

2023 PROGRESS

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Commerce Chenango keeps the cogs of industry and innovation turning



Commerce Chenango hosts a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Sherwood Hotel in Greene. The event was one of five ribbon cuttings held by Commerce Chenango in 2022. (Photo submitted by Commerce Chenango)

By Shawn Magrath
Evening Sun Contributor

NORWICH – With new leadership at the helm, unfamiliar challenges in a post-COVID era, and a multi-million revitalization grant on hand, Commerce Chenango is bracing for an

eventful year ahead.

Commerce Chenango has long been a go-to source for businesses looking to settle or expand in Chenango County, but the past year has been busy to say the least. The agency spearheaded a number of initiatives to help local entrepreneurs, hired a new

CEO, graduated a new class through its Leadership Chenango program, and resurrected in-person festivals and events that had gone virtual during the pandemic – all while administering a \$10 million New York State grant for downtown Norwich.

“Part of the greatness

of Commerce Chenango is being able to adapt and pivot to the needs of businesses and our community,” said Julia Miller, chairperson of the Commerce Chenango Board of Directors. “I think the team has done an outstanding job of weathering

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Norwich Family YMCA gets back in the swing of things in 2022



The Norwich Family YMCA offers child care in addition to their many sports and fitness programs. Pictured is the 2022-23 YMCA preschool class in front of a mural painted by YMCA employee Sarah Williams in 2022. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

Sarah Genter
Evening Sun Writer

NORWICH – The Norwich Family YMCA has been enjoying a return to normalcy in 2022, as well as major milestones and new developments.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought on a six-month closure of the 68-70 North Broad Street facility, and from September 2020 to September 2021 the location was operating at just 33 percent capacity.

“2022 was really our first calendar year since 2019 where we didn’t have restrictions,” said Norwich Family YMCA Executive Director Jamey Mullen. “It was great because we were getting back to those pre-COVID activities, programs, facility usage, without the restrictions [and] without the limitations.”

The pandemic also brought on a dip in membership for the YMCA.

Mullen estimates the facility was just shy of 4,000 members, which dropped down to around 2,000 in the wake of COVID-19. However, those numbers have been steadily rising in 2022, and the Norwich Family YMCA is now up to around 2,600 members.

While there are challenges the organization will continue to tackle, the YMCA also has a lot to celebrate.

160th Anniversary

Last year marked the 160th anniversary for the Norwich Family YMCA. Established in 1862, the facility has seen several location changes and renovations over the years.

In addition to the changes and growth over the years, Mullen said one thing has remained the same: the facility serving as a central gathering place for the community.

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THE EVENING SUN

The Fight for Progress

With recent changes in technology, the economy and politics, the old way of how we lived may never be the same, but what is getting better and what is getting harder for the people living in Chenango County?

To understand these changes The Evening Sun sought the perspectives of local representatives, volunteers and business owners.

On March 16, The Evening Sun will celebrate 132 years serving as Chenango County’s Daily Newspaper.

We have run a daily edition almost every weekday since 1891.

If it happens to land on a weekday, Christmas is our only official holiday, meaning we publish every other weekday of the year.

If the roads are closed, if the power is out, the Evening Sun newsroom is open and our dedicated staff is still working.

The newspaper is lucky to be a gateway to success for so many locally talented people. There have been dozens of local writers and many of the staff are well known and pursue professional careers within the community.

The writers, sports editor, design artists, press workers and delivery people are here every morning before the sun even rises. The writing staff often end their days late at night attending after-hours meetings, sporting matches or weekend events. There is always a next deadline and nothing is ever completed.

The history the newspaper is as rich and deep as Norwich itself.

The Evening Sun is the descendant of the first and only daily newspaper founded in the county, which was called the Morning Sun.

The newspaper’s actual history goes back even further if you count older weekly publications.

The very first newspaper in Norwich was created on Nov. 14, 1816 when J.F. Hubbard began publishing The Norwich Journal for 2 cents a copy.

The Journal continued to be published successfully for several years, changing hands numerous times.

In 1877, publisher B. Gage Berry changed the name to The Chenango Semi-Weekly Telegraph, with an issue coming out every Wednesday and Saturday mornings at a cost of two dollars per year.

Eventually, The Telegraph merged with The Norwich Sun nearly a century later.

The paper was first known as The Morning Sun until 1904. It then became The Norwich Sun until 1961, when it was renamed The Evening Sun.

