

# Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



Volume 1, Issue 11

December 2008

## From County Executive Chris Collins



It's hard to believe my first year as County Executive is coming to an end. This year has been busy, productive and exciting. I want to thank you for the trust you have placed in my administration.

This month's newsletter brings you the latest information on where the County's Six Sigma program is headed in the new year. I've also included an update on the recent recommendations of the Upstate Mandate Relief Commission, a combined effort between Erie, Monroe and Onondaga counties.

My wife and I would like to wish you a Happy Holiday and a safe New Year. I look forward to working hard in 2009 to make Erie County even better.

## Contact the County Executive

Office: 95 Franklin St., 16th Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202

Phone: (716) 858-8500

E-mail: [public\\_feedback@erie.gov](mailto:public_feedback@erie.gov)


## Six Sigma Update

The Erie County Six Sigma Program is currently in the process of training the second wave of Green Belt employees. The classroom training, totaling 72 hours, began in November and will be completed next month. Erie County departments with participating employees in wave two of training include: Health; Real Property Tax; Personnel; Budget and Management; Central Police Services; Senior Services; County Attorney; Environment and Planning; and Social Services.

The Six Sigma Program is also conducting Yellow Belt training. The initial 16 hour classroom training was completed earlier this month. The classroom portion focuses on the fundamentals of the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) process, along with some of the basic tools used in problem solving. This wave of Yellow Belts will be working on a stand-alone project or as a member of a Green Belt team. The second wave of Yellow Belt training is scheduled to begin this coming January.

## County Executive Signs Tax Exemption Law

Erie County Executive Chris Collins has signed into law a partial county real property tax exemption for Cold War-Era veterans. The new law will allow veterans a 15% reduction in their county property taxes, up to \$12,000, beginning in 2010. A Cold War-Era veteran is a person who served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces between the end of World War II and December 26, 1991. This date marks the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The exemption is also available to spouses of deceased Cold War era veterans who have not remarried.

 The Erie County Legislature unanimously approved the partial property tax exemption earlier this year.

Cold War era veterans living in Erie County's towns or the City of Tonawanda have until March 1, 2009 to apply for the exemption by visiting their town or city assessor's office. New York State has authorized this exemption for ten years.

## DWI Holiday Hundred

Erie County Executive Chris Collins, Sheriff Tim Howard and County Clerk Kathy Hochul joined area police agencies at the start of the holiday season to announce a DWI enforcement and information campaign. One hundred police patrols from 17 agencies will comb Erie County in search of drunken drivers from now until New Year's Day. Erie County Probation officials will also be cracking down on felony DWI probationers during the same time.



## Upstate Mandate Relief Commission Makes Recommendations

This fall, Erie County Executive Chris Collins, Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks, and Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney formed the Upstate Mandate Relief Commission (UMRC) and charged it with the task of examining the specific practices, procedures, and programs New York State requires of its county governments but whose cost burden the State has historically been unwilling to shoulder.

On December 15, the UMRC released a list of recommendations for Governor Paterson and the New York State Legislature to consider as they debate the 2009-2010 Executive Budget. All of the proposed reforms will eliminate or reduce State mandated expenses without shifting costs to property taxpayers.

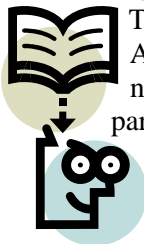
The five recommendations brought forth by the UMRC are:

- Eliminate the Automated Finger Imaging System Requirement for Public Benefit Programs
- Revise Reimbursement Rates for Residential Domestic Violence Services
- Eliminate Duplicative Reporting Requirements of the New York State Case Reporting System
- Apply Prior Approved State Waivers for Interested Local Social Services Districts (Counties)
- Reform Public Employees' Benefits – Create a Tier 5 within the New York State and Local Employees Retirement System

The UMRC believes following these recommendations will yield substantial savings for years to come.

