



From the Director's Desk

Grateful

I've recently written letters to both of my children and read them aloud expressing how grateful I am to each for who they are and what they've brought to my life. The exercise was more impactful than I expected. Even if you have appreciation for those around you, it is likely that you express that appreciation less often and not as clearly as you think. I don't self-identify as one who withholds praise, but I do if I am not mindful about it. We have become an organization that is more active and more systematic about feedback thanks to some consulting from Angelo Fernandez who is now at Eagle County. Even being systematic is not enough. I am coming around to understand that a practice of expressing gratefulness is important in one's work life too.



I am grateful for the people in the NWCCOG organization, for their spirit and energy. I knew before I arrived at NWCCOG that it was a purpose-driven entity with a startling array of siloed programs and roles. In starting my job 4.5 years ago we surveyed members and it was soon obvious that though well respected, even our most fervent supporters didn't know much about what we did, who did it or who we impacted. We were an organization with many untold stories and un-sung public servants. We are driving hard to change that.

We have just launched our third member survey since I started, and I am hoping that it reveals that we are a little better understood for what we do than before. If it arrives in your in-box, please know that your response is important to shaping our future. In the coming weeks we will be launching a new website that is geared to tell those stories more clearly. Forgive us in advance for our excitement about that. The new website will expedite those who know exactly what they want to find it. For those who want to browse, it will be much more engaging. The site highlights the people who do the work, highlights who we serve and will tell a bit more about what we do in less-bureaucratic lingo. I'm eager for you to see it and maybe rediscover NWCCOG.

When I started, I feared that I may not be cut out for a quiet organization that does a lot of background support services the way it always has. I like to innovate. I like to envision. I like to grow. I'm very excited to learn from our members, and to share that back out in hopes that it we can each learn a bit from each other. What I have discovered is that the people at NWCCOG were ready for that as well. I'll end with a few shout outs.

I'm grateful to Elaina, our office manager who has embraced and brought excellence to everything she has taken on including managing the benefits side of HR including introducing us to an on-line HR platform. She brings the same energy to our safety and wellness programs. I couldn't do what I do without her.

I'm grateful to Becky, our fiscal assistant, who is geared to take on a lot more responsibility soon after brining an eye to efficiency to every system she touches. She has brought us a new app for managing credit card receipts and bank statements, among other innovations. I'm grateful to Mike, our fiscal officer who has quietly, competently managed our very complex financials for decades.

I'm grateful to Doug and Nate S in our Energy office who have added three new services that leverage the team's weatherization skills while diversifying the programs' revenue structure. They have been recognized for excellence by their partners at the state, and are sought after by the institutional partners they've cultivated to take on new projects that add tremendous value to the customers they serve.

I'm grateful for Erin and her team at Vintage, who rebranded, and then adapted just about everything they do with their local partners to continue to serve older adults through the COVID crisis. She continues to build a top-drawer team of individuals. Erin has recently been recognized nationally for her role and is becoming a sought-after leader in her field.

I'm grateful for Nate in our broadband program who was recently recognized by the Governor's office. Developing Project THOR with him has been a public-service career highlight for me. Hardly a week goes by without hearing some way he has found to add value to one of our many local partners broadband efforts.

I'm grateful for Anita and Scott at the Northwest Loan Fund who bring a passion for those business owners they fund, who stepped up in the fall to screen, process and distribute Energize Colorado Gap funds across the region when it wasn't apparent, they had any additional capacity available from their usual work.

I'm grateful for David in our Elevator Inspection Program who transformed our program from the State doghouse into a pillar of excellence. He and the team he manages are sought after to train others.

To Torie and her team at QQ, to Rachel in EDD who has stepped up to manage hundreds of dollars in programs during COVID recovery, to Kim at NWAHEMR and Addy at NWHCC who have supported their constituents who've been at the front line of this past year's crisis. I'm grateful to Judi who has supported a doubling of our Newsletter output this past year with the COVID series, and Jodi in GIS who puts us on the map, literally.

I'm grateful to the many clients who share back their stories to keep our teams energized. I'm grateful for the local jurisdictions we serve and the NWCCOG Council that supports us and allows us the latitude to innovate and adapt.

