

UPTOWN

Hometown Legislative Action Day: Partners for Progress

Building effective local-state partnerships is essential for South Carolina to progress. Municipal officials from across the state will gather in Columbia on February 15 for MASC's Hometown Legislative Action Day to show their commitment to becoming full partners in South Carolina's progress. "Local officials must get to know state legislators on a personal level," explained MASC President Mayor Tom Peebles of Hilton Head Island. "They must foster an atmosphere in which both can bring forward their concerns and listen to one another."

Charleston Mayor Joe Riley will give the keynote address during the Opening General Session. Riley will

talk about the value of South Carolina's cities and towns and the need to work as partners with all levels of government. Senator Jim Ritchie of Spartanburg will continue the theme of "Partners for Progress" by providing a legislator's perspective of the essential partnership between the state and municipal governments. He will also explain how cities are the economic engines of the state.

Hometown Legislative Action Day provides two opportunities for local officials to meet face to face with their legislators. As MASC did last year, the House and the Senate will be asked to adopt a concurrent resolution recognizing February 15, 2005 as South Carolina Hometown Day.

Between 11:45 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., both the Senate and the House will recognize municipalities. It is imperative that as many people as possible gather in the galleries and the Statehouse lobby during that time. Having a strong municipal presence at the Statehouse will demonstrate the importance of SC cities and towns and why developing a strong partnership is essential for South Carolina's progress.

The legislative reception, held from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m., is another opportunity to discuss key legislative issues with legislators and to develop successful state-municipal partnerships.

Throughout the meeting, officials will learn about and discuss key

ACTION DAY continued on page 2

South Carolina Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

MASC offers training opportunities for municipal elected officials to ensure SC cities and towns reach their full potential. One such training opportunity is the Municipal Elected Officials Institute.

Sessions A and B of the Institute will be held February 16, the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day in Columbia. Registration information will

INSTITUTE continued on page 5

December 2004

Inside This Issue

Community Builders grants 18 awards to those building better communities

page 6

The soaring costs of workers' compensation: The why and the how

page 9

Action Day continued from cover

legislative issues affecting SC municipalities in 2005: better annexation laws, true Home Rule authority and more flexible revenue sources. The afternoon sessions are dedicated to exploring each of these areas in depth. Officials will also learn how to develop “message boards” to communicate municipal issues on the local, state and federal levels.

How to prepare

There are several things you should do to prepare for Hometown Legislative Action Day. Contact your representatives and senators and tell them about MASC’s Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 15. Read the

articles in this and upcoming issues of *Uptown*, which further explain the key legislative issues (annexation, Home Rule authority and revenue sources). Be prepared to discuss the issues with your senators and representatives. If you have any questions or need clarification about an issue, contact MASC.

When you speak with your legislators, tell them you will be visiting the Statehouse during the day on February 15 and you hope to see them there. Invite them to the MASC reception that evening for a more informal discussion about the issues. Invite them to dinner after the reception. The more time you can spend with

your senators and representatives, the stronger your partnership will become.

For more information, visit MASC’s Web site at www.masc.sc. MASC will mail meeting information in early January. The pre-registration deadline is February 1. Registrations postmarked after February 1 will be returned, and the registrant will be required to register at the meeting. The Adam’s Mark Hotel reservation deadline is January 24 to guarantee the group rate.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government will be held the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day. See related story on page 1.

MASC continues its efforts to provide workable annexation laws in South Carolina

South Carolina is a state of contrast. Vast areas of undeveloped land surround modern urban centers. In the more than 32,000 square miles comprising our state, the US Census Bureau has identified eight urban areas. These urban areas make up less than 4 percent of South Carolina’s land mass but are home to more than 70 percent of South Carolinians. The urban areas also contain 75 percent of the available jobs.

As we know all too well, “urban” in South Carolina is not the same as “municipal.” South Carolina’s annexation laws mean our central cities contain only 13.5 percent of their metropolitan area’s population. Only 35 percent of the state’s population lives inside a municipality. Our central cities are the fifth smallest central cities in the nation. This inability of our cities and towns to reach out to their “urbanized fringe” results in fragmented government and higher costs of services for citizens living within the city.

Citizens living in the urban fringe benefit from the central city, but do not help pay for the city services they use. They come into the city for jobs in banks, legal and accounting firms, utility headquarters and other industries. They come to receive services from the offices of the county, state and federal governments. They come to visit the museums, theaters, zoos and sports arenas. They come to the colleges and universities located in our cities and towns. Yet the burden of maintaining roads and streets, providing police and fire protection, and maintaining parks and cultural facilities is left to the citizens living inside city limits.

