

# PROGRESS

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# CHENANGO

# 2021

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## Chenango SPCA proud to be no-kill shelter and places animals first



Shelter Manager Kathy Wyder and Executive Director Annette Clarke kneel beside a recently adopted dog on stones marking the major donors of the Chenango County SPCA. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

BY TYLER MURPHY  
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NORWICH – The Chenango County SPCA has worked hard and is very proud to be designated as a no-kill shelter.

That means, except for a few exceptions, the shelter does not euthanize ani-

mals due to space issues or basic illness. It takes more time and expense to accomplish the designation, but the current volunteer board has made the investments to make animal welfare a top priority.

There are 14 volunteers serving on the board of directors, many of them are community members

and local professionals, including Board President James Dunne II, Vice President Heather Bartlett-Ferrarese, Secretary Peggy Finnegan and Treasurer Bette Osborne.

A decade ago, when the Chenango County SPCA was under different leadership and did not have the no-kill designation, it

operated as most standard shelters do.

Figures show more animals were being killed than were being adopted.

About two thirds of the animals brought to the shelter were being euthanized and only roughly a quarter of the animals

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## Angela's thrives by putting quality and customers first



Angela's store owner Angela Titus, with her husband Brock Titus, and her brother John Dabbraccio as the team prepares for the dinner rush. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

BY ZACHARY MESECK  
Evening Sun Reporter  
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NORWICH – Being a newly opened restaurant when a pandemic hits might be a disaster for some businesses, but Angela's has managed to remain open thanks to its loyal customers and authentic flavors.

Angela's is located at 6142 NY-12 in the Town

of Norwich, and has been in business for more than a year. Some of their most popular dishes include the grandma's pie pizza, penne a la vodka, and a variety of salads including barbecue and Buffalo salads.

The business opened just a few months before the pandemic hit, but has been able to stay open despite the challenges brought by COVID-19.

Angela's owner Angela

Titus said while her business is relatively new, her family has been in the Norwich area for more than 20 years, and that isn't changing any time soon.

"I love being a part of this community, because I originally came from Long Island where the community is very large, and you don't really get to know people the same way you do here," said Titus.

"Everyone here has been so supportive, and it's nice to do something I've been doing since I was a teenager."

Titus said learning from her father has enabled her to do more with her own business, and that she has been in the food industry basically her entire working life.

"I've been doing this

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Despite the pandemic and reduced enrollment numbers SUNY-wide, SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus saw an eight percent increase in enrollment during the 2020 fall semester. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

## SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus sees increase in enrollment

BY ZACHARY MESECK  
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CHENANGO COUNTY – While SUNY Morrisville had its fair share of challenges like many others in the education world, they still saw an increase in enrollment in the fall of 2020.

According to SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus Director Lindsey Lefevre, while the SUNY system as a whole experienced close to a six percent decline in enrollment, the SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus saw over an eight percent increase in total students for the fall 2020 semester, especially within the academic programs of Nursing, Business and Human Services.

With the unknowns surrounding enrolling at a traditional residential college campus, students cited several reasons for choosing to attend the Norwich Campus including the small size of the campus, affordability and flexible options to advantage of in-person as well as virtual learning.

"Through regular COVID testing and pre-arrival screening efforts, the Norwich Campus plans to increase the number of on-campus classes and labs to allow for 70 percent of the total student population to have an on-campus opportunity," said Lefevre. "Faculty also have access to various forms of technology and learning platforms to provide flexibility to those students who may be in quarantine or have daycare concerns."

"It was also imperative that the campus continued to engage students through involvement with on and off campus projects and events, and if I had to characterize the SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus in the year 2020, it would have to build around the themes of community and collaboration."

Lefevre said as the COVID crisis developed in the spring, not only was the focus on ensuring students were transitioned smoothly to a virtual learning environment but also asking how and what would be the most impactful way to use our resources to support the community.

"We understood that food security would be one of the larger issues affecting families due to disruptions in the supply chain, closure of schools and loss of employment," she said. "When an inquiry came from one of our dedicated alums, we immediately began to plan a series of large scale food drives that would not only feed hundreds of families but also support local producers and grocers."

"With the support of numerous organizations,

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# Angela's thrives by putting quality and customers first —

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since I was 16-years-old, and this is all I know," she said. "My family has owned several businesses throughout my life, and when the opportunity came to open my own I took it."