In 1996, newspaper moved headquarters from Hale Street to Lackawanna Avenue.

The Evening Sun was purchased by Snyder Communications on May 2, 1994 and for the first time in 15 years it was locally owned.

The Evening Sun is an independently and locally owned publication to this day thanks to the support of our readers and advertisers.

— Tyler Murphy,
Evening Sun Managing Editor



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Co-owners Tamara Tarbell and Bryan Tarbell of T-Squared Custom Millwork in Oxford display the monetary help they received from the Development Chenango Corporation (DCC), a subsidiary of Commerce Chenango. In 2022, DCC doled out \$264,750 to businesses looking to relocate or expand in Chenango County. (Submitted photo)

Commerce Chenango keeps the cogs of industry and innovation turning -

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a leadership change, significant investment projects, and supporting businesses big and small all year. Part of the fun is in the journey.”

Commerce Chenango currently boasts 230-plus members, nearly 30 of whom were new in 2022. Of them, 65 percent employ fewer than ten people while 12 percent employ 50 or more. In total, more than 17,000 local employees working in the industries of hospitality, entertainment, manufacturing, agriculture, and finance – among others – are represented by Commerce Chenango.

“We envision Commerce Chenango to be the first place you think of to get business done in Chenango County,” said Commerce Chenango President and CEO Sal Testani.

Testani is a new face to the Commerce Chenango team, having joined the agency in October, two months after the unexpected departure of the agency’s previous CEO.

“We have several resources that we can put to work for a business to help them be successful,” Testani added. “If you need help growing, relocating, or investing in your business, Commerce Chenango is the place to start.”

Although Commerce Chenango touts business resources in all four corners of Chenango County, it’s the City of Norwich – the economic hub of the county – that’s by and large seeing the highest investment this year, thanks to a \$10 million state economic development grant. When the award was announced in late 2021, Commerce Chenango went to work pinpointing the most promising investments in Norwich’s business district. The financial windfall, says Miller, will breathe new life into Norwich’s downtown landscape.

“We were very pleased that Norwich was award-

ed the DRI or Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant. This project will help us transform Norwich’s downtown into a vibrant area that will attract both community members and visitors to shop, work and live,” Miller added.

“We envision Commerce Chenango to be the first place you think of to get business done in Chenango County,” said Commerce Chenango President and CEO Sal Testani.

Identified projects will enhance business and housing opportunities, improve streetscape walkability and public spaces, and expand arts and cultural amenities. The grant will also spur job creation and stimulate the local economy. Nine projects are slated for DRI funds which will leverage private investments. Money will be used for facade improvements and interior renovations to create apartments and retail space in some of Norwich’s oldest buildings.

- Allocations include:
- \$3.36 million for development of a 45-room boutique hotel.
 - \$3 million for redevelopment of the 10,000 square-foot Unguentine commercial building and creation of roughly two dozen new apartments and commercial space.
 - \$292,000 for the Heritage building on North Broad Street for a healthy food market and brewery.
 - \$140,000 for facade improvements and new living space at 15-19 Lackawanna Ave.
 - \$1.1 million to improve East, West, and Library parks to support better programming and events.
 - \$165,000 for updated seating and a digital display on the historic marquee at the Colonia Theatre.
 - \$570,000 to upgrade

the seating, lighting, and audio-visual equipment in the Martin Kappel Theater at the Chenango County Council of the Arts.

– \$470,000 to outfit American Avenue with improved lighting and aesthetics.

Another \$600,000 of DRI funds will be utilized by the Development Chenango Corporation (DCC), the economic development arm of Commerce Chenango, to pad its Downtown Norwich Small Project Grant Fund. The fund leverages investments from private property owners for building improvements and other transformational projects in the heart of the city. Testani says DCC is conceiving additional funding and meetings will be scheduled with project leaders to keep plans moving forward.

Of course the DRI grant wasn’t the only highlight of the past year for Commerce Chenango. In December, the agency inaugurated 22 graduates in the Leadership Chenango class of 2022. It marked the 18th year that the agency has utilized the talent and experience of today’s leaders in order to foster growth for tomorrow’s leaders.

“The journey has just begun for these 20 emerging leaders, who are already putting what they have learned into action,” said Testani. “It is exciting to see how they are choosing to give back through mentorship programs, serving on boards and supporting volunteer efforts throughout the county – as well as growing and evolving in their role as leaders within their respective businesses and organizations.”

