

**2020
Annual Report**



SWNYDLFC



CVP



Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

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Kimberly Witherow
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Emily 'Beth' Southworth
Fred DeGoiler

AGRICULTURE

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Michael Wilson
Jessica Brehm
Ben Nickerson
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Staff

ADMINISTRATORS

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Executive Director
DARCY CRAMER
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LUCY CONTI
Administrative Assistant
LISETTE CABRERA
4-H Administrative Assistant

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT

LISA KEMPISTY
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4-H DEPARTMENT

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MOLLY BROWN
4-H Community Educator

NUTRITION DEPARTMENT

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SNAP Education Community Educator
HEATHER GREGORY
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TRICIA DRAGOO
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Cornell Regional Teams

VEGETABLE TEAM

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Julie Kikkert
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Ali Nafchi
Judson Reid

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LAKE ERIE REGIONAL GRAPE PROGRAM

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RON ALMETER

Agricultural Representative

JEFF MILLER

Agricultural Representative

DAN PAVLOCK

County Legislator

JOHN HEMMER

County Legislator

DAN HEITZENRATER

County Executive Rep

RENEE MOONEYHAN

Extension Specialist

Directors Statement

It is almost hard to remember back to the early months of 2020, we were planning for a full summer of livestock shows, events and outside programming, and enjoying good friends and food at the Annual Green Tie Affair. We were poised to introduce over 1800 elementary children about agriculture through Ag Literacy week and we had over 50 instructors and judges contracted to teach classes, judge shows and mentor the youth in Chautauqua County.

2020 was certainly a year of turmoil, disruption, and unexpected changes. But under different perception 2020 was an amazing year of growth, resilience, innovation, and opportunity. The staff at CCE Chautauqua embraced the opportunity to redefine and improve our offerings. From virtual and hybrid programming to sanitizer distribution to video editing 2020 at CCE Chautauqua may have looked very different but sometimes the more things seem to change the more they really stay the same. The only constant is change itself. In the last 2 years our staff have moved offices, from the Ag Center to JCC, and from JCC to their homes, but we continue to provide valuable low cost, high quality programming to the residents of Chautauqua County. Enclosed in this document are some of our 2020 highlights and a unique look at all our staff. Please enjoy a quick look and read further for an in-depth description about each of us. A very special thank you to our Nutrition Educator, Heather Gregory who graciously and eloquently took on a brainstorm of an idea to use this annual report to help each of you connect with who we are here at CCE, and why we love to serve the community, ever through the craziness that will never be forgotten and always known as the Pandemic that changed our lives.

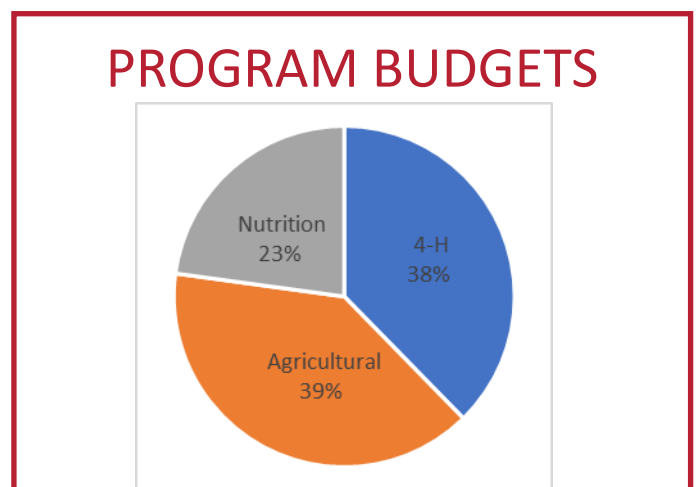
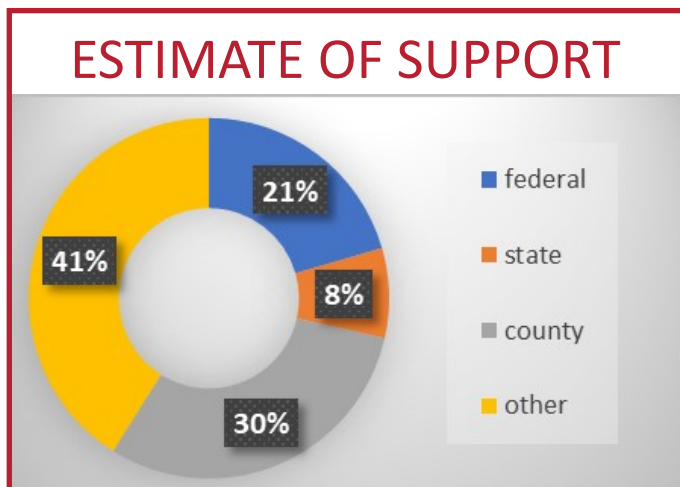


Please enjoy this document and reach out to us with any further questions, concerns, opportunities, and ideas for 2021. We are becoming masters of change and look forward to how we can help you in 2021 and beyond.

EMILY REYNOLDS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

OUR MISSION

Cornell Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability and social well-being. We bring local experience and research-based solutions together, helping New York State families and communities thrive in our rapidly changing world.



Youth Development– Keeping Kids Connected



Before the Pandemic, the Fredonia Middle School STORY group presented their Green Living and renewable energy program to the Fredonia Rotary club and then presented again to the Chautauqua County Legislators.



4-H made and distributed over **1900** homemade face coverings to those in need.



New hybrid and virtual opportunities allowed you to learn skills like cake decorating, flower arranging, sewing and much more.

Over **1600** people viewed Cooperative Cooking, a healthy cooking series of videos demonstrating healthy cooking on a budget.

Cooperative Gardening demonstrating the differences between hydroponic gardening and grow light gardening, in partnership with the CCE Master Gardeners has reached over **1700** views.

Programming at Chautauqua Institution included 'Invasive Species', 'What's in a Farm' and 'FashionBots'. In total, **27** campers participated in the programming and one family re-took the Invasive Species course stating it was the best programming of the summer.

4-H Mission to Mars, was a socially distant, class with **4** youth learned about the topography of Mars the current NASA Mission to Mars with the Perseverance rover and then created their own rovers.

What's the Coop is a new Facebook community page educating the public on backyard chicken rearing. The group is up to **140** members and has become a communal helping forum.



When COVID-19 closed the Chautauqua County Fair, the Chautauqua County 4-H Meat Animal Sale Committee voted to move the sale online so youth who had been working hard on their projects would have the opportunity to complete their project and sell their animals. The sale generated over \$85,000 and 94% of that is returned to the youth. Over \$1,000 in donations were made to various 4-H animal projects and the 4-H Endowment held at the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation.



Chautauqua County 4-H Meat Animal Sale
 July 16-17, 2020
 PetersonAuction.com




56 youth participated in a social distant Public Presentation events throughout the county. Public speaking builds confidence, teaches poise, self awareness and help youth feel connected to the community.

Local and Regional Agricultural Impacts



(left to right) Emily Reynolds, CCE Executive Director; Jennifer Russo, Cornell Lake Erie Regional Grape Team Leader; and Madonna Martin, Field Assistant.

In collaboration with NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, 1,180 Gallons and 1063 units of the 2 oz. spray bottles of hand sanitizer, 5,720 face coverings, and fact sheets in English and Spanish on the proper use of PPE were provided to the County agricultural community.

Grape growing education went virtual with great success. "This unintentional platform (zoom) was so well received by our stakeholders, that they have requested we continue to offer Virtual Coffee Pot ." The LERGP offered 13 opportunities to receive pesticide recertification credits in 2020. There were 13 Virtual Coffee Pot Meetings total with 13 Guest Speakers and 457 total participants in the meetings with 183 attendees in the third quarter. Meetings in the future.



