

UPTOWN

MASC Annual Meeting sessions to range from gangs to green cities

Municipal officials will have the chance to learn about an array of topics — from gangs to industrial recruitment to environmentally friendly practices — at the Municipal Association of South Carolina’s 2007 Annual Meeting.

Each year, the Association’s Annual Meeting addresses current issues affecting cities and towns. This year’s meeting will be held July 12-15 in Greenville. The theme of the meeting is “South Carolina Hometowns: Bridges to Success.” Many of the general sessions will deal with the messages highlighted by MASC’s *Hometown, SC* initiative and its goals: to communicate the value of South Carolina’s cities, the impact of partnerships to realize success and municipalities’ need for flexible resources to meet citizens’ needs.

Various breakout sessions will look at specific issues facing many cities, including the growing problem of gang violence. A representative from the Richland County Sheriff’s Department’s Gang Task Force will lead a discussion titled “Gangs 101.” Gangs, according to Sgt. David Soto of the Task Force, are an issue throughout South Carolina.

“A lot of people are in denial,” he said. “A number of our resources and revenues in South Carolina are based on tourism. When we say we have gangs, it turns people away.”

Yet the issue must be dealt with, he noted. Soto said gang members can often

be identified based on their dress, tattoos and language. One of the first signs a gang has moved into a community is an increase in graffiti, he said. There also will be an increase in crime, starting with small things like petty larceny and shoplifting and eventually escalating to murder, he said.

The session will highlight programs available to communities to help with gang problems. “It’s a matter of trying and seeing what works in your community,” Soto said.

The City of Columbia has done a good job identifying and addressing the problem of gang violence, but much more needs to be done, he said. Gangs are not simply a law enforcement problem; they are a community problem, Soto said. Parents, neighborhoods, churches and synagogues, and mental health facilities all need to be aware and involved in the lives of young people to avoid gang exposure.

Another session will feature an environmental discussion:



Greenville’s downtown is home to more than 130 retail shops.

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New at the 2007 Annual Meeting

We'll be dancin' in the ... Hyatt

Greenville's Falls Park and Liberty Bridge will provide an awesome backdrop to kick off this year's meeting. Join your friends and colleagues for hors d'oeuvres, music and dancing. The event will be held in the Hyatt Regency Ballroom on Thursday, July 12 from 6:30 - 9 p.m.

Take me out to the ball game

As American as mom and apple pie, the Greenville Drive (the Boston Red Sox's South Atlantic League affiliate) will take on the Kannapolis Intimidators at 7 p.m. on Friday, July 13. The Drive plays at West End Field - a stadium heralded as one of the premier ballparks in the country. In preparation for this year's season, the team's owners spent more than \$1 million upgrading the downtown ballpark. Modeled after Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, West End Field boasts its own "Green Monster," a 30-foot high wall in left field, equipped with a manual scoreboard. Tickets are \$6.50 and can be purchased at MASC's conference registration area in the Hyatt Regency.

Tour de Greenville: An insider's look

Did you know Greenville's downtown covers 1,118 acres and is home to 130 retail shops, 22 churches, 1,200 residential units and 6,000 city-owned parking spaces? Learn how Greenville is continuing to expand its economic efforts in and around the downtown by joining city staff for a guided shuttle tour

of Falls Park, RiverPlace, the International Center for Automotive Research (ICAR), affordable housing initiatives and much more. The tour is offered as a pre-conference workshop on Thursday, July 19 from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Lunch is included in the \$65 registration fee.

Please note: The exhibitor showcase will be open only on Thursday, July 12, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Greenville's downtown covers 1,118 acres.

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"What Does 'Green' Really Mean?"

"We're going to showcase some of the best practices cities are already using to be more environmentally friendly," said MASC Director of Advocacy and Communications Reba Campbell.

Topping the list is the City of Union, which has made changes over the past year in an effort to reduce dependency on foreign oil and find alternatives to save fuel.

The City has replaced its fleet of diesel vehicles with a bio-diesel fleet, said Mayor Bruce Morgan. City Council also

has authorized the City to purchase a hybrid pick-up truck for the Utility Department and a plug-in hybrid vehicle as soon as they are available on the market, Morgan said.

In addition, the City worked out a unique agreement with the local Exxon dealer and Verde Biofuels in Greenville to make E-85 (fuel containing 85 percent ethanol) available to City vehicles and the public, Morgan said.

Morgan also is involved with Gov. Mark Sanford's Climate Change Group. The group is studying the impact of

possible climate changes on the state and how to address them.

"We're trying to be a greener city and reduce our dependence on foreign oil," Morgan said. "We encourage other cities to do the same."

