

## 2019 Advocacy Initiatives Target Funding, Police



**M**ore than 250 local elected officials and staff attended Regional Advocacy Meetings in August and September. They shared their concerns and ideas on issues ranging from the Local Government Fund to working with the SC Department of Transportation to local flexibility and infrastructure.

From these nine meetings (one was canceled because of Hurricane Florence), the 2019 advocacy initiatives were identified and approved by both the Municipal Association of South Carolina legislative committee and the board of directors.

What are the initiatives for the upcoming session, and where do local officials fit in? Read on for the priorities of cities and towns and simple tasks that any local elected official can do, regardless of the size or location of their city or town.

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### Advocacy initiative:

Update the Local Government Fund formula to guarantee a reliable funding level that is fair to cities and towns of all sizes.

*How can you help?* Write down one thing that your city funds with your portion of the Local Government Fund and how that directly affects your residents and businesses. How would dependable funding from the LGF help you better serve your residents?

### Advocacy initiative:

Expand flexibility for using accommodations and hospitality taxes to allow expenditures for infrastructure and law enforcement in tourist-related areas.

*How can you help?* Think about tourist-related areas in your hometown and how you could improve the area around it, either with additional law enforcement, improved drainage or roads that lead visitors to you. How would better infrastructure help you attract more tourists?

### Advocacy initiative:

Reduce the wait time for local law enforcement hires to be admitted to the SC Criminal Justice Academy.

*How can you help?* Make a list of your police recruits and how long you have waited to get them in the academy. How does this affect the safety of your residents?

Working together, cities and towns and the Municipal Association legislative team can work with legislators to introduce, pass and implement new laws which help municipalities provide more and better services to residents, businesses and visitors.

Remember to always share information related to the advocacy initiatives with the Municipal Association legislative team. Whether it's stories related to one of the initiatives, data from your budget that illustrate those stories, or first-hand accounts from residents and businesses, the legislative team is always looking for different ways to build support for the initiatives.

*Look for more tips for communicating with your legislators in the January Uptown. The new two-year session starts on January 8, 2019, at the State House.*

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# SCEMD Director Kim Stenson to Speak at HLAD

First there was the October 2015 flood, breaching dams and washing out roads even in inland areas which typically experience only minor impacts from storm flooding. The storm may not have had a clear name, but it required the greatest level of statewide emergency response since Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

Second, a year after that 2015 flood, Hurricane Matthew came, bringing coastal flooding as it scraped up the shoreline. Then, almost two years after that, the sluggish Hurricane Florence dumped a tremendous amount of water on the state, reflooding many cities and towns which were still working to recover from Matthew.

South Carolina disasters have often come in the form of rising floodwater in recent years, and this creates an obvious theme for SC Emergency Management Division Director Kim Stenson when he speaks at Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 5.

An Army veteran who has served SCEMD for the last two decades, and who has served as its director since 2013, will speak about the impacts of and responses to all three storm events to HLAD attendees.

While areas for improvement remain, Stenson said that these storm events were marked by good advance notice, strong leadership engagement and valuable

prestaging of assets. In other words, the events demonstrated the utility of “extensive planning, training and exercising at all levels of government,” he said.

Before Hurricane Florence, he said, “the evacuation went well. We had good information put out to locals on what we thought the water was going to do in terms of the flooding.”



One aspect of disaster response where SCEMD is often pursuing improvements is the percentage of residents who comply with evacuation orders, and Stenson said he had seen some gains there during Hurricane Florence. Information management is another focus area: making certain that, in the midst of the tremendous amount of information flowing from news sources and official sources ahead of and during a disaster, the public information coming from SCEMD is as actionable for decision makers as possible.

Stenson encourages municipal officials to participate in county and

statewide disaster exercises whenever possible, which helps promote integrating of services from the local level up through the levels of state and federal assistance.

Another key, he said, is for city staff to have disaster plans ready to go for their own families. This reduces the degree to which personnel have to worry about their own family members, he said, “when they’re up to their necks in whatever is going on.”

Learn more about SCEMD emergency response on Tuesday, February 5, at the Municipal Association’s 2019 Hometown Legislative Action Day. The preregistration deadline for HLAD on February 5 and Municipal Elected Officials Institute on February 6 is Tuesday, January 22.

*For more information, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: HLAD). The deadline to make hotel reservations at the Columbia Marriott is Wednesday, January 10. Call 1.800.593.6465 or 803.771.7000 and ask for the Municipal Association of SC HLAD rate of \$153 plus taxes.*



# Don't Miss the Affiliate Experience

Professional positions in municipalities often have specialized job responsibilities without direct comparison in the private sector. The Municipal Association of South Carolina offers 11 affiliate associations for municipal staff to provide relevant and timely training tailored to these unique job functions.

The mission of each affiliate organization is to create a community of peers who learn through traditional face-to-face training, networking, and sharing best practices and experiences. The Municipal Association manages and programs the affiliates with guidance from a board of directors elected from each affiliate's membership.

