

## News From the Nation's Counties



### ARIZONA

**COCONINO COUNTY'S** Economic Empowerment Coalition recently announced the receipt of nearly \$1 million in federal tax credits and state tax refunds by county residents as a result of its efforts this past year.

In tax year 2006, the coalition helped **Earned Income Tax Credit**-eligible residents with tax preparation by using more than 60 volunteers at 11 sites throughout the county. The credit applies to families earning less than \$38,000 annually.

The program, budgeted at \$49,000, is funded by the county, United Way of Northern Arizona, the city of Flagstaff and others. The program returned \$995,243 in tax year 2006.

"This represents a really successful return on investment and a significant economic stimulus to our county," said Carl Taylor, chairman of the Coconino County Board of Supervisors.

### GEORGIA

A sheriff's decision to donate \$100,000 in **confiscated drug money** to a local university has angered **CAMDEN COUNTY** commissioners.

The commissioners have sued Sheriff Bill Smith for his donation to Georgia State University, saying that he shouldn't have given the institution any money without

their approval, according to the Associated Press.

Smith intended for the money to establish a criminal justice scholarship program.

According to the AP, the county's drug money account had about \$1.6 million in funds returned to the county by state and federal authorities.

### HAWAII

The **HAWAII COUNTY** Council is considering a bill that would extend a pilot program that keeps county **bus rides free** until the end of 2009.

Established in 2004, the program has been so popular that the county hired a private bus company to supplement its service, according to the Associated Press. The most popular route goes between Hilo and the Waikoloa resorts.

Most jobs on Hawaii's Big Island are on the expensive Kona side, forcing hotel workers to live on the east side and commute two hours in each direction.

### IDAHO

**BONNEVILLE COUNTY** is on the hunt for a loose culprit: the **salt cedar tree**.

According to KIFI-TV, a small salt cedar can drink up to 300 gallons of water a day, removing water from rivers, creeks and canals. The trees have the ability to drain entire ponds.

The county has reclassified the plants as noxious weeds, thereby giving the county's weed control department the task of pulling every salt cedar in the county.

Weed control will pull residents' trees at no cost for a limited time.

### MINNESOTA

The University of Minnesota and **HENNEPIN COUNTY** officials signed an agreement today that will streamline the process by which the county and the university initiate **joint research projects**, putting a greater focus on getting results and less on unnecessary process steps.

The partnership allows both entities to conduct research on issues of mutual interest, share expertise, provide students with field experience to enrich their learning experience and share best practices around the operation of large institutions.

Commissioner Linda Koblick, the lead in establishing the partnership, said that the agreement "completes the circuit that enables us to effectively partner and collaborate with the university, breaking down unnecessary and costly institutional barriers. We citizens and taxpayers



Photo courtesy of Broward County, Fla.

### FLORIDA

**BROWARD COUNTY** employees and residents **donated food items** throughout the month of August during the "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation" food drive. Collection boxes set up throughout the county were filled with donated nonperishable food items.

In the end, three tons of food were collected and given to the **Cooperative Feeding Program**. Shown with the collected food items are, left to right, county employees Marlene Wilson and Elayne Baron, both of the Broward County Human Services Department; Andy Cagnetta and Marti Forman, both of the Cooperative Feeding Program; and County Commissioner Sue Gunzburger, who initiated the campaign.

### NORTH CAROLINA

Counties across North Carolina are moving quickly to put on the November ballot one or both of the new revenue options included in the state budget recently passed by the General Assembly, according to the **NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**. The budget included two **revenue options** for counties — a 0.25 percent increase in the sales tax or a 0.4 percent land transfer tax. A county can only enact one of the two options, and whichever one it enacts must first be approved by voters in a referendum.

"Counties are faced with tremendous infrastructure needs, including almost \$10 billion of school capital projects over the next five years and billions more for clean water projects," said NCACC President and Buncombe County Commissioner David Young. "We cannot keep relying on the property tax to fund all of these needs."

### PENNSYLVANIA

•The **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** Medical Examiner's Office recently

all benefit from this, and it paves the way for others to emulate this partnership."

Recent collaborations between the university and the county include a multi-year transportation research program, a homeless reduction project and community health assessment.

### NEW YORK

A memorial to the 344 **NASSAU COUNTY** residents who died in the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks was unveiled recently.

The **Sept. 11 memorial** features two aluminum towers rising from a fountain and also incorporates two pieces of steel from the World Trade Center, *Newsday* reported. The project cost more than \$1 million; it was built largely by donations and volunteer labor.

"The passage of time has numbed some of our raw emotions, but for many the grief is as deeply felt as a fresh wound," Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi told widows, children and friends of the victims.

Each of the victims' names is carved in stone on the monument.

### ALASKA

It took two counts, but in the end, voters turned down — by a wide margin — the establishment of **DELTA BOROUGH** in the Delta Junction area.

According to the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, nine out of 10 voters rejected the plan. Voter turnout was 47 percent, much higher than the 9 percent at last fall's Delta Junction municipal election. The **proposed borough** was the subject of a story in the April 23 issue of *County News*.

Delta Junction City Councilman Pablo Martinez told the *News-Miner* that many residents were uneasy with the proposed financial plan for the borough. The plan would have called for a gold mine tax and a pair of utility taxes to fund the government.

"Hopefully this issue will not come up again until there's a better [economic] foundation here to support a borough," Martinez told the paper. "Delta has always been a boom-and-bust area; that's their biggest concern."

## Program focuses on quality of applicants, not quantity

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was the case with the most recent call to complete the program.

"It requires a lot of case management, working with these folks," Dodd admits. "But we're trying to walk that delicate line between supporting them enough, but also dropping them if they become too labor-intensive or if they're not doing what they say they're going to do."

Participants are weeded out for a number of reasons — failing drug tests and loss of interest among them. Further, as the program has grown and been fine-tuned, Dodd says it has gotten better at screening out applicants who are not likely to succeed.

"The commissioners said we need to have a quality program here, so we get a good reputation; the numbers will grow later," he says. "And so we have set the bar high."

Liakakis, the county commissioner, adds, "The message that our county commission has given out is that we want to continue to do this, because we see successes that have occurred" — like carpenter-turned-electrician Wallace Bell.

"I'm a more skilled employee now," Bell says, "so I'm hoping that I have more value."

To learn more about the *Chatham County's Construction Apprentice Program*, visit [www.stepupsavannah.org](http://www.stepupsavannah.org), e-mail Daniel Dodd at [danieldodd@stepupsavannah.org](mailto:danieldodd@stepupsavannah.org) or call 912/644-6420.

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