



E·C·G·R·A
ERIE COUNTY GAMING REVENUE AUTHORITY

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT
FOR
JANUARY
2024**



Erie | North East | Pittsburgh | Jamestown, NY

Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.
120 West Tenth Street | Erie, PA 16501-1461
814-459-2800 | www.kmgslaw.com

Timothy S. Wachter
twachter@kmgslaw.com

January 4, 2024

Mr. Perry Wood, Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road
Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

RE: 2024 Solicitor Rate

Dear Mr. Wood:

Please know that we value our relationship with you, and look forward to continuing to serve you throughout 2024. The Knox Law Firm appreciates the public service that you provide, and as such, we have traditionally charged our public sector clients a deeply discounted rate for legal services. In the past, our rate increases have averaged less than 3% a year.

While we are able to continue to charge you our deeply discounted rates, due to the increase in costs that we have all experienced, we are increasing our rates for 2024 effective January 1, 2024. Accordingly, rates for attorneys who provide general solicitor services will be increased to \$210 per hour.

Thank you for allowing us to continue to serve you. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I remain,

Very truly yours,

KNOX McLAUGHLIN GORNALL &
SENNETT, P.C.

By: 
Timothy S. Wachter

TSW/smt

2480709.v1

December 2023

Meeting with Executive Director

Ongoing Social Media Management

Ongoing Consulting

December Comms

IMPLEMENTED

- 12 Total December posts
- 4 Total graphics created
- Renaissance Block event (Dec. 6th)
 - Media advisory, distribution, pitching
 - Press release and distribution
 - Grant recipient graphics
- PowerPoint template
- Strategic Marketing Planning with Kate Philips and Executive Director

IN PROGRESS | 2024 Grant Releases and Graphics

- Lead Assets
 - Grant recipient graphics
 - Press release and distribution
- Holiday Graphics
- Economic Impact Report rollout
 - Press release
 - PowerPoint presentation
 - Social media graphics

IN PLANNING

- Parks Fields & Trails 2 year report
- ECGRA Playbook
- Roadshow Tours



Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Thursday, January 11, 2024
11:00am – 1:00pm
5240 Knowledge Parkway
Erie, PA 16510

Zoom Invite: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84946246247>

AGENDA

1. Pilot Program – Erie City Moms
2. Anchor Building
3. Community Assets – Parks, Fields, and Trails
4. Good of the Order

Tammi Michali

From: Mary Wassell <wassell@parkerphilips.com>
Sent: Friday, December 22, 2023 8:45 AM
Cc: Kate Philips
Subject: RELEASE: PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development Invests in MCIC Grow Erie Project

External Sender - From: (Mary Wassell <wassell@parkerphilips.com>)
This message came from outside your organization.

[Learn More](#)

BUILDING EQUITY FOR



GROW
erie



NEWS*NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS***NEWS**

PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development Invests in MCIC Grow Erie Project

One of 26 NAP recipients in Erie County

CONTACT: Kate Philips
philips@parkerphilips.com
215.850.4647 | mobile

ERIE, PA (December 22, 2023) — The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) awarded the Minority Community Investment Coalition (MCIC) Grow Erie project \$273,750 through the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP). This program helps nonprofits (501(c)(3)) complete vital community projects by providing tax credits to businesses that provide contributions to those projects.

The NAP is a tax credit program specifically designed to support projects serving distressed and vulnerable communities, like MCIC’s Grow Erie project.

“The continued investment by state officials continues to shine a spotlight on the residents that live in one of the poorest census tracts in the country,” said Gary Horton, executive director of the Urban Erie Community Development Corporation and co-founder of MCIC. “By investing in the community, advancing equity, and providing unique agricultural opportunities, Grow Erie will leave a long-lasting impact on our Erie community.

“This project is a vital first step in working to rebuild Erie’s Eastside, an area impacted by disinvestment and poverty for decades. We look forward to continuing working with the state and other funders to realize the vision of a revitalized Buffalo Road corridor.”

