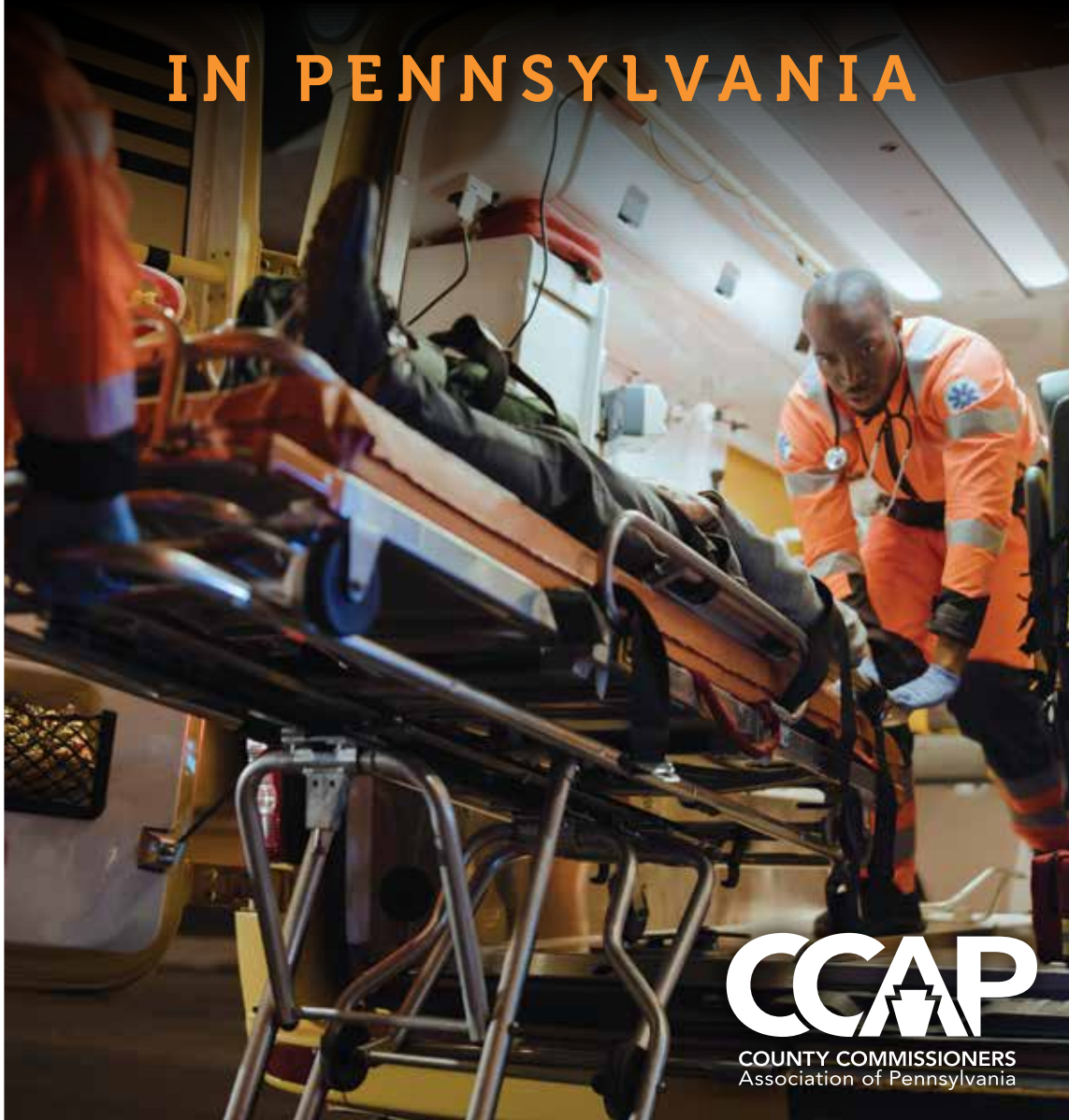


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summer
2021

PENNSYLVANIA county news

Pennsylvania's emergency response system is in crisis. Working partnerships and smart management are critical to rebuilding a strong base for future success.

SPECIAL FEATURES

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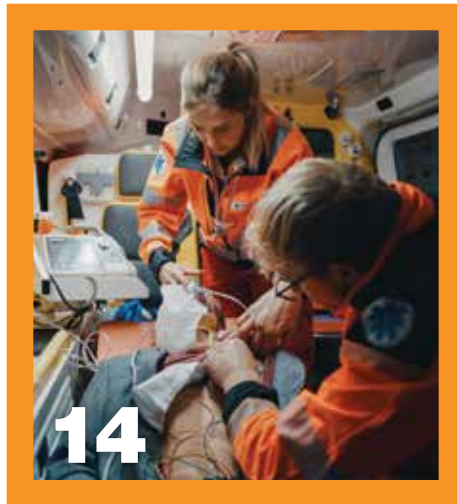


Montgomery
County

features



The EMS Response Crisis



Addressing the EMS Crisis



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KEVIN BOOZE

President, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania
Butler County Commissioner

Learning, Leading and Meaningful Connections

There are days we may ask ourselves the “why” question or a constituent may ask you, “Is the job what you thought it would be?” I think they ask that question to see if you have adjusted to the “lifestyle” of being a county leader.

Like you, I learned that our positions are not jobs and that they demand extreme flexibility, understanding, empathy, stability, focus, patience and resiliency. These are all things that should be listed in your county leader lifestyle description, things that your family signs off on, too.

We have learned more during the pandemic than we could have ever imagined, such as, the structure of our state government and their emergency responses may or may not correspond to that of our federal and local government. We have learned that the Department of Health evolved into a broad statewide asset as opposed to county specific for most of us.

We also learned the power of connectivity through virtual meetings and realized efficiency that, still, can never outweigh the benefits of the connections made in-person. We have learned that elections could use some changes. We also learned

that like most professions, there is a culture of espoused values that comes with an alphabet soup of acronyms. We have learned that all counties are unique and no two states operate the same way. We have learned to connect with national associations such as NACo for information that will eventually affect us and those we serve. All while working closely with CCAP, borough and township associations to serve as the communication link between the leadership. All of this is in a day's work. Of course, that day is likely a Saturday, Sunday or a holiday.

I am concerned about you, however. You who take care of so many people, things, and crises. You who while on vacation are still zooming in on meetings. You who may have been newly elected in 2019 and were barely getting your feet on the ground when the other shoe dropped COVID on you. You who did not have the pleasure of meeting in-person via CCAP's 2020 conferences to find your peers welcoming, understanding, and making themselves available to you for support. I am watching you taking on more and more to get your counties back on track while absorbing historical knowledge from peers and other leaders in your

county. As president, I have had the honor and privilege to get to know many of you. Whether by Zoom or by voice, we have had meaningful connections; connections that now begin again in-person.

You may recall in my very first commentary in the winter Pennsylvania County News I stated the following ... as leaders of our communities, we must continue to incorporate the past into the future, build upon our successes, learn from our challenges and lead, perhaps as never before. Now, several months down the road I have witnessed all of you rise to the challenge and lead your counties in a way that has been unprecedented! And I am so grateful to everyone at CCAP for their ongoing dedication to the work we do as county leaders.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve in 2021 as your CCAP president and as the end of the year draws closer, I look forward to many more years of opportunities to serve CCAP and connect with you. 🍷



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THE EMS Response CRISIS



IN PENNSYLVANIA



Mark Hamilton

Tioga County Commissioner
EMS Task Force Co-chair

Kevin Boozel

Butler County Commissioner
EMS Task Force Co-chair

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, neighbors wanting to help neighbors organized small groups of volunteers who would borrow the local undertaker's hearse and drive the infirmed or wounded to their nearest hospital. **Thus, the emergency medical response system was born.**

This system, over the years, evolved into a highly professional and successful system, but the model our system has been based on has not been based on sound business practices; it has left Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response vulnerable to change. Over time, more regulation, more training and cultural changes have resulted in a severe shortage of volunteers and the EMS response crisis we are in today.

CCAP EMS TASK FORCE

Just in the last year (2020) 2,288 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) did not renew their certification, leaving approximately 30,000 to serve across the state. Of that 30,000 only half are active with an EMS response agency, leaving about 15,000 EMTs to answer 1.2 million emergency calls in a year. Furthermore, in the last forty years, Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance response agencies themselves have dwindled from 2,000 to approximately 900 across the commonwealth.

The legislative SR6 Commission report in 2018 sparked many conversations amongst county commissioners across the state as to the moral responsibility we may have with our constituents. In no way did we want to take over responsibility for this area of service, but we did have an obligation to help our public partners with solutions anywhere we could. Thus, the CCAP EMS Task Force was formed.

The first task the group took up was to look at the SR6 Commission report and determine what EMS

1

Statutory Authorization for Regional EMS Service Delivery

issues were germane to CCAP and may be addressable by our group. The task force arranged many of the issues by topic groups and assigned policy considerations as well as county opportunity suggestions to each.

Our task force published a report with all of this information in November of 2019. The report, along with many other resources the group found useful, can be accessed on CCAP's website, www.pacounties.org, under the government relations tab.

THREE AREAS

Since the publishing of the task force report, CCAP has been focused on three areas. The first area is seeking statutory authorization for county or multi-municipal authorities that would be capable of aiding in countywide or regional EMS service delivery. Flexibility is the key in this model where an authority could simply assist providers with administrative duties such as grant writing or coordinating training opportunities all the way to a much more senior role for levying per capita fees, funding the cost of readiness, and coordinating ambulance response.

Secondly, the task force is producing a toolbox of best practices

2

A Toolbox of Best Practices

ideas that we hope to publish for commissioners across the commonwealth, giving them an aid at their fingertips to give them ideas in solving local EMS issues. CCAP has entered into an agreement with DCED, as a consultant, and two sets of counties as a pilot project to help produce the EMS toolbox: Butler/Mercer and Tioga/Lycoming/Sullivan.

The third area of concern is that of system funding needs. There is a very wide variety of EMS service models across Pennsylvania, but almost without exception delayed ambulance response times can be tied to lack of funding one way or the other. In the near future there are a number of items that should be tackled along this line. Reimbursement rates from Medicaid, Medicare, and other insurances should have some cost-of-living increase tied to them. By the way, the last time the legislature did give an increase, CCAP was at the table and very effectively lobbied for that increase.

There are also several other programs that have good potential of reducing funding needs in the long run that need to be tweaked and accelerated such as the Triage, Treatment, Transport Program (ET3) and Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Programs.

3

System Funding Needs

IMPACT

If we can, in the near future, have a significant impact in these areas, the cost of readiness needs for many of our ambulance crews could be addressed without dipping into our taxpayer's pockets.

The EMS Task Force, from day one, has kept in mind that commissioners are not ultimately responsible for safety needs in our boroughs and townships, and understand this must be a collaborative effort. With that said, we are very proud of the relationships we have built and are continuing to foster. We have been working with legislators, state government staff, municipality organizations, EMS providers, and associations that represent their needs—even firemen's representative groups.

We fully believe the working partnerships here will lead to great solutions to the EMS response crisis. We want to wholly thank each one for their time and effort in working together. 🍷



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ADDRESSING THE EMS CRISIS

A PERSPECTIVE FROM PIKE COUNTY

Krista Gromalski

Communications Director
Pike County

In Pike County, as in many other rural counties, the foundation of Public Safety—including Emergency Medical and Fire Protection Services—has consisted predominantly of volunteers who donate their time, energy, and skills to benefit their communities.

In recent years, however, increased call volume, long transport times, and economic factors have caused many volunteers to decrease or discontinue volunteering. This has forced local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies to explore paid services or a combination of paid and volunteer services.

Pike County is not alone in seeing a decline in EMS volunteerism. National numbers for fire departments and medical services have drastically decreased over the past decade, causing a shortage in staffing.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need to build Public Safety services that can continue to meet the community's needs during the most challenging times. This requires the foresight and planning to properly fund and sustain necessities such as training, equipment, and salaries.

Senator Lisa Baker (R-20) says, "For years, it has been a real challenge to attract volunteers and provide the equipment and training they need to be safe and effective. Local officials have put a lot of thought into assessing the current capabilities and trying to determine how to meet prevention and protection needs going forward. Obviously, the pandemic has increased the degree of difficulty and furthered strained manpower and financial resources for first responders."

PROACTIVE MEASURES

Pike County has taken a proactive approach to Emergency Medical Services since recognizing the looming EMS crisis back in 2017. The commissioners at that time convened a meeting of county and municipal officials, and leaders from local emergency response agencies to identify EMS needs and potential solutions.

