



NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Fall 2015 ISSUE

From Devastating Diagnosis to Victory Dance

Lauren Law's journey to becoming a breast cancer survivor

It was a Saturday morning in late 2009, and Mrs. Lauren Law was playing a piano in a waiting room at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. It was something she did after receiving a shot to help counteract the side effects of her weekly chemotherapy treatment.

Often, she was the only one in the room, but this Saturday morning was different. A gentleman on a Segway scooter quietly entered the room. He simply circled the room, making his two-wheeled vehicle “dance” to the music. When Mrs. Law finished playing, the gentleman silently glided out of the room, not saying a word, but obviously having enjoyed the experience.

“If a person who can’t walk very far can dance on a scooter,” thought Mrs. Law, “then when this is over for me, I’m going to dance.”

That brief thought became a source of hope for Mrs. Law during the tremendous difficulties and challenges she faced while undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

Mrs. Law’s battle with this disease began with the knowledge that “something was not quite right.” In late 2008 and early 2009, she noticed changes in her body during self-exams that concerned her.

She recognized that she should probably get it checked out but kept putting it off. She was afraid it would interfere with a six-week church mission trip to South Africa. She was concerned that it might be difficult for her husband because he had lost his previous wife to breast cancer. Like so many others in the same situation, she was afraid of what a doctor might find.

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Fall 2015 Rural Futures

NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT RURAL NEW YORK STATE

A Publication of the NYS Legislative
Commission on Rural Resources

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Mrs. Lauren Law and her husband, Dan. He was a vital source of support as she faced the challenges of breast cancer. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Lauren Law.)

And because she had no health insurance coverage from her employer at that time, it was far too easy to put off.

But in April 2009, she noticed a dramatic change during a self-exam – a portion of the left side of her breast had caved in. It was alarming, and she later shared that information with a close friend. Mrs. Law's friend convinced her that she needed to see a doctor, regardless of insurance coverage. This same friend provided Mrs. Law with the phone number for the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties.

The subsequent phone call was the first step on the road to becoming a survivor.

The Cancer Services Program was there to help uninsured or underinsured people just like Mrs. Law. (See the article on page 4 to learn more about the program.) They rapidly set up an appointment with a gynecologist who examined Mrs. Law. The next day, she had a mammogram. Just a week later, she was in Buffalo for a series of biopsies. She was diagnosed with late Stage II breast cancer.

The next two weeks, while she waited to see an oncologist were immensely difficult.

After meeting with her oncologist at Roswell Park Cancer Institute (RPCI), Mrs. Law was greatly relieved to have a plan in place. It was not going to be easy, but she knew the course of action. It included surgery, intensive chemotherapy, and radiation treatments.

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Surgery included the removal of both breasts, along with 15 lymph nodes under her left arm. It was an aggressive approach, meant to stop the spread of the cancer and remove any pre-cancerous tissue. The doctors felt that the cancer had not spread beyond her lymph nodes.

Had her cancer not been discovered, Mrs. Law was likely only a few weeks from having the cancer metastasize. This means the cancer could have moved from its original location to another part of the body – definitely a scary thought, and further evidence of just how vital early detection can be.

She spent three days in the hospital recovering from the surgery. Just a few weeks later, she began the first of 14 total chemotherapy sessions. It was an exhausting and difficult process.



Mrs. Lauren Law enjoys spending time with her grandchildren.
(Photo courtesy of Mrs. Lauren Law.)

A typical treatment started with a 70-mile Friday trip to RPCI to have her chemotherapy treatment administered intravenously. Afterward, she returned home, only to make the same trip the next day to obtain a shot to help counter some of the side effects.

Over the next four days, she mostly slept – thoroughly exhausted. This process was repeated, typically on a weekly basis, and Mrs. Law describes it as a period of time of intense fatigue and violent illness. Her world became dull. Not only did she lose her hair, but she temporarily lost her sense of taste.

During this time, it seemed that the only thing that brought her joy were visits from her grandsons. Listening to music helped. Receiving cards from family and friends also proved uplifting.

About six months later, she finished her chemotherapy treatments. Shortly afterward she began radiation treatments, consisting of daily trips to a medical provider nearby for the treatments. Not long thereafter, she completed her treatment regimen.

She had survived. She had won her battle against an insidious opponent.

