

The Iowa County

Targets Set
For The
Year Ahead



January 2005

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The Iowa County

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Denise Obrecht, EDITOR



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.

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Looking Forward To 2005 As ISAC President

This is an exciting time of year, January always brings with it the opportunity for new beginnings. It is my hope that over this upcoming year we can build upon past successes and continue to forge a strong coalition with the Iowa League of Cities and the state legislators who share in many of our interests.

Advance of Legislative Agenda

The immediate goal that I will have as your president will be to advance our legislative agenda, focusing on our top legislative priorities of property tax reform; distribution of secondary road and farm to market road use tax dollars to counties; auditors' technical elections bill; and involuntary commitments. We, as an association, have spent many months preparing our legislative agenda, which provides a thoughtful reasoned approach to issues that have a significant impact on all of Iowa's counties. It is my hope that county elected officials can work in concert with our respective city council and mayors to influence our respective state legislators to adopt our legislative priorities. Where our agenda's differ or are unique from cities, we as county officials can use our offices to tell our story to our state legislators; winning their support.

Raise Awareness of County Government

I have often felt that county government is the least understood local governmental entity. This is most unfortunate, as counties touch the lives of citizens each and every day. As county officials, we must make sure that our citizens and other elected officials understand how county government touches the lives of all citizens within a county. The services we provide have a significant impact on the quality of life for all the people we serve. The better our citizens and other elected officials understand this, the more poignant our voices will be when we speak to our legislative agenda.

Therefore, I ask you and your colleagues to join me in making this one of our top priorities in the coming year. Let us work together as an association to raise awareness of the importance of county government and the services we provide. Working through our association, we can develop programming for civic classes in our schools so that the citizens of tomorrow have a basic understanding of county government and its services.

We can continue to partner with our sister association, the Iowa League of Cities, to identify common agendas, building on our initiative of intergovernmental decision-making partnerships and increasing the understanding of county government by our city officials.

Those of us who have served as county officials or worked in county government for many years tend to forget how little the public knows about the role and responsibility of county government. As an association, we have an obligation to inform the

By: Angela Connolly

ISAC President &
Polk County Supervisor



public about county services and the role we play in ensuring the quality of life in our local communities. Unless we do, county governments will be seen as an unnecessary layer of government and a target for elimination by those who seek to eliminate the redundancies in local government.

Education of the public helps to justify the expense of local government to the property taxpayers of our counties. This education enables us to advocate for the revenues required to perform the services we are mandated to provide by the state and that are required of us by our constituents. An informed public is better equipped to make decisions about the appropriate level of revenue for local government and the services local governments need to perform.

By educating the public about the services county governments provide, we will increase the effectiveness of our county services. Those who our programs are designed to benefit will be able to access these services sooner and easier. The need for new services and initiatives such as e-commerce will become more apparent to the general public, helping us to convince our state and federal officials to support these initiatives.

Increase Involvement With NACo

My final goal is to increase our involvement with the National Association of Counties (NACo). Just as we have benefited on a state level from working with the Iowa League of Cities, we will benefit on a national level through an increased involvement with our national association. I am asking that each county consider joining NACo to increase our visibility on the national stage. Iowa has a unique opportunity to bring national attention to county issues every four years with the presidential caucuses. Now is the time to begin to plan for a strategy to maximize this opportunity.

By working through NACo, we can more effectively lobby our congressional delegation for the changes and initiatives we seek as county governments. Local county elected officials, working with our ISAC staff and in concert with NACo, can become a more powerful lobby in Washington D.C.

Over the next year, it is my hope that we can build upon the tremendous successes we have already accomplished by focusing on building new alliances, continuing to cooperate with other associations and leagues, and increasing education and public awareness of county government and its importance to the community. I am looking forward to serving you as ISAC President and working with you in achieving what I hope will be many successes for ISAC in 2005!

Impasse or Opportunity

On December 13, 2004, Governor Vilsack certified the results of the 2004 election. So I guess you could say the election is over – some people might say finally over. Whatever your opinion, this election captured the greatest voter interest and participation of any in recent memory. I don't have an explanation for the high voter turnout. Maybe citizens are paying closer attention to their government than some might suspect. I'll leave the election analysis to others and try to focus on what lies ahead – although trying to create a vision based on the results of the Iowa Legislative races could result in a slightly fuzzy vision.

The Iowa Senate, as I am sure you are all aware, is split evenly at 25-25. The Iowa House will have a slim 51-49 Republican majority. These numbers mean that for all practical purposes we have an evenly divided legislative body. It is a rare occurrence when either party could keep all their members locked into a caucus position in previous legislative sessions. So I suspect it will be an equally unlikely occurrence in the next two legislative sessions. Well what does that mean? It means that the Legislature has a choice. It can allow an almost complete impasse to develop – where nothing gets done – or it could take advantage of the greatest opportunity to achieve results in a long time. The greatest victories and successes are often achieved by only the narrowest of margins – often they result when it appears there is the greatest chance for failure. It seems that something in human nature produces a greater effort in difficult times – this could be one of those times when a greater effort could result in important results.

Macro/Micro Level

My theory on why this is a great opportunity is based on logic (my logic anyway). The Iowa Legislature, and probably most legislative bodies for that matter, exists at a macro and micro level. First, what happens at the macro level? Action at this level is directed by the majority and minority caucus leaders. Normally, there is a clear majority and minority during most legislative sessions. And when this clear margin exists, both parties have their respective roles to play in the legislative process. The majority party has to set the priorities (sometimes with input from the minority), chair committees, and provide the votes to approve budgets, programs, etc.

The minority party's role has traditionally been to question everything that the majority does and look for ways to make the majority party look bad. The minority party's goal is to create in the mind of the citizen observing the process enough skepticism that come the next election, they will make the minority party the majority. So what happens at the micro level? This is level where the individual legislator exists. They have been elected to get things done. And, that is exactly what they want to do. While this seems like a simple goal, their problem is convincing at least 50 other representatives or 25 other sena-

By: **William R. Peterson**

ISAC Executive Director



tors to vote with them. Their goal of getting things done forces them into the swirling mess at the macro level. And while they would like to ignore it, they can't, because it provides the mechanism to create a voting majority and allows them to achieve their goals.

So why is this year different? It is different because there is no clear margin for either party. The normal process used to achieve a voting majority won't work. It will clearly take votes from members of both caucuses to pass legislation. Locking up votes in caucus positions will result in impasse – which means nothing will be accomplished. I said earlier that I thought the Legislature was faced with a choice. The fear of failure should trigger recognition that a different approach will have to be taken to achieve results.

The next two years it won't be a political majority but voting majority that matters. This is the chance for legislators operating at the micro level to build voting coalitions and get things done. This is the opportunity to take on tough issues – property tax reform, income tax reform, economic development, school funding, mental health parity, road funding – it is a long list, but we are long past the time when many of these issues should have been addressed. From my view in the cheap seats it all seems pretty simple – we have impasse or we have opportunity. You choose.

