

# Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



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June 2009

## From County Executive Chris Collins



Now that the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority (Control Board) voted unanimously to revert to advisory status, we'll be able to run our government even more efficiently.

Capital projects are moving forward thanks to a short term borrowing agreement we reached with the Control Board last month. As a result of the Control Board going advisory, Erie County will be able to do its own long term borrowing next year.

My administration will also be able to hire employees and execute contracts without waiting for Control Board approval.

I'm grateful the members of the Control Board recognize the great strides my administration has made in running government like a business.

We continue to make you, the taxpayers, our top priority.

## Contact the County Executive

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## Control Board Accepts Collins' Financial Plan, Goes Advisory

The Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority (Control Board) accepted a newly revised Four-Year Financial Plan prepared by the Collins administration, and as a result, has reverted to advisory or "soft" status. The Control Board has been in control or "hard" status since November of 2006. The acceptance of Collins' new financial plan resulted in the move back to advisory status.

"I am very pleased that a year and a half into my administration, my team was capable of demonstrating to the Control Board our firm understanding and proper management of county finances," said Erie County Executive Chris Collins. "The County's financial health and respect for hard-earned tax dollars remains the number one priority of my administration. Despite the weak national economy and increasing cost-shifting from Albany, Erie County is in strong financial shape. Our plan was also realistic and included several possible fiscal obstacles in the out years."

Erie County has come a long way financially since the 'red/green' budget meltdown of 2004 and 2005. The County has finished the last four years with a surplus, including a \$13 million surplus for 2008. In addition, the County's credit rating continues to improve. In February of this year, Erie County received a two step upgrade to its credit rating from Fitch Ratings. The agency also labeled the County's financial outlook as 'stable.'

Last month, the County Executive and Control Board reached a successful capital borrowing compromise, allowing dozens of critical and long stalled infrastructure projects to move forward. In May, the Control Board also agreed to fully fund the administration's Six Sigma and Space Utilization initiatives through 2010 using state efficiency grant dollars.

"My administration will continue to work toward even greater financial strength for Erie County and provide residents with the most value for their tax dollars," said Collins. "I know Control Board members share those same goals, and I look forward to working with them in an advisory capacity to achieve them."



*ECFSA Chairman Robert Glaser and County Executive Collins sign a borrowing agreement last month.*



## Erie County Observes EMS Week

Erie County Executive Chris Collins, Health Commissioner Dr. Anthony Billittier and Emergency Services Commissioner Greg Skibitsky were joined by first responders from across the area to recognize the efforts of Emergency Medical Services workers. EMS Week was observed May 17<sup>th</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup> in the County.

Members of Emergency Medical Services teams include EMT's, paramedics, firefighters, medical technicians, physicians, nurses, educators, administrators and others who are ready to provide life-saving care to those in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Access to quality emergency care dramatically improves the survival and recovery rates of those who experience severe injuries or sudden illnesses.

Erie County Executive Chris Collins said, "It's important to take a moment to thank the brave men and women who provide Emergency Medical Services in Western New York. They're willing to go into dangerous situations to save countless lives every year. I'm happy to recognize their efforts by declaring this week EMS Week in Erie County."

Health Commissioner Dr. Anthony Billittier said, "I'm very proud of the hard work and dedication of all the Emergency Medical Services providers throughout Erie County. Their skill and dedication shine through in every medical emergency we experience in this County."

Emergency Services Commissioner Greg Skibitsky said, "I'm grateful the County is honoring the hard work of the Emergency Medical Services providers during EMS Week. These talented individuals throughout the County are dedicated in responding to all emergencies which was especially evident following the crash of Flight 3407."

Approximately 2/3 of all Emergency Medical Services providers are volunteers who engage in thousands of hours of specialized training and continuing education to enhance their lifesaving skills.

## Parkview Bridge Under Construction—Will Re-Open

Erie County has hired a contractor to rebuild Parkview Bridge in Akron Falls Park.

The bridge, originally built in 1933, has been closed to traffic since 2003, due to deterioration in the superstructure.

Cold Spring Construction was awarded a \$1.7 million bid to fix the bridge. It is scheduled to re-open on August 31, 2010. The recent borrowing agreement between Erie County and the Control Board allowed the project to move forward.

## Erie County CPS Lab Helps with Cold Case

The Erie County Central Police Services Forensic Laboratory provided key information that led to the arrest of a suspect in the 1975 homicide of Michelle Dixon.

Forensic Serologist Kristen Homick analyzed DNA in the case. Buffalo Police announced 55 year old Bernard Thomas is charged with second-degree murder.



