

UPTOWN

It's not too early to gear up for the 2008 legislative session

By Warren Harley, Governmental Affairs Liaison, Municipal Association of SC

With the legislative session only a few months away, two issues – annexation and spending caps – are looming large for SC hometowns. MASC is preparing to represent municipal interests on both issues during the next session scheduled to begin January 8.

Municipal officials with the Municipal Association of SC's staff will work for legislation that provides hometowns the opportunity to grow and expand their natural boundaries through annexation. Last session, Rep. Ben Hagood of Sullivan's Island formed a study committee to discuss annexation. MASC will continue this dialogue with members of the General Assembly, particularly House members.

Annexation will continue to be a hot issue on our legislative agenda in 2008. Sen. Jim Ritchie of Spartanburg sponsored legislation that deals with enclave annexation (S 201), and MASC is currently working with Rep. Hagood and the study committee to encourage support in the House for companion

legislation. A comprehensive annexation reform bill is also a possibility.

We must also be prepared to defend against spending cap legislation (H 3515) introduced by Rep. Garry Smith of Greenville. This legislation would impose annual spending limits for operating purposes. The House Ways and Means Economic Development, Capital Improvement and Other Taxes subcommittee held two hearings on this issue. We expect more discussion this session about spending caps, but we are not certain spending cap proponents will continue to have legislative support this year.

So what can you do now to help advance the municipal position on these issues? First, take an opportunity to meet with members of your legislative delegation. Now is the best time to meet with them. If possible, take the opportunity to meet with them face to face. Whether you bring your entire delegation together, meet one-on-one, write a letter or make a phone call, it's important

for you to tell your legislators the facts and the municipal side of the story.

They need to know how their actions help or hurt your ability to create an environment for strong businesses and a great quality of life. It is important you take the opportunity to study the issues, so that you are able to articulate your message clearly.

Try to find out where your legislator stands on these two important issues. If he or she opposes the municipal position, make an attempt to find out why. This will be very helpful for future discussions you might have and for the MASC staff as they work daily at the State House.

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Sales tax clarification

Starting November 1, consumers will no longer pay the state sales tax on groceries. This does not affect local sales taxes. (SC Code of Laws 12-36-2120 (75). Local officials need to make sure their grocery stores know they must still collect local sales taxes, said MASC Executive Director Howard Duvall.

Taste test gives Columbia's water high marks

Move over sweet tea. There's another beverage in Columbia that folks are raving about.

The city's tap water tied for second place in an unscientific taste test on NBC's "Today" show. In July, two professional wine tasters sipped water samples submitted by 12 cities. Columbia tied with Boston, and trailed only Salt Lake City.

Wine taster David Lynch said Columbia's tap water is "luscious — I like its guts," according to the morning news program's Web site.

Columbia Mayor Bob Coble told *The State* newspaper that the city is proud of the way it treats and distributes its water. "It's a testament to the hard work of a lot of people here," he said.

The City of Columbia pumps more than 60 million gallons of water daily from its Columbia Canal and Lake Murray plants to residents in the city

and parts of Richland and Lexington counties. The city's water also can be found in some of the bottled water sold at stores. Each year, Columbia sells millions of gallons of water to Pepsico., which uses it in its Aquafina bottled water and other drinks, the newspaper reported.

The taste test comes amid a national debate about the benefits of bottled water versus tap water. Some scientific studies have shown that bottled water is no better than tap water. Bottled water also is far more expensive, and creates problems with trash and littering.

The mayors of Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and San Francisco have asked agencies to stop spending money on bottled water. San Francisco's mayor has said the bottles too often end up in landfills or littering the streets, and that millions of gallons of oil are used annually to produce those bottles.



Legislative session continued from cover

Let your legislator know specifically the impact these issues will have on your community. Detail real life scenarios you face in your community due to the restrictive annexation laws.

Explain how the cumulative impact of millage caps, spending caps and restrictive annexation laws hurt your community by linking your ability to allocate resources to the consumer price index and a population that is unlikely to grow due to our inability to annex.

Let them know specifically how

spending cap legislation will hinder your city's ability to conduct business and provide essential services your residents demand.

Explain that spending caps would also limit your ability to compete for a qualified and capable workforce.

Your legislators also need to understand that your expenses increase based on health insurance, workers' compensation insurance and other normal costs of doing business that are beyond your control. Speak candidly about your local

budget concerns, mentioning the specific needs of your community, such as the purchase of a new fire truck, to continue providing quality fire service to your residents and necessary equipment and personnel for police services.