Important Role In The Process

I've left out two important players in this process – and have unfairly laid the entire load on the backs of legislators. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that those in the lobby are going to have to ante up. I am not referring to campaign contributions – many make enough of those as it is. I think every group is going to have to (as my friend Tom Bredeweg would say) put some skin in the game. This means being open to taking a different approach to those age-old positions that never seem to change or are open to discussion.

And finally, where is Governor Vilsack going to be in this process? What role will he play? His signature is required on every piece of legislation. Will he take the same approach he has in previous years? I'll let all of you formulate your own answers to those questions. One thing is clear; he should have an important role in the process.

I hope you all had a great holiday season, that the Cyclones and Hawkeye's won their bowl games, and you are ready for an interesting year.

capitol comments

Top Priorities

There are many serious issues facing Iowans that deserve careful consideration by new and returning state lawmakers. In October, the ISAC Board met and approved the reports of the seven ISAC policy steering committees. The Board recommended four items from these reports to be the top legislative priorities for the Association in 2005.

After careful consideration by the county officials present at the ISAC Fall School of Instruction in November, the membership approved the steering committee reports and ratified the top four legislative priorities as proposed by the Board.

Property Tax Reform

For years Iowa citizens have complained to legislative candidates about the need to “do something about property taxes!” A continued shift of tax burden among classes of property has fueled taxpayer demands. Thus, every year, it becomes the most consuming issue for ISAC on Capitol Hill.

During the 2004 interim, ISAC joined with the Iowa League of Cities for a comprehensive review of the property tax system and to create recommendations for reforms to make it more simple, equitable, stable and fair. County and city officials are best suited to understand needed system changes as they must continually balance citizen needs with demands to hold the line on property taxes. A joint proposal dealing with property assessments and valuations, county and city budget and tax systems, and new limitations was issued last October. ISAC recommends it as the top priority for the 2005 legislative session.

Essentially the plan removes local governments from the complicated system of state property tax credits, repeals the “roll-back”, provides for a 50% residential property tax exemption with a valuation floor of \$10,000 and ceiling of \$300,000, and imposes an inflationary index of allowable tax increases for city and county governments. The proposal reduces property tax exemptions to broaden the base so the rate for all taxpayers is lower. Because new limits are imposed on local governments, the plan must be considered as a total package and should be enacted for the benefit of all Iowa property taxpayers.

SRFDAC Report

Over the years, the “Quadrennial Needs Study” used by the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) to base distributions of the county share of the RUTF has become increasingly inefficient. Drastic swings in county allocations were causing so many budgeting problems for supervisors and engineers, a new and more predictable system became necessary.

In the 2002 legislative session, SF 2192 directed that the Secondary Road Fund Advisory Committee (SRFDAC) be created to consider methodologies for distribution of monies in the secondary road fund and the farm-to-market road fund and to make recommendations to the General Assembly. The committee was comprised of members appointed by the Iowa County Engineers Association, the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors and the DOT. A new “Factor Breakdown Method”

By: **John Easter**

ISAC Director of
Intergovernmental Affairs



is recommended by SRFDAC to better distribute shares of the RUTF amongst counties. The proposal includes a five year phase in period. To date, 89 counties have affirmatively adopted resolutions in support of this plan. Six counties actually oppose the plan while the remaining four remain silent. The SRFDAC plan should be approved.

Auditors' Technical Elections Bill

Changing election laws can be a tricky game. Political stakes for the two major political parties have never been greater. Combine that with growing controversies involving the election process itself, it is hard to secure successful passage of legislation making changes in the process. One of the most important functions of the Iowa county auditors is that they are the “Commissioner of Elections” in each county. They are charged with conducting the elections process for any matter that goes before voters at any time.

County auditors in Iowa are a mix of Democrats and Republicans. As a group, however, their legislative priorities are non-partisan. Such is the case with their proposal. This multi-part package contains many non-controversial changes to the elections laws to help make the process operate more efficiently and cost-effective. It has been introduced over the last few years but has always become a vehicle for other elections amendments. In fact, this package was enacted in 2004, but it was vetoed by Governor Vilsack because of a controversial provision attached to it in the final hours of the legislative session. County officials understand the temptation to attach other items to this bill. ISAC respectfully requests that this nonpartisan, non-controversial legislation be enacted without controversial amendments to help county auditors provide the best in elections services for Iowa's voting public.

Court Ordered Placements

In recent years sluggish state revenues have been squeezing judicial system budgets. In an effort to cut costs, district court judges ceased court placements for persons committed under Iowa law. As a result, the responsibility for making placements has fallen to counties by default and essentially has become an unfunded state mandate. Counties are under hard budget times too and these costs add to the property tax burden. It is time that legislation be enacted to clarify the state responsibility for making placements and for funding for an adequate number of beds for persons with mental illness or substance abuse as needed. ISAC will support the creation of a state financed computer tracking system of available beds in the state.

In order for the hard work to be done on these and other critical issues affecting Iowans, politics must yield to statesmanship.

“Amorous Embrace” Leads To Wrongful Termination Suit

Three recent Iowa Court of Appeals decisions should interest county officials.

Olson v. Ballantine: Robert Olson was a Story County employee. In 2001, a construction worker doing work on the Story County Justice Center walked into a room and observed a man and a woman in an “amorous embrace.” The worker apparently later identified Olson as the man involved.

After trying unsuccessfully to secure a written statement from the witness, a Story County employee wrote a memo to the Story County Board of Supervisors about the incident, stating that Olson had been identified by the witness as one of the two individuals engaged in the embrace. Olson was terminated.

Olson sued Story County for wrongful discharge and defamation. The district court granted the County’s motion for summary judgment and dismissed Olson’s claims. He appealed. To support the wrongful discharge claim, Olson asserted that the county’s personnel policies and policy regarding violence in the workplace created a binding employment contract.

The Court of Appeals reviewed the language in an acknowledgement that Olson had signed. It provided in part: “I further understand that these Personnel Policies . . . do not create a contract of employment between myself and Story County. Furthermore, I do not claim this to be so, nor will I ever make a later claim or assertion that there is such a contract between myself and Story County.” Based on this crystal clear language, the Court of Appeals concluded that no contract was created by these policies.

Discharged employees often claim that they are not at-will employees, and that the county’s personnel policies create an employment contract. For this reason, every county should make sure that it has unambiguous language like Story County’s in its personnel policies.

Olson also contended that the statements made by Story County employees implicating him were defamatory. Story County argued that any such statements were entitled to a “qualified privilege,” meaning that the County and its employees are not liable for statements made in the performance of their official duties.

The Court of Appeals agreed, holding that statements made by county employees to the board of supervisors about activities that occur in county facilities were covered by a qualified privilege. But the Court of Appeals said that Olson’s defamation claim against the County should not have been dismissed by the district court. The case was sent back to the trial court for a determination as to whether the qualified privilege was abused.