Grow Erie, which officially began construction a couple months ago, consists of two distinct facilities at Savocchio Opportunity Park. Once developed the project will positively impact about 20,000 residents in need.

- A 17,000 square foot commercial facility where fish and plants will be grown using a system of aquaponics. This high-tech greenhouse will operate 365 days a year, and will supply C.A. Curtze Company with market-rate, locally grown fresh greens, micro-greens, live herbs, and rainbow trout.
- A 2,500 square foot community greenhouse will be open to local residents and offer a variety of raised beds for growing produce. The accessible, year-round greenhouse will contain the necessary equipment for ensuring food-safety and the production of clean, healthy food for distribution through neighborhood farmer’s markets.

Business contributors to MCIC’s Grow Erie project include: C.A. Curtze Company, ErieBank, Highmark, F.N.B. Corporation, Marquette Savings Bank, Northwest Bank, and UPMC Health Plan.

Grow Erie partners include: Erie County Redevelopment Authority (ECRDA), Integrated Agriculture Systems (INTAG), Porter Consulting Engineers (PCE), City of Erie, Cornell University Engineers Without Borders, Curtze Food Service, Diverse Erie, Eastside Grassroots Coalition, Enterprise Development Fund, Erie Community Foundation, Erie County, Infinite Erie, PA Dept. of Environmental Protection, PA Dept. of Agriculture, and NAP investors: Curtze Food Service, UPMC Health Plan, Highmark, ErieBank, First National Bank, Marquette Savings Bank, and Northwest Bank.

ABOUT MINORITY COMMUNITY INVESTMENT COALITION (MCIC)

The Minority Community Investment Coalition (MCIC) is dedicated to helping Erie grow, shine, and thrive. Officially formed in 2016, the Booker T. Washington Center, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, and Urban Erie Community Development Corporation (UECDC) work together to build equity for a change and improve the life chances for Erie families living in poverty. MCIC coordinates a variety of services to low-income residents, reaching over 20,000 people annually — approximately 20% of the City of Erie’s population — in West Bayfront, Center City, and East Erie. MCIC is focused on outreach, collaboration, and coordinating through neighborhood-based, culturally-responsive programs and services that move the needle on community and economic development.

ABOUT INFINITE ERIE

By coordinating inclusive growth strategies to deliver transformative change, Infinite Erie will implement Erie’s Investment Playbook and position Erie to attract & secure more public and private sector funding than like-size regions. Powered by the Erie Action Team, the team consists of public, private, philanthropic, and civic leadership in Erie County, who bring influence, guidance, and resources to empower the work of the Delivery Teams and put plans into action, including: Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), Erie Insurance, Jefferson Educational Society, Hamot Health Foundation, Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership, Erie County Redevelopment Authority, City of Erie, Diverse Erie, Erie’s Black Wall Street, Urban Erie Community Development Corporation, Greater Erie Economic Development Corporation (GEEDC), and the Office of the Governor of Pennsylvania (ex-officio).



HOLY TRINITY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

2220 Reed Street • Erie, PA 16503-2196 • (814) 456-0671

October 27, 2023

Dear Friends,

Let me start with a sincere **THANK YOU** for your generous contribution to this summer's 30th Anniversary Zabawa Program! We were so pleased to have 28 lead Sponsors for this year's event along with another 120 advertisers, patrons and memorials! **EVERY** ad was greatly appreciated! **On behalf of the entire Zabawa committee, I am enclosing a copy of your advertisement in the program book and we hope you are pleased with it.**

Over the three days of Zabawa, we were blessed with great weather. Ever so many people flocked to our church campus to reunite with their friends, their heritage **AND** great food and drink! By our estimates, near 40,000 people attended and your support was a key factor in their enjoyment and our success!

We hope you are pleased with our program and as always, if there is anything we can do for you, please do not hesitate to call us! Again we value your support and we hope you plan on staying with us as we move into next year and our 31st Annual Festival!

Sincerely,

Edie Luniewski, Sponsorship Chair



November 2023



ECGRA
Perry Wood
5340 Fryling Rd Ste 201
Erie, PA 16510-4672

Remember the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more.