MASC will continue its work with the General Assembly to provide workable annexation laws that allow our cities to absorb this urban fringe. Last year, MASC supported two changes to existing law. First, MASC asked for a reduction in the percentage of property owners required to sign an annexation petition from 75 percent to 60 percent. This

“super majority” still protects the rights of property owners. Secondly, MASC will continue to work for an enclave annexation law, which will allow a municipality to annex an area completely surrounded by the municipality.

MASC will also work with interested legislators to study alternative methods to annex urbanized areas around a city. Other states, most notably North Carolina, allow their cities to annex by ordinance any area meeting an agreed upon definition of “urban.” North Carolina cities have been able to capture 52 percent of their counties’ population growth between 1950 and 2000, whereas South Carolina’s cities only captured 14 percent of the population growth.

Cities and towns are the economic hubs of their regions. They must be allowed to grow to their natural urban boundaries in order to have the financial resources to provide the services required by municipal residents and enjoyed by residents of the urban fringe.

Editorials support importance of local government

Legislators, candidates oblivious to needs of local government

by Cindi Ross Scoppe, reprinted from The State

One of the more striking patterns that ran through interviews with 31 legislative candidates in the primaries and general elections was the reaction when I asked what, if any, changes the legislature should make concerning local government: deer-in-the-headlights blank stares.

That's a slight exaggeration. Some of the candidates were familiar with some of the problems with legislative interference in local authority. But with the exception of Ken Wingate, no one we talked to had a firm handle on the depth and range of problems.

Things didn't get a lot better when I reverted to a leading question, asking whether the legislature needed to meddle less in local matters and remove some of the constraints it has placed on the ability of elected city and county councilmembers to set local tax rates and manage growth and allocate local resources.

One candidate thought a moment and said that, no, he didn't suppose there was a need for the legislature to reduce the authority of local governments. Another suggested they might be given a bit more leeway — along with a requirement that they justify each action to the legislature.

An all-too-frequent response was that voters hadn't mentioned this — as if that meant it therefore couldn't possibly be a problem.

Somewhere along the way, Brad Warthen started adding in a reference to "fulfilling the promise of Home Rule," which seemed to trip a light-switch in several candidates' heads. But even that led to nothing more than a denunciation

of legislative attempts to further restrict local officials' authority. Denunciation of the legislature's attempts to prohibit county councils zoning out mega-hog farms was commonplace.

What disturbed me most was when Joan Brady talked only about bad things she would fight to stop. This from a former mayor and current county councilmember who is so keenly aware of how legislative actions hamstringing local governments that she says, admirably, that she hopes to be a voice for local government at the Statehouse.

If even she can't imagine a pro-active, pro-local-government agenda, what hope is there that we'll ever have real local government in South Carolina?

In the three decades since Home Rule was enshrined in our constitution, those who believed in the principle have mostly faded away, replaced by a generation who have no concept of what was actually promised — and how far short the legislature has come of realizing it. Like anyone who knows only what they have experienced, they assume the status quo represents life as it should be.

It does not.

The idea of Home Rule was that decisions should be made as locally as possible, so the unique needs and preferences of each community could be taken into account. That means city councils should run cities, county councils should run counties, and the legislature should concentrate on running the state.

Much improved immediately upon adoption of Home Rule: Local legislative delegations stopped writing the annual county budget, and thus were freed up to concentrate on doing the job they

were elected to do. County councils got to decide how much to spend on the sheriff's department and the jail, the health department, the election commission and so on. They got to designate parts of the counties where only homes could be built, and parts where only industry could locate.

But much of the promise of Home Rule has never been realized.

More than 500 special little governments that the legislature created still run fire districts, recreation commissions and water and sewer districts. They duplicate the work of cities and counties, driving up costs for everyone. Some are elected, but many are appointed by local legislators, which means the people elected to run local affairs have no say over their actions. And legislators have little say, since there are no provisions to remove appointees.

Local delegations still pass special laws for their counties that override the authority of county councils and of the legislature as a whole. The fact that the constitution specifically prohibits this provides no deterrent.

The legislature passes laws to restrict all local governments' authority to set the types and levels of taxes that the voters in those cities and counties want.

And cities are hamstrung by some of the most restrictive annexation laws in the nation. This makes it impossible to exercise some measure of control over a community's development, as growth outside the city limits creates urban population centers that then demand counties provide duplicative municipal services.

