



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

NEW COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTOR

2/28/23

On January 17, the Columbia County Department of Health welcomed Victoria McGahan as its new public health director. McGahan succeeds Jack Mabb, who retired on January 13.

"I've always wanted to help people," said Director McGahan, who oversees a staff of 40-plus. "That's why I chose psychology as my undergraduate focus. I have family in the health and human services field in Greene and Columbia counties, so I was fortunate to land an internship with Greene County Public Health, which really introduced me to public and how broad a field it is, as well as its ability to really impact a lot of people."

Prior to her appointment to her new position, Director McGahan served as Public Health Educator for Columbia County DOH, a position that found her heavily involved with Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) as well as with the DOH website and other social media. Prior to the pandemic, she also provided health education at schools, preschools, libraries, senior centers, and summer camps, among others.

Director McGahan grew up in East Durham, where her summers were spent at the O'Neill House, owned and operated by her grandparents, Maxine and Otto Ohle. Everyone chipped in – at the age of eight McGahan found herself washing dishes at the resort. She attended the Cairo-Durham Central School District, from which she graduated in 2009. Director McGahan went on to attend SUNY Cortland, where she received a B.A. in psychology. She would subsequently earn a master's in community health.

Since 2015, Director McGahan has been a Certified Health Education Specialist through the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing. This is a professional certification that asserts competence in the following areas of health education: Assessment of needs and capacity; Planning; Implementation; Evaluation and Research; Advocacy; Communication; Leadership and Management; Ethics and Professionalism.

At a little more than a month into her tenure as county Public Health Director, Director McGahan said she "didn't take this job to make drastic changes too quickly. I've observed for seven years how this department is run and I think that it's been run extremely effectively and we have a very dedicated team. I think Covid proved that."

"The Health Department does not work independently on many issues," she added. "Maybe in a few cases, but most of the time we're partnering with somebody in the community to achieve whatever it is we're working towards. Columbia County is very fortunate. We do have a lot of resources here. The people who work in the health and human services field, especially in this community, are extremely dedicated public servants. Many have been around and stayed around for a long time."

Looking ahead, continuing the COVID-19 fight along with the critical issues of opioid abuse, obesity, and diabetes are among the items at the forefront of Director McGahan's thinking.