The Leadership Chenango program was developed under the auspices of the Chenango Foundation in 1988. The program equips individuals with knowledge needed to deal with the area’s biggest

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Commerce Chenango keeps the cogs of industry and innovation turning -

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challenges. Graduates typically go on to fill voluntary roles in their community. Leadership Chenango has graduated 350 participants over the years.

In addition to its success with Leadership Chenango, DCC abetted a number of private enterprises over the past year. The agency doled out \$264,750 to businesses seeking to relocate or expand in Chenango County. Beneficiaries included Natural Beauty Breast Prosthetics in Sherburne, Forged Brewery in Bainbridge, T-Squared Custom Millwork in Oxford, and Hillcrest Lavender in Sherburne. What's more, the Chenango County Industrial Development Agency helped fund the expansion of two Afton businesses: Everything Bagelry and Afton Tent Rental. It also facilitated Protel's purchase of an incubator building at the Norwich airport, and Norwich Meadow Farm's purchase of the Earl B. Clark Park in North Norwich.

Alongside its efforts to provide entrepreneurs with a financial leg up, Commerce Chenango is also taking aim at the labor shortage by working closely with businesses and educational institutions to nail down shortcomings in the local workforce. Efforts like



The building that once housed SUNY Morrisville's remote campus is likely to be repurposed as a boutique hotel in downtown Norwich. The project is one of nine in the city identified by Commerce Chenango that will greatly benefit from the \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Grant awarded by New York State. (Photo by Shawn Magrath)

the Leadership Chenango Next-Gen program and DCMO BOCES new mentorship program are working with area youth in hopes of building a talented and skilled workforce for the community.

"One that truly excites me is the Route 12 STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Agricultural, Arts and Aviation, and Math) Initiative, which is a project we are currently working on with superintendents to provide a round table discussion with facil-

itators in each school district," said Testani. "This provides an opportunity for businesses to show teachers what skills students may need for employment at their respective place of business."

The last year also saw the resurgence of in-person events for Commerce Chenango — a critical networking component of the agency that had been put on hold during the pandemic.

"Looking back on 2021, it was difficult to increase awareness and show the

value of what Commerce Chenango could offer both our membership and the community," said Audrey Robinson, Commerce Chenango's director of marketing and tourism. "It was hard to build strong relationships and be the catalyst for collaboration with businesses, organizations, community members, and the government when everything was via email or Zoom."

After a few virtual events in early 2022 that were met with poor attendance,

Commerce Chenango brought members face again during its summer events, including its annual gala and its summer golf tournament.

"We started improving our resources, and our reach, and were able to increase our activity and investment in Chenango County," said Robinson.

In the realm of networking and tourism, Robinson said Commerce Chenango leveraged matching state tourism dollars into more than \$80,000 of promotional marketing for highlights and events in Chenango County in 2022. An additional \$9,288 was collected through the county's newly established hotel bed tax, making it possible for organizations that weren't eligible for matching funds to market their events.

Looking to 2023, Commerce Chenango knows its plate is full with managing the DRI while continuing its work advocating for local businesses. The agency is planning a women's leadership seminar to get more people involved in business, as well as a youth leadership program aimed at encouraging students to explore different career options here at home. Testani said the agency has its sights on addressing the region's biggest barriers, including the growing need for work-

force development as well as the county-wide shortage of child care. It's working closely with other nonprofits and child care agencies to find solutions.

What's more, Testani acknowledges missed opportunities due to Chenango County's aged infrastructure which is making it difficult to attract and retain businesses. He argues that Chenango County needs improvements to many of its communities' public water or sewer systems, cell service, and broadband in order to capitalize on the growing interest of rural community living.

"Given the experiences of COVID, more people than ever are appreciating the benefits of living and working in more rural areas like ours," he said. "That's an opportunity for us. But we have to have the right infrastructure to support it."

"Chenango County is a wonderful place to live and raise a family," Testani added. "We have a tremendous amount of natural resources, and the cost of living is very reasonable. Most importantly, Chenango County is made of tremendous people who are vested in the success of our community. Our local businesses are vital to that community, and we are committed to helping them be successful."



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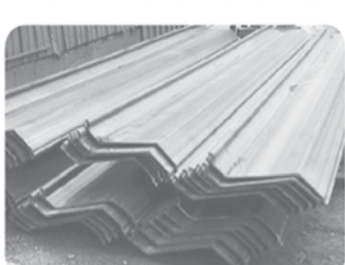
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Norwich Family YMCA gets back in the swing of things in 2022 -

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“The important thing that we always need to remember about the Norwich Y, especially in the small community of Norwich and the surrounding areas, it is the focal point, it’s the central gathering place,” he said.