LEGISLATORS continued on page 5

Editorials support importance of local government

Statehouse Report: Duplicity on Home Rule

by Andy Brack, reprinted from Free Times

South Carolina seems to be becoming a state that wants to have its cake and eat it, too. In politics, some seem to want two styles of government at once.

On one hand, many in South Carolina remain strong believers in a Republican-backed mantra that the government which governs best is that which is closest to the people. Hence, the Palmetto State's longstanding kinship for state's rights over federalized control.

But on the other hand, a new kind of political rationale is being heard from business-backed interests. They seem to generally agree with the overall mantra — unless it doesn't fit their needs. Then, somewhat hypocritically, they call for centralized state control.

Two examples this year come to mind.

First is the case of hog farms. In reaction to some counties that enacted tough regulations to keep factory hog farms out of their area, House GOP leaders pushed through a bill in the spring that would have prohibited local governments from enacting stricter guidelines on hog and poultry farms than those in state law. As the bill wound its way through the Senate, it morphed into a broad measure that would have barred local governments from adopting regulatory measures tougher than the state's. The bill failed. But it will be back next session.

Second, the state Department of Health and Environmental Control is working on a draft of legislation to protect isolated wetlands. In the past session, a bill backed by the SC Association of Realtors got all the

way to conference committee before it died in the last days of the session. That bill, thought to be bad by conservationists because it exempted too much land from protection, also will be back in some form.

In both instances, proponents of the measures essentially argue that the state is a better guardian of standards than local government. But these calls for more centralized government fly in the face of the GOP's years-long pitch for devolved government.

"The business community wants it both ways," says Dana Beach, executive director of the SC Coastal Conservation League. "They are being cravenly opportunistic. When they see something advantageous to them that involves devolving [government] down to the local level, they're for it.

"But when it comes to things they see as disadvantageous, such as municipal regulations of hog farms, they're big fans of centralized government. Ultimately, it's just a matter of trying to promote policies that promote their particular interest, not the interest of the public."

At issue is where control of local policies should rest. Under Home Rule in South Carolina, the state is all powerful, but grants certain functions, such as zoning and police powers, to local governments.

Local governments are ideal for many parochial matters because they can respond more quickly than the state, and they can take local conditions into account, says Robert Croom of the SC Association of Counties. Also, when local governments can

control development through zoning and other tools, they're able to steer some growth to certain areas or make undesirable growth difficult.

Consider the benefits of this local control. Some communities have ordinances that require signs like the McDonald's golden arches to be discreet. Others regulate where adult bookstores and liquor stores can be.

These local controls allow communities to define and improve their quality of life. Furthermore, in communities like Hilton Head Island, such regulatory enhancements can have a positive effect on property values.

If state lawmakers take away local flexibility on some regulatory matters, such as adult bookstores and giant hog farms, they will limit people's abilities to create the kind of communities they want to live in.

In the long run, that could hurt the state's efforts to recruit retirees and new businesses.

Bottom line: Before succumbing to the business lobby's arguments for more centralized control in some cases, lawmakers should look at the bigger picture and think about what state control would mean to the quality of life in South Carolina's towns, cities and counties.

At Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 15, learn how to educate your legislator about the essential value of cities and how the state's success is dependent upon the economic health of local governments across South Carolina.

Institute continued from cover

be part of the Hometown Legislative Action Day registration materials mailed in early January. Session A topics are: "The City as an Employer," "An Overview of Local Government Planning and Zoning" and "Conducting Public Meetings and Team Building/Goal Setting." Session B topics are: "Business License Tax Administration," "Municipal Finance," "Municipal Annexation, Mergers and Consolidation," "Liability of Municipalities and Elected Officials" and "Ethics and Municipal Governance." Officials must take Sessions A and B in consecutive order.

Core courses

In addition to Sessions A and B, elected officials must take a series of core courses to graduate from the Institute. The five core courses may be taken any time prior to graduation. The classes are offered through three telecasts, which are broadcast in the evening to the 10 regional councils of governments (COGs). Participants at the COGs may talk with the instructor during the broadcast. Time is set aside during the telecast for group discussions at each location. MASC mails registration information for core courses prior to each telecast. The Association also advertises upcoming broadcasts in this newsletter and on the MASC Web site (www.masc.sc).

Institute requirements

- Participants must complete:
 - Session A
 - Session B
 - Five core courses taught in three telecasts
- Sessions A and B must be taken in consecutive order.
- Core courses may be taken in any order at any time prior to graduating.

