

## Public Safety Program Excellence Award in Memory of William H. Hansell, Sr., and Alice Hansell

POPULATIONS OF GREATER THAN 50,000



MELVIN L. WALDROP

*ICMA's Public Safety Program Excellence Award, established in memory of Philadelphia firefighter William H. Hansell, Sr., and his wife Alice, is awarded to a local government and its chief administrator for the most creative public safety program. This year, ICMA presents two Public Safety Program Excellence Awards in the greater-than-50,000 population category. The first goes to the city of Macon, Georgia, and City Administrator Melvin L. Waldrop for its innovative door-to-door smoke detector program.*

The dramatic and often tragic results of a fire are felt throughout an entire community. The loss and devastation are represented not only in dollars, but also in the eyes of those who have lost a loved one. Too often, a nonfunctioning smoke detector or the complete lack of a smoke detector is to blame for

death or injury. The elderly, children, and low-income families are among the populations most at risk.

In just three years, several deaths and numerous injuries occurred due to fire in the city of Macon and in Macon and Bibb counties in Georgia. The Macon-Bibb Fire Department vowed to do whatever it could to reduce these numbers. Recognizing the role that working smoke detectors play in saving lives, the department wanted to ensure that every person in the community had access to working smoke detectors and knew how to use them.

In the fall of 2000, the Macon-Bibb Fire Department implemented the "Wake Up Call" campaign. Firefighters from all 18 fire stations systematically went door to door in the neighborhoods of their districts, visiting residents to share fire prevention literature, and offering to install the smoke detectors. In addition, residents were given the option of having the fire department paint their house number on their house, making it easier to see for emergency personnel in times of emergency.

In today's tight financial climate, including free smoke detectors in the fire department's operating budget would be hard to defend, even given the past injuries and deaths. After purchasing uniforms, supplies, and half-a-million-dollar fire trucks, there isn't much money left for fire departments to purchase anything else. However, through extensive fund-raising efforts, from a "Peanuts for Smoke Detectors" sale to the Miss Fire Safety Pageant for sixth-grade students, the program raises about \$8,000 annually. The program is also the beneficiary of a number of private donations and grants from a variety of local and national organizations. As a result, the depart-

ment has been able to pay for smoke detectors without having to divert any money from its own budget.

But the main element that led to the program's success is the commitment of sworn and non-sworn personnel at all levels of the fire department, and the support of the mayor of Macon and the city administrator. Since the program began in late 2000, firefighters have shared fire safety information with more 20,000 residences, installed more than 2,000 smoke detectors, and painted house numbers on more than 100 residences. Although the most important figure—the number of lives saved—will never be known, city and county officials and firefighters know that such benefits can never be quantified. ♣

Firefighters from the Macon-Bibb Fire Department stress the importance of fire safety.