“We could walk through this building right now and you’re going to see men and women, you’re going to see young and old, you’re going to see healthy and sick. You’ll see individuals that probably have wealth and others that are struggling significantly,” he continued. “That’s what’s so important about the Norwich Y: when you walk through this building, you see that and you know that. That’s just very warming and comforting to know that still continues today from what was started years ago.”

The Norwich Family YMCA offers a litany of services to the community, ranging from youth sports programs to child care, fitness classes, swim lessons, access to exercise equipment, and youth summer camp.

The facility also hosts several family-friendly activities throughout the year, such as the annual Halloween parade, the Pumpkin Splash, gingerbread house workshops, and Healthy Kids Day.

With the 160th year of the Norwich Family YMCA’s operation, several lifelong members reflected on their fond memories of and favorite things about the facility.

“The other day there was no school, and the kids were there and it just lifted my heart to see the kids having a good time enjoying themselves, and being rambunctious but in a controlled atmosphere, and having fun,” said YMCA Board of Trustees member Howie Sullivan, who has been a member of the YMCA for 73 years. “You go out Saturday mornings when they have basketball and there’s probably 1,500 people all together throughout the day that come to the Y, and they’re all families, grandparents, kids, mothers, fathers. And there’s swim lessons. Saturday is a day that family just oozes, and it ends on Saturday night with family night.”

“The Y pretty much raised me,” he added. “It hugely impacted my life, and I support the Y in any way that I can.”

Lifelong YMCA member Mickey James said his favorite thing about the facility is the welcoming atmosphere and friendships that are so easily fostered within the facility.

“It’s someplace where you can come, you can stay in shape, you make friend-



The YMCA frequently opens its doors to local schools and organizations. Pictured is the Norwich City School District 6th grade travel basketball team during a practice with coaches Josh Bennett and Mike Christie in the Norwich Family YMCA gymnasium. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

ships, and you can socialize,” said James. “I think that’s my favorite thing. Because the Y is always there for you.”

Also a member of the Norwich Family YMCA is Assemblyman Joseph Angelino, who presented the Y with a New York State Assembly Citation for 160 years of service and commitment to the community.

But their 160th anniversary wasn’t the only milestone celebrated by the Y in 2022.

Gus Macker

After two years on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the beloved summer basketball tournament Gus

Macker finally returned to the City of Norwich streets on July 8, 9, and 10. The tournament celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2022, although Mullen jokes it “took us 27 years to get here.”

While the anniversary and the return of the event was a major step out of the COVID era for the organization, bringing Gus Macker back came with its own set of challenges.

“After restarting after two years, it’s like you almost had to reintroduce it to a market after not having it for a couple years,” said Mullen.

Work on downtown Norwich streets meant the tournament wasn’t able to set up shop in its usual location on East Main Street. Instead, the Norwich Family YMCA teamed up with the Norwich City School District to host Gus Macker at the middle and high school properties on Midland Drive.

Fortunately, the change in location worked out great for the tournament, according to Mullen. In total, 22 basketball courts were set up along Midland Drive and in the Norwich High School parking lot for the three-on-three basketball games, several areas were designated for parking, food vendors set up along the driveway in front of the Norwich Middle School, porta-johns were

set up along the road, and a medical station was established in the NHS Cafeteria.

Although the logistics panned out smoothly, registration for the tournament took a pretty significant blow. Mullen said they had around 210 teams, similar to their registration for the first ever Norwich Gus Macker, and down approximately 100 teams from the last Gus Macker tournament in 2019.

While Mullen said the lower numbers made the event more manageable after the two-year hiatus, it did impact their usual revenue from the event.

“100 teams probably equated to \$16,000 in lost revenue, too. So where we had done the event in year’s past as a fundraiser for the Y, obviously not as much funds were generated from that just due to the expenses associated with that,” he explained.

He said costs included T-shirts, trophies, insurance, trucking baskets from Michigan to Norwich — a cost compounded by the high price of gas in the summer of 2022 — and paying for basketball officials.

Plans for this year’s tournament are already in the works, with the organization preparing to announce the date, and Mullen and Revoir gearing up for the National Gus Macker Conference in

Grand Rapids, Michigan.

