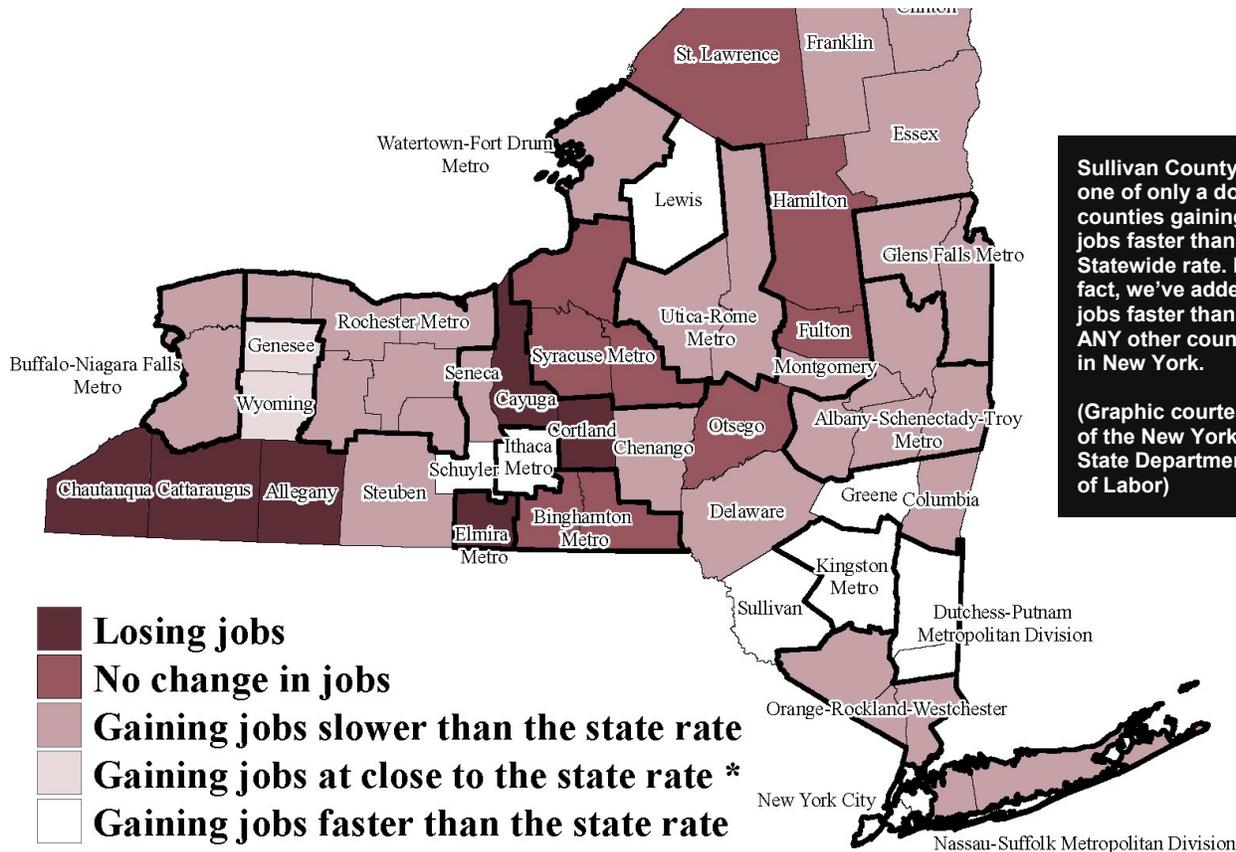


# INSIDE INSIGHTS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Sullivan County Manager's Office

December 2018



Sullivan County is one of only a dozen counties gaining jobs faster than the Statewide rate. In fact, we've added jobs faster than ANY other county in New York.

(Graphic courtesy of the New York State Department of Labor)

## A year of record progress

The year 2018 proved to be the moment Sullivan County has long awaited. Driven by the opening of several major destination resorts and the resurgence of our downtowns, the County has seen record advances in job growth and sales tax proceeds.