"I love working here every day, this is a job that makes me happy and lets me spend time with my family, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world."

She added that the secret to her authentic foods comes from her father, who has been in the food industry for more than 30 years, and that good food mixed with positive customer service has helped her business immensely during the pandemic.

"When the pandemic first hit, it was just me, my brother, my husband, my niece, my nephew, and

one worker, and when we shut down I really didn't know what to expect," said Titus. "I didn't know what was going on and we just had the mindset that we would work through it and do what we had to do."

"When it was time to slowly start opening again, some of my workers came back, and then we started rolling again, but I realized that I couldn't have people in the dining room because if one of us gets sick then we may have to shut down for even longer."

Titus said that without being asked by the Chenango County Health Department or any other government official she swapped to take out only to help limit the potential threat to herself or her team.

She said another result of the pandemic was a series of layoffs, but that



By swapping to take-out and delivery only, Angela's has been able to keep its team safe and continue to provide food to its customers. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)



By using fresh ingredients and keeping to their traditional roots, Angela's has been able to make the most of the pandemic and keep its doors open. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

when the time came for people to return some individuals didn't want to return to work because of the unemployment benefits.

"I had to lay some people off but some people didn't want to come back because they made more money there, and it is what it is," she added. "The people that did want to come back I had to limit hours for because we just couldn't afford to have everyone here full-time with the dining room closed."

"This meant that for the people that were still here, we had a lot more we needed to do ourselves."

She said as a way of thanking the customers that do come in regularly to support them, Angela's has a weekly drawing for \$25 gift cards for three people. She said initially she had intended for it to

be a short-term gesture of thanks, but she decided to keep it going with all of the overwhelming support from the community.

"Every week we give back to the community, and I started it maybe five or six months ago," said Titus. "Originally I was only going to do it for a couple of weeks, but then I thought you know what, as long as people are supporting me I'm going to keep giving back and supporting them."

"Nobody has jobs like they did, the economy went down, a lot of people don't have the money to spend like they did, and the ones that do have been coming out to support us which means a lot."

Titus said with the call volume, especially on Friday, orders can take longer to deliver to customers. She said that is

in large part due to the fresh ingredients and classic cooking techniques her business uses.

"Without the customers I wouldn't be here, and I want to make sure they know they're getting the freshest, best quality food we can give them," Titus added. "When you order something and it's a Friday night and you're waiting, it's because you're getting fresh food."

"People take shortcuts with food, and those shortcuts aren't going to make their food taste any better."

According to Titus, the pandemic has really shown

that the people in this area want to see other people succeed, and that being grateful for them and prioritizing good food can really make a difference.

"What I've learned throughout this whole thing is to just be grateful for your customers and your family," said Titus. "I know without either Angela's wouldn't be here right now."

Anyone who is interested in learning more about Angela's may visit their facebook page or reach out at (607) 373-4333.



There is a wall in Angela's full of customer's signatures as a way of saying thank you to everyone who has helped support them. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

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# SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus sees increase in enrollment despite COVID-19 —

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foundations, businesses and the Nourish NY Initiative, the campus organized and executed four food drive-thru events that provided healthy dairy, meat and fresh produce adding up to over 1,700 distributions and close to \$50,000 spent locally in and around Chenango County.”

She added that volunteers did not hesitate to inquire how they could help from packing products to participating in the actual distributions.

SUNY Morrisville Norwich students also gained valuable insight and experience on the organizational efforts that were necessary to collaborate across its community and the numerous logistical details that needed to be addressed in order for these events to be successful.

“In conjunction with the SUNY Morrisville Liberty Partnerships Program (LLP), a program designed to support high school completion, the campus began an after-school academic support program for students grades 9-12,” said Lefevre. “LPP students were invited to campus twice a week to receive in-person professional tutoring services in the subjects of math, science and composition free of charge.”

“Tutors worked with high school educators in order to best assist students



**According to SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus Director Lindsey Lefevre, campus leaders have recognized that they need to continue to offer more virtual opportunities to help serve a broader spectrum of students. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)**

struggling with content and a hybrid model of in-person and virtual learning.”

The Liberty Partnerships Program also served to address issues surrounding access to reliable internet and support with online learning platforms. A total of 10 students participated during the fall semester with the hopes that the campus can expand the program during the spring semester.

