

Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



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From County Executive Chris Collins



Right now, I am getting ready to deliver my second State of the County Address. This year's address will be held on February 5th at the UB

Gateway Building in downtown Buffalo. At my second county-wide address, I will be remarking on our many achievements this past year. I will also be unveiling my vision for economic development in Erie County.

This year, Erie County and the Niagara Frontier Recreation & Parks Society are bringing Winterfest back to Chestnut Ridge Park. Turn to page two for information on the date, time, and activities that have been planned for your enjoyment.

Buffalo was recently awarded two exciting designations. The City of Good Neighbors has been named as one of the 44 Places to go in 2009 as well as one of 2009's 'Dozen Distinctive Destinations'. These two honors further emphasize the importance of Buffalo as a cultural and historical destination. We should be proud of our city and its many attractions.

Contact the County Executive

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Six Sigma Update

Last week, the second wave of Green Belt Classroom Training was completed by Six Sigma Director Bill Carey. This wave's candidates will now focus on their individual projects throughout the next several months. They will be using the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) process, the foundation of Lean/Six Sigma, while completing the certification process. The project will culminate with the Green Belt examination, to be given in February. Projects which will be tackled this wave include:

- Department of Health - improving the delivery service model for Special Needs Early Intervention Program
- Real Property Tax - increase the rate of collection on delinquent taxes
- Personnel - improve efficiency for the hiring process
- Purchasing - optimize use of Department Purchase Orders
- DISS - optimize printer/copier utilization
- County Attorney - review/re-engineer Workers Compensation process
- Environment & Planning - optimize paper recycling at the Rath Building
- Social Services - optimize workload management for Child Welfare Services
- Social Services - optimize emergency shelter process for homeless

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Shelter Reservations Underway

The Erie County Parks Department is now taking reservations for the 2009 season. A listing of all rentable shelters and buildings is available online at www.erie.gov/parks. An electronic reservation request can be made online through http://www.erie.gov/parks/shelter_reservations.asp for shelters located at:

- Elma Meadows
- Emery Park
- Isleview Park
- Spraguebrook Park
- Wendt Beach
- Akron Falls Park
- Chestnut Ridge Park
- Como Lake Park
- Ellicott Creek Park

To make a reservation for shelters at other parks, please call the Parks Department at (716) 858-8355. Reservations for the 2010 season can now be made exactly one year in advance of the date either online or by calling the Parks Department.

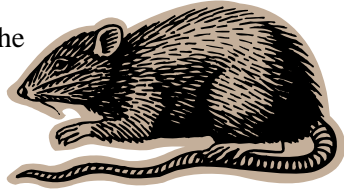


Operation Clean Sweep

The Erie County Department of Health has been working with local municipalities to sweep out the local rodent population. As well as being a nuisance, rodents can cause serious life-threatening bacterial disease that could infect not only human health but dogs and other animals as well.

As a result of Operation Clean Sweep activities throughout the county:

- Rat complaints in Tonawanda have decreased 64% over a one year period.
- Confirmed cases of the bacterial disease Leptospirosis in dogs have decreased significantly.



Garbage tote programs have also been implemented in the cities of Buffalo and Tonawanda, the towns of Amherst and Tonawanda, and in the villages of Kenmore and Williamsville. The towns of Cheektowaga and West Seneca, along with Village of Lancaster have implemented laws pertaining to the proper disposal of garbage. Other municipalities are reviewing the possibility of implementing similar programs. All of these programs significantly hinder the growth of the local rodent population.

Department of Social Services Six Sigma Projects Take Hold

The Erie County Department of Social Services department is seeing real results through Six Sigma. Employees from the department participated in two projects within the first wave of Green Belt trainees. The two projects, 'Streamlining Application Workflow' and 'Decreasing Current Office of Child Support Enforcement Backlog' generated savings of over \$220,000 in 2008.

The 'Streamlining Application Workflow' project was targeted to reduce overtime utilization while achieving and maintaining case processing mandates. Using Six Sigma methods, the project team was able to identify work process changes which resulted in increased efficiency in case processing for the Food Stamp, Medicaid and Temporary Assistance programs. As a result, the Department has seen a 2008 savings value of \$136,000, an average 90% of cases processed within mandated timeframes and an over 10% reduction in overtime utilization.

