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December 1, 2025

The CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference begins on Wednesday and runs through Friday! Registration is still open! See the article below for more information, we hope to see you there!

Association and Member News | State and Federal News |
Education and Grants | County News |
Job Postings

Statehouse Report and Counties Current Archive | Dates to Remember

ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

Back to Top

Lake County Commissioner Richard J. Regovich passes away

The following is a release from the Lake County Board of County Commissioners

The Lake County Board of Commissioners share with great sadness the passing of Commission President Richard J. Regovich on November 26, 2025. Commissioner Regovich was a dedicated public servant whose commitment to the people of Lake County spanned 11 years of distinguished service.

Commissioner Regovich's priorities included economic and workforce development, and infrastructure improvements. He played an instrumental role in advancing initiatives that strengthened the county's quality of life. His leadership, integrity, and tireless work on behalf of residents will leave a lasting impact on all of Lake County.

Commissioner Regovich began serving the public as Ward 1 Councilman in the City of Willowick in October 2014, becoming Mayor in 2016. He was sworn in as Lake County's 81st Commissioner on November 29, 2022.

"Rich was more than our Commissioner, he was a dear friend who loved Lake County, and cheerfully gave his last days on earth in service to his local community. A week and a day before his passing, Rich sat right next to me at the dais and ran the Commissioners meeting as our President. His last words to our County Administrator were "build the jail under budget." My friend Rich gave his life to Lake County and his life made a big difference," said Commissioner John Plecnik.

In addition to public service, Commissioner Regovich was known for his love of family, friends and sense of humor. His strong desire to enhance the lives of senior citizens and those in need was evident when he founded the Willowick Hearts and Hammers program.

"All of Lake County has suffered a tremendous loss, none greater than that felt by the Regovich family. They have my deepest sympathies and prayers. It was an honor to serve with Rich, and I am better for it," said Commissioner Morris Beverage III.

Flags at all county facilities will be flown at half-staff in Commissioner Regovich's honor. Information regarding public memorial services or opportunities for community remembrance will be shared as it becomes available.

The Board asks the community to keep the Commissioner's family in their thoughts during this difficult time.

DeWine-Tressel Administration awards jail funding

Last week, the DeWine-Tressel Administration awarded $24 million to counties for jail construction and renovation.

- Clark County received $4 million to assist the county in acquiring land and starting design work for a new jail.
- Stark County received $7.5 million to support the county's ongoing jail construction project.
- Montgomery County received $13 million to support the county's ongoing jail renovation projects.

The awards are the latest in the renewed state-county partnership on funding county jail projects. More than $230 million in state funds has been distributed to counties to assist with new jail construction and renovations of existing jail facilities. Many of these projects have been to enhance the security of facilities and expand capacity to reduce overcrowding and to provide mental health and substance addiction treatment.

The state is holding $5 million in reserve to fund urgent security and safety projects that may arise through the rest of the state's biennium.

The General Assembly will likely consider a capital budget in 2026 and CCAO will continue to advocate for additional funding to help other counties across the state with jail projects.

CEBCO Announces Leadership Change and Interim Appointment

The County Employee Benefits Consortium of Ohio (CEBCO) announced today that its Managing Director for Health and Wellness, Kevin Hinkle, will step down from the role on December 5. CEBCO extends its appreciation for his service and contributions to supporting the health and well-being of county employees across Ohio.

Former Managing Director Mike Kindell, who retired earlier this year after more than a decade of impactful leadership, will return to serve as Interim Managing Director while CEBCO conducts a search for the next permanent director.

CEBCO remains committed to ensuring a smooth transition and continuing its strong work on behalf of Ohio's counties.

CEBCO is also fielding applications for a new Benefits Specialist position.

The position will be required to respond to inquiries regarding CEBCO programs, assist member counties for benefits service, gather and collate data from member counties, and prepare reports for actuarial consultants.

The position will also involve travel by participating in member county health fairs and conducting regional meeting for brokers and prospective clients.

Applicants for the position must have a Life, Health Annuity Sales License, and 3-5 years experience in health insurance industry is preferred.

The full job description and application portal is available on Indeed. Applications will be accepted through December 12.

THIS WEEK! 2025 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference registration still open!

Click Here to Register!

