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Higgins announces grant opportunity for local fire departments

Gary Clark Jr. to headline Artpark concert

Train to perform at Artpark on July 19

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Catholic Charities launches 100th annual Appeal

Guest Editorial by Deacon Steve Schumer

Last year, Catholic Charities of Buffalo celebrated 100 years of serving the Western New York community. This year also marks something equally special - our 100th annual Appeal. The backbone of stability for our organization, the annual Appeal has allowed us to continue our mission of providing "HOPE" for all seasons for the last century.

Almost half a billion dollars has been raised throughout the past 99 Appeals to help millions of people across eight counties, further demonstrating the impact that the annual Appeal has on our community. We are so very proud of - and yet humbled by - this legacy.

The very first Appeal in 1924 served about 12,500 people. Today, Catholic Charities supports more than 145,000 individuals and families of all ages and of all faiths, illustrating the continued need for these critical programs and services.

While we live in a dynamic and vibrant

community, our community also experiences significant poverty and increasing needs for the most vulnerable among us. This is not just the homeless and underprivileged, but includes the working poor and even children. The need today is very real and Catholic Charities is, as it has been for the last century, here to meet the challenge.

The annual Appeal helps fund more than 50 programs and services administered by Catholic Charities along with several ministries through the "Fund for the Faith." As the most comprehensive human services provider serving all of WNY, our services include basic emergency assistance for nearly 25,000 people; food and nutrition for nearly 100,000 individuals and families who might otherwise go hungry; behavioral health services for more than 8,000; education and workforce training to more than 1,000; safety and stabilization services for more than 4,000 people; support to more than 1,000 fleeing violence; oppression and poverty, in-

school counseling services for more than 6,000 children; and support for more than 1,100 frail elderly. And these were over the past year alone.

Everything we do starts with "HOPE." We know that the success of the Appeal has always depended on the continued generosity of those who are able to and who choose to give. We also know that this support directly translates into "HOPE" for those struggling with life's challenges. We see it every day on the faces of too many of our neighbors. Thanks to ongoing support of the annual Appeal, "HOPE" can be restored when success doesn't seem possible.

As you can see, when you donate, you play a vital role in helping your neighbors. Your gift is providing more than just a hot meal for a family, or counseling for someone who is troubled. It gives them "HOPE."

Appeal 2024, with a need of \$9.5 million, runs through June 30.

Deacon Steve Schumer is president and CEO of Catholic Charities of Buffalo.

Income tax filing season is underway! Time to Free File

Submitted by the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance on Sunday announced the start of the 2024 income tax filing season. The Tax Department and the IRS began processing income tax returns on Monday. The deadline to file returns and pay any tax owed (or request an extension of time to file) is midnight on April 15.

The Tax Department urges

taxpayers to explore submitting their taxes using Free File software available on the Tax Department website at www.tax.ny.gov (search: free). Taxpayers who meet income and other qualifications may be eligible to file both federal and New York state returns with private online tax preparers at no cost through the Tax Department website using Free File.

Many New Yorkers take advantage of this free service each year,

saving them hundreds of dollars and more in tax preparation fees.

"Too often, taxpayers who use commercial tax preparation software are surprised by charges for additional fees when completing their annual filing," Acting Commissioner Amanda Hiller said. "For a truly free experience, go to the New York State Tax Department website where there are no added costs or hidden fees - ever - for those who qualify."

Free File information is available in multiple languages at the Tax Department's website.

The Tax Department website also offers income tax filing resources for taxpayers who want to do their own taxes. It explains how to get started, how to check for available tax credits, and how to check the status of your refund. It also provides tips for hiring a tax preparer for people who prefer to have someone do their taxes for them.

Dangerous winter weather intensifying emergency blood shortage

✓ \$20 Amazon.com gift card by email for those who come to give in February

Submitted by the American Red Cross

The American Red Cross continues to experience an emergency blood shortage, as severe winter weather has further impacted the ability to rebuild the blood supply. Blood and platelet donors are urged to give now to help ensure lifesaving medical procedures are not delayed.

The national blood supply remains at critically low levels. Blood drives have been canceled in nearly every state where the Red Cross collects blood. As a result, nearly 15,000 blood and platelet donations have gone uncollected this month alone.

In addition to dangerous road conditions, many Americans have dealt with flight and shipping delays, and the Red Cross is no different. Snow, ice and extreme

temperatures have made it tougher to move vital blood products across the Red Cross network, affecting deliveries to hospitals in some locations.

As much of the country warms up this week, individuals are urged to make an appointment now to give blood or platelets by using the Red Cross blood donor app, visiting RedCrossBlood.org or calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767). As a thank-you, all those who come to give Feb. 1-29 will receive a \$20 Amazon.com gift card by email. Visit RedCrossBlood.org/Heart for details.

The nation is currently facing the lowest number of people giving blood in 20 years. When fewer people donate blood, any disruption to blood donations - like recent weather systems - can have a huge

effect on the availability of blood products and dramatic consequences for those in need of emergency blood transfusion. Generous blood donors are vital to ensuring those in need of transfusions have access to lifesaving care.

New Blood Donor Rewards Program

Since announcing an emergency blood shortage earlier this month, thousands of donors across the country have answered the call to help. In appreciation for all those who take the time to help save lives, the Red Cross is pleased to launch an all-new blood donor rewards program. This initiative offers a new way for the Red Cross to say thank you for the generous donations that are critical to patients counting on lifesaving care.

All donors will now earn points

for their donations that accumulate each time they roll up a sleeve to give. Donors automatically started earning points on Jan. 1, 2024, and they can redeem points any time of year to receive e-gift cards or save them to redeem and claim an exclusive Red Cross merchandise item in the next calendar year. For more information, visit RedCrossBlood.org/Rewards.

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides comfort to victims of disasters; supplies about 40% of the nation's blood; teaches skills that save lives; distributes international humanitarian aid; and supports veterans, military members and their families. The Red Cross is a nonprofit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to deliver its mission.

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