

# INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

Fall 2019



## A year of hope & progress

Sullivan County took to the world stage throughout 2019, earning positive praise and international press coverage not only for the Woodstock 50th anniversary but as a destination in its own right.

"We welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors this year to a growing array of events, businesses, major conventions, parks, lakes, rivers, mountains and re-energized downtowns," noted Sullivan County Manager Josh Potosek.

"But we didn't forget our residents in the process, as we made good on promises to institute a much-needed public transportation service, invested in a wireless broadband project, replaced close to a dozen aging bridges, introduced early voting, cut the ribbon on the new Jail, successfully responded to the measles concern, and shared more services than ever with our local towns and villages," he added.

"In the process, we established ourselves as a Statewide leader in job growth, tourism, and sustainable practices — without significantly raising taxes or adding other burdens on taxpayers," Potosek acknowledged. "2019 will be remembered as a very good year in Sullivan County, and the County's 1,100 employees (and our partner agencies and contractors) are working on making 2020 just as memorable."

### In This Issue

- Our Bridge Unit was hard at work
- Move Sullivan just keeps growing
- Meet the new Commissioner of Human Resources
- Decoding our social media channels
- Measles didn't overwhelm us



The Sullivan County Division of Public Works' Bridge Unit includes these talented and hard-working guys, from the left: Bob Trotta, Chris Innella, Roman Di Cio, Kenny Peters, Ryan Brown, Karl Gillow, Tim Dexheimer, John Hinckley, Michael Nicoletti, Chris Dolfini, Eddie Lopez, Jake McKean, John Valentin and Lenny Davis. They're standing on one of the County's newest bridges, carrying Tempaloni Road over Sandburg Creek in the Town of Mamakating. The 55-foot concrete beam bridge replaced a 42-foot steel beam, timber-decked bridge dating back to 1950.

Departmental Spotlight: Bridge Unit of the Division of Public Works

## Keeping you out of hot (& cold) water

You probably never give it a thought, but travel just about anywhere in Sullivan County, and you're riding, strolling or caravanning over a finely crafted piece of concrete, steel or even wood.

"We maintain 400 bridges and large culverts, 150 of them on town roads," notes Roman Di Cio, P.E., Junior Civil Engineer in the Sullivan County Division of Public Works' Bridge Unit. "On average, we spend \$2-\$5 million a year on bridge structures."

In 2018, however, legislators authorized a \$10 million bond to rebuild/rehab 10 bridges and culverts, so as to ensure safe travel on local roads, be they heavily or lightly trafficked.

"The most important thing we look at is the safety of the structure," Roman affirms. "We and the DOT [New York State Department of Transportation] do inspections biannually.

"What we find could be just an issue with a load posting sign or a guiderail, but we look at the whole superstructure and abutments for signs of deterioration or damage," he adds. "Rust is the most common, due to road salt, but we can also see damage from flooding, heavy truck traffic and accidents."

If there's an issue that can safely be deferred for the moment, the most evidence you may see from an inspection is a new sign lowering the maximum weight limit for vehicles crossing the bridge or culvert. Or there may be a work crew there for a day or more to make repairs. The last resort is closure, as it deeply inconveniences travelers and just as deeply impacts taxpayers.

## Up & over...

The Bridge Unit, part of the Engineering section of the Division of Public Works, is active all year long, not just in the warm-weather building season. And they don't just work on bridges.

"A bridge is considered anything over 20 feet in span along the centerline of the road," Junior Civil Engineer Roman Di Cio explains. "Anything smaller than that is considered a culvert."

Bridges have been a part of the County's responsibility since 1929, when a County Highway Dept. first formed.

- As of 2019, the County maintains 400 bridges and large culverts — 247 County-owned and 153 owned by local towns
- 4 are covered bridges
- 5 are stone arch bridges (the 1850 Sickmiller Road bridge in Jeffersonville is the oldest County bridge still in service)
- 10 are steel truss bridges
- 22 are timber beam bridges
- 72 are culverts
- 117 are steel beam bridges
- 170 are concrete beam bridges (Bridge 192, on Hunter Road in Claryville, is the newest, having just been installed)
- And there are 2 dams—Toasperm in Eldred and Sunset Lake in Liberty

## Julie Diescher: a real resource

Sullivan County Manager Josh Potosek welcomed Livingston Manor resident Julie A. Diescher as the County's new Human Resources Commissioner earlier this year.

