

Departmental Highlights: 2009 Oneida County State of the County Message

Time and space do not permit a full listing of all the ways Oneida County Government Departments serve the people of this county, but here are some of the highlights:

Office for the Aging and Continuing Care

In the coming year, we here in Oneida County will be on the leading edge of programs as we partner with New York State Office for the Aging and SUNY Albany-Center of Excellence on Aging to implement the U. S. Administration on Aging's Demonstration Project known as Nursing Home Diversion Modernization Grant. The purpose of this project is to establish a new, flexible consumer directed model for individuals at-risk for nursing home placement.

Youth Bureau

In 2008, the Youth Bureau went back in time to recover \$140,000 in money from the state. Youth Bureau staff, led by Director Bob Roth, have also worked to provide youth with a connection to the Potato Hill Farm Outdoor Educational Center. A summer program geared to helping youth learn about the environment drew more than 700 young people, while during the course of the year, 3,000 youth had the invaluable chance to experience the outdoors. All of this was done at no cost to the youth or the taxpayers. The total cost savings to Oneida County amounted to about \$250,000!

Planning Department

If you want to talk about working behind the scenes and working with a vision to the future, wait until you hear what our Planning Department has done. Planning staff worked jointly with 27 communities that wanted to partner with us to identify addresses that were potentially missing from Census mailing records. The remaining 21 municipalities that opted not to participate directly with us were reviewed independently by our County Planning Department. More than 12,000 missing addresses were identified and submitted for inclusion in Census Bureau's master address file. Because federal and state aid is population-based, adding thousands of addresses increases our chance to get our fair share of the more than \$31 billion in federal aid distributed across NY every year based on local municipal populations. This is a job that wasn't any fun; it doesn't even sound like fun, but it could pay off for 10 years to come because of the vision and diligence of the staff.

Health Department

Oneida County's Health Department deals with every aspect of public health – regulating public water supplies, food service establishments, children's camps, swimming pools and beaches, and realty subdivisions. This year, our Lead Primary Prevention Pilot Project grant will help us increase the number of people we can help by 25% so that we can work with more families to help prevent lead poisoning in more children. We will work with contractors and do-it-yourselfers to provide free contractor lead abatement training and lead safe work practices classes. Through a public-private collaboration with GroWest, Inc. Utica residents living in 'high risk' areas will receive free training on how to safely replace their old windows and permit them to buy the new replacement windows, at cost, thus reducing lead dust levels and saving home energy costs.

The Health Department regulates public water supplies in Oneida County. In filling this regulatory function, staff at times partner with communities to assist them in improving their water supply. During the past few years, health department staff whose salaries are funded in part from a NYS Water Enhancement Grant, collaborated with officials from the Village of Bridgewater to prepare a grant to update the village water supply. This process, which took several years, culminated with the Town of Bridgewater receiving approximately \$3.5 million in state and federal monies to upgrade the village water supply.

The Health Department also directly serves thousands of people each year. In 2008 alone nearly 600 newly arrived refugees received complete health assessments at the clinic.; our clinic investigated over 2,000 reportable communicable diseases; approximately 9,000 residents received vaccines. The WIC program served 16,500 clients.

Probation

One of the most fundamental commitments of County Government to the people of our county is to be pro-active in public safety. Our Probation Department is one of the models for collaboration with the community, with law enforcement, and with the courts. Our collaborations have not only reduced outstanding warrants by over 30% but assisted in the apprehension of numerous dangerous offenders. As a result we have become a full partner in the U.S. Marshall's Office, Fugitive Task Force. This is an honor that very few Probation Departments achieve.

Because Probation has been an innovative, creative leader in protecting the community, the coming year will see expanded efforts from the state-funded Re-Entry Task Force that was created in 2006. Our Office of Workforce Development laid a great foundation for this grant-funded project, and in the coming year, our Probation Department and the District Attorney's office will have stronger roles so that we can achieve even greater success in ensuring that when area residents return to the community from jail or prison, they are not a public safety risk.

STOP-DWI

One of the greatest risks in our society is drunk driving. Oneida County's STOP DWI program, which is funded by DWI fines and not county tax dollars, has been aggressive about getting the attention of the highest-risk drivers – youth. This year, with the leadership of our DA, STOP DWI implemented a program called Alive at 25 that puts young DWI offenders into classes to help change their outlook on driving. To date, eleven classes have been held and 182 students have completed the course. This spring, our Teen Traffic Safety Education Program will provide safe driving information to 900 students from across Oneida County. Our goal is very simple: If we save one life, if we prevent one tragedy, we have done our job.

Central Services

Whether to meet the requirements of state programs or the needs for remote information sharing, technology is a major part of managing the massive amounts of information that are part of government. Our Central Services Department faces a tremendous challenge of upgrading systems in a budget environment where equipment is the first thing we cut. Their work may go unseen, but it allows employees to communicate and manage information in a very secure technological environment. You will see some of the fruits of all of their work this spring as we realign all of our existing web content into a modern, attractive, flexible and efficient structure that is designed to increase the ease of delivering information and services to residents and visitors of and to our community.

Public Works

Sharing services is an integral concept in our Public Works Department, because have a central source for essential, specialized pieces of equipment that everyone needs at one time or another but no one needs all the time can save taxpayers money. This past year, Oneida County received a \$260,820 shared services grant that allowed our Public Works Department to add a specialized excavator that is shared with towns, meaning they can just borrow it for free instead of renting one. One simple project that saves towns thousands of dollars in rental costs.

Workforce Development

Teamwork and regional thinking are part of the mission of our Office of Workforce Development. The office has brought grants to our area with more than \$5 million over the next 3 to five years so that we can develop a Renewable Energy Training Center just down the road at Morrisville and link it to our own MVCC; we can train unemployed young people and adults in careers that will lead to good-paying jobs; and we can help young adults with disabilities overcome their barriers. We are accomplishing all of that without any county dollars. Further, one of Oneida County's signature programs, our County College Student Corps, is now operating with absolutely no administrative costs. Every dollar budgeted goes to students who want internships in Oneida County. That's the type of efficient, innovative, creative management that finds ways to do more with less.

Inter-departmental partnership

The Department of Social Services is working with the departments of Probation, Mental Health, Planning and our contracted service providers to reduce the numbers of Oneida County youth that are remanded to institutional care, secure and non-secure detention. That can save money and help youth. This is where County Government changes lives and saves dollars – not with slogans and sound bites, but by focusing on tough problems and working in partnership to resolve them.