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The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) was created in 1925 by county officials, for county officials. Since the beginning, our mission has been to represent, educate, advocate for, and serve New York's counties and the elected and appointed county officials who serve the public.

NYSAC advocated for dozens of issues throughout this year’s State Budget negotiation process, beginning last November all the way through the weekend before the April 1st start of the state fiscal year, the day state lawmakers gave passage to the current year spending plan.

All of our counties were part of NYSAC’s process of prioritizing budget issues, through the Association’s resolutions process, development of the NYSAC Legislative Program, standing committee meetings, advocacy meetings, letter-writing, sending memos, delivering testimony, and actively educating the Governor, state lawmakers, and the public about the impact of certain budget proposals on counties and local taxpayers.

The budget provided additional revenues for counties through the repeal of the sales tax exemption given to energy service companies known as ESCOs and the adoption of the Internet Marketplace Fairness Act, which NYSAC championed for many years and will require large internet marketplaces to collect sales tax for all vendors that use their platform. The state will use revenue from this local tax to continue the Aid and Incentives for Municipalities (AIM) program.

The state also added several new programs and policies that must be implemented at the county level, some with additional funding and others with no funding. The enacted budget includes $10 million for early voting operating costs and $14.7 million for the purchase of electronic poll books, on-demand ballot printers and cybersecurity software. The budget also includes the Executive Budget proposal of $15 million to address the unmet needs of seniors, an additional $50 million for indigent legal defense expansion, $3.735 million for a Veteran Peer-to-Peer Support Program, continues funding for a jail-based SUD treatment program, and adds $500 million in new funding for clean water infrastructure projects.

NYSAC always works to put county concerns and priorities before the State Legislature and the Governor and will continue to do so. We had success in recent years in partnering with state leaders to address county concerns, including a cap on county Medicaid costs, pension reforms and increased transportation assistance. In addition, counties have had success with ensuring new state mandated programs come with additional state funding assistance to ensure local taxpayers are not harmed, especially in the property tax cap environment. The Governor and state leaders have recognized this and provided more funding for counties to implement new state programs to raise the age of criminal responsibility and expand public defense services for the indigent. NYSAC will continue to build on this success to ensure counties’ priorities are heard in Albany. We all know well that strong counties make the state stronger.

I am proud of NYSAC’s advocacy efforts on behalf of our counties across the state, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to make our communities better. It is our hope that together, the 62 counties of New York State can remain strongly united in our advocacy efforts.

Charles H. Nesbitt, Jr.
NYSAC President
CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

SESSIONS WILL COVER
Schedule subject to change

2020 Census
Affordable Housing
Data-Driven Justice
Disaster Management
Federal Policy Outlook

Health Equity
Brand Development
Renewable Energy
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Counties Connect: this is an ideal theme for NYSAC’s official publication. In many ways, NYSAC is all about making a wide range of connections between individuals, governments, and institutions across New York State and the nation.

NYSAC connects our member counties, and their elected leaders and appointed officials, through their association. We connect 57 diverse counties, and their leaders of all political parties, from across the state, along with the City of New York with its five boroughs. NYSAC connects each county with information about the issues, policies, and procedures that each provide to the public every day.

We connect county leaders with other levels of government. Every year, NYSAC facilitates meetings between our members and the White House. We connect local concerns with the NY congressional delegation and our US Senators: Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. We are working closely with our federal leaders and our Governor on another connection project: to connect New Yorkers in rural areas to reliable cellular service.

On the state level, we work with Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state agencies that are coordinated with county government, and we connect counties with state legislators and policymakers who enact and implement programs and services that need to be delivered at the county level.

We connect our county members with educational material and training opportunities through our research reports, webinars, conferences, and meetings held throughout the year. This spring we hosted our annual Finance School for treasurers, budget officers, and other county officials who manage county fiscal operations. NYSAC also ran a series of spring webinars on policies enacted in this year’s State Budget, including the state plastic bag ban, voting reforms, food waste diversion, and census complete count committees.

We also connect county elected leaders with dozens of county departmental affiliates. In this magazine, we have featured articles from the NYS Association of County Health Officials, the Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors and the NY Association of Training and Employment Professionals.

These are just some of the many ways that NYSAC connects with our member counties. If you feel there are other ways we could “Connect NY,” just let us know.

Have a safe and productive spring and summer, and we look forward to seeing you in September at the 2019 NYSAC Fall Seminar in Sullivan County!

Stephen J. Acquario, Esq.
NYSAC Executive Director
NYSAC’s mission is to represent, educate, advocate for, and serve member counties at the federal and state levels.

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*Cover Photo*
Boughton Park: Victor, Ontario County

*Photo Credit*
Joann K. Long
The State Budget, completed in the early hours of Monday, April 1st, included several key issues that counties have been tracking since this fall. Budget highlights include major criminal justice and environmental policy reforms, as well as changes to the tax code that will benefit county governments.

SFY 2020 Budget Highlights

Several components of the budget will have an impact on county operations, including:

**Repeal of ESCO Sales Tax Exemption.** The Executive Budget proposed to eliminate the sales tax exemption for gas and electric service purchased from an energy service company (ESCO). The exemption is applied on the transportation, transmission or delivery of gas and electricity when it is sold separately from the commodity. Repealing the exemption is expected to increase local sales tax collections outside of New York City by up to $46 million on a full annual basis, with about $38 million accruing to counties before regular sales tax sharing arrangements.

**Internet Marketplace Fairness.** After three years, the Governor’s proposal to update New York’s sales tax collection process to ensure that sales taxes owed on internet transactions are collected has passed (effective June 1, 2019). The legislation requires large internet marketplace providers to collect sales tax on behalf of all vendors that use their platform and remit these sales taxes to the state.

A portion of this new revenue will be withheld by the state for state funding purposes. The net fiscal impact by county will vary depending on the amount withheld to satisfy AIM restoration payments and their existing sales tax sharing arrangements.

Using the DOB estimate that $390 million will be generated for all local governments from the combined actions described above, NYSAC estimates the following:

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**Election Reform**

The budget also includes a series of election reforms, as well as appropriations (both operating and capital) to assist counties with implementing these reforms:

- $10 million for early voting operating costs and $14.7 million for the purchase of electronic poll books, on-demand ballot printers and cybersecurity software.
- Poll hours must be open from 6am to 9pm for primary elections.
- Employees may, without a loss of pay, be granted up to three hours at the beginning or end of their shift to vote.

**Bail Reform**

The budget includes language to reform bail, discovery and speedy trials (effective January 1, 2020). Arresting officers must release individuals under non-monetary conditions and issue an appearance ticket unless an individual is charged with a felony, a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, or if an individual was convicted of a violent felony within the last five years.

**Additional Items**

The enacted budget also included additional revenue modifications and policy changes, including:

- $15 million to address the unmet needs of seniors.
- A provision to allow for local offices of the aging to create a private pay program to allow additional participants to partake in programming offered by the county.
- $33 million for local agricultural programs.
- A statewide ban on plastic bags (effective March 1, 2020). The legislative body of any county and city can also impose a fee on paper carryout bags.
- An additional $4 million for TANF Youth Employment, bringing the total appropriation to $44 million.
- An additional $50 million for indigent legal defense expansion to the remaining counties to comply with the Hurrell-Harring settlement. The Governor’s budget proposal of a one-year restriction on payments for county reimbursement was not included in the enacted budget.
- $3.7 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to-Peer Support Program and an additional $300,000 for a NYC pilot project.
- 20% sales and compensating use tax levied at the point of retail sale and manufacturers for vaping products. Vaping product dealers must also register with the state and be licensed by the NYS Commissioner of Health to sell vapor products.
• $3.75 million for jail-based SUD treatment programs; $1 million for additional services and expenses of jail-based SUD; $2 million for NYC to hire additional substance abuse and intervention specialists; and $1.5 million for the office of the substance abuse ombudsman.

• CHIPS and Marchiselli aid are level from prior year’s funding. Extreme Weather repair ($65 million proposal) was not included in the capital budget bill; however, legislative leaders stated that there will be a supplemental capital bill. There are indications, and NYSAC will advocate for, the Extreme Weather repair funding to be included in this supplement.

Post-Budget Summary

Between May 1 and June 19, state lawmakers will convene for 23 legislative session days before they adjourn for 2019. Additional priorities that NYSAC will continue to engage lawmakers on include:

• The rural cellular taskforce and rural cellular coverage issues;
• Paint stewardship;
• Home rule authority and sales tax extenders;
• Sports betting;
• Adult-use cannabis legalization;
• Parole violators in county jails;
• Income tax credits for volunteer firefighters and EMS workers;
• Pre-arraignment holding;
• Design build authorization for county projects;
• Judgement interest rates;
• PINS reform; and
• Bail reform.