If this sounds a bit like a good-bye, it shouldn't. I'm just really grateful, and I feel so much better for getting that off my chest. Try it.

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Mountain Migration – Survey

For Immediate Release
March 1, 2021

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Mountain Migration –

Are COVID Impacts on Housing and Services Here to Stay?

Have you noticed that the usual seasonal pattern of visitor in-and-outflow to our mountain communities seems to have changed during COVID? Does it seem that more people are here all the time? If so, you are not alone. There is much anecdotal experience leading to this conclusion. But to what extent is the migration “really happening” and are changes here to stay or will things shift when the pandemic eases?

Many leaders in local government and local business are asking similar questions. Is it time to re-assess the pace of certain capital projects? Is this short-term adaptation something we should invest further in? Should we accelerate our plans to address systemic issues that we already know exist in our community related to the affordability gap, such the lack of workforce or affordable housing? The national news has many reports of an outflow of residents from the cities and migration to high quality of life areas like ours. Gathering input from our residents – new and existing, full-time and part-time – is the goal of a new project to better understand if these shifts are here to stay and, if so, how we can best meet community needs.

A regional research project entitled “Mountain Migration” funded by the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) and Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) with support from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs is geared to help local leaders better understand these trends. Research has begun, and survey input is being gathered beginning in March so that the results can be published by the end of May 2021.

Please help us reach the long-time residents, new residents and part-time residents that we need to hear from by publishing the survey link www.polco.us/nwccog-survey so that they can answer some of these questions and help our communities plan for the COVID era.

NWCCOG and CAST are entities with overlapping membership across the Colorado mountain resort region. The survey is being conducted in six Colorado mountain counties-Eagle, Grand, Pitkin, Routt, San Miguel and Summit. Results should have widespread applicability in other high amenity communities throughout the mountain west. A Work Group with community leaders from each county is ensuring shared and unique concerns are addressed. The project is funded primarily through member dues, with a matching by grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The survey is confidential, but the report will be public and widely distributed.

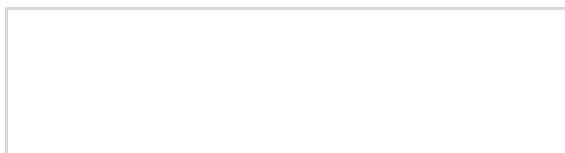
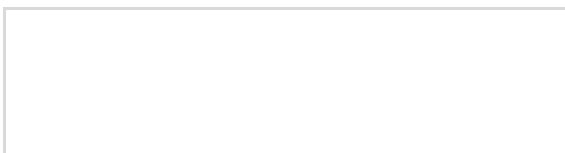
It's not always about Energy -- it' often about saving lives.

The auditor is the first person from the Energy Program to enter our client's home. Health and Safety checks are the first thing they perform. This is a broad category of tests and observations. Is there a mold or moisture problem visible? Are there indoor air quality issues? Are there suspected asbestos containing materials present? If the home was built before 1978 they determine if there is potential for disturbing potential Lead containing materials. The auditor wears an ambient carbon monoxide detector on their person the whole time they are making their initial assessment of the home and checks it regularly throughout the audit. The auditor does a complete test of each combustion appliance in the home. For a gas fired water heater they check that the venting is intact and the flue cap is undamaged. They test that it is drafting properly so that the flue gasses safely exit the home. The carbon monoxide production is tested and recorded. The gas line is tested for leaks. The home's heating system undergoes the same tests. The heat exchanger is also inspected. If there is a gas fired cooking appliance the CO is measured and the oven is also checked for gas leaks. If any of the tests or observations indicate a problem the auditor will address the issue. If they are capable of fixing or remediating the hazard they will. If it is an issue that they cannot immediately resolve they will shut down the appliance, give client education, and create a plan to quickly provide a solution.