"Ms. Diescher is well-versed in the complex field of human resource management, and I am very pleased to have her on our team," Potosek affirmed. "As leader of our Division of Human Resources, she



Julie Diescher

will initiate and oversee crucial efforts to consistently recruit, retain, train and evaluate employees, so that taxpayers can be confident their money is creating and nurturing the absolute best workforce."

"Sullivan County has always been my home, so I am thrilled to be able to

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From the left, NYS Senator Jen Metzger, Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, Sullivan County Legislature Chair Luis Alvarez, Liberty resident Gary Siegel, Deputy County Manager John Little and Center for Workforce Development Director Laura Quigley spent a recent Friday morning sampling a portion of Move Sullivan's route.

## Move Sullivan takes off

With ridership rocketing from 200 per week at its August debut to now more than 800, Sullivan County's new Move Sullivan public transportation service is a bona fide hit.

"The fact that we've been inundated with requests to expand the service — just four months after it started — testifies to the fact that this is a much-needed and much-appreciated offering," said County Manager Josh Potosek.

And an expansion is indeed in the works. Legislators in December approved Potosek's request to set aside \$300,000 to purchase two new buses, plus \$150,000 to add hours and/or routes. A survey open to everyone ([www.surveymonkey.com/r/9NR33KJ?fbclid=IwAR3Y8DQYSyMMa27F8z74UqPBC1Pk8l3n6Nm1OcVxODnCj4qzIsG7n-sXkf4](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9NR33KJ?fbclid=IwAR3Y8DQYSyMMa27F8z74UqPBC1Pk8l3n6Nm1OcVxODnCj4qzIsG7n-sXkf4)) will guide County officials in how and where to expand.

Results thus far indicate the majority of riders use Move Sullivan to commute to and from work, but a significant portion also use the buses for shopping and healthcare appointments.

"Our ultimate goal is to bring Move Sullivan to the bulk of Sullivan County's communities, so that anyone in need of transportation can have a reliable, safe and affordable option to get where they need to go," said Potosek.

Beginning in 2020, a \$2/trip fare will be implemented in order to offset costs. The County continues to seek other funding sources to help pay for and sustain the service as it grows.

For routes, schedules and other info, visit [www.movesullivan.com](http://www.movesullivan.com) or call 845-434-4102.



## Get ready to Renaissance ... again!

Sullivan Renaissance, a key partner of Sullivan County, will host the G2R Winter Symposium – Get Ready to Renaissance! on Wednesday January 8, 2020 at 5:30 p.m. at the CVI Center in Liberty.

This symposium will present resources for a successful Renaissance project; complemented by workshops focused on fundraising, marketing, gardening, and recruiting volunteers. This is the not-to-be-missed event of the 2020 grant season for anyone looking to apply for project funding. Grant applications will be available. Bring your friends and learn what's new at Sullivan Renaissance.

A special (and highly informative) presentation by Leah Exner, a Fallsburg School Teacher, will tell the story of the Nature Trail at Benjamin Cosor Elementary School and how she leveraged a Sullivan Renaissance Healthy Community Initiatives grant for additional funding, partnerships,

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# Diescher: Cultivating talent

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serve the people of the County through this new role,” Diescher remarked. “Having dedicated my career to cultivating and supporting talented and skilled workers at some of the region’s largest employers, I’m privileged to now share my skills with the 1,100 professionals who diligently provide services to the County every day. I also am excited about attracting new, diverse talent, further defining Sullivan County as an employer of choice.”

A summa cum laude graduate of Marist College with concentrations in Organizational Leadership and Psychology, Diescher began her career in the Human Resources Department of the former Frontier Insurance Company in Rock Hill. Over the course of eight years, she quickly rose through the ranks, handling the coordination of benefits, policies, procedures, employee relations and compensation for their workforce.

