Executive Director’s Report
For
August 2020
August 2020

MEMO

To: ECGRA Board of Directors
Re: Erie County COVID-19 Response Fund (Response Fund)

Executive Director’s Status Report

Summary

The Response Fund was created by the ECGRA board of directors on 3/19/20. The first grant made from the Fund went to the Second Harvest Food Bank on 3/20/20 to address the pressing needs of food insecurity. The Response Fund was designed to be locally controlled, swift, and flexible. It incorporated these principles and produced results consistent with the expectations placed on it by the ECGRA board and Erie County Council. Here’s some numbers on the Response Fund:

- ECGRA received 69 grant applications; 44 grants were funded fully or partially
- Response Fund grant total: $2.4 million requested; $688,234 funded
- Loan Fund Activity: $520,000 small business; $100,000 Nonprofits

Introduction

During a disaster, one of the organizational types deemed essential by state governments are grantmaking agencies. The “essential” designation recognizes a) that grantmaking must continue to flow, b) grantmaking must flow to the right places, and c) grantmaking is an important part of innovative solutions amid crisis. But what role can they really play? The ECGRA – Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority – is a county-level grantmaker whose purpose is community and economic development. At its core, the ECGRA invests in people and place. Both are important during a crisis, since both involve the preservation of life and the quality of life for those living and surviving in the aftermath of a crisis.

Erie County’s story begins in March 2020, as local officials begin to wrap their minds around the spread of COVID-19 across the United State and major metropolitan areas in Pennsylvania. Smaller counties like Erie are less dense in population, play host to satellite hospitals. However, in a global society, no place is immune to the spread of a highly contagious virus. A heavy advanced manufacturing town, Erie has international players making stuff for the world’s industrial supply chain. A university town, Erie has students traveling for Spring break.
Set between New York and Ohio, Erie is a pass through in the tri-state area. Knowing that Erie County would not be simply passed by, local leaders acted before the virus hit its borders. Erie County Council joined with the ECGRA to create the Erie County COVID-19 Response Fund.

Erie County COVID-19 Response Fund

The Response Fund was the result of collaboration between Erie County Council and the ECGRA. They created the Response Fund proactively after witnessing news reports from larger cities concerning the spread of the disease, its effects on the population of those cities, and resulting behavior of citizens in those cities. The Response Fund had three components:

1. **Immediate Human Relief**
2. **Nonprofit Loan Fund**
3. **Small Business Loan Fund**

Each area of funding was designed to address the crisis for multiple stakeholders from multiple perspectives. Erie County had never experienced such a virus-based crisis that had the potential to kill so many people, cripple the county’s quality of life, and devastate the economy. How can one respond to such a multi-tiered crisis?

Grantmakers are uniquely positioned in a crisis because they are regularly in touch with human service providers, nonprofit institutions that provide quality of life and community development services, and economic development agencies for small business. Communication with these sectors led to an early conclusion: capital was not flowing. Liquidity was problem for small business of which half in the US have enough cash reserve for 10-14 days. Nonprofits could not fundraise event-style because of social distancing. Philanthropy had slowed because the stock market had taken a massive hit. How could grantmakers wrap their heads around this?

One helpful source early on was *The Disaster Philanthropy Playbook*, which can be found online at [www.disasterplaybook.org](http://www.disasterplaybook.org). Serving as a framework for the Response Fund, the Immediate Human Relief component was structured as a grant program focusing on four primary areas:

- **Food Insecurity**, Food Banks, Food Pantries, Food Delivery to the home bound. According to Second Harvest Food Bank, Erie County had 30,000 food insecure individuals prior to the crisis.
- **Homeless Shelters**, new requirements for the homeless amidst a pandemic included limiting shelter sizes, regulating social distancing for a mentally ill population.
- **Elderly Care**, telemedicine, protective personal equipment (PPE) for human service workers, sanitization supplies.
- **Child Care Centers** for essential workers that needed a safe place for their children so they could go to work at hospitals, grocery stores, and public safety entities. Like eldercare, the childcare people were struggling with protecting the health of both the
children and their workers. PPE became essential. New standards for sanitization were being pioneered. All on the fly.

The loan fund components for both nonprofits and small business were structured using an existing relationship with a Community Development Financing Institution (CDFI). Bridgeway Capital, a US Treasury regulated and Aeris Rated CDFI, had been working with ECGRA since 2014. Nonprofits that had a revenue-based service were directed to the loan fund for stability. Small businesses that would soon experience liquidity issues leading to solvency problems were directed to the loan fund.