Whether it was abused depends on whether Story County employees “entertained serious doubts as to the truth” of the allegations against Olson. Although the construction worker was an eyewitness to the embrace, after his original report of the incident he would never confirm what he saw, or who was involved.

By: *David Vestal*

ISAC General Counsel



The Court of Appeals said that summary judgment was not proper because a factual issue remained concerning whether Story County employees acted with reckless disregard in identifying Olson to the Board of Supervisors without strong eyewitness testimony.

The good news here is that the Court of Appeals acknowledged that county employees generally cannot be sued for statements made in the performance of their official duties. But that only applies if the employees subjectively believed that the statements were true. Story County has appealed this decision.

Yohn v. Levik: William Yohn sought damages from the mayor and members of the city council of Buffalo Center. Yohn owned property inside the town limits. City officials determined that the conditions on his property constituted a nuisance. Yohn ignored a notice to abate the nuisance. The city then abated the nuisance and billed Yohn. Yohn sued, claiming that his property was taken without just compensation. The city filed a motion for summary judgment, contending that it was immune due to the discretionary function immunity in Iowa Code §670.4(3).

The district court granted the motion for summary judgment. On appeal, the Iowa Court of Appeals affirmed. The Court of Appeals held that the city’s action in deciding to abate the nuisance was the performance of a discretionary function, entitling the city to immunity from liability for its action.

The decision to abate the nuisance, according to the Court of Appeals, “involved balancing competing social, economic, and political policies, as well as safety considerations.”

Harms v. City of Sibley: The city rezoned property from light industrial to heavy industrial to allow construction of a cement ready-mix plant on property within the city limits.

The plant neighbors sued. The district court found that the plant was a nuisance and held the plant owners liable for damages. The city was also held liable under the theory of taking without just compensation by inverse condemnation. In other words, the city was liable because it rezoned to allow the use.

On appeal, the Court of Appeals reversed, finding that there was no compensable taking by the city. According to the Court of Appeals, adjacent property owners such as the plaintiffs in this case “have no vested right to the continuation of the current zoning.” The Court of Appeals also said there might be a takings issue if the city had denied the land owners of all productive use of their land. But here the plaintiffs could continue to use their land as a residence.

Parting Ponderable: “So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.”

- Christopher Reeve

health check

Happy New Year!

This time of year I feel compelled to address the issue of resolutions. I really think that resolutions are a good thing. Just think of it - a conscious effort to be a better person. How can that be bad? Well, of course, the difficulty is in maintaining the resolution.

There is one aspect of this process that I think we should remember. We think of the coming of the New Year as a new beginning and it is. We have a fresh slate with which to write a new and more productive plan. But, I think we should think of it a little differently. Each new *day* is a new beginning!

In thinking of our resolution process this way, we can make more progress. If you have a bad day, and you will, you can just begin again tomorrow. Don't think of a bad day as a total failure. It is just one day in a series of many. If you eat a few too many of those wonderful cookies your mother makes just do a little better tomorrow. If you don't exercise because you are just too tired, begin again tomorrow!

Here are a few tips that also might help you maximize your efforts:

1. **Set clear and realistic long and short term goals.** You cannot achieve goals you do not set.
2. **Identify those things that help you succeed and use them.**

By: Sandy Longfellow

ISAC Administrative Assistant



Start playing racquetball with your spouse or play active games with your kids.

3. Plan to have obstacles and begin anew. Remember each new day is a new start.

4. Ask friends and family for support and help. There is nothing like an encouraging word.

5. Track your progress. I know it is a pain in the neck to keep that food diary but it does make a difference.

6. Reward yourself when you do well. Don't buy a half gallon of ice cream when you eat all your fruits and veggies for the day, but maybe buy a music CD that you enjoy.

7. Alter your environment to support your change. This means don't keep those chocolates out where you see them all the time; better yet, don't have them around.

8. Keep your goal in mind. Think about why you want to make a change - to be able to more easily play with grandchildren or to be successful in that cancer walk you want to attend.

Good luck and remember, tomorrow is another day!

technology center

Simple Computer Tips For The New Year

Here are just a few computer tips that you may find helpful and can put to use in the New Year. These tips are all very simple to do, once you know where to look and what to click, so let's begin.

Changing Your Computer Screen's Resolution: To begin, select "Control Panel" from your "Start" button and from the "Control Panel", you will need to select "Display." Once "Display" is selected, select "Settings." Under "Screen Resolution" move the slider until the resolution is the desired sized. Remember the larger the number, the smaller the content will appear on your screen and vice versa. Once you select the size you prefer, click "Apply" and "OK." Your screen's resolution will now remain the newly selected size.

How to "Pin" a Program to Your Start Menu: You will need to select the program you wish to appear on the display located at the top of your start menu. Once selected, perform a right click and from the menu that appears select "Pin to Start Menu." Your program will now appear on the start menu list.

How to Create a Favorite for a Website: In Internet Explorer, you will need to bring up the website that you wish to add to your "Favorites", once you have the website on your computer screen, select "Favorites" and "Add to Favorites."

By: Tammy Norman

ISAC Technical Services Coordinator



In other programs, it is basically the same method but may be entitled differently.

How to Create a Shortcut on Your Desktop: Select the program or document

you wish to create a shortcut for. Once selected, perform a right click and select "Send to Desktop (create shortcut)" and now a shortcut to the program or document has been added to your desktop.

Each of these tips may seem extremely simple; however, if you do not know the procedure, they can produce frustration. One last tip, remember to right click on objects; many shortcuts and menu options appear when you perform a right click and will aid you in the use of your computer.

Website Note: Check out the new directory pages in mid-January! The county directory pages will be updated online and contain all the newly elected county officials. If you would like to order a hard copy, you may do so for the cost of \$15 for our members and \$25 for non-members. Please forward any items that you would like addressed in this column to my attention at tnorman@iowacounties.org or by calling 515-244-7181. Until next month, keep clicking!

New CCMS Staff Member

Hello to all! I am Jackie Olson Leech and joined ISAC as a County Case Management Specialist on November 29. I am thrilled for the opportunity to be a part of the CCMS team. In September, I was informed that CCMS was looking to expand their team. I decided to update my resume and apply for this position. I have always thought highly of the technical assistance provided by the CCMS staff, whom I first became acquainted with in 1995 as a new case manager at Muscatine County Community Services. Through the years as a case manager, the CCMS staff was always there to provide me with technical assistance and training, so that I was able to provide quality case management services to those I served. I am honored to be asked to join the CCMS team and look forward to serving case managers around the state in this capacity.

