



Week of November 25th,

Happy Thanksgiving Week Dear Neighbors!

As promised, here is the second half of my newsletter recap detailing the work that my office staff and I were engaged in over the last few months prior to the election and during the Assembly's moratorium on mass communications. From Halloween events, to conversations with students, to ribbon cuttings and even a visit from the Speaker of the Assembly, we had such a packed and productive few months that we had to split this newsletter in two parts! My hope is that you will feel more civically engaged and connected with all of the incredible initiatives, projects and activities around District 125 after this update.

As a reminder, I invite you all to join me on **December 20th from 4 - 7pm** at my Ithaca District Office (130 E State Street - on the commons) for my Annual Holiday Open House and Community Reuse Gift Wrapping Extravaganza! Come enjoy some holiday treats and cheer, wrap some holiday gifts with donated wrapping paper, take home some unused and donated or pre-used holiday wrapping paper and meet some of your neighbors you might not already know.

**How to participate in the Holiday Open House & Community ReUse Gift Wrapping Extravaganza** - 3.5 million pounds of wrapping paper go into landfills every year! Let's do our part to build the wrapping paper circular economy!

**STEP 1: Wednesday, December 4th, 11th and 18th from 12pm - 4pm** (call 607-277-8030 to make alternative arrangements) feel free to come by my district office at 130 E. State Street (above Mia restaurant) to drop off any wrapping paper you have lying around not being used, wrap your presents, or just come to pick up wrapping paper, gift bags, ribbon and more to take home and wrap until your heart's content.

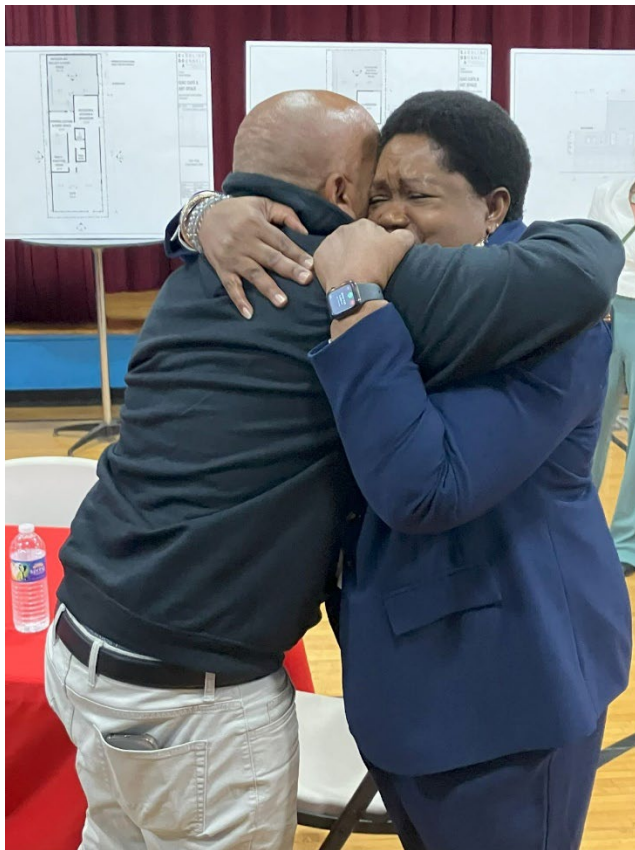
**You can also drop off wrapping paper at the Visitor's Center at the Tompkins County Center for History & Culture, 110 N. Tioga St., Ithaca during all their open hours, which are Monday through Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm.**

**STEP 2:** Join the holiday party and wrapping fest on December 20th at 130 E. State Street and enjoy treats and good cheer.

**STEP 3:** Unwrap presents carefully with loved ones during the holidays, save any undamaged paper and save it for next year's presents or bring it back to our office for next year's Holiday Reuse Wrapping Paper Extravaganza!

