISAC's Vision:

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation, information and services for and about county government in Iowa.

## Investing in Our Conservation and Recreation Infrastructure

*But are we doing enough? And what is the return on such investments?*

One of the primary functions of government is to provide for the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. Governments at all levels want to make sure they are making wise expenditures of precious public resources. Don't overlook the value of natural resource conservation and outdoor recreational opportunities to your citizens.

We all hear a lot about economic development - attracting new businesses and keeping those we currently have healthy and growing. We also hear about the importance of an area's quality of life. Iowa has what most people are looking for - small town living (even our largest cities are considered small by many), safe communities, good schools, low cost of living and ready access to the outdoors. From the business standpoint, Iowa has an attractive state tax code, according to the Tax Foundation. We also have a productive and educated workforce.

More and more of us in the natural resource conservation/outdoor recreation field have seen the positive impacts of quality of life investments to areas all over Iowa. We need to not only keep our young people here, but also our older population. We can do that by ensuring wise investments in quality of life improvements, not only in good educational systems, but also in cultural and recreational opportunities and clean air and water.

People want and need places to recreate close to home, not only for personal enjoyment and relaxation but also for their health. The rise in health problems related to sedentary life styles is well documented, and according to the Iowa Department of Public Health costs Iowa nearly \$1 billion annually. Public open space conservation and recreation areas can provide connections to nature and active or passive outdoor experiences. In addition to a healthier public, protecting green spaces and connecting greenways along our rivers and streams can also help provide for a healthier and more diverse environment. Unfortunately, Iowa ranks near the bottom in the United States in the amount of land devoted to public recreation. Iowa's system of county conservation boards provides many of these important areas in cooperation with cities and state agencies.

### **Iowa Must Do More**

Iowa must invest much more in its 'green infrastructure' to ensure the improvement of our water quality, expansion of public recreational opportunities and protection of the special places that are unique to each of our counties. Parks and recreation areas provide pleasant experiences for family and friends and are the focal point in many areas.

Conservation and recreation is good for business and is big business. Tourism expenditures in Iowa are approximately \$5 billion annually. Iowans spend nearly \$750 million annually on fish, wildlife and related activities - nearly \$35 million alone to feed birds in their backyards! Trails provide at least \$25 - \$50 million per year to local communities, in addition to the tremendous health benefits. Farmers and contractors receive millions

*By: Mark C. Ackelson, President of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation & Don E. Brazelton, Executive Secretary, Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards*

of dollars each year for soil, water and wildlife conservation practices. Recent studies have also shown us that those counties and communities that have readily accessible public conservation and recreation areas are experiencing the most economic growth.

### **Legislative Support**

The state of Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP) provides support to every county in the state and also makes matching grants available for specific projects for soil, water and wildlife conservation and recreation. REAP is currently authorized at \$20 million per year but has been only funded at the \$11 million level. This year the Iowa Legislature and others are working to increase the level of support to this program. We should all voice our support to our legislators.

Last year, the Iowa General Assembly saw the importance of conservation to our future by forming the Sustainable Natural Resource Funding Advisory Committee. The Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation were members of this committee, along with such diverse members as the Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, Pheasants Forever and the Sierra Club. The members of the committee all came to the realization that these issues are critical to the future of Iowa - both urban and rural. They also realized that a stable source of funding is key to being able to plan and complete the necessary projects. You can learn more about this study and read the final report by going to [www.iowadnr.com/sustainablefunding/index.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/sustainablefunding/index.html).

### **Plan Ahead**

Efforts, both public and private, should be encouraged. Many times we get so busy in our day-to-day duties that we don't take the time to "plan ahead." The future of your county, your region and your state will be enhanced if we all take the time and effort to determine how best to protect, expand, and utilize our natural open spaces to improve our attractiveness to our citizens and our businesses - to those we want to keep here and to those we want to attract. Each county should have a plan for how to protect and improve their natural resources and provide recreation opportunities. County conservation boards should be involved in that process and help lead implementation. Plans can help ensure that you are getting the most from your investments.

How is your county doing? Investments in your land, water, wildlife and conservation education programs are also investments in your economy, your people and your county's future.

## Property Tax Reform

*Right now* is the best time for property tax reform in Iowa. With a new governor and new majorities in the General Assembly, the political landscape for a renewed opportunity is here. Governor Culver's margin of victory is the largest of any governors race in a long time. That means he has stronger voter support than governors who won in previous years. Strong voter support translates into political capital for such controversial issues as property tax reform.

This is a non-election year - another reason why this is the time for significant reform. Non-election years allow more time for voters to accept controversial policy decisions, such as tax reforms. Next year is an election year and the following year the Governor will begin planning for his re-election bid. The 2007 session therefore presents a rare window of opportunity to advance a tax reform agenda.

According to the Iowa Taxpayers Association, Iowa is in the top-10 list of states with the highest commercial property tax rates for both urban and rural rankings. In Iowa, there is a growing disparity between the classes of property. The commercial property class has a statewide average effective tax rate of 3.7%. That is more than double the residential effective tax rate, which is 1.6%. The agricultural (market) rate is 0.6%. This comes about by assessing agricultural land on a productivity formula and applying the rollback to the classes of property. Since the residential class is tied to agricultural, the burden is disproportionately shifted to the commercial class.

### Commercial Property Tax Task Force

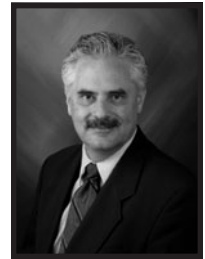
Last December, Governor-Elect Culver appointed the Commercial Property Tax Task Force to examine Iowa's property tax system and the equity of taxes between commercial property and other classes of property. The nine-member bipartisan task force was given 30 days to collect information, evaluate options and make recommendations. The property tax system is big and complicated, yet the charge to the task force was limited to addressing the immediate problem facing commercial properties.

The task force considered a few different scenarios to help Iowa businesses offset their property tax burden. The task force finally recommended providing commercial property tax relief to this class by means of a commercial property tax refund reported on income tax forms and paid as a property tax refund. Governor Culver's proposed budget for FY08 contains \$25 million to fulfill that recommendation.

The task force also recommended some education funding strategies to equalize disparities among school districts, raise state funding of K-12 education from 87.5% to 95% by 2012 and increase the uniform school levy to \$7.50. These proposals were recommended as a means toward property tax relief for *all* classes of property. The task force also recommended a two-year bipartisan study of the property tax system that engages citizens, leg-

**By: John Easter**

ISAC Director of  
Intergovernmental Affairs



islators and stakeholder groups. Reform issues such as de-coupling agricultural and residential classes, sharing of governmental services, and review and analysis of properties exempt from property tax were proposed for consideration.

### The Solution Is Here

There is no need for more studies of the property tax system. At a recent meeting of a House Ways and Means subcommittee, ISAC and the Iowa League of Cities (ILC) recommended a simple, transparent solution to fundamentally repair the system. The plan has two basic parts:

- Implement a rollback corridor on residential property of 43% to 50%. Residential and agricultural property values would still be coupled, and each would still have the 4% assessment limitation. However, the residential rollback could not drop below 43% or rise above 50%.
- Convert city and county rate-based limitations to property tax revenue limitations. After a specified base year, county property tax revenues in the general basic and rural basic funds would be limited to growth for inflation and new construction. Boards of supervisors could vote to exceed the limitations, subject to reverse referendum.

