

"Cities Mean Business" month returns in February

As part of the *Hometown, SC* initiative to raise hometown voices to a new level of influence, the "Cities Mean Business" campaign encourages local leaders to engage business leaders, legislators and key influencers in efforts to boost collaboration and partnerships for the future competitiveness of the state.

February 2009 is "Cities Mean Business" month throughout the state and another opportunity for local officials to reinforce the value of cities and towns. Last year, over half of the cities and towns across the state celebrated "Cities Mean Business" month with proclama-

tions, events, editorials and ads. Local officials continued the "Cities Mean Business" activities throughout the year with business breakfast events, engagement sessions and new ways of framing their messages about the value of strong cities. "Cities Mean Business" 2009 gives local officials another opportunity to show residents and key influencers that cities mean business to the future economic success of the state.

Last year, if you passed a proclamation, this year you can...

Pass another proclamation declaring February 2009 as "Cities Mean Business" month. Invite your local chamber president to a city council meeting to present the proclamation. Include in the proclamation positive steps your city has taken to boost the state's economy.

Last year, if you hosted a Business After Hours event, this year you can...

Partner with your local chamber to host a similar event and invite all key influencers – not just business owners – to come as your guests to meet other leaders. Make sure to get attendees' names and contact information. Follow up with them throughout the year to keep them informed.

Last year, if you submitted an opinion column, this year you can...

Help draft an opinion column for a key influencer to submit to your local paper talking about the great things your city or town is doing to attract

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For a list of current municipal
job openings, visit
www.masc.sc/misc/jobs.htm


CITIES: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

business and industry. Also, partner with your local chamber president on an editorial about a successful collaboration.

Last year, if you hosted an engagement session or launched a series of engagements sessions, this year you can...

Move your engagement to the next level by focusing your efforts on a very targeted group of key influencers who can be quickly mobilized for legislative support.

Association staff distributed a key influencer guide on hosting engagement sessions at the *Hometown, SC Road Shows* in October. It is available to download from the Association's Web site at www.masc.sc.

"Last year, if you did not have time to do anything to celebrate 'Cities Mean Business' month," said Casey Fields, municipal advocacy manager, "visit the Association Web site for a complete list of ideas, sample proclamations and ads in the 'Cities Mean Business' online toolkit." 

For more information, contact Casey Fields at cfields@masc.sc or 803.933.1256.



"no blue law" Christmas

As Christmas approaches, our faces aren't the only things we stuff. Our calendars tend to fatten up a bit around the holidays, too. Parties, decorating, photos with Santa – when's a mom (or dad, wife, grandfather) supposed to shop? Many citizens would like the option to shop on Sunday mornings.

Under unusual circumstances (Sundays during the Christmas season or special events such as sporting events, concerts), SC law (Section 53-1-10) allows municipal councils to suspend the blue law – a law regulating commercial practices on Sundays – if they receive a request to do so from the chamber of commerce or a town merchant.

The council can pass a resolution allowing staff to issue a permit for the municipality's businesses to open at 10 a.m. This would apply to all businesses within the city limits, not just those that petitioned the council for it.

While these measures may seem aimed at citizen's convenience, they are also helpful to the municipal economy. It is difficult for a town or county to compete with a neighboring area that is exempt from the blue law. Areas that collect more than \$900,000 in one fiscal year in accommodations tax revenue are exempt from the blue law provisions.

Council can add a provision to protect employees who are "conscientious objectors" to Sunday work.

The exemption law originated when Clemson hosted the Carolina Panthers during their inaugural year. The law allowed the area to reap the economic benefits from hosting a professional sporting event.

A Groundswell of Change: adapting to the 24-hour information cycle

by Reba Campbell, deputy executive director

With all the buzz these days about new communications tools such as blogs, social networking sites and online video sharing, it's easy to get overwhelmed with all the possibilities for communicating with residents about city issues and events.

The main point to remember when evaluating how to use these

Carolina research group describes this groundswell as "a social trend where people use technology to get the things they need from each other rather than from traditional institutions like corporations or government." Government and traditional media are no longer the only, or even the primary, distribution points of information about what's going on in your city.

Back in the good old days – say

just a few years ago – it was easy to track the tone and content of news stories and what was being written about the city. But now it's practically impossible to keep up with all the special interest sites, blogs and video uploads that are so easily available to everyone.

In today's world of the 24-hour information cycle, an argument in a council meeting easily could be recorded on a camera phone by someone sitting in the audience. The audio or video from that camera phone might be posted on YouTube or to a blog. This can happen before the mayor and council are home for the evening or before the local newspaper is on the press for the next day.

An anonymous blogger could easily post information about a brewing scandal in city government driven by unsubstantiated rumors long before the traditional media will report it. While some bloggers are beginning to gain credibility as legitimate news sources, many still don't adhere to traditional journalistic standards about accurate reporting, fact checking and taking responsibility for their mistakes.

Three cities – Orangeburg, Woodruff and McClellanville – are experimenting with blogs. These blogs are not intended to stir up controversy, address a specific issue or respond to controversial topics. Rather, they are being used as another way of communicating the positive news about the city.