Lefevre said in addition to that program, students were able to take advantage of a speaker series through the college’s Human Services Institute, involvement with the Kurt Beyer Park Redesign Project and student activities that revolved around art projects and virtual concerts.

She said in May 2020, when the college resigned to the fact that students would not be able to partic-

ipate in a traditional graduation ceremony, the campus organized a Drive-Thru Commencement in order to recognize and congratulate the students’ perseverance and dedication to their academic program.

She added that 50 members of the graduating class were greeted by bagpipes, staff and faculty dressed in full regalia in the campus parking lot to receive a yearbook and congratulations by the college’s administration.

“Even though the graduating seniors were not able to participate in an official ceremony, they were grateful that the college and the staff still made the effort to recognize the extraordinary challenges they had overcome in order to successfully complete their degree program,” said Lefevre. “Overall, the Norwich Campus will strive to sup-

port the higher education goals of those that reside in the Chenango County community while recognizing the challenges that students will continue to face during the pandemic.”

“The strategies that had to be implemented during this time will undoubtedly transform the way in which we serve students.”

She said SUNY Morrisville prides itself on hands-on, applied learning which is imperative to the mission of their academic programs, however, the college has also recognized that it needs to be flexible by offering more virtual opportunities to serve a broader range of students whose life situations are very diverse.

She added that this is a major initiative that will continue to grow as they move towards meeting the educational goals of the students who choose the Norwich Campus.

“The Norwich Campus is extremely grateful for the support shown by numerous foundations, organizations and businesses and SUNY Morrisville looks forward in continuing to collaborate with our community to meet the post-secondary needs of Chenango County and our region,” said Lefevre.

## Success Story

### Chenango Arts Council offers unique solution to COVID’s impact on the arts

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the arts hard and Chenango Arts Council has been no exception. Like so many arts organizations, we’ve had to move largely online, from our gallery (although the Mariea Brown and Raymond Loft Galleries are now reopened for in person exhibits), to workshops and performances like last year’s Craig Czury Poetry Workshop and our special Christmas message from Matt Nakoa, brought to you by NBT Bank.

We knew we had to do something to provide support for our artists, promote them and keep them working, so we are very happy to tell everyone about our new Artists Catalog.

If you’re looking for a special, unique and unusual arts experience, this is the place. It’s called Your Guide to the New World of Arts and Culture. You can look at it on our website [www.chenangoarts.org](http://www.chenangoarts.org), and flip through the various *local* artists, arts organizations, performers, presenters, and innovators – pick one, then the Arts Council will arrange for them to perform *live* for you via the internet – Facebook, Zoom, Google, etc. For instance, how cool would it to see a private Magic Show, where the magician knows your name and you can speak directly with him, without leaving the comfort of your couch! Or take a personalized drawing or painting class without leaving your home.

The price for a 45- to 60-minute event is \$200 – you’ll be making a huge impact on supporting our struggling member artists and will help sustain the arts well into the future. We also have sponsorship opportunities for organizations such as schools, nursing homes or group homes that are interested in sharing events with students and residents!

Call the Arts Council at 607-336-2787, schedule an event viewing, share the cost with your group be they from around the corner, the country, or around the world! You can learn a few dance steps together or take a private tour of many cultural institutions. There are so many categories to choose from!

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# Chenango SPCA proud to be no-kill shelter and places animals first –

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were being adopted out.

Contrasted with today, currently the shelter finds homes for about two thirds of the animal brought in and on average only euthanizes about one in 15 animals.

“I want to emphasize that we are a no-kill shelter. That is the big deal stuff. You could see by the numbers that ten years ago we were euthanizing two-thirds of what we got in and only adopting out a quarter of the animals. Today we’ve flipped it,” said Chenango SPCA Executive Director Annette Clarke

In 2020 SPCA was able to euthanize less than five percent of the animals brought to the shelter.

Before one can appreciate the achievement of earning a no-kill designation, it’s important to recognize the standard operations and the challenges many shelters routinely face.

Clarke said sharing the information was not meant as a criticism of past operations. Understanding how the local shelter operated in the past was not abnormal and was the industry’s standard for most shelters.

However, a lack of that understanding has caused a number of people to criticize the shelter. Some still express concerns and staff continue to explain and

educate people on the past realities and the current no-kill status.

## A second chance

Clarke has been the executive director of the Chenango SPCA for 10 years. When she first joined the organization, she often fielded concerns from local citizens over past interactions.

