

Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



Volume 1, Issue 3

April 2008

From County Executive Chris Collins



Welcome to the third edition of the Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter. As I complete my first 100 days in office, I look forward to continuing to create an open and transparent administration.

Six Sigma continues to focus on creating efficiency in county government as part of our efforts to make county government more cost effective. In this edition you'll read about my work with Deputy County Executive Davis to cut unnecessary cell phone costs from the county budget. Savings such as these, which some refer to as merely pennies, certainly do add up.

This month you'll also meet our new County Attorney, Cheryl Green. I welcome her to our team and I look forward to working with her to better serve the taxpayers and protect your interests.

Erie County Industrial Development Agency

County Executive Collins recently announced the appointment of five new members to the Erie County Industrial Development Agency Board of Directors. They are:

- Phil Ackerman, Chair (Chairman, National Fuel)
- Phil Corwin, Vice Chair (VP and CFO, The Talking Phone Book)
- Barry Brandon (Senior VP and General Counsel, Seneca Gaming Corp.)
- Lynn Marinelli (Chair, Erie County Legislature)
- Ramona Gallagher (Retired Assistant Commissioner, New York State Department of Labor)

The new members started their terms last month after completing a detailed review of ECIDA policies and practices.

With these appointments, a renewed focus on the taxpayer will come, along with a commitment to make sure our community truly benefits from the tax incentives that are awarded. It is important to note that small businesses are the backbone of our community, creating 80% of new jobs, and will be an important focus for growth in the future.

Collins' appointees will also support an effort to expedite the review and permitting process for local projects.



Contact the County Executive

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State of the County Address

Chris Collins delivered his first State of the County Address on April 2nd at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. The address provided an opportunity for Collins to reaffirm his commitment to county taxpayers, acknowledge the work already accomplished, and layout his vision for the future.



To read a full text of the State of the County Address, please click [HERE](#)

Electronic Recycling

Erie County and the City of Buffalo, in conjunction with the US Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes Program, will be sponsoring an Earth Day Recycling Day on April 26, 2008 from 9:00 am-1:00 pm.

Participants will be able to recycle computers and other electronic items such as, cell phones, rechargeable batteries, VCR's, DVD players, fluorescent bulbs, and televisions. Those dropping off electronics will be required to verify that the materials were generated by a household and not an office.

The drop off location is Central Park Plaza on Holden St., off of E. Amherst St. between Main St. and Bailey Ave. For more information please call 858-6996 or visit www.erie.gov.

Mayors & Supervisors Meeting

County Executive Collins hosted a meeting last month with the Mayors and Supervisors of Erie County's cities, towns and villages in order to create an open and meaningful dialogue between the County and area municipal leaders. This meeting was an important step in restoring the trust between the County and its local governments. Thirty-nine out of the forty-four municipalities within Erie County were represented at the meeting.

For too long, the consolidation of services within the County had a top down approach, often ignoring the true concerns and wishes of the municipalities. The Collins administration wants the process to become a bottom up approach, with towns and villages able to bring their ideas to the forefront. It is important for all elected officials within the County to have an open and honest line of communication as the discussion of consolidating services moves forward.

Many towns expressed similar issues at the meeting, most stemming from a lack of attention to infrastructure. The condition of the roads, bridges, and parks in each official's jurisdiction generated the most comments. The meeting also provided a unique opportunity for the rural communities of Erie County to air their very specific concerns, which are often overshadowed by the needs of the more populated cities and towns.

The University at Buffalo graciously hosted the March meeting at its Amherst Campus. The next meeting is planned for June and will be held in the Southtowns.

County Cell Phones

After a thorough review, County Executive Collins has reduced the number of county department cell phones by 36%. The annual savings from this reduction will total over \$140,000.

Last year, a total of 758 cell phones were used by various county departments. Today's total cell phone usage stands at 487, providing the nearly 36% reduction. The County Executive's office has only 2 cell phones in use out of the 11 that had previously been assigned to the department. Other county departments making significant cuts include the Department of Public Works (65 to 42), the Health Department (164 to 109) and the Department of Information and Support Services (51 to 7). The number of blackberry devices in use has been cut from 131 to only 51.

In addition to the cell phone savings, some employees who currently have pagers will be given cell phones instead. This will allow the County to discontinue the additional pay these employees receive for agreeing to carry a pager. Certain union contracts mandate employees with pagers be paid \$35 a week. The county can assign these employees a cell phone for under \$30 a month, further reducing county costs.