With water main replacement and repaving of South Broad and East Main Streets anticipated for this summer, Mullen said he expects Gus Macker to be held at Midland Drive once again.

“It did work last year at the school. We’re thankful for that. They did offer again to work with us on that. If it grows in size, we’ll have to get a little creative for sure,” said Mullen.

However, he hopes to eventually get the Gus Macker Tournament back downtown.

“Being downtown with the businesses and the parking and the closeness to the Y, and the fire department, and the police station, and the sound systems, and things of that nature, has always been an asset for the event,” said Mullen.

“There are many pros to having it at the school, too. So each venue provides something positive and unique for the event. So we’ll assess that in the years to come. It just sounds like this year we’ll be back at the school again.”

Other developments

Beyond anniversary celebrations and the return of Gus Macker, the Norwich Family YMCA has had a busy year full of new developments and both returning and new programs.

One of the biggest accomplishments in 2022 was the development of a new strategic plan, which Mullen said will focus on three major topics: sustainability, people, and expansion.

“We had a strategic priority number one, we call that sustainability. I mean, we’re a business, we’re doing operations, so we need to be able to be sustainable,” Mullen explained. “Our other strategic priority is people. So that’s our membership base, that’s our participants, that’s our staff, our employees, our volunteers.”

“And then our strategic priority number three was expansion, and expansion.”

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sion meaning as we look to the future, that could be program expansion, innovation, new programs, new expanded community partnerships and collaborations. Looking for like-minded organizations to work together for the benefit of the greater Norwich community, and Chenango County,” he continued. “Maybe it could be some growth for the facility, so capital improvements as well that we’ll start looking at for the future.”

The strategic plan also included a newly revised impact statement, which reads, “The Norwich Family YMCA is committed to providing an inclusive environment that is accessible and welcoming to all people. We seek to build and sustain relationships with our YMCA and throughout the community so that all people have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive through the programs and services we provide.”

“It’s kind of bringing everybody together. So we’re excited to be bringing this out and working on this now and having some direction,” said Mullen.

The Norwich Family YMCA was also able to complete a capital project that provided a new dehumidification system for the YMCA swimming pool, a project

that totaled approximately \$500,000.

The organization celebrated the return of the YMCA Dolphins swim team, and rang in their 50th anniversary at the YMCA Camp Thompson facility. Plus, they celebrated the addition of some new sports programs.

Beginning in the fall of 2022, the Norwich Family YMCA partnered with then-student Kara Collins to create Unstoppable Soccer, a sports team geared toward children with unique needs.

“We did a soccer program in the fall called Unstoppable Soccer, and it was part of my college internship actually. I had a 125-hour internship I had to complete. So I created the soccer program and I partnered with the YMCA. They helped me to fund it and insure it and do everything I needed to,” explained Collins, the program’s creator and coach.

She said after the success of Unstoppable Soccer, there was a wide interest in a similar program for basketball. Despite the completion of her college internship, she once again partnered with the Norwich Family YMCA and YMCA Sports Director Tom Revoir to create Unstoppable Basketball.

“It’s a basketball program designed to work on fundamental skills for kids

with unique needs,” said Collins. “A unique need is a pretty broad definition, and so what does a unique need look like? A unique need could be ADHD, a unique need could be a physical difference, it could be an intellectual difference, it could just be anything.”

The program doesn’t just benefit the children, though. Collins explained it can also provide a reprieve for parents or caregivers, as well as aid in connections with other parents that have children with unique needs.

“Parents came, they were able to interact with each other. That’s another big thing in sports, parents interact as much as the kids, at practices and games and things like that,” said Collins. “A lot of these parents struggle to form relationships and friendships and stuff because they have a high needs child. So it was really nice to see that too, these parents kind of all getting together and talking and being able to socialize while their kids were learning a new sport. It was really cool.”

Revoir said not only was the program a nice break for parents, but it also showed them just how much their kids were capable of.

“It’s a great way for parents to have an hour off, and be allowed to watch their own children grow,

both physically and mentally, in a program like that,” he said. “It was incredible. I had a lot of tears from a lot of parents this past fall. They couldn’t believe their kid could do what they were doing.”

Facing challenges

Although the Norwich Family YMCA had much to celebrate in 2022, the year did not come without challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant dip in membership and participation the organization is still trying to bring back.

Revoir said the sports department is actively trying to engage local youth and boost participation in their sports programs.

