

Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



Volume 1, Issue 10

November 2008

From County Executive Chris Collins



This month you'll learn about our ongoing Lean Six Sigma program and the success of our first wave of Green Belt certified employees.

With the cold weather months upon us, Erie County is prepared to help an expected record number of residents apply for the federally funded HEAP Program.

The winter is also a busy time for the County Parks Department. Please read more to learn about available park facility rentals and the return of a holiday tradition in Chestnut Ridge Park.

On behalf of my wife Mary and I, I want to wish you and your family a happy and healthy Thanksgiving holiday.

Contact the County Executive

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Erie County Employees Earn Six Sigma Green Belt Certification

Erie County Executive Chris Collins presented nine county employees with their Six Sigma Green Belt certification in late October. These employees successfully completed training and spearheaded the County's 2008 Lean Six Sigma pilot projects. These projects alone generated over \$1.3 million in savings. Erie County's total Lean Six Sigma effort – lead by Deputy County Executive Al Hammonds and Six Sigma Director Bill Carey – helped taxpayers save nearly \$2 million this year, far surpassing expectations.

“In addition to driving efficiency and reducing waste, Lean Six Sigma is empowering county employees to suggest changes to their work process,” said County Executive Collins. “As a result, Erie County is realizing significant cost savings and improving the quality of services provided to the public. I want to personally congratulate our nine member Green Belt inaugural class for their hard work, dedication, and shared commitment to moving Erie County forward. The public should be proud to have these employees working on their behalf every day.”

The 2008 Green Belt projects represent a cross section of county departments and functions, and were driven internally by county employees.

The 2008 Six Sigma Green Belt Inaugural Class:

Peter Curtis – Mental Health
Jim Hart - Parks
Shaun Hughes – Social Services
Stan Jemiolo - Parks
Tim Konicki – Social Services
Kevin Madoo – Public Works
Marie Morilus-Black – Mental Health
Amy Rockwood - Health
Gary Zawodzinski – Public Works



Erie County's Six Sigma program receives critical support from the Center for Industrial Effectiveness at the University at Buffalo and from Canisius College.

Collins Taps New Six Sigma Director

Erie County has a new Six Sigma Director. Erie County Executive Chris Collins and Deputy County Executive Al Hammonds have hired Bill Carey to head the Administration's signature reform and efficiency program. The search for a new Six Sigma Director began when Hammonds was promoted to Deputy County Executive in early August. Carey will now work in tandem with Hammonds as the program prepares to train more employees and identify new cost saving projects for 2009.

Continued on pg. 2

County Parks Open During Winter Season

The following shelters are still available for rent from the Erie County Parks Department throughout the winter months:

Ellicott Creek Park: Casino & Friendship House
Emery Park: Fieldhouse & Judge Stohrer Lodge
Chestnut Ridge Park: Martin Building, Mac Kinnon Building & Casino Meeting Room



All buildings are heated. Some may also contain fireplaces or kitchens. Please call 858-8355 for reservations. You can also visit http://www.erie.gov/parks/shelter_reservations.asp to make an online reservation for Chestnut Ridge Park or Ellicott Creek Park.

Santa Land will be held at Chestnut Ridge Park this winter! Visitors will be able to meet with Santa, take a hayride, or check out arts and crafts while listening to music and participating in toy giveaways. Santa Land will be open on Saturday, December 6 and 13, and Sunday, December 7 and 14, from 10 AM until 4 PM. Although free to the public, attendees are asked to make a donation to "Domestic Violence Shelters of WNY."

Emery Park will hold free skiing throughout the winter months, weather permitting. A t-bar lift will be available for use on the hill as well. For daily times and weather conditions, please call the Winter Hotline at 858-8513.

Office of the Disabled Honors Community Members

The Erie County Office of the Disabled held its 2008 County Executive Awards Dinner this past October. Six individuals with disabilities were presented with the County Executive Award for outstanding job performance in their given fields. Honorees were Jason Wolfe, Karen Kane, Lee Fullenweider, Karl Shallowhorn, Julie Schulz, and Christian Minkler. Each award winner was presented with a plaque by County Executive Collins.

Chris Kelsay, Defensive End for the Buffalo Bills, was the guest speaker of the event. The event, which was held in Elma, was sponsored by the Buffalo Bills, Buffalo Wheelchair, Verizon, Wegmans, West Herr, Elaine's Flower Shop and Rich Products.