Dear Perry,

As the vibrant season of autumn sweeps across our landscape, it brings with it the passion of the Mercy Center for Women. Autumn is a time of transformation, as leaves burst into glorious hues, harvest moons grace our skies, and meadows bask in the warmth of golden sunshine. It is a season of change and renewal, and at the Mercy Center, we see it as a time for embracing the most precious gift of all: time.



We recently ventured out for a day of apple picking, and our families reveled in the joy of baking delicious pies. In September, we harvested fresh tomatoes from our own MCW garden, and our women joined hands to create sauces and fresh salsa that brought smiles to many faces.

We extend this heartfelt letter to invite you to partake in the joy of giving to both the Mercy Center for Women and the Mercy Anchor Community Center (MACC). Early this year, the doors of MACC swung open to welcome men and women, marking a significant expansion in our ability to serve the needs of Erie County's unhoused families.

We are committed to opening doors and nurturing relationships to meet the diverse needs of our community. The value of giving is immeasurable, and there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for making a difference.

At the heart of our mission is transparency, and we believe that our donors deserve to know precisely how their generous contributions are allocated. Your gift directly impacts the individuals we serve at the Mercy Center and supports our vital Anchor building. Our invitation to you is a partnership. Be the difference to our Mercy mission serving the homeless, abused, and those individuals in recovery. As Erie County witnesses an increase in all three of these areas, **the TIME to GIVE is TODAY!** Join hands with the Mercy Center in identifying the purpose to "open your heart" to women, children, and families in need.

Our hope is without hesitation you will make your gift. We move forward into the season of gratitude and generosity. Smile today, pray for tomorrow, and be kind always.

Smile, Pray, Be Kind,

Jennie Hagerty
Executive Director

Dear Perry,

Visibility and accountability is important to donors as ECGRA. We hope this Annual Review will show inspiring stories how you, Tom, and board made a difference.

Blessings



Dr. Gertrude A. Barber
Foundation

Making dreams come true.

November 16, 2023

Mr. Perry Wood
E.C.G.R.A.
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Perry,

Coming soon! A phrase that makes our hearts sing here at the Barber National Institute. For more than two years, sponsorships, registrations and ticket purchases for our events have helped us raise funds for our \$3million pool renovation. For over 40 years, our pool has provided therapy and recreation for our students and adults here at the Barber Institute. Hundreds of children and adults from the community have learned to swim here and enjoyed the use of our pool. And we can finally say, our pool is "coming soon" in early summer 2024.

There is still much to do at the Barber Institute and your sponsorship of our events makes it possible for us to raise the necessary funds to keep moving forward. Your business will benefit from being associated with a first-class event and we will work with you to ensure you receive the maximum exposure to your desired demographic. In return, your support will bring opportunity to children and adults with autism, intellectual disabilities, and behavioral health challenges.

Please review the enclosed **2024 Barber National Institute Event Sponsorship** offerings. We have several events throughout the year and offer a wide range of sponsorship opportunities. Please consider supporting the work of the Barber National Institute with your sponsorship of our 2024 events.

Perry, thank you very much in advance for your support. You are truly making dreams come true for children, adults and their families in the Erie community.



Sincerely,

Laura R. Schaaf
Director of Giving
LRS/cmb



**Making a Difference for
Over 150 Years!**

November 17, 2023

Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510


Dear Perry,

On behalf of all of us at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center, we offer our sincere appreciation to you and your team at the Erie County Gaming Revenue for the generous contribution of \$86,000.00 through the **2023 Build a Better Future Transformative Grant Program – Community Facilities!** This grant was processed on October 27, 2023, via electronic transfer, and is already making a significant impact at our St. Ann's Campus. Thanks to your vital support, we have begun installing a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system in the St. Ann's school building. This critical improvement would not have been possible without your significant support, and we are all very grateful for your generosity. The installation of this new HVAC system is one of the main components of our **St. Ann's Campus Enhancement: Phase 1** project, as we continue to improve and enrich our programs and facilities for the children and families in Erie's *Pulaski-Lighthouse* district.

