



RENSCONNECT

WHERE BUSINESS + COMMUNITY CONVERGE

RESPONSE, RECOVERY & REOPENING

What's Next for Rensselaer County? A Conversation with Co. Exec. Steve McLaughlin

Chamber President Kate Manley recently checked in with Rensselaer County Executive Steven McLaughlin for a look at how the county is continuing to respond to COVID-19 and what to expect next.

Kate: As we enter the fall, what is Rensselaer County facing in regards to COVID-19? What are the concerns as we move forward?

McLaughlin: Rensselaer County has had more than 850 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of this writing. We have encouraged residents to follow necessary precautions while trying to maintain a quality of life, following a “Be Careful, Not Fearful” motto, and our residents and businesses have responded very responsibly. Since the county’s first case on March 17, we have focused a great deal of attention and resources toward fighting the outbreak. We established an independent COVID-19 testing site — the greatest commitment of any county in the region — because we recognize testing as a way to return to normalcy. Throughout the outbreak, we have tried to bring a balanced approach in our response. The economy was surging just before the onset of COVID-19 and we have kept an eye on our economic situation every day. We have supported a careful reopening to ensure that businesses and services get back up and running with minimal delays or obstructions.

Kate: What is the role of Rensselaer County as schools plan to reopen? How are we positioned to respond to possible increases of COVID cases?

McLaughlin: Rensselaer County is fortunate to have an exceptional health department, led by Director Mary Fran Wachunas. They are doing an outstanding job responding to a complex and fast-changing situation. We are in regular contact with school superintendents and educators to navigate the outbreak together and recognize the burdens facing school districts. We plan on keeping the county COVID-19 testing operation (which has administered approximately 38,000 tests so far) in place at least through the early stages of the school year. We have also worked with school districts to ensure they have adequate PPE and sanitizer. Throughout the outbreak, Mary Fran and her team have done a great job handling contact tracing. In fact, we believe our contact tracing would compare favorably with contact tracing operations anywhere in the state. We know the start of the school year will bring unexpected challenges and changes and we are ready to respond to help keep students and families safe.

Kate: What economic development initiatives are on track and progressing, despite COVID setbacks?

McLaughlin: When the COVID-19 outbreak started, we took action to ensure both the Amazon warehouse and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals projects continued to move forward. Thanks in part to our efforts and advocacy, both projects were deemed essential by the state and they each continued construction. The Amazon project will create 1,000 new jobs, along with construction jobs. The Regeneron project means several hundred new jobs. There was also the announcement in March that R&L Carriers will be building in South Troy and creating 70 new jobs. In addition, Rensselaer County is making a major investment in improving important services, including a significant expansion of the number of miles paved in our county road network. We are also constructing a new emergency services training tower after the previous tower was closed for several years. Effective transportation and emergency services encourages investment, just as our stronger bond rating and two consecutive budgets with tax decreases also helps.

Kate: What trends should Rensselaer County businesses be looking for in the immediate future and how is the county assisting small businesses?

McLaughlin: The first way the county is trying to help small business is simple but essential: we are your partners during this unprecedented time. We understand small businesses are navigating a new reality that jeopardizes their future success. County government is not the enemy and we work to strike a balance between protecting health and safety and the viability of a business or service. As county executive, I have at every turn strongly advocated for our partners in business and for those who help our county grow. We are hearing from state leaders that the curve has been flattened and we believe some of the restrictions placed on businesses and services can be eased without unnecessarily jeopardizing public health. We definitely urge small businesses to join together and lend their voice to advocate for a safe reopening process. We are looking at utilizing IDA and JDP support for small businesses working through the pandemic and have supported earmarking aid for small businesses. We also want the state to again consider select tax-free days to encourage shopping activity. All county departments have been instructed to help businesses deal with the new rules and reality. Our Employment and Training office is ready to help businesses find new employees (see article at right).

(cont'd on page 3)

Chamber President Kate Manley is talking with some of the key leaders in our community about response, recovery and reopening in the wake of COVID-19. This is the fourth in a series of conversations published in our digital newsletter. For COVID-19 resources, visit renscochamber.com/coronavirus-resource-guide.



ASK A BOARD MEMBER

Jobs, Training & Workforce Development

Brian J. Williams is the Commissioner of Employment & Training for Rensselaer County and Director of the Rensselaer County One Stop Career Center under the Capital Region Workforce Development Board.

He has over 20 years of experience in the workforce development field.



Q » What is the hiring environment at this phase of the pandemic?

