

Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



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May 2009

From County Executive Chris Collins

I'm happy to announce my Administration was able to reach an agreement with the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority (Control Board) to borrow the money needed to complete dozens of long stalled projects.



The County will work through the Control Board to borrow approximately \$100 million, to complete already approved capital projects for 2007 and 2008, as well as the pending capital projects for 2009.

Some of the major projects that are moving forward as a result of this agreement include the rehabilitation of Ralph Wilson Stadium, improvements at the Buffalo Zoo, and security improvements at the Alden Correctional Facility. Many local construction projects will soon be underway, and improvements will be made in County parks.

It took productive communication and a collaborative process to finish this accord. My administration recognizes the Control Board's ability to conduct financing at a favorable interest rate for taxpayers. In return, the Control Board recognizes the County's improving financial condition and our need for financial independence.

Contact the County Executive

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Erie County Well Prepared for Swine Flu

Erie County has now confirmed Swine Flu in our community, and to date, all suspected and confirmed cases have been mild, and similar to seasonal flu.

The Erie County Department of Health has been operating its Health Emergency Operations Center for several weeks in response to the Swine Flu cases occurring across the United States

and throughout the world. The department has a special Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit closely monitoring flu activity in hospitals, urgent care facilities, schools and daycares throughout Erie County.

The Erie County Public Health Lab is performing confirmatory testing for the Swine Flu virus. The Lab is testing suspected cases of influenza to help determine how the disease is spreading locally, what age group it is infecting and the severity of illness it is causing.

Health Commissioner Dr. Anthony Billittier encourages everyone to follow common hygiene practices like covering their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze, avoid touching their eyes, and wash their hands regularly.

The County Department of Health will continue to educate the community about the Swine Flu through our dedicated website at www.erie.gov/health/swine_flu.asp.



Dr. Anthony Billittier speaks to reporters about the Swine Flu.

Erie County Reaches Parks Agreement with City of Buffalo *County is Looking to Hire Seasonal Workers*

Erie County Executive Chris Collins and Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown have reached an agreement that will keep City parks and recreation areas open and fully staffed during the upcoming summer and fall season. This resolution continues the existing inter-municipal agreement until the end of 2009. During the extension, the City of Buffalo will pay Erie County approximately \$3.5 million. The Olmsted Park Conservancy will continue to operate the 24 Olmsted parks.

Erie County will continue to operate, manage and maintain City park parcels, recreation centers, indoor and outdoor pools, and splash pads. The County is budgeting for 52 full time staffers, and is looking to hire about **144 seasonal workers** who will help at the City parks. Applications for these jobs are available at http://www.erie.gov/parks/pdf/employment_application.pdf.

“This agreement reflects the need to keep the City parks, pools and recreation centers open and fully operational during our summer season, and the need to have Erie County fairly compensated for providing those services,” said Erie County Executive Chris Collins. “Our parks – both County and City – are assets and the public deserves safe and clean recreation areas. With this additional funding, I am confident the Erie County Parks Department can properly maintain City properties this summer and fall, and I look forward to continuing to work with Mayor Brown and his administration to structure a new, long-term agreement in the near future.”

“Under this agreement the quality of our parks will improve greatly,” said Mayor Brown. “For example, there will now be a 12-day grass cutting schedule compared to the previous 20-day cycle. In addition, we will immediately begin working with Erie County and our unions to create a new, long-term agreement that is both affordable and ensures quality City parks, pools and recreation centers for our residents.”

The County Executive and Mayor will now continue to work to structure a new City/County parks agreement for 2010.



County Executive Collins and Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown are joined by 3 Erie County Legislators as they announce a parks agreement.

Report Shows County Budget Running Positive

A first quarter Budget Monitoring Report (BMR) prepared by Erie County Director of Budget and Management, Gregory Gach, shows the County operating with a positive variance of more than \$4.7 million so far this year.

