

ERIE COUNTY

connection

Winter 2016



WHAT'S INSIDE

POETRY ABOUNDS

PAGE 1, 6 Meet Erie County's new Poet Laureate.

DOWNHILLS **PAGE 2**

Discover the best places to sled throughout the County.

WHAT'S NEW **PAGE 3**

Learn what's new in Erie County offices.

REVERSE IT **PAGE 4**

Welcome to the new Reverse 911 system.

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

PAGE 4 Foster children receive holiday cheer.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT **PAGE 5**

Meet Faith Houghton, who is a corrections officer at the Erie County Prison.

DISTANCE THROW

PAGE 7 IT Director Erick Friedman represented the U.S. in Master Outdoor Championship.

NEW POET LAUREATE CHOSEN FOR ERIE COUNTY

Marisa Moks-Unger is a published poet, a former teacher, a current small-business owner, and an advocate for writers. Now, she has a new title: Erie County Poet Laureate for 2016-17.

The city of Erie resident was chosen from among 12 applicants for the honor in August, and she has spent the fall working to implement her Erie County Poetry Project, which encourages residents to write

and to engage in poetry as an art form.

Erie County has sponsored the Poet Laureate initiative since 2009, in cooperation with Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Gannon University, Mercyhurst University and Penn State Behrend. Moks-Unger, the county's fifth Poet Laureate, took a moment to answer some questions about the title, her goals for her Poetry Project and her experience as a writer.

What does the title of Erie County Poet Laureate mean to you, both professionally and personally?

Professionally, I am honored to hold this title and do everything I can to help promote literacy and the interest of poetry in the forms it is written, spoken, and read. I am using my business background in communications and education to put the poet laureate project together. To do this work, I am weaving from past experiences of being a creative writing workshop leader, a secondary teacher and a photojournalist. Assisting, encouraging and enticing over a quarter-million people in our county



CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Snow much fun IN ERIE COUNTY

Do you have fond memories of careening down hills at a breakneck speed? Would you like to make the most out of what is projected to be a very snowy winter season?

If so, we have some tips for you. We asked around to find the biggest, the best and the

most beloved sledding hill throughout Erie County. So put on your snow pants, put some hot cocoa in a thermos and head out into the winter wonderland that we call Erie County.

And don't forget to bring along your snow tubes and toboggans.

NORTH EAST

Gravel Pit Park: Located off of Route 20, Gravel Pit has one huge hill and smaller hills throughout.

LAWRENCE PARK

Lawrence Park Golf Club: The golf course, which is on East Lake Road, has a few hills that are perfect for sledding.

HARBORCREEK

Penn State Behrend campus: Behrend, which is located off of the Bayfront Connector at Station Road, has many fantastic hills to explore. The most popular is behind the Prischak Science Building.

EDINBORO

Culbertson Hills Golf Resort: Located in the center of Edinboro, off of Plum Street, is the spot in the Boro to go sledding in the winter.

CITY OF ERIE

Frontier Park: Frontier Park, located on Eighth street near the Bayfront Parkway, has been a favorite sledding spot of city residents for decades.

MILLCREEK

Chestnut Hill Elementary School: The school, located on West 54th Street, has some great rolling hills to sled down.

Erie Golf Club: The sledding hill at the golf course is off of Old Zuck Road and has been a favorite for generations.

GIRARD

Girard Borough Park: The best place to sled in Girard is the Girard Borough Park, which is located at Lake Street and Park Drive.

FAIRVIEW

Pleasant Ridge Park: If you want some good hills in Fairview, Pleasant Ridge Park is the place go to. It is located on Barker Road.



WHAT'S NEW IN ERIE COUNTY

Lactation Room

Nursing mothers now have a cozy, welcoming room of their own at the Erie County Courthouse.

Thanks to a mini-grant from the Erie County Department of Health, a private room on the ground floor of the courthouse has been designated as a lactation room for county employees.

The room has been outfitted with nursing mothers in mind - including a comfortable chair, a fan, a table, a small refrigerator and other supplies.

The courthouse is among other Erie County facilities, including the Department of Human Services and the Erie County Prison, that have received mini-grants to create lactation spaces.

The mini-grants were distributed through the Erie County Department of Health's award-winning "Pumped for Work" program, funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant. Over the past two years, ECDH awarded 17 mini-grants, totaling more than \$72,000, to businesses, organizations and nonprofits in Erie County.

County employees interested in using the room should contact Danielle Weaver in the Human Resources department.