NYS Harvest NY Berry Specialist Esther Kibbe worked with 3 county berry growers directly taught a local berry workshop, and spoke at a growers meeting for the Chautauqua Produce Auction. 2021 Chautauqua will host a SWD demonstration exclusion netting trial.

SWNYDLFC was part of a state wide collaboration with Regional Dairy Specialists and Cornell PRO-DAIRY to host a virtual dairy feeder school. This event was offered in both



English and Spanish. The program had more than 143 individual registrations, with additional viewers from the same location and views of the recording on YouTube.

The Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops regional team conducted **1,045** Farm Consultations on topics related to Farm Business Management, Field Crops, Dairy Management, and Livestock Production.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Cornell Vegetable Program 14-County Region

This region accounts for **more than half of all vegetable acres** in the state with **1,229 farms**, and a farm gate value **exceeding \$200 million.**

3,588
farm visits and crop consultations made by the Cornell Vegetable Program team

*
*
*

83
educational meetings and presentations given by Cornell Vegetable Program Specialists

*
*
*

3,025
people increased their knowledge by attending presentations given by the Cornell Vegetable Program

*
*
*

33
research grants and projects managed by the Cornell Vegetable Program

Chautauqua County's investment of \$113K in CCE's dairy, livestock, field crops, vegetable and grape teams, leverage **\$1.47M** in extension and applied agriculture research programs critical to the success of progressive farms in Chautauqua County. In partnership with Cornell and other counties, we are able to deploy 18 highly skilled specialists in the areas of dairy, livestock, field crops, vegetable, grape and ag business management.

The CCE agriculture teams provide cutting edge research and education to Chautauqua County's 1,228 farms, operating on 223,634 acres with a total market value of \$639,035,000 (land, equipment, machinery) and generates annually over \$161 million/year for the local economy according to the USDA 2017 Ag Census. The county's investment in supporting agriculture through CCE represents only 0.07% of the value of the county's ag industry per year...a small investment to ensure the growth and profitability of the food industry that is vital to put food on resident's tables but is also an important economic engine in the county!

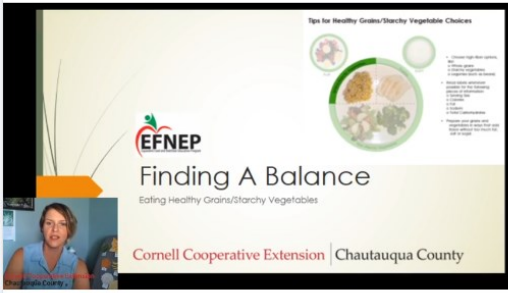
The county's investment to ensure a strong agriculture and food system represents a **13x ROI**, not including the value of fringe and overhead by the University. Including this, the value of the program is \$2.7M or a ROI of 23x.

By participating in regional agriculture teams, Chautauqua County is able to access the expertise and resources of all 11 regional teams in the Extension System and more effectively access the rich faculty and program resources of Cornell University and the entire National Land Grant System to benefit Chautauqua County growers and ultimately, all residents of the county.

Nutrition Education Changes Lives

Finding A Balance

What's a starchy vegetable anyway? Let's chat about it!



Our team has developed recipe cards that go with the produce that is in season. On the recipe card we have added tips on how to pick the freshest produce for the family, easy to follow recipes and tips on storing leftovers and so much more.

120

Are delivered weekly to the Dunkirk Farmers Market



Pre-COVID nutrition educators attended an event at the Job Corps to help promote Nutrition Education at the school.

Attendance Summary:

- 143 Students attended
- 28 tables were occupied



SNAP-Ed Nutrition, created a collaboration with the Salvation Army in Jamestown, NY. Basic Need Coordinator to create videos each Thursday to teach pantry clients how to create a healthy recipe with items used solely from the food pantry.

Our first Facebook Live group to teach the EFNEP diabetes curriculum launched with one session receiving more than **125** comments and interactions!

"In our very first session, she (participant) learned that her toddler should have milk with every meal, and she immediately made that change. She had a roommate that overran their refrigerator with his food, and there was only half of a shelf available for her and her child. We worked to brainstorm ways to take advantage of frozen foods. She was hesitant about canned foods. A few probing questions revealed she did not own a can opener. I gave her mine, and by my next visit she was incorporating more canned beans into her meals."

Helpful SNAP-Ed nutrition handouts as well as the monthly SNAP-Ed newsletters are distributed to over **500** local food boxes monthly.



"Expanded Food Nutrition Education: A participant from our ESL groups responded to my call and was interested in completing her nutrition education. Though months had passed since our sessions began, she continues to make shopping lists, plan her meals, and cook dinner at home six days a week. During our first Zoom session, she showed me pictures of the garden she began this year. She is excited that it is flourishing! She has graduated our program, and hopes to re-enroll in the fall."

Finding A Balance

What's a starchy vegetable anyway? Let's chat about it!



128 Comments



"I always make one visit a hands-on cooking session. The day I did, I asked my participant to retrieve an item from her refrigerator. She put her hand to the door, paused, growled, and turned to the scale that was right beside the refrigerator. She weighed herself, growled, and returned to the refrigerator. Talking to her revealed she weighs herself every time she gets an item from the refrigerator. I advised her our bodyweight fluctuates over the course of a day. I encouraged her to weigh herself at the same time and on the same day, once a week. I never saw her do that again. "

Master Gardener Volunteers Improve the Community

Chautauqua Institution (CI) Garden Census Project, 2020

In cooperation with Angela James, President of the CI Bird, Tree, & Garden (BTG) Club, and under the direction of Betsy Burgeson, CI Supervisor of Grounds and Landscapes, Sandi & Nick Stupiansky were the project leaders for this cooperative venture to conduct a census of perennials, shrubs, and trees in approximately 30 CI gardens. This process included plant identification and photos of plants in bloom. This list grew to approximately **48** gardens as the project continued. A total of 14 CHQ County Master Gardeners participated in this project in 2020.

Throughout this time, CHQ Master Gardeners contributed **257** onsite hours .

The data collection phase of the project consisted of plant identification, often using a phone app (Picture This, iNaturalist, Plant Snap, etc.) and photos of plants in bloom. This information, along with description, location, size, number, etc. of the plants, was uploaded to a Chautauqua Institution BTG website. Over **1,970** plant entries were submitted during the summer project, most of these by Master Gardeners. The database will be used by Betsy Burgeson for garden maintenance, ordering, and plant id markers. The database will also be used by the BTG club for future garden and tree tours, both virtual and face-to-face, and for updating the BTG website with links to each garden. The public will benefit from this additional information.

This was a great cooperative project that connected the non-profit Chautauqua Institution, the historical BTG Club, and the CCE Master Gardeners. Chautauqua Institution and the BTG Club gained valuable information which will be utilized for plant markers, future tours, and an upgraded BTG website. It was an educational experience for CCE Master Gardener volunteers as each became more comfortable and knowledgeable with plant identification.