“The first quarter BMR shows Erie County is in strong financial shape, despite weak consumer confidence and increasing pressures from Albany,” said Gach. “A positive variance reflects the Administration’s business management focus and control of our budget. We continue to scrutinize the necessity of every vacant position and are achieving lower expenses through efficiency efforts and Lean Six Sigma projects.”

The first quarter BMR includes \$6.5 million in Federal Medicaid Assistance revenue as part of the federal stimulus bill, as well as an unexpected \$6.5 million expense payment to ECMCC. Going forward, Erie County expects to receive approximately \$8 million per quarter in Federal Medicaid Assistance revenue.

This BMR does not reflect the impact of the recently passed 2009-2010 State Budget, since New York’s fiscal year begins April 1st. Gach estimates the State Budget will shift an additional \$4 million in costs to Erie County in 2009.

Foster Parents Desperately Needed

There is an urgent need for more foster and adoptive parents in Erie County. Children ranging from infants, to teens, to groups of siblings are in need of homes. The Erie County Department of Social Services regularly receives more than 50 requests each month for child placements.



Children who are in need of foster and adoptive parents come from all ethnic groups, religions and areas of the county. Many of them were abused, or neglected.

Foster and adoptive parents are compensated for costs and are given clothing allowances, room and board payments as well as medical care for children in foster care.

The best foster and adoptive parents have the ability to love and care for children. They have the capability to manage stressful and emotional situations as well as provide a safe environment for children to live in.

“Framing Faces, Finding Families” is an exhibit that will be running through May 17th to help find foster and adoptive parents. It’s taking place at the Burchfield Penney Art Center and is being hosted by the Heart Gallery of Western New York. For more information about these important programs or how to become a foster parent, please call 858-7274, or register for the next public information meeting by calling 858-6868.

Lean Six Sigma Makes Progress in the Parks

Erie County’s Lean Six Sigma Director, Bill Carey, is tracking the progress of completed Six Sigma projects in all departments.

A Parks Department project last year focused on making it easier to process permits for shelter reservations. The department added a link on the County website to make shelter reservations online, and pay by credit card.

Thanks to this Lean Six Sigma project, shelter reservations are up 49 percent so far in 2009. The project also helped the department create steps to clean the shelters more quickly, so they’re ready for use sooner.

Elder Abuse Awareness Day

In Erie County, more than 1,500 cases of elder abuse are reported each year, and many more go unreported. Abusers can include family members, spouses, intimate partners, friends, neighbors or caretakers. The most common types of abuse are physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, neglect and financial exploitation.

The Council on Elder Abuse and the Family Justice Center of Buffalo and Erie County will offer free training to help people recognize the signs of elder abuse on June 5th. “Train the Trainer” day will be held at the Holiday Inn at 620 Delaware Avenue in Buffalo from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. A continental breakfast will be provided.



This training would be helpful for counselors, social workers, nursing home staff, care-takers, healthcare aides, bankers, law enforcement, students, block clubs, clergy and others who work with seniors.

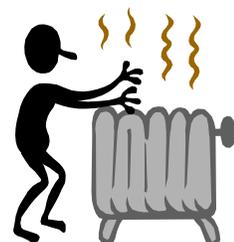
For more information, please contact Christina Potempa, at cpotempa@fjcsafe.org or 716-558-5261,

HEAP Program Helps Record Numbers of People

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) saw a significant jump in requests for assistance in the 2008-2009 winter season. The federally funded program helped heat the homes of record breaking numbers of applicants. HEAP received requests from 95,000 households in Erie County. The program distributed \$45 million in assistance, including heating and utility benefits, to qualified residents.

With an unstable economic future and increasing energy costs, HEAP is expecting more families to participate in the upcoming year. There are numerous changes planned for the future of the program as well as expansion of telephone application certification and the continuation of HEAP Outreach locations.