Registration Fees:

Full Conference $625

One Day Only $480

Spouse or Guest Flat Fee for Full Conference or One Day Only $300

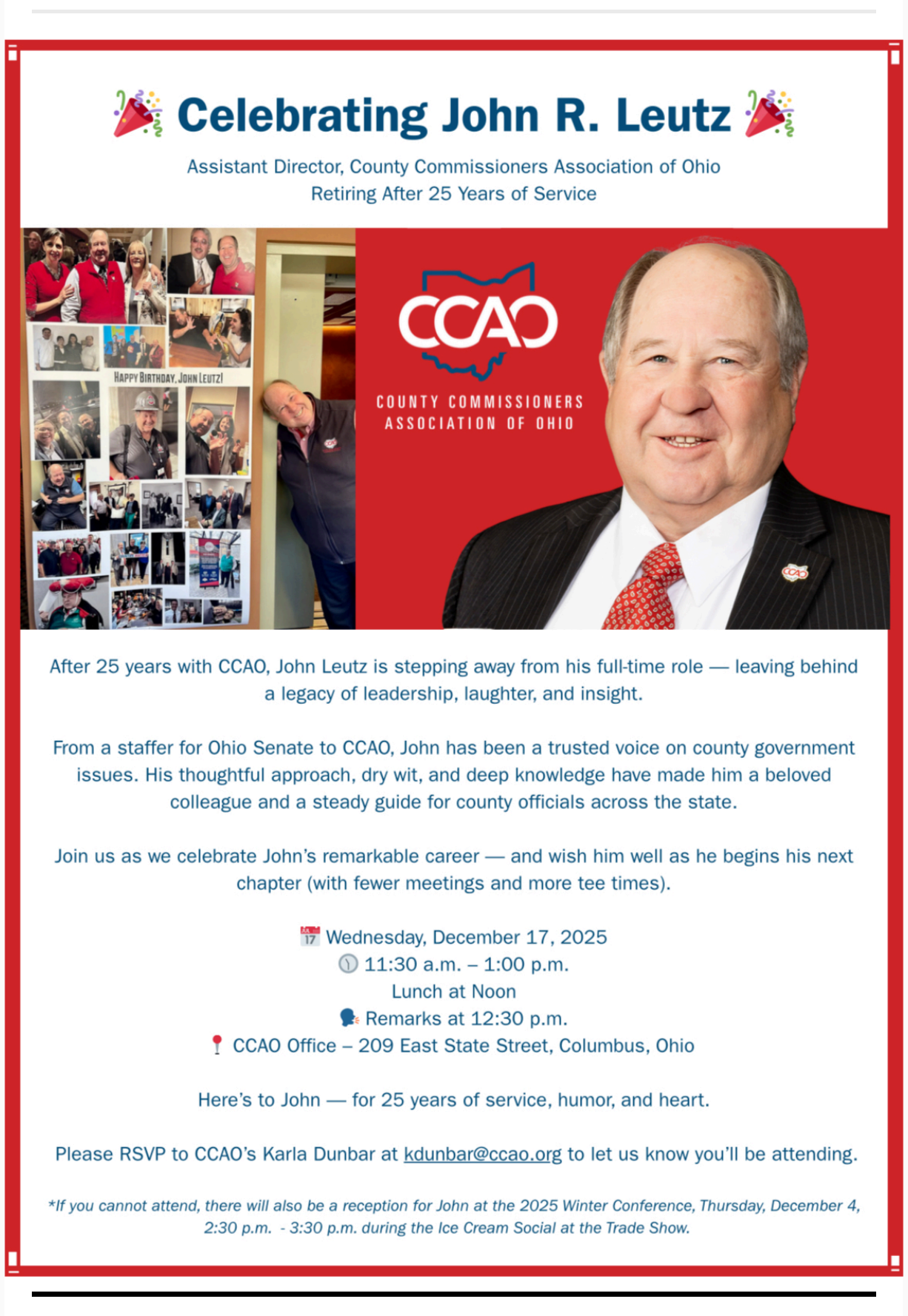
Affiliate Groups Have Option to Choose Meetings Only + Coffee Breaks $175

Sessions at this year's conference will include best practices for energy and economic development, information on data centers, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and changes to the children services landscape.

There will also be five sessions focusing on different aspects of property taxation and the potential ramifications of if property taxation is eliminated. These include hearing from proponents of a potential constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxation, learning how levy-funded agencies manage their budgets, and a legislative update on property tax reforms.

The final agenda can be viewed here.

There will also be a reception to congratulate CCAO Assistant Director John Leutz on his retirement and thank him for his 25 years of service to the Association. CCAO will also be hosting a separate event to honor John (see flier below).



🎉 Celebrating John R. Leutz 🎉

Assistant Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio
Retiring After 25 Years of Service

CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOHN LEUTZ!