As an immediate follow up, the Pike County Office of Community Planning and Department of Public Safety compiled an Assessment of Emergency Medical Services study, which outlined strengths and weaknesses and made recommendations. "We also contacted Senator Baker, who was very helpful and began developing bipartisan legislation along with Senator Tim Kearney (D-26)," says Pike's Commissioner Chairman Matthew Osterberg. "We then addressed CCAP and asked its leadership to place the EMS crisis on its list of priorities. CCAP and the other counties recognized the crisis and began holding breakout sessions and quarterly meetings to discuss proposed legislation and other possible solutions."

In August 2020, the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, chaired by Senator Mike Regan (R-31), held a public hearing on fire and EMS issues at the Pike County Training Center, a state-of-the-art facility where public safety professionals gain hands-on training and experience to better protect their communities. Senator Baker requested

the hearing to review the Pike County EMS assessment and the progress made since its release.

"Emergency response is a crucial conversation in small communities and rural areas. And, while I have consistently advocated the concerns and needs of emergency and protective services, I wanted my colleagues to hear directly about local concerns and needs," says Senator Baker. "State and local budgets are afflicted with revenue shortfalls, but we cannot afford to shortchange our first responders."

FUNDING CHALLENGES

A major challenge in implementing solutions to the EMS crisis is funding. Under current Pennsylvania legislation, municipalities hold the sole responsibility of ensuring that local fire and EMS are adequately provided, including the provision of financial and administrative assistance for these services. However, many small municipalities cannot provide adequate services with limited taxable properties.

"We realized that many other counties were facing the same crisis. We heard similar concerns from places like Chester, Butler, Forest and Wayne counties," notes Osterberg. "Adequate and reliable EMS coverage is something we all expect regardless of whether we are home or traveling throughout the commonwealth."

Osterberg and his fellow commissioners Ronald Schmalzle and Steve Guccini agree that this challenge is simply not a local issue;

it is one that would benefit from a partnership among municipal, county and commonwealth leadership.

"Solving this crisis is in all of our best interests. Building strong countywide EMS coverage will take our entire community. It cannot be just the responsibility of municipal leaders. It must include all of us working together," adds Osterberg.

FLEXIBLE LEGISLATION

One possible solution is to address the challenge through flexible legislation, such as SB 698 co-sponsored by Senators Baker and Kearney, which would amend Title 53 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to allow counties to work together with municipalities and by the sheer economy of scale create the funds necessary for countywide public safety services for residents and visitors.

This amendment would allow, but not mandate, the creation of county public safety authorities with municipal representation, which can assess fees to support countywide emergency medical and fire services.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

As SB 698 moves through the legislative process, Pike County continues to build public and private partnerships to address the EMS crisis.

Some recent accomplishments on these fronts include:

- Creation of the Pike County Emergency Services Initiative Fund (PCESI), which the commissioners and Public Safety Department helped to establish along with generous founding gifts from the law firm of Weinstein, Zimmerman & Ohliger; and William Lovejoy. The fund is administered by the Greater Pike Community Foundation. PCESI funds have so far saved local agencies \$10,400 in EMT course fees. Recently, 16 individuals representing eight agencies completed the EMT course with financial assistance through the PCESI Fund.
- Accreditation of the Pike County Training Center as an EMS Educational Training Facility in the commonwealth. This allows EMS professionals to gain top-notch

training locally and more economically. The center houses a four-story class A burn building with basement, a confined space unit, a flashover simulator unit, class B props, and four classrooms. It has achieved Educational Training Agency status with the State Fire Academy and Department of Health.

- An offer by the Pike County commissioners to match a local municipality's EMS contribution up to a maximum of 2 mils. On a countywide scale, 2 mils equate to about \$2.2 million. Combined with municipal funds, the county match could create approximately \$4.4 million for Emergency Medical Services in Pike County. With input from the municipalities, the commissioners are developing a plan and draft guidelines outlining how the funds could be distributed.

While Pike and many other counties in Pennsylvania are developing innovative partnerships and solutions to address the EMS crisis, work remains to be done legislatively at the state level.

Osterberg states, "We are grateful to CCAP for its leadership in addressing this issue, and we in Pike County will continue to work locally while anticipating state solutions." 🍷



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EMS

A COMMON PURPOSE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION

Senator Lisa Baker
Senator Tim Kearney

For small communities and rural areas across our commonwealth, declining numbers of volunteer emergency responders has been a **growing concern for many years.** The reasons for the alarming drop have become an almost perfect storm of disincentives. While the services are under severe strain in funding and manpower, the threats to communities, and the need for protective and preventative steps, is on the rise.

Task forces and commissions have convened and produced recommendations for a quarter century. State legislators have approved incentives to help out, but this is sort of a tourniquet on a hemorrhage.

Then along comes the pandemic, which has added to the training and equipment challenges for service providers, as well as elevating the risk levels for emergency responders.

This combination of problems has made the issue a concern in suburban counties, including those in southeastern Pennsylvania. There is a silver-lining benefit here, in that the coalition seeking solutions has broadened geographically and politically.

EXPLORING SOLUTIONS

Fortunately, CCAP's EMS Task Force convened several years ago proved an effective forum for exploring new solutions to this long-running, still-accelerating crisis.

Perhaps the most immediate possibility to emerge involves the pooling of resources. This concept has been applied elsewhere for years, most notably in regional policing,

so experience has pointed out the advantages and drawbacks. The big plus is this can add heft to the many responsibilities units are scrambling to cover—recruitment, financing, administration and much more.

Instead of rewriting the laws pertaining to fire and EMS services, with all the complications that would entail, this approach would work through the Municipal Authorities Act. Give counties the ability to establish public safety authorities, encompassing fire, EMS and supporting services. Make it a discretionary decision, however, rather than the typical state mandate.

This offers a safety valve to struggling communities. They can opt in, or they can decide to keep their current structure. State agencies can provide a great deal of technical assistance on how to set up and run an authority in a sound and accountable manner.

Now, it could well be there are counties with a large number of municipalities in widely divergent circumstances that are leery of taking on this responsibility. There is a fallback for this contingency. In such cases, interested munic-

ipalities can band together in a regional authority.

Advocates of shared services highlight the advantages of pooling resources and improving response capabilities. Critics worry about imbalances between the partners in terms of what they contribute. This bill leaves the decision up to local discretion. Officials and residents can publicly weigh the pros and cons and assess the true costs of change versus standing still.

MOVING FORWARD

Given the depth of the volunteer crisis, and the dire implications for public safety in many communities, state and local officials cannot afford to stand still. In the true spirit of collaboration toward solving crucial community problems, Republicans and Democrats, at the state, county and municipal level, are finding common purpose and constructive action.

With the proper advocacy and commitment, we can ensure that the alarms in neighborhoods everywhere will be responded to with the urgency and professional capacity our citizens have come to expect. 🍷



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2021 - 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PROGRESS REPORT

SUMMER
2021

SHARING THE COUNTY MESSAGE

CCAP and its members provide input and testimony on legislation to a wide variety of committees, explaining how a bill might affect counties or how counties are involved in a particular issue area.

CCAP sent legislative memos on **23** bills to **14** Senate committees and **13** House committees, as well as the full House and Senate.

CCAP and its affiliates also testified at **7** hearings since January, and submitted written comments for **7** other hearings, covering policy issues like broadband, elections, human services, public worker safety, tourism, and more.

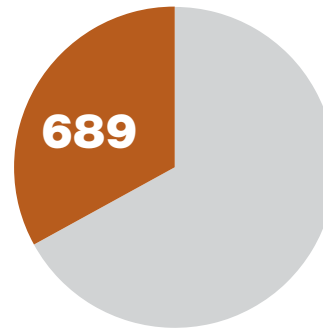
WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE 2021-2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION?

While counties have made strides on many policy fronts, including maintaining funding for county human services in the FY 2021-2022 budget, there is more work to be done on county priority issues, including elections reforms, broadband development and increased funding for community mental health programs.

CCAP continuously heard the impact of county grassroots efforts in advocating for policy counties needed. Your input and voice as a locally elected official is critical to inform policy. Share your powerful stories, bring your undeniable data showing the good work your county has achieved and also the vital need for increased resources. Using the virtual skills you've honed over the last year, ensure your legislators hear your perspective clearly and often. We must remind leaders at every level that investment and cooperation are in the best interest of all of our constituents throughout the commonwealth.



2,299 bills introduced



30%
of bills introduced
were tracked by
CCAP for potential
county impacts

15 acts affecting county
government signed
into law, including:

Act 1 of 2021: Establishes the COVID-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRPS) and Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), providing for \$145M and \$569.8M in funding for COVID impact relief

Acts 7, 8, 9 of 2021: District Attorney vacancy clarifications

Act 24 of 2021: Omnibus Fiscal Code amendment for FY 2021-2022 budget providing ARP funding to address mental health in schools, nursing and long-term care facilities, updates ERAP and establishes the ARP Rental and Utility Assistance Grant Program (ERA-2)

Act 33 of 2021: Tax sale bidder pre-registration

Act 50 of 2021: Small Wireless Facilities Deployment Act

Act 65 of 2021: Sunshine Act public meeting agenda amendments

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in the Post-Pandemic World

Chuck Mazzitti
Executive Director
Mazzitti & Sullivan, EAP

We are all well aware of what we have been through since the pandemic began. We know the fear, the anxiety, the loss of independence, and the grieving it has brought to our lives. The questions now are: Who are we at this point? Are we the same people we were before the pandemic? Or are we different in some ways? How will this experience influence how we think and act in the future?

Let's look at some of the factors that will influence us as we move forward.

Chuck Mazzitti
Executive Director
Mazzitti & Sullivan, EAP

ANGER

THE RISE OF AMBIENT EMOTIONS

There are three dominant ambient emotions that manifest during times of great physical and emotional upheaval. As the pandemic grew last year, these emotions started to take hold in many of us and affect the way we think and how we behaved. For some of us, this change was sudden and alarming; but for many of us, it was more gradual, steadily growing in the background and impacting our worldview, our beliefs, and our sense of our own mortality. The three dominant emotions are fear, sadness and anger.

Their impact is often expressed in the following ways: fear can lead to anxiety; sadness can lead to depression; anger can lead to irrational decision making.

These emotions often stay in the background, affecting how we see the world and how we respond to it. The effects can be short or long term, depending on the experience of each person going through the traumatic event.

By way of illustrating the impact these emotions can have, I want to relate *a tale of two sisters*. When I was a young teenager, I knew two sisters who were the daughters of immigrants. They both married and had comfortable lives, never wanting for anything. However, each of them had habits that I considered odd. I guess you could say they were hoarders. Not in the junk collecting sense, but they would accumulate things beyond what they might ever use.



For one, it was food. She would can and freeze hundreds of quarts of vegetables every year, even though it was only for her and her husband. The dates on some of this food went back more than 10 years, but it stayed in storage. For the other sister, it was clothes and household goods. She had six to eight dozen white dress shirts in her basement that she bought for her husband, all in the original packaging. She also had hundreds of tea towels, also unopened from the store. One day, while surveying her lack of closet and storage space, she looked at me and said, "Chuck, I have purchased my way right out of this house."

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

Over the years I have tried to understand why they behaved this way, given that they appeared to have everything they might need. The common threads of their lives were these: they grew up in a lower economic class family; and they

grew up during the Great Depression. Their experiences during that time, and the impact of the resulting ambient emotions, were coloring their behavior forty years later. I see this as a warning for where we may be headed as we come back from our current public health crisis.

We can find another example of probable reaction from the last pandemic we experienced in 1918. Many historians believed that the Roaring Twenties were a "rebound" from World War I, but now many believe that it was equally a response to the Spanish flu pandemic of the same time period. The Roaring Twenties represented a time when many people threw caution to the wind, to "seize the day," and to engage in activities that stared fear and death directly in their macabre faces. Why wait for an unsure tomorrow to live life to the fullest? Nothing is promised us but today!

It is easy to see the disparity between the impact this same event had upon the lives of the flappers of the Roaring Twenties and the two sisters. Ambient emotions drove different responses in different people, based upon their experiences.

So, how does this apply to our current situation?

This past year was the first time many of us were confronted with our own mortality on a daily basis. We were bombarded with pandemic news and rising illness and death statistics from our television, computers, and social media. We were being re-traumatized on a daily basis by the possibility that we could become gravely ill or die. We could become sick without knowing who, or where, it came from. And there was very little we could do to control it.

The consequences of living under this protracted trauma are predictable.