Brighter Future Fund Donates Over \$135,000

Erie County Executive Chris Collins and former Deputy County Executive Mark Davis have contributed over \$135,000 in salary to local charitable organizations since January. Collins and Davis have been working for one-dollar per month since taking office and have been donating their salaries to the Brighter Future Fund. The Brighter Future Fund committee has reviewed several dozen funding applications and has awarded 20 grants totaling more than \$135,000.

"It is humbling to see the need in our community and it is gratifying to know that we were able to help provide these organizations and their clients with a brighter future," said County Executive Chris Collins. "It is important to me that these donations directly impact the organizations and the people they serve and I am pleased we were able to support all the great non-profit work happening in our community, especially in the City of Buffalo."

Collins thanked the Brighter Future Fund committee members for their dedication and hard work. The County Executive continues to work for one-dollar a month and will do so until the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority reverts back to advisory status. Davis left the Administration in July. Mr. and Mrs. Collins will be working directly with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo to award future grants.

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A Six Sigma Black Belt, Carey has a long and distinguished career in banking and finance. Carey came to Erie County from M&T Bank of Buffalo where he was the Senior Vice President of Lending Process & System Optimization. Prior to joining M&T in 2001, Carey worked for HSBC Bank. Carey earned an MBA in Finance/Management from Canisius College in Buffalo and has an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and Accounting from the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB). A Certified Public Accountant, Carey received his Six Sigma Black Belt training from the Center for Industrial Effectiveness at UB.

"This opportunity allows me to use my 30 years in the private sector to help County Executive Collins bring business principles to county government," said Carey. "The impact Six Sigma has already had in the Rath Building is clear and I know the potential moving forward is tremendous. The Collins' Administration is committed to making county government more efficient and improving the services we provide to county residents. Lean Six Sigma is helping us accomplish that."

Library in Partnership with Science Museum

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library is teaming up with the Buffalo Museum of Science to present Branched Out, a science outreach program, in eight city branch libraries. This unique partnership between the Science Museum and the Library gives young people the opportunity to enhance their science and literacy skills through a FREE fun-filled series of programs designed to help them learn through "doing, talking, reading, and writing about science."



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Brighter Future Fund Grant Awardees:

- American Academy of Ballet Guild - \$2,500
 - Boy Scouts of America - \$3,500
 - Boys & Girls Club of Buffalo - \$1,000
 - Buffalo Inner City Ballet - \$7,000
 - Buffalo Renaissance Foundation - \$10,000
 - Buffalo State College Foundation - \$1,000
 - Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo - \$35,012.85
 - Compass House - \$10,000
 - Delaware Soccer Club - \$1,800
 - Eden Co-Operative Nursery School - \$3,525
 - Hearts and Hands - \$5,000
 - Holy Cross Church - \$5,700
 - Homeless Alliance of WNY - \$4,000
 - Junior Achievement of WNY - \$5,000
 - Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes - \$10,000
 - Matt Urban Human Services Center - \$9,934.93
 - People, Inc. - \$1,000
 - Suicide Prevention and Crisis Service - \$5,000
 - Theatre of Youth Company - \$10,000
 - Urban Christian Ministries - \$5,000
 - Villa Maria College of Buffalo - \$2,500
- Total: \$138,472.78**

Brighter Future Fund Committee Members:

- Theresa Jehle (Chair) - Junior League of Buffalo, Past President
- Schuyler Banks - National Grid
- Mary Collins - Chris Collins Representative
- Nancy Davis - Mark Davis Representative
- Mary Jo Hunt - Leadership Buffalo
- Francisco Vasquez, PhD - People, Inc.

Food Stamps

New York State recently developed a new website – www.mybenefits.ny.us – to help families determine if they qualify for Food Stamps and other social service programs designed to help low-income, working households.

Erie County's Department of Social Services is now using the MyBenefits website to help automate our local Food Stamps program. The County has teamed up with the local organization Food For All to use the MyBenefits website to screen applicants for Food Stamp benefits at portal sites throughout the County. This pilot project also gives consumers the ability to complete applications on-line and helps Erie County increase efficiency during the application process.



November is Adoption Awareness Month

National Adoption Awareness Month is celebrated each year throughout the month of November. The purpose of this month is to raise awareness about the

114,000 children in foster care who are waiting to find permanent, loving families. The month also draws attention to the need for more adoptive families and honors those who have decided to adopt.



