



*By MCCA Executive Director, Rosemary Kulow*

Recently, I attended the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual conference in New Orleans, LA, along with Penobscot County Commissioner, Peter Baldacci – MCCA’s chosen NACo representative, and Cumberland County Manager, Peter Crichton. NACo provides many valuable services to our nation’s counties, including legislative advocacy at the federal government level, discount health programs, information analyses and dissemination, and other beneficial programs and services. This year’s annual conference was held at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center July 11-14 and was well attended by county representatives from all across the USA, including Alaska and Hawaii.

The convention provides opportunities for meetings of all affiliate groups and committees, as well as chances to network with peers and other county government officials. In addition, continuing education work sessions that cover a wide range of topics are available to attendees. As an executive director of a state association, I was invited to a reception for relatively new execs that was hosted by the executive director of NACo, Matt Chase. There, I met and heard perspectives from several other executives about issues facing them in their prospective states. During the convention I also visited the Exhibit Hall to meet various vendors who provide programs and services to county government.

As the state association executive director, I belong to the NACo-affiliated NCCAE (National Council of County Association Executives) and serve on the Meeting Planning Committee. The Meeting Planning Committee discussed the upcoming Insurance meeting and NCCAE Annual Conference, which will take place in October in Colorado Springs. NCCAE also held its annual business meeting at this conference and provided additional continuing education sessions on strategic planning (transforming teams for success) and prevention of investment fraud, which I attended. My participation in these sessions also enabled me to begin building relationships with other state execs and share ideas about challenges we all face.

Not directly related to the work of state association executive directors, but directly related to county government services, were several other continuing education work sessions presented at the conference. Sessions I attended include: a meeting of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Steering Committee; “Plan for Procurement: Lessons Learned from Disasters”; the NACo Achievement Awards Luncheon; the NACo 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Candidate Forum; and “Public Engagement for Successful County Infrastructure Projects,” for which fellow Mainer, David Cole (former commissioner of the Dept. of Transportation) was a presenter.

Of particular note and interest to me was this year's annual NACo business meeting, at which NACo's policy resolutions and platform changes were considered and adopted. Officers for the upcoming year are also elected at this meeting, and next year's president is the Honorable G. Riki Hokama from Maui County, HI. This year's meeting considered some controversial issues that were vigorously debated, including the NACo policy stances on minimum wage and immigration. The whole convention process is very intriguing and exciting to me, and it was an honor to witness this democratic process in action. Commissioner Peter Baldacci made us proud and represented Maine with intelligence, dignity and good humor, as always.

The convention concluded on the last night with a fabulous celebration at the Mercedes Benz Superdome. The arena floor was divided into sections in which the various Louisiana parishes (counties) beautifully presented displays of their local culture and offered delicious foods for our eating pleasure. The celebration was accompanied by great music and a parade that showered spectators with many, many Mardi Gras beads. The heartburn I endured later from all the tasty food was well worth it.

I highly recommend attendance at NACo conferences to any county official who may be considering doing so in the future. They are extraordinarily well planned and implemented and provide exceptional educational and networking opportunities for anyone interested in high quality county government. I sincerely appreciate being afforded the opportunity to attend these national conferences that enhance my understanding of county government issues and state association management.