



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

Annual Meeting Keynote Speaker: **'Be with the People'**



Compassion, a willingness to listen and the simple act of showing up to lower-profile gatherings — such as events at local schools — can all go a long way toward communicating a commitment to public service and building bonds between local government officials and residents.

Those are just a few of the ways Jennifer Pinckney — whose husband, Rev. Sen. Clementa Pinckney, was killed in the shootings at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston — urges municipal elected officials and staff to show leadership.

In the three years since the shooting, Pinckney has established a foundation to continue her husband's legacy of improving the quality of life for all South Carolina residents.

She also urges those in public life to accept that one of the greatest challenges will be balancing the often competing needs and desires of a diverse population.

“As a leader, you’re never going to satisfy everyone,” she said. “Everyone is going to have their own opinions, their own thoughts, their own feelings on different issues.”

'Don't always delegate'

First, listen, says Pinckney.

“When you’re serving the public, you basically need to first listen to figure out what’s going on and to find out what the problems are before you try to jump in and solve them.”

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she said. “Be more compassionate with people. Get down and work with the people. Don’t always delegate.”

‘Roll up your sleeves’

Go to the source.

“Instead of finding out information from other people, roll up your sleeves and get down in the valley and work with people,” said Pinckney. Part of that means connecting with a wide swath of residents.

“You shouldn’t always talk to the president or the top tier people because they may not always know a lot of the general problems,” she said. “Sometimes you need to talk to the workers themselves.” (See page 8 for more about gathering resident input.)

“And you’ve got to do the good and the bad side of it. You just can’t go to those with the authority — the upper class or the middle class,” she said. “You’ve got to go to the lower class people, too. Figure out what problems are out there and how can we all come together in unity to solve the problems.”

‘Everyone wants to be heard’

Municipal elected officials and staff know they have a unique challenge: To communicate with residents from all walks of life, who have a variety of needs, expectations and life experiences. But some things draw them together. Start by identifying attributes that all residents share.

“We all want to be heard. We all want to feel that whenever we speak, regardless of who we are, that we are heard and that our opinions are being valued,” said Pinckney.

“Everyone should be treated fairly. And everyone should be entitled to give their thoughts and their opinions.”

This goes beyond merely going through the motions, however.

“Value people’s opinions and consider what people have to say,” she added.

‘Be with the people’

Pinckney has a special message for municipal elected officials — Get active in the whole city, including places you wouldn’t immediately think to visit.

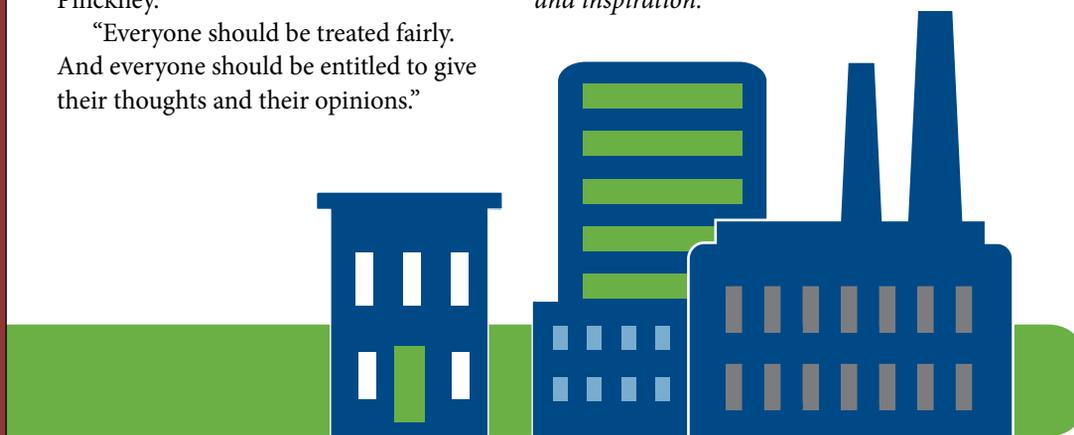
“Go out and visit the schools. Go to some of the parent events that are being held,” she said.

“Sometimes you should just show your face to let people know you care, versus the only time they see you is during election time. During election time, you go everywhere. But after the election time you don’t see them anymore.” (See page 10 for more tips on resident engagement.)

It comes down to social capital. Local government officials, and law enforcement in particular, know that establishing rapport in the absence of conflict is a powerful proactive step.

“I think you’ve got to be with the people and create opportunities — You can either create them or go to community events that are already out there,” she said. “Talk to the people. And not just when you need a vote. Show them that you care.”

Pinckney will be the keynote speaker at the Municipal Association of South Carolina’s Annual Meeting, July 19 – 22, where she will bring a leadership message of hope and public service to the opening general session. Her vision will set the tone for this year’s agenda of learning, public service and inspiration.



Tech Talks Highlight Trends

Annual Meeting 2018

Technology is advancing so rapidly that it can be hard to keep up. The Municipal Association with its technology partner, VC3, will offer Tech Talk sessions during the Annual Meeting. These 15-minute sessions are designed specifically for elected officials and municipal staff. During these sessions, attendees can learn about a variety of technology topics in a short amount of time.



