

# Orange County named one of 100 Best Communities for Young People

**Celebration at Chester Academy** will focus on commitment to keeping kids in school

BY GINNY PRIVITAR

**CHESTER** — America's Promise Alliance, a national organization founded by General Colin Powell to support young people, has named Orange County one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People.

A celebration will be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 9, in the Chester Academy auditorium, 64 Hambletonian Avenue. Community partners in the effort, including Orange County Executive Edward A. Diana, Youth Bureau Director Carol Chichester, and youth program partners, including Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, Newburgh Performing Arts, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orange-Ulster BOCES, Lucky U, and the Partners for Children Initiative invite the community to come and help celebrate the recognition.

This award came about in a national competition identifying 100 communities nationwide that have exemplified their commitment to ending the high school dropout crisis by helping young people overcome challenges to success.

America's Promise Alliance raises awareness and supports communities to ensure that young people have the fundamental resources needed to graduate high school and succeed in college, work, and life. Through its 100 Best Communities for Young People competition presented by ING, America's Promise Alliance honors communities that are committed to

creating brighter futures for America's young people by helping ensure that all graduate from high school and are doing their part to help end the nation's dropout and workforce readiness crisis. The competition is open to all communities that make children and youth a priority, from small towns to large cities, to local counties and school districts.

## Newburgh youth violence remains a challenge

Orange County still has great challenges. Its biggest city, Newburgh, made the national news this year for its high rate of violence by and against young people.

According to the Times: "This latest round of violence is shaming a harsh new glare on the city, both for the intensity of the attacks and the young ages of many of those involved. The community led the state in violent crimes per capita in 2008 and is on course to do so again this year."

"Gang violence has been responsible for all but 2 or 3 of the city's 16 homicides in the last two and a half years. By law enforcement estimates, gang members with national affiliations outnumber the city's police by a ratio of three to one, not counting the hundreds of young people in homegrown groups.

"At a Senate hearing with Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. in Washington last month, Senator Charles E. Schumer called the situation in Newburgh 'shocking.'"

The Times article goes on to quote two teachers at the Newburgh Free Academy, who blame the wider community. They said the problem "is the lack of jobs and activities available to young people. The city has no supermarkets, one Boys and Girls Club that is closed on weekends and a virtually nonexistent bus system, leaving young people without cars too far from the only steady source of employment, at regional malls well outside of town."

The problem got so out of hand that Newburgh was stormed by 500 federal, state and local law enforcement officers, also in May.

In this case, why would Orange County get such an honor?

Kristin E. Jensen, assistant to the county executive, said, "Those concerns are shared by many throughout Orange County and much has been done to focus on the youth of our cities. Among the initiatives is the grand opening of the Center for Hope at 280 Broadway, Newburgh."

The Center for Hope is an educational and recreational program for at-risk youth and their families operated by the Dispute Resolution Center, with leadership and funding from Orange County Department of Social Services. It was founded to provide Newburgh's young people with a safe, secure alternative place for spending those critical after-school hours.

Ed Stoddard, whose Lucky U organization partners with America's Promise (see related story on page 8), wrote in an

## Why Orange County is one of the best

In granting the "100 Best Communities for Young People" award to Orange County, the America's Promise Alliance lauded the county's "collaborative spirit" that has brought local, state and national resources for youth together.

The organization further cites "municipal based and county-wide leadership trainings, including small group workshops, large scale youth conferences and retreats and community events to raise awareness of how youth are accessible resources," along with the county's "several action teams and coalitions," such as the Kiwanis Clubs, TEAM Newburgh, Middletown Cares, the Town of Wallkill Police Youth Coalition, and the Montgomery Youth Movement Council.

America's Promise also praises partnerships in the county that have helped increase the number of children and youth enrolled in the New York State managed care health plans. The county's immunization programs, community health centers, and Planned Parenthood health centers help provide care to youth in need.

To see the entire document, visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org).

e-mailed message: "As a member of the committee that submitted the winning application, I am writing to state that I for one and many on the committee are well aware of the concerns you have expressed.... We do not see this as a 'trophy' to be placed on a shelf. Rather it is a challenge to do all in our power to prove the recognition was deserved."