Deadline for pre-registration is Monday, June 25. Visit MASC's Web site (www.masc.sc/education/annualmeeting.htm) for more information.

SCLGAG adds more options for health care coverage

The SC Local Government Assurance Group (the Municipal Association of SC's self-funded health insurance program) is offering three new options for the 2008 plan year, beginning July 1.

To promote a higher level of wellness and accountability, SCLGAG added two types of Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRA) plus a value option for those wanting a less expensive alternative.

SCLGAG's Enhanced and Standard HRA options reinforce the program's commitment to wellness and preventive care. Available in lieu of the traditional deductible plans, these options incorporate employee health screenings, questionnaires and other wellness elements at no additional cost to the employee or employer. Employees who complete the screenings and questionnaire are eligible for a \$300 deductible credit (up to \$600 for a family). The employee can use the credit to offset ongoing medical costs. If this credit is not used in the first year, it can be rolled over to the second year.

"Incorporating the health screenings and wellness elements into the plan will help us confidentially identify potential health-related problems before they require a trip to the emergency room or result in long-term illness," said Harvey Mathias, director of Risk Management Services. "It may help our employees

become aware of medical conditions they may not know they have, as well as save SCLGAG catastrophic claims dollars in the future."

The HRA approach is favored nationwide as employers struggle to manage rising health care costs. In the current health care marketplace, it is increasingly difficult to balance what an employer can afford to provide and what employees want. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, health care premiums have increased over three times the rate of inflation since 2000. The HRA gives the employer considerable flexibility, as well as promotes employees' interest in their own wellness and health care costs.

SCLGAG also added a Value Plan to its menu. The Value Plan has a higher deductible and does not provide all of the bells and whistles some of the other plans offer. However, it costs about 45 percent less than the Med200 Plan (SCLGAG's richest benefits plan).

"Many employees told us they were having problems affording full family coverage" said Mathias. The Value Plan provides our employees with a lower cost alternative while still providing excellent catastrophic protection. It does not sacrifice the emphasis on wellness and prevention either." The Value Plan has the same \$300 wellness benefit as all of the SCLGAG plans.



Overall, SCLGAG members will see a 14 percent rate increase for the 2008 plan year. This follows two straight years of only a 6 percent increase in 2006 and 2007.

"Our claims expenses were higher in the current year than what we would have liked, but this follows two years where we handily beat the double-digit national and state averages," Mathias said.

Over the last five years, the SCLGAG rate has increased an average of just 9.5 percent annually. "I don't know of any other plan out there that can report an average sustained single-digit increase over the past five years other than SCLGAG," Mathias said.

For more information about SCLGAG and the new plan options, contact Harvey Mathias at 803.933.1212 or e-mail hmathias@masc.sc.

Latest municipal compensation survey results available online

The Municipal Association of SC released the results of its 2007 Compensation Survey. Individuals can access the information from the Municipal Association's Web site at www.masc.sc/CompensationSurvey/.

The online version allows users to browse compensation data for each city or compare specific data, such as position, salary range and fiscal budget across cities. Also, users can export the data to an Excel file for additional research.

"The posting of annual compensation survey results on the MASC Web site, coupled with the added ease of importing search data into Excel, has simplified the task of researching and presenting statewide municipal compensation

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Employers must have clear leave policies

It's not just important for employers to develop good leave policies for their workers; state law requires it, according to a Columbia labor attorney.

The South Carolina Wage Payment Act requires employers to give notice of where and when wages get paid - and leave time such as vacation, holidays and sick days are considered part of an employee's wages, said Linda Edwards, an attorney with Gignilliat, Savitz & Bettis, P.A.

Many employers offer sick leave and annual leave. Others have replaced sick and annual leave with paid time off, or PTO, which is simply a bank of days available to the employee.

Many employers also offer bereavement leave to allow an employee to attend a funeral and civil leave for employees called to jury duty or casting a vote. Most employers put limits on these types of leave, such as funeral leave for immediate family members only and a cap on the number of paid days for jury duty, Edwards said. Otherwise, there's the potential for an employer to get stuck paying for leave while an employee serves on a long, drawn-out trial, she said.

It's important for employers to clearly state their leave policies to avoid abuse or accidental misuse, Edwards said.

Employers need to specify whether there are any caps on the accrual of leave and whether any leave can be carried over from one year to the next. The policy also needs to make clear whether advance notice is required to take leave and how the leave can be forfeited.

A city's policy should require the leave to be earned before it is used, said Howard Duvall, executive director of the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

"Some of our towns let the employee come in and get paid for the two weeks leave they will earn during the year. Then the employee quits," Duvall said.