Affiliate members receive discounted registration on training and access to a members-only listserv, a group email network for users to post questions and seek feedback from colleagues.

"The value of affiliate participation cannot be overstated," said Eric Budds, deputy executive director of the Association. "The nominal costs associated with affiliate membership and participation are easily offset by the benefit of having a more knowledgeable, work ready and confident employees, who know there is a network of peers available, willing and able to support their success."

During the past year, the affiliate groups serving municipal staffs conducted approximately 36 specialized training events with more than 2,200 municipal staff members and associate members participating.

Affiliate memberships run on a calendar-year schedule. Current members will receive a renewal notice the first week of January. All municipal officials and staff are eligible

to join online or by contacting the Association's staff contact. Membership applications and renewals will be online beginning January 2.

## Building Officials Association of South Carolina

BOASC focuses on the challenges of administering and enforcing building and related codes and offers education and networking through its annual meetings and listserv.

## Municipal Court Administration Association of SC

MCAA offers training to court administrators, clerks of court, municipal judges and other employees involved in court administration.

## Municipal Technology Association of SC

MTASC promotes the effective use of technology. Recent training sessions covered open data, cybersecurity when using third-party vendors, PCI requirements and drones in disaster recovery.

## SC Association of Municipal Power Systems

SCAMPS focuses on legislative initiatives, mutual aid and provides training for elected officials, management staff and operational personnel.

## SC Association of Stormwater Managers

SCASM offers quarterly training on stormwater management policies and best practices. Training regularly covers proposed changes to stormwater regulations and case studies of innovative practices.

## SC Business Licensing Officials Association

BLOA promotes best practices for administering the local business and professional license tax through training

sessions, networking and the Accreditation in Business Licensing and Masters in Business Licensing.

## SC Community Development Association

CDA provides educational forums on economic and community development needs, best practices and successful case studies.

## SC Municipal Attorneys Association

The MAA annual training addresses the needs of municipal attorneys and complies with the Supreme Court of South Carolina Commission on CLE and specialization requirements for continuing education credits.

## SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association

Training programs cover unique member responsibilities, which include customer service, public records requests, parliamentary procedures and codification. MFOCTA sponsors the Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute with the Municipal Association and the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities.

## SC Municipal Human Resources Association

MHRA training programs give members information and the opportunity to exchange ideas and stay current on state and federal labor law and court rulings.

## SC Utility Billing Association

SCUBA trains members on utility billing, collections and customer service. Programs frequently focus on customer service skills, workplace safety, and best practices in utility billing and collections.

*For a list of staff contacts for the affiliates, visit [masc.sc](http://masc.sc) (keyword: affiliate).*

# Wayne George: Lessons Learned from the First Year on the Road

By the second day of 2018, when Wayne George began his service as the sixth executive director of the Municipal Association of South Carolina, he had already begun the process of meeting stakeholders in every corner of the state.

In meetings both planned and unplanned, he met with Municipal Association board members, elected officials and city staff. As the year comes to a close, he expects to hit triple digits: at least 100 meetings on the road.

The purpose of the visits, George said, was “to meet, greet and listen,” to gain knowledge, ideas and suggestions.

Growth of medium-sized cities outside of more urban areas stuck out to him in places like Mauldin and Clemson. In the smaller towns, he said he saw firsthand the conflict of aging infrastructure and funding limitations.

The road trips, George said, “gave me a good insight on what the needs are in the cities and towns of South Carolina.”

The feedback he received soon led to a new Municipal Association offering. Recent elections meant a record number of new elected officials, so the Association hosted an orientation session for them



Municipal Association Executive Director Wayne George visited the Town of Nichols soon after Hurricane Florence.

in Columbia in May. It brought 43 new officials from 31 municipalities and is now planned as an annual event.

As part of the Municipal Association’s emergency committee, he also made his way to areas hit by the storms of 2018. He visited the Town of Nichols soon after Hurricane Florence, a time when the flooded Town Hall could be reached only by large National Guard vehicles.

The disasters and successes in cities and towns this year made for an up-and-down year, but George said that through all of it, he gained a deeper understanding of the value that the Municipal Association’s programs and affiliates bring to cities and towns, and the ongoing need of making local government officials and staff aware of all the resources available to them.

## NEWS BRIEFS

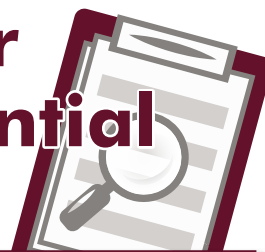
Members of the **Municipal Court Administration Association of SC** elected their 2018 – 19 board of directors during their annual meeting. President Lachesha Dowdy, City of Clinton; First Vice President Mary McWaine, City of Charleston; Second Vice President Brittany Burns, Town of Pine Ridge; Members at Large Kirsten Pressley, City of Greer; Tabitha Morris, Town of Saluda; Kimberly Poulin, City of Anderson; and Past President Pam Larson, City of Greenville.