# Around the District

## Speaker Heastie Visits District 125



NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie & GIAC Executive Director Leslyn McBean-Clairborne Embrace after Announcing State Funding for GIAC.

I had the privilege of visiting the beloved [Greater Ithaca Activities Center](#) (GIAC) with NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie on October 11th. We visited the main campus center, took a youth-led tour of the dynamic, new recreation center, observed the significant renovation needs at the Alex Haley pool, and visited the historic Red and White Cafe. Together, we made an exciting announcement that the Assembly Majority will invest \$750,000 to expand the Red and White Cafe, so it can become the center for a culinary entrepreneur training program providing both education and employment opportunities for teens and young adults in the community. The Assembly Majority expects to make another

announcement in the spring of a significant investment to renovate the Alex Haley pool, a facility which provides swimming opportunities to the public and one of the only accessible outdoor recreation opportunities in the downtown core of the city. While the initial proposal was for a renovation to the existing pool I will be advocating in partnership with the Speaker for a fully enclosed pool facility, which would ensure year round access to swimming and water recreation.

These projects are the result of the tireless vision, effort and passion of Director Leslyn McBean-Clairborne and her entire team. GIAC is dedicated to these neighborhood revitalization projects, providing a rich array of accessible, affordable recreation, and entrepreneurship training for our community, particularly those in marginalized communities. Thank you to Speaker Heastie, for committing to invest in this invaluable community resource. GIAC, the Northside neighborhood and the entire Ithaca area will benefit from the state's significant investment in these recreational and educational community spaces for years to come! To read the full press release, follow this [link](#).



AM Kelles celebrates a ribbon cutting with (left to right) Learning Farm Founders Pete and Christa **Nuñez**, and Assembly Speaker **Carl Heastie**.

Another stop on the district tour with Speaker Heastie, was a second visit to The Learning Farm, following the Speaker's initial visit in 2021. We participated in a ribbon cutting to celebrate the construction of several cabins on the farm that will allow them to offer family farmstay opportunities and sleepaway camp programming designed for BIPOC youth from metropolitan areas with limited access to nature. These cabins were built with an initial \$200,000 grant from the Assembly Majority. The construction of four cabins, renovations to an existing cottage and the erecting of ten permanent

"glamping tents", expected to be completed in the Spring of 2025, are critical to the farm's mission to provide an immersive experience for the youth they serve. I worked with the Learning Farm and the Assembly Majority to secure an additional state investment of \$450,000 to fund the construction of a commercial kitchen on the farm. This kitchen will further expand the farm's teachings on sustainable food production and the benefit of shared community meals. It will also serve the community of BIPOC farmers associated with the farm to produce packaged goods they can sell directly to consumers in markets and to stores. Thank you to Christa and Pete Nuñez and all the visionaries behind the Learning Farm, for providing children and families with the knowledge and experience of sustainable farming to carry with them into the future! To read the full announcement visit this [link](#).

### Virgil Community Meeting



AM Kelles speaks with Seniors at Virgil Community Meeting

I had a wide ranging and lively discussion with Virgil community members on October 22nd, talking about specific legislation and state resources that specially serve our aging population. For example, we discussed the [Medicare Savings Program](#) which can assist people with limited income to help pay for Medicare premiums. Click [here](#) for the income guidelines. To help navigate health insurance related questions, New York has created the [Health Insurance Information and Counseling Assistance Program](#), which has trained counselors available to answer questions. In Tompkins County, staff at the local Office for the Aging work in conjunction with the HICAP programs at Lifelong to meet the needs of adults. Contact the office of the aging (607) 274-5482 for more information. Cortland residents can call 607-753-5060.