Erie County's cell phone bill for 2007 was \$407,188. Under Collins' initiative, there is an annual savings of \$88,464 for cell phone plans and a \$9,000 savings from aircards (wireless internet). The additional \$45,500 savings earned by reducing pager pay will create a total annual savings of \$142,964.

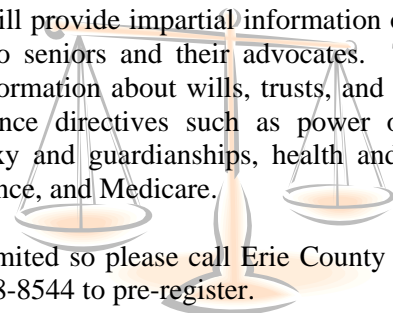


Elder Law Fair

The Erie County Department of Senior Services will be co-sponsoring a free Elder Law Fair on May 29th, from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm at the Hearthstone Manor, 333 Dick Rd. in Depew.

The Fair will provide impartial information on a variety of topics to seniors and their advocates. Topics will include information about wills, trusts, and estate planning, advance directives such as power of attorney, health proxy and guardianships, health and long term care insurance, and Medicare.

Space is limited so please call Erie County Senior Services at 858-8544 to pre-register.



Six Sigma Update

The Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority approved the next phase of Six Sigma implementation at their meeting April 11th. This approval will allow Al Hammonds to begin training nine employees as green belt practitioners. These green belt employees will serve as project leaders in their departments as specialized projects are selected to drive efficiency and eliminate waste in Erie County government. There will be nine pilot programs in five county departments. The Department of Public Works, Parks, Social Services and Mental Health will each have two projects, and the Department of Health will be working on one project. During the County Executive's first State of the County Address, he mentioned these cost saving initiatives that will save County taxpayers approximately \$1.1 million in 2008 alone.

Earlier this month, Hammonds also gave a training session to 25 area municipal leaders. He provided an overview on the implementation of Six Sigma in county government much like the sessions he held earlier in the year with county employees. He also answered questions on how Six Sigma may be beneficial to municipal leaders and their individual communities.

Brighter Future Fund

The Brighter Future Fund has announced their first round of grant awardees. The Buffalo Inner City Ballet and Holy Cross Youth Center Computer Laboratory were presented with grants on March 24, 2008. County Executive Chris Collins and Deputy County Executive Mark Davis are working for \$1 per month until the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority reverts back to advisory status. Until that time, the remainder of their salaries will be donated to the Brighter Future Fund and grants will be awarded to deserving non-profit organizations in Erie County each month. Collins and Davis are working for \$1 per month to demonstrate their willingness to be held accountable for their own actions.

Buffalo Inner City Ballet received a \$7,000 grant to replace the floor in its dance studio. The program has been providing classical ballet instruction to youth from low-income families since 1972. The Holy Cross Youth Center Computer Laboratory received a \$5,700 grant for technical support. The Youth Center Computer Laboratory is a resource for local children and families who do not have access to a home computer. Staffed by AmeriCorps volunteers, the lab is open during the afternoon and evenings and allows parishioners and the general public to use the facility for research, coursework, and computer training.

The next round of grants will be announced later this month. No Erie County funding or resources will be used to administer this fund. The Brighter Future Fund has been established at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. For additional information please contact the Brighter Future Fund at info@brighterfuturefund.org

New County Attorney

The Erie County Legislature approved Cheryl Green on April 3, 2008 as the first female County Attorney in Erie County. Green's selection as County Attorney further proves the commitment of the Collins administration to appoint more women to leadership roles within county government than at any other time in county history.

As a lawyer in private practice, Green brings an important private sector mindset to her position. As a Partner at Lustig & Brown, she specialized in the defense of professional malpractice and workers compensation suits. Before Lustig & Brown, Green served as Staff Counsel for CIGNA Insurance, primarily focusing on labor law, products liability and tort claims.

A graduate of Cleveland Marshall College of Law, Green is a member of the New York State Bar Association, the Erie County Bar Association and the Western New York Women's Bar Association. She is active in the community, volunteering her time teaching disabled children to ski and snowboard, and is involved with supporting literacy efforts for immigrant and refugee families through Every Person Influences Children (EPIC).

Coming Next Month

- *News from the Department of Information and Support Services*
- *Changes to the Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau*
- *News from the Department of Senior Services*
- *Six Sigma Update*