

# Community Partnerships

**Earn It Keep It Save It**  
United Way Erie **FREE Taxes**

## This marks our 6th year of leading the rural effort for United Way Erie Free Taxes.

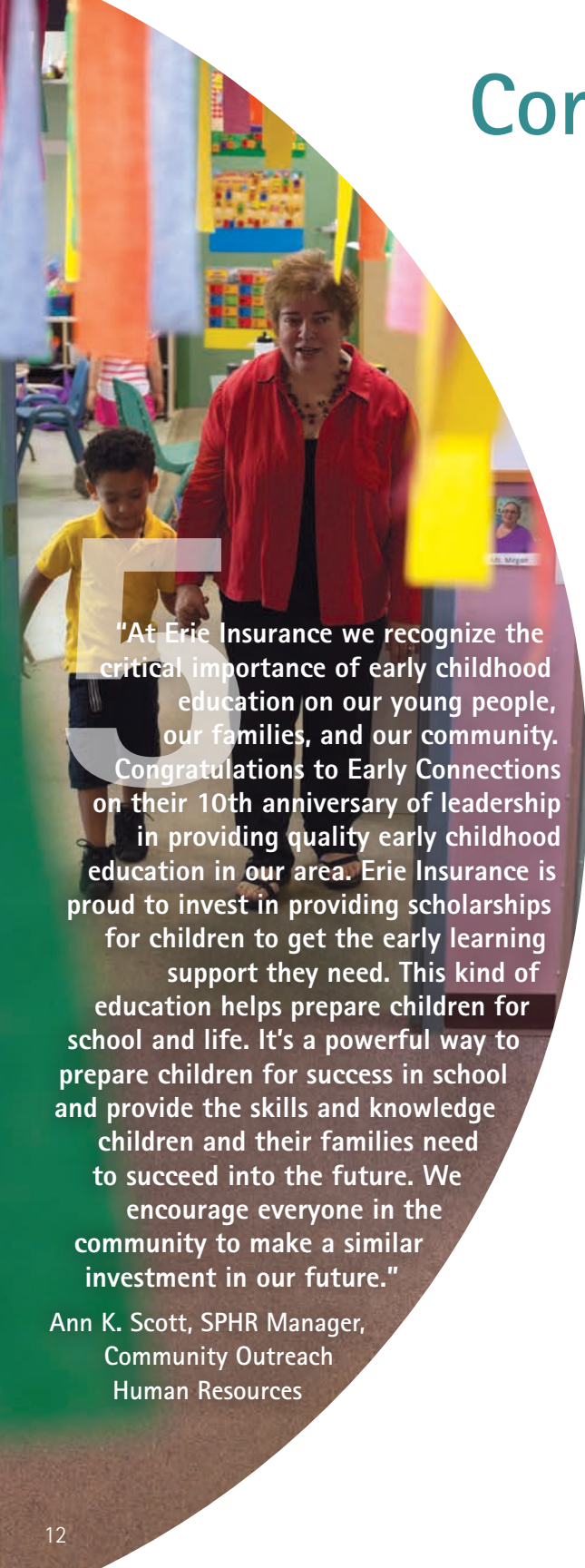
United Way Erie FREE Taxes is a program established to help eligible low to moderate income wage earners claim the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a cash refund, by providing them with free tax preparation and filing services at volunteer tax sites. Created by the federal government in 1975, the program is the most effective poverty reduction program in the country. The EITC is a special federal tax benefit for working people who earn low to moderate incomes. It is a refundable credit that reduces or eliminates income taxes they owe.