After 25 years with CCAO, John Leutz is stepping away from his full-time role — leaving behind a legacy of leadership, laughter, and insight.

From a staffer for Ohio Senate to CCAO, John has been a trusted voice on county government issues. His thoughtful approach, dry wit, and deep knowledge have made him a beloved colleague and a steady guide for county officials across the state.

Join us as we celebrate John's remarkable career — and wish him well as he begins his next chapter (with fewer meetings and more tee times).

📅 Wednesday, December 17, 2025
🕦 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Lunch at Noon
🗣 Remarks at 12:30 p.m.
📍 CCAO Office – 209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio

Here's to John — for 25 years of service, humor, and heart.

Please RSVP to CCAO's Karla Dunbar at kdunbar@ccao.org to let us know you'll be attending.

**If you cannot attend, there will also be a reception for John at the 2025 Winter Conference, Thursday, December 4, 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. during the Ice Cream Social at the Trade Show.*

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

RUMPKE

STATE AND FEDERAL

Back to Top

Governor DeWine signs bill with provisions, vetoes that affect counties

On Tuesday, Governor DeWine signed House Bill 434, a budget clean up bill that included some provisions that affect counties. The Governor also issued one line item veto.

Provisions that pertain to counties include:

- Clarifying that the local option ("piggyback") homestead exemption has the same eligibility as the state homestead exemption. The budget language that created the piggyback would have required additional means testing.
- Allows fees collected by courts for special projects to be used for training or education that occur within the continental United States, not just within the state.
- Expands eligibility for the Drones for First Responders Program to allow county first responders to apply.

Governor DeWine vetoed a provision that would allow law enforcement to charge victims of crimes a fee to reclaim private vehicles that were seized as evidence in an ongoing criminal investigation. In his veto message, the governor cited that the provision imposes an additional burden on victims of crimes.

In addition to the above county-related provisions, the bill includes funding for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to establish a system to determine error rates in the SNAP program and to reduce those rates. The funding is solely for the state department, but CCAO and the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association continue to advocate for funding to county agencies to help reduce local error rates.

If you have questions about any of the provisions of House Bill 434, please contact policy@ccao.org.

REVIEW: Auditor of State bulletin on payment re-direct schemes

Last year, Auditor of State (AOS) Keith Faber released a bulletin to provide guidance to governments regarding payment re-direct schemes and business email compromise schemes. As cyber scams continue to increase in frequency, counties need to be vigilant to safeguard taxpayer funds.

NOTE: Failure to follow the guidance may result in an AOS finding if a loss occurs , and the employee is considered liable as a result of negligence or performing duties without reasonable care.

The bulletin gives four real examples of successful or attempted scams on local governments:

- **Spear phishing:** More than $700,000 was stolen from a recreation district because of a payment re-direct scheme. Emails were received by the district, from an email account slightly different than the original vendor email account, which contained erroneous payment instructions to the "vendor." The district followed the instructions and transferred $713,094 to the fraudulent account, without independently verifying the identity of the requester or the new banking account.
- **Spear phishing:** A city fell victim to a "spear phishing" scheme resulting in theft of nearly $219,000 when the finance department received emails from someone pretending to be an existing vendor. The email persuaded the employee to change the bank account routing information the city had for the vendor. Vendor verification protocols were not followed, which could have prevented this fraud.
- **Investment account change request:** A college fell victim to a spear phishing attack that included convincing branding and logos of a financial institution causing the college to change account information on a $6 million account. Realizing a day later due to Daily Cash Monitoring protection that the money was not in its account the college was able to recover the funds through the activation of the Financial Fraud Kill Chain.
- **Fraudulent check and Electronic Funds Transfer/ACH scheme:** A city reported three instances of fraudulent checks submitted for payment to their bank and two instances of attempted ACH fraud. Though none of these instances were successful and the city did not experience a loss, this is another example of attempted fraud.

The rest of the bulletin discusses ways to identify and prevent these scams.

Counties are tasked with safeguarding millions in taxpayer dollars, so it is vital that county fiscal staff familiarize themselves with the bulletin.

If you have any questions regarding the information in the bulletin, send an email to the AOS Special Investigations Unit at PaymentSchemeQuestions@ohioauditor.gov.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

Back to Top

OEPA Environmental Education grants accepting applications

Ohio EPA is accepting grant applications to the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF) for projects educating preschool through university students and teachers, the general public, and the regulated community. OEEF offers mini-grants between $500 and $5,000 and general grants of up to $50,000. Many entities are eligible to apply, including counties and soil and water conservation districts.

