

The Excellence in Action Award program is a competitive awards program that seeks to identify and recognize innovative county government employees, programs, and ISAC affiliates. Please encourage all county departments to apply.

CRITERIA

- Programs nominated must do one or more of the following:
 - Offer a new service to county residents, fill gaps in the availability of existing services, or tap new revenue sources.
 - Improve the administration or enhance the cost effectiveness of an existing county government program.
 - Upgrade the working conditions or level of training for county employees.
 - Enhance the level of citizen participation in, or the understanding of, government programs.
 - Provide information that facilitates effective public policy making.
 - Promote intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems.
 - Provide a model from which other counties or affiliates may learn.
- Nominated individual must demonstrate exemplary service to citizens or staff or stakeholders.

JUDGING

CoSTAR will rate each application based on the following seven attributes: creativity, innovation, cost savings, replication, leadership, increased efficiency, cooperation with others, and perseverance.

GUIDELINES

- Nominated programs must have become operational after January 1, 2014.
- Individual nominations should reflect the individual actions of the last 24 months.
- Nomination should be made using the application form below.
- A narrative of the county program or individual's action must be included; please limit to three pages.

AWARD PRESENTATION

Awards will be presented at the 2015 ISAC Fall School of Instruction held on November 18-20, 2015, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The winners will receive a special ribbon to be worn on their nametags. Winners will be recognized on the ISAC website and in a news release sent to statewide media. ISAC staff members will also attend the board of supervisors meeting to present the award.

QUESTIONS

Contact Robin Harlow, ISAC's Innovation and Research Manager at 515.539.7006 or rharlow@iowacounties.org.

NOMINATION FORM

- Attach a narrative of the county improvement/project/program/individual (three-page limit).
- Return all nominations by **May 1, 2015 (postmarked date)** to:
Iowa State Association of Counties
Attn: Robin Harlow
5500 Westown Parkway, Suite 190
West Des Moines, IA 50266.
- OR email your application form (containing all the information on the form below) to Robin Harlow.

Please fill out each field completely.

Please indicate nomination type: Individual Program

Name of individual/program: Iowa Assoc. of County Conservation County or affiliate: Buchanan County - County Conservation Directors Association

Name of nominator: Dan Cohen Title: Executive Director, Buchanan County Conservation Board

Nominator's phone: 319-636-2617 Nominator's email: bccbdan@iowatelecom.net

IOWA'S "COUNTY CONSERVATION PORTAL" ON MYCOUNTYPARKS.COM

Many of our "seasoned" county conservation employees remember the discussions in the mid-1980s about how to improve our networking and sharing of ideas....."Wouldn't it be great if there was some kind of central repository for best practices, ideas and other success stories within county conservation across the state that we could all share?" It would be a couple of decades and significant advancements in technology before those concepts could be realized.

Primitive, individual county conservation websites began to emerge in the late 1990s, and by 2003-2004 technological advances and upgraded computers were allowing county conservation boards better access to the internet, website development and management opportunities. An internal survey in late 2008 yielded the following status of county conservation board's presence on the new internet:

- 22 county conservation boards had no internet presence whatsoever
- 40 were embedded in a general county site or other host location
- 37 were considered to have a "stand-alone" website for an internet presence

A Google search would essentially yield little if anything, so the need was very clear to many of us.

In the meantime, our statewide employee association, IACCBE (*Iowa Association of County Conservation Board Employees*) had taken note of the internet & website frustrations, as well as the need to perhaps generate a collective presence to promote the county conservation system and be able to share information internally. Discussions that started in early 2006 lead to the May purchase of the URL – "MyCountyParks.com", and by June an initial website had been established. As 2007 rolled around – unbeknownst to each other – three county conservation boards (Linn, Polk & Black Hawk) had commenced with investigating an ability to provide online reservations for their cabins, campsites, events, etc. It was not long before each became aware of the other's interest, and the three soon became partners – pooling their financial resources and forming a development team. Over the next 20+ months the group shared concepts & needs, reviewed prototypes and coalesced their joint visions into a broader project which epitomized the adage of "together we can do more". It was perhaps at the inaugural meeting of this threesome that the recognition was there that, if we were going to build this for three counties – let's be sure to make it "scalable" so that other counties could be added on in the future. This idea was soon incorporated into the scope of the broader project – all 99 counties would now be assured a presence on the new eventual end-product.