Thursday, July 19

- **Anatomy of a Ransomware Attack**
Ransomware attacks are unfortunately common. Learn what they are, how to avoid an attack and what to do if your city is targeted.
- **Information is a Click Away**
Technology options can be overwhelming regardless of whether you're newly elected or a long-term official. Pick up easy tips for working with email, agendas and frequently visited websites.
- **Putting New Technology to Work**
Technology is an ever-increasing, and costly, part of how municipal officials work and serve residents. Learn about trends that can help consolidate some of a city's technology costs.
- **Analyze City Data and Avoid Flying Blind**
Analytics and dashboards measure everything from performance data to crime rates. Explore how analyzing your city's existing data with a business intelligence tool can drive better decisions.

Saturday, July 21

- **Responding to Security Breaches**
Security threats are on the rise, and municipalities are increasingly under attack. Find out what to do if a breach occurs.
- **10 Ways to Engage Residents Online**
A city's website is often a resident's first connection to city services. Learn 10 inexpensive ways to engage residents using the latest web technologies.
- **Technology in Council Meetings**
With options like live video feeds, Facebook Live, web streaming and recordings, cities can bring council meetings to all residents. Learn how cities are using these tools to broadcast and manage their meetings.
- **Beyond Utility Billing — Streamlining Forms and Payments**
Residents are expecting municipal services to operate faster and more efficiently. Explore how to move away from time-consuming paper forms and manual payments with easy-to-use online versions.
- **Three Problems Solved with Microsoft Office 365**
Nearly all cities use Microsoft's suite of products in some capacity. Learn how the newest products included with Office 365 solve three common problems municipalities face.

NEWS BRIEFS

Members of the **Building Officials Association of SC** elected their 2018 – 2019 board of directors. They are President Patrick Brown, Town of Edisto Beach; President-elect J. Shawn Brashear, Florence County; First Vice President Chris Stover, City of Greenville; Second Vice President Ruthie Helms, City of Greer; Past President Buddy Skinner, City of Greenville. Directors are Tink Barnes, City of Clinton; Ward Braswell, City of Newberry; Rebecca Finch, Dorchester County; Barry Holcombe, Anderson County; Kecia Lara, Richland County; Curt Whaley, Florence County; and Rollie Reynolds, Kershaw County.

The Government Finance Officers Association elected **City of Rock Hill** Deputy City Manager Steven Gibson as its president. This national organization of more than 19,000 government finance officers promotes "excellence in state and local government financial management."

The **City of York** was named a finalist in the America's Main Streets contest. The contest promotes "the importance and strong economic benefits of these Main Streets and the small businesses that help them thrive."

Social Media 101



Many South Carolina cities are successfully and strategically using social media to engage residents, communicate about city priorities and share good news about what's happening in the city.

Rock Hill used multiple social media platforms to build a successful outreach strategy last summer during the UCI BMX World Championships. The city kept residents informed about all the activity taking place around the event and helped visitors get around the area, decide where to eat and stay, and what to do in Rock Hill.

The City of Rock Hill won a 2017 Municipal Achievement Award for its marketing plan for the championships.

“Admittedly, it’s easy to get intimidated when you think about keeping up with multiple social media accounts,” said Katie Quinn, public information officer in Rock Hill. “It’s even more scary to think about the time it would take to respond to social media messages. Understanding how social media can be used for good and having a strategy to use it are critical.”

Quinn offers the following tips to help make the best strategic use of social media platforms.

Use hashtags to help people find your content.

Hashtags are the hash mark (#) followed by a short keyword link used to organize content and track discussion topics based on those keywords. Hashtags help people who are interested in specific events or topics easily find posts of interest.

There is no preset place that approves or keeps lists of hashtags. Anyone can create a new hashtag simply by inserting the hash before a series of words with no spaces between them. If a hashtag is being used for an event or outreach promotion, it’s a good idea to thoroughly research if the hashtag or a similar one is already in use. Sometimes even innocent-sounding hashtags have been hijacked for inappropriate uses.

Encourage visitors to share and comment on content.

Using hashtags and handles to mention other organizations that would be interested in the event or program increases the possibility of your post getting comments or being shared.

Understand the strengths and shortcomings of social media platforms.

Every social media platform can bring a different strength to a communications or outreach plan. Facebook works well for longer narratives. Facebook events can help

drive traffic to a specific program or event. Twitter is great for sharing links to web posts or new stories. Instagram photos can tell a visual story with few words. Don’t try to use the same post on all platforms.

Use video, photographs and graphics to boost engagement.

Keep in mind that social media is a highly interactive communications tool, and research shows posts with images get much higher engagement. Keep videos clips very short and use simple infographics or GIFs (animated image files) to draw attention to your post.

Be aware that social media audiences can tell if a post has been changed or deleted.

