

Facebook Journalism Project awards Niagara Frontier Publications

Announcing first round of grants supporting local newsrooms' coronavirus coverage

The Facebook Journalism Project (FJP), the Lenfest Institute for Journalism and the Local Media Association (LMA) are announcing the first round of North American local newsrooms receiving FJP Community Network grants to support their coronavirus news coverage. A complete list of winners will be announced in early April.

Six local newsrooms in New York were selected to receive almost \$30,000 in funding – CNY Latino, Examiner Media, Niagara Frontier Publications, Spotlight Newspapers, Walkill Valley Publications Inc., and Watertown Daily Times, with each of these recipients getting \$5,000. In this first round, 50 local newsrooms across the U.S. and Canada are receiving \$5,000 grants to help cover unexpected costs associated with covering the crisis in their communities. Additional recipients will be announced in the coming weeks.

Access to trustworthy, accurate and local information is critical now more than ever in our state. These small investments can help fulfill immediate needs such as increasing frequency of publishing, tools to work remotely, combating misinformation and serving vulnerable and at-risk groups.

This is a part of Facebook's broader effort to provide support around COVID-19, including a



A look inside the Facebook Seattle office at Arbor Blocks 300. (Image courtesy of Facebook)

separate \$1 million in grants to supporting fact-checkers.

The Facebook Journalism Project builds community through news, trains newsrooms globally, and achieves quality through partnerships. Along with Lenfest and LMA, the Facebook Journalism Project partnered with Canada's News Media Association and The Independent News Challenge

to include journalists in remote communities across Canada.

Sign up for the Facebook Journalism Project newsletter to learn more about its programs and stay up-to-date on its latest announcements.

Niagara Frontier Publications is a 76-year-old, family-owned, award-winning publishing company that is the first name people

in Niagara County, Grand Island and the surrounding areas think of for timely, accurate, local news and information in print, on the web, and in social media.

NFP is the proud publisher of the Niagara-Wheatfield Tribune, Island Dispatch, The Lewiston-Porter Sentinel, Grand Island PennySaver and www.wnypapers.com.

COVID-19 Closures & Updates

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"We are grateful The Facebook Journalism Project, the Lenfest Institute for Journalism and the Local Media Association selected us for this prestigious award," GM/Managing Editor Joshua Maloni said. "Quite obviously, this is an extremely challenging time – for all of us – with a rapidly moving cycle of news. We are bombarded by constant floods of information we need to verify, edit, and deliver back to our community each day. This grant will help us in that endeavor, by allowing our staffers to work both in the office and remotely as we, too, practice responsible social distancing.

"Educating, informing, empowering and entertaining our readers, while helping local businesses stay afloat – that is our No. 1 priority. Thank you for helping us achieve that goal."

Publisher Skip Mazenauer said NFP is partnering with local chambers of commerce and sharing marketing ideas with small businesses.

Higgins: Seniors will now receive automatic COVID-19 stimulus payments, after Ways & Means members 'fought for change'

Congressman Brian Higgins, D-NY-26, and his colleagues on the House of Representatives Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security requested and won agreement by the U.S. Department of Treasury to automatically provide stimulus checks to senior citizens who are Social Security recipients – reversing course on previous directives that would have required seniors to complete forms to receive the COVID-19 relief payment.

IRS guidance issued on March 30 stated: "People who typically do not file a tax return will need to file a simple tax return to receive an economic impact payment. Low-income taxpayers, senior citizens, Social Security recipients, some veterans and individuals with disabilities who are otherwise not required to file a tax return will not owe tax."

Higgins and other members of the Ways and Means Committee objected to this requirement, which would have created additional hurdles and delayed payments for seniors. In a letter to the Treasury secretary, the members wrote: "We are extremely displeased to see the IRS guidance recently notifying the public that Social Security and Supplemental Security beneficiaries who did not file tax returns in 2018 or 2019 must file a return in order to get the rebate. This requirement presents substantial and unnecessary hardships for these beneficiaries and delays critical relief for our most vulnerable citizens."

On Wednesday, the U.S. Treasury announced it would no longer require Social Security bene-

Real ID postponed until 2021

Niagara County Clerk Joseph A. Jastrzemski on Friday said the Department of Homeland Security has delayed implementation of the REAL ID requirements for domestic flights until Oct. 1, 2021. The requirements were set to take place this October.

"I am very grateful that common sense has prevailed and the REAL ID requirements have been pushed back," Jastrzemski said. "With our DMV offices and our passport office closed indefinitely, this really is the only option."

Jastrzemski said, given the uncertain nature of when these offices will reopen, he was concerned about the ability to meet demand.

"We know there is going to be a lot of catch-up to do in the clerk's office once life returns to some degree of normal, just with drivers' licenses, car registrations, pistol permits and so on," he said. "We do not need the pressure of the REAL ID deadline creating further backlog for our office and an additional expense for residents."

ficiaries to file an abbreviated tax return to receive an economic impact payment. Instead, payments will be automatically deposited into their bank accounts.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, approved by Congress, authorizes a one-time automatic

payment to most Americans as the nation confronts the COVID-19 pandemic. The Internal Revenue Service will disburse a \$1,200 payment to every eligible adult (\$2,400 for joint filers), plus an additional \$500 per dependent child under 17. These payments gradually phasedown for individ-

ual incomes exceeding \$75,000, \$112,500 for head of households, or \$150,000 for joint filers.

A summary of COVID-19 relief available to seniors can be found in a fact sheet on Higgins' website, at higgins.house.gov/issues/coronavirus-disease, and on The Sentinel website, wnypapers.com.

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