We have seen a dramatic increase in the intensity of the response to the issues tearing at the social fabric of our nation and communities. We can watch with bewilderment the intensity and number of tragedies we are seeing. But I believe that the increasing influence of the three ambient emotions on our lives are directly responsible for this.

SOBERING STATISTICS

Here are how these “background” emotions are playing out in our daily lives:

From the beginning of 2020 until the present day, the following data has been collected:

Gun violence in 2020 was up 25% over 2019. It is up another 40+% so far in 2021.

Suicides were initially lower, but we have seen an increase in calls from clients reporting suicidal thoughts are up more than 300%.

Drug overdose deaths increased 38.4%.

Domestic violence severity saw an increase in criminal cases from an average of 20% of all reported cases to more than 80% of all cases.

Life expectancy dropped for the first time since data has been recorded. The life expectancy rate went from 78.8 years of age to 76.7 years of age in 2020.

The national birth rate dropped more than 40%.

People are being attacked and killed because of their ethnic and/or racial background.

People are being attacked and killed over compliance with COVID restrictions.

If the gradual influence of ambient emotions can negatively affect those of us who are in relatively stable situations, it will have an outsized influence on those who already have poor emotional or impulse control, or those previously prone to violence. This can help explain the dramatic change in the statistics above. If alcohol or drugs are your coping mechanism, abuse of those things will increase with continued exposure to the trauma of the pandemic. If violence

is how you try to control everything in your life, it may become a more frequent option. Or violence may appear to now be a solution to losses that were never before considered.

Fear and anger have gripped some people because they feel that they have lost control over their lives. This may lead them to make poor decisions that negatively affect their relationships, their health and/or their finances. The negative results may reinforce their belief that things are out of control and seem hopeless.

On the other hand, if you are an older employee considering retirement, now may be the time to seize the day. *“I am outta here!”* will be the battle cry, especially for older workers in professions hardest hit by the pandemic. Think health-care (hospitals and nursing home employees especially), teaching, first responders and social services.

Some people will look for jobs that they believe are more fulfilling or rewarding. Why stay trapped in a job you hate when tomorrow is not guaranteed? Older county employees may decide to retire rather than go back to the daily grind of commute, sit in an office, and then drive home. I also believe there will be a significant number of hospitality and food service workers who will opt out of that line of work completely. They were hard hit financially by this past year, and now they will think twice before returning to such an unreliable and low paying job, especially with the prospect that their customers’ behavior may be even worse than it was before the pandemic.



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Some people may couple the newly enlightened views on working or retirement to leave the economic grind for new pursuits. Some may look for experiences (like travel, hobbies or spending time with family) to pursue now rather than later. For many people, they will crave a new level of personal involvement and service to others as a result of this experience. The recent loss of personal interaction can breed a newfound appreciation for the importance of these things they missed in their lives.

AMBIGUOUS LOSS

The next psychological consequence we should be aware of is something called *ambiguous loss*. While we often see ambiguous loss associated with war, immigration slavery, holocaust, natural disasters, catastrophic illnesses or head injuries. The loss is ambiguous because it cannot be resolved. It is caused by the lack of concrete facts surrounding the loss of a loved one, or the loss of familiar surroundings. It is called ambiguous because there is no explanation, no closure for those affected. This phenomenon indefinitely ruptures human relations and can give rise to an increase in the ambient emotions.

One group experienced this type of loss more than others during the past year—our school aged children. For many young people, school is a second home, the source of friendship and social connections, a place to grow and learn about themselves and the world. The pandemic took all of that away from them. The loss of routine, of connectedness, of be-

longing—disappeared overnight. A lot of their world vanished without closure. Traditions such as prom and graduation were gone in the blink of an eye. Seniors went from being in school to never going back again.

Many children have struggled emotionally. Some have struggled academically, trying to navigate the world of online learning. Some lost a main source of daily nutrition. Some children were suddenly confined to living in an abusive environment, away from the eyes and ears of those that might help protect them: teachers, doctors, social workers, and other caregivers. A percentage of our young people may not recover from this experience. If they failed, many might believe that they were the problem instead of understanding that the pandemic created their problems. For too many people, it is already a short walk from “I failed” to “I am a failure”. Having that perspective creates *self-limiting beliefs*, which prevent us from even trying to reach our full potential.

These emotional and psychological impacts may be short lived, or they could last for years.

All of these emotional and psychological impacts are compounded by the changes in work operations that most of us were forced to adopt. Working from home became the norm. Zoom meetings and virtual conferences found new utility. Virtual learning replaced in person settings. Childcare options disappeared. Reliable income dropped for many. For some that were forced to work through the

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pandemic, there was great fear and anxiety about the safety of their work environments, and anger at their employers for not doing everything possible to keep them safe. Our sense of vulnerability and mortality was brought into clear focus.

The transition to working from home created some interesting dynamics. Learning to use and manage new technologies produced some humorous—and some embarrassing—situations. Being at home provided some comfort knowing that the virus was outside

our space, until we had to venture *out there* for food and other essentials. On the other hand, being at home could also produce a sense of confinement and loss of freedom. It also had the effect of eliminating the physical boundary that separates work from home, making it more difficult to establish where one began and the other ended.

According to a recent survey by *Leesman*, the majority of employees who switched to working from home believe that they were more productive there than in the office. It may be because there are fewer people at home to distract us from our work. With fewer interruptions, we are able to focus on the task at hand and accomplish more in the same amount of time. Working from home also allows us to avoid toxic coworkers or, worse yet, a toxic work environment.

All of these factors may help explain why many employees do not want to return to the office. I have encountered numerous examples of this over the past few months as employers try to transition “back to normal.” Two recent employee surveys found that there will be considerable resistance to going back in the office. According to *Morning Consult*, 39% of those surveyed would absolutely consider quitting if forced to return full time to the office. A survey conducted by *Flex-jobs* reports that a whopping 58% would look for a new job if returning to the office was mandatory. Only 2% stated that they wanted to return to the office full time. If these statistics are anywhere close to accurate, they should give us pause as we contemplate getting “back to normal.”

GAME CHANGERS

Given these reported changes in work preferences post-pandemic, is transitioning back to normal as it existed pre-pandemic necessary or desirable? Will it create new and unexpected problems with staffing, hiring, and retention? Or can we try new approaches to service delivery that accommodate the shifts in how people conduct business and access services? As we have noted previously, things have changed. How we do things has changed! How we see things changed and especially how we feel about things emotionally has changed. Some trends will return to the way they have been done in the past because they need to do so. But for those areas where online or telephonic access are available, the shift to those options will accelerate. Perhaps we should view the past year not just as a disruption in our service delivery system, but as a potential new *strategic inflection point*. A game changer, as you will, that simply accelerated change that was slowly, but inevitably, coming.

If we are to embrace this opportunity for change, we need to assess the pros and cons and look at how the changes benefit the county, our employees, and our constituents. As with all planning, we need to start with the facts. What percentage of our constituents would rather access services online or telephonically? Can we livestream public meetings, and post instructional videos on the county’s website explaining how constituents can get access to the services they need? What technology will we need to add to accomplish these goals? On the other hand,

what services *must be* delivered in person? How many staff do we need in the office vs. how many can work remotely? The answers to these questions and other related questions will allow us to make informed decisions about the nature of our operations. I believe that there are significant opportunities right now to change how we provide county services to our constituents. And they might fit nicely with the changing dynamics of our employees’ personal experiences during the pandemic.

Rather than lose some of our top talent to fear, anxiety and depression, perhaps we could create a service delivery system where some employees are office based and some continue to be home based. Maybe the home-based employees would still be required to make field, home or site visits, depending on the needs of the job. This option may appeal to those who are comfortable and feel secure at home, or whose situation benefits from this working arrangement. It may also appeal to those older employees we discussed earlier who are tired of the grind associated with in-office work.

For all employees, but especially those that will be office based, we should work to create a supportive and healthy working environment. One that recognizes that we have all been through a lot, and that each employee may react differently to job stressors as we move forward. Can we provide and emphasize supportive mental, financial and physical health services for our staff? Do we have a robust

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Employee Assistance Program that can assist in this effort? How do we assure that our office employees feel physically safe given that COVID-19 will not be completely eradicated? What new protocols must we put in place for employee health and safety given this reality? We should have a space in the office where employees can go to de-stress after traumatic or highly emotional encounters with constituents.

Our managers and supervisors should be trained on dealing with the effects of these ambient emotions and how to be supportive. Our leaders should check in regularly to see how the staff is doing. We need to show them that we have their backs; that we care about them and their families; and that we have the resources available to help them when they need assistance. Our leadership should include recognition of the good work they do for our constituents and the difference they make in our communities. We need to encourage our teams to look out for each other, work together, and support each other every day. This should be the same for all employees, whether office or home based.

A POSITIVE TRANSFORMATION

Because the emotional and psychological changes brought by this pandemic happen to us from the outside, (rather than from our own consciousness) the most effective responses will be family, community and work based. This is why I believe that, as employers, counties will have a significant role in positioning employees back to work,

whether they remain at home or go back in the office.

If history has taught us anything, it is that rigidity and doubling down do not succeed as a response to external threats. But those who can be resilient, who can find new meaning and purpose, who can tolerate ambivalence, will not only succeed but flourish. I believe that as employers, the counties have a role in creating this positive transformation.

Embracing these opportunities with the correct responses will not only better serve our constituents but will help us retain our best talent while attracting new talent to our ranks. If we understand the physical, emotional and behavioral changes that our employees and their families have experienced this past year and a half, we can build a new business model that is healthy, inclusive, supportive, and delivers county services more effectively and efficiently than ever before.

Now that we know what the traumatic personal impacts of this crisis may be, what will the future hold for us, our staff and our operations? Many of us have suffered the loss of family and friends. Some have endured financial hardship. A lot of us have had to deal with the relentless knowledge that we were powerless over this pandemic and its effect on our lives. Still others appeared to make it through with little mental, physical or financial impact.

How will we react? Some of us will turn inward. We will embrace life, focus on family, having children, building our future. Some of us will turn outward, embracing activities that give our lives meaning and

purpose. They will work to give purpose to and make sense of this experience. Some of us will live for the day, doing things now rather than later, taking risks they previously thought unimaginable.

And unfortunately, some of us will be irretrievably broken, or at least have our reality altered in unconscious ways that will look more than a little odd to the generations that follow us.

SEVERAL THINGS ARE CERTAIN

We cannot reverse the effects of long-term trauma in a short amount of time. We need to have some patience and give each other the time necessary to heal and adapt to a post-pandemic world.

Some of the changes that were necessitated by the pandemic will continue to stay with us going forward—working from home; telemedicine and therapy; online ordering of almost everything we need or want; restaurant take out and food delivery services; new sanitation and personal interaction norms; and a renewed focus on the importance of family and relationships in our lives.

If we are going to be the leaders our counties need as we emerge from this crisis and create the future, we need to learn all we can about the issues raised here and forge a plan for incorporating the best practices of what we have learned into our operations. At the end of the day, I believe this will determine how successful we are in managing county operations for years to come. 🍷

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Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Carbon County Partner to Reduce

High Veteran Suicide Rate

Carbon County is home to about 8% of Pennsylvania's veterans, but the county also has the highest suicide rate among veterans in the commonwealth. A new collaborative between the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and the Carbon County Veterans Affairs Office is focused on reducing that startling suicide statistic to zero.

The two partners have adopted the Together With Veterans (TWV) model, which requires an action plan to address veteran suicide prevention. TWV is a national program funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Rural Health in partnership with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. TWV is one of the three pillars of

the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's national initiative for community-based suicide prevention.

The suicide prevention strategies that TWV teams implement are evidence informed and aligned with the strategic focus areas of the VA/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Governor's Challenge to prevent suicide among service members, veterans and their families. The key elements of the plan include screening for suicide risk; promoting connectedness and improving care transitions; and reducing access to lethal suicide methods and enhancing safety planning.

"Together With Veterans succeeds because of the effort and leadership on the part of the local veter-

ans and their partners," said Nate Mohatt, TWV program lead. "We work with local teams to make sure they have a structured program to follow, with ample support and tools. The model is built on extensive experience in partnership with rural communities, but the program ultimately is local. As with all TWV sites around the country, Carbon County formed a very strong leadership team—this is where the success comes from."

Mohatt added that TWV is a good fit when a community has a strong team that is willing and able to put in the long-term work. Carbon County was connected to TWV through the DMVA and the VA's suicide prevention program identifying them as a community with the right veteran leadership to manage a TWV effort.

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS

The DMVA is the lead entity for the Pennsylvania Governor's Challenge. Pennsylvania is one of 27 states taking part in the Governor's Challenge. Participants work to implement statewide suicide prevention best practices and learn from stakeholders nationwide, such as Carbon County.

