

PROGRESS

VOLUME TWO

CHENANGO

2021

AN EVENING SUN PUBLICATION

The Impact Project has record year for projects in Chenango County



In November of 2020, The Impact Project helped Afton homeowner Roger E. Newbauer by providing him with a new roof, free of cost, after the previous 40-year-old roof started to leak. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

BY ZACHARY MESECK
Evening Sun Reporter
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2020 was a ground-breaking year for The Impact Project. With projects ranging from Earlville to Nineveh, more ground was covered in Chenango County this year than any other.

According to The Impact Project Executive Director, James Willard III, this year The Impact

Project made great efforts to help even more families in Chenango County, reaching an all time high of 10 projects in the area.

Willard said with the help of more than 4,000 volunteers to date, generous support from local communities and the hard work and dedication of businesses including Blue Ox, Curtis Lumber, The Gutter Experts, Alpine Metal Roofing, and The Trojan House Deli and

Catering, The Impact Project is focused on assisting as many people as it can.

“There are many components that have come together to create 2020 for us,” said Willard. “COVID-19 is terrible, but the systemic issues of poverty in Chenango County are also bad and have been greatly magnified by COVID-19.”

Willard said as his team has moved through

Chenango County they have seen a decline in housing conditions and an increase in applications for assistance.

“The county looks a lot worse than it did even a year or two ago,” he said. “Last year we had received so many applications that we had to shut down operations to process them all, but this year we were prepared.”

“Our organization
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DCMO BOCES team pulls together to serve students and their families

All wheels were in motion for DCMO BOCES to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2020.

The news of COVID immediately shifted their full attention to serving students and their families.

Classrooms moved to Zoom meetings, cafeteria food now traveled to homes, and support to schools absorbed the team’s time and efforts. Like one army, united by the desire to overcome all obstacles, the DCMO BOCES team worked tirelessly to aid the front-line teachers, administrators, and component school teams in the field.



DCMO BOCES Superintendent, Perry T. Dewey

In the midst of developing health and safety plans, teaching through Zoom, and delivering learning material to students, news of a new grant arrived. A proposal that was written to the Appalachian Regional Commission to support the Career Destinations Program was approved and granted to DCMO BOCES to solidify opportunities to connect students to local jobs.

According to District Superintendent, Perry T. Dewey, the announcement’s timing was critical. “The Career Destinations team had begun preparing for a year of limited program implementation due to the financial constraints from COVID. The news of a \$99,000 funding allocation lifted our spirits knowing that despite all the challenges, the organization could still move forward with this wholesome resource.”

As a result of this funding and multiple matching resources, 2021 presents the opportunity for the full implementation of the Career Destinations Program. The initiative, according to Dewey, introduces students to local jobs, college, and career opportunities in the region. “The population decline has a large effect on school funding and community resources. Connecting students to employment opportunities is a proactive strategy to retain our students in the region,” said Dewey.

Adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic required all hands on deck. “Without an instruction manual or pandemic preparation drills, our team relied on the knowledge of many state, county and health organizations to develop plans that permitted educational activities with the least amount of health risk,” said Dewey. Predictions for the next six months are encouraging. “With the vaccine now available and the amazing support from students and their families following social distancing and other health and safety rules, we hope to see our many school activities back,” said Dewey. He also commented on the hope to restore year-end in-person ceremonies that are precious to students and

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Chenango County Historical Society: Lighthouse for local history



BY TYLER MURPHY
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The Chenango County Historical Society is a non-profit organization, and like many others, it was unable to hold regular fundraisers or events in 2020 but used online resources to reach the public and get support.

“You have to learn to be flexible and roll with the challenges. I had this philosophy early on about what we called the ‘great pause’ and how to embrace it and learn from it, and don’t waste this opportunity to make positive changes to your organization and the community,” said Chenango County Historical Society and Museum Executive

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Chenango County Historical Society (CCHS) is the primary organization in the county dedicated to actively and comprehensively preserving local history. The organization has temporarily ceased regular business hours and activities.

Chenango County Historical Society: Lighthouse for Chenango County history —

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Director Jessica Moquin.