Master Gardener Volunteers Train New Volunteers

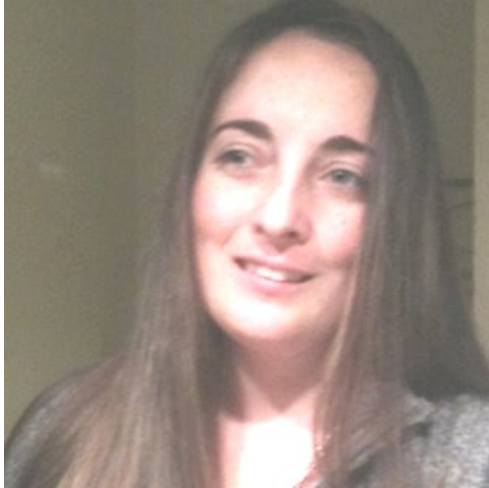
Despite the Pandemic Master Gardener Volunteers hosted a new volunteer CORE training class in which interested community members are selected to complete 38 hours of training under the direction of Cornell University Cooperative Extension. Starting in early May, video conferencing Zoom meetings met and covered various gardening and adult learning topics. Since completion of the classroom activities, new volunteers are working to complete 50 volunteer hours on gardening project or contributing gardening service in the community before becoming a full Master Gardener.

The successful completion of these Master Gardeners in training and our current active Master Gardeners volunteers will bring us to a full complement of **53** Master Gardeners supporting Chautauqua and helping to reintroduce a program in Cattaraugus County.



Zoom Classroom showing students and staff on a 2020 Master Gardener Training Session

Engineered by Emily



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Emily Reynolds

Imagine a horse show. There's a program of events, and people enter the contest with their horses. They all do their individual prep work, and then gather at the show to run their predetermined course and see how it all turns out. Though the course is the same for every entry, there are still slightly different variables for every participant. Judges, observers, and participants are all prepared for this, so even if it goes spectacularly awry, there's some level of recognition that the turmoil at hand was always a possibility.

It's not a huge stretch to envision CCE as a daily horse show. Every office contains a different area or "event" of sorts. Every person in each event approaches their setup and execution in different ways, and results vary vastly by person, area, and strategy. As a spectator, it's hard to keep up! What if you're in charge of the show?

Enter Emily Reynolds. Executive Director for Chautauqua County Cornell Cooperative Extension – and arguably – show coordinator extraordinaire. Keeping apprised of everything that is happening and being accomplished, and then conveying that to Cornell, the county legislature, the board, and other invested parties is no small task. What happens when all the "horses" get sent off the grounds and to all corners of several counties and two states?

"The whole crisis of the pandemic hit and everybody wanted to be in control of every piece of it," Emily recounts. "I think that maybe it's about just going with the flow, you know? Rolling with the punches and figuring it out, and letting go of what we can't control." Emily understood the importance of first getting everyone settled into a home office environment, and then figuring out work structures that worked best for each person.

"I was proud of the fact that everybody had equipment to take home," Emily recounts. "I jumped right on [obtaining] the wifi, hotspots before supply sources ran out, so everybody was able to have internet too. Then the main concern became revenue, and the PPP [Payment Protection Program] loan became available but we did not apply right away, I refused to do it without board approval, so there was some concern there. But the applications process allowed for extended submissions and our application was already sitting there, and it got approved. Probably after that there was this realization of we're there. We did it. Everybody's got a computer at home, everybody's got internet at home. We're working."

Praise for her abounds within her staff. Emily will cheer successes, encourage through defeat, and guide when things go off course. Even in this interview, Emily shares a tip for those with a few too many irons in the fire. "My greatest piece of professional advice was when I started in 4-H," Emily recalls a fellow educator, whose name is now a bit of a blur, giving her strategies for managing projects. "I was at the 4-H state conference, in the fall of my first year and [was] talking about how overwhelming and how much stuff there is to do, and he looked at me and he says, 'here's what I do: I work on a little bit of each project every day. That way I'm making progress and I'm not lying when somebody calls and says, 'Have you worked on this?' I can say yes.'"

Emily believes strongly that quality work comes from people who are allowed to create in ways that best suit them. Emily values keeping her team connected during this remote phase. At 9AM every Tuesday, a team Zoom meeting provides an opportunity to share work updates, successes, struggles, and personal stories. "We need to meet at least weekly to see each other's faces and remind each other that we're all still here," Emily explains. In this sense, the Chautauqua County team has never before been so connected and informed of the work going on in areas of Extension that are not their own.

The same could also be said of the state-wide Extension network. While networking with other counties and staff at Cornell was always possible, regularly scheduled team meetings have made the wealth of knowledge and experience that lies within the state-wide network even more accessible. "With Cornell, we have that network that when we

REYNOLDS continued....

have ideas, we can throw them out there,” Emily describes how then others will share their experiences with similar ideas, which has enabled her to amend her plans to create more successful outcomes. “Some of the best professional developments I’ve had have been just sitting around a table and talking about what you’re doing. I tell people about our dinner all the time as a fundraiser, and they’ve taken pieces or portions of it and ask good questions about it can come up with their own spin-offs.”

As we move through this unprecedented time in our lives, the ability to collaborate and draw strength and focus from each other gains value. In her career, Emily has observed the life cycle of committees, and now sees that playing out with her team as all, including herself, move through the process of reshaping how, when, and where we work. “They’re either growing, they’re flourishing, they’re collapsing, they’re rebuilding, and they go through that cycle,” Emily explains. “I feel like it’s the same individually now with everybody at home. When I got the e-mail from Cornell that says it going to be at the earliest May of 2021, it was like a gut punch. It took a good staff meeting and few phones calls and we are right back at it, changing the world one program at a time”

That said, Emily has found benefit in working from home also, and realizes her team experiences this same inner conflict along the way. “Luckily, all the staff are not on that same life-cycle wave because we wouldn’t be able to pull each other out of it if we were all at the bottom at the same time. It’s a whole new challenge of management, that’s for sure.”

Cyberspace is a vacuous place. While there is so much work happening, the effort is hidden within the remote walls of residential locations distributed across and beyond the county. Instead of seeing a co-worker’s struggle in your office (and being able to lend a hand), we only rarely see the process, or a finished product. When the moments of overwhelm happen, we are often isolated in our homes with no one to lend a hand in assembling mass distributions, or even just a word of encouragement to carry on as this too shall pass. Sometimes, just surviving the work week is the most remarkable thing that happens.

There have been moments of validation. For Emily, they revolve around the rare moments of being at an in-person event, like the 4-H Chicken Barbeque. “When I got there, it was like nothing had missed a beat – it just unfolded,” Emily recalls. “It’s been eight months since we’ve seen each other, and this is all still just happening, it’s all still working, everybody is still doing their piece and it’s all still coming together, and it was hugely successful. It was a really good reminder of all the work we’re doing. We’re still reaching, people are still doing programming.”

The question becomes, how do we make sure our community knows we are still here, and still doing good work? How do we keep reaching people? In some cases, it takes a village. For CCE, it may also take the board. “We will begin with our board of directors in 2021, educating them about CCE and helping them develop the tools to best explain the association to the community.” Emily shares. “It doesn’t have to be the same for each person, but some kind of pitch about extension for each of the board members so that they feel like they’re empowered to share our story in a meaningful way.”

Hopefully personal experience will light the way for those statements, and Emily is happy to share how CCE can impact so many areas of our community. When the state asked farms to generate a reopening plan, and farms were too busy (because they never closed!), CCE was there to assist and provide items like free hand sanitizer from the Department of Ag and Markets, to ease the burden of compliance. Emily delivered to Agricultural producers in need often saying “I’m just here to deliver for you so you don’t have to do it as an extra thing.”

“Despite the pandemic, nutrition staff were at farmer’s markets and food pantries to connect with the community and help people make use of the resources they have. Both nutrition and 4-H continue to reach families, though it’s been largely virtual “and I know in a couple instances, that has made a difference in the well-being of a child who hasn’t seen their family, or don’t have a way to connect otherwise,” Emily surmises. “We will continue to redefine, redevelop, and improve, our programs, our skills, and the lives of the residents in Chautauqua County.”

Though the venue changed, the show went on. Engineered by Emily.