Members of the **Municipal Technology Association of SC** elected their 2018 – 19 board of directors during their annual meeting. President Ryan Byrd, City of Goose Creek; Vice President Jason Thomton, Town of Fort Mill; Secretary/Treasurer Tommy Sunday, Town of Bluffton; Member at Large Mike Blizzard, City of Greenville; Member at Large Jason Nixon, City of Anderson; and Past President Phil Hasty, City of Clinton.

The **Municipal Association of SC** announced two staff changes. Meredith Kaiser, formerly a loss control consultant with Risk Management Services, is now an underwriting manager. Russell Cox joined the staff in October as the Uptown editor and digital production manager.

Some South Carolina municipalities have made the list of Conde Nast Traveler’s Readers’ Choice Awards. Towns of **Hilton Head Island** and **Kiawah Island** were voted No. 1 and No. 3 respectively for the “Best Islands in the U.S.” The **City of Charleston** topped the list of the “Best Small Cities in the U.S.,” and the **City of Greenville** came in at No. 9.

## Ethics Tip: Using or Disclosing Confidential Information



According to the Ethics Reform Act of 1991, municipal officials may not use or disclose confidential information gained through their official capacity that would affect their economic interests or the economic interests of a member of their immediate family, an individual with whom they are associated or a business with which they are associated. Doing so may result in their immediate discharge.

For more information, refer to Section 8-13-725 of the Ethics Reform Act.

The monthly Ethics Tip is provided by the SC Ethics Commission.

# 2018 HEDG Recipients Announced

## *13 Cities to Receive Grants*

The Municipal Association of South Carolina has awarded Hometown Economic Development Grants to 13 cities and towns. Up to \$25,000 each, the grants are intended to support those economic development projects that will make a positive impact on a municipality's quality of life. The grant program also promotes and recognizes innovation in economic development practices.

The Municipal Association board of directors created the program to fund projects that will produce measurable results, can be maintained over time and illustrate best practices that can be replicated in other cities.

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### **City of Bamberg – Caboose in the Middle**

In recognition of the area's status as home to the first rail line in South Carolina, the city and county will partner to place a historic caboose next to the county courthouse campus which will celebrate the Hamberg-Charleston line and attract visitors of all ages.

### **Town of Batesburg-Leesville – Batesburg-Leesville Master Plan**

The town will use its grant funds to create a master plan which will include a strategic vision for its two historic business districts, two town parks and the conversion of a historic auditorium into a performing arts theater.

### **Town of Blacksburg – Lime Street Trail Head and Park**

The town's project will be the first step in a countywide trail project to connect the Cowpens National Battlefield with King's Mountain National Military Park. The town will use grant funds for architectural and engineering services related to the park's development.

### **Town of Brunson – Brunson Streetscape**

Continuing with its previous efforts through other grant projects, the town will use its grant funds for a variety of activities to improve its central business district including facade upgrades, parking improvements, decorative lighting and landscaping.

### **City of Central – Facade Grant Improvement Program**

Capitalizing on its ongoing downtown improvement efforts, the city will leverage grant funds with local dollars to expand its Facade Grant Improvement Program.

### **City of Conway – Riverfront Amphitheater Feasibility Study**

The city will conduct a feasibility study for a proposed amphitheater along the downtown riverwalk. The proposed amphitheater would be home to the existing Theatre of the Republic and allow it to hold outdoor performances, which will attract residents and visitors to the downtown.

### **Town of Gifford – Gifford Rosenwald School**

Using grant funds as leverage with a Community Development Block Grant, the town will stabilize and renovate its historic Rosenwald School for use as a technology and vocational education facility.

### **City of Laurens – Small Business Learning Lab**

The Small Business Learning Lab will be a small business development center for the City of Laurens and a resource center for entrepreneurs. Grant funds will be used to engage design professionals to develop the Learning Lab in a historic downtown building that will focus on the design elements needed to make the lab suitable for attracting entrepreneurs.

### **Town of Lowrys – Giving in a Small Town**

Through many gifts it has received over the years, the Town of Lowrys provides rural living to its residents through open space and unique events. With the use of grant funds, the town will establish a permanent town hall by renovating a historic building as a gift to its residents.

### **Town of Moncks Corner – Miracle League Field**

The town will match 100 percent of grant funds and use private in-kind services to pay for design costs of its \$1.2 million Miracle League Field at its Regional Recreation Complex.

### **City of Orangeburg – Open Air Market and Pavilion**

Partnering with the Downtown Orangeburg Revitalization Association, Orangeburg County and the state, the city will use grant funds to design an open air market and pavilion to host the city's weekly farmers market and provide an anchor for center city events.

### **Town of Richburg – Renovation and Maintenance of 107 and 109 Broad Street**

Threatened with losing its post office, the town will use grant funds to stabilize and renovate 107 and 109 Broad Street. The building is a key asset in the town that houses the post office, a community food pantry and a proposed railroad museum.

