



Civic Federation News

January 2010

Serving the Public Interest since 1925

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County Civic Federation
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January Program: Senior-Friendly Communities By Carole Ann Barth, Chair, Parks & Recreation Committee

We've all heard the proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child." Well, it's equally true that in these tough economic times, it takes a community's united efforts to help senior citizens stay in their homes. Our January Program will feature three different neighborhood approaches to building a senior-friendly community.

Capitol Hill Village (Washington, DC) is a neighborhood nonprofit which provides a mix of volunteer and contracted services to help elderly residents "age in place." Whether it's help with yard work or a ride to the Doctor's office, the needed support is available right in the neighborhood. Like a Co-op, members pool their funds to hire a staff and to contract for services at reduced rates. Also like a co-op, members of all ages volunteer time to reduce the need for hired help.

Burning Tree Village (Bethesda MD) charges no fees. Services are provided through a mix of volunteers and partnerships with County agencies and other nonprofits. Montgomery County also provided some start-up funding.

Bannockburn Civic Association (Bethesda MD) has organized a "Neighbors-Assisting-Neighbors" program. This is a volunteer program similar to Burning Tree Village, but services are not limited to the elderly. For example, the program will also serve families that need babysitting help or a resident of any age coping with a serious illness.

We have invited representatives from all three programs. It will be interesting to compare the different approaches and learn both what's working and what are the barriers to success. This is also a timely program given the County's aging suburban population and most peoples' preference for staying in their homes.

Don't miss this program. Even if your community isn't ready to create a full-blown 501(c)3 nonprofit aging-in-place organization, our panel's experience in coordinating existing services will be valuable. This is information that could change your future, or that of someone you love.

Mark Your Calendar Now
for the
Montgomery County Civic Federation's
2010 ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET
Friday, May 14, 2010
6:00 to 9:30 p.m.
Conference Center
at the
Universities at Shady Grove

President's Message: Treasure Our Libraries By Peggy Dennis, President

The Montgomery County Public Library (MCPL) system is one of the crown jewels among our many and varied public services, and one most likely to take a substantial hit in the coming budget cycle. This may well be because most resident's think of their local library simply as a place to pick up the occasional book or leaf through a newspaper or magazine. But our libraries and librarians are so much more!

I am probably one of the library systems most dedicated users, and I cannot begin to calculate how many thousands of dollars our family has saved by the judicious use of this resource over the years. When we decided to design our dream home, we did not look for an architect. I went to the library. I found books on timber frame construction and the renaissance of the "post and beam" home led by Ted Benson in New England. We read, studied photos of fabulous homes, started drawing and working on floor plans. I went

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through stacks of back copies of Country Living, House Beautiful, Architecture Digest and Home and Garden. I made Xerox copies of the doors, windows, fireplaces and rooms that struck my fancy, and took copious notes on the local distributors and retailers carrying building products I wanted to look at. For instance, when PEPCO's energy conservation consultant suggested that we look into water source heat pumps, I found books on this relatively obscure (at the time) HVAC technology at the library. When it came time to build our home, I turned to the library for books on how to be your own general contractor. I read; I made copies of timelines and checklists; I did it myself! All this work, with help from my local libraries must have saved us between 50 and 100 thousand dollars.

When our son started showing signs of difficulty concentrating on his work at school and at home, the librarian at Potomac found the book Why Johnny Can't Concentrate for me. This was my introduction to Attention Deficit Disorder and all the theories, therapies and medications used to control this vexing condition. When we ultimately pulled Alex out of the school system and decided to try homeschooling for a year, the library had an entire shelf of materials just for homeschoolers: "How To" books and magazines, and information on groups and associations for homeschoolers in Maryland and Montgomery County. What might otherwise have been a lonely and daunting undertaking quickly became an exciting and wonderful adventure for all of us.

When Alex's writing tutor asked me to find audio tapes that he could listen to then take notes from, the librarian introduced me to the racks of audio lectures produced by The Teaching Company. These tapes (and now CDs, DVDs and downloads) cover the best university courses given by the best professors in America. Soon Alex, a 10th grader, was utterly absorbed in the lectures of Professor Thomas Childers of the University of Pennsylvania on "World War II: A Military & Social History". He went on to minor in history at college.