Mrs. Law is quick to express her gratitude to all those who helped her along the way. She gives great credit to the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties for helping her navigate the processes of diagnosis and treatment. She is thankful for all the medical professionals who provided treatment and care. Her husband's continual presence at her side, the encouragement of friends and family, and her faith were central to her survivorship.

Perhaps most of all, it was her desire to be there for her grandchildren that helped her endure the most difficult days. When she was first diagnosed, she had two grandsons. Today, she enjoys her newest role as the full-time grandmother of six.

She also takes time to share her victory with her grandchildren – often, by dancing with her granddaughter!

The Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties played a pivotal role in Mrs. Lauren Law's story. To learn more about New York State's Cancer Services Programs, please see the article on page 4.



About New York's Cancer Services Programs



No doubt about it – choosing to be screened for cancer can be a life-saving decision. Early detection and treatment dramatically improves the odds for survival.

The various county-level Cancer Services Programs (CSPs) work to raise awareness of the importance of early screening for cancer, especially for those individuals who might not pursue a screening due to prohibitive costs.

“We work with organizations, physicians, hospitals, and others to get the word out. We hang fliers and attend events in the region,” said Ms. Madelyn Thornton, Program Coordinator for the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties.

However, many people do not have adequate health insurance to cover the cost of a screening, and, as a result, too many people choose to forego these vital tests.

At the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, a team of three works to raise awareness of the importance of early detection. They also assist uninsured and underinsured individuals to obtain and navigate the screening and diagnostic processes for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer.

Typically, the first step takes place upon receipt of a phone call from a potential patient. After a brief intake discussion over the phone, the CSP sends out a consent form and begins to arrange the appropriate screenings and tests. This particular CSP works with a wide range of healthcare providers in Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, as well as others in the Rochester and Buffalo areas. The patient chooses which provider works best, then undergoes the appropriate screening at no cost to the patient.

The next step is dependent upon the test results. The patient receives these results directly from the provider who conducted the assessment. If the results are negative, the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties typically follows up with the patient the next time a screening might be needed, whether that is a year away or five years down the road. If the patient is still uninsured or underinsured, the process to arrange for a screening can be repeated.

If any abnormal results are encountered, the CSP helps the patient through the diagnostic process to determine whether or not cancer is present. If cancer is detected, the CSP helps the patient with the paperwork necessary to enter the Medicaid Cancer Treatment program. They also help the patient through the annual renewal process, if necessary.

This can be an especially difficult time for the patient, and it is vital to ensure that the patient is pursuing the path toward treatment and survival.

Even as treatment begins, the Cancer Services Program of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties stays closely connected with their patients to care for them. For example, they have a breast cancer support group. The program also provides patients with wigs and hats to help them cope with hair loss during the difficult days of treatment.

And often, the program provides one of its most vital services. They lend an ear.

“Sometimes, we just pick up the phone to check up on them,” said Ms. Thornton.

For more information about New York State's Cancer Services Programs, or to find a local CSP, please call 1-866-442-CANCER (2262).



A Coalition of Care

An Introduction to the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester

“How can I help” is a common refrain from the hardworking group of staff and volunteers at the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester.

It is the only full-scope breast cancer support group in its region. The Coalition is a grassroots non-profit organization with its origins going back to 1997. While it was originally founded to serve the Rochester area, its range has expanded to help those in Monroe County and six other surrounding counties, and the Coalition often receives inquiries from well outside the region.

“It is an environment of care and concern,” said Tracy Brown, Regional Outreach Director for the Coalition.

The organization has built a reputation of providing support, information, and care to women and men who have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

The Coalition has four focus areas: Support, Education, Research, and Advocacy. Breast cancer survivors are integral to each of these focus areas. They make advocacy visits to Albany, New York, and Washington, D.C., provide feedback and recommendations for research projects, and play active roles in providing the support and education to others diagnosed with breast cancer.

“Upon facing round two of breast cancer, I came to the difficult decision to have a bilateral mastectomy. At this juncture, I needed help – the kind that a physician cannot provide. I looked to the unequivocal support of other women who had made their own wrenching decisions. The beauty of the women at the Coalition became a mirror for my own beauty. It was the courage I found in these generous souls that helped me to recognize that I had that kind of courage, too,” said Ms. Carol Kistner, a breast cancer survivor from Batavia, New York.