Nothing ever completely goes away on the internet. Even if a post is removed, it’s highly possible the post was already shared or someone took a screen shot. On Facebook, it’s possible to see the string of edits that were made to a post. Having a sound policy about dealing with offensive or inappropriate posts is very important to a successful social media strategy.

Katie Quinn and Ryan Johnson, North Charleston’s public information officer, will share additional tips on using social media at an Annual Meeting session on Thursday, July 19.

Get the Annual Meeting App

The Association’s app is a one-stop shop for all things related to the Annual Meeting, July 19 – 22.

With the app, attendees can read about each session, create a personalized schedule and set reminders for each agenda item. The app allows users to take notes and export them after the meeting, access attendees’ and exhibitors’ contact

information, and communicate directly with speakers, exhibitors and patrons.

Download it from the App Store or Google Play by searching for MuniAssnSC.

The app will automatically update with the 2018 Annual Meeting information for anyone who has downloaded it for past meetings. A limited function web version is available at mobileapp.masc.sc.

To learn more about the app, contact Sarita Chourey at 803.933.1206 or schourey@masc.sc. Additionally, Association staff will be available at the Annual Meeting to provide assistance.



In Their Shoes: Law Enforcement Simulator Demonstrations



that involves a gun gives officers a higher level of confidence when dealing with that same real-life situation.

Many law enforcement agencies in South Carolina are taking advantage of a computerized training simulator that puts officers into life-threatening

understanding of what these highly charged encounters entail. Training in these simulated stressful situations helps the officer make similar real-life decisions under duress.

The Municipal Association's Risk Management Services programs have been using the simulator for 15 months and have trained more than 800 officers in 26 police departments around the state. The focus is also on training the trainer, so that large and small departments alike can benefit from this unique hands-on learning.

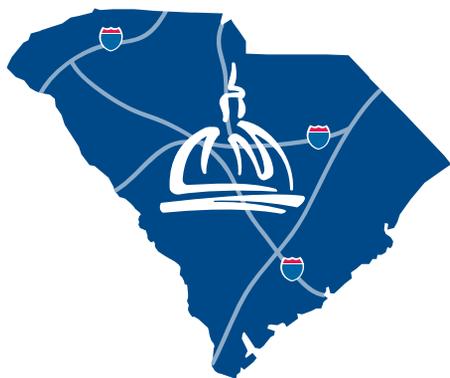
No one ever wants to come face to face with a gun barrel. But police officers face the potential for unpredictable circumstances and emergencies every day. Having the chance to simulate an incident

scenarios to help them understand how to respond if they are in a similar situation.

The simulator helps teach and reinforce proper use-of-force decision making and gives users a firsthand

Local officials attending the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting can get a demonstration of the simulator on Friday, July 20.

Advocacy Meetings Start in August



The 10 Regional Advocacy Meetings held across the state from the middle of August through the middle September give municipal officials the opportunity to learn about legislative issues affecting cities and towns and to play a role in establishing the Association's legislative initiatives ahead of next year's new, two-year legislative session.

These meetings, which are for elected officials and city staff, will outline bills passed into law during the 2018 session that affects cities and towns and issues that will likely come up again in the 2019 session. Local officials will have the chance to discuss challenges in their cities that could be solved through legislative action.

House and Senate members will be invited to attend the meetings and share their ideas as well.

The meetings will be held from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m., and lunch will be included. The locations are organized by council of governments region, but officials may attend any session that is convenient.

There is no charge for the meetings, but registration is required for an accurate head count for lunch and handouts.

- **August 14** – Arts Center, City of Greenwood
- **August 15** – Clemson Fire Department Community Room, City of Clemson
- **August 16** – Historic Spratt Building, Town of Fort Mill
- **August 21** – Victor's in Hotel Florence, City of Florence
- **August 22** – Moncks Corner Train Depot, Town of Moncks Corner
- **August 23** – Colleton Museum and Farmers Market, City of Walterboro
- **August 28** – Aiken Conference Center, City of Aiken
- **September 5** – Sumter City Centre, City of Sumter
- **September 6** – Fifth and Main, City of Conway
- **September 11** – Cayce Tennis and Fitness Center, City of Cayce

People call them RAMs. But what are they exactly?

“The Regional Advocacy Meetings are the starting point for the Association's work in the upcoming legislative session each year,” said Reba Campbell, the Association's deputy executive director. “Discussions with local officials at these meetings determine our priorities, and it's important that elected officials and city staff attend to get their local issues heard.”

To register, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: RAM). For more information, contact Ashleigh Hair at ahair@masc.sc or 803.933.1288.

Hometown Economic Development Grant Announced



For the third year, the Municipal Association will offer Hometown Economic Development Grants to member cities and towns.

The Hometown Economic Development Grants were first awarded in 2016 in an effort to help cities and towns implement economic development projects designed to have positive effects on the quality of life in their communities. Starting with an initial investment of \$200,000, the program has grown to \$300,000 in 2018, which will allow for the distribution of up to 12 grants of \$25,000 each.

Grant funds may be awarded to cities and towns across South Carolina for a variety of uses, including professional services, assets or programs.