If you need assistance, call MASC's Advocacy and Communications staff at 803.933.1270 or visit MASC's Web site at www.masc.sc.

Local governments should review policies on e-mail, e-data

The documents you create on your computer live forever. That's the message attorney Sarah Montgomery tries to spread. Montgomery, of the Haynsworth Sinkler and Boyd law firm, specializes in the complex and evolving field of electronic discovery.

E-discovery refers to the use of computer files for evidence in a civil or criminal legal case. A variety of data can be used as evidence, including text, images, calendar files, databases, spreadsheets, audio files, Web sites, computer programs and e-mail.

An electronic file is very different from a printed version, Montgomery said. The e-file contains information such as who created the document, when it was last modified, when it was opened and whether it was flagged important.

It's much faster and easier to search for data electronically than to manually dig through paper files, she said. Plus, electronic data is saved on hard drives, making it more difficult to destroy than paper documents.

The courts' views on electronic documents have been changing, Montgomery said. Hard copies of documents no longer are considered sufficient as evidence. Electronic data, including e-mail, are considered agency records and therefore, public. That has left many public agencies scrutinizing their policies on e-mail and other electronic data.

South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act requires governmental agencies to respond to requests within 15 days. That doesn't give agencies a lot of time to search through their scores of data on hard drives and servers, Montgomery said.

Montgomery urges local governments to review their FOIA policy and

identify records that they respond to and post frequently. They then can make these documents available on the Web virtually at any time. This would save valuable time and expense, rather than constantly searching for the documents, she said.

Many agencies already do this; posting online the minutes of public meetings or 911 tape requests. FEMA has posted information on flood mapping, and NASA has posted information on the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster, she said.

Montgomery suggests that in high profile cases, agencies post responses online for all to see, rather than responding to hundreds of similar requests.

It's also very important, she said, that local governments educate employees about e-mail. "E-mail is the worst managed document by everybody, especially government," Montgomery said.

It's a good idea for agencies to have a disclaimer on the end of their e-mail, requesting that the information provided in the message be used only for its intended purpose. But employees still must consider carefully what they send in an e-mail, and decide whether the information is too sensitive to be sent by the computer, she said.

"Never, ever assume that your e-mail is private," she said.

For more information on e-discovery, attend Sarah Montgomery's session at the joint annual meeting of the SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and the SC Business Licensing Officials Association, scheduled for October 31-November 2, at the Embassy Suites in North Charleston. Visit MASC's Web site at www.masc.sc for registration information.



■ The Town of Prosperity is accepting applications for police chief. Provide a cover letter and detailed resume including references to PO Box 36, Prosperity, SC 29127, Attn: Town Administrator, or e-mail karen.livingston@prosperitysc.com. Application deadline October 31.

■ The City of Spartanburg Building Inspections Department is accepting applications for a plans reviewer. Submit cover letter and resume with salary requirements to: Human Resources, City of Spartanburg, P.O. Drawer 1749, Spartanburg, SC 29304, e-mail hr2@cityofspartanburg.org, fax 864.596.2262.

■ The City of North Myrtle Beach is accepting applications for a director of planning and development. Send cover letter, application and resume to City of North Myrtle Beach, Human Resources, 1018 Second Avenue South, North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582, fax 843.280.5638. For more information, visit www.nmb.us. Position open until filled.

■ The Westminster Police Department, is accepting applications for the position of police officer. Applications and job description are available from the Westminster Police Department, 106 Windsor Street, Westminster, SC 29693, phone 864.647.3222, fax 864.647.3223 or e-mail sbannister@westminstersc.org. Position open until filled.

■ The City of Charleston is accepting applications for an assistant finance director and a senior accounting technician. Send resume to hr@ci.charleston.sc.us or apply in person at 174 East Bay Street, Suite 302, Charleston, SC 29401, phone 843.724.7358, fax 843.724.7358. Position open until filled.

■ Richland County is accepting applications for a community development housing project coordinator. Send applications to Human Resources Department, 2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204. Position open until filled. Visit www.richlandonline.com for more information.

Festivals highlight a community's uniqueness

By Amy Geier Edgar

Towns across the state – both large and small – are holding festivals. Some honor animals, vegetables or historic symbols. But they all offer a chance for residents to connect, for the city to showcase its downtown, and for a community to celebrate what makes it unique.