These concepts are based on the property tax reform plan designed by ISAC and ILC in 2004. The rationale for these changes is simple. It has taken about 30 years for the current system to fall into disrepair. Accordingly, it will take several years to correct it.

The rollback corridor would help to stabilize and repair the disparity between classes of property over time. The corridor would allow the rollback to decline some from the current level of 45.6%. This would be politically attractive because legislators could not be accused of voting to increase property taxes.

The revenue limitation would provide transparency. By tying revenue increases to the government price index and new construction, the worry about assessed valuations and adjustments of levy rates would vanish. There would be no more capture of additional taxes due to property value increases. Citizens would have a clear understanding of city and county revenue increases and local officials would be directly accountable.

The ball is in the Legislature's court. Further studies are not needed. The political landscape has changed. Voters want property tax reform. The \$25 million for commercial property tax relief is there. ISAC and ILC have offered the solution to make Iowa's property tax system more equitable and transparent. The best time for property tax reform in Iowa is *right now!*

## “E-Government” Bills Spark Debate Over Internet Use

One repercussion of the CIETC scandal was the passage last session of SF 2410. That bill required that 28E boards publish their minutes, salaries and approved bills in the newspaper.

No one has suggested that there was any “smoking gun” in the CIETC board minutes. Nor has anyone proven that if SF 2410 had just been in place sooner, CIETC would have been prevented. In fact, the intentional wrongdoing by CIETC employees was so well hidden that it was not discovered in multiple audits. So this bill was an attempt by the Legislature to “do something” in response to CIETC, even if that “something” was a little silly.

Besides which, CIETC is an anomaly. There are about 15,000 28E agreements in place in Iowa. Yet CIETC is the only example anyone can point to for fiscal mismanagement by a 28E entity. Even if there were a few other examples, that hardly merits passing a law that applies to hundreds of 28E boards.

Thinking that SF 2410 was overkill, this session ISAC got HSB 213 and SSB 1289 introduced. Those bills would have allowed 28E boards to publish a notice in the newspaper that announces that the meeting was held, and says that if readers want a full set of the board minutes they can get them online, and then gives the Internet address.

It turns out that Iowa’s newspaper establishment is not a fan of “e-government.” The Iowa Newspaper Association got newspapers around the state all stirred up. Editorials were written about ISAC wanting to erode public accountability. Newspapers took cheap shots, attacking us as being against open government. There was such uproar that at the time I am writing this, it seems unlikely that either of the bills will pass.\* Here are some of the arguments being used against these bills:

*This Is Not About Money:* The Iowa Newspaper Association and all of the newspapers that chimed in on this keep saying the issue is government accountability, not the revenue they would lose if board minutes were posted online. But according to the Iowa Newspaper Association, newspapers in Iowa take in about \$6 million annually from publishing public notices. And that figure is low, since it doesn’t include the money made publishing 28E minutes. Anytime someone is making \$6 million a year, don’t let them tell you it’s not about the money - it is.

*Iowa Would Be Breaking New Ground:* In one subcommittee hearing a newspaper representative ominously warned legislators that Iowa would be the first state in the country to allow online publication of minutes. It’s true - no other state allows online publication of minutes. But what legislators weren’t told is that there are quite a few states where local boards don’t have to publish their minutes in the first place.

By: David Vestal

ISAC General Counsel



States like Virginia, Indiana, Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Tennessee, New York, New Mexico and North Carolina have no requirement that meeting minutes be published at all.

*People Actually Read Public Notices:* To support its position, the Iowa Newspaper Association paid for a survey in 2006. One finding of the survey was that “public notices are as well-read in Iowa as national sports news.” That statement is so outrageous, it’s like saying that the sun revolves around the earth. Do you know anyone that reads public notices? I don’t. Even their own highly “scientific” survey said that 48% of Iowans “seldom or never” read public notices. I’d bet it’s more like 90%.

The larger question is, why continue to put public notices in newspapers if no one is reading newspapers? Newspaper circulation is way down across the nation, and Iowa is no exception. That is why more than half of Iowa’s newspapers have now created their own online sites - to try to recapture readers that are flocking to the Internet.

You can see how effective the Internet is - stories in the newspaper now often include a box that says “for more information on this subject, go to our website.” That is exactly what HSB 213 and SSB 1289 would allow counties to do as well.

*Newspapers Are More Accessible:* The newspapers argue that moving information from the printed page of the newspaper to, as one editorial phrased it, “the back alleys of cyberspace” would reduce accessibility. But after you have done it once, it is easy to find the minutes of your local board or board of supervisors online. They are only a few clicks of your mouse away, they stay there forever and the information is free.

Compare that with newspapers. Since public notices appear in newspapers on an irregular schedule, you never know when the minutes you are looking for will be in the paper, and then if you don’t save that particular edition of the paper, they are gone forever. And you have to pay for the newspaper.

In the future more government business is going to be conducted online - including the posting of board minutes. The newspaper industry will continue to fight it, earnestly telling the public that “it’s not about the money.”

**Parting Ponderable:** “Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe.” Abraham Lincoln

\* Not surprisingly, the best way to get an update on the status of these two bills is to go online to [www.legis.state.ia.us](http://www.legis.state.ia.us).

## “The Café Chasse en Papier”

We take a lot of things for granted in our everyday life - basic things, like having hot and cold running water at our immediate disposal, choosing where we want to go to lunch, or the simple pleasure of ordering a cup of coffee for a friend in the morning. But what would happen if new parameters were imposed on some of these choices?

Consider the following exchange between Customer Albert, Customer Bob and Vendor Vic at your local coffee shop:  
ALBERT: I'd like to buy a cup of coffee for my friend Bob. I'd like to use my RediPaid gift card to make this purchase.

VENDOR VIC: Does Bob have a “Need for Caffeine?”

ALBERT: I'm sorry... what?

VENDOR VIC: Your friend will need to have an evaluation completed by a qualified professional before we can determine whether or not you'll be allowed to buy him a cup of coffee. If the evaluation substantiates a dependence or increased tolerance for caffeine, without exhibiting physiological dependence for the substance, we may be able to proceed with a Schedule I protocol of treatment that could include administration of caffeinated beverages.

ALBERT: How long would such an evaluation take?

VENDOR VIC: Three to six months, provided your friend has coverage and hasn't had an evaluation within the past year.

### 4 months later

ALBERT: We're back! We have an evaluation for Bob. His doctor has diagnosed him as 292.9 “Caffeine-Related Disorder Not Otherwise Specified” related to withdrawal symptoms (an actual DSM-IV diagnosis). Can we get that cup of coffee?

VENDOR VIC: Oooh, I'm afraid not. You'll need to complete the preauthorization process first. You can have a seat at the table and complete this preauthorization request in which you identify how Bob's diagnosis impacts his ability to function in the community.

### 2 hours later

ALBERT: There! We're finished! Let's have some coffee!

VENDOR VIC: Not so fast there, Bucko! We're going to have to deny the initial request because our rules clearly state you must purchase multiple items in order to be approved. Also, you forgot to sign and date the request.

ALBERT: OK! We'll also take a Danish and I'll sign and date the request.

VENDOR VIC: I'm sorry, but that's not the way the process works. We'll have to mail you a denial letter and then you can request an appeal process. Also, the “Need for Danish” has not yet been established. You will need to go back and get an additional evaluation that falls under DSM-IV “307” code that addresses eating disorders and you will need to reflect the impact of

By: *Dan Vonnahme*

ISAC Case Management  
Specialist



this diagnosis on the preauthorization request as well. However, this portion of the request will need to be processed by the Mega-Big Bakery division, as we only process caffeine-related requests at this store.