“There was a lot of name calling and a lot of bad feelings. And I could understand why because it did seem like that. The old shelter philosophy was if you had a cat room that had 20 cats in it and one of them started sneezing, it meant that the cat was sick and they would just euthanize all of the animals in the room rather than try to take care of them or medicate them,” said Clarke. “I don’t want to say anything against them, because that’s what shelters always did. That was the way shelters operated.”

When Clarke took over, she reached out to a licensed veterinary technician with two decades of experience, Manager Kathy Wyder. The two had the expertise and shared a common goal of wanting to transform the organization into a no-kill shelter.

“We sat down and talked about what it would take to become a no-kill shelter. And her response was we need money to be able to send the animals to vets, so if they’re sick, we

can treat them. She knew how to treat them, so as long as we can get a vet to prescribe the medication, she could administer it. So that’s what we did, we started raising money for what we call our second chance, to give them a chance to get better.”

At certain times of the year, spring and fall, animals, especially cats, often contract upper respiratory infections which can be amplified by being in a shelter with many animals in a confined area. These seasons were a serious challenge in trying to improve the shelter and avoid expense.

Respiratory illness is especially a concern because they are easily transmitted. In order to become a no-kill shelter Clarke realized they had to be proactive.

Avoiding an outbreak is much cheaper than treating one. Attempting to pay for treatment for a number of sick animals is costly and it increases their stress.

So, Clarke and Wyder worked together to review effective and cost-efficient options.

“We did some research and started giving the cats Lysine twice a year, which is an immune booster. It boosts their immune system and we don’t have that problem anymore. We get very few that come down with upper respiratory infections now, and when

they do, they go to the vet and then we can treat them with antibiotics,” said Clarke.

Another step in creating a no-kill shelter also means setting standards for the animals the Chenango SPCA will accept. It will not take in very ill or old animals, and if they think an animal is beyond their care and in danger of needing to be euthanized, they tell those people bringing in the animals up front.

In decades past the shelter was an open admission shelter and accepted all animals anyone brought to them.

“We used to take all animals regardless of their health or anything else,” said Clarke.

Being an open shelter in the past sometimes led to abuse with some dropping off very ill or neglected animals, or older ones with serious medical issues that the owners could not afford to take care of. Many of those animals are expensive to house and difficult to adopt.

The largest challenges facing a no-kill shelter is balancing taking in too many of those challenging animals, because then all the other animals under their care can suffer the consequences. Still the shelter tries to take in as many as it can, but if an animal is deemed too sick, old or dangerous, it is classified as unadoptable and not accepted.

“The biggest problem with being a no-kill shelter is that you cannot euthanize because you have too many animals and that’s something that people grapple with. So most no-kill shelters pick and choose who they take in. The animal has to be adoptable,” explained Clarke.

“It’s not to say that we don’t take in some that aren’t adoptable. But for the most part we do reserve the right - if somebody brings us an animal that is really dangerous, or they bring us an animal that’s 16 years old and on its last legs because they don’t want to have to euthanize it, we help them with funds, but we have them take it to a vet. Sometimes

they hire us to euthanize, we do sometimes do it for the public, but we only do it if we know that the veterinarian has the same feeling about the animal as we do,” she said.

Becoming a no-kill shelter takes additional resources and commitment. Much of the additional funds are used for veterinary assistance.

“We have built up a fund called the Second Chance Fund, and people can donate to that directly. That money goes towards vet visits. We just took an animal across the street to Pet Street Station because the animal had a high fever. We don’t quite know what’s going to come of it, we think they’ll probably just prescribe an antibiotic,” said Clarke.

“So that’s the extra cost for us to become a no-kill shelter. We have to help the animals by having extra funds for veterinary visits,” said Clarke.

“We all care about the animals a great deal, so the idea is that we do the best we can for them, and the best we can do is keep them healthy and adoptable so they can find a home. And if that means we have to care for them a little bit longer or that we go to a no-kill policy, then we can honestly say that we care for these animals. From a development standpoint, people are more apt to donate to you if they know you’re a no-kill shelter than they would if you were a kill shelter. Getting funds is important because that’s how we maintain the health of the animals. So, it’s a win-win.”

## Finding a companion in a pandemic

Typically, the SPCA has anywhere between 150 and 200 at the shelter. They accept on average between 500 and 600 each year.