Employees also need to understand it's up to their employer to determine whether a request for leave can be granted, Edwards said.

"A lot of people think, 'I've got sick time built up; I'm just taking it,'" she said. "But an employer can request a doctor's excuse. Excessive use is grounds for discipline."

Another problematic situation is when an employee requests leave, is denied, then calls in sick. That sick time can be denied, Edwards said.

Leave is at the discretion of the employer, Edwards added. No law requires leave, except for military leave to allow military personnel to serve their

country and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

FMLA allows eligible employees to take up to 12 workweeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for the birth or adoption of a child, to care for an immediate family member with a medical condition or when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

To be eligible, employees must have worked for the employer at least 12 months, worked a minimum 1,250 hours in that year and at a location employing at least 50 employees.

Clear policies on leave benefit both the employee and the municipality, Duvall said.

"A good leave policy makes sure the employee and the city are treated fairly. It avoids questions about how leave time is used and when it is paid," he said.

The "Model Employee Handbook", published by the Municipal Association of SC, the SC Municipal Human Resources Association and Gignilliat, Savitz & Bettis, P.A. references leave policies on pages 19 - 29. For a copy of the Handbook, visit the MASC Web site at www.masc.sc/resources/publications.htm or contact Michelle Willm at 803.933.1259 or mwillm@masc.sc.

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information," said Tracie Barnes, human resources manager for the City of Beaufort and president of the SC Municipal Human Resources Association. "The online MASC compensation survey is my first stopping point for public sector salary information."

This is the second year MASC offered the survey results online and the first year participants could enter the data online. In the past, MASC mailed a paper survey form to each municipality. After receiving the

completed form, MASC staff entered the information into a database, proofread the data and compiled the information into a large report that was then printed and mailed to each city and town. This was a lengthy process and resulted in a 200-page publication that proved difficult to use when trying to compare data from city to city.

In late 2005, MASC turned to its technology partner, VC3, to create a more efficient process. MASC's goals

were to streamline the survey process and make the survey data more accessible and useful to its municipalities.

In the future, MASC plans to add the ability to retrieve several years of data for side-by-side comparisons.

For more information, contact Marisa Cebulski, MASC junior staff associate for Education and Training, at 803.933.1240 or mcebulski@masc.sc.

SC ORBIT reaches milestones

The South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Investment Trust (SC ORBIT) recently passed three major milestones. SC ORBIT is MASC's trust created to assist cities in meeting their GASB Statement 45 requirements.

In early February, the Municipal Association's board of directors appointed SC ORBIT's initial seven-member board of trustees. Serving two-year terms are Joleen Deames, assistant chief financial officer, City of Charleston; Belinda Harper, finance officer and clerk/treasurer, City of Seneca; Charlie Potts, director of administrative services, Town of Mount Pleasant; Phil Robey, director of the Office of Management and Budget, City of Greenville; David Vahaun, management services adminis-

trator, City of Rock Hill; David Williams, city manager, City of Florence and Steffanie Dorn, finance director, City of Greenwood. The new board selected Williams as chair and Harper as vice chair.

At the May meeting, the trustees approved the trust agreement, plan document, resolution and participation agreement that will allow employers to join the Trust.

Another major accomplishment was selecting Synovus Trust for investment management services for SC ORBIT, as well as for the Municipal Association and Risk Management Services trusts. "As part of developing the Trust, we issued 11 requests for proposal for investment management services,"

said Heather Ricard, chief financial officer for MASC's Risk Management Services. "We received seven qualified responses." Synovus Trust's contract goes into effect in July.

Also, Synovus Trust's Retirement Plan Services group will provide the Trust with administrative and record keeping services.

In addition, SC ORBIT recently unveiled a calculation tool prepared by Milliman, Inc., the actuarial and consulting firm used to help establish SC ORBIT. The tool will allow members to calculate a rough estimate of their liabilities and annual required contributions associated with GASB 45. Contact Heather Ricard at 803.933.1258 or hricard@masc.sc to access the calculation tool.

July 2007 Hometown Happenings



Hometown Happenings

Each month, municipal officials have the opportunity to download materials that will help them share the value of cities and towns with the community and, more specifically, their key influencers. Through each suggested activity and corresponding materials, municipal leadership will form partnerships with the local business community, the media, local non-profit organizations and policy makers.

July *Hometown Happenings* information, as noted here, will be posted to the MASC Web site in early June. Let MASC know if you participate in a *Hometown Happening*. Call Casey Fields at 803.933.1256 or email cfields@masc.sc.