Resilience as a Conceptual Framework

When a crisis hits, we often look to media sources to get our information. Politicians, government agencies, and NGOs pump out carefully crafted messages letting us know what’s happening in the world. However, that’s not the only level of action and information dissemination that counts. On the local level, every community has a mixture of organizations that play a role in a pandemic. Those organizations can be divided into three distinct sectors – public, private, civic. Sometimes known as the “triple helix” of community DNA, these sectors work in conjunction with one another, complementing efforts when appropriately aligned. Each has different motives, resources, obstacles, and objectives, but if they can align in a time of crisis, then a community gets the most out of these organizations.

Resilience in Six Principles

1. People – Erie County Council & ECGRA, nonprofits, universities, municipalities, small business & industry.
2. Systems Thinking – Food insecurity, homelessness, daycare & elderly care, small business
3. Adaptability – the industry/university partnership to produce PPE
4. Transformability – COVID should transform our thinking on how to respond with resources
5. Sustainability – the Response Fund is a new source of continued planning and resource development that should be with us for years to come.
6. Courage – our collective future requires us to understand how ill prepared we were and how we could do better in the future.
The Grantmakers Role

Despite differences, these sectors can come together in a time of crisis to promote stability, safety, and innovation if they are properly understood and effectively incentivized. In fact, during a crisis is the time when they are most likely to collaborate efficiently, since time is of the essence. This is where the grantmaker comes into play. During calmer times, the grantmaker has a process for soliciting grant applications. This involves grant writing, grant review panels, careful back-and-forth with applicants answering questions, in short, a vetting process that leads to inquiry, communication, and ultimately deliberative behavior. In a time of crisis, the grantmaker’s primary role shifts to one of information clearing house, resource provider, and matchmaker.

In short, grantmakers become important intermediaries between those who understand problems and those who can solve problems. They don’t let sector differences, incentives, and bureaucracy stand in the path. The following examples illustrate the ECGRA acting as intermediary between sectors and agencies in order to solve the problems of immediate human relief and cash flow liquidity for both nonprofits and small business.

- Examples
  - Food Insecurity, food banks, pantries, distribution
  - Emergency Homeless Sheltering: a confederated system (HOME Team)
  - Emergency Childcare for essentials workers in the short-term and to restart the economy in the long-term
  - Digital Divide: Need for Residential Internet Access, especially for students
  - Small business liquidity & solvency
  - Civic institution viability

- Lessons Learned
  - You can’t prepare, but you can react intelligently
  - Expedited voting procedures to act swiftly and comply with Sunshine Law in mind
  - Amplify existing relationships
  - Dual mission of saving lives and livelihoods (Public health & economic development)
  - Relationships between funders and elected officials