I earned my BA degree at Drake University in 1988, majoring in Sociology, and I am a licensed social worker. I have over 20 years of human services experience in a wide variety of settings and population groups. I have been a case manager for eight of these years. Prior to accepting this position, I worked for almost three years at ChildServe as a case manager. It was diffi-

By: Jackie Olson Leech

ISAC Case Management
Specialist



cult to say goodbye to my co-workers and consumers, as I loved being a case manager at ChildServe. I also knew that because of my love for case management and my past work experiences, I could be influential in serving persons diagnosed with a disability through training of their case managers, as a Case Management Specialist with ISAC.

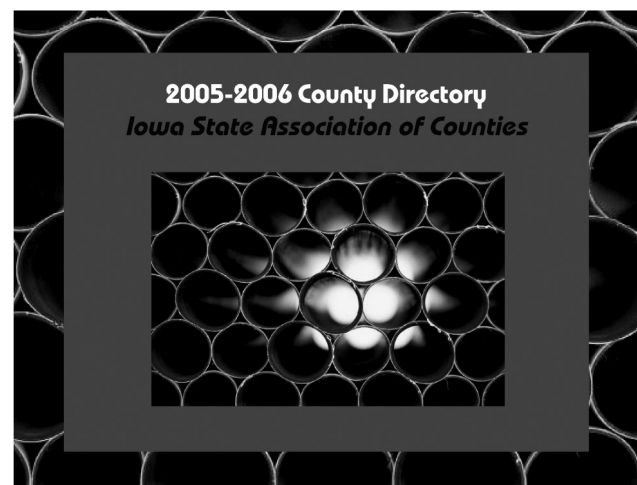
I have lived in the Des Moines area for most of my life and attended Urbandale High School. My husband Chris and I have been married for one year (our anniversary was on November 29, so I will never forget my hire date with ISAC) and we recently sold our home and are looking for a larger home to purchase. Chris's son, Tyler, is 11 and he lives with us part time and is a joy in our lives. We have two cats, Belle and Cleo, who also keep us entertained.

During this first week of employment at ISAC, I am impressed with the friendliness of the ISAC staff and look forward to getting to know everyone better. I hope you have a great holiday season!

2005-2006 County Directory Available January 19

The 2005-2006 ISAC County Directory will be for sale at the New County Officers School January 19, 2005. Order forms are also available on ISAC's website (www.iowacounties.org) under 'County Information.' The directories will be sold for \$15 to county officials, \$25 to non-county officials.

The ISAC County Directory is the most detailed county directory in Iowa because it contains the phone number, address, fax number, email address, and party affiliation for every county department head in all 99 counties. The directory also includes ISAC services, county seats, county officials by county and in alphabetical order, key state phone numbers and congressional delegation contact information.



2004 ISAC Innovation Award Winners Announced

Innovative and collaborative, two words that describe counties, especially during tough economic times. ISAC's Innovation Award Program provides the opportunity for officials and staff of counties in Iowa to receive appropriate recognition by their peers and the public for superior and innovative efforts in their profession. Through this program counties can share the best public service ideas in Iowa, demonstrating that county government public servants are progressive, competent and caring.

Four awards were given this year to outstanding projects that made their county more service oriented, resulted in monetary savings for their county, brought about cooperation with another entity, or solved a problem in a courthouse.

Linn County Special Needs-Medically Fragile Emergency Shelter Program

The goal of this project was to address the emergency needs of the medically fragile. The medically fragile population lives in their own homes but rely on electrically powered medical assistance devices to maintain a level of health stability. Many of these people have some limited amount of back up or battery reserve, but most cannot go beyond 6-12 hours without recharging or changing batteries. This portion of the population is not eligible for access to regular Red Cross emergency shelters and they are generally not ill enough for hospital admission.

Responsibilities: Since the Special Needs/Medically Fragile Shelter is not designed to provide individual medical care, personal responsibility is essential. Persons using the shelter will be required to bring with them:

- A caregiver if needed
- Equipped medical devices
- Medicines
- Special dietary needs

Due to limited space only patients and their designated care providers will be admitted to this Shelter.

NOTE: No pets are authorized in the shelter except dedicated service animals such as Seeing Eye Dogs. Caregivers are responsible for the needs of the service animal.

A Shelter for the Medically Fragile

What would happen to you or a loved one who is dependent on an electrically powered medical assistance device if our community suffered a wide spread extended loss of power such as experienced during Hurricane Isabel in the fall of 2003?

Now thanks to a unique community partnership, a Special Needs/Medically Fragile Shelter has been established to provide a means for persons with a critical need for electricity to continue their treatment even in times of disaster.

Contact the Linn County Emergency Management Agency at 319-363-7400 for more information on this free and confidential service.

Announcing the Linn County Special Needs/Medically Fragile Shelter

A Shelter program designed to be used during emergency situations, for persons defined as being "Medically Fragile".

This population includes those persons living at home, who have a critical need for electricity to either to maintain their medical equipment to avoid hospitalization.

A Special Needs Advisory Council

was formed to implement the Special Needs/Medically Fragile Shelter Program. Committee members were from the Linn County Emergency Management agency, Linn County Public Health, St. Luke's Hospital, Mercy Medical Center, Linn County Medical Society, Linn County Community Health Free Clinic, Grant Wood Area Chapter, American Red Cross, Alliant Energy and Duane Arnold Energy Center.

The advisory council addressed the following: site selection for a shelter, defining who would be eligible, operation of the shelter, communications (which included a brochure), registration of those with special needs, staff descriptions, and supply list.

The cost of implementing the Special Needs/Medically Fragile Shelter Program was minimal, consisting of staff time and

office supplies. Linn County will initially have at least one and potentially several more shelters to meet the needs of the medically fragile. The shelters will be set up in all quadrants of the community and will be handicapped accessible.

For further information contact Lisa Gibney, Linn County Emergency Management Liaison Officer, 319-363-2671.

Palo Alto County Driver's License Issuance

In 2003, the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced their intentions to reduce the number of driver's license stations in the state. Since the station in Emmetsburg would be affected, county officials in Palo Alto County began to think about how to accomplish putting a station in their county, maintained by county officials instead of the DOT.

Palo Alto County Sheriff Russ Jergens and Treasurer Kathleen Thompson began talking about how they could share the duties of a station, serve the county citizens and save money at the same time.



Each office sent two employees to the Spencer Driver's License office to learn procedures and protocol for the issuance of licenses. The sheriff's office performs the physical driving exams and re-exams and the treasurer's office performs the daily clerical testing and actual issuance of the license. By combining the services Palo Alto County was able to avoid hiring two or three additional employees. With the change, citizens will be able to renew licenses three days a week (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) and have the convenience of a driver's license station in Emmetsburg (closest driver's license station from Emmetsburg 25 miles away).

Sheriff Russ Jergens and Treasurer Kathleen Thompson of Palo Alto County announcing their joint drivers' licensing program. Photo taken by Dan Voigt, Emmetsburg Publishing Company.