### **Town of Saluda – Saluda Theater**

Built in the Art Deco style in 1936, the recently-restored Saluda Theater will be brought back to life with grant funds which will provide modern audio, video and lighting equipment, and allow the town and the Saluda Historical Society to once again attract residents and visitors for movies, plays and concerts.

# Annual Notice of Regularly Scheduled Meetings

All public bodies, which include municipal councils, public utility boards, municipal planning commissions, boards of zoning appeals, architectural review boards and all other boards, commissions or committees appointed by council, are subject to public meeting notice and agenda requirements in SC Code Section 30-4-80 (Freedom of Information Act).

All public bodies must give written public notice of their regular meetings at

the beginning of each calendar year. The annual meeting notice must include the dates, times and places of all regularly scheduled meetings.

The annual meeting notice must be posted on a bulletin board in a publicly accessible place at the office or meeting place of the public body and on a public website maintained by the body, if the public body has one.



## Test yourself monthly quiz

**True or False:** “Each municipality in South Carolina must meet three main requirements regarding municipal audits: Municipalities must have an annual external audit, audits must be made public and audit contracts cannot extend beyond four years.”

**Answer: True**



An annual audit is required by state law. An audit is an independent assessment of a municipality’s financial statements to reasonably ensure they are materially correct. An audit also assesses the effectiveness of internal controls, or policies and procedures, which minimize the risk of fraud. Although an audit contract can be renewed, the contract cannot be for more than four years at a time.

*The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person*

*and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework graduate from the institute and are eligible to participate in the Advanced Institute. The next in-person courses, held February 6, will be MEO Sessions A and B. The next Advanced MEO Institute sessions also on February 6 will be “Advanced Municipal Economic Development” and “Public Safety Policy and Administration.”*

# Cities Unaffected by the Hurricane Help Cities in Need



Social Services

*Through the South Carolina firefighter mobilization and mutual aid program, the City of Columbia Fire Department assisted the City of Hartsville and several other cities after Hurricane Florence.*

Chesterfield Administrator David Huntley knew his town was in trouble soon after the flooding from Hurricane Florence began. A 12-inch sewer line covering a 700-foot span above a creek was wiped out, dropping raw sewage and rainwater into a swollen waterway already raging with flood waters.

“We’re a small town. We had no way of coming up with a temporary fix, much

less figure out how to fix it permanently,” he said.

Luckily for Chesterfield, and for many other coastal and Pee Dee towns swamped by the September hurricane, help came quickly from other South Carolina municipalities, eager to jump in and offer assistance.

In Chesterfield, Rep. Richie Yow got on the phone with Sen. Vincent Sheheen of nearby Camden. By midnight, the

City of Camden had a bypass pump in place and 700 feet of 6-inch pipe laid across the side of the bridge in Chesterfield.

“Without the City of Camden, I’m not sure what we’d be doing,” Huntley said. “It took probably 12 hours from the time we knew the sewer line washed out until Camden was there. DHEC was extremely happy we could get a temporary fix in place.”





The City of Camden came to the aid of the Town of Chesterfield with a bypass pump when flooding washed out a 12-inch sewer line.

Chesterfield also received help from the City of Lancaster with picking up mountains of yard debris, with work coordinated through the Municipal Association. Instead of Chesterfield town workers manually picking up debris and tossing it in a dump truck, Lancaster sent a crew of four workers and two knuckle boom trucks with claws that quickly and easily cleared piles of yard debris.

“They could do more in a day than we could have done in three weeks,” Huntley said.

Steven “Flip” Hutfles, Lancaster city administrator, said his staff and crews understand the needs of municipalities in the wake of powerful storms. When Hurricane Matthew flooded the state in 2016, Lancaster workers helped out in Latta for two weeks.

“We have some seasoned veterans who were here when Hugo hit. Lancaster was hit very hard by Hugo in 1989. It’s still fresh in a lot of employees’ minds. They can feel for someone else,” Hutfles said. “If they can come back and pay it forward, we’re more than happy to.”

City staff in Columbia feel the same way, with the memories of the historic floods that hit the capital city in 2015 still vivid in workers’ minds.

As Hurricane Florence approached, the Columbia Fire Department’s medical emergency response vehicle made three trips to the coast with drivers, navigators and medical personnel. There, they evacuated people from medical facilities in cities and towns in Georgetown and Horry counties, moving them to health care facilities around the state, said Columbia Fire Department Chief of Special Operations Daniel McManus.

After the storm, the Hartsville Fire Department, through the South Carolina firefighter mobilization and mutual aid program, requested two engine companies to relieve firefighters who had been working excessive hours, McManus said. The statewide program encourages overstressed departments to request help from other cities. Columbia responded, sending two engines and a battalion chief to relieve the Hartsville firefighters for 24 hours.

