By Jessica Ford
Newsline Editor

“Like sand through the hourglass,” Fulton County Administrative Officer Jon Stead likened navigating the county through the highs and lows of each budget year, to an old-time soap opera featuring the New York State Government as a main character.

Successes, budget challenges and new projects were part of each drama-themed plot twist in Stead’s annual State of the County address, hosted on February 28 by the Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce at the Winner’s Circle in Fonda.

He gave some of the most positive news first, noting in the financial report section of his presentation that there is “absolutely no debt,” currently on Fulton County’s books.

Unfunded Mandates

Stead said the New York State Medicaid mandate is still the largest pressure point on Fulton County’s annual budget. He credited Governor Andrew Cuomo as a hero for placing cost control caps that have helped counties stay under the tax cap and provide services locally. In fact, he said this may be “one of Cuomo’s biggest achievements.”

The Medicaid tax burden was down to 45 percent for 2020. The challenge, however, comes with the fact that 69 percent of Fulton County’s tax burden is in mandates that the county legislators have no control over, and 45 percent of that is in Medicaid costs.

This soap opera or drama, Stead jokingly called “As the state turns, or as my stomach turns.” He said Cuomo’s approach is “don’t ask questions, don’t question me, just get on this ‘progressive train.’” However, this is having implications for residents by affecting county government.

He said that in 2019, the Governor expanded government via what he titled, his “justice agenda.” Stead called it “progress at all costs,” with serious implications on counties.

Due to these types of initiatives, Fulton County Administrative Officer Jon Stead, center, prepares to give the Fulton County "State of the County" address, flanked on the left by NY State Senator James Tedisco and on the right by Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce President Mark Kilmer.

Fulton County Faces Future With No Debt, Progressive Agenda

See Fulton, on page 3

Montgomery County Sees Great Strides in 2019, Readies for Challenges in 2020

By Jessica Ford
Newsline Editor

Montgomery County Executive Matthew L. Ossenfort and his team will focus on those things that can be controlled, as the entire region faces the coming year in the midst of uncertainty.

Ossenfort gave his summary of past challenges and successes, as well as future plans, during the Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber’s annual State of the County address, held on March 12 at the Winners Circle restaurant in Fonda.

He began by saying, “We woke up today. Literally today — in a different world.” He cited the cancellation of NCAA March Madness, and the cancellation of the rest of the NBA season, as examples of how things are changing in the face of the COVID-19 Coronavirus, and its impact on the world’s economy and local events and business.

But always keeping a positive attitude, Ossenfort said, “Your mettle is tested, and we find out who we really are, during these tough times. But we can still work toward our goals and positive outcomes in Montgomery County.”

See Montgomery, on page 4
Chamber Welcomes New Director of Membership and Member Services

Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber President Mark Kilmer announced the appointment of Janet Davis as Director of Membership and Member Services for the organization.

Davis is a lifelong Fulton County resident, who has spent many years in banking, starting a teller and working her way up to become a branch manager.

She said she loves working with the public, and credits her years in banking as a great training ground for this new career path.

“Banking made me realize how much you can help people,” she said. My branch was very successful because my team was there to help our clients’ needs, and having a great team meant everything to me.”

Kilmer said, “We are grateful that Janet chose to join our team. I know she will make a great contribution to our work here. Look for her out in the community, helping new members learn the benefits of Chamber membership, and working with current members to make the most of the services that the Chamber provides.”

Davis said, “I am very excited to meet the community and help the Chamber increase memberships, and I am also looking forward to working with the team at the Fulton Montgomery Chamber.”

She attended Mayfield High School and FMCC for Business Administration. She has been married 38 years and has 2 children. Part of her passion for the region comes from the great recreational opportunities available, and she takes advantage of the outdoors, including hiking, canoeing, walking and swimming.

Welcome Janet!
Fulton, continued from page 1

He noted that Montgomery County has similar circumstances to Fulton County, while Saratoga County’s per capita for the same mandate is $112.

“It’s important to both communities,” he said.

Expenditures

Stead said Fulton County has held a hard line, with “all of our department heads working hard, to keep costs down.”

Getting Things Done

Despite all of the challenges, “Fulton County government is still chugging along, getting good things done,” he said.

“We administer so many programs that touch the lives of our residents,” he said. Highlights include actively working on cooperative inter-municipal projects.

He said the county continues to work within the Smart Waters project, the ongoing program by the county to extend water and sewer services to communities outside Gloversville and Johnstown, to further development in the county.

Stead said the demolition of select properties inside the county is a highlight of the year as well; along with county programs to enhance school safety assistance for BOCES. The county has also re-authorized school districts to share voting machines; and has advocated for a student success case-worker to center on issues in Gloversville School District.