2005 telecast schedule

March 3

- Basic Budgeting for Municipal Officials

May 5

- You've Been Elected: Now What?
- The Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina

September 1

- The Forms of Municipal Government
- Benefits and Pitfalls of Economic Development

"When elected local officials take advantage of educational opportunities, they ensure their municipality will operate efficiently and effectively," explained Michelle James, MASC director of Education and Training.

When it was formed more than 60 years ago, the Municipal Association of South Carolina made a commitment — to offer services and programs that give municipal officials the knowledge, experience and tools for making the best possible public decisions in the complex world of municipal government.

For almost two decades, MASC, in cooperation with Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and the University of

South Carolina's Institute of Public Service and Policy Research, has presented the South Carolina Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Using faculty drawn from local government experts across South Carolina and other states, the Elected Officials Institute is specifically designed for South Carolina municipal elected officials.

The commitment of every municipal elected official to participate in this Institute is essential for South Carolina cities and towns to reach their full potential.

For more information about the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government, contact Mary Brantner at 803.933.1206 or mbrantner@masc.sc.

Legislators continued from page 3

Howard Duvall, executive director of the state Municipal Association, has become so concerned about what he calls "a continuing and probably growing problem" that his organization has launched a multi-year campaign to re-educate the public about the importance of local government.

A study soon to be published attempts to demonstrate the extent to which "municipalities serve not just city residents but their regions."

While the campaign is focused primarily on getting the public to recognize the need for strong, empowered cities, officials hope that message will filter up to elected officials. "Our

ultimate goal," Mr. Duvall told me, "is to have a legislature that values cities and realizes the essential function that we perform in supplying the economic power behind South Carolina."

It's an important and worthy goal — and one that will not be easy to achieve.

Community Builders grants 18 awards to those building better communities

The Community Builders Awards Program recognizes and celebrates the hard work, dedication and success of its member programs. The achievements of Community Builders members make South Carolina a state of unique “communities of place” that celebrate each town’s past while working for a positive future. At its Annual Meeting held in November in Greenville, Community Builders presented 18 awards for 2004 achievements. Following are highlights of a few of the many award-winning endeavors.

The Community Builders Award of Recognition was given to Mike Welch, director of Public Works for the City of Hartsville, for going above and beyond the call of duty to protect investments in downtown Hartsville. During the summer of 2004, Hartsville was plagued with heavy rains and flooding. Business owners located in the low-lying portion of downtown watched in frustration as water rose up to the curb, over the sidewalk and finally under the doors of their businesses not once, but many times. Welch stood shoulder to shoulder with his seven-man crew during and after the rains to help downtown businesses recover and helped put in place prevention methods to alleviate future flooding problems.

This year, Community Builders presented two Outstanding Public Improvement Awards. The Potting Shed Garden Club in Chester won the award for its Breezeway Garden project. Club members dedicated hours of planning and hard work to create a garden in an area used as a shortcut from a city parking lot to the heart of Chester’s historic downtown shopping area. They turned a drab 60-foot by

Community Builders’ 2004 award winners

Outstanding Board: Bennettsville Downtown Development Association	Outstanding Public Improvement: The Breezeway Garden, The Potting Shed Garden Club in Chester
Outstanding Board Chairman: Dale Satterfield, Main Street Laurens USA	Edisto Memorial Gardens Spray Park, City of Orangeburg Parks and Recreation Department
Outstanding Public/Private Partnership: Revitalization of historic property, City of Columbia, Columbia Development Corporation and Holmes Smith Developments	Hometown Hero: Jean Quick, Bennettsville Downtown Development Association Jeff Orr, Chester Downtown Development Association
Outstanding Promotional Program: Downtown Magnolia Market, City Center Partnership in Columbia	Patsy Adams, Main Street Laurens USA Pat Meadows, Main Street Laurens USA
Outstanding Promotional Event: The Little River Bridge Run and Walk in Laurens Horseplay in Aiken	Public Service Award: Nancy Anderson, councilmember for the City of Chester Max Alderman, administrator and director of Public Utilities for the City of Bennettsville
Master Merchant Award: Iris Bryant, owner of Bold & Sassy Children’s Boutique in Lake City	Community Builders Award of Recognition: Mike Welch, director of Public Works for the City of Hartsville
Gaines Jontz Rehabilitation Award: Canal Dime Savings Bank Buildings in Columbia Midnight Rooster Courtyard and Eatery in Hartsville	

26-foot area into a beautiful breezeway that could be enjoyed by all.