We Hereby Deem Darcy Essential



FINANCE ADMINISTRATOR

Darcy Cramer

Remember the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy looks behind the curtain to discover who the real Wizard is?

It's like that when you open the door to Darcy Cramer's office, too.

The self-proclaimed "city girl amongst the country mice," Darcy didn't want to be interviewed. Her job isn't flashy and she isn't out interacting with the community, so she imagines a perception of her work as mundane and somehow non-essential.

In reality, Darcy holds us together. From what educators likely perceive as the herculean task of accounting, to being the keeper of benefits information and each person's available days off, to teaching how to be more organized with e-mail, or simply being the smiling face (well, maybe eyes these days) that says "hello, friend" when you walk in the door... Darcy is there for each one of us.

This year, she's not only been that for us, but for Niagara County too. Her stint with Niagara was originally planned for six weeks. They utilized her talents for almost a year. The pandemic sent us home, but Darcy was never bored – she did a software/program change for both counties as well as two area teams in that time too! Soon many more staff will be familiar with the program Darcy's been working to establish at two CCE's. Acumetica will enable educators to view their program budgets without having to ask their finance staff for the information. Getting ready for the transfer was a big job.

"We had to clean up all the vendor lists, customer lists, all the accounts [before it could be entered in the new program]," Darcy shares. "Donna James, WSBN Finance Manager, has been the rock of this area. We're fortunate because she is one of the people converting the whole state, and she is our go-to."

In her six years with CCE, Darcy has become central to everything we do. "I don't view it that way," she says when it's pointed out. The pandemic placed her physically at our core: being the only person at the office has meant gathering supplies for remote staff, helping with print jobs, and rethinking how to get day-to-day things accomplished without paper or a physical signature. "Now we scan everything," Darcy explains. Due to the nature of her work and the files she manages (good luck trying to move that file cabinet!) she was the last person to move out of the office. Five months later, she was the first to return.

For years our culture has waxed innovation by "thinking outside the box." This year – everyone had to think outside the office. For Darcy, that meant creating e-versions of vouchers and other documents that required signatures and other information from the staff. Because she'd already been working remotely with Niagara County, Darcy had experiences that helped her know what needed to be done.

"[We had to] learn how to do our jobs differently, and still do our jobs," Darcy recounts. "PDF'ing everything and having it sent back – we were rethinking the workflow."

Yet at every staff meeting when asked for an update on her work, Darcy shrugs and says "I'm doing the same thing I always do." When the point is pressed, she is quick to point out the value of the programs she supports. "Ag is essential because you're feeding people. Nutrition is important because you're teaching people how to [feed themselves healthfully]," Darcy explains. "4-H is getting the kids out and together. My job is not essential by any means, but I think each department has an essential piece to it."

Personally, Darcy also had some adjustments to make at home. "Having my husband home every day, because he was travelling 2-3 days a week, and now he's home all the time," Darcy shares. "I'm used to being home at night reading a book and now he's home and I had to get used to that."

CRAMER continued....

One of her daughters got married this past summer, and the next one is slated for June 2021! Given the current cultural climate, it's easy to understand how shows like "90-day Fiancé" became preferred fare over the nightly news. "Exercise helped," Darcy shares. "I was already doing it. I made sure I continued. It clears your head. Now I go for a walk at the end of the day since I've been sitting at my desk all day." Darcy reflects a moment. "We all just stepped back a bit and realized that was OK," she muses. "It's suddenly OK to be home."



Lucy Leaves You Smiling



ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Lucy Conti

"Humble and kind" are words we see paired together in some areas of pop culture. Spend a little time with Lucy Conti, and you will soon feel you are in the presence of someone who embodies the spirit of that phrase. The first face you see upon entering the CCE workspace, and often the first voice you hear when you call, Lucy is adept at explaining CCE. "We provide knowledge and education to the community as the bridge from Cornell University to our local community," Lucy shares. "We help with the challenges the community faces and address the needs in Agriculture, Nutrition, 4-H Youth Development, and Gardening."

Lucy often finds herself answering questions about everything our office is involved with – and even things we aren't. From home bat invasions to making tea from dandelions in the yard, Lucy often hears it first. Getting sent home made that challenging; but Lucy was determined to keep things running as smooth as possible. She doesn't consider what she did remarkable; and yet she does still successfully provide answers for those calling into the office.

Order and mail guidelines changed with the pandemic, and Lucy has kept on top of that, while also keeping volunteers informed of events and paperwork that is necessary for reporting. Lucy creates *Extension Connection* every month, and manages soil samples and receipts from all the programs. What once happened relatively unfettered at her desk, now had to happen at home. "I had to stay focused even though we were working from home so I could continue to assist our programs," Lucy shares.

Lucy tries to take one day at a time and not stress over small things. She lives true to her intentions, and in so doing, helps CCE as a whole, remain a resource for the community. "I see how we help our agriculture community with information and education with their livestock, soil, invasive species and pesticide trainings," Lucy explains. "Nutrition education helps people lead better lives by choosing the right foods and improving their health by exercising. 4-H Youth programming makes a big difference in the youth that participate. It makes youth more responsible and empathetic towards others and they grow up to be responsible adults."

Lucy enjoys horticulture, and is glad that even with the guidance that has come with the pandemic, Master Gardeners are still able to provide assistance. "Master Gardeners beautify our community and improve our environment as well as answer the many questions from our local residents on gardening problems. I am happy to be a part of an organization that really works hard to help the community," Lucy noted. "Especially this year since the world has so many uncertainties. CCE has been there to help answer the many questions and guide our agriculture community with practical information. I look forward to another successful year."

Masks, Big Asks, and COVID Tasks



4-H ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Lisette Cabrera

Lisette – Masks, Big Asks, and COVID Tasks

“You evolve to what you have to, considering the circumstances.”

We’ve all had our share of circumstances, and Lisette Cabrera is no exception. At the heart of all things 4-H is an attentive, creative woman with a penchant for organization. Given all the project committees, clubs, lone members, and project offerings in the county, it takes someone with multiple strengths to make sure all the details are thoroughly attended to. Before joining CCE, Lisette was only vaguely aware of 4-H. She notes now what a value the program is for families of all walks of life. “If I had more information about 4-H when I was homeschooling my son, I’d have had him

in 4-H!” Because of this, Lisette values looking for more ways to spread the word about the program. She notes that because so many are entrenched in virtual learning and communication, revisiting paper via the newspapers and even informational flyers distributed through the school system might be a fresh way to connect with the community.

Lisette understands the value of CCE as a whole. “We’re a group that’s built to service the community. We’re a link to Cornell University, so we have access to information,” she shares. “You have access to different specialists. Generally, people call us for ANYTHING they can think of!” Lisette reflects on memories of the diverse questions and callers that have sourced the office over the years.

From project books, to record books, event tickets, fundraisers and voucher forms, Lisette has a place and process for managing everything. When COVID sent the state into quarantine, Lisette had to completely rethink her workflow. “At work I have certain places where I put things,” Lisette shares, “I had to find a way to mimic that paper process virtually.”

Lisette is learning to lean more heavily on organizing in an electronic space and relying less on paper. Being accustomed to having a physical representation of something to remind you of a task, can make a move to virtual reminders rather disconcerting. Organization is one of Lisette’s super-strengths. By default, her mind keeps a running task list. “If it doesn’t get done, it can’t come off the mental list,” she explains. Not having a completed paper document to trigger her mind to take an item off her list was upsetting at first.