In continuing efforts to work cooperatively with neighbors, Fulton County is providing dispatch and emergency services to neighboring Hamilton County. They also web-host their probation services and offer veterans services. With Montgomery County, Fulton helps to offer veterans transportation services.

Safety and security is another priority of the County Government, Stead said. They are focusing on school safety throughout the county. A computer-aided dispatch system was purchased to assist in improving emergency medical services. In addition, a full-time EMS coordinator was hired, and legislators are working on an incentive program to ensure rural parts of the county receive ambulance services.

Stead explained the the Fulton County Public Defender’s office was recently reconfigured to handle state mandates in this area. The District Attorney’s office was realigned as well.

Marketing to Visitors

Stead expressed his enthusiasm for work being done to market the county to visitors as well as incoming businesses. He said, “We have a very active and aggressive Center for Regional Growth marketing Fulton County every day. The CRG and similar economic development organizations are working hard to retain businesses, and dozens of new jobs have been created because of them.

The County’s Industrial Development Agency is also heavily involved in moving things along in the economic future of the region, he said.

Stead expressed his enthusiasm for new efforts in tourism promotion for Fulton County. He recited statistics that show traveler spending has increased 27 percent in the time period of just 5 years (the most recent available, 2014 - 2018). Spending on second homes was up 26 percent, second only to Saratoga County in the Capital Region.

He announced some new events being planned by the Tourism Department in partnership with the County.

“We’ve got some, neat new events,” he said, including a new “Outdoor-Palooza coming in the fall, and a “Quilt-A-Palooza” in the second half of the year as well.

Stead introduced Anne Boles, the Chamber’s new Director of Tourism Development for Fulton and Montgomery counties, saying, “Tourism is on the move as well!”

Up to the Challenge

Stead concluded that he and the rest of the leaders in Fulton County are up to working hard to continue all of the positive endeavors underway on behalf of residents, and also to “figuring out how to work with the mandates in New York State.”

He noted that regardless of where we all stand on the income scale, even in rural New York, we are all lucky to be among the wealthiest people in the world. He expressed his appreciation for the great “luck we have” to be in the United State of America. “I appreciate everybody being here. The more people understand this, the more we can change things and address issues in our state and our country.”

Fulton County Administrative Officer Jon Stead speaks about positives and opportunities facing Fulton County in the coming months.
In an effort to address some of the most immediate considerations of residents and leaders in Montgomery County, Ossenfort assured the crowd that the team of directors in place at the county are working in close concert with each other, and welcomed to the podium Sara Boerenko, LCSW, Public Health Director and Mental Health Director, to offer a local perspective and update.

Boerenko asked people not to use hand sanitizer if they have access to soap, and offered a “prize” to select attendees of soap, provided by Dollar General. She noted people over the age of 57 are more likely to have fatal consequences from the disease, and specifically those with already existing underlying health problems.

“While I don’t want us to panic, I want us to be aware,” she said. “It is spreading faster than the flu. Check on what we need to be aware,” she said. “It is under the Medicaid cap. Specifically those with already existing conditions from the disease, and age of 57 are more likely to have fatal consequences from the disease, and specifically those with already existing underlying health problems.”

He said at the first meeting, there were many new ideas.

Public Transportation

A focus will be placed on working with CDTA, as leaders are very aware that public transportation is something the county is lacking. He said, “it’s a barrier to many needs, including groceries, medications, healthcare and more.” He said the group should hear from CDTA by the end of April for next steps.

Workforce Development

The county and committee listed a new goal to create a 24-hour daycare facility to serve the businesses in the Route 5S corridor. He said that in discussions with business leaders, they expressed that a lack of daycare facilities is a major barrier, especially in second and third shifts. He said Hill & Markes has expressed an interested in taking a lead in this.

He introduced Jackie Marciniak of MVP Healthcare, and noted that they will work to develop a plan to offer “wrap-around services” for employable members of the community, to include life skills, in the hope of transitioning people from being on support services, to being in the workforce.

Relocation, Improvement of County Facilities

Ossenfort said, “Basically every building we had in 2014 has needed some renovation. We’ve replaced boilers, roofs, etc.” He described the project to move the Emergency Management garage, which was paid for with a grant from New York state. The facility is now safe and out of the flood zone it was in.

In addition, the county has a goal to create a new Department of Public Works facility to replace the one currently in the flood zone. He expects to utilize a $2 million state grant to get the project started, and county leaders will need to come up with an additional $8 million to complete the project. Despite the cost, he noted his determination to complete the project. “I believe We need to get this done,” he said.

Veterans Programs

Ossenfort described an upcoming “ride-share” type program that will utilize electric vehicles received through an initiative, that will be used to help with veterans transportation.