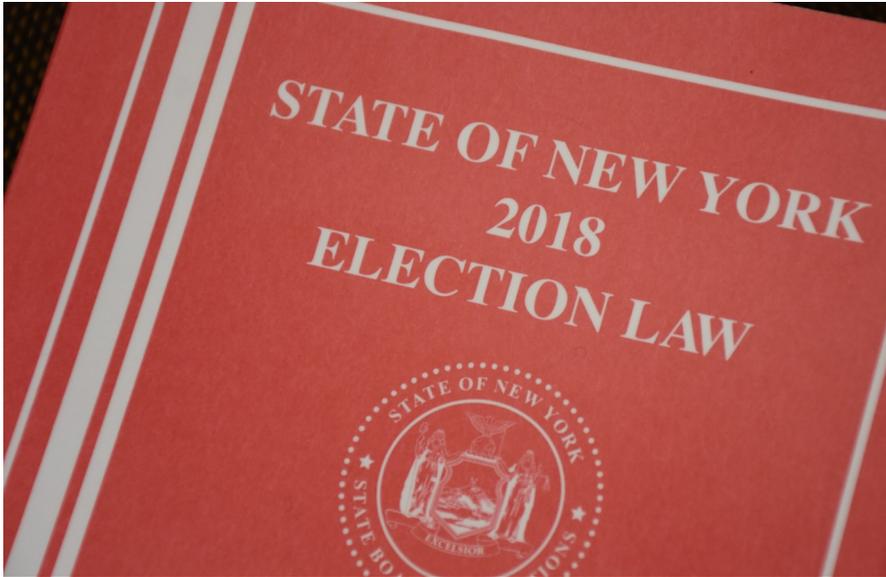
"We are leading the State in jobs, and our unemployment rate is so low that the most pressing need for local businesses is workers," notes County Manager Josh Potosek. "That's far removed from just a few years ago when we flirted with a double-digit unemployment rate and there were far more people willing to work than jobs available."

As 2018 turns into 2019, Sullivan County can boast of the following:

- 12.6% job growth, highest in all of New York State
- \$39.3 million in sales tax revenue, nearly \$6 million more than this time in 2017
- A 4.5% increase in the total taxable assessed value Countywide, leading directly to a reduction in taxes for most property owners

### In This Issue

- The year-round work of the Board of Elections
- Our Woodstock doves take flight
- Budget 2019: Passed
- Get ready to Renaissance!



Known as their “bible,” the annual compendium of New York State Election Law is a vital resource for the Sullivan County Board of Elections.

Departmental Spotlight: Board of Elections

## Democracy in action, every day

Your right to vote is something the Sullivan County Board of Elections (BOE) takes extraordinarily seriously. It’s the very reason the office exists.

“This is democracy at work,” notes Democratic Elections Commissioner Cora Edwards. “It is a daily commitment.”

That commitment lasts all year long every year — not just during the Presidential elections that draw the most attention. Any weekday of the year, people may need to register as voters or candidates, election inspectors may need to be trained, ballots may need to be prepared, questions on rules may need to be answered, equipment may need to be maintained and updated, and information most definitely will need to be dispensed by phone, email and at the BOE’s front desk inside the Government Center in Monticello.

It all culminates on Election Day every November, when the BOE’s half-dozen staffers work harder than ever.

“We start at 5 a.m.,” says Republican Elections Commissioner Lori Benjamin. “And we might not leave until 1 the next morning.”

Half the staff are under Lori, the other half under Cora, in compliance with NYS Election Law. The commissioners are selected by the members of their respective parties, ensuring fairness and impartiality in both perception and practice.

“Our office is set up in a bipartisan manner,” affirms Cora, adding that’s the case in all of New York’s 62 counties. “It’s really important to understand how well that works in New York State.”

“Everything is checks-and-balances here,” adds Lori.

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## A busy year for the BOE

Think the Sullivan County Board of Elections (BOE) only ramps up just prior to Election Day?

As Republican Elections Commissioner Lori Benjamin puts it, “There is no downtime.”

Take a look at the numbers from 2018:

- 46,643 active voters
- 3,078 new voters
- 7 different election dates spanning March to November
- 68 election districts
- 200 election inspectors
- 75 electronic voting machines

What’s ahead in 2019?

- Local village elections in March
- Several likely primaries
- The general election on November 5
- New voting machines
- And a move from the Government Center to 518 Broadway in Monticello, where the files, the staff and the voting machines will be conveniently in one spot

## A budget that reduces taxes? Yep

Weighing in at nearly \$43,000 less than originally proposed, the 2019 Sullivan County Budget was unanimously adopted Dec. 13 by the Legislature.

“Our Division of Management and Budget, which has worked for months to develop a responsible and efficient budget, was able to lower the appropriations for 2019 by \$42,947, bringing the total appropriations in the 2019 Budget to \$235,286,181,” said County Manager Josh Potosek. “The reduction was the result of a savings in our health insurance rates.”

The Budget also is coming with a reduction in taxes, as the County tax rate is anticipated to fall by 1.61% (approximately \$19 per \$100,000 of assessed value), largely due to a significant increase in the overall assessed value of properties Countywide.