We expect the State Legislature to continue to remain active throughout the remainder of session. The Legislature has signaled that they intend to tackle statewide rent regulation, equal pay legislation, climate community protection act, and adult-use cannabis legalization, among other issues. The NYSAC legislative team will continue to monitor legislation and inform members on pending legislation impacting counties.

Broadband App Launched

NACo has partnered with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) to develop a mobile app designed to identify areas with low or no connectivity to help ensure adequate funding for broadband infrastructure is provided across the country.

Your help identifying gaps in our nation’s broadband coverage is critical to making substantive changes to the process for reporting broadband service. We hope you will help shed light on this critically important issue and encourage your friends, family and constituents to join in the efforts as well!
Ontario County Citizens Academy

A Behind-the-Scenes Perspective on Government Operations

By Mary Krause, Ontario County Administrator

There’s a new springtime tradition in Ontario County. As winter’s grays fade and the region’s bright greens begin to emerge, residents come together for a few evening hours weekly to learn more about how their government operates.

Ontario County’s Citizens Academy, now in its third season, is a six-week program developed to provide citizens with a healthy dose of information and insights to the priorities and programs of county departments and leadership.

We launched the program in 2017 as a way to provide a casual atmosphere for citizens to learn more about how their government serves residents and businesses. The program connects participants with county subject matter experts who share information on department roles and responsibilities and programs. From public works, public safety, and public health to budgets, finance, and economic development. Most every one of the county’s 26 departments is introduced in some capacity through the program.

The Citizens Academy has been well-received by the community. It gives curious citizens as well as folks who might be interested in seeking public office or those exploring a career in government an interactive and up-close introduction to county government.

Each of the six sessions takes place over a three-hour period with the first half of the program held in a classroom setting with panels and speakers and the second half on a tour in one of the county’s many facilities. The county jail, 911 Center, public works buildings, and the Record & Archives building where some of the region’s oldest historical documents are warehoused are among the facilities visited as part of the program.

Class size is limited to 30 so that speakers and participants can easily interact. A light refreshment is provided, some of which are donated by Finger Lakes food and beverage merchants.

Each session opens with a brief introduction by a member of the Board of Supervisors. Each week different department heads guide presentations, describing their team’s mission, staff composition, significant projects under way or planned, little known facts, and issues that may be of particular interest to citizens. Plenty of time is always allotted for questions and answers.

The Citizen’s Academy has become a valuable tool in helping us educate the public about how the county is organized and serves their day-to-day life. In turn, we sometimes discover concerns and misconceptions citizens might have about the way we do business that we have an opportunity to clear up.

Upon completing the program, participants receive a certificate, a thumb-drive with all of the programs presented, and an Ontario County “Ambassador” branded coffee mug.

We consider our graduates to be ambassadors for Ontario County. Our hope is that they will impart information about county services to family and friends or point someone who needs our services in the right direction. Perhaps they might pass along a good word or two about county government.

As one of our 2017 Citizen Academy graduates Bonnie Maguire said: “I’ve lived in Ontario County my entire life and found the program to be so enlightening. It was a chance to learn and ask questions about every area of county government from actual department heads. I gained a much better understanding of how our tax dollars are being managed.”
Approximately three years ago, Martha Sauerbrey and LeeAnn Tinney, attended a Leadership Meeting hosted by Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul at Binghamton University. The meeting was a roundtable discussion attended by professional women from around the region, and they talked about women in leadership positions and the challenges they face. The discussion was so inspiring that on the drive back to work, Sauerbrey and Tinney decided to do something about building a leadership program in Tioga County. Together with other similar thinkers, they created an organization called Tioga Women Lead.

Tioga Women Lead (TWL) is a local group of professional, women leaders who are committed to advancing women's leadership in Tioga County through empowerment, education, and experience. The group is organized by six Tioga County women: Martha Sauerbrey, Tioga County Legislative Chair; LeeAnn Tinney, Director, Tioga County Economic Development and Planning; Gwen Kania, President, Tioga County Chamber; Penny Bartlow, Owner, PKB DESIGN, LLC / Creator, Global Leadership Now; Pam Pringle, President Elect, New York State Women Inc., Susquehanna Chapter; and Rebecca Maffei, Director, Tioga County Tourism.

“We knew what we wanted to do, we just didn’t want to get caught up in a lot of rules and regulations, so we partnered with the Tioga County Chamber of Commerce and began to get to work” stated Martha Sauerbrey.

The TWL Mission Statement says, “The mission of Tioga Women Lead is to educate, support and advance women leaders in Tioga County. Smart and strong leadership is essential to successful and sustained economic and community development. Tioga Women Lead provides the tools and network to assist women with effectual leadership in their profession and community, while inspiring and guiding future leaders.” TWL recognizes that women already play a vital leadership role in government, corporations, independent businesses, community organizations, schools and families in Tioga County, and sees the potential to encourage more women, including our youth, to become local leaders.

Since its inception, Tioga Women Lead has held quarterly meetings throughout the county, featuring speakers and workshops to help develop leadership skills. Events have ranged from educational lunches to a half-day conference with breakout sessions. Topics have included Leading with Integrity, It’s Up to You, and Living in Possibility. These events offer participants a chance to hear from local women leaders about how they can become leaders in their homes, at work, and in their community.

TWL created an award program called the “You Rock Award,” presented to women who have made significant contributions to the community. The first award was presented to Lindsey Field, a Senior at Owego Free Academy who won the New York State Weight Lifting Competition for her weight category. TWL had no funding for awards so they created their own awards by artfully painting rocks for presentation awards.

In 2018, Lt. Governor Hochul made a stop in Tioga County for a New York State Women’s Suffrage Event, and Tioga Women Lead presented her with a You Rock Award, thanking her for her inspiration.
In a county that is spread out over 1,397 square miles in the rural Southern Tier, with 48 municipalities and hundreds of community partner organizations, Steuben County officials strongly believe communication with local leaders and residents is key to serving the public's needs.

However, about five years ago, press coverage of county happenings began to drastically decrease. Newsroom staff cutbacks and a change in corporate media's approach meant previous avenues of communicating county news, such as newspapers, radio, and television, were no longer conveying county government news.

The public quickly noticed that news coming out of the county was dwindling. Legislators began to be contacted by constituents and asked what was happening during legislative meetings and why information wasn't being shared. In addition, this impacted public awareness of, and participation in, many service opportunities offered by Steuben, including vital public health and aging programs.

In response to relying on traditional means of communication, under County Legislature Chairman Joe Hauryski, the county has made use of more unconventional ways, including a bimonthly newsletter sent to municipalities, an active social media outreach, and direct contact with local print and media.

The bimonthly newsletter, compiled by County Manager Jack Wheeler, is comprised of departmental highlights noting achievements and special efforts to meet specific needs, such as the county’s programs to combat opioid abuse, safety tips from the Sheriff and Emergency Services, and notices of volunteer opportunities. The newsletter is shared with city, town, and village officials and posted on the county’s webpage for citizens to view. The response from stakeholders is continuously positive.

Next, social media, specifically Facebook, has proven to be an invaluable source for keeping county residents informed. Since it was created in June 2014, with an automatic feed to Twitter, it has become a primary vehicle for informing residents almost daily of issues, legislative activities, and departmental events including law enforcement, social services, public health, youth activities, office for the aging and employees of the month.

It is also becoming the primary source of information during emergency operations, ranging from a town evacuation to severe winter storms. With timely posts from the Office of Emergency Services and 9-1-1, safety tips, and access to road conditions, some posts have drawn responses from more than 15,000 people.

The county also became more proactive in pushing news out to media outlets. To coordinate the distribution of information, the county issued an RFP in 2014 for press information officer services and contracted with a former government reporter who was laid off by a local newspaper due to budget restrictions. She writes county news releases geared toward a “copy, place and paste” Associated Press style and communicates directly with the media.

Finally, a weekly television news segment is connecting the county with residents. Last summer, the county was approached by WETM-TV, the local NBC affiliate in Elmira, to grow the ways in which local news is shared with the public. Beginning in September, WETM began hosting a weekly segment called “Ask the Manager” during their noon broadcast. During this segment, Wheeler shares important municipal updates and answers questions from the reporter or viewers.

At a time when local press resources are limited, and dwindling, Steuben and other municipalities have been forced to be creative to ensure that stakeholders and the public remain informed. The use of newsletters, social media, and increased interaction with the media have been successful tools for the county.
In February, the Tompkins County Legislature passed its usual resolution acknowledging and recognizing African American History Month. I co-sponsored the resolution with Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, but we also added something extra to this year’s resolution. In addition to recognizing the importance of honoring African American history, the Legislature also resolved to fly the Pan-African (which I call the Red, Black and Green or “RBG”) Flag over various Tompkins County buildings to add a visual reminder of the month. I was motivated to make this request because I could not find in the legislative records that anyone had ever requested to fly this flag. Honoring African American History more visibly felt important.