Scott Slatton started a blog when he was city manager in Woodruff. He says, "The blog was the best tool I have ever used to generate media attention toward what we were doing. So many times the local television stations and newspapers did stories on Woodruff based simply on what I posted on the blog. Media folks love blogs – though they might not always admit it. Blogs can be a reporter's best friend because they help reporters find stories they otherwise would not have heard about or been interested in." (See story on p. 15 for more information on city blogs.)

There are, however, negatives related to city blogging. First, someone must be dedicated to keeping it up to date. In the fast-paced world of the blogosphere, a blog that isn't timely is useless. Second, city officials must agree in advance how to manage negative comments posted to the blog. Finally, blog entries must be transparent. Having the city public information person write and post on the mayor's behalf will quickly be discovered and the blog will lose its credibility as a reliable and legitimate source of information.

Several South Carolina mayors have tapped into the world of social networking using Facebook to communicate with residents – particularly younger residents. While social networking has not yet reached the point of mass communication, these sites certainly have value to city officials interested in new ways to communicate about city issues and concerns.



tools is it's not about the technology – it's about communication. Ultimately your goal is to get your message out to the people who need to hear it. These new tools are just a vehicle to get you there.

Government leaders have an especially daunting challenge in evaluating how to use these new tools both proactively and reactively. You may decide that having a city blog isn't the thing for you, but you still need to know what's being said in the blogosphere about city activities and officials. You may not be interested in a personal or city Facebook or MySpace page, but it's still important to see what's being posted on others' social networking pages about things going on in the city.

These tools have been described as part of a "groundswell" of change in how we communicate. A North

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REACHING *the Unreachable*

By Daniel Byrne, fire marshal, City of Beaufort

The Beaufort Fire Department has found a creative way to provide interactive fire safety education to an age group that many may feel are “unreachable” – the middle school child. While programs for these children are limited, fire service cannot afford to overlook this group. With many households today requiring two incomes and the rising costs of daycare, these “unreachable” children are those often left home alone or in charge of younger siblings.



In 2002, the City of Beaufort Fire Department made the commitment to move beyond just providing fire safety awareness and toward providing fire safety education. By using a combination of programs already available, along with locally created programs, we quickly found ourselves speaking in front of many age groups and organizations on topics including fire safety and beyond.

However, these programs still did not seem to fit the middle school child. These children are too old to be awed by the sight of fire trucks and firefighters. Yet without underestimating their ability to comprehend, they are too young to be interested in our adult orientated programs. Most often, they are concerned with peer pressure and establishing their individual identity than with fire safety. They are more interested in “being cool” than practicing good safety habits.



After responding to residential fires and other emergencies in which a middle school child was the oldest in the home, we made reaching this age group a department goal and set out by vocalizing this desire at every opportunity. During a local media interview, fire personnel shared this goal with the public. The article caught the eye of Beaufort Middle School’s Community Liaison Officer Margaret Rushton, who manages the school’s enrichment program. Rushton invited the department to get involved and participate in this program by offering a fire safety course.

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Feature Section: Public Safety



Since 1985, the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program has linked an untold number of seemingly unrelated violent crime investigations and helped state and local law enforcement solve many of those cases.

ViCAP will soon be available – from any Internet terminal – to participating law enforcement agencies at the local, state and federal level.

History

ViCAP's original concept – to share investigative data from violent crimes – actually came from a local police officer. Eventually, it was decided that the FBI would house this data, primarily because of the agency's experience in being a national repository of other types of criminal justice data, like fingerprints.

ViCAP's initial focus was transient/serial killers who crossed jurisdictional boundaries. But it expanded and now includes actual/attempted homicides, missing persons (believed victims of foul play), kidnappings (including child

abductions), sexual assaults and unidentified human remains. The database houses modus operandi, signature aspects, crime scene descriptions/photos, victim and suspect details, and other pertinent information.

ViCAP Today

Today the database contains about 150,000 open and closed violent crime investigations submitted by some 3,800 state and local law enforcement agencies – and includes some “cold cases” that go back to the 1950s. Once cases are added, they are continually compared against other cases housed in the database. Based on common traits and similar modus operandi, cases that are possibly related are linked. Then ViCAP analysts take over and give the process the human touch – looking for patterns to pinpoint crimes that may have been committed by the same offender, and hopefully generating new investigative leads.

ViCAP offers additional assistance to participating partners – including multi-agency coordination efforts, investigative support, case management help, crime mapping, case series matrices and on-scene case assistance.

Evolving ViCAP Access

Back in 1985, ViCAP information sat on a mainframe computer in Quantico, Va., accessible only to FBI personnel. Users submitted their case information to the FBI through the mail. In the mid-90s, the system managers migrated ViCAP to a client-server system to get the information closer to the people who needed it most – state and local law enforcement. That meant that ViCAP software was placed on desktop computers in police agencies around the country. Users were then able to electronically send the FBI their case information, as well as any requests for assistance.

The process was faster, but programmers continued looking for ways to enhance it. Thus, after several years in development – and in coordination with the ViCAP advisory board of state and local representatives – ViCAP Web was born, accessible through the secure Law Enforcement Online portal.

