



In the News

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NECAC Lincoln County Service Coordinator Janice Allan is interviewed live by KSDK TV Chief Meteorologist Scott Connell as part of the Hardee's Rise & Shine promotion Feb. 10. The fund-raiser is sponsored by Heat Up St. Louis in 14 Missouri and Illinois counties. NECAC receives funding from the annual event to help low-income, elderly and disabled utility customers in Lincoln, Pike, St. Charles and Warren counties. Pictured in the background is Michael McMillan, President of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis. Check out more photos on Page 2.



Biscuits for a Buck

NECAC participates in utility assistance fund-raiser



St. Charles County Service Coordinator Carrie Dina awaits customers at the Hardee's in Lake St. Louis.



President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Page receives a donation from Cathy Taylor at Louisiana.



Al Himmelsbach puts \$1 in the collection can held by Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon at Bowling Green.



Intake Assistant Karen Ford waves to motorists as they line up in the drive-through at Lake St. Louis.



Housing Assistance Counselor Anita Lemke gets a donation from a driver in Troy.



Warren County Service Coordinator Desiree Antoniou greets customers.

At a time of great need, it was one for the record books and NECAC played a part in it.

The 23rd annual Hardee's Rise & Shine promotion Feb. 10 sponsored by Heat Up St. Louis raised an all-time high of \$900,000 — topping last year's total by 29 percent.

NECAC staff members were among more than 600 volunteers who collected money at Hardee's restaurants in 14 Missouri and Illinois counties. Customers could also buy \$1 sausage or egg biscuits — a price that has not gone up in the entire lifespan of the promotion. Corporate contributions also were part of the effort.

All proceeds will benefit utility assistance programs for the low-income, elderly and disabled.

"It's all about neighbors



Photo by Liz Fuget

Poage Ford of Bowling Green was among corporate donors to the Hardee's Rise & Shine Heat Up St. Louis fund-raiser Feb. 10. Pictured, from left, are Poage salesman Curtis Thomas and Ryan Kent, NECAC Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon and Poage General Manager Mark Stotler.

helping neighbors," said Heat Up founder Gentry Trotter. "This is one of the most exciting things we can do in the community."

Heat Up said that demand for utility assistance had increased by 48 percent since last year. Inflation and

skyrocketing prices were to blame.

"The Hardee's Rise & Shine event is crucial to assist our low-income neighbors with their winter heating bills," said NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Page. "Not

only did Hardee's customers get a great bargain, but all of those dollars will help people who need it with their bills. It's a win-win situation, and we greatly appreciate everyone's participation."

One of the people spotlighted during the event was NECAC Lincoln County Service Coordinator Janice Allan, who was interviewed by KSDK Channel 5 Chief Meteorologist Scott Connell.

Allan called the event "a great fund-raiser" that "raises the community's awareness" of the difficulties faced by many households.

Trotter, who has worked in the media and public relations regionally and nationally, founded Heat Up in 2000. To find out about giving, log on to www.heatupstlouis.org.

NECAC awarded funding for apartment complex upgrades

NECAC and Rural Housing Developers LLC have announced funding for major renovations at two Crawford County apartment complexes.

The Missouri Housing Development Commission has awarded \$5 million in federal and state tax credits and National Housing Trust Fund dollars to upgrade the Cedar Crest Apartments in Bourbon and the Wildwood Apartments in Steelville.

Thirty-two units at the two complexes will be renovated. The work will include new heating and air conditioning units, flooring, windows and appliances. It should start by summer and take about a year.

"This funding award will allow these two properties to become even better places to live," said NECAC Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts. "NECAC is

thrilled to partner with Rural Housing Developers for such an important project. These renovations will help make the two complexes more vibrant for years to come."

"Rural Housing Developers is honored to partner with NECAC to provide newly-remodeled units in Bourbon and Steelville," said Rural Housing Developers Chief Operating Officer Christina Ott. "Rural communities such as Bourbon and Steelville are at risk of losing affordable housing units. It is our mission at Rural Housing Developers to ensure that affordable housing units are available to seniors and families in smaller communities in Missouri."

The two complexes were built in the 1980s. NECAC acquired them about 20 years ago from USDA Rural Development.



Employee Spotlight: Blickhan defines dedication

Lisa Blickhan started as NECAC Shelby County Service Coordinator before she graduated college.

That was 37 years ago, and she still loves the job.

"Nothing is the same everyday," the 57-year-old Shelby County native said. "It's never dull. That's what keeps your blood flowing."