The 'Office of Child Support' project has focused on reducing an approximate eight month case backlog. Through Six Sigma methods, the division was able to justify the need for certain additional staffing, while recognizing opportunities to implement office practices that would assist in case establishment efficiencies. The project has resulted in savings totaling over \$85,000, a significant reduction in case backlog, and an increase of over \$1 million in gross child support collections from new cases opened during the project period.

Winterfest Back at Chestnut Ridge Park

Erie County and the Niagara Frontier Recreation & Parks Society (NFRPS) are teaming up to host Winterfest 2009 at Chestnut Ridge Park in Orchard Park on Sunday, February 8, 2009 from 10 AM until 4 PM. This free, family friendly event is back for 2009 after being cancelled for several years due to budget cuts. This year's event has received private sponsorship, and several local community groups are donating goods and services to make Winterfest possible.



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StoryTubes Taping at a Library Near You

Do you know a child who would like to star in their own movie? The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library is helping children in Grades K-12 participate in the nationwide StoryTubes Contest. Participants create a two minute video about their favorite book to compete for prizes at the local and national level. The Audubon, Clearfield, Crane, Merriweather and Orchard Park libraries as well as the Central Library's Children's and Teen Rooms are official StoryTubes taping sites. Visit the Library's website at <http://www.buffalolib.org/featured/StoryTube.pdf> for specific taping dates and times.



Get Graphic! Project to Publish a Graphic Novel

Do you know a Western New York teen with a story to tell? The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library's *Get Graphic!* initiative is encouraging local teens to tell their story in graphic novel format to become part of a graphic novel to be published in the spring. The published graphic novel, which will be titled *Get Graphic! Our World in Words and Pictures*, will be unveiled at a reception at the conclusion of the project in May. Graphic novel pages should be submitted no later than February 2, 2009 for inclusion in the book. Visit www.getgraphic.org to learn more about the project.

Erie County Donates Vans for Senior Citizens

Last month, Erie County Executive Chris Collins handed over the keys to three brand-new vans for the Erie County sponsored Going Places Van Service – a shuttle service for seniors in need of transportation. The 12 passenger vans were given to the towns of Cheektowaga and Concord as well as the City of Tonawanda.

The Going Places vans are used to transport independently active seniors to destinations such as medical and health centers, retail and grocery stores and banks throughout Erie County. Requirements for use of the Going Places vans include:

- Riders must be aged 60 years or older without transportation
- Riders must be physically able to enter and exit the van under their own

ability

If a resident qualifies under these requirements, they can contact Going Places at 858-RIDE and will be provided with the necessary information on using the van service.

Service from your home is available for senior residents of Erie County who are living independently but unable to use conventional means of transportation. Reservations for health-related trips may be scheduled up to two weeks in advance, and non-medical trips may be scheduled one week in advance. A brief, one time, registration is required for service. Calls can be made between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm Monday through Friday at 858-RIDE (858-7433).



The Going Places van service is available in the cities of Buffalo and Tonawanda, as well as the towns of Aurora, Boston, Cheektowaga, Clarence, Collins, Concord, Elma, Evans, Lancaster, Newstead, Orchard Park, and West Seneca. In addition to regular van service, wheelchair service is also available in the towns of Cheektowaga and West Seneca. Requests for travel outside the providers service area is limited and is not always able to be accommodated.

Real Property Tax Director Elected to State Board

Lancaster resident and Erie County Director of Real Property Tax Services Joseph L. Maciejewski, has been elected to a two year term to the Board of Directors of the New York State Association of County Real Property Tax Directors. Maciejewski will represent the 17 counties made up of the Western Region of New York State. In addition, Maciejewski was appointed by Association President David Jackson of Westchester County to the Legislative committee. That committee reviews all real property administration legislative proposals and offers advice and position statements to the Governor and State Legislature.

Six Sigma continued from page 1

In other Six Sigma news, the second wave of Yellow Belt training began January 20th and continues on the 27th. Twenty new Yellow Belt candidates will complete 16 classroom training hours. Candidates will then assist with either existing or upcoming Green Belt project opportunities.

