

# INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

October 2018



A light snow coats the Sullivan County Government Center earlier this year. The white stuff is about to return, as is our Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

## Stay warm this winter

You don't need to suffer in cold silence in the months ahead, notes County Manager Josh Potosek.

"Most people think you must have an extremely small income — or none at all — to qualify for the NYS Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)," he explains, "but actually the income thresholds are quite reasonable. The whole idea is to keep all of our citizens safe and warm."

HEAP opens for this winter season on November 13, 2018, running through March 15, 2019 unless extended by the State. Eligible applicants can receive financial help in paying for electricity, natural gas, oil, coal, propane, wood/wood pellets, kerosene or corn. Income guidelines are listed on page 6.

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### In This Issue

- Fully developing the Emerald Corporate Center
- Probation: much more than you think
- Introducing the Peer Connection Center
- Walking our way to wellness (and some scenic sights, too)



The Sullivan County Probation Department team includes, front row from the left, Account Clerk Linda DiCio, Director Barbara Martin, Probation Officer Janet Myers, Senior Probation Officer Vincent Reilly, Senior Probation Officer Anna Bernhardt, Probation Officer Regina Pierce, Probation Supervisor Pennie Huber, and Senior Probation Officer Lisa Rivers-Mota; back row from the left, Probation Officer Oliver Spearman, Probation Supervisor Louis Setren, Probation Officer April Meade, Probation Officer Caitlin Flanagan, Probation Officer Bret Reimer, Senior Probation Officer Kristy Sigelakis, Probation Officer Richard Crown, Probation Supervisor Tonya Martin, and Probation Supervisor Steven Pitcher. Not pictured are Administrative Assistant Lyn Klein, Typist Delmonica James, Clerk Cynthia Michel, and Probation Officers Patrick Vinette, Jessica Gray, Arianna DaCosta & Megan Stratton.

#### Departmental Spotlight: Probation

## Agents of change at the community level

There's a reason why they're called probation "officers." They're on the front lines in the fight against crime, ensuring public safety and security as much as any police officer. Considering Sullivan County's probation officers are also badged, armed, extensively trained and (as peace officers) have certain police powers specific to probationers, the only external difference is the uniform. Nevertheless, the job is distinct from other law enforcement.

"Our overall goal is to protect the community," says Probation Director Barbara Martin. "In doing so, we have two major roles: supervising offenders in the community and preparing pre-sentence investigation reports for the courts."

Probation is not the same as parole, however.

"Probation is serving a sentence in the community. Some probationers may receive sentences that involve a 'split bid,' where they serve a short term of incarceration and the remainder of the sentence on probation," Barbara explains. "Parole is when a person has been sentenced to a period of incarceration in a State prison and is released prior to serving the entire sentence."

A judge sets the conditions of probation, and it is the Probation Department's job to see that probationers follow those conditions "and to steer them into changing their way of thinking so they become law-abiding, productive citizens," adds Barbara.

Why spend all this time and money on such a challenging goal? Why not just keep offenders in jail?

For one, probation is less expensive than the \$200 a day it costs to jail an inmate. But it's also to avoid what Barbara calls a "repeat performance."

"People who are employed and connected to their community are less likely to reoffend," she notes.

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# County Manager earns top Partnership award

The Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development chose County Manager Josh Potosek as this year's recipient of its Distinguished Service Award.



“To be selected for this particular award means a great deal,” Josh stated afterwards. “The Partnership and I share the same goal: to improve Sullivan County’s future and fortunes through a business-friendly and professionally attractive atmosphere.”

Potosek shared the podium with fellow honoree and retiring NYS Senator John Bonacic at the October 4 award ceremony.



Sullivan County’s hardworking coroners proudly welcomed their professional brethren from all around the state at the Fall 2018 Conference of the NYS Association of County Coroners and Medical Examiners. From the left are Coroner Michael Speer, District Attorney James Farrell, keynote speaker and Bethel resident Dr. Michael Baden, and coroners B. Elton Harris, Albee Bockman and Alan Kesten.