Blickhan came aboard Feb. 3, 1986, months before getting a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Culver-Stockton College in Canton. She thought about pursuing a master's degree, but changed her mind. The first day on the job, she trained with the late Monroe County Coordinator Wilma Crook.

"It was wild," Blickhan recalls. "She said 'You've got to make a choice between your job and school.' I said 'Well, I guess it's going to be school.'"

But it wasn't. "I liked what I was doing," Blickhan said. "And I stayed."

The Shelby County Service Center was in Shelbina at the time. It later moved to

a building in Shelbyville before settling in the current space at 204 E. Third. "We had to run up a ramp (at the old building) to go to the bathroom," Blickhan said.

Things have changed over the years, but Blickhan can count on one constant — assisting those in need.

"We are helping families achieve their goals," she said. "We just don't put Band Aids on. We find solutions to help them overcome their barriers."

Funding limits and a lack of resources are frustrating, but Blickhan says the irritations are put aside when clients succeed — especially because it can be a two-way street.

"We can learn things from them," she said. "They can make a dollar stretch and do things we may not have thought of."

Blickhan and her husband, Kent, have a 25-year-old son, Jonathon. She hopes to stay at NECAC at least five more years before retiring, which she admits will be tough. Her advice to other NECAC employees is typical Blickhan atti-



File photo by Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Shelby County Service Coordinator
Lisa Blickhan oversees distribution for the
Celebration of Sharing Christmas program.

tude.

"You're there to help that client become successful," she said. "Don't give up."

Community Needs Survey seeks input about programs



Kayla Wasson

NECAC is offering people in its 12 counties a chance to recommend changes to programs or new services for the disadvantaged.

The agency is conducting a Community Needs Survey through June 30.

"We are trying to collect information from the counties to identify the needs, which includes any barriers and gaps in services," said NECAC County Services Programs Director Kayla Wasson. "We

are trying to identify how we can better serve our communities through additional programs."

NECAC conducts the survey every three years as part of its requirements to receive federal and state funding for social service, community health and public housing programs. Past questionnaires led to creation of food pantries at NECAC service centers, a diaper distribution program and an employment readiness service.

"It is a big part of the full picture of what NECAC offers,"

Wasson said. "We encourage people to participate."

The survey features 36 questions covering income, employment, education, housing, transportation and other needs. It can be filled out electronically at NECAC Service Centers, on the NECAC Facebook site or the SurveyMonkey link at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CNA2023>.

In the spring, NECAC will put together focus groups made up of residents, businesses and organizational representatives to study the possibilities.

"We'll have more qualitative questions and seek their opinions on issues that are happening in their communities," Wasson said.

The 2020 survey was conducted just as the COVID pandemic was breaking out. Wasson said that while some concerns from that time remain, others will be different.

"There's an economic angle now because of inflation," she said. "Prices have gone through the roof, so it's a different situation than the last survey. I'm sure we will get a lot of answers and suggestions that result from the way things are now."



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Chairman of
the Board



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Return Service Requested

Smith completes training



Amanda Smith

NECAC Homeownership Programs Administrative Assistant Amanda Smith of Louisiana has successfully completed USDA 502 Loan Packaging Certification Training.

The weeklong, 20-hour program is a USDA requirement and was administered online. The certification included instruction about calculating eligibility, acceptable deductions and property requirements.

“This certification will enable me to help more customers with the loan process,” Smith said. “We’re here to help more people achieve their goal of becoming homeowners, and the 502 program is a great way to do that.”

Smith joined NECAC last year. She works with clients, helps with the grant process and works on special housing-related projects. The 502 loans are used mostly by income-qualifying people to buy homes in rural areas. Families must meet mortgage payments, taxes and insurance. The interest rate is set by the lender. No down payment is typically required.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Red Kettle success

NECAC, the Salvation Army and community partners wrapped up December with successful Red Kettle campaigns in Lincoln, Macon, Pike and Randolph counties. Pictured is Charles Sidwell placing a donation in the bucket at the Bowling Green Walmart. Ringing the bells are NECAC Office Manager Christina Ray, left, and her daughter, Morgan Windmiller.

Promotions announced

Brittany Kidd of Bowling Green has taken the role of Weatherization Department Procedural Director. She will oversee administrative management of the program. Kidd joined NECAC on March 6, 2018. **Eric Benn** of Bowling Green is the Weatherization Department Technical Director. He will take care of crew oversight and work assignments. Benn began at NECAC on March 18, 2010. **Danielle Sanders** of Curryville has been named an Emergency Services Coordinator. She will help oversee crisis programs NECAC administers. Sanders joined the agency on Oct. 5, 2020.



Brittany Kidd



Eric Benn



Danielle Sanders