

10

Publications & Communications

The publication of the first *Courthouse News and Notes* in 1960 marked the beginning of one of MACo's most important membership services – communications. The publications that followed it – the pictorial *Membership Directory*, the *Directory of County Officials*, the *Budget and Tax Rate Book*, the *Annual Legislative Summary*, and an *Annual Compensation Survey*, would provide county officials and state officials with resources unavailable anywhere else.

Courthouse News & Notes

Courthouse News and Notes was first published on July 15, 1960. In that first issue, Executive Secretary Lovelace reported, "about the fifteenth of each month, the staff will try to get out a newsletter such as this. The idea is to report upon what counties and the Association are doing... and, in general, to supply whatever information an Association like ours needs in order to achieve common progress." The Association's official newsletter would keep members abreast of "current issues facing local government, Association news, conference information, and job openings." The typed, one-page newsletter included an update of the "Mission 23" assignment— Lovelace's plan to visit all of the counties— and praise for Talbot County's self-financed "Economic Development Committee," which the newsletter described as "a red-hot outfit."

When the *Legislative Bulletin* began publication in January 1962, the name was shortened to *Courthouse News*. The origin of the *Courthouse News* name is unknown. It was published on Fridays during the Legislative Session to coincide with the weekly Legislative Committee meetings, and to offer the Committee members a preview of the legislation to be discussed the following Wednesday.

Content has remained fairly consistent through the years. During the Legislative Session, the newsletter has always contains lists of proposed legislation impacting local government, reports on the progress of those bills, local hearing schedules, conferences, and some general information about other Association activities. Even during the Interim, legislative affairs drive the content; articles outline staff and member involvement in task forces and workgroups, and the activities of the Legislative Committee and Board are reported.

During his tenure, Executive Secretary Ratchford included a section called "Around the Counties" in which noteworthy activities in each jurisdiction were reported. Some of the first items included in this section were Councilwoman Stella Werner's 1962 nomination for "Maryland Business and Professional Woman of the Year," and an announcement that a civil defense course in community survival, covering "varied aspects of nuclear explosions and means of surviving nuclear attacks," was to be held in Wicomico County.

A tight Friday afternoon deadline set the tone for much of staff's involvement in *Courthouse News* production. Some of former staff's fondest memories of MACo stem back to newsletter production. Former staff member Mickey Geisler remembers, "all of us stopped our own work and

gathered in the office workroom to get the newsletter out.” While the camaraderie was enjoyable, she admits that the 5:00 p.m. deadline on Fridays during Legislative Session and the temperamental behavior of the copier caused many tense moments. Former Executive Director Tee O’Connor recalls those early days when the newsletter was collated by positioning the staff around the table, each with a stack of pages, ending with the person who had to manually staple each completed newsletter.

Staff labor and the inconsistent operation of the MACo copier machine led to discussions about outsourcing the printing and mailing of *Courthouse News*. After much deliberation, with concerns raised about maintaining quality control, the decision was made to outsource the job to the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS) in Baltimore City beginning in 1999. With the convenience of emailed transmission to DGS, the deadlines were easier to meet, more time was allowed for proofreading, and staff time was freed to focus on more professional duties. MACo continues to outsource the newsletter to DGS today.

In spring 1998, with the introduction of first MACo website, www.mdcountries.org, *Courthouse News* went online. The online version included only the text, but added another important feature. From that point forward, all issues would be archived on the website for reference. This was a significant step forward in MACo communications, as it enabled staff to post the newsletter to the website within a few hours of its completion in-house, allowing members, particularly of the Legislative Committee, quicker access to the bills that would be reviewed at the following Wednesday’s meeting at MACo. *The website is discussed in detail later in this chapter.*

Today, *Courthouse News* is published as needed, sometimes weekly, during the General Assembly Session, and monthly during the Interim. It has never contained advertisements, but does post complimentary job openings for county governments. It is possible that as more people use email as their main communication source, *Courthouse News* may one day exclusively be emailed to readers, but such a change remains to be seen.

Directory of County Officials

The same year that *Courthouse News* appeared, members expressed an interest in printing a "mimeographed" directory of Maryland county officials, listing each official’s home address, telephone numbers, and office information. Executive Secretary Lovelace compiled the information from a membership survey, and the first *Directory of County Officials* was published and then distributed at the 1961 Summer Meeting. It contained 34 pages and each copy cost \$3.00 to purchase, though it is unclear whether the publication was complimentary for members. The first advertisement to appear in the Directory was a full-page ad from the Baltimore Gas & Electric Company.

Today, the enormously popular 420-page *Directory of County Officials* includes both county and state government listings and is published every other year. The vast amount of information is compiled in house, with updated information solicited electronically. The publication is complimentary for county and state elected officials and is sold to other interested parties for \$40 per copy.