Cities and towns that receive grants must provide matching funds or services. The amount of a recipient's match is determined by the city's size.

Cities and towns may also use grant funds to augment funding from other sources.

Since the program's inception, the 18 cities and towns that were awarded have leveraged Hometown Economic Development Grants funds for a greater than 2 to 1 return.

Applications for the grants are accepted online on the Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: Hometown Grants). The application period will open on July 19. The deadline for entries this year is 5 p.m., September 28.

Applicants should ensure all of the questions on the application are completed. Incomplete applications are not accepted.

Applicants must plan ahead to make sure their council places Hometown Economic Development Grant resolutions on their meeting agendas for consideration before the application deadline. The resolution acknowledges the council's support of the conditions of the grant. A sample resolution of council can be found on the grant program's webpage.



Ricareo Anderson, owner of Zoey O's and a tax service business next door, was one of the winners of Envision Williamston and the Town of Williamston's Facade Grant Program, which benefited from the town's Hometown Economic Development Grant. Photos: Envision Williamston.

Previous winners have used grant funds to create master plans for their downtown areas, support business incubators and build tourism-related facilities:

- The **City of Beaufort** used its grant to support establishing the Beaufort Digital Corridor in partnership with the Charleston Digital Corridor. An incubator for digital technology startups, the Beaufort Digital Corridor will help diversify the economy in the Lowcountry.
- Amid redevelopment pressures, working waterfronts and the commercial fishing industry in South Carolina are struggling to survive. The **Town of McClellanville** is using its grant to partner with several organizations to develop a master plan for securing the future of the town's working waterfront.

- The **Town of Estill** is leveraging its grant funds to match a Community Development Block Grant that will help demolish 26 dilapidated houses and an abandoned manufacturing facility.
- The **City of Williamston** used its grant to fund the Mustang Alley feasibility study and to develop a facade improvement program in partnership with Envision Williamston.

The Hometown Economic Development Grants are making a difference in all of the cities and towns that have received awards. With the addition of funds for 2018, even more municipal residents across South Carolina will benefit from the program.

Electric Linemen Compete, Share Skills

The South Carolina Association of Municipal Power Systems held its annual lineman training sessions in April. Fourteen of the 21 SCAMPS members attended the training, and 11 utilities competed in events, such as the crossarm changeout, knot tying, hurtman rescue, speed climbing and others. The events are timed and judged on how well participants follow proper procedures.

“Through this competition, we are promoting safe work habits and proper procedures,” said Eric Budds, deputy executive director for the Municipal Association.

“This also supports one of the core missions of SCAMPS to

provide mutual aid during times of disaster. The linemen have a chance to get to know one another before they have to work together under post-emergency conditions.”

SCAMPS member utilities not only provide mutual aid for in-state emergencies, but they also work with utilities around the southeast when disaster strikes.

Easley Combined Utilities took nine first place awards while Greenwood Commission of Public Works received two and Laurens Commission of Public Works received one.

April 18 was National Lineman Appreciation Day. SCAMPS is an affiliate organization of the Municipal Association.



A tweet from the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Twitter account recognized National Linemen Appreciation Day on April 18.



Test yourself monthly quiz

True or False:

“A quorum of a municipal council exists only if all members comprising a simple majority of the membership of council are physically present at the meeting location.”

Answer: False



A public meeting occurs when a quorum of the council, whether in person or by means of electronic equipment, such as videoconferencing or teleconferencing, convenes to discuss or act upon public business regardless of whether votes will be taken (Section 30-4-20(d)). A quorum, unless otherwise defined by applicable law, means a simple majority of the council. A physical presence is not required to convene a quorum.

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 September 18, will be Municipal Economic Development and Forms of Municipal Government. The next Advanced MEO Institute sessions on October 24 will be Advanced Budgeting and Finance and Advanced Leadership and Governance.

Cities Take the Pulse

When Jeff Lord looked across the room full of residents in front of him, most of them were staring down at their phones, texting during his presentation. But he didn't mind. In fact, it was just as he had hoped.

Lord, the town administrator of Moncks Corner, was using a web-based audience response system to gather instant opinions during a meeting about whether the town should start offering emergency medical services. As residents texted their answers, a bar graph on a screen at the front of the room shifted in real time to reflect their views.

"A lot technical things go into the decision of EMS, so this was a way to keep them engaged," said Lord of the Poll Everywhere program.

"A lot of questions were like, 'How long do you think it should take for an ambulance to get to you?' That led into the conversations about response times. It was kind of a way to check people's expectations to standards."

It's still true that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. But Moncks Corner and other cities have found ways to make sure that all parts of the vehicle — not just the wheels — are also heard.

"A lot of times you only get the most diehard on one side of the issue," Lord said. "When in fact, a large part of the constituency is concerned but would rather not stand up to speak."

While cellphones are handy, colored dots can work, too. In the Town of James Island, residents got to weigh on the town's Pinckney Park design and amenities as part of its "dotmocracy," a concept the town learned about from the Town of Mount Pleasant.