A » The number of job openings in the region has remained steady after taking a dip at the beginning of the pandemic. At this point, there are close to 10,000 job openings in the Capital Region listed in the New York State Job Bank. Numbers vary by industry, with healthcare, information technology and office/clerical positions being most in demand. Also, as was true prior to the start of the pandemic, skilled occupations in the construction trades are still at the forefront of job openings.

Q » Are workforce development opportunities still available at this time?

A » Absolutely! Workforce development is more important now than ever for the economic vitality of our region. But effective workforce development is very much a business-driven activity. What was true before the pandemic is still true: there is a serious skills mismatch between unemployed/under-employed individuals and the skills needed by businesses. Many of the individuals that have been laid off as a result of the pandemic were in jobs that paid less than \$40,000 per year. Providing skills training for higher wage jobs is the foundation of enhancing the economic vitality of our region. The goal of workforce development is to bring business and education partners together to achieve this. The workforce development system can assist businesses in creating training programs that suit their skills needs. Matching up these education pathways with the businesses' career pathways is the key to success for all.

Q » How can unemployed and under-employed people re-enter the job market?

A » The first step is to reach out to one of the One Stop Career Centers in our region. The expertise of the workforce advisors in each career center is invaluable. They can assist in resume development, career exploration and, most importantly, identifying the transferable skills of each individual to build a plan to connect you to the industries that need your skills and are in demand. Our career center staff can develop an individualized training plan that may include classroom training, online skills enhancement or “learn and earn” on-the-job training opportunities that will lead to your success.

Contact the Rensselaer County Career Center at 518.270.2860 or email to renselaeronestop@capreg.org.

Welcome New Members

Hunter Engineering
Automobile Service Equipment
Rep: Tony Spada
215 Glasco Turnpike
Saugerties, NY 12477
Phone: 845.417.3497

Please join us in welcoming our newest members by patronizing their businesses. You can invite businesses and organizations to join our growing Chamber by contacting us at 518.274.7020 or info@renscochamber.com.

Member Milestones

30 Years

Capital Plumbing & Heating

25 Years

Thomas K. Judd & Associates

10 Years

Excelsior College

5 Years

Diocese of Albany Catholic Schools
Madison Hearing Center

3 Years

Gretchen Meyer Financial

By the numbers

A closer look at our Chamber's response for our members during COVID-19

4,292

Unique Visitors to our online resource guides since March 13

833

Attendees of our free webinars & virtual events since March

46

eNewsletters sent to membership in 24 weeks

Member Driven
Member Focused

Member News



Excelsior College welcomed its new president, David Schejbal, effective August 1. He is the fourth president in the college's nearly 50-year history as a distance learning institution for adult learners. Schejbal previously served as vice president and chief of digital learning at Marquette University. VISIT excelsior.edu

eBizDocs, a leading electronic content solutions provider, completed the SOC2 Type II attestation with zero defects or any adverse observations. eBizDocs continues to differentiate itself by certifying its ability to protect customer data and meet all relevant trust services criteria for security and availability. Pairing eBizDocs services and the SOC 2 audit creates an enterprise-grade solution that scales to the needs of the public sector, small-to-midsize businesses and enterprise-level clients. VISIT ebizdocs.com

Hudson Valley Community College introduced Career Launchpad, a new initiative that offers workforce training opportunities, community and professional education courses and credit-bearing microcredentials in "career bundles" that can help quickly retrain individuals and launch them on new careers.

Prospective students are encouraged to explore non-credit and credit courses to earn certifications to advance in their field or fast-track training to switch careers. The staff at the college's Career & Transfer Center is offering personalized guidance to explore how Career Launchpad can help with both short and long-term job opportunities. VISIT hvcc.edu



Passport For Good was awarded a three-year statewide contract through Erie 1 BOCES to provide college and career readiness support to 28 school districts in New York State. Passport For Good is a mobile-friendly, web-based platform that gives students a simple, measurable way to securely chronicle and present their community service, career development and extracurricular activities. The result is a verifiable, non-academic transcript they can use for college and career readiness. VISIT passportforgood.com

Teal, Becker & Chiamonte hired Geoffrey S. Mullen as a partner. With 25 years of experience, his specialties includes real estate partnerships, mergers and acquisitions, private equity portfolio companies, technology companies, state and local taxation and tax credits, consolidated corporate tax filings and more. VISIT tbccpa.com



Carbone Subaru presented a \$31,501 check to **Vanderheyden** to benefit the nonprofit's Richard A. Desrochers Educational