We delved into the need for state tax reforms and a revamped long term care program. I discussed [A10143](#), a bill I introduced this year that would enact the New York Long Term Care Trust Act. The bill would create a trust that anyone who is employed in the state of New York can pay into by having just \$0.58 per \$100 taken out of each paycheck. After 10 years of contributing, the fund would provide long term care benefits for eligible residents who are in need of assistance with at least two activities of daily living as determined by the Department of Health. Ultimately it could fund up to \$365/day or up to 3 years of universal care. This will be significantly more comprehensive than Medicare alone and would offset Medicare costs for eligible individuals who would not be required to pay a premium or copays for covered care.

Virgil community members were particularly concerned about the implications of the proposal to eliminate all fiscal intermediaries (FIs) and replace them with a single, out of state corporation. In particular, residents shared concerns about maintaining consistent care through the transition and continued access to their current FIs. The new law enacted in this year's budget will impact more than 250,000 New Yorkers who receive home care services. I share these same concerns and have been working with local FIs and Independent Living Centers to detail questions I will be presenting to the Governor and the Department of Health.

I shared with the group that New York State is embarking on a State Master Plan for the Aging (MPA), which is intended to ensure adults can live healthy, fulfilling lives and age with dignity. The plan addresses challenges related to communication, coordination, care-giving, long-term care financing and innovative care models to further the ability to age with dignity and independence. To read the preliminary report, click [here](#). To view the committee of stakeholders giving input on the report, click [here](#). The plan is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Thank you, to Virgil Methodist Church for hosting us and thank you to the local community members who asked such thorough questions and engaged in such thought-provoking dialogue. I'm eager to continue engaging with seniors across the district to hear about the issues that impact and are important to them. If you would like to set up a time for me to visit with your community please fill out this [form](#).

#### Campus Democracy Challenge at TC3



AM Kelles speaks to students at TC3

This Fall, Colleges and Universities across the U.S. participated in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in the lead up to the November General Election. As part of this effort, I had the opportunity to give a presentation to students at Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) on the work that I do as their NY State Assemblymember, the state level policies that impact them, the Election process and their rights as voters. We had an in depth conversation about what elected positions would be on their ballots, a lively discussion on Proposition 1, and the statewide requirements to be on the ballot as a political party. Many students were unaware that these requirements were made much more stringent in 2019

forcing several parties to be disqualified from the N.Y. state ballot (parties must now get a minimum of 250,000 votes on their line for every major state election every two years, compared to the 50,000 votes needed prior to this change). I was excited that following our conversation, a handful of students registered to vote with the help of my office and TC3's student center staff.

Students were particularly interested in the state legislation and budget items passed during this year's legislative session that impacted them, such as increased funding for NY's Community Colleges, housing affordability measures like the [Good Cause Eviction](#) tenant protections, and efforts to make public higher education more affordable such as expanding the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). The budget increased the minimum individual TAP award from \$500 to \$1,000 and increased the maximum award to \$5,665. TAP was also expanded to expand its availability to part-time students and those enrolled in non-degree programs to ensure financial support for non-traditional students. TAP is a yearly award that does not have to be paid back and is offered to full-time and part-time students at public and private colleges and universities as well as students enrolled in non-degree workforce credential programs. If you or someone you know could benefit from TAP, I encourage you to explore the program further by visiting the NY State Higher Education Services Corporation's [website](#). The deadline to apply for TAP for the academic year starting in September of 2025 is June 30th, 2025.

#### GIAC Recreation Center Ribbon Cutting



AM Kelles cuts the ribbon on the new GIAC recreation center with GIAC staff & youth participants.

I was honored to take part in a moving celebration at the grand opening of the new state of the art recreation center at [Greater Ithaca Activities Center](#) (GIAC) on October 25th. Through the tireless work and clear vision of Director Leslyn McBean-Clairborne and GIAC's community of donors and supporters, this cutting edge facility became a reality for the community's youth. It focuses on multicultural, educational and recreational programs to foster the development of all the participants. In this beautiful facility, our local youth can feel valued, seen and invested in, as they share with their peers and friends access to beautiful basketball courts, a large dynamic game room, a screen printing shop and a recording studio to name a few of the amenities. Thank you to GIAC, for providing this beautiful space to the community, where our young people can not only enjoy a safe and hospitable community space, but work to see their dreams realized.