The Historical Society has 14 members on the board of trustees. It currently operates within eight buildings.

The Chenango County Historian also works in one of those buildings, on the first floor of the James Flannigan Research Center, and they often work in collaboration.

Right around March 13, when the state ordered the lockdown, the CCHS closed its doors to the public. They briefly opened from the middle of September to the middle of November by appointment only for the fall exhibits, but then as the COVID cases rose they decided that it was more prudent to just continue focusing on virtual presentations.

Strategic planning avoided devastation

Much of the CCHS support comes primarily from private organizations, foundations, corporations and members.

In 2020, the historical society determined that it didn't have adequate resources to hold any annual fundraisers, namely the Summer Barn Party, which is typically held in July. Their annual antique show in September was also cancelled.

Typically, those events raise about five percent



Joseph Fryc, newly appointed Chenango County Historical Society (CCHS) Operations Manager, visits regional landmark The Old Mill, located in the town of Guilford's Rockwell Mills District.

of the group's operating budget, so in lieu of those fundraising opportunities, the CCHS received a grant from the Pomeroy Fund for New York State History.

"They offered up a challenge to encourage giving and help overcome the loss of that revenue, and as a result, thanks to the tremendous support we received through this matching campaign, we were able to raise more than double what those two annual fundraisers traditionally generate for our organization," Moquin said.

The special grants and support they received this year were a life-saver for the organization. If the CCHS had relied on traditional fundraising it would have been devastating.

"But because the community rallied and we were able to put that challenge together, we raised over \$30,000 towards that. We're really grateful that the community was amazingly generous, and that's why we're still here," said Moquin.

The annual operating budget for the CCHS hovers around \$150,000 per year.

The Historical Society was one of three finalists for Commerce Chenango's Nonprofit of the Year Award, alongside Chenango Memorial Hospital and the United Way.

"It was pretty awesome to be considered a good company in the middle of the pandemic among those ranks with two organizations that have done so

much for the community. It was really quite an honor to be one of the finalists in that category," said Moquin.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York, a trade organization, the Historical Society was able to develop a new strategic plan in early 2020.

"We didn't have a lot of outside distractions when we were creating our strategic plan, so we actually achieved our re-imagined comprehensive campus plan during this time, and we developed a collaboration with the Cornell University design tech program," said Moquin.

"We're shifting our focus from not simply just a curator of local history, but also as a community partner, an educational resource and a regional destination. Through that strategic planning process, we reaffirmed our mission to lead and support the advancement of research, education and enjoyment of Chenango history, and that mission will guide our organization for the next four years and into the future."

Part of the strategic plan called for the creation of an operations manager and expanding online services. This past summer the CCHS hired Joseph Fryc for the position.

He is responsible for financial administration and overall operations, assisting with collections curation, exhibit preparation, facilities management, retail and office management.

"We were able to finish and adopt our strategic plan in April of last year and when we moved forward with the plan, we realized that if we wanted to achieve all of these great things we were going to need another person, a paid professional within the industry of the work and experience," said Moquin.

Becoming a virtual museum

The historical society is run by the two full-time positions, including Jessica's, and is also supported by the efforts of about 96 volunteers. As the pandemic began to shut things down the CCHS needed new ways to reach the public.

"We've developed some new creative ways to accomplish our mission. We ramped up all of our online programming, all of our virtual work, and that includes all of our educational programming and exhibits. We had to focus on engaging with our community virtually, so that included the launch of our redesigned website and we're sharing far more robust social media content," said Moquin.

However, the lack of

internet access in our area hurts organizations like the CCHS.

"I think our biggest challenge right now is the limits we have with technology, specifically slow broadband in the outlying areas, as well as information illiteracy – people who don't know how to use the technology. So that hinders our work virtually and online," she said.

As part of their online push the Historical Society also looked to join larger industry trends such as #MuseumBouquet, #MuseumFromHome and #MuseumSunshine, and they also created their own original content such as their #TastyTuesday. Their popular "Cooking Historically" series features recipes from the Chenango County cookbook, "Made Nine Pies."

