

INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

September 2018



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- Award recognizes proper budgeting
- Providing summer work for our teens
- We're proud to partner with Sullivan Renaissance

Our truly fearless Public Works employees were out clearing snow many times last winter, and they're getting ready to do so again in 2018-2019, no matter what nature throws at us.

We're prepared. Are you?

Summer is coming to a close, and it was a busy one. The Sullivan County 911 Center recorded 8,610 incidents in July and August of this year, compared with 7,853 the year before. And while just under 19,000 calls came into 911 in 2017, more than 21,000 have been logged in 2018 to date.

"In 2018, we saw a 10% increase in recorded incidents over the same period in 2017," 911 Coordinator Alex Rau explained. "Likewise, our phone call traffic increased as well by 12% over last summer season."

Now we're gearing up for the winter season, not only in 911 and the Sheriff's Office but in our Division of Public Works, which handles snowplowing under often very difficult conditions.

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Sullivan County is fortunate to have a group of employees focused on the health and well-being of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. The team behind the Children With Special Healthcare Needs Program includes, from the left, Account Clerk (Database) Cherie Schwartz, Senior Typist Patty Kearns, Principal Account Clerk Terrie Sheeley, Principal Account Clerk Cheryl Goetschius, Coordinator Lisa Wissmann, Initial Service Coordinator Rita Burns, Principal Account Clerk Joyce Babcock and Initial Service Coordinator Nikkie Rose.

Departmental Spotlight: Children With Special Healthcare Needs Program

Making sure every child has a shot at success

Lisa Wissman is straightforward about the program she oversees: Children With Special Healthcare Needs.

“Although it’s a very expensive program, the services are critical to help children with disabilities and developmental delays, ensuring that they are able to reach their greatest potential,” she explains.

The constant focus is on providing hope, not only to the children of Sullivan County, but to their families.

“My own daughter went through the program,” says Lisa. “She graduated seventh out of her class of more than 200, and she’s now doing well in college.”

Because of the services of the Children With Special Healthcare Needs Program, Lisa’s daughter overcame speech and cognition issues in her formative years, and that’s a success story Lisa wants to see repeated for other children. Thanks to the support of the Legislature, the County Manager’s Office, Public Health Services and her coworkers and staff, it’s become her daily life’s work.

Not that it’s easy. The 750-800 kids that the program annually serves in Early Intervention (EI) and Preschool Special Education have diagnosed disabilities and/or developmental delays ranging from mild speech impediments to autism, Down’s syndrome, and even terminal diseases. Their parents may be poor or their family lives troubled, they may have difficulty learning, they might be wrestling with physical handicaps, or they might find social situations challenging. Or all the above.

Lisa breaks down their challenges into five categories: adaptive, cognitive, communicative, physical, and social/emotional.

“Our goal is to get them to where they are considered to be as typically functional as their same-age peers.”

To do so, Lisa and her crew pull out all the stops. Every bit of the County share of the expenses (\$2.8 million in the amended 2018 budget) is employed in finding the right services and specialists for these children

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Our 2018 Summer Youth Employment Program participants could be found all over the County, including planting vegetables at SUNY Sullivan's Hope Farm.

Training the next generation

The Sullivan County Summer Youth Employment Program welcomed no less than 72 teenagers this year, simultaneously showing them the monetary, personal and community benefits of productive, gainful employment.

Coordinated and held accountable by the hardworking staff of the Center for Workforce Development, the young folks spread out to a working farm at SUNY Sullivan, a community garden in Monticello, a prosthetics manufacturer in Middletown, a creative arts partnership with Callicoon-based ENGN, a trail-building at our Social Services complex, Hanofee Park in Liberty, the Federation for the Homeless in Monticello, our Department of Family Services, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Achieve Rehab & Recovery in Liberty, the Catskill Fly Fishing Center & Museum in Livingston Manor, our Division of Planning, Monticello's E.B. Crawford Library, Literacy Volunteers, the Livingston Manor and Sullivan West schools, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the United Way, the Woodridge Housing Authority, the Youth Economic Group and the Town of Liberty Code Enforcement Office.

"This program prepares local teens for the realities, challenges and joys of the workforce," County Manager Josh Potosek stated. "The County is proud to give them an opportunity to do something worthwhile and satisfying in our communities — and get paid at the same time."



Liberty's Hanofee Park has newly stained picnic tables thanks to our summer crew.

Top kudos, third year in a row!

For the third time, the County Manager's Office and the Division of Management and Budget have earned the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).

A panel of judges carefully reviewed more than 1,600 budgets submitted to the GFOA, including Sullivan County's version for the 2018 fiscal year. They judged the budgets on their excellence as policy documents, financial plans, operations guides & communications devices, deeming Sullivan's to be "proficient" in all four categories.

"To have won this award from a major national professional association is testament to the fine work our Management and Budget team, led by Commissioner Janet Young, undertakes every day," County Manager Josh Potosek affirmed. "The attention to detail and our focus on responsibility to taxpayers were noticed by the judges, and we aim to continue that record of achievement in 2019's budget, now under development."

Proud to partner with Renaissance

The County of Sullivan would not be the place it is today without the ongoing efforts of Sullivan Renaissance. From Roscoe to Barryville, Callicoon to Woodridge, Wurtsboro to Monticello, the beautification and community development program has brought new life to many, many people and places.

“Sullivan Renaissance has lived up to its name in every way,” says County Manager Josh Potosek. “Led and organized by a committed band of talented locals, Renaissance has come to encompass every corner of the County, literally remaking our image and establishing an international baseline for community beautification.”