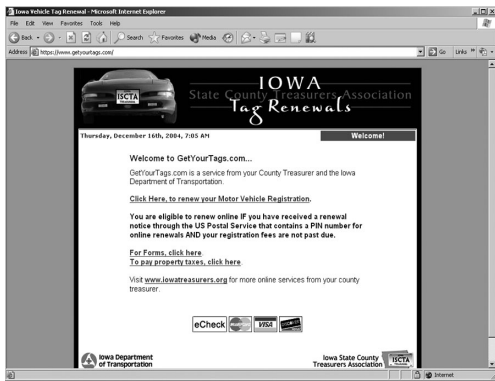
Sheriff Jergens and Treasurer Thompson feel this "first in the state program" is good not only for the county residents but also an asset for their employees who have developed an appreciation for the duties of each office.

For further information contact Kathleen Thompson, Palo Alto County Treasurer, 712-852-3844.

Iowa State County Treasurers' Association

www.GetYourTags.com

The Iowa State County Treasurers Association conducted a statewide survey of 29,296 vehicle owners renewing motor vehicle registrations in December 2000. The survey responses identified a significant interest in online vehicle renewals, as well as a desire to be able to renew vehicles using major credit cards and electronic checks. An opportunity to assist the public and the



DOT, Iowa State County Treasurers Association (ISCTA) and Iowa Interactive to examine the possibilities. Following a two-year cycle of study and project definition, work began on system development at Iowa Interactive. A team representing four county treasurer's offices was instrumental in this project. They were Polk, Winneshiek, Woodbury and Scott counties. This team worked to define the project, develop functional specifications, monitor development, extensively test the online renewal service, market the service and launch a pilot project in January 2004. Following a successful pilot program, the service was expanded to all 99 counties in March and April 2004. In a five month period since all counties went live and with no statewide marketing to date, a total of 25,641 vehicles have been renewed online.

The project was developed without the use of county or state funds. ISCTA utilized its contract with Iowa Interactive to develop www.GetYourTags.com, building upon a relationship set in place to develop the www.IowaTreasurers.org portal for all county treasurers, and the treasurers' online property tax payment service. Iowa Interactive absorbed the development costs of the online service by enabling a service delivery fee that is generated with every electronic transaction through the portal.

As online renewals and associate services continue to grow, each county will gain significant processing efficiencies from a fully automated system (2,137 hours of staff time saved for treasurers so far). Citizens are now provided the convenience of 24/7 services with enhanced payment options.

For further information contact Lana Taylor, Poweshiek County Treasurer; 641-623-5128.

Story County Damage Assessment 2004

Often necessity becomes the mother of invention. This is the case with our next award winner. On May 22, 2004, disaster struck Story County. Flooding was widespread and many private properties in the county were damaged by heavy rains. The citizens were devastated and panic swept through the communities just like the floodwaters. The questions arose: Where do I get help? How can I afford to clean up the mess? What about the damage to my home, my business and my property?

Story County had already addressed these questions through

treasurer's office by online payment services for tag renewals and other business was recognized.

A partnership was formed between the

planning, training, and the coordination of a county-wide disaster plan and assessment team. With funding always an issue, Lori Morrissey, Story County Emergency Management Coordinator, formed a Damage Assessment Team with the foresight to train teams in several county departments to assist when disaster strikes and the budget doesn't allow for "specialized staff." She said, "In other words, the staff you have has to do or it doesn't get done." Department heads from the offices of planning & zoning, assessor, conservation and engineer were willing to provide the staff members to create the Damage Assessment Team, knowing that additional compensation would not be a possibility for their staff and their usual duties would have to be put aside when disaster struck. Additional assistance and information was provided by city officials and fire departments.

On May 23, the Damage Assessment Team hit the road and spread out throughout the county to document the damage and take photos. Planning & Zoning officials visited approximately 250 properties to assess damage in three days. The conservation office checked 2,600 acres of county property for damages. The engineer's office traveled approximately 400 miles of county roads to check damages, including about 225 sites where roads were damaged. All documentation was returned to the Planning and Zoning office where it was compiled for FEMA, using GIS capabilities to provide linked visual documentation to each property with damage.

Information Technology assisted emergency management with routine website/media updates and public outreach. Email groups were established with

public officials and the media to provide accurate and up-to-date disaster information. County sanitarian and emergency management websites also provided health, safety, and clean-up information to the public. The Damage Assessment Team also made recommendations that will be useful in the future addressing such issues as training, volunteers, brochures, signage and establishing storm spotters. Leanne Harter, Story County Planning & Zoning Director, said, "Without the information that the Damage Assessment teams gathered, Story County residents would not have received over \$1 million in disaster relief."

For further information contact Leanne Harter, Story County Planning & Zoning Director; 515-382-7247.



Leanne Harter, Director of Planning and Zoning; Lori Morrissey, Emergency Management Director; and Natalie Herrington, Code Enforcement Office, accept the ISAC Innovation Award from ISAC President J. Patrick White.

ISAC brief

ISAC Spring School 2005

By: Jerri Noboa

ISAC Meetings Administrator



Though it seems like we just finished the ISAC Fall School of Instruction, it is now time to update you on the ISAC Spring School of Instruction which will be held March 16-18, 2005 at the Downtown Marriott and Renaissance Savery in Des Moines.

There were many issues that came out of the fall school conference evaluations, i.e. parking, hotel not willing to bill the county, too far to walk between the hotels, exhibitors only in one hotel, coffee breaks only in one hotel and I-235 construction. I will be meeting next week with the hotels to work on some of these problems.

Parking & Construction

What I can discuss at this time, and will keep you updated on each month, is parking and construction. I agree it is a mess right now, but when I-235 is done it will be a breeze to get to downtown Des Moines. Once the new parking garage is rebuilt at Seventh & Mulberry, which will be connected to the skywalk, the parking situation will be much easier (completed in time for our Fall School).

I want everyone to keep in mind that our spring conference will be occurring the same time in Des Moines as the High School Boys Basketball Tournament - parking will be a major concern. I am asking the Marriott to have more valet parking spots available. The hotel has 50 spots below the hotel and can use 130 other spots across the street. The majority of the spots in parking garages are taken by daily commuters, so I would recommend arriving in Des Moines between 6pm-7am for maximum ease in finding parking close to the hotels. I'll discuss some of the other parking options next month.

Hotel Reservations

The Marriott and Savery are offering rates of \$69/flat with suites at \$175. The Hotel Fort Des Moines' rates are \$69/flat with suites at \$89. Hotel reservations can be made at the Marriott (700 Grand Ave, 515-245-5500/800-514-4681), Renaissance Savery (401 Locust, 515-244-2151) and Hotel Fort Des Moines (1000 Walnut, 515-243-1161/800-532-1466).

The following affiliates will be meeting at the Marriott: Community Services Conservation, Emergency Management, Engineers, IT, Recorders and Supervisors. The following affiliates will be meeting at the Renaissance Savery: Auditors, Assessors, Public Health Nurses, Sheriffs, Treasurers and Zoning.