On Wednesdays the group promoted #WomenWednesdays to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Another partnership with Live NY that took place in the City of Norwich allowed the CCHS buildings to be lit up with the colors of the Suffragettes to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women receiving the right to vote.

"Having to engage with our community virtually, that forced us to

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Career Destinations

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www.dcmoboces.com

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think outside of the traditional museum-in-a-box. We're not in a box anymore," said Moquin.

"We've never been quite so focused before on taking advantage of virtual platforms to share our stories, and it was very successful. We yielded an increase in our Facebook audience of over 40 percent, so we were very pleased about that."

They also celebrated the Smithsonian's Museum Day, which is typically held in April, and while the Smithsonian cancelled their museum day, the Historical Society still had a prepared program presented virtually in collaboration with the local 4H clubs. Also, from June to October the CCHS presented weekend video events "Path Through History," as well as a virtual Parade of Trees in December.

"We're still sort of pausing, so I think that's really important. It's more about having a positive attitude – and as long as you have a positive attitude you can overcome those challenges, be strategic and do things better," she said.

"That has been an advantage for us to be able to take a step back and allow us to refocus and hone in on what makes our organization unique, how we can best serve the community and celebrate the cultural heritage of the county. It's our goal to encourage pride in our region and all that we've accomplished. I serve

as a community collaborator to help our community achieve their full potential and realize what a great place Chenango County has been and continues to be."

There were some things the Historical Society was able to do this year that might not have happened in a regular year.

They had a partnership with musician, historic preservation planner and Cornell grad student Andrew Roblee. His project was called Historic Structures of Sound. His group came to perform and record music inside one of the CCHS's old buildings. It was one of a dozen or so historic structures in the state that he selected. The project analyzed the nature of how the sound reverberates within a historic structure, specifically those that were never designed to be music venues.

Lighting up history in 2021

Moquin explained the organization looks forward to opening its doors again in 2021, and it will continue to expand development for virtual and hybrid programming. A major challenge facing 2021 is the health and safety of the community, and that is the primary lens for all considerations.

"We want to make sure that history will always be here, and it's our job to preserve it and make it safe for the community, so that's why health and safety is such a priority for us."

"We imagine this will be

more of a marathon than a sprint kind of situation. So we'll be slowly reintroducing in-person activities based on size and scope, and of course there will be challenges as we make adjustments because managing changes is always unpredictable. A big takeaway from the pandemic is that we need to have a contingency plan in place in case something goes awry and you're not able to have in-person programming as originally intended."

The CCHS is currently prioritizing work on development of additional outdoor facilities, exhibit spaces and interpretive structures in order to be ready for a reopening.

The CCHS hosted a collection of over 40,000 objects, and most of the artifacts are only available now for online digital viewing.

The group just recently finished a virtual exhibit in collaboration with the Earlville Opera House called "Unfolding Stories."

A priority in 2021 will be to hopefully hold two in-person exhibits, one of which is "Women of Chenango County". There are 21 towns in Chenango County, so 21 noteworthy women from local history were selected to have their stories told.

"Yes, they may have made an impact on local history, but the exhibit is about how their stories made a difference in the world. A perfect example is a woman from Chenango County who was a soldier in the Civil

War. Her name was Sarah Rosetta Wakeman and she actually disguised herself as a man, and she passed away as Private Lyons Wakeman," said Moquin.

There are other great stories, like Alida Avery's. From Sherburne, she was a Suffragette and the first female physician in Colorado.

What is the goal of the Chenango County Historical Society?

"This is the analogy that I use – we are the lighthouse for Chenango County history, and part of our role is to shine our light on other historical societies within the county. There are other historical societies across the county that preserve and celebrate their own specific townships, like the Afton Historical Society, the Bainbridge Historical Society, there's a Coventry town museum, and more. We like to collaborate as much as possible, that's why I like to use that analogy. With 21 towns in the county, there's such a great breadth of stories to be told, so there's a lot of light to be shown," said Moquin.