## B&ECPL Hosts Literacy Forum

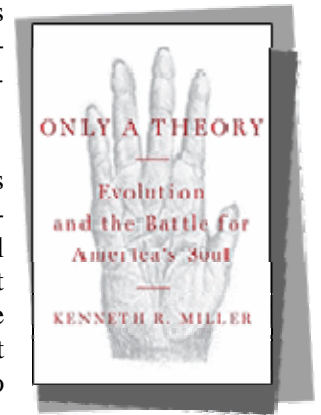
The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library hosted a Literacy Forum in the Central Library's Ring of Knowledge on Thursday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of the forum, according to Library Director Bridget Quinn-Carey, was to begin to create a path for local libraries to become hubs for literacy efforts throughout the county. Judy Trupin from the Queens Library was the featured speaker. Ms. Trupin provided details on the highly successful Adult Learner Program at the Queens Library, noting that literacy in the home begins with the parents. County Executive Chris Collins was also on hand and expressed his enthusiasm at working with the Library System and the City of Buffalo on issues of economic and workforce development and problems of illiteracy.



## Meet the Author at the Library

The Library's most recent installment of the *Meet the Author Lunchtime Library Series* on WBFO 88.7 FM was held on Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at Noon in Fables Café at the Central Library. The program featured author Kenneth Miller's new book "Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul."

The bi-monthly series features contemporary writers and interesting books for open, thoughtful discussion. Each live broadcast will include a reading from the author, an exchange with the host and questions from the studio audience.



Every Meet the Author event is free and open to the public, but seating is limited so please arrive early.

## Erie County Parks Announces Schedule of Winter Activities

The Erie County Parks Department's schedule of winter activities is now available for Erie County residents. All parks are open from 7am to 9pm. The following is a list of winter activities and their times (if applicable) by park:

### Akron Falls Park



Ice Skating: 10am – 8pm  
Sledding  
Cummings Lodge is open for resting



### Chestnut Ridge Park

Sledding and snowboarding: 10am – 8pm  
Cross country skiing  
Snowboarding  
Casino is open for resting  
Martin and MacKinnon Lodges available for rent



### Como Lake Park

Ice Skating: 10am – 8pm  
Sledding  
Casino is open for resting



Parks cont'd from pg. 3

### Ellicott Creek Park

Sledding  
Casino and Friendship House available for rent

### Elma Meadows

Sledding  
Cross country skiing  
Snowboarding  
Club House is open for resting



### Emery Park

Downhill skiing and snowboarding with a free T-Bar Lift  
Monday – Friday: 1:30pm – 7:30pm  
Saturday and Sunday: 11:00am – 7:30pm

Snowmobiling  
Cross country skiing  
Ski Lodge is open for resting  
Fieldhouse and Judge Stohrer Lodge available for rent

### Sprague Brook Park

Sledding  
Skiing  
Cross country skiing  
Snowmobiling  
Camping rentals  
Casino is open for resting

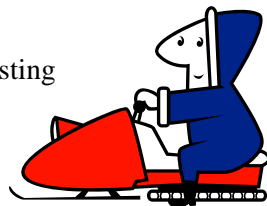


### Forestry (Sardinia)

Cross country skiing  
Snowmobiling  
Warm-up Huts on trails open for resting

### Delaware Park

City Park Hours: 7am – 10pm  
Sledding behind Marcy Casino



## Help Understanding Insurance Options

The Erie County Department of Senior Services offers unbiased insurance information through its Insurance Resource Center. Located on the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Rath Building, the Center provides insurance information regardless of income on matters pertaining to Health, Prescription, and Long Term Care Insurance. The experts with Senior Services can help throughout the year with:

- ★ One-on-one counseling by appointment
- ★ Referrals to appropriate agencies
- ★ Prescription Coverage
- ★ Coverage for individuals with no insurance
- ★ Medicare, Advantage Plans/Supplemental Plans
- ★ Help paying for Medicare premiums – Medicare Savings Plan/Part D Extra Help
- ★ Confidential assistance with appeals filing
- ★ Long Term Care Insurance

The Department of Senior Services does not sell insurance, so the goal is to help you make an educated decision as to what is best in matters of health and long term care insurance. For personalized information or to schedule an appointment, please call 858-7883.



## Medical Examiner's Office Streamlines Services

Erie County Central Police Services and the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office have collaborated to eliminate the duplication of forensic services. On December 1, 2008, the Medical Examiner's Office began performing all DUI/DUID forensic testing. This transfer will result in an improvement in the forensic services available to Erie County law enforcement agencies. It is yet another example of how cooperation and communication between departments have resulted in delivering high quality service in a more efficient manner.

### Coming Next Month:

- **Wrap-up of 2008**
- **Impact of the 2009-2010 New York State Budget**
- **State of the County Preview**