

Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



# 2014 Achievement Awards



## 2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

### Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

#### Program Information

Locality Stafford County, VA

Program Title In the Loop

Program Category Communications

#### Contact Information

Name Cathy Vollbrecht

Title Director of Communications

Department County Administration

Complete Mailing Address 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford, VA 22554

Telephone # 540-658-4894 Fax # \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail cvollbrecht@staffordcountyva.gov

#### Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name Anthony Romanello

Title County Administrator

Signature 

## Call for Entries

## **Overview of the Program – In the Loop Newsletter**

Our elected leaders, the Board of Supervisors, are inundated with emails and phone calls from constituents, other government officials, media representatives and County staff. In addition, they are required to attend many meetings every week and most of the supervisors hold full-time jobs as well. The problem was how to whittle down the information overload and guide the Board to “hot-button” and other significant issues so that they can focus on the priorities for the community. The other problem was how to present them with an ongoing update of the work of staff. The answer turned out to be a weekly newsletter for the Board called *In the Loop* that focuses on information the Board *needs* to have and information that staff *needs* for them to have.

Information the Board needs to have includes updates on current and ongoing issues and a calendar of meetings and events. Each newsletter is filled with articles about various topics such as the schedule for the advertisement of the fiscal year budget, an increase in the health insurance rates that County employees pay, and the plans for a special event celebrating Stafford’s 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Information that County Administration needs for the Board to know includes stories about the compliments received by staff from citizens, visitors and customers, employee awards and appointments, and efforts of employees to save money and innovate.

*In the Loop* is a both a help and a resource for information for the Board. After all, getting Stafford County’s message out in an organized and articulate manner is one of our paramount goals. *In the Loop* helps everyone do that.

***In the Loop* Newsletter  
Stafford County, Virginia**

**1. What was the purpose of your project?**

According to the Radicati Group, Inc., out of Palo Alto, California, there are 182.9 billion emails sent and received each day throughout the world. In Stafford County, Virginia, alone, Stafford Government employees receive, on average, about 10,000 emails each day. Our elected leaders, the Board of Supervisors, are inundated with numerous emails and phone calls each day from constituents, other government officials, media representatives, and County staff. They also have numerous meetings to attend as part of their elected official duties. One supervisor recently mentioned that he had 13 meetings to attend in one week. Pressure is their constant companion. They are leaned on to address concerns, establish a priority, advance an agenda, or respond to a crisis. Many times, the feedback they receive from the public about County staff is negative: they tend to hear more about what they do wrong, rather than what they do right. In the past, this resulted in a reactive role on the part of staff. Getting in front of an issue and helping to frame the public conversation was not always easy. However, with the addition of the weekly *In the Loop* newsletter targeted solely at the Board of Supervisors, there are increased opportunities to be proactive and help guide Supervisors' – and the public's – perception of County government.

The purpose of *In the Loop* is twofold: it provides information that the Board needs to have, and information that County Administration needs for them to have. Information that the Board needs to have includes updates on current and ongoing issues and a calendar of meetings and events. Each newsletter is filled with brief articles about various topics such as the schedule for the advertisement of the fiscal year budget, an increase in the health insurance rates that County employees pay, and the plans for a special event celebrating Stafford's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition to these short notes, the second page of *In the Loop* is a calendar of the following week's meetings. These include official County meetings for different boards, authorities, committees and commissions, community gatherings such as special dinners, school fairs and festivals, ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings.

Information that County Administration needs for the Board to have includes stories about the great work performed by our employees for the community. We write about the compliments that our employees receive each week from citizens, visitors, and customers to whom they provide services. We include information about employees who win awards for their work, or who are hand-picked to serve on a statewide board or in another prestigious role. We describe the efforts of an employee or a group of employees to save money or be innovative. These are the things that happen on a daily basis, but don't make the newspaper, may not get recognized at a Board meeting, or included in an email chain. *In the Loop* sheds light on the dedication, creativity, and diligence of our employees. We always tell our new employees in New Employee Orientation that it takes a special kind of person to dedicate their lives to public service. *In the Loop* tells the stories of these special people, who have seen sparse salary increases these last few years, rising health insurance costs, and a heavier workload (but no more staff to help ease that burden), but who consistently go above and beyond to make Stafford the premiere place in Virginia to live, work and raise a family. Week after week, we tell these stories to our Board, so that they can tell the stories to their constituents.

## **2. How did you measure the project's success?**

We know that *In the Loop* is successful in a number of ways. The feedback we receive from Board members (which usually comes to us within an hour after the newsletter is emailed) is one indication. We may also get a question about a particular story that we've included in the newsletter, and our answer gives us an opportunity to provide additional information about a particular topic. All of this feedback tells us that our information is valued by Board members, and we use it to help us improve future newsletters.

There is no doubt that this regular outreach to our Board members has had a positive effect on their perception of County government. We recently received an email from one Board member who had had a complaint about the time it takes to process a building permit in Stafford. That Board member replied that he did "not believe for one minute that our staff was the problem," but wanted to share that exchange with us. Another example is when a former elected official told our county administrator recently that he hears good things throughout the county about staff; this was the first compliment he had ever paid the administrator.