There are twelve paid staff but only one full-time employee. The SPCA has also traditionally relied on a number of volunteers to aid them but due to COVID-19 the shelter has temporarily suspended volunteer programs. The shelter did not have any layoffs in 2020 because of the payroll protection plan.

On average the Chenango SPCA spend about \$1,000 a day to run it facility in Norwich. There annual budget is about \$370,000.

That \$1,000 a day pays for food, lights, heat and the staff.

The animals are allowed to go outside for two or three times a day and staff often work with the animals if they have issues to help improve their adoptability. They house train and socialize animals that need help learning things.

“If an animal is particularly shy or something, we’ll have a person from staff work with them one-on-one and try to get it so that they are adoptable because that’s the whole point, is to get as many animals adopted as possible,” said Clarke.

In 2020 the SPCA adopted out 486 animals. Clarke said the shelter saw more interest from the public in 2020 than a normal year, likely due to people seeking companionship during the pandemic lockdown.

Currently the shelter is open by an appointment only. Clarke said those wanting to look at the animals need to call ahead, and they will make arrangements as soon as possible, on slower days that could be only a short time later. Staff and visitors must wear a mask and additional cleaning work is done every night to ensure a clean environment.

Clarke said animals provide physical and emotional support, and that many who are living isolated lifestyles appreciated that more than ever.

“Animals bring comfort. They have said that when a cat purrs your blood pressure goes down because it relaxes you and it’s soothing. When a dog comes and lays his head in your lap and you’re petting him, it helps you. It’s not human contact, but it’s living, breathing contact. I think people reached out for animals because this is their way of having warm-blood contact. Do I think that that’s the only reason why we adopted out as

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many as we did? It's hard to tell, because we had that one program called the Safe Haven Funds for Animals that allowed people to adopt with no charge," said Clarke.

**Supporter of animals in need**

The Safe Haven Funds program ran from January to the beginning of November. It started because a donor wanted to relieve the cost of adoptions fees.

The donor also covered the cost of all spay and neuter procedures because by New York State law the SPCA cannot release an animal that hasn't been spayed or neutered.

It's a little more than a \$100 for a cat and about \$200 for a dog, depending on if it's male or female and what size the animals are. More than 400 animals have been through the program.

"The spay or neuter fee is the highest. Our adoption fees were \$40 for a cat and \$100 for a dog, and when you would get the animal they would be up to date on their vaccines, they would have a microchip, they would be healthy and ready to go home. But it was that spay and neuter fee that really caught people unaware," said Clarke.

COVID has made not just volunteering difficult but also postponed most of the SPCA's fundraising events.

"No volunteers and no fundraising besides the appeal letters. No actual fundraising events, like our Furball for February has already been cancelled. Our stocking event in November was cancelled. We had a Putt-Putt for Paws event for this summer that was cancelled," said Clarke.

The SPCA sent out only a couple of appeal letters in 2020, half their normal amount

"We were trying to be sensitive to the fact that many people were either without a job or maybe they worked in a restaurant and they were laid off, and we knew that money could be tight," she explained.

Instead, the SPCA reached out to major



**Shelter Manager Kathy Wyder and Executive Director Annette Clarke posed in December with handfuls of kittens available for adoption and in need of support at the Chenango County SPCA. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)**

donors and asked if they could spare a little more. And those strong supporters in the community responded, offered enough aid for the shelter to break-even in 2020.

One donor doubled their contribution from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Yet despite the relaxed approach many people still donated.

About 1,200 people, who have been regular donors to the SPCA over the past three years gave something, many gave more.

Clarke said she and the board were impressed and very grateful.

"We always try to emphasize is that there's no gift that is too small. I just want to say thank you," she said.

The SPCA has many business supporters as well, including most recently a annual partnership with Staffworks.

Staffworks is the recruitment agency based in Norwich and every year they sponsor a charitable giving event through their not-for-profit foundation. Organized by the founder of the company Anita A. Vitullo, the "Staffworks Save a Life Campaign," has donated large sums to animal shelter across

the region, including Chenango County.

"She gives us the opportunity to do the Save a Life Campaign. She works with 38 kennel organizations in Central New York. We did it last year and it's a great program that make a serious impact," said Clarke.

The SPCA was able to raise \$116,282.82 through the Save-A-Life Foundation and generous community support.