"The DMVA realizes that the best way to reduce veteran suicide to zero is by establishing partnerships throughout Pennsylvania communities and raising awareness of resources available to veterans at risk," said Joel Mutschler, director, DMVA Bureau of Veterans Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration, and Outreach. "Carbon County is experiencing a high rate of veteran suicide so adopting the TWV model is an excellent way to structure a strategy that will address this concerning issue. Carbon County is focused and committed on helping veterans in crisis, which makes the county an ideal community partner."

About 47,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States, but military veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veterans. For female veterans, the risk factor is 2.2 times more likely. When looking at these statistics and factoring in that Pennsylvania serves nearly 800,000 veterans—the fourth largest veteran population in the nation—it is easy to see why the DMVA is actively seeking community partners like Carbon County to help rollout suicide prevention initiatives.

Mutschler, an Air Force veteran, also attributes the success of the Carbon County collaborative to the county's leadership support and hard-working staff.

"The county commissioners and the veteran affairs staff are extremely focused on doing the best possible job for the veteran community, regardless of the issue," Mutschler said. The county is extremely energized when it comes to veteran suicide. It is amazing to see how they work together and with other advocates to address what I consider to be an epidemic in the veteran community. The veterans and their families throughout Carbon County are fortunate to have such incredible, local support."

ADDING CREDIBILITY

At the head of that support are three county commissioners who have been very involved in the Carbon County veteran suicide collaborative with DMVA: Air Force veteran Wayne Nothstein, Army veteran Chris Lukasevich and Rocky Ahner.

"We have a high population of veterans in Carbon County, and it is important to let them know that we care," said Nothstein. "They need to see support from elected officials. Our involvement adds credibility to what the county is saying and doing."

Nothstein has nothing but praise for TWV and the success its model brings to Carbon County. "Carbon County needed to bring the right people to the table to help get the word out to veterans about what

resources are available for them to get help, and TWV is that ideal partner," he said. "We couldn't do it alone. The guidance we get from TWV and their model to work with are essential in meeting our goal of reducing veteran suicide.

Hopefully, our efforts will encourage other counties in Pennsylvania to put programs like this together to help veterans in crisis before it is too late."

Pennsylvania counties interested in adopting the TWV model should reach out to their local VA community engagement and partnership coordinator.

Another person instrumental with the veteran suicide collaborative is Christine LeClair, director of Veterans Affairs for Carbon County. LeClair said that though we do not know for sure why Carbon County's veteran suicide rate is so high, there are clear contributing factors.

"Carbon County is rural and the closest VA hospitals are about an hour away," she said. "We do provide van transportation on some days, but access to care like mental health services can be logistically difficult at times. Another challenge we face being a rural community is identifying all the veterans. We figure there are about 5,700 veterans in Carbon County, but not all have checked-in with my office."

LeClair encourages veterans to visit her office in the county administration building and find out what benefits are available to them thanks to their service to our country. Veterans can also connect with LeClair by calling (570) 325-3986.



About 47,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States, but military veterans are **1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veterans.**

LeClair said that one of the best ways to reach veterans and raise awareness about suicide is by connecting with other veteran advocates, like Carbon County has done with DMVA.

"Carbon County Veterans Affairs is fortunate to partner with DMVA to empower community members, local leaders, organizations, family and friends to take action against veteran suicide," she said. "Our partnership plans to equip our community with the tools and resources it needs to connect veterans who are experiencing emotional or mental health crisis with lifesaving support."

CONNECTING

Another key community collaborative for Carbon County is its extremely active veteran suicide Steering Committee. The committee includes Carbon-Monroe-Pike Mental Health and Development Services, DMVA, PA CareerLink Carbon County, a Carbon County resident and retired Army chaplain, St. Luke's University Health Network, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, Scranton Vet Center, and The East Central and Northeast PA Area Health Education Center.

"We are committed to our veterans and it is our hope that the work of the Steering Committee and adoption of the TWV model will lessen the stigma that is associated with suicide and will help to prevent another tragic death," said LeClair. "The rollout of DMVA's PA VETConnect initiative is another important tool Carbon County is using to help veterans."

PA VETConnect identifies and cultivates new community partnerships to simultaneously broaden referral capabilities and connect veterans to the best possible resources, regardless of the township, county or region where they reside.

Two innovative features of PA VETConnect make the program unique in Pennsylvania when it comes to veteran advocacy.

The engine driving PA VETConnect is a team of five Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) who work with veteran advocates throughout Pennsylvania to build relationships and develop a network that connects Pennsylvania's military heroes to the resources they need to live a healthy, quality life. The RPOCs are DMVA's field-level individuals who live and

work throughout the state. They not only discover new resources to assist veterans within their communities and across the commonwealth but serve as a liaison between veteran advocates and DMVA.

Another feature of PA VETConnect is an Information and Referral (I&R) database that provides those who serve veterans – such as county directors of veteran's affairs and veteran service organizations – with the names, contact information and an overview of thousands of organizations throughout the commonwealth that have the resources to assist veterans' specific needs.

"The DMVA is right where it needs to be with PA VETConnect – in communities," said Mutschler, who oversees the program for DMVA. "The RPOCs are building relationships and addressing veteran suicide or underlying issues such as homelessness, unemployment, PTSD and so much more. We holistically look at what is driving these issues and help connect veterans to the right resource before something bad happens. Every day a veteran's life is saved is a win for everyone." ▼



Pension Technology Group protects its business against advanced cyber threats with Rackspace

As a leader in the web-based pension administration software marketplace, Pension Technology Group (PTG) knew that it needed to partner with a leader in online security to protect its clients' data with around-the-clock threat detection and response.

As a leading Managed Security Services Provider (MSSP), Rackspace not only offers threat monitoring and data protection services but around-the-clock rapid response and remediation services. Backed by the Rackspace Customer Security Operations Center (CSOC), Rackspace actively hunts for threats and responds to them immediately, freeing PTG staff to focus on the initiatives that drive their business forward, all at a significant cost savings of internally developed security solutions.

The Rackspace Difference

Rackspace provides PTG with deep security knowledge, leading technology and advanced threat intelligence tailored to its business needs. Rackspace uses advanced analytics to detect unknown (zero-day) threats through behavioral patterns and anomaly detection, across the world's leading clouds.

"PTG's strong partnership with Rackspace is vital to the high level of services that PTG provides to its clients. Rackspace's commitment to data security and business continuity has helped differentiate the PTG solution from its competitors."

John R. Reidy :: Co-Founder & President, Pension Technology Group

Benefits and Features

- **Dramatically reduce the risk of data loss by minimizing the breach window:** An active security approach is designed to minimize a threat's most precious resource — time in your environment.
- **Meet security goals while lowering total cost of ownership (TCO):** The advanced security protection of Rackspace Managed Security can significantly lower TCO over internally developed security operations centers and comparable managed security service offerings.
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- **Net-based protection:** Intrusion detection increases network security by monitoring traffic and inspecting and scanning packets for suspicious data.
- **Security analytics:** Advanced technologies are augmented by behavioral analytics which enable the CSOC to aggregate, correlate, analyze and respond to security threats in the environment.





Rackspace helps Pension Technology Group architect, deploy and manage its virtualization environment

As a leader in the web-based pension administration software marketplace, Pension Technology Group (PTG) needed to partner with a leader in server virtualization. By choosing to work with Rackspace, the internal IT team at PTG can now focus on delivering applications and running their business without the need to deal with the underpinnings of virtualization and its infrastructure.

The Rackspace Difference

Rackspace was the perfect fit to provide the benefits of virtualization without staffing up or retraining existing resources. As a VMware Cloud Verified Partner and with over a decade of expertise deploying VMware® solutions, Rackspace provides management services built on industry-leading best practices and service level agreements.

“PTG’s strong partnership with Rackspace is vital to the high level of services that PTG provides to its clients. Rackspace’s commitment to data security and business continuity has helped differentiate the PTG solution from its competitors.”

John R. Reidy :: Co-Founder & President, Pension Technology Group



Benefits and Features

- **Anytime, anywhere access to vital statistics:** PTG manages their virtual environment from the MyRackspace® portal, and use the provided statistics to see their available CPU, disk and memory capacity.
- **Systems that grow with you:** Rackspace can handle PTG’s most performance-hungry workloads. With flexible virtual CPU and RAM options and the ability to break applications up into component parts and place them in a hybrid architecture, Rackspace allows PTG to scale out into the Rackspace public cloud when demand suddenly peaks.
- **Built-in resiliency:** Rackspace lets PTG take snapshots before making changes to VMs so they can safely commit changes or roll back updates if needed. They also have a broad range of resiliency options to help protect their environments in the event of disaster or unexpected downtime.
- **Secure, predictable, trusted:** Dedicated hardware resources translate into consistent performance with no tenancy-related performance compromises and no “noisy-neighbor” effect. PTG also gets the enhanced security of a single-tenant environment with physically isolated network, compute and storage layers.

For more information or to request a demonstration, please contact:

Stephan Georgacopoulos, Director of Northeast Markets
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Did you know that every spring and fall CCAP's Insurance Programs mails out a FREE publication called the GLIMPSE? The GLIMPSE catalog provides a detailed listing of workshop topics being offered that season. CCAP's Insurance Programs offer a full schedule of workshops statewide. These workshops include risk management and professional development opportunities for county officials and county employees. Workshops are offered at little or no cost to your county and are FREE to attend if your county is a member of the sponsoring insurance program.

Stay tuned for a copy of the 2021 Fall Glimpse Training Catalog! We are hoping to have in person trainings for the fall and will be following all safety precautions.



To learn more about our workshops or to receive a copy of the Glimpse Training Catalog contact Linda Rosito at (717) 736-4728 or lrosito@pacounties.org.

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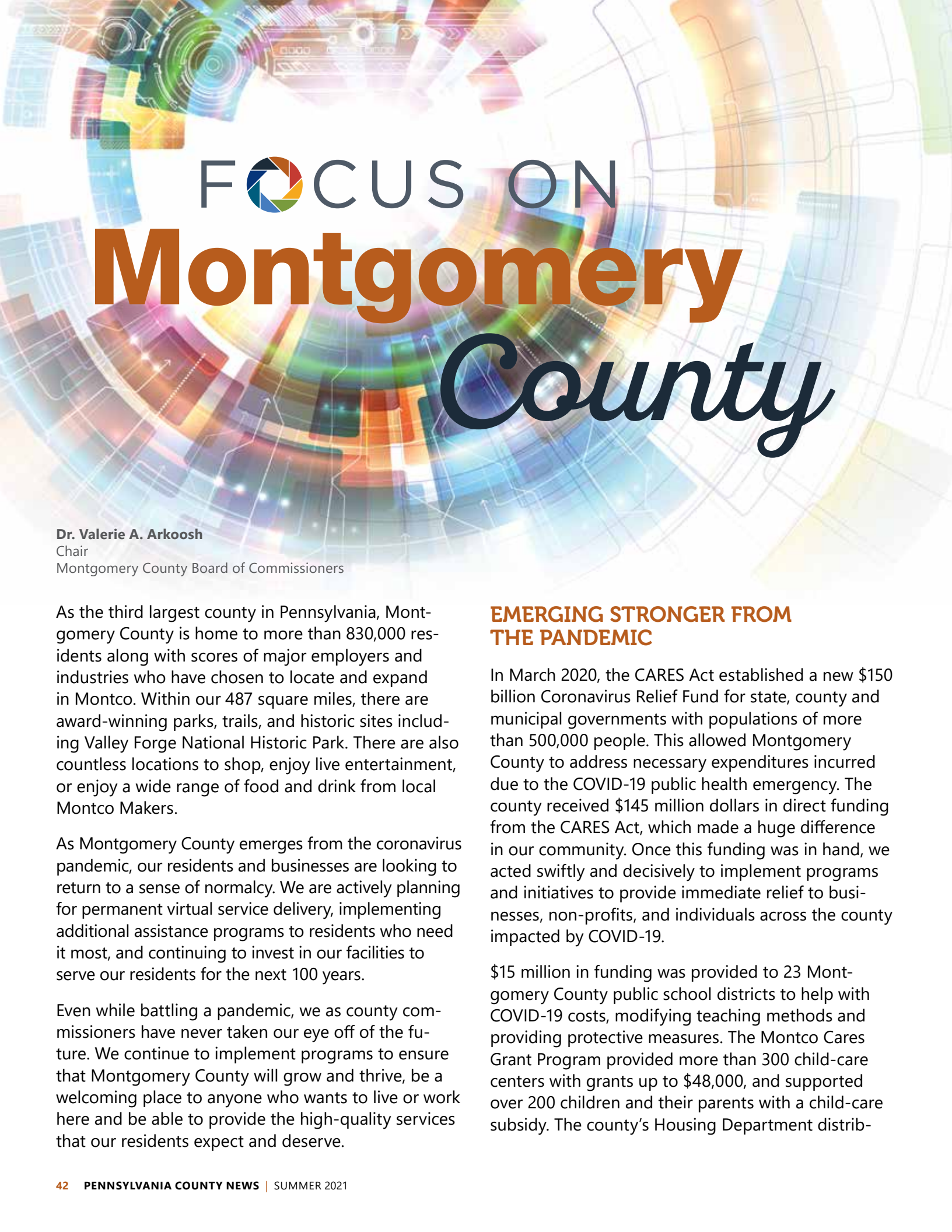
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FOCUS ON **Montgomery** *County*

Dr. Valerie A. Arkoosh

Chair

Montgomery County Board of Commissioners

As the third largest county in Pennsylvania, Montgomery County is home to more than 830,000 residents along with scores of major employers and industries who have chosen to locate and expand in Montco. Within our 487 square miles, there are award-winning parks, trails, and historic sites including Valley Forge National Historic Park. There are also countless locations to shop, enjoy live entertainment, or enjoy a wide range of food and drink from local Montco Makers.