Center. The funds, raised through a Subaru "Share the Love" event, will be used to enhance student learning and provide equipment and programming similar to public school offerings, including a Chromebook for each student. VISIT carbonsubaruoftroy.com and vanderheyden.org



Mohawk Hudson Humane Society and **Brown's Brewing Company** kicked off a Happy T'Ales Beer Label Contest. Owners are invited to enter photos of their pets through September 13. The winner will be featured on a label specially designed for a Brown's Brewing Company beer, which will be available exclusively for pickup on Saturday, October 24, the day of the humane society's virtual Oktopurrfest fundraising celebration. VISIT mohawkhumane.org

Unity House of Troy, Inc. introduced a unique pharmacy model customized to the needs of individuals living with behavioral health issues. Genoa Healthcare opened an on-site pharmacy at Unity House's Front Door building in Troy, which serves individuals struggling with mental health, employment, domestic violence or housing needs in Rensselaer County and surrounding communities. The pharmacy is intended to expand access to mental health and substance abuse services, leading to improved medication adherence and reduced total cost of care. VISIT unityhouseoftroy.org

CAP COM Federal Credit Union hired Carin Urban as vice president of member services, overseeing CAP COM's 11 branches and its Member Contact Center. Urban will develop and lead programs to strengthen member experience and service delivery. VISIT capcomfcu.org



Remember the Fallen



Albany Diocesan Cemeteries announced a restoration project at its historic St. Mary's Cemetery at 79 Brunswick Road in Troy. The Adopt a Soldier Veteran Restoration Project's goal is to clean, restore and reset more than 130 veteran gravestones and markers, assuring that veterans, from as early as the Civil War, are buried in

properly marked and maintained graves, preserving them for generations to come. The business community is invited to Adopt a Soldier: \$50 sponsors a gravestone cleaning; \$125 sponsors a cleaning and reset that restores the veteran's gravestone to its original state, as closely as possible. Donors may choose to sponsor a specific gravestone from a list of soldiers in St. Mary's Cemetery or choose to restore a grave in memory of a loved one. VISIT <https://blog.capitaldistrictcemeteries.org>

EventsCalendar 2020 Visit renscochamber.com to register for these upcoming events

WED SEP 16 **Virtual NetworkingPlus**
Get connected, develop leads and build relationships at our NetworkingPlus events - now in virtual format! Capped at the first 32 attendees, this program offers three breakout room rotations and a system designed to avoid repeat introductions. Leave with new ideas and business contacts.
🕒 Zoom meeting, 3 to 4 p.m. EST. No cost. Register online at renscochamber.com. Sponsored by Sunmark Credit Union.

THU SEP 24 **Quick Learn Webinar: Building Effective Presentations in PowerPoint**
Take advantage of this Quick Learn webinar, with instruction by MicroKnowledge, Inc., and learn how to WOW your audience without distracting them. This session is packed with best practices and techniques.
🕒 Webinar 12 to 1 p.m. EST. No cost. Register online at renscochamber.com. Presented in partnership with MicroKnowledge, Inc.

TUE SEP 29 **E-Business for Small & Mid-Sized Businesses (Beginners) Webinar**
Designed for new or small businesses looking to start an online presence, this free seminar introduces the online marketing world and presents a five-step, e-business process with the right tools to get results.
🕒 Webinar 10 to 11 a.m. EST. No cost. Register online at renscochamber.com. Presented in partnership with Endorphin Digital Marketing. Sponsored by Pioneer Bank.

TUE OCT 06 **E-Business for Small & Mid-Sized Businesses (Intermediates) Webinar**
This intermediate-level seminar takes a deeper dive into the five-step digital marketing process. Explore concrete ways to increase online visibility and generate paying customers.
🕒 Webinar 10 to 11 a.m. EST. No cost. Register online at renscochamber.com. Presented in partnership with Endorphin Digital Marketing. Sponsored by Pioneer Bank.

spotlight



Evergreen Commons Rehabilitation & Nursing Center's primary commitment is to the health and dignity of each resident. "We're more than the average nursing home — we're family and we get through everything together," said Sarah Paparella, MPH, LNHA. "Our values and our mission are to treat every one of our residents with the respect and dignity they deserve. The COVID pandemic has challenged us but has renewed our commitment to keep our residents safe, healthy and appreciated."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, not a single Evergreen Commons resident has tested positive for COVID-19. "It's a true testament of our hard work and team effort, but we know that the work is never over," said Paparella. "Every day we are diligently following health and safety protocol, as well as working to bring our residents a sense of comfort and security." Early intervention and a team effort has helped protect residents from the virus. As early as March 2, Evergreen developed a COVID response plan and began communicating a consistent message to staff, residents and families every week. Closing to outside visitors on March 12, Evergreen built in daily moral boosters, from safely celebrating birthdays and milestones, to teaching residents how to use iPads and tablets to