Throughout February, the county flew these RBG flags at the following county buildings: human services building; airport terminal, main courthouse, public safety building, health department, emergency response center, public works facility, crash, fire, rescue building and, my favorite location, the public library.

When I saw the flags at the courthouse, the library and the airport terminal, I felt great pride in Tompkins County. When I was growing up, I never imagined that I would live in a county that would proudly raise and fly the RBG flag. I am hoping that people in the county noticed the flags and wondered how and why those flags were raised.

I checked online to learn that some cities across the U.S. had raised the RBG flag, but you could count those cities on one hand. I asked someone to check on other New York counties to determine whether any other county had flown the flag; they could not find a single one.

Commemorating Black History Month in Tompkins County

By Henry Granison, Tompkins County Legislator

History of the Pan-African Red, Black, and Green Flag

The Pan-African Flag is known by several names: the Marcus Garvey, UNIA flag, Afro-American flag, Black Liberation flag and others. On August 13, 1920, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and African Communities League formally adopted the flag during a month-long convention in New York City. For several years leading up to that date, Marcus Garvey, the UNIA’s leader, talked about the need for a black liberation flag. Robert Hill, a historian and Marcus Garvey scholar, says that Garvey thought of a flag as necessary symbol of political maturity.

One theory about the Pan-African flag’s colors was that each had symbolic meaning. Red stood for blood — both the blood shed by Africans who died in their fight for liberation, and the shared blood of the African people. Black represented, well, black people. And green was a symbol of growth and the natural fertility of Africa.

Robert Hill says that the Pan-African flag went on to become the template for flags all over Africa as they gained independence. Ghana, Libya, Malawi, Kenya and many other African countries adopted the red, black and green — often with the addition of gold, which sometimes symbolizes mineral wealth. Moreover, Kwanzaa, the holiday created by African Americans to observe Black cultural heritage and values, also has the same colors as those found on the Black Liberation Flag.

You can learn more about the flag at http://www.panafricanalliance.com/rbg/

As for the response from the residents of the county, I heard that one person came running into a county office with great excitement in their voice stating that the flag was flying at the human services building! This was exactly the response that I was seeking: Residents noticing the flags and feeling proud that someone flew the flag, visibly honoring African American History.
DMV Outreach Drives Revenue
Broome County Clerk Connects with Constituents

By Joseph A. Mihalko, Broome County Clerk

Since taking the helm as Broome County Clerk in January 2018, I’ve been working hard to develop new, innovative ways to connect with my constituents and attract more DMV customers.

In today's fast-paced society, when nearly everything can be done online with a credit card and the click of a button, flexibility is key to connecting with customers and maintaining relationships. That means continually reassessing the services we offer and making necessary adjustments to enhance accessibility and accommodate residents' busy schedules.

Currently, only 40% of all DMV transactions are processed locally. Many of us simply lack the time and patience to visit a crowded DMV office when we can process the same transaction online without the hassle.

Unfortunately, that convenience comes at a price for county governments, which are bleeding revenue every time someone renews online or mails their paperwork to the Albany DMV. Currently, only 40% of all DMV transactions are processed locally. Many of us simply lack the time and patience to visit a crowded DMV office when we can process the same transaction online without the hassle.

So how can cash-strapped localities retain these fees and better connect with residents to incentivize local renewals? I’d argue the solution is twofold: We need to work smarter to meet the community’s needs and we must convince our state leaders to update New York’s antiquated fee sharing agreement with county governments.

New York State has been pocketing 87.3% of all DMV fees collected locally since 1999. Coupled with declining revenues from online sales, it’s a recipe for disaster.

My deputies and I traveled up to Albany on March 5th to drive this point home with our Senate and Assembly representatives, Transportation Committee members, and newly-appointed DMV Commissioner Mark Schroeder. Senator Richie carries a bill that would increase the county’s share of fees from 12.7% to 25%. This legislation is critical to the future of our local DMVs, but we’re not making enough noise and it won't pass unless county leaders across the state start speaking out about it in a loud, clear, unified voice.

In the meantime, my office has been initiating a variety of outreach efforts to connect with drivers and encourage their use of our local services. For example, we enclosed a flyer with every homeowner’s 2019 property tax bill touting the fiscal impact of renewing locally. To date, we’ve received 170 driver’s license and vehicle registration renewals using the pre-printed address card that was included on the flyer - that’s money that would’ve landed in the abyss of Albany’s General Fund otherwise.

We also installed DMV “Drop Boxes” in six different rural and suburban locations throughout Broome County, where residents can deposit their renewals. They’re a win-win for the county, which retains a portion of the fees, and for our residents who get to save their stamps and avoid the DMV lines.

As an added convenience, Broome County also offers Saturday DMV hours, drawing customers from every county in the Southern Tier and beyond. Residents from 17 other counties—many of whom live well over an hour away—regularly travel to Endicott to utilize our Saturday services.
To connect with constituents outside of Broome County’s urban core, we also deploy a mobile DMV unit to four rural locations throughout the week. It makes life a little easier for folks who lack reliable transportation or don’t have time to travel to one of our full-service branches during normal business hours.

We’re continually planning for the future and making the Broome Clerk’s Office work smarter in other areas too.

Upon learning that New York is converting the entire State Thruway to a cashless tolling system, for instance, we began selling E-ZPass tags to help residents prepare for the transition. Offering this new service was a no-brainer. Billed tolls are higher than those paid with E-ZPass. It’s a great opportunity to make it easier for our constituents to save a few bucks.

Finally, in addition to distributing U.S. Passport applications at local bridal shows, our office has been collaborating with various schools, municipalities, and non-profit organizations to host Passport Fairs for future travelers. These events are an all-hands-on-deck, one-stop shop for residents’ Passport needs. In 2018, we hosted Fairs in partnership with the Town of Union, Broome-Tioga BOCES and Seton Catholic High School. Future collaborations with AAA and others are in the works.

I hope the initiatives we’re rolling out in Broome County are helpful to my counterparts in neighboring regions. After all, our communities face a lot of the same challenges, and public service is all about exchanging ideas, addressing gaps in services, and connecting with the people we were elected to represent.
One Click at a Time
Enhancing Citizen and Government Communications

By Monika Salvage, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator, Cayuga County and Project Manager for the Cayuga County Website Redevelopment Project

Is the notion of “county government at your fingertips” idealistic or an attainable goal?

Should people be able to apply for county jobs online, submit and track community improvement ideas, receive news and meeting alerts, make online tax payments, and have access to online forms and documents whenever and wherever?

Think about it from the perspective of a resident first, and then decide how your county fares in these areas.

We live in a fast-paced time where people expect to access information, sign up for notifications, and carry out transactions on the go. While governments have historically not been on the cutting edge when it comes to a compelling web presence, accessibility for people with varying needs, and overall transparency, this mindset is no longer acceptable to citizens.

While many municipalities are striving to connect with their constituents, it is by no means an easy task and it’s an ongoing quest in this constantly evolving environment.

Local governments also must contend with the fact that people don’t want just any kind of information thrown at them, as they are already bombarded with a myriad of news, emails, and advertisements on their devices. They want specific information of interest to them, they want it in real-time when it is still relevant, and they want to be able to rely on receiving this information.

In Cayuga County, we kept these societal realities in mind throughout the rigorous development and redesign process for our new website (www.cayugacounty.us) that involved all 30 county departments.

It was a mind shift for all of us to think less about our internal departmental structure and more about the services we provide and the different ways residents might be looking to access them on our website. This resulted in a global navigation that not only lists departments, but also service areas (for people who are not sure which department administers a certain program), and a search menu for task-oriented searches (How Do I… apply for, find, pay, report, sign up for, or submit something).

We also sought to increase community engagement and enhance communication between residents and our county government. To facilitate this process, we once again approached things from the viewpoint of the citizens and aimed to provide opportunities to specify the topics and information they want to receive or request. The following features are catching on:

Notify Me

No more checking back to see if a certain item has been posted to the website already! Citizens may subscribe to automated notifications to their email and/or cell phone. This includes emergency alerts, press releases, monthly administrator reports, meeting notices, agendas and minutes. Residents may choose as many categories as they like and break it down by department or even committee level.
Citizen Request Tracker

Share and receive responses on the progress of your feedback or request! This feature allows residents to address a request directly with the department that can help them and allows for follow-up communication if desired. Sub-categories are provided for even more targeted feedback and documents or pictures may be uploaded to support the request. Citizens may create an account on the website to be able to track the status of their requests or submit as a guest with the choice to request feedback from the assigned county employee.

Careers

Sign up for exam alerts and apply online! People who are interested in working for Cayuga County can now sign up to receive alerts for upcoming Civil Service exams and apply online for vacant positions. As an extra perk, applicants can create an account that stores all their information for future applications. If they want to apply for a different position, all they need to do is update the existing information in the system.