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- The editors of Money magazine named **Beaufort** one of its "Top 6 Terrific Towns on the Water," for soon-to-be-retired baby boomers. The article cited easy access to top-notch medical care, area golf courses, the Beaufort River and the area's history as a backdrop for a handful of famous films as the reasons why Beaufort made the list.

- Tumiko Rucker, town administrator for **Kiawah Island**, was selected to serve on the board of directors for the Association of Public Treasurers of the United States and Canada. Rucker earned her Certified Public Finance Administrator certification from the Association and served on its cash handling, disaster preparedness certification and membership committees.

- The City of **Spartanburg** received the inaugural State Treasurer's Award for Financial Excellence. The award acknowledges and recognizes any individual, organization or government entity in the state that exemplifies outstanding financial management.



Moonlighting:

Getting full-time coverage for part-time workers

Moonlighting can generate a lot of extra income for off-duty law enforcement personnel during the holiday season. It also can generate a lot of extra headaches for local governments.

Though moonlighting is a long-standing practice in the law enforcement community, many local governments still have not adopted a practice that adequately protects the interests of both their employees and the city. Many officers are paid for moonlighting "under the table," leaving questions about insurance liability unresolved. Even in cases where there is a formal arrangement between the city and outside entities, the insurance situation sometimes remains unclear.

Some South Carolina cities have adopted a proactive approach to answering the liability questions for moonlighting arrangements that don't specifically lay out which party is responsible in the event of an accident.

"We learned that hybrid arrangements are not advisable and could be problematic in nature, especially in regards to liability for the city," said Cindi Howard, risk manager for the City of Georgetown. "Our officers could have become caught in a pinch situation between insurance companies as to who would pay their medical claim and who would defend them in an excessive force lawsuit."

The City of Georgetown was recently asked by a local hospital to provide additional security in the emergency room on some nights and weekends. City staff reviewed its moonlighting policy and made changes.

"The goal of the City's policy is to present standard extra-duty agreements with each outside entity requesting off-duty police security," Howard said. "The agreement defines the scope and responsibility of each party."

"The issue is whether they are on the clock as police officers while moonlighting," said Jeff Thompson, assistant director of Risk Management Services for the Municipal Association. "Legally, they aren't necessarily acting as police officers, so who is responsible if they get hurt or killed?"

Thompson extolled the proactive policies of cities like Georgetown, Seneca and Aiken for being sure that they answer any liability questions before allowing the moonlighting agreement.

"A lot of problems can be eliminated by making sure that the workers compensation and liability questions are answered ahead of time," Thompson said. "All parties (the workers, the city and the part-time employer) need to be clear about who is responsible if something happens. There may be some initial pushback from the moonlighting cops, but once they understand the reasons for formalizing the arrangement, that conflict normally disappears."



Small towns use education, ordinances to fight gangs



Gang members use tennis shoes strung over a utility line to mark their territory.

No longer just a big-city problem, gangs have been making their way to rural and suburban areas. You can see their presence through graffiti on buildings, an increase in drug-related crimes and violence, and organized teens wearing the same colors or symbols.

South Carolina once thought itself immune from the plight of gangs. However, officials in recent years have acknowledged that the problem is real and serious and have been taking steps to stop its spread.

A study conducted by the University of South Carolina in 2006 found that gangs are expanding from South Carolina's larger cities into rural areas. Law enforcement officials have estimated that more than 300 gangs exist in South Carolina. Taking action, the state passed a gang bill in 2007 that gives the state grand jury the authority to investigate gang crimes and adds tougher penalties for gang members who threaten or coerce others.

Many law enforcement agencies have created specialized gang units within their departments to combat the problem. Officers in these units often investigate and gather intelligence on gangs, and work to spread gang awareness and prevent their expansion.

The City of Mauldin added a gang detective in July. This officer, who is working in collaboration with the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, is gathering details on and tracking gang activity in the city of some 15,000 people.

The officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of his undercover work, said smaller cities have a difficult time combating gangs.

"Gangs can be suppressed in larger cities. For example, the Atlanta Police Department can afford to have a full-time gang department, so they can push them out," he said. "Then they go to smaller cities, and they can fly under the radar."

In addition to the full-time gang detective position, the City of Mauldin has been proactive about giving police tools to fight gangs. The Mauldin City Council has adopted ordinances to keep graffiti off buildings and to prevent loitering, according to the detective.

Yet not all cities, especially the smaller ones, can afford to add officers to fight gangs full-time. Marion Police Chief Willie Smith does not have enough money in his budget for a specialized gang unit, but the City does allot his department a certain amount of money each year for overtime. Smith is utilizing those overtime dollars to pay for officers working on gang prevention and investigations.

Smith said gangs are a serious issue in Marion with three groups jockeying for position. He thinks young people are often susceptible to gang influence in smaller towns like Marion, which has a population of only about 7,000. "In smaller towns, there's less to do," he said.

To prevent teens from loitering aimlessly, the City Council is considering an ordinance to establish a curfew for juveniles, Smith said. The City also has a mentoring program for youths who have been involved in the criminal justice system, he added.

Many cities reach out to parents and church groups, in an effort to educate them about gangs and prevent kids from ever getting involved.

