

INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

September 2019

We welcomed the world



Years of Woodstock

A top-down view of the famous Woodstock field in Bethel, where nearly half a million people celebrated "peace, love and music" in 1969, and close to 45,000 did so again in 2019. The staff of Bethel Woods Center for the Arts lit trees in varying colors and laid a strip of bright white lights in the shape of a 50th anniversary peace sign. (Image courtesy of the New York State Police's aerial drone team.)

Sullivan County welcomed an estimated 100,000 people to events and activities across the region August 15-18. Looming largest was the 50th anniversary of the famous Woodstock Music and Art Fair, a multi-venue celebration of the Bethel rock festival that impacted the nation and the world.

With other events like the Little World's Fair in Grahamsville and Porchfest in Callicoon occurring simultaneously with the 50th anniversary in Bethel, Sullivan County and State and local partners opened the County's Emergency Operations Center for the duration of the weekend. But emergencies and traffic backups proved fewer in number than even a typical summer weekend.

"Our team — including the State, the Visitors Association, Bethel Woods and the Town of Bethel — ensured this historic moment in our history was as memorable and trouble-free for residents as it was for visitors," said County Manager Josh Posek. "I thank everyone who brought that peaceful 'Woodstock spirit' to every corner of the County."

"I want to thank everyone who spent this weekend working to ensure people had the best experience possible," stated Legislature Chairman Luis Alvarez.

"Together, we defined Sullivan County as a very special place in the minds of thousands, spreading good will and good cheer around the world. It doesn't get any better than that!"

In This Issue

- Veterans serving veterans
- New public bus route has arrived
- Meet the new Deputy County Manager
- Working hard to keep pace
- Still leading in job growth Statewide



Take one step into the Sullivan County Veterans Service Agency, and you're likely to meet one of these fine fellows. From the left: Pablin Santiago-Lugo, who is as personable as they come and is often the first one to greet visitors; John Crotty, the experienced leader of the team; Howie Goldsmith, who is second in command and also the head of the nonprofit Sullivan County Veterans Coalition; and Stephen Walsh, whose knowledge is matched only by his research skills to get vets the benefits they need.

Departmental Spotlight: Veterans Service Agency

Serving those who have served

Sullivan County Veterans Service Agency Director John Crotty is a veteran himself. So's virtually everyone else in his office. And it's their honor to serve other veterans.

"Many vets don't consider themselves veterans because they didn't serve in combat, or they weren't injured in some way," Crotty says. "They don't think of their service as extraordinary — but it really is."

In what ways?

"You just hand yourself over to your 'lord and master': the U.S. government," he notes. "And tens of thousands of us have served all over the world with little to no backup. In fact, we have guys who've served as the only American on a base entirely composed of foreign nationals."

"We have two local veterans who were in the U.S. embassy compound on the last day we were in Vietnam," he adds. "They didn't know if they were going to get out of there. Maybe they didn't serve in actual combat — but boy, were they in a scary situation."

"The stories you hear are both frightening and invigorating," Crotty concludes. "It's a wonderful job to meet these people."

And that can be upwards of 100 visitors and callers a day, spread amidst the five folks who crew the Veterans Service Agency (VSA) in the Government Center.

The VSA is not the VA (Veterans Administration), which is a federal department, but it works closely with the VA.

"We cut through the red tape," he affirms.

Bet you didn't know our VSA does all this...

The federal Veterans Administration can do a lot, but so can Sullivan County's Veterans Service Agency.

"Our focus is on the struggling, blue-collar veteran," Director John Crotty notes.

- **Connecting vets to benefits:** health/medical, educational, financial assistance
- **Transportation:** to/from Veterans Administration hospitals and doctors' visits, in coordination with the Sullivan County Veterans Coalition's transportation service
- **Employment counseling:** to help vets find/keep local jobs
- **FAVOR Card:** The FAVOR (Find and Assist Vets Of Record) Program gives vets special discounts in local shops and businesses
- **Transitioning to civilian life:** providing guidance and assistance to discharged veterans, in collaboration with local veterans organizations
- **County Veterans Cemetery:** offering a no-cost place of burial for vets and their spouses in a perpetually maintained landscape

In 2017, 4,308 veterans in Sullivan County received nearly \$14 million worth of non-taxable compensation, benefits & pension payments, and over \$16 million in medical care through the Veterans Administration.

The VSA is open M-F from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Government Center, 100 North Street, Monticello. Phone: 845-807-0233

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John Liddle: a trained leader

Rigor. Transparency. Accountability. Deputy County Manager John Liddle puts those words at the top of his progress and goals update every week.