Lisette realized she needed some coping strategies. This fall, she invested in a fitness tracker, and implemented a walking routine. “There have been four days since the beginning of October that I did not close the ring [complete the goal on the tracker],” Lisette explains. “I’ve got to have some sort of constant activity to keep my sanity and make sure I can still get out my door when this is over, despite the amount of ice cream I am consuming,” she laughs. Lisette says walking has helped her deal with both work stress and the heartache that goes with having family far away during a pandemic. “Work has been no challenge in comparison to not being with your only child when there are big milestones going on.” As so many have managed weddings and funerals from a distance, Lisette has also been unable to be involved in some major milestones. Her son recently purchased his first home, and renovations have been moments for family bonding in the past. Missing this feels as though a glowing thread of tradition has been snapped prematurely. However, that seems minor when reflecting on the baby reveal for their first grandchild. “I would have never imagined having to be on Zoom to be part of the reveal for our first grandchild. I’m really hoping the travel restrictions will be lifted so we can actually visit when the baby arrives!”

Yet Lisette has carried on and tackled everything from improving her knowledge and proficiency in the vast array of computer programs available through CCE, to learning all she can about COVID-19. She has committed herself to tuning in to the Food Industry Office Hours, where questions about the virus are addressed. “It sounds like it should be just food questions, but it’s not,” Lisette explains. “I credit them with helping me cope with the virus.”

To Lisette’s credit, she has invested time and energy of both personal and professional nature, to helping others cope with the virus too. “The Mask Task was totally different,” Lisette shares. “All of a sudden people needed masks and they weren’t readily available. This is something 4-H could help with.” Lisette shares the idea came to her and she

CABRERA continued....

had approached Emily Reynolds, CCE Chautauqua Executive Director about bringing it to life. “It wasn’t long after that Emily shared New York State 4-H was looking into doing a Mask Task as a statewide project. She asked me if I wanted to take care of it for our county, and so that’s what I did.”

A couple of 4-H members, and several adult volunteers worked to create face masks to share with the community. A donation from The Maskmakers of WNY helped round out the offering. “We gave masks out to all three of the Tractor Supplies in the county,” Lisette recalls. 4-H was also able to distribute to a pediatric office in Jamestown as well as other individuals and not-for-profits who were required to have them available. For the most part, the effort has concluded, but the energy is there to ramp it back up if needed.

Lisette has made more than 150 masks herself and contributed them to the greater good. She usually has one at the ready, in case she sees a person in need. “I feel bad for the people who have to wear them every single day,” Lisette says. As the 4-H pledge states: “my hands to larger service and my health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world.” Lisette has benefitted those working at groceries and gas stations alike by making them a [little](#) better outfitted to weather the virus.

Despite her own trials, Lisette points to positives that have come from the pandemic. “It was time for us to start doing things a little differently,” she reflects. “COVID pushed us into thinking outside the box. Not necessarily to do it differently,” she self-edits, “but how can we do it better.”



Trish Talks Tech, Teaching, and Trainings



EFNEP COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Trish Dragoo

In January 2020, Trish Dragoo began her career as CCE’s part-time nutrition educator. She had just finished her training when COVID took hold, and instead of being sent out into the world to find EFNEP participants, she was sent home to ride out the pandemic. As a new educator, it’s hard to know where to begin. How do you figure that out while working from home – with so many of the agencies you might have normally been building partnerships with also in a massive state of upheaval?

Trish smiles. “Year one in a pandemic: Stop the world, I wanna get off!”

Despite this major obstacle to beginning the teaching component of her responsibilities, Trish values being able to work from home. It has allowed her to be immersed in things like raising chickens and beekeeping, and making nutritious

meals a greater focus in her own life. “I love how the pandemic has forced the workforce to really consider the importance of the ability to work from home,” Trish shares, “I know that is going to forever change the way the general workforce works. And I think that’s a good thing. I’m just grateful that I have a job that I can do from home, because I know that when things were really bad, so many people lost their jobs - one of my kids being one of them.”

Though she began getting acclimated with computers and technology earlier than most people her age, Trish deals with ADHD and struggles with being still and having to sit at a computer for long periods of time. She adapted to having so much more computer time than she thought she would when she was first hired by putting her office apps on her phone so she can go outside and physically do something while she is listening to a meeting or an educational workshop. “I put Zoom on my phone, put my phone in my back pocket and went outside and did stuff,” Trish shares, “I listen and I pay attention better when I can do something kind of mindless like picking berries or cutting down brush or chicken chores, whatever.”

Trish loves creating weekly Facebook Live sessions for the community. “I don’t know that we would be doing that if it weren’t for the shut down.” She has dabbled in video some, but editing (as most educators in the county have all come to understand) is tedious and time-consuming and so it’s an area she hopes to gain more experience in. “I still have a cooking video to edit, and that’s the hard part.” Trish muses, “if I could just film it and then give it to somebody to edit, that would be so much faster!”

Trish is grateful for the opportunity to work more regionally. “That just made the job so much better and so more enriching,” Trish shares. “It’s so hard when you feel like you’re a lone soldier.”

Trish likes that she has had the time and opportunity to implement MyPlate philosophies into her personal nutritional habits. “I’ve always struggled with trying to have a better, more rounded diet,” she explains. “I love MyPlate! It’s so much better than

DRAGOO continued....

the old food pyramid. It's easier for people to understand. That and the other stuff I've learned in this job has made it easier for me to focus on how to eat more healthfully."

Trish feels we are more essential than ever, because so many people got into things like homesteading and making their own meals. "People started doing things that they've never done before, and that makes us more essential than we've ever been," Trish explains. "Now there are people that need information that they never ever thought would be relevant to them, and for nutrition especially, one of the best ways to prevent disease or to slow disease progression is to eat nutritious foods. But you and I grew up like the boxed cereal generation, where kids get up in the morning, have a bowl of fruit loops and call that food. It's barely food, you know, and mom then later, for dinner, makes a box of Hamburger Helper and maybe throw some green beans, or cooked peas, whatever and calls it a meal and it's not. So for us, it is important that we try to get our message out because people need it more than ever before."

Learning in Leaps and Bounds



RETIRED SNAP-Ed COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Iris Ruiz

Before anyone was talking about making "Virtual Leaps," Iris Ruiz had already made a leap of her own. Nearly five years ago, Iris began working for CCE as an EFNEP educator. Bilingual and with armed with a wealth of nutrition knowledge, she quickly gained traction with agencies and respect in the program. The EFNEP program sets goals ("Numbers") around how many people each educator should enroll, teach, and graduate every year, and Iris was one of the few in the state to consistently meet her goals.

In 2019, CCE obtained the SNAP-ed grant, and Iris decided to interview for the part-time educator position. She was hired, and soon she was learning new ways to reach and teach her community. One thing remained consistent: nutrition educators are on the go constantly!

That all changed in March, and Iris again was faced with learning new ways to reach and teach her community. The difference was, there were no instructions for making this happen. There was also no office to work from, either.

When SNAP-ed decided to start having their educators make instructional videos from their home, Iris faced a new challenge: EVERYONE was home! "it was too busy in my home [to record] so I would wait for everybody to go to sleep and wake up at night you know -- and get the table set up and get myself looking like it's two o'clock in the afternoon or something," Iris laughs.

Recording was a challenge, and so was editing, uploading, and presenting with software and applications that had never been necessary to her work before. "It got done and it came out and I learned it," Iris recalls. "I think that was one of the most interesting things for me during that time."

Reaching her community is still the goal. As restrictions eased, Iris has been able to make appearances at the Healing Words Food Pantry and is doing lots of special projects and trainings. She remains centered on her purpose – one she believes is central to every facet of Extension.