As we move through our 152nd year of service, we are continually reminded of all the wonderful people and organizations throughout the community who have helped our agency deliver care, compassion and hope to the more than 1,700 children and families we serve annually. ECGRA continues to be a strong community partner, and your support enables us to provide the mental health, behavioral health and trauma-related services that our children and families depend on daily.

Perry, I wanted to share a few photos with you of the work that has begun thanks to ECGRA's very special support. The team from J.J. Agnello Heating & Air Conditioning has been hard at work since November 3rd, when they began installing the new HVAC system for our students and staff – just in time for the Erie winter season!



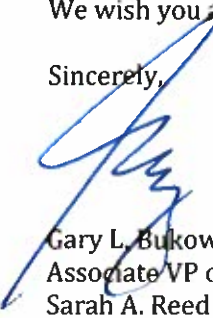
***None of these pictures would be possible without ECGRA's generous support.
Thank you for helping to make this critical project possible!***



Perry, thank you for ECGRA's partnership with us on **The St. Ann's Campus Enhancement: Phase 1** project! Please convey our deepest appreciation to your Board of Directors and the entire ECGRA staff for the difference they are making at Sarah Reed through this **2023 Build a Better Future Transformative Grant Program - Community Facilities** grant. I look forward to giving you and your team a tour of our St. Ann's Campus once our project is completed so you can see first-hand the impact of ECGRA's philanthropy here in Erie County.

We wish you and your colleagues at ECGRA a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,


Gary L. Bukowski, MA, CFRE
Associate VP of Development
Sarah A. Reed Children's Center
2445 West 34th Street • Erie, PA 16506
Phone: (814) 835-7602 • GBukowski@SarahReed.org

Thank you and your Board Support at ECGRA for making a difference for the children at our St. Ann's campus. B.st to you during this season of Thanksgiving!

P.S. I enclosed a copy of the case study that was just published featuring our St. Ann's Campus. We greatly appreciate ECGRA's generous support of this campus and the students and families it serves!

Cc: Tom Maggio; Grants Manager, ECGRA
Tammi Michali; Office Manager, ECGRA
Dr. Adrienne Dixon; President/CEO, Sarah A. Reed Children's Center
Karen Wagner, CPA; Chief Financial Officer, Sarah A. Reed Children's Center
Sue Popoff; Finance Supervisor, Sarah A. Reed Children's Center
Tracey Sampson; Associate VP of Community Clinical Services, Sarah A. Reed Children's Center
Ron Rodney; Supervisor of SBLP, Sarah A. Reed Children's Center



Thank you for ECGRA's outstanding support of our children and families at Sarah Reed's St. Ann's Campus!

**No goods, services or other benefits of value were exchanged in consideration of this gift. Please retain this document with your tax records.*



Bayfront N.S.T.C. Inc. Martin Luther King Center

*James C. Sherrod
Executive Director*

A. Multi-Service Center

December 11, 2023

Mr. Perry Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Mr. Wood,

Thank you for your most generous donation to the Martin Luther King Center. Each donor is truly making a difference in the lives of those we serve and the Martin Luther King Center values your support tremendously.

The Martin Luther King Center has been working arduously since 1966 to serve the disadvantaged community in the City of Erie. We appreciate each and every one of our donors and we wouldn't be where we are today without your support. Your recent gift will go towards our community facilities funds at the Martin Luther King Center.

If you have questions about how your gift is being used or you would like further information on how to continue your support please don't hesitate to contact me. I am available by phone at (814) 459-2761 or you can visit our website at www.mlkcentererie.org.

Again, thank you for helping us help the Erie community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "JCS", written over a horizontal line.

James C. Sherrod
Executive Director

312 Chestnut Street Erie, Pennsylvania 16507 Telephone 459 2761



1701 Parade Street
Eric, PA 16503 - 1994
814.452.6113
f: 814.461.9483
stmartincenter.org

December 12, 2023

Mr. Perry N. Wood
Executive Director
Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority
5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201
Erie, PA 16510

Dear Mr. Wood and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority,

We are **incredibly** grateful to you for the award of \$75,000 under the Community Facilities funding to be used for our roof replacement. We cannot adequately express how much this award means to us.