2020 Census Planning

“The 2020 Census Planning Committee is up and running,” he said. He noted that the committee will work to ensure that they are able to count particularly hard-to-reach people in the county, including the immigrant farming population.

Financial Update

Ossenfort complimented County Treasurer Shawn Bowerman, who was in the audience. He said that “In our discussions about this year the theme has been, ‘Bracing for Impact.’” However, he said the county balance sheets have gotten better each year due to consistent increases in sales tax revenue. “But,” he said, “given what’s going on the world right now, we could be headed for a recession that may last into the fall and winter, and we need to be prepared for that.”

He described the fact that the global oil market current has rush of supply, and as demand goes down, we will see prices plummet. “As a county with several rest stops along the Thruway — for consumers it is great, but as a county it’s concerning.”

Cuomo’s Medicaid

Ossenfort mirrored comments made by Fulton County Administrative Officer Jon Stead, who gave his State of Fulton County address several weeks earlier. He explained that Medicaid mandates set by the State stand to further tie the hands of county leaders, who have no control over the spending.

He said Medicaid costs have been capped for a number of years, providing stability in the Department of Social Services budget, and the county leaders have not been held accountable to decisions made at the state level.

“As of now, if you stay under your tax cap, control costs in Medicaid at 3 percent, then we will be able to keep under the Medicaid cap.”

He cautioned, “But if you don’t, you’ll be responsible for all of those increases.”

He asked, “How the heck are we supposed to control these costs? We don’t have a say in who is eligible (for Medicaid and related services) and who is not.”

He warned that there is a storm brewing — “between oil prices, a potential recession and the state trying to balance its budget on the back of county governments,” he said.

The county’s fund balance has traditionally been used to plug budget gaps, because legislators can raise taxes vs. the tax cap. As time goes by, he said the difference in the amount that has had to be made up has gone down over the past several years. “We’re starting to trend in the right direction,” he said.

For sales tax, budgeted vs. actual — he said, “We are doing well, but we now — for 2020 and beyond — can’t necessarily look to sales tax as a means to build a budget gap. As we head into the coming year, this is going to dominate our thinking.”

He described a scenario to illustrate the difficult circumstances faced by leaders. He said for example, if the county was to receive a $1 million sales tax increase over what we budgeted in a sample year, the county would only get 60 percent of that windfall, because of generous sharing agreements the county has with towns and cities in Montgomery County. He noted that some counties don’t share any of their sales tax funds.

“We only have two spigots,” he said, quoting a comment he said is often made by County Legislator Mike Pepe: “You have sales tax, and tax cap (which you are mandated to stay under). Revenue options are limited. The state is putting more and more on you, and the one big one we do have, where we have seen some growth (sales tax revenue), we only have 60 percent to work with.”

Business Development Center Successes

Ossenfort praised the county’s Business Development Center and its leader, Kenneth Rose, calling its successes “tremendous.” He said that in 2019, approximately 400 new private sector jobs were created in Montgomery County. Companies that worked with the BDC employed just over 2,700 individuals, with a combined annual payroll in excess of $60 million, that generated $3.1 million in property taxes and pilot payments, along with and $500 million in capital investment.

He said Rose and his team are consistently working to maximize the county’s strengths to potential busi-
Tourism Development

Continued

Tourism Development

Mohawk Valley Revolutionary War tourism is a focus for the county, and cooperative promotion is happening between small tourism sites in the county, Ossenfort said.

The Erie Canal Bike Path was completed in 2019, and he said that additional signage and markings are coming in future.

Preserving the Schoharie Creek Aqueduct through a state grant will be a new highlight for visitors in the county. In the next few years, a long term, multi-phase project to stabilize the aqueduct and make it more accessible to visitors is underway, according to www.eriecanal.org.

Ossenfort said he’d also like to partner with Federal government on the preservation efforts, and he said the grand vision could include a bike path with nice clear plate glass underneath, to “shine on what is a tremendous asset,” that can be incorporated with recreational activities.

Another tourism-related plan, which Ossenfort called a “Fun project this year,” is the further development of the Thomas H. Burbine Memorial Forest, a 330-acre space owned by the county that contains a hiking trail 1 mile loop, water features, and “peace and quiet,” Ossenfort said. He noted that disc golfers have contacted him and are showing an interest in developing a course there.

“I don’t know why we can’t try some of these unique projects. Disc golf is an up-and-coming sport. Tournaments sell out.” He said the county would be willing to put a course there with the help of a local aficionado who can help to design it. “We want it to be best in the region,” he said. He is hopeful the course will open this summer.

Three events are planned for the site for the year, including one featuring disc golf, one to focus on the wetting hole with a fishing derby, and one with a snowshoe event.

Continuing Communications

Ossenfort took the last few minutes of the presentation to thank the Legislators and Executive team at the county, “We have a really thoughtful board. We have the ability to debate things. They don’t run things, and I don’t run things, we do them together,” he said.