We applaud the Cayuga County Legislature for moving our county government’s online presence forward by approving this innovative project. The new website is mobile responsive and allows residents to access their local government from any device at any time. A special focus was placed on ADA compliance and accessibility.

It was a huge undertaking to redevelop our website that features 30 county departments and 19 towns and villages in less than five months. Thanks to the efforts of our website team and everyone involved, we were able to present updated content in a new way and get all the departments and hosted municipalities trained so they are empowered to create and maintain their own content in an easy-to-use content management system.
Welcome to the County Fairs of New York

By the NYS Association of Agricultural Fairs

Agriculture, New York's #1 Industry

The New York State Association of Agricultural Fairs Agricultural Awareness program provides support to local county fairs to showcase New York’s best in agriculture and livestock.

Each year the program makes funds available to fairs to create exhibits or facility improvements that support agriculture during their annual events. These funds enable the local fair to present an aspect of New York agriculture with an emphasis on education and product promotion in the local area. With the support of the people, the local fair is the showcase.

Some of the 2019 projects supported by the Agricultural Awareness program funds include:

At the Chautauqua County Fair, in Dunkirk, “The Importance of Water” exhibit will feature the pitcher pump to water pump and how the growing process of agricultural products needs water to survive.

Columbia County Fair, Chatham, has created an app to lead people throughout the fairgrounds to the various ag-related exhibits. It will also feature information about the history of various commodities.

Fonda Fair, Fonda, will create live size stand up cut outs featuring various ag related products and livestock for great photo-ops.

The Genesee County Fair, Batavia, is working with FFA to create various learning labs and children's activities throughout the fairgrounds.

Gouverneur/St. Lawrence County Fair, Gouverneur, has purchased an “Incredible Milking Cow” for fairgoers to learn just how to milk a cow for real.

At the Niagara County Fair, Lockport, Farm to Fork will feature the local agriculture products and will feature interactive displays and information.

The Ontario County Fair, Canandaigua has created an educational display in the draft horse barn and purchased new panels and pens for the sheep barn to provide a more comfortable place for the animals while at the fair.

At the Steuben County Fair, Bath, a new sound system will be used throughout the grounds and in the livestock area show ring to keep fairgoers aware of the importance of livestock judging.

Wayne County Fair, Palmyra, has also purchased new livestock panels for the livestock area and the comfort of the animals.

Whatever your destination is throughout New York, you will find a county fair exhibit to peak your interest. Be sure to stop by and visit one of the 52 fairs in New York. They will provide you and your family with fun, a positive experience, and insight into where your family’s food comes from, how it is grown, harvested and marketed. As people of this great state, we are proud to keep the tradition of agriculture and the State & County Fair “Standing Strong!”

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Food for Thought: Farm-to-School Feeds Students, Communities

By Chris Watkins, Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension

In counties across New York, farm-to-school (F2S) programs are connecting K-12 students with much-needed healthy food. Through F2S, students have reliable access to fresh, locally-sourced fruits and vegetables and other farm products while district dollars go back into the pockets of local farmers and food producers.

Collaborating with a wide array of stakeholders and programming partners, Cornell Cooperative Extension county associations and regional agriculture teams are on the front lines of these efforts. Our system has association offices located in every county, housing extension specialists and educators trained to provide research-based nutrition, family development, agriculture and economic development expertise and outreach to their communities.

The mission of F2S – to connect communities and local agriculture - is a familiar one for CCE. It is firmly in our wheelhouse and has been stitched into our service fabric for many years.

For CCE educators, today’s F2S efforts mean connecting school food services directors with farmers to procure local fruits, vegetables, dairy products and animal- and plant-based proteins along with training food service staff on food prep techniques. We also teach students and parents about the value of healthy eating and lead farm visits to show them where their food comes from.

CCE educators directly interface with districts as well as state and local agencies to secure and maximize important federal and state funding - in particular, recent grants from New York State Agriculture & Markets (NYSDAM). State funding in support of F2S programming – which doubled in the Governor’s 2018-19 budget - has given our efforts new wings. A component of the “No Student Goes Hungry” initiative, there is a key $.25-per-lunch-served incentive for schools that purchase at least 30 percent of their meal ingredients from New York farms or utilize products comprised of at least 51 percent New York-grown ingredients.

Currently, there are 16 counties across the state involved in CCE-assisted F2S programs that utilize direct funding from NYSDAM. We also recently launched the “Farm to School New York” Program Work Team consisting of CCE educators, Cornell University faculty and external stakeholders who collaborate on F2S efforts across the state.

While CCE also is involved in F2S projects utilizing a variety of other funding streams, here are a few highlights of CCE’s work in NYSDAM-funded counties across the state:

- In western New York, CCE’s Harvest New York agricultural economic team is now in its sixth year collaborating on F2S measures with the Buffalo City School District (BCSD). An 11-school pilot program that began in 2015 has grown to now provide local foods and nutritional education programming in 86 buildings, where they serve 30,000 lunches and 24,000 breakfasts daily.

- In addition to addressing food insecurity in Buffalo’s inner city by providing access to healthy food, western New York’s agricultural economy also gets a boost - one that continues to trend upward. Of the District’s $13M total food budget for

Continued on Page 24

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**Counties involved with the New York State Agriculture & Markets-funded CCE Farm-to-School partnerships:**

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2019-20, it’s forecasted that $3.1M will be used to purchase local produce and dairy products.

- While also supporting the BCSD project, CCE Erie County’s efforts extended across the county through a dedicated F2S Coordinator working to establish connections between 14 farms and 13 school districts. Collectively the program serves more than 25,000 students with a goal of helping the districts meet the 30 percent New York-grown-ingredient incentive mark.

- In the Finger Lakes region, CCE Seneca County educators are leading F2S efforts in 13 schools across four districts. This year, nearly 4,000 children in grades K-12 have access to a variety of locally grown products.

- Up north, CCE St. Lawrence County is partnering with St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES to bring fresh fruits and vegetables - grown by 25 North Country farmers - to 18,600 students in 21 school cafeterias in St. Lawrence and Lewis Counties. A “Know Your Farmer” campaign also is underway to create a stronger connection between students and growers.

- In the Mohawk Valley, CCE Oneida County is benefitting 56,000 students in 37 school districts by working to procure local food and provide training to cafeteria staff.

- In the Southern Tier, CCE Steuben County, in partnership with Greater Southern Tier BOCES and our CCE Schuyler and CCE Chemung County associations, is working to increase procurement of local specialty crops. In addition to local farmers, the effort benefits 28,907 students in 21 school districts across three counties.

- Also in the Southern Tier, CCE Broome County educators are assisting Broome-Tioga BOCES in the procurement of local farm products in a project that also better equips cafeterias to prepare local farm products and educates students about the local foods included in their menus. The project will benefit 21,455 students in 10 school districts.

As you can see, CCE has not been alone in these F2S initiatives. We are extremely thankful for many dynamic collaborations that tap into the strengths of our community partners. From state, county, and municipal leaders, to the school districts and food producers, we are proud to work in concert with our F2S partners to elevate this important work on behalf of New York’s schools, children and farmers. 

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Energize NY now offers Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing without requiring the municipality to guarantee payment during tax delinquency.

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National developers are coming to NYS to finance redevelopment projects using Energize NY’s new open-market PACE program.

Energize NY is a non-profit local development corporation that provides PACE financing to commercial property owners on behalf of our member municipalities. You can learn more at energizeny.org/openpace
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Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEP) across the state provide young New Yorkers ages 14 - 24 with paid employment in the summer months. Summer jobs contribute to skills development, increased earnings, improved school attendance and educational outcomes, reduced involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice system, which leads to a pipeline for workers and reduced poverty.

From public parks and local businesses to senior centers and day camps, youth are placed at various worksites all across New York. Students selected for programs in their local areas receive work assignments at a variety of public, private and nonprofit entities.

In New York, there has been gradual recovery in youth employment since the recession; however, the youth unemployment rate is still significantly higher than the overall unemployment rate. An estimated 12% of youth in New York State are unemployed, and 17% of youth in NYC are unemployed. While this has improved since 2010, JobsFirst NYC reports that all job growth for young people is in part-time work; full-time jobs have decreased during the economic recovery.

There is a strong correlation between youth employment and working as an adult. Without work, young people are missing out on the economic advantage of employment and the opportunity to develop critical "soft skills" -- working in teams, showing up on time, problem solving, customer service, etc. This critical set of skills is crucial to long-term employability, yet many employers see it lacking in today’s workforce.