As stated in our application, this roof is over 40 years old and further damage would be catastrophic to our work as this section covers our food pantry and other areas. Because of your award, we will be able to replace it without worry.

Thank you so much for supporting this project and helping us to keep our clients, staff, and work safe.

With gratitude,

David González
Chief Executive Officer

Let's get on the
roof when the
weather gets
better!
😊

No goods or services were provided to the donor in exchange for this contribution.

Upgrades in Union City will continue

Valerie Myers
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Union City has been re-inventing itself for more than a decade.

Updated parks, home and business facade improvements, additional downtown parking, a downtown mural and an outdoor “gateway” courtyard have been among the town’s revitalization projects.

And there are more improvements coming in 2024.

“People who come home to Union City say that they can’t believe the changes,” said Union City Borough Manager Cindy Wells.

See UPGRADES, Page 2A

Upgrades

Continued from Page 1A

“It’s very different than it was even a few years ago.” The downtown revitalization has been fueled by more than \$6 million in state, county and local grants since 2009.

“I think it’s all been put to good use,” said Mary Lou Rose, who lives and works in Union City.

“A lot of thought and work went into the improvements. The changes have been wonderful.”

The new gateway to Union City

Chief among the changes was the demolition of the once iconic Union City Diner at the corner of Main and High streets last fall.

The building had been vacant for decades and was purchased along with an adjacent building in 2019. After studies determined that the building had deteriorated beyond repair, it was demolished last year and replaced this year with a new “gateway” courtyard.

The concrete courtyard is bounded by brick pillars and iron fencing. There’s also a new stairway to lower-level public parking and a “diner-like” look for the adjacent building owned by the community.

Brick pillars and iron railings likewise enclose Industrial Park, across High Street from the gateway.

A Christmas tree will be lighted in the gateway courtyard during a “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” event including carriage rides, carols and story time with Mrs. Claus on Nov. 25.

“It’s something new. I think it will bring people downtown and give them a chance to look at the shops and know what’s here,” Rose said.

Other Union City projects completed this year include a new playground and accessible parking area at Southwest Park and the installation of an electronic message sign on North Main Street.

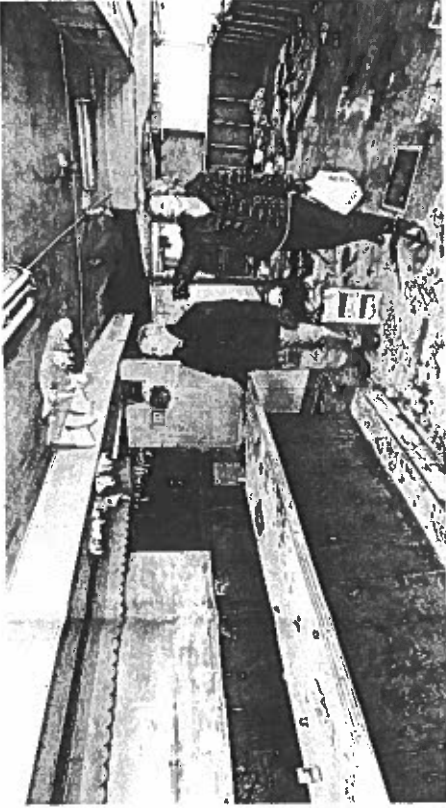
Coming in 2024

New murals, downtown lighting and an events pavilion are expected to be completed next year.

LED lights will be strung along the tops of downtown buildings and on trees around the new public parking lot across Main Street from Union City Public Library to illuminate the downtown each evening.

A pavilion to be built behind the parking lot will be available for library story times and other public events.