But they're more than words. They're a way of life, established during childhood in Pottsville, Pa.'s hardscrabble coal country and permanently drilled into him over the course of a 20-year career

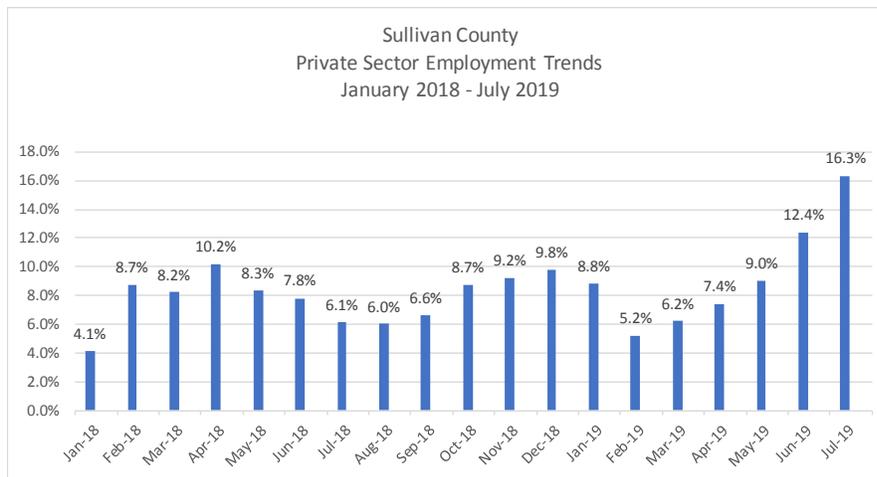


John Liddle

in the U.S. Navy, from which he just retired at the rank of Lt. Commander.

"John came to us with tremendous leadership experience," recalled County Manager Josh Potosek, who hired John earlier this year. "He'd led crews on Naval vessels, overseen the Washington Navy Yard, and earned two masters: in

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Sullivan County continues to lead — and outpace — the rest of New York in job growth. While new resorts are a primary catalyst in the local economic engine, they are not the sole reason for the sustained increase. (Graph courtesy of NYSDOL)

On an upward track... still

Sullivan County remains a State leader in job growth, hitting an unprecedented 16.3% growth rate in July, nearly tripling the rate from a year before. Unemployment is at a historic low of 3.3%, as well.

"This is a welcome sign of our continued economic health," said County Manager Josh Potosek, who well remembers Sullivan's difficulties just a decade ago during the Great Recession.

"What's important, however, is not to be lulled into complacency," he added. "The County and its economic development partners continue to be focused on diversifying our employment landscape, attracting a range of businesses that aren't tied to one industry sector. Only with a wider base — mom-and-pop shops, light industry, distribution warehouses, farms, healthcare offerings, etc. — can we have a fair chance at weathering future national and global economic downturns."

To that end, Sullivan County officials have been developing plans for a light industry park behind the former Apollo Plaza in Monticello, where the now-closed landfill was to have been expanded, along with an industrial park along the Old Route 17 corridor between Harris and Ferndale.

The County is also heavily involved in assisting small businesses in various downtowns, from Callicoon to Wurtsboro, Livingston Manor to Rock Hill. And partner agencies are constantly working to attract new businesses to those downtowns.

"With more business comes more opportunity for residents, especially in earning a competitive salary that gives them upward mobility," observed Potosek. "We want to raise the standard and quality of living throughout Sullivan County, and to do that, we have to bring and create jobs with incomes that can not only support families but help them thrive. It's a task we take extremely seriously."



Cheryl McCausland

County Atty. elected 2nd VP of State Association

Sullivan County Attorney Cheryl McCausland has been elected by the Board of Directors of the County Attorneys Association of the State of New York (CAASNY) to the position of Second Vice President of the Board.

CAASNY promotes and advocates for county attorneys and their offices across the State, and McCausland will plan and coordinate the Association's 2020 Annual Meeting, including its two-day Continuing Legal Education Program.

"County Attorneys must be prepared to address any civil issue that arises within their municipalities. We are required to be generally familiar with a multitude of federal and state laws and regulations," McCausland explained. "To

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Liddle: new life, same values...

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Strategic Communications and Leadership from Seton Hall University, and in National Security and Strategic Studies at the Naval War College. He'd even participated in the rescue of two dozen hostages from Somali pirates. It's no wonder that one of his references was a rear admiral."

These days, however, John is most interested in how he can best serve the employees of Sullivan County government, and by extension, the people of the County itself.

"I'm trying to provide the management structure and policies we need to be responsive to a fast-moving world," he stated. "I see so much good work people are doing, but sometimes it's unstructured: the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing."

As a result, his work tends to fall into one of two categories, or "buckets," as John likes to say: internal coordination (as the County's de facto chief of staff) and external coordination (with nonprofits, agencies, municipalities and other community groups).

Within the internal "bucket," serving directly under the County Manager allows John to develop a comprehensive understanding of the work County employees do.

"I feel it's important to connect the Legislature and the staff to make sure legislators are well-informed when they have important decisions to make," he explained.

He's finding it's no less a team effort externally, as well: "I'm pleasantly surprised to see how many hamlets and villages are really thriving, and I've been struck by all of the different nonprofits, social media outlets and how active folks are in their communities – it's far beyond what I'm used to seeing in my travels & it's very encouraging."

That gives John both hope and energy. "Here, you have a chance to actually make government work for the people ... which, quite frankly, doesn't happen in DC," he admitted.