## Coroners host state conference

For only the second time in recent memory, Sullivan County’s four coroners — Albee Bockman, Alan Kesten, B. Elton Harris and Michael Speer — brought the NYS Association of County Coroners and Medical Examiners to Sullivan County for the Association’s annual conference.

Held last month at the Sullivan Ramada in Rock Hill, the conference tackled topics that would churn most stomachs but are necessary components of the duties of coroners and medical examiners: autopsies, exhumations, forensics, etc.

One of the main speakers was Bethel resident Dr. Michael Baden, famous for his involvement in the investigations into the deaths of celebrities and presidents. He engrossed the audience with his stories, including the assassination of Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers. Thirty years after Evers’ death, Baden led the team that exhumed Evers’ body and conducted an investigation that ultimately led to the imprisonment of the assassin, a white supremacist.

District Attorney Jim Farrell and Liberty PD Detective Steven D’Agata spoke about the investigation into the overdose death of a Liberty man (which led to criminal charges against the dealer), while Bockman and Dr. Kunjlata Ashar discussed the flu-related death of a boy travelling through the County earlier this year.



Around 100 professionals attended the conference to hone their skills.

## Coming soon: The Peer Connection Center

Introducing the Sullivan County Peer Connection Center – a place people can come when in need of assistance for mental health and chemical dependency issues.

They will be greeted by peers who will assist them with a caring ear, information to educate on questions and services available, and linkage and access to services.

We have acquired a space due to the generosity of Action Toward Independence (ATI). A task timeline was developed in order to address what needs to be accomplished in the coming weeks to meet our goal opening date of January 2019, including funding opportunities, policies and procedures, days and hours of operations, and staffing.

We have a committee of caring members who are providing support and their expertise where needed: ATI, Independent Living, Rehabilitation Support Services, Access, Mobile Mental Health, 911 Center, local law enforcement, NYS Office of Mental Health, Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Catholic Charities, Sullivan County Department of Family Services, Department of Community Services, CRMC, the District Attorney's Office, Legal Aid, Sullivan County Public Health, and the Legislature, to name a few.



Mullet Brook Falls in the Neversink Gorge Unique Area near Rock Hill was a breathtakingly unique destination in this year's lineup of County Employee Wellness Walks.

## Our boots are made for walking!

Thanks to the Sullivan County Employee Wellness Initiative, our workers and their friends and families have enjoyed memorable hikes to some of the County's most scenic and hidden locations: Mullet Brook Falls near Rock Hill, the Parksville and Hurleyville rail trails, the Roosa Gap Fire Tower above Wurtsboro and Mongaup Pond north of Livingston Manor, to name a few.

The walks range from mild to moderate and are open to the public, as we want them to experience the benefits of great exercise — and the thrill of a “good find” — as much as our employees! If you'd like to be on the email list for upcoming walks, just drop a request to [dan.hust@co.sullivan.ny.us](mailto:dan.hust@co.sullivan.ny.us).

Come join us!



The convenient and handicapped-accessible Parksville Rail Trail brought out the families and the pets for a scenic, relaxing walk along the falls and rapids of the Little Beaverkill. Picnic tables and benches mean you can stay longer than we did!



# Probation: Tough, rewarding

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And it's those stories that remind her and her crew why they do what they do.

"You get to see people overcome personal challenges and become successful," she states. "One young probationer, for example, invited me to his high school graduation because he was the first one in his family to do so. That's what keeps us coming to work: seeing that people can change their lives."

A probation sentence generally starts the moment an offender steps out of the courtroom. The court order establishes strict parameters of expected behavior, including when to report to their assigned probation officer — but they're also forewarned that probation officers are empowered to visit them at their home and worksite.

"We can talk to family members, employers, school officials, social workers, treatment providers," she lists. "We can search their homes without a warrant — sometimes announced in advance, often not. In effect, when you're placed on probation, you are losing some of your rights."

The idea is not to harass probationers but to ensure they're complying with the conditions and are making progress towards overcoming the circumstances which landed them on probation to begin with.

"We deal with adult and juvenile offenders, as young as age 7," Barbara notes. "We also have certain specialized caseloads such as DWI offenders, domestic violence cases, the Drug Treatment Court, and sex offenders."