Many of South Carolina's cities and towns are seizing opportunities to honor something that is uniquely theirs, said Brandi Griffith, executive director of the South Carolina Festival and Events Association.

"Community festivals offer a chance for neighbors to get out with their families and celebrate their own community," Griffith said.

In Winnsboro, the Town Clock building is its defining feature. Built in 1833, the clock is said to be the oldest continuously-running clock in the nation. It seemed only natural a town festival would honor the historic timepiece. So, 11 years ago, the Rock Around the Clock Festival was born.

While there are bands at the festival, that's not necessarily what the "rock" in the festival name refers to, said Susan Yenner, administrative assistant with the Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce. Winnsboro was rich with blue granite that was quarried and used in buildings and monuments across the world, according to the county chamber's Web site.

The festival, scheduled for October 5 and 6, attracts almost 12,000 people, Yenner said. It features a car show, kids' activities, food and craft vendors and music. There also is a Rocking Chair Parade, which ties in with the county's theme to "create rocking chair memories." People are encouraged to incorporate rocking chairs on floats for this unique parade.

In the City of Union, residents showcase their renovated downtown, said festival committee member Lou Stackhouse.

Events at the Uniquely Union Festival, which in September marked its 12th year take place downtown, at the University of South Carolina-Union campus. "It's a great way to show off what we've got," Stackhouse said.

Downtown streets are blocked off, and merchants open their doors to the public, she said. Events include a free kids' play zone, a firefighter competition, beauty pageant, photography contest, and tennis and golf tournaments. In addition to food and craft vendors and live music, the highlight of the festival is a state barbecue competition. Last year's event attracted 30 cookers from seven states, Stackhouse said.

Barbecue also is popular in Laurens at the Squealin' on the Square festival, said Jonathan Irick, of Main Street Laurens. This year's festival, on October 5-6, was the seventh.

Along with a barbecue cook-off, activities include a classic car show and an antique tractor show. A special children's area, called Down on the Farm, invites youngsters to interact with farm animals and pioneer re-enactors. Crowds also enjoy the 'hawg calling' and pickle eating contests, Irick said.

The festival's numbers continue to grow; Irick reports that last year about 20,000 people attended the two-day event. It is funded largely through corporate sponsorships and some grant money.

The majority of events for the festival are held in the Historic Square — a source of pride for many residents. "We are one of only a handful of communities that has an actual 'square'

downtown with an historic courthouse located in the center," Irick said.

In the Town of Lamar, residents celebrate their history of local industry, which includes eggs. For years, a large egg farm – Egg and I Farm – has been located in Lamar, and town leaders decided to create a festival that would tie in with the industry. The Egg Scramble Jamboree was first created back in 1983, and has been revived in the past decade, said Victor Pizzurro, director of development and planning for the Town of Lamar.

The festival, held this year from March 28 to April 1, featured a car show, games, pony rides, petting zoo and parade. It also included a variety of bands to appeal to its diverse residents, Pizzurro said.

Along with some grant money, the festival is funded by the contributions of local businesses, he said.

The festival helps spur economic development by drawing people downtown, and adds to the quality of life for residents, Pizzurro said.

"Everybody comes together for this festival," he said. "It's a celebration of the town and the surrounding area."

Small festivals statewide have become increasingly more popular and successful, thanks in part to "local tourists," according to Griffith.

"Event-goers from neighboring communities are helping these events grow through economic stimulation and civic involvement, providing towns a renewed sense of community pride," she said.

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Cities need strong sign ordinances to avoid billboard lawsuits

Drive down most major roads in South Carolina, and you'll see billboards dotting the landscape. The signs are effective tools for marketing everything from restaurants to political campaigns, but they also provide a source of concern for municipalities trying to manage development and beautification efforts.

Sign ordinances in cities nationwide have been targeted by lawsuits from outdoor advertising companies.

"Outdoor advertising organizations across the nation are well-funded and aggressive in attacking municipal regulations," said Howard Duvall, executive director for the Municipal Association of South Carolina. "Cities need to be well-prepared to protect their communities."

The City of North Charleston knows this from experience. In December 2004, Covenant Media of South Carolina submitted an application for a permit for a new billboard on Ashley Phosphate Road. By late spring 2005, Covenant had received no word from North Charleston concerning its application. Covenant never inquired into the status of the application. Instead, the company filed a civil action against North Charleston, alleging the city violated Covenant's First Amendment rights through enforcement of its sign regulation.