The Solid Waste Access Fee, charged on every County tax bill to pay for debt on the now-closed Landfill, will also decline. Commercial payers will see their rate drop from \$300 to \$200 a year, while residential payers will have their \$120 rate fall to \$80 a year.



The Alder Hotel is opening within a few weeks as the newest part of the Resorts World Catskills complex in Monticello.

## From drawing board to reality

Sullivan County has a multitude of major private-sector projects in the works that will transform the region and promise to put it at the top of tourism once again:

- The Kartrite Resort and Indoor Waterpark in Monticello, opening this March
- The Alder Hotel next to Resorts World Catskills Casino, opening next month
- The reborn Eldred Preserve, opening by 2020
- The Chatwal Lodge Bethel in White Lake, opening in the spring of 2020



To meet the expectations of tourists and the demands of employees, a number of smaller hotels and large-scale affordable housing projects are also in the works, mainly around Monticello.



The Kartrite Resort and Indoor Waterpark is aiming for a late-winter/early spring opening. While independent of Resorts World Catskills just down the road, a biking and walking path will connect the two destination resorts.

## 2019 will be the 50th anniversary of Woodstock

Sullivan County has been preparing for months for the 50th anniversary of the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969, and not just for the historic three days in August.

“A committee comprised of legislators Scott Samuelson and Luis Alvarez, Communications Director Dan Hust, Visitors Association President/CEO Roberta Byron-Lockwood and Herb Clark, and Supervisor Dan Sturm and Chris Cunningham of the Town of Bethel have been meeting since early this year to plan for the promotion, logistics and traffic of this once-in-a-lifetime anniversary year,” noted County Manager Josh Potosek.

As part of their efforts:

- Route 17B has been permanently designated “The Woodstock Way”
- A bridge replacement along 17B in Mongaup Valley has been postponed by NYSDOT from 2019 to 2020 to facilitate traffic flow
- Three dozen fiberglass doves will be distributed around the County to celebrate (see story at right)
- Providing for safety at events and along heavily traveled roadways

# Our doves have landed!

Sullivan County and the Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association (SCVA) this month revealed the three dozen fiberglass doves that will find their perches across the County in the weeks ahead.

About 5 feet tall and 7 feet long, each dove is mounted on a metal pole ready to be installed at highly visible locations in virtually every community in Sullivan County. The goal? To celebrate the 50th anniversary year of the Woodstock Music and Art Festival beyond just its hometown of Bethel.

“To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Woodstock festival, we are presenting the 36 doves to our communities throughout the Sullivan Cats-



kills. Each dove will be painted by local artists showcasing the character and history of each community. The trail will entice visitors and local residents to explore the Sullivan Catskills and learn the stories that makes us a distinctive designation to visit and live,” stated Roberta Byron-Lockwood, President/CEO of the Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association. “It will be also be an economic engine that will stimulate tourism spending in our local towns, villages and hamlets.”

“These doves are meant to last far beyond 2019, to definitively mark Sullivan County not just as the home of Woodstock, but of peaceful surroundings, of a passion for nature, of a love of music,” noted Sullivan County Legislature Chairman Luis Alvarez. “They will be a visible reminder of our legacy, our hopes, our dreams and our future.”

In support of this effort, Sullivan Renaissance has announced a special grant program to aid communities in bringing life and color to their doves. These grants may be used for expenses related to landscaping and artist fees.

Design guidelines for the painting of the doves – emphasizing the colors and themes of the 1960s – have been developed by the Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association, and a Dove Trail Planning Committee will begin reviewing proposals in January. For more information, contact the SCVA at 845-747-4449 or email [rbl@scva.net](mailto:rbl@scva.net).

# BOE: Preserving your rights...

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But don't get the wrong idea: the Board of Elections is not a rancorous place. On the occasion when the commissioners disagree (for which there are procedures in place), the atmosphere does not turn cold.

"We're a 'work family'," nods Lori. "This is a well-run office, and I am very, very proud of the staff."

A passion for politics unites the commissioners. Lori, for example, has been involved with the County and Town of Thompson Republican committees for well over 20 years, still serving on both.

"I've always enjoyed the elections and the politics," she acknowledges, recalling a pivotal introduction to the BOE years ago. "I worked closely with [former BOE Commissioner] Fran Thalmann and learned a small amount of the inner workings of the office."

Having volunteered on State, Federal and Town of Liberty campaigns, Cora became more involved in local politics in 2005, and successfully ran for District 6 County Legislator in 2011. She 's currently a member of the Town of Liberty and Sullivan County Democratic committees.

