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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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# **Great Miami Drinking Water Protection Project in Ohio Receives 2009 National Planning Achievement Award for a Hard-Won Victory**

**Washington, D.C.** – The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) faced an enormous – and critical – challenge: how to help the economically challenged Village of New Miami in Ohio protect drinking water for itself and its neighbors. Working through local political turmoil, and coordinating with New Miami leaders, business people and residents, the OKI helped the village adopt a new plan and ordinance to safeguard its groundwater, an important natural resource that supplies seven public water systems serving more than 300,000 people.

“The project demonstrated how building consensus among government, communities, business and environmental management can produce long sustaining protection of one of our most valuable resources,” said OKI Executive Director Mark Policinski. “OKI is dedicated to working with jurisdictions to find mutual solutions to problems and the success of the project exemplified how teamwork can benefit a region.”

For these accomplishments, the American Planning Association (APA) has selected the Great Miami Drinking Water Protection Project to receive with the National Planning Achievement Award for a Hard-Won Victory.

“These leaders demonstrated that grit and determination can solve even the toughest problems,” said Carol Rhea, AICP, 2009 National Planning Awards Jury Chair. “They never gave up, and thanks to their fortitude and perseverance, a critical water source is now protected.”

The National Planning Achievement Award for a Hard-Won Victory recognizes a planning effort undertaken by a community, neighborhood, citizens group, or jurisdiction in the face of difficult, challenging, or adverse conditions.

Many efforts led to the success of the project:

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments knew it needed a collaborative project to protect the Great Miami Buried Valley Aquifer System—a major source of drinking water in Southwest Ohio—from pollutants from decades of manufacturing activity. The intergovernmental effort hinged upon the Village of New Miami, which sits atop the aquifer.



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The first step attracted a multi-disciplined team of hydrogeologists, conservationists, water suppliers, environmental educators, regulators and other experts willing to contribute time, travel, brainpower and other in-kind services to a small town.

Bruce Koehler, an environmental planner at OKI, had worked with a variety of groundwater organizations and had close relationships with several conservation districts. He identified common concerns and framed them as opportunities for longstanding problems to be solved through planning. This consensus building resulted in nine project partners and more than \$58,000 worth of in-kind services that ranged from technical assistance to monitoring well installations.

A key challenge was to keep moving forward in the midst of political turmoil. OKI extended the project timeline to wait out New Miami's political troubles and finish revisions to the plan. A new mayor, Patti Hanes, provided the leadership to revive the water protection project. Three years of project work came to culmination on May 15, 2008, when the New Miami Village Council accepted the Ohio EPA's endorsement of the protection plan, and then voted to adopt an ordinance to protect the drinking water.

"We have long been aware of the problems of protecting our source water systems. We just did not have the resources and expertise to deal with this issue in a way that would not present a hardship to our remaining businesses," Hanes said. "We realize that it was a challenging three year process to develop the right plan with so many obstacles that could have derailed the effort.

"OKI continued to work with us through a pretty tumultuous time. They continued the work with full confidence in the process," Hanes added. "The project maintained its focus and adapted to the changes of our community."

The Great Miami Drinking Water Protection Project will receive the National Planning Achievement Award for a Hard-Won Victory at APA's National Planning Conference in Minneapolis on April 28, 2009. The project will also be featured in an upcoming issue of *Planning* magazine, APA's flagship publication.

For a list of all of the APA 2009 National Planning Excellence, Achievement, and Leadership Award recipients, visit [www.planning.org/awards/2009](http://www.planning.org/awards/2009). APA's national awards program, the profession's highest honor, is a proud tradition established more than 50 years ago to recognize outstanding community plans, planning programs and initiatives, public education efforts, and individuals for their leadership on planning issues.

*The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, are dedicated to advancing the art, science and profession of good planning -- physical, economic and social -- so as to create communities that offer better choices for where and how people work and live. Members of APA help create communities of lasting value and encourage civic leaders, business interests and citizens to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. APA has offices in Washington, D.C., and Chicago, Ill. For more information, visit its website at [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org).*



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