Then Columbia firefighters headed to the coast with a 15-member water rescue team and four boats deployed to the Pawleys Island and Litchfield Beach area. Along with City of Charleston teams, they conducted search and rescue missions. The help from the two cities allowed the area fire department to

expand its coverage from three boats to 12. After 16-hour workdays, helping check on residents by boat, the team moved about 20 miles to the Conway area, which was facing devastating flooding.

“We got to Conway and found homes under 5 to 8 feet of water. The teams were deployed for 18 hours, and 2,800 homes were assessed. We made contact with over 200 residents,” McManus said. The Columbia Fire team was also able to use a new FEMA app that allowed them to take photos of homes and detail the type of damage each sustained, enabling the incident command station to see the extent of the flooding damage in real time.

Other cities and towns also pitched in to help their fellow South Carolinians. The City of Simpsonville organized a donation drive, with a tractor trailer set up in a church parking lot across from the fire department.

Firefighters and police officers manned the truck 12 hours a day for three days, until it was filled with supplies — everything from canned food and toothpaste to toilet paper and diapers. The truck carried supplies to

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Horry County Fire Station No. 7 near Myrtle Beach.

“I could not be happier that the City of Simpsonville was able to do our part in helping our friends on the coast. Providing donated food, diapers and bottled water is the least we could do. Although I was impressed by our residents and citizens, I was not surprised. This drive was an example of how giving our city is, and it’s important we take every opportunity we can to give to those in need,” Mayor Janice Curtis said.

The City of Westminster also collected trucks full of supplies. Mayor Brian Ramey said his work with the South Carolina Baptist Convention’s disaster relief team helped him understand the need for supplies following a storm.

After the city put the word out, dozens of people came in to the Westminster fire station with cases of bottled water and personal supplies.

Ramey learned from the Municipal Association that Mullins Mayor Bo McMillan had put out a call for help for the Town of Nichols. The city then pooled its collections with an area church and a local business, and sent its first two shipments — including a 10,000-pound load of water and supplies — to Mullins and Nichols. A later collection went to the Georgetown area.

“We’ve got a great group of people up here. We know we’re far enough away that hurricanes don’t affect us, but we wanted to help,” Ramey said.

McMillan said help from Westminster, Easley and other towns were part of the acts of kindness “that makes you enormously proud, No. 1, to be a South Carolinian, and No. 2, a mayor of a South Carolina town. We’re South Carolina strong, indeed we are. What I have seen in the last three weeks and what I saw two years ago were wonderful acts of love.”

The state’s network of Main Street cities also reached out to help storm-damaged downtown businesses.

Jenny Boulware, manager for Main Street SC, said she learned Dillon needed large, industrial-grade fans to dry out flooded downtown businesses.

She contacted the state’s Main Street communities, which almost immediately stepped in to help, and Boulware requested the fans for Dillon. One of those Main Street programs that answered the call was Summerville DREAM.

“The impact of the downtown commercial district on the local economy is significant. When the commercial district is threatened by natural disaster, it’s important for friends and neighbors to lend a hand — if possible, to mitigate the effects; if not, to help with clean up and restoration. We were honored to be able to offer assistance to our colleagues in Dillon and we’re pleased to know that they are recovering from Florence’s impact,” said Michael Lisle, executive director of Summerville DREAM.

Edisto Beach Mayor Jane Darby, who is the president of the Association of South Carolina Mayors, said she remembers the winds and rain of Hurricanes Joaquin, Matthew and Irma. That’s why she doesn’t hesitate to respond to any South Carolina town in need during a storm.

“During those times, it is extremely stressful and it is reassuring to have other mayors and other towns reaching out to you and asking what they can do. They assure you that you have their support. It’s a wonderful, collegial feeling. This year, we were most fortunate, we were not impacted by Florence. However, some of our other mayors were. We made an effort to reach out to them and offer the same support they’ve given to us before,” she said.

Darby knows how exhausting the days before, during and in the aftermath of a storm can be for city leaders and employees. She also knows the importance of cities reach out and helping each other.

“After Matthew, we sent a planning department [person] to Nichols to do appraisals and assessments. They’re



The state’s network of Main Street cities stepped up to help storm-damaged downtown businesses, such as *This That & More* in downtown Dillon, with industrial-grade fans to dry out flooded downtown businesses in Dillon. Photo: City of Dillon.

a small town, which we can relate to. None of us have all the resources,” she said. “The state is very good about supplying what is needed, but often it is not quick enough or timely enough. If you can contact one of the other cities that have that equipment, you can get it immediately.”

Darby said the Municipal Association helped work as a clearinghouse, matching cities in need with those willing to help.

“I think events like this, while we don’t always agree on issues, bring us together even more because we have been there, done that, and we recognize the need,” she said. “I think that’s important. We are ready to band together to take care of any need.”