He also highlighted the mix of women and men in leadership roles in the county. In the last 6-7 years he said there have been “a lot of really strong, dedicated women” who have stepped into leadership positions in the county. Some elected some appointed. When he first began in his position he said 8 out of 24 department level positions were women. Today the number is 13. “I just wanted to take time to thank them for what they do. They’ve brought a lot to the table,” he said.

He said, “2020 could be a tough year, but these are the times we are going to figure out what we are made of. We have to stay strong. (This county has historically been through) flooding, raids, we’ve been through it all. This will pass,” he said. He encouraged all to conduct themselves with great empathy, while digging in to solve any issues that arise.

Chamber President Kilmer commended Ossenfort for his enthusiasm and ability to work well with others. He noted that Montgomery County has been described as, “made of something stronger.” He said, “Picture yourself driving Route 5S just 10 years ago. Have you seen the change of the landscape there? It’s been incredible. We’ve got names like Amazon, Dollar General, Microtel, Hill & Markes. Congratulations!

Sponsors of the event included C.T. Male; along with Cancer Prevention and Action, located in Amsterdam.
Health Insurance News

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – What Employers Should Know and Do?

Over the course of the last several weeks there has been a lot of media coverage regarding the outbreak of the respiratory virus known as the Coronavirus, or COVID-19.

As a business, it is important that you remain informed about what steps you can take to protect your employees and ensure that you can continue to operate your business should the virus reach epidemic levels and become widespread in the United States.

Recently, the New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS) issued a directive requiring private health insurers in New York to make COVID-19 testing free for patients by waiving any out-of-pocket costs. This includes any fees associated with an emergency room visit or a visit to an in-network health care provider for the purpose of getting tested for COVID-19. To that end, we have outlined below the CDC recommended guidelines that business may want to follow so they are prepared in the event that the Coronavirus becomes widespread in our area.

What actions should I take to protect my employees and my business?

**Most U.S. Workers Remain at Low Risk of Exposure**

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for most people in the United States, including most types of workers, the risk of infection with Coronavirus or COVID-19 is currently low.

The CDC states that while the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 poses a Potentially serious public health threat, the risk to individuals is dependent on exposure.

**What is Coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in humans and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people, such as with MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person in China and some person-to-person transmission of the virus has been reported in countries outside China, including the United States. However, it is important to keep in mind that respiratory illnesses like seasonal influenza, are also currently widespread in many US communities as well, including throughout New York State and the Capital District Region.

**What should you be doing?**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recently issued interim guidance that may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses. The guidance also provides planning considerations in the event of more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19 could take place in the future. The guidance is focused on two elements –

1) **Workforce and Workplace Strategies**

   - Review human resources policies to make sure policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the Department of Labor’s external icon and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s external icon websites).
   - Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and others if state and local health au-

   2) **Business Continuity Planning**

   - As a precaution, the CDC guidelines indicate that businesses may want to consider developing a plan designed to ensure they can continue to operate and meet the needs of their customers should the Coronavirus become more widespread than it currently is. The CDC recommended guidelines can be seen at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html.
   - The CDC recommends that in developing these plans, employers should:
     - Ensure the plan is flexible and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan.
     - Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected if it will work.
     - Share your plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them.
     - Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.
   - The Business Continuity Plan should focus on the following elements:
     - Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks to your employees. OSHA has more information on how to protect workers from potential exposures external icon to COVID-19.
     - Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the Department of Labor’s external icon and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s external icon websites).

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Health, continued from page 6

authorities recommend the use of social distancing strategies. For employees who are able to telework, supervisors should encourage employees to telework instead of coming into the workplace until symptoms are completely resolved. Ensure that you have the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home.

— Identify essential business functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements within your supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations. Plan for how your business will operate if there is increasing absenteeism or these supply chains are interrupted.

— Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company’s infectious disease outbreak response plan, altering business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees. Work closely with your local health officials to identify these triggers.

— Plan to minimize exposure between employees and also between employees and the public, if public health officials call for social distancing.

— Establish a process to communicate information to employees and business partners on your infectious disease outbreak response plans and latest COVID-19 information. Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.

— In some communities, early childhood programs and K-12 schools may be dismissed, particularly if COVID-19 worsens.

— Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children if dismissed from school. Businesses and other employers should prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies for these employees.

— Local conditions will influence the decisions that public health officials make regarding community-level strategies; employers should take the time now to learn about plans in place in each community where they have a business.

— If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the US, consider canceling non-essential business travel to additional countries per travel guidance on the CDC website.

— Travel restrictions may be enacted by other countries which may limit the ability of employees to return home if they become sick while on travel status.