Funding priorities for the 2026 state fiscal year include:

- Encouraging Ohio students to explore environmental-related careers;
- Encouraging habitat and ecological restoration efforts;
- Reducing emissions to improve air quality, including through energy conservation and alternative energy sources;
- Encourage planning and emergency preparedness for extreme environmental events (environmental releases, extreme weather, etc.);
- Using innovative practices to improve water quality, reduce nutrient loading, and prevent harmful algal blooms;
- Reducing lead exposure in drinking water;
- Reducing exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as "forever chemicals;" and
- Connections between the environment and human health, including but not limited to, air quality and respiratory conditions, tick prevalence and Lyme disease, scrap tires, and mosquitoes.

Prospective applicants must submit an electronic Letter of Intent to apply within OEEF's grant management system in the eBusiness Center no later than January 9 to start the application process. Completed applications must be submitted no later than January 16. Prospective applicants are encouraged to speak with an OEEF Coordinator about project ideas before applying.

Grants for ISPs to complete extension for set-back homes

BroadbandOhio is accepting applications for the Ohio Broadband Line Extension program, which is intended to offset costs associated with line extension construction projects for running fiber to unserved homes that are set back from main roads. The grants are available for projects beyond the first 200 feet and are capped at $9.50 per foot.

The grants will be accepted and rewarded on a rolling basis until the $3 million in funding is exhausted. Projects must be operational by December 31, 2026.

The grants are only available to internet service providers, but CCAO encourages counties to help raise awareness of the program with ISPs in their areas.

More information can be found on the program's webpage.

Lake Erie Protection Grants open for applications

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission is now accepting applications for the 2026 Lake Erie Protection Fund (LEPF) grants. LEPF grants help finance research and on-the-ground projects aimed at protecting, preserving, and restoring Lake Erie and its watershed, fulfilling the intent of the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan. This includes reducing harmful algal blooms, controlling nutrient runoff, restoring and improving wetlands, and more.

Grants are limited to $50,000 per award and are open to local governments, among others. Grants in prior rounds have been used to support assessments to convert a former golf course to wetlands, design plans for nature-based solutions to shoreline erosion, and other shoreline protection projects.

The deadline to apply is January 9, 2026.

COUNTY NEWS

Back to Top

Each week Counties Current highlights the happenings in our counties in the words of their local media. One story from each of the CCAO's five districts is highlighted, and on occasion other stories may be highlighted as well.

Northwest District

County passes $208M budget with $12M shortfall, funds public-safety increases

Toledo Blade, November 18, 2025

Lucas County commissioners approved a $208.8 million budget that comes $12.1 million short of revenue expectations and funds salary increases for the sheriff's department among other modest increases for several departments.

Commissioners said the budget passed Tuesday comes amid uncertainty surrounding the impacts of federal cuts to social safety-net programs and rising costs of health care and utilities.

"The cost of doing business is rising for all of us ... and on top of that we need to prepare for the impact the Big Beautiful Bill and the future property tax reform would have on our ability to deliver core, essential services to our county," Commissioner Lisa Sobecki said.

According to budget documents, insurance costs will increase by $1.2 million and utility costs will increase by nearly $1 million.

The county passed its 2025 budget expecting a $10 million shortfall, but is projected to end the year with a $3 million surplus.

The projected $12.1 million shortfall would be funded by a one-time transfer from general fund reserves, which currently have a balance of $45.44 million. By policy, the county maintains a reserve of at least 15 percent of the total budget amount in the reserves, which leaves up to $15.5 million to cover any potential shortfall in 2026.

Commissioners directed county departments to stay flat with 2025 levels, and more than a dozen came back requesting increases in funding. The budget passed by the county grants some increases for the clerk of courts, common pleas court, county engineer's tax map office, court of appeals, integrated justice system, juvenile court, prosecutor, sheriff, coroner, and veterans services.

Northeast District

Mahoning County Departments mostly requesting more in 2026 budget

WFMJ, November 18, 2025

Department heads are making requests for next year's budget that's allocated by the Mahoning County Commissioners.

The Mahoning County Clerk of the Courts office is requesting a 4.47% increase bringing them to $5,061,945.

Clerk Michael Ciccone called the higher budget "standard" for contractual wage increases despite firing one of his highest paid employees this year, Jennifer Ciccone.

The commissioners didn't question the budget request but some did question the Ciccone's previous decision of such a high raise for Jennifer after the last budget allocation.