New York State’s Legislature and Governor have dedicated significant resources to SYEP as a tool to promote opportunities for young people. For the summer of 2018, 18,909 youth across New York State participated in summer youth employment funded by a $40 million investment from the State. This summer, youth were placed at over 14,384 worksites. For the summer of 2019, the Governor and New York State Legislature have increased summer youth employment funding by $4 million for a total of $44 million, to cover the cost of an increasing minimum wage. These resources are sourced from federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars. Even with the increase, the full need isn’t covered. Each year, about half of the youth who apply for summer work don't receive a slot due to a lack of funding.

Summer Youth Programming makes an impact. Across the State, feedback from participating youth highlighted the invaluable skills learned during their SYEP employment, including problem-solving skills, ability to work with others, and the importance of communication and professionalism.

Dwayne, 17, from Monroe County, remarked on his favorite part of working at Hedonist Artisan Chocolates, he said, “learning the responsibility of handling funds taught me to be more responsible with my money and the value of money management.”

In Chautauqua County, Carrasquillo, 16, was provided her first work experience at an Adult Daycare Center. “Working with the elderly this summer was such a rewarding experience. It was more than just playing games and making crafts, our conversations were fun and memorable,” she said.

In Ulster County, Christopher, 16, spent his third summer at his worksite, the George Washington Elementary School Custodial Department. He said, “this summer I really felt as if I learned a lot about leadership, and what it means to be part of a team and guide a team.” In the future, Christopher would “really love working with computers and would like to study computer science or computer engineering.”

Every year the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) collects information on Summer Youth Employment Programs and youth profiles from across New York State. For the past six years NYATEP has showcased this information on a dynamic website that highlights the great work done in youth programs across New York State. We encourage legislators, employers, and workforce colleagues to view youth profiles to understand the impact and importance of summer work experiences for New York State’s young adults.

Check it out: www.nyatep.wixsite.com/nysummeryouth.
FIRST Brings Robotics Competition to Oneida County

By David Catalfamo, Director of Economic Development, Oneida County

The future of Oneida County and upstate New York comes down to one thing - its people.

In March 2019, people were the focus as Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente welcomed more than 3,000 people to the county co-sponsored FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) at the SUNY Polytechnic Institute campus. For almost 30 years, the global non-profit FIRST has been getting kids in grades K-12 hooked on science and technology through robotics competition.

This year's program included 40 teams travelling from around the state, the country, and as far away as Turkey to participate in the three-day competition. Hosting for the second year in a row, SUNY Poly and President Grace Wang once again did a tremendous job showcasing the school and the region to the hundreds of young people, families and coaches at the event.

STEM Education to Support the Future Workforce

Why are initiatives like FIRST critical to Oneida County and the region? As technology continues to permeate across industries, skills gaps exist across the board. To compete and to grow, we need to continue to encourage our young students to pursue careers and education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). With almost $2 billion spent on research and development at Rome Labs annually, the emergence of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) technologies, and the increased automation of every industry, from farming to distribution centers, the need for a highly-skilled workforce is critical to our economic growth.

The number one challenge employers face in choosing a community to expand or move to is the availability of a workforce with the right skills. And, like most communities in Upstate New York, Oneida County is already in a deficit. Today, there are over 60 plus unfilled engineering and science positions at the Air Force Research Laboratory in Rome. As we seek to nurture and grow our own organic high-tech companies through initiatives like our partnership with Vision 2020, MVCC, and the Innovation Collective, the availability of a skilled workforce is critical.

Are we doing enough to upskill, educate and train the workforce of tomorrow? Not yet, but through initiatives like FIRST we are on our way. County Executive Picente is committed to working with our public and private sector partners to achieve this goal. National Grid, another sponsor of FIRST, has already implemented a program to help educate and then hire new engineers from our region.

More than Robots: Craft and Trade Skills Need a Boost

Finally, it's important for everyone to understand that the high-tech economy is not limited to scientists and engineers. One mentor of a robotics team, a shop teacher, told me that a few years ago his class had dwindled to just a couple of students and tools like lathes, welding and machining equipment were gathering dust. Today, the robotics competition has inspired the rediscovery of these skills. Moreover, they are integrated with CAD Design programs and 3D printers to craft robotics and other exciting high-tech products.

It's an important thing to understand: It doesn't require a PhD to excel in the new economy. Opportunities abound in several fields, including manufacturing, machinery operation, inspection, electronics and others which require more than a high school education but less than a four-year college degree. The demand for these skills, coupled with a need for craft and trade workers to help fill the jobs to build a new downtown hospital, the NEXUS Center, the new YMCA, and other capital projects, is why County Executive Picente is launching a new initiative to partner with the trade unions and industry to implement a recruitment/education program to meet that demand.

Robots (flying robots!), automation, and artificial intelligence: these aren't science fiction, they are here now - they are here for everyone. Together as a community, Oneida County is poised to get there FIRST, to answer the challenge and seize the opportunity of the innovation economy.
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NACo Takes County Government to the Classroom

By Brian Namey, Chief Public Affairs Officer, NACo

"The practice of democracy is not passed down in the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation of citizens," said retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) agrees. That's why we partnered with iCivics, founded by Justice O'Connor, to create civic education resources for America's youth. Together, we created a full suite of materials, including a curriculum and online game to educate students grades six through 12 about the important role and functions of county government. These materials assist teachers with preparing lessons on county government.

The County Solutions classroom curriculum, aligned with state standards, includes middle and high school lessons. Available free of charge, the curriculum guides students through the basics of county government and encourages them to engage in local solutions to challenges they identify. Students also learn and practice research, analysis and advocacy skills as they develop a plan to have impact on their chosen issues.

The Counties Work online educational game allows students to simulate the roles of elected county leaders responsible for balancing budgets, services and citizen requests. It's a fast-paced game that challenges students to adjust quickly when a community crisis strikes and see how citizens react to their decisions. The game is compatible across iOS and Android tablets.

The My County Works activity book is designed for younger students, because it's never too early to teach children that counties matter.

Since its launch, the curriculum and activity book has been downloaded more than 10,400 times, reaching half a million students. The online educational game has been played more than 1.7 million times.

One of the most common questions county leaders receive is, "What does a county do?" These tools help students (and adults!) understand how county government impacts people's lives.

NACo makes it easy for county leaders to reach students. We created a classroom discussion guide and presentation template to facilitate classroom activities. One idea is to introduce students to the Counties Work game and host a friendly competition with students. It would be fun to see if they can score higher than you!

Because these tools are designed for a national audience and every county is unique, we encourage you to tailor your discussions specifically for your county. NACo's County Explorer online interactive data tool and NACo's Counties Matter campaign can help you localize information for each classroom.

County Explorer provides the latest available data on each of the nation's 3,069 counties. It has hundreds of data points on every county as well as printable PDF versions of county and state profiles.

Counties Matter is a visually engaging way to walk through the many aspects of county governments, with a listing of services and interesting facts and figures. This can be a launch point for explaining how your county is similar to or different from counties nationwide.

Many county leaders engage young people and help to elevate awareness of county government and encourage civic participation. Helping students understand the nuances of county roles and responsibilities while they are young sets them up for lifelong understanding of how counties affect their lives. And perhaps more importantly, these resources aim to help the next generation of Americans become more engaged in local government – seizing opportunities and overcoming challenges our communities face.

All of these resources are available at www.naco.org/icivics.
At the Erie County Clerk's Office, we made community wellness a top priority. That may sound strange - how is a county clerk's office related to wellness? What we have found is that there are multiple ways for the Clerk's Office to serve our community and go above and beyond traditional clerk's office services. One of the ways we have done this is by creating the Clerk's Wellness Collaborative (CWC).

According to the 2017 Robert Woods Johnson County Health Rankings Report, Erie County ranked 50th out of the 62 counties in New York. This upsetting score was a call to enact change within our community.

It was apparent that improving this substandard ranking was going to require a team effort by both elected officials and community health organizations. The Erie County Clerk's Office serves hundreds of customers a day through our various departments. This large number of transactions each day offers us the unique ability to touch the lives of many and improve our poor ranking. Therefore, in January 2018, the Erie County Clerk's Office launched the Clerk's Wellness Collaborative.

Cardiovascular Health

Our first mission was a collaboration between the Erie County Clerk’s Office and Catholic Health System (CHS) Mercy Hospital. In working with health professionals, we determined that one way to help better community health is through sharing health information and providing services for residents where they wouldn't normally see it.

Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in Erie County and the number one cause of death in the United States. In fact, Erie County residents experience 33% more heart disease deaths than the average U.S. citizen. As part of American Heart Month in February and World Stroke Awareness Day in October, the Clerk's Office and Catholic Health teamed up for two years in a row to offer free blood pressure screenings and carotid artery screenings at auto bureaus across the county.

The goal of the "Heart Healthy Auto Bureau Blood Pressure Screenings" and "Stroke Prevention Carotid Artery Screenings" was to enter into the non-traditional setting to promote healthier lives and help prevent heart disease and stroke in our community. The blood pressure and carotid artery screenings proved to be a great success. Registered nurses from CHS conducted 220 blood pressure screenings and found that 84 participants had high blood pressure. Of the 200 carotid artery screenings, 12 participants were found be at risk of stroke due to calcifications within the arteries.

