

## Welcome to "In the Field"

Accomplishing the goals of protecting the public and promoting healthy environments in New York State takes innovation, creativity and passion. I don't need to tell you this because it's obvious as you read through the articles in the issue. To share a personal note, one of my mentors, Nancy Clark, recently retired. At her send-off, it was said that not only is she passionate but her passion is based on facts. In other words, she takes the best available science and evidence and uses it to serve the people. Keeping in mind that science only takes us so far, we must apply who we are and what we care about to achieve meaningful results.



Nathan Graber, M.D., M.P.H.,  
Director  
Center for Environmental Health

## Challenging Standards

I think it's safe to say we all experienced some change in our Environmental Health work over the last five years. For many of us that may seem like an understatement.

Environmental Health programs protect the way of life society has become accustomed to. Safe water, safe food, and safe recreation are expectations, not something that needs consideration as the public plans each day. Environmental Health programs were developed out of the necessity to control the spread of illness so that the actions of a few do not affect the health of many. It seems at times that the

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## Putnam County Teamwork Improves Food Environment

Food sanitarians with the Putnam County Department of Health have worked closely with food operators on food safety issues for decades. Recently the sanitarians have expanded their role beyond regulations and compliance issues and in 2014 partnered with department nutritionists and health education staff to launch an innovative annual event called Eat Smart Restaurant Week (ESRW). The purpose is to tackle a top Prevention Agenda challenge—chronic disease and obesity.



Since 2007, the annual department-run food operators' seminar has provided a forum to educate about new industry trends. This non-mandated event is well attended. Nearly 40 percent of the County's 377 food establishments attend. The gathering also helps to "read the pulse" of food preparers, assess training needs, and find new collaborative avenues.

Food operators were concerned about reports customers planned to eat out less due to health concerns and felt left out of the growing health-conscious market. The ESRW concept was conceived to address this and launched at the March seminar with a panel discussion of local farmers, chefs, restaurateurs, the Health Commissioner, and a County planning department manager, followed by presentations by a food sanitarian and a nutritionist.

ESRW kicked off in September 2014 for its two week stretch and 35 eateries participated. Restaurants, deli or counter-style establishments, one "fast-food" chain, and a few cafeteria-style operations all worked closely with department nutritionists to finely tune selected menu items.



## Serving up Success

Participants submitted between two to five recipes and a four-point criterion was used to assess them. Department nutritionists analyzed everything—all at no cost to the restaurant operators. The four principles were moderate portion sizes for meat, poultry, fish, cheese, pastas, and grains; emphasis on fresh, local vegetables; healthy oils in moderation; and finally, salt and high-sodium ingredients used sparingly. Together nutritionists and chefs tweaked each recipe until it was acceptable under the department's guidelines.

Health education staff promoted the initiative beginning with a press kick-off event, unveiling a specially designed ESRW event logo at one of the participating restaurants. Creative materials included signage (both interior and exterior), menu inserts, posters, and flyers. Media releases included announcements when new restaurant menu selections were approved and "photo ops" when signage went up at individual participating locales. In addition, social media posts, online publications, and calendar listings were utilized. Advertising dollar support came from the County's tourism office, as well as full endorsements from the Economic Development Corporation and the County Executive's Office. Pre-event publicity also included a 30-minute television production which aired opening week on *Good Day Hudson Valley*, featuring three owner/chefs and health department staff.

Success is often counted in repeat "customers" and ESRW 2015 had nearly all eateries returning, with new popular spots joining the effort.

*Contributed by Rick Carano and Shawn Rogan, Putnam County Department of Health*

# Backflow Threat to Water Supply

I would like to cover the issue of cross connections as a result of a recent incident encountered in the City of Lockport, Niagara County. Our Public Water Supply Program ensures that each water supply system in the County, from source supplies to purchase water systems, has an active cross connection control program.