The city proposed a new sign law in September 2005, and Covenant quickly submitted 25 additional applications for billboard permits. The sign law changes were adopted in October 2005. The amended ordinance, which took effect immediately, prohibited all new billboards. The city sent a letter to Covenant denying its original application, stating that the application was incomplete and non-complying under both the prior and the current version of the ordinance.

The case went to district court, where judges determined that Covenant did not have standing to challenge the sign regu-

lation. Covenant appealed, but the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the district court's judgment for North Charleston in a July 6 decision.

"Contrary to the district court's decision, Covenant does have standing to challenge North Charleston's sign regulation, but Covenant's standing extends only to challenging the sign regulation's lack of time limitations on the city's decision to grant or deny an application," according to the ruling. "Nevertheless, because the sign regulation is content neutral, its failure to include time limitations does not render it unconstitutional. Neither did the city apply it unconstitutionally."

To avoid legal issues, cities should adopt a procedure for reviewing applications for outside advertising, Duvall said.

"Cities need to look at what outside sign regulations they have on the books and make sure they're up to date with the latest regulations," Duvall said.

When reviewing or creating new sign ordinances, cities must include a message substitution provision, said Randal Morrison, a San Diego attorney and sign

law expert involved in the North Charleston case.

If a city council decides on a billboard prohibition, or a "cap and replace" policy, that must be stated clearly in the ordinance. It's not enough to define "billboard" as a sign that displays "off-site" advertising. The definition also must state that it's a sign used for advertising for hire or general advertising, and a sign which is a principal use of a parcel.

Sign ordinance drafting should be a joint project of planners, zoning enforcement officials and an attorney experienced in sign regulation, Morrison said.

"The sign regulation field is horribly complex and confusing," Morrison said. "Some of the court rulings are inconsistent. The sign companies use this to create fear."

About 10 percent of cities choose not to fight billboard lawsuits and grant some permits, but this just feeds the beast, he added.

Some cities leave flawed sign ordinances on the books because they have

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Federal regulations require cities to address stormwater runoff

A heavy rain provides water to the trees and grass, and often cools the air after a steamy South Carolina afternoon.

Clean water is critically important to the state's economy. It provides drinking water, a means for producing electricity, economic development opportunities and recreational activities. It is too important a natural resource to sit back and watch it disappear.

But all too often, stormwater trickles over roads and parking lots, roofs and construction sites, carrying with it to local streams and rivers a dangerous mix of sediment, chemicals and debris. This stormwater runoff can impact water quality, kill fish and other wildlife and erode the banks of streams.

The Catawba River faces a growing pollution problem that threatens both the public and wildlife.

Parts of the Catawba and many of its tributaries have failed to meet federal clean-water standards because of bacteria and chemicals polluting the water from homes, stormwater runoff and sewage spills, according to the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

It's a problem faced by areas across the country. People have long relied on the Mississippi River for food, drinking water, recreation and a means of commerce. But after decades of pollution from industrial waste and runoff from cities and sewers, the river is in poor health.

Some areas around the Mississippi have tried to address runoff concerns by educating businesses and residents and by creating or enforcing stormwater management techniques. Adding plants and vegetation to soak up water, and capturing and filtering runoff before it reaches the river are methods that have been used to prevent pollution.

The federal government first addressed the issue of water pollution in the 1970s, when municipal and industrial wastewater pollution had become a national concern. Congress passed the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, which created the National Pollutant

Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit Program. NPDES permits, which are mostly granted by the states, seek to prevent pollutants from entering local water bodies by stormwater runoff.

DHEC manages South Carolina's stormwater program. It requires permits for construction sites, many industrial sites and all regulated municipal storm sewer systems. The stormwater program requires development and implementation of a plan to control runoff and sediment to prevent them from entering water.

The issue of stormwater runoff control will have an impact on cities for years to come, said Howard Duvall,



executive director of the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

"This is going to involve billions of dollars of expense for cities," Duvall said. "It's going to take a lot of manpower and time."

The South Carolina Association of Stormwater Managers, an affiliate of MASC, offers training sessions throughout the year about stormwater management policies and best practices. It also provides members a forum for sharing ideas and keeping current on state and federal laws. For more information, visit www.masc.sc/affiliates/scasm/description.htm.