According to Clarke, this year's campaign was themed as: "Give the Gift of Life," where Staffworks matched every donation, dollar-for-dollar during December, up to \$10,000 to the animal shelter.

She said Staffworks donated an additional \$1,000 for every \$5,000 raised. She added that with limited visitation and an inability to hold regular fundraising events, the SPCA has relied on these regular community donors and savings to cope with the ongoing pandemic. The year before the program raised \$92,000.

The SPCA has also been apply for more grants and has a trust fund it can tap into for emergencies.

"We're watching our pennies. We're watching what we do. I write more grants. We have a decent

trust fund that, if we are really short, we can pull out of. I try not to touch it, but it's there if I need it. We have a trust that, when I came on board there was almost nothing in it, and now we're sitting pretty well. But it's there for emergencies and we're hoping not to use it, so we keep trying to just add to it."

**Leading by example, seeking help in the months ahead**

Clarke is hoping that 2021 will be better than 2020 but if the shelter has to cope with another difficult year it may have to reduce staff by the beginning of the coming summer.

"It's hard because staff cares for the animals and we don't carry a lot of excess staff. Twelve sounds like a lot of people, but they're part-time workers, some work in the morning, some in the afternoon, and we have to work seven days a week because there has to be someone here to care for the animals. The shelter manager and I decided, and this is something we worry about, that if anybody comes down with COVID and we have to quarantine staff, we decided we would come in and try to handle it all on our own," said Clarke.

With less staff the shelter would also seek additional foster homes and reach out to other area animal shelters or kennels who often work with SPCA,

like, Doggie Dude Ranch. The group offered to care for all of the SPCA's dogs, at least temporarily, in an emergency.

The shelter has also lined up 10 foster homes for cats, but with 180 cats, each person would need to accept about 20 animals.

"I'll put cages in my basement and I'll put in as many as I can. It takes a lot to take care of that many animals, but if we need to, we'll figure it out. This is what we do. We're hoping that it never comes to that. We were very grateful when we could continue to work because we're considered an essential business, and we are all very careful around each other and everybody is careful out in the community so they're not bringing it in," said Clarke.

Clarke had considered stepping down from her role in the next year or two but the pandemic has made things difficult and now she feels she has to stay on longer because so much depends on her.

Recognizing the challenges, the SPCA staff is working closer than ever before.

"If I had to start laying off people that would bother me because these workers are, for the most part, they're a little bit above minimum wage but not much, and they depend on this. They live paycheck to paycheck. I also will say that they could have left our employ and collected

much more in unemployment than working here, but they stuck with us. So that was really positive," said Clarke.

"We've looked out for each other. That's something that we need to do, we need to be respectful of each other and not do stupid things once you leave the building. I think we have found that the community as a whole is generous and supports us. When I was calling around to see if I could find enough foster places to take cats in case we had to shut down, people came forward that I might not have expected to. So, I think that we see that is really something that's positive."

So far no one working at the shelter has fallen ill.

"I think we're all in this together. We have to work together. That's the way we look at the positive effects of this," said Clarke.

The Chenango County SPCA does not receive county or government funding. They do not receive funding from the larger national SPCA organization either. It relies solely on donations and grants from private charities and foundations.

To help the SPCA visit their website [chenangospca.org](http://chenangospca.org), you can find an application to volunteer on the site as well. Call 607-334-9724 if you have any questions.

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**COMMUNITY  
VIEWPOINT**



## Jessica Moquin, Executive Director Chenango County Historical Society & Museum

### A love of history makes you an eternal optimist

Perhaps because I am an eternal optimist, or maybe because of my natural inclination for continuous improvement, my motto over the last year has been to try and find the good in everything!

This has guided my approach in my role as Executive Director of the Chenango County Historical Society and Museum. When our region was slowing down to decrease the spread of COVID-19, I began calling this period “The Great Pause,” since pause has a more positive connotation than “shut down.” As an organization, we made a great effort during this past year to really embrace “The Great Pause” and everything that has come our way as a result.

As with all non-profits, the current public health crisis has proven to be an unprecedented challenge for our organization. Although we have paused traditional programming, we have been able to strategically plan for the future, and we have developed creative ways to accomplish our mission.

