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Pauly provides update on Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, 2021 events

As I closed out 2020 on New Year's Eve with my family (yes, I actually stayed awake past midnight!), I couldn't help but reflect on the year we just put behind us. I thought of how the events of 2020 affected my family and friends, as well as on a larger scope with the Chamber of Commerce and community.

So many hurdles were thrown at us, seemingly on a daily basis. Things we knew as "normal" were taken away so suddenly and new normals had to be established, sometimes within less than 24 hours notice. Now we are in a new year and are all trying to figure out how we move forward. Do we plan for "normalcy" to resume in April? June? The last quarter of the year? How do we plan for some of the major events and programs that we had to take off the calendar last year?

We are going into the year with some uncertainty; however, one thing for certain is our communities have all helped each other out. There has been a show of love, support and humanity for our local businesses, organizations and residents that the Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce is proud to represent. We are all digging in to make a difference and it shows. Some of the initiatives launched by the Chamber of Commerce include:

- Give or take food table
Gift certificate program - The certificates are redeemed by

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Jennifer Pauly President

"Chamber Champion" - Some of our businesses were able to pay it forward and pay membership dues for another member.

Online meeting functions (Zoom) - We provided online meeting hosting for local government, networking, business groups and organizations.

Small business video series
Leaders meeting during the pandemic - Local elected leaders and first responders met online weekly for months during the COVID-19 pandemic, as organized by the chamber

Many aspects of community and commerce were affected in 2020. Day-to-day operations for most of our businesses were halted or given strict regulations. Major events that are generally a staple in our communities did not happen. Some of these events have been happening for 20, 40, 60 years ... the thought of them not happening was unheard of for many. The decline in tourism in general had an impact on our attractions, ac-

member businesses for reimbursement

COVID-19 resource page for businesses and community

"Roam The Region" - A weekly online program featuring our members

commodations, businesses and the general "feel" of our business districts. Our first responders were put to the test.

The list goes on. How do we move forward for 2021?

Our first board of directors meeting took place Wednesday. Our chairwoman, Christine O'Hara, is energized and ready to plan.

"As we begin the new year facing many of the same challenges that plagued us in 2020, we are committed to continuing to provide the 'core services' to our members," she said. "We transitioned quickly when COVID-19 hit, setting a path through the pandemic assisting our members through the layers of information that changed daily. We will continue to abide by the restrictions set forth by New York state, and don't know when we will be able to once again conduct 'business as usual.' However, we will stay true to our mission of unifying the Niagara River Region, promoting it as a premier place to live, work and play."

We will continue to provide guidance from NYS, CDC, Small Business Administration, county/local governments and industry experts to lead us through the next part of 2021 to keep businesses and the communities we represent safe. Additionally, the chamber staff has been restructured, and our strategies for mem-

bership, programming, events and promotions are being updated and reimagined to fit the needs of our members, while the safety of all continues to be our first priority. Using the many talents of our board of directors, we will expand our digital footprint, community and business leadership, chamber foundation and mission in the year ahead.

One of the questions we receive on a daily basis is on the major events in our region and if they will take place this year. We will continue to work with our partner organizations on the fluid guidelines and planning for large events. We are not planning to hold the popular Lewiston Smelt Festival or the Taste of Lewiston that traditionally happen in the first six months of the year. We are concentrating on the possibility of June through December events, including our annual awards dinner happening in a possible outdoor venue in the summer.

There are many aspects to be considered when planning our large-scale events and festivals, with COVID-19 adding more layers. We will keep everyone updated regarding the future of major events and festivals in 2021.

The chamber will continue to connect members to valuable resources, uphold our mission and be the voice of business and a champion for our communities. We will recover, rebuild and grow stronger in 2021!

Town of Porter excited about 2021

BY JOHN "DUFFY" JOHNSTON Supervisor, Town of Porter

As we all know, 2020 was a horrible year for a lot of different reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic being the worst.

The safety and health of Porter residents and Porter employees were the town's highest priorities. We have disinfected our garage and Town Hall several times and will continue to monitor them as we move forward. Our Town Hall is disinfected every day with a special sanitizing gun we purchased.

The Porter on the Lake Park fundraiser was canceled in July, but we hope it will resume on July 17, 2021. The county sales tax was way down for 2020, due to our restaurants and stores being closed temporarily (and some unfortunately for good). This loss in sales tax and other cuts by the state make it very difficult to keep

a town and its programs funded. There were some cuts in funding that the Town Board had to make for our 2021 budget; this hurt some of our programs, but they had to be made. None of the Porter employees received a raise, that was another tough decision we made that hurt the board, but had to be made.

Moving forward, some good projects did happen in the Town of Porter in 2020.

- We finalized our (LWRP), Lake Water Revitalization Plan. This has been adopted and will help in receiving grants in the future.
There was also the completion of a \$350,000 grant at our lake front park off Powell Lane. Mark Cerrone Inc. did an amazing job on securing over 300 feet of shoreline on this project.
Porter also entered into a new garbage and recycling contract

with Modern Disposal in 2020. The new one cart system is the wave of the future. By moving this project up to October, instead of waiting until 2021, Porter saved \$26,000 on the garbage totes alone.

There has been a few hiccups, but we have addressed them. One being leaf pick up, so we had a Dumpster dropped off at the Town Hall that worked well for our residents.

Change can be tough, and I would like to thank our residents for understanding. Porter was one of the first to move to the one cart system, but in 2021, Newfane, Cambria, Pendleton, Somerset, Barker and Middleport will be on the one-cart system.

The town has also installed two 911 call boxes at Porter on the Lake. Reception can be lost at the park, and these boxes tell the operator exactly where you are.

I hope that 2021 will also bring some new hope and projects to Porter. We have a grant that was secured by Sen. Rob Ort in 2018 for Porter on the Lake. This \$210,000 grant will heat the main pavilion and enclose it with garage doors, glass doors facing the lake. There will be a new restroom and all buildings will have new metal siding. Another parking lot will be added and a 50-by-75-foot garage will also be built. This grant has been on the New York Senate majority leader's desk for final approval and hopefully in 2021 he will sign it!

The town and Village of Youngstown are working with the Greenway bike trail group to expand the bike trail from Lewiston through Youngstown and continue to Porter on the Lake.

In closing: Wear a mask, stay safe and let's move forward in 2021.

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PUBLISHER Skip Mazenauer
GM/MANAGING EDITOR Joshua Maloni
EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR Terrence P. Duffy
WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS Joshua Maloni, Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES Colleen Rebmann, Jeff Calarco, Marcy Lombardo
CIRCULATION Kim Wendt
ACCOUNTING/OFFICE MANAGER Halie Hernandez

PRODUCTION MANAGER/ GRAPHIC DESIGNER Wendy Juzwiczki
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder
CLASSIFIED MANAGER Toni Snyder
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Jennifer Walowitz
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/REPORTERS Michael J. Billoni, Kevin and Dawn Cobello, Michael DePietro, Karen Keefe, Wayne Peters, Mark Williams Jr., David Yarger

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Phone (716) 773-7676 Fax (716) 773-7190

Editorial: Tribune@wnypapers.com Dispatch@wnypapers.com Sentinel@wnypapers.com

Advertising: NFPDesign@wnypapers.com Classifieds: NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com

Circulation: NFPcirculation@wnypapers.com Legals: legalnotice@wnypapers.com

Website: wnypapers.com

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