The CCHS is always seeking people to get involved. To join the Society as a member or volunteer visit www.chenangohistorical.org, and fill out the short application. You can also email info@chenangohistorical.org or call at 607-334-9227 ext. 2, to get more information.

DCMO BOCES team pulls together to serve students and their families —

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their families.

According to Dewey, the past five years have brought many challenges to the education segment. "The population decline affects funding to schools in terms of school taxes and also state funding allocations per student. DCMO BOCES leadership has shifted to propel regional growth, increasing premier educational services to 16 component school districts and also to employers," said Dewey.

According to Dewey, the local government has a critical role to play. He stated that legislators who advocate investment in education and use their voice to affect ruling that impacts resources for students at risk have the strongest effect on our ability to prepare the citizens of the future.

Over 13,000 students from 16 Component School districts in Chenango, Otsego, Delaware, and Madison counties are served by DCMO BOCES. With more than 400 staff members, the organization serves students at

two Career & Technical facilities and also dispatches a team of teacher aides, educators, and special education staff to support families at their home schools.

When identifying the organization's future focus, DCMO BOCES turned to the input from a task force of employers, educators, and legislators. The group identified as a priority, the need to connect the needs of employers to the classroom by increasing opportunities for students to participate in work-based learning. "Our students are not aware of jobs and careers available and our employers stated that the students are not prepared for the workplace.

Work experiences, internships, and shadowing opportunities are excellent vehicles to close the gap and engage educators with the needs through evaluations and post-work experience feedback. "The job of changing our future requires everyone working together to achieve success. Retaining our youth with rewarding careers is a powerful goal," said Dewey.

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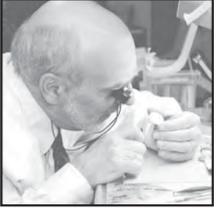


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The Impact Project has record year for projects in Chenango County —

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has been blessed with the financial resources to bring on more personnel, we brought business models into the fold, and we've pulled all of that together which has created a more effective and efficient engine for operations."

He added that in 2020, The Impact Project added two key members to the organization, an office manager and a caseworker.

"You can only do so much as one person, but now we have three people here," said Willard. "We've divided the work, and because of that we're now able to increase the speed of our process and add a lot more quality as well."

"When you have three sets of eyes, everything is better; other people see different things and the whole process is better."

He said as other non-profits closed down due to the pandemic, The Impact Project remained open, which is part of what paved the way for the group's record breaking year.

"Our motto is 'saving souls one house at a time'. That remains our focus."



The Impact Project had a record-breaking year with 10 projects completed in Chenango County, and officials say they hope to do even more in 2021. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

Willard said that COVID has forced the organization to get creative with projects, working with fewer volunteers at each project and focusing on safety. He said collaborations with local businesses was the key to making it possible.

"At the end of the day, partnering with businesses will be an addition to our model moving forward," Willard added. "The businesses that we work with think like we do, and have a genuine concern for their communities."

"These businesses are going out of their way to make sure the people liv-

ing nearby are taken care of."

He said because of the reduction in volunteers they can bring to projects, certain things like beautification including landscaping and painting were temporarily cut from the program.

According to Willard, this allows a very specialized group to still complete a roof project in a day or two.

Willard said once the coronavirus isn't an issue, The Impact Project can bring back more volunteers and start doing more of the painting and landscaping again.

"We know we want to do and can do more," said Willard. "This was an amazing year in a terrible environment, and we're hoping to help even more people in need in 2021."

"We don't have a specific number yet, and we'll have to see what happens with the virus, but we're going to make the best of it either way."

He said as the organization looks to the future it hopes to continue to grow and increase the size of its staff. He added that the group is ready to take on more projects.

"It would be nice to have two or three more people involved with this organization to help with making decisions," said Willard. "If that doesn't happen I won't complain, we did a great job this year with the board size that we have now."

Willard said one of the things that has allowed The Impact Project to help more people is the strength of its board. He said board members regularly attend projects, help make tough decisions on who to help next, and have the spirit of volunteerism at heart.