“We do a lot of advertising. We are all over Facebook,” he said. “Plus we’re working really closely with the schools and they’re putting all of our stuff up on their monitors in the schools to advertise to the students, which are the ones that we need to advertise to.”

He also makes an effort to reach out directly to Unadilla Valley schools about the Y’s sports programs, which has proven to be a move that pays off.

“That’s one of our schools that we try to attract to come here and participate in youth sports. In fact, indoor soccer, when that

starts, we’re going to have 12 teams and about 100 kids from Unadilla Valley playing,” said Revoir.

Still, the decrease in revenue from lost membership and program participation coupled with an increase in costs are putting a dent in the facility’s operating budget.

“We did have a significant operating deficit. We built that into the budget, but again we had some carry-over funds from the government that allowed us to kind of operate at the level that our members have expected and our community has expected. But that challenge is continuing into 2023 as we budget another operating deficit,” Mullen explained.

Further contributing to the issue is the high cost of services such as gas and electricity. Mullen said in 2022 the natural gas heating cost doubled for the facility. The annual minimum wage increases add an additional strain on the YMCA budget as well.

Plus, being in such a small area can mean there is a lack of resources when it comes to fundraising. With so many organizations in need of community support, Mullen said local residents and businesses can only do so much to help.

“Businesses that are here are asked to support

so much. So they are limited resources to support all organizations in the community at the level that they desire to be supported at. I think that’s a challenge,” said Mullen.

To combat the disparity between costs and revenue, the YMCA has made the decision to increase membership rates beginning in March of 2023 — something the facility hasn’t done since before the pandemic.

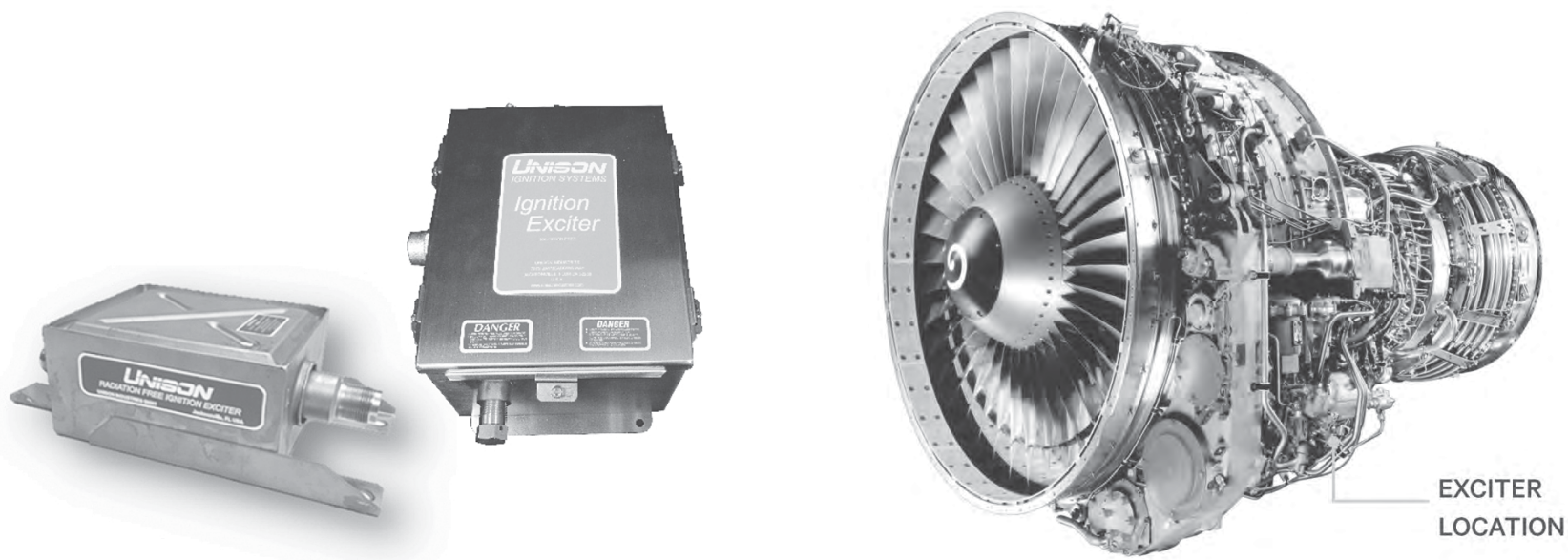
“We will have to adjust our membership rates in 2023. We have adopted some new rates that will go into effect in March. We have not raised our rate since pre-COVID,” Mullen said. “Just our electric bill itself in December was \$23,000. So I mean, even if we raised membership one dollar a month for all of our members, the amount that we collect for that increase won’t even cover the electric bill for December.”

