



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

NINA BENVENUTO – NEW OFA ADMINISTRATOR

I'm pleased to announce the appointment of Nina Benvenuto to the position of Administrator of the Columbia County Office for the Aging. She succeeded outgoing Administrator Kevin McDonald at the beginning of April.

Administrator Benvenuto, who attended Hudson schools, brings a wealth of experience to her new post and a vision of how to expand on the excellent work OFA has done over the years. A wide array of experiences acquired over the course of Administrator Benvenuto's past working and volunteering life have led her to this point, she said.

"I've joked that I'm a professional volunteer – I'll sign up for anything. I want to go out and help people." Early on, she said, "I got involved with Make-A-Wish and became a wish granter for a couple years. It was one of the cooler things I've ever done." Administrator Benvenuto would go on to become involved with such organizations as Special Olympics and the Alzheimer's Association, quickly coming to the realization that she wanted to do that sort of thing as a career.

Administrator Benvenuto would ultimately study in the social welfare program at UAlbany, where she picked up her B.A. "I learned a lot. I'm absolutely obsessed with the idea of social services. I'm fascinated by the idea of what makes people do what they do. Why do we think the way we think? What do our behaviors communicate?"

Following school, Administrator Benvenuto spent time at Mohawk Opportunities as a relief counselor "helping people coming out of jail assimilate back into society"; the United Counseling Service in Vermont; Best Buddies International, Albany, "where I got good at problem solving"; and Berkshire Family & Individual Resources, where she served as assistant director.

It's this vast body of experience helping others that Administrator Benvenuto brings to OFA, where she's "passionate about maintaining independence and dignity for the elderly, which is not something our society necessarily aims to do, unfortunately."

"What we do at OFA now I think we do really well," said Administrator Benvenuto. "This is the first job I've been in that everyone on the team actually works as a team – there's a camaraderie in the office. I think that's huge."

Pushing more community education and engagement is a large part of the vision she holds for the future of the department. "I think it's really important to engage with the community you're serving. I think there are a ton of people we could help that don't know about us yet -- we need to get creative with how we reach those people."

Adding more information to the OFA website, including a caregiver section that addresses such needs as in-home support, is one goal moving forward. Administrator Benvenuto also plans to "encourage older residents of Columbia County to feel as though they can advocate for themselves a little bit more. I want to help them educate

themselves more on what their rights are, how to go about gaining access to what they need. We want to help people age at home and maintain their independence.”

The Office for the Aging is located at 325 Columbia Street, Hudson. The phone number is 828-4258, and the website is columbiacountyny.com/columbia-county-office-for-the-aging. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.