The West Columbia Police Department began an anti-gang initiative last year, funded through a Project Safe Neighborhood/Project CeaseFire grant. The program provides education and information on gang awareness to community members. The Department also began a mentoring program last year, matching up officers with at-risk students, said Major Jackie Brothers. The officers visit the youths once a week and monitor how they are doing at home and school, Brothers said. They also plan special outings like fishing trips and cookouts, she said.

Although West Columbia's population is only about 15,000, the city still is touched by the presence of gangs.

"We know it's in our community," Brothers said. "Maybe it's not as organized as in big cities, but there certainly is an element and it's impacting the kids in our area."

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Education and awareness has been the major focus for Cheraw, a town of about 6,000. Captain Keith Thomas of the Investigative Division of the Cheraw Police Department has been making presentations to churches and youth programs. He tells parents about the warning signs that their children are in gangs and provides information on available counseling and ways for youths to get out of a gang.

Many parents think gangs only exist in urban areas, Thomas said, but then he tells them about graffiti on buildings in town, symbols on book bags and fights after school.

“The parents are surprised by what’s going on,” he said, adding that parents need to spend more time communicating with their children to see what they are involved in.

While work remains to be done, Thomas said he has seen changes in Cheraw. Previously, teens were “flagging,” or wearing certain gang colors or bandanas.

“Now we’ve suppressed that. They’re not advertising it,” he said. “There is still gang activity going on, but the kids are not a big billboard for it. If you let anybody advertise, they’re going to increase their numbers.”

Thomas said the key to suppressing gang activity, especially in smaller towns with limited resources, is to get on the front end of it – when it is still a juvenile problem – and to educate parents. He also said city councils should invest money in creating gang investigator positions.

“The money goes directly to deterring kids from gangs,” he said. “And, it costs a lot less than sending them to prison.”



Feature Section:
Public Safety

Cities consider fire sprinkler credit

Last spring, the SC General Assembly passed legislation that provides incentives for installing fire suppression systems in older buildings not required by law to have sprinkler systems. The new law allows – but does not require – local governments to give a 25 percent property tax credit to those installing sprinkler systems in older buildings. This local incentive would be paired with the 25 percent state income tax credit offered to property owners under the new law.

Model Ordinance

Municipal Association staff worked with the city attorneys from Columbia, Greenville and Charleston to develop a model ordinance for local governments that want to offer the incentive. The model ordinance calls for the taxpayer to meet a series of conditions to receive the 25 percent property tax credit. To receive the credit, the taxpayer submits a form to the SC Department of Revenue within one year of installing the system documenting the costs and amount of tax credit requested.

Actual Cost

Also, the new law prohibits “a publicly- or privately-owned utility [from imposing] a tap fee, other fee or a recurring maintenance fee of any nature or however described for the installation and maintenance of a fire sprinkler system that exceeds the actual cost associated with the water line to the system.” This prohibition applies whether the local government passes the local property tax credit or not.

Impact on local governments

The law prohibits a charge exceeding the “actual cost” associated with connecting a fire sprinkler line to the system. The law defines actual costs as direct labor, material, necessity of increased capacity and other charges associated with separate fire sprinkler lines. The law requires the utility to document the actual cost through either an invoice or a work order. The utility must specifically assign the costs to the separate fire sprinkler line. The law does not apply to domestic or combined fire/domestic (dual-purpose) lines.

For a copy of the model ordinance and a checklist for local governments to use to ensure compliance with the requirements for tracking actual costs, visit www.masc.sc/resources/about.htm#ordinances.



The department determined the goals for the course:

1. Fire prevention.
2. An appreciation of the fire service and knowledge of what firefighters really do and experience.
3. Basic fire science and how it plays into prevention and tactics. Why firefighters do what they do on the fireground. There is more to putting out fire than just spraying water.
4. Hands-on experience with equipment and applying basic fireground techniques to give the students an appreciation of the knowledge and skills necessary to not only be successful on the fireground but also have the confidence and skills to save themselves and others. Topics would include thermal imaging, search and rescue, ventilation, and salvage and overhaul.

On the last two days of the class, the students have to complete a realistic search and rescue scenario in which they must work as a team and apply all that they have learned. Our Family Safety Education House is filled with white training smoke and an infant CPR mannequin is hidden inside. The students arrive on scene in a fire truck with lights and sirens. They must formulate and carry out a plan based on their knowledge of fire dynamics and the priorities that they have learned during the class. Wearing full bunker gear and

an air pack (although not breathing air from the pack); students pull an empty hose line into the “smoky” house and go to work.


At the end of the semester, the school holds a celebration and firefighters are on hand to provide certificates to the graduates.

The key to this format is that the students are able to learn about fire and fire safety in their own terms, by getting hands-on attention, by drawing their own conclusions, by using real life information, with only guidance from the firefighters. They are teaching themselves the important lessons to be learned, and in turn, are teaching their peers by experience.

This program has been huge success and a very effective tool to reach this important audience. It is one of the most popular in the enrichment syllabus at the Beaufort Middle School. Not only have firefighters become popular again with this hard-to-reach group, but the department’s commitment to providing safety education has been recognized and reinforced within the school system. In addition, these future taxpayers have developed an appreciation for the fire service, what it takes to be a firefighter, and the problems and challenges we face.

