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Erie County Department for the Aging

ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ INSTRUCTS FIRST CLASS OF THE 2025 FALL SEMESTER OF UNIVERSITY EXPRESS LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAM

ERIE COUNTY, NY – The Erie County Department for the Aging's University Express program launched its Fall 2025 semester today at the Amherst Senior Center with a special class taught by Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. His presentation, titled *"How FDR's 'Four Freedoms' Principles Still Apply in Our Country and World Today"*, drew an engaged audience of over 30 older adults from all over Erie County.

"Our main focus is to encourage older adults to stay healthy and connected. Each semester more and more people join University Express. We're proud of how this program's growing, and we're really thankful for the seniors, the volunteers, and our partners that support us" said **Randall Hoak, Commissioner of Department for the Aging**.

The University Express program offers free in-person and virtual classes for adults 50 and older at locations throughout Erie County. Led by volunteer instructors from across the community, these classes cover a wide range of topics and give participants the chance to stay mentally engaged, socially connected, and active in their daily routines. Each semester, the program continues to grow in popularity, and this fall it's offering more than 400 classes on subjects like current affairs, history, humanities, finance, and medicine. There's no homework or testing—just lively discussion and learning among peers.

County Executive Poloncarz captivated attendees with an in-depth look at the historical context of FDR's famous "Four Freedoms" speech, explaining how the United States, facing challenges like the Great Depression and rising global tensions in the early 1940s, needed strong leadership. He delved into the four freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—emphasizing how FDR's vision remains relevant in today's world. Following the presentation, a lively Q&A session allowed the audience to further engage with the topic and its application to modern-day issues.

"FDR's Four Freedoms speech resonates as much today as it did the day he delivered it, speaking to the hopes and dreams of all Americans and underscoring the resiliency of our country, overcoming challenges today as it did decades ago. The audience at the Amherst Senior Center is always lively, thoughtful, and engaged and it was a pleasure to speak to them" **said County Executive, Mark Poloncarz.**

This semester also brings an exciting lineup of new classes and partnerships. In collaboration with the Hispanic Heritage Council, University Express will honor Hispanic heritage and even offer a class taught in Spanish. A new partnership with Literacy Buffalo Niagara introduces classes on health literacy and digital literacy, helping older adults navigate tools like patient portals and other everyday technology. Other highlights include *Staying Safe Online*, *Healing Through Art*, *How to Play Bunco*, *Men's Health Decoded*, *Bennett Riley: Buffalo's Unsung Hero*, *Buffalo First Ladies*, and much more.

Beyond the classroom, University Express now offers field trips to landmarks across the region. This fall, participants can choose from 6 outings, including visits to the Burchfield Penney Art Center, the Buffalo History Museum, and the Erie County Longshed. The program also brings people together through monthly trivia events, which engage more than 100 older adults across 10 senior centers, as well as the Trivia in the Park series, which combines fun and learning in Erie County's parks, Puzzlepalooza, Fantasy Football, March Madness, Book Club, and more.

The University Express Program accepts new participants online at <https://www4.erie.gov/universityexpress/> where you can also find the complete class schedule for the Fall 2025 semester.