### 2 months later

ALBERT: All done! Here are the forms you requested!

VENDOR VIC: I'm sorry, we can't take these at the counter - you'll have to use your fax machine to send them in.

ALBERT: Fax machine? What's that?

VENDOR VIC: It's like e-mail... only slower and less efficient. I'm sure you have one somewhere in your office.

### 1 month later

ALBERT: Done. We've won the Appeal for Caffeine-Related Services and the Request for Danish has been approved! What would you like with your Danish, Bob?

BOB: How about a large Americano? (espresso and hot water)

VENDOR VIC: Oooh... I'm sorry! Your RediPaid gift card doesn't include Americanos as a covered service. Might I suggest that you order a Grande Mucho Mocha Skinny Latte with Sugarfree Caramel flavoring? It is the only RediPaid-approved item that includes espresso. Of course, we can only honor payment for the shot of espresso itself for that particular drink. But I'm sure you can figure out some way to pay for the rest of the drink, extract the espresso, and then get the hot water to complete the Americano you want. However, you will need to provide your own cup.

ALBERT: OK... whatever. We'll figure out a way to make it work.

### 15 minutes later

VENDOR VIC: How's that coffee, sir?

BOB: It's cold!

VENDOR VIC: Well, no wonder... you waited too long!

This, of course, is “Theater of the Absurd” that exists only within the over-caffeinated imagination of a writer trying to meet a deadline. Processes and accountability are very important components of any complex service delivery system, and the many players involved work hard to insure compliance within the current parameters.

But “if I were King”, here is my wish: Efficient access to services, supports, and funds to meet the real needs of persons with disabilities in the community. I've got to go now - my coffee's getting cold.

## Windows Vista

**By: Tammy Norman**

ISAC Technology  
Services Coordinator



**Q: I heard that Microsoft has come out with a new operating system for PCs. Should I purchase this upgrade? Any advice?**

A: Microsoft recently released a new operating system entitled Windows Vista. It has several different versions to choose from. There is Business, Ultimate, Enterprise, Home Premium and Home Basic. The Business edition will be comparable to the Professional versions of the earlier Microsoft operating systems - such as Windows XP, 2000 and so on. The Ultimate is the replacement for Windows XP Media Center edition. Enterprise is only available to volume license customers. Microsoft now offers home users two different versions - Premium or Basic. Basic will work fine for most end users. The Premium version offers a digital entertainment package that will allow you to connect a PC to your TV and/or X-Box. There is not much difference in price between the two Home versions; however, there is a difference in the system requirements for your PC. You will need to have 1GB of RAM for the Basic version and a 64 bit (x64) processor. The Ultimate and Business editions require 2GBs of RAM and a dual core processor. Microsoft's minimum requirements are less than this. After experiencing Windows Vista myself and getting advice from computer techs, you will not be satisfied running Windows Vista on a PC that has only Microsoft's minimum system requirements. Windows Vista seems to run slower than its predecessor Windows XP on a computer with twice the Microsoft minimum system requirements. This is due in part to the security layers and built in backup/recovery systems in Windows Vista.

If possible, do not purchase or upgrade to Windows Vista until the Service Pak 1 is out. It is due for release sometime later this year. Another thing to keep in mind is the fact that many printers do not have drivers that are compatible with Windows Vista. Check out all your peripherals before upgrading. Software designed by companies other than Microsoft may not function properly on Windows Vista. These areas will improve over time, but right now they are a concern. If you do have to go ahead and purchase a new computer with Windows Vista installed, do not despair. It is nice eye candy and is relatively simple to use.

**Website Note:** Have a question regarding new technology and would like it addressed in this column? Contact me at 515-244-7181 or [tnorman@iowacounties.org](mailto:tnorman@iowacounties.org). Until next month, keep clicking!

## Growing the ETC: Part 2

**By: Robin Harlow**

ISAC Technology  
Project Manager



This month I want to explain how using ETC's BizTalk and Business Activity Monitoring (BAM) to move transactions can be used to generate status reports about the work we do. Whether the work is health claims or invoices, someone needs to know how many we have and what the status of each item is.

In a manual environment and depending on size, capturing this information can become quite a chore. Just manually processing the claim is tough - now you have to stop what you are doing and do something that will keep you from your normal duties.

By using BizTalk to move transaction information between applications, the systems will capture the time spent in each piece of the process. For example, a provider submits a claim to ETC. At the point the user acts on the claim, information is captured about how long the claim sat waiting to be acted on. User did nothing more than do their task. When setting up the process, the end-user determines the points in the process where they want the data captured.

Okay, now you have all this data, isn't it going to take a rocket scientist to pull it out of BizTalk? BizTalk comes with "BAM folders." For example, an Excel user could connect to the BAM folder the same way one would connect to a network drive. The user could then read information into spreadsheet, and create a graphical view of the aspects of this process that the user wishes to see. This view can be updated as often as necessary, allowing real-time monitoring of the county process.

Not interested in process data? Simply capturing the actual data (claim amount, client, etc.) in ETC allows for that data to be reported in standardized reports, brought into Excel or even moved to another application.

An automated county process that uses BAM can provide more information to the people who depend on it than if it were a manual process. People don't always have the time or the inclination to respond to status requests but well-designed software does. Improving county processes with BizTalk technologies hinges on making them more automated, which implies an increasingly important role for BAM.



# health check

## How to Lose Weight

By: **Sandy Longfellow**

ISAC Administrative Assistant



It is almost spring and thoughts turn to swimsuits and the like. Some people seem to be able to shed the “winter” pounds easily and get into the size they want. Others...not so much. The way to weight loss doesn't lie in a variety of crash diets but in sensible, smart eating. There are a number of small steps that can be taken to accomplish our goals.

**Don't Starve Yourself:** Many people think that if they skip food they lose weight. Well, that might work for a while but eating a variety of fruits and vegetables can more quickly satisfy hunger than snacks.

**Get Unrefined:** Watch the kinds of grains you eat. Instead of that slice of refined white bread, make it 100% whole wheat instead. You are not only avoiding something that can add weight but also adding a lot of nutritional value to your eating. I think these types of grain breads have a lot more flavor as well.

**Don't Dry Up:** In the age of soft drinks, water sometimes is forgotten, but it is a huge asset. Among other things water helps digest food, keeps your metabolism flowing along, brings nutrients to your muscles and keeps you from overheating.

**So, You Don't Cook:** If you are like me and cooking is not your number one skill, there are options. Eating fresh fruits and veggies is one of them. Luckily it doesn't take much to have broccoli, carrots, celery and the like on hand. The grocery stores are even very helpful by cutting them for you. Look around your grocery store and try and find healthy, non-cooking options.

**Let's Eat Out:** I know stopping by a fast food place on the way home from work is tempting. Unfortunately, restaurants are not generally our ally in the nutritional eating contest. In many places a single meal could feed a whole family. Weight Watchers has suggested getting your doggy bag right away and putting half of your food in it. This saves calories and you usually have a whole meal to take home.

*For more information on eating healthy go to [www.health.msn.com](http://www.health.msn.com).*

# ISAC meetings

## ISAC Fall School 2007

By: **Jerri Noboa**

ISAC Meetings Administrator



I know we just finished ISAC's Spring School (March 18-20), but it is time to think about making hotel reservations for ISAC's Fall School in November.

