



# SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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## **SCAC ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE ASSOCIATION'S 2021 AWARDS COMPETITION, RECOGNIZES PARTICIPANTS IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RESILIENCY SHOWCASE**

South Carolina Association of Counties (SCAC) announced winners of the Association's 2021 Annual Awards Program and recognized participants in the COVID-19 Response and Resiliency Showcase at this year's Annual Conference on Aug. 2. SCAC previously hosted the annual awards program on June 8 at SC ETV and livestreamed the event on Facebook and SCAC's website at [www.SCCounties.org](http://www.SCCounties.org).

SCAC recognized all entities that competed in the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Competition and all entities that competed in the Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award Competition.

The Association also recognized entities that participated in the COVID-19 Response and Resiliency Showcase, which was not adjudicated.

### **GREENWOOD COUNTY WINS 2021 J. MITCHELL GRAHAM MEMORIAL AWARD**

**Greenwood County** won the 2021 J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award for developing and implementing the Soil Class Application for the Greenwood County Assessor's Office, an innovative approach to address an ongoing issue of accurately identifying soil classifications on property designated for agricultural use.

"Over 75 percent of the acreage in Greenwood County is agricultural, and over 4,800 parcels are designated for agricultural use," said William E. Tomes, Fellow, Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities, College of Charleston, who headed the three-judge panel evaluating this year's competition.

Multiple soil classes are typical on large tracts. Each soil class has an acreage amount that must be identified. Each acre or portion of an acre in a soil class is then further classified as crop or timber.

"Each acre or portion of an acre has a value per acre that must be calculated, based on values established by the state legislature. The values change depending on soil class and type," Tomes explained. "The prior method of determining soil class had multiple steps involving both appraisers and administrative assistants using a combination of automated and manual processes.

“Through a collaborative effort of the county’s GIS and Assessor’s departments,” he added, “a component of an in-house Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal Software application was developed to quickly and accurately compute soil classification data of agricultural properties using GIS layers. Instead of taking up two days, this new system allows for agricultural calculations to be processed within half an hour from beginning to end by one person, reducing errors and time for completion.”

According to Tomes, all citizens of Greenwood County benefit because the automated process ensures that agricultural properties are not taxed disproportionately as compared to residential and other classifications of real property.

This is the 49<sup>th</sup> year the SCAC has awarded the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award. The award, named in honor of the late J. Mitchell Graham who served as SCAC president from 1969 to 1970, recognizes counties that address community challenges, implement operational improvements, or enhance their citizens’ quality of life in a unique way.

## **CLARENDON, CHARLESTON AND KERSHAW COUNTIES WIN HONORABLE MENTION AWARDS**

Clarendon, Charleston and Kershaw counties won Honorable Mention awards.

Each year for SCAC’s annual awards program, county entries are grouped in the following categories: counties with populations under 50,000; counties with populations between 50,000 and 150,000; and counties with populations greater than 150,000. Counties compete and provide 10-minute presentations before a panel of judges during the competition.

Honorable Mention awards are presented when merited in each of the three population categories.

This year, in the category for counties with populations less than 50,000, **Clarendon County** won an Honorable Mention for using teamwork, cooperation and hard work to merge the county’s fire and EMS services.

“The merger, which occurred during the Coronavirus pandemic, was a huge success for Clarendon County,” Tomes said. “The hard work of upgrading facilities and equipment, adding new positions and pay bands, and creating buy-in from the public paid off. The transition was seamless, enhancing county services and the quality of life for county residents. The County Fire and Rescue program is now an impressive model on which other counties can base future endeavors of this type.”

In the category for counties with populations between 50,000 to 150,000, **Kershaw County** won an Honorable Mention for its Enhance U Program, designed to improve and better utilize a county’s greatest asset—its employees.

“Setting out to provide better opportunities for workers and retain a talented workforce, Kershaw County implemented a radical culture change,” Tomes said. “Employee talent was systematically identified, mapped against both team and individual goals and intentionally developed.

“The county provided individualized development opportunities and comprehensive learning solutions, which resulted in enhanced employee satisfaction and performance,” he added. “Today, the Enhance U Program provides a scalable solution that counties can easily replicate to empower employees, create an agile workforce, and lay a foundation for comprehensive talent management.”

In the category for counties with populations greater than 150,000, **Charleston County** won an Honorable Mention for creating a Satellite Voting Unit that takes the Board of Elections and Voter Registration Office to voters across the county.

“Citizens are now able to cast their absentee votes closer to where they live without driving long distances,” Tomes said. “The Satellite Voting Unit also serves as a traveling billboard that allows citizens to learn more about voter registration and elections services. The Satellite Voting Unit puts a face on the county registration and elections office within communities.”

## **LANCASTER COUNTY WINS 2021 BARRETT LAWREMORE MEMORIAL REGIONAL COOPERATION AWARD**

**Lancaster County** won the 2021 Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award for Operation Significant Impact (OSI), a collaborative effort between the county, the City of Lancaster, and other agencies to reduce substance abuse, drug overdoses and crime.

“Using three grants, Operation Significant Impact consists of a pre-arrest diversion program where law enforcement officers divert criminal charges and place individuals with substance abuse disorders in a harm reduction program,” Tomes said. “A team of first responders visits individuals who recently experienced a drug overdose and works with the community to identify hot spots of crime and drug use.