Typically, an individual who has been diagnosed with breast cancer is first introduced to the Coalition’s Breast Cancer 101 program. Participants meet with trained facilitators who are breast cancer survivors. Usually, these meetings are face-to-face, but they could be over the phone. It is an opportunity to gather more information about breast cancer and to develop a plan to cope with the upcoming challenges.

The Coalition’s “Brown Bag Fridays” program takes the discussion to a supportive group setting. Every Friday at noon, participants can bring their lunch and drop in to listen and share with a diverse group of survivors. Desserts are provided, and the discussion can cover a wide range of topics.

Perhaps one of the most unique opportunities provided by the Coalition is a mentorship program called “Peer Advocates Lending Support” (PALS). It connects someone diagnosed with breast cancer with a closely-matched mentor – one who may have faced a similar diagnosis, shares the same values, is close in age, or has other similar experiences. The PALS mentor serves as an invaluable source of one-to-one support and caring.

“It’s exciting to have the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester reaching out to provide support in the communities where we live. The PALS program through the Coalition will give us the opportunity to support new breast cancer patients in our community. I’m hoping that several members of my local support group will take the PALS training,” said Gail Serven, a 30-year breast cancer survivor living in Romulus, New York.

Another group, called “Common Ground,” provides specialized support for those individuals who are dealing with metastatic breast or gynecologic cancer. These are especially difficult life-threatening diseases. This particular group, led by a licensed therapist, addresses the unique concerns faced by the group members.



Ms. Holly Anderson, Executive Director of the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester, and Senator Catharine Young, Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, at a recent roundtable discussion for breast cancer survivors.

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These are just a few of the programs provided at no charge by the Coalition. With such an important mission, it is no surprise that the Coalition is working to expand its outreach within New York State. With the support of Senator Michael Nozzolio and other senators from the region, including Senator Catharine Young, who is the Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, \$200,000 was included for the Coalition in the state budget.

Additionally, the Coalition has been working with these senators to hold roundtable sessions throughout the region, in order to obtain more information about the needs of those diagnosed with breast cancer. Feedback provided by survivors and family members will help the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester provide the services, support, and healing that is needed by so many who are facing the challenges of breast cancer.

“Healing is very different from the eradication of disease. The freedom and safety of the Coalition provided me with a most incredible community, and that is where healing happened,” said Ms. Kistner.

For more information about the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester, please call 585-473-8177 or visit their website at bccr.org.

Leading the Station

An Interview with Dr. Susan Brown, Director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station



Dr. Susan Brown
(Photo by Robyn Wishna)

Susan K. Brown, PhD, is the Goichman Family Director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) and the Herman M. Cohn Professor of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. She is a Professor in the School of Integrative Plant Science, with a joint appointment in the sections of Horticulture and Plant Breeding. She conducts her research on apple breeding at Cornell's Geneva campus. In 2013, Dr. Brown was named Associate Director of NYSAES. In 2015, she was named Director.

Dr. Brown's research passion is apples, including ways in which their genetic improvement can benefit New York's apple industry and consumers. She is the co-inventor of 10 sweet cherries and four apple varieties, and her research is frequently featured in the media.

In 2010, Cornell partnered with a newly formed grower organization, NYAG LLC, in order to provide New York growers exclusive rights to commercialize two new varieties from the Cornell apple breeding program. In 2013, these two new varieties, “SnapDragon™” and “RubyFrost™,” were introduced to consumers and were received enthusiastically. Such partnerships help the state industry's competitiveness and provide consumers with new, high-quality varieties.

Dr. Brown has received multiple awards for her leadership and accomplishments, including being named a “Woman of Distinction” by the New York State Senate in 2014.

Dr. Brown recently took the opportunity to share her perspective on a variety of topics with *Rural Futures*:

Question: How would you describe the mission of the Station and its importance in New York State?

Dr. Susan Brown: Cornell's Geneva campus, also known as the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) is a preeminent leader in research and extension on specialty crops, with a major emphasis on fruits and vegetables. Our mission is to sustain the growth and economic vitality of New York agriculture through discovery-based, solutions-oriented food and agricultural research, as well as educational engagement with producers, students, and local communities.

Q: What is your vision for the future of the Station?

