



E·C·G·R·A
ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
SEPTEMBER
2019**



Ridge Policy Group Activity

ECGRA August 15 – September 15 Report

RPG Relevant Activity

- Sent over follow-up information on algae bloom clean-up in response to conversations with Ridge Environmental Center and Other Sources
- Sent over follow-up after 8/14 meetings in Erie with Perry Wood, Councilman Foust, Ridge Environmental Center, and Karl Sanchak

Funding Opportunities Presented

Federal Opportunities:

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative accelerates efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

All projects must support one of the GLRI focus areas:

- **Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern**
- Invasive Species
- Nonpoint Source Pollution Impacts on Nearshore Health (formerly Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution FY2010-2014)
- Habitat and Species (formerly Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Restoration FY2010-2014)
- Foundations for Future Restoration Actions (formerly Accountability, Education, Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication and Partnerships FY2010-2014)

Funding is typically available in February and July of each year.

More information can be found [here](#).

NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science

NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) typically has up to 30 new and continuing harmful algal bloom (HAB) research awards over the last several years. NCCOS HAB competitive research programs develop science-based solutions to address expanding HAB impacts that are affecting coastal resources and economies in every U.S. coastal region. HAB species and impacts vary regionally and NCCOS projects are advancing the understanding of bloom toxicity, applying new technologies to detect HABs and their toxins in the field, producing HAB forecasts, and exploring HAB prevention and control methods. Summaries of new and continued research projects by region are below. NCCOS projects are the result of a rigorous competitive peer-review process that ensures support for the highest quality science.

This year's funding opportunity was from January – February and it is expected to be similar next year. More information can be found [here](#).

Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) program is a federal-state partnership that provides communities a permanent, independent source of low-cost financing for a wide range of water quality infrastructure projects. Funds are available for the implementation of a variety of watershed pollution management activities related to HABs, including: removal of leaking or damaged septic systems, implementation of agricultural BMPs such as no-till equipment and manure management measures, and wetland restoration. Other projects to prevent the degradation of water quality that are less focused on drinking water systems, but still impact source water, include green infrastructure and stormwater management activities.

More information can be found [here](#).

319 Grant Program for States and Territories

Under Section 319, states, territories and tribes receive grant money that supports a wide variety of activities including technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects and monitoring to assess the success of specific nonpoint source implementation projects.

More information can be found [here](#).

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

USDA provides funding through the RCPP to foster restoration efforts and the sustainable use of soil, water, flora, and fauna at regional and watershed scales. Through the RCPP, funding recipients partner with agricultural producers to help the producers implement and maintain conservation activities in defined project areas. The partners administer RCPP funding to local project participants and stakeholders. Funds have previously been provided to water and sewer districts for watershed conservation projects. RCPP funding is allocated at the national level, state level, and for **critical conservation areas such as the Great Lakes, Mississippi River watershed, and Chesapeake Bay**. State entities administer state-specific funds. A project can be eligible for funding at all levels. Funding is provided in accordance with the rules of EQIP, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and other USDA conservation programs.

More information can be found [here](#).



Funding Opportunities	Awards
Erie School District/Mercyhurst University – PASmart Award	\$ 500,000
Greater Erie Community Action Committee – pre-apprenticeship program	\$ 49,995
ARC Grant – Investing in Appalachia’s Future: ARC 5-year Strategic Plan	\$ 200,000
EDA – Regional Innovation Strategies Assistance to Coal Communities Program	\$ 1,000,000
Millcreek School District Foundation – tax credit	\$ 20,000
City of Erie/Erie Innovation District (ARC POWER grant)	\$ 500,000
Erie Innovation District (EDA grant)	\$ 2,000,000
TOTAL:	\$ 4,269,995



Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Monday, September 9, 2019
11:30am – 1:00pm
5240 Knowledge Parkway, Erie, PA 16510

AGENDA

1. Announcement in Edinboro – Goodell Gardens 10:00am

2. Mission Related Investments
 - a. Sustain North East
 - b. eCAT

3. Board Effect Software

4. Community Asset – Arts, Culture & Heritage Review



**ECGRA invests in Edinboro
AGENDA**

Perry Wood
ECGRA, Exec. Director

ECGRA Invests in Edinboro/Emcee

Scott Rastatter
Erie County Council

Remarks on ECGRA Investments in
Edinboro

Dr. Guiyou Huang
Edinboro University

Remarks on ECGRA investments in
Edinboro

Kevin Oppe
Edinboro, Borough Manager

Remarks on economic energy built
by investments

Brenda Cannell
ECED, Chair

Remarks on ECGRA investment
used as a catalyst for cooperation &
progress

Michael Paris
ECGRA, Board Chair

Check Presentations

CHECK PRESENTATIONS

Mission Main Street, Borough Manager, ECED

Edinboro Highland Games, Tim Thompson

Downtown Edinboro Arts and Music Festival, Fred Parker



NEWS*NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS**

ECGRA Investments Support Edinboro Community, Economic Revitalization

Latest Award totals tops half million dollars invested in Edinboro Community

CONTACT: Kate Philips
pahilips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

EDINBORO, PA (September 11, 2019) – As towns and communities across the region reinvest in local businesses, infrastructure, and neighborhoods, ECGRA officials announced a new round of investments in Edinboro, including a \$250,000 Mission Main Street grant to support the Borough of Edinboro’s efforts to reinvigorate its downtown corridor.

“Local share gaming revenue is making a transformational impact through reinvestment in Erie County’s Main Streets, and helping fuel economic activity by supporting successful arts and cultural experiences like the Edinboro Highland Games,” County Council Member Scott Rastatter said. “These experiences draw visitors and residents to our communities, while investments in our Main Streets help to grow the local economies.”

ECGRA officials today also awarded Special Events grants to the Edinboro University Foundation (\$7,668) and Edinboro Highland Games (\$2,124). Today’s announcement marks more than a half a million dollars (\$693,971.07) of local share gaming revenue invested in the Edinboro community since 2011.

“These projects are part of an overall strategy to improve the business environment and enhance the community offerings that make towns like Edinboro desirable places to live, work and play,” said Perry Wood, ECGRA Executive Director. “ECGRA dollars are empowering this well-organized group of leaders to make a lasting impact on the long-term viability of one of Erie County’s unique and historic towns.”

Rastatter was joined by Edinboro University President Dr. Guiyou Huang, Edinboro Borough Manager, Kevin Opple, and local Borough and Economic Development officials to celebrate the ongoing reinvestment in the Edinboro community.