Healthiest Districts Initiative

The next initiative under the Clerk's Wellness Collaborative was the Healthiest Districts Initiative (HDI). The HDI is a collaborative effort between the Clerk's Office, five school districts, and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo. The initiative targeted health and wellness information and practices within our school communities. In working with leaders from the school districts, it became clear that one of their top health priorities was mental health. Working with the Mental Health Advocates of WNY, we were able to organize a Mental Health Staff Training. This training provided information and resources on how school districts can take proactive, instead of reactive, measures when it comes to addressing mental health in their schools.

The HDI also sought to expose students to the great health and wellness resources available in Erie County, such as our state parks. In May 2018, the HDI launched the first ever 'HDI Parks Clean-Up Day'. Hundreds of students from five school districts visited three different NYS Parks in Erie County, where they worked together to help clean-up the park, get active outside, and socialize with students from different school districts. We are excited to continue this event in Spring 2019, which will be renamed “HDI Wellness in the Parks Day.”

Workplace Wellness

Another new wellness initiative of the Clerk's Office is workplace wellness opportunities for employees who wish to participate. We have teamed up with a local health instructor who is volunteering her time to put on a pilot program for Wednesday “Midday Meditations” at the Clerk's Office.

We also have a continued partnership with Unyts Donate Life. In 2018, we saw an unprecedented 60% increase in the number of donor registrants from 2017.

To answer that original question about how a clerk's office can be related to wellness, we can say that a clerk's office has a unique opportunity to engage with our daily customers and connect with communities from across the county. At the Erie County Clerk's Office, we have taken advantage of this opportunity by working to improve the health and wellness of our entire county
One of the ways to foster a sense of belonging in a community is to bring together different sectors to achieve a common goal. To address a public health issue, we seek input from those affected, but whose voices are often not heard.

In Livingston County, we sought to uncover the barriers to healthcare for some of our populations. We began with talking to residents in rural communities and asking them what their challenges were when it came to healthcare.

Our conversations revealed that access and transportation to healthcare are difficult in rural areas. These challenges coupled with the demands of work and childcare can make many activities hard for families to participate in.

Bringing Health to the Community, with Community Support

Residents of Nunda, a small rural municipality in Livingston County, were often unable to access county public health services. Through the Be Well Nunda initiative, the Livingston County Health Department held meetings in Nunda, enabling local residents, the schools, and the Mayor to participate. This allowed the individuals most affected by challenges like high obesity rates to be actively involved in finding solutions, thereby improving the community’s overall health.

The Mayor of Nunda started a blog which sparked a lot of interest. In addition, the Boy Scouts volunteered for a colon cancer initiative which not only created momentum, but also allowed those involved to “think outside of the box.” This helped to achieve two policy adoptions and system-wide changes, including providing a flexible schedule so employees can take the time they need to seek out medical care.

A small practice opened so that employees can seek care during their lunch hour or have a more flexible work schedule and walk to the office. Keeping community members in rural areas motivated to participate by holding events in their towns helps sustain interest. Having local leaders, like the Mayor, be a champion of the Be Well initiative also makes changes more realistic and likely to stick. Popular community events like a Holiday walk, and group hikes help engage all ages and demographics and entices local retailers to offer support.

Solutions that Address Real Life Challenges: Funding and Awareness

In addition to our policy work, in Livingston County we achieved 80% by 2018 for cancer screenings due to our work with employers to allow and encourage time off for employees for this important cause. The employers ranged from factories to local auto shops that were previously unaware of these initiatives.

The barrier for many in getting screened is lack of funding and awareness. Improving access to those who have been marginalized is imperative in achieving these impressive numbers.

During the community health assessment process, we seek not only quantitative, but qualitative data to help ensure needs are met across all sectors of the community. Most recently, we included students, inmates, and the Migrant Center. As a result, we were able to provide increased access to care and bilingual services, as necessary.

One example which proved successful occurred at the time of the devastating hurricane in Puerto Rico in 2017. Our Spanish-speaking employee assisted residents by helping them reach out and in some cases locate their loved ones in Puerto Rico who were affected by the hurricane. While it was not within a typical definition of public health, our community realized the detrimental effects of not being able to reach loved ones, which could negatively impact one’s emotional health. Building this relationship helped provide services to those transient as well. Our data showed a remarkable increase in our Mount Morris population after the hurricane and since that time we have increased our services for mental health at our Mount Morris Site.

Solving public health challenges isn’t something we can do from our desks. It requires getting out to speak to the community, to both hear about their challenges and inform them about the services we offer and the importance of activities like screenings, medical care, and exercise. By connecting with our residents, we can better solve the public health issues in our county.
2019 County Spotlight Photo Contest Winners

View full captions and a selection of all submissions on our Facebook Page @NYSCounties

Monroe County
Saikat Chakraborty
Rush Rhees Library

“Harmony”

Madison County
Christine Coe
Original Brass Courthouse Doorknob

“County Courthouse”

Wayne County
Jeff Timmerman
Perseid meteor shower at Sodus Point

“Sodus Point Meteor Shower”

Ontario County
Joann K. Long
Pedestrian bridge in Victor, built in 1995

“Boughton Bridge to Beauty”

Kings County
Frank T. Pietrzak
Brooklyn Bridge

“Sometimes the World Seems Upside Down”
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County Children’s Single Point of Access

Connecting Families to Vital Community Resources

By Katherine Alonge-Coons, LCSW-R, Commissioner of Mental Health, Rensselaer County
Chair, NYS Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors

The New York State Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors (CLMHD) is a statewide membership organization and NYSAC affiliate representing the Directors of Community Services (DCSs)/County Mental Health Commissioners for each of New York’s 57 counties and New York City.

Also known as the Local Governmental Unit (LGU), the DCS has a statutory authority and responsibility for oversight and cross-system management of the local mental hygiene system and develops, implements, and plans for services and supports for adults and children with mental illness, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities.

Each county and borough in NYS operates a Children’s Single Point of Access (C-SPOA) which is embedded in the LGU and operates under the authority of each county’s DCS. The C-SPOA program was created to operate as the name applies - to establish a Single Point to assist children and families with complex needs in navigating and coordinating the process for obtaining care. The Departments of Mental Health, Social Services and Juvenile Probation are often involved in C-SPOA cases along with clinics, supportive services providers in the community, and often the school district. The goal of C-SPOA is to identify child/family needs and access services that will enable the youth to remain in their home, school and community and avoid out of home placement and/or psychiatric hospitalizations.

Though the C-SPOA began as a Mental Health system process, each county’s C-SPOA has evolved its operations over time to adapt to changes in the community’s available services and to the children’s NYS Medicaid Managed Care Redesign transition. The LGU/C-SPOAs also provide service coordination for children who are not eligible for Medicaid coverage, allowing them to access services directly through the county.

In order to meet a child’s specific individualized needs, C-SPOAs rely on their strong cross-system partnerships within the community. In the 1990s, several LGUs were awarded multi-year grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to establish Children’s Systems of Care (SOC) in their counties. SOC provides an evidence-based approach where communities connect and
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support one another to problem solve collectively, enabling the sharing of resources and leadership to accomplish common goals to meet the physical, mental, social, emotional, education, and developmental needs of children and their families.

The counties that received SAMHSA/SOC grants brought together representatives of the local child-serving community to collaborate around ways to better coordinate services and support for children/youth and families in their counties. For example, Westchester County partnered closely with families and family-run organizations to develop and sustain a SOC model which not only gives children access to a variety of services, but also ensures that these services are coordinated and individualized to meet the child and family's needs. In Orange and Erie counties, cross-system partners have agreed to co-locate intake staff to review referrals and regularly interact with the community stakeholders. In Erie County, the local Departments of Mental Health, Social Services and Juvenile Probation share office space and participate as multidepartment teams. This rich formal and informal communication enables more frequent case conferencing, streamlines the process for families, and fosters shared responsibility for problem solving.

With the NYS Children's Medicaid Managed Care Transition well underway, the C-SPOAs are prepared to support the children's Health Home model, the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver transition and the eventual final transition into the Medicaid Managed Care environment. Through collaboration with State Agencies, Health Homes, and community referrers, CLMHD and county C-SPOA Coordinators have developed a standardized referral process that will be utilized across NYS and NYC. This new process allows anyone referring a child for services through C-SPOA to experience streamlined procedures in every county, thereby improving the children's system of care functioning and adapting to changes in the service system resulting from the Medicaid transformation initiatives.

