



Amherst Bee

138

YEARS OF
COMMUNITY
JOURNALISM



2018-03-14 / Local News

Poloncarz touts Erie as leader during State of County

by BRYAN JACKSON Cheektowaga Editor

County Executive Mark Poloncarz's hour-long State of the County address last week was wide ranging, but the overarching message was direct: Erie County will lead.

Poloncarz rattled off initiatives that he said show the county's leadership and laid the groundwork for the coming year's agenda, during his sixth State of the County Address, held at the Buffalo Museum of Science the afternoon of March 8.

Erie County's top executive pointed to falling opioid deaths, down from 301 in 2016 to 268 in 2017, as evidence that policies — especially early groundwork such as formation of the Opioid Epidemic Task Force in January 2016 — are working.

Additionally, Poloncarz said, the work toward combating the opioid epidemic is being recognized across the county, with information provided to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration by the Erie County Department of Central Police Services Forensic Laboratory resulting in several deadly opiate derivatives, such as butyryl fentanyl, being recognized as controlled substances at the federal level.

Later in the address, Poloncarz announced that the county Department of Health is partnering with the Cheektowaga Police Department on a program that is designed to get people who overdose into treatment faster.

"Anytime — anytime — an individual overdoses and is saved with Narcan in Cheektowaga, the police and a peer counselor from the Health Department will follow up with that person the very next day to ensure they are getting necessary treatment," he said. "This partnership will save lives."

While the program is launching in Cheektowaga, recently secured grant funding will allow the initiative to expand to other towns down the line, Poloncarz said.

This was not the only law enforcement initiative announced during the speech, with Poloncarz saying all of Erie County will be using the so-called "closest car" program by the end of the year.

The software that allows dispatchers to identify and send the closest officer to a reported emergency, regardless of whether it is an Erie County Sheriff's Office deputy or a New York State trooper, was introduced and piloted in 2016 and expanded in 2017. Currently, about 50 percent of the county, including District Two, which covers Clarence, for example, relies on the program.

Poloncarz highlighted millions of dollars in road construction completed throughout the county and said although federal plans to shift a majority of costs to local governments could slow down work if passed, he said Northtowns thoroughfares such as Goodrich Road in Clarence and North Forest Road in Amherst could expect reconstruction in 2018.

Similarly, he emphasized the \$11 million worth of investments in the county park system and announced that the forestry division will begin replanting blight-resistant American chestnut trees in Orchard Park's Chestnut Ridge Park, often touted as the crown jewel of the county's parks.

The speech was not all pats on the back though.

While he touched on many cost-saving efforts taken by the government at the county and local levels, Poloncarz took aim at non-municipal taxing districts, such as schools or fire and sewer districts, toward the middle of the address.

According to the county executive, those districts levied 64 percent of Erie County's \$1.8 million 2017 tax levy. Poloncarz moved that school, fire and special taxing district representatives be required to sit on shared services panels, something Gov. Andrew Cuomo required of municipalities in 2017, in order find ways to save, even if that means mergers or consolidation.

In Poloncarz's mind, Cheektowaga — and its five school districts — is Exhibit A for inefficiency.

He cited the town's population decline, both total and among school-age children, between 1970 and today, and wondered aloud why the inner ring suburb needed a full hand's worth of districts when similarly sized Tonawanda and West Seneca have one, and Williamsville with about 1,000 more students, spends \$2.3 million less on administrative costs.

The answer, Poloncarz said, has been a lack of political will, but he asserted that districts such as Cheektowaga's could merge, save millions on administrative costs by eliminate superintendents and business officials, "without the closing of one school, or the layoff of a teacher, a teacher's aide, a guidance counselor or a bus driver."

Poloncarz teased an "eye-opening" report regarding school districts that he said the administration has been compiling for the past few months, but, predictably, superintendents from Cheektowaga pushed back, releasing a one-page statement before the State of the County address was even underway.

They contested the county executive's assertions of a bloated, top-heavy system in the town, criticizing him for failing to approach the districts beforehand and pointing to studies going back to the 1980s that have consistently concluded that mergers would not achieve significant cost savings.

[Return to top](#)



Get In Shape – Go Home Safe!

6 Weeks
INTRO SPECIAL \$19.95
 Includes: 1 Private Lesson and 1 class!

- Lose Weight • Tone Muscle
- Burn up to 800 Calories
- Learn Practical Self-Defense

KRAV MAGA OFFICIAL TRAINING CENTER

TRAINING EDGE 8200 Main Street
 800 Bushy Park - 134M, East of Town
 Williamsville
 www.thereisnoedge.com

Call Now **565-9568**

Presenting Sponsor

univera
 HEALTH CARE



FARMERS MARKET
 at the **Williamsville Hill**

Fruits & Vegetables, Flowers,
 Baked Goods, Wine, Pasta,
 Natural Beef and so much more!

FARM FRESH
EVERY SATURDAY
FROM MAY 19TH
THROUGH OCTOBER 27TH
 8AM to 1PM
 @ Town Hall Parking Lot (Main Street)

Jazz at The Taylor

Mark Filsinger Quintet
Plays the Chet Baker
Songbook

March 24, 7:30 PM

\$20 general/\$15 members
 Tickets available at the Kenan Center,
 on Ticketleap, or call 433-2617.
kenancenter.org

Also ahead:

Finger Poppin': The Legacy of Horace Silver with
 The Buffalo Jazz Composers Workshop
 May 19

Born to be Wild – The Buffalo Jazz Octet
 Plays the Music of 1968 and More
 June 23

Alec Dube Quartet Plays Tribute to
 The Modern Jazz Quartet
 October 6

The Edward Croft Trio's
 Comfort & Jazz Holiday Show
 December 1

Kenan Center Taylor Theater
 433 Locust St, Lockport
 Ample free parking

ALL-GIRL POWER. ALL SUMMER LONG!



SUMMER@SEM

Day camp for girls entering grades 5-9

Jun. 25 - Aug. 3

NEW: SLEEPAWAY@SEM
NOW: CREW, SAILING, SQUASH

Check-out what else is new and register online:
BuffaloSeminary.org/SAS
Facebook.com/SummeratSEM



205 Bidwell Parkway, Buffalo, NY 14222 | 716-885-6780

Reserve Our Beautiful Gathering Room for Your Next Event



Front & Back Patio Open Soon

Up to 100 Guests



THE IRISHMAN
PUB & EATERY

5601 Main Street • Williamsville
626-2670 • www.IrishmanPub.com



Portable **HOT TUB RENTALS** delivered to your home

5981 Main Street
Williamsville
631-9752
www.creeksidehottubs.com




SUMMER CAMP 2018



9 weeks
June 25-August 24
children grades **K-10**

To learn more, call Director Michael Garcia: 204-2078.
Pick up a camp brochure at either JCC location.
campcenterland.org

A program of **Amherst**
2640 North Forest Road
behind the Benderson Family Building