Conference dates are November 28-30 and we will again be at the Marriott and Renaissance Savery in downtown Des Moines. The following affiliates will be meeting at the Marriott: Auditors, Engineers, ICIT, Recorders and Supervisors. All other affiliates will be meeting at the Renaissance Savery. Conference registration will not be online until August 1, but you can make your hotel reservations now.

Marriott (515-245-5500) rates are \$73 for single or double. You need a credit card to hold the reservation. If you do not want to pay for the room on your personal credit card, you will need to call the accounting department and tell them you are going to bring a check with you and request that they send you a document stating the room rate, hotel/motel tax, etc. Then have the check cut to take with you. This process must be done for each ISAC school. The Marriott is a smoke-free facility and there is a \$250 charge if you violate this regulation.

Renaissance Savery (515-244-2151) rates are \$73 for single or double. You may opt to send in a claim form with a letter (on county letterhead) asking to have the room billed back to the county. This must be done before arrival date and for each ISAC school. The letter of request can be faxed to Carla Curry at (515-243-8974). The Renaissance Savery is a smoke-free facility and there is a \$250 charge if you violate this regulation.

Hotel Fort Des Moines (515-243-1161 or 800-532-1466 and use booking #208580) rates are \$73 for single or double and \$93 for suites. You need a credit card to hold the reservation or they will accept purchase orders/claim forms, which must be done before arrival and for each ISAC school.

Holiday Inn Downtown (515-283-0151) rates are \$74 single or double. The cut-off date for these rates is November 6. You can ask for a credit application when you make your reservation, and then they will bill back to the county.

**Note:** If you cancel your sleeping room at the Marriott or Renaissance Savery, that room does not go back into the ISAC block of rooms, it goes back into their block of rooms that they sell to the general public for the rate of \$100 more per night. So if you need to cancel your room, first check to see if someone in your county could use your room and then transfer the name on the room or contact me (515-244-7181 or [jnoboia@iowacounties.org](mailto:jnoboia@iowacounties.org)) and I will see that it gets used by a county person.

# ISAC meetings

## ISAC's Budget Approved at the Spring School

More than 800 people attended ISAC's 64th Spring School of Instruction March 18-20 at the Marriott and Renaissance Savery in downtown Des Moines. On Sunday, March 18, ISAC held two seminars for attendees. David Rabiner was the presenter for both - the first seminar being "Insights on Leadership: How to Build Influence and Credibility" and the second entitled "The Magic in the Mix."

On Monday, March 19, ISAC's FY07/08 budget was approved for the year during the morning general session. ISAC then awarded scholarships to eight outstanding high school students. The winner of the top scholarship, in the amount of \$7,500, was Alissa Caltrider from Carroll (Carroll County). Five other students received scholarships in the amount of \$5,000: Sarah Clague from Estherville (Emmet County), Kelly Evans from Storm Lake (Buena Vista County), Justin Sukup from Malvern (Mills County), Tosha Kirchner from Donnellson (Lee County) and Kelli Kregel from Delhi (Delaware County). Samantha Nahra from Manchester (Delaware County) received a scholarship in the amount of \$1,500 from the BureauCats, a band almost entirely comprised of Scott County employees. Margaret Smit from Wellman (Washington County) received a \$2,000 scholarship from the Iowa Counties Information Technology Organization.

Also during ISAC's General Session, more than 300 county officials were honored with Years of Service Awards to acknowledge their dedication to serving citizens through county government. Years of Service Awards were given to county officials with 15 years of service or more (in five-year increments).

Featured speakers during the conference included the National Association of Counties (NACo) President Colleen Landkamer; NACo 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Don Stapley; and Charlie Wittmack, the first Iowan to climb Mt. Everest.

Thank you to everyone that attended and we look forward to seeing you at ISAC's Fall School November 28-30, 2007!



Photos from left: David Rabiner was the presenter for two ISAC seminars on March 18. Wayne Northey, Dickinson County Supervisor, was happy to pick up his registration packet for the conference. NACo President Colleen Landkamer spoke during the ISAC General Session. Kim Painter, ISAC President, posed with keynote speaker Charlie Wittmack after his inspiration talk.



Photos from left: Samantha Nahra received the BureauCats scholarship. Alissa Caltrider was the top ISAC scholarship winner. The scholarship winners posed after the ISAC general session - Justin Sukup, Samantha Nahra, Kelly Evans, Sarah Clague, Tosha Kirchner, Kelli Kregel, Alissa Caltrider and Margaret Smit.

## Good-Bye From Denise

**By: Denise Obrecht**

Former ISAC Marketing/  
Communications Coordinator



Everyone told me a baby would change my life, but I really had no idea how true that would be. Last April my husband and I welcomed our first child, Max, into the world and I moved from full time to part time for ISAC. For the past year I worked one day in the office and a few hours from home each day during the week. To say the least my days were interesting working from home - I definitely learned the art of time management. With Max growing older though I feel it is best for ISAC and my family to pass the baton to someone else.

I have worked at ISAC for over six years doing publication design, website design and marketing to companies wanting to do business with county officials. I still remember the day that Bill and David interviewed me. Though it was a bit intimidating - sort of good cop, bad cop - the interview was so entertaining that I had no hesitation in accepting the job. Though it has been hard work being in a small office - always picking up jobs that needed to be covered, never having enough time for everything - it was worth it because I really felt like I was working with family - each of us with our own little quirks. I strongly believe it isn't necessarily what you do in a job, but who you work with that gets you out of bed every morning.

I look forward to more quality time with Max - these are precious years that I don't want to look back on with regret. I look forward to spending more time with my husband - without a laptop between us. And more importantly I look forward to going on a new journey.

When I was young I remember asking my mom why she didn't just go out and get a job like other moms I knew. I probably thought she was lazy! Now I know she had a very hard job and a huge responsibility. I realize that she was making my brother and I a top priority and sacrificing her past career in teaching in order to be there when we got home from school, to come get us when we were sick and attend all of our school events. She gave us time - which I now realize was the best gift she could have ever given me. I want to be that kind of mom for Max.

A special thanks to the ISAC Board and staff for their encouragement, support and kindness. ISAC is a wonderful organization and I am proud to have been a part of the team.

## Welcome Hanna

**By: Hanna De Groot**

ISAC Receptionist



Hi! My name is Hanna De Groot and I am the new receptionist/administrative assistant for ISAC. I will be answering all of the telephone calls for ISAC, as well as assisting in many other administrative assistant duties. I look forward to getting to know all of your names, faces and voices!

Before coming to ISAC, I attended Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political studies, with an international affairs minor in May 2006. Throughout college I worked in the registrar's office as a student assistant staff member. I also had the joy of teaching violin lessons to several students, a position that I held since high school. During the spring semester of my senior year of college I interned at the Sioux County Auditor's Office. It was a great experience and I enjoyed helping prepare for the elections and training the election officials on the new equipment, as well as assisting the gentlemen at the Holland precinct for the 2006 primaries.

I grew up in Orange City, IA with my two younger sisters. All of us play a string instrument so there have been many opportunities to play together for weddings and other occasions. I have been playing the violin for over 18 years now and have played in the Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra and subbed for the Sioux Symphony Orchestra. I met my husband in college and we were married the end of June. He is an IT auditor for Ernst and Young and has held that position since June 2005. We currently reside in Norwalk.