SB: My vision is to continue the strong history of research, extension, and teaching that has benefitted students, growers, science,

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and consumers. We have always excelled at interdisciplinary research. The implementation of our new strategic plan will provide guidance in building teams that will advance soil health, crop protection research and implementation (for both diseases and insects), crop production, as well as new varieties and new products via our Food Venture Center. Our strength in wine research and extension will continue, and we will expand training in the areas of food safety, brewing, cider, and spirits.

Q: How does your work as Director impact the work you do in developing new varieties of apples?

SB: This year, my first as Director, was especially hectic, yet I am learning how to balance both activities. My packed schedule forces me to evaluate which activities can be delegated or skipped. I attend fewer seminars than in the past, yet I'm more engaged in the activities I do. Being in the orchard is energizing. I'm also very fortunate to have a talented research support specialist (Kevin Maloney, formerly from Buffalo) as an assistant, along with two stellar PhD students. I have a great administrative aide in the office (Amy Andersen), and the Administrative Service Center support staff are important to my success as Director.



Dr. Susan Brown and Research Support Specialist Kevin Maloney working in the Station's apple orchards to develop new apple varieties. (Photo by Robyn Wishna.)

Q: What is your most satisfying accomplishment during your time at the Station?

SB: The NY Loves Food Summit was recently hosted at NYSAES. It was sponsored by Senators Nozzolio and Ritchie, Assemblyman Magee, Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Science (CALs), and NYSAES. Over 175 leaders in agriculture attended the summit, and the speakers and panelists provided examples of how research and outreach at the Station had been crucial to their individual businesses. We had thoughtful discussions on how new advances in food processing, such as the high pressure processing unit to be housed at NYSAES, would transform the food processing arena and what investments would aid in that transformation.

Q: The SnapDragon™ and RubyFrost™ apples are great additions to New York's many varieties of apples. Any hints to the next great apple on the horizon?

SB: There are several selections being readied for commercialization. One of these selections is great as a dessert apple, also is good for baking, and as an added benefit – it can also be used in hard cider production. As my 23 and 25 year old daughter and son say, "Now you are talking!" We also have an apple that has wonderful crispness and juiciness, but the juice is unusual and is thick like nectar. It offers wonderful flavor and quality, but also has attributes that growers will like.

Q: What is your favorite apple?

A: It really depends on the day, use, and if the apple is paired with other food or being eaten as a snack. I have many favorite apples and most of these have numbers rather than names. They are selections in the running to become our 66th named apple. Sometimes I want a highly flavored apple and other times something milder. We have that range in our portfolio.

The New York State Agricultural Experiment Station was established in 1880 via state legislation. Its purpose is to promote agriculture through scientific study. The Station is located in Geneva, New York, and it has grown in both size and scope over the years. For more information about the Station, please visit nysaes.cals.cornell.edu.



Hiking to the Top

How Peter Herrig Became a Winter 46er



Mr. Peter Herrig enjoys the view from the top of Iroquois Peak upon completing the challenge of climbing all 46 of the High Peaks in winter. (Photo courtesy of Mr. Peter Herrig.)

For Mr. Peter Herrig, the invitation to do some hiking turned into a passion.

Mr. Herrig grew up in Rome, New York. He later moved to Albany, where friends from college introduced him to certain outdoor activities, such as hiking in the Catskills and Adirondacks.

In January 2007, he took on a winter hike to the peak of Lower Wolf Jaw Mountain in the Adirondacks. He struggled a bit, but made it to the top.

It was his first official peak. He was hooked.

Afterward, Mr. Herrig decided to tackle the other 45 mountains in the Adirondacks known as the “High Peaks.” It was a task he completed at Whiteface Mountain in September 2008. In doing so, he became a 46er.

The Adirondack 46ers is a historic club with its roots going back to the 1920s. It was established as a club for those individuals who had climbed to the summits of all 46 of the Adirondack Mountains that reach over 4,000 feet high. While subsequent surveys have measured four of these

peaks at slightly less than 4,000 feet in elevation, the list has remained unchanged due to tradition. Since the club’s founding, nearly 9,000 people have registered their accomplishments and become members.

After submitting the required paperwork documenting his ascent to all 46 peaks, Mr. Herrig officially became the 6,351st member of the club.