Another challenge is finding volunteers to assist with various programs, according to Revoir. Many of the YMCA’s programs rely on the support of volunteer staff, and Revoir said many more people are qualified to help than they may realize.

“What’s really been a challenge is to get the volunteers to help out. We can’t run these programs

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without the volunteers and there's so many people out there that they worry that they're not good enough to be a coach," he explained.

"If you know a game and you understand a game, you can be a coach. Especially in the YMCA programs because it's a recreation program. We're not out there to be competitive. We're trying to put the fun back in the sports here at the Y," he added.

Those with any interest in volunteering or coaching a team are encouraged to reach out to Revoir at TRevoir@NorwichYMCA.org.

"If you have the inkling and you really are interested in volunteering, don't sit back and keep telling yourself you want to do it and not know how to do it," said Revoir. "Pick up the phone, come into the Y, ask, because there's oodles and oodles of volunteer opportunities at the Y. So if you want to do it, just get up and do it."

But with all the challenges they may be facing right now, Mullen reminded that everything has ups and downs. He's hopeful about what the future has in store for the YMCA.

"You just have to remind yourself of that when you work in an organization that has ups and downs,

or a business that has ups and downs. You know, you may have a down but shortly thereafter you're going to have an up again," he said. "There's a lot of positive. You just have to look."

Moving forward

With a new year on the horizon, the Norwich Family YMCA plans to continue serving the Chenango County community, partner with other organizations to provide even more services and opportunities, break down barriers for local residents, and continue to grow and adapt as an organization.

Mullen likes to view the organization's resiliency as an analogy of juggling basketballs.

"Using the basketball analogy here at the Y: If we're juggling eggs and we drop an egg, it's going to drop and splatter. At least if we're juggling basketballs, it's going to bounce, it's going to come back up, and you're able to get it going again," he explained. "We may drop it, but we keep moving forward."

The organization will continue to implement their new strategic plan, work toward building their membership base back up, look at opportunities to build upon existing programs, and explore other community organizations they can partner with.



Partnering with local organizations is part of the YMCA's mission to provide for the community. Every month, Norwich-based nonprofit Helping Hands sets up in front of the Norwich Family YMCA to give out food, cleaning supplies, and hygiene items to those in need. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

Partnership with Helping Hands

Currently, the YMCA partners with local nonprofit Helping Hands to provide food, hygiene items, and cleaning supplies to area residents in need. Every third Thursday volunteers set up in front of the Norwich Family YMCA at 6 p.m., rain or shine, and hand out bags of supplies to anyone who stops by, no questions asked.

Mullen said examples like these show just how prevalent the kindness and compassion is in a small town.

"You're seeing challenges of unemployment, you're seeing challenges of fear and concern, you're seeing fear of healthcare. We'd be remiss if we didn't com-

ment that we're seeing the side effects of homelessness in our community," Mullen said. "But as we see those changes, we also see the support of the community rallying together. So you see the good in your neighbors still."

"The benefits are the relationships and opportunities to provide to the residents of Chenango County. The opportunity to support families that need assistance, to assist them in their home and work environments. The small town provides a level of safety and comfort and relationships with your neighbors, and maybe more so than a larger city. You're connected, you care," he added.

One of the most important ways the Y continues to move forward is by supporting the community through the Open Doors Scholarship program, which provides financial assistance for those who can't afford YMCA membership, childcare, or program participation.

"Our best program that we have in this building is not a swim lesson program, or a child care program, or a youth sport, or an amazing fitness class," said Mullen. "Those are all amazing, great programs, but our scholarship program that breaks down any financial barrier or stigma, that 'I can't afford to come to the Y,' that breaks that barrier down and allows folks the opportunity to do any of those other programs."

"The scholarship program provides that opportunity for others to be able to participate and take advantage of the opportunities the Y has, as an individual or a family," he added.

Every year, the YMCA runs a support campaign to solicit donations to the program. Mullen said usually around \$100,000 is raised every year by dedicated volunteers and donors, and he wants to keep working on spreading the word so area residents know that assistance is there for them.