She became Director of Human Resources for New Hope Community in Loch Sheldrake in 2007, managing not just the HR team but the Purchasing Department, Security, Reception and the Wellness/Fitness Center. In 2014, she was named Director of Human Resources for The ARC of Orange County, headquartered in Newburgh, where she initiated a transformation of the Employee Practices Handbook and developed systems to effect positive organizational changes, saving the nonprofit nearly \$200,000 in her first year by reducing hiring lag time and implementing an effective Workers Compensation strategy.

From January 2018 to her hiring by the County this past October, Diescher served as the Director of Human Resources for Pestech Exterminating in Ferndale, where she focused on attracting high-quality candidates, in addition to introducing policies, systems and low-cost benefits to increase employee satisfaction and morale.

Throughout her career and across her employers, Diescher has developed reorganization plans saving hundreds of thousands of dollars, decreased turnover by 18%, streamlined application processes, created multiple training and procedural manuals, and developed systems that track vacancies, hires and more in real time.

“I enjoy working with people at every level, demonstrably making their lives better, while living within the constraints of an organization’s budget,” she explained. “I also enjoy putting technology to work in a manner that gains efficiencies and provides continuity. That benefits both the employer and the employee.”

“It’s critical that we attract and retain the very best employees, especially during this historic growth we’ve been experiencing,” Potosek explained. “Ms. Diescher is ensuring we are ready to handle those changes and challenges as they arise.”

# Bridge Unit: Minding the gap...

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"We make every effort we can to avoid a full bridge closure," Roman nods. "As stewards of taxpayers' money, we try to extend the service life in the most efficient way possible."

Indeed, a bridge built and maintained correctly will outlast its designer.

"We're trying to build bridges that will last 75-100 years," Roman says — a significant increase from early 20th-century designs that mostly endured only 50-60 years.

That's thanks to the training and tenacity of Roman and his supervisor and colleague, Bridge Engineer Bob Trotta, P.E. (a 40-year veteran engineer), along with a team of Public Works employees. It's even more notable when you find out that the Bridge Unit once consisted of two Bridge Engineers and three Junior Engineers — yet the inventory of bridges and culverts has not decreased.



Sandburg Creek rushes below the new Tempaloni Road bridge near Spring Glen in the Town of Mamakating. The \$730,000 project included more than just the bridge's concrete beams but also the abutments, guardrails and approaches on either side.

"Bob and I are responsible for the design and management of the full bridge inventory," Roman acknowledges, even if a contracted firm actually builds the structure. "We submit reimbursement claims, address issues, review concerns and determine appropriate action. And we help out on any other engineering issues as needed."

They're assisted by two bridge crews who replace/rehab at least 2-4 bridges every year — at a cost that is typically 80% less than hiring an independent contractor to do the same work.

The Bridge Unit's inventory actually includes two dams, but the bulk of their work involves bridges, and that's where they find the most enjoyable challenges.

One of their current projects will lessen flooding that has bedeviled the Kohlertown/Jeffersonville area for years.

"Being highly skilled in stream management," explains Bob, "we are currently working on the Kohlertown Flood Risk Reduction Project, which will reduce flooding along County Route 164 and NYS Route 52 in the Town of Delaware."

It's unlike anything they've tackled before — but that's pretty much how it always works.

"When we design a bridge, we look at the waterway and hydraulics, the roadway and the surrounding ground," Roman notes. "Every bridge is different."

## Social media? Yeah, we've got that!

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest ... the choices feel endless — and confusing.