“ECGRA is maintaining a keen focus on investments that move the needle for Erie County by supporting innovation and collaboration through the Beehive Network, which opens the doors of our universities entrepreneurs across Erie County,” said Dr. Guiyou Huang. “We are excited to partner with our neighbors who support EU’s efforts to provide the best possible experience for our students and area residents.”

Using national best practices as models for grant making and impact investing since 2008, ECGRA has made and reported on 1,075 grants and loans to 248 nonprofits and municipalities totaling over \$58 million of investments of local share gaming revenue.

“The success of facade renovations made possible through 2018 ECGRA grants has energized the community to invest in the improvement of the downtown community,” said Opple. “The ECGRA and Borough investment of about \$18,000 leveraged more than \$65,000 in investments from business and building owners, fueling the first downtown renovation program in over a decade.”

ECGRA has set aside \$2.5 million in grants over the next three years for Main Street revitalization. Mission Main Street grantees are required to match ECGRA’s \$1.2 million of local share gaming revenue investments, extending the reach of these valuable economic development dollars to \$2.4 million revitalizing main streets across Erie County in the past six years.

The Mission Main Street Grant announced today will provide direct assistance to the business community through façade improvements, transformation of lighting and sidewalks, new banners for Erie and Meadville Streets, train and reinforce partners to leverage social media platforms to advance business and community goals.

ABOUT MISSION MAIN STREET

ECGRA’s Mission Main Street Grants is one of three *IMPACT: Neighborhoods & Communities* initiatives invested in and measured by the ECGRA board of directors with the purpose of reinvigorating neighborhoods and main corridors, boosting buy-local efforts, and combating blight.

Mission Main Street Grants were established in 2013 by the ECGRA board of directors to buttress any area recognized as a “main street” — a distinct geographic area host to small businesses, special events, historic structures, green spaces, and parks.

Mission Main Street grant guidelines, available at www.ECGRA.org, were originally written in collaboration with a volunteer committee made up of 19 municipal, nonprofit, and business leaders from across the county.

Applicants can apply for up to \$250,000 over three years for an implementation project, and up to \$10,000 for a one-year planning project. All projects require a 1:1 cash match.

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August 28, 2019

Dear County Council candidate,

I would like to invite you to attend a briefing of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) on Friday, September 13, 2019 at the Bayfront Convention Center beginning at 4:30pm. This is an opportunity to help you become more familiar with the Authority and the efforts put forth to increase the economic and community development of Erie County.

As both the current Chairman and Board member of ECGRA for the past ten years, I have seen the impact that reinvesting our local share into this great community has made. I would encourage you to attend and hear about some of the programs that have brought about this change. Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director of ECGRA, will direct the conversation, culminating with a discussion on the GECAC Summer Jobs program and the effect that it has had for the underprivileged youth of this county.

Immediately following this short briefing, GECAC is holding their Annual Dinner to discuss results of the 2018 Summer Jobs and More Program. You are invited to attend, along with a spouse or other guest. If you are interested in staying for this presentation, please contact Tammi Michali at 814-897-2690 or tmichali@ecgra.org with the name(s) and number of those attending.

I look forward to meeting you and feel positively that as we work together, we can continue the forward movement that is taking place in this wonderful place known as Erie!