— Consider cancelling large work-related meetings or events. Food for Thought

It is difficult to determine how widespread the Coronavirus may become in the United States, in New York State and in the Capital District Area. Measures are being taken in New York State to control the spread of the Coronavirus. Taking the time to become informed about the Corona virus and engaging in some contingency planning for your business is a worthwhile and wise investment.
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How to Improve Your Website’s Buying Process

From small businesses to huge corporations, increasing profits is the #1 goal.

As a business owner, it’s your main purpose and what you focus the bulk of your energy on. However, it can be a challenge – especially when you’re so close to your brand – to see what’s missing and to make the necessary changes.

Fortunately, there’s no shortage of ways you can improve your buying process and see results in the near future.

Whether you run a product- or service-based business, here are 7 ways to increase online sales:

1. Have a user-friendly website that looks good.

   This might seem obvious, but you’d be surprised how many small business owners neglect their online presence, even if they don’t have a brick and mortar store.

   They get so focused on selling they forget about the user experience. As a result, visitors get frustrated they can’t find what they’re looking for, wrestle with glitchy pages and outdated content and go elsewhere.

   Remember, many people are also going to be browsing and/or buying from their phones, so optimize accordingly.

2. Tell nothing but the truth.

   Don’t exaggerate what your product can do or oversell your services. This will only hurt your reputation in the long run and keep you from gaining your customers’ and followers’ loyalty.

   You might make initial profits, but people won’t return, will leave negative reviews and will tell family and friends.

   Of course, you want to market effectively, but don’t claim your coaching services will absolutely lead to a six-figure income or your skincare products will make anyone look 20 years younger.

   Be honest and transparent while sharing the benefits of whatever you’re selling.

3. Spend time on SEO.

   You want your business to be found in Google, but that’s not going to happen unless you research your competitors, choose the right keywords (including longtail keywords) and properly optimize your website.

   For example, a wedding planner will face stiff competition when creating campaigns around “wedding planning in Vancouver.”

   He or she could create targeted, longtail content around keywords related to wedding planning, such as fall flower arrangements, unique cupcakes, elegant Bohemian wedding décor, his and her cocktails and so on—anything to drive traffic to the site while standing out from the competition.

4. Create a sense of urgency.

   If users land on your site only to see an offer from a year ago is still front and centre, it’s disappointing and makes people wonder how much energy you put into your business or if you’re still in business at all.

If you want to improve your buying process, it’s essential to help customers understand the value of what you’re providing, whether it’s a limited-time offer or a seasonal sale.

5. Understand that content is king.

   We’ve been hearing this for a long time, and it’s still so relevant! Search engines reward fresh and useful content. Here are some characteristics of a user-friendly website:

   • Detailed, unique product descriptions
   • Blog articles about interesting topics related to your product or service
   • A FAQ page where you answer all your customers’ questions

6. Monitor and respond to reviews.

   Nearly 95% of shoppers read online reviews before making a purchase, according to the Spiegel Research Center, 2017. I recently talked about the importance of online reviews in How to Deal with Negative Reviews Without Harming Your Business.

   From Google My Business to Yelp, you have the opportunity to share your information and get customer feedback, whether it’s negative or positive.

7. Be super social.

   You NEED a social media presence, and the time has come to focus on content marketing storytelling. Not only do users check out online reviews and how responsive you are, they also look to see what you’re promoting and how often you’re active.

   You should have strategies the major platforms you know your target market is using including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

   Don’t neglect your audience and they won’t neglect you! It’s worth it to put the energy into strategizing now for great results.

   No matter what your brand is, boosting your online sales, brand awareness and loyalty can be a big challenge.

   Contributed by Susan Friesen, founder of the award-winning web development and digital marketing firm eVision Media. Visit www.ultimatewebsitenguide.ca.
Hill & Markes Expresses Commitment to Inclusive, Diverse Workforce

Hill & Markes, wholesale distributor in Amsterdam, is collaborating with local chambers and organizations as part of their commitment to nurturing an inclusive, equitable, and diverse workforce.

The recent partnerships include Montgomery County Business Development Center’s New Business Advisory Committee, and The UpState New York Black Chamber of Commerce, a U.S. Black Chamber.

A press release from Hill & Markes stated, “These partnerships support strategies that increase workplace diversity, advance economic success, and develop opportunities and resources for professionals of all backgrounds.”

“Hill & Markes is committed to an inclusive, diverse, and open workplace,” said CEO of Hill & Markes, Jason Packer. “My vision is to partner with local chambers to expand our workplace diversity and to ensure the community knows we welcome employees and leaders of all backgrounds. We are fully behind the UpState New York Black Chamber of Commerce’s mission to provide a platform, network, and education for all individuals to thrive in the marketplace.”