Outside of the office I enjoy traveling with my husband, running, reading, attending concerts and plays, and playing games. I also enjoy going along with my husband to the golf course to keep him company while he plays.

I look forward to my first year at ISAC. If you need to contact me call (515) 244-7181 or email me at [hdegroot@iowacounties.org](mailto:hdegroot@iowacounties.org).

The Third Annual  
**ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser**

Hosted by the Iowa State Association of County Recorders and  
the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors

Jester Park Golf Course - Granger, Iowa - June 13, 2007

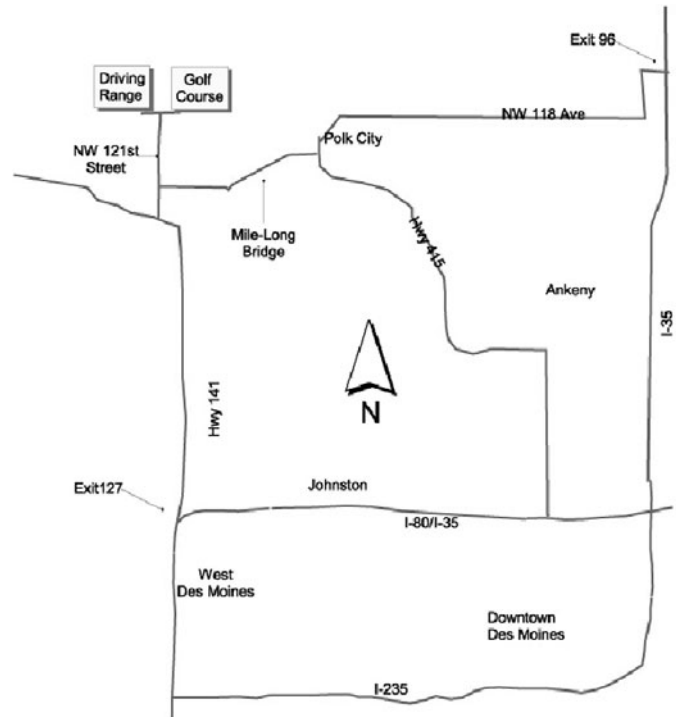
The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) announces the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser to be held June 13, 2007, at Jester Park Golf Course in Granger, Iowa. Jester Park is a par 71, 18-hole golf course that has the ability to accommodate 144 golfers. Jester Park Golf Course is located off I-80/35, exit 127, 30 minutes northwest of downtown Des Moines. Follow Highway 141 west 6.5 miles to NW 121st Street and turn right. Go north two miles to the golf course.

The Iowa State Association of County Recorders will be co-hosting the event with the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors to raise money for ISAC's scholarship program. ISAC scholarships are awarded to high school seniors that are children of county officials or county employees.

The 18-hole scramble (best-shot) with a shotgun start will begin promptly at 10:30am. Registration begins at 9:30am. You may register individually or in a group of up to four people. The \$75 fee includes golf with cart, lunch, beverages, welcome gift, one raffle ticket, prizes and dinner following golf. Soft-spiked or soft-soled shoes are acceptable. Metal spikes are prohibited.

Individuals wishing to golf or just attend the dinner (approximately 4:00pm) should fill out and return the registration form before May 30, 2007. Payment must accompany your registration and is non-refundable. The course is limited to 144 golfers, and we sold out last year, so register early to reserve your spot! If you have any questions please contact Jay Syverson via phone at (515) 244-7181 or email at [jsyverson@iowacounties.org](mailto:jsyverson@iowacounties.org).

We look forward to seeing you on June 13<sup>th</sup>! Remember, registration begins at 9:30am and golf begins with a shotgun start at 10:30am sharp - please be prompt.



The Third Annual  
**ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser**

Hosted by the Iowa State Association of County Recorders and  
the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors

Jester Park Golf Course - Granger, Iowa - June 13, 2007

**When:** Wednesday, June 13, 2007  
9:30am - Registration  
10:30am - Golf - 4-person scramble (best shot)  
Approximately 4:00pm – Dinner (immediately following golf)

**Where:** Jester Park Golf Course and Lodge  
11949 NW 118 Avenue, Granger, Iowa (515) 999-2903

**Cost:** \$75 (18 holes, shared cart, lunch, beverages, welcome gift, prizes,  
dinner and one raffle ticket – more raffle tickets on sale June 13)  
\$30 (dinner and one raffle ticket)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I will play in the ISAC Golf Fundraiser on June 13<sup>th</sup>. My \$75 is enclosed.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I will play in the ISAC Golf Fundraiser on June 13<sup>th</sup>. I am a qualifying sponsor and my fee is waived.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I have organized a group to play in the ISAC Golf Fundraiser. Our total entry fee is enclosed.  
\_\_\_\_\_ No golf, dinner only – \$30 is enclosed.

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

County/Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Fax/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you wish to arrange a group of players, please confirm your group prior to indicating the names on this form. Individuals and groups of less than four will be paired with other players.

1) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County/Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County/Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County/Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

4) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County/Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment MUST accompany registration and is non-refundable. Make checks payable to the ISAC Scholarship Fund. Entries must be received by May 30, 2007, and are filled on a first come, first served basis. Mail to: ISAC, Attn: Golf Fundraiser, 501 SW 7<sup>th</sup> St., Ste. Q, Des Moines, IA 50309. If you have any questions, please contact Jay Syverson via phone at 515-244-7181 or email at jsyverson@iowacounties.org.**

## ISAC brief

### ISAC NACo Representative

Pursuant to the ISAC By-Laws, notice is hereby given that ISAC is accepting applications for the position of ISAC National Association of Counties (NACo) representative. The ISAC NACo representative is selected by the ISAC Board of Directors.

The duties of the ISAC NACo representative include attending four NACo Board of Directors meetings a year around the country and representing Iowa on the NACo Board of Directors. The ISAC NACo representative is automatically a member of the ISAC Board of Directors as well. The ISAC NACo representative will be required to attend nine ISAC Board meetings annually and report to the ISAC Board regarding NACo.

Applicants must be either county officials or county employees. Applicants must be from a county that is a member of NACo. The term of the ISAC NACo representative is three years, and commences in July, 2007, at the conclusion of the NACo Annual Conference. A person may serve a maximum of three terms. This is an unpaid position. ISAC will reimburse the ISAC NACo representative for all reasonable travel expenses to attend the NACo Board of Directors meetings and ISAC Board of Directors meetings.

Applications are available on the ISAC website at [www.iowacounties.org](http://www.iowacounties.org), or by calling the ISAC office at 515-244-7181. Applications must be received by 4:30 p.m. on April 13, 2007 at the following address: ISAC; Attn: William R. Peterson, Executive Director; 501 SW 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite Q; Des Moines, IA 50309-4540 Email: [bpeterson@iowacounties.org](mailto:bpeterson@iowacounties.org)

### Steering Committee Sign-Up

There is still time to sign-up to be a member of one of ISAC's steering committees. As a member of an ISAC steering committee, you will represent your affiliate's legislative needs and concerns. You are asked to attend your affiliate's summer meetings and the two ISAC steering committees that will be held on August 29th and October 4th in Des Moines.

There are seven ISAC steering committees: County Administration and Organization, Environment and Public Health, Human Services, Land Use and Rural Affairs, Public Safety, Taxation and Finance, and Transportation. These committees provide the public policy platform for ISAC in dealing with the legislative and executive branches of state government. The committee process is where policy statements and legislative objectives are introduced, debated, and rejected or adopted. Each ISAC affiliate is entitled to name three members to each steering committee.