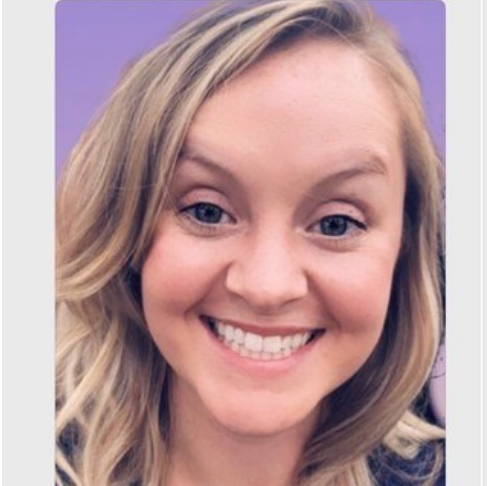
"CCE for me is education – bringing the latest information to the public – the latest in everything from recipes to farming, every area in every program," Iris shares. "We're always helping people. We're always reaching out no matter what."

The difference is in how the reaching out happens, and that has continued to evolve throughout the year. "We were individually doing the Zoom demonstrations and then found out some were better at it: it just comes easy to them," Iris recalls. She explains the decision was made to let educators who demonstrated proficiency with video production continue to create material that educators across the state can access to use in their county.

"Some are excellent – like movie stars!" Iris shares that the videos can be utilized during Zoom meetings with groups and that has simplified the process, and made the presentations more interesting.

Iris is a vibrant educator. She misses teaching in person, and connecting with her community. The same determination that helped her begin to navigate her new program, and then learn the programs and processes necessary to do her job from home, is what carries her through difficult moments. "I'm determined to do whatever is put in front of me," Iris agrees. "I'm just learning it and following through on it and telling myself it will be OK."

Molly Makes the Most of It



SNAP-Ed COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Molly Howell

While we talk about the unprecedented havoc COVID has created in our country, there have been moments of transformation that still managed to happen because of the shut down... and sometimes in spite of it.

For instance, our Molly Howell, SNAP-ed Nutrition Educator, became Molly Harvey. In her first year with CCE after our bid for her program was accepted, Molly was already getting used to a new office (she was in on the move to JCC as some of her first work!), and new co-workers when the pandemic sent her home. "I'm so happy I made the switch just because I love CCE!" Molly continues "I was so excited to be able to be part of the fair and all the things that CCE is all about and then everything got cancelled. I'm hoping next year will be great. I'm going to be positive. It'll happen."

It was obvious from the start Molly is an educator who loves what she does, and is constantly-on-the go! On a regular basis, she well exceeded the goals set for her by her program. She was a hit at the sites she had built partnerships with. Seemingly in the blink of an eye, Molly went from being all over the county, to parked on her couch, spending quality time at home with her dogs.

"I was never in that office. Let's be honest. I was never in the office," Molly recalls, "because my calendar was always so full! That's what I like to like! I would take half of a day to get all my data in, but other than I was out in the community."

The SNAP-ed program collectively moved to have every educator try their hand at video production. Molly spent countless hours recording and then learning how to edit using Adobe Premier Rush video editing software. It's a new skill she is glad she's acquired. "I'm really proud of myself about the Adobe Premier Rush because that is not the easiest, and I literally had no video editing skills. A ten-minute video took me an entire week to edit! But I'm excited I got to do it." Out of all the videos submitted, Molly's was one of the few statewide to ultimately receive approval for publication.

While learning to make videos; Molly also planned her wedding. "I actually just got the pictures today," Molly shares. "When I was trying to get everything together for the wedding that was a hotmess express! There's just so much going on but it always worked out."

Molly says some of the success SNAP-ed has been able to claim this past year was due to a shift towards uniting educators on a regional and state-wide level. "Before, we were just like islands," Molly muses. "Just like that, things change and we get to talk to each other and see what's happening in Brooklyn – girls and guys trying to do their programming from their tiny apartments in Brooklyn, New York! I don't think that the program would have felt as much like a community if it wasn't for this whole pandemic and people working from home. I'm super-excited that they opened it up more."

SNAP-ed now is collectively dipping their toes into live videos. Molly has reached out to a few of her previous partnerships to see if a collaboration can happen, and has started participating in the EFNEP Facebook Lives that publish every Friday on the Nutrition Educators of CCE Chautauqua's Facebook Page.

Molly has also taken on creating a monthly newsletter for SNAP-ed. The goal of the newsletter is to market the program and share healthy eating tips. She may not be able to keep up with that, once restrictions ease and she returns to her usual full slate of groups to visit, but for now, her work is shared digitally across the state.

No matter if she's talking about our work within the county or her work with her statewide SNAP-ed team, Molly sees the significance of building – and maintaining – communities. We all know our communities still exist, and some are waiting for us to weave them together. If COVID-19 folded those communities up and put them in a drawer. "And when they pulled it out and they called it Zoom," Molly surmises.



CCE and the Health of Its Community



CCE BOARD PRESIDENT

Shelly Wells

Current board president Shelly Wells has, perhaps, a different perspective on CCE than the organization is used to. Though her family does have ties to the Chautauqua County agricultural community, Shelly's primary focus is on public health. Those topics may sound worlds apart at first, but they are, in truth, intrinsically intertwined.

"It's like life," Shelly muses. "One thing doesn't make us everything we are."

Initially she was asked to help find board members. As she sifted through her network, she was often asked "why don't you do it?" At first, she didn't consider herself, because she didn't feel she was the right person for the job. "I don't live on farm. I didn't go to 4-H. My kids didn't go to 4-H," Shelly explains. "My grandfather, his family, all my cousins are farmers over in North Clymer, so there was that piece of me that knew [about Extension], but also the piece of me that said, well, how do I fit? I guess that's where I feel like I bring the perspective of what it can be. It's so important for so many reasons. Not just because you grow crops or you have cows."

Shelly sees areas of CCE that others might overlook or undervalue – she finds a bit of kinship with the nutrition department - and she sees the value of the whole organization. "You have the opportunity to educate people about the farm community and local food – I feel like we have such an advantage to have this in our community, and there are so many different ways to benefit." She also sees an opportunity to celebrate farms and their impact on community health. She points out that being healthy isn't unilaterally about treatment of conditions. Better community health centers on an illness-prevention mindset.

Shelly enjoys getting to know her fellow board members, and the pandemic has created interesting opportunities to get to know everyone in different ways. "One of the guys did the call from the tractor and I loved that!"

Shelly appreciates the collective thinking that survives even as CCE educators struggle to reach people throughout the pandemic. "What I appreciate and have seen is everybody's willingness to change and to adapt and to turn things around and really try to present the same information in a different format," Shelly shares. "Perhaps that didn't happen as easily as I saw it. I think, you know, we all have frustrations, but that's not what I have seen. I have seen people saying, Okay, we can't do this, so let's do this. Let's try it."

Shelly sees mental health aspects for the community that CCE can address, simply by staying visible and accessible. "There's so many things that affect our mental health," Shelly muses, and touches on the potential for isolation and feeling of overwhelm that can happen when running a business. "Knowing that there's the agency there that you can still reach out to, I think it is one thing to boost your mental health. Children especially have gone through so much change," Shelly continues. "They've also been asked to go through so many changes. Knowing that someone's there, even if it looks different, but knowing that those people are there, it's just helps your mental health. It's more than the actual doing of something. It is the still being there, still reaching out, still, you didn't just disappear. I think that helps people's mental health. We need to know that some things are still there."

Shelly values the history of Cornell, the research and backing CCE educators bring to their work at the county level. With her background in nursing and public health, and the total community-wellness culture CCE oozes from every department, Shelly sometimes finds herself championing positions the rest of the community isn't ready to embrace. "Why do we fundraise with candy bars? Why not flower bulbs?"