The C-SPOA model is based on the principle that helping children grow and thrive is everyone's responsibility, and that families should always be in the driver's seat. This process will continue to ensure that both Medicaid and non-Medicaid children have access to vital services, as C-SPOA partners closely with families and family-run organizations to implement and sustain the various statewide initiatives at the county and community level to improve care and reduce costs, while at the same time providing local systems oversight and accountability, assuring the unique needs of the child and family are met.
Can You Hear Us Now?
Adirondack Officials and NYSAC Call on State to Help Expand Cell Phone Coverage

By Matt Simpson, President, the Adirondack Association of Towns & Villages

The words still ring in Brian LaFlure's ears:

“That's just trees.”

Brian, the longtime director of emergency services for Warren County was attending an informational session on the highly touted FirstNet system, a high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network for the exclusive use of first responders and other public safety personnel.

Looking at the FirstNet coverage map for New York State, he saw a gaping hole in Warren County and the rest of the Adirondack Region. Because of poor or non-existent cell phone coverage, the system would be of little, if any, use in the Adirondacks.

Brian pointed out this lack of coverage over such a vast geographic area, and was shocked at the uninformed response from a FirstNet representative: “That's just trees.”

“It's not just trees,” Brian says now, still frustrated by the exchange. “People live and work in the Adirondacks. People vacation here. And all of those people rely on emergency services to protect their families and help them when they need it. It's imperative that something be done, sooner rather than later, to improve our cell phone coverage.”

Brian is far from alone in feeling this way. From town halls and fire stations to small businesses, college campuses and countless Adirondack living rooms, people are calling for improved cell phone service in the interest of public safety and economic growth.

Public Health and Safety at Risk

The Adirondack Association of Towns & Villages (AATV) recently passed a unanimous resolution stating that every area of the state “has a right to this key piece of technology infrastructure,” and calling upon local governments throughout New York to stand together and “insist that the time is now to move NYS ahead of the nation in terms of this critical technology.” The resolution was forwarded to Gov. Cuomo and state legislative leaders.

“We're at a point in society where cellular service and the ability to use wireless devices is no longer a luxury. It's critically important for emergency services, for business and tourism, for education and for our overall quality of life,” says Matt Simpson, president of AATV and supervisor of the Warren County Town of Horicon. “We've heard the economic arguments from the service providers, we've heard the aesthetic concerns about towers, but it's time that everyone works together to find a solution.”

Earlier this year, Senator Betty Little, Assemblymember Dan Stec, and Assemblymember Billy Jones issued a bipartisan call for higher cell towers to improve coverage in their districts.

Sen. Little was the driving force behind an earlier effort that resulted in dramatic improvements in cellular service along the northern portion of the Adirondack Northway corridor after a tragic accident in January 2007. A Brooklyn man froze to death after he and his wife's car went off the Northway in a remote area and they were trapped, unnoticed, for more than 30 hours in sub-zero temperatures.

In a recent essay in the Plattsburgh Press Republican, Sen. Little wrote, “I want to emphasize the importance of wireless connectivity for public safety. I have had constituents who have not been able to reach the help they needed in an emergency due to cellular dead zones, with devastating, fatal consequences.”

The risks to public health and safety exist even in Saratoga County, one of the most affluent and economically vibrant counties in the state.

“We have towns in the northern portion of the county with little, if any, coverage,” says Sheriff Michael Zurlo. “When you're stranded off the side of a road, or you lose land line service during a storm, having a cell phone can be a real lifeline. Lack of coverage is a big concern from a public health and safety standpoint.”
Arthur “Mo” Wright, first vice president of AATV, is the supervisor in one of those under-served Saratoga County communities, the Town of Hadley. From an emergency services perspective, he says, Hadley, like many small towns, relies on a mutual aid arrangement with nearby communities. The town would like to subscribe to a mobile responder tracking system that would allow them to see exactly which departments are responding when a call goes out and how quickly they will be there, but the system requires cellular service.

"Instead," Supervisor Wright says, "We basically wait to see who shows up. It's just one of the ways that poor cellular service restricts the way we live our lives in Hadley."

Economic Development Hampered

Poor cell phone service is also increasingly a concern from an economic development standpoint.

“The 21st century presents many fresh economic opportunities for the Adirondacks, including the ability to live where one can play while conducting their business. But this is an elusive myth without both broadband and cell service,” says Garry Douglas, president of the Plattsburgh-based North Country Chamber of Commerce, one of the five largest chambers in the state, with more than 3,200 members in five New York counties and southern Quebec.

“Whether one is a business owner, a professional service provider or a tourist, the continued large gaps in cell service are discouraging and economically harmful,” Garry says. “Governor Cuomo’s commitment has helped achieve great progress on the broadband front, and it is time now to come back around and look to close the vast and troublesome cell phone service gaps in the region.”

Jim McKenna, CEO of the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism in Lake Placid, agrees. His team is responsible for marketing Essex, Franklin and Hamilton counties to leisure and business travelers from across the northeast. “Cell service is something that most of the traveling public assumes they’ll have, especially the younger demographics,” he says. “So it is of increasing concern to us from a destination marketing standpoint.”

On the positive side, Jim notes, the region had 18.3 million tourist visits in 2017, and he says that’s a number the cellular service providers should be paying attention to. “Providers traditionally look at regions based on population, or prospective customers,” he says. “But I would suggest there's reason for them to look at the Adirondacks a little differently. They have millions of good, existing customers from metropolitan areas who come here every year. Wouldn't those customers be happier with their service overall if they could continue to use their phones here?”

911 Connection Would Have Saved His Life

As AATV encourages local governments across the state to join in the call for improved cell phone service in the Adirondacks and other areas where coverage is lacking, they urge people to remember that the Adirondack Region is not “just trees” — as Sen. Betty Little can well attest.

“I will never forget the conversation I had with the widow of a gentleman who died not far off the side of an international highway, the I-87 Northway, trapped in their car, with a cell phone on his chest,” the Senator wrote in her Plattsburgh Press-Republican essay. “They were unable to make the 911 connection that would have saved his life.”

Let’s not wait for another tragedy before we act.

The Adirondack Association of Towns & Villages represents the interests of communities wholly or partly in the Adirondack Park.

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Most New York State counties operate an Enhanced 911 system that provides caller location information to the Emergency Dispatcher. The system developed over the years from standard 911 to advanced stages, and now many county’s Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) embrace NG911 technologies.

Telephone companies route all incoming 911 calls to the PSAP, and the dispatcher’s computer uses the information to display the caller’s address or Auto Location Information (ALI). When using modern wireless mobile phones, the geographic coordinates, commonly known as Global Position Satellite (GPS), in terms of latitude and longitude are displayed on a map so First-Responders (police-fire-rescue-EMS) and other services can be efficiently and effectively sent.

In the last few years, our 911 Communications PSAP used this technology to locate callers who were lost, injured, or endangered by their location. This technology is especially important at or near the wildlife management area known as High-Tor, in the western part of Yates County, where parts neighbor the county of Ontario. High-Tor consists of approx. 6,800 acres with numerous ecological habitats, step-wooded terrains, gullies, eroded cliffs, and wetlands. The largest part is east of the village of Naples, NY, which is very scenic, but with steep wooded terrain and forests. In High-Tor, water areas drain through the famous Naples Creek into the east-southern end of Canandaigua Lake, a lake in the Finger Lake Region. Common areas used for hiking are near Parish Hill Road, Conklin’s Gulley, and Clark’s Gulley near Sunnyside in the Township of Italy, Yates County.

New York State has a diverse landscape of natural beauty, and hiking is used by many as a great outdoor activity, but some trails are not maintained as park walkways and can be rugged and rough. Important equipment to have while hiking includes maps, compasses, flashlights, food/water, and a first-aid kit. However, a cell phone is essential! In a recent case, a cell phone was crucial to a mother and her two children when they were on a trail next to a gorge when it started to rain. They realized they were now on slippery ground and afraid of falling 100 plus feet into the chasm. She called 911 on her cell phone, dispatchers plotted their location, and with assistance from the NYS Forest Rangers, guided them to a safer location to exit the area.

911 receives common calls from those stranded in a dark and gully hiking area, lost near a gorge, or who are stranded when they encounter icy areas. In these cases, Naples Fire Department search and rescue are dispatched, with sheriff’s deputies, Forest Rangers, the county’s office of emergency management, and sometimes the Rope Rescue Team. The Enhanced 911 dispatcher will plot the caller’s location on the map and dispatch first responders for rescue at the approximate latitude and longitude while staying on the call for assurance and compassionate support. The county operated enhanced 911 system is truly the first-first responder in rescue incidents at public lands, forests, and county parks. The county operated 911 technology continues to prove itself essential for public safety and the health of our citizens and visitors.
As municipal officials you know that protecting drinking water is a high priority. Nearly 95 percent of all New York residents receive water from one or more of over 9,000 public water supply systems and keeping the public drinking water safe is a big task. New York State is investing $2.5 billion in drinking water infrastructure, clean water infrastructure, and water quality protection through a number of funding opportunities as well as a new initiative called the Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) to assist communities with protecting their source of drinking water.