Erie FREE Taxes VITA patron statistics for the 2012 tax filing season indicated that:

- 41% of VITA patrons received the EITC
- 40% of VITA patrons were of minority populations
- 28.6% of VITA patron households spoke a language other than English
- 14% had a disability
- 14.6% were from rural communities
- 15% of VITA patrons were unbanked
- Total Tax in dollars returned: \$5,269,087
- Total EITC Claimed: \$2,166,533

Erie FREE Taxes VITA patron statistics for the 2013 tax filing season indicated that:

- EITC: 35%
- Minorities: 37.8%
- Language other than English: 22.7%
- Disability: 18%
- Rural: 19%
- Unbanked: not yet known
- Federal refund: \$7,963,318
- EITC (included in federal refund amount): \$3,150,469



"At Erie Insurance we recognize the critical importance of early childhood education on our young people, our families, and our community. Congratulations to Early Connections on their 10th anniversary of leadership in providing quality early childhood education in our area. Erie Insurance is proud to invest in providing scholarships for children to get the early learning support they need. This kind of education helps prepare children for school and life. It's a powerful way to prepare children for success in school and provide the skills and knowledge children and their families need to succeed into the future. We encourage everyone in the community to make a similar investment in our future."

Ann K. Scott, SPHR Manager,  
Community Outreach  
Human Resources



**Erie Together** continues to do outstanding work in the community in an effort to decrease poverty and ameliorate its affects on those currently living in poverty. With the Early Childhood Team of Erie Together having developed a Kindergarten Checklist written about in previous reports, this past year a Parent Toolkit was developed with Early Connections coordinating the effort. This Toolkit is designed to help parents understand how to support their child's preparation for kindergarten and uses as its base the kindergarten checklist developed by the team.

**Partnership with Erie Art Museum** The Erie Art Museum applied for and received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency. Early Connections is an official partner in this grant project. Every Early Connections site received eight hours of training in learning engaging multicultural songs and how to integrate them into the classroom.

"Old Songs New Opportunities" was a series of activities provided by the Erie Art Museum designed to provide children with exposure to songs from other cultures, activities to go with the songs, and the opportunity to perform their songs for their families, over a two-year period. During the prior year, Art Museum volunteers came into all Early Connections classrooms to share songs from their cultures with the children. This year, the experience was deepened as Art Museum personnel worked with Early Connections teachers to video the children performing their songs. These videos were presented at family events at each site, where families enjoyed watching their children's performance while enjoying a variety of traditional foods. Some sites integrated art with the presentation, while others included math and science during food preparation.



### Community Events Sponsored by Early Connections/Success By 6

The **2014 Early Learning Expo** was attended by 566 persons, of which 307 were children. There were 42 unique vendors and 134 volunteers. The Expo moved from previously having been held at Penn State Behrend to the Millcreek Mall. This move has resulted in many new and positive partnerships that are benefitting children and families.

# 6

### *"The Erie Community*

*Foundation understands that investments in quality early childhood programming pay significant dividends throughout a lifetime. It is a proven way to change our community, one child at a time. We are proud to have played a small role in developing the community vision that became Early Connections and we look forward to continued growth and development."*

*Mike Batchelor, President The Erie Community Foundation*

# 10+2=Nancy Anne Kalista

## A Retrospective: 2002-2014

by Nancy Anne Kalista



*Within my eight years as an active member on the Pennsylvania House Education Committee, and the founder of the State House Early Childhood Education Caucus, I am proud to have such a valuable program in my district. Early Connections has been a leading light for high-quality early childhood education in Erie County, while providing leadership and support alike to families and educators. Under the guidance of Nancy Anne Kalista, Early Connections has made great strides in overcoming many of the barriers dealing with high-quality early childhood education within our community. The programs and services that Early Connections provides have become a model for others to emulate around the state, and country. Happy 10th year Early Connections!*

**Patrick J. Harkins**  
Pennsylvania State Representative  
District 1 – Erie

While this annual report focuses on the 10 years that this organization has been known as Early Connections, the groundwork for the evolution of Early Connections began in 1895 when it was known as the YWCA. After providing many services and acting as the springboard for the growth of several other agencies in Erie County, the YWCA of Erie in 2002 welcomed Nancy Anne Kalista as its Executive Director. This retrospective summarizes some of the key areas of growth and initiatives during the 12+ year tenure that Nancy served as Executive Director. At the end of September 2014 Nancy Kalista will leave PA to begin the "next chapter" as she looks forward to watching from the sidelines the continuing growth and future of Early Connections.

