



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

**Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Stafford County's 350th Anniversary Celebration

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Stafford County, VA

Jurisdiction population(s): 138,230

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: January Year: 2014

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Anthony Romanello

Title: County Administrator Jurisdiction: Stafford County

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Anthony Romanello

Title: County Administrator Jurisdiction: Stafford County, VA

Street address: 1300 Courthouse Road

City: Stafford State/Province: VA

Zip/Postal Code: 22554 Country: US

Telephone: (540) 658-8612 Fax: (540) 720-4572

E-mail: aromanello@staffordcountyva.gov

## **ICMA Award Nomination 2015**

### **Stafford County's 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

#### **The Challenge**

How do you throw a year-long celebration to honor the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of one of America's most historic counties with limited resources and use the event to build community in a diverse, suburban community with a transient, growing population? By creating an innovative partnership with private industry, civic groups and government, Stafford County, VA, commemorated its semiseptcentennial and forged community bonds that will last well into its next 350 years.

Stafford is the 25<sup>th</sup> oldest county in the United States. From Pocahontas and Captain John Smith, to George Washington's fabled "chopping of the cherry tree," to Civil War encampments and hospitals, many of the milestones in Stafford's history parallel those of the history of our nation. Residents of Stafford have made many contributions to the precepts and concepts of liberty, religious tolerance, free enterprise, freedom, art, racial equality and social justice. Today, Stafford is a dynamic county with a diverse base of businesses, world-class schools, an airport, a community college, a university, a vibrant tourism scene and an educated and accomplished populace. Stafford's motto is "Progress since 1664" and progress is always a goal for the future. For Stafford's Board of Supervisors, honoring the County's past, present and future was as important as throwing an unforgettable celebration with lasting impacts.

#### **Implementation**

##### **1. Planning – How to Start**

Planning for the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration started in October of 2011. The Board of Supervisors appointed 11 community leaders to a "**Blue Ribbon Planning Committee**" to oversee the celebration. A diverse group of leaders who represented a wide range of groups and interests, the committee came up with a system of coordination between partners, sponsors, and

community groups. The committee itself formed four subcommittees to oversee 350th efforts. The Finance, Public Relations and Marketing, Education and Legacy, and Events subcommittees touched on virtually every aspect of the celebration.

The Blue Ribbon Planning Committee hired a part-time **program director**. She became the “ringmaster” for all the sponsors, partners and citizen groups. Multiple outreach efforts by organizers generated a list of 400 ideas, which were narrowed to 36 ideas by late fall 2012. A prioritization process was used to compare and develop consensus. The final projects were used to create a budget and fundraising goals. These plans deliberately involved placing events and programming in diverse communities in every voting district of the County, to truly make it a County-wide celebration. An issue of the *Stafford* magazine, a quarterly County publication, was dedicated to details about the events of the 350<sup>th</sup> and mailed out in November of 2013.

A renowned local resident, Lt. Gen. Ron Christmas, USMC-Ret., founder of the National Museum of the Marine Corps, was asked to assemble and spearhead a **fundraising team** of civic and business leaders in the community. They pursued fundraising with a three-pronged approach: 1) direct contact; 2) a letter writing campaign to organizations; and 3) a brick program, which enabled individuals to both support the 350<sup>th</sup> and memorialize their support. Starting in June of 2013, the fundraising team raised funds through 2014 and surpassed the fundraising goal of \$1 million by raising \$1,003,040.50. A mix of public and private sponsorship, approximately two-thirds of the funding came from private sponsorship from businesses and individuals.

“**Sponsors**”, or donors, were crucial to the 350<sup>th</sup> effort. Without their financial and in-kind support, the effort would have been very limited in scope. Regional and local businesses stepped up to contribute. There were multiple levels of sponsorship “opportunities,” from being a “legacy partner” and donating \$250,000 or more, to being a “sponsor” for \$250. A local media

conglomerate, the Free Lance-Star Companies, earned “Founder” status by agreeing to donate \$100,000 of in-kind media support. A Stafford company, Atlantic Builders, became a “Benefactor” by donating \$25,000 towards the building of Celebration Stage, a permanent amphitheater.