Three new murals that will overlook the downtown gateway will be painted by the Looking Glass Art Project, comprised of Erie artists Thomas Ferraro, Edward Grout and Steve Milk. It’s the same collaborative that painted and installed a South Main Street mural dedicated in 2021 for the 150th anniversary of Union City’s



Steve Bishop and Cindy Wells, of Union City Borough secretary treasurer, are shown in this November 2019 photo inside the former Union City Diner. The diner will be demolished and a new “gateway” to the town will be built in its place. ERIE TIMES NEWS FILE PHOTO

naming.

Union City art students, senior citizens and the general public are being asked to share ideas for the murals. The public meetings on the project will be held at First Global Methodist Church, 42 E. High St., on Nov. 29 at 6:30 p.m. and at the American Legion post, 9225 Route 6, on Dec. 2 at 10 a.m.

Ferraro said the meetings with students, seniors and the general public are intended to reach a multi-generational consensus about what the murals should contain. Community members will be asked for ideas, words, colors and styles that should be included in the murals.

“That’s our content; that’s how we put things together, Ferraro said. Going into a project, he said, “we never quite know where the content’s going to land.”

The artists will present their design ideas to community leaders early in 2024. The final designs will be painted on fabric for greater longevity and installed on downtown buildings later next year.

“It’s almost like putting up wallpaper,” Wells said.

Also coming in 2024 will be new sidewalks along portions of Willow, Bridge and Concord streets; a new Willow Street bridge; and accessibility improvements at the City Building, among other projects.

The funding

The laundry list of Union City improvements in re-

cent years was made possible by a host of state agencies, foundations and other funding sources.

Major grants were from the Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, Union City Community Foundation, Erie County Redevelopment Authority, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, and Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

There was funding, too, from Union City Borough, Union City Pride, LECOM, Erie Insurance, MFG Corp of Union City, and Union City Lions and Union City Little League.

The list — both of improvements and funding — goes on.

Familiarity with the various funding sources and grant programs has been essential to the town’s success in obtaining grants, Wells said.

The borough additionally works with the EADS Group in Clarion to provide the engineering plans required for some grants, Wells said.

Teamwork by community organizations, Wells said, also is essential.

“Union City Borough, Union City Community Foundation and Union City Action all work together on projects and funding,” Wells said. “They’re our three-legged stool.”

Contact Valerie Myers at vmyers@timesnews.com.

Chamber hopes to add flights as Fly Erie Fund grows

Jim Martin
Erie Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Seven months after the launch of the Fly Erie Fund — a pool of money to help airlines offset the cost of serving Erie International Airport — the effort seems to be gathering steam.

But it has taken time, said James Grunke, CEO of the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership that came up with the idea.

It was only recently that the legal work was completed to create the entity that will solicit, collect and deploy money to help increase the level of air service in Erie.

Grunke said recently that he was working to complete letters soliciting potential donors.

But the fund already has substantial commitments as it works toward a goal of raising \$500,000 a year for each of the next three years.

The largest of those commitments is from the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority.

Perry Wood, executive director of ECGRA, said the organization's board agreed in September to commit a total of \$375,000 to the fund to be dispersed \$125,000 a year for the next three years.

Wood, who will serve on the board of the Fly Erie Fund, said he's hoping

Fund

Continued from Page 1A

the money can make a difference.

"We did it based on that the faith that we folks who are coming around the table are interested in putting the airport on a new trajectory that includes more local people using the airport," he said. "We believe the airport is an important asset to our county."

Ongoing talks with airlines

A combination of money from the Fly Erie Fund and the airport's own reserves are expected to help offset higher costs at Erie International.

But a team of local representatives, including the chamber and Tim NeCastro, CEO of Erie Insurance, also have met virtually with major airlines to discuss the future of Erie air service.