Sign ordinances

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not encountered many problems. But it's easier to have a solid ordinance on the books than to face a costly lawsuit, said Derk Van Raalte, an attorney in the North Charleston case.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," he said. For more information, visit Randal Morrison's Web site at www.signlaw.com

Sign ordinances and the recent court rulings will be discussed at the Municipal Attorneys Association meeting on December 7 at Embassy Suites in Columbia. Visit MASC's Web site, www.masc.sc, for registration information.

Options for managing liabilities related to GASB 45

By Heather Ricard, CFO for MASC's Risk Management Services

While many of you are struggling with the impact of GASB 45 and the best solutions for your municipality, you are probably being contacted by consultants, insurance companies and other entities selling products and services and promising ways to implement GASB 45 or lessen your GASB liabilities.

This spring, the Municipal Association of SC created the South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Investment Trust to help cities and towns understand, determine and fund their GASB 45 liabilities. While MASC believes this is the best option for funding GASB 45 related costs, it is also the Association's duty to help shed some light on other products and services being marketed by outside entities.

GASB 45 requires accounting for annual contributions for post-employment benefits over the working life of employees. For a contribution to be considered a qualified annual required contribution (as required under GASB 45), it must fall into one of three categories: payments of benefits directly to or on behalf of the retiree; premium payments made to an insurer or payments to an irrevocable trust.

Options for pre-funding contributions for other post-employment benefits, such as retiree health, include:

• **Traditional Defined Benefit plans (such as SC ORBIT).** The defined benefit plan offers a set benefit amount. The employer assumes the investment risk by agreeing to pay the stated benefit. In SC ORBIT, the benefits are not individually vested, and the transfers to the trust are irrevocable. As long as the annual required contribution is funded into an irrevocable trust using a defined benefit funding philosophy, the municipality will have no net Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) liability to record in its financial statements. Also the employee will be guaranteed a defined amount during retirement years.

• **Traditional Defined Contribution plans.** The employer sets aside a certain amount of money each year per employee. The accumulated value of the contributions is not guaranteed, and there is no guarantee of the amount of benefit paid in retirement. A qualified trust is normally required to account for these contributions. The administrative costs of defined contribution plans are

typically higher than those of defined benefit plans because of the detailed accounting required per employee. Additionally, defined contribution plans do not provide for existing retirees and do not give those nearing retirement sufficient time to set-aside funds. As long as the annual required contribution is funded into an irrevocable trust using a defined contribution philosophy, the municipality will have no net OPEB liability to record in its financial statements, but the employee may have an unanticipated shortfall due to less-than-projected self-directed investment returns.

• **Health Savings Accounts.** Health savings accounts have defined contribution-like characteristics and must be funded into a tax-exempt trust or custodial account. These accounts are only available for individuals who are covered by high-deductible health plans (a plan with an annual minimum deductible of \$1,050 for single coverage up to \$2,100 for family coverage; maximum deductibles also apply. See IRS Publication 969 for additional information). Because these plans are coupled with high deductible health plans, many HSA participants will use current year

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News Briefs



■ South Carolina is home to three of the top 10 hotels in the Continental United States and Canada, reports *Travel + Leisure* magazine. Five South Carolina properties (all within city limits) ranked in the top 100 on the list.

- Woodlands Resort & Inn, Summerville – 2 (27 on the world's best list)
- Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah Island – 5 (43 on the world's best list)
- Planters Inn, Charleston – 7 (53 on the world's best list)
- Inn at Palmetto Bluff, Bluffton - 34
- Wentworth Mansion, Charleston - 40

■ John Hanson, town administrator for Irmo; Warren Harley, governmental affairs liaison for MASC; Aubrey Jenkins, deputy fire chief for Columbia; and Jeff Shacker, assistant city manager for Newberry have been selected for the 2007-08 class of the Executive Institute. Institute sessions deal with the decision making process at the executive and policy levels.

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contributions towards current year deductibles, leaving a smaller balance to grow towards retirement. Additionally, insurance premiums may not be treated as qualified distributions until a retiree reaches age 65.

• Health Reimbursement

Arrangements. Health reimbursement arrangements also have defined contribution-like characteristics. High deductible health plans are not required and are generally established as notional accounts that exist only on paper. The employer determines how funds may accumulate and carry over each year. A GASB 45 liability will exist for these accounts if the funds deposited into the “on paper” accounts are not deposited into a qualified trust. Therefore, an employer will have a growing net OPEB liability on its financial statements unless

qualified contributions are made into a trust.