The goal of the partnerships is to impact the community in a variety of ways through development plans and discussions with business leaders on the Business Advisory Committee, led by County Executive Matthew Ossenfort. Hill & Markes will also actively champion strategies that support the newly established UpState New York Black Chamber of Commerce, led by Anthony Gaddy.

“UpState New York Black Chamber of Commerce is excited to partner with Hill & Markes to support their initiative towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce,” said cofounder and CEO, Gaddy. “For us, Community Development is workforce development, in addition to business and economic development. If we can assist in identifying and filling gaps for a stronger workforce, we will be at the table when called upon.”

Hill & Markes officials said the company “is willing and open to connect with a variety of stakeholders in the marketplace to encourage growth and development within the community. If you share the same passion for this pursuit, please reach out!”

Hill & Markes is a 113-year-old family-owned wholesale distributor servicing the state of New York with ice cream products, janitorial products, food service, packaging, and office supplies.

Surgeons with heart.

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99 East State Street - Gloversville, NY 12078 - nlh.org
Littauer Welcomes New Physician Assistant

Nathan Littauer Hospital & Nursing Home welcomed Alison Townsend, Registered/Certified Physician Assistant, or RPA-C, to its medical staff in January.

Townsend brings 18 years of expertise and medical experience to Littauer, practicing in St. Johnsville, Little Falls, and Middleburgh prior to joining the medical team in Gloversville.

“All the staff are very welcoming,” Townsend said.

“Littauer is a comfortable setting for a medical provider. It feels like you’re part of a family.”

Townsend obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Physics at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. She continued her studies at Midwestern University, where she obtained her Masters of Medical Science in Physician Assistant studies.

“The best part of my day is helping my patients reach their health goals,” Townsend said. “I choose to practice at Nathan Littauer Hospital because Littauer is patient-centered and provides me with unending support for myself and my patients.”

Townsend will focus on family practice. She is accepting new patients at Nathan Littauer’s Caroga Lake Primary Care Center, with office hours from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information or to make an appointment, call the Caroga Lake Primary Care Center at (518) 835-2341.

Home Helpers Caregivers Recognized for Dedication and Commitment

Four Personal Care Aides from Home Helpers at Amsterdam were recognized at a special luncheon at the home care agency.

Rachel Barnes, Amanda Tylutki, Diana Moodie and Brittany Daigleault enjoyed lunch with CEO and owner Ramon Rodriguez, and each caregiver also received a bonus check and pay increase in celebration of their 90-day anniversaries as Home Helpers employees.

“PCAs who are committed and dedicated to providing exceptional care are the backbone of our business,” said Rodriguez. “We’re honored Rachel, Amanda, Diana and Brittany are part of the Home Helpers team and recognize the impact their work has on so many lives.”

Home Helpers & Direct Link of Amsterdam is a licensed home care agency that provides services to seniors, the disabled, new moms, and individuals recovering from surgery or injuries. Certified Personal Care Aides provide assistance with homemaking, running errands, meals, medication reminders, personal care, companionship and more.

“Recognition for our caregivers such as the 90-day luncheon, retention bonus and pay increases show our caregivers we’re committed to them, just as they’re committed to us and our clients,” said Ramon.

Home Helpers takes a proactive approach to hiring and retaining the best caregivers in the community for good reason. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people aged 65 and older is expected to top 55 million in 2020.

“We are among one of the fastest-growing franchise business sectors in the country today,” said Ramon. “More and more seniors prefer to age in place. Caregivers who provide exceptional care ensure we can help seniors live life the way they want to, in their own homes.”

Anyone interested in Home Helpers & Direct Link of Amsterdam’s employment opportunities or services is invited to visit their location at 58 N. Pawling St., Hagaman; call (518) 842-5626; or go to www.HomeHelpersHomeCare.com/Amsterdam to learn more. An on-site training program that leads to PCA certification is available for qualified individuals seeking to start a new career.
Tourism News

Fulton County Administrative Officer Jon Stead touted the new event by saying, “Fulton County’s new Restaurant Week is a way to get a great meal at a great price.”

He added, “With Spring weather starting to break through, it’s a good time to invite some friends out for food and fun.”

We appreciate everyone, near and far, who supported this inaugural event. The tourism department is looking forward to watching it grow.

Tourism promotional bags – items needed for upcoming season

The Tourism Department is preparing for the upcoming summer season with the coordination of the popular “goodie bag” project, which provides information about local businesses, to visitors in our region. This is a FREE marketing opportunity! The businesses provide the Tourism Department with 500 brochures, flyers, discount coupons, and/or promotional items. We stuff and deliver the bags (prior to Memorial Day weekend), to campgrounds, bed and breakfasts, hotels and motels, real estate agents, and any Chamber member business who wishes to distribute them.