"You can't build a roof

sitting behind a desk," he added. "Most people once they've been to one of our projects can't wait for the next one, and I think that's because we all have a piece in us that loves to help other people."

"All we need is a triggering mechanism to help awaken that part of us, and The Impact Project's work is one of the ways people access it."

Willard discussed why each project draws in volunteers and said volunteers are able to change a person or family's life in just a day or two of work.

Willard said the families they help often reach

out to the organization as a last-ditch effort to save their homes. He said the families can't wait two years for help when they need it now, and none of that would be possible without the volunteers that make it happen.

"To everyone who has come out during this year to make a difference, thank you, we couldn't have done it without you," he added. "The Impact Project is going to continue to do its best to help the people of Chenango County who are suffering, and we look forward to doing what we can in 2021."



The Impact Project visited Maude Thompson in Plymouth in April 2020, building a ramp and installing a new driveway for her in a two day project. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

SUCCESS STORY

Staffworks in Chenango County

HOW IT BEGAN:

Decades ago Central New York native and Staffworks Founder/President, Anita Vitullo, drove into the heart of Norwich and felt at home. Shortly after, Vitullo opened a staffing services office in Dick Snyder's Pennysaver building.

Vitullo began her staffing career in 1979 with Kelly Services. During a 15-year career span Vitullo was an Area Manager and received the highest profit achievement awards for her NY district.

During her Kelly Services career Vitullo recognized the need for a regional service model. In 1994, Vitullo left Kelly Services and opened a staffing services office in

New Hartford that grew into what Staffworks is today.

STAFFWORKS TODAY:

In the last 27 years, Staffworks become Central and Southern New York's largest independently owned regional staffing services company. There are eight locations: New Hartford, Rome, Herkimer, Syracuse, Norwich, Oneonta, Binghamton and Corning. Staffworks provides a full range of business, manufacturing and health care skill areas from career entry to professional levels. Hundreds of New York State and national clients utilize Staffworks for temporary, temp to hire and direct placement staffing services.

The Staffworks team

sources and manages a workforce allowing clients to focus on their core mission. Investments in technology, recruiting and service staff ensures a continuous flow of candidates and quality service.

In 2020, Staffworks employed over 5,500 Central New York residents. In 27 years of operation, Staffworks has employed over 125,000 New York State and Pennsylvania residents.

STAFFWORKS SUCCESS:

Staffworks has received scores of notable awards for business achievements, community service and philanthropy.

- 2020 Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce "Business of the Year"
- 2020, 2019, 2018 Utica

- Observer Dispatch "Best of the Best Employment Agency"
- 2020, 2019 CNY Business Journal "Best Place to Work"
- 2019 "Outstanding Philanthropist"

Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties

STAFFWORKS GIVES BACK:

In 2005, Vitullo established the Staffworks Fund at the Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties. Today, \$15.5 million in Staffworks funds for charitable giving are managed by the Community Foundation.

The Staffworks Fund supports nonprofit organizations that provide

direct care and services for at-risk animals and people in need throughout Central and Southern New York and Pennsylvania.

Since inception, the Staffworks Fund has donated \$6.8 million to 57 organizations.

In 2014, the Staffworks Fund Save A Life Campaign was established and has raised more than \$6,156,444 for non-profit organizations providing care and services for at-risk animals. This regional fundraising campaign provides Staffworks matching levels of financial support for community donations during the month of December.

In 2020, 39 organizations participated in the Save A Life Campaign, raising a record-breaking

\$3,041,832 in 32 days!

The Chenango SPCA has received \$141,515 from the Staffworks Fund. This year, Every Dog's Dream Rescue in Greene participated in the Save A Life Campaign and received \$15,000.

CONTACT STAFFWORKS:

Whether you're looking for strategic staffing solutions or seeking employment, Staffworks can help. Contact their Norwich office at 24 Conkey Ave., (607) 334-5055 or www.staffworkscny.com.

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The Staffworks Fund supports organizations that care for at-risk animals in the communities Staffworks Inc. operates. In Chenango County, Staffworks has provided \$139,515 to Chenango SPCA and \$15,000 to Every Dog's Dream Rescue.