"That goes back in to support kids and families with scholarships and assistance for membership, so they can have access to the facility. Scholarships for programming, so they can sign up for a swim team, or they can sign up for youth sports, or after school childcare. All the different things that we offer," he said. "We want to promote and educate folks that that scholarship program is there for folks to take advantage of. We want everybody to still be able to come and use the facilities."

It's through the generosity of the Chenango County community that the Y is able to continue providing their services and programs to every member of the community, regardless of financial status.

"I'm very proud of that program, very proud of our donors that support the Y, very proud of our volunteers, because the organization, yes, we have staff, but

it's very volunteer driven, volunteer focused. It allows people to give back and take ownership in the building and the work of the Y," said Mullen. "I think that's how, and why, the Y has survived 160 years in Norwich."

Mullen and Revoir both recognize the importance of continuing to put one foot in front of the other to take things day by day, and to not expect massive and instant results. While membership numbers and revenue won't jump up overnight, they're hopeful that continued effort and dedication will only continue to build up the Norwich Family YMCA.

"People are starting to come back again and utilize the facility. So our numbers are definitely increasing," said Revoir. "I would say just take it one day at a time. If I went back one year that would be what I would have done different. Stop thinking about too far out, because you start thinking too far out, you get your hopes up, and then what you were hoping doesn't happen. So if you just work at it one day at a time it tends to work out a little bit better."

Ultimately, Mullen said the overall goal of the Norwich Family YMCA is to serve as a safe and welcoming place for everyone that comes through the door.

"Any city, any community, is diverse and eclectic and unique and all socioeconomic and demographics are in that community, and you see that at the Y too. So we are a true reflection of our community," said Mullen.

"Don't judge a book by its cover, because you don't know what that person is going through, or what that person is dealing with, or that that person is maybe hurting. But you know that they are here at the Y for maybe their health, their mental wellbeing, their social acceptance, their desire to be better, and you know, that's what's great about the Y," he continued. "You walk through the building, when you come through these doors, the Y is for everybody."



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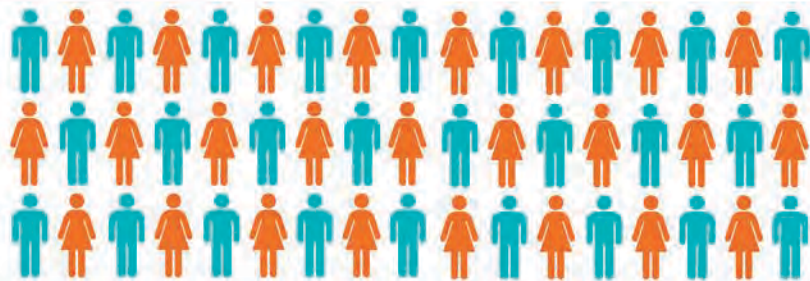


MEMBERSHIP

January 2022 - December 2022

233

MEMBERS



+28
NEW MEMBERS

17K+

EMPLOYEES
REPRESENTED

BUSINESS SIZE



65% FEWER THAN 10 EMPLOYEES



23% MORE THAN 10 EMPLOYEES



12% MORE THAN 50 EMPLOYEES

BUSINESS TYPE

- COMMUNITY/SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS
- CONSTRUCTION/BUILDING SERVICES
- AMUSEMENT/ENTERTAINMENT
- HOSPITALITY
- MANUFACTURERS
- INSURANCE
- FINANCIAL
- AGRICULTURE
- OTHER



COMMUNICATIONS



3,094 FOLLOWERS
FACEBOOK



517 FOLLOWERS
TWITTER



598 FOLLOWERS
INSTAGRAM



13,392 VISITORS
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48 ISSUES CHAMBER WEEKLY NEWSBITES



1,955
EMAIL
SUBSCRIBERS



42%
OPEN
RATE



0.21%
SOCIAL AUDIENCE
GROWTH



32
SPECIAL
ANNOUNCEMENTS



6
SURVEYS

EVENTS



5

RIBBON CUTTINGS



17

CHAMBER EVENTS



1,107

ATTENDEES

TOURISM

700+

ATTENDEES
Joined us for the inaugural Wine, Beer & Food Truck Festival.

Initiated a marketing grant program for smaller tourism properties

11,497

Visitors to
www.visitchenango.com

Created a video for a Spectrum TV spot.

273,000+

impressions for digital marketing

DEVELOPMENT CHENANGO COPORATION

5

Loans provided to Chenango County Businesses

9

DRI projects Approved by NYS

8

Grants Applied for

LEADERSHIP CHENANGO



NEW LOGO

21

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