New Union Contract Upholds Pledge

When elected, County Executive Collins pledged to never sign a new union contract which did not deal with the strangling cost of retiree health care in a real and meaningful way. Previous administrations have negotiated union contracts that included free retiree health care for life. As a result, Erie County has an unfunded liability for retiree health care costs totaling \$750 million. This staggering number is simply unaffordable and unfair to taxpayers.

One year into Collins Administration, Erie County and the union representing county nurses was able to agree on a

historic new contract that upholds the County Executive's pledge. The new contract impacts nurses working for Erie County's health Department, as well as nurses at the Erie County Medical Center and the Erie County Nursing Home.

Provisions of the new contract include:

- New hires will no longer receive retiree health care
- Current employees will pay 50 percent of their retiree health care costs (nurses within five years of retirement are exempt)
- New hires will pay 15 per-

cent of health insurance costs

- Current employees will pay 15 percent of any increase to health insurance costs
- Elimination of summer hours
- Reduction of two paid holidays
- New hires will receive a 30 minute paid lunch (current employees receive one hour)

This new contract also recognizes the hard work and vital skill set of our county nurses. As a result, this new contract gives our nurses a much needed raise.



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Bird's Eye View

The Erie County Sheriff's Department helicopter was useful when flooding occurred in Amherst, Clarence and Newstead late last month. Employees of the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Emergency Services, along with local officials, used the chopper to see the impact of current flood waters. The aerial view was also used to find potential flooding areas as water moved along Tonawanda Creek. Critical areas could be seen from the bird's eye view through video which was fed back to others gathered at the Amherst Highway Department.



Together with people on the ground, the helicopter was able to isolate areas where water was restricted, causing additional flooding. DPW and local highway crews will investigate these areas in better weather to reduce the possibility of flooding in the future.

Mobility Manager Improves Medicaid Transportation Program

The Erie County Department of Social Services (DSS) has entered into a new partnership to improve medical transportation for Medicaid patients. Last August, The Center for Transportation Excellence (CTE) began providing transportation for non-emergency medical services for eligible Medicaid recipients.

Using a network of local, independent transportation providers, CTE is able to provide comprehensive, community-based mobility management services within Erie County. Transportation modes utilized include wheelchair van, taxis, and straight stretcher. Eligible recipients are required to call CTE's 24/7 call center to make a reservation at least 48 hours in advance of the medically necessary scheduled appointment. For hospital discharge plan-

ners and other medical providers only one phone call is now necessary to order appropriate transportation services at any time of day.

CTE's Mobility Management approach provides a structure that enhances a non-core activity of the Department of Social Services while ensuring practices are employed to serve recipients and provide accountability to both the County and the State. For each trip arranged, CTE verifies the Medicaid eligibility of the individual through its mobility management system software and electronic interface with the State of New York. In addition, CTE staff ensures that each trip is to a Medicaid billable service.

Located on Buffalo's east side, CTE's comprehensive, community-based mo-

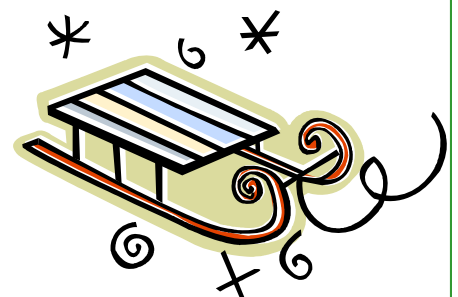
bility initiative was recently highlighted as a model for future transportation by a state-wide task force. As a single point of contact, CTE's "One Call Serves All" approach to scheduling and coordinating transportation services ensures they are performed in accordance with the State Department of Health and Department of Transportation requirements, while also ensuring such services are audited and reviewed to minimize fraud and abuse.

Erie County receives 100 % reimbursement from the State Medicaid program for providing these medical transportation services. CTE was awarded the contract to act as the County's mobility manager through a competitive bidding process and upon final approval from the New York State Department of Health.

Winterfest continued from page 2

Winterfest 2009 will feature: sledding, snow shoe hikes, snowboarding, snow sculptures, hay rides, a hockey skills competition, wood branding, nature education, marshmallow roasting, and food and beverages.