The City of Orangeburg Parks and Recreation Department also won the Outstanding Public Improvement Award for its creation of Spray Park. In this 6,000-square-foot area, water is splashed,

pumped and dumped from fixtures such as a giant daisy, a water cannon, a rainbow and large buckets. The park also includes a covered picnic area, restrooms and a modern playground with a slide, swings and a climbing wall. The park opened in May 2004, just in time for



Children cool off on a hot summer day at Spray Park, created by Orangeburg's Parks and Recreation Department.



Thirty fiberglass horses were created for Aiken's public arts celebration, Horseplay, which won the Community Builders' Award for Outstanding Promotional Event. The horses were sold at auction during the celebration but remain on display in downtown Aiken, drawing thousands of visitors.

Orangeburg's youth to cool off during those hot summer days.

Community Builders also presented two Public Service Awards because community revitalization projects cannot happen without the support of volunteers and elected officials. A Public Service Award was presented to Max Alderman, administrator and director of Public Utilities for the City of Bennettsville, for his outstanding leadership in the many projects that have enhanced and helped revitalize the city's downtown. Nancy Anderson,

councilmember for the City of Chester, also received a Public Service Award that recognizes her years of service on the Chester Downtown Development Board and her continued support of downtown revitalization in her role as a councilmember.

Community Builders encourages all towns to celebrate their uniqueness and build toward a positive, revitalized community. For more information about these projects or others, contact Beppie LeGrand at 803.933.1231 or blegrand@masc.sc.



Classifieds

- The Town of Andrews is accepting applications for the position of public works director. Send resumé to Towanda McClary, PO Box 378, Andrews, SC 29510.
- The City of Walterboro is accepting applications for the position of code enforcement officer. Submit application to Job Services, 101 Mable T. Willis Boulevard, PO Drawer 530, Walterboro, SC 29488.
- Richland County Planning and Development Services in Columbia is seeking applications for a building official. Submit resumé to elainefinney@richlandonline.com or Elaine Finney, Administrative Services Manager, Richland County Planning and Development Services, 2020 Hampton Street, First Floor, Columbia, SC 29204-1002 (PO Box 192, Columbia, SC 29202-0192), or call 803.576.2144 for more information.

News Briefs



- In October, SC Business Licensing Officials Association members elected their 2004-2005 board of directors. President — Rusty Lameo, MBL, of Kiawah Island; Vice President — Pat Fowler of Williston; Secretary/Treasurer — Lex Kirkland of Aiken; Members At-Large — Patricia Jones of Batesburg-Leesville, Jeff Bowman, MBL, of Greenville and Kathy Barnes of Hilton Head Island; Past President — Steffanie Dom, MBL, of Greenwood.
- In October, SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association members elected their 2004-2005 board of directors. President — Tina Wicker of Newberry; Vice President — Charlotte Cheatham, MMC, of Edgefield; Secretary/Treasurer — Steve Thomas of Conway; Members At-Large — Hilda Hopper, CMFA, of Clover; Kelly Lovette of Goose Creek; Fran Strickland of Abbeville and Tammy P. Barkley, CMC, of Cayce; Past President — Thomas Chandler, CPM, CGFO, of Florence.

Great Falls to turn nature-based assets into "economic engines"

During a water-flow experiment conducted by Duke Power Company last month, white water finally roared over boulders that had been sitting high and dry for more than 100 years in the Great Falls of the Catawba River. The rapids disappeared from the Town of Great Falls in the 1900s when dams were built to generate electricity.

Called the "state's most impressive rapids" by historians, the rapids gave the Town of Great Falls its name. "It's that history that makes us eager to return the rapids to Great Falls," said Glinda Price Coleman, executive director of the Great Falls Hometown Association (GFHA). "We've been working for five years on objectives like this one to attract tourists and visitors to our beautiful, scenic community."

The Nature-Based Tourism Initiative started in 2000 when the GFHA held a charette in conjunction with Community Builders, a service of the Municipal Association of South Carolina. The community meeting involved a number of architects, designers and representatives from

state agencies, including the State Department of Natural Resources. From the charette, four objectives were established to stimulate the town's economy using its natural surroundings as assets:

- Develop a historic park on Dearborn Island and the ruins of Mount Dearborn Arsenal to focus on the interpretation of a Colonial military installation.
- Create a rails-to-trails project to develop a trail on the abandoned CSX railroad line from Great Falls to Landsford Canal State Park.
- Generate tourism and educational opportunities around the cultural assets of Duke Power Company's hydroelectric plants.
- Preserve the view shed and character of the Cedar Creek Reservoir (Stumpy Pond) and develop a management plan focused on recreational values of the reservoir.