"I got a lot of guidance from the BOE team that was here then: Honora Wohl, Ann Prusinski, and Faith Kaplan. They really provided a tremendous amount of support," she remembers. "And as a legislator, it became obvious to me how important every voter is in determining the kind of government we have."

Indeed, at the local level, voters have incredible power to affect their future quality of life.

"If more people understood that," muses Cora, "I think we'd have a higher turnout."

Regardless of how many voters actually take the time to vote, the Board of Elections is constantly ready to meet their needs and protect their rights. It's as much a public mandate as a legal one.

"Elections have become much more of a national conversation in regard to how they are run," notes Cora.

"Our counter has been five deep a lot of times," adds Lori, who's particularly proud to note that BOE's crew reported the full County results of this year's midterm elections to the State by 10:30 p.m. — just an hour and a half after polls closed. "That was a watershed moment."

Lori's deputy, Pam Murran, and Cora's deputy, Deanna Rajs, also actually program the ballots for the electronic voting machines — even recording names and instructions in both English and Spanish for the visually impaired.

"They've done a fabulous job," Lori affirms. "They give their all."

That's the kind of service the staff gives to anyone who walks in the door at the Government Center, calls 845-807-0400 or emails [SCBOE@co.sullivan.ny.us](mailto:SCBOE@co.sullivan.ny.us). For, as Cora points out, "every year is an election year."

## Be a part of our Renaissance!

"Sullivan Renaissance has become an indispensable part of the fabric of Sullivan County," says County Manager Josh Potosek, "and I encourage everyone to volunteer to make our communities look as good as they can be in 2019."

With a new grant year quickly approaching, Renaissance Executive Director Denise



Frangipane took a few moments to answer questions...

### How long has Sullivan Renaissance been in service and who started it?

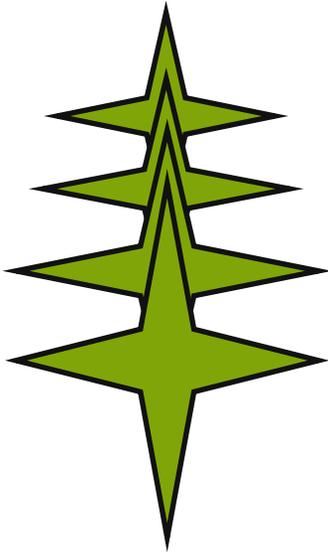
Sullivan Renaissance was founded in 2000 by Sandra Gerry, who was inspired by her experience visiting a small community abroad where the residents had joined together to beautify their neighborhood. Upon her return she met with Gerry Foundation staff to work out the details.

### In what way does Renaissance utilize its funding?

Sullivan Renaissance invests in the community through grants and resources that

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# Yes, Virginia, we recycle trees



The Sullivan County Department of Solid Waste & Recycling is pleased to announce that it will once again accept retired Christmas trees at no charge from Sullivan County residents, businesses and visitors at the end of this Holiday season.

For individuals with access to back yards and open spaces, strategically-placed, spent Christmas trees offer welcome cover during the winter months for birds and wildlife.

Residents, businesses and visitors with limited access to open space, however, are encouraged to take their trees to any Sullivan County Recycling & Transfer Station for FREE disposal.

For additional information about waste reduction strategies, reuse and recycling, please contact the Sullivan County Department of Solid Waste & Recycling at 845-807-0290. Check out online Materials Management resources at [sullivanny.us/Departments/SolidWasteRecycling](http://sullivanny.us/Departments/SolidWasteRecycling).

## Renaissance...

Continued from page 5

support volunteer efforts to realize a vision for their community. Funds are administered through a variety of organizations, schools, churches, municipalities, as well as businesses.

**What is the best-kept secret or fun fact about Renaissance that not everyone knows?**

We are so much more than flowers! Even at that, flowers turned out to be a way for community members to come together around something that was non-political and without controversy. You would be amazed at the types of meaningful conversations that happen in this neutral space of a community park or community garden.



The Livingston Manor Concert Band was one of the largest groups to visit the Government Center during this year's Holiday Concert Series.

## Thank you, one and all!

Once again, scores of talented Sullivan County young people gathered at the Government Center in Monticello to entertain and enthrall employees and visitors with a series of Holiday Concerts. Virtually every school district, plus Nesin Cultural Arts and the Center for Discovery, ensured the sounds of the season echoed throughout the hallways. To each and every participant, thank you for truly "making the season bright!"



*Get Ready to Renaissance!*

Join Renaissance at its Winter Symposium on Jan. 9 at 5:30 p.m. at the CVI Building in Ferndale! To register, call 845-295-2445 or visit [SullivanRenaissance.org/seminar](http://SullivanRenaissance.org/seminar).