For any business that wants to distribute goodie bags, we will be sure to provide you with a sign to put in your window to let travelers know they are available. Please keep in mind that the items need to be delivered to the Chamber office by Friday, April 24. Please call Anne at the chamber to participate at (518) 725-0641 or via email: tourism@fultonmontgomeryny.org.

We encourage ALL businesses who would like to be included in the goody bags to supply promotional items, as well as printed literature with contact information. Consider that when a promotional item is attached to a brochure about your business, it will grab attention, especially if the item is something a visitor might use. When they read your business name and contact information on the item, your business will be remembered!

Some examples include sunscreen, lip balm, hand sanitizers, key chains, pens, notepads, bottle openers, can koozies, golf tees and accessories, and water bottles.

Thank you. This will be a great way for visitors to learn more about our local small businesses!

First Annual Fulton County Restaurant week complete

Thank you to everyone who participated in Fulton County’s first Restaurant Week! We hope you enjoyed it. Our gratitude goes out to the restaurants who participated:

— 308 Prime – Holiday Inn
— Johnstown/Gloversville
— Salt American Bistro and Wine Bar
— The Brass Monkey Restaurant and Bar
— Historic Hotel Broadalbin
— Hales Mills Country Club
— Nick Stoner Inn and 19th Hole
— Romana’s Italian Kitchen
— Plaza Italian Bistro
— Peaceful Valley Maple Farms
— Union Hall Inn
— Jackie’s Diner
— Second Wind Coffee
— Mohawk Harvest Cooperative Market
— La Palma Mexican Grill
— Nicolino’s Restaurant
— Vintage Café
— Let’s Twist Again Diner

Chamber Member Anniversaries

The following businesses have found value in their Chamber investment and have renewed their membership in the month of March this year. Please note these member businesses and the year they joined! Thank you to all our renewing Chamber members.

Less than 5 Years

Dollar General ....................................2019
Greater Johnstown Lions Club .................2019
Adirondack Generators .........................2018
NBT Bank-St. Johnsville ..........................2018
Regional Animal Shelter ......................2017
Adirondack “By Owner” ........................2017
Advanced Cleaning & Restoration Services ............................................2017
Perth Motors ....................................2017
Stump City Brewing, LLC ......................2017
Town of Caroga ................................2016

5 to 9 Years

KCS Land Research ................................2015
NBT Bank-Fonda ..................................2015
Bethany Schumann-McGhee, Attorney at Law ....................................2012
Family Ear, Nose & Throat Services ..........2012
Rock Creek Farm ................................2012
Zanella’s Market Hill Service & Auto Sale ...........................................2011

10 to 19 Years

Taylor Made Custom Products ................2010
Frank’s Gun Shop, Inc. .........................2010
South Shore Marine ............................2010

10 to 19 Years continued

T & T Storage, Inc ...............................2009
DeMi’s Wines and Liquors ......................2008
Elizabeth Cady Stanton .......................2008
Women’s Consortium ..........................2007
Buanno’s Custom Body Shop ..................2007

20 to 29 Years

Glove Cities Veterinary Hospital, P.C. ....2000
Putman Enterprises .............................1999
Power and Composite Technologies, L.L.C. ........2000
Plaza’s Italian Bistro ...........................2000
Beech-Nut Nutrition Corporation ............1998
Amsterdam Housing Authority ...............1998
GreatSacandagaLakeAssociation .........1998
Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville Central ............................................1997
Fulmont Community Action Agency, Inc. 1996
Adirondack Harley-Davidson, Inc. ..........1996

30 to 39 Years

Medicine Shoppe ................................1990
Coldwell Banker ................................1989
Arlene M. Sitterly, Inc. .........................1989
F-M-S Counties .................................1989
Private Industry Council .....................1988
Santos Construction ............................1982

40 to 49 Years

Walrath and Stewart Funeral Home ..........1974

Hitchcock Made Media Specialist for Utica’s Johnson Park Center

Greg Hitchcock of Gloversville was recently hired as a media specialist at Johnson Park Center, a faith-based non-profit organization that promotes positive change, revitalization, and community development in the heart of Cornhill, the poorest neighborhood in the City of Utica, New York.

His duties include writing reports and documents, public relations, maintaining the organization’s website and social media channels, and other assignments as needed.

Hitchcock is a local journalist, author and writer who has over 20 years of experience in multimedia storytelling through words, pictures, and video. He is the sole proprietor of Command Voice Journalism, a full-service writing and communications company that provides web design, writing and editing services to a variety of clients from small companies to large organizations.