Looking for another challenge, Mr. Herrig opted to hike all 46 peaks in the winter. It took awhile longer, but he completed his winter round in January 2012. For a time, he hiked every winter weekend to complete his goal. Now his member number is listed as “6351W,” with the “W” recognizing his accomplishment as a Winter 46er.

It is a significant achievement. While thousands have documented their ascent to all 46 peaks, only a percentage of those have done so in the winter.

He emphasizes the importance of planning and safety, especially for winter climbs. While Mr. Herrig has hiked solo in the summer, he always hikes with someone else during the winter. He leaves his itinerary with a loved-one. He also establishes a non-negotiable turn-around time for a winter hike. Regardless of how close they might be to the summit, once that time is reached, it is time to head back down the mountain. He cautions others that a climb in the winter can look deceptively easier than it actually is, especially above the tree line where one is fully exposed to the weather conditions.

Mr. Herrig has a deep appreciation for the environment in which he hikes. He, along with the 46ers, stresses the importance of being good stewards of these natural wonders in New York State. The club often participates in trail upkeep and other activities to preserve hiking opportunities well into the future.

Mr. Herrig has also hiked the 35 peaks in the Catskills that are over 3,500 feet in elevation, becoming a winter member of the Catskill 3500 Club. He has hiked the five tallest mountains in Vermont, and he is currently working his way to the tops of the 48 highest peaks in New Hampshire.

It is a lofty goal.

For more information about the Adirondack 46ers, please visit adk46er.org.



More than Logging On

How an Initiative in the North Country is Helping Seniors Build Digital Skills

For many rural New Yorkers, the resources, opportunities, and social connections made possible by the Internet remain out of reach, especially among seniors. For older New Yorkers who grew up without the Internet, becoming comfortable using a computer and navigating the online world can be challenge. Continual, and often confusing, technological upgrades, along with concerns about identity theft, computer viruses, and scams, can make logging on seem overwhelming. As a result, many seniors choose to avoid the Internet.

But with some training and education, older New Yorkers can be empowered with all the skills and know-how needed to take advantage of the many benefits of Internet access.

Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), a New York City-based nonprofit, is leading an initiative in New York's North Country to help more seniors improve their quality of life and enhance their social and civic engagement through the Internet.

OATS identifies their mission as “more than simply teaching seniors how to use computers” but rather, “empowering older adults to live successful, independent, more connected lives.”

Active in New York City for the past decade, OATS has taught tens of thousands of older adults the digital skills that allow them to stay connected with family and friends, manage their healthcare, take advantage of economic opportunities, and remain lifelong learners.

Now, with the launch of OATS' new initiative to bring their free services and trainings to seniors in seven counties in northern New York, rural residents can also take advantage of this opportunity.

Beginning in November, residents 60 and older can attend hands-on training courses, workshops, and lectures at the brand new Senior Planet Exploration Center in the Champlain Centre shopping mall in Plattsburgh, which will serve as OATS' central location in the North Country. By January 2016, additional lab locations in Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Essex, and Hamilton counties will also be up and running. For seniors unable to make it to one of these centers, training may also be available via mobile labs that travel throughout the region, as well as through an online learning platform currently under development called “Senior Planet U.”

This on-the-ground effort to familiarize more seniors with using the Internet goes hand-in-hand with one of the highest priorities of policymakers in Albany – making access to high-speed broadband available to every New Yorker. In the 2015-16 New York State Budget enacted earlier this year, \$500 million will be invested in the development of high-speed Internet access in unserved and underserved areas of the state. The budget also leveraged an additional \$500 million in private investment to enable providers to expand high-speed broadband in communities lacking adequate access.

Programs like the Senior Planet Exploration Center, alongside efforts to expand broadband access, are increasingly important in the effort to eradicate the digital access gap that disproportionately affects rural New Yorkers. Such programs will serve critical roles in helping rural communities grow and thrive.

For more information about this program, please visit seniorplanetnorthcountry.org



Artist's rendering of the interior of the Senior Planet Exploration Center in the Champlain Centre shopping mall in Plattsburgh, New York. (Photo courtesy of Older Adults Technology Services.)



The Process of Apple Picking



Before that crisp bite of a New York State apple can be enjoyed, it has to be removed from the tree. It's an obvious assertion, but it turns out there is much more to the process than the average consumer likely realizes.