Our involvement with local groups – such as Commerce Chenango, the Inter-Agency Council, and the Non-Profit Connections Roundtable – has allowed us to remain connected and focused on community engagement. We have taken advantage of professional development offerings from the Documentary Heritage & Preservation Services of New York (DHPSNY), Museum Association of NY (MANY), New York Council of Non-Profits (NYCON), Preservation League of NY, and the Texas Historical Commission, which have helped us navigate the multitude of changes that cultural non-profits like ours are experiencing.

We recognized early on that our delivery mechanisms would need to be adjusted in significant ways so that the Chenango County Historical Society and Museum would remain relevant in the midst of this public health crisis. Growing our online presence became top priority, and the launch of our redesigned website – [www.ChenangoHistorical.org](http://www.ChenangoHistorical.org) – means offering content which had previously been available only by visiting us in-person. Patrons now have

direct access to more than a dozen online research sites, the Chenango County Legal History, a retail experience with regularly added products, and much more!

The Chenango County Historical Society and Museum continues to actively develop programming and online content to inspire self-directed exploration of stories related to the unique culture and heritage of our region. While our School Field Trip Experiences and plans for developing Preschool Journeys were paused, we continue connecting with local community groups – such as 4-H, Girl Scouts, and Daughters of the American Revolution – to generate material in place of traditional, in-person programming. Virtual activities have included a celebration of the Smithsonian’s Museum Day in April, and “Path Through History” weekend virtual events in both June and October. Our online exhibit “Unfolding Stories: A Celebration of Quilt Artists” was hosted in collaboration with the Earlville Opera House (complete with interactive Quilt Quiz!), and a virtual “Parade of Trees” (in the spirit of our annual Holiday Open House) was also held.

Besides utilizing industry trends – such as #MuseumBouquet, #MuseumFromHome and #MuseumSunshine – we

generated original content for #MovieMonday, #TastyTuesday, and #FilmFriday. Our #WomenWednesday series provided us with the opportunity to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The popular “Cooking Historically” series featured recipes from Chenango County’s own “Made Nine Pies” cookbook. These social media initiatives have proven extremely effective, yielding a 39% increase in our Facebook audience.

Creativity has been key in maintaining a positive attitude throughout “The Great Pause,” and so we hosted artistic opportunities outside of typical museum activities. Andrew Roblee brought his “Historic Structures of Sound” to the halls of Ward School No. 2. This unique project has two goals: to produce a record of original music arranged and recorded to capture the intangible historic fabric of historic spaces, imbuing the music with real meaning; and to demonstrate how acoustics are a character-defining feature of an historic building, providing another supporting argument in the pursuit of sustainability and place-making. Visit [www.andrewroblee.com](http://www.andrewroblee.com) for more details and listening options.

Thanks to “Live Event

NY,” the façade of Ward School No. 2 joined other landmarks across the country to commemorate “Forward through the Darkness, Forward into Light,” presented by the Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission. On a warm evening last August, the home of the Chenango County Historical Society and Museum was awash in the vibrant colors of lavender, white, and gold.

In an effort to grow capacity for visitor experiences without compromising safety, we have also prioritized work on the development of additional outdoor facilities, exhibit spaces, and interpretive structures on our campus. We anticipate unveiling these dynamic new areas in the near future!

Since most of our artifacts are now only available for digital viewing, there has been a renewed focus on improving collections care and management. We are refining our object inventory and retrieval systems in order to more easily access pieces for use in virtual programming.

“The Great Pause” removed distractions so that we could fully embrace the implementation of our new strategic plan, which was adopted early last spring. Shifting our focus from not simply just a curator of local history but as a community partner, an

educational resource, and a regional destination included the reaffirming of our mission: to lead and support the advancement of research, education, and enjoyment of Chenango County history.

As we work to accomplish goals identified in the new strategic plan, it was decided to create the new position of Operations Manager. After a regional search was conducted last summer, Joseph Fryc began his new role on Oct. 1. He is responsible for financial administration and overall operations. Joe also assists with collections curation, exhibit preparation, facilities management, retail, front-of-house, and office management. Thanks to Joe becoming part of our team, many new programs and exhibits are currently in development!

We have all heard the old adage that “when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade,” and that has been our motto over the past year. (Plus, wouldn’t you much rather sip a sweet lemony drink than eat a sour lemon?!) It is my hope that we can continue offering delicious “refreshment” to Chenango County by keeping our focus on the positive aspects of our current circumstances.

To quote my favorite American icon, Walt Disney: “If you can dream it, you can do it!”

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