As Montgomery County emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, our residents and businesses are looking to return to a sense of normalcy. We are actively planning for permanent virtual service delivery, implementing additional assistance programs to residents who need it most, and continuing to invest in our facilities to serve our residents for the next 100 years.

Even while battling a pandemic, we as county commissioners have never taken our eye off of the future. We continue to implement programs to ensure that Montgomery County will grow and thrive, be a welcoming place to anyone who wants to live or work here and be able to provide the high-quality services that our residents expect and deserve.

EMERGING STRONGER FROM THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the CARES Act established a new \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund for state, county and municipal governments with populations of more than 500,000 people. This allowed Montgomery County to address necessary expenditures incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The county received \$145 million dollars in direct funding from the CARES Act, which made a huge difference in our community. Once this funding was in hand, we acted swiftly and decisively to implement programs and initiatives to provide immediate relief to businesses, non-profits, and individuals across the county impacted by COVID-19.

\$15 million in funding was provided to 23 Montgomery County public school districts to help with COVID-19 costs, modifying teaching methods and providing protective measures. The Montco Cares Grant Program provided more than 300 child-care centers with grants up to \$48,000, and supported over 200 children and their parents with a child-care subsidy. The county's Housing Department distrib-



Cyclists cross over the Perkiomen Creek at Spring Mount along the Perkiomen Trail in Montgomery County.

uted \$4.5 million in rent and utility relief to more than 1,000 households to help people stay in their homes. In addition, the Pennsylvania Housing Financing Agency Rent Relief Program administered by the county distributed \$1.8 million of rent relief to 545 households in Montgomery County.

To support nonprofit groups and help them continue the work they do every day, \$5 million was provided for the Montco Strong Nonprofit Resiliency and Restoration Grant Program. In addition, \$1.1 million of funding was provided to the Montgomery County Community College for educational programming to train and place students with manufacturing businesses.

The Montco Food Panty Assistance Program provided \$2 million in assistance to provide food security for an estimated 160,000 County residents impacted by COVID-19. In addition, the Food Security and Work-

force Development Program provided \$1 million of funding to the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and YWCA Tri-County Area. These two organizations, in partnership with the county Departments of Commerce and Human Health Services have developed a program to alleviate food insecurity for families while improving employment skills.

We also continue to support the tourism industry, which has been hit hard by the pandemic. The "Make It Main Street" marketing initiative provided \$700,000 of funding to the Valley Forge Tourism Bureau to lead marketing efforts to restart business activity and reinvigorate communities in Montco to focus on recovery of small businesses and local communities. We also provided a \$500,000 grant to the Elmwood Park Zoo, a major driver of tourism in the Valley Forge area. And finally, through our Montco Strong Small Busi-



The Montgomery County Justice Center will tie three complex projects into one, constructing a modern county justice center that more than doubles the size of the existing county courthouse, completely renovates the current courthouse facility, and re-invents Hancock Square Park as an accessible, active public park.

ness Grant Program our Commerce Department has awarded 2,205 grants for a total of approximately \$26 million to support our local economy.

Our experience standing up relief programs through the CARES Act showed us that our economic recovery must be as equitable and inclusive as possible. Entire sectors of people lost their jobs during the pandemic here in Montgomery County, and many are still struggling to make ends meet. Now we are redirecting our efforts to make an impact using funds from the American Rescue Plan. Instead of focusing on specific programs or sectors, our leadership team is taking a holistic view of what economic recovery looks like for all of our residents, especially our most vulnerable. In addition to strengthening our social safety net, we are also looking to redesign parts of it so our providers have the resources they need in challenging times, while also meeting the needs of our residents.

Through the American Rescue Plan, we have the chance to critically examine our existing service models, processes and infrastructure. By examining how we can rebuild and recover sustainably, we can use this once in a lifetime opportunity to create long term prosperity for our residents.

INVESTING IN A JUSTICE CENTER FOR THE FUTURE

While Montgomery County was working over the last year to quickly to stand up multiple programs to counter the impacts of COVID-19, work on many other county projects continued. This is a true testament to the leadership of the county administration and our employees.

There is no better example of this than construction of the new Montgomery County Justice Center. This transformational project broke ground this spring creating jobs and procurement opportunities. The Justice Center ties three complex projects into one, constructing a modern County Justice Center allowing all of the county's courtrooms to be located in the same building. It also will completely renovate the current historic courthouse facility and re-invents Hancock Square Park as an active public park, accessible to the entire community. The county's Capital Improvement Program (2021-2025) includes \$800 million of projected spending and almost 50% is represented by the Justice Center project. This is the largest 5-year capital project program in the county's history, primarily funded by bond proceeds.

Phased over five years, the Montgomery County Justice Center will provide:

- New Justice Center: A 330,000 square foot, six story new building connected to the existing courthouse housing new courtrooms, court-related offices, and public spaces.
- Hancock Square Park: Reconstructed Hancock Square Park, expanded from the current 40,000 square feet to 113,000 square feet, incorporating carefully planned landscape native plantings, direct access from Main Street, and respectful incorporation of current monuments into reflective spaces.
- Historic Courthouse: Complete renovation of the existing courthouse, incorporating detailed attention to historic preservation and a full replacement of all utility infrastructure systems.

As we work to modernize our facilities, we are simultaneously modernizing our services that will eventually reside in this new facility. Since 2018 we have prioritized improving services to justice involved individuals by working with the courts, public defender and district attorney to create a Pre-trial Services Division. During our most recent budget process, we approved funding for ten positions to launch this new program.

Pre-Trial Services will work with the Montgomery County Office of the Public Defender to provide a navigator for everyone entering the county's court system. The goal of the program is to even the playing field for everyone who comes into contact with our justice system. Pre-trial Services is rooted in research that shows that when people are diverted from prison and given the services and resources they need, they have better outcomes.

Highlights of the Pre-Trial Services program include a standardized risk assessment to guide bail decisions to reduce the disparities in the current system; legal representation at the first court appearance including preliminary arraignments and hearings; and connections to housing, food, mental health or substance abuse treatment and other services.

MAKING REMOTE WORK PERMANENT

With COVID-19 mitigation measures lifted, the county and its residents are returning to life before the pandemic. Similar to other counties across the commonwealth, many Montgomery County employees have been working from home for more than a year.

There has been a clear, positive benefit to employees and our residents in a number of service areas. Employee survey results indicated that overall most employees found it beneficial for work and personal reasons. We acknowledge that remote work is not possible for all departments, all roles within a department or for all employees within a specific role. However, there are clear benefits that we expect to continue to offer to our employees and residents.

An internal county team including representatives from Human Resources, Information Technology Services, the Solicitors Office and several department heads worked together to develop a Remote Work Policy using the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania's policy as our model. With supervisor approval, eligible Montgomery County employees can now apply to work remotely on a permanent basis.

GETTING OUT ON THE TRAILS

Taking care of our mental and physical health is always important, but it was particularly vital during the coronavirus pandemic. Montgomery county parks, trails, and historic sites provide a welcome respite from everyday stresses and with more than 6,000 acres of public open space and 60 miles of trails across our county, we are fortunate to have many options for outdoor recreation.

In 2020, our parks and trails were visited by over 2.8 million visitors! Normally these facilities see around two million people annually, but it's no surprise that our residents were hitting the trails even more in 2020. What makes this even more remarkable is that this increase in visitors from last year only represents nine months of operations since all of our parks, trails, and historic site facilities were closed for three months because of the pandemic. That is why we have invested \$14.5 million dollars over five years to maintain and improve these important natural resources.

This year we marked the completion of a very important segment of regional trail, the Pennypack Trail in Lower Moreland Township. With the completion of this 0.7-mile section, the trail now extends for 6.2 miles along an exceptionally scenic corridor beginning at the south in Rockledge Park and continuing north to the Bucks-Montgomery border at County Line Road.

The Pennypack Trail is one of the most popular trails in the county with an average of more than 375,000 visits annually. Built on the former Fox Chase-Newtown SEPTA rail line, the trail offers visitors a 12-foot-wide gravel path that provides level hiking and biking opportunities with scenic views of the Pennypack Creek valley.

To continue to encourage trail use by our residents and visitors, the Montco Trail Challenge has returned for its sixth year from May 1 to December 1. This annual family-friendly program allows participants to track their visits to select Montgomery County trails and earn an award for completing visits to five, ten or fifteen participating trails.

Last year, the Montco Trail Challenge saw more than 1,600 participants ranging in age from 2 months old to 79 years old. The program draws people from the surrounding region representing Montgomery, Bucks, Berks, Chester, Philadelphia and Delaware Counties.

The Trail Challenge survey showed that 94% of respondents visited a new park or trail, and 89% learned something new about their community. The Trail Challenge also encouraged participants to get active, with 89% of survey takers said they walked more, 33% biked more, and 15% ran more. Overall, 88% of survey respondents said they improved their physical health, and 96% improved their mental health. 🍂



PRESERVING 10,000 ACRES OF FARMLAND

Over 30 years, the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program has worked to preserve open space and support productive farms in the county, which also provides important open spaces and scenic vistas. This year the program reached a historic milestone by preserving 10,000 acres of farmland.

"We are proud to recognize Montgomery County's farming heritage, which dates back more than 200 years," said Dr. Valerie A. Arkoosh, chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. "The farmland preservation program shows not only the importance of open space, but also the vital ways that farms contribute to the county's economic and sustainability efforts."

To date, there are 177 farms, representing a combined total of 10,196 acres, preserved in Montgomery County under the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program. In Pennsylvania, there are 5,813 preserved farms in 59 participating counties, representing an overall total of 591,819 acres preserved statewide.

"The importance of local food provided by Montco farms cannot be understated," said Kenneth E. Lawrence, Jr., Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Commissioners. "The growth of the farm-to-table movement has decreased both food miles traveled and carbon footprints to make it a win-win for everyone. Local farms are also critical partners in our anti-hunger efforts to support people in need by providing healthy, local food to our residents."

County funding leverages additional state dollars to bring total program funding to over \$2 million dollars annually. Funding for the program comes from both the county and state, and, in some cases, the municipality. The remainder of the funding comes from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through cigarette taxes, the Environmental Stewardship Fund, and other sources. A township or borough may contribute money to preserve a farm within its own boundaries.



There are 177 farms, representing a combined total of 10,196 acres, preserved in Montgomery County under the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program.

The farmland preservation program purchases agricultural easements on productive farms in Montgomery County. When the easement is sold, the owner keeps the land but the land must remain in farming in perpetuity. The farmer may sell the land, but the new owner must continue to grow productive crops or pasture on it. Applying to the program is voluntary.

Montgomery County thanks partners who have supported the farmland preservation program over the years including the Montgomery County Conservation District, the Montgomery County Farm Bureau, and the Penn State Extension Montgomery County.

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Agility

A Roadmap to Providing
a More Seamless
Transportation Experience



Rich Kirkpatrick
PennDOT Bureau of Innovations

Pennsylvania's 67 counties share a challenging responsibility with PennDOT to manage key components of a far-flung and extensive road and bridge network, and the Agility program, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, offers an important tool in pursuing that mission successfully.

