



181st ERIE COUNTY FAIR
The Erie County Fair is Back!
 August 11-22, 2021
 Look for Erie County Fair Special Offers throughout this week's issue!

County Health and Schools To Work On Reopening Plans

With the announcement that New York State will not enforce any requirements on school districts in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Erie County Department of Health is reaching out to county schools to assist in guideline planning.

At the same time, some districts like Iroquois Central are also working on individual plans based on what fits the district.

"I will be moving forward with designing a plan for instruction in September for Iroquois based on New York State's statement that local school districts must make their own decisions," Superintendent Douglas Scofield said in notice to district residents last week. "The Governor's office and New York State Department of Health have publicly stated that they will not be issuing guidance to govern the opening of schools next month. Their position on this is a shock after how last school year was handled by both organizations."

School districts had been working on reopening plans for the fall, with the idea to return students to a 5-day a week, full schedule setting. There were still questions about whether any mask mandates would be in place, as well as social distancing requirements. While some work was underway, there was an expectation that the state would release guidelines. But last week, the state Department of Health said it would not issue any guidelines.

"With the end of the state disaster emergency on June 25, 2021, school districts are reestablished as the controlling entity for schools," State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said. "Schools and school districts should develop plans to open in-person in the fall as safely as possible, and I recommend following guidance from the CDC and local health departments."

Soon after, Erie County Department of Health issued its own state-

ment saying it would work with school districts to gather feedback on safety guidelines for the new school year.

"This is a welcome opportunity for [county health department] and schools to move forward together with practices that reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission in school settings, and maximize student and staff time within classrooms and extracurricular activities," said Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale Burstein in a news release. "The school leaders' insights are valuable for our school team to hear, and we discussed use of face masks, physical distancing, return to school protocols, transportation and lunch settings."

Her department will review this feedback as it compiles COVID-19 recommendations for K-12 school settings for this upcoming school year. ECDOH will also consider recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in developing that guidance.

Burstein's department noted it would work to get the recommendations in place soon to help districts plan for the fall.

In his message to the district, Scofield said he would meet with the Iroquois administrative team to finish the school's safety plan, which he would then send out to the district. He expects it to be done by the end of this week, and will host a virtual town hall meeting the week of Aug. 16 to answer questions on the topic.

"During this time, please refrain from listening to any rumors or believing unofficial social media postings," Scofield said in his report. "Additionally, please remember that your habits outside of school will directly affect what happens during September. You are the difference, and we will be counting on you."



Photo by Renea Lauck

It was a good evening for families to get out and have fun while also learning more about the mission of ITAC in the community.

Ice Cream and ITAC Brings People Together in Town Hall Meeting

by Renea Lauck
 Freelance Reporter

ITAC, It Takes a Community Drug and Alcohol Coalition, has a mission to increase awareness of substance use within the community and enhance communication between parents, youth, educators and residents while utilizing data to drive prevention efforts, promote education and provide access to resources.

ITAC held a town hall meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 3 at the Elma Village Green Park, aligning with its mission of providing prevention, education and communication. The event attracted over 200 people from surrounding communities. With generous donations from the community and ITAC fundraising efforts, many families were provided with free school supply bags and ice cream from The Pink Cow Ice Cream.

The evening included kid-friendly activities including a ropes course led by the National Guard and a "Drug Free Looks Like Me" picture contest. Presentations by John Bennett, the Kids Escaping Drugs Face-2-Face Program Director, shared current substance use trends. Mark Sterlace, President of ITAC, and Interim ITAC Program Director Bette Dehr shared focus group data. A mini health fair with repre-



Photo by Renea Lauck

Reese Kinal from the Elma Fire Department gives away information and gifts supporting the fire company at the ITAC event.

representatives from Women's Health and the community. This event was an opportunity for the community to come together and celebrate each person while embracing a healthy lifestyle. Along with a little scoop of ice cream to enhance the enjoyment.

Elma Farm Continues Decades-Long Work at Local Market

by Rick Ohler
 Columnist

A funny thing happened on the way to putting this article together. In discussing newspaper stories, I suggested that we might profile some of the long-time, local vendors at the East Aurora Farmers' Market, now in its 43rd season.

I started with the story from a couple of weeks ago about Roxanne McCoy and her family, owners of Lilies of the Field. The West Falls cutflower farm has been a popular mainstay at the market for 26 years. Then I asked Sandy Starbrite, market manager, who else I should think about. She told me that vendor Jerry Miller's father had been with the farmer-run organization since its beginning in 1978. I visited with Jerry and his granddaughter Grace Miller at their stand last Saturday and arranged to meet Jerry at his 20-acre Clinton Street farm in Elma. Little did I suspect that Frank Cerny, retired professor, pastor and founder of the Rural Outreach Center, would become a part of the story.

Jerry Miller splits his time between the greenhouses and two acres of gardens where he grows vegetables, mums and other flowers that his band of loyal customers has been enjoying for 43 years. It's a lot of work for him and a few helpers, but it's a life he chose in his 40s. No, he didn't start out to be a farmer, to follow in the family tradition. Not by a long shot.

"My dad and mom began farming here in 1976, coming over from Gardenville-Ebenezer area of West Seneca. My grandparents had a Red & White grocery store in Gardenville

where I worked as a kid. The Clinton Street farm was a kind of sustainable arrangement for Mom and Dad, where they grew most of what they needed, and had some leftover to sell. They had a couple of beef cattle, chickens and some vegetables, although not to the extent that we do now.

"I was a data center manager at M&T Bank and Goldome, and along about the mid-1980s, I decided I was tired of the office politics, tired of working just for a paycheck and tired of putting on a suit every day and driving into the city. My brother, who was working for Frey's Meats at the time, and I approached Mom and Dad and began to run the place in 1987."

The land has been farmed "since forever," said Jerry. It was part of the Buffum, Phillips and Neuendorf acreage that covered a good bit of northern Elma along Buffalo Creek. The soil, at least to this amateur gardener, looks gorgeous.

"It drains great," he agrees. "It can rain in the morning and by afternoon you can be on it working."

When Jerry and his brother were trying to decide what crops would work best, they enlisted the help of Cornell Cooperative Extension Agent Walter Nelson. "Walter told us that there was a lot more sex in flowers than vegetables," he said with his trademark laconic chuckle, "so that's the way we went." They grew all kinds of annuals and gradually specialized in poinsettias and fall chrysanthemums. Already his main greenhouses are filling with rooted cuttings of poinsettias a couple of inches tall.

"How many will you sell?" the naive inter-



Photo by Marty Wangelin

Jerry Miller and Ellen Moomaw exchange pleasantries at the Miller Farms tent at the East Aurora Farmers' Market.

viewer asked. "All of 'em, I hope," he said with a straight face. That's the kind of guy he is. Then he relented and added, "We sell directly to churches, mostly. About 500 hangin' baskets and 5,000 pots. Churches know to call us and put in an order. We cut out the middle man a few years ago, because with wholesaling it was tough to make a living."

Gradually, Miller has added more vegetables, which he grows inside a large plot protected, theoretically, by a deer fence that is electrified by solar power. His regulars at the

farmers' market will know that his produce is the best: squash, kohlrabi, melons, beans, two kinds of kale, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, beets—you name it. And a walk in those gardens with its crumbly, friable, fertile soil, which he amends with tons of organic chicken manure from the Kreher Egg Farms, helps you understand why. While Miller Farm isn't certified organic, Jerry uses non-chemical, integrated pest management techniques to control problems.

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