While a program such as this does require a commitment, the opportunities are there and the potential payoff is immeasurable. If your schools do not have a program such as the enrichment program, you can approach the science and physics teachers, the physical education teachers, intercession programs or even the school nurse about being a guest teacher in their class or

during an after-school program.

The fire service is constantly searching for creative ways to teach fire safety, and the school systems are searching for creative ways to teach their academics. It is a win-win situation for all! 

Authors’s Note:

Fire Marshal Daniel Byrne shared several examples of programs the Beaufort Fire Department offers to its residents.

These are shining examples of the taxpayers’ dollar coming back to them. We do not want them to get their money back from us only when they are in danger and call 911.

Our Special Friends (special needs) program is a quick version of our 1st Impressions Program the Department offers to children in daycare, pre-K and kindergarten.

We have Hispanic programs, college programs, elementary school programs, senior citizen programs – you name it, we have a program for them!

These are all very simple programs that any fire department can do, and they are more than just showing off the fire truck and handing out fire hats, which do not teach children anything about fire safety. Cost is minimal. This is important. As the middle class dissolves and poverty grows, so will fire.



Hometown

DECEMBER HAPPENINGS

The Municipal Association will post December Hometown Happenings information on its Web site in early November. Let Casey Fields know if you participate in a Hometown Happening by e-mailing cfields@masc.sc or calling 803.933.1256.

Holiday Season – With the holiday season approaching, many cities and towns are planning holiday parades and festivals. While planning the events, consider using the holiday season to partner with a local business to sponsor a food or toy drive for local children. Partner with local businesses to host holiday events around your hometown, especially those that benefit less fortunate residents. Send holiday cards to your local businesses and honor them with a reception at city hall. Host a tree lighting ceremony at your municipal building. Decorate your downtown with lights. Celebrate the holiday season with employees and residents.

Arbor Day – Sustainable forests and green space are precious commodities. Celebrated in South Carolina on the first Friday in December, Arbor Day is a great opportunity to showcase your Tree City designation or host an event to plant trees in your downtown area. Partner with local businesses or schools to host ceremonies and events to show residents that trees and the preservation of the environment in your community are important to city officials. Research what it takes to be named a Tree City by the Arbor Day Foundation and work toward that designation. Partner with local colleges and universities to plant trees on campus or in the surrounding areas. Collaborate with local environmental groups to plant trees in your hometown. Commemorate Arbor Day with a luncheon at your local park honoring city park and recreation employees. Pass a proclamation reaffirming your hometown's commitment as a Tree City.

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.

ViCAP: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Benefits of a Web-enabled ViCAP

Formerly, only ViCAP personnel had access to the system's data. Now, agencies will have direct access to the national database so they will be able to input and retrieve data instantly, search the database for similar cases, review historical cases and update their own investigative data. As a result, the database will be more current.

Other benefits include the ability to offer nationwide web-based training to users, faster updates and enhancements to the system, and the end of maintaining hundreds of standalone ViCAP computers.

In the short-term, law enforcement agencies will reap the benefits of this new and improved ViCAP. In the long-term, it's the American public – kept safer from violent criminals – who will benefit.

ViCAP Web will be available through the secure Law Enforcement Online portal (www.leo.gov/). 

Information courtesy of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. For more information about ViCAP, visit www.fbi.gov/hq/isd/cirg/ncavc.htm.



Feature Section:

Public Safety

Risk Management programs provide public safety grants

The SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund provides grants through its Law Enforcement Technology Matching Grant Program. The program offers financial assistance for SCMIRF members to purchase products or equipment that help reduce litigation and physical injury claims. SCMIRF pays for half of the cost of the eligible purchase, up to a maximum of \$1,500 per member annually. Purchases of police vehicle video cameras, Tasers, Taser cameras and body cameras are eligible under this grant program.

Members of the SC Municipal Insurance Trust are eligible for partial reimbursement for the cost of soft body armor. SCMIRF began the program in

1999 and, to date, has helped provide soft body armor to almost 1,000 law enforcement officers. This year the Trust began a new grant program to help fire departments purchase personal protective equipment. The Fire Service Equipment Cost Sharing Program targets smaller, volunteer departments but is open to all SC-MIT members. The SCMIT board of trustees allocated \$30,000 to the program for 2008.



For more information, call Phil Cromer at 803.933.1210 or Amy Lindler at 803.933.1271.

Planning **official** training is not voluntary; *it's mandatory*

Planning and zoning officials have a tough job. The work they do directly influences the character of a community while providing a blueprint for growth.

Legislation passed in 2005 requires all members of local government planning commissions, boards of zoning appeals and architectural review, as well as staff who directly or indirectly work with planning officials, to complete six hours of orientation training within one year of their initial appointment or employment.

"I cannot stress enough the importance of all planning officials covered by this law attending the required training," said Municipal Association Executive Director Miriam Hair. "Cities and towns that do not make sure their officials receive training are taking a risk that planning and zoning decisions may be challenged in court. An appointed or elected planning official may be removed from office or

dismissed from employment if he fails to complete the required number of hours of training each year."

The Municipal Association, in partnership with the SC Chapter of the American Planning Association and the SC Association of Regional Councils, developed a six-hour curriculum provided in one-hour segments on DVD to help officials meet these requirements.