We encourage you to take a moment and sign up for this opportunity. You can do so by going to the ISAC website and registering at [www.iowacounties.org](http://www.iowacounties.org) or contacting your affiliate president directly. The deadline for registration is April 23.

## NACo news

### American City & County Magazine Announces Call for Nominations

*American City & County* magazine is encouraging NACo members to submit nominations for the 2007 Crown Communities County Awards and the 2007 County Leader of the Year Award. The deadline for entries is April 6 for both awards.

The 2007 Crown Communities County Awards recognize the extra steps governments take that have lasting effects on residents, businesses and the environment. Any county government project in the United States substantially completed between April 2006 and March 2007 is eligible.

Projects will be judged on uniqueness, short and long-term value to the community and effective/innovative financing. Projects can encompass virtually any aspect of county government, including, but not limited to, water supply, streets and highways, parks and recreation, waste water collection and treatment, public finance, public transportation, storm water and flood control, technology, solid waste collection and treatment, public safety, county management, building maintenance and construction and grounds maintenance. There are no restrictions on who can submit a nomination. The 2007 Crown Communities County Awards official entry form, may be downloaded online at <http://americancityandcounty.com/news/awards-entry-forms>.

The County Leader of the Year award is the highest honor the magazine bestows on a county government official. All elected officials, department heads or employees working for any county government in the United States are eligible. There are no restrictions on who can submit a nomination. County Leader of the Year Entry forms can be downloaded online at <http://americancityandcounty.com/news/awards-entry-forms>.

### Register for NACo's 2007 Annual Conference

The Greater Richmond Region eagerly anticipates the arrival of county officials from across the country. A multitude of educational opportunities await you during NACo's 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference and Exposition July 13-17 in Richmond, Virginia. In addition to education, networking opportunities and previewing the latest products available to county governments, a celebration of America's 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will be held at Jamestown Settlement living-history museum in historic James City County, Virginia. *To register and for more program information, visit NAC's website at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*

## NACo Launches Green Government Initiative

NACo has launched a new Green Government Initiative to assist local governments in “going green.” The initiative draws upon the support of 11 founding corporate members to help NACo serve as a comprehensive resource for local governments on all things “green,” including energy efficiency, renewable and alternative energy, green building, air quality, water quality and land use.

Through the program, NACo will provide education and outreach to counties on “green” options, and then direct counties to the companies and organizations providing these green services and products. The program will expand to include cities and schools in 2008 and 2009.

*To sign up for more information on the Green Government Initiative, contact Kelly Zonderwyk at [kzonderwyk@naco.org](mailto:kzonderwyk@naco.org) or 202-942-4224.*

## Sustainable Communities Award Program

Is your county joining with other governments, private sector or community stakeholders to improve economy, environment, or social fabric of your community? Then get the recognition you deserve and apply for the 2007 Sustainable Communities Awards Program.

County leaders face a broader range of challenges than ever, from building strong local and regional economies, providing quality housing, and protecting the environment to securing the homeland, providing crucial services, and combating climate change. America’s citizens are looking for strong, visionary leadership to meet them.

Fortunately, while county leaders are closest to the challenges, they are also closest to the solutions and have collaborated with private sector and community leaders to find them. The awards program is your opportunity to share your success and innovations with county, administration and community leaders across the country.

Winning counties and their partners will receive national recognition for their efforts and a chance winning \$5,000 or \$10,000 in cash. Applications are due May 11. To be eligible for a Center for Sustainable Communities Award, two or more partnering entities must prepare a joint application describing projects and initiatives they have implemented together to make their communities more economically prosperous, environmentally safe, and socially equitable. At least one partner must be a county government. *For more information or to download an application visit NACo’s website at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*

## 2008 Presidential Election Project

*By: NACo President Colleen Landkamer*

Interaction between presidential candidates and NACo members is part of the 2008 Presidential Election Project that was launched in partnership with the state associations of counties. The main focus of the project is to inform and engage 2008 presidential candidates about county issues. Part of that focus is for candidates to hear a unified message from county officials on key issues in a non-partisan format.

An ultimate goal for the project is to renew the federal-county partnership with the new president and Congress. The project is concentrating on Iowa and New Hampshire, the states where the first caucus and primary will be held. These states were also chosen because the candidates meet with county officials in their homes, in local coffee shops and at county facilities.

County officials have one-on-one discussions with the candidates because of the process in these states. We will also expand the project into South Carolina and Nevada to take advantage of those states’ early primary and caucus. The next step is to take this project across the country.

To assist county officials in their discussions with the candidates, the following steps have been taken: 1) developed a set of questions about county issues to ask the presidential candidates; 2) prepared a brochure for the candidates and their staffs that explains the project and its objectives; and 3) created an online tracking and reporting system that will allow members to learn about candidates’ visits to states and counties (go to [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org) and scroll to bottom of the features section). NACo has also hired a full-time staff member, Kim Rogers, to help coordinate activities for county officials participating in the project.

The bottom line: this project cannot be successful without the help of NACo’s members. I challenge you, as county officials, to attend meetings and events where presidential candidates are appearing. It is also essential to discuss issues with the candidates, stressing the action that should be taken.

The project will be even more successful if county officials host events in their homes or in community facilities. Discussions can then be tailored to true county needs.

Looking ahead, presidential candidates will be invited to speak at the Annual Conference being held in Richmond, Va. July 13-18. *If you have contacts with any of the candidates or would like to help with other aspects of this program please let us know by contacting Tom Goodman, NACo public affairs director, at 202-942-4249 or [tgoodman@naco.org](mailto:tgoodman@naco.org).*

## classified ad

### Assistant MH/DD Services Director

Johnson County MH/DD Services has an immediate opening for an Assistant MH/DD Services Director. The Assistant Director will assist in planning, development and coordination of all MH/DD programs and policies, including Central Point of Coordination (CPC), Case Management/Social Work and Jail Alternatives/Mobile Crisis. This individual will manage the department in the Director's absence, and will be responsible for personnel management. The Assistant Director will perform statistical and financial analysis and monitor performance as it relates to federal and state guidelines and to Johnson County's MH/DD Services Management Plan and budget. The Assistant Director will also administer the State Payment Program and implement the MH/DD Three-Year Strategic Plan.

The Assistant Director must meet Chapter 24 rules for qualified case managers and supervisors {441-24.3(225C)}: a Bachelor's degree in social work and a minimum of three years' progressive experience in MH/DD with at least one year of experience with each of the population groups served (CMI-MR-DD-BI) and Chapter 25 rules for CPC Administrator {441-25.11(3310)}. Master's degree preferred. Position also requires a minimum of two years supervisory, accounting, budgeting, and financial experience.

Starting salary range is \$52,400 - \$56,400, plus outstanding health benefits. See [www.johnson-county.com](http://www.johnson-county.com) for details. Send resume, cover letter and application by April 20th to: Elaine Sweet, Johnson County MH/DD Services Director, 911 N. Governor, Iowa City, IA 52245. EOE/AA

## miscellaneous

### USEPA to Award \$2.7 Million

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) will award about \$2.7 million in cooperative agreements in two levels through the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) program. The CARE program, which began in 2005, helps to build broad-based local partnerships for reducing risks from toxic pollutants that come from numerous sources.