The 2008-2009 Home Energy Assistance Program benefit season ends May 15, 2009, but the County will continue to repair and replace heating equipment until September 30, 2009. HEAP applications are expected to be mailed to elderly and disabled citizens in late August. A limited number of households will be eligible for weatherization assistance. For information please contact the HEAP program hotline at 858-7870 or 858-7644 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.





Veteran's Traveling Tribute Coming to Erie County

The American Veterans "Traveling Tribute" will be on display in East Aurora from June 24-29th. Each year, this exhibit travels the country at sponsored events with a mission to honor, respect and remember those who served and who are still serving.

The Traveling Tribute features an 80% replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. It also includes displays honoring the brave men and women involved with WWII, Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan and 9/11.

The Traveling Tribute will be on display at Knox Farm State Park, 437 Buffalo Road, in East Aurora. It will be open to the public 24 hours a day. The event will kick off on June 24th, when a Vietnam Veterans motorcycle escort will bring the Traveling Tribute from a Tops Market on Transit Road in Depew to Knox Farm. For more information about the Traveling Tribute, call the East Aurora Chamber of Commerce at 652-8444, or visit www.eanycc.com. Erie County gave a grant of \$10,000 to help bring the exhibit to Western New York.

New Civil Service announcements with the last filing dates up to **May 20, and June 10, 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.



Elder Law Day Back By Popular Demand

The Erie County Department of Senior Services is pleased to once again co-sponsor an Elder Law Day on **Thursday, June 11th from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.** at the Hearthstone Manor, 333 Dick Road, in Depew, NY. The purpose of Elder Law Day is to provide impartial information to seniors and their advocates in a "sales free" environment. This information assists a person to make informed choices about plans for their health and financial well-being.

Topics at this year's Elder Law Day will include information about wills, trusts, and estate planning; advance directives such as power of attorney, healthcare proxy and guardianships; health and long term care insurance; the role of Medicaid and Medicare in long term care; Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plans; and Veteran's Benefits, to name just a few. The rules governing these programs are constantly being modified, so it is important that people learn how these changes will affect their plans for maintaining their independence. Learning about these programs and the related services and benefits that are available can help a person avoid making costly mistakes and increase the options available to them. **The Elder Law Day event is free of charge and open to the public.** However, a suggested donation of \$5.00 will be accepted at the door to help defray costs of materials and refreshments.

In addition to Erie County Department of Senior Services, co-sponsors include the Network in Aging of WNY, Legal Services for the Elderly of WNY, Inc., the University at Buffalo Law School, the Bar Association of Erie County, and the Bar Association of New York State.

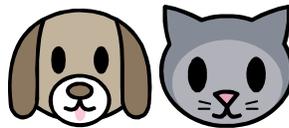
Space is limited, so please call Erie County Senior Services at 858-8544 to pre-register and reserve your spot at what has become a very popular event.



Erie County Stop DWI Director John Sullivan joins Amherst Police Investigator Pat Lucey, University at Buffalo Officer Guy Harvey, and County Executive Collins at the Annual Stop DWI Awards Breakfast.

Erie County Announces More Free Rabies Clinics

The Erie County Health Department is once again teaming up with the Niagara Frontier Veterinary Society and the Erie County SPCA to offer free rabies vaccinations for family pets.



Erie County Health Commissioner, Dr. Anthony Billittier said, "These free clinics are the best way to fight rabies disease, and I urge everyone to take advantage of them."

Clinics will be available at the following times and locations:

May 20th 5-7 p.m.	Amherst Highway Garage 1042 N. Forest Road, Amherst
May 27th 5-7 p.m.	Brant Fire Company 1231 Brant-Farnham Road, Brant
August 19th 5-7 p.m.	Elma Highway Garage 2170 Bowen Road, Elma
August 26th 2-4 p.m.	SPCA 205 Ensminger Road, Tonawanda
September 2nd 5-7 p.m.	Lakeview Fire Company 2005 Lakeview Road, Lakeview
September 9th 2-4 p.m.	Broadway Market Parking Ramp 999 Broadway, Buffalo
September 16th 5-7 p.m.	West Seneca Highway Garage 39 South Avenue, West Seneca

Spring Cleaning in the Parks

Erie County Parks and Recreation staffers have been working hard to get the parks ready for people to enjoy in the warmer weather. For weeks, crews have picked up debris, removed downed trees, and painted picnic tables and shelters.