Let us simplify the Sullivan County government side of these social media channels, by showing you where you can find our posts and updates:

- Main **Facebook** Page: [www.facebook.com/sullivancountygov](http://www.facebook.com/sullivancountygov)
- Other official County **Facebook** pages:
  - Public Health Services: [sullivancountypublichealth](http://sullivancountypublichealth)
  - 911 Center: [SCNY911](http://SCNY911)
  - Bureau of EMS: [scbems](http://scbems)
  - Bureau of Fire: [SCBureauOfFire](http://SCBureauOfFire)
  - Office for the Aging: [scnyaging](http://scnyaging)
  - Recycling & Solid Waste: [SullivanCountyRecycles](http://SullivanCountyRecycles)
  - Care Center: [CareCenteratSunsetLake](http://CareCenteratSunsetLake)
  - Move Sullivan: [MoveSullivan](http://MoveSullivan)
- **Twitter**: [twitter.com/SullivanCntyGov](http://twitter.com/SullivanCntyGov)
- **Instagram**: [instagram.com/sullivancountygov](http://instagram.com/sullivancountygov)
- **LinkedIn**: [linkedin.com/company/sullivancountynygovernment](http://linkedin.com/company/sullivancountynygovernment)
- **YouTube**: [youtube.com/channel/UC-6KnDAiuQEnDNWO13Ev1sw](http://youtube.com/channel/UC-6KnDAiuQEnDNWO13Ev1sw)

# Measles came but did not conquer

Despite worries, the measles epidemic that struck New York City did not migrate this far north. And that was, in part, because Sullivan County did more than just worry — we took action before, during and after the downstate outbreak.

“Sullivan County ultimately confirmed 19 cases of measles, and most of those cases were individuals who hadn’t been vaccinated against the disease,” noted Loretta A. Santilli, Director of the NYS Department of Health’s Office of Public Health Practice, in a congratulatory visit to Public Health Services on November 25. “We’re here today to recognize the heroic, compassionate and unstinting work of Sullivan County Public Health officials, Public Health Director Nancy McGraw and her remarkable team, who reached out to the community, engaged them and educated them to stop one of the world’s most contagious diseases from spreading.”

“The potential crisis of a large measles outbreak at the height of Sullivan County’s busy summer season was not lost on us, and I am proud to say that County employees once again delivered top-tier service to both local residents and visitors this past summer,” said Deputy County Manager John Liddle, who served as Incident Commander in the measles response. “The safety and health of everyone in the County remained our utmost priority, and I am pleased to join the State in affirming we preserved public health and safety.”



**Public Health Services employed “camp auditors” to ensure local summer camps were complying with State and County rules mandating campers and staffers provide proof of measles immunization this past summer. Auditors included Nancy McGraw, Kathleen Lara, Rich Conroy, Carla Hardnett, Anita Kambhampati (pictured), Jeffrey Pagan (pictured), John Coursey and Dawn Tuckey.**

Around 500 immunizations were given over the course of the summer at many of the 173 local camps under NYS jurisdiction, which proved quite the challenge for the County’s small response team — though they were aided by both the NYS Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

“Everybody just pitched in and helped, and we worked together as a team,” acknowledged McGraw, whose staff prioritized the measles response amidst an already significant workload. “It was really a learning experience, and I can’t say enough about the support from the State as well.”

## Renaissance: Kicking off a new year...

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helping hands, and raw materials.

A choice of workshops will follow the program, which include:

- The WOW Factor, led by Peter Patel and Ann Smith, seasoned Sullivan Renaissance judges. Learn from these esteemed experts what they look for in a winning project.

- Volunteer Power, led by Anne-Louise Scandariato, Volunteer Program Manager. Participants will leave the workshop with specific strategies and resources on the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers.

- Project Success Through Budget & Promotion, led by Cory Dame, Marketing and Events Coordinator, Kathleen Capozzoli, Fiscal Manager and Sullivan County Division of Planning. Learn how to raise awareness of your project in 4 easy steps, budget for sustainability and glean resources available through SC Division of Planning.

- Building a Healthy Community, led by Colleen Emery, Healthy Community Initiatives Program Manager, and Juan Journet, Neighborhood Revitalization Coordinator, will look at how Renaissance grant funding can support projects that build a healthier community.

The event is free, but registration is required. Register at [www.SullivanRenaissance.org](http://www.SullivanRenaissance.org) or call 845-295-2445.