The application deadline for the 2007 CARE Cooperative Agreements RFP is April 9, 2007. A range of community groups may apply for funding, including county and local governments, tribes, non-profit organizations and universities.

*For additional information about CARE, projects awarded in 2005 and 2006, or how to apply for the cooperative agreements, visit USEPA's Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/care> or contact Kelly Zonderwyk at 202.942.4224 or [kzonderwyk@naco.org](mailto:kzonderwyk@naco.org).*

## miscellaneous

### IPAIT Fees Reduced

The Iowa Public Agency Investment Trust (IPAIT) reduced program fees effective January 1, 2007. IPAIT is served by WB Capital Management as administrator, in-



vestment manager, and marketer; and Wells Fargo as custodian. ISAC is joined by the Iowa League of Cities and the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities as program sponsors.

All servicers and program sponsors are participating in the fee reduction. While lower fees will initially result in decreased revenue, the expectation is for long-term program growth, as lower fees will produce higher returns and aid in increased participation.

The fee reduction comes in the wake of an analysis of total program fees (including service providers and sponsors) compared to similar association sponsored programs across the country. While IPAIT has always been competitively priced, the recent 25% decrease puts it among the lower-cost alternatives. Total program fees of approximately 0.37% also include miscellaneous program administration expenses. As assets increase, fees decrease due to breakpoints that are applied at various levels.

IPAIT offers money market and fixed-term investments. The program was created pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 28E to enable eligible Iowa public agencies to safely and effectively invest operating and reserve funds. Both the IPAIT Diversified and Direct Government Obligation (DGO) portfolios have followed established money market mutual fund parameters, and are registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in accordance with Rule 2a-7. The Diversified and DGO Funds were among the first local government investment pools to be registered, and have been regulated by the SEC since inception.

The program started in 1987 and serves 215 active participants. Of the \$400 million invested, counties represent approximately \$129 million. IPAIT is especially popular for county treasurers in April and October during the busy tax collection time. *To find out more, please call an IPAIT representative at 800-872-4024 or visit [www.IPAIT.org](http://www.IPAIT.org).*



## County Financing in Changing Times

By: Jeff Heil  
Ruan Securities Corporation

Counties have always faced a challenge when it comes to generating enough revenue to fund the services their citizens want and need. Iowa's elected representatives have adopted laws and administrative rules to guide local leaders through the methods of funding local government. Many of the tools that are available to fund local government today were adopted many years ago. Tax levies, supplemental levies, debt service levies, levies by fund and methods to exceed the levy rate limits were all adopted years ago to meet the needs of local communities. As the environment changes, local leaders must adapt to the financial guidelines set forth in the Iowa Code to operate local government.

In recent years the residential rollback and tax increment financing (TIF) are two items that have dramatically impacted the taxable valuation available to levy taxes for the services that are needed. In Iowa the residential rollback for 2006 valuations is 45.6% and the average TIF value is over 6% based on 2005 valuations. These two items alone have a considerable effect on the taxable value used to figure tax rates for local government.

With these thoughts in mind, the purpose of this article is to address one of the tools that Iowa law allows local officials to use to generate revenue - the debt service fund and levy. In the past counties have used the debt service levy to fund either county buildings or jails approved by a vote of county citizens. However, in recent years, counties have been utilizing the debt service fund to pay for many other capital items that were once paid for through the general fund.

It is appropriate to review a scenario that suggests why the debt service fund has become a viable option in these changing times.

- 1) In many counties the general basic levy rate is already at the \$3.50 limit and all allowable expenses have been shifted to the supplemental fund.
- 2) There has been a loss of taxable valuation due to the rollback or declining agricultural values.
- 3) Projects that have been put on hold in the past waiting for better times must now be completed for a variety of reasons.
- 4) There has been an increase in the amount of TIF increment value in the county that has limited the growth of the regular taxable valuation available to be used by the general fund.

The debt service levy is applied to all TIF valuation that has been certified, whereas the general fund only includes the regular base valuation. This allows a smaller tax rate in the debt service fund than in the general fund to generate the same amount of revenue. Just how much smaller depends on how much TIF increment exists in a given county.

There are two basic ways that a county can certify a debt service levy. One is by election following the procedures in Iowa Code §331.442. The other is by a public hearing process for qualified purposes. An increasing number of counties are using the public hearing process for certifying debt. Iowa Code §331.441 identifies the "essential county purposes" that qualify to be paid for through the debt service fund. Voting equipment and geographic information systems (GIS) are two essential purposes that several counties have funded through the debt service fund. Also common are public buildings subject to dollar limits based on the population of the county. The limits vary from \$400,000 in the smallest counties to \$1 million in the largest counties. If the county follows the proper procedures and authority for publishing and holding the hearings for issuing debt for "essential county purposes," the board action for issuing debt is final unless a citizen appeals to the district court and the court finds that the county exceeded its statutory authority.

Counties can also issue debt without an election for a "general county purpose" subject to dollar limitations again based on population. Any expense that is necessary for the operation of the county or the health and welfare of the citizens is a "general county purpose." Counties have used this authority to issue debt for sheriff and conservation vehicles, for example. The limits vary from \$50,000 to \$150,000 depending on population, and the public has the right to petition for an election. All debt paid by the debt service fund must be for items that qualify being paid for over the entire general tax base of the county. Items that are only paid by the rural fund cannot use the debt service levy that covers the whole tax base of the county. Also, a county must obviously issue debt in order to utilize the debt service levy.

As mentioned above, the average TIF value in the state of Iowa is 6%. What this means is the average debt service fund in counties across Iowa has 6% more value over which to spread the tax levy than the general fund. Borrowing costs for tax-exempt municipalities are between 4% and 5%, depending on a variety of factors. As a general rule of thumb, if you have TIF increment valuation greater than your borrowing costs then there is an economic advantage to using the debt service fund. It all comes down to your local situation. Some counties do not have any TIF increment and there are others that are well over 10% TIF increment. TIF increment is only one factor to consider in your decision to use the debt service fund. There could be several reasons why the debt service levy fits your county situation. As county officials, it is important that you consider all practical tools that are available in order to adapt to the changing times.

## County Real Estate Web Portal

**What is the inter-affiliate agreement?** The Agreement to Create and Manage an Internet Web Portal for County Real Estate Data (inter-affiliate agreement) is an agreement between the four affiliate organizations of the assessors, auditors, recorders, and treasurers.

**What is its purpose?** The inter-affiliate agreement creates the county real estate web portal (CREW portal) and establishes a new entity to manage it.

**Who wrote the agreement?** Members of the County Real Estate Electronic Government Advisory Committee (CREEGAC) developed the agreement. That committee was established in 2005 by HF 882 for the purpose of developing a plan to integrate the various Internet websites housing county real estate data.

**Who is on the CREEGAC committee?** The legislation creating CREEGAC specified the following members: two treasurers, two recorders, two auditors, and two assessors, as well as a banker, attorney, Realtor, abstractor, credit union representative, and one person appointed by ISAC.

**Why are these four affiliates involved and not other county offices?** These four affiliates were named by the legislation because they represent the offices that have statutory custody of county real estate data.

**Has the agreement been reviewed by an attorney, and do the affiliate organizations have the legal authority to sign it?** Yes. ISAC attorney David Vestal has reviewed the proposed agreement, and his additions and corrections are incorporated in the current draft. Also, he has stated his opinion that the affiliates have the legal authority to enter into a contract or agreement.