The issue encountered in Lockport on May 18, 2015 involved a hydroseeding operation at a local school where the company's operator connected their hydroseeding tank with a hose to a local fire hydrant without the permission and knowledge of the City



*Hydroseeding tank parked at school curb*

and without installing a readily available backflow device. It appears as though he then engaged the on-board pump to circulate the tank water while adding his mixture, containing grass seed and wood/cellulose material. The pump also exceeded the pressure in the City system (because

the operator failed to close the valve and disconnect from the hydrant) and therefore backflowed his mixture into the water supply.

## Lesson at School

There are two City schools located in the area, and they soon noticed a lack of water pressure problem and called upon the City for assistance. The City responded immediately, notified our department, and proceeded to determine the source of the problem as the hydroseeding operation. A Drinking Water Advisory was issued by the City as prepared by this department advising people in the area not to drink the water until further notice. A Niagara County Department of Health press release was issued, and the County's Reverse 911 System was utilized to phone residents in the area, along with notification via the NY Alert System. Hydrants in the area were flushed for two hours (325,000 gals) to purge the City's water supply system in the area.

The water systems at both schools were flushed and sampled over a two-day period, with bottled water utilized and cold lunches provided with single service utensils. Contact was made with the company responsible for the hydroseeding, as they had already completed their seeding and



*Hydroseeding mixture of grass seed and cellulose*

had left the area. Samples from the hydroseeding operation were collected to test for contaminants and bacteria.

The company and the hydroseeding driver were interviewed and the schools' food service operations were inspected by the Department. The driver admitted to NOT using the backflow device provided on the hydroseeding trailer.

All sample results came back within standards, and the Advisory was lifted two days later. In the interim, the City arranged for residents to pick up water for drinking and cooking from the fire department at City Hall. The City was very cooperative during this incident and needs to be commended for their quick action and follow-up. Both the City and the Department will be pursuing legal action against the company to ensure that this and any similar backflow incidents are prevented. The incident points to the importance of our public water supply backflow prevention program and the need to ensure compliance throughout the industry.

*Contributed by James J. Devald and Ronald Gwozdek, Niagara County Health Department*

## Challenging

*cont. from p. 1*

public is so accustomed to the standards of Environmental Health that they may not realize that the day-to-day work of Environmental Health staff is upholding these standards. Maintaining public health through Environmental Health programs is a tremendous responsibility we all take to heart.

In addition to everyday challenges our Environmental Health Division faced some unique challenges over the past five years, including the loss of the Division's five senior supervisors (three of which retired on the same day), retirements of additional technical staff, position losses, shared responsibilities, uncertainty of position backfills, office relocation, file reorganization, administration changes at both Department and County level, budget cuts, reevaluation of mandatory program priorities, and redistribution of work assignments. These challenges may not

be unique but together caused significant hardship given the low availability of resources, the loss of institutional knowledge, the cultural change, changes in accountability, and having to do more with less while insuring security of our programs, and meeting expectations.

On the positive side, while all this was going on new opportunities arose; opportunities to evaluate our programs, to see if things could be done differently, assessing if current actions were going to yield the results needed for new expectations, and the chance to educate the public about the importance of Environmental Health. This process reinforced the need for Environmental Health programs as well as the way in which the programs are implemented. It also highlighted that our programs not only protect public health, but ensure and protect the value of property, business, and infrastructure.

The balance of priorities in Environmental Health may shift over time and standards will no doubt evolve. Environmental

Health has always taken public health challenges and turned them into opportunities to provide a proactive approach to the protection of public health.

Whether the challenge is new, or familiar, we should take comfort in knowing that Environmental Health is not a grass roots concept that will fade with time. Time gives Environmental Health strength; it is the cornerstone of our lifestyle, constantly challenging what acceptable standards are.

If you believe the public is going to settle for lower Environmental Health standards, you haven't sent out a large scale Boil Water Notice in a while!

