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Niagara County has better-than-expected financial status, thanks to 'rethink' & 'reconfigure' plans

The Niagara County Legislature is well into preparation and review of our 2021 budget and, if I had to sum it all up right now, I would say, "It's much, much better than expected."

I think many of us thought the COVID-19 pandemic would completely decimate our budget, but with a lot of good work by our county manager, department heads and legislators, I think we have produced a responsible document that recognizes the realities we face.

Starting with revenue, the biggest concern had been how bad would sales tax revenues decline? In the case of Niagara County, the first few months of 2020 saw record levels of sales tax revenue

as our economy was humming. We then took a significant hit for several months beginning in April. But things rebounded a bit and, because we did not budget for big increases, all in all we did OK.

Next, the county was able to realize significant savings in its health insurance program by introducing competition into the way it buys prescription drugs. By bidding out this portion, our costs were lowered, producing \$1 million in savings.



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

We were also aided by \$2.3 million in CARES Act funding that came directly from Washington. (Side note, for those who remember my article on CARES funding from last month, no, we still have not received anything from Albany.)

Producing a responsible budget during tough times requires tough decisions. As you may recall, during the course of the last year, we furloughed 200 employees, restricted travel and took other steps to control spending. We continue that into this budget by abolishing 31 positions and enacting a retirement incentive that, together, will save us more than \$1.5 million.

So what does all of this mean? Niagara County once again produced a budget that stays under

the tax cap for property taxpayers and actually reduces the full value tax rate by about 3%. And this was done without negatively impacting our services.

I want to commend all of the county employees who helped put this together. We challenged everyone to "rethink" and "reconfigure" how we conducted county operations so we could maintain services at less cost, and they delivered.

There is still opportunity for the public to have their say before the budget is adopted. There will be a public hearing on the budget at the Niagara County Courthouse in Lockport on Tuesday, Dec. 1, at 6:20 p.m. The budget will be voted on at our meeting on Dec. 8.

Consider giving to your community

Dear friends:
The United Way of Greater Niagara is in the last month of our 2020 campaign and we are confident that we are moving in the right direction. We are reaching out to our community for our final push to help support the local programs in our community.

We are aware of the challenging times but find our community generous in helping others. We will continue with our mission: To invest in programs that focus on education, health and financial stability that deliver measurable results to improve our community today and strengthen it for tomorrow along with our vision. Greater Niagara is a vibrant region where

all individuals and families achieve their human potential through education, income stability and healthy lives.

The United Way of Greater Niagara has been in the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have kept our agency open all year to assist the community with referrals. We have continued to fund our partner agencies to ensure they are servicing our community needs. We have supported two day care programs for essential employees in Niagara County during this past year and continue to do so.

Your donation stays here in our Niagara community, which serves over 100,000 different people. Your

investment in the United Way of Greater Niagara helps fund 29 program providers that provide different programs throughout Niagara County. Please consider donating this year to our campaign and thank you if you have donated.

We are proud of our partnership with labor and we are appreciative of their strong commitment to the United Way of Greater Niagara.

We appreciate our donors that have supported us over the years and we hope that you will continue to do so and help meet our needs in the Niagara Community. Please call us at 731-4580 if you would like to donate or go to our website at www.uwgn.org. We will be happy to come to your business or

organization any time during the year to talk about the United Way programs.

We want to thank Denise Abbott, DeGraff Medical Park, and Nicolas Maniccia, KeyBank, for chairing the 2020 campaign and their commitment to the United Way of Greater Niagara.

This year more than ever United Way of Greater Niagara needs your support. Please consider giving to your community.

Thank you for "Living United!"
Connie Brown,
President and CEO
Robert J. Kazeangin Jr.,
Chairman of the board

Kara's Korner: Garbage bulk pickup day is Dec. 12 in Porter

BY KARA HIBBARD
Porter Town Clerk

Hi Everyone!
I hope you all had a nice Thanksgiving. I know it's a little different this year, but hopefully next year we can all be with our loved ones again.

Just a few things I would like to mention and keep everyone aware of. Saturday, Dec. 12, in the Town of Porter will be garbage bulk pickup day. It's on a Saturday and you can put three large bulk items out at once and Modern will pick

them up. Please have your items out by 7 a.m.

Also, Thursday, Dec. 10, will be the last day to drop off your leaves in the Dumpster located in the Town Hall parking lot. It's been a huge success and hopefully we can continue to have it there every year.

The town's NYS DEC decals system has been up and running for about a month now. You can purchase your hunting and fishing licenses here at the Town Hall. An appointment is not needed. Our

doors are open during regular business hours.

The Town of Porter Christmas Basket Program will once again be serving those in need in our community. There will be a few changes this year due to COVID-19 in order to keep recipients and volunteers safe. If you would like to make a donation so that gift cards for food and children's gifts can be purchased, please make checks payable to the Youngstown Civic Guild and mailed to 337 Riverview Drive, Youngstown, NY

14174. Gifts can also be delivered to the Youngstown Red Brick Village Center, 240 Lockport St., from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday Dec. 7, to Friday, Dec. 11. If you would like to volunteer, please call 745-7260 or 745-0952.

There will also be a box located inside the Town Hall where anyone who wishes to donate can help by bringing canned goods and nonperishable items. The drive is from Nov. 24 through Dec. 8. Your help and generosity can make a difference!

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