Winterfest 2009 is a collaboration between the Erie County Department of Parks, Recreation & Forestry and the Niagara Frontier Recreation & Parks Society. The event is receiving private sponsorship from Cappelli's Pizzeria, Chautauqua Institution, Dick's Sporting Goods, Earth Spirit and WBEN Radio. This event is also made possible through assistance from the Canisius College Physical Education Department, the Erie Community College Recreation Department, Hamburg YES Volunteers, the SPCA and Tift Farm.



Buffalo Named to 2009 List of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations

Earlier this month, Erie County Executive Collins participated in a press conference announcing Buffalo's addition to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2009 Dozen Distinctive Destinations list. Below is an excerpt from the National Trust's press release, detailing why Buffalo was chosen.

to the Underground Railroad, and is perfectly positioned for a quick trip to nearby Niagara Falls where some of the oldest



The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently named Buffalo one of its 2009 Dozen Distinctive Destinations.

Since 2000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has annually selected communities across the United States that offer cultural and recreational experiences different from the typical vacation destination.

Buffalo is a gold mine of late 19th/early 20th century urban design. Erie County's lakeside city harbors an unexpected discovery around every corner, offering a staggering range of cultural resources as well as some of the country's most captivating architecture. Extraordinary examples of Victorian, Beaux-Arts, Romanesque and Art Deco architecture can also be explored on one of the city's more than 500 walking tours. Buffalo is also home to the Erie Canal Harbor, a 184-year old Commercial Slip that has been restored and is now open to the public for the first time in generations.

The city features an awe-inspiring collection of historic grain elevators and other examples of commercial urban design as well as surviving buildings by the nation's first professional woman architect, Louise Blanchard Bethune. Buffalo also boasts critical sites related

est buildings on the Great Lakes can be found.

For the past decade, historic preservation has played a critical role in Buffalo's revitalization efforts. Neighborhood by neighborhood, Buffalo's turn-of-the-century legacy is being restored. Many landmark buildings have returned to past glory while former warehouses, department stores and manufacturing plants have found new life as offices and residential lofts.

Today, Buffalo caters to all tastes and interests. There is a lively arts scene that includes the world-class collection of modern art at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the opulent European-style opera house that now houses Shea's Performing Arts Center. Beautiful botanical gardens and annual festivals are also an essential part of the city's appeal. Buffalo's pedestrian-friendly Elmwood Village, recently designated one of the best neighborhoods in America by the American Planning Association, combines clusters of galleries, boutiques and shops with an assortment of bistros, bars and cafes where distinctive regional delicacies such as chicken wings, beef-on-weck and foot-long charbroiled hot dogs can be sampled.

The remainder of the 2009 List of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations includes:

- Athens, GA
- Bristol, RI
- Fort Worth, TX
- Franklin, TN
- Hot Springs, SD
- Lake Geneva, WI
- Lititz, PA
- Santa Barbara, CA
- Santa Fe, NM
- Saugatuck-Douglas, MI
- Virginia City, NV

Buffalo is also celebrating its addition to the *New York Time's* 44 Places to Go in 2009 listing. The article noted that the new Burchfield Penney Art Center will "thrill culture junkies." This additional honor continues to solidify Buffalo's position as a destination rich in art, culture and history. The article can be viewed through the *New York Time's* website, or by following this link:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/01/11/travel/20090111_DESTINATIONS.html

Contract continued from page 3

This new contract is critical for several reasons. First, it sets the template for future contract negotiations with other county unions. The new nurses' contract demonstrates the County Executive's commitment to deal with retiree health care costs. As the nurses' contract proves, significant changes in retiree health care will be accepted by union employees when they receive a fair increase in wages.

This new contract is also a significant step forward in the effort to merge ECMC and Kaleida Health. Future col-

laborations and an eventual merger proved impossible when such a large difference in wage and benefits existed between nurses at the two organizations.

Finally, this contract is a major victory for our children, grandchildren and unborn generations. The taxpayer savings generated by this new contract in the short term are small, but they grow significantly in future years as retiree health care costs come due. If the County is able to negotiate similar contracts with other unions, we will be able to save \$400 million in retiree health care costs.