Counties own roughly 6,000 of the state's 31,000 bridges, and local governments oversee roughly 75,000 miles of the 121,000 miles of roads that crisscross the state.

Thus, an overriding issue is how to address the challenging impact of the jurisdictional boundaries created by Pennsylvania's myriad of state, county and local governments with road responsibilities to offer a seamless transportation experience for the state's citizens.



PennDOT's Agility Program

Service-for-Service Partnering

Agility enables PennDOT and its eligible partners to exchange **services, equipment** and **staff** without monetary payments. Agility helps PennDOT and its partners to make the most of limited resources, while developing **strong** and **rewarding** relationships.

How Agility Works?

By passing a resolution, executing an **Agility Agreement** and negotiating an **Agility Work Plan**, an eligible partner can exchange services with PennDOT over a 5-year period.

Examples of Exchanges

- Partner receives painted road lines in exchange for mowing
- Partner receives inlet cleaning in exchange for street sweeping
- Partner receives seal coating of local roads in exchange for winter services
- Partner receives paving of local roads in exchange for litter pick up and meeting facilities



Learn More

For more information, call 717-736-7225 or email RA-PDAGILITY@pa.gov.



Who Is Eligible?

- Local and County Governments
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Rural Planning Organizations
- School Districts and Colleges
- Volunteer Fire Companies
- Charitable Hospitals
- And Many Others!

Why Agility?

- Completes work that otherwise may not have been done
- Provides better service to the public
- Provides smoother, safer and cleaner roads, bridges and roadsides
- Use funds more efficiently and effectively

Who Benefits?

- **Public** benefits by seeing more work completed on the entire state and local road system
- **Partners** benefit by getting credit for seamless improvements across the state and local networks

A CONCEPT IS BORN

The Agility story begins in 1995, when then-PennDOT Secretary Brad Mallory came across a book by author Roger Nagle, "Agile Competitors and Virtual Organizations," outlining a concept to spur businesses to think outside of the box.

That December, Mallory turned to his deputy secretaries and bought each of them a copy of Nagle's book and asked them to come back to him with ideas on how to bring the Agility approach to PennDOT.

"Rob Wonderling (then PennDOT Deputy Secretary for Administration and now president and CEO of The Chamber of Commerce for Greater Philadelphia) came back with a program layout to reach out to local governments and trade services with them," Mallory said. "Instead of stopping the plows at the borough line, we should continue with a straight pass and they do a similar loop and hit some of our network."

By enabling PennDOT and partners to equally exchange services, like snow plowing or mowing, without exchanging money, synergies could be found to improve transportation in Pennsylvania.

Reflecting his often-stated mantra when he headed PennDOT, Mallory said, "People don't care who owns the road, they want seamless service and that (Agility) really played to that."

A COLLABORATIVE PILOT PROGRAM

Mallory and his team launched Agility in May 1996. The program commenced with a pilot agreement that involved Crawford and Venango counties and the cities of Meadville, Franklin and Oil City; Crawford, West Mead and Vernon townships; and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which represents PennDOT employees. PennDOT painted traffic lines on local streets while local crews did mowing, cleaning and other services on state highways.

The initial savings amounted to about \$25,000. Within five years, the program had expanded to all 11 PennDOT engineering districts and over time has attracted more than 3,000 partners.

Creativity is a hallmark of Agility as evidenced by an agreement worked out between PennDOT and the State Correctional Institution at Mercer. Inmates performed litter pickup on various state routes and painted a PennDOT wash bay. In return, PennDOT graded and paved an access road on prison property. The exchange allowed PennDOT to redirect its maintenance staff to other roadway concerns that otherwise would have been delayed.

That same creativity has led to one of the most compelling Agility success stories in the solid relationship that has developed over the years between PennDOT's Butler County operation and Cranberry Township.

"It's one of the best programs that has been offered around the



A common Agility exchange over the past 25 years has been PennDOT painting lines on local roads.



Harborcreek Township in Erie County completes work as part of the state's first-ever executed Agility agreement.

state for municipalities in general," said Jason Dailey, Utilities director and former Public Works director for Cranberry Township in Butler County. "We have certainly had a really good experience with the program."

Dailey said Agility inspires creativity on both sides of the exchange.

"The creativity you can bring to it, the flexibility the district offices have to make this program work for everyone, the opportunities are really endless," he said. "If you can think it up, your district will work with you to work to make that happen."

PennDOT's **Agility** PROGRAM

Did You Know?

The travelling public benefits from PennDOT and its eligible partners exchanging services, equipment and staff without monetary payments. Agility also helps PennDOT and its partners make the most of limited resources, while developing strong and rewarding relationships.



EXAMPLE: Partner performs winter services in exchange for PennDOT seal coating local roads.

Who is Eligible?



LOCAL & COUNTY
GOVERNMENTS



SCHOOL DISTRICTS
& PUBLIC COLLEGES



VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES
& CHARITABLE HOSPITALS

And More!

Program Benefits

- Completes work that otherwise may not have been done
- Provides better service to the public
- Provides smoother, safer and cleaner roads, bridges and roadsides
- Uses funds more efficiently and effectively



LEARN MORE AT: PennDOT.gov > Doing Business > Local Government > Agility Program
EMAIL: PDAGILITY@pa.gov

Chris Robinson, roadway programs coordinator for PennDOT's Butler County operation, noted the circumstances when partners are drawn to an Agility agreement.

"Usually, it's when you have a resource that either is unavailable to the other group or you can do at a more efficient cost than the other group," he said. "If you have something that is easier for you to provide or the other group doesn't have, that's a good time to look at things."

DELIVERING THE VERY BEST SERVICES

Some of the key steps in the Agility process are:

- PennDOT and the partner organization must enter a formal written agreement.

- The partner must be a public entity. The program is open to counties, school districts, non-profits, volunteer fire companies and others.
- No money can be exchanged.
- Materials alone cannot be exchanged as part of the agreement except for road signs, salt brine and magnesium chloride.

There are three general steps that must be followed on the road to an Agility agreement:

- The partner must evaluate what services it needs and what services it can provide to PennDOT.
- The partner must complete the Agility agreement, which includes a resolution indicating acceptance by the partner's officials. The resolution must be adopted at a public meeting.

- The partner, PennDOT and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees must negotiate a work plan that spells out who will do what for whom.

With all levels of government trying to deliver the very best services with limited resources, Agility represents an important tool to assist in meeting that goal.

"We welcome new ideas and partners for our Agility program," said PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian, P.E. "Agility has fostered effective and lasting cross-government relationships that in turn have produced enhanced transportation services across Pennsylvania. We invite more counties to join us." 🍷



GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS

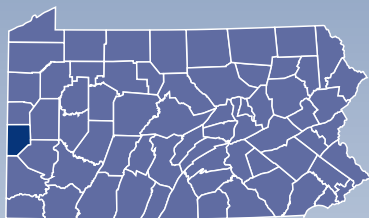
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COUNTY HIGHLIGHT:

BEAVER

Equity Trilogy

- diversity •
- inclusion •
- cultural •
competency

CULTURAL AWARENESS: Beaver County's State Approved Curriculum to Bring **Cultural Competency** to Schools

2020 was a year for the books! Beyond the hardships of a global pandemic, 2020 pushed the American society to think about and view race relations in a whole new light. The cultural events of 2020 opened conversations between friends, family and coworkers, and companies spent more time encouraging and promoting equality and diversity.

Knowing the importance of gaining cultural competency, Beaver County looked upon those who have championed the mission for years. One such organization is Beaver County Behavioral Health (BCBH). BCBH has been engaged in Cultural Competency Training for its System of Care for the past decade. With growing awareness, and a sense of need and urgency, BCBH and the Beaver County commissioners created the Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Council (IDAC). IDAC was formed to bring together community and business partners to create an awareness of the value of diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency throughout all of Beaver County.



CALL TO ACTION

Initially, IDAC created a program and built a partnership with the Youth Ambassadors, a group of students from 17 Beaver County schools (including public, private, parochial, special education and charter schools). The Youth Ambassador Program worked to promote awareness and understanding of current issues youth are facing today. This work included creating an atmosphere where individual differences are respected and conversations about the Equity Trilogy, diversity, inclusion and cultural competency occur. They hoped to promote awareness of behavioral health and wellness, decrease the stigma associated with mental health and substance use, promote leadership and self-advocacy among youth, and build relationships with other youth in their districts and across the country.

While the students worked hard to implement change, over time it became clear that a school-based curriculum in cultural competency would better serve the Youth Ambassadors, as well as all other district students. With the support of BCBH, under the leadership of Gerard Mike, executive director of the IDAC and the Beaver County commissioners (Daniel C. Camp III, Tony Amadio and Jack Manning), Dr. Donald Sheffield, education consultant and president of TAME Inc., was called upon to create a training program designed for school administrators to explore and develop cultural competency for the curriculum. The Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit was engaged to assist in the application and delivery of the course and the recruitment of interested school districts.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL

Championing behind the cause, BCBH stepped in and used grant money from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration to fund the creation of a course for school districts. The belief was that the mental health of students directly ties into the acceptance of their differences.

After a rigorous design and application process, a training program, *Preparing Educational Leaders for Equity in Cultural Competency: Connecting Across Cultures*, was created for school administrators to explore and develop cultural competency for the curriculum. This course provides superintendents, principals, and Intermediate Unit leadership forty hours of Act 45 credits to gain an understanding of cultural competency, and how it connects to high performing schools, as well as create a district-wide plan to embed cultural competency into the curriculum.

COURSE PILOT

In February of 2020 the Pennsylvania Department of Education approved a course for professional development credit (ACT 45) for school administrators. Four Beaver County school districts were selected for the first pilot program funded jointly by BCBH and the participating school districts. These districts included Big Beaver Falls, Blackhawk, Western Beaver and Rochester.

Eighteen school leaders participated in the pilot course that was written to encompass the following learning objectives:

- Awareness of the role of culture in leading in diverse societies and school systems
- Knowledge of the role of the brain in teaching and learning
- Understanding of cultural competency and how it relates to valuing diversity and differences among diverse student populations
- Knowledge of self-reflection and assessment as a means to lead and manage the school improvement strategies and plans in one's own school or district
- Understanding of the 4 A's of differences (accept, appreciate, acknowledge, attention) that support the environmental inclusion and achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, socioeconomic, and homeless backgrounds
- Ability to engage in critical self-reflection of one's own attitudes, behaviors, and practices (strengths and weaknesses) that may positively impact or negatively impede leadership and decision-making across and within diverse student cultures and groups
- Ability to change and shift one's own attitudes, values, and practices in ways that support the maximization of the teaching and learning of all students in one's own school or district
- Skills in communicating and leading cultural competency strategies and practices that integrate the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion across all cultures and groups, i.e., staff, students, parents, and community members.

Throughout the course, participants discussed how teachers should teach with the brain in mind and students need to gain cultural sensitivity.

OUTCOMES

Upon conclusion of the course, all participants raved about their experience, including Christy (Powell) Meszaros', "What a great training that was! [Dr. Sheffield] was an excellent speaker with a very helpful and insightful message for us!"

Key points collected from post-surveys indicate:

- All would recommend the training to other school districts. They liked the group activities, discussions and the opportunity to learn more about the topics and consider how this applies to their students' needs. They wanted more group discussions and activities.
- By the end of the training, the vast majority of respondents reported understanding the concepts of diversity, inclusion, cultural competency and pluralism. Everyone reported understanding the relationship between cultural competency and high performance.
- Based on the changes in pre-post-ratings, the training increased participants' understanding about equity and equality, judging others, tolerance and appreciation and how practice makes permanent not perfect.

Through the facilitation of the course and discussion of council members, IDAC leaders acknowledged two possible ways for school district implement. For



communities who lack a governing body, the creation of IDAC is strongly advised. This allows for members of all walks of life, who know their neighborhoods and businesses well, to come together to bring change that works in their backyards. However, on the flip side, if a council or task force is already in place, this course in cultural awareness promises to help strategic planning and goal setting to further the work already set forth. Either way, having a governing body and training its members will allow key stakeholders to gain a common language and support the implementation within the school systems.

NEXT STEPS

Preparing Educational Leaders for Equity in Cultural Competency: Connecting Across Cultures is gaining great momentum. With interest of districts outside Beaver County, this course stands the chance to implement real change in western Pennsylvania and beyond. One of the requirements of the course is the formation of a community based cultural competency advisory council, to ensure input from like stakeholders from the local district. The members consist of representatives from law enforcement, social service, workforce develop-

ment, businesses, faith-based, education, health care, housing and other related areas. The council will also be trained on the basic principles of equity and its role in supporting a high performing school.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

Since the presentation of the first cohort of learners, *Preparing Educational Leaders for Equity and Cultural Competency: Connecting Across Cultures* has not only been gaining attention within Beaver County, but it has also become a popular professional development for the summer of 2021. Beaver, Central Valley, Ambridge, Midland and New Brighton School Districts have already committed to sending their administrators to the 20-hour classroom sessions beginning this July.