- Recommendations
  - Create the Disaster Response Fund permanently
  - Map out home delivery services needed in time of crisis
  - Work with Erie County to create an emergency shelter plan for the homeless
  - Incorporate small business behavior into a crisis response stimulus package
  - Educate nonprofits on the resources available during an economic crisis
  - Establish technology and broadband resources for every student in Erie County
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Second Have N Food Bank of NWPA</td>
<td>Emergency Food Relief Boxes</td>
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<td>Emergency Shelter System</td>
<td>Emergency Shelter Funding for the Homeless of Erie County</td>
<td>$12,500.00</td>
<td>3/21/2020</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>North East Food Pantry</td>
<td>Emergency Food Acquisition</td>
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<td>3/23/2020</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Erie Family Center</td>
<td>Diaper Depot</td>
<td>$7,500.00</td>
<td>3/22/2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>YMCA of Greater Erie</td>
<td>Licensed Childcare for S莉e-S sustai性</td>
<td>$16,000.00</td>
<td>3/26/2020</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mercy Center for Women</td>
<td>Emergency Homeless Shelter related costs due to COVID-19 regulations</td>
<td>$9,575.00</td>
<td>3/25/2020</td>
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<td>The Upper Room</td>
<td>Costs associated with increased regulations due to COVID-19</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Meals on Wheels</td>
<td>Food distribution for homebound elderly</td>
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<td>3/26/2020</td>
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<td>Penn State University</td>
<td>Face Shield Manufacturing</td>
<td>$6,700.00</td>
<td>3/28/2020</td>
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<td>Community Shelter Service</td>
<td>Emergency Sheltering increase due to COVID-19</td>
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<td>St. Patrick's Haven</td>
<td>Men's Shelter Costs</td>
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<td>Erie City Mission</td>
<td>Homeless Shelter and Kitchen</td>
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<td>Safe Journey</td>
<td>Rural Domestic Abuse Shelter</td>
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<td>EDAWN</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Safe Housing</td>
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<td>Gannon University</td>
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<td>Sarah A Reed Children's Center</td>
<td>Technology Costs related to social distancing/remote therapy</td>
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<td>MVA Senior Living Alliance</td>
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<td>Erie United Methodist Alliance</td>
<td>Homeless Shelter-related costs</td>
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<td>St. Martin Center</td>
<td>Childcare Center Preparation Costs</td>
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<td>Bethany Outreach Center</td>
<td>Emergency Hygiene and Food Distribution</td>
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<td>MEGA Senior Center</td>
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<td>Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network</td>
<td>Staff Costs to shift from in-person to volunteer-based</td>
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<td>Midtown Counseling &amp; Mental Health Advocacy</td>
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<td>Urban-Erie Community Development Corporation</td>
<td>Refrigerator, hygiene, sanitation-related things</td>
<td>$16,408.00</td>
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<td>Salvation Army, Erie</td>
<td>Refridgerator, hygiene, sanitation related things</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Penn State University</td>
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<td>Christian Cupboard (Grand Food Pantry Food Pantry Supplies</td>
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<td>Erie Cohran Food Pantry</td>
<td>Harborcreek Food Pantry Supplies</td>
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<td>Northwestern Food Pantry (Albion)</td>
<td>Food Pantry Supplies</td>
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<td>Union City Food Pantry</td>
<td>Food Pantry Supplies</td>
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<td>Waterford Food Pantry</td>
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<td>Harborcreek High School</td>
<td>Ear Savers</td>
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<td>5/4/2020</td>
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<td>Elmwood Food Pantry</td>
<td>Food Pantry Supplies</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Edinboro Community &amp; Economic Dev Food Relief packages and supplies</td>
<td>$5,370.00</td>
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<td>Erie Family Center #2</td>
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<td>YMCA of Greater Erie #2</td>
<td>N95, Food cost, food prep, childcare sanitation supplies</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Sacred Heart Food Pantry</td>
<td>Food and personal items</td>
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<td>Service</td>
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<td>Youth Leadership Institute of Erie</td>
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<td>5/12/2020</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Project Shield</td>
<td>PPE Purchase for Public Safety and Nonprofit Sector</td>
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<td>5/21/2020</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Sarah Reed Senior Living</td>
<td>Food Equipment (Heating Carts)</td>
<td>$5,200.00</td>
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<td>International Institute of Erie</td>
<td>Pre-School Childcare &amp; Summit Program</td>
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<td>Project Shield for Educators</td>
<td>Face Shields for Public School System</td>
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<td>6/4/2020</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

$681,234.00
ERIE, PA (July 24, 2020) – The Erie Urban Entrepreneur Program, financed by the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) and managed by Bridgeway Capital (Bridgeway), is helping prepare entrepreneurs to succeed and generating economic activity among Erie County’s African American entrepreneurs.

With funding from ECGRA, Bridgeway helps entrepreneurs of color develop and launch business through its Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator (EMOBA). EMOBA is designed to provide developing businesses a strong foundation to launch and grow.

The program, modeled after a pilot project launched by Bridgeway in Pittsburgh, was conceptualized by ECGRA in 2016 when its leadership saw a need for more programs to support African American entrepreneurs in Erie. Bridgeway is currently preparing to welcome its second cohort of entrepreneurs into EMOBA.

"Bridgeway Capital is excited to welcome the second Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator cohort," said Cathryn P. Easterling, Director of the Bridgeway Capital Erie Office. "While in a pandemic, businesses are still planning, growing, and projecting. Their hard work is representative of the Erie community’s resiliency."

"This program provides excellent opportunities for emerging and existing minority-owned businesses and truly addresses the barriers that many minority-owned business face when navigating
entrepreneurship. I look forward to working with these diverse businesses in the second Erie Minority-Owned Business Accelerator cohort and to see their maturation and impact within our region."