Founded by Sandra Gerry and funded by the Gerry Foundation, Sullivan Renaissance honors and celebrates its vast group of volunteers with an annual Awards Ceremony, where hundreds of thousands of dollars are distributed to those efforts judged to be the best of the bunch. This year’s winner of the top \$250,000 “Golden Feather” prize was the Town of Liberty for a wide-ranging initiative involving code enforcement, health and beautification efforts.

To that end, Renaissance will host a Municipal Forum on Wednesday, September 26 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the CVI Center in Ferndale, featuring two dynamic speakers sharing research and presenting on code enforcement and healthy communities. It is not necessary to be a municipal official or be part of a town planning or zoning board to attend. Pre-registration is requested, and refreshments will be served. To register, visit SullivanRenaissance.org or call 845-295-2445. Event details can also be found on [the Sullivan Renaissance Facebook page](#).

Got a question?

Try your legislator first, by calling the Sullivan County Legislature’s office at 845-807-0435. They can direct you to the representative who is elected to serve you.

Or look up who you’re seeking directly, via the County’s website:

SullivanNY.us

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Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther hands the \$250,000 Golden Feather “check” from Sullivan Renaissance to Keri-Ann Poley and Vincent McPhillips of the Town of Liberty. Behind them is Warwick Mayor Michael Newhard, one of the judges in the municipal category. (Photo by Michael Bloom, courtesy of Sullivan Renaissance.)

Children: Achieving their greatest potential...

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— doctors and nurses for medical concerns, educators and counselors for school studies, therapists and behaviorists for social, emotional and physical needs... not to mention transportation to get them to these services.

“Every child is entitled to a free and appropriate education, so we look at the least restrictive, most ‘normal’ environment for them first,” Lisa notes. “If that’s not enough, we look at center-based programs.”

Finding providers of such services, however, has become increasingly difficult, and this is part of the reason the Public Health Director has requested another EI service coordinator position in the 2019 County budget.

Taxpayers, however, should understand how closely Lisa and her staff pay attention to and monitor the cost of these services.

“We are not just giving away services to anyone who asks for them,” she states. “We pride ourselves on maintaining the fiscal integrity of the program.”

The staff pride themselves even more on helping a child achieve their greatest potential, no matter the challenges facing them. Like the little girl who suddenly won’t stop talking after years of silence. Or the once-ostracized boy who just graduated as valedictorian of his class. Or the cancer-stricken teenager who can walk once again, thanks to the new prosthetic leg that replaced the one he was outgrowing.

“Or simply seeing a child smile — that’s incredibly rewarding,” Lisa affirms. “That’s what motivates us: the success of children and their families.”

Be alert through NY-Alert...

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The County has also just received nearly \$210,000 from the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism and other catastrophic disasters.

But to be truly ready for what’s to come in Sullivan County, residents and businesses need to be prepared themselves.

“So in recognition of September being National Preparedness Month, I’m urging everyone to sign up for NY-Alert, the statewide emergency alert system,” said County Manager Josh Potosek. “Signup is free, and you can tailor the alerts to a certain location (like a town or the County) and to particular devices (like your cell, email or automated phone call).”

NY-Alert offers critical, emergency-related information, including instructions and recommendations in real-time by emergency personnel. Information may include severe weather warnings, significant highway closures, hazardous material spills and other emergency conditions — and you can choose what you want to receive. For more info or to sign up, visit alert.ny.gov.

What they do & how it’s funded

The Children With Special Needs Program operates three active programs under the authority of Sullivan County Public Health Services and in collaboration with a variety of public, private and nonprofit agencies and providers.

A team of professionals evaluates the children and their families at their homes to determine needs and eligibilities. Then the crew of the Children With Special Health-care Needs Programs puts them in touch with providers and services that can assist, often in concert with local public school districts.

“We need to really do whatever we can to ensure they have the opportunity to be productive citizens,” says Program Coordinator Lisa Wissman.

Early Intervention (EI):

- For ages 0-3
- Services include speech, occupational and physical therapy, special education, and case management
- After insurance coverage, County pays 51% of costs, State pays 49%

Child Find:

- For ages 0-3 who are not eligible for Early Intervention
- Services include monitoring of issues that may require EI

Preschool Special Education:

- For ages 3-5
- Services similar to EI
- After Medicaid coverage, State pays 59.5% and County pays 40.5%

For more info, call 845-292-5910.

In appreciation for the hard work they do

County employees at the Liberty Social Services complex enjoyed a BBQ with all the fixings last month. Food and drink were donated by supervisors & commissioners in thanks for their tireless efforts to help those in need in Sullivan County. (Thanks to Don Lara for the photos!)



Our very own Blue Star

The Sullivan County Veterans Service Agency and the Community Garden Club of Liberty joined the public on September 9 in dedicating the Blue Star Memorial Marker just installed at the Government Center in Monticello.

“This is the newest addition to the area where we honor those who served and their families,” noted Veterans Service Agency Director John Crotty. “And it is a fitting trib-



ute to our servicemembers past and present, from a group – the Garden Club – that is similarly invested in protecting and enhancing the place they call home.”

“We are so very pleased and honored to be able to contribute this marker and the plantings that surround it,” said Garden Club member Judy Bergstrom, chair of the Blue Star Memorial Committee. “We intend to maintain this small section of the Government Center’s North Street lawn in perpetuity, constantly reminding passersby to never forget the deep sacrifices made by those serving in our armed forces & their loved ones.”

The Community Garden Club of Liberty is a member of the National Garden Clubs, originator and sponsor of Blue Star and Gold Star Memorials across the U.S.