

INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

February 2018



The crowded main corridor of the Resorts World Catskills gaming floor in Monticello is a scene that has been repeated several times over in the days since the February 8 “soft” opening (to be followed by an official grand opening this May or June).

We're open for business

It didn't matter whether they like gambling or not — the thousands who crowded into Resorts World Catskills upon its February 8 opening were witnesses to the penultimate moment in a half-century quest to bring a casino hotel to Sullivan County's Catskills.

“To be able to see this long-awaited dream realized — and help welcome it to our community — was a memorable experience for me as both County Manager and County resident,” County Manager Josh Potosek affirmed. “I think it's the start of a new era in the County's storied tourism history, and I hope — coupled with the other resorts soon to open — this will introduce a new generation of visitors and future residents to the natural beauty and unique attractions which exist throughout Sullivan County.”

YO1 Wellness Resort is scheduled to open this summer just north of Monticello, followed by the Kartrite Indoor Waterpark & Hotel near the casino early next year.

In This Issue

- County Historian celebrates 25 years
- We love our vets!
- Youth Bureau, RSVP reached far and wide in 2017
- Take the survey and 'step up'



Sullivan County Historian John Conway, right, discusses a recent guided tour of Fort Delaware in Narrowsburg with his fellow colonial-era tour guide Gary Cochrane.

Departmental Spotlight: The Office of the Sullivan County Historian

Sullivan County's time traveler

For the first few years of John Conway's life, Route 17 ran right past his Rock Hill home - as did all the Borscht Belt traffic.

"Especially on Fridays and Sundays, you couldn't get out of our driveway," he remembers, more with fondness than frustration.

But like everything in life, things changed, and the opening of the new Quickway — relocating 17 to a four-lane superhighway — turned John's portion of "Old 17," now known as Rock Hill Drive, into a concrete-paved dead-end.

"It became our playground," he says, smiling at the thought. "It was just a great place to grow up."

John's father ensured some of that free time was also spent amidst the pages of history books, pointing his son to definitive tomes like James Eldridge Quinlan's "History of Sullivan County" and Alf Evers' "The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock."

"My dad was a big history buff and an avid reader. He always encouraged me to compile my own library," says John. "Our conversations at the dinner table revolved around history, so it was kind of a natural thing for me."

By the 1980s, that affinity for history and nostalgia had evolved into a call-in show on WSUL called "The Brunch Break." Part of that featured his recollections of "a boy coming of age amidst the bungalows" — and suddenly he was hearing from all sorts of folks with interesting tales of Sullivan County's days gone by.

"It became apparent very early on that people had this thirst for history — local history," John affirms.

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Make the trip back with John Conway

Sullivan County Historian John Conway is excited to announce he will be collaborating with two not-for-profits, The Delaware Company (which he helped found) and the Hurleyville Maker's Lab, to once again offer a six-week "History of Sullivan County" course for the public.

The classes will run from 6-7:30 p.m. for six consecutive Monday evenings beginning April 9 and ending May 14.

"The material for this class is brand new...so we are calling this the 'History of Sullivan County Part II'," John explains. "Whether or not you have already taken my six-week course, or even my three-credit class at SUNY Sullivan back in the day, this will NOT be repetitive for you. And even if you have never taken one of my courses and know little or



Get that flu shot

With more than 600 cases of the flu so far this year in Sullivan County — and the season only now nearing peak — County Manager Josh Potosek urges everyone to seek a flu shot.

“I can say firsthand that the flu is debilitating and painful,” Potosek affirms. “And even if the current vaccine is only partially effective against the most virulent strains of the flu, it can shorten the duration of symptoms and help slow the spread of this always miserable and sometimes life-threatening infection.”

Free flu shots are being offered at Public Health Services, 50 Community Lane, in Liberty Mondays-Fridays from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. or on March 5 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Government Center in Monticello.

Got a question?

Try your legislator first, by calling the Sullivan County Legislature’s office at 845-807-0435. They can direct you to the representative who is elected to serve you.

Or look up who you’re seeking directly, via the County’s website:
co.sullivan.ny.us

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With funding and support from the Sullivan County Youth Bureau, the Town of Neversink Youth Recreation Program brought Animal Embassy to the Grahamsville Fairgrounds on August 25, 2017 (above) and took kids to Skater’s World in Ferndale on February 10, 2017 (below).

2017 was a whole lotta fun!

The Sullivan County Youth Bureau provided funding, monitoring, and extensive technical support to 25 youth-serving programs Countywide in 2017, reaching 9,198 children and teens with recreational, educational and preventive activities. This number increased from 2016 when we served 8,094 children.

Some of the youth programs that we funded and worked with in 2017 operated in the towns of Cochetcon, Fallsburg, Forestburgh, Highland, Lumberland, Mamacating, Neversink, Rockland, and Tusten; as well as the Fallsburg and Liberty Police Department Juvenile Aid Bureau, Head Start’s “I Am Moving, I Am Learning” Program, Alive@25 Program, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and the Children Community Chorus, among others.



Dear Veterans: Sullivan loves you!

Close to 3,000 schoolkids in Sullivan County (you read that right!) created Valentine's Day cards for local veterans, so that none of our servicepeople would feel forgotten or unloved that special day.