• **Other options.** Some other funding options include Voluntary Employee Benefit Associations (also referred to as 501c (9) trusts), 401(h) plans and Retiree Medical Accounts. VEBAs are essentially another type of defined contribution plan and may also be considered an HRA. VEBAs generally have vesting and portability rights for the employee. A 401(h) plan is also an acceptable plan for GASB 45 purposes; however, it must be established in conjunction with an existing defined benefit pension plan. RMAs are similar to HRA plans and may be used only to purchase health benefits in retirement. Again, these are considered notional accounts (they exist only on paper). A GASB 45 liability will exist for these accounts if the funds deposited

into the “on paper” accounts are not deposited into a qualified trust. An employer will have a growing net OPEB liability on its financial statements unless qualified contributions are made into a trust.

While a lot of lingo has been provided for available options for funding health care benefits, in reality, benefits will probably be funded by two main types of plans: a defined benefit or defined contribution plan. Any local government providing retiree benefits should analyze carefully the available options and determine what is financially prudent for its employees, retirees and citizens.

Contact Heather Ricard at 803.933.1258 or hricard@masc.sc for help in evaluating proposals or assessing the options best suited for your local government.



Hometown Happenings

November

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.

MASC will post November *Hometown Happenings* information on its Web site in early October. Let MASC know if you participate in a *Hometown Happening*. Call Casey Fields at 803.933.1256 or cfields@masc.sc

• **Veterans Day** – Always observed on November 11, Veterans Day is a time to honor military servicemen and women who have served in the U.S. military in peace and wartime. Host a parade to say thank you to all the veterans in your community. Send a thank you note to veterans in every water and electricity bill. Urge residents to display American flags and yellow ribbons. Honor servicemen and women by passing a proclamation. Send care packages overseas to servicemen and women who will be in Iraq or Afghanistan on Veterans Day. Take this day, and every day, to say thank you for their service and thank you to their families for their sacrifice.

• **Thanksgiving Day** – Celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November, Thanksgiving was originally started as an opportunity to give thanks for a bountiful harvest and a day for expressing thanks for the good things in life. Take this time to give thanks for a successful hometown, your municipal employees and the quality of life enjoyed in your community. Host a Thanksgiving Day lunch for employees, pass a proclamation or write a letter to the editor listing the things in your community for which you are thankful or sponsor a 10K run (called the Turkey Trot) the day after Thanksgiving to run off the goodies.

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

MASC co-sponsoring workshop for reporters

MASC and the SC Press Association are sponsoring a workshop October 18 for reporters who cover municipal government around the state. The daylong session, set for MASC's offices in Columbia, will feature a variety of topics to give reporters more in-depth knowledge about municipal issues.

The agenda includes presentations on budgeting, forms of government, research resources and the Freedom of

Information Act. Reporters will also hear a presentation by Terry Plumb, former editor of *The (Rock Hill) Herald*, focusing on developing stories and sources. Howard Duvall, executive director of MASC, will provide answers to the top 10 questions the Association gets from reporters along with suggestions for 10 creative "under-covered" stories.

Please share this information with reporters at your local newspaper, and

encourage them to attend. The workshop is free, but registration is required. Visit www.scpres.org to register. **You must be a reporter to attend the workshop.**

For additional information from MASC, contact Reba Campbell at 803.933.1245 or rcampbell@masc.sc.

Road Shows coming to a town near you

As announced in last month's *Uptown*, the Municipal Association of SC's staff is hitting the road again from September through November, making eight stops around the state. The Road Shows are bringing local municipal officials together to learn more about

incorporating our message of strong cities into communications with other community leaders.

Attendees get an insider's look at the upcoming legislative session and tips on incorporating our strong cities message when contacting legislators out of session.

While attending Road Show sessions is free, please RSVP so MASC can have a head count for the meals and make sure we have enough toolkits for everyone. RSVP to Michelle Willm at 803.933.1259 or mwillm@masc.sc.

Date	Time	Location	City
October 11	11:30 a.m.	Simpsonville Activity and Senior Center, 310 West Curtis Street	Simpsonville
October 17	11:30 a.m.	Technical College of the Lowcountry Bldg 12 Auditorium, 921 Ribaut Rd.	Beaufort
October 25	5:30 p.m.	Hilton Garden Inn 2671 Hospitality Blvd.	Florence
October 26	11:30 a.m.	Marriott Resort at Grande Dunes 8400 Costa Verde Dr.	Myrtle Beach
November 1	11:30 a.m.	Bridges/Rockwell Room, Baxter Hood Center, York Technical College	Rock Hill

Investment in cities is a must for a successful state

By Ed Sellers

Leaders in South Carolina often talk about how building our state is like building a bridge. They have a vision of the completed bridge but refuse to invest in the pilings that will hold it up. Those pilings are our state's cities and towns.

