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With new leadership, student success at the core of DCMO BOCES mission



DCMO BOCES Board of Education President Vanessa Warren greets newly appointed BOCES District Superintendent Michael Rullo. Rullo will take the reins at the organization in mid February. (Photo submitted by DCMO BOCES)

Students enrolled in the DCMO BOCES welding program attend a hands-on learning session. The program is one of 14 core programs and three enhanced programs offered at BOCES' two vocational centers in Norwich and Sidney Center. (Photo submitted by DCMO BOCES)

By Shawn Magrath
Evening Sun Contributor

NORWICH — “Opportunity knocks” has the air of being the DCMO BOCES epithet for 2023. With a number of big feats in recent months, including the appointment of a new superintendent and the procurement of a fed-

eral grant to better connect students with local chambers of commerce, BOCES has reason to be optimistic about the year ahead.

BOCES has long been a staple for local school districts to take advantage of shared educational resources. Today, DCMO BOCES boasts of more than

Continued on Page 35 →

Six winners selected for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest

Sarah Genter
Evening Sun Writer

NORWICH — For the fourth year running, the Evening Sun and Norwich Building Tomorrow Foundation have hosted the Home Beautification Contest as a way to identify, encourage, and reward property owners in the City of Norwich for making improvements to their homes.

The contest is divided into two categories: owner-occupied single-family homes, and multi-family properties. First place winners receive \$5,000, second place wins \$3,000, third place receives \$2,000, and fourth place wins \$1,000. Three properties were also selected for honorable mention, each receiving a \$100



Lowe's gift card.

The winners for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest are as follows:

Single Family

- First place: Martha Ryan, 63 Silver Street
- Second Place: Chris Halom, 13 Pellet Street
- Third Place: Jack Roque, 26 Prospect Street
- Fourth place (tie): Nancy Brunton, 20 Wales

Continued on Page 36 →



FIRST PLACE

The Evening Sun and the Norwich Building Tomorrow Foundation have announced the winners for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest. Taking first place in the single-family category is Martha Ryan with her home at 63 Silver Street. (Submitted photos)

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With new leadership, student success at the core of DCMO BOCES mission -

Continued from Page 33 →

11,000 students supported by its educational services across 16 school districts in Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego counties. About 47 percent of the secondary students in those districts benefit from the 14 core career and technical education (CTE) programs and three enhanced programs offered at BOCES' two vocational centers in Norwich and Sidney Center.

No doubt this year looks promising as the organization continues its mission of offering diverse and innovative opportunities. But that's not to say there aren't challenges in the way. BOCES, like the school districts it serves, must find ways to close the educational gap created by the COVID pandemic and cope with a "new normal." Moreover, a labor shift has adversely impacted the educational system, driving BOCES to focus on equipping area schools with teacher substitutes, accounting services, and other educational resources.

"We need to adopt a forward-thinking approach," said DCMO BOCES Assistant Superintendent Ginger Rinaldo. "We ask all our stakeholders to help us put behind the pandemic and many other challenges faced in the past few years.

With a focused commitment to support the needs of our students, we all move in the right direction regardless of our differences."

In order to "move in the right direction," as Rinaldo said, BOCES is fixed on building stronger ties with school districts while keeping students' needs at the forefront. That, in part, is the philosophy behind hiring Michael Rullo as the new BOCES superintendent to replace retiring Superintendent Perry Dewey.

Dewey had been at BOCES' helm since 2017. Following two search efforts from a selection committee – comprised of school admin and staff, community members, and local entrepreneurs who were tasked with replacing Dewey – the NYS Commissioner of Education gave the nod last October for negotiations and the appointment of Rullo, the superintendent of Harpursville Central School District. Rullo will start in his new position at BOCES in mid February.

The turn in leadership is perhaps BOCES' most notable change of the last year. DCMO BOCES Board President Vanessa Warren said Rullo's experience is a welcome asset for BOCES as the organization continues to steer the programs outlined in its three-year



11,000 students are supported by DCMO BOCES educational services across 16 school districts in Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego counties. About 47 percent of the secondary students in those districts benefit from the 14 core career and technical education (CTE) programs and three enhanced programs offered at BOCES' two vocational centers in Norwich and Sidney Center. Pictured: On November 10, 2022, 13 students from the Alan Pole- Norwich Campus were inducted into the prestigious National Technical Honor Society (NTHS). From left to right: Marli Pohli (Oxford), Ember Cushman (Norwich), Kearra Eckert (Norwich), Pierson Bookamer (Norwich), Parker Wier (Norwich), Kolbie Pearson (Otselic Valley), Braden Wright (Sherburne Earlville), Everett Rivenburg (Sherburne Earlville), Annaliese Jackson (Norwich), Bailey Chesebro (Oxford), Alexandria Whitehead (Sherburne Earlville) (Submitted photo)

strategic plan.