Books on tape. Books on CDs. The library has thousands of them! They make long car trips go by in a flash. Apart from the Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers mysteries which we love to listen to, my own top recommendation for a surprise treat is T Rex and the Crater of Doom by Dr. Walter Alvarez, Professor of Geology at UC Berkeley. This is a serious geology book but written for the lay reader. Dr. Alvarez portrays not only his career, but the work done collaboratively by scientists from a variety of fields and a number of countries over the span of more than twenty years to unravel the mystery of why the Cretaceous period ended

suddenly with the mass extinction of dinosaurs and many other animals. Fascinating!

When my husband and I were planning a trip to Tanzania, we wanted to learn a little Swahili before setting off. We discovered the MCPL's system for foreign language learning. The Library has a contract with Mango Tree, a computer language learning system similar to "The Rosetta Stone". The library will set you up with your own direct access so that you can learn whatever foreign language you choose from the comfort of your home computer. It's free.

Apart from using the internet to access the library's catalogue to locate and put holds on books, I had never before really explored their website. What a revelation! There's a whole world of programs and services even I was unaware of. Check it out! <http://bit.ly/mclibrary>. You'll be amazed, and I bet you'll come away believing that this is one area where your taxes are being spent in a magnificently productive manner.

Whatever Happened to... By President Peggy Dennis

At our November meeting we passed a resolution opposing the proposed closing of Monocacy Elementary School. This proposal has been withdrawn. Good!

In the November newsletter, I wrote about the proposal to fundamentally change the use of Rockwood Manor Park. Many residents of Woodrock, the adjacent subdivision, vehemently opposed the "unsolicited Public/Private Partnership" scheme to turn over the entire 44 acres and its collection of buildings to the owner of Potomac Paddlesports. Rockwood would have then become The National Outdoor Center. This proposal has also been withdrawn.

MCPS News and Budget Review Paula Bienenfeld, Education Committee Chair

Now that school has started, it is time to begin the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Budget review. According to MCPS publication Operating Budget and Personnel Complement FY 2010, the MCPS budget for FY2010 is \$2,200,577,000. Yes, that is over \$2.2 BILLION! Each year the public school system takes up over half of our county's budget. According to the Budget FY10 document, our public school system has 137,727 students and we are spending \$14,294 per pupil.

Schedule of Hearings	
Sign-up begins for BOE Operating Budget Hearings	December 23, 2009
BOE Operating Budget Hearings	January 13, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.
	January 20, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.
BOE Operating Budget Worksessions	January 27, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.
	January 28, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.
BOE Operating Budget Action/Adoption	February 9, 2010
BOE FY 2011 Operating Budget Request presented to County Executive and County Council	March 1, 2010
County Executive issues Operating Budget	March 15, 2010
County Council holds Operating Budget Hearings	April 2010
Council approves Operating Budget	May 20, 2010
Final Board of Education Action to approve FY 2011 Operating Budget	June 8, 2010

Are we getting our money's worth? Are our children and grandchildren getting an education similar to that at other schools in the county? Are they getting an education similar to the education in the best schools in our county? Those high schools which, until this year, have made the US News and World Report's list of best schools in the nation were: Walt Whitman, Winston Churchill, and Walter Johnson high schools. Does every child receive the same education as the children that attend those schools? If not, now is the time to speak up. Each child in our county public school system should receive the same care and attention as another child. Are their bathrooms clean and functioning? Is there toilet paper? In some schools children receive two textbooks so they can keep one at home and don't have to carry a heavy load back and forth to school. Is that

true at every school? Is there a helpful, caring school psychologist? Is there a music program? How about foreign languages? Some schools teach French, or Chinese, or both. Does each child have access to that same education? Does every child have enough textbooks? Last year MCPS asked the council to surplus over \$6M in textbook budget dollars. That means that MCPS asked the County Council, an elected body, for permission to NOT spend \$6M that had been designated for textbooks. The Council approved this request. In these times of difficult budget decisions I would ask that every one of you take a look at the MCPS proposed budget as it undergoes citizen and government review.