It worked like this: Town officials gathered residents in a room, wrote down everyone's suggestions and handed each resident some color-coded dots. The dots had points assigned to them, allowing residents to give an idea the appropriate dot to correlate to how strongly they felt about a given suggestion.

The dotmocracy event allowed residents to rank future park amenities and attributes, such as whether the park should have restrooms, alcohol allowed, a historical interpretive center, disk golf and other features.

A list of about 50 suggestions in order of dot-based rank — a special events stage, a canoe and kayak launch, and "marsh left alone" ranked the highest — is posted on the James Island website.

Most recently, James Island used the dotmocracy method to find out what residents wanted in a new town hall.

"The architects posted a great deal of inspiration images on the walls, and residents placed dots on the images that appealed to them the most," said James Island Town Administrator Ashley Kellahan.

Reaching beyond council chambers

When Jake Broom started in his position as administrator for the City of Goose Creek in 2016, he introduced himself through the city's Facebook account.

Soon afterward, "Ask the Administrator" was born, a chance for residents to get real-time answers from Broom by posting questions to the city's Facebook page and receiving responses. Residents wanted to know about the city's finances, the status of the fire department's radio system, dead tree removal, speeding concerns in a particular neighborhood and whether a dog park would be opening.

"Ask the Administrator" also helped combat rumors that spread across Facebook pages that weren't affiliated with the city. The most common rumor was that the city was picking and choosing



which businesses could come into the city. Broom's "Ask the Administrator" sessions, which were then shared on the noncity pages where some rumors had flourished, helped put those rumors to rest.

"The belief existed that certain businesses are not here because we don't want them here," he said. "But that's not true. So we let them know what's going on and how we're working to recruit these businesses. ... We're doing all we can to recruit the types of businesses they want to see, but that's something they're not necessarily aware of unless we tell them."

The Way Broom sees it, of the tens of thousands of city residents, only 30 may show up to a City Council meeting.

"But about two or three thousand will see my Facebook posts," he said. "The reach is exponential."

'Crystalizing public opinion'

Polling the public first often leads to better decisions and also better-received decisions.



In one year — from 2016 to 2017 — the number of business license applications that poured into the Town of Bluffton increased by nearly 11 percent, from 2,809 to 3,104 applications.

Even before that, however, Bluffton officials were trying to figure out how to make the business licensing process both more user friendly and more business friendly. In April, the town hosted a public meeting to discuss various ideas. But that's not all they did.

They put a business owner survey on Facebook and the town's website, distributed a press release to local media and residents' distribution lists, and also informed the local Chambers of Commerce of the meeting and survey.

While only a handful of business owners showed up to the public meeting, representatives of a real estate agent association and the Chamber of Commerce attended and spread the information to hundreds of their members. Several ideas took shape, including special incentives for in-town businesses, discounts for startups during their first few years and changes to the license renewal date.

"When Town Council embarks on updating or streamlining an existing ordinance, such as the business license law, it is the town's duty to ask what works best with its business owners," said Debbie Szpanka, public information officer.

"Crystalizing public opinion is a part of the process."



Cities Try the Unexpected to Engage Residents



In the City of Hanahan, sometimes a trash can is more than a trash can — it's an invitation.

The lesson: Doing things a little outside the ordinary can pique residents' interest.

Cities and towns are showing that tools of engagement come in all forms — a sizzling hotdog, an unusual meeting location, an unexpected invitation and, in one city's case, even some fake blood. Cities have used those tools and others to gather residents' concerns, build a sense of place and deliver potentially lifesaving information.

In Hanahan, the city invites residents to events by promoting them on the back of the 3 ½ by 8 ½ "Talking Trash Can" fliers that sanitation workers place between the lid and the can. One side of the flier communicates trash collection changes during holiday weeks. The other side invites residents to the city's movies in the park series, senior center events, festivals, youth programs through the recreation department, and police and fire department open houses.

The key to this type of resident engagement is to be selective about which types of events and messages to send out and to carefully limit how often the city uses the fliers. In Hanahan's case, the invitations run about eight times per year.

"We do get promotional requests from residents occasionally, but we don't typically put those out unless it's going to be city event," said Randy Moneymaker, Hanahan public services director.

"Everybody is coming to grab their can and pull it back to their house," he said. "We know we are going to reach 5,500 to 6,000 houses. They are able to grab that and catch up on information."

The fliers help the city reach all demographic groups, not just the ones that are glued to their smartphones.

"In today's society with social media, there are multiple avenues to get messages out," said Moneymaker. "But not everyone uses that. So we're still able to give someone a hard copy of something that they can grasp and read."

The approach is working. Take it from the residents who call the city to ask

about specific events featured on the back of the fliers.

"We do 'Movie in the Park' at our amphitheater four to five times a year," said Moneymaker.

"People show up and say, 'I saw it advertised on my trash can.'"

How to engage high school students

It can take a lot to get through to teenagers. So public safety officials for the City of Clinton teamed up with Greenville Health System, Laurens County and various government agencies to send a lifesaving message to area high school students.