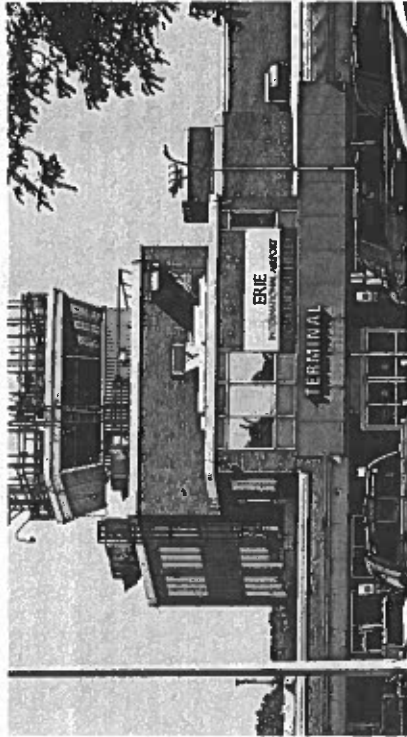
Delta, which has served Erie in the past, "was pretty clear that Erie does not fit in their business model for the next three or four years," Grunke said.

American Airlines, which in September added a third flight to Charlotte four times a week, plans to expand that third flight to a seven-day schedule in April. The airline also left the door open for further expansion, he said.

United, which discontinued service between Erie and Chicago in June, "was probably the most encouraging," Grunke said.

Fees assessed by Erie International Airport have made it one of the most expensive airports of its size. Grunke said he believes the airport's own efforts and those of the Fly Erie Fund could make it one of the least expensive.

If that happens, "I think United could be doing stuff in Erie as early as the second quarter of next year, which is much sooner than we expected," Grunke said.



The terminal at Erie International Airport is shown in Millcreek Township on June 1. GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Grunke said that doesn't necessarily mean a return to Chicago flights.

"We just asked them that we want to be back in their system, whether that means Newark or Dulles or Chicago."

On the whole, the meetings with airlines have been encouraging, Grunke said.

"They have been very willing and receptive to talking with us and sharing what they are thinking," he said.

NeCastro's presence at the table also has been helpful.

"It never hurts to have a Fortune 500 CEO talking to them," Grunke said. "It's also good for him to hear directly from the airlines to hear what they are thinking."

Financial update

The chamber is hoping to announce an update on the progress of the Fly Erie Fund at its annual meeting on Jan. 31.

Grunke, who has asked the city of Erie to contribute \$50,000 a year, said he's hoping that half of the \$500,000 a

While the chamber had originally hoped a low-cost carrier could be operating from Erie by September of this year, Grunke said that goal continues to move closer.

"It has been delayed because of aircraft availability," Grunke said. "The other thing is they are interested in seeing the fund created. The airport has offered them no cost the first two years. They want to know what happens in year three."

Tourists from the south?

John Oliver, president of VisitErie, Erie County's tourism promotion agency, said his organization has committed to contributing \$25,000 a year for three years to the Fly Erie Fund.

In addition to that, Oliver said VisitErie also plans to invest \$25,000 in new advertising.

While most Erie visitors come from within a two- or three-hours drive from places such as Buffalo, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Oliver said some new marketing efforts will be directed at Florida in hopes of enticing residents of the Sunshine State to take advantage of the ultra-low-cost carrier.

"We thought we would invest some money and promote Erie down in Florida," Oliver said. "Perhaps come up to Erie for the summer. We have no jellyfish and no sharks."

Oliver said he's optimistic that the low-cost carrier can help draw more visitors to Erie — whether they fly here from Florida or drive into Erie to catch an outbound flight.

"I do think it can help move the needle," he said. "I have been told there is a large number of people who are going to Cleveland and Pittsburgh to take a low-cost carrier to Florida. There is a market that already exists."

Contact Jim Martin at jmartin@timesnews.com.

year will come from the private sector and that half will come from government.

He's asking some businesses to contribute an amount equal to 10% of their annual travel budget.

As of early December, Grunke said, "I think we are about halfway there."

Landing a low-cost carrier

Along with Derek Martin, executive director of Erie International Airport, the chamber has been working to attract what they refer to as an ultra low-cost airline that would make direct flights to Florida.

The most likely candidate is Houston-based Avelo Airlines, which would fly two flights a week to each of two Florida destinations.

At one point, Martin said landing such a carrier was a reasonable expectation.

"There isn't an airport our size in the country that doesn't have an ultra low-cost carrier," he said.