"Great Falls has such potential in the area of nature-based tourism," Coleman explained. "Because the town and surrounding community are located on the Catawba River and several reservoirs that are basically untouched by development, we are on the brink of becoming a destination place."

The GFHA is not the only group pushing to accomplish these objectives. Outdoor and environmental partners are involved in the Initiative. With the Great Falls being replenished, new rapids will open for kayakers to explore. The replenishment will also restore fish habitats that once flourished in the channels long ago.

"The plans can make Great Falls a thriving, economically viable community, as it once was," said Coleman. "With a little time and the dedication of the community, people will be coming to Great Falls instead of skirting around it."

Information about the Great Falls Hometown Association's Nature-Based Tourism Initiative was presented at the SC Community Development Association's Winter Meeting in November.

Telecommunications Tax Bill: Please sign here

Monitor and adjust — this is an expression frequently used by educators referring to a classroom situation. The cities and towns of South Carolina are "monitoring and adjusting" to Governor Mark Sanford's delay in signing our number one legislative priority for 2004, the Telecommunications Tax Bill.

On the last day of the 2004 legislative session, the General Assembly passed legislation (H3530, R0406) that

permits a business license rate of 1 percent on telecommunication companies. As of the publication deadline, Governor Sanford had not signed the legislation into law. The governor has until January 19, 2005 to sign the legislation, veto it or allow it to become law without his signature.

To allow municipalities participating in the Telecommunications Tax Collection Program (TTCP) the most flexibility, the participants have adopted ordinances that levy the highest rate

allowed by state law as of February 1, 2005. The due date for taxes paid in 2005 has been moved to February 1, 2005, payable by February 28. The ordinance allows the municipality to benefit from the increase from the current 0.75 percent should the legislation become law before February 1.

MASC continues to work with the governor's office to provide information on this legislation and encourage the governor to sign the bill into law.

The soaring costs of workers' compensation: The why and the how

At the turn of the 20th century, workers were being injured and dying on the job at alarming rates. Oftentimes, the only chance workers had to recover costs associated with their injuries was to sue their employer. From a practical standpoint, this didn't happen much, because the cost of litigation was prohibitive for most employees.

In 1911, Wisconsin passed the first Workers' Compensation Act in the United States. South Carolina followed in 1935, establishing the South Carolina Industrial Commission (later changed to the Workers' Compensation Commission in 1986). Workers' compensation laws were passed to establish a no-fault system to protect employees from medical bills and lost wages in the event of an injury on the job. It also gave employers protection by prohibiting employees who accept workers' compensation coverage from suing their employer. This model continues to this day; however, the system has evolved dramatically in subsequent years.

Workers' compensation benefits are separated into three main categories. The first category is medical payments. When hurt on the job, an employee's medical bills are paid 100 percent by workers' compensation. The second category is wage replacement. When an employee is out of work for more than seven days, workers' compensation pays a tax-free payment to the employee equaling two-thirds of the employee's average weekly wage, up to the maximum amount allowed by law. The final category of payment is to the employee for temporary or permanent injury. The payment is computed based on the extent of the injury (theoretically), is prescribed by state statute and is determined by the Workers' Compensation Commission.

2005 rates

SC Municipal Insurance Trust

- Five percent overall rate increase effective January 1.
- Individual adjustments (up and down) by payroll classification code.

SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund

- No overall rate increases
 - General Liability — no change
 - Auto Liability — 5 percent increase
 - Property — 10 percent decrease
 - Auto Physical Damage — 5 percent increase
- Rates effective January 1

As the costs for providing workers' compensation coverage increased, employers looked for ways to control their overall costs. Workers' compensation providers began offering experience-rated plans, meaning that employers with good safety records could recognize a significant reduction in their costs. Experience rating provides an excellent incentive for employers to implement solid, sound safety programs.

"Despite these efforts, workers' compensation costs have been soaring in recent years," said Harvey Mathias, director of Risk Management Services for MASC. "Even employers with good safety records have watched their costs climb."