Shelly shares a personal story of assisting with a concession stand for a family member. She stocked it with healthy food, and found potential customers walking away to drive to the nearest gas station to purchase pop and other junk food. She understands intrinsically that running an organization on a shoestring sometimes means fundraising using products the population will buy. "It's an awful circle." The visionary in her wonders if CCE can work to be a leader in trying to teach a different mindset while still making fundraising goals, and knows that is a difficult challenge.

"How does public health fit with Cornell Cooperative Extension? Some people may say it doesn't. But I would say it's in everything that you're doing," Shelly says. "There's so many ways that we can meld things together and say that public health is so much a part all the things that you're doing."



Humanity Shines Through and Beyond a Virtual Divide



4-H COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Kate Ewer

Of all the programs CCE is known for, 4-H is arguably the most recognizable. Year after year, for decades, 4-H has worked to empower youth through leadership opportunities within each club, and mentorship opportunities through every sort of hands-on project under the sun! From animal projects to upcycling trash into treasure, 4-H strives to give youth real-world, practical skills.

Once upon a past moment years ago, a community member had suggested making project meetings available digitally. The idea was unheard of and quickly deemed not in keeping with the interpersonal connection that is so intrinsically woven into the fabric of a 4-H community.

So what happens when the world as we know it shuts down, and everyone is asked to carry on through their electronic devices?

The answer lies somewhere in a strongly-held belief that is best expressed by Kate Ewer, 4-H Community Educator and now acting-wizard behind Chautauqua Grown.

“Cornell Cooperative Extension is an arm of Cornell University. We are an under-utilized resource in our community. I just don’t think people know what we do,” Kate shares. “Our staff are really knowledgeable, and if we don’t know the answer, we can find you a resource or find you someone who does know the answer.”

There was no question: a hands-on program that thrives on the energy and connection of the family of people created by the culture that is uniquely 4-H had to push on.

Kate is humble in speaking of the leaps and bounds made by 4-H to develop programs and the capacity to reach youth, volunteers, and program supporters through virtual means. She fails to mention her own personal battle of being without her office at JCC which provided stronger and more stable internet connections than are available in the comfort of her home – situated neatly in a near-dead zone for internet service. It’s almost as if she finds her own efforts less remarkable because it seems the whole world made the virtual leap at once.

But no county made that leap in the same way. The needs of each program varied from region to region. In Chautauqua County, the possibility of not having a 4-H meat animal sale was deemed too great a loss for the youth who invest so much time and resources into their project. The small commission 4-H garners from each sale also adds up to a sizable splash in the annual budget bucket! Coincidentally, the sale is a priceless, time-honored community tradition that unites business members and past 4-H members in supporting the learning and development of each generation.

“Moving the meat animal sale virtually... that was definitely amazing,” Kate recalls. “We had around 26 new buyers register with us. That was a huge feat!”

Kate praises the volunteers on the meat animal sale committee for their willingness to accept a virtual format.

“Their thinking from the start,” Kate describes as “we have to give these kids the opportunity we promised them in October.” She explains that even those who normally avoid the internet, and especially sharing personal information in what can be a less-than-secure space, supported the action. “I was excited [that they] wanted to take that risk for our youth.”

Kate notes that moving to a virtual space gave youth in the program a new challenge: pivoting their marketing practices to encourage participation in the sale, and buyers for their animals. She felt many gained useful skills in the process.

EWER continued....

Now in a new program year, 4-H is learning to lean into virtual programming. An option to attend each meeting via Zoom is available for all projects. So far, the Zoom aspect has been well-utilized.

“It was an eye-opener to see how many more youth were able to participate virtually when given the option,” Kate shares. “Every [meeting] gets a little better. Our equipment is a little limited, but as you know, we weren’t ever planning on doing this!”

When asked to pinpoint the most significant moment of her year, Kate passes over all of this. The challenges and personal accomplishments seem miniscule in comparison to the moments when quarantine regulations eased and she sees her community reconvene in person.

“When we get to see the kids come back together and just be so thrilled to see one another,” Kate smiles, “that is the coolest moment.”

While 4-H is the nearest, dearest, largest portion of Kate’s work time, it cannot go unspoken that she now also leads CCE’s Chautauqua Grown initiative. This adds another facet to Kate’s perspective on CCE. Chautauqua Grown is a guide to all things local foods, including farms that sell products direct to consumers, farmers markets, and restaurants that purchase locally produced foods. Chautauqua Grown has been a great resource to the community this summer. Many people visited the site to locate farm markets near them or to find a specific seasonal product.

“We support people with five chickens. We support dairy farms with thousands of animals. In 4-H, we support youth from five to 18 who are from varying areas, income levels, and family situations,” Kate continues, “and we try to level the playing field. In food and nutrition, we’re helping people live their best lives.”

Kate explains that in her view, CCE is essential because of the way it can weave a community into a family.

“The connections people make here are connections that last and are meaningful in people’s lives,” Kate concludes, “I think we are an excellent resource.”



Molly B. Loves CCE



4-H COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Molly Brown

Molly Brown’s upswept curls bob at the top of her head, in time with her treadmill pace. Never one for being still, her husband built a stand so she can walk while she works. We have come to expect nothing less than energy and innovation from our 4-H STEM educator.

A few short years ago, Molly knew nothing of CCE, but she was in love with Extension before she joined the team. “My husband asked ‘did you look up CCE? I hear commercials for them. I see stuff on Facebook for them all the time. You gotta look into it – they do the coolest stuff ever!’ So I friended on Facebook. Then I saw the job posting for 4-H and thought... okay, I’m never

going to get this job, but I’m going to apply for it.”

Molly’s work is largely funded by a grant provided by the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation. Her job didn’t exist in this county before she came into it. It took time for Molly to build connections and begin sharing her robotics curriculum with area youth; but by this spring, her program was not only taking off, but diversifying into other areas. She had also taken on coordinating Ag Literacy Week for the county, when everything came to a screeching halt. Molly was sent home to try to find a way to do her job while parenting her two young children.

BROWN continued....

"I got really depressed and it was really hard to juggle the kids at home," Molly shares. "I don't know how people are doing it to this day. And then Emily saved my life. She's like, 'Don't hide yourself from the kids, incorporate the kids.' And it was so touched she said that I'll start crying, thinking about it. Oh my gosh, relief!"

Molly now had the opportunity to involve her kids in her work, and she felt like she didn't have to hide behind her computer anymore. Instead, she stepped away from the computer, and stepped in front of the camera. Molly created three potential social media groups: What's the Coop, Cooperative Gardening, and Cooperative Cooking. She teamed with other educators to share information about raising chickens and sharing healthy recipes, and the Master Gardeners to dip into gardening.

"Cooperative Gardening kind of came to a standstill," Molly recounts. "That one was my hardest because it was as if I had imagined, wow, let's take something that you're not very good at or done anything with." She credits Jim Cowan with helping her get as far as she did. She hopes to add a soil test video to next year's garden offerings.

"What's the Coop is still very active," Molly smiles. The community boasts 170 followers at the time of this interview. "I love it so much. Any Barkly's [Livestock Specialist with the Southwest New York Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops Program] been amazing helping me with that one," Molly shares.

In a time when it felt the world had shut down, Molly managed to showcase three areas of CCE: Agriculture, Nutrition, and the Master Gardener program. While all of this was happening, her STEM curriculum also made a virtual leap. Chautauqua Institution wanted her work for their summer camp program, which they were moving to an online model.