*Buffalo Police hold a press conference regarding the homicide of Michelle Dixon in 1975.*

### Coming next issue:

- **Rebuilding Erie County Parks**
- **County Construction Projects Update**

## Erie County Social Services Honored

Jewish Family Services honored Erie County's Department of Social Services on May 20th with their Service Award. The honor was bestowed in recognition of the Community Alternative Systems Agency (CASA), which partners Social Services with Jewish Family Services.



The CASA program helps ensure that elderly and disabled individuals in Erie County remain independent as long as possible by providing levels of community based Medicaid long-term care services. The coordination of quality care, community education, and the most efficient use of Medicaid resources is key to the success of this program, both for clients and the taxpayers of Erie County.

## Health Department Sees Savings through Lean Six Sigma

The Health Department is seeing the financial benefits of Lean Six Sigma efforts completed in 2008. The Family Planning Benefit Program Enrollment project team, led by Green Belt Amy Rockwood, used Lean Six Sigma concepts and tools to implement a new process in the Department of Health's Family Planning Program.

The Family Planning Benefit Program (FPBP) is a source of reimbursement for family planning services. Unlike Medicaid which has a large local share, FPBP is funded with 90 percent Federal and 10 percent New York State dollars. Before starting this project in the first quarter of 2008, only 2 percent of Family Planning visits were paid for by FPBP in Erie County. In the first quarter of 2009, 16 percent of visits were paid for by FPBP. The program has enrolled over 350 people in FPBP in the year since the Lean Six Sigma project began.

Through April 2009, \$41,847 has been collected vs. \$2,387 for the same period in 2008. The program is tracking to collect more than \$110,000 in 2009.

## Six Sigma Helps Erie County Get Grant Money

The New York State Department of Labor awarded Erie County a \$37,862 grant for safety training. The training will include back injury prevention, personal protective equipment and workplace violence, among other topics.

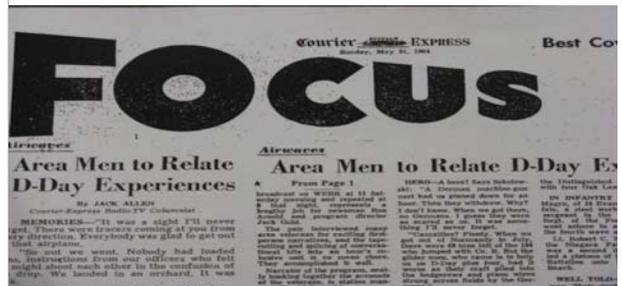
For the first time, Erie County included slides from a Lean Six Sigma Workers Compensation project in the grant application. The slides illustrated how high a priority workers' safety is for Erie County.

Erie County relies solely on this grant to fund workplace safety training.

## Erie County Veterans Remember D-Day

June 6th marked the 65th anniversary of the day the Allied troops stormed the beaches at Normandy. Thousands of American and Allied soldiers died that day in France in the battle to liberate Europe.

Some D-Day survivors from the Buffalo area told their stories to the local media on the 20th anniversary of D-Day in 1964. Erie County's Director of Veterans' Services shared a copy of the 20th anniversary article from the Courier Express, and WNED-AM radio 970 replayed a radio program featuring local veterans who survived D-Day. It originally aired on the Courier Express Station, WEBR, in 1964. The program opened with the voice of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander and later President of the United States. The broadcast is available online at: [www.publicbroadcasting.net/wned/news.newsmain/article/0/0/646695/news/D-Day.In.Their.Own.Words](http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wned/news.newsmain/article/0/0/646695/news/D-Day.In.Their.Own.Words).



*D-Day 20th Anniversary article from the Courier Express.*



*County Executive Collins, along with City of Buffalo and State Parks officials, announces the re-opening of the newly renovated Tow Path Park in Buffalo.*

## Erie County Helps Low Income Families Afford Child Care

If you are struggling to afford child care, Erie County may be able to help. The County offers a subsidy for qualified families. Parents contribute toward the cost of care based on a sliding income scale.

You can choose the childcare provider you want, but the provider must be licensed, registered or approved by the Child Care Resource Network at **877-6666**. Please call the TYKE Line at Erie County's Day Care Unit at **858-8953**. They will do an initial screening over the phone and then set up a time to meet an examiner in person if you appear to be eligible.

### Required Documents:

- Verification of Income (including child support)
- ID for all household members
- Verification of household composition
- Day care provider information.