Mathias explained several factors are to blame: medical costs continue to rise; attorney involvement has made the process more expensive, with typically only the attorney benefiting from increased settlements; permanent and temporary injury payments have been inflated by workers' compensation commissioners against the recommendations of advising physicians; second

injury and guaranty funds have been abused, thus requiring increased assessments from insurance providers; the court system has liberally interpreted SC workers' compensation law, essentially finding coverage for injuries where coverage did not previously exist; provisions intended to prevent abuse from fraudulent claims have been rendered ineffective; and state legislators have been reluctant to make changes to the law.

"All these factors have led to soaring increases in costs. If these issues are not quickly and effectively dealt with by our legislature during the next legislative session, the chilling effect on economic development in South Carolina will worsen," said Otis Rawl, vice president of Public Policy for the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, who will push for legislation to clean up the current workers' compensation laws.

The South Carolina Municipal Insurance Trust (SCMIT), the MASC-sponsored workers' compensation program, is looking for ways to help its members reduce their costs. "From offering safety and loss control assistance to aggressive fair claims management," Mathias said, "SCMIT is working to clamp down on controllable costs. Unfortunately, many costs (such as those mentioned previously) remain out of SCMIT's control."

You will hear more from MASC about workers' compensation reform. Pay attention to the reforms identified by MASC and work with your legislative delegation on these issues. Not only are your municipality's workers' compensation expenses at stake, but so are prospects for enhanced economic development in your city or town.

2004 Achievement Award Winner

Public Safety Category: The City of Aiken

By volunteering their time, Aiken's public safety officers were able to reach at-risk youth and help keep them out of trouble by teaching them "America's favorite pastime."

When Captain LaLita Ashley of the Aiken Department of Public Safety told her husband about a 9-year-old boy in trouble for throwing rocks at passing cars, an idea was born. The boy had managed to crack two car windows as they passed. Captain Ashley's husband said, "With an arm like that, that kid should be pitching for a baseball team."

Ashley mentioned the idea of teaching inner-city children to play baseball in an effort to keep them out of trouble to Captain Richard Abney during a staff meeting. A longtime baseball player and coach, Abney went to work to make it happen. In the beginning, six public safety officers stepped up to the plate and volunteered their time. Soon, everybody was pitching in to help the Neighborhood Diamonds.

The Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club offered bats and balls, gloves and a pitching machine through a grant from Major League Baseball. The City of Aiken's Parks and Recreation Department offered the use of its new fields behind Schofield Middle School. Schofield's afterschool program helped, as did the Neighborhood Division of the City Manager's Office.

Slowly, in groups of twos and threes, children wandered onto the fields from the neighborhood. Two dozen boys and girls from varied backgrounds — who didn't know how to hold a baseball bat — were soon standing at the plate, learning to swing and getting some much needed adult attention and instruction from Abney and his volunteers.

The next spring, Abney formed two teams to play in the city's Dixie Youth League — the Royals (ages 9-10) and the Diamondbacks (ages 11-12). Abney



Children who didn't know how to hold a bat were taught baseball basics by public safety officer volunteers.



The Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club offered the newly formed team bats and balls, gloves and a pitching machine through a grant from Major League Baseball.

believed it was important these players have good uniforms. He wanted them to fit in and knew uniforms would boost their self-respect. The middle and high school students of the Junior Leadership Council of Aiken County raised more than \$1,000 to purchase uniforms for the team.

Armed with all the necessary equipment, uniforms and support,

the Diamondbacks won their first official game, 5-4. Each season, teams continue to form, and each season, community support grows. The children know they won't be able to play ball if they get into trouble. According to Ashley, none of the children involved in the Neighborhood Diamonds have committed a criminal offense since play began.

The police officers have developed close relationships with the children. They aren't seen as the enemy. They are coaches and, for some players, the only father figures they have.

By volunteering their time, Aiken's public safety officers were able to reach these children and help keep them out of trouble by teaching them "America's favorite pastime."

For more information about this project, contact Pete Frommer at 803.642.7620.

2004 Achievement Award Winner

Economic Development Category: The Town of Meggett

By bringing citizens and businesses together to volunteer their time and donate talents and funds, Meggett is working to return the town to its once thriving existence.

In the early 1900s, the Town of Meggett was a major Lowcountry railroad hub, connecting the waterway freight system and truck farmers. The town also served as a major distribution point for the second largest oyster and fish cannery in the state. In the 1920s, the SC Produce Association built a large two-story brick building to house the Association and the Farmer's Exchange Bank. Along with the adjacent post office, railroad depot, packing shed and large merchants building, Meggett prospered for more than 30 years. However, the advent of refrigerated trucks, the decline of the oyster industry and the consolidation of the railroad led to the decline of the town.