Sincerely,

Michael J. Paris, Chairman

Board of Directors

Michael J. Paris
Chair

David M. Bagnoni
Vice-chair

Dale E. Barney
Treasurer

David S. Sample
Secretary

Whitey Cleaver

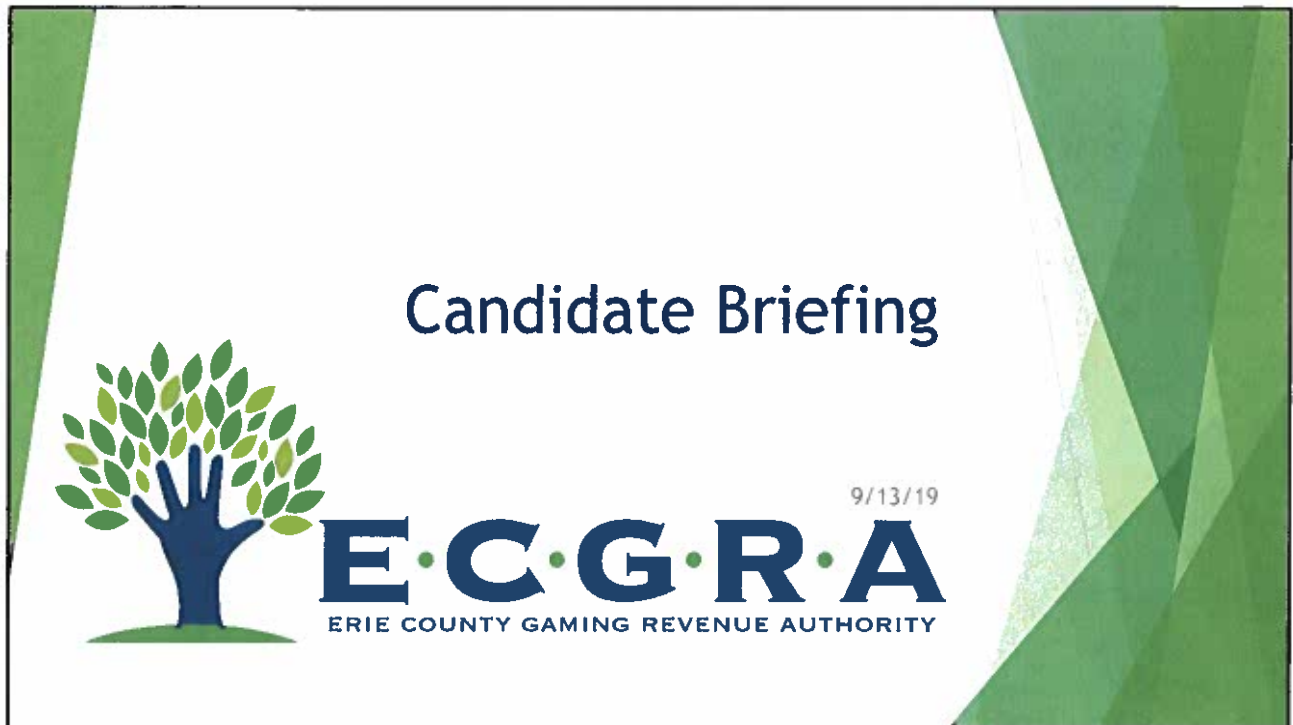
Dominick D. DiPaolo

Kelly S. Hess

Fiore Leone
Ex-officio

Gary N. Lee
Ex-officio

Perry N. Wood
Executive Director

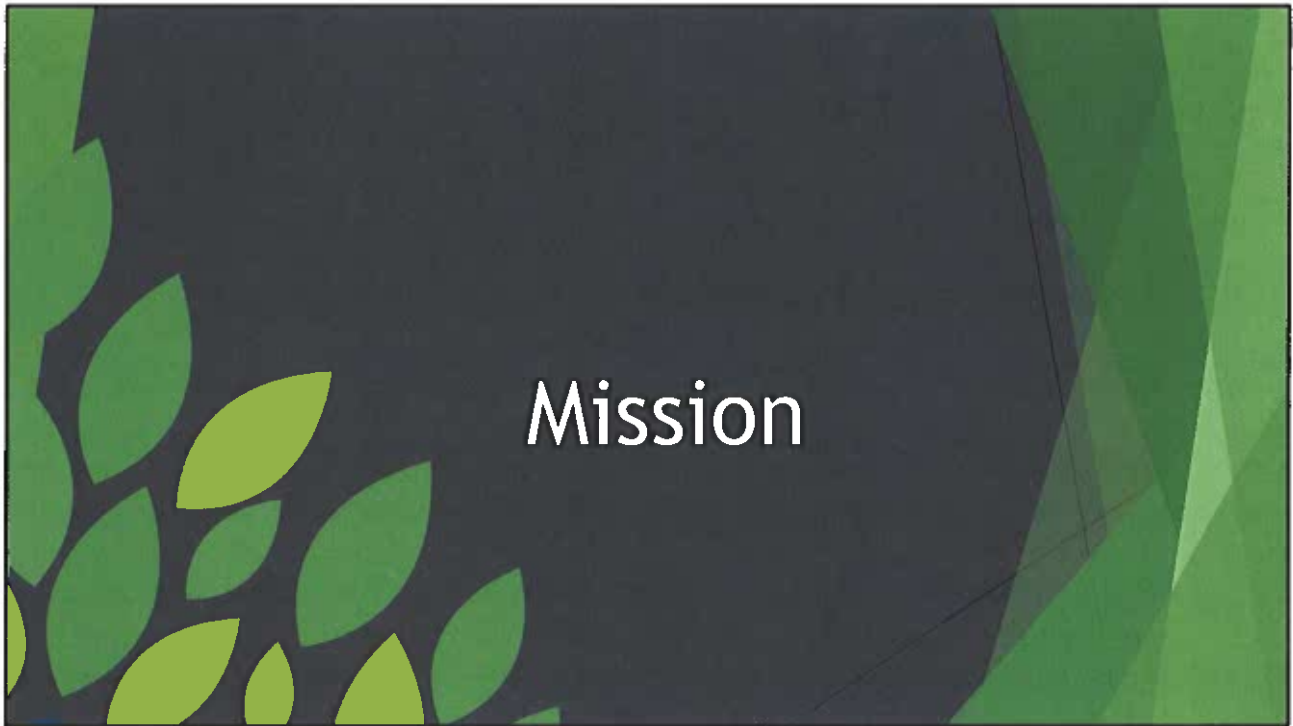


Gaming Revenue Explained

- ▶ PA Race Horse Gaming Act of 2004
- ▶ Innovative Policy: Local Share Gaming Revenue
- ▶ ECGRA created by County Gov't 2008
- ▶ Report of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Committee (2008)
- ▶ ECGRA Strategic Plan (2010)

By the Numbers

- ▶ Local Share is appx \$11 million annually
- ▶ The Land Bank \$1mm
- ▶ Erie County Gov't \$5.5mm
- ▶ ECGRA \$4.5mm
- ▶ ECGRA has invested \$55.8 million
- ▶ 990 grants
- ▶ 244 municipal governments, nonprofits, & economic development projects



ECGRA's Mission

- ▶ An impact investor, ECGRA's mission is to elevate Erie County by empowering the nonprofit sector toward economic & community development
- ▶ This mission is captured in the ECGRA Annual Report

Operational Terms

Community Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Process of making the community a better place to live & work aka Quality of Place• Occurs primarily in the public & civic sectors• Strengthening the social fabric
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Process for creating jobs, wealth, innovation & technological advances from which the community benefits• Occurs primarily in the private sector• Strengthening the economy

Annual Report & Process

Report Components

- ▶ P&L Statement
- ▶ ECGRA's board of directors & staff
- ▶ Narrative & Testimonials
- ▶ Grants Info:
 - ▶ Grantees
 - ▶ Grant Program
 - ▶ Date Awarded
 - ▶ Amount Awarded
- ▶ Impact Categories:
 - ▶ Small Business
 - ▶ Quality of Life
 - ▶ Local Gov't Development
 - ▶ Neighborhoods & Communities
 - ▶ Youth & Education