Supervision, however, is just one of two major tasks of the Probation Department. The other is the pre-sentence investigation report — essentially a person's life history in a dozen pages, starting with basic demographic info and expanding into the offender's legal and criminal history, home life, education, employment, military service, physical/mental health, and substance abuse. Statements from the victim(s) and arresting officer(s) are also included.

"We verify the information, then we make a recommendation to the court," says Barbara. "A judge is not bound by that recommendation, but they rarely go against it."

Probation also oversees the Alternatives to Incarceration program. Those who have been arrested but not yet convicted of a crime (or unable to make bail) may qualify for pre-trial release under the supervision of a probation officer, allowing them to take care of their family at home, go to work, engage in treatment, and deal with pressing issues. The program also offers certain probationers the chance to undertake community service in lieu of sitting in jail, again saving the County potentially thousands of dollars.

"Probation officers are a mix of police officer, a teacher and a parent," Barbara notes. "We're here to make and keep probationers accountable, to point out the good choices, the not-so-good choices and the downright ugly choices — and the ramifications of those choices, which is what they will have to live with."

## What they do

Since its 1960 founding, Sullivan County's Probation Department has taken on a new challenge virtually every day, agrees Director Barbara Martin.

"We are very fortunate to have a group of really good, professional officers who do a remarkable job under very trying circumstances," she affirms.

And those circumstances aren't just violent offenders, difficult family members or snow-covered roads on the way to site visits. The challenges also include the ongoing effort to go paperless, new technologies, the need to follow evolving State regulations (including the new Raise the Age legislation that forbids treating 16- and 17-year-old offenders as adults), and the sometimes vast pay disparity between municipal probation departments.

The Sullivan County Probation Department employs 4 supervisors, 4 senior officers, 11 officers and trainees, and 4 support staff. Director Barbara Martin is new to the leadership post but is in her 38th year with the Department.

Training is extensive and ongoing. All trainees must have a relevant bachelor's degree and complete an initial four-week program and a 47-hour course in firearms (the same as a police officer). Officers must possess a master's degree or a bachelor's with several years of experience, and are required to complete 21 hours of continuing education every year.

Officers oversee individuals convicted of misdemeanors and felonies. Misdemeanors generally carry maximum 1-3-year probation sentences, while felony convictions can come with maximum probationary periods of 5-10 years.

And if offenders violate the court's conditions, probation can be extended (often after additional jail time has been served).

# HEAP: Warming up to it...

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On January 2, 2019, the State's Emergency HEAP benefit will become available for those who are in immediate danger of running out of fuel or having their utility turned off.

New York State also offers funds in the spring for cooling and for heating/ventilation system repair.

To find out more, visit [sullivan.ny.us/Departments/Familyservices/Temporaryassistanceprograms/HEAP/Applyforheap](http://sullivan.ny.us/Departments/Familyservices/Temporaryassistanceprograms/HEAP/Applyforheap) or email [HEAP@co.sullivan.ny.us](mailto:HEAP@co.sullivan.ny.us).

## 2018-2019 HEAP Benefit Gross Monthly Income Guidelines

Household Size	Maximum Gross Monthly Income
1	\$2,391
2	\$3,127
3	\$3,863
4	\$4,598
5	\$5,334
6	\$6,070
7	\$6,208
8	\$6,346
9	\$6,483
10	\$6,621
11	\$6,918
Each additional	Add \$540



## At the Center of opportunity

The Emerald Corporate Center in Rock Hill is on the cusp of new development. Long the home of Crystal Run Healthcare's 80,000-square-foot medical center, the Center's 24-acre back lot is being subdivided to attract tenants and complete the vision for this property.

Commercial office space isn't the only available use, however. Zoning now permits business support services, research and development, laboratories, medical facilities, home healthcare equipment rentals, film and audio production studios, light manufacturing, art galleries and other flexible spaces.

Sullivan County is currently seeking a proven commercial real estate agent to market the properties. For more information, contact [planning@co.sullivan.ny.us](mailto:planning@co.sullivan.ny.us) or call 845-807-0527.