Early Connections provides leadership in early care and education throughout Northwestern PA at the State level and beyond. This has been exciting to be part of over the last 12 years. It was in **2003** after leading a strategic planning effort for the then YWCA that the decision was made to disaffiliate from the YWCA. After disaffiliating, in **2004** we obtained a contract from United Way of Erie County to administer Success By 6 in Erie County, were awarded a contract with the Northwest Regional Key to provide technical assistance and professional development services, held our first professional symposium with 500 parents and professionals in attendance, and were approved to receive tax credit funds from the State for scholarships for children.

**2005** United Way of Erie County dedicated their proceeds from their Annual Rock 'n' Roll Golf Outing to SB6, Early Connections delivered 33 trainings in the community, Early Connections obtained a contract from the Northwest Regional Key to coordinate the 18 county Northwest Regional Leadership Council.

**2006** We received a leadership award from the Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA) called the 2006 *Community Champion Award*. PACCA described their 2006 *Community Champion Award* as a recognition of a "community-based organization/community initiative that has shown leadership in building public awareness of the value of quality child care by developing and implementing a specific campaign/project or through a history of public awareness activities. We also were recognized by ECIDA locally being put on their Honor Roll as one Employer of the Year at the Annual Economic Development Corporation dinner. We held our first of many annual legislative breakfasts that year, extending our influence at the State level for policies supportive of young children and their families.

**2008** I was honored to be asked to serve on The Erie Community Foundation's Community Access Panel for Early Care and Education. Prior to the first meeting I was also asked to author an environmental scan on early care and education in Erie County which encompassed 48 pages of research. Both items were used with the panel to consider issues and eventually to make recommendations. Erie's Future Fund grew from this work. Since 2011, Early Connections provided leadership to Erie's Future Fund including fundraising, public relations, impressive media attention, development of policies and procedures, recruitment of children and families, documentation of assessments and progress of the children. That same year I was one of 30 individuals chosen to participate in a statewide task force to consider all forms of early childhood education funding. Locally, I served on the steering committee of the local poverty initiative that grew into Erie Together. Also established in 2008 at the Erie Community Foundation was the Early Connections' Endowment Fund.

**2009** We were again honored by the Economic Development Corporation of Erie County because of our "investment in Erie County." We had obtained two financing bonds over the years through the Corporation that supported our purchase initially of West Side and a refinancing of the City Center property and subsequently our purchase of the Union City building in 2008. We were one of 5 recipients across the Commonwealth for a large facilities grant (\$153,300) that went to our West Side site. We were one of 18 recipients across the Commonwealth to receive a Keystone Babies grant award (\$130,592). That was a year of great economic challenge as the State did not pass their budget until November. Through careful planning and leadership we did not have to cut staff, eliminate services or lay off anyone.

**2010** Through a contract with the Northwest Regional Key we had the responsibility of monitoring state grants in 18 counties of northwestern PA.

**2011** One of the highlights of my professional life, was welcoming the national Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan to our site at City Center, facilitating a panel of leaders, including the Secretary and getting very favorable publicity. We were the only center visited by the Secretary in Erie County.

**2012** On November 13, 2012 I was a presenter for the third year in a row at the Erie Together Annual Community Forum at which more than 350 leaders from the community were present.

**2013** A collaboration between the Erie Family Center, Erie County Department of Health, and Union City Family Support Center, Ready, Set, Grow - Erie was established at Early Connections. Ready, Set, Grow - Erie is the centralized intake for Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV) programs. Erie County has a number of evidenced-based home visiting programs each with a particular focus and/or prescribed target population.

On July 29, 2013 I was honored to be one of the presenters for a panel at the The Eleventh Annual ERIE (Economic Research Institute of Erie) Conference held at Penn State Behrend on Monday, July 29. The theme of the conference was "Investing in Kids: Can Early Childhood Education Be an Economic Development Strategy?"