Tentative Agenda

This is the tentative agenda planned for the ISAC Spring School. We are still working out the details surrounding the legislative reception, dance and keynote speaker. I will keep you posted.

Wednesday, March 16

7:30am - 4:30pm ISAC Registration - Marriott (Exhibit Area)
9am - Noon ISAC Seminars - Marriott
Noon - 1:30pm CCMS Luncheon - Marriott
1:30pm - 4:30pm Affiliate Time
4:30pm - 8pm Committee Meetings
5:30pm - 7:30pm Hospitality Rooms
6pm - 7:30pm ISAC Board/Staff Dinner
8pm - 9pm Legislative Reception
9pm - Midnight ISAC Dance

Thursday, March 17

7:30am - 4:30pm ISAC Registration - Marriott (Exhibit Area)
7:30am - 8:30am Coffee & Rolls with Exhibitors
8:30am - 10:30am ISAC General Session/Business Meeting
10:30am - 11am Break (Exhibit Area)
10:30am - 4:30pm Affiliate Time
2pm - 2:30pm Break (Exhibit Area)
4:30pm - 5:30pm President's Reception Sponsored by Exhibitors (Exhibit Area)
Dessert/Ice Cream Social & Vendor Drawing
5:30pm - 9pm Hospitality Rooms

Friday, March 18

8am - Noon Affiliate Time
9am - 3pm Local Government Sharing Workshop - Marriott

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New County Officers School**
www.iowacounties.org

Training For All County Officials - January 19

Affiliate Training - January 20
(supervisors, sheriffs, auditors, treasurers and general assistance)

An excellent opportunity for incumbent county officials to brush up on important county subjects! Training held at the Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines.

Employers Are Liable For Cell Phone Use

The use of cell phones around the country has grown to enormous proportions. According to the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, the estimated number of cell phone subscribers was more than 158 million in December 2003, an increase of nearly 20 million from the year before. The permeation of cell phones has created some great benefits, such as convenience.

Employees are now able to conduct business over their cell phones, outside of the office and outside of normal business hours. The convenience of cell phones for this use cannot be overstated, but employers, including governments, must be careful about how they regulate cell phone use among employees in light of a few recent court decisions.

Courts across the country have now ruled that employers could be liable for injuries and accidents caused by employees using their cell phones for business purposes while driving in a motor vehicle.

Recently, the large investment firm Smith Barney was ordered to pay more than \$500,000 to settle a wrongful death suit when an employee was involved in a car accident. Even though it occurred on a Saturday night, outside of normal business hours and while the employee was driving to a restaurant, he was conducting business on his cell phone. The employee dropped the phone and ran a red light when trying to pick it up. The court found that the employer was liable since the employee was conducting business.

Another case involved a law firm in Virginia. An associate at the law firm was driving home one evening, and struck and killed a young girl on the side of the road. The complaint alleged that she was on her cell phone at or near the time of the accident making business-related calls. The firm settled out of court.

The new rash of liability rulings is not only aimed at the private sector. In 2001, the State of Hawaii was ordered to pay \$1.5 million in damages when a state teacher caused an accident while talking on a cell phone on the way to work.

While many employers encourage (or at least do not discourage) the use of cell phones to conduct business outside of the office, these rulings can have far-reaching effects for the employers, including governments, around the country. How can employers respond to this development?

Tips for Employers

One suggestion would be to require the employees to follow local or state law regarding cell phone use in the car. Many jurisdictions, including New York and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws banning the use of cell phones while driving unless they are used as a hands-free device.

The employees must be educated as to their local laws pertaining to cell phone usage and the employer could be a vehicle for that education campaign. Even if there is no local ban on cell phones while driving, it may be useful to the employer to adopt a similar regulation for its own employees.

Many companies have begun to implement their own cell phone use policy. If the employer is reluctant to ban cell phone use in cars as a general rule, many have implemented a policy that requires the employee to pull safely off the road to conduct business over the phone, or requiring the use of the hands-free device, even if the local regulations do not require such measures. Still others have implemented training for employees on the use of cell phones, and keeping them informed of local and national developments in this area.

Cell phones, and wireless communication in general, have become an integral and essential form of communication in the United States, but employers must be knowledgeable about the actions of their employees. For employers, what they don't know can hurt them.

For further information contact Joseph Hansen, NACo research associate, at jhansen@naco.org or (202) 393-6226.

NACo Unveils "Web Stickers" for Members and Award Winner's Use on Websites

Get the recognition you deserve! Member counties of NACo, 100% NACo membership states, as well as awards program winners can now proudly display their recognition on their website through NACo's web sticker program. Much like a sticker that you see on a conference attendee badge, NACo is making available electronic files that allow for the posting of an image that looks like a sticker anywhere on a county website. The images are "web friendly" and ready for easy posting.

To request copies of these images, please contact NACo's Andrew Goldschmidt, agoldschmidt@naco.org or Emily Landsman, elandsman@naco.org. You may also call 202-393-NACO (6226) and ask for membership.



IFA's State Housing Trust Fund Supports Local Affordable Housing Activities

Ask Rick Schloemer what's new with affordable housing in Scott County, and then stand back. "Last fall, the Scott County Housing Council awarded \$123,260 in grants and \$42,000 in loans to seven different nonprofit housing service providers and developers," said Schloemer, SCHS Executive Director. "The funds will go to rehabilitate or build 67 units of affordable housing that range from shelter to permanent supportive housing to owner-occupied housing to new construction. More than \$90,000 worth of awards is going to projects that serve households earning less than 30% of the area median income. The \$165,260 awarded will leverage another \$737,422 in construction and rehabilitation costs, for a ratio of 4.5 to 1 and a cost per unit of roughly \$2,500."

Schloemer's enthusiasm about affordable housing accomplishments is not unique. In dozens of counties across the state, officials are celebrating the successes of local housing trust funds. And other counties are getting on board, especially with the availability of state funding for local housing trust funds.

The Iowa Finance Authority will award \$1.8 million from its State Housing Trust Fund in 2005 – \$1 million to local housing trust funds and \$800,000 to project-based housing programs. Applications for the initial funding round are due February 11 (though local housing trust funds must be certified by IFA prior to application).

The purpose of the State Housing Trust Fund, authorized by Iowa Code §16.181, is to support the development and preservation of affordable housing for low-income Iowans. Sixty percent of funds available in the State Housing Trust Fund are allocated to local housing trust funds and 40% of the funds are allocated to project-based housing programs.

The goal of the local housing trust fund component of the fund is to provide financial assistance to local housing trust funds so they can provide additional affordable owner-occupied or rental housing (through production or rehabilitation), infrastructure, transitional housing, homeless shelters, capacity building or other purposes. Local housing trust funds must have a local governing board recognized by a city, county, council of governments or regional officials as the board responsible for coordinating local housing programs.

