



YOUR SPRING NEWSLETTER

FROM

Chris Higgins

ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATOR
6TH DISTRICT

277 HUDSON AVENUE
ALBANY, NY 12210

(518) 320-8580 • WWW.HIGGINSFORALBANY.COM
CHRISTOPHER.HIGGINS@ALBANYCOUNTY.COM

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News & Views



HUDSON/PARK, WASHINGTON PARK, PARK SOUTH, CENTER SQUARE & THE MANSION NEIGHBORHOODS

It is my pleasure to distribute my county newsletter to you. Throughout my term in office I intend to use this newsletter to keep in touch and share my perspective on what's happening in our county. I believe that an important aspect of public service is responding to constituent concerns and providing relevant information. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

INSIDE:

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ALBANY COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

Increasing local energy efficiency and green sustainability programs have been among my top priorities as your county legislator. I am proud to report that over the past months the county has begun several major projects that will reduce energy use, preserve our environment, and save taxpayer money. These include:

- Beginning a waste heat recovery project at the sewer district that, when completed, will recapture enough energy to heat 3,000 homes. More than 90% of this project is grant funded. Upon completion, waste heat from the incinerators will gener-

ate 3.2 million kWh's per year. These changes will reduce energy use at the sewer district by 30%, averaging \$15 million over the next 20 years and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 1,400 tons annually.

- Securing a \$50,000 grant to investigate creating a solid waste management authority for the Capital Region. Creation of such an authority would be of great value to city residents as we struggle with expansion of the landfill and associated costs.
- Partnered with NYSERDA and the New York Power Authority to make

energy efficient improvements to the county-owned correctional facility and TU Center.

- Completed purchase of land for a county Rail Trail. This nine-mile stretch of the old Delaware & Hudson Railway connects the port of Albany and Voorheesville. The purchase was made possible with \$700,000 of grant funding. The total cost to develop the trail is approximately \$7.8 million, which includes construction of the trail, safety improvements and repair of several bridges.



Chris presents \$2,000 of funding to Bhawin Suchak of the Grand St. Community Arts Program in the Mansion neighborhood

I-PRO PRESCRIPTION DISCOUNT CARDS

Albany county has recently partnered with ProAct, Inc. to provide prescription discount cards to all Albany County residents. The cards will provide users with discounts ranging from 10-20% on brand name drugs and 20-70% on generic drugs. While the program will be of most benefit to residents lacking prescription drug insurance and seniors paying out-of-pocket expenses, all Albany County residents, regardless of income or age can use the card. There are no enrollment forms or membership fees. Additionally, the program is at no cost to taxpayers!

ProAct, at their expense last month mailed the discount cards to residents' homes. Discount cards

are also available at participating pharmacies, the County Clerk's office, the DSS and online at www.NYRxDiscountCard.com. Simply present the card to the pharmacy along with a new prescription or refill to receive the savings. The card can be used at any pharmacy in Albany county and at over 56,000 nationwide. Albany County is the 28th county in New York to offer the program. Through January 2010, more than 942,379 prescriptions have been filled using the program with a savings of over \$19.8 million to participants.

For more information on these, and other topics, please visit www.higginsforalbany.com.

GUN BUYBACK RENEWAL

Last month, \$10,000 in funding was authorized to continue the county's gun buyback program I initially sponsored. The program, run by Pastor Charlie Muller accepts operational guns only, in exchange for gift certificates to the mall. To date, the program has taken in over 150 weapons, including an assault rifle recently turned in with over 40 rounds of ammunition from two SUNY Albany students.

COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

This past month the Legislature adopted a resolution I authored suspending the use of county funds for out of state travel for conferences and training seminars. Travel will still be allowed if the expenses are 100% reimbursed with funds other than county funding. The intent behind the policy is twofold: 1) to curtail abuses of travel for conferences not directly related to county duties that some county employees were taking advantage of; and 2) to save money in light of the county's fiscal condition given the recession.

SENIOR SERVICES OF ALBANY

Earlier this year the County Legislature authorized an \$1 million appropriation to Senior Services of Albany for "Meals on Wheels." The program is designed to foster good health to homebound seniors, nutrition counseling and case management services at various sites in Albany county.

To be eligible, an individual must be incapacitated due to accident, illness, or frailty; lack support of family, friends, or neighbors; and be unable to prepare meals because of lack/inadequacy of facilities, or inability to shop, cook or prepare meals safely, or lack knowledge or skill.

Those interested in participating in the program can contact the Dept. of Aging at 447-7117.

NURSING HOME NO BID CONTRACT

Debate over the future of long term care in Albany continues. Recently, and over my objections, the Legislature approved a \$25,000, no bid contract to a private consulting firm to analyze the nursing home. While I have always believed more information is needed to determine whether a new county-financed nursing home should be built, hiring consultants without background information is simply inappropriate. Authorization of this contract was not transparent and ignored the county's very own public contract procurement guidelines. As such, while more information is in fact needed, I had to vote against the resolution.