"Guided by our core belief that student success is the center of our decision making and impacting our students' learning opportunities by continuing to implement the rigorous strategic plan, board members felt strongly about the focused leadership and connection to student success embedded in Mr. Rullo's work experience," Warren said.

While bringing Rullo on board was certainly a highlight in 2022, BOCES is also celebrating another

big achievement: the procurement of a \$78,000 federal grant awarded by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to run a pilot mentorship program that bolsters partnerships between school districts and area chambers of commerce.

This third ARC funding cycle strengthens the DCMO BOCES Career Destinations Program which is designed to introduce students to jobs available in the area. Jennifer Waite, BOCES director of career and technical education programs,

explained the grant will support roughly 200 senior students with mentoring services and also expand schools' access to hundreds of business partners that are willing to support students with career mentoring. Matching funds were received from the Greater Norwich Foundation and The Foundation for South Central New York to bolster the program and incentivize students to take part.

"This program responds to a needs assessment conducted among soon-to-gradu-

ate students," said Waite. "When asked about the top resources they needed to connect to local jobs, they stated the need to connect with someone who could guide them to opportunities."

Waite says mentors are still wanted and can apply by following information at BOCES' main website, www.dcmoboces.com.

Looking ahead, DCMO BOCES says it will continue being a premier provider of educational services in the region; but its success depends on the relationships maintained with component school districts, businesses, and the community at large. BOCES leaders say it's imperative to stick to the organization's strategic plan in order to "challenge the norm and reach out for higher goals."

Those relationships matter, says Rinaldo. In fact, if given a chance to go back a year and offer one piece of advice to herself, her words would be simple: "Work diligently to build positive relationships with our students and increase communication with our component districts and families."



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Six winners selected for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest -

Continued from Page 33 →
 Drive; and Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm, 11 Rexford Street
Multi Family

First Place: Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm, 8 Henry Street

Honorable Mention
 Maureen Byrne, 20 Newton Avenue; Melissa Beers, 49 Sheldon Street and Tim and Brenda Lowie, 142 South Broad Street

Martha Ryan
 First place winner Martha Ryan said restoring houses in the City and Town of Norwich is a passion of her and her husband. The couple has been purchasing and renovating properties for 19 years, and to date they have restored seven houses in the City of Norwich and one house in the Town of Norwich.

"We take dilapidated, destroyed houses and we buy them and we restore them one at a time," said Ryan. "I moved into this community, my husband lived here all his life, and it was sad to look at houses falling apart, and well, we'll take one at a time, we'll [make] it beautiful, and then sometimes we rent them, sometimes we sell them, and sometimes we keep them."

Ryan purchased 63 Silver Street in 2021 for just \$100 through a city tax sale, and by October 2022 had completed all her planned renovations. She credits the City of Norwich for trust-

ing her to create a beautiful property, as well as Code Enforcement Officer Amy Donnison for educating her on city codes and how to get the house in compliance.

"We approached the City of Norwich and we said, how about we take care of this house? And they were so good," she explained. "They're going in the tax sale, they sell them to the community, and you can put a small bid, and they consider it. They could have chosen a bid for more money, and instead they chose to trust us and that means a lot."

"And the code enforcer, Amy [Donnison], has been a heaven sent. She educated us on all the codes, she's gone out of her way to make sure we understand what we needed to do to comply," she added.

The Norwich Lowe's and Oxford contractor Larry Lewis were also integral to the restoration project, Ryan said.

The property underwent top-to-bottom restoration, inside and out. Ryan said the Curb Appeal Program, which provides financial reimbursement for upgrades made to homes in the Museum District, helped her to complete renovations on the home's exterior.

For the exterior of the house, Ryan replaced front columns, replaced the roof, installed new concrete steps, installed lan-

terns, removed fencing and merged two driveways with a pavement base, and created paver-lined perennial landscapes.

She hopes this renovation and those she's done in the past, as well as the Home Beautification Contest, will inspire others in the area to upgrade and beautify their homes. To show off and give kudos to those helping to beautify the city, Ryan even started the Norwich Homes Movement Facebook page, where homeowners can share photos of their renovations.

"The committee, the trustees, are looking for the stories of people who are taking pride in their community. So I think it's worth doing it," said Ryan. "When we all work together to make this community nicer, and prettier, and safer, we all win from it."

Although 63 Silver Street has served as her home for the past year, Ryan said she will soon be moving out so the property can be used as lodging for the museum district.

Chris Halom
 Second place winner Chris Halom spent most of last year renovating the entire exterior of his home. Upgrades included new siding, rebuilt front porch and steps, parging, a new garage door, and landscaping in the front yard.

But, Halom said he's not done renovating yet, and his winnings from the contest

will help to complete further projects on his home.

"I want to still do a little more work on the house. There's a couple projects inside and a couple more I want to do on the outside that it will help with. So I'm really excited to have the money to go on and do other things," he said.

Like Ryan, he hopes his renovations will inspire others to complete their own. In fact, he's already seen others on his street following suit.