These days, there is increasing interest in learning the background of how food is grown, raised, and makes its way to the consumer. This quick primer on apple picking provided by Bittner-Singer Orchards in Appleton, New York, is certainly an eye-opener.

Safety is first. Apple picking typically requires climbing a ladder to reach the fruit. Ensuring that the ladder is in good order and stable is vital. Placing a ladder near a woodchuck hole can ruin an apple picker's day.

Pickers never grab the rungs of the ladder, but hold on to the sides because the rungs may have dirt from the picker's shoes on them. This prevents inadvertent contamination of the apples.

The picking container is padded on the inside to hold the apples gently, and it has hard plastic or metal on the outside to protect the apples from being bumped from the outside.

Simply pulling on the fruit until the branch relents to let it go is not part of the process. A professional picker never uses his or her fingertips to pull the apple off the tree, but rather carefully palms the apple and lifts it up to snap the stem. There are two reasons for this. First, the force needed to pull the apple from the tree can result in finger bruising of the apple. Also, when an apple is pulled from a branch there is a risk of pulling the stem out of the apple. If that happens, the apple may spoil in storage.

Careful handling is a necessity. Pickers never put two apples in one hand because the fruit may bruise where they contact each other. The picker carefully sets the apple in his or her picking bag, without bruising the fruit. Apples should never be dropped or thrown into the picking container.

When the picking container is full, it has about 35 pounds of apples in it. After setting it in the apple bin, the picker carefully opens the bottom of the picking container, and slowly releases the apples into the bin. The apples roll into the bin, preventing the bruising that could occur if they were dropped.



It is a process repeated many times over for each of the eight to ten thousand apples a picker might harvest each day.

Careful picking ensures that a New York State apple will tickle the taste buds and provide a satisfying crunch.

For more information about New York State apples, please visit nyapplecountry.com.

Apples being carefully picked and loaded into bins at Bittner-Singer Orchards. Depending on the size of the fruit, each bin contains about 1,800 apples. (Photo courtesy of Bittner Singer Orchards.)



Recommendations for Online and Blended Learning

Online Learning Advisory Council Issues Final Report

Online and blended learning courses have the potential to dramatically improve educational opportunities for students throughout New York State, and a report issued by the Online Learning Advisory Council provides recommendations to improve the availability of these learning systems.

Senator Catharine Young, Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, sponsored a bill that established the council. The bill was signed into law last year. The council was comprised of 11 members whose backgrounds include a wide variety of expertise in online and blended learning. They were tasked with developing recommendations regarding the statewide delivery of online and blended learning services in school districts. Throughout the process of developing the report, the council sought and incorporated input from stakeholders throughout the state.



“Online and blended learning systems provide school districts, teachers, and students with innovative and cutting-edge approaches to education. There are tremendous opportunities for schools to utilize these teaching methods and dramatically enhance the educational experience for students. For example, imagine students interacting directly with subject-matter experts from thousands of miles away, or having access to college preparatory and career-specific courses that were not previously available,” said Senator Young.

Online courses, as well as blended learning initiatives that combine both a physical location with online resources, provide schools with cost-effective opportunities for students to access coursework and educational resources otherwise not available. These learning initiatives are critical to providing education for children. It is important in rural areas where geographic distances and limited resources can reduce the options available to students and schools, but the recommendations also apply to schools in non-rural areas.

The report does not follow a one-size-fits-all methodology, and it recognizes that each school has unique resources and equally unique needs.

Recommendations made in the report foster collaborative innovation in the classroom and among teachers when implementing online learning and other technologies. These include:

- Implementing professional development programs in partnership with higher education institutions to expand instructional skills;
- Providing certain waivers of regulations that will reduce the risk for teachers and schools as they implement new online learning programs;
- Establishing a team of leaders at the New York State Education Department specifically dedicated to online education and educational technology; and
- Incorporating online and blended learning training within pre-service teacher curricula.

The Council’s recommendations are timely as more schools are exploring the purchase of technology for the classroom that will enable the implementation of online and blended learning systems. This is especially important now that schools may obtain funding for online learning and technology through the Smart Schools Bond Act that was approved by voters in 2014.

To download the full report from the Online Learning Advisory Council, please visit young.nysenate.gov.



Slide Like an Olympian

Skeleton Rides at Lake Placid



Olympian Skeleton Racer Katie Uhlaender begins a run down the track.
(Photo courtesy of Ms. Katie Uhlaender.)