Take some time to study the budget then make your voice heard. Remember, programs like meals for senior citizens are being cut to fund this school system. The County Council, which is responsible for the county budget and how our money is spent, needs to hear from you. Please don't pay for a budget you haven't read and don't understand. For example, the total 'Field Trip Fund' for FY10 was estimated at \$2,314,716. Did your child go on a field trip this year? If not, where did that money go?

During the course of the next few months there will be public hearings and time for citizen input (see the schedule at left). Make sure your voice is heard. YOU are the citizen. The government works for YOU. Every penny MCPS spends comes from YOU. Educate yourself on the proposed MCPS budget. The budget will be available for free at MCPS headquarters, and on the web at the MCPS website. Here is the link to the FY10 budget: <http://bit.ly/mcschbudg2011>. Paper copies are also available at the MCPS headquarters, at 850 Hungerford Drive, Rockville. Bound copies will also be available in all branches of the library system by about mid-January.

And, please remember, if you have concerns about your school, please do not hesitate to contact me at paula_bienenfeld@yahoo.com, or by telephone.

County Executive Tackles Reform of Forest Conservation Law by Ginny Barnes, Environmental Committee Co-Chair

On December 15th, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) formally presented its long awaited proposal to the Forest Conservation Advisory Committee (FCAC) for revising the Forest Conservation Law (FCL) and providing protection for trees on smaller lots. The previous two sets of

amendments to the FCL never made it out of the County Council's T&E Committee. Time ran out to act on the amendments so they were effectively killed. At this time last year, the County Executive, seeing that the Council was unable or unwilling to take on the complexities presented by competing interests, announced that he wished to try a different approach. It has taken nearly a year, and the DEP proposal is still a concept that will require discussion and ground proofing to determine if and how it can work. A Subcommittee of the FCAC has been formed to look at the proposal in more detail.

Essentially, the proposal relies on GIS (geographic information system) overlays; one to determine existing forest and another to show tree canopy on any given property. Once these are established, the square footage of tree and forest loss is calculated and mitigation fees levied accordingly. Intended as a "pay to play" approach, it does not prohibit cutting but makes it so expensive to remove trees and forest that it acts as a monetary incentive to configure development plans so they foster retention over cutting and replanting. The triggers for applicability are any one of the following, regardless of lot size: the issuance of a sediment and erosion control permit; any primary new dwelling (including redevelopment on lots in older neighborhoods); any new primary commercial building or the removal or fill of 100 cubic yards of soil. Any monies collected for choosing to cut would be used to plant trees and forest. The County would contract out all planting and maintenance. It would no longer be done by property owners or developers.

This is a radical new approach. It raises a lot of questions and will need a lot of details ironed out. What, for instance, prevents a property owner from cutting all the trees on site before ever applying for one of the trigger permits listed above? The proposal is not strictly a tree ordinance as it only applies to "development". As such, is it enough? Do we value older tree specimens over smaller trees in calculating loss? What constitutes a reasonable fee structure for tree and forest destruction? Our tree and forest resources are increasingly valuable as part of an effective climate change strategy. We've lost 4 years of effort already. Montgomery County needs to move on significant reform very soon.

Please Spread the Word

We encourage our members to forward the electronic version of this newsletter to others in their association, friends and neighbors. Information is like manure – it's better if you spread it around, far and wide!

Keep well, have a wonderful and safe holiday season, and thank you for your activism and interest.

Planning Department Explores Streamlining Development Review by Jim Humphrey, Planning and Land Use Chairman

The Montgomery County Planning Department is holding public input meetings focused on a possible streamlining of the development review process. Staff is soliciting comments on whether or not to shorten and simplify the procedures for developers seeking review and approval of proposed construction projects, and how best to accomplish that if it is done.

At present, for each development project in the county the Planning Department staff reviews separately a Project Plan, when needed, a Preliminary Plan, and a Site Plan if required. Staff then submits their recommendations to the Planning Board, which holds a hearing on each plan at which the developer, neighbors of the project, and members of the public may testify. Under a streamlined process, the staff would review a Preliminary and Site Plan at the same time, along with a Project Plan if required, and present their findings on all plans to the Board at a single hearing.