*Contributed by: Tanya Clark, Dutchess County Department of Health*

*[Editor's Note: Congratulations to the Environmental Health Services Team, Tanya Clark, Jim Fouts, and Monique Jones for being recognized as 2014 Public Health Works! Honor Roll members.]*



# Utica Unity Gardens Offer a Welcome Urban Retreat



*Utica Unity South Community Garden*

As the sun's dappled light dances across the garden, honey bees drink the nectar and dew from the morning glories, a Monarch butterfly flits from flower to flower, and young squirrels busy themselves trying to scale sunflowers growing in the summer heat at the Utica Unity Gardens.

This community garden project takes vacant lots (Brownfields) and transforms them into usable, green space to encourage

apartments, a low income housing project; Sculpture Space; the Utica Public Library; and along Park Avenue.

The largest garden, Utica Unity South, offers one hundred raised garden beds for residents' use, and a garden demonstration area that is under development. It will feature a growing display of 32 different vegetables, a hoops demonstration project to examine extending the gardening season, a Victorian gazebo, a hops display, and a walking path. The Parks Conservancy recently installed an urban orchard, and berry bushes will be planted this fall.

## Community Reaps What it Sows

The project team developed a Summer Children's Gardening program that supports 140 children at four gardening sites. Pre-school to grade six children learn gardening basics including planting, watering, harvesting, and composting while caring for their own plants in their own raised bed garden plots. Children's gardening journals were developed in partnership with SUNY Polytechnical Institute Food & Culture classes, and the project also provides internships to local college students interested in urban planning and landscape architecture.

The project offers free beginning adult horticulture and micro-greens growing classes in English, Spanish, and other languages spoken by recently resettled refugees, to encourage gardening. It supports entry level employment opportunities for low income and limited English proficiency residents in area greenhouses and home gardening supply stores by providing a 10 hour certificate program in horticulture.

The project team partners with the Mohawk Valley Youth Build program to provide work site training in garden construction and landscaping to youth 18-24 who are completing their high school equivalency diploma requirements while gaining job skills.

In partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County, it provides Master Gardener students to support the children's programming and garden sites. Two Eat Smart New York nutritionists provide nutrition education, and live cooking

demonstrations at the gardens to educate residents on healthy and low cost snacking through a Garden Talks program.



*Creating a peace pole*

In addition to support to the NYSDOH from the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the project is supported by the CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, City of Utica's Parks Department, the Parks Conservancy, the Utica Public Library, the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, and various private philanthropies including area landscaping firms, nurseries, and foundations.



*Students install hoops for micro-greens project*

community socialization, improve access to healthy fruits and vegetables for residents living in food deserts, promote exercise through gardening, and foster neighborhood beautification and revitalization.

The community garden project currently consists of nine, unique gardening sites of various sizes in two low income neighborhoods of Cornhill and West Utica. The gardens support many local residents and can be found at Women, Infants, and Children; the Utica Rescue Mission; the Salvation Army's meal site; Kennedy Plaza



*Community partners celebrate completion of the children's garden at Utica Public Library*

*Contributed by Cathe Bullwinkle, NYSDOH, Outreach & Education*

## In the Field of Environmental Health

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Back issues of *In the Field* are posted on the Health Commerce System, or contact us for copies.

**Special thanks to our contributors**

## Just Another Day in the (Snowy) Field



Becky Bussert, Senior Sanitarian with the NYSDOH Glens Falls District Office, was asked to perform a migrant farmworker housing pre-operational inspection at the Saratoga Apple facility in Schuylerville, NY. The pre-operational inspection needed to be completed by March 8, 2015 per a request from the NYS Department of Labor (DOL). Per an agreement with the DOL, pre-operational inspections are to be conducted one month prior to their date of need for migrant help.

With the cold temperatures and recently fallen snow, Becky knew this wasn't going to be just another walk through the orchard. She called the operator

to schedule the visit. The operator confirmed that the housing located in the orchard would be a challenge to get to, and Becky should come prepared.

