

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Aislyn McQueen | External Relations Assistant

Aislyn.mcqueen@erie.gov

September 23, 2025

Erie County Department for the Aging Celebrates Healthy Aging Month by Spotlighting Staff and Their Service to Older Adults

Erie County, NY – The Erie County Department for the Aging is proud to join the national celebration of Healthy Aging Month, shining a spotlight on the importance of living well at every stage of life. Throughout September, the department showcased members of its dedicated staff through a special video series, recognizing their vital work in ensuring that older adults across Erie County have the resources, support, and care they need to thrive.

Nutrition for Healthy Aging

The series began with **Erin Mahoney, Nutrition Coordinator**, who oversees approximately 10 of the department's congregate dining sites. The Stay Fit Dining Program offers hot, nutritious meals weekday afternoons at 40 locations countywide, with only a suggested confidential contribution.

For many participants, these meals are more than just food on a plate — they're a daily opportunity for nourishment, social connection, and community. At each site, Mahoney ensures food quality, safe serving techniques, and kitchen cleanliness. She also leads nutrition education workshops such as *Cooking with SASS (Smart and Simple Sustenance)*, which features live demonstrations of healthy, easy-to-make recipes that can be prepared using simple appliances.

By giving older adults the confidence to cook for themselves and the chance to share meals with neighbors, Mahoney's work helps people stay independent and engaged. In addition, the Department's partnership with FeedMore WNY ensures meals are not only safe but also of the highest quality, proving that healthy food can be both accessible and enjoyable.

"Food has a profound impact on our health," said Mahoney. "Our nutrition team works hard to make sure that older adults across Erie County can access the meals and resources they need to eat well and live well."

Fitness and Movement

In the area of physical wellness, the department highlighted **Julie Ruzsala, Fitness Trainer**, who leads the Club 99 Exercise Program. Originally created by local fitness icon Richard Derwald, Club 99 was designed to provide older adults with a safe, adaptable fitness routine for every level of mobility.

Club 99 is more than just an exercise class — it's a community where older adults build strength, regain confidence in their bodies, and experience the joy of moving together. The program incorporates bodyweight movements, chair exercises, and resistance band training, and has improved the strength, balance, and mobility of thousands of participants. Club 99 is now offered at more than 20 locations throughout Erie County.

Ruszala also recently introduced Club 99 Dance, a line dancing program that turns exercise into a celebration. Currently offered at four locations, the program is rapidly expanding. Participants not only get a workout, but also form friendships, reduce stress, and discover that healthy aging can be fun. The dancers even showcased their hard work with a spirited performance at a Buffalo Bisons game, inspiring others with their energy and proving that staying active adds joy to life at any age.

Supporting Independence and Well-Being

Equally essential to healthy aging is the work of the department's **case management team**, which helps older adults maintain independence, dignity, and quality of life. These professionals connect residents with community resources, promote healthy habits, and provide guidance and advocacy when needed.

Among them is **Senior Case Manager Rodtrice Matthews**, who was featured for her leadership and community impact. Rodtrice manages case managers, ensures compliance with state regulations, and provides training and support for contracted agencies that extend the department's reach across Erie County. She also maintains her own caseload, conducting service monitoring calls to make sure clients receive the highest quality of care.

For many older adults, a call from Rodtrice or her team can mean the difference between feeling overwhelmed and feeling supported. Their work helps ensure that no one slips through the cracks and that every individual has the chance to age with dignity, security, and peace of mind.

Other Programs That Build Connection

Alongside nutrition, fitness, and case management, the department also supports innovative programs that help combat **social isolation** — one of the greatest barriers to healthy aging.

- **University Express** provides free, engaging educational courses on topics ranging from history and culture to current events and personal finance. These classes not only keep minds active but also bring older adults together to learn, share, and connect.
- **RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Program)** creates opportunities for older adults to give back to their community through meaningful volunteer work. Participants find purpose, build friendships, and make a tangible difference across Erie County.

Together, these programs strengthen both mind and spirit, showing that staying connected and involved is just as important to healthy aging as good nutrition and physical activity.

“Our team works tirelessly to ensure older adults in our community not only receive the services they need, but also feel supported, respected, and valued,” said **Randall Hoak, Commissioner of the Department for the Aging**. “Healthy Aging Month is the perfect opportunity to celebrate their passion and dedication.”

By celebrating both the principles of healthy aging and the dedicated staff who make it possible, the Erie County Department for the Aging reaffirms its commitment to helping residents live healthier, fuller, and more connected lives at every age. These programs don’t just provide services — they build confidence, foster friendships, and create opportunities for older adults to thrive.