While a stated goal of the possible streamlining is to provide continued transparency and public involvement, the new process would reduce the number of opportunities that members of the public currently have to weigh in on a proposed development project. And it would reduce the amount of time one has to testify before the Board on two plans, or possibly three, to a combined total number (yet to be determined) of minutes to address all of the plans for a project.

The first public meeting on streamlining the development review process was held on December 10. In order to hear from as many people as possible, the Department will hold additional public input sessions on January 6 and 20 at 7:30 p.m., in the auditorium at Park & Planning headquarters located at 8787 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring.

You can access a copy of a PowerPoint presentation describing the current development review process, and the possible streamlining, on the Planning Department website at: <http://bit.ly/mcdrprocess>.

Volunteers Needed for Committees By Peggy Dennis, President

The Civic Federation is seeking persons to fill the Secretary's position, two "member at-large" positions, and chairs for the Public Finance, Public Safety and Transportation Committees. Please consider these

opportunities to serve your community and contact me at 202-744-3019 or hotyakker@comcast.net if you can help.

We are also asking for members to serve on two short term but very important committees. Unlike our standing committees which do the lion's share of our work, year in and year out, these committees meet for just a few months during the winter and spring, often by email and phone.

The Nominating Committee will be chaired by Past President Cary Lamari and will put together the slate of nominees for elective office: the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. You can contact Cary at 301-924-2746 or CaryLamari@yahoo.com.

The Awards Committee will be chaired by Jim Humphrey. It will ask for nominations and propose recipients for the awards to be presented in May: the Star Cup, the Gazette Award and the Sentinel Award. Contact Jim at 301-652-6359 or theelms518@earthlink.net.

We can't do the great job we want to do without your active participation, so please volunteer to help with one or another of these important committees.

Volunteer Opportunities

By Laura Angela Brown, AmeriCorps VISTA, Montgomery County Volunteer Center

Do you enjoy connecting others with their passions and interests? Have a flair for working with different kinds of people? Is serving others important to you? If so, consider working with the Montgomery County Volunteer Center!

We are recruiting volunteer leaders to work with the Pro-Bono Consultant Program, as well as volunteers to join our A-Team of Advisors and Ambassadors. Applicants for these positions must have excellent verbal communication skills and be comfortable with using a computer to communicate through email and Google Groups as well as search a database. Expertise in volunteer management, human resources, or career counseling is particularly welcome.

- The Pro-Bono Consultant Program matches highly skilled volunteers with local nonprofits seeking professional expertise for specific projects. We are looking for individuals to conduct interviews with volunteers and nonprofits, develop and implement outreach and recruitment strategies, and conduct trainings. A

time commitment of at least ten hours per week is required.

- The A-Team is composed of Ambassadors who educate the community at public and private events about the Volunteer Center's work, and Advisors who help people in our Rockville office find meaningful volunteer opportunities. We are looking for new A-Team members, especially helpful would be bilingual English/Spanish speakers. A-Team members must be able to schedule a minimum of three hours a week in the office, routinely attend monthly meetings, and be available to occasionally staff outreach events on an as needed basis.

For more information and to request an application contact Laura Brown at 240-777-2638 or laura.brown@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Montgomery County Civic Federation Meeting Dates

January 2010 - July 2010

Regular Monthly Meetings: Second Monday of the month

January 11, February 8, March 8, April 12, May 10, June 14

Executive Committee Meetings: Third Wednesday of the month

January 20, February 17, March 17, April 21, May 19, June 23, July 21

Annual Awards Banquet:

Friday, May 14

Forum for Civic Activists to Speak Out

The Montgomery County Sentinel is the only privately owned newspaper in the county. It is celebrating its 155th year. And it is the only newspaper which routinely provides a forum called the "Federation Corner" in which civic activists may speak out and discuss issues of concern in detail. MCCF members are encouraged to both subscribe to The Montgomery County Sentinel and to write about issues of concern. Articles or opinion pieces should be between 800 and 1,000 words long. Please submit articles for the "Federation Corner" as an attachment to an email to Jim Humphrey at theelms518@earthlink.net.