- **National Recreation and Parks Month** - Gather your community together and celebrate outdoor sports throughout the month of July during Recreation and Parks Month. Since 1985, the National Recreation and Parks Association has encouraged citizens to get outside, enjoy and advocate for parks and outdoor activities like youth sports and exercise. Proclaim July as National Recreation and Parks Month, partner with your local recreation commission or sponsor an outdoor event at a local city park to inform your residents about the importance of outdoor activity and the enhanced quality of life that parks bring to a city or town.
- **National Independent Retailers Week** - July 15 - 21 is a week designated to recognize independent business owners and encourage them to get involved with their hometown. Businesses play an important role in attracting tourists and residents to cities and towns. Pass a proclamation recognizing the importance of independent businesses in your hometown. Dedicate the week in July to supporting businesses in your municipality and recognizing their contributions to your thriving community.
- **Municipal Association of South Carolina Annual Meeting in Greenville** - July 11 - 15. Hometown leaders will gather in Greenville for the 67th Municipal Association Annual Meeting. This is a time to sharpen your skills as an elected official and leader while also networking with other municipal leaders from across the state. Keynote speakers will focus on the state's new economy; breakout sessions will focus on everyday issues ranging from environmentally friendly practices to technology for cities and towns. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper telling your residents you will be participating in the annual meeting, what sessions you will attend addressing specific issues in your community, the benefit of attending training and how you are looking forward to bringing new ideas and solutions back home.

Visit the MASC Web site to download *Hometown Happenings* materials in early June.

Legislative session brings change and success

As the first session of the 117th South Carolina General Assembly comes to a close, the Municipal Association of SC has come a long way on developing legislative strategy, rolling out a new tracking system and weekly report, and adding “feet on the ground” in the State House lobby. From supporting the state’s competitiveness agenda to passing out doughnut holes to legislators, cities and towns can count a number of successes this session.

First, MASC combined the advocacy and communications departments to make a strong and solid team of professionals working together on external messages and legislation. After hiring several new employees in this department, the number of staff at the State House has increased and so has MASC’s ability to monitor, track and work important legislation for cities and towns.

MASC also initiated a new legislative tracking system to maintain a comprehensive up-to-the-minute database of legislation affecting cities and towns. This system tracks committee and floor activity, allows users to send comments and questions to MASC staff and includes bill summaries in easy-to-read language. Among other features: easily accessible lists of Senate and House members with an immediate e-mail option and a district look-up to double-check hometown legislators. Weekly introductions and bill activity are also



Town of Williamston Councilmembers David Harvell and Otis Scott met with Senator Billy O’Dell and Representatives Michael Thompson and Dan Cooper during the April 24 Hometown Connection. Photos such as these were sent to local media along with a press release to let citizens know their municipal officials are working with legislators to make sure the city’s voice is heard.

included along with key words to make searching the system quick and easy.

By developing a legislative agenda that supports the state’s competitiveness, MASC has developed business partners to join the effort to show cities and towns mean business and are the economic engines driving the state’s economy. This year’s *Hometown, SC* Legislative Action Day featured business leaders and other key influencers sharing ideas on how to partner to encourage the growth and success of cities and towns.

To show support of Senator Jim Ritchie’s (R- Spartanburg) Community Unification Act (the enclave annexation or doughnut hole bill), MASC delivered

more than 1,000 Krispy Kreme doughnut holes to all House and Senate members, encouraging them to support the bill and attend the legislative reception during *Hometown, SC* Legislative Action Day.

MASC’s weekly report is another useful tool enhanced this session. More reader-friendly and interesting, the new report’s look includes lists of weekly introductions and all weekly committee and floor action. Added features include the buzz around the State House and links to other Web sites that feature legislative news. Bills featured in the report are linked back to the MASC tracking system for easy reference.

News Briefs



■ Councilmember Kathy Maness of Lexington was elected to the Women in Municipal Government board of directors at the National League of Cities meeting in Reno in December.

■ Mayor Elaine Harris of Pacolet accepted the Rural Leadership Award at the Department of Commerce Rural Summit in March. The award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and addressed issues of both short and long-term significance to community growth.

■ Town Administrator Dewayne Ennis of Allendale and Councilmember Chandra Dillard of Greenville were selected for Leadership South Carolina’s Class of 2007 and graduated in May. Now in its 29th year, Leadership South Carolina is the state’s oldest and most respected leadership development program.

MASC has also had great success with this year's monthly Hometown Connection. Officials from cities and towns across the state came to Columbia to have their voices heard at the State House. After a short briefing on key issues by MASC staff, hometown officials visited legislators to talk about hot button issues like community unification enclave annexation, spending caps and regulatory takings. Before their visit, officials got materials about navigating the State House lobby. During the visit, MASC staff took photos of hometown leaders with their legislators and sent the pictures to local newspapers to illustrate the importance of local government involvement at the state level.