An approved facilitator must present the DVD-based training for the participant to receive credit. To be designated as an approved facilitator, the State Advisory Committee requires the individual to be certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners, hold at least a master's degree in planning from an accredited college or university, or be licensed to practice law in South Carolina.

Facilitators provide the Municipal Association with proof of a participant's attendance at the training sessions. The Association will certify the planning official who must then file the notice of the certification with the city/town clerk.

The training requirement is not satisfied with just the initial six hours of training, however. Each appointed or elected planning official must attend at least three hours of continuing education each year. An approved facilitator is not required to deliver this training, but the trainer must be knowledgeable of the course material and use approved materials. The American Planning Association can provide approved materials. The facilitator must document the planning official's attendance which also must be filed with the clerk.

For more information on training requirements, a list of approved facilitators, and how to become a facilitator, visit www.masc.sc/education/PlanningandZoning.htm or contact Miriam Hair at 803.933.1204 or mhair@masc.sc.

Cities can utilize local, state and national programs for development deals

When leaders in the City of Columbia were looking to revitalize the downtown area known as the Congaree Vista, they wanted to preserve its history and character while updating it with a splash of arts and culture.

The first step in redeveloping an area is creating a vision that includes community consensus, said Fred Delk, executive director of the Columbia Development Corporation, a public-private partnership that promotes investment in the Vista and downtown areas.

“Look to the history, the inherent uses of the area, the character of the historic corridor,” Delk advised.

Once that vision is created, planners can tackle the next hurdle: paying for it. Regardless of the project, however, there usually is some sort of assistance available from other levels of government, said Richard Sidebottom, supervisor of compliance, tax incentives and outreach programs with the State Historic Preservation Office.

“There are all sorts of tools out there, financially, for putting these things together,” Sidebottom said.

Many grants are available, usually for community-based groups and local governments. Tax incentives also can offer some financial assistance for individuals or groups looking to renovate historic properties, said Sidebottom.

The Historic Preservation Fund, which is funded by the federal government, offers grants to help survey and stabilize historic properties. The State Historic Preservation Office also has a one-time grant through the Preserve America program to help plan preservation projects in smaller communities, Sidebottom said.

There also are quite a few tax incentives designed to help private individuals who are putting their own money into restoring a building. The type of tax incentive received depends on how the building will be used, Sidebottom said. For example, there are tax incentives for income-producing properties and owner-occupied residences, he said.

Some areas also have local property tax abatements. These special assessments, which are determined by local taxing authorities, can freeze property taxes at pre-

improvement levels for a 5 to 25 year period, Sidebottom said.

“This is a huge benefit for neighborhood redevelopment,” he said.

Many other special incentives exist for specific cases. For instance, people who own historic buildings listed on the National Register can get a federal incentive if they donate an easement. There also is an abandoned textile mill property tax incentive offered by South Carolina to encourage redevelopment of the sprawling plants that were once such an important part of the state’s economy.

The National Trust Preservation Fund also offers several types of financial assistance to nonprofit organizations, public agencies, for-profit companies and individuals involved in preservation-related projects, according to Linda Sorden of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These funds have helped with projects such as the rehabilitation of a former factory in New York into retail, office and housing space; and the renovation of a historic building destroyed by fire in the Main Street area of Muskogee, Okla., Sorden said.

Delk said cities also should look into a bank loan pool, Community Development Block Grants or partnerships with private developers. Public and private partnerships are crucial, he added, and standards should be set high.

“Set the bar high with the very first project you do; it helps spur future projects,” Delk said. “Public infrastructure is always followed by private investment, if it’s done right.”

Delk, Sidebottom and Sorden all participated in a discussion about putting together development deals at the Main Street South Carolina retreat in August.

For more information on financial assistance for redevelopment, visit the State Historic Preservation Office Web site at www.shpo.sc.gov or the National Trust for Historic Preservation at www.preservationnation.org. For more information about Main Street South Carolina, visit www.masc.sc or e-mail Bep-pie LeGrand at blegrand@masc.sc.

Consider **due process of law** when enforcing infractions

Smoking bans, parking violations, business license revocations. When people violate municipal ordinances but do not break any criminal laws, how can cities enforce their ordinances?

It's a question faced by municipal officials across South Carolina. The answer, lawyers say, is to follow the due process of law, giving violators notice of their infraction and the opportunity to argue their case.

An infraction is a minor violation of a regulatory law, less serious than a criminal misdemeanor, which results in a citation being issued, explained Thomas Ellenburg, city attorney for Myrtle Beach. Only fines can be issued for those found guilty.

However, an infraction still is a violation of statutory law and due process is necessary, Ellenburg said. These matters can be heard through an administrative process, he said.

Cities should set up a method to hear all civil infractions, encouraged Ron McKinney, city attorney for Greenville. This should include a violation notice and a hearing, he said.

In Greenville, for instance, timed parking violations are a civil offense, McKinney said. Those wishing to challenge their citations can go before a parking administrator.

Similarly, business license revocation hearings generally are not heard before a municipal judge, rather an administrator or manager hears them, he added.

While businesses have been largely compliant with Greenville's smoking ban, the strongest enforcement measure has not been issuing citations, McKinney said. Rather, it is the fact that the city can pull business licenses for repeated violations. The municipality has the capacity to revoke licenses based on health and safety violations, he said.