"We had 27 campers for all the different programming for the institution," Molly shares. "So that one was Runway Robots, Invasive Species, and What's In a Farm." Her foray into creating an agricultural curriculum proved to be most rewarding for Molly. "My life's mission is to become a farm advocate," she enthuses. She credits much of her success in developing a robust curriculum to Lisa Kempisty and Lesch Farms, who guided and challenged her along the way to create something that went beyond big tractors and cute animals. "That's where the worm curriculum came from," Molly explains. "I did the week on soil and I'd become obsessed with soil."

Molly's energetic, engaging videos don't just fall from the heavens, either. Editing footage is a time-consuming process that Molly had no previous experience with. What was even more difficult, however, was the risk she felt in putting herself in front of a potentially vast and varied audience, as-is. "My brother said to me, 'I admire you so much for just putting yourself out there all the time. Putting your house out there, putting your farm out there, just putting yourself out there to look bad or make mistakes.' The gardening video is really hard: for me to look bad and putting that out there, but so many people responded. And that's what makes it easy to put yourself out there is because it was helping so many people."

Helping people is what lights Molly up. It might be what she loves most about being part of CCE. "I thank God every day that I work for CCE," Molly says. "What an incredible thing to be proud of. We're helpers. How many people get to help like this? Who are we going to help? You know? We can't just roll over and die, you know? Then we can't help anyone. Everyone is depending on us, and if they're not depending on us, they should because we're an awesome resource! We are a conglomerate of scientific-based information, quite radical. I mean, that is radical. If people want information, we're people that you can talk to. We're not Google we're people! I'm Molly and you're Heather and we're extension-based information. You can call us and we'll help you and talk to you. If we don't know the answer, we've got our whole team to talk to and get you the information you need. That is amazing!"

The New Year is shaping up with opportunities for Molly to return to teach in person. She'll go into it fully aware that she has knowledge to share that benefits all ages and stages of living. If there's one thing that a year of creating online education has done for Molly, it's to prove that people never really want to stop learning.

"There's just so many opportunities for knowledge and people are hungry for knowledge right now," Molly shares. "People are hungry to better themselves. It's just a really beautiful world that we've become out of the pandemic in terms of helping others and supporting locals," Molly muses. "I really think it's been so beautiful from what's come out of the pandemic and the thirst for knowledge and bettering ourselves."



Health Happening



EFNEP COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Heather Gregory

I will leave her work as written but add in a preface here (by Emily Reynolds) Heather is one of the most passionate, considerate and dedicated employees I have had the honor to supervise. She willingly took on the extra task of interviewing all of us for this Annual Report and her humble, motivational and passionate personality and her outstanding literary talent, shines in each of our biographies and in her own below. If you have not met her yet please reach out she will inevitably leave you smiling and empowered. - Emily

This will be interesting – in the middle of all of these biographies that I’ve written, here’s an autobiography for anyone who cares to read it. I’m Heather. I am the full-time EFNEP educator for Chautauqua County. I’m a mom of two teens, one on the Autism spectrum and both passionate and active in their personal interests... none of which are the same.... Insert Heathers smirks here...

I love this job. Teaching, good food, and movement lies at the core of who I am and what I’m about. I grew up on a dairy farm so I deeply value our agricultural industry and am a fervent advocate! (advocate for Agriculture) I consider it an honor when I teach participants who haven’t been exposed to the lifestyle I was raised in. It’s a moment to share what I know and often I find myself not only teaching nutrition, but debunking misinformation they’ve seen on social media and taken to heart. I was a 4-Her for seven years of my childhood too – and interned for Ohio State Extension in Clinton County. In so many ways, my life has come full-circle, to be home and working for an organization that really feels more like a living, breathing organism. I’m so proud of our diversity and all the ways we can help our community.

The pandemic provided me with an opportunity for a resounding gut check. I love my job, and I love my family... and I wasn’t fully aware of how exhausted I was becoming after moving into a full-time position outside of my home (I was a freelancer for many years) until we were sent home.

It was my grand mission to use social media to help my community use the food boxes schools were providing and build our online communities – I was on FIRE to do that! Cornell decided we needed to pause and take time to learn and grow our information base. I won’t tell you that didn’t frustrate me, it did! But there was and is value in taking time to learn more, there always is and we need to do that to stay relevant and useful.

Personally, I finally tuned in and realized I needed to slow down a bit... and speed up in other areas. My fitness habits had taken a large hit. I was gaining weight, cutting corners nutritionally and all of it was contributing to the mental and physical exhaustion I exhibited – a coworker later mentioned an awareness that I was wearing out – she noticed before I did.

Thanks to our base on the Cornell campus, and Emily here in our county, we were able to make the shift to home. It is a blessing we have the supports and hierarchy to encourage productivity in a remote environment. As someone who had spent more than a decade working in a vacuum, I can tell you that structure helps me stay focused, motivated, and on-task.

It was a significant moment for me to hear that the smog had cleared over California and people were seeing stars for the first time in their lives. Did that make you pause? Wildlife in parks like Yosemite are hanging out in the parking lots and living more like they would if humans weren’t invading their territories. Families are coming together around a table for a meal more regularly, and we’re eating out less – these are major goals of EFNEP! While it doesn’t minimize the economic crisis we face, it brings a sense of balance to it. There are economic, environmental, and domestic benefits to our great remote experiment.

Running has made a comeback for me. My fitness routine went back to some sort of movement daily. I got more thoughtful and disciplined – adding strength training to my old staples of running and yoga. Where I was running with

GREGORY continued....

hip pain before I went to work for CCE, I now run more thoughtfully, and pain-free. And I RUN! I've lost the weight I've gained and work with more energy, and usually more focus.

My work focus has turned to a problem EFNEP has long had – recruiting and community building! The program targets low-income families. Who wants to be singled out like that? We were only just beginning to dip our toes into e-learning using private groups in Facebook Live. COVID was the gym coach that abruptly shoved us off the edge of the pool and into the deep end. It's opened a can of worms on how we market, and how we approach our jobs. This year will mark a sea-change: we won't hit our target numbers of enrolled and graduating participants. Hopefully, we will set the stage for years ahead where we ALWAYS get our numbers, because we've changed our marketing strategies and delivery methods... and we'll be better off for having done so.



Last... and Not a Little Bit Least.



AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY EDUCATOR

Lisa Kempisty

While her schedule prohibited her from being interviewed for this project, Lisa Kempisty is, and has long been, the heartbeat of the agricultural program at CCE Chautauqua. It would be an injustice to leave a blank space for someone who fills a huge need in our county.

Farm families rely on Lisa's expertise, commitment and enlightenment to help them keep their farm practices current, and also their 4-H children growing in the 4-H dairy program.

Social distancing means many things. Most profoundly, it means we cannot truly know how someone else is experiencing this moment of physical isolation. We see each other most often on our computer screens. When we

see each other in person, we are behind masks. Without asking directly, it's presumptuous to assume what the pandemic has been like for Lisa. There are some things we know, without being told. Lisa is a warm, kind, caring educator. Her work, mission and purpose are deeply personal. It all matters. To be separated from her people –to not visit farms... it must be beyond frustrating, even when viewed in a tiny square in a Zoom meeting.

Lisa works hard to stay connected. She sat in the parking lot at JCC so agribusinesses could pick up hand sanitizer and PPE –that they were mandated to have on hand. She was able to pull off one of the first outdoor, socially-distanced events so the 4-H dairy project could hold their annual showmanship clinic. Lisa is now working hard to make sure that good things are coming for her community in the future.

Computers are not her favorite work environment, but she is doing what she must to still be a resource for the farms and farm youth of Chautauqua County. For her, that takes precedence over chatting about how things went and what she feels good about. It's a safe bet that Lisa will feel good when we are all back together again.



Our dark days make us strong. Or maybe we were already strong, and they made us prove it.