

Higgins: \$314,000-plus for City of Niagara Falls Fire Department

Federal award funds new self-contained breathing apparatuses for firefighters

Late last week, Congressman Brian Higgins announced the City of Niagara Falls Fire Department was awarded a federal fire award. Funded by the Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) Grant program, the grant totals \$314,718.

"The work of a firefighter is tough, dangerous and selfless," Higgins said. "This federal grant fills a great need to ensure Niagara Falls firefighters are protected and have the tools necessary to serve the city's residents, businesses and visitors."

City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino said, "Again, we are grateful to Congressman Higgins for his advocacy and assistance for the City of Niagara Falls. Our Niagara Falls Fire Department have remarkable responsibilities as reflected in their recent efforts to rescue a fallen hiker along the river. This grant, awarded through the efforts of Congressman Higgins, helps the city keep our firefighters in the most up-to-date equipment to ensure their safety."

The City of Niagara Falls will use the grant funding to purchase 36 new self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBAs) for firefighters, as well as a filling station for the devices. The Niagara Falls Fire Department's existing airpicks were 20 years old and scheduled to expire under existing safety standards this year. The department's air-filling station was more than 25 years old and recently broke, requiring Niagara Falls firefighters to take their tanks to a North



Congressman Brian Higgins addresses the media. (Submitted photo)

and immediate need for this vital equipment. His leadership and advocacy were crucial to the fire department obtaining this grant."

The AFG program awards grants directly to fire departments, non-affiliated EMS organizations, and State Fire Training Academies (SFTAs) to enhance public safety and health protections, as well as protections for first responders. It is one of three DHS/FEMA programs that focus on public and firefighter safety with respect to fire and related hazards.

Niagara Falls Firefighters Local 714 President Noah Masur added, "This is an example of the good things our federal government can do to provide frontline workers at the local level with the tools necessary to best serve our community. With this grant, we can quickly replace our obsolete SCBAs and hit the ground running with modern equipment."

In 2020, Congress approved \$318.5 million for the AFG program to help first-responder organizations improve fire-response capabilities and emergencies of all types. Since 2001, the program has awarded \$7.7 billion in grants that provide critical resources to equip and train emergency personnel, enhance operational efficiencies, foster interoperability, and support community resilience.

To learn more about Assistance to Firefighters Grant awards, guidance and tools, visit <https://www.fema.gov/vi/grants/preparedness/firefighters/assistance-grants>.

Tonawanda fire station for filling.

Fire Chief Joe Pedulla said, "This grant could not have come at a better time. We have had to use parts from outdated discarded airpicks to keep ours operational. Each time our firefighters put these airpicks on they risk entering a very dangerous situation and deserve the best equip-

ment we can provide."

Higgins' team said, "SCBAs are critical devices for firefighters because they provide breathable air in environments with oxygen deficiencies, smoke or dangerous gases, and other hazardous airborne contaminants."

Niagara Falls Fire Officers Local 3359 President Jason Cafarel-

la said, "There may be no other article of firefighter protective equipment more essential than our breathing apparatus. Our current SCBAs are not only obsolete, but they expire in a matter of days. On behalf of our membership, and the residents of our city, I want to thank Congressman Higgins for identifying this real

Higgins: \$280,000-plus for Grassroots Gardens, Niagara Falls School District & Buffalo Schools

Farm to School Grants expand access to fresh, local foods & hands-on agricultural learning

Congressman Brian Higgins announced three local recipients of U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm to School Grants. Grassroots Gardens of Western New York received an award totaling \$96,627, the Buffalo Public School District was awarded \$96,290, and the Niagara Falls Central School District received an award of \$94,603.

Higgins' team said, "The grants will introduce more locally grown produce to school cafeterias and expose children to agriculture and nutrition education and hands-on learning. The grants also work to provide revenue to American farmers and boost the local economy."

He explained, "Even before the pandemic, too many children went to school hungry, and the breakdown of services caused by the pandemic shows how vulnerable children and families are in our community. These efforts, led by Grassroots Gardens and the Buffalo and Niagara Falls school districts, will play a role in beginning to address food access gaps and foster healthy eating lessons that can be carried forward."

Grassroots Gardens of Western New York (GGWNY) is a dedicated group of community gardeners and activists with the mission of sharing knowledge, power and resources to grow healthy food, heal systemic harm,

and strengthen neighborhood connections through community gardens. Members collaboratively cultivate more than 1 million square-feet of urban green space, with over 100 community gardens in Buffalo and Niagara Falls. The grant will be used to implement the Western New York School Garden Project, which serves students at farm-to-school-eligible districts to create collaborations, teacher-led garden clubs, as well as video content, training and resources for teachers and parents leading school gardens.

"While Grassroots Gardens will continue to only build and fund school gardens in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, we have increasingly been asked to provide technical assistance to rural and suburban schools starting their own school gardens," Executive Director Jeanette Koncickowski said. "This project will allow us to build a digital curriculum to provide on-demand teacher or parent training on school garden programming. We'll be sharing lesson plans, harvest of the month ideas and recipes, toolkits for building raised beds, and more all the while featuring the beauty and bounty of BPS' school gardens."

The grant award to Niagara Falls Central School District will aid its farm-to-school program in engaging the community in activi-

ties that improve access to local foods. This includes local procurement and agricultural education efforts. Through the grant, the district will expand and enhance the garden curricula, offer enhanced curricula at the middle and high school levels, increase purchasing of local products, expand the existing "Harvest of the Month" program, bring prepared meals to low-income neighborhoods, and provide staff training. As a result, the district wellness committee anticipates expanding building-level wellness committees and training for the 7-8 grade levels.

"The Farm to School Grant helps us take on urban food deserts by bringing healthy, fresh, local foods directly to our students and families," Niagara Falls City School District Superintendent Mark Laurrie said. "It is vital to the health of our community, and it is a duty of the school district to provide nutritious food and information on healthy eating to Niagara Falls residents who are experiencing difficulty getting it on their own."

The award allocated to the Buffalo City School District will help fund the "Celebrating Cultural Diversity Program with Buffalo Farm to School," enhancing the existing farm-to-school program by introducing a focus on cultural

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Mary O'Brien
2746 Delaware Ave.,
Kenmore, NY 14217
(716) 998-9332
mary@kendev.com

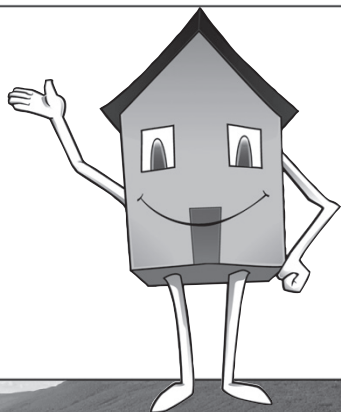
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