Right now in Erie County, over 100 children are waiting for adoptive families to be found. In 2007, Erie County placed 113 children in permanent homes through adoption. If you would like to learn more about the joys and responsibilities of adopting or fostering through the Erie County Department of Social Services, please call 858-7274.

SAFIS Helping to Solve Local Crimes

Erie County's Public Safety campus houses a unique state facility which helps solve local crimes. Erie County runs the Western Site of the Statewide Automated Fingerprint Identification System (SAFIS). This system holds over 3,000,000 individual fingerprints and records which are used in crime scene identification. Law enforcement officers are able to enter fingerprints into a database in an attempt to identify suspects.

First created in 1990, SAFIS has been used to solve over 1,300 crimes in Erie County alone. The first crime solved with the program was in 1990, when a single print from a church window was entered into the system. The identification of that print led to the arrest of an entire gang which was stealing from churches throughout the region.

Most recently, SAFIS has been used to investigate a string of burglaries at construction sites. A single print was left on a construction trailer, and is now instrumental in the apprehension and arrest of a group of individuals in connection with the crimes. SAFIS is a valuable law enforcement tool that has helped to keep Erie County safe.



Erie County Announces 2008-2009 Home Energy Assistance Program

With cold weather fast approaching and energy costs on the rise, Erie County Executive Chris Collins has announced that help is available to Erie County residents. Earlier this month, the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) officially began for 2008-2009. HEAP is a federally-funded program designed to help families with the rising costs of energy. It is administered locally by the Erie County Department of Social Services in partnership with the Erie County Department of Senior Services.



program and Erie County is prepared to meet the needs of our residents.

Income eligibility guidelines and benefit amounts have increased since last year. The HEAP income guidelines are as follows:

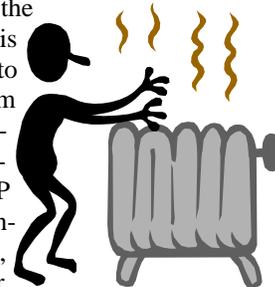
Household Size	Income At Or Below (Monthly)
1	\$ 1,963.00
2	\$ 2,567.00
3	\$ 3,172.00
4	\$ 3,776.00
5	\$ 4,380.00
6	\$ 4,984.00
7	\$ 5,097.00
8	\$ 5,210.00

In anticipation of the cold weather months and subsequent high fuel costs, all eligible Erie County households are encouraged to apply for HEAP. The federal government has made the necessary adjustments to deal with this season's anticipated participation in the HEAP

Households in need of assistance can apply for help at the HEAP office located at 478 Main Street, Buffalo and at various outreach locations throughout Erie County. Senior citizens and households that received HEAP last year can apply

for the upcoming program via mail.

Erie County is conducting a major outreach initiative to inform Erie County residents of the availability of this service and to increase program access for assistance. In addition to the HEAP office in downtown Buffalo, applications for HEAP assistance are available at all Erie County Legislative offices, various community centers and all National Fuel Gas customer assistance centers.



Designated Hotlines are available from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM to answer questions on the program. Erie County residents are encouraged to call 858-7870 or 858-7644, Monday through Friday, to request an application or obtain the necessary program information.

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The first eight week fall program series focused on "The Human Body" with an "Around the World" theme being offered during the months of November and December. Visit the Library's website at www.buffalolib.org, to learn more about specific program offerings.



Powerful Tools for Caregivers Accepting New Registrants

A six-week educational program designed to provide caregivers the tools they need to take care of themselves, while they are caring for others is now being offered. 'Powerful Tools for Caregivers' classes help caregivers learn to reduce stress, improve self-confidence, better communicate feelings, and locate helpful resources. Attendees also learn how to increase their ability to make tough decisions and balance their lives.



Pre-Registration is required. Call 858-2177 or e-mail caregiver@erie.gov for more information about 'Powerful Tools for Caregivers' classes and to register. There is a \$25 cost for the course, which includes a copy of The Caregiver Helpbook.*

Class listings are available and regularly updated on the Senior Services website at: www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices.

'Powerful Tools for Caregivers' classes are supported by a grant from the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York and co-sponsored by the University at Buffalo, School of Public Health and Health Professions and the Erie County Caregiver Coalition.



*Complete course cost is covered for all Independent Health and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of WNY health insurance members.