Coordinated by our Veterans Service Agency, the Valentines for Vets program continues to grow every year and is a wonderful expression of gratitude, care and compassion from our youngest citizens to those who have ensured our liberty!



A few dozen of the 2,700+ Valentine's Day cards students made for veterans were on display inside the Government Center lobby in Monticello.

Help us 'step up'

The Sullivan County Economic Development Team, with funding from the Sullivan County Funding Corp., will launch a public service campaign to help local businesses take advantage of new economic opportunities.

They are asking people to complete a short survey to better understand attitudes about the County and its readiness to "step up." The answers will help develop a campaign that speaks to our community's specific needs: www.surveymonkey.com/r/MRJV2X2

We serve our seniors yearlong, day in and day out

RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), sponsored by the Office for the Aging, is currently in its 45th year of operation. The program seeks to provide volunteer opportunities for people aged 55 and older who come from all economic, educational and social backgrounds. Take a look at what we accomplished in 2017:

- 280+ RSVP volunteers served in 60 nonprofit sites, many of them running the sites.
- We served over 50,000 meals to community individuals.
- We engaged 57 volunteer medical drivers, with over 3,000 hours transporting seniors to needed doctor's appointments. There were 2,000 requests for medical transportation. In collaboration with the Sullivan County Transportation Department, we provided 1,600 trips to the elderly.
- Our volunteers served 226 seniors with congregate meals, donating over 1,300 hours, and delivered meals to 250 homebound seniors, driving over 2,000 hours in the process.
- 28 thrift shop volunteers served 9,000 Sullivan County cus-

tomers with affordable clothing and home goods.

- 24 Literacy Volunteers of America tutors spent over 600 hours teaching 250 locals reading skills.
- Many of our homebound elderly received telephone reassurance calls throughout the year, keeping them in touch with the office and the community.
- Over 60 individuals and their families were assisted by our Hospice volunteers during very difficult life stages.
- Over 2,200 seniors were involved in Friendly Visiting, Exercise and Art Programs and special events such as Senior Games and other offerings run by 20 volunteers.
- Our 2 AARP Driver Safety volunteers provided 500 seniors safe driving classes, and our 5 AARP tax preparation volunteers prepared free tax returns for 364 County residents.
- Overall, our 283 active volunteers gave \$787,500 worth of services!

Classes in history

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nothing about Sullivan County history, you will not be out of place in this class."

You can take one class for \$10 or all six for \$55:

1. **SPLENDID AND MIRACULOUS: The Region's History as a Healing Environment**
2. **STRANGERS IN OUR MIDST: New Ethnicities in Sullivan County History**
3. **DOCTORS SAY "GO TO THE MOUNTAINS": The Evolution of Tourism in Sullivan County**
4. **MURDER IN PARADISE: Organized Crime in the Catskills 1920 - 1940**
5. **THEME PARKS, AMUSEMENT PARKS AND ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS**
6. **GLEN SPEY: Sullivan County's Newport and the Architectural Legacy of George Ross MacKenzie**

Pre-registration is required by Saturday, March 31, 2018.

To register or for more information, email John at jconway52@hotmail.com.

Historian: Oh, the tales he tells

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His beloved newspaper column, "Retrospect," which debuted in 1987, both quenched and deepened that thirst, evidenced by the fact it continues to be published today.

"I once told someone that this is 'Indiana Jones without the rats,'" John chuckles. "There is so much left to explore. I still find stuff that excites me!"

He shares that enthusiasm not just in print but via classes at SUNY Sullivan, programs at the County Museum and other local venues, and on air occasionally - all under the title of County Historian, a mantle he's now worn for 25 years as of this month.

"The last couple of years, I've done more than 50 speaking engagements annually," John relates, on top of hundreds more throughout his tenure as Historian. "I've also written seven books about the County's history." (Plus one on trivia, his other passion.)

Virtually none of that, though, would have become reality without John's wife, Debra, an accomplished author and history buff herself.

"She certainly aided in getting me my column at the paper, to get me the position as County Historian -- in fact, the late County Clerk Joe Purcell approached her about my interest because they had a good relationship from stories she had done about him and his projects, and she was very friendly with Barbara, his wife," John recalls.

"The fact that she has shared my passion for history and been involved in so much of what I have done as Historian has made it so much more enjoyable," he nods. "She has been my muse, my inspiration, and my best friend over the years."

Two more books from John are coming soon - much-anticipated compilations of his "Retrospect" columns, which will contain some of his favorite finds.

"I'm constantly amazed at how the County has had connections to so many great things," he notes, pointing out, for example, that 19th century Monticello resident Daniel Bennett St. John played a role in the founding of the New York Times. "Those are the kinds of things that excite me."

The future of Sullivan County, however, remains just as exciting for him. Indeed, he believes the County is beginning yet another momentous chapter in its more than 200-year history, based on a timeline he researched and created that illustrates a cyclical progression in the region's tourism climate every 25 years or so. Such knowledge of the past is what sustained his optimism during the dark years of the recent recession.

"I'd tell people that it's important to know we're not facing downturns for the first time," he explains. "When the economy collapses, we reinvent ourselves."

That may be happening again.

"The great thing to me about the casino is not that it's somehow going to re-create the Golden Age of the resorts here," John remarks, "but the realization that decades ago, there was once just one hotel in Sullivan County, and we know what grew from that."