IFA has a process in place to certify local housing trust funds; certification is required before a local housing trust fund is eligible to apply for the State Housing Trust Fund. Local housing trust funds covering a population of 50,000 can apply for up to \$200,000; those with populations less than 50,000 can apply for up to \$100,000. Only local housing trust funds legally formed after July 1, 2003 that have not previously received State Housing Trust Fund funding are eligible to apply for the initial 2005 funding round. If additional funds remain, applications will be

By: Monica Fischer, Iowa Finance Authority

County Housing Trust Fund Activities in 2004

In the 2004 funding round of the State Housing Trust Fund, IFA awarded \$1,225,000 to local housing trust funds and \$550,000 to project-based housing programs. Here's what some Iowa counties received:

- **Council of Government Housing, Inc.** was awarded \$100,000 to capitalize a fund for grants and loans for projects serving low- and extremely low-income people in Audubon, Carroll, Crawford, Green, Guthrie and Sac counties.
- **Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County** was awarded \$200,000 for grants and loans for projects meeting the housing needs of low- and very-low income people.
- **Iowa Northland Regional Housing Council** was awarded \$125,000 to establish a program in Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Chickasaw and Grundy counties (excluding Cedar Falls and Waterloo) to acquire and demolish dilapidated structures and prepare sites for new construction of single-family homes and for grants and loans to housing providers serving extremely low-income people.
- **Scott County Housing Council** was awarded \$200,000 to provide grants and loans to nonprofit housing agencies and developers for the construction and rehabilitation of single-family and multifamily housing.
- **Operation Threshold** was awarded \$200,000 to create a revolving loan pool in Black Hawk County for capacity building, transitional housing, homeless services and affordable housing development by nonprofit providers.
- **Polk County Housing Trust Fund** was awarded \$200,000 for the development of affordable housing units and to fund operating expenses and housing supportive services of six private, nonprofit affordable housing organizations.

accepted from local housing trust funds that received funding in 2004.

The goal of the project-based housing program component of the fund is to support the development and preservation of affordable single- and multifamily housing units. Eligible applicants include cities and counties, nonprofit and for-profit housing development organizations, recognized neighborhood associations, economic development organizations, homeless service providers, transitional housing providers and domestic violence shelters. The maximum project-based housing program award is \$90,000.

For more information about the State Housing Trust Fund, contact IFA Housing Specialist Sharon Murphy at 515-242-4904 sharon.murphy@ifa.state.ia.us.

EPA Grants Available For Clean-Up of Brownfields

By: Jim Halverson, Howard R. Green Company

Over the past few years, there has been a strong movement toward the cleanup of brownfields sites – areas contaminated by former industrial properties. To help communities afford this cleanup, and to redevelop brownfields areas into aesthetically pleasing, useful properties, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established several funding programs.

This funding does not come easily, as cities and counties are required to participate in an extensive, detailed application process to receive money. For organizations new to the funding application process, this money can seem unattainable.

Writing a successful grant application is not a quick or easy task. While there is a considerable amount of homework that must be completed before you can even begin to prepare the proposal, once you are comfortable with the application, the process becomes manageable.

There are three EPA grants available to communities seeking funding for the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields sites: the Brownfields Assessment Grant Program, the Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Program and the Cleanup Grant. Each grant has a different set of requirements and criteria for the distribution of funds. Becoming familiar with the criteria is an essential first step, not only because it will help you successfully secure the funds you need, but knowledge of the intricacies of each grant's requirements will help you determine which of the EPA's grants is the best fit for your community.

Because so many communities will be competing for funding in the coming year, getting a leg up on your competition is a must. Following these simple do's and don'ts will help arm you as you battle it out with other cities for these coveted grants.

Do...

- become familiar with the application in advance, and start early so you can be sure that all of the criteria will be met.
- contact your EPA representative early to avoid any missteps.
- carefully document everything you do in your pre-application work (e.g. public involvement meeting, notices, etc.).
- involve as many people and organizations as possible to show community involvement and dedication to the project.
- develop a specific plan, because you'll be required to outline many of your proposed steps in the application.
- include your past experience with grant management in the application.
- link your project with the EPA's priorities (e.g. green building, smart growth, etc.).
- be able to show the EPA exactly how you intend to use the money.
- provide perspective about how pervasive the brownfields are in your community and why the area is important.

Don't...

- let yourself be intimidated by the application process.
- procrastinate the preplanning.
- be afraid to show your passion for the project in your application.
- forget to allocate some of the funds in your budget to some of the most obvious tasks (e.g. establishing the grant, promoting the program, and servicing loans).
- list any references that you are not comfortable having the EPA contact.
- be vague because the EPA will want to know that you have thought through the project from pre-planning to finish.
- leave out any details regarding the cleanup's benefit to the community.
- neglect your communications responsibilities; hold public meetings, post information to a dedicated website and keep a copy of the application on file at the library.

The EPA grant process can be intimidating, and many counties look to consultants for help wading through the process. Partnering with these experts can give you the right combination of thorough research, smart strategy and concise writing to turn you into one of the successful professionals who are reshaping this country, one brownfields project at a time. Visit the EPA's website at www.epa.gov for further information.