Drinking Water Source Protection

The goal of source water protection is to prevent contamination of a community's drinking water. Protection comes in many forms: from acquiring land close to the supply and enacting local land controls, to public education. These actions can protect the waters of New York from both current and future contamination.

Benefits to Communities from Protecting Their Drinking Water Sources

Carefully guarding your source of drinking water protects your residents' health and safety and your community’s environment. Experience tells us protection is less expensive than treating a contaminated supply or finding a new source of water. High quality drinking water is important to future growth and economic development of your community.

Funding Opportunity: New York’s Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) Program

You may already be familiar with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Water Quality Improvement Project grant program. It is a long-standing grant program that helps local governments and not-for-profit corporations implement projects that directly address water quality impairments or protect a drinking water source.

Do you know that acquiring lands to protect your source of drinking water is now a project that WQIP funds? The WQIP program provides funds specifically for Land Acquisition, focusing on acquiring and protecting lands that are critical to safeguard a source of drinking water.

This program has a low-cost municipal match requirement and a sizeable maximum grant award. Two rounds of WQIP Land Acquisition grants have been made, and for example, one city was awarded more than $3,000,000 to protect their surface water supply from the threat of changing land use. A new round of funding is expected to be available later this year for additional land acquisition projects.

Funding for the WQIP program is made available through the state's landmark $2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act and the Environmental Protection Fund. WQIP is part of the Regional Economic Development Council’s (REDC) Consolidated Funding Application program. Check the REDC website (https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/) for information on when the grant applications are available and how to apply.

If you want to learn about WQIP Land Acquisition Projects for Source Water Protection visit the DEC website or contact us at WQIPsourcewater@dec.ny.gov.

NYS DEC will also be hosting an “Ask the Expert” call this summer to answer questions regarding WQIP Land Acquisition funding. To learn more, visit the WQIP Land Acquisition Projects for Source Water Protection Toolkit and join the Making Waves weekly newsletter.

Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

In addition to the WQIP Program, DEC and the Department of Health have launched the Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2) to provide municipalities with tools and resources to proactively protect their drinking water sources. Soon the state will provide communities with guidance on how the community can come together and build their own protection program. Although the state's guidance applies statewide, each community will use the guidance to customize their drinking water source protection program, unique to the wants and needs of the community. Also, as part of the program's initial roll-out, the state is in the process of selecting up to 30 municipalities to work with a state hired consultant to help the residents develop and implement a community specific protection plan for their source(s) of drinking water.

Your Role in Protecting Drinking Water

Protecting drinking water is a high priority and New York State is providing municipalities with resources and tools to help them build community-specific protection plans. We encourage you to visit the websites listed in this article and take advantage of the opportunities to protect your community’s drinking water.
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Eye Sore No More

Partnerships Boost Economic Revitalization through Brownfield Redevelopment

By Holly Granat, Environmental Policy Analyst, Onondaga County Office of Environment
Jean Hamerman, Deputy Director, Center for Creative Land Recycling

Land recycling is a team sport. From a project’s conception until its completion, experts from a wide range of disciplines are often needed to develop and execute the remediation plan, obtain funding, and get municipal approval. However, the end results justify this often long, multi-step, multi-stakeholder process. Investing in brownfields redevelopment can create valuable green space, return properties to the tax rolls, and spur community revitalization by turning community eyesores into community assets.

As Onondaga County can attest, forming a partnership early on can help streamline redevelopment processes and ultimately lead to successful community revitalization. This article spotlights the productive partnership between Onondaga County and the Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR), U.S. EPA’s Technical Assistance to Brownfield Communities provider for NYS.

In 2016, Onondaga County formed a partnership with CCLR (“See Clear”) when the county applied for its first U.S. EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant for the former Roth Steel property (“Roth Steel”). CCLR collaborates with municipalities, government agencies and the private sector to catalyze and facilitate the repurposing of blighted properties for community benefit through technical assistance and grant review services. It also convenes multi-sector practitioners at regional and statewide workshops to give stakeholders the skills and network they need to bring redevelopment projects to fruition. The partnership between CCLR and Onondaga County provides a classic example of how collaborative relationships in the field of brownfields redevelopment can yield outsized results in community revitalization.

Although Onondaga’s first attempt at attaining a US EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant was unsuccessful, connecting with CCLR set the county on the path to success. CCLR was pivotal to the county’s understanding of the brownfield assessment and cleanup processes. They provided technical assistance during the FY16 and FY17 EPA grant application rounds and cut through much of the guesswork that can bring redevelopment projects to a standstill.

In 2017, the county was competitively selected to “pitch” the Roth Steel site at a Redevelopment Rodeo at CCLR’s Redevelopment Summit in Albany, NY. The county used this experience to meet a network of redevelopment experts who provided useful insights and expedited the process of Phase I and Phase II investigations through an agreement with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. This experience, and the continued technical expertise from CCLR, set up the county to re-apply for an EPA Cleanup grant for Roth Steel in 2017. This time, they won the coveted $200,000 EPA grant. In the years since the EPA Cleanup grant was awarded, the Roth Steel Property project continues to move forward, with all eight buildings demolished, and an agreement with NYSDEC to divide the site for cleanup.
Seeking to expand their newly formed and fruitful collaboration, CCLR and Onondaga County partnered with the City of Syracuse to host the, “Igniting Revitalization through Land Reuse” workshop in October, 2018. The workshop drew public officials including Syracuse’s Mayor, The Honorable Ben Walsh and Onondaga County Executive, Ryan McMahon, municipal and county planners and economic development specialists, land reuse professionals as well as federal and state partners from NYS DEC, NYS DOS, NYSERDA, Empire State Development, and US EPA. The event highlighted the successes of local brownfield projects such as the Destiny USA Mall expansion, Loop the Lake Trail, and One Group Center, a former brownfield site where the event was hosted. The workshop also provided an invaluable opportunity for stakeholders to exchange land reuse resources and cultivate partnerships.

Onondaga’s brownfield redevelopment success story is one of hundreds nationwide. In most cases, redevelopment projects have a champion; a non-profit, local government and/or developer, willing and able to propel a logistically challenging but worthwhile project forward. Leadership is the grease that drives the commitment to make the project happen. The glue is an array of talented teams of planners, environmental consultants, attorneys and contractors whose skills help these projects succeed.

For information about the Summit, visit www.cclr.org/workshops
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Thanks to the partnership with the New York State Association of Counties, it’s now easier than ever to join the New York State Donate Life Registry. Today we ask that you help us take another important step closer to achieving our goal of ensuring a transplant for every man, woman and child in need by accomplishing one simple task: Please include a link to the Donate Life Registry www.donatelifeny.gov on your website so New Yorkers can easily educate themselves on the importance of donation and to learn how they can register as an organ and tissue donor. Together, we are saving and healing lives.
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For more information contact:

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A NEW WAY TO INVEST FOR RETIREMENT.

Your Guide to Roth 457(b) Contributions

By now, you may have heard of the Roth IRA. You may have even set one up. Well, you also have the opportunity to designate all or part of your contributions to your governmental deferred compensation plan as after-tax Roth 457 contributions.

When you contribute to a Roth 457, you pay taxes on the portion of your salary that goes into the plan; but withdrawals of contributions and earnings can be tax-free during retirement if certain conditions are met.1 If you wish, you can even split your contributions between traditional, pre-tax 457 contributions and Roth 457 contributions.

What’s the benefit of designating some or all of your contributions as Roth? It gives you the opportunity to pay taxes on your contributions now and avoid taxes later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Let’s compare</th>
<th>Traditional (pre-tax) 457(b)</th>
<th>Designated Roth 457 (Current Tax Bracket: 15%)</th>
<th>Designated Roth 457 (Current Tax Bracket: 25%)</th>
<th>Designated Roth 457 (Current Tax Bracket: 35%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single contribution</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less federal taxes paid on contribution</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net total contribution</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$8,500</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in 20 years</td>
<td>$46,610</td>
<td>$39,618</td>
<td>$34,957</td>
<td>$30,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less federal taxes at distribution (25% tax bracket)</td>
<td>$11,652</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net distribution</td>
<td>$34,957</td>
<td>$39,618</td>
<td>$34,957</td>
<td>$30,296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These examples are hypothetical in nature and assume a 25% tax bracket at distribution. It also assumes that the retirement plan’s value earns an average total return of 8% compounded annually. Investment return is not guaranteed and will vary depending upon the investments and market experience.

A single contribution of $10,000 will be worth the same amount in 20 years if the tax bracket remains the same.

However, if the future tax rate is greater, the amount distributed from the Roth account will be greater than the post-tax amount distributed from the traditional 457(b) account.
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