## Innovating Above and Beyond: Cities Find New Ways to Make Residents' Lives Better

From a police department program that checks on senior citizens to a small town collecting pennies to buy holiday presents for children in need, cities and towns work each day to make life a little easier for those who need extra help.

Here is a look at four examples of cities reaching out to ease the burden for some of their residents.

### Columbia: Encouraging kids to save

Columbia City Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine said she is especially passionate about opportunities for youth and financial empowerment. The “Columbia Kids Save” children’s savings account pilot program allowed her to bring both of those ideas together.

The children’s savings account partners with local banks and Richland School District One to provide seed money and incentives for 5K students at Watkins-Nance Elementary School, a Title One school in Columbia. Through the program, every kindergarten student who enters Watkins-Nance can opt-in to the program. Once parents decide to sign up, the city opens a savings account for each child with a \$50 deposit. The city will then match up to another \$50 that the student saves.

Devine said the program is the first by a South Carolina city. It is managed and monitored by the City of Columbia Community Development Department’s

“Bank On” Columbia program coordinator. Each account will be monitored to see if deposits are being made throughout the year and matching deposits will be made periodically.

Watkins-Nance Elementary School staff members explain the benefits and encourage students and parents to save and participate in financial education.

Devine said she learned about children’s savings accounts over the past few years while serving on the National League of Cities Council on Youth, Education and Families.

“The concept revolves around the city supporting children to build savings to go to college.

If children have money saved, they can see themselves going to college. It helps the graduation rate,” she said. “I was intrigued by the program. Looking at what the city is doing with economic empowerment, this was a natural to add.”

The program started this summer, with South State Bank, Security Federal and First Citizens each contributing \$5,000 in seed money that allows the pilot program to be funded for two years. South State Bank will house all of the children’s savings accounts and will collect monthly deposits at Watkins-Nance Elementary School.

“Those are some of the most needy of our kids. It’s a good place to start.”



“Our goal is to educate the child and the family as well. Young people will have financial education through the school and from our banking partners, and parents will come in for financial education as well. If we can get the kids excited about saving, we can teach the parents. It builds financial literacy in the adults as well.”

While the seed money is available just for the first year, the program will follow the students until they graduate from high school, with possible other incentives added in over the years, she said.

Devine’s advice for other cities looking at establishing children’s savings accounts is to not reinvent the wheel; many cities around the country are setting up programs.

“I’d tell other cities, talk to others who have done it and then look at your community and what would work there. Things that work in St. Louis may not work in South Carolina, but there are some things they do that can be perfect for us. Look at how we can tailor it to us.”

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### **Hardeeville: Starting the school year right**

In Hardeeville, city leaders want to be sure children start the school year ready to learn — and they throw a party to make sure the kids are excited about heading back to the classroom.

City officials collect school supplies each year, filling a bus with pencils, paper and other necessities that are distributed to the district's schools. On the Saturday before school starts in August, the kids come together to celebrate the end of the summer and the start of a successful school year.

"We try to build more community support and provide service to the community. It's a huge partnership effort, and there's no charge to the taxpayers," said Jennifer Combs, Hardeeville's parks, recreation and tourism director.

Hundreds of kids and their families filled the Hardeeville Recreation Complex for free food, music, inflatable waterslides and games — along with information

about ways to get involved in community programs.

"As the parks and recreation director, the most important aspect is providing services to the community where there is a need. This is what residents want. We're reaching out — not just here for fun programs — but to provide programs and events that are filling the needs of a community," Combs said.

Along with the school supplies that were delivered through the pack the bus campaign, additional supplies were given out at the party.

"Some of these kids may not have access or means to get these school supplies. We packed up drawstring bags with supplies on the list for the Jasper County School District. We gave them a lot of what they needed," said Brittany Thomas, the programs and partnerships manager with the parks and recreation department. "We wanted to make sure they had a fun event to get them pumped up for a school year. This is a community effort to give these children and families the support and information and

resources to be able to start off the school year."

### **Surfside Beach: Calling on the elderly**

A new community assistance program started in Surfside Beach this year, allowing for the town to check in on its many senior citizens, some of whom live alone without any family nearby.

The senior watch program features a computer-aided dispatch system that prompts the police dispatcher to call and check on elderly residents who register for the program, said Police Chief Kenneth Hofmann. If there is no answer at the home, the police department reaches out to the resident's emergency contacts. If there is still no response, the department dispatches an officer to the house. The timing of the calls is tailored to each person, with some people wanting more check ins than others.

The program also allows special needs families to provide specific information if a certain type of response is needed when officers are called to a home. The



*The City of Hardeeville connects with the residents through a back to school bash by providing a fun program while filling the needs of the community. Photo: City of Hardeeville.*



*The City of Hardeeville uses the back to school bash as a opportunity to provide school supplies to residents and raise awareness of community programs.  
Photo: City of Hardeeville.*

information is available if a call comes in for help at that address.