“Operation Significant Impact is ongoing, and has realized successes,” he added. “A cost savings analysis indicates that the cost to the county of a criminal drug case is \$5,200 while the cost of the diversion program is \$1,480, which saves more than \$3,700 per case.”

This is the 24<sup>th</sup> year the Association has awarded the Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award. The award, named in honor of the late Barrett S. Lawrimore who served as SCAC president in 2004, highlights the critical need for regional partnerships, strategies and solutions. Competition for this award is open to two or more political subdivisions (counties or county partnerships formed with city, town, district or regional government organizations) that work together to complete an innovative project.

## **JUDGING SCAC’S 2021 AWARDS COMPETITION**

Judging this year’s competition were: Katherine O’Neill, Chief Economic Development Officer, OneSpartanburg, Inc.; Milton Pope, Principal, Parker Poe Consulting; and William E. Tomes, Fellow, Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities, College of Charleston.

## **ALL COUNTIES RECOGNIZED FOR PARTICIPATING IN SCAC’S 2021 AWARDS COMPETITION**

SCAC recognized all counties that participated in the 2021 Awards Competition, and Tomes briefly described all of the entries submitted when he announced this year’s winners.

Descriptions of those entries, except those already provided for the award winners, follow:

### **J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Entries**

#### **Berkeley County**

The Berkeley County Sheriff’s Office set up community substations and a Citizens Advisory Board to provide the public with a unique and effective platform to express their concerns and amplify their voices. The Board helps solve the perceived disconnect between the public and police. The presence of substations and proactive efforts of the Board reduces crime, ensures safer communities, and affirms that county deputies value residents.

#### **Lancaster County**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments quickly implemented protocols to limit exposure; however, protection after a death occurs was not widely considered. Immediately after a death, infectious diseases can continue to be released through bodily fluids and air escaping the body. The Lancaster County Coroner’s Office developed a protection protocol after death, which rendered the spread of infection non-existent.

#### **Pickens County**

Pickens County experienced multiple severe weather events between February and November 2020 that resulted in the need for numerous culvert replacements, including one that would restrict access to main roads for 22 households in a residential neighborhood. This became an opportunity for Pickens County’s Public Works Division to develop a template that would serve the county and its residents for many years to come, allowing for more resourceful, fiscally responsible, and eco-friendly operations in Pickens County.

**Richland County**

Richland County faced the challenges of a global pandemic with determination and resolve. Using \$1 million in financial support from the COVID-19 Pandemic Relief grant, the county assisted over 50 local small businesses and more than 15 local non-profits. The COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Grant is unequivocally an example of Richland County’s strive for excellence.

**Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Award Regional Cooperation Award**

**Berkeley County**

Berkeley County took exceptional measures to safely and effectively execute an essential and popular annual event—the Delinquent Tax Sale. Through unique partnerships among county departments and a creative collaboration between local government and local business, Berkeley County was the only county in the state to offer both online and in-person options for the annual tax sale. The tax sale set a surprisingly strong and successful standard for all future sales.

**Pickens County, Pickens County School District, and Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative**

The Pickens County Broadband Initiative is designed to alleviate the challenges a lack of internet service creates for the community, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using facilities as anchor institutions, the county will develop an enhanced cyber loop through areas with the highest concentration of underserved households, creating the backbone of fiber implementation in these communities.

**BERKELEY, LEXINGTON, PICKENS AND RICHLAND COUNTIES RECOGNIZED FOR PARTICIPATING IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RESILIENCY SHOWCASE**

SCAC recognized Berkeley, Lexington, Pickens and Richland counties that presented entries in the COVID-19 Response and Resiliency Showcase, and Tomes described each of the entries:

**Berkeley County**

Berkeley County adjusted and prioritized safety over all else in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also ensuring that county business continued. By providing additional online services, the county made processes more efficient. The county worked with surrounding agencies to promote testing sites and vaccine distributions. County leaders and staff developed plans that continue to make employee and citizen safety a top priority while ensuring the continuation of normal operations.

**Lexington County**

In February 2020, lifestyles were altered, and daily activities became more complicated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The County of Lexington made strategic decisions to ensure that critical services for the citizens of Lexington County continued, while also maintaining safety for its employees and citizens. Steps were taken to respond to, cope with, and mitigate the impact of the virus.

**Pickens County**

Pickens County was able to enhance safety protocols to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission without interrupting essential government services. The county sought innovative ways to ensure that public services were not interrupted during the pandemic. A Temporary Information Pod was deployed, which served as a drive-thru and makeshift front desk where citizens were assisted from their vehicles by knowledgeable staff.

**Richland County**

Using every resource at its disposal, Richland County worked tirelessly to educate and protect its residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The county exhibited strong financial policies and practices, continued its economic development efforts, and collaborated with governmental entities, community-based organizations, and local businesses to be "Richland Strong."

SCAC, chartered on June 22, 1967, is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization whose membership includes all 46 counties in South Carolina. Governed by a 29-member board of directors elected each year by county officials at the Association's annual conference, SCAC is the only organization representing county governments in the state.

The Association provides a number of services, programs, and activities to county governments and their officials, including: research and technical assistance; education and training; legal assistance; policy development, advocacy, and legislative information; publications, including a magazine and newsletter; meetings and conferences; public information, including an annual directory and website; and financial services, including the S.C. Counties Workers' Compensation Trust and S.C. Counties Property & Liability Trust.

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