## Halloween on The Commons



AM Kelles passes out candy to young trick-or-treaters at the Halloween on the Commons event.

Also on October 25th, my staff and I participated in the [Downtown Ithaca Alliance's](#) Halloween on the Commons event. The event began with a Halloween parade from the Greater Ithaca Activities Center ending on the Commons for trick-or-treating. It was a real treat (even if a bit scary) to see all of my littlest constituents in their Halloween costumes and pass out candy to all the ghosts, ghouls, princesses, witches, werewolves and superheroes. We had so many visitors that we had to run out for more candy! We cannot wait to participate again next year. For more information on this annual event and how to become a participating business/trick-or-treat destination visit the Downtown Ithaca Alliance [website](#).

## Golden Opportunity (GO) Tutors Program



AM Kelles joins tutors with Golden Opportunity (GO) Tutors Program

Adding to one of the busiest Friday's my office has had all off-session, on October 25th I also stopped by the Tompkins County Public Library where it was my distinct pleasure to see how a \$30,000 state grant award supported by my office to the Golden Opportunity (GO) Tutors Program is being used to bolster tutoring resources and provide educational materials to underserved Ithaca City School District (ICSD) students.

The program provides free, one-on-one tutoring and mentorship for dozens of low-income students in grades 2-8 enrolled in ICSD. GO Tutors integrate themselves into all facets of their student's academic experience and serve as advocates, helping students develop the necessary skills needed to succeed in school and life. Their experienced team of tutors work with students who are performing below grade level standards to close this opportunity gap by directing resources (tutoring, advocacy, and mentorship from experienced educators) to students and families who need them most.

GO Tutors believe that listening to and learning from students, parents, educators, and the broader community is vital to offering effective tutoring services. GO celebrates and respects differences and believes that all people must be afforded equal opportunities to succeed and strives to make expanded learning opportunities more equitable for Ithaca's young people. I am honored to be able to support their critical work.



## “Come Together” Voting Rights and Criminal Justice Event



Ithaca Police Chief Thomas Kelly, Ultimate Reentry Opportunity Director Taili Mugambee, and St. James AME Zion Church Pastor Terrance A. King sit on panel on Community Policing and Reintegration

On Sunday, Nov. 3rd, the [Tompkins County Office of Human Rights](#), the Tompkins County Chapter of League of Women Voters, the [Ithaca Alumni Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated](#) and the [Ithaca Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated](#) hosted a series of panels on voting rights, reproductive rights and criminal justice.

I was particularly moved and inspired by the Community Policing & Reintegration panel consisting of [Ithaca Police](#) Chief Thomas Kelly, Director of the Ultimate Reentry Opportunity (URO) Taili Mugambee and St. James AME Zion Church Pastor Terrance A. King. The panelists discussed the realities for individuals who are currently or formerly incarcerated in our community and delved into the need for a “whole community approach” to reintegration after incarceration. Their vision of a “whole community approach” involves engaging partners in the business, nonprofit, and government sectors to address the systemic inequities and barriers to housing, employment, healthcare and civic life facing individuals who are currently or formerly incarcerated. URO Director Taili Mugambee highlighted his organization’s work to provide wrap-around services and job opportunities to individuals who have experienced incarceration as they re-enter the community. This is particularly important considering that studies have shown that individuals who are currently or formerly incarcerated participating in secondary-degree programs and workforce development training reduces recidivism by 30 percent. Post-secondary degree programs have been found to have an even greater impact on reducing recidivism. Pastor Terrence King addressed the imperative of having role models for at-risk youth as well as providing educational and career opportunities for those youth. IPD Chief Thomas Kelly spoke to the difficult task at hand for his department to build trust and develop strong relationships between the community and law enforcement.