Minutes of the December 14 Meeting by Sandy Vogelgesang, Acting Recording Secretary

Call to Order: President Peggy Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:46 P.M. After introductions of all attendees, the agenda for the meeting was approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Bill Schrader summarized the latest report which indicates a current balance of \$11,005.99.

Minutes of the November 9 meeting were approved as amended by language indicating that "Chuck Lapinski presided over the remainder of the program presentation" on the Maryland Public Service Commission.

Program on Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL): Peggy introduced the main speakers, Ms. Parker Hamilton, Director of Libraries, and Ann Dorough, President of the Board of Friends of the Library. Ms. Hamilton outlined the core services of MCPL from answering questions (over 4700 every day) to checking out books (11.8 million in FY 09), and providing programs for everyone from pre-schoolers to seniors. She highlighted the technological innovations and the large network of partnerships including, inter alia, the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system, the Family Services Agency and the Recreation Department that enable MCPL, with its 21 branch libraries, to rank in the country's top ten. Although MCPL is doing its best to respond to the needs and requests of its 740,000 registered card-holders in a population of approximately one million, it has been hit hard by what amounts to the largest proportionate budget hit in the County government.

Ms. Dorough explained how the Friends of the Library, a 503c3 non-profit organization founded in 1982, helps support MCPL. It is the umbrella organization for the sixteen chapters affiliated with specific branch libraries. Raising most of its money from its bookstores, the Friends of the Library provide special programs for all age groups, such as summer reading, and help fund staff training. Those interested in becoming a Friend can find more information and join online at www.folmc.org. A lively Q. & A. session followed the presentations.

Committee Reports:

Nominations and Awards. Peggy asked for volunteers to chair and serve. Cary Lamari offered to serve as chair of the Nominations Committee and Jim Humphrey offered to chair the Awards Committee.

Cary and Jim would each welcome volunteers to join them on their respective committees.

Transportation: Peggy reported that the County Council recently approved the Dedicated But Unmaintained (AKA "Orphaned") Roads Policy.

Planning and Land Use (PLU): Chair Jim Humphrey reported on the status of Master Plans under review. Gaithersburg West is on hold until early 2010. The County Council is working on White Flint. No date has been set for Council review of Kensington. Park and Planning is working on Takoma Park-Langley. Park and Planning is also working on Wheaton, which will be addressed by the new County Council in 2010. Jim noted that there is no scheduled Council committee review for the re-write of the Housing Chapter of the General Plan. (Jim has since learned that the Council PHED Committee has scheduled a work session on the Housing Chapter rewrite for January 21.) Finally, Jim reported that Park and Planning held a first session on streamlining the development review process and that it will hold next sessions on January 6 and January 20. MCCF members are encouraged to register concerns about a one-stop review process that will limit the amount of time citizens and civic associations have to comment on plans.

Education. Chair Paula Bienenfeld reported on the latest MCPS budget which reflects an increase to \$2.6 billion, or about half the County's budget). She also noted the initiative by students at Piney Branch Elementary School to get rid of styrofoam trays in order to help the environment and the fact that no MCPS school made the latest US News & World Report "top 100 list" of outstanding U.S. high schools.

Legislation/Committee for Montgomery (CFM). Chair Dan Wilhelm reported on the annual CFM breakfast where most speakers focused on the large State and County budget shortfalls.

Adjournment: Since there was no new or old business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM.

Minutes of the December 16 Executive Committee Meeting by Virginia Sheard, Acting Recording Secretary

Attendance: Peggy Dennis, Dan Wilhelm, Bill Schrader, Ginny Barnes, Paula Bienenfeld, Chuck Lapinski, and Virginia Sheard.

The meeting at William Schrader's home was called to order at 7:55 p.m. by President Peggy Dennis. The

meeting agenda and minutes of the November 18 ExComm meeting were both approved by unanimous vote. Mr. Schrader then submitted the Treasurer's Report.

