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Catawba County wins three statewide awards

Catawba County has been recognized with three 2012 Outstanding County Program Awards from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners.

Catawba County has become a leader in the use of technology, and the county's IT department was recognized for its use of QR (Quick Response) codes for building permits. The program was one of three winners in the General Government category. Utilizing this technology enables contractors and citizens to access key information at any time. Catawba County added QR codes to Building Services permit placards that are posted at job sites to help deliver the needed information much quicker. Each placard shows two QR codes: one that links to the GIS information for the parcel of the building site, and another that links to the full permit information on the web. The codes are created when the placard is printed and contain links specific to that parcel and permit. Not only do the placards improve customer service for contractors, they also help the county's transparency efforts by making this same information available to citizens.

Catawba County is also beginning to use QR codes in other facets of its operation, including job postings, business cards and newsletters. For more information about this program, contact Terry Bledsoe, Chief Information Officer, at (828) 465-8497 or tbledsoe@catawbacountync.gov.

Catawba County Social Services was recognized for its Backpack Program for Children. The program was established to reach families affected by economic distress, and it serves as an ongoing, immediate source of food for students during weekends and extended breaks from school. The program also educates parents about resources in the community, including job fairs and other free family-oriented activities, by including printed information about these programs in the backpacks. Because of its emphasis on public information, the program was one of three winners in the Public Information/Participation category.

The program was a true community effort. BB&T Bank employees contributed 400 hours of volunteer assistance, and BB&T provided \$10,000 in funds. Churches and community members also provided financial and volunteer assistance. The Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian Ministry, a non-profit organization, provided 3,000 square feet of warehouse space for food storage and a place to pack the backpacks. The program initially served 360 students in seven elementary schools and now serves 980 students per week and is in 20 of the county's 25 elementary schools. For more information about this program, contact Lori Williams, Prevention Unit Supervisor, at (828) 695-4418 or lwilliams@catawbacountync.gov.

The county is also taking steps to promote healthy, sustainable policies that improve physical activity and nutrition in schools through the Healthy Schools Recognition Program. The program was one of three winners in the Human Services category. It was created by Eat Smart Move More Catawba County (ESMM), a volunteer coalition aimed at reducing and preventing childhood obesity. ESMM is part of Catawba County Health Partners, a non-profit entity managed by Catawba County Public Health. The annual program encourages schools to meet or maintain seven specific criteria to be recognized as a Healthy School. Among the criteria are having a school wellness council that meets monthly and consists of school personnel and parents, offering fresh or frozen fruit or vegetables during lunch at least three times a week, 30 minutes of physical activity a day in grades K-8 and having a healthy foods policy for concessions.

Sixteen of the county's 40 public schools participated in the program during 2010-11, and 10 were recognized as a Healthy School. Implementation of the program was a collaborative effort between ESMM members (representing local healthcare providers, hospitals, schools, nonprofit organizations, and human service agencies) and Catawba County Public Health's school nurses. Based on the success of the program's first year, ESMM is now implementing a similar program to encourage healthy policies in local childcare centers. For more information on the program, contact Amy McCauley, Community Outreach Manager, at (828) 695-5818 or amccauley@catawbacountync.gov.

The Outstanding County Program Awards have been handed out each year since 1991 by the NCACC. The intent of the program is to recognize and share information with other counties about innovative programs that address common problems faced by many counties. A team of judges selected three winning programs in each of three categories: General Government, Human Services and Public Information/Participation. Catawba County won one award in each of the three categories.

***About the NCACC:** The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. Founded in 1908, the Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of lobbying, fiscal and legal research, communications, intergovernmental relations, information technology, field visits and risk management services.*