Mock distracted-driving crashes — complete with fake blood and bandages for the student "victims" and helicopter rides over a baseball field courtesy of Greenville Health for students — can leave an impression on young people, said Clinton Fire Commander Scott Shiflet.

"You can tell by the expressions on their face that they were visibly affected by it," he said. "We wanted it to be as realistic as possible so it would catch their attention."

This year marked the third time the city performed the accident re-enactments with area students. The effort calls for a lot of partners and intergovernmental cooperation.

"We also worked with the victims advocate to simulate working with the family of the ones in the wreck," said Shiflet. "We tried to incorporate everyone we could, even Highway Patrol. They came out before we did the re-enactment and gave a presentation in the gym to talk about the hazards of distracted driving."



The City of Hanahan spreads the word about city events by attaching a flyer like this one to trash cans. Photo: City of Hanahan.



The City of Clinton partnered with Clinton High School and other agencies to teach teens about the dangers of distracted driving.
Photo: Clinton High School.

A show-and-tell approach also helps convey lifesaving information in the City of Hardeeville and Town of Bluffton.

The two departments teamed up in June to put on a burn-house demonstration to impress upon residents how quickly a fire can consume a structure if it does not have a sprinkler system built in.

“We can go out and speak, and we can show videos and show pictures of things, but until you see what happens in real time with real elements, you don’t quite understand the realism of how fast fire develops and grows,” said Joey Rowell, fire marshal for the City of Hardeeville.

“Whenever we do the burns, we do one side that’s unsprinkled (does not have a sprinkler system installed) and one side that is sprinkled, and you’ll see how fast the fire consumes the

unsprinkled room. ... It shows you that you don’t have a lot of time to get out of the house.”

A hot meal, friendly location

Fortunately, not all messages require dramatic re-enactments. For the City of Manning, officials delivered a subtler message of accessibility and government responsiveness.

At a recent SC Community Development Association meeting, Scott Tanner, city administrator, said Manning had found success in holding a public meeting about the terms of a Community Development Block Grant at a location other than Manning City Hall.

“A lot of times we’re guilty of having the public meetings and hearings at City Hall,” he said. “But there are a lot of folks out there, especially in distressed

neighborhoods, who don’t want to come to City Hall and they won’t come to City Hall.”

Manning officials invited residents to attend a meeting and enjoy hotdogs at the Brotherly Love Lodge.

“Several of these folks came out, got a hotdog and left. But in order to get the hotdog, you have to sign the sign-in sheet,” said Tanner. “Seriously, if you want to get folks involved, go out into their neighborhood and serve food.”



Engaging Visitors Through Niche Tourism



Theme parks, stadiums and performing arts venues make great tourist attractions, but they're not the only sites that draw visitors and send ripple effects to local businesses.

An eye for what's possible and a strategic approach can help make the most of a city or town's unique assets — from natural features to historical sites to amenities-based appeal to culinary tourism.

Inclusivity draws families

Families with children on the autism spectrum have particularly good reasons to vacation in the Town of Surfside Beach — and to return year after year.

The Town of Surfside Beach is an autism-friendly tourism destination, thanks to one resident's initiative, the Champion Autism Network. Families can produce the CAN card at establishments, which participating businesses and other establishments will recognize, alerting employees to the presence of a family with a member who has autism. CAN provides training on autism-friendly operations to employees of participating organizations and businesses.

"The CAN card was a really easy way for our families to identify themselves in a graceful way without a big scarlet letter A, like 'here we come with autism,'" said Becky Large, executive director of CAN.

Establishments that recognize the card sometimes offer a discount or special care, such as allowing a family with a child who has autism to move to the front of the line if there is a significant wait.

The organization also trains churches and businesses on operational considerations, puts out public service announcements and holds sensory-friendly events, such as movies.



Families may produce the Champion Autism Network's CAN Cards at restaurants and other establishments in the Town of Surfside Beach to be recognized for special care. Photo: CAN.

"Having a niche tourism initiative is great for any community," said Large. Families with children who have autism are especially loyal to a place, she added.

Because those on the spectrum crave familiar surroundings, if a family visits a particular hotel suite and has a good experience, Large said, they are very likely to return to that exact same hotel suite the following year.

"And they're going to go home and tell their friends," she said.

CAN has 350 local families in its database and nearly 450 tourism families who travel to Surfside Beach.

"The town is really supportive. We're training their lifeguards and the police, and we already trained some police and fire department last year," she said, adding that it is especially important to work with public safety officials due to the possibility a child with autism could run away.

"Our police here in Surfside Beach need to know how to approach them," Large said.

The City of Myrtle Beach, meanwhile, won an Achievement Award this year for Savannah's Playground Enabling Park, which offers a variety of equipment that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The park features a zip line, specially designed swings, rubber surfaces to soften falls, an extended wheelchair ramp that stops at stations, a cooling mist feature during the summer and a mile-long wheelchair path that goes around the lake.

Online reviews of the playground come from as far away as Canada indicating they came specifically to visit the playground. In doing so, those families have also patronized restaurants, shops and recreational activities nearby.

