



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

YOUTH BUREAU

After a bit over a year into his new post as Columbia County Youth Bureau Director, Dan Grandinetti has his department hopping. Among his initiatives have been restoring the Youth Awards Banquet, moving the Think Differently program forward, and the Parents as Driving Partners program.

"I am excited about reintroducing the Louis A. Pierro Leadership Award Banquet for its 20th year. The Pierro name and the additional individual's name we will be recognizing at the event is synonymous with leadership, impact and service," Director Grandinetti said recently.

After a COVID-19 induced hiatus of several years, the banquet is back and ready to get about the business of awarding \$1,000 to a deserving high school student from one of the six school districts around the county.

In addition to the high school award, this year a middle school award is being introduced, said Director Grandinetti. This award will also be named for an individual who has been instrumental in terms of leadership and service in the community. He or she will be revealed at the banquet, which is scheduled for Thursday, May 23, 5:30 p.m. at the Hudson Elks Club.

As for Think Differently, in the mid-2010s, the county Board of Supervisors signed on as a Think Differently county. This is a program instituted by then-Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro designed to create a supportive and welcoming environment for those living with special needs.

Director Grandinetti explained the approach has been to tie in the family, youth, and educational components of Think Differently with the Youth Bureau, the Department of Social Services, the county Mental Health Center, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Last year, as Think Differently began to get off the ground in the county, one of its actions was a Sensory Safe Room at the Columbia County Fair, which was taken advantage of by more than 200 families, Director Grandinetti said. In addition, one morning of the Fair the volume and lights were turned down to help create a sensory sensitive environment for those living on the autism spectrum.

The Parents as Driving Partners initiative, having originated in Putnam County, "Is a way of speaking to the oversight and the commitment to safe driving between the parent and the child. It's kind of symbolic but it's also a way to formalize a level of commitment."

To date, he said, since its December 2023 introduction into the county, 128 new drivers have signed contracts with their parents/primary caregiver to participate.

Director Grandinetti works in conjunction with the Youth Advisory Board, composed of Donal Collins, Alicia Cooper, Ralph Graziano, Peter Frank, Jen Depew, Shari Franks, Vern Cross, Brian Newsom, Vince Doto, TJ

Gardner, Jackie Salvatore, Bob Gibson, Isiah Heard, Michael Grandinetti, Matt Perry, Becky Polmateer, Alex Colwell, JB Brantley, Nick Zachos, John Gallo, Ellis Richardson, and Marcus Walthour.

The Youth Bureau office is located in the Department of Social Services building at 25 Railroad Avenue, Hudson. The telephone number is 518-828-9411 x2241. Visit <https://ccyouthbureau.columbiacountyny.com> for up-to-date information on Youth Bureau programs and activities.