Pictorial Membership Directory

During Executive Director Raquel Sanudo's tenure, a small pictorial *Membership Directory* was first published. It provided photographs of all county elected officials with basic contact information. It was only distributed to the membership. The publication attracted sponsors and was published every four years after the general election through 1998. In 2002, the decision was made to combine the pictorial directory with the *Directory of County Officials* to enhance the value of that publication and provide a more updated composite of the photographs.

Legislative Bulletins

In addition to the monthly newsletter, Lovelace began producing special Legislative Bulletins "as circumstances required." During the 1961 General Assembly Session, 20 issues of the *Legislative Bulletin* were published. The Bulletins included legislation of interest to local government and some mention of the Association's tracking of the major legislation.

Budget & Tax Rate Book

Citing a need to provide comparison information on county tax rates, budgets, and other financial statistics, a booklet entitled *Maryland County Statistical Abstract* was published in 1977 and again in 1979. It contained basic information about property tax rates and county fee rates.

The Budgetary Guide for Maryland Counties was published in 1983 as an expanded version of its predecessor, including more statistical data. It continues to be published annually and is distributed to county and state elected and appointed officials. Now titled the *Annual Budget and Tax Rate Book*, email technology has streamlined the collection of the vast data that is provided by county financial and budget officers. It is compiled in house by MACo staff and data revisions, once not readily available, are scheduled to be posted on the MACo website as that information is provided to staff. Next to the *Directory of County Officials*, the *Budget and Tax Rate Book* is the most sought after publication produced by MACo.

Compensation Survey

The Salaries of Selected Officials in Maryland's Subdivisions was published in 1965 for county officials. Who received the document is largely unknown, but it must have been well received, as it was produced on a biannual basis after that time. It is known that the Maryland Municipal League published similar surveys as well.

By the late 1990s, Executive Director David Bliden began discussions with the Institute for Governmental Service (IGS) at the University of Maryland – College Park about the possibility of assistance with the survey. IGS ultimately took over the project, and made the decision to combine both county and municipality compensation information into one document, which was published as the *Compensation Survey of Maryland Local Governments -Fiscal 1999*. IGS continues to collaborate with MACo and MML to publish the survey every two years.

Legislative Summary

Since 1961, MACo has compiled some form of a legislative summary concerning bills that the Association identified as impacting local government. The first document of that kind, the *Association's Legislative Program 1961* was published pre-Session December 1960 under the leadership of Executive Secretary Lovelace. It contained information on pending legislation that the Association would be tracking at the upcoming session. Through the years the format and content changed, placing more emphasis on post Session results.

The 2002 *Summary* was expanded and contained substantive discussions on the legislation actively tracked by MACo's legislative staff. It further provides information on the results of MACo's proposed legislative initiatives and statistics documenting the effectiveness of MACo's efforts in Annapolis. The *Summary* is written by MACo legislative staff and distributed to all elected county officials, county administrators, and county attorneys.

Hints to Help Survive the Session for Interns by Interns

MACo has provided other reports based on need throughout its history. For instance, MACo often used student interns during Legislative Session to assist staff during those busy months. In 1985, apparently written in frustration, a handbook entitled *Hints to Help Survive the Session for Interns by Interns* was published. The guide included the how-tos on MACo legislative procedures, maps of the Senate and House building layouts, policy statements, and more practical information. MACo also published a similar document in 1971 for anyone wishing to know more about MACo itself, *The Organization: Finances and Functions of MACo*; it was updated again in 1978.

Various publications have included *Property Tax Relief in Maryland: Tax Credits for Low Income Elderly and Disabled Homeowners* (1975), *Fire Protection and Emergency Services in Maryland Counties* (1981), and a report of Executive Director Raquel Sanudo and Associate Director Chip McLeod's presentation to a Senate Committee on the *Governor's Commission on Health Care Policy and Financing* (1988).

Website Launched

With the addition of desktop Internet access and email for staff came the suggestion that MACo needed to go "on-line" with a web site. A Website Advisory Committee was formed and discussions ensued as to the content and structure of the website. Once a vendor was chosen to design the site, work began on populating the various sections. It was launched in the spring of 1998 with the design and structuring services of Real Computing, a now-defunct Annapolis-based company.

The site contained much information that was generated in-house, but also contained sections in which information was fed directly from the MACo database, specifically, legislative affairs and the publications section for *Courthouse News*. As mentioned previously, MACo staff could post the newsletter online within an hour of its completion, providing the membership rapid access to *Courthouse News* and, most importantly, to the legislative tracking information during Session.

A second phase for website design and content had begun as of Fall 2002. Plans included surveying the membership, redesigning the site, and adding new capabilities to best meet the needs of the membership and other Internet visitors. The revamped website was scheduled to be “launched” during the 2003 Summer Conference that, appropriately enough, will feature a technology theme.

The website continues and expands the goal that the first *Courthouse News and Notes* set out to accomplish in 1960: to serve the MACo membership by providing the most current and relevant information in an accessible format in the most timely manner available. As technology advances, MACo will continue to take advantage of those opportunities.