Surrounded by history

In the City of Gaffney, municipal officials knew they had a unique tourism opportunity. Visitors would journey to the area to research their ancestors who fought in the American Revolution. After all, the city is nestled among national treasures that include three national parks about the Revolutionary War — Kings Mountain National Military Park, Cowpens National Battlefield and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail.

But the city was only attracting about 500 tourists annually. So, city employees decided to study visitor habits, said LeighAnn Snuggs, director of the city's marketing and tourism department.

"We spent those first few years asking, 'How did you hear about us?'" she said. "And now we specifically target them." Their efforts paid off. Three years later, the city welcomed 10,000 tourists.

While the Gaffney peach water tower became a favorite among “House of Cards” fans, Snuggs said the Peachoid is not as central to the city’s tourism as the national parks and the historic gems of downtown Gaffney.

“We love the peach, but it really isn’t our No. 1,” she said.

When the 2011 federal government shutdown caused the parks to close, the City of Gaffney hosted a celebration of the Battle of Kings Mountain in historic Capri Theatre in the city’s downtown.

Although the parks soon reopened, a partnership between the National Park Service and city officials established Gaffney as a historic tourism destination drawing curious visitors researching their genealogy.

“There was no partnership with the NPS before that time,” said Snuggs. “We promoted that we had national parks, but there was in no way the relationships that we have had since.”

The city also leveraged the scenic beauty of its surroundings. It used accommodations tax revenue to produce an advertising-free pamphlet with information about S.C. Highway 11, called the *Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway Travel Guide*. The project won a state tourism award and has been the second-most popular item in welcome centers, said Snuggs.

“The No. 1 draw for tourists is not going to be ‘What is everyone else doing?’” said Snuggs. “It’s ‘what’s unique to you? What can you do that others can’t do?’”

There’s more ahead.

“We’re working on a project now, called “Centuries of History, a Walking Tour,” said Snuggs.

“We are celebrating our Main Street downtown as the Revolutionary War Trail from 1780. We have 18th, 19th and 20th centuries to celebrate, so we are putting up information about the street names and why the streets were named what they were.”

The efforts of South Carolina’s cities and towns have caught the attention of the state’s top tourism official. Cities in South



The Cowpens National Battlefield attracts history buffs, visitors researching their ancestors and Revolutionary War re-enactors, such as these women in period attire.



Savannah’s Playground in Myrtle Beach draws families and children of all abilities to enjoy the unique amenities.

Carolina are a key reason why tourism is a \$21.2 billion industry, said Duane Parrish, director of the SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

“Our city destinations have done an incredible job identifying authentic

attractions they can offer to visitors,” he said. “They work well with regional and state marketing organizations to promote their best attributes to the nation and the world.”

A Day in the Life of an *Engagement Leader*

The “Day in the Life” series gives an insider’s look at the professions that make South Carolina cities and towns great places to live, work and play. Municipal employees from around the state explain their role, discuss challenges they face and share stories from the unique world of municipal government service.

Hands On, Hearts On

As Anderson Police Chief Jim Stewart scribbled notes, an eighth-grade girl stared back at him skeptically.

“I don’t know why you’re writing all this down,” she told the chief, who was surrounded by alternative school students during a law enforcement listening session with local youth. “If you’re not going to take us seriously, you’re wasting your time,” the girl continued.

But Stewart was paying close attention. He wanted to know what the young people thought of their local police department.

“If I’m writing this down, we’re going follow up on it,” he replied. “I’m not writing this down to stay busy in a meeting. We will act on what you are telling us.”

By the end of the meeting, “She was my buddy,” Stewart recalled.

It was just one community meeting Stewart had attended as part of the Law Enforcement and Community Relations Task Force, a push to improve interactions between police and residents, especially in minority neighborhoods. The initiative, which unfolded in 2015, spans 4,000 residents and 63 events, from Bible schools to neighborhood committees to nonprofits, civic clubs and projects for the needy.

The police department worked closely with city administration and the African American Ministerial Council at first and then spread to the school district, SC Department of Juvenile Justice, solicitor’s office and other partners. The city’s police officers addressed specific community questions, such as “Why do two officers

show up to a call?” (Answer: It’s a policy for officer safety.)

For Stewart, there was a common thread: He kept putting himself in unusual positions, appearing places where a police chief was unexpected. One day he was serving food and refilling iced tea glasses at a restaurant. Another day he was teaching Sunday school at a church that wasn’t his own.

**“This isn’t so much of a job
— yes it’s exhausting, and
the hours can be long —
but to me, it’s a purpose.”**

— Lauren Sims,
Town of Mount Pleasant’s Community and
Government Affairs Chief

“You make deposits,” said Stewart. “One day, you’ll have to make that withdrawal.”

The lesson? Anyone on a city’s staff can be a “resident engagement” leader, even — and in some cases, especially — the police chief.

Like Stewart, Lauren Sims, the Town of Mount Pleasant’s community and government affairs chief, is on a daily mission to connect residents to local government and to one another. And like Stewart, Sims has learned to be versatile.