**2014** In addition to obvious roles by virtue of being a United Way funded agency, partner with the Erie School District and partner with the Union City Area School District etc., in this last year I have served on the Education Impact Council for United Way of Erie County, United Way Board of Corporators, UPMC Hamot Board of Corporators, have been recognized by the Director of Business Partnerships with the Early Learning Investment Commission (Harrisburg) as a vital member of the ELIC outreach in NW PA and have participated in Economic Summits in Harrisburg with said group. Furthermore I have served on the Education Subcommittee of Erie Vital Signs, an initiative begun by The Erie Community Foundation and now a collaboration of The Erie Community Foundation, The Nonprofit Partnership, United Way of Erie County, Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, and Erie Together. Members of these agencies comprise a Steering Committee that provides project oversight to help guide our community's future for the next decade. I serve on the Erie County Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood In Home Visiting Stakeholder's Group facilitated by the Mercyhurst Civic Institute which has resulted in federal and state dollars coming into Erie County to provide evidence-based home visiting programs for pregnant mothers and new parents/caregivers.

# Contributors

## Special Thanks

The Erie Community Foundation  
Northwest Regional Key  
United Way of Erie County

## PreK Tax Credit Donations to Erie's Future Fund

C.A. Curtze Co.  
Custom Engineering  
ERIEBANK  
Erie Insurance  
McCormick Structural Systems  
Northwest Savings  
Scott's Development Company  
Twelfth Street Realty  
United Concordia  
UPMC Hamot

## Other Donations to Erie's Future Fund

Christine Drabic  
Knights of St John  
Larry Lechtner  
Pulaski Club  
Slovak National Club  
UPMC  
Wesleyville Homes Association

## Grant of

**\$24,000 to \$115,000**

PA Keystone STARS

## Donations

**to Early Connections**

**Gifts of \$1,000 to \$9,999**

Dr. Michael T. & Nancy A. Kalista  
ERIEBANK  
First Niagara Bank  
Kern Family Foundation  
Jason & Michelle Robertson  
Susan & Tom Hagen  
Wells Fund

**Gifts of \$500 to \$999**

Barbara Sambroak  
Gary Schneider  
The Cafaro Foundation  
UPMC Hamot  
Vicary Insurance

**Gifts under \$500**

Alice Moomy  
Amy Cuzzola Kern  
Bonita Booker  
Charlotte Kneidinger  
Dale McBrier  
David Kruszewski  
Dennis & Betsy Bort



# 8

"Our agencies have a close working relationship built on mutual respect.

Early Connections consistently demonstrates a commitment to the philosophy of inclusion – that every child, regardless of developmental delay or disability, should be included in learning environments with their typical peers, to the greatest extent possible."

*Rebecca N. Brumagin  
Executive Director  
Achievement Center*

We have made every effort to list all grants/gifts received during the period of July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014

We apologize for any errors or omissions and ask you to contact Early Connections Administrative Offices at 814-874-0144 with corrections.

Early Connections at City Center-  
Personnel  
Early Connections at Harbor  
Homes-Personnel  
Early Connections at John E.  
Horan-Personnel  
Early Connections at Union City-  
Personnel  
Early Connections at West Side-  
Personnel  
Elizabeth Kidd  
Erie Business Association  
Eriez Construction  
Friends of TREC  
Hagan Business Machines  
J.J.H.T., Inc.  
James Domino  
Janel Bonsell  
Jay & Ruth Alberstadt  
John Daneri  
Lori Engott-Spaulding  
Maryann Yochim  
PNC Bank  
Presque Isle Partnership  
Rep. Ryan A. Bizzarro  
State Employee Combined Appeal  
(SECA) United Way  
Sherry Dyne  
St. George School  
Susan Busse  
Thomas Blecki  
United Way Alleghany County

### **Donations In Kind**

Ambridge Rose Spa  
Amy Cuzzola Kern  
Brick House Coffee Shop  
C.A. Curtze Co.  
Coventina Day Spa  
David Bennett  
Donna Douglass  
Erie Otters  
Erie Water Works  
Glenwood Beer  
Jr's Last Laugh  
Local Erie Wineries  
Maryann Yochim  
Meredith Rodenbaugh  
Michelle Robertson  
National Fuel  
Nemacolin Woodlands Resort  
Office Max  
Relish  
Rep. Greg Lucas  
Romolo Chocolates  
Scott Enterprises  
St. Martin's Center  
Tops Friendly Markets  
Valerie Kish-Bierbower

