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Date: May 30, 2025

Erie County Wraps Up Older Americans Month with Education, Advocacy, and Empowerment

Erie County, NY — As Older Americans Month comes to a close, Erie County Senior Services celebrates a powerful May filled with education, advocacy, and community engagement — all designed to uplift older adults and strengthen the essential systems that support them.

Throughout the month, our educational social media campaign spotlighted a variety of crucial topics:

- **Healthy Habits:** We encouraged regular screenings and lifestyle choices that help older adults stay independent, energized, and ready for the moments that matter.
- **Staying Active:** We celebrated National Fitness Month with features on our Club 99 FREE Fitness Program, thanks in part to amazing volunteer instructors like Rose at the Lancaster Senior Center. We also began our Senior Hiking Club in collaboration with Erie County Parks.
- **Mental Health Matters:** In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, we tackled the stigma surrounding aging and mental health, reminding our community that depression, anxiety, and loneliness are real — and treatable. Caring for your mind is just as vital as caring for your body.
- **Intergenerational Care:** We recognized the 131,000 grandparents in New York raising their grandchildren and celebrated the countless older adults providing love and guidance across generations.

Advocacy in Action

We elevated urgent advocacy efforts to defend the programs older adults rely on most:

- Partnering with Feeding New York State, we urged the public to oppose potential cuts to SNAP — a move that would devastate families, strain local food banks, and increase pressure on state resources.
- We prepared a public education alert, ready to push critical updates by phone and text in the face of looming funding threats.
- We educated the public on what's at stake: home-delivered meals, transportation services, in-home support, caregiver resources, and wellness programs — lifelines that enable older adults to age with dignity.
- To support caregivers, we also hosted a free mindfulness workshop, offering tools to manage stress and create moments of peace.

Breaking Taboos and Telling Stories

We ended the month with an eye-opening and empowering event: [“Let’s Talk About Sex”](#) — a candid conversation on sexuality and intimacy in later life. Held both in person and via livestream, this event broke barriers and underscored the message that sexual health, consent, and pleasure are vital aspects of aging well.

But perhaps the most powerful part of the month came from the stories shared by older adults in our community. We were honored to feature interviews with six remarkable Erie County residents whose lives and legacies are as inspiring as they are diverse:

- [Sharen Trembath](#) transformed grassroots volunteer efforts in the Town of Evans into what is now Harmonia Collaborative Care, serving over 40 years as a medical assistant. A fierce environmental advocate known as the “Beach Queen,” she inspired local and national beach cleanup movements.
- [Chalma Warmley](#), a gifted musician and actor, shared his love of the arts through decades of work at the African American Cultural Center, mentoring youth and appearing in productions like *Marshall* with Chadwick Boseman.
- [Louise Lipton](#), a retired teacher and longtime community advocate, exemplifies the value of lifelong service. Once a Meals on Wheels volunteer and now a recipient, she champions older adults’ voices in shaping local decisions.
- [Second Lieutenant Jacob Cooper](#), 101, served as a WWII fighter pilot with the 493rd Squadron, flying 98 combat missions. A pillar in the veteran community, he is the last living member of his squadron and a proud symbol of dedication and resilience.
- [Casimiro Rodriguez](#), founder of the Hispanic Heritage Council, has spent decades empowering the Latino community in Erie County, fostering unity through cultural preservation and advocacy.
- [Valerie Staats](#) lovingly cares for her wife Shelley, who lives with Alzheimer’s. As we transition into Pride Month, their enduring bond reminds us that love, strength, and caregiving transcend every barrier.

“Our goal this month was to honor older adults with more than just recognition — we wanted to create change,” said **Randy Hoak, Commissioner of Senior Services**. “By bringing attention to mental health, fitness, nutrition, caregiving, and even sexuality, we’re helping redefine what it means to grow older in our community.”

As Older Americans Month concludes, Erie County Senior Services remains deeply committed to advocacy, education, and empowerment year-round. We invite residents, partners, and policymakers to carry this momentum forward — because aging isn’t a problem to solve, but a journey to support.

For more information, visit erie.gov/seniorservices.