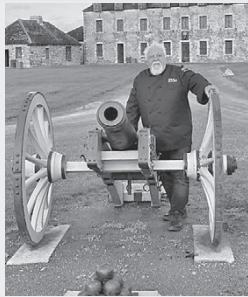


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Catholic Charities

Appeal 2023 launches with \$9.5 million goal

Annual campaign provides programs & services to more than 134,000 neighbors in need in WNY

Officials have launched Appeal 2023, in support of Catholic Charities of Buffalo and the diocesan 'Fund for the Faith,' with a goal of raising \$9.5 million by June 30.

'The hope Catholic Charities provides for those who are struggling to make ends meet or who are facing challenges impacting their health and well-being every day is evident on the faces of so many across our community,' said Adam Sumlin, Ph.D., Appeal 2023 chair. 'Community support through the annual Appeal is crucial, as the funds raised ensures that much-needed programs and services can continue. If we look out for our community, we will always create a better place for others who are less fortunate.'

The annual Appeal helps fund 57 programs and services adminis-

tered by Catholic Charities across 80 locations, and many diocesan ministries through the 'Fund for the Faith.'

A press release stated, 'As the most comprehensive human services provider serving people of all faiths across all eight counties of Western New York, Catholic Charities' programs and services include basic emergency assistance such as food pantries, educational and vocational advancement services, family safety and stabilization services, immigration and refugee assistance, behavioral health and substance use treatment, and youth and family support services.'

This year marks the 100th year of Catholic Charities serving Western New York, and the 99th year for the annual Appeal.

'We are inspired by Catholic Charities' centennial year of service, and are launching this year's Appeal with renewed vigor and

excitement,' said Deacon Steve Schumer, president and CEO of Catholic Charities. 'During its first year, Catholic Charities served about 12,500 people. Last year, Catholic Charities' programs and services supported more than 134,000 individuals, families and children. In the 98 years of the Appeal, close to half a billion dollars has been raised to provide help and hope to those who need it most.'

The 'Fund for the Faith' provides for such ministries as campus ministry, cultural diversity, deaf ministry, parish spiritual renewal, marriage preparation, leadership and support services for Catholic education, and curriculum for 'Faith Formation' programs in Catholic schools, among others.

'Let us all answer the call to love one another because, when we help those in need, we help our entire community,' said Bishop Michael W. Fisher. 'The ministries carried

out by Catholic Charities and the diocesan 'Fund for the Faith' are a true gift to individuals and families from every walk of life. This year, we move forward with confident hope for the success of this campaign. My fervent prayers will be for positive results at the Appeal close in six months.'

This year's Appeal patron is Venerable Nelson H. Baker, founder of Our Lady of Victory charities, and one of the signers of the letters of incorporation for Catholic Charities in 1923.

To donate to Appeal 2023, visit ccwny.org/donate or call 716-218-1400. In addition, donors can give by texting GIVEHOPE 23 to 44321 or scanning the QR code found on Appeal materials.

For assistance, visit ccwny.org or call 716-218-1400 to find help through Catholic Charities.

DiNapoli urges New Yorkers to spend holiday gift cards

\$48 million in unused gift cards turned over to his office in 2022

New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli is urging New Yorkers to make sure they spend any gift cards they received this holiday season. Unused gift card balances can eventually be turned over to his Office of Unclaimed Funds (OUF), which took in a record \$48 million from them in 2022.

'Unused gift cards have set a new record, as they make up a growing number of the accounts being held by our Office of Unclaimed Funds. My office is working to get these funds back in the hands of their rightful owners,' DiNapoli said.

'This holiday season, I encourage all New Yorkers to spend their gift cards in a timely manner to avoid possible inactivity fees or having the money turned over to my office.'

The record high amount of unused gift cards turned over to OUF in 2022 was attributed, in part, to a settlement that required H&M to return approximately \$18 million worth of unused gift card balances to OUF. In a similar settlement, almost \$3 million worth of unused gift card balances was turned over by Apple.

State law governing gift card expiration dates and fees was

changed this year. A new law went into effect on Dec. 10, 2022, that allowed the expiration date for gift cards to increase from five to nine years after the card was issued, or the date on which funds were last loaded. It also prohibited many fees.

A press release said, 'Despite the change in law, the NYS abandoned property law remains unchanged - gift cards and certificates owed to New York residents, or to unknown owners but issued by an entity incorporated in New York, are deemed abandoned and reportable to OUF after five years of inactivity, regardless of expiration date.'

DiNapoli urges recipients to read the fine print for details about the fees and expiration dates on any cards they receive and to register the card with the retailer.

His office is currently holding more than \$17.5 billion in unclaimed funds. DiNapoli urged New Yorkers to visit his unclaimed funds search portal to see if they are owed money.

Track state and local government spending at Open Book New York. Under DiNapoli's open data initiative, search millions of state and local government financial records, track state contracts, and find commonly requested data.

Attorney general to hold public hearing on mental health access in WNY

New York Attorney General Letitia James announced her office will hold its second in-person public hearing concerning the provision of mental health care for people with serious mental illness in the Western New York Region. The hearing is scheduled for 11 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 18, at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, and members of the public, advocacy groups and health care providers are encouraged to testify. Individuals who wish to provide oral testi-

mony at the hearing must submit their testimony online in writing by 5 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 11. Written testimony will be accepted online through Jan. 18.

'New York is battling a mental health crisis in every town, in every county, and in every region. Any solution must address the concerns of all New Yorkers, from Buffalo to Brooklyn,' James said. 'As we continue to grapple with the impacts of COVID-19 and the immense tragedy facing Western New Yorkers, it

is imperative that complete mental health services are available to our communities. Hearing from those with first-hand experience navigating our mental health care systems will better inform recommended solutions for New Yorkers in need.'

This will be James' second public hearing on mental health. The first public hearing was held in June 2022 in New York City, and primarily focused on issues impacting the downstate region.

Through these hearings, the at-

torney general aims to gain insight from the public regarding the problems people suffering mental health crises or chronic severe mental illness experience in accessing mental health services and use that information for legislative and enforcement solutions.

The hearing will be held in the Mason O. Damon auditorium at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. It will be viewable to the public via livestream.

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