

County Officials Orientation Program

General Session Speakers



Jon Walden, CTAS Executive Director

JON WALDEN is executive director of The University of Tennessee County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS). He has been with CTAS since October 1993, serving as an administrator of information technology prior to becoming manager of information technology & environmental services in 2002. He was named CTAS interim executive director June 1, 2020, and selected as executive director on December 1, 2021.

Before joining CTAS, he was a Programmer Analyst with Columbia State Community College. Jon holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from Tennessee State University and a master of arts in leadership and public service from Lipscomb University.

CTAS was created by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1973 at the urging of county officials and their organization, the Tennessee County Services Association (TCSA). County officials wanted an agency to provide prompt, accurate technical assistance on a daily basis to Tennessee's 95 counties.



Dr. Herb Byrd, III, UT IPS Vice President

DR. HERB BYRD III is vice president of public service at The University of Tennessee. After attending Harding College (Searcy, AR) for two years, Dr. Byrd received his bachelor's degree in Animal Science, master's degree in Reproductive Physiology and PhD in Educational Leadership, all from The University of Tennessee. Most of his professional career (almost 29 years) has been spent with his alma mater in UT Extension.

He began his Extension career as a 4-H agent in Monroe County. He then worked in McMinn County for seven years in Adult Agriculture & Resource Development while serving as county director. In a two-year stint away from Extension, Dr. Byrd was a Vice President with Lads to Leaders, Inc. where he conducted workshops teaching adults how to teach leadership skills to youth.

After returning to UT Extension's state office in 1998, he was responsible for recruitment, personnel, and civil rights and served as Extension's affirmative action and EEO officer. In addition, he was also the director of the Extension Evaluation and Staff Development department, organized July 1, 2003. Before his appointment as Interim Vice President of the Institute for Public Service, he was also the Human Resources Officer for the Institute for Agriculture. He has served on the staff of the University of Tennessee's Leadership Institute since 1999.

The Institute for Public Service was created in 1971 by the UT Board of Trustees on the recommendation of former UT president Edward J. Boling, who had a vision to create an institute that would take university expertise to governments and industries across Tennessee, bringing technical assistance, research, consulting services, information and training to Tennessee citizens. IPS became the umbrella organization for CTAS when it was created in 1973.

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General Session Speakers, *continued*



Kristy Godsey Brown, CTAS Manager of Legal Services

Kristy joined UT CTAS in February 2007. Prior to joining UT CTAS, Kristy practiced real estate and regulatory law at a Nashville law firm. She received her bachelor's degree, summa cum laude, in political science from the University of Tennessee in 1999 and was the College of Arts and Sciences Top Graduate, graduating with a 4.0 GPA. She received her law degree from Vanderbilt University Law School in 2003 and was the Elliott E. Cheatham Scholar, a Dean's Scholar and on the Dean's List.



Stephen Austin, CTAS Legal Consultant

Stephen joined UT CTAS in January 2003. Prior to joining UT CTAS, Steve served as an assistant attorney general for the State of Tennessee, assigned to the criminal justice division, handling federal and state capital case litigation. Before that, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a judge advocate, receiving the Meritorious Service Medal, Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal and Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal. He retired from the U.S. Marine Corps at the rank of major after 23 years of service. He received his law degree from the University of Memphis in 1989 and his bachelor's degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in 1986.



Jeff Metzger, CTAS Legal Consultant

Jeff joined UT CTAS in 2007. Prior to joining UT CTAS, Jeff was an associate at Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis. He graduated magna cum laude from Tennessee Technological University with a bachelor of science degree in 2001. He received his law degree from the University of Tennessee College of Law in 2005, graduating summa cum laude. While at the University of Tennessee College of Law, he received a Chancellor's Citation for Extraordinary Professional Promise.



Laylah Smith, CTAS Legal Consultant

Laylah joined UT CTAS in September 2020. Prior to joining UT CTAS, Laylah was the chief legal counsel for the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), where she focused primarily on legal issues affecting local government, government contracts, and employment law. Before joining GNRC, Laylah was a solo practitioner focusing mainly on elder and family law. Laylah received a bachelor's degree in business administration from Belmont University in 2004 and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, in 2008. She received her law degree from Nashville School of Law in 2013.

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Breakout Session Speakers

Highway Officials' Breakout Session



Kelsey Schweitzer, CTAS County Government Consultant

Kelsey joined UT CTAS in October 2017 as county government consultant for the southern West Tennessee region. He previously worked for the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury as a legislative auditor and in the banking industry. He earned a Master of Business Administration degree in 2017 and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, summa cum laude, in 2010, both from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Kelsey also earned the Certified Government Financial Manager designation in 2019.



Melisa Kelton, CTAS County Government Consultant

Melisa joined UT CTAS in January 2017 as our finance and budget consultant. She was named county government consultant for the southern Middle Tennessee region in February 2020. She previously worked at the Center for Industrial Services, beginning in December 1996. She also has over 20 years of experience working in both private and public financial sectors. Melisa earned her undergraduate degree from Tennessee Technological University and her graduate degree from Middle Tennessee State University.



Brett Howell, TCHOA Executive Director

BRETT HOWELL is executive director of the Tennessee County Highway Officials Association (TCHOA), a nonpartisan, non-profit public service organization representing the goals and objectives of elected and appointed county highway officials in all 95 Tennessee counties. Brett previously served over 25 years as communications specialist at CTAS. He holds a master's degree in Public Administration from Tennessee State University and a bachelor's degree in English/journalism from Tennessee Technological University, where he also received a minor in history.

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Breakout Session Speakers, *continued*

Assessors of Property Breakout Session



Joe Griffin, CTAS Property Assessment Consultant

Joe joined UT CTAS in 2016 to become one of two property assessment consultants. Joe has over 25 years of property assessment experience. Prior to joining CTAS, he worked for the Metro Nashville Davidson County Property Assessor's office and the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury's Division of Property Assessments. Joe carries several designation including Residential Evaluation Specialist Designation (RES), Tennessee Master Assessor, and the IAAO designation of Assessment Administration Specialist (AAS). In 2017, he became an IAAO instructor. He earned his BBA in business management with a minor in general business/marketing from Austin Peay in 1993.



Gabe Looney, CTAS Property Assessment Consultant

Gabe joined CTAS in March 2017. Gabe has over 20 years of property assessment experience. Gabe previously worked for the Blount County Assessor's Office as a Chief Deputy and for an assessor in Clay County, Florida, as a commercial appraiser. He is an active member of the Tennessee Chapter of the International Association of Assessing Officers and in 2017 he was awarded the IAAO designation of Assessment Administration Specialist and the Tennessee Master Assessor from the State Board of Equalization. Gabe earned his Bachelor of Arts with an emphasis in Psychology and a minor in Criminal Justice from the University of North Florida in 1995.



Will Denami, TNAAO Executive Director

WILL DENAMI is the executive director of the Tennessee Association of Assessing Officers (TNAAO), a professional organization composed of the elected officials serving as Assessors of Property in Tennessee's 95 counties, as well as concerned professionals and organizations that assist these officials in carrying out their duties. Will assumed the position of TNAAO executive director in 2007. Will was chosen after an exhaustive search to replace Ralph Cooper after his retirement, who served 10 years as TNAAO's first executive director.