IMPACT
SMALL
BUSINESS



IMPACT
YOUTH &
EDUCATION



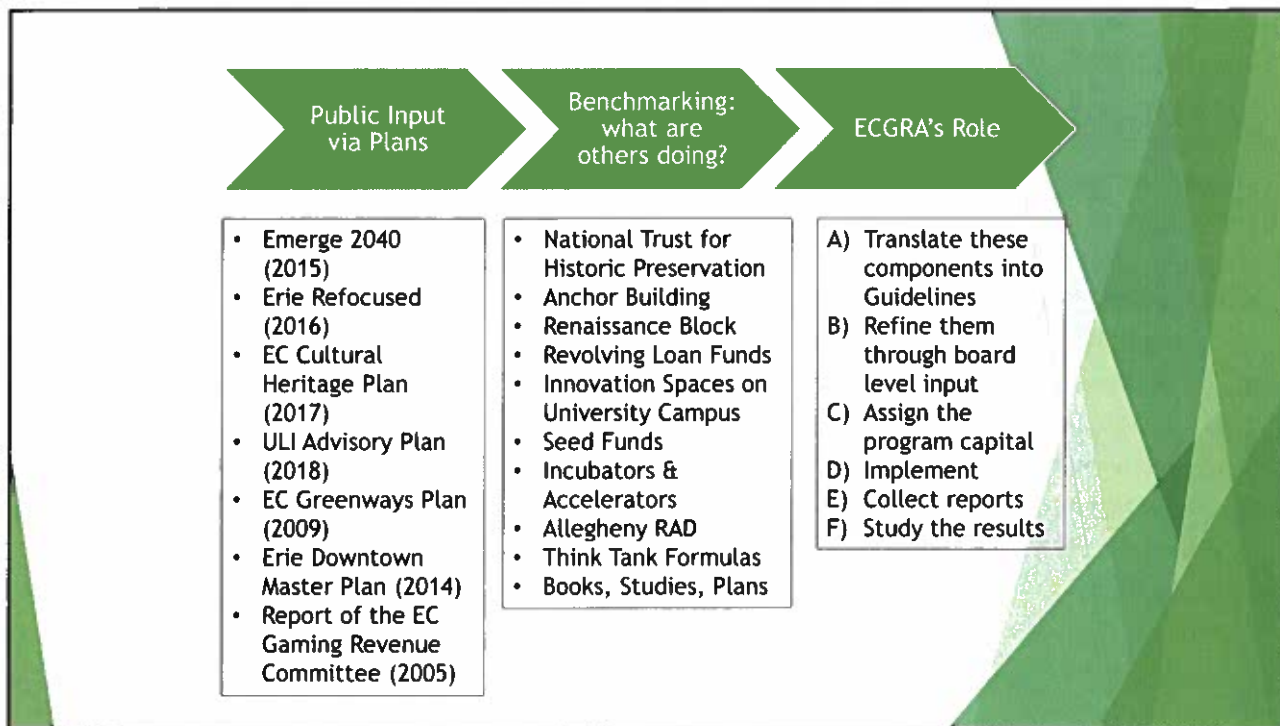
IMPACT
NEIGHBORHOODS
& COMMUNITIES



IMPACT
MUNICIPALITIES



IMPACT
QUALITY
OF PLACE



Collaboration with Erie County

Choose Erie Web Portal Development



IMPACT
SMALL
BUSINESS

- ▶ Partners: Erie County, Chamber, ECGRA
- ▶ Goals: Erie County Web Portal for Site Selectors
- ▶ What? Asset inventory, current market profile, data for decision-makers

The Ideation Beehive @Blasco Library



IMPACT
SMALL
BUSINESS

- ▶ Partners: Erie County, Erie Regional Library Foundation, Edinboro University, ECGRA
- ▶ Goals: build the Idea Lab's capacity to assist entrepreneurs
- ▶ What? Programming, develop partnerships with universities, staffing

Blue Zones Corry Pilot Project



IMPACT
QUALITY
OF PLACE

Partners: Erie County Health Dept, Partnership for a Healthy Community (hospitals), Impact Corry, ECGRA

Goals: Improve the health of EC's workforce

What? Green space development, food policies, school district wellness policies, workplace culture around health, community engagement

Erie County Summer Jobs & More Program



IMPACT
YOUTH &
EDUCATION

Partners: Erie County, GECAC, Young Entrepreneurs Society, ECGRA

Goals: help opportunity youth get their first job

What? Soft skills training, employee wages, employer training, matchmaking

Councils of Government & EMAs Support



**IMPACT
MUNICIPALITIES**

Partners: Erie County eCOG, & 13 municipalities, Tri-County COG

Project Examples:

- ▶ Foster municipal collaboration through technology adoption, parks/trails, purchasing, mapping software (stormwater), sewer & water, public safety equipment, joint recycling, civic leadership academy, 2020 census outreach

Thank you for your time



Ben Franklin
Technology Partners

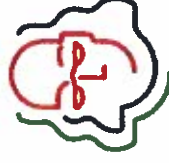
We Invest in Innovation



The largest early-stage seed investor in our region, Ben Franklin Technology Partners/CNP is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and funded by the Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority. The program provides investment capital, business support services, and TechCelerator startup boot camps to emerging tech-entrepreneurs and small manufacturers for the purpose of creating high-paying jobs and business growth opportunities in the Commonwealth.

www.cnp.benfranklin.org

Finale & Graduation
Summer 2019



BEN FRANKLIN TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS

TechCelerator

@Erie

Our Partners...



S B D C
PENNSYLVANIA

Small Business Development Center
Gannon University

Helping businesses start, grow, and prosper

Knowledge Park

AT PENN STATE ERIE

Your Partner in Business & Technology Growth

September 3, 2019



Mr. Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Ste. 201
Erie, PA 16510-4672

Dear Mr. Wood:

Thank you for sending your generous gift of \$2,500 to sponsor our 49th Annual Dinner.

You will have two reserved tables at the event. If your guests are unable to attend, please let us know.

I look forward to seeing you on September 13th!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danny J. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "J".

Danny J. Jones
Chief Executive Officer

GECAC is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. For federal income tax purposes, you can deduct as a charitable contribution the price of this sponsorship less its fair market value. We estimate the fair market value of this sponsorship to be \$1,000, so **your charitable contribution is \$1,500.**

The official registration and financial information of the Greater Erie Community Action Committee may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Helping People. Changing Lives. | www.gecac.org

18 West 9th Street | Erie, Pennsylvania 16501 | Tel: 814.459.4581 | Fax: 814.456.0161

An equal opportunity employer.

2nd public meeting slated for Union City Historic Preservation Plan

From staff reports

UNION CITY — The borough of Union City is hosting a second public meeting to present a draft of the Historic Preservation Plan being developed for the borough's commercial historic district.

The meeting will take place on Thursday, Aug. 29, at 6 p.m. inside the American Legion, 9225 Route 6, Union City. Everyone with interest in preserving and improving the commercial historic district is invited to attend.

The Historic Preservation Plan's consultants began work in May by studying the conditions of Union City's commercial historic district, a 2-mile portion of Main Street, and in June feedback was gathered from community members, elected officials and business and property owners.

The initial draft of the Historic Preservation Plan is now ready for review.

The plan details improvements to public spaces in downtown and provides recommendations for building maintenance, signage, lighting and streetscape improvements.

Facade improvement plans have been developed for multiple historic buildings. The facade improvement plans provide property owners with a history of each site, detailed suggestions for improvements, ideal phasing for the improvements and cost estimates.

A few non-historic buildings also received facade improvement plans in order to better integrate them with the surrounding historic buildings. Following the second public meeting, and after incorporating public feedback, the Historic Preservation Plan will be finalized and presented at a public hearing in the fall.