"We all work for the taxpayers. We're all supposed to be public servants to the taxpayers and when they see such an egregious number as were being put out it's bad for everyone," Commissioner Geno DiFabio said.

Ciccone claimed in the meeting all offices are doing well and blamed any operating issues the commissioner brought up on restructuring during his first year in the position.

"If anyone thinks that what I inherited was a fantastic, wonderful operation that's not the case," Ciccone said in the meeting but declined to comment on-camera afterwards.

The Mahoning County Sheriff's Department also made a higher request than last year, up 7.97% bringing them to nearly $34 million dollars.

The sheriff said they've seen an increase in healthcare costs for inmates and are trying to keep wages for deputies competitive. On top of what the commissioners end up allocating, the department is also expecting to generate $5 million dollars from getting paid to house ICE inmates.

Central District

Delaware County approves 2026 budget with 8% increase from 2025

Columbus Dispatch, November 26, 2025

Delaware County commissioners have approved a $163.5-million budget for 2026, an 8% increase over this year.

Some of the departments that have the biggest increases in the budget passed Nov. 24 include the clerk of courts, common pleas court, the sheriff's office, the county engineer and veterans services.

The sheriff's office and the engineer's office, for example, are getting more than $3 million more next year, while veterans services is getting an additional $1 million for programs.

"In Delaware County, we are both fortunate and challenged to keep pace with the population growth we still experience," Commissioner Barb Lewis, president of this year's Board of Commissioners, said in a news release. "Our 2026 budget reflects our commitment to managing that growth proactively, while respecting the resources that our constituents and taxpayers provide us."

The increases come from increased staffing in a few departments, including the clerk of courts and the emergency medical services department, which is opening a new station in Berkshire Township, as well as more services within the Veterans Service Commission.

After a slight decrease in sales tax collections last year, the county anticipates an $8 million increase in its 2026 budget, according to documents shared with The Dispatch.

"Investing in public safety, infrastructure and our community of veterans is important to us and our residents," said Commissioner Jeff Benton. "This budget allows us to do that, while also continuing to provide tax relief in the form of 1.5 mills of property tax rollbacks."

Southwest District

Miami County pushes need for new jail

Dayton Daily News, November 25, 2025

Miami County officials are hitting the road hoping to explain the need for a new county jail to residents.

Sheriff Dave Duchak and county Commissioner Wade Westfall have been working with others to offer current jail tours and make presentations.

The basis of the discussion is one of three proposals for new facilities outlined in a jail study conducted by consultants from Henningson, Durham and Richardson Inc., or HDR. In the report released earlier this year, the consultants recommended a new jail on the grounds of the current county Incarceration Facility north of Troy. The cost of a recommended 200-bed maximum security jail, including 32 new medical beds, was estimated at around $100 million.

The county currently has the Incarceration Facility, a minimum-security unit that opened in 1999 between Troy and Piqua, along with a maximum-security facility built in downtown Troy at the county Safety Building in the early 1970s.

The proposal calls, for reuse of the Incarceration Facility's beds, its lobby, laundry and food service areas, among others. Duchak said a new facility should include sheriff's office administration space plus offices for the county Emergency Management Agency and the backup county 911 center.

Commissioners said options to pay for a jail solution include a sales tax increase, which would have to be approved by voters. The amount of the proposed sales tax now would be 0.5%. Food and groceries would not be taxed, and visitors/shoppers from outside the county would help share the cost.

Southeast District

America250 updates commission on coins

Ironton Tribune, November 24, 2025

At Tuesday's Lawrence County Commissioners meeting, Rich Donahue, the chairman of America250 Lawrence County committee, updated them about coins, coloring books and Christmas ornaments.

He passed around two silver coins, one with a state logo and one with a Lawrence County logo, the committee had minted in celebration of America's 250th birthday.

The one ounce Troy silver coins are for sale for $100 to raise funds for the committee's various projects. They are available at Central Hardware and McCauley's Furniture and online. They are $110 if you use a credit card to purchase them.

"We have sold a few already," Donahue said.

Commissioner Mike Finley said the coins were very nice and very unique. "It will be something you can give to your grandchildren or children, because they are super nice," he said. "The way silver has gone up, they are probably worth more than it cost to buy them."

The commissioners donated $1,500 to buy the coins and the funds raised off the sale of the coins will be used for the events around the county that will be held next year.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please view the CCAO Calendar for a comprehensive list of events to note.

Back to Top

DECEMBER 3
CCAO Board of Directors Meeting

DECEMBER 3 - 5
CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference

DECEMBER 25
Christmas - Holiday

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