Krystal Robinson, a participant in EMOBA’s first cohort, has been working intensively to build a business that increases access to healthy food in Erie. Krystal entered EMOBA with an idea—she wanted to share her passion for healthy food and cooking with the Erie community. Through the accelerator, she gained access to a network of business development professionals who guided her to develop a business plan and marketing strategy.

“I was able to fully conceptualize my company, Taste and See: All Things Fruits & Vegetables, and step into the Erie renaissance effort by working with Bridgeway Capital,” said Krystal Robinson, CEO, Taste and See: All Things Fruits & Vegetables. “Being a part of Erie’s Flagship City Food Hall will enable me to share my passion for nutrition while also receiving developmental support. I want to help Erie look good and feel good because it eats good.”

EMOBA program participants will engage in nine months of extensive mentoring and one-on-one tailored assistance focused on business planning and strategy development. Erie entrepreneurs are excited for this opportunity; Bridgeway has received 35 applications for the EMOBA program set to begin in late August 2020.

“The key revitalizing factor is small, urban businesses beginning to provide jobs for the neighborhood, particularly young people; an entrepreneur providing fresh food for her community, a barber inspiring young people to continue their education, a high-quality child care center within walking distance of home—that’s the community development we are trying to spur,” said Perry Wood, Executive Director, ECGRA. “Krystal’s story is evidence that the EMOBA is working, and we strongly encourage anyone interested in learning how to create and grow a business in Erie’s urban core to apply.”

The Erie Urban Entrepreneur Program offers a streamlined process, including a loan checklist with more relaxed lending standards. Bridgeway markets directly to the community, launching the program out of Erie City Hall, to ensure potential business owners feel no barriers to entry. Bridgeway also provides credit counseling services to help borrowers boost their credit rating when necessary.

More information on EMOBA can be found here.

Here is a link to a YouTube video about Krystal and her business: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zj7Zt5C50c&feature=youtu.be

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority views Erie County’s inner city as a regional force in the economy and recognizes that there is an unrealized potential of inner-city markets and entrepreneurs. To apply for funding through the Erie Urban Entrepreneur Program at Bridgeway Capital, borrowers should call Cathryn Easterling at 814-451-1172.

####
July 24, 2020

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA)
Perry Wood
5340 Fryling Rd suite 201
Erie, PA 16501

Dear Mr. Wood:

For 60 years, Stairways Behavioral Health has assisted individuals with mental health care and addiction needs at any stage of life in their recovery by providing comprehensive rehabilitation, treatment, arts, and supports essential for living, working, learning and participating fully in the community. We take great pride in providing progressive and compassionate care.

Over the last several years, however, we have seen drastic changes in our marketplace that led to serious disruptions in our revenue and an increase in our expenses. We worked hard to keep our core services intact, even as we recognized the need to make cuts elsewhere in order to strengthen Stairways for the long run. For example, due to a change in funding we had to close Crawford County outpatient programs a year ago. We have also completed administrative restructuring, re-bid our vendor contracts to create savings and more recently, we adapted programming because of the pandemic and reorganized/improved efficiencies in many of our programs.

Despite these many changes, they were not enough to balance our budget for the 2020/2021 fiscal year as we try to position Stairways to be a stronger agency for years to come. Regrettably and after much deliberation, a decision was made to close the BLOOM campus. While we have long believed in the value of art therapy and the positive impact those programs have had on our clients, our payers simply do not reimburse us for these services at a level that covers our costs. With each passing year, BLOOM continued to operate at a loss which we can no longer afford to subsidize while COVID-19 added additional constraints on our ability to offer the programs at BLOOM. Please know that this was a very difficult but necessary decision that Stairways’ Board of Directors had to make, and it was not done lightly.

As a loyal donor of our BLOOM program, I wanted to reach out to you so that you were aware of this unfortunate turn of events. I deeply appreciate your commitment to the Stairways and BLOOM missions for these many years. We recognize that these difficult decisions made now will ensure that Stairways will be here for generations to come for the thousands of clients who rely on us for their mental health and drug and alcohol services. We hope you will, too. Thank you for your commitment to the Stairways and BLOOM missions. Please feel free to reach out to me via email at rldowling@stairwaysbh.org should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Robin Dowling
Executive Director
July 29, 2020

Dr. Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

Thank you for the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority’s continued support of the children and staff at Sarah A. Reed Children’s Center!