The all-new **MyCountyParks.com** was launched on the morning of February 2, 2009 amidst much fanfare and a live remote radio broadcast from Waterloo on WHO Radio from Des Moines. Iowa's county conservation system will forever be indebted to the Linn, Polk and Black Hawk County Conservation Boards for their investment of staff time and nearly \$80,000 in financial resources to construct a new networking and promotional "system" for the ages. The site was an immediate smash success - being recognized in October of 2009 as the **Iowa Tourism Website of the Year**. It received additional accolades from the technology industry for creative design and functionality. The dreams from 2006 had become a reality – but the hope from the 1980s was still on the horizon!

As with the creation of any new digital adventure – fast-paced new technologies made the freshly launched site “antiquated” in just months, and the website had immediate growing pains. In the first three years the ownership and management of the site was shifted from the three county consortium to our statewide IACCB organization (*Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards*); underwent two moderate renovations; and, the list of unmet needs and wants for the site was growing rapidly. In 2012, the IACCB Board of Directors authorized planning and development work to incorporate several “administrative infrastructure” needs. As the existing website was tackling the marketing, promotion and online reservation pieces of our statewide system – it was the right time to address those visions from the 1980s!

Drawing on decades of experience in the administrative statewide networking of the county conservation system - four primary goals were identified for the new portal on the website:

- A “cloud”-like file storage/sharing system with various security levels of access
- A best-practices inquiry and archiving system
- An ability & template for all 99 CCBs to post job openings. Postings would appear on a dedicated public page of the MyCountyParks.com website, could be turned on/off and would be archived for future use (*annual seasonal position postings, etc.*)
- A digital “live” personnel directory that would be sortable/printable with access by all 99 county conservation boards. Updating & accuracy for the 1,100+ listings would be the responsibility of the local conservation boards. The directory would also provide an accurate and current email address listing for a statewide communications network.

This new “**IACCB Portal**” would be a secure non-public addition to the website with username & pass word access to county conservation staff and board members only.

Concept development & design began immediately, with January 2014 as a target date for launch and implementation. As code writing and testing was occurring with the developer – so too was the manual writing and technical education that would provide a smooth conversion to a new way of doing “things” that had been firmly seated since the statewide conservation board system came into being in the mid 1950s. This planned conversion would have a grace period of a couple of months once launched – but all county conservation boards were to be on-board with the new functionalities by the end of that period. Training seminars were provided by our system administrator and the training manuals were posted online for availability to everyone. Not everyone across all 99 counties was necessarily “all-in” with these changes, but also recognized the need to move ahead.

January 2014 arrived – and off the cliff everyone jumped! No one could have conjured up the perfect and flawless launch for so many changes – but we came really close to one! To ease the front end upload of personnel data, IACCB hired a data-entry person to initially upload the 2013 information for all 495 conservation board members and 575+ employees – the counties then had to simply update any changes. In the first 14 months of operation, the IACCB Portal has been an incredible success with near-to-zero glitches.....a 30 year old dream come true! Since the launch, there have been 253 job openings posted; over 75 best practices inquiries; hundreds of files & PowerPoints uploaded to share in the cloud; and the data for 1,166 staff and board members is current and available “live” 24/7.....an amazing transition for a county system that barely has all 99 networked via email.

You can only imagine the efficiencies that have come about as we graduated from the paper shuffling and snail-mail arenas. Information is now available immediately, and the archival nature of the Portal will provide resources for those who follow in the decades to come. We are fortunate to have tremendous longevity in the county conservation staff throughout the state, as well as very supportive board members – both of which served as significant catalysts in the acceptance and implementation of these dynamic and visionary changes. Our statewide system was created by enabling legislation in 1955 – providing the opportunity to celebrate 60 years of successes in 2015. The **IACCB Portal**, as well as **MyCountyParks.com** exemplify a rich history of innovation and creativity to conquer new challenges and attain higher ideals as an industry leader in outdoor recreation, educational outreach and natural resource management.