Dental Care

The Erie County Department of Health is giving Erie County residents something to smile about. In October, ECDH launched its Growing Smiles of Erie County program, which provides dental care, such as cleanings and other treatments, as well as oral hygiene education to residents who do not have access to regular dental care. The program saw 20 patients in the clinic's first month and is at about 75 percent capacity. The program also refers patients to partnering dental clinics and provides home visits to pregnant women and first-time mothers.

Preserving Culture

What do you picture when you think of Erie County's cultural heritage? Maybe it's the Eagle Hotel in Waterford. Or the string of ethnic festivals that mark our summers. Or

the shipwrecks that dot our harbors. The Erie County Department of Planning wants to know what you think the priorities should be for a new Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan. The Department of Planning is working with Preservation Erie to create and set forth policies and strategies to preserve and maintain our cultural and historic resources. Weigh in on our cultural priorities in an online survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ErieCoCHP>.

Library Upgrades

The Erie County Public Library is gearing up for a new circulation system that will expand service to patrons. The new, integrated Polaris software system, which is set to debut in January, will manage circulation data for the library's branches. For the library staff, the new system promises to better integrate all library

facilities. For patrons, the system will be apparent in new services like text messaging options and a new look for the library's online catalog.

Going Green

Calling all Greenways grant applicants! The Erie County Department of Planning is opening the 2017 Erie County Greenways Grant round. The grant program provides funding for projects that improve the quality of life in the county, through preservation of our natural and recreational resources. To date, the program has awarded nearly \$850,000 for public resources in Erie County. For more information on the program and the new grant round, visit <http://www.eriecountypa.gov/county-services/county-offices/planning-department/grant-programs/erie-county-greenways-program.aspx>.

REVERSE

911

PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT HAS NEW INFORMATION TOOL

If you own a cell phone, Erie County's Department of Public Safety has news for you: You must register your number if you want to receive a notification call in the event of an emergency.

During a major emergency – such as inclement weather, a natural disaster or a hazardous materials incident – Public Safety will notify affected residents through the Emergency Notification Call-Out System, known as Reverse 911. Landline residents are already enrolled in the system, but those who use other systems – cell phones, Voice over Internet Protocol systems, and TTY/TDD devices – must register their numbers in order to receive the notifications.

Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper and Public Safety Director John Grappy in November launched an informational campaign to educate Erie County residents about the system, and the need

to register – which is especially important given the increased use of cell phones.

“Nearly half of Americans now rely solely on a cell phone,” Dahlkemper said. “So this is extremely important to make sure that all of our Erie County residents – including those who don't use a landline – receive a notification in the event of an emergency.”

Public Safety officials are also working to inform residents about what to expect from an emergency notification call. The calls come from an out-of-state phone number and often start with an electronic voice, which might be mistaken for a robocall or telemarketer. It is important for residents to remain on the line to hear the information in the entire message, Grappy said.

For more information about the Reverse 911 system or to register your cell phone, VoIP or TTY/TDD number, go to www.eriecountypa.gov.



COUNTY EMPLOYEES MAKE THE HOLIDAY GREAT

Erie County employees from all branches and departments came together this season to “adopt” more than 400 children and purchase gifts for them this December. The project was the brain-child of a group of Ice House graduates, who joined forces with the staff at OCY. OCY provided the project coordinators with the ages and genders of 441 children who are in out-of-home care throughout Erie County. Different locations put up trees and wreaths covered in tags representing each child, and one by one every single child was chosen and gifts purchased, wrapped and delivered to OCY to be distributed to the children by their caseworkers. Thank you to all of the Erie County employees who participated in this meaningful project.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



MEET FAITH HOUGHTON

Q What is your job title, what does your job entail and why do you enjoy it?

A My job title is a Corrections Lieutenant. I am a first line supervisor that oversees the daily operations of the prison. I have worked for the Department of Corrections since 2002, and to this day, there is always something new and different going on that makes the job enjoyable.

Q If you had to pick another job to start doing tomorrow, what would it be?

A I would become a schoolteacher if I had to pick another job.

Q What do you do in your free time to relax and recharge?

A I play volleyball all year round on different leagues and play softball in the summer. The activity helps relieve stress and helps me keep in shape.

Q What is your biggest pet peeve?

A My biggest pet peeve is when I am driving and cars in front of me do not use turn signals. You would be surprised at how often that happens!

Q If you won the lottery, what would be the first thing you would spend the money on?

A The practical response of course would be to pay off my mortgage and any credit card debt. However, first I would take my family (husband and 2 children) on a European cruise sparing no expense!

Q What is your favorite type of music? Genre, style, decade?

A My favorite music comes from the '80s and '90s. I like all of the pop and R&B music from that era.

Q What are three things left on your bucket list?