The meeting on Aug. 29 invites the public to provide the consultant team with feedback on the Historic Preservation Plan. Anyone planning to attend should RSVP via email to secretary@ucborough.us or call 814-438-2331 by Friday, Aug. 23.

During the first public meeting in June, the consultant team gathered general feedback about the commercial district and presented the historic preservation planning process. When the plan is complete, it will include strategies for public space and the Union City streetscape as well as proposed improvements for each facade reviewed in the study.

◀ See Meeting, P.2

Meeting

(Continued from front page)

The plan's goal is to provide design and development guidance for the borough and its stakeholders for distribution of grant funding and assistance, especially for commercial district property owners interested in making building repairs and improving their building facades.

The borough has hired a consultant team — citySTUDIO, T&B Planning and Milton Ogot Architect. The team has combined experience in preservation planning, as well as historic building preservation and rehabilitation.

Partial funding for the Union City Historic Preservation Plan is supported by a Keystone Historic Preservation Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), a state agency funded by the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Additional funding was provided by Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), the Union City Community Foundation and the borough of Union City.

For more information about Union City's Historic Preservation Plan, call UC Borough Secretary Cindy Wells at 814-438-2331.

OUR VIEW

Erie should fight for right college

The issue: NPRC ends negotiations
Our view: Erie County's needs unique

The objections of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College and a powerful backer, GOP state Sen. Joe Scarnati, to Erie County's community college application always rested on a false premise: The bricks-and-mortar community college model sought by Erie County represents a duplication of the NPRC's distance-learning services.

In truth, Erie County's community college application encompasses a broader mission, informed by distinct needs and history. The region enjoys a strengthening manufacturing, high-tech and med-surg economy in need of nimble workforce development, but also features, thanks to malignant historical practices, an intolerable percentage of citizens languishing in racially disparate poverty.

Their representatives and experts tell us that population needs hands-on, remedial resources tailored to power their emancipation. If those are not forthcoming, when employability demands ever-greater skills, the divide promises to grow.

That the NPRC on Sunday abruptly broke off talks to create a hybrid model to meet Erie County's needs does not surprise. The fact that it spurned negotiations just two days after more than 20 Erie African-American leaders published a letter explaining their support for a stand-alone college only underscores the NPRC's myopia.

Also dooming these deliberations was the backroom, anti-democratic deal-making that spawned them. Erie Republican state Sen. Dan Laughlin announced in December that he would seek compromise over Erie County's stalled community college application by asking Scarnati to allow a physical NPRC facility here. The administration of Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper, a Democrat, began meeting privately with the NPRC. Only shortly before they reached a tentative deal — which would require Erie County to withdraw its publicly vetted college application for only vague assurances in return — did she alert the public.

When Erie County Council and its task force sought to conduct deliberations in public view and seek concrete commitments, the NPRC balked. It met once with the task force — in Warren.

NPRC Chairwoman Kate Brock on Monday suggested the debate wasted "time and energy." "Just one of many counties," Brock said of Erie County.

This county comprises about half of the NPRC's population base. And the debate over the future of community college-style learning here comes at a crucial tipping point for Erie County.

The NPRC says it will now proceed with its existing model in Erie County with input from "community stakeholders." Erie County should proceed with its original application.

In the meantime, the public has a right to know whom the NPRC taps for input, what they decide and why; and also the outcomes of NPRC education, something we are seeking via an extensive Right-to-Know request.

The outcome of this mangled process could shape lives for generations. There's no shirking that. That includes Erie's state delegation and Gov. Tom Wolf, who, as far as anyone knows, have done just that.

Girard Borough gets ECGRA grant

By Sandy Rhodes
Editor, FLAG area

GIRARD — At least \$170,000 will be invested in downtown Girard over the next three years thanks to an Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority grant.

Girard Borough and the Girard Downtown Improvement Group were awarded the grant, which will be used to fund a myriad of projects.

According to Preservation Erie President Melinda Meyer, \$10,000 of the grant is already earmarked for a master plan. Meyer, who wrote the grant on behalf of the downtown group,

See Grant P.2

Grant

Continued from Page 1

said the group has \$30,000 in its coffers to fund the master plan. The other \$20,000 is coming from Girard Borough and the Keystone Historic Preservation Planning Grant. Both Girard Borough Council's commitment and the grant is for \$10,000 each.

"The goal is to build a thriving downtown," Meyer said of the master plan.

Generally, a master plan includes several components. Meyer said the downtown group will ultimately decide what to include in the plan.

This may include plans for streetscape and green space projects as well as for sprucing up some of the buildings themselves.

"We want to build an environment that will also look at business development and retention as well as promotion and marketing of downtown Girard," Meyer said. "I think the committee will help form what the plan will focus on. The plan can look at everything from parks to sidewalks to lamp poles in addition to building up businesses."

The master plan is just one of the facets that will be funded through the ECGRA grant. A good portion of the money will go toward facade improvement as well as promotion and marketing.

The three-year grant breaks down to \$80,000 for the first year and \$45,000 for 2020 and 2021 each.

The facade portion of the grant will be a 50-50 match and will help building owners and business owners improve their storefronts.

"These facade grant pro-

grams are helpful because small businesses don't have extra cash lying around," Meyer said. "If we can cut the cost in half, that is helpful."

Last year, several businesses benefited from the facade grant program, which resulted in the formation of the Girard Downtown Improvement Group. The group oversaw the grant process and ultimately decided what businesses received the funding.

"We are happy to support Girard," Meyer said. "I was happy with the funding we received for Girard. This means that there will be funding available for businesses and property owners to continue working on their buildings and keep downtown looking fantastic."