The panel collectively acknowledged a prevailing sense of injustice felt in Ithaca’s Black community for a lack of restoration or reconciliation following high-profile police shootings across the country and

stressed the importance of law enforcement continuing to actively engage in the community in order to form stronger ties with residents. Adequately re-integrating individuals who have experienced incarceration into society, repairing broken relationships between law enforcement and marginalized communities, and ensuring our at-risk youth have every opportunity to succeed are not simple tasks, but I am deeply encouraged by the work being done by government, nonprofits, businesses and faith organizations throughout Ithaca to build bridges and improve public safety for all.

# Community Resources

## Flu & COVID-19 Vaccines Available

The Tompkins County Whole Health is alerting the community about the importance of prioritizing flu vaccinations. [Influenza](#), or the flu, can cause mild to severe illness, with symptoms commonly including fever or feeling feverish/having chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue (tiredness), and vomiting and diarrhea. Flu viruses are highly contagious, spread mainly by tiny droplets from coughing, sneezing, or talking. Vaccination is the best protection against the flu. It is proven to cut down on hospitalizations and death from the flu. Vaccination can prevent you from getting sick, which can prevent you from spreading the flu to others. It is recommended that everyone ages 6 months and older receive a flu shot in early fall. Flu vaccines are now available at many locations throughout our community, including healthcare provider offices, pharmacies, and clinics. For people aged 65 or over, the [“high dose” flu vaccine](#) has been shown to be most effective.

Everyone ages 6 months and older can now also receive an updated [COVID-19 vaccine](#). COVID-19 vaccines can be taken at the same time as a flu shot, so double up your protection this fall. TCWH recommends that you consider getting both the flu and the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time. To get one or both vaccines, check with your [local pharmacy](#) or talk to your healthcare provider. Dial 2-1-1 (1-877-211-8667) for assistance with finding an appointment or for assistance with setting up primary healthcare or health insurance.

## Statewide Senior Action Council Urges Caution about AI

StateWide Senior Action Council is offering seniors tips on how to recognize Artificial Intelligence (AI) healthcare scams. For example, AI can generate realistic-looking fake medical claims, or realistic patient data or fake identities to submit fraudulent claims and it can even create convincing fake audio or video recordings of doctors or patients to support false claims or prescriptions. To stay vigilant, StateWide urges people to verify the source of information, limit the personal information you share online and be very careful when providing any financial information or personal data online. To report Medicare fraud, errors or abuse you can call NYS Medicare Fraud Helpline at 800-333-4374 or visit [www.nysenior.org](http://www.nysenior.org)



## New York State Parks Offers Explorer App

[The New York State Parks Explorer app](#) is your key to helpful information about the variety of destinations and adventures available across the Empire State's vast system of state parks and historic sites. The app is free and available in both Apple and Google Play stores. Enjoy quick access to park information, including directions, hours, fees and rates, trail maps, events, and helpful know-before-you-go details. Download the app today and start exploring.

## Winter Holiday Bash Coming to Downtown Ithaca

This festive one-day celebration on December 7th will have family-friendly events all day. Santa will scale down Center Ithaca and then a silent disco will be held in the evening. For more information click [here](#).

## State Grant Opportunities


Click here to view Speaker Heastie's December [Grants Action News](#) which contains a list of upcoming funding opportunities available. The list includes a wide and varied list of state and federal grants each relevant to different eligible groups from nonprofits, local governments, and centers of higher education.

## Volunteer Tompkins Promotes Platform

Volunteer Tompkins, a program of United Way of Tompkins County, is recruiting volunteers to view and utilize Volunteer Tompkins, a page where you can create your volunteer profile and be matched with potential volunteer opportunities across the county.

Additionally, if you are a non-profit organization in need of volunteers, reach out to [rhinton@uwtc.org](mailto:rhinton@uwtc.org) for information and resources.

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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