Yet, the momentum does not stop there. News of this timely course has traveled outside of Beaver County, and the North Hills School District in Allegheny County has already scheduled the course starting in June. Beyond that, other school districts have inquired about the training and are in preliminary talks about scheduling. The popularity of equity leadership is growing, and the outlook appears promising. 🍷

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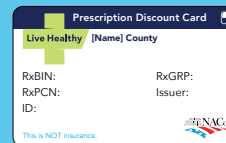
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ARE YOU READY FOR THE

NEXT CRISIS?

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The light at the end of the tunnel! 'Rounding the final turn.' 'Almost there.' 'Back to normal.' We've all heard these phrases related to COVID-19, expanding vaccinations, and our return of freedom again. A year and a half since shutdown, the reality of a protective vaccine is truly remarkable.

Yet, public health, risk and crisis managers may not be so jubilant. COVID remains. Caution is still the 'watchword' in the United States. Other parts of the world continue to suffer greatly from COVID and deadly secondary infections such as India's Black Fungus. None of us know what level of COVID or variant reoccurrence will emerge this fall and winter. If restrictions return, how will government leadership react to pushback from the public? The timeline of this crisis is far from over by a long shot.

Perhaps now is a strategic time to quickly check lessons learned from this crisis and apply each to existing knowledge and operations.

DECISIVE LEADERSHIP

Multiple definitions of crisis can be synthesized to suggest a crisis is an event that disrupts normal organizations or community function. Variables are numerous. Natural or man-made crises. Violent or non-violent. Internal administrative or external emergency management responses. Crisis damage to people and property or image and reputation.

Whatever the situation, crisis management requires prompt and decisive leadership.

County commissioners in Pennsylvania have access to their own set of crisis experts in their emergency management divisions. County EM directors have PEMA available for immediate guidance. PEMA coordinates when necessary with FEMA. However, not all crises require an EM-type response.

Embezzlement, sexual harassment, data loss, computer system failure or hacking, fraud, unexpected

leadership change due to death or illness do not require an on-scene EM activation. Each type however, may compromise normal operations and require action to retain public confidence in county government.

CRISIS MODELS

Traditionally, government orientation to crisis followed FEMA's model: Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. Current crisis managers recognize *Mitigation* as a separate and distinct element of this model next to Prevention.

Other models expand the construct of crisis. None are exclusive or exhaustive, but each offer foundational categories every government executive should know and indeed apply daily.

One of the seminal references to crisis was written by Steven Fink in his book, *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*. At the time of the Three Mile Island crisis, Fink worked in the Thornburgh



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Administration in Harrisburg. Based largely on TMI he says crises start with prodromes or warning signs. He further suggests crises erupt if pre-crisis issues are not managed or corrected. From crises, he says lingering effects require action before the crisis ends.

Although written in the mid 80's, Fink's idea of prodromes is essential to crisis management today. Let's transpose this model onto the COVID crisis. US intelligence knew of illnesses in the Wuhan, China region in 2019. World media sounded alarms as the virus' deadly escalation invaded Asia and Europe. US health officials warned of its arrival. And, in early March 2020, Pennsylvania's first cases surfaced. The bottom line: The world knew.

Warning signs of COVID were evident for months prior to its onslaught here in the US. Over the last 18 months, we've also seen the extent of economic, political, and psychological lingering effects.

My last model represents bits and pieces from several crisis models over the last 20 years and after several of our world disasters. Yet, elements of each are directly applicable to you in county government here in Pennsylvania.

Seymour and Moore (2000) depict crisis as 'cobra'-like in its sudden strike, as in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They also suggest some crises parallel a gradual and cunning 'python'-like approach. Smith (1990) suggests the inability to see a crisis coming, failing to identify

warning signs or signals is actually a crisis of management. He also challenges flawed response and recovery is a crisis of legitimacy. In between crises of management and legitimacy, many authors identify failed operations point to inexperienced leadership.

ASK QUESTIONS

So how can you apply these models to your varied levels of government leadership? First, the time is now to strategically ask questions of yourself and others. Perhaps, an organizational chart helps. At each level, in each subdivision of your organization, what do you know is problematic right now? How long has it been deficient, substandard or a potential crisis? What can you do to mitigate its explosion into a crisis-level operational full-stop? Is the issue systemic or systematic, requiring sweeping change for which funding is limited or not available? What if that crisis went public and your constituents realized you could have prevented it from negatively impacting them?

These questions can be incorporated into director or staff training, retreat agendas, or periodic organizational development meetings. The benefit of sharing the concept of prodromes as present warning signs, will prompt greater organizational awareness to known operational flaws.

It's those unknown crises that keep us up at night that also require investigation. In a recent CCAP leadership seminar, I encouraged Zoom

attendees to scan media for examples of crises that could impact you. Are crises elsewhere emerging slowly but eventually reach you in your county? The answer should not be "nay, that could never happen here!". Rather, your best response should be: "if that happens here, what would I do about it?". This simple crisis response exercise is well worth the time.

Two recent cases come to mind. What would you do if your lead counsel, solicitor or district attorney abruptly resigned due to immoral character or a divorce and affair? This happened in Oklahoma. What vendor redundancies are in place if any of your vital service divisions were hacked and your entire system shut down? The recent Colonial Pipeline crisis challenged fuel suppliers and motorists throughout the eastern half of the US. The answers to these questions should point you to your crisis plan.

YOUR CRISIS PLAN

Your county risk manager or emergency management director probably use a response plan format in their specific divisions. A review of those plan subcategories may be useful. Further, across your county operational divisions, other plans exist.

Business continuity plans are designed to decentralize operations to ensure against failure of government if one location is compromised or destroyed by fire or terrorism. Contingency plans focus

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on securing extra resources so materials are always available. Consequence management assumes loss and damage to the extreme and lists methods to return to normalcy over the long haul. Crisis communications plans outline sustained public information message templates and procedures to keep the public informed.

Your crisis plan at the leadership level in county government should first define its purpose to identify and prepare for crisis, response and recovery. It should acknowledge the presence and location of any other plans which may support your 'leadership' plan.

Remember, your plan is a work in progress. You will want to update it, add to it, and modify it as new helpful information for your plan emerges. Also, any observation of other county's experiences across Pennsylvania or the US, should be inserted as best practice examples.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

One important self-reflective exercise involves listing the top five or ten crises you worry about the most. Crisis academic Fearn-Banks (2017) suggests you rank these most critical crises by likelihood of occurrence and level of damage each may produce. Damage here may include physical damage, short or long term trauma and protracted psychological recovery costs, or image decline and reputation loss.

Next, your crisis typology should categorize crises that seem extraordinary but have even a distant de-

gree of plausibility. Each division of county government may also want to conduct this type of crisis audit and report back to the commissioner level through its directors.

Any crisis at the highest level of county government requires a concerted team of leaders to support commissioners and commensurate decisions before, during and after crisis. Each county executive has a core group of reliable colleagues.

Your crisis team should include your solicitor or legal counsel. Your finance, risk, and human resource directors need a place at the table. Your sheriff is essential with regard to public safety and security on this team. Your IT leadership may be needed to ensure digital communication/privacy. Your public information officer or chief clerk should be present as the conduit to the public and media. Membership on this team varies with the uniqueness of the crisis.

Your plan should also spell out the role of each member of the team, when and how each will be activated and where the team will stage when called. All administrative assistants should be briefed on the formation of the team, the role they will play in shifting from regular operations to crisis function. Crisis activation for support personnel may include clearing a designated meeting room for arrival of the team, deferral of all calls for each team member, directing media inquiries to the public information officer or others after conclusion of crisis meetings.

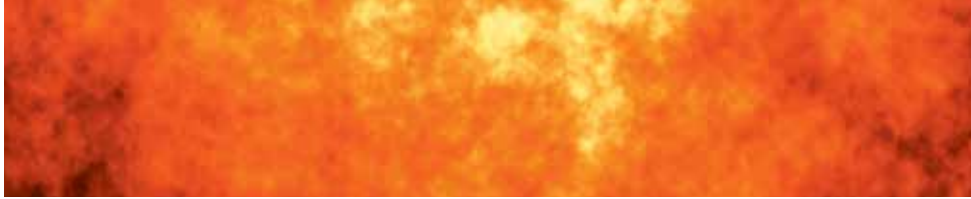
ACTIVATION PROTOCOLS

Your present emergency protocols with your emergency management department likely include attendance of the chair commissioner to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) when a declaration is declared. It's important for commissioners in the EOC to appreciate and accept the leadership of the EM director and not usurp that individual's expertise, direction or action.

Likewise, the presence of the emergency management as a silent support to and at the request of the commissioners may be helpful in a non-EM crisis. Some counties have a PIO assigned to emergency management and available to all other divisions of county government.

At the moment the commissioners activate their crisis plan and team, all members need to respond promptly. Their support personnel should be advised to 'hold-down-the-fort' in their absence. Upon arrival at a meeting place, the commissioner or someone else should brief the team on known facts at that time. In crises, initial facts will likely change as more details are revealed.

After the initial briefing, a lead facilitator should canvas the team for reaction and suggested action. These responses should be clear and concise. Three status boards or screens should be developed. First, a situation board should list



known facts: who, what, when, where, how (as known). This board will be revised numerous times as new information is received. A second screen should identify key personnel and contact info for each, if these persons are needed but are not members of the crisis team. Next, a list of action steps to resolution or return to normalcy should be documented. This list will be used to compare variations that surface as time passes.

Your meeting location and materials are important to list in your plan. An initial brainstorming session will likely reveal the need for computers, phones, hard drive space, crisis screen templates, dry-erase boards, printers, notepads, pens, Zoom or teleconference software, lighting for digital conferencing, and refreshment supplies. Your materials list will likely vary.

Crises usually take far more time to resolve than time allows in a normal workday. Your team should also identify a 72–96-hour response shift rotation. If shifts are not necessary, a roster of availability for each member of the team is critical through the perceived end of the crisis.

MEDIA AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Anytime a potential crisis surfaces, leadership must recognize the likelihood of media finding out about the situation. One school of thought promotes transparency with the media and public. Before you contact media, two considerations make sense. You and your team should have full knowledge of the crisis and have an action plan ready to reveal to the public per the impact and resolution. Next, if the crisis could have been prevented or is one for which the president commissioner has some measure of responsibility, the best notion is to acknowledge the shortcoming, identify the process of relief or resolution and ask for forgiveness.

Strategic communicators recognize that if you have a constituency with which you have cultivated a long and valued relationship, they will more quickly forgive and continue support than if the crisis is hidden from them.

Prior to any crisis, leaders also need to have a complete understanding of who their community opinion leaders are and how to reach them. These are people who have supported you, hold resources that benefit you and your administrations, and who will publicly advocate for you in a crisis.

The people may not be your close friends, political colleagues or financial supporters. The people who matter in a crisis plan are those who can reach core groups of the community on your behalf. Each sector of your county has these leaders across education, manufacturing, healthcare, economic development, transportation, law enforcement, real estate, retail and retirees, and more. In your plan, these opinion leaders' contact information should be at the ready.

FUTURE CRISES

Crisis management planning is inherently vital to your success. Your ability to develop a finger-tip ready crisis plan for yourself and your county is essential. Your skill in recognizing prodromes and engaging your crisis team to mitigate each before situations must be honed over time. Without question, county executives juggle multiple operational situations constantly. Most do not rise to the level of a crisis where normal operations are interrupted and compromised to the detriment of your public. However, we never know when crisis will strike. Hopefully, this information will prompt you to increase your readiness and crisis resolution. 🍷



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Important Factors to Streamline Park Maintenance Strategies

Brian Koehler
Director
Pennsylvania Park
Maintenance Institute

The National Park System approximately has \$315 million deferred park maintenance in the state of Pennsylvania alone¹ Pennsylvania State Park and Forest Systems have estimated more than a \$1 billion price tag for deferred maintenance/infrastructure needs across the commonwealth.²

Neither of those figures account for the additional amount of deferred maintenance needs from 2100+ county and local parks statewide. COVID-19 may have

changed our social and economic realities for the foreseeable future, but it has not stopped the plants from growing, the trash from piling up, equipment from rusting, or the trails from eroding. Park maintenance professionals are needed now more than ever, and this is an opportunity to implement more strategic approaches within daily operations. The following paragraphs outline three important factors to consider as we move towards recovery and resilience.