The very special contribution of 30 face shields was received and processed on July 29, 2020, and will be put to immediate use by our children and staff throughout our agency. Please convey our heartfelt thanks to your colleagues at EGRA and the team at Bliley Technologies for the difference they are continuing to make in the lives of those we serve, especially during these challenging and uncertain times.

While many businesses and organizations have closed temporarily due to COVID-19, we have been working harder than ever to continue our programs and find new ways to meet the critical demand that exists in our community for children’s mental and behavioral health services. This includes the 2020 Summer Reading & Math Program, which is operating remotely this year and providing a variety of reading, math and educational activities to the 62 children who are currently enrolled in our 24-hour Residential Treatment Program. As you’ll see from the enclosed report, the children are practicing social distancing this year and using Chromebooks to engage in online learning from their residence halls rather than receiving in-person education at the former Ridgefield Elementary School, as we had done in past years. We greatly appreciate EGRA’s strong support of our technological initiative, which is helping to equip our students, therapists and teachers with the technology they need to stay connected, stay safe and keep learning.

Perry, I can’t wait to walk you around campus once it’s safe to do so and show you the impact that EGRA is continuing to have on our agency and those we serve! Thank you for standing with us during this time and helping to shine the light of hope for children and families in our community.

Sincerely,

Gary L. Bukowski, MA, CFRE
Associate VP of Development
Sarah A. Reed Children’s Center
2445 West 34th Street • Erie, PA 16506
Phone: (814) 835-7602
GBukowski@SarahReed.org

cc: Tammi L. Michali, Executive Assistant
July 29, 2020

Mr. Perry Wood, Executive Director
Eric County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Mr. Wood,

Thank you for ECGRA’s donation of 1200 face shields to Erie’s Public Schools.

The school district’s number one priority is the health and safety of our students and staff and your generous donation of face shields will help us provide the extra support needed in our schools as we navigate these unprecedented times.

Again, thank you for your donation and support of Erie’s Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Polito, CPA
Superintendent of Schools
August 7, 2020

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
Ms. Tammi L. Michali
Office Manager
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA. 16510

Ms. Michali,

With all the deepest gratitude, I am so honored that the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority chose the Erie County Technical School as a recipient of a number of face shields. During this trying time of the COVID-19 pandemic, your donation to the school will assist our administration in creating a safe environment for all, especially the instructional staff. The face shields will be assigned to the instructional staff, and any other staff that may desire the PPE. As you can only imagine, the staff will be extremely surprised and grateful for this kind gesture and your recognition of the essential job that each of them preform daily.

Please know that Mrs. Sharon Kresse, our school nurse will continue to be the contact for the Erie County Technical School for any additional health care related donations that the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority may be willing to share with our school. Again, during this trying time, any support for our staff and students would be extremely appreciated.

Again, I appreciate you thinking of the Erie County Technical School and our staff! I am wishing you and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority continued success. God bless you.

Sincerely,

Joe Tarasovitch
Principal
COVERING CORNY, Columbus, Concord, Climer, Ewing, Findlay, Leesburg, Spencerville, Spring Creek, Union City & Wayne Township

COVERING CORNY, Columbus, Concord, Climer, Ewing, Findlay, Leesburg, Spencerville, Spring Creek, Union City & Wayne Township

The City Journal, Union City, Ohio, July 16, 2020

Applicants to Share $50K in UC Renaissance Grant Funds

Wells said, "They select specific businesses, programs or projects that they see as having the potential to create jobs, stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life in the city." Wells added that the program is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for changes and adjustments as needed.

Union City Mayor M. Jones said, "We are excited to see the impact of this grant program on our city. It will help us invest in projects that will benefit our residents, businesses and downtown area. These funds will be used for a variety of projects, including infrastructure improvements, economic development initiatives and community improvements." Jones emphasized the importance of collaboration and community involvement in ensuring the success of the program.

The UC Renaissance Grant Program is a collaborative effort between the City of Union City, the Union County Area Development Organization, and the Union County Economic Development Corporation. The program is funded through a combination of local and state resources, as well as private contributions.

Applicants interested in the UC Renaissance Grant Program are encouraged to submit proposals that align with the program's goals and objectives. Funding will be allocated based on the severity of need, the potential impact on the community, and the feasibility of the proposed project.

"We are committed to supporting projects that will make a difference in our city," said Jones. "This grant program is just one of the many ways we are working to improve Union City and create a better quality of life for our residents."