stay in touch with family. Ice cream Fridays, T-shirt giveaways, pizza night, Employee of the Month and other activities were maintained, as well as career development for staff and the graduation

of Evergreen's newest CNA class. At the same time, Uber donated rides for Evergreen employees, Grace Fellowship Church delivered masks, Ford Motor Co. gave face shields and the Chamber sent books and other items, making residents feel less isolated and part of the greater community. On August 20, Evergreen opened its doors again to outside visitors and families were reunited.

"I'm so proud of everyone here for pulling together," said Paparella, noting that Evergreen was named to the *Times Union* Top Workplaces list for 2020 in April. "The past six months have been difficult, but at the end of the day these are the challenges that make us even stronger." VISIT evergreencommonsrehab.com



A Conversation with Steve McLaughlin (cont'd)

Kate: Describe the county's current fiscal condition and the effects from the COVID shutdown.

McLaughlin: The county was seeing strong growth and performance before the COVID-19 outbreak. We've had two budgets adopted unanimously, with each budget including a property tax decrease. The county was able to add to the surplus and earned very positive independent audit reviews. We saw our bond rating raised by Moody's to Aaa3, which is just below elite status, and also earned solid ratings from Standard and Poor's. Sales tax growth in our county was the highest in the state among comparable sales tax rates. The first two quarters of 2020, including months during the COVID-19 outbreak, show a drop in revenue contained to within 6%, which is better than anticipated and better than other counties. This is good news for county residents and for the local governments that share in these revenues. We are still seeing healthy shopping activity and we're also encouraged by growth in the housing sector, even during the outbreak. There will be challenges, but we are ready to make the choices needed to maintain our strong financial position.

Kate: What positives are helping Rensselaer County continue to grow and thrive during the COVID-19 outbreak?

McLaughlin: Rensselaer County was experiencing strong growth before COVID-19 and we are optimistic and ready to partner to resume our success story. We have worked hard in the county to create a platform for growth with low taxes, solid fiscal reviews/ratings and a focus on improving services every day. We have met the COVID-19 challenge and seen residents and businesses step up with common-sense, compassion and creativity. Large-scale projects like Amazon and Regeneron are coming to our county, creating jobs and growing our economy. During the past several months, many have moved to our county for our exceptional quality of life. Opportunity and growth are coming, so please remain optimistic and energized.

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WELCOME THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

The Leadership Institute Class of 2021

The Chamber is proud to announce The Leadership Institute Class of 2021, marking the 16th year of our award-winning, skills-based program. This year's dynamic and diverse group of professionals are poised and eager to expand their leadership and business acumen. Graduates will join more than 450 Leadership alumni who are applying their valuable talents within their professions and communities.

Ready to Join Us? Start Planning Now for the Class of 2022

If you or a staff member are interested in applying to The Leadership Institute, now is the time to budget for the program. For more information, contact the Chamber at 518.274.7020 or visit renscochamber.com.

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The Leadership Institute is sponsored by CDPHP

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VIRTUAL **LOW VISION TECH & HEALTH FAIR**

October 14, 2020
9:30AM to 2:00PM

Free to the Public!

Presenting Specialists:

Chris Gabriels, MD
Gabriels Eye MDs
Albany
Topic: **Glaucoma**



Christopher R. Zieker, MD
Zieker Eye
Wilton
Topic: **Cataracts**



Jonathan Huz, MD
Retina Consultants, PLLC
Slingerland
Topic: **Macular Degeneration**



Live presentations include time for questions * Professional demonstrations of the latest in low vision technologies for reading, computers & adaptive vision aids * Adaptive living experts on living successfully with low vision, vision rehabilitation therapy, traveling and what to expect at a low vision exam.

The event program will be in our newsletter and on our Facebook events page.

Attend online or by phone at:

Zoom Meeting ID: 851 3508 2353

Passcode: 812644

By phone +1 929 205 6099

Questions or to sign up for the newsletter, contact Lisa Jordan, Coordinator of Outreach Services, ljordan@naba-vision.org or call 518-463-1211 x 241



How to Zoom

An intro class September 29
10AM for phone & online
Meeting ID: 818 0264 2009
Passcode: 000975
By phone 1 929-205-6099



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under Events for all updates & event developments!



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