In the month of February our crew was busy. Auditors found cracked heat exchangers on 2 furnaces. A home in Grand County had multiple gas leaks and her cook stove was producing potentially lethal amounts of carbon monoxide (CO) directly into the home. Long-term exposure to CO levels above 35 ppm can cause physical damage. Her oven was producing 1,200 ppm. This was a single mom with a small baby. Underneath a mobile home in Eagle County the crew found a propane leak. Propane is heavier than air and tends to settle and pool instead of being dispersed. This had the potential to build up until it found an ignition source. The flue vent on a furnace in Clear Creek was completely disconnected. The elderly woman who lived there reported that she had severe flu symptoms almost every winter. She probably misdiagnosed the cause of her symptoms. It was more likely that she closed up her home every winter and she was being poisoned by carbon monoxide.

Almost half of the manufactured homes that we enter have health and safety issues. Almost 20 percent of site built homes have some kind of health and safety issue. The staff is trained and capable of identifying and fixing or protecting our clients from these issues. The oven in Grand has had the carbon monoxide mitigated. The 2 furnaces have been replaced with new high efficiency furnaces. The propane leak in Eagle has been fixed and the flue in Clear Creek has been replaced.

The attention to detail the staff exhibits every day save our clients on their energy bills, make their homes more comfortable and most importantly make sure their homes are safe. More to be grateful for.





The crack in this furnace caused a serious safety hazard before it was found, and the furnace replaced.



This flue not aligning at the top allowed dangerous fumes into the house and likely resulted in flu-like symptoms for the occupant until it was properly repaired.



The cracking in the back of this furnace was close to causing a fire in the mobile home which could have been disastrous. See next photo.



It's easy to see where the crack in the back of the previous photo's furnace, lined up to this wall in the mobile home -- it had very nearly burned through - and our auditor found the problem just in time.

Certified Age Friendly Employer designation awarded to NWCCOG

In February, NWCCOG joined an impressive list of companies that have earned the Certified Age Friendly Employer™ designation, including the IRS, New York Life Insurance Company, REI, Starbucks, Walgreens, and many more.

According to the Age Friendly Foundation,



“the Certified Age Friendly Employer (CAFE) program is an initiative to identify those organizations that are committed to being the best places to work for employees at or above age 50, and to assist age 50+ job seekers by identifying age friendly employers. Demographic shifts resulting from increases in life expectancy mean that traditional retirement is not likely to exist in the future. Instead, we will see longer employment, increasingly phased retirement, part-time or reduced hours, and other modified employment options that are conducive to continued participation in the workforce. Employers that address the needs of older workers will benefit not only themselves, but the

economy as a whole.

Certified employers are those that value employees based solely on their proficiency, qualifications and contribution, and also maintain policies, practices and programs supporting people age 50 and older. Further, Certified Age Friendly Employers want age 50+ candidates to know they are valued for their knowledge, maturity, reliability and productivity as well as their commitment to provide meaningful employment, development opportunities and competitive pay and benefits for those employees.”

Ageism, arguably one of the last socially acceptable “-isms”, reared its ugly head again at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (remember “Boomer Remover”?). Ageism played a role in the allocation of medical resources as hospitals and nursing homes ran rampant with the disease and elected officials on both sides of the aisle espoused ageist language and policies. Ageism is real and particularly acute in the workplace “for women and minoritized racial groups, as incidents of age discrimination in the workplace often intersect with gender and racial discrimination.” (Suh, J.Y. Age discrimination in the workplace hurts us all. *Nat Aging* 1, 147 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43587-020-00023-1>).

A [2018 survey by AARP](#) found that:

- Nearly 1 in 4 workers 45 or older faced ageist comments at work.
- About 3 in 5 older workers had seen or experienced age discrimination at work.
- 76% of older workers viewed age bias as a hurdle to finding a new job.

The same article concludes that “while there certainly are companies discriminating against older workers deliberately, most organizations are simply unaware of their age biases because they’re so ingrained in our culture.” That’s part of the reason why the NWCCOG pursued the Age Friendly Employer designation to both be an example of an anti-ageist organization within our community and to actively update our policies to include age within our diversity and inclusion strategy.

If you’re interested in the CAFE employer certification, the process typically takes two weeks. To apply, please contact the Research & Certification Professionals at support@agefriendlyfoundation.org.

Next Council Meeting

Thursday, March 25, 2021 Full Council Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-Site Location TBD

Time: 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of final 2020 financials; program overviews.