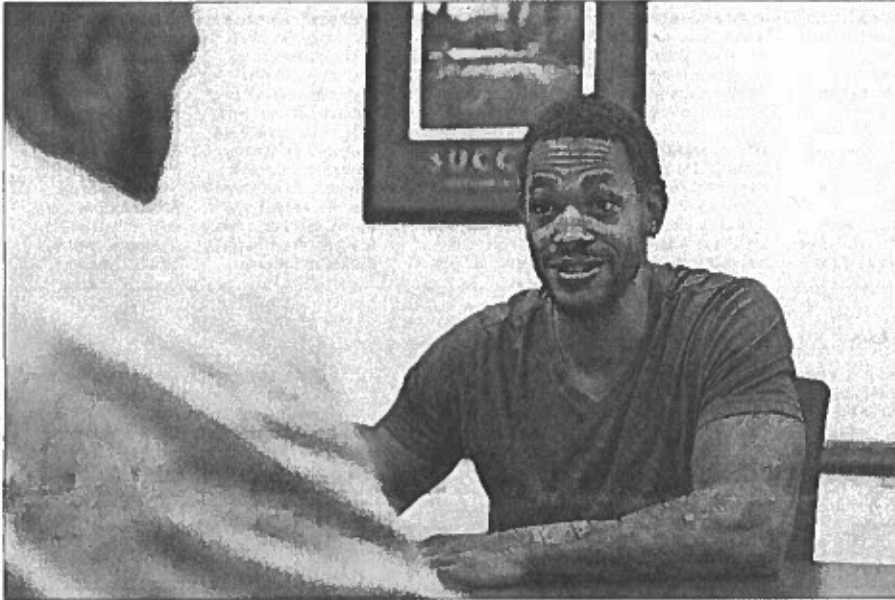
Another portion of the funding will go toward marketing and promotion, which includes the borough's website, which is like a calling card for the borough.

"The first thing people go to for information is a website," Meyer said of the importance of keeping a website up to date and active.

Girard Borough Manager Rob Stubenbort said the extra money will go to good use and it will reinforce the direction the borough wants to go.

"I think it's significant that organizations like ECGRA are noticing the effort being put in the business district of Girard Borough," Stubenbort said. "Businesses that have taken part in the money we have received so far have certainly made improvements to the business district and for that I thank the downtown group, Council and Melinda Meyer."

Looking for a lifeline



Erie County Reentry Services and Support Alliance counselor Jessie Tate, left, listens as Lavonne Beardsley, 40, describes his current neighborhood during a meeting in Erie on Wednesday. The Unified Erie re-entry and call-in programs are expected to run out of money and cease operations in late October. The agency's goal is to provide support and services to individuals released from federal, state or county prison re-entering Erie County. (GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS)

Unified Erie re-entry, call-in programs could end if new funding source not found

By Kevin Flowers
and Madeleine O'Neill
kevin.flowers@timesnews.com
madeleine.o'neill@timesnews.com

Lavonne Beardsley knew he couldn't do it alone.

Beardsley, 40, was released from the State Correctional Institution at Albion in late 2016 after serving an 18-month sentence for violating parole related to an earlier conviction for cocaine possession.

When he returned to Erie, he sought help from the Erie County Re-entry Services and Support Alliance, an agency that provides support and services to people returning from prison and trying to break free of criminal behavior.

"They came to a re-entry fair while I was at Albion and had representatives talk to a couple of us about what they do," said

"During our planning process, we learned that 1,250 people returned to Erie County (from prison) every year. This is not something we can just kind of go. 'Well, it's not worth the investment.' It's happening."

Sheila Silman, program manager,
Erie County Re-entry Services and
Support Alliance

Beardsley, who remains under state parole supervision. "I know I was personally thinking about how, in the past, I didn't take into account that everything isn't going to be easy street. ... I didn't know before that day that kind of help was available. And sometimes we need people in our lives that are going to help us take different paths.

"I didn't know I could have the kinds of things, by working, that I strived for selling drugs," Beardsley said. "I know now that I can."

ECRSSA is part of Unified Erie, an anti-crime initiative focusing on re-entry, getting violent offenders off the streets and crime prevention.

The re-entry program helped Beardsley, a father of two children, find three jobs since his release, including his current position as a welder with a local manufacturer.

Beardsley, who said his desire to change is largely about "wanting my kids to see a different side of me," hopes that others continue to get the same chances via ECRSSA. But the agency's future is in jeopardy.

Without a new funding source, ECRSSA's programs will end on Oct. 25.

See LIFELINE, A8

LIFELINE

From Page A1

The loss of the local re-entry program would eliminate a foundational pillar of Unified Erie's three-pronged approach to reducing crime, and would undermine the success of the program's prevention and enforcement strategies, Erie County District Attorney Jack Daneri said.

Losing one of the prongs could threaten the future of the entire Unified Erie initiative, he said. Daneri also mentioned that ECRSSA has been a success story in terms of reducing recidivism, or the likelihood that ex-offenders will return to crime.

"If there is recidivism, if that population is back doing what they might tend to do in our community, then it's going to affect how we're going to enforce," Daneri said. "Our prevention piece — what are going to be your tailored efforts at prevention if we have a recidivism problem and we have a new crime problem?"

"I don't think we ever envisioned that one would continue, or two would continue, without the other," he said.

Daneri said the re-entry program plays a critical role in building trust between law enforcement and community members by offering more than just a crackdown on crime.

"All of the hope is in the re-entry portion," Daneri said. "I think it does do a lot of good service to try and bridge that divide."

Beardsley said he has a message for elected officials and others who have the power to keep ECRSSA afloat.

"If they're serious about strengthening the communities that I come from, they would fund this," Beardsley said. "If they care about advancing broken minds and broken spirits, they need to keep this open."

Funding crisis

Sheila Silman, ECRSSA's program manager, said the program will need about \$450,000 annually to survive and continue offering services at the current rate. She estimated that the program has served more than 400 ex-inmates since it began in October 2016.

The re-entry program has seen success with the funds from its initial three-year grant of \$1.2 million from the Erie Community Foundation and the United Way of Erie County. That grant was intended to help the re-entry program, and Unified Erie's call-ins aimed at curbing gun violence, get off the ground and to give Unified Erie time to find a sustainable funding source.

Among 152 clients who completed ECRSSA's intensive case management program between 2016 and 2018, 7 percent received new charges that resulted in a conviction and incarceration, according to program statistics.

By comparison, Erie County's average recidivism rate for ex-inmates — those who are reconvicted and reincarcerated within three years of their release from prison — is 41 percent. That's according to a data summary prepared by the Mercyhurst University Civic Institute, which provides research and data analysis for Unified Erie.

The re-entry program offers ex-inmates two levels of services: long-term intensive case management and resource coordination, which offers short-term assistance connecting with resources for those who aren't eligible for intensive case management.