For two thousand years, urban centers have been the fundamental source of economic growth because of their high concentration of people and organizations with different skill sets. The complexity of today's new economy makes our cities more critical than ever to economic growth.

A modern economy is based on the exchange of knowledge and ideas, not just the creation and sale of a product. Innovative ideas lead to technology advances that are embedded in new and existing services and manufactured goods. In cities, where people and businesses with different skill sets can share knowledge and work together, this process usually happens faster and more efficiently.

New Carolina was established to make South Carolina's economy stronger and more competitive in a new global environment. To accomplish this, we're pursuing a three-pronged approach, and our cities have a key role to play in each area.

First, we must embrace the idea of developing clusters for business development. Clusters are businesses that traditionally might have competed with one another but now work together to build on their common interests. Cities are a critical element in developing successful clusters. The healthiest clusters are the ones in which the members each contribute unique skills and join together to compete against other regions throughout the world. To do

that, you need a critical mass of individuals or businesses with different skill sets working together. This type of critical mass tends to congregate around urban centers.

Second, we must create an environment in which new ideas can live and breathe. This includes providing funding to help businesses with new ideas thrive. It also means ensuring we have an educated workforce qualified to handle these new and advanced jobs. Plus, we must supply the high quality of life that educated workers will want. People with advanced degrees cluster in urban centers because they seek the cultural opportunities and diverse environments that only cities can offer.

Finally, we must connect the dots. South Carolina is a place where many people like to be in charge, so it can be hard getting folks to work with each other within our state. But the fact is that Cheraw is not competing with Mullins for new jobs and corporate investment. South Carolina is competing against North Dakota, North Carolina and South Korea. We are at war with every other regional economy in the world. There will be winners and losers, and we have to focus on those strategies unique to our environment that will help us win.

Local leaders must work together and not against each other in this competitive environment. By supporting the development of clusters and regional collaborations, cities become the conduits that can connect the dots between industry and government partners to make us all stronger. When we work together, we can compete nationally and internationally rather than with our next-door neighbors.

Speaking of neighbors, a focus on strong cities doesn't equal neglect of our rural areas. Each of our communities has a part in making sure that in South Carolina as a whole, we take advantage of our particular skills and advantages to make our economy competitive with the rest of the world. Rural communities can and should assess their strengths, create their own niches, and partner with cities to attract industry and jobs.

It must be noted that the South Carolina legislature has a very specific role to play in ensuring that our urban centers can fulfill their potential as engines of economic growth. South Carolina has restrictive and outdated annexation laws that hamper the growth of our cities, and these laws must be changed. Better annexation laws will lead to a more concentrated tax base in urban areas. A stronger tax base gives a city greater control over its destiny by allowing it to pay for infrastructure and programs that support healthy growth as well as provide amenities that attract highly educated workers.

At New Carolina, we're not shooting for overnight success. You have to start where you are, and the strategy that wins the game is a 20-year, long-term vision of the kind of place we want to build for our future and our children.

Ed Sellers is the chairman of New Carolina and the chairman and CEO of BlueCross BlueShield of SC.

This column appeared in The Greenville News on September 12. Sellers' observations in this column reflect the theme of his keynote address at MASC's Annual meeting in Greenville in July.

Poor writing skills cost you money

By Dr. Henry T. Price

When we make mistakes in our written communication, they are often small things — a comma here, a slightly “wrong” word there. But, make no mistake about it, those mistakes can be costly for any business, small or large.

Some would say that’s an overstatement. Others would say it’s right on the money. Unfortunately, many CEOs in South Carolina are finding it fits far too many of their employees. One executive said, “My young sales staff can sell, but they don’t know enough about grammar and punctuation to write a proper business letter to the customer.”

The Wall Street Journal notes that 80 percent of businesses surveyed believe that their employees’ biggest problem is written communication. Think about it. The first impression most people get of your business comes from a written message, either on a piece of paper or on a computer screen.

You want that message to sell your business, but all too often it has at least one error in grammar or a misspelling or any of dozens of other writing problems. When errors are found, the message suffers — and so does the image of your business.