To continue the efforts to showcase the value, partnerships and resources that hometowns bring to the state's effort of economic success, MASC will host a series of regional roundtables across the state this fall. Similar to the *Hometown, SC Road Shows* last fall, the roundtables will include a meal and discussion. Be on the look out for information and locations.

MASC has enjoyed several partnership opportunities this legislative session. From the editorial by MASC President Doug Echols and Harris DeLoach of the SC Chamber of Commerce highlighting the groups' focus on comprehensive tax reform to the partnership with the South Carolina Association of Realtors on the public official recusal bill, this session brought many opportunities to work with other organizations. MASC also joined the Citizens for Community Protection Coalition to stop attempts to pass regulatory takings legislation.

At press time, the General Assembly was winding down its final week and a full description of progress this session will be outlined in the July issue. Two successes to highlight include:

10 tips for keeping the lines of communication open during the off season

- 1 Send a weekly or monthly handwritten note to all delegation members, updating them on hometown activities and events to illustrate the value of city programs and services.
- 2 Invite delegation members to hometown events like ribbon-cuttings, festivals, parades or building dedications.
- 3 Include the delegation on newsletter mailing lists.
- 4 Schedule a meeting with delegation members to ask them about their priorities.
- 5 Ask councilmembers to write a brief thank-you note to each delegation member.
- 6 Offer to present a brief update on what's going on in your city/town during a legislative delegation meeting.
- 7 Send your delegation newspaper articles highlighting successes in your hometown.
- 8 Ask for a legislative update at the next council meeting.
- 9 Localize MASC's competitiveness brochure with local information and give to legislators. (Contact Reba Campbell at 803.933.1245 or rcampbell@masc.sc for more information.)
- 10 Co-host a breakfast with the local Chamber for businesses, city leaders and legislators to discuss issues.

- The successful passage and veto override of H3226, the public official recusal bill. MASC joined with several other organizations to push for an override of the governor's veto with a unanimous vote in both houses.
- Holding the spending caps bill, H3615, in subcommittee. More than two dozen hometown leaders quickly mobilized the day before the hearing to contact their legislators and let them know that spending caps would severely limit services and thwart economic development efforts.

But the work isn't over just because the General Assembly is not in session. "Contacting legislators during the

summer and fall months is critical to your relationships and success during the session," said Reba Campbell, MASC Director of Advocacy and Communications.

Get to know your Senate and House members before you ask them to support legislation during the session. Establishing yourself as the number one source of municipal information for your city or town is critical. This will make contacting your legislator during the session much easier and is proven to show results.

To view MASC's legislative tracking system, visit www.masc.sc/legislative/legislative_tracking.htm



Educational Opportunities

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

■ **June 8**, will hold its Quarterly Meeting at the SC Hospital Association in Columbia. Topics include an introduction to pictometry, conducting a baseline water quality assessment and a SC Department of Health and Environmental Control update.

SC Association of Municipal Power Systems

■ **June 10-13**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Hilton Head Marriott Beach & Golf Resort. Topics include emerging policy issues in public power, disaster recovery and business continuity planning for electric utilities, and a policy maker's guide to municipal electric systems operations.

SC Business Licensing Officials Association

■ **June 21**, will administer the Accreditation in Business Licensing test at 10 a.m. at the MASC office, 1411 Gervais Street, Columbia.

Municipal Association of SC

■ **July 12-15**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Hyatt Regency in Greenville. See related story on page 1.

SC Business Licensing Officials Association

■ **July 20**, will administer the Accreditation in Business Licensing test at 10 a.m. at the Greenville City Hall 1st floor Conference Center, 631 S. Main Street.

Setoff Debt Collection Program

■ **July 31**, will hold a mandatory New Participants' Training Session for the Setoff Debt Collection Program from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at MASC's office, 1411 Gervais Street, Columbia.

Main Street South Carolina

■ **August 1**, will hold its Annual Retreat and conduct a training session, "Business Recruitment," at the Palm Key Nature Get-Away Retreat in Knowles Island, SC.

Setoff Debt Collection Program

■ **August 2**, will hold a mandatory Current Participants' Training Session – New Employees for the Setoff Debt Collection Program from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at MASC's office, 1411 Gervais Street, Columbia.

Setoff Debt Collection Program

■ **August 3**, will hold a mandatory Programmers' Training Session for the Setoff Debt Collection Program from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at MASC's office, 1411 Gervais Street, Columbia.

SC Municipal Court Administration Association

■ **August 21-24**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Sheraton in Myrtle Beach.

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.



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