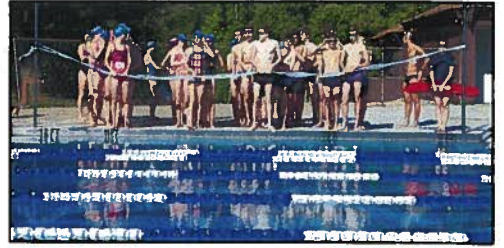
In addition to sharing compliments our staff receives in the newsletter, it is also important for our Board to know that our employees – their employees – are working hard to help Board members meet their priorities for the community, the primary one being fiscal responsibility and reducing the tax burden on citizens. We consistently share stories about our employees' efforts to be creative and save money, and we know that Board members are recognizing these efforts. In fact, in 2010, the Board authorized the County Administrator to implement the Creative Solutions and Innovations Employee Incentive Program to encourage efficiency and resourcefulness within County government, and to recognize the efforts of employees who have helped the County become more efficient through creative and innovative thinking. We think that the stories in *In the Loop* contributed to the development of this program.

## **3. Is there any other interesting information about the project you would like the judges to know?**

With the hundreds of emails received by Board members each week and the multiple meetings and community events they attend, it can be challenging for them to determine what they need to know now and what can wait. *In the Loop* helps to whittle down the information overload and guide the Board to "hot-button" and other significant issues so that they can focus on the priorities for the community. *In the Loop* serves a practical purpose as well; by having this information in one document, it helps to reduce the number of emails Board members receive from staff.

*In the Loop* is produced in house by one staff member, but the credit for its success belongs to the whole organization. Employees consistently share information about current issues, upcoming projects, and their good work so that we can share this with the Board members, and ultimately, the rest of the community. *In the Loop* does not cost additional money to produce; it is provided via e-mail. In addition to text, it also includes photos of special events such as ribbon cuttings and groundbreaking in which the Board may participate. This enables them to use the newsletter as a communication tool for their own constituents, showing them how they (the Board members) are working for them to build a great community in Stafford.





Members of the Stingrays swim team prepare to jump into the Curtis Park pool.

## Stafford Fire and Rescue Wins Another Award

Last night, Stafford's Fire and Rescue Department was named the Outstanding EMS Agency for 2014 from the Rappahannock Emergency Medical Services Council (REMS). In addition, Lori Knowles, Stafford's Acting Division Chief EMS Division, has received the Excellence in EMS award (individual award) for 2014. REMS will be sending out a press release. Also, both the Fire and Rescue Department and Lori will automatically be submitted for the Governor's EMS awards, which are presented in November.

The **2014 Business Appreciation Reception** will take place on Friday, June 6, 2 p.m. — 4 p.m. at the Stafford Regional Airport. The keynote speaker is Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice Jones. Winners of the Best Place to Work and Entrepreneur of the Year awards will be given. All Board members are invited to attend. Click [here](#) for more information.



## Utilities Takes Part in Cyber Security Study



Stafford's Utilities Department was selected by the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water to participate in an assessment of its vulnerability to cyber security threats. The review is part of a grant program by EPA that involves a cross-section of water systems in the Commonwealth. The assessment teams grilled Stafford's water treatment plant operators and delved into the controls systems. The teams also talked to IT and HR staff so that they could fully understand the controls the County has in place regarding access control and personnel as it relates to the water system. The results will be provided to Utilities, which staff plans to use to improve their processes.

## Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

recently received a note from a parent about spring break camp. The parent wrote, "Stafford Parks and Rec is my go-to place anytime I need a venue for my daughter to go for a valuable, fun, and worthwhile activity/event/outing. I can always depend on the staff that do everything they can to ensure my child has a great camp experience. Heather, Suzanne, and others are the best! Keep up the good work and thank you for a great camp week! I love Stafford Parks and Rec!"

## Open Enrollment Deadline Today!

Don't forget, if you want to make changes to your benefits, the deadline is today at 4:30 p.m. If you are not making any changes, you do not need to do anything. If you do have changes, please send your paperwork to the Human Resources Department today.





*Members of the Curtis Family attend the ribbon cutting at Curtis Park pool.*

**Calendar of Meetings and Events: June 2 — 6, 2014**

**May 30, 2014**

**MON  
June 2**

**Tour of Fort AP Hill**  
10:15 a.m.  
1327 A.P. Hill Drive,  
Building 1327

**Architectural Review Board**  
6:00 p.m.  
Conf. Room ABC

**TUES  
June 3**

**Community & Econ. Dev. Committee**  
12:00 p.m.  
Conf. Room ABC

**Infrastructure Committee**  
1:30 p.m.  
Conf. Room ABC

**Board of Supervisors**  
3:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.  
Board Chambers

**WED  
June 4**

**GEICO's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Rededication Ceremony**  
1:00 p.m.  
One GEICO Blvd.  
(Route 17).

**Mary Washington Healthcare's Update to the Community**  
5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.,  
John F. Fick, III  
Conference Center

**Boys Scouts of America (BSA) "Good Scout" Dinner**  
6:00p.m.  
The Historic Dining Room at Seacobeck Hall

**Sheriff's Office Awards Ceremony**  
6:30 p.m.  
Brooke Point High School Auditorium  
1700 Courthouse Road

**THURS  
June 5**

**Historical Commission**  
3:00 p.m.  
Conf. Room ABC

**Joint Planning Commission and Airport Authority**  
6:30 p.m.  
Stafford Regional Airport  
95 Aviation Way

**PRTC - OPS CMT & COMMISSION**  
7:00 p.m.  
14700 Potomac Mills Road, Woodbridge

**FRI  
June 6**

**350th Finance Subcommittee**  
10:30 a.m.  
Conf. Room ABC

**2014 Business Appreciation Reception**  
Stafford Regional Airport  
2:00 — 4:00 p.m.

**Hartwood Elementary School's 50th Anniversary Celebration Picnic on the Hill**  
Hartwood Elementary School  
5:00 p.m. — 8:00 p.m.