“We came up with this concept that was initially targeted at identifying senior citizens in the community, who may be far away from their families, may be shut-ins, may live by themselves. This is a way we could have contact with them by being proactive on our part,” he said.

Hofmann said the town had a couple incidents where elderly residents had fallen in their homes and weren’t able to immediately get help, including one who was alone for three or four days before someone checked in. “We may not be able to prevent that, but this is a way we can avoid situations when an elderly person is not heard from,” he said.

The police department asks residents to fill out a form with contact information for relatives. Hofmann said the department held three events to push enrollment — the family fest, the fire department open house and the senior citizens fair.

He said the town wanted to do everything it could to assure the safety of elderly residents but also reach out to people who don’t tend to call the police.

“It’s another way to have our officers engage the community,” Hofmann said. “It’s another way to open lines of communication between a good portion of our population that we may not hear from for years at a time.”

The chief said the town has also worked with families and advocacy groups for special needs alerts. For example, if a family has an autistic child, they may need a special type of response from law enforcement, perhaps one that doesn’t use loud sirens. “They tell us what is the best type of police response for them,” he said.

### **Norway: Pennies add up**

Think pennies aren’t worth much? To the tiny town of Norway in Orangeburg County, those one-cent coins were able to spread a lot of happiness to children during the holidays.

Mayor Sara Ann Johnson said this is the third year Norway is asking for donations for “Pennies for Presents,” a way to raise money to buy gifts for needy children at Christmas.

The first year, she said the town was able to buy a \$25 gift for about 18 children. Last year, about 44 children received gifts from proceeds from the pennies. They also raised enough to buy food for about 25 families in need.

She said the city sends letters to churches and other organizations asking for pennies and puts a collection jar out in city offices all year. So when people pay bills, if they have a few pennies leftover, they drop them in the jar.

Families fill out applications for presents for underprivileged children who may not get a lot for Christmas. A party is held in late December, and Santa Claus gives out the toys to the children.

“It means a lot to see kids come out and get those presents. It makes them happy,” Johnson said. “And it’s joyful to see those kids’ faces.”

# A Day in the Life of a

## Victim Advocate

Victim advocates have a tremendously varied job description. They help eligible victims apply for assistance, work with creditors when appropriate, keep victims informed of the status of their cases, and keep the victims updated on whether the person accused of a crime in their case is arrested or released. They can also provide confidentiality, protection and transportation as appropriate.

Often, the work comes with a significantly emotional or interpersonal element to it. Victim advocates aren't just bringing information and help; they also provide some comfort to people in trying times.

It's a job that makes a difference — and changes lives — every day. And each day in a victim advocate's office brings different tasks, experiences, responsibilities and challenges.

Consider a case handled by Sadiyah Cochran, the victim advocate with the Lexington Police Department. A domestic violence victim told Cochran that her controlling partner had prevented her from working or from driving a car. When she decided to leave her abuser, the woman told Cochran that her top priorities were to get a job and a driver's license. She knew she wanted to be a part of this woman's journey, so on top of her regular duties, she offered some personal assistance in her free time.

"We talked, laughed, cried and cried again. I remember the day she came to the police department with her license. She said I was her first stop," Cochran said. "I knew that she would never allow anyone to tell her what she can't do."

When the woman left the police department that day, Cochran said she closed the case "in my file and in my heart. That's how



Sadiyah Cochran, victim advocate with the Lexington Police Department Photo: Town of Lexington.

I wanted to answer and end every 'call for service' the rest of my life."

Cochran is not alone. All cities and towns in South Carolina with a police department are required to provide victim assistance services, whether directly through the police staff or through an approved service provider. Victim service providers are required to fulfill initial and continuing education as approved by the state Office of Victim Services Education and Certification. Cities pay for victim assistance using restricted funds that come out of court fines processed through a municipal court.

The advocates that work in agencies all around the state help victims navigate the difficult, sometimes dangerous and often

confusing days that follow a crime.

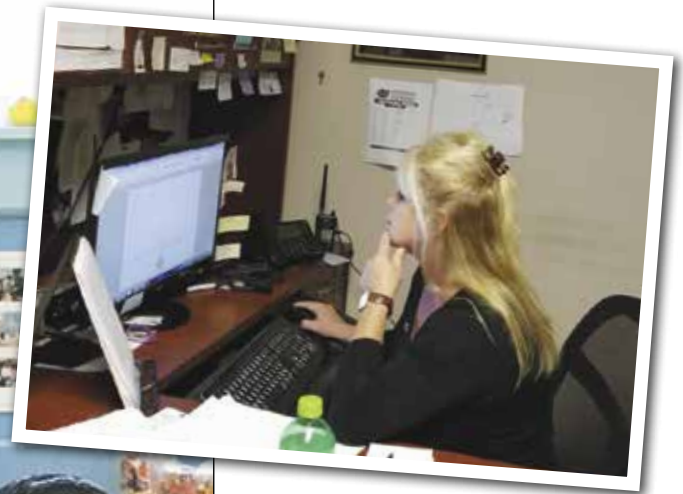
A typical day for a victim advocate can include reading incident reports, creating safety plans, meeting with victims at the hospital, attending bond hearings, working with police investigators, making referrals to counselors, helping secure vouchers for items such as food and diapers, and informing victims about services they can access, such as battered women shelters and funds for medical expenses.

