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Union County Receives Three National Achievement Awards

MONROE, N.C. (Sept. 15, 2021) – The National Association of Counties, also known as NACo, has awarded Union County Government three Achievement Awards for innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents. Three County departments received Achievement Awards in varying categories:

- Achievement Award in the category of Libraries for the **Library's Small Business Support Program**
- Achievement Award in the category of Health for the **Behavioral Health Collaborative**
- Achievement Award in the category of Civic Education and Public Information for the development and accomplishments of **the Public Communications team**

"The extraordinary work of these three teams has resulted in additional support, resources and valuable information for the residents we serve," said Deputy County Manager Michelle Lancaster. "I'm glad these groups are earning national recognition for their commitment to innovative programs and serving our community."

The Library's Small Business Support Program helped local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic by leveraging grant funding to develop a customer passport program and provide business owners with resources to bolster their online presence. "The library is not only a place to borrow books, but has evolved to a full community support system. This program is a perfect example of the various services and programs we are proud to offer," said Nina Chaffin, Director of the Union County Library.

The Behavioral Health Collaborative is a partnership between Union County Department of Social Services and Union County Public Schools to place social workers and behavioral health therapists in schools across the district. The collaborative served more than 5,000 students and their families in the first year. "We have seen this program save lives and improve student

Public Communications

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outcomes by intervening earlier and connecting families with critical resources," said Christina Neal, who leads the Behavioral Health Collaborative.

Lastly, the Public Communications team is a result of a commitment by the Management Team to consolidate disparate communications from across departments, broaden the County's communications footprint to reach more residents and have a more strategic approach to communications. Since forming in 2019, the Public Communications team has embraced technology and analytics to increase efficiency and concentrate efforts on areas of greatest impact. The effort has resulted in greater salience to the public and has been crucial to sharing information throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, county programs and services from various departments, key updates to major investments, and much more. "Communication is woven in everything we do as a County and is vital to engage with the residents we serve," said Kathryn Brown, Director of Public Communications.

NACo selects recipients in 18 different categories that reflect the vast, comprehensive services counties provide. Started in 1970, NACo's annual Achievement Awards program is designed to recognize county government innovations.

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