Thrill seekers looking for an Olympic adventure have an array of options available to them at the site of the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

One such choice is skeleton, a sliding sport that returned to the Olympics just over a decade ago, where athletes race down the same icy track that is used by bobsled and luge competitors. It is a gravity-driven sport with participants plummeting headfirst down the track on a small sled. They can reach speeds in excess of 80 miles per hour.

With the return of cooler temperatures, a skeleton ride at Lake Placid provides the opportunity to experience the excitement, albeit on a smaller scale, that racers like Katie Uhlaender experience during competition. (Read more about her in the Summer 2015 edition of *Rural Futures*.) Even though participants at Lake Placid only slide along the bottom portion of the course, they still reach a speedy 30 to 40 miles per hour.

For those who do not relish the idea of sledding face-first down a mountain with their head only inches above the ice, there are also plenty of other activities to explore, such as bobsled rides.

For more information about activities at the site of the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, please visit whiteface.com/activities.

New Farmers Grant Fund



The second round of the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund is underway, with \$1 million included for the program in the 2015-16 state budget.

The goal of the program is to provide grants that support new farmers who have chosen to begin a career in agriculture. The funds can be used to improve profitability by expanding or diversifying production, implementing innovative and sustainable practices, or developing agricultural partnerships.

Grants range from \$15,000 to \$50,000 and can be used to cover up to half of the total project costs. The remainder of the project costs must be matched by the grant recipient.

The farm must be no more than one hundred fifty acres in size, fully located within New York State, and produce a minimum of \$10,000 in annual sales. The owners of the farm must be New York residents, at least 18 years old, and within their first decade of ownership of the farm. Eligible owners must also play a significant role in the day-to-day operation of the farm.

Grants will be announced in the spring, and applications must be postmarked by January 22, 2016.

For more information about the New Farmers Grant Fund, including full eligibility requirements, guidelines, and a link to the application, please visit esd.ny.gov/BusinessPrograms/NewFarmersGrantFund.html.



A Weekend of Forestry and Fun

On the third weekend in August, thousands gather at the Boonville Oneida County Fairgrounds for three days of fun, with a focus on forestry. The New York State Woodsmen's Field Day takes place annually, with this year being its 68th year of operation. It is billed as the largest forest promotion event in the Northeast, and nearly 46,000 people visited the Field Days in 2015, setting an attendance record.

It is an event focused on promoting the forest industry along with showcasing the skills of the lumberjack. On display are over five acres of the latest in forest industry tools, technology, and equipment. Artisans demonstrate their skills and display their creations. The Field Days hosted the annual NYS Open Lumberjack Championships, the World's Open Lumberjill Championships, and the Northeast Junior Lumberjack Championships. Other events include a 10K race, chainsaw carving competitions and demonstrations, and even a canoe/kayak race. There are activities for all ages, and many families choose to make it a part of their summer vacation, often camping on-site.



The event highlights the importance of forestry within New York State, and it is not too early to put this event on the calendar for next year. The 69th annual NYS Woodsmen's Field Days is scheduled for August 19-21, 2016, rain or shine.

For more information about the event, please visit www.starinfo.com/woodsmen/, or contact the event organizers at fielddays@aol.com.

Positive Trends: Farm to School

It is a mutually beneficial relationship. Farms provide schools with fresh, local food. School districts become a market for nearby farms.

Farm to School programs encompass a range of activities. The most obvious example is when a school district purchases locally-grown or raised food. Other Farm to School activities include activities like field trips to local farms or a school gardening program.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the relationships between educational institutions and agriculture are becoming increasingly common across the country. Early data from the USDA's Farm to School Census indicates that over 42,000 schools are investing nearly \$600,000 in local food products. This is an increase of 55 percent from two years ago, the last time this particular census was conducted.



However, that is not the only good news. School districts also report that students are less likely to waste their food when provided with local food. Many schools also report that Farm to School programs result in lower food costs along with greater support from parents and the community.

Responses from school districts for the census are still being tallied by the USDA. The final results will be released in early 2016.

In the last census, 311 school districts in New York State, serving more than 1.8 million students, reported their participation in Farm to School programs. What will this year's census reveal?

For more information about the USDA's Farm to School Program, including reports on the results of the census, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool.