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"My personal and company interest began 10 years ago when I received a letter from then State Sen. Jane Earl noting the Early Connections initial golf tournament which has since become an annual event. That letter invited community members to participate, but more importantly, it gave a vivid look into one family's struggle and subsequent success due to the Early Education Program. I was moved at the program possibilities and the importance of enrolling young children in this high quality program.

To me it was clear that "Dollars spent on early childhood education will provide an extraordinary return." The many successes of the various Early Connections programs, clearly is evidence that we must invest in the very young."

**Gary Schneider**  
Howard Industries

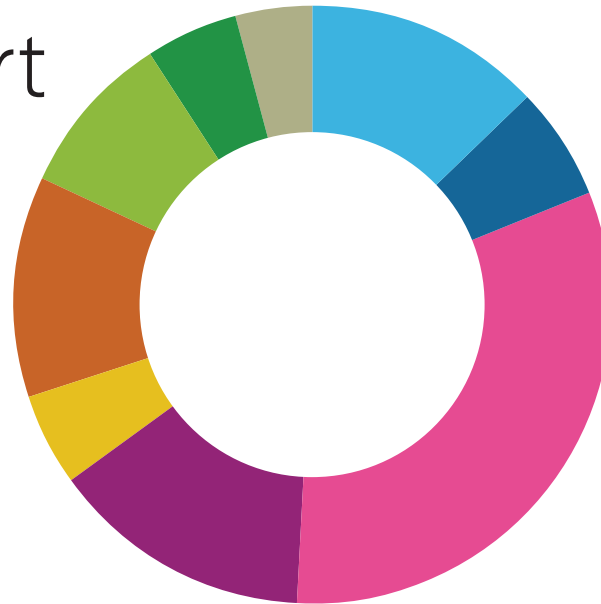


# Financial Accomplishments



- 1 12th consecutive year that Early Connections ended the year with no deficit
- 2 The first of three years of education funding awarded by United Way of Erie County at an increased level from the previous years
- 3 More than \$650,000 was raised for Erie's Future Fund
- 4 Erie Insurance awarded Erie's Future Fund its largest gift: \$221,112
- 5 Continued strong partnership with the Erie School District including a subcontract for Pre-K Counts at three of our locations and our fifth year of contract with the Erie School District for Early Intervention (work with children with special needs)
- 6 New contract with Erie School District's Family Center to coordinate enrollment for evidence-based home visiting programs in Erie County
- 7 Early Connections received an \$8,000 grant from the Union City Community Foundation which was used to replace the aged roof at our Union City site and additional repairs related to gutters, etc.
- 8 Established in 2008 at the Erie Community Foundation, Early Connections' Endowment Fund now totals \$52,000
- 9 Thanks to the Keystone STARS program, our high ratings by STARS and the STARS merit awards, Early Connections distributed merit awards with a total of \$53,835 to 21 classroom staff with a range from \$800 to \$4,120.
- 10 The golf outing netted more than \$20,000 with half going to Erie's Future Fund and half to Early Connections operations. This outing has grown from a net in 2002 of \$6,043 to more than 3 times that amount this past year

# Fiscal Report 2013-2014



- 13% Early Learning Center
- 6% John E. Horan Apartments
- 32% City Center
- 14% Union City Center
- 5% Harbor Homes
- 12% Management & General
- 9% Erie's Future Fund
- 5% N.W. Regional Key
- 4% Success By 6



The official registration and financial information of Early Connections may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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*"Early Connections continues to make an immeasurable impact on our community by improving the lives of our most vulnerable yet most important citizens, our children. Congratulations on an incredibly successful 10 years."*

*Nick Scott, Jr. Vice President Scott Enterprises*





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Early Connections  
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