

2016 ANNUAL NACo CONFERENCE

Last month I attended the Annual NACo Conference in beautiful Long Beach, California, along with Franklin County Commissioner and NACo board member, Gary McGrane. I believe we both found the conference to be very educational and enlightening, as it provided many opportunities to learn about county government initiatives in other parts of the country, as well as how other county officials deal with the problems and challenges county governments face. The conference venue provided opportunities, both educational and entertaining, for participants to learn how California counties deal with their own peculiar challenges.

As a member of NACo's Agriculture & Rural Affairs Steering Committee, my Friday morning was spent in meetings of that body. We discussed and voted on the many policy resolutions and platform changes geared toward county government interests in agriculture and other rural affairs that the committee had been working on throughout the year. Meetings of the other NACo steering committees were also held throughout the day Friday, so committee members were busily preparing their policies for consideration at NACo's Annual Business Meeting Monday.

At noon a luncheon on the opioid epidemic was held with author, **Sam Quinones**, who discussed his book about the origins and development of the Mexican heroin trade in the U.S. The book is fascinating and does much to explain how the epidemic of opioid use and addiction has spread throughout our country. An afternoon reception with vendors in the exhibit hall was followed by a conference opening reception entitled, "*Lights, Leadership, Action.*" The event took place at a local outdoor park that evening which featured food, drinks, and dancing to a fun 60s band of which some of the musicians were county commissioners.

On Saturday I attended a session about the "*Stepping Up*" program and how to reduce mental illness in jails. This was a working meeting for officials whose counties currently have *Stepping Up* programs. I also attended a meeting of State Association Meeting Planners to learn and talk about how the various state associations plan their annual conferences.

The General Session in the afternoon treated attendees to presentations from former NBA player, author, filmmaker and columnist, **Kareem Abdul-Jabbar**, and the founder and president of Esri, **Jack Dangermond**, who, with his wife, invented Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Sunday was my day to spend with other state association executive directors at NCCAE (National Council of County Association Executives) sessions. The morning was kicked off by two consecutive professional development sessions for execs (as we call ourselves). "Crisis Management" and "Managing Change" provided sound insights to the topics and opportunities for sharing our own thoughts and experiences.

The NACo Achievement Awards Luncheon was held at noon, followed by the NACo 2nd Vice President Candidates' Forum. After that, I attended the NCCAE Business Meeting of the executive directors' association. I closed my work day by attending a session on *Social Security – Choice of a Lifetime*, an explanation of how the program works for retirement. A reception

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sponsored by Aetna aboard the *Queen Mary* in Long Beach Harbor pleasantly concluded the conference day.

On Monday, the Annual NACo Business Meeting and Election was held convention style in the morning. This is always the highlight of the conference, as it is the time when county representatives from all states vote on policy resolutions, platform changes, and officers for the upcoming year. The adopted policy positions are those presented by NACo lobbyists and county officials to lawmakers in Washington D.C. throughout the year.

A meeting of NACo's Northeast Region was held after the NACo Business Meeting, and the General Session occurred in the afternoon. The General Session featured two stunning speakers – record-setting athlete, sports broadcaster, and author, *Diana Nyad*, who set records swimming from Cuba to the Florida Keys as a 60+ year old woman, and presidential historian and Pulitzer Prize winner, *Jon Meacham*. Both speakers were entertaining, enlightening, and inspirational.

A conference-wide celebration event closed the conference that evening with more fabulous food, beverages, and dancing to a cover band that featured guest singer and winner of NBC's "The Voice, Season 10," *Alisan Porter*.

I highly recommend attendance at NACo's annual and legislative conferences to all county government officials. The benefits realized from interactions with county government officials from around the country and education about relevant issues are an investment in the future of county government and well worth the cost of attendance. I extend my sincere appreciation to Maine counties and citizens who make my attendance at these conferences possible and encourage all of you to fully utilize the services and information provided by the National Association of Counties.

Rosemary Kulow

MCCA Executive Director