"I think the good thing is our street is kind of competitive as far as keeping up with the Joneses," said Halom. "The neighbor across the street, she went and put a new porch on the front of her house, and when I put a garage door in, the contractor was doing that for me. Basically he ended up getting my neighbor to put a garage door in, and then the guy down the street put a garage door in. Everybody sort of got sucked into my project."

Jack Roque
 This year's third place award went to Jack Roque with his property at 26 Prospect Street. Roque removed overgrown trees and shrubs, added mulch around the house, removed a tree, excavated and removed driveway fencing, installed stones to the driveway platform, planted grass, added new steps to his side door, painted the front and side entrances, and planted cedar trees.

Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm
 Norwich residents Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm spent the past year renovating not one, but three houses, including their own home and two rental properties. Their residence and a multi-family rental property took fourth place in the single-family category and first place in the multi-family category.

Their home on Rexford Street received new front steps, repaired skirting and railings on their front porch with new mahogany wood, a fresh coat of paint, new shutters, repaired cracks in the siding, and replaced windows, shutters, and doors on their garage.

"[Lee] tried to go around the house every year and take one side just to keep

it painted up. But to have it all done, this time we did it all, and we changed the color. So the house looks, to us, very dramatically different," said Marilyn, adding that shortly after renovating their home, they almost drove right past it because they didn't recognize it anymore. "We almost didn't recognize our own house. We pulled in the driveway and I said, I just really don't believe this is my house."

Their multi-family rental property on Henry Street received similar renovations. New railings and steps were installed, the house and garage were repainted, garage doors were replaced, and shrubs and flowers were planted in the front yard.

The Wilhelms also took advantage of the Curb Appeal Program to help offset the cost of renovating their single-family home, and after completing renovations on both properties realized they could enter the Home Beautification Contest, too.

Lee said he hopes more people take advantage of the incentives out there to help with beautifying their homes.

"It certainly is contagious if you're looking at it with the right attitude. And the fact that both of these programs, Curb Appeal and the Home Beautification Contest, they're going to have money like that available for someone to help with the [work] or actually accomplish the improvements that they want to do and get reimbursed for it, I don't understand why more people aren't doing exactly that. But it's catching on, I'm sure it's catching on," said Lee.

"We're totally blown away by the results which have been awarded to us," he added. "We're glad to be recognized for this particular contest and the work that we've done."

Nancy Brunton
 Tying with the Wilhelms for fourth place in the single-family category is Nancy Brunton, who grew up in Norwich and moved back to the city in 2020.

She said she knew her property had a lot of potential, and the past year was the right time to realize her

vision.

"I just knew that the house had a lot more potential with some updating and modernization that could just look really like a nice house. I mean, it's got a beautiful piece of land up here, and so I just had that vision right from the start," said Brunton. "With the contest I thought, why not? I know it's going to be a big difference, so let me enter the contest and see how we do."

She put new siding on her house, added a front porch, repaired and extended the roof to cover the porch, added two stone walkways leading to the road and her driveway, and did some landscaping that she hopes will grow and flourish over the coming years.

Brunton utilized the services of local contractors and companies to get the work done. She said Brooks Construction completed her porch, Jerry Knapp Construction handled the siding, and RB Landscaping completed the masonry work. She also had a lot of help from the Norwich Curtis Lumber, who she said helped her with drawings of the porch, siding materials, roofing, and more.

"All local contractors, which was important to me if I could do that. I know we've got a lot of good talent here in town, so it's nice to do that," said Brunton.

Now that her home looks exactly how she wants, Brunton said she's excited to relax and enjoy the work she's done, and is happy to know others see the change in her property as well.

"It feels good to know that there are other people that can see the improvements and appreciate the improvements that I made. I mean, I see them, so even if I hadn't, I would still love it. But it's nice to get that acknowledgement."

"It is a good motivation, if you can get even a little bit of the money back," she said of the contest. "Maybe it's just a coat of paint, or just repairing something to just freshen it up and make it look nicer. And with those kind of things, maybe the contest could help."

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Six winners selected for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest -

SECOND PLACE



Chris Halom took second place in the 2022 Home Beautification Contest with his property on 13 Pellet Street. (Submitted photo)

THIRD PLACE



Jack Roque's property on 26 Prospect Street won third place in this year's Home Beautification Contest, run by The Evening Sun and the Norwich Building Tomorrow Foundation. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

FOURTH PLACE



Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm have tied for fourth place with their home on 11 Rexford Street. (Submitted photo)



At 20 Wales Drive sits the home of Nancy Brunton, who has tied for fourth place in the 2022 Home Beautification Contest. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

FIRST PLACE MULTI-FAMILY



In addition to their fourth place win, Lee and Marilyn Wilhelm have also taken first place in the multi-family category for the 2022 Home Beautification Contest with their rental property at 8 Henry Street. (Submitted photo)



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