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Erie County Department for the Aging

TWO ERIE COUNTY VOLUNTEERS RECOGNIZED AT STATEWIDE OLDER NEW YORKERS' DAY CELEBRATION

Erie County, NY – Two Erie County residents, Kathleen Collins and Barbara Murie, were recognized by the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) during the annual Older New Yorkers' Day Celebration, held May 26 at The Crowne Plaza Hotel–Desmond in Albany. The event honors older adults from across New York State whose volunteer service, leadership, and civic engagement have made a meaningful impact in their communities.

The annual celebration, held during Older Americans Month, shines a spotlight on older adults who continue to make a difference through volunteerism and community involvement. This year's theme was "Champion Your Health", and the event serves as a reminder that older New Yorkers remain vital contributors to the strength, health, and vibrancy of communities throughout the state.

"I congratulate Kathleen and Barbara for earning this prestigious honor," **said Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz**. "These two special members of our community deserve this special recognition for all that they do to make Erie County a wonderful place by sharing their talents with others."

The Erie County AmeriCorps Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), coordinated by the Erie County Department for the Aging, is one of the largest volunteer networks for individuals aged 55 and older. RSVP connects older adults with meaningful service opportunities tailored to their skills and interests, including mentoring youth, supporting veterans, and assisting at food banks and senior centers. In 2024, over 425 RSVP volunteers provided 35,000 hours of service at 40 different sites, representing \$702,100 in economic impact to the community.

Honoring Kathleen Collins: Inspiring the Next Generation

After spending nearly five decades teaching biology, physics, and geometry at Mount Mercy Academy and St. Francis High School, Kathleen Collins continues to share her passion for education through volunteer service.

Since joining the Seneca Street Community Development Corporation's after-school program in 2023, Kathleen has become a trusted mentor and tutor for local students. Volunteering twice each week, she uses her extensive knowledge of math and science to help young people strengthen their academic skills while building confidence in the classroom. Her ability to connect with students and encourage their success has helped foster a welcoming environment where learning can flourish.

Kathleen's contributions extend beyond tutoring. She regularly helps obtain donations of educational materials and supplies, ensuring students have access to the resources they need. She is also valued by staff and fellow volunteers for her collaborative approach, thoughtful ideas, and commitment to helping programs grow and improve.

In addition to her work with Seneca Street CDC, Kathleen volunteers with Make-A-Wish, Hospice and Palliative Care Buffalo, BPM, and Erie County RSVP, where she assists with initiatives designed to attract and retain volunteers.

Reflecting on the value of volunteering, Collins encourages others to get involved.

"Your skills can make a meaningful difference in someone's life," Collins said. "No matter your experience, interests, or the amount of time you can give, there are opportunities for everyone. When you volunteer, you not only help others—you often discover something you truly love and become part of a stronger, more connected community."

"Kathleen has devoted her life to helping others learn, grow, and succeed," said **Erie County Department for the Aging Commissioner Randall Hoak**. "Her commitment to education and volunteerism continues to have a positive impact on young people and the organizations she serves."

Honoring Barbara Murie: Service Through Strength and Compassion

Barbara Murie's dedication to helping others has remained unwavering despite significant personal challenges. A cancer survivor multiple times over, Barbara is currently undergoing treatment for stage 4 cancer while continuing to work and volunteer in her community.

Following the loss of her husband two years ago, Barbara chose to deepen her commitment to service. She contributes both as an employee and volunteer at the Buffalo Naval Park, donating additional hours to support its mission. While spending time in

Florida, she volunteered several days each week at a local food pantry, assisting individuals and families facing hardship.

Barbara recently expanded her volunteer efforts by joining the American Red Cross. Earlier this year, she traveled to Tennessee to help establish and operate an emergency shelter serving families affected by severe winter weather.

Her compassion is evident in both large and small acts of service. During a recent shift at a food pantry, Barbara encountered a man experiencing homelessness. Determined to help beyond providing a meal, she contacted local organizations and worked to connect him with housing resources. Within a day, he had secured safe shelter and dependable access to food.

"Barbara's determination to serve others, even while facing challenges of her own, is truly remarkable," said **Commissioner Randall Hoak**. "Her generosity, resilience, and concern for those in need are an inspiration to everyone around her."

The Erie County Department for the Aging nominated Collins and Murie in recognition of their outstanding volunteer contributions and their commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. Their stories exemplify the many ways older adults continue to enrich communities through service, leadership, and compassion.

Learn more about Older New Yorkers' Day:

<https://aging.ny.gov/older-new-yorkers-day-2026>

Learn more about RSVP:

<https://www3.erie.gov/aging/rsvp>

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