Informing the Public and Protecting Waterways



The Sewage Pollution Right-to-Know Act was passed into law in 2013. Even as it was passed into law, many people did not know that such an identification system did not already exist. The law now requires that water treatment facilities report any discharges to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) within two hours of its discovery. The program alerts the public when it is determined that untreated or partially treated sewage has entered a particular water body.

The alerts are sent to individuals who sign up through the NY Alert website, as well as to neighboring municipalities. Information contained within the alerts includes the location, time, and volume of the spill. The alert also identifies affected water bodies. The legislation was enacted to inform the public that certain water bodies may not be safe for swimming, boating, or fishing.

Discharges can happen for a variety of reasons, including heavy rains, broken sewer pipes, or even vandalism. There are also several steps everyone can take to help ensure a well-functioning sewer system, to help offset the risk of discharges. These include conserving water and refraining from pouring oil or grease down drains that lead to sewer systems, to prevent clogging these systems.

Members of the public can register online to receive these alerts, along with other customized emergency notifications.

For more information about the program, please visit the following website: www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/90315.html. Sign up to receive alerts at nyalert.gov.

Vendors Sought for Pilot Project for Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables

The New York State Office of General Services (OGS) is seeking vendors who would be interested in participating in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Pilot Project for Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables.

The purpose of this USDA-funded project is to increase the opportunities for schools to obtain fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables for use in their school lunch programs. New York State was one of eight states selected by the USDA to participate in the pilot program.

The project could be an opportunity for farmers, growers, and food hubs to build upon their existing markets. OGS encourages vendors of any size to apply to participate in the program.

For more information, please email Diane Green at the NYS Office of General Services at 518-473-9386, or via email at Diane.Green@ogs.ny.gov.





Mind the Bats

Now is not the time to explore caves and mines

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently reminded the public not to disturb bats by exploring the caves and mines in which they hibernate. Following these guidelines is an important step in the effort to combat a deadly disease affecting multiple species of bats.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a fungal disease affecting bats, first discovered in eastern New York State during the winter of 2006-07. It is rapidly spreading across the country, devastating bat populations.

The disease gets its name from one of its symptoms, a white fungus that appears around bats' noses and wings. The fungus thrives in the cool and humid environmental conditions typical of the caves and mines where bats often hibernate.



A close-up of a little brown bat with white-nose syndrome. (Photo by Ryan von Linden/New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.)

When bats are infected with WNS, they often act in unusual ways, such as flying around outside during the day when temperatures are below freezing. This causes the depletion of fat reserves that bats need to survive during hibernation, and they starve to death. Visiting a cave where bats are hibernating could further disturb bats infected with WNS.

Additionally, there is a risk that this fungus could be spread by humans to uninfected bat populations, especially if people visit multiple caves.

Bats play a vital role within their ecosystem. Many species have voracious appetites for insects, reducing pests that pose a threat to agriculture and other activities. A United States Geological Survey study released in 2011 estimated that these insectivores provide pest-control services that save the nation's agricultural producers at least \$3 billion annually.

The DEC is working closely with other organizations across the country to learn more about the disease and, hopefully, identify ways to stop it from spreading further.

For more information about white-nose syndrome, please visit whitenosesyndrome.org.

Share the News...


To request additional copies of current or previous editions of *Rural Futures* for distribution, please contact the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources at RuralRes@nysenate.gov.

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SAVE THE DATES!



 **New York State Agricultural Society – Annual Forum
“Climate Smart Farming:
Changes and Opportunities”**


JANUARY 7, 2016

Holiday Inn Liverpool/Syracuse, NY
nysagsociety.org

 **2016 Agricultural and Food
Business Outlook Conference**

JANUARY 20, 2016

Warren Hall, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY
[dyson.cornell.edu/outlook/
economic-outlook-conference](http://dyson.cornell.edu/outlook/economic-outlook-conference)

 **Christmas Tree Farmers
Association of New York
2016 Winter Convention**

JANUARY 21-23, 2016

Holiday Inn, Liverpool/Syracuse, NY
christmastreesny.org

 **New York State Association
of Counties
2016 Legislative Conference**

FEBRUARY 1-3, 2016

The Desmond Hotel
and Conference Center
Albany, NY
nysac.org

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Please email the Commission at RURALRES@NYSENATE.GOV**