Clients in the program



Erie County Reentry Services and Support Alliance counselor Jessie Tate, left, and ECRSSA program manager Sheila Silman stand near Lavonne Beardsley at the ECRSSA office in Erie. The Unified Erie re-entry and call-in programs are expected to run out of money and cease operations in late October. The agency's goal is to provide support and services to individuals, like Beardsley, released from federal, state or county prison re-entering Erie County. (PHOTOS BY GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES NEWS)



Lavonne Beardsley, left, jokes with daughter Avonna, 7, at his sister's house in Erie on Thursday. When not working, Beardsley likes to spend time with his large extended family.

get help putting their lives back together after their return from prison. Some need basic assistance, like help getting a bus pass. Others need help finding a job, mental health or drug counseling or educational opportunities.

By guiding ex-inmates through the re-entry process, officials said, ECRSSA helps them avoid committing new crimes out of desperation or hopelessness.

"During our planning process, we learned that 1,150 people returned to Erie County (from prison) every year," Silman said. "This is not something we can just kind of go, 'Well, it's not worth the investment.' It's happening."

Among ECRSSA clients who identified employment as one of their goals, 73 percent have been able to find work, the statistics show. More than 80 percent of clients who identified finding mental health treatment, drug treatment, medical care, shelter or clothing as goals have been successful in accessing those resources.

The loss of the re-entry services would undercut those advances, Unified Erie officials said.

On a broader level, the end of the program could also hamper Erie's revitalization efforts if it were followed by an upswing in crime, Daneri said.

"People who are looking toward Erie, I would think they wouldn't look so favorably if ... we had a rate of recidivism, if we had crime rates, if we had homicide rates, shots fired that just kept on rising," he said.

Call-ins

The same is true, officials said, of Unified Erie's call-in program, also known as group violence reduction strategy. The program saw immediate success in

reducing the number of gang-related homicides to zero after the first call-in was held on April 26, 2017.

And, officials announced in August 2018, the gangs appeared to be disbanding after the first few events. The focus of the events then shifted to gun violence instead of group-related gang violence, Silman said.

The data-driven strategy honed in on community members who had connections to criminal networks but might walk away from crime if given an opportunity. Erie's call-ins were based on a similar strategy in Kansas City, Missouri, which members of Unified Erie visited and studied while creating their program.

Unified Erie's five call-in events presented the participants with the chance to give up crime and get help accessing resources from an ECRSSA case manager.

If they continued committing crimes or became involved in violence, law enforcement would be quick to respond. The call-ins highlighted data and surveillance that showed law enforcement had detailed knowledge of Erie's criminal networks.

"Actually seeing that, it's a different story," said Jessie Tate, a case manager with ECRSSA. "It has more of an impact on individuals."

Mayor Joe Schember, who has participated in the call-ins, agreed.

"It's very important that we continue this program. It really has made a difference and has basically eliminated gangs," Schember said. "It's also helped keep people who might be leaning toward a life of crime from going in that direction. I've seen the information from these call-ins touch them. And I've seen the call-ins give people the opportunity for help."

Daneri said a large part of a call-in's effects happened

after the event, when participants went back to their groups and spread the message about law enforcement's reach.

"The whole plan is to help the individuals in the church pews, but also, if they don't want help, they sure as heck are going back to their group and saying something," Daneri said.

That would end if the call-ins were forced to stop due to lack of funding, he said.

The next call-in is being planned for November, Silman said, but it likely would not happen if ECRSSA runs out of money. The program's case managers would not be available to offer follow-up and help with services to the call-in participants who accepted help, she said.

"We're the worker bees, so to speak," Silman said. "We are the ones that they come to."

Initial funding

In July 2016, Unified Erie celebrated its largest-ever financial commitment at an event in Perry Square.

The Erie Community Foundation and the United Way of Erie County had agreed to split a \$1.2 million grant to support call-ins and the re-entry program.

The money went to the Greater Erie Community Action Committee, which administered the grant and offered a home to ECRSSA at its office near West Ninth and Peach streets.

The joint grant was a response to urgent community concerns about escalating gun violence and the young age of the people involved in the crimes.

It was not intended to become a long-term funding source for ECRSSA. Bill Jackson, the president and CEO of the United Way of Erie County, said his organization pulled money from a reserve fund to help pay for the program.

"The group-related violence was a concern in Erie," he said. "It was a big deal. People were dying and people were afraid to go out."

Because the money came from a contingency fund, the United Way can't contribute to the ECRSSA on an ongoing basis, Jackson said.

"Everyone knew on the front end that this was just a three-year grant and it would end," he said. "We think it's a great program, and I wish we did have more funding availability."

Mike Batchelor, the president of the Erie Community Foundation, said the grant was offered on the understanding that ECRSSA would work to find a different,

sustainable funding source.

The grant "wasn't part of our planned expenditures," Batchelor said. "We were impressed with the energy, but we were not expecting to sustain this program."

Jackson and Batchelor said they are open to the possibility of offering the program bridge funding if there is a strong possibility that a new funding source is going to come through.

"We're very excited with the results and we want to do everything we can to help them stay operational," Jackson said.

Continued efforts

If ECRSSA is going to survive, where should the funding come from?

The Unified Erie team has some ideas.

They have applied for grants and appealed to legislators. They are willing to piece the funding together from a variety of sources, Silman said.

Ideally, said GECAC CEO Danny Jones, the funds would come from state and county government, which are benefiting from the savings of a lower recidivism rate.

ECRSSA's services cost \$12 per client per day, while it costs \$74 per day to house an inmate in the Erie County Prison, \$17 per day to house an inmate in a state prison and \$95 per day to house an inmate in federal prison, according to ECRSSA statistics.

"Shouldn't some of that money that's being saved come back into the program?" Jones asked. "Not 100 percent, but some of that should come back in as a show of faith that you're doing something to save the state money or the county money."

Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper said she has had only a preliminary discussion about the possibility of county funding with the Erie County Board of Supervisors. She said she'd like to see data about savings to the county included in any formal proposal for funding the group subunits.

"I'd love to be able to find a way to make sure that this program is funded in the future," she said. "How that's done, we have yet to determine."

State Sen. Dan Laughlin, of Millcreek Township, R-49th Dist., said he has asked his staff to work on finding funding for ECRSSA at the state level. He's also reached out to the U.S. Department of Justice, which he said is considering making ECRSSA a national model for re-entry, for help with funding the program.

"It is working so well it seems it would be a real shame to just let it run out of funding," Laughlin said. "I'm doing literally everything that I can to find funding for it."

State Rep. Pat Harkins, of Erie, D-1st Dist., has met with Daneri, GECAC officials and others about ECRSSA in recent months.