Chanda Robinson, the victim's advocate with the Georgetown Police Department, said the work is both challenging and rewarding.

"When I can assist them, it makes their lives a little easier. It doesn't take away the pain, but I know I've been able to lift the burden and make life a little easier through a traumatic incident," Robinson said. "Victims don't ask to be victims. When I can look at them and say, 'I can help you with this,' that's my reward."

When Robinson first applied for the job 11 years ago after she earned her associate degree, she didn't realize the position was part of the police department. She ended up getting the job, going to the police academy, and becoming an officer and a certified victim advocate. Since then, she's gone on to earn her bachelor's degree in social work along with master's degrees in both counseling and criminal justice. She says her coursework has helped her better understand the law and victims' needs.

"By law, victims have rights, but they can fall between the cracks," she said. "The advocate can free up a police officer to investigate a crime while the advocate can listen, console and inform them of services," Robinson says. "Advocates are



Top: Krista Cooper, victim advocate with the North Myrtle Beach Department of Public Safety

Left: Chanda Robinson, victim advocate with the Georgetown Police Department

here five days a week and on call 24/7.”

Krista Cooper had been a paralegal in an attorney’s office when she saw the victim advocate position advertised in North Myrtle Beach.

Now a certified victim assistance specialist with the North Myrtle Beach Department of Public Safety, she helps victims from all sorts of crimes, from criminal sexual conduct to robbery to car break-ins. She also said advocates sometimes fill the roles of social workers or counselors in situations where there may not be a “victim,” but a person who is in need of help.

“Many people come to the police for all kinds of issues that aren’t always police matters, but we try to help our residents

and visitors as best as we can,” Cooper said.

“I enjoy when someone tells me how much I helped them or they tell me how important the work I do is,” Cooper said. “I don’t see it that way, since I am so used to what I do. But I try to imagine if I had no experience with the criminal justice system how hard it would be to know what was going on.”

She said while victim advocates may not always be able to resolve the situation in a way a victim would like, she always listens to their concerns, offers ideas and options, and tries to counsel them on the best next steps.

Cooper’s biggest challenge right now is the lack of a domestic violence shelter in Horry County. “The shelter closed

down several years ago. There are many grassroots efforts to get a shelter back open, but it is a huge undertaking,” she said. “That is very hard to deal with when a woman needs a safe place away from domestic violence and has nowhere to go.”

Cochran found her way to the Lexington victim advocate’s office after serving as a patrol officer. She said she always felt the desire to go beyond the police calls.

“My heart would be invested in the people and their story. When the [victim advocate] position became available, it seemed I had no choice,” she said. “I am happiest when I am making someone else’s life a little better.”

She said that can range from creating an escape from abuse to riding along with a patrol officer who is discouraged to crying with a sexual assault victim.

“The services provided to victims are not just for the victim but for the community that is impacted,” she said. “I believe it comes down to one very essential ideal: How would you want to be treated if you were a victim of crime?”



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# Calendar

For a complete listing of the Association's training opportunities, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) to view the calendar.

## DECEMBER

**7 SC Municipal Attorneys Association Annual Meeting and Continuing Legal Education Seminar.** Columbia Embassy Suites. Topics include federal and state law updates, attorney wellbeing, municipal case law, records retention and local criminal justice issues.

## FEBRUARY

**5 Hometown Legislative Action Day.** Columbia Marriott. (See page 3)

**6 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Session A and B, Advanced Institute and Advanced Continuing Education.** Columbia Marriott. Topics

for Session A include an overview of local government planning and zoning; conducting public meetings; and strategic planning. Topics for Session B include municipal annexation; intergovernmental relations; and ethics and public accountability. Advanced Institute Courses are "Advanced Municipal Economic Development" and "Public Safety Policy and Administration." Advanced Continuing Education topics include a more in-depth overview of ethics and the Freedom of Information Act.

## MARCH

**7 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting.** Seawell's.

**10 - 12 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting.** Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Airport Hotel and Convention Center.

**13 - 15 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Spring Session - Year 1, Session A.** Hyatt Place Columbia/Downtown/

The Vista. Topics include the role of the municipal clerk, records management, interpersonal skills and forms of government.

**21 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting.** Newberry Firehouse Conference Center.

**28 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association Spring Academy.** Seawell's

## APRIL

**3 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Training Institute and Advanced Academy.** Seawell's.

**12 Municipal Court Administration Association of SC Spring Meeting.** William L. Yates Conference Center at the SC Hospital Association.

**18 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Spring Meeting.** Seawell's.