In 2001, Meggett's Citizen Planning Committee studied the town's assets and made recommendations to return the town to its prosperity. With history as the driving force, the committee developed a master plan to provide a wide array of social, economic and recreational opportunities for the citizens and surrounding areas. The project was named "Meggett 1925" to reflect the town's glory days.

The initial phase was to generate community support by constructing the Donor's Pavilion, a covered walkway connecting town hall and the adjacent Association building owned by the Town. The Donor's Pavilion allowed citizens to become involved through volunteer work or financial support. The sale of brick pavers, T-shirts and Christmas ornaments helped raise funds for the project, reducing the Town's dependence on grants and other tax dollars.

With a SC Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant,



The initial phase of "Meggett 1925" was the construction of the Donor's Pavilion that connects town hall and an adjacent Town-owned building.

in-kind services, volunteers and town funds, the Town is restoring the association building, which will be leased to professional businesses to generate additional funds for the Town's project. Just across the street is the new community park featuring a pond, walking trail, shelters, benches and a playground. Meggett also received a grant to install sidewalks, historical lighting and landscaping in the downtown area.

Future plans include reconstructing the railroad depot, the packing shed and the merchants building. Several interested parties are considering making the depot a restaurant, while the packing shed will be used for weekend farmers markets, art markets and antique shows. The merchants building will provide small retail spaces, giving citizens and entrepreneurs quality facilities in which to start a business.

By bringing citizens and businesses together, the ambitious master plan to bring Meggett back to its once thriving existence is well on its way.



The new community park features a pond, walking trail, shelters, benches and a playground for citizens to enjoy.

For more information about this project, contact Tom Boozer at 843.889.3622.

MASC recognizes and encourages innovations and excellence in local government through its Achievement Awards. Started in 1987, the program provides local government officials and employees the opportunity to receive deserved recognition for superior and innovative efforts in local government. The program also provides a forum for sharing the best public service ideas in South Carolina. For a copy of the 2004 Achievement Award video, contact Sophia Johnson at 803.933.1236. For more information about the Achievement Awards, visit MASC's Web site at www.masc.sc or call Christie Zeller at 803.933.1215.



Educational Opportunities

Hometown Connection

■ **January 25**, municipal officials from Anderson, Cherokee, Chester, Fairfield, Greenville, Lancaster, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg and York counties visit with their state legislators. Officials should meet at MASC's office at 1411 Gervais Street in Columbia at 10:30 a.m.

MASC

■ **February 15**, will hold Hometown Legislative Action Day at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Columbia. See related article on page 1.

SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

■ **February 16**, will hold Sessions A and B at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Columbia. Session A is open to any SC municipal elected official. Only elected officials who have attended Session A can register for Session B. See related article on page 1.

Hometown Network

■ **March 3**, the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government will present "Basic Budgeting for Municipal Officials." The session will be broadcast via satellite to the 10 regional councils of government. See related article on page 1.

SC Utility Billing Association

■ **March 16-18**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Bay Watch Resort in North Myrtle Beach.

Hometown Connection

■ **March 29**, municipal officials from Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Lexington, Orangeburg and Richland counties visit with their state legislators. Officials should meet at MASC's office at 1411 Gervais Street in Columbia at 10:30 a.m.

Hometown Connection

■ **April 26**, municipal officials from Abbeville, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Edgefield, Greenwood, Kershaw, Laurens, Lee, Marlboro, McCormick, Newberry, Saluda, Sumter and Union counties visit with their state legislators. Officials should meet at MASC's office at 1411 Gervais Street in Columbia at 10:30 a.m.

Hometown Network

■ **May 5**, the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government will present "You've Been Elected: Now What?" and "The Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina." The session will be broadcast via satellite to the 10 regional councils of government.

For more information about these meetings or other MASC meetings not listed, please call 803.799.9574, or visit our Web site at www.masc.sc.



1411 Gervais Street ■ P.O. Box 12109
Columbia, South Carolina 29211
Tel: 803.799.9574 ■ Fax: 803.933.1299
www.masc.sc

Prsrt Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Municipal
Association of
South Carolina

President: **Mayor Tom Peeples, Hilton Head Island**
Executive Director: **Howard E. Duvall Jr.**
Editor: **Mary M. Brantner, APR**
Associate Editor: **Christie M. Zeller**