## Eden Library Club Sending Homemade Gifts to Afghanistan

Since September 2008, the ladies of the Eden Library's Yarn Club have been knitting and crocheting items for our wounded soldiers in Afghanistan, as well as orphans in that country. They've already shipped 340 items, including blankets, helmet liners, sweaters, vests, hats, scarves, and mittens. Club members also collected 134 new or gently used plush toys for the orphans in Afghanistan.

An additional 100 baby sweaters, hats and booties were given to Harvest House. In its first two years, the Yarn Club members have made a total of 964 items for charities. Yarn Club meetings resume in September and will benefit "The Priscilla Project" for refugee women and children, wounded soldiers, and homeless men. For more information, call 992-4028.



*County Executive Collins has lunch at the Amherst Senior Center, as residents take part in the Stay Fit Dining Program offered by Erie County's Senior Services Department.*

## Erie County Beaches to Open Early

Erie County Parks employees have been hard at work getting Wendt and Bennett Beaches ready for the hot summer days ahead. Parks Commissioner Jim Hornung is happy to report both of the County beaches will open ahead of schedule on June 27th.

The beaches will be fully staffed with lifeguards, and will be groomed three times a week for a better experience for the whole family this year.

The County Parks Department is also managing pools and splash pads in the City of Buffalo this summer. The City pools are set to open on schedule July 1st. Centennial Pool is still undergoing renovations, and will open later in the summer.

## "Go Green" Rath Building Recycling Project

A five week Lean Six Sigma project aimed at increasing recycling in the Rath Building was tremendously successful. Six Sigma Green Belt Paul Krantz and his team report a total of 41,415 pounds of paper was collected.

That translates to these environmental benefits:

- 352 trees saved
- 7,866 gallons of oil saved
- 62 cubic yards of landfill space avoided
- 82,800 kw hours of electricity saved

We look forward to continued recycling efforts both within the Rath Building, and across other County facilities.



Kenmore Mayor Patrick Mang joins Senior Services Commissioner Brenda Ward and County Executive Collins at a press conference.

## Erie County Donates Van for Kenmore Seniors

Erie County Executive Chris Collins handed Mayor Patrick Mang the keys to a refurbished van for senior citizens in the Village of Kenmore. The van will transport seniors to and from the Senior Meal Program at the Kenmore Community Center. Curb-to-curb service is available to seniors who are living independently but are unable to use conventional transportation.

County Executive Chris Collins said, "Our County Senior Services Department works very hard to ensure we're meeting the needs of seniors in our community. Commissioner Brenda Ward has been working with towns and villages across Erie County to efficiently provide services such as transportation. This van will make it easier for seniors in Kenmore to maintain their independence."

Senior Services Commissioner Brenda Ward said, "One out of every five residents in Erie County is over the age of 60, and many of them live alone. My department is happy to help that population remain active by donating vans like this one."

Kenmore Mayor Patrick Mang said, "I'm very grateful Erie County is partnering with our Village to provide this much-needed transportation. This 12 passenger van is larger than our current van, and we think it will be easier for our seniors to get in and out of. We will be able to help more people in a more convenient way."

Seniors who would like to take advantage of the van may call (716) 873-5700. The Village accepts a \$1 donation roundtrip from seniors who use the van. Erie County's Department of Senior Services dispatches transportation for many other municipalities through the "Going Places" program. Call 858-RIDE for transportation options.

## Erie County Parks Shelter Reservations Easier than Ever

- Shelter reservations can now be made up to **one year in advance**
- Organization Rentals – Senior organizations can receive a weekday half-rate. Regular rates apply for holidays and weekends.
- Reservations can be made by calling **858-8355** or online at [www.erie.gov/parks](http://www.erie.gov/parks)



View from Commissioner's Cabin at Chestnut Ridge.

## Battle of the Books Teams Now Forming

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library is inviting students to join a *Battle of the Books* Team at their local branch this summer. The *Battle of the Books* is a trivia competition based on six pre-selected books for students who will be in grades six through nine this fall.

Teams compete head to head through six rounds of trivia during the battle which will be held on Saturday, August 1, 2009, at ECC South Campus. The 2009 book selections are: *Cracker!* *The Best Dog in Vietnam* by Cynthia Kadohata, *Killing Sea* by Richard Lewis, *Wanderer* by Sharon Creech, *Framed* by Frank Cottrell Boyce, *Sisters Grimm Fairy Tale Detectives* by Michael Buckley and *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* by Wendy Mass.

Interested students should ask at their local library branch for information about teams.



## Follow the Library on Twitter!

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library is now using Twitter to send brief tweets about Library news, events, programs, training classes, facts and other useful information. Check it out on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/buffalolibrary> (New to twitter? To receive regular library updates click the Join Today button). Twitter is a free short messaging and social networking service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as tweets.