The City of Myrtle Beach has developed a process to handle municipal infractions. The City passed an ordinance to set up an administrative hearings system, which can conduct administrative hearings on citations charging violations of the city's municipal ordinances.

The system allows city inspectors, and police, code and fire prevention officers to issue violation notices. A hearing is held before an administrative hearing officer, who is appointed by the city manager. Attorneys may represent the City or the respondent. The administrative hearing officer may hear testimony; issue subpoenas; rule upon motions, objections and the admissibility of evidence; issue a final order; and impose penalties and fines.

While the process is not a criminal one, Ellenburg notes that other corrective legal actions could be possible if the frequency, intensity or duration of the infraction warrant further civil action. Infractions left unaddressed could result in a warrant being issued, he said.

Before a council passes any ordinance, it is important to assess the impact enforcing the ordinance will have on staff, McKinney said.

"They need to be able to follow up on what they're passing," he said.

Methods for enforcing municipal infractions will be a topic discussed at the SC Municipal Attorneys Association meeting on Dec. 5.



finance corner

Verifying Taxpayer Identification Numbers

Accounts payable professionals often run into problems with W-9s because the information provided often does not match IRS records. In the past, this was not discovered until the 1099 was issued, often as long as a year after the payment was made. Now, the IRS has a program to check this information throughout the year. The TIN Matching program allows companies to submit names with TINs for verification purposes. The turnaround is fairly quick. Use of the IRSTIN Matching program is fast becoming a best practice in the 1099 world. Register to use this program by visiting www.irs.gov/taxpros/article/0,,id=109646,00.html.

Reprinted with permission from "Accounts Payable and Sarbanes-Oxley" by Mary S. Schaeffer. For more information about the TIN Matching program, visit www.irs.gov/govt/tribes/article/0,,id=131207,00.html.

Smoking ban Update

In March, the SC Supreme Court upheld the City of Greenville's smoke-free ordinance. Six months later, the Court upheld the Town of Sullivan's Island smoking ban. The Court's decisions have made it clear that cities and towns are free to adopt local smoke-free ordinances to protect residents and visitors from harmful second-hand smoke while also making their communities healthier, cleaner places to live and work.

Since Sullivan's Island passed its smoking ban in May 2006, 18 cities and towns have passed their own ordinances. Aiken, Beaufort and Richland counties have all passed smoking bans, while other counties throughout the state are discussing the idea of a county-wide ban.

The City of Columbia and Richland County leaders collaborated on a smoking ban that went into effect Oct. 1, while leaders in the City of Rock Hill and York County are also working in partnership to pass a smoking ban. Partnerships at the local government level, among elected officials and business leaders, are critical to make hometowns great places to live.

In the same state Supreme Court decision that upheld the Town of Sullivan's Island smoking ban, the court ruled that disobeying the ordinance was not a criminal penalty under state law.



In light of this ruling, municipalities that had passed smoke-free ordinances including criminal penalties revised their penalties to just fines. In the City of Greenville, fines cannot exceed \$50. In Columbia, a business faces a \$25 fine and the risk of losing its business license.

Visit the Municipal Association's "No-smoking section" Web page (www.masc.sc/NewsRoom/no-smoking_section.htm) for more information and an up-to-date list of cities that have passed smoke-free ordinances

Slatton joins field services team

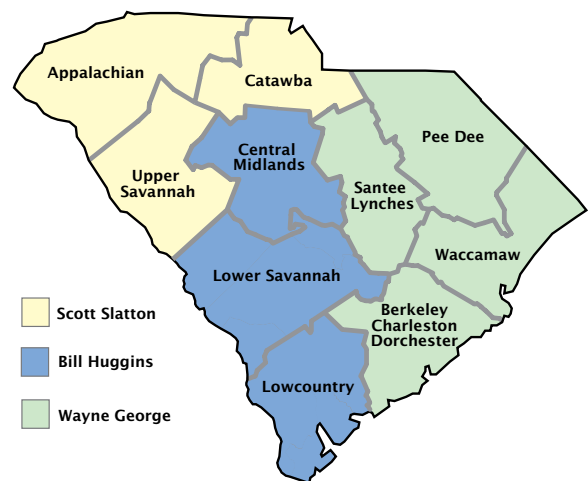
Scott Slatton, former city manager of Woodruff, joined the Association staff in October as field service manager for the Upstate. His region covers municipalities represented by the Appalachian, Catawba and Upper Savannah councils of governments.

The Association's field services managers provide technical assistance, discuss municipal issues and coordinate resources with the Association's 270 cities and towns. They also communicate with municipal officials about key legislative issues and promote the Association's programs including insurance services, training programs, affiliate member-

ships and collection programs. Slatton joins Bill Huggins and Wayne George as part of the field services team.

George covers the Pee Dee, Waccamaw, Santee-Lynches and Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester councils of governments' region, while Huggins works in the Lower Savannah, Central Midlands and Lowcountry councils of governments' area.

Slatton replaces Chip Boyles who left the Association to become the first executive director of the Na-



tional Town and Gown Association based in Clemson.