Too many business messages are so long that they compound the problems caused by basic writing errors. Very few executives have the time to plow through paragraph after paragraph, trying to figure out what the writer wants. Such epistles usually are consigned quickly to the circular file. Most of us know that writers who know what they’re talking about don’t need to be long-winded.

An article by Sue Oliver in the January-March 2004 issue of the *Business and Economic Review*, published by USC’s Moore School of Business, quoted a 1995 report from the Winthrop University Center for Economic Development: “The

economic value lost as a result of an uneducated or undereducated work force is an estimated \$824 million extra....” If you were to adjust that figure for inflation over the past 12 years, it is more than likely well beyond \$1 billion now.

One of the most damaging shortcomings of our national education system is its worsening inability to teach young people to read, and especially write, the English language. If you doubt that, the next time your newspaper runs a story about the performance of college-bound students on the SAT, read it carefully.

Employees who can’t read well and can’t employ precision and conciseness in written communications put any business at a severe disadvantage in today’s highly competitive world.

Today’s young professionals have been reared in the computer age, when learning about technology seems far more important than mastering such mundane things as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. After all, most of us communicate now through e-mail, and you obviously don’t need spelling, grammar, and punctuation for that! We seem to forget that good writing, like good manners, will get you into places that money never will.

Dr. Price, a consultant with Sam McCuen and Associates, taught copy editing and writing for more than 30 years at the University of South Carolina.

Article reprinted with permission from South Carolina Business, SC Chamber of Commerce, May 2007.

Quiz

See whether you can find any grammar problems in the sentences that follow. Respond quickly, as if you were writing a letter, and don’t reach for your favorite grammar reference book. You’ll find the answers at the end.

- a – Between you and I, they’re getting along well.
- b – I wish my roommate was not such a slob.
- c – None of us really know what happened that night at the party.
- d – According to news reports, he hung himself in prison.
- e – Whom should I say is calling?
- f – I’ll send the samples if your still interested.
- g – The chairman wanted Karen and I to speak to the press.

Answers

- a – The nominative “I” should be the objective “me,” because it’s part of the object of the preposition “between.”
- b – It should be “were,” not “was.” The sentence refers to a condition that is contrary to fact, which requires the subjunctive mood.
- c – It should be “knows,” not “know.” The subject of the sentence is “none” (short for “not one”) and requires a singular verb.
- d – “Hung” should be “hanged.” Things are “hung;” people are “hanged.”
- e – It’s “who,” not “whom.” The word in question is the subject of the clause “who is calling” and requires the nominative case.
- f – “Your” should be “you’re.” The erroneous use of the possessive pronoun “your” in place of the contraction “you’re” (short for “you are”) is common today.
- g – “I” should be “me.” The phrase “Karen and me” is serving as the direct object of the sentence and requires the objective case. If you left Karen out of the sentence, you wouldn’t say, “The chairman wanted I to speak to the press.”



Educational Opportunities

Road Show

October 11, the Municipal Association will hold a *Hometown, SC* Road Show at 11:30 a.m. at the Simpsonville Activity Center in Simpsonville.

Road Show

October 17, the Municipal Association will hold a *Hometown, SC* Road Show at 11:30 a.m. at the Technical College of the Lowcountry in Beaufort.

Road Show

October 25, the Municipal Association will hold a *Hometown, SC* Road Show at 5:30 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn in Florence.

Road Show

October 26, the Municipal Association will hold a *Hometown, SC* Road Show at 11:30 a.m. at the Marriott Resort at Grande Dunes in Myrtle Beach.

SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and the SC Business Licensing Officials Association

October 30 – November 2, will hold a joint annual meeting at the Embassy Suites Airport/Convention Center in North Charleston. Topics include e-discovery, Census 2010, Investments 101, revoking/suspending a business license and identify theft.

Road Show

November 1, the Municipal Association will hold a *Hometown, SC* Road Show at 11:30 a.m. at York Technical College in the Baxter M. Hood Center in Rock Hill.

Main Street South Carolina

November 2, will conduct an Incorporating the Innovation Economy into Downtown training session at the Orangeburg County Chamber of Commerce, 155 Riverside Drive in Orangeburg from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

November 9, will hold its fourth quarterly meeting at the SC Hospital Association in Columbia. Topics include MS4 implementation and the realities of pollutant removal.

SC Utility Billing Association

November 13, will hold its fall meeting at the SC Hospital Association in Columbia. Topics include teambuilding for success and top customer service complaints and how to handle them.

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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