Reservations are being taken for parks shelters online at <http://www.erie.gov/parks/>, or by phone at 858-8355 Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Shelter rentals range from \$60-\$300.

All Erie County Parks are now open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Parks in the City of Buffalo are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The County beaches will be open no later than July 1st. They will be staffed with lifeguards.

Important Reminder

Any homeowner who wishes to challenge their assessment must do so by May 26th. For more information, contact your local Town Assessor.

Coming Next Issue

- **County Beaches 2009 Season**
- **Our Road to a Bright Future to be Featured on TV Show**



County Executive Collins met the owners of the Alfa Romeo BAT 11 concept car, when they stopped at the Pierce Arrow Museum in Buffalo.

Boy Scouts Earn Public Health Merit Badges

The Boy Scouts of America are committed to broadening areas of education for youth. Their merit badge program gives young men the opportunity to explore more than 120 fields of skill and knowledge. Merit badges play a key role in fulfilling an educational commitment. To reach the highest rank of Eagle Scout, a Scout must earn a total of 21 merit badges, among other requirements. The Erie County Health Department now offers a special merit badge program in Public Health.



Boy Scouts learn about careers in Public Health.

Last month, six Boy Scouts spent a Saturday with County officials to learn about careers in Public Health. They studied a variety of public health topics, and took part in science and laboratory based activities. They also went on a tour of the Erie County Public Health Laboratory. This challenging and educational Public Health merit badge course was developed and led by Michael Simkins, who works at the Public Health Lab.

Simkins presented the program as a "Wood Badge" training project. The Wood Badge award represents the completion of the Boy Scout's highest level of adult volunteer training.

Free Computer Training at a Library Near You

Would you like to enhance your computer skills or learn new ones? The Buffalo & Erie County Public Libraries offer classes on computer basics, using the internet, setting up and using email, Microsoft Word and much more. Upcoming classes include: Internet Basics on Monday, May 18 at 11:00 a.m. at the Dudley Branch Library, Thursday, May 21 at 4:00 p.m. at the Central Library or Friday, May 22, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. at the Grand Island Public Library. Also, a Library Catalog & Databases course will be offered on Wednesday, May 27, 2009 at 10:30 a.m. at the Audubon Library. All computer classes are free and open to the public but registration is required. Visit <http://www.buffalolib.org/ComputerTraining/index.asp> for additional information on classes in your neighborhood.

Have You Read a Good Book Lately?

If you are looking for a good book to read, check out *Pageturners*, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library's one stop source for your reading entertainment. You can find featured books and book lists by topic, read reviews written by Library staff, submit your own book reviews or even find a book club at a library near you. Visit the web page at <http://www.buffalolib.org/pageturners/index.asp> to learn more.

Job Opportunities for Youth

The Erie County Department of Social Services is accepting applications for the Summer Youth Employment Program. Applicants must be income eligible, and between the ages of 14 and 24. All public assistance families automatically qualify.

Working papers must be submitted with applications for anyone age 14-17. Applications will be accepted until May 29th.

Residents of the City of Buffalo may contact the **Buffalo Employment and Training Center** at 856-8139 ext. 3102. The Center is located at 77 Goodell Street in Buffalo. Applications will be accepted Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Residents outside of Buffalo may apply at the **ECC One Stop Center** at 3176 Abbott Road in Orchard Park. For more information, call 825-2525 ext/ 3026.



County Executive Collins and Hamburg Supervisor Steven Walters talk with employees at the new Cold Stone Creamery in Hamburg. The store opened inside an existing Tim Horton's location in April.