New Civil Service announcements with the last filing dates up to **June 24** and **July 15, 2009** are now available on the County's website.

Please see: <http://www.erie.gov/employment/index.asp>

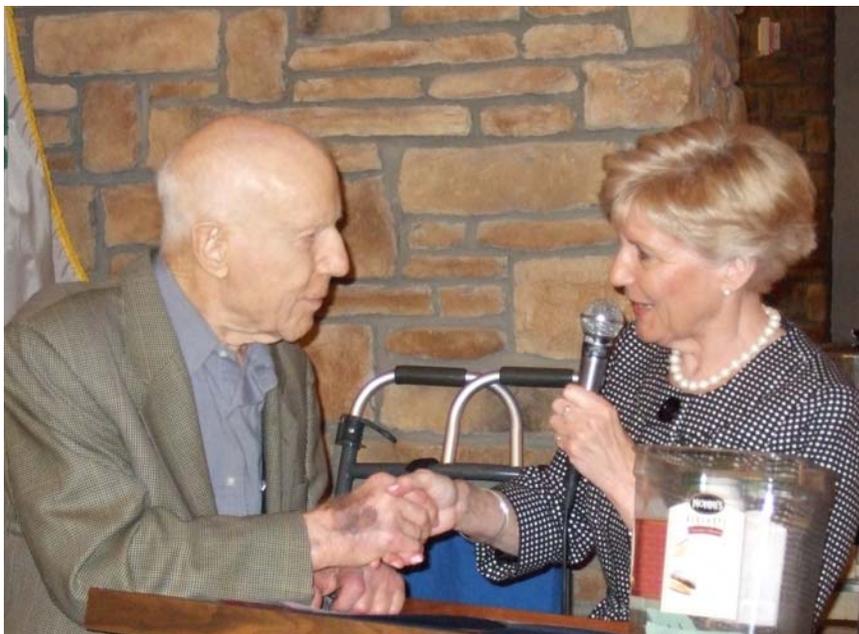
or call the Erie Co. Civil Service Exam Line at **716-858-8729**.



## Erie County Senior Recognized by State for Volunteer Activities

Buffalo resident Emmanuel "Manny" Fried was recognized by the NYS Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) during the Senior Citizens' Day festivities in May at the Governor's Mansion in Albany. The theme for the day was "Empowering Communities through Civic Engagement and Volunteerism."

Having recently celebrated his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday, Manny Fried remains active and engaged in the theater and literary arts community. For over six decades, Manny was a volunteer union activist and fought for the rights of workers. In 1954, he was called to testify before the infamous House Un-American Activities Committee. He was harassed and blacklisted until 1972 for his failure to cooperate and "name names" of fellow actors. One of his prize possessions is a letter from Albert Einstein congratulating Mr. Fried for standing up to the Committee and challenging its right to exist. Although being blacklisted caused him to lose out on many acting opportunities in Hollywood and on Broadway, Manny remained active as an actor, playwright, author, and teacher. Until just recently, he taught a course at Buffalo State College and has conducting the WNY Playwright Workshop. He has made regular appearances in Theatre for Change skits, using the power of live theater to address social issues like elder abuse, diversity, and other contemporary issues. Mr. Fried currently works with the local theater company Musical



*Manny Fried accepts a proclamation signed by County Executive Collins from Senior Services Commissioner Brenda Ward at a celebration in May at the Cheektowaga Senior Center.*

Fare. In 2008, he wrote and performed in a one man play, "Boilermakers and Martinis", which was a powerful autobiography about his role in the Buffalo labor movement. The play was recently released on DVD.

Manny has received countless accolades over the years, and recently *Artvoice* magazine created the "Manny Fried" award, given to the outstanding new playwright of the year. In 1990 he received the "Joe Hill Award" in recognition of his decades of union activism. A WW II veteran, he also received the "Lifetime Contribution Award" from the WNY Peace Center, for his activities and commitment to peace. He has also received the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Arts Council of Buffalo, an award from the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce for "Lifetime Contribution to the Community" and the Just Buffalo Literary Group intends to present him with an award in December for his contributions to the literary arts community.

The Erie County Office for the Aging assists seniors and caregivers by providing services and benefits enabling seniors to live independently. The office may be reached at 858-8526 or at [www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices](http://www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices). Erie County matches volunteer interests and strengths with community opportunities – call **858-7548** or visit [www.erie.gov/rsvp](http://www.erie.gov/rsvp) for more information about volunteering.