Programs

January 2010 will focus on services and programs for the Elderly planned by Carol Ann Barth and Lee Shipman

February 2010 will have two presentations: one on the new 311 phone system for non-emergency government services and communications presented by Tom Street, Assistant to the County Executive and a review of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) proposed projects and budget coordinated by Chuck Lapinski. Fiscal year 2011 proposed CIP budget should be available from the County Executive's Office in late January. Possible guest will be Yale Weisman, new president of the Maryland Taxpayers League speaking on public financing programs.

March 2010 will be a presentation and discussion of the County Operating Budget by Chuck Lapinski. Paula Bienfeld, chair of Education Committee may provide brief report on the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) budget.

Committee Reports

Membership (Dan Wilhelm) - 10 organizations have not yet renewed membership. Final reminders will be sent. 2 membership renewals have recently been received, others may be pending, outreach effort will continue. Discussion included lack of interest by outlying communities in Civic Fed membership, possibly because most are focused on concerns in their immediate area rather than county-wide issues.

Web Site (Peggy Dennis) is being reviewed and updated with the Adobe Dreamweaver program.

Environment Committee:

Forest Conservation: Co-Chair Ginny Barnes is also a member of the Forest Conservation Advisory Committee (FCAC). She reported on a new Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) proposal to revise the Forest Conservation law and add tree protection for developing lots, regardless of size. The proposal was presented at a special FCAC meeting on December 15. Currently the FCL is triggered only on lots 40,000 sq. ft. and larger. This proposal intends to provide incentives for retaining forest and tree canopy over cutting and replacing trees.

Environmental Site Design: The State of Md. passed legislation in the last session that requires the use of Environmental Site Design (ESD). Development sites will be required to assess and protect environmental features that contribute to managing storm water and

protect natural features such as trees and wetlands. The Stormwater Partners broad coalition is working with the County to ensure that new regulations will integrate the requirements of the new law.

Public Utilities: Mr. Lapinski reported on the impending 'financial rape by the county and the state'. The projected state budget deficit is about 2 billion and the county's projected budget deficit is over \$600 million. Capital gains, income tax, and property tax revenues are down significantly and will continue to be down next year.

Maryland is said to have the reputation of being 'anti-business' compared to Virginia, ranking 47 out of the 50 states in business friendly policies. State needs to review union policies and permitting processes for small businesses, etc. Erratic enforcement of existing laws is also a deterring factor. Small and medium size businesses are most affected. Inspectors are said to enforce rules and regulations unevenly coming down heavily on small businesses and 'gypsy' businesses which are largely unregulated and unsupervised. We might have a program in the spring around the question "Is Maryland Unfriendly to Business?"

Meeting adjourned at 9:25pm

Federation Meeting

Monday, January 11, 2010
7:45 1st Floor Auditorium
County Council Office Building.
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD

Agenda:

7:45 Call to Order
7:46 Introductions & Announcements
7:56 Approval of Meeting Agenda
7:57 Approval of Minutes from Dec. 14 meeting
7:58 Treasurer's Report
8:00 Program on Elderly Aging in Place
9:15 Committee Reports
9:40 Old Business
9:50 New Business
10:00 Adjournment

The **Montgomery County Civic Federation** is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization. It was founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. Its monthly Federation meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Monday of each month September through June at 7:45 p.m. in the First Floor Auditorium, County Office Building, Rockville, MD.

The **Civic Federation News** is published monthly. It is mailed to Delegates; associate members; news media, and local, state, and federal officials. Permission is granted to reprint any article provided proper credit is given to the "**Civic Federation News of the Montgomery County Civic Federation.**"

Submit contributions for the next issue by: **Midnight, Saturday, January 23.** Prepare submission as an MS Word, Word Perfect or text-only document, **attach** it to an e-mail, and send it to:

hotyakker@comcast.net

Please send all **address corrections** to Dan Wilhelm, 904 Cannon Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904, 301-384-2698, or djwilhelm@verizon.net.

NEXT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, January 20, 2010, 7:45 p.m.

At the home of Dan Wilhelm

904 Cannon Road

Colesville, MD 20904



**Official Publication of the
Montgomery County Civic Federation**

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First Class Mail

Address service requested