He is a graduate of the University at Albany, State University of New York, Class of 1992. For more information, contact Hitchcock at (518) 921-4462 (Office); (518) 775-3332 (Mobile); or via email: greg hitch66@gmail.com.
Last month HFM PTECH freshmen and sophomores held an art exhibit at the Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce. The exhibit, titled “The Light and Dark Side of the Mind,” represented different aspects of mental health. In addition to their traditional pieces, the exhibit included an interactive art piece that required attendee participation.

Canajoharie High School Pathway

Canajoharie’s Computer Science & Information Technology pathway program hosted their first career pathway panel discussion last month. Pathway panel discussions allow students in the program to explore each pathway and gain a better understanding of the jobs available in the region. Thank you to our guests, Solomon Nero from Overit and Ben Jordan from GreyCastle Security for attending the pathway panel.

Canajoharie Construction Technology: Renewable Energy & Sustainable Building Pathway hosted guest speaker David D’Amore last month. David D’Amore recently sold his company and is now working as a lead architect at C.T. Male Associates which has multiple locations across New York State. D’Amore spoke with students about his role as an architect and the education and training needed to be successful.
Callanan Industries spoke with students from four programs at the HFM Career & Technical Center about summer internships and career possibilities. Callahan Industries is a leading supplier of paving material and construction services, and operates 15 distribution sites in New York, including the quarry on Route 5S in Pattersonville. Callanan representatives, including a 2011 graduate of Amsterdam High School and CTE, spoke with students in the Auto Technology, Construction Technology, Environmental Conservation, and Skilled Trades: Electrical, HVAC and Plumbing programs.

Freshmen in the College and Careers Pathway Program at Amsterdam High School shared their Humanities project with Debbie Fowler, founder of Eyes Wide Open in Schenectady. She also spoke with students at the start of their project about her job at a Human trafficking victims’ shelter, discussed the signs that someone is being trafficked, and shared ways the students can help. Throughout this project students learned about human rights violations in Global studies, read the book “Sold” in English class, and conducted research about trafficking.

Agriculture PTECH

In March, Ag PTECH purchased the 2445 Organics SuperGrow System, which consists of vertical stainless-steel racks with grow lights and trays that allow for water to be soaked up from the bottom of the plants. Within a week, an entire section of the agriculture classroom at Ag PTECH started to look a lot like an active greenhouse. Freshmen and sophomores have started their produce growing efforts with two kinds of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and basil. Their goal is produce enough fresh salad for students and staff.
Schoharie Crossing Calls for Photography, Paintings

Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site is issuing a call for photography and painting submissions to be included in the 2020 art exhibit, “Waters Reflections: Seeing the Past in the Present.”

Photographers residing in New York State who want to showcase their work in a competitive, juried exhibition are encouraged to read the show description and submit original work within the theme by the deadline of May 24, 2020.

To recognize the ongoing commemoration of NYS Barge Canal heritage and historic Erie Canal, Schoharie Crossing is hosting this fourth annual exhibition of talented artists. This year the focus will be on photographic and paintings depicting Schoharie Crossing. Jurors have accepted the task of reviewing the pieces and prizes will be awarded to those honored by the jurors. One will recognize a photographic work, and one will recognize a painted work.

Schoharie Crossing officials said, “The Erie Canal historic site and NYS Park is a great place for recreation, such as walking, cycling, kayaking, fishing, birdwatching, picnics, and more, and provides memories & experiences for generations. The site supplies views of nature as well and the historic canal structures are juxtaposed among the natural world of plants and animals along the Schoharie Creek and Mohawk River.

The trails along old towpaths of the canal allow for a journey back in time. Flora and fauna thrive within the tranquility of the waterways, wetlands and open spaces of Schoharie Crossing, lending great inspiration for any artist.

The Erie Canal’s vital importance is highlighted by the classic arches of the Schoharie Creek Aqueduct and the impressive lock chambers that still exist at locations throughout Schoharie Crossing. Views of the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys can also be taken in as you explore this landscape.”

Schoharie Crossing encompasses over 200 acres and spans over 3 miles in length, running from the western end of the site at the Aqueduct boat launch, across the Schoharie Creek and east to Yankee Hill Lock and the Putnam Canal Store. The site contains portions of the original 1820s Erie Canal and features two sets of double locks from the Enlarged Era Canal and is adjacent to the Erie Canal of today – the Mohawk River.

Lock E12 at Tribes Hill on the river is situated close to the site and provides access to witnessing the newest century-old canal of today.

Submissions can be made online by following this link: form.jotform.com/200513516413139. The exhibit’s opening celebration will take place during the Schoharie Crossing Discovery Day event on July 11, and artwork will be displayed inside the Enders House until Labor Day. For more information on how to enter, please visit the Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site page of the New York State Parks website, nysparks.com, call Schoharie Crossing at (518) 829-7516, email SchoharieCrossing@parks.ny.gov or find us on Facebook.