**350<sup>th</sup> “Partners,”** community groups as varied as the Rotary, Lions Club, the local school system, historic societies, the NAACP, the library and an artists’ guild, were invaluable. Their many members were an incredible asset in staffing and coordinating the five signature events: Celebrate Stafford 350; the Founders Day Parade, History Square and the Fine Arts Festival; the grand opening of Celebration Stage; the Wings and Wheels Festival; and the Trail to Freedom and Rowser African-American History Wall unveiling. Some groups partnered for signature events: Stafford Rotary partnered on the Founders Day parade; and the NAACP partnered on the “Trail to Freedom Tour.”

A diverse group of **County staff** was selected from multiple Stafford County departments to support the 350th. This group met once a week starting in early 2013. Their teamwork strengthened ties across department lines, a wonderful bonus for Stafford County. Staff outside this core group helped as needed, for a total of more than 225 staff members pitching in to help. Using County staff as a resource was also a big money saver and part of the County’s contribution.

## **2. The Celebration Itself**

The 350<sup>th</sup> kicked off with “Celebrate Stafford 350,” an outdoor event on January 4, 2014. More than 4,300 people enjoyed a temporary ice skating rink, music, a historical pageant, a history tent and vendors, despite temperatures in the teens. Founders Day featured a parade and arts festival over two days, with an attendance of 12,816. The grand opening of “Celebration Stage,”

Stafford's first outdoor amphitheater, was enjoyed by 1,244. Fall's "Wings and Wheels Festival" at the local airport, brought more than 5,935 people out to enjoy an air show, car show and celebration of military heritage. In November, the County focused on African-American heritage with a bus tour of "Trail to Freedom" sites, with 1,001 participants, and an unveiling of an African-American history mural, attended by 256, at the former home of the Stafford Training School. Now called the Rowser Building, the historic African-American school is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The December premier of a movie of Stafford's history in honor of the 350th was screened by 362 folks. Additionally, there were many programs administered by local organizations. The George Washington Foundation administered the "Tell Your Stafford Story," an opportunity for individuals to record, via video or audio, their experiences in Stafford to be stored for future use. Educational grants were given to teachers to integrate the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary into their curriculum. One art teacher used a grant for her students to create tree ornaments and paintings of historic sites in Stafford. The library created a geocaching trail, loaned out "History Adventure Packs" and hosted a History Lecture Series. More examples of programming can be found at [www.stafford350.com](http://www.stafford350.com).

### **Tangible Results**

One of the most obvious ways to measure results is to examine numbers. More than 30,000 citizens and visitors attended the five signature events and the movie debut. Thousands of other people participated in the many different types of programming throughout the year. The 350<sup>th</sup> e-newsletter had a circulation of 400 readers. The Facebook page ended up with 1,170 followers and the Twitter account had 252 followers. The website had 178,997 total page views from the time it was established until the end of 2014. And the fundraising goal of \$1,000,000 was surpassed by the end of 2014.

Perhaps the most beneficial tangible result of Stafford's 350<sup>th</sup> celebration was the building of new partnerships and the strengthening of existing relationships between County government, businesses and the community, and among County departments as well. With limited funds, everyone became creative in securing and utilizing resources. Signs and banners were used and reused. Publications designed as mementos for the public became vehicles for thanking partners and sponsors. Scheduling the Founders Day Parade at the same time as the annual Fine Arts Festival in the schools ensured attendance at both events and doubled resources. Bolstering relationships with the community and learning to innovate with available resources are lasting benefits to the mission of Stafford County government.

### **Lessons Learned During Planning, Implementation and Analysis**

In the beginning, Stafford County and 350<sup>th</sup> organizers tried to accomplish too much. By narrowing the focus and concentrating on the five signature events, Stafford was able to hold an extremely successful 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. Even so, each event was on a scale of the type that most communities might host once a year. Human capital was the single most important resource and the teamwork among all the stakeholders involved – Blue Ribbon Planning Committee, sponsors, partners, volunteers and County staff – was a cornerstone to the success of the celebration. Hundreds of people were involved in making sure each of the signature events went off without a hitch.

In preparing for this celebration and showcasing all the diverse people in the community, perhaps Stafford learned its biggest lesson of all. Organizers thought they knew everything about the County when they started planning. By the end of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and its events and interaction with the community, they saw an amazing new side of Stafford and what makes it so special. The “party of the century” won't soon be forgotten.