For more information about the field services program, call Wayne George, senior field services manager at 803.933.1242 or e-mail wgeorge@masc.sc.

Contact Scott Slatton at 803.354.4750 or sslatton@masc.sc.

Columbia Mayor Bob Coble has a Facebook page with well over 1700 “friends,” a large number of whom are under 30 years old. In addition to showing off his grandchildren on the site, Coble says he uses it to post opinion columns and news stories. He also links to events, causes and video uploads that support city initiatives and activities.

Dennis Waldrop, mayor of Simpsonville, says “I’ve learned that Facebook is a great way to network with other government officials and professional friends. I had always believed that it was a kid’s site but learned that it works for all age groups.”

So what’s the key to adapting to these constantly evolving new communications tools? It’s about applying old wisdom to new dynamics and using the traditional tenets of good two-way communication with residents and city leaders. The basic rules of good communication still apply.

- **Be prepared.** It’s always easier to respond pro-actively than reactively. Even issues that you don’t anticipate becoming a problem do. Technology makes this happen even faster.
- **Be honest.** Technology gives greater access to information that’s not always accurate, fair or correct. Make sure all communication from the city reflects the truth and is transparent in its delivery.
- **Be responsive.** Technology increases the expectation of immediate response. Develop processes to get city officials communicating about how they respond to electronic inquiries both from the perspectives of timeliness and accuracy.
- **Be citizen-focused.** Your messages should always be focused on how a program or service benefits your residents – not the government as an entity. These new technology tools make it easier to personalize an issue. 

Q&A:

with two city bloggers

Kevin Bronson, assistant city administrator in Orangeburg, and Scott Slatton, former city manager in Woodruff, started blogs as a proactive communications tool to go directly to residents with good news stories about the city.

Why did you start the blog?

Bronson: For awhile as I made my way around town to the local service and civic organizations, I found that I was often repeating the same information over and over. I realized that there were many things going on in Orangeburg that more people wanted to know about. Because I read several blogs (as part of my daily news gathering) I thought a blog would be an efficient way to communicate more of the information I had access to and attach commentary to, if needed. I still repeat much of the same information over and over as I make my way around town, but now I find that more folks are already informed.

Slatton: I started my blog in an effort to communicate directly with the public on a larger scale than with traditional methods.

What is the goal of the blog?

Bronson: The goal is real simple, make positive information about the City of Orangeburg (as a community and an organization) available to anyone who wishes to read it. I do not do news reporting, I leave that up to the media.

Slatton: The goal of my blog was to give the public insight into how and why city government makes decisions. Another goal was to make people who read it “insiders” at city hall, which gives them a better appreciation for the services their government performs for them every day.

How do you handle negative comments on the blog?

Bronson: I did some research on other municipal blogs and from that research established a list of “ground rules” for publishing comments. While I allow for comments, I have full editorial control on what is posted on the blog. I do not shy away from opposing points-of-view; at the same time I am very mindful of how anonymity emboldens some folks beyond their normal selves. Comments without a name and/or legitimate contact information are discarded.

Slatton: Negative comments are always a part of exercises that give the public a chance to speak its mind. I always allowed negative comments on the blog so long as they did not make personal attacks or misstate facts. When negative comments appeared on the blog that contained those elements, I always responded to them in the blog’s comment section.

What’s been the local community feedback on your blog?

Bronson: A lot of folks around town tell me they enjoy reading my blog and appreciate the information I put out there. The kind-of odd thing about the reaction has been folks prefer to tell me in person rather than post on the blog. Since verbal exchange is one of the “losses” of a blog, I am encouraged that I am able to have (or maintain) that verbal exchange which may otherwise be lost.

Slatton: People loved the blog. It made them feel more a part of what’s going on at city hall. When I was out in the community people inevitably said something about a blog post like “I didn’t know that was the case until I read it on your blog.” The other surprising thing I learned was that there a lot of older folks who read the blog.

events

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

5-7 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Annual Meeting. Kingston Plantation, Myrtle Beach. Topics include: compensation and classification plans, hiring process, identity theft protection and GASB 45.

7 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Quarterly Meeting. Columbia Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include: pollution prevention, DHEC audit checklist and bioretention systems.

12-14 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute. Radisson Hotel, Columbia. Topics include: notary public functions, payroll administration, using technology to communicate, grants administration and risk management.

20 SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund Annual Meetings. Embassy Suites, Columbia.

DECEMBER

5 SC Municipal Attorneys Association Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites, Columbia. Topics include: enforcing municipal infractions, military leave litigation, identity theft protection and defending civil conspiracy claims.

JANUARY

29 Hometown Connection. Municipal Association's office, Columbia. Municipal officials from cities in Aiken, Anderson, Calhoun, Cherokee, Chester, Fairfield, Greenville, Lancaster, Lexington, Oconee, Orangeburg,

Pickens, Richland, Spartanburg and York counties.

FEBRUARY

17 SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Sessions A and B. Marriott Columbia. Topics include: conducting public meetings, annexation, teamwork, business licensing and liability of municipal officials.

18 Hometown, SC Legislative Action Day. Marriott, Columbia.

For more information about these meetings or other association meetings not listed, please call 803.799.9574 or visit www.masc.sc.



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