Upon arrival at the facility, Becky donned her winter apparel and set out to meet the operator. They met at the store for the facility, and in front of a crackling fire, they both put on their snowshoes. Slapping through the store did turn a few heads, but they headed out to the orchard.

While on their 30 minute trek of about 300 yards, the operator was talking with Becky about the facility and future plans. In order to hear better, Becky moved to the side of the operator, who quickly said that she ought to get behind him so that he can break track.

The inspection went well, and Becky got her exercise that day. Just another example of never knowing where the job is going to take you.

*Contributed by Ed Bartos, Capital Area Environmental Health Program*

## Long Island, NYC, and Great Lakes Beach Information Now Available Online

In July, the NYSDOH Bureau of Community Environmental Health and Food Protection launched the New York State Beach Water Quality website. The site was developed to meet the requirements of the Federal Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act coastal monitoring and notification grant program. It provides the public with up-to-date information on the operational status and water sample results of beaches on the

Atlantic Ocean, Long Island Sound, and Great Lakes.

The website can be viewed at [http://ny.healthinspections.us/ny\\_beaches/](http://ny.healthinspections.us/ny_beaches/) or at NYSDOH's Swimming Pools/Bathing Beaches/Recreational Aquatic Spray Grounds web page at <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/swimming/>. Links are also provided to the appropriate websites of coastal jurisdictions that maintain their own beach water quality information.



The site provides information on beaches in New York coastal areas and may be expanded to include inland lake and river beaches in the future.

If you have any questions about the Beach Water Quality website, please contact your regional field coordinator or Eric Wiegert at [eric.wiegert@health.ny.gov](mailto:eric.wiegert@health.ny.gov)

## In this Issue

**Eat Smart Restaurant Week**  
[www.putnamcountyny.com/eat-smart-restaurant-week-returns-september-27-through-october-11-food-establishments-encouraged-to-sign-up-early/](http://www.putnamcountyny.com/eat-smart-restaurant-week-returns-september-27-through-october-11-food-establishments-encouraged-to-sign-up-early/)

**Cross-Connection Control Program**  
[www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/cross/cross.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/cross/cross.htm)

**Public Health Works!**  
[www.health.ny.gov/prevention/public\\_health\\_works/](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/public_health_works/)

**Brownfields**  
[www.health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/brownfields/](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/brownfields/)

**Migrant Farmworker Housing**  
[www.health.ny.gov/regulations/nycrr/title\\_10/part\\_15/](http://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/nycrr/title_10/part_15/)

**NYS Conference of Environmental Health Directors**  
[www.nyscehd.org/](http://www.nyscehd.org/)

**Beach Water Quality Information**  
[ny.healthinspections.us/ny\\_beaches/](http://ny.healthinspections.us/ny_beaches/)

## \* New or Updated Resources \*

**Cook Hot, Store Cold Magnets (Spanish and Chinese)**  
[www.health.ny.gov/publications/6542.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/6542.pdf)  
[www.health.ny.gov/publications/6543.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/6543.pdf)

**Lead Poisoning - Are you Pregnant?**  
[www.health.ny.gov/publications/2593.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2593.pdf)

**Home Safe Home**  
[www.health.ny.gov/publications/3106.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/3106.pdf)

### FISH PUBLICATIONS:

- Long Island and NYC: Health Advice on Eating Fish You Catch (Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Russian, Chinese)
  - Health Advice on Eating Fish You Catch - Finger Lakes (Spanish)
  - Health Advice on Eating Fish You Catch - Hudson Valley Region
  - NYS Blue Crab Cooking & Eating Guide (Chinese)
- [www.health.ny.gov/fish](http://www.health.ny.gov/fish)

## Available from Distribution Center Only

Too Hot for Tots Coloring Book #3135

Handwashing and Glove Use Q & A  
 • Spanish #1352 • Chinese #1353

Handwashing Sticker  
 • Spanish #6540 • Chinese #6541