**When will the agreement take effect?** The inter-affiliate agreement will take effect upon adoption by each of the affiliate organizations representing the assessors, auditors, recorders, and treasurers. The agreement will be presented for adoption to each of the affiliates during the 2007 spring ISAC meetings.

**What is the term of the agreement?** The inter-affiliate agreement is for a five-year initial term, and will automatically renew for one-year periods.

**Can it be terminated?** Yes. The inter-affiliate agreement can be terminated either by the withdrawal from the agreement by two or more affiliates, or by a vote of the majority of the CREW board, following written notice to the affiliates.

**Will this replace the affiliate websites, like the recorders' Iowa Land Records system?** No. It will exist independently and in addition to the affiliate websites.

**What real estate data will be stored on it?** No affiliate data will be stored – it will always be retrieved on demand. The CREW portal will be linked to the affiliate websites, which is where the county real estate data from their respective members is stored.

**Is it an Internet search engine?** No. The CREW portal will be linked to the search engines at the four affiliate websites.

**So, if it doesn't house any data and has no search engine of its own, what does it do?** The CREW portal will use active links and program logic to: 1) run concurrent searches on the affiliate websites; 2) prioritize and consolidate returned data; 3) display results in an understandable and user-friendly manner; and 4) use frequently asked questions (FAQs) and Help Desk e-mails to communicate with users.

**Why not just link the affiliate websites?** The CREW portal will have links to the four affiliate websites. The functional benefit is that the user can use the CREW portal to do concurrent searches and avoid reentering information such as a parcel ID number.

**Are the four affiliates required to sign it?** No. Both HF 882 and its successor HF 2794 require only that the four affiliates “develop a plan” to integrate their websites.

**So if it's not mandated by law, why should the affiliates participate?** Based on the intent of the two House Files and on conversations with members of the local government committees of both the Iowa House and Senate, it is the opinion of the CREEGAC committee that the legislature will mandate participation if county affiliates do not take action on their own initiative.

**Why not just wait until the legislature requires us to do so?** CREEGAC members believe we will have more control over the outcome and a better finished product by acting on our own initiative.

**Where can I see a copy of the agreement?** Copies of the inter-affiliate agreement in a pdf file format are available at the ISAC website, [www.iowacounties.org](http://www.iowacounties.org).

**Who will be in charge of the CREW portal?** The inter-affiliate agreement creates the County Real Estate Web portal board (CREW board) to govern and manage it. The CREW board will have eight members, two appointed by each of the four affiliate organizations.

**What authority will the CREW board have?** The CREW board will be authorized to enter into contracts, set policies, and adopt budgets for the operation of the CREW portal.

**Why doesn't CREEGAC manage it?** CREEGAC is a creation of HF 882 and does not survive beyond the term of the legislative session. Members of the committee feel strongly that CREEGAC has been effective in self-governing, and has adopted a similar model for the CREW board.

**Where will the funding come to build the CREW portal and who will build it?** CREEGAC, with the co-sponsorship of the ISAC board of directors, applied for and received a \$146,000 IOWA Access grant on March 7. The Department of Administrative Services – Information Technology Enterprise will write the system.

**Will the CREW portal sell data?** No. The CREW board has no authority to sell any data. Affiliate members will retain any and all authority to sell data for which they each serve as legal custodian.

**How are ongoing operations costs funded?** The four affiliates will each pay one-fourth of the cost of operations of the CREW portal. For the first two years, each will pay \$3,000 per year. This should be sufficient since the annual web hosting and maintenance are estimated at \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year, and since the first-year web hosting costs are covered by the grant funding.

**Why not sell data to fund the operations costs?** The consensus of CREEGAC members was that the issues of setting up fee and apportionment schedules and payment mechanisms complicated the operation of the CREW portal and delayed its implementation. They decided to leave these issues to the affiliate members, who already deal with them on their respective websites.

**What effect will there be from the existence of the two treasurers' websites?** Both treasurers' websites will be linked to the CREW portal. Any effect of their co-existence will be transparent to the user, because the program will search the appropriate website and display the resulting data.

**Will confidential information be stored?** No data will be stored on the CREW portal, and only public information will be accessible from it, such as information already available on the treasurers and recorders websites. The only "new" information will be public information from auditors and assessors that do not currently have websites.

**Why not build one website that houses all data from the four affiliates?** First, there is no benefit in doing so, since one of the strengths of the Internet is that multiple data sources can be linked. Second, the CREW portal can efficiently use the existing resources and avoid duplication. Finally, the individual affiliate offices best understand their data, and storage at the affiliate websites reinforces the independence and control of each office and the statutory responsibility each has for custody of its data.

**What will this do to our county website?** The CREW portal will exist in addition to the websites in individual counties. It will be set up to link to them so that a user can "drill-down" to the county website for additional detail. The CREW portal will also be set up to link to the offices of other county affiliates, as well as to certain state agencies.

**I'm in charge of the county IT department. What do I need to do or be aware of?** There is no change to the current operation for recorder and treasurer data. If your auditor participates in the auditors' website, you will need to send a file via ftp of auditor-year data once per day. Talk to your assessor, since the operation for assessors is unique to each county. You may also choose to have a link between your county website and the CREW portal.

**Who gave CREEGAC the authority to require all of these changes?** Currently, there is no requirement - either from CREEGAC or the legislature - for counties or affiliates to participate. The committee's legislative mission was "to develop a plan to integrate" the affiliate websites.

**So why does CREEGAC want to develop the new web portal?** The committee members took the initiative to implement the plan because they believed it was the ultimate intent of the legislature and because they felt it was in the best interests of the public and the county affiliates.

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Cost Advisory Services, Inc.	20
French-Reneker-Associates, Inc.	21
IIW ENGINEERS & SURVEYORS, P.C.	20
Iowa Concrete Paving Association	23
IPAIT	22
JEO Consulting Group, Inc.	20
Jerico Services	21
Kuehl & Payer, Ltd.	21
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Snyder & Associates, Inc.	23
Solutions, Inc.	21
The Sidwell Company	24
Trileaf Corporation	20
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# calendar

## APRIL

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Urbandale)
- 11 CCMS Cost Report Training  
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/  
Urbandale)
- 12 CCMS Support Staff  
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/Urbandale)
- 13 ISAC Legislative Liaisons (ISAC Office)
- 17 CRIS Board (ISAC Office)
- 17 CCMS West Support Group  
(Riverside Grille, Council Bluffs)
- 27 ISAC Board of Directors (ISAC Office)

## MAY

- 3 Wellness Meeting  
(Carroll County Conservation Center,  
Carroll)
- 9-11 Treasurers Conference (Clinton)
- 9-10 GA Retreat  
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 10 CCMS Advanced Case Managers  
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/  
Urbandale)

## JUNE

- 6 District 6 or 2 Legislative Workshop
- 6-7 CCMS Supervisors Training  
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/Urbandale)
- 6-8 ICIT Annual Conference  
(Riverside Casino & Golf Resort)
- 7 District 6 or 2 Legislative Workshop
- 13 ISAC's Scholarship Golf Fundraiser  
(Jester Park Golf Course, Polk County)
- 15 District 3 Legislative Workshop  
(Buena Vista University, Storm Lake)
- 20 District 4 Legislative Workshop (location TBA)
- 20-22 CCMS Fundamentals  
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/Urbandale)
- 21 District 1 Legislative Workshop  
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 22 District 5 Legislative Workshop  
(Indian Hills Community College, Ottumwa)

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