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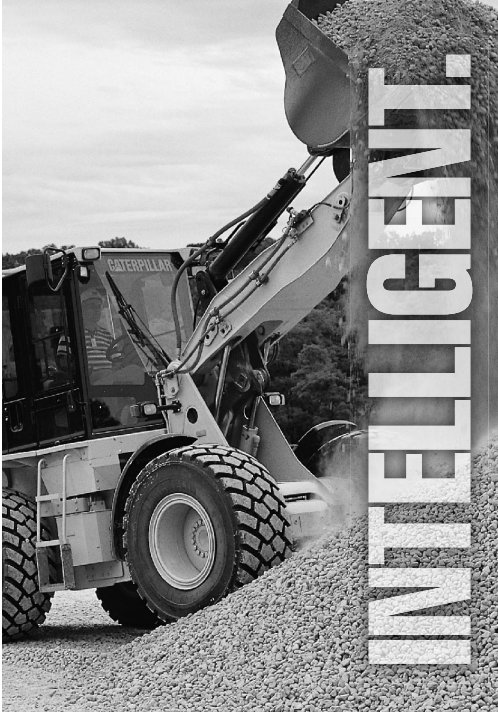
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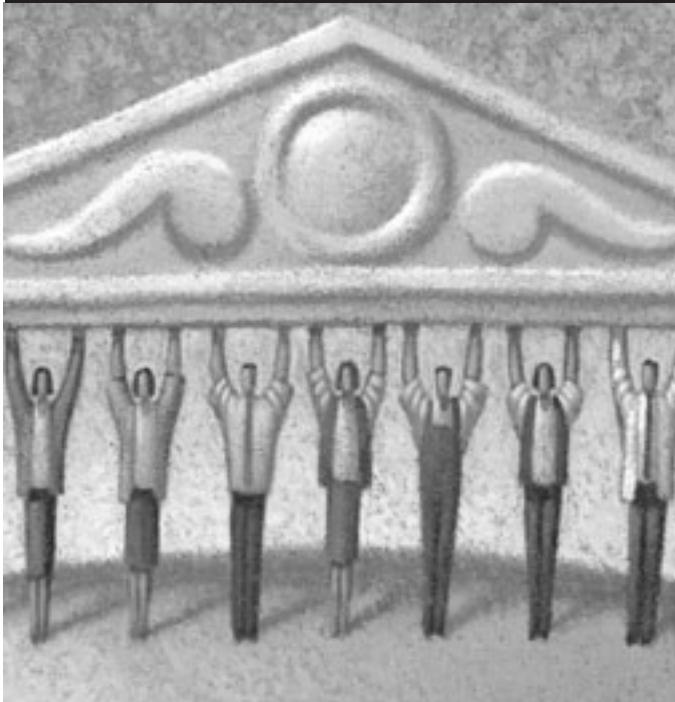
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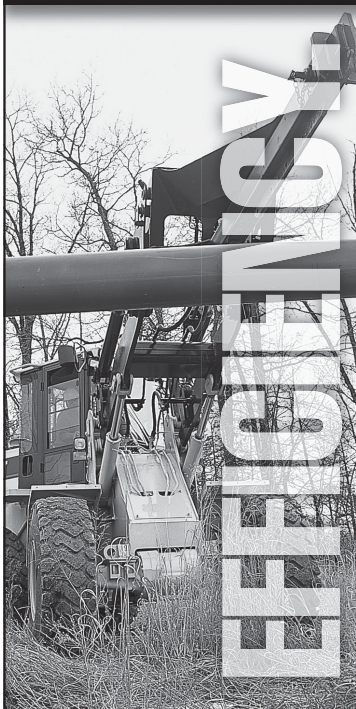
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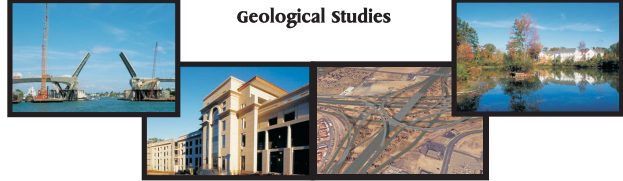
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(319) 291-2077 • FAX (319) 291-8628

Suite 4100 • One North LaSalle St. • Chicago, IL 60602
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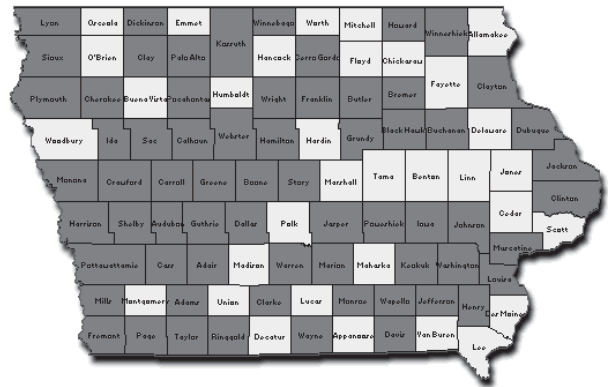
Quote of the Month:

*Be a good listener. Your ears
will never get you in trouble.
- Frank Tyger*

“It’s not that other coverage providers won’t do what we do. It’s just that they can’t.”



County Risk Management Services, Inc. (CRMS) has provided marketing services for the Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP) and the Iowa Municipalities Workers Compensation Association (IMWCA) since 1987.



Its principals (clockwise from lower center: Clarence Hoffman, Fred Dolezal, Russ Sporer, Ken Bilbrey) work with local insurance agents across the state to introduce and represent these programs to Iowa Counties. Currently, sixty-three counties are represented by CRMS and participate in one or both programs.

The IMWCA was formed in 1981 to offer workers compensation and employers liability coverage to Iowa public entities. Current membership stands at 474 members (64 counties). ICAP’s inception was 1986. ICAP provides property and casualty coverages to 500 members (63 counties).

What We Can Do That They Can’t

- *Provide Member ownership
- *Offer coverages specifically designed for Iowa public entities
- *Represent the only program that has not increased casualty rates since 1986
- *Offer only programs endorsed by the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC)

Both programs offer their coverages to Iowa counties, cities and 28E organizations. Both are specifically designed for Iowa public entities.



For Additional Information, call County Risk Management Services at 800-397-4947

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JANUARY

- 5 CCMS Northwest Support Group
(Season's Center, Spencer)
- 11 CCMS Administrators
(Hilton Garden Inn, Des Moines/Urbandale)
- 12 CRIS Board of Directors (ISAC Office)
- 13 CCMS North Central Support Group
(Bennigan's, Clear Lake)
- 13 CCMS West Support Group
(SW Iowa Mental Health Center, Atlantic)
- 19-20 New County Officers School
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 20 CCMS Board of Directors
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 20 Supervisors Executive Board
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 21 Statewide Supervisors Meeting
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 28 ISAC Board of Directors (ISAC Office)

FEBRUARY

- 17 ISAC Executive Board (ISAC Office)
- 24-25 ISAC Board of Directors (ISAC Office)

MARCH

- 2-4 CCMS Fundamentals
(Baymont Conference Center, DM))
- 4-8 NACo Legislative Conference
(Washington DC)
- 16 CCMS Board of Directors (Marriott, DM)
- 16-18 ISAC Spring School
(Marriott & Renaissance Savery, DM)

APRIL

- 12 CCMS Administrators/Support Staff Meeting
(Baymont Conference Center, DM))
- 13 CCMS Cost Report Training (location TBA)
- 27 ISAC Board of Directors & League of Cities
Board of Directors Dinner/Meeting
- 28 ISAC Board of Directors (ISAC Office)

MAY

- 12 CCMS Advanced Case Manager
(Hilton Garen Inn, Des Moines/Urbandale)

JUNE

- 7-8 CCMS Supervisors Training (location TBA)
- 15-17 Information Technology Annual Conference
(Cedar Rapids)
- 22-24 CCMS Fundamentals (location TBA)

JULY

- 12 CCMS Administrators (location TBA)
- 13 ISAC Board of Directors (ISAC Office)
- 15-19 NACo Annual Conference (Hawaii)

AUGUST

- 4-5 Supervisors Executive Board (Atlantic area)
- 10-12 CCMS Annual Conference
(Holiday Inn Airport, DM)
- 11-13 Recorders Annual Conference
(Grand Harbor Resort, Dubuque)

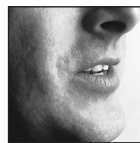
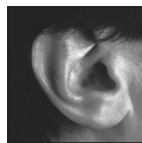
For agendas or additional information on any of the above listed meetings please visit our website at www.iowacounties.org and click on 'Upcoming Events!' If you have any questions about the meetings listed above, please contact Jerri at (515) 244-7181 or by email at jnboa@iowacounties.org.

1.800.707.4248

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