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ERIE COUNTY OLDER ADULTS SHOWCASE SKILL AND TEAMWORK AT CHAMPIONSHIP PUZZLE PALOOZA

ERIE COUNTY, NY — The energy was high and the competition fierce at the Amherst Senior Center on Friday afternoon, as puzzle pieces snapped into place and cheers erupted during the Championship Puzzle Palooza, hosted by the Erie County Department of Senior Services' acclaimed University Express Program.

More than 40 older adults from senior centers across Erie County gathered for this first-of-its-kind challenge celebrating teamwork, mental agility, and the joy of healthy competition. Ten teams of four participants raced against the clock—and each other—to complete a 300-piece jigsaw puzzle in under an hour.

In a thrilling finish, the _____ Senior Center team emerged victorious, completing their puzzle in just ____ minutes. Close behind were teams from the _____ Senior Centers, showcasing sharp minds, steady hands, and impressive coordination.

The Championship Puzzle Palooza served as a dynamic and social addition to the University Express Program, a flagship initiative of Erie County Senior Services that offers more than 400 free educational and enrichment classes each semester to older adults across the region. University Express provides free, accessible, learning opportunities in subjects ranging from history and science to health, art, and current events—without tests or homework.

More than just a class catalog, University Express is a vital part of the county's mission to support healthy aging. The program stimulates the brain, combats social isolation, and builds community by connecting older adults through shared learning experiences. With sessions held at senior centers, libraries, and available online, the program ensures that older adults of all backgrounds and abilities have access to engaging, meaningful opportunities for personal growth.

"This wasn't just about puzzles," said **Commissioner of Senior Services Randy Hoak**. "It was about coming together, having fun, and staying sharp—mentally and socially."

University Express is one of the best things we offer to our older adults, and events like this highlight just how impactful it can be.”

The Puzzle Palooza embodied the core values of the University Express Program—lifelong learning, social connection, and joyful engagement. It is just one of many creative offerings that demonstrate how Erie County is leading the way in making aging a time of opportunity, not limitation.

With laughter, teamwork, and community spirit on full display, the event was more than a competition—it was a celebration of what’s possible when older adults are given the tools and opportunities to thrive.

For more information about the University Express Program and future events, visit <https://www4.erie.gov/universityexpress/> or contact our NY Connects line at (716) 858-8526.