“This isn’t so much of a job — yes, it’s exhausting, and the hours can be long — but to me, it’s a purpose,” Sims said. “When I think about what I’m doing in the community, and I think about whether it’s something simple like providing information or connecting people to resources, I’m also thinking about the people themselves.”

Like Sims, Warren Davis also doesn’t see his role as a job.

“It’s more of a ministry,” he said of his Sumter Police Department program, CheckMate, which keeps a watchful eye on vulnerable seniors and residents with disabilities who have no one local to turn to.

“It’s a calling the chief put me into four years ago.”

Through CheckMate, he updates residents’ emergency contact information, suggests ways for them to improve safety and deter crime and makes referrals to other agencies if necessary.

Davis, a senior corporal and former patrol division officer, does the same training as any other police officer. Of his special role with CheckMate: “I don’t think there’s anything hard about it. I am a certified officer. A lot of times that makes people feel at ease.”

The tools of engagement

What does it take to champion a town’s shared community identity?

“It’s a desire to help people and see people for what they are, and that’s a fellow human being,” said Sims. “A lot of times with technology, which can be



Anderson Police Chief Jim Stewart waits tables at a local restaurant as part of his resident engagement campaign. Photo: Anderson Police Department.



Top photo: Eric DeMoura, town administrator for the Town of Mount Pleasant, rides the bus with residents to learn about their experiences in the town. Photo: Town of Mount Pleasant.

Bottom photo: Papa G, who leads the Sumter Police Department's CheckMate program, visits residents throughout the week to assist them with basic household repairs and promotes safety and wellbeing. Photo: Sumter Police Department.



a great and helpful tool, sometimes it can remove the human element. You're dealing with a username."

Sims, who grew up in Mount Pleasant, is right at home when she heads into the field with her laptop, water bottle and signup sheets to subscribe residents to newsletters. The water bottle is key for Sims, who does a lot of talking for her job.

As for Stewart, his best tool fits in his pocket.

"I carry a stack of cards, so before we leave a meeting, I give all students my contact information," said Stewart. "That's my number one tool." Depending on the age of his audience, he wields ice cream cones. Squad cars for students to climb into also work well.

For Davis of Sumter, his on-the-job tools include "compassion" and "a little step stool."

"What happens when your 82-year-old mother has a light go out? Does she

get on a ladder and change it?" he said. "I certainly hope not."

Expect anything — And learn to adapt

There's no typical day.

Sims might speak with members of a neighborhood about their speeding concerns, attend roundtable meetings with a homeowner association board or assist the mayor at an outreach event. When she's in the office, she is researching the impacts of existing programs and evaluating their effectiveness.

Sims has learned to be flexible and adjust her methods according to experiences. For instance, she knows now that meetings that involve more than 20 residents have a tendency to break off into pockets of residents. She also learned that the old advice to "go where the people are" isn't a sure thing.

On one occasion, town officials set up a booth at a clean water/safe fishing

event, but residents walked right by without stopping.

"Even when you sat there and say, 'can we talk? Where do you live?' people were laser focused on the event and weren't interested in anything else," said Sims.

In the City of Sumter, Davis, who goes by "Papa G" — It started out as Warren G but became "papa" after his hair started to turn gray — takes a different approach to resident engagement.

"I've had a person call and say, 'I've got some guy replacing the water meter at my house, and I'm a little unsteady about this person,'" said Davis. "I just went and talked to her when they were changing out the water meter. Sometimes it just takes a police presence. I wear my uniform and drive a marked car."

For all three, engaging residents for a living is exactly what they want to do.

It makes sense for Sims: "These are the people I care most about in the world."



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Calendar

For a complete listing of training opportunities, visit www.masc.sc to view the calendar.

JULY

19 – 22 Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting. Hilton Head Marriott.

AUGUST

7 SC Business Licensing Officials Association ABL Exam. Municipal Association of SC.

7 Setoff Debt Collection Program Mandatory Training Session for Interested Participants. Municipal Association of SC. Session is for interested participants who have never attended a training session.

9 Setoff Debt Collection Program Mandatory Training Session for New Employees of Current Participants. Municipal Association of SC. For current participants with new employees who have never attended a training session.

14 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Greenwood. Upper Savannah Council of Governments area.

15 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Clemson. Appalachian Council of Governments area.

16 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Fort Mill. Catawba Regional Council of Governments area.

21 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Florence. Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments area.

22 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Moncks Corner. Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments area.

23 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Walterboro. Lowcountry Council of Governments area.

28 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Aiken. Lower Savannah Council of Governments area.

29 – 31 Municipal Court Administration Association of SC Annual Meeting. Hilton Head Marriott. Topics include victim service provider training, court financials, ethics, courtroom security, updates from the SC Court Administration and SC Department of Motor Vehicles, and recognizing and dealing with mentally ill customers.

29 Building Officials Association of South Carolina Fall Training. Municipal Association of SC. Topics include the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule and tips to improve the city's rating.