A Skydiving, a vacation in England and to meet the players from the Baltimore Ravens and get autographs.

Q What is the last movie you saw, and what did you think of it?

A "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them". The movie had a good storyline and was very enjoyable.

Q If you could eat only one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?

A Surf and Turf! Maine Lobster Tail with lots of butter, Filet Mignon, Garlic Mashed Potatoes, and Peanut Butter Cheesecake. Yummy!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to see poetry as an art form, I find to be a great task. Personally, I am grateful for the opportunity to present poetry as a therapeutic medium to helping our citizens process their narratives and challenge them to re-write the portions that they wish to change. I have done this work myself. And as one heals oneself, then she or he is able to be more present to helping others to do the same.

As Poet Laureate, what are some of the goals you hope to accomplish in the county? I am very interested in making poetry appreciation and study an equitable experience in Erie County. By that I mean that I am working to involve as many people in my Erie County Poetry Project, *Picture This: Residents Respond by Writing*. There have been three writing workshops on art, including popular/cultural art, fine art and photography. From the workshops three videos will be created. These videos will be independent study for those who could not attend the open workshops in the fall of 2016 at Radius CoWork. From the workshops/video experiences, people will create poems and prose-poems, which in turn can be submitted to a regional anthology. Finally, the anthology will have multiple release parties throughout Erie County to, again, involve as many people as possible in poetry as an art form.

Is there anything about Erie County - scenery, community, culture, etc. - that has inspired your work? Erie is a cross-roads of culture. We are in the epicenter of the arts. Consider our geographical location. We are about 2 hours away from Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. We sit four hours away from Detroit and Toronto. And even further, we are eight hours from Chicago and NYC. So we have both a East Coast and Midwestern influences here. Furthermore, we live in the Great Lakes Region, which encompasses shared borders with Canada. As a child and now as an adult, I spend a lot of time outdoors - especially at Presque Isle. I bike, swim, hike, walk and picnic with loved ones on our shores. It holds many childhood memories of simpler times. Also, Erie's open-heart ways towards immigrants, especially refugees, has always had an impact on me and my writing. Finally, I was raised Roman Catholic and a lot of symbolism/imagery comes from that upbringing. All of these things play into my work.

Veneration

By Marisa Moks-Unger

On Good Fridays gone by
Dad took us to noon mass
stood us in line
one by one we kissed
the foot of the cross
with the rest of the believers.
And again we stood in line to get
a nail for our pockets
to remember those
pierced into Christ.

Then, home, for more
reflection of the Word.
No radio, no TV, no play
until sometime after 3.
But he found reflection,
in the sacred act of spade
to soil. Digging dirt to
add a sapling to the yard.
After, he'd sip a Schlitz, his
head bent in homage to the tree.

- Midwestern Gothic Literary Magazine,
Fall 2014

What advice would you give to any new writers - whether those interested in a career or simply a hobby?

Every time you sit down to write anything from a simple email to a book, you begin with a fresh start. Write drafts as quickly as possible without regard to spelling, usage, punctuation or grammar to get the ideas down. The Beat poet Allen Ginsberg famously noted: "First Words. Best Words." After you get as much down as possible, think of the project and audience. Focus on the audience. What are their desires and needs? Then, write quickly in a tried and true format using Burke's pentad: Have an introduction, three supporting points and a closing. Add more points if you wish, but keep the writing tight and to the point. Shorter pieces are in more demand. And whether you are doing the writing for profit or for personal reflection, take a moment to consider the power of your words. Consider writing editorials and opinion pieces - most are 200 words or less. Consider writing poetry as a form of activism and reading at open mics throughout the region. Regarding poems and essays, go to area critique groups to polish your work. Then submit your work frequently to publications you read on a regular basis. Finally, go back and be willing to start, again, as a beginner.

COUNTY IT DIRECTOR IS A MASTER AT JAVELIN



Erick Friedman, Erie County's information technology director, took his javelin skills all the way to Australia this October. This past summer, Friedman qualified for the World Masters Athletic Championships by throwing a toss of 167 feet and 7 inches. That toss named him the best male javelin thrower in his age division for the U.S. Track and Field Association's Master Outdoor Championships. He traveled to Perth, Australia, to compete for his division's gold medal.

Friedman spent eight months training for his appearance at the Western Australia Athletics Stadium.

He lost 7 percent of his body fat and built 15 pounds of muscle. Then he traveled a grueling three days to arrive in Perth, where he was the sole American to compete in his division.

Friedman finished 5th in the world

with a distance of 49 meters at the end of the 12-day meet. He said that it was an amazing experience and that he is looking forward to the next world championships, which will be held in Spain in 2018.