IDENTIFY ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS AND AUXILIARY SERVICES

What is a community need? vs. What is an administrative want?

Strategy isn't only the work of senior executives—don't stand still, awaiting the "final" answer on essential operations. Focus on what our community needs first. We owe it to the public to deliver value every day. Identify daily tasks and specific resources that are essential to maintenance of your facilities. What must happen in order to keep facilities from being damaged? What must happen in order to keep facilities safe and healthy for the public? What facilities are not able to operate due to lack of resources? Efficiency can be achieved with strategic thinking and resource management.

What should we do now? vs. What should we put on a back burner?

When the strategy is uncertain, the best managers acknowledge what's unknown, but also look ahead to what needs to happen to maintain operations. Where are potential bottlenecks in various supply chains that would impact operations? How can you reprioritize staff duties based upon availability/skill sets? What projects can be deferred until more certain times? What projects have previously been put on hold, that may now be an opportune time to complete? Investigate the X-factors in your park operations and make decisions that create the greatest impact and improve longevity of your park facilities.

OPEN, HONEST AND CONSISTENT STAFF COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

Ask Questions / Allow Opportunity for Constructive Venting

Valuable, open discussion can only occur when all parties feel they are being heard. Seeking advice from our crew is an excellent method to engage discussion. People like to share their knowledge, opinions, and experience. The challenge comes with directing individual passion and energy towards common purpose. Allow people opportunity to share thoughts, concerns, frustrations. Follow-up with requests for potential solutions in order redirect energy and build positive momentum.

Listen / Share Concerns

Share emotions to demonstrate emotional steadiness and acknowledge those of our team in productive ways. Openly share how and why priorities have been established, allow opportunity for the team to share feedback and digest. Maintain open dialogue to keep our team engaged and aligned until a clear direction emerges. "It is OK not to have an answer, but let's try to figure it out together." Clearly define priorities and shared values to drive a team forward with direction and confidence, even in uncertain times. Direction inspires purpose and cultivates innovation. Once focused, our team will deliver consistent value and begin to explore what's possible to expand.

ESTABLISH COMMON PROCESSES AND ENCOURAGED BEHAVIORS

Establish and Maintain Communication Protocol

Communication is a reciprocal process of giving and receiving information. Encourage team communication through dialogue rather than directives. Engage our crew in the strategic process through regularly scheduled huddles to ensure everyone is aware of daily operations. Increasing regularity of communication does not justify more meetings—however it does encourage more frequent, purposeful communication. Meeting in person for the sake of meeting is often a waste of time. Valuable team communication can occur through teleconference, group chats, and many other virtual means customizable to the needs of our crew. The intent is to reduce competition for resources and frustration from duplicated work. Create an agreeable process to promote collaboration, increase innovation, encourage sharing of best practices and reward contributions. Strengthened team identity will pay off in efficiency, increased morale, sense of ownership, and quality of performance.



Expand Our Knowledge Base

Ask ourselves: “Who is the most experienced member of our crew? What are absolute minimum skills needed from everyone on our team?” How do we train and evaluate our crew members? How do we capture data? The answers or (lack of) help us understand our potential knowledge gaps.

If our most experienced crew member were to leave—What knowledge, skills and abilities are lost? How can we capture / record that experience (write it down / spreadsheet / videos / shadow training)? Who would be able to

fill that gap immediately? How long does it take to hire someone in our shop?

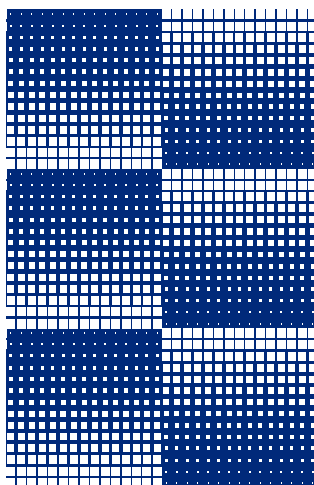
Park maintenance is only as valuable as the performance of the labor. To use a sports analogy, we should build our crew with a training strategy of the Steelers from the 1970s—find raw talent, define a game plan, nurture individual strengths that contribute towards the success of the game plan.

In conclusion, take a practical approach to defining essential park maintenance operations. Consider the needs of your community, and the longevity of existing facili-

ties first. Include “boots-on-the-ground” as members of the strategic development team as well as a piece of the execution plan. Build your park maintenance professionalism from the bottom up. The future of our parks relies upon our ability to maintain their existence. 🍷

¹ National Parks Service

² Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation



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County Leaders Graduate from Center for Excellence

Mandi E. Glantz, CAE

Director of Member and Vendor Relations
County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania



The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania Center for Excellence in County Leadership (CEL), a premier professional development program for county officials, recently graduated 11 leaders from its intensive two and a half-day training program.

CEL training focuses on fostering individual growth through interactive and high-level classroom training aimed at improving participants' communication, management and leadership skills. CEL includes intense classes in styles of leadership, managerial versatility, interpersonal dynamics, crisis communication, media management, daily communication problem solving, decision making, and other areas.

Participation is available to one eligible person per county per year, with a maximum of 12 participants annually. An application is required for admittance to the program, with final selection being made by a standing CCAP Committee. The program is open to county commissioners or council members, chief clerks, county administrators and solicitors of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Key county leaders and department heads are also eligible.

The 2021 CEL program was produced by The Professional Edge, Inc. (www.theprofessionaledgeinc.com).

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Front row, seated (l to r): Deb Baughman, Bedford County commissioner; Scott Rastetter, Erie County councilmember; Loretta Spielvogel, Lawrence County commissioner; Becky Ann Bartlett, Northampton County deputy director of administration.

Back row (l to r): Krista Gromalski, Pike County communications director; Colleen Dawson, Somerset County commissioner; Elizabeth Arnold, Susquehanna County commissioner; Josh Maxwell, Chester County commissioner; Molly Mudd, Esq., Adams County solicitor; Stacy Richards, Union County commissioner; Michael Rivera, Berks County commissioner.

MESSAGING AND SPEAKING SKILLS CAN **INFORM, INFLUENCE AND MOTIVATE**

Ken Kroski

Director of Media and Public Relations
County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

It remains at or near the top of the list for the most frightening of human endeavors ... public speaking.

Yet, as county leaders, pretty much everything you say can be considered public speaking—in its own way. You speak with legislators, residents, employees, media representatives—the list is endless. And, this communication takes many forms: one on one in person, on the phone, in small groups or with large audiences. It also encompasses constituents with a variety of education levels, socio-economic incomes and levels of power. Yet, it's easy to forget that almost everything you say or don't say sends a message and has the ability to influence.

➤ “It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.”

MARK TWAIN

WHAT YOU SAY. HOW YOU SAY IT. TO WHOM YOU SAY IT.

Issues are complicated. Context and reason are suspect. And to make things more difficult, perceptions about county services and your credibility are varied. You can be judged instantaneously based upon one word, a pre-conceived notion, the look on your face, one event, or even the dreaded misrepresentation. And, managing others' anger and apathy require skill and fortitude.

All the more reason to know your subject matter—the details and the big picture. All the more reason to know your audience, how they perceive things, what emotional triggers they may have and, particularly, how the issue affects their lives. Understanding through the other person's eyes, through their context, is critical to using the correct methods of communication and messaging to break through barriers, solve problems and provide the best service possible. Choose your words carefully and tailor the message to your audience. It's not about you. It's about them.

➤ “A genuine leader is not a seracher of consensus, but a molder of consensus.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

A MEANINGFUL MESSAGE

Influential speaking must take into account many variables, but beyond learning the intricacies of the subject matter and your audience, no easy tasks, there are things you can do to deliver an influential message—a message that motivates—a message that resonates and is remembered.

First and foremost, remembering that you are a leader should form your thought processes, preparation, delivery and response. You are the one sought by many to be the voice of information, reason and rationality, the one who molds consensus. You are the helping hand. This means that preparation, including knowing the red flags and anticipating specific questions, is important to the eventual outcomes.

And, delivering a meaningful message relies on many factors. Your appearance, controlling nervous energy, gestures, facial expressions, sounding professionally passionate, eye contact, intonating and pausing to allow your audience to process your message – all of these factors play a role in getting your message understood.

Understand the difference between what you want to say vs. what the audience wants to hear vs. what the audience needs to hear. What are you going to say to a legislator and how does it differ from informing and engaging a community leader or fellow county employee?

▶ “A wise man speaks because he has something to say, a fool speaks because he has to say something.”

PLATO

WHITE NOISE

At times, listening seems to be a lost art, so the old adage—tell them what you’re going to tell them—tell them—then tell them what you told them—stands the test of time. Many people will remember only up to three things from any conversation or speech. So think in threes, use short sentences with active words, and your chance to be impactful will be increased. Above all, say only what you want to be heard. You also need to listen and process messages. Resist the temptation to make immediate responses without first taking a breath, then delivering a thoughtful, constructive message. And, know when to stop talking or you’ll just become white noise.

Under any circumstances, one on one or in a large group, read your message as little as possible. Reading diminishes the effectiveness of your words and provides an unwanted opportunity for the audience to disconnect. If visuals are used, make them supplemental. And, be concise but say what needs to be said. You always can add information via an email, a newsletter article, editorial, website, social media link or other communications vehicles. And while we’re there, think about how what you write and how you write it portray the same message, care and professionalism. Tone takes on a whole new meaning in writing, so make sure that your written words build trust and a collaborative spirit.

▶ “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

MAYA ANGELOU

ENGAGEMENT AND BALANCE

What are you going to do locally and at the state level to make a difference? Engaging your audience, whether it’s one person or one hundred people, means telling a story that they can appreciate, stating the effects, producing statistics and making the messaging relevant to their concerns or lives. Get them to think about what they are not thinking about. Teach them what they don’t know. Understand beforehand what you want them to feel after they’ve heard your story. As the old saying goes, people don’t care what you know until they know that you care.

Know the goal. What are the bottom-line reasons for your message? If an ask is involved, tell the story then consider starting sentences with, “Let’s help people who have this problem, by ...,” “You and I can use funding more wisely by ...,” “The other options we can explore to help with this issue include ...,” or “We need your help to make this service”

Engagement also means balancing pleasantries with the seriousness of the message, as well as soliciting feedback and acting on it. Prepare messaging and your demeanor to meet a specific setting and the specific relationships with participants. Is it a casual or formal relationship or event? Do you know the audience or is this their first impression of you? Of course, a good handshake, eye contact and a smile always speak volumes.

Think about who can help you to break through the cacophony of information we each encounter—who can help you really connect with your audience. Perhaps other leaders or experts can collaborate? Perhaps county employees? Perhaps civic leaders? Nothing builds relationships like a common goal.

➤ “Recognizing the ‘moment’ of opportunity allows you to influence timing, circumstances and results.”

CLIFF KRASINSKI

TIMING AND ISSUES

The speed of information today is, well, essentially instantaneous. Word of mouth isn’t far behind. Knowing when to get ahead of a need or an issue - and to act rather than react - is critical. So, preparing for an event, a concern or an action to become public is more important than ever. It gives you time to think about messaging and influence eventual outcomes. You may be hamstrung by legal and political factors, but recognizing the potential fallout of not saying something is critical to your impact on the issue as it progresses. In general, say the best thing at the right time.

It is when you are caught off guard or you regard something as being blown out of proportion that you quickly must gather information, determine what the perceptions are and determine how you will proceed in the best interest of your constituents. You may not think it’s an issue, but others might, so respecting their belief and preparing with sensitivity and thoroughness can make or break your influence and future perceptions of you. You are always building trust for the next issue—whether you are being proactive or reactive.

➤ “The more I practice, the luckier I get.”

ARNOLD PALMER

ANALYZE

Influential speaking takes practice and repetition for most people: practice in front of a mirror, practice by recording yourself and critically listening to it, and practice in front of others who will tell you what you need to hear not what you want to hear. Ask others how you can improve your messaging and speaking style. Even a seasoned leader can benefit from analyzing their communications skills and abilities to influence.

Also, think about how others, in various settings, have made you feel engaged. Incorporate their skills into your delivery style.

Be yourself, be genuine, but model the commitment you want from others. If they remember you in a positive manner, chances are they will remember your message in a positive manner.

Getting Your Message Across



- Know the subject matter and audience
- Your message is about them, not you
- Study how you communicate
- Be professionally passionate
- Teach them what they don’t know
- Be memorable



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