Here, too, he and wife Laura are closer to their Pottsville family. The couple has purchased a home in Liberty, where they've set down roots with their two school-age daughters. "I really like it here," he nodded. "I'm truly falling in love with this place, and I think my family is, too."

Having travelled around the world for the past two decades, John is also eager to simply settle down and apply his experiences to a single locale.

He already recognizes a top priority.

"If we're going to fill homes and control blight, we've got to recruit young families to come here, and that's hard to do when the taxes are as high as they are," he observed. "We have to find ways to deliver government services to people as efficiently as possible. The solutions aren't all going to come from the Government Center, but we can bring the decisionmakers together."

VSA: Whatever veterans need...

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They also reach out to veterans wherever they can: community events, flyers, personal conversations.

“That’s part of our job: to get the word out,” he says. “You name a place, we’ve probably been there or will be going there.”

A well-utilized service is daily bus runs to the VA hospitals in Albany and Castle Point, in collaboration with the separate nonprofit Sullivan County Veterans Coalition.

But perhaps the most important offering involves a friendly smile and a helping hand. Whatever a veteran needs, the dedicated crew of the VSA will try their utmost to provide them.



VSA Secretary Cheryl Grossfield

That’s not how it was in August 1945, when the VSA sprang into existence less than three days after World War II ended. Back then, the Agency was focused solely on helping veterans fill out forms to receive a small helping of health and financial benefits. The only other task — to drive vets to Albany for medical treatment — was handled by the director himself.

These days, all the VSA staff are highly trained in the myriad technical skills and details necessary to connect veterans with services, benefits and documentation.

Yet the goal is still the same: to give back to the people who gave so much, even if they

don’t think they deserve it.

Because they do.

“We make all these County, State and Federal programs — \$200 billion worth — work for the veterans of Sullivan County,” Crotty proudly remarks. “This is their office and their agency, and they are always welcome here.”

County Attorney: On Statewide board...

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have an Association where matters of great relevance can be discussed frankly among similarly situated colleagues is an extraordinary benefit.”

“I am humbled and gratified by the trust my colleagues have placed in me,” she added, having served on the board since 2016 but having attended CAASNY conferences for the past 20 years. “I look forward to being an even more integral part of CAASNY’s important education and outreach efforts.”

Serving you promptly

At the beginning of 2019, the Medicaid Assistance (MA) Department of the Sullivan County Health & Family Services Division had 150 overdue cases requiring attention (those that have lingered past 30 days or greater).

Leaders of put a plan in place to aggressively reduce that backlog, and by March, it was down to 93. By the end of May, it fell to just 19.

There are currently 14 cases overdue, with only 9 of those being over 45 days. The MA team was able to accomplish this even with a vacant Social Welfare Examiner position.

“While it may be easy to criticize government when it gets something wrong, it’s important to also publicly recognize when we get something right, and we certainly did here,” County Manager Josh Potosek remarked. “Our entire team in that department collaborated on the critically important goal of serving our citizens as quickly and efficiently as possible, and as the numbers prove, they succeeded.”

“Our staff held themselves accountable to the people they serve and to each other,” Health & Family Services Commissioner Joe Todora said. “Director of Temporary Assistance Giselle Steketee and I couldn’t be prouder of these true professionals. Congratulations!”

Introducing 'Move Sullivan'!

If you haven't heard about our new Move Sullivan public transportation service yet, you soon will.

"In the weeks since the August 19 debut of this service, we've received an enormous amount of compliments and thanks, with many folks saying this is very need-



ed," County Manager Josh Potosek related. "Move Sullivan is indeed meant to fill a need for reliable, minimal-cost public transportation in the population, employment and shopping centers of the County."

The approximately 50-mile loop serves Monticello, Liberty, Harris, South Fallsburg, Loch Sheldrake and Hurleyville, with buses running in opposite directions Mondays through Fridays in both local (all 15 stops) and express (select stops) trips, depending on the time of day. Buses can also be flagged down along the route, and drivers are happy to drop off passengers in any safe location between stops.

Paratransit passengers are welcome at any time, although it's recommended they call the main info line, 845-434-4102, ahead of time for prompt service.

Rides currently are FREE, and starting in January 2020, a one-way ride will cost just \$2. For more info and a downloadable brochure, visit www.movesullivan.com. For the latest updates, head to www.facebook.com/movesullivan.



LEGEND

- Route A
- Route A Express
- Route A Stops
- Route A Express Stops
- Villages
- Hamlets



LEGEND

- Route B
- Route B Express
- Route B Stops
- Route B Express Stops
- Villages
- Hamlets



Not the microwave you're thinking of

It's not often you find the president of a company out installing equipment, but that's exactly what Mark Hamilton, president of upstate-based Integrated Systems, was doing earlier this year on the roof of the Government Center. His team was also out at our communications tower next to the new jail, mounting a similar microwave antenna to relay signals amongst the Government Center, Jail and our data center.

This is all to create a backup to our Information Technology Services' hard-wired data transmission system, ensuring better performance and resiliency in critical communications.