Harkins said he is also talking with other legislators in Harrisburg about the program.

"It's a good program and something we can't afford to lose," Harkins said. "But right now, I don't know what the (funding) answer is. I would like to see a dedicated funding stream from the state at some point."

"It cuts down on incarceration," Harkins said. "And it makes our streets safer."

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Madeleine O'Neill can be reached at 870-1728 or by email. Follow her on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ETNO'Neill](https://twitter.com/ETNO'Neill).

SOAR

From Page B1

their parents, attended Saturday's ribbon-cutting ceremony, which featured tours of the facility, a neighborhood cookout and children's activities.

"I just recently found out about this program and once I realized what it was about, the Afro-centric part of it captured my attention," said Erie resident Tiffany Jackson, 31, whose daughter, D'Myah, 10, will enter the fifth grade on Tuesday at the new school.

"My daughter has always been a good student," Jackson said. "I feel that with the curriculum, it's good for the students to be held to a higher standard. My daughter doesn't know how to feel yet about being here, but I think she'll be more excited once she starts because it's a big change for her. It's really exciting for the children to be able to shine and feel good about themselves. I feel it's going to be a huge confidence-booster to kids and just to help them realize that they can do whatever they want to do, especially with the mentorship. They'll get to see different people doing different things and know that they can do it, too."

The program is open at grade level and find a way for them to succeed and move forward."

Politto said the Eagle's Nest program would cost the district about an additional \$120,000 a year in rent and to help pay office staff.

"This is one of the first programs we've added since coming out of that financial crisis," Politto said. "It marks a shift for the district into more of a growth mode than a cutting mode."

Politto said the new program is targeting fifth- and sixth-grade students because it was an area the district didn't have programs for.

"We did have credit recovery programs and cyber programs, which went from seventh grade through 12th grade, so this will start to reach some kids at the younger grade levels, especially those students who are



Bishop Dwane Brock speaks during an open house event at the Eagle's Nest Program of Academic Distinction in Erie. The school, which opens Sept. 3, is a partnership between the Erie School District and Brock's Eagle's Nest initiatives for at-risk youth. (JACK HANBAH/ERIE TIMES-NEWS)

heard from the community through our strategic plan process is we need to change the way we did business, and that really includes instead of having the child conform to our system, change our system and meet the students where they are."

Erie schools Superintendent Brian Politto said.

"With this program, we're trying to find different avenues for students to succeed, especially those students who might not perform very well in the traditional classroom setting," Politto said. "Our long-term goal is really to reach those students who are not performing at grade level and find a

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transitioning from the elementary to the middle schools," Politto said.

Each grade will have two classrooms, which are located on the second floor, along with a principal's office, two restrooms and an elevator. A cafeteria is located on the lower floor.

Brock said the building underwent nearly \$200,000 in renovation work. The project, which began in the spring, was funded mostly through private and corporate donations.

"We've had to put a \$42,000 elevator in, a \$27,000 sprinkler system in and a \$16,000 modified heating and air conditioning system," Brock said.

Brock said plans are to add fourth-grade and seventh-grade programs to the school for the 2020-2021 school year.

"I have to build more classrooms on this campus," Brock said. "We have white, black and Hispanic students. Give me six months to a year and this school will intellectually challenge any school in Erie. How about that? I'm making a challenge to the other schools that if you give me six months to a year with these young scholars, they'll be on top."

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An open house event was held Saturday at the Eagle's Nest Program of Academic Distinction in Erie. The school, which opens Sept. 3, is affiliated with the Erie School District. (JACK HANBAH/ERIE TIMES-NEWS)

New Eagle's Nest School set to soar

By Ron Leonard
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Sixty-four students are preparing to launch on Tuesday a new one-of-a-kind Erie School District program for a select group of fifth- and sixth graders.

The Eagle's Nest Program of Academic Distinction is a partnership between the Erie School District and Bishop Dwane Brock's Eagle's Nest Leadership Corp.

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony were held on Saturday afternoon outside the Eagle's Nest school, 1133 Pennsylvania Ave., at Brock's Eagle's Nest and Victory Christian Center campus.

Classes start on Tuesday, the first day of school in the Erie School District

in 2010-20, in a renovated two-story building that previously served as a Romanian social club.

"We don't call them children, we do not call them students, we call them scholars," Brock said. "We want to change the way they think. Coming into this school, they will be in uniforms, shirt and tie, and they will stand when the teacher walks into the room. They will recite the Pledge of Allegiance and they will learn the creed. We will solve the bullying issue the first day. There will be no bullying, no bullying whatsoever. As I told them, there is one tough guy in this building and that's me, and that's going to be it."

Brock said the program will emphasize civility, character development,

honor, respect, good behavior and the "dynamics of self-responsibility."

"We expect them to really excel, and the teachers are all on fire and they're going to raise the bar of education with these children," Brock said.

The program will present an Afrocentric curriculum focusing on the African-American experience and will include core subjects such as math, science and the arts.

Brock's Eagle's Nest Leadership Corp. for at-risk youth is a work-readiness program that has helped many young people earn positions at UPMC Hamot and at Erie Homes for Children and Adults.

More than 200 people, including many students and

See SOAR, B2

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Edinboro receives revitalization grants

Times-News staff

The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority on Wednesday presented several grant awards in support of ongoing reinvestment in the Edinboro community, including a \$250,000 Mission Main Street grant.

With Mission Main Street Grants, launched in 2013, ECGRA targets revitalization along countywide commercial corridors that are home to small business, historic structures and special events.

Erie County Councilman Scott Rastetter, Edinboro

University President Dr. Guiyou Huang, and local borough and economic development officials attended Wednesday morning's grant announcement at Edinboro's Goodell Gardens, 221 Waterford St.

ECGRA officials said this latest investment is part of an ECGRA strategy to invest in and reinvigorate towns and cities across Erie County through the local share of gaming revenue. ECGRA has invested \$693,000 in the Edinboro community since 2013.

Municipalities and

nonprofits with plans to renew historic commercial corridors can apply for Mission Main Street Grants. A 1-to-1 cash match is required for all applicants. Projects may include overhauled streetscapes, revamped landscapes and restored facades.

Mission Main Street grantees are required to match ECGRA's \$1.2 million of local share gaming revenue investments, extending the reach of these economic development dollars to \$2.4 million revitalizing main streets across Erie County in the past six years.