



DIVERSE.  
erio  
DIVERSITY · EQUITY · INCLUSION



# ENGAGE IN DEI INITIATIVES



# REFLECTING ON THE PAST YEAR WITH CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER GARY N. LEE

Over two years ago, Erie County took a significant step forward in alignment with national leaders and metropolitan governments serving diverse BIPOC populations. This pivotal moment led to the unanimous creation of the Erie County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission, now recognized as Diverse Erie.

Today, Diverse Erie celebrates the successful launch of two grant programs and one loan program. These initiatives have resulted in the allocation of nearly \$2 million to 36 deserving organizations, despite receiving over 80 applications. These figures underscore the pressing need within our community for Diverse Erie's support, offering vital capital injections to BIPOC-owned and BIPOC-serving businesses, nonprofits, and organizations, thus fostering local economic growth.

Beyond its role as a grantmaking body, Diverse Erie serves as a catalyst for community cohesion, advocating for the authentic inclusion of people of color. Comprised of dedicated citizen leaders, the commission leverages diverse expertise to advance its mission and vision, while actively engaging with and serving the BIPOC community through volunteer efforts.



## 2023 Annual Report

During the past year, the Diverse Erie commissioners and team attended a board training session conducted by Strategy Solutions Inc, covering crucial topics such as board governance, Robert's Rules of Order, policies and procedures, along with insights on state ethics. On May 12th, 2023, I was thrilled to lead a workshop titled "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Is it just a hashtag or Is it real?" at the Jefferson Educational Society, which was highly praised for accomplishing its objectives. Taking our powerful mission beyond Erie, I was honored to attend the Pennsylvania Black Legislative Black Caucus 50th anniversary event in Harrisburg.

Diverse Erie Commissioners have continued to make significant strides throughout Erie County. Notably, Commissioner Saeedullah Taraky's establishment of the first Afghan Community Center in Pennsylvania, and Commissioner Brandy Cortes's dedicated advocacy for the Hispanic and Latino community on the City of Erie Government Mayor's Hispanic Latine Advisory Council.

Furthermore, Diverse Erie proudly contributed to the launch of the Grow Erie project by awarding \$250,000 through the Generational Impact Grant. This transformative initiative, led by the Minority Community Investment Coalition, marks a significant milestone in advancing equitable economic development within our community.

Despite the challenges faced nationally, including the June 29th, 2023, Supreme Court's decision to strike down affirmative action, Diverse Erie remains steadfast in its commitment to championing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Understanding the pivotal role of embracing diversity and equity and the advantages of a more inclusive society for all, I responded to this decision with an op-ed in the Erie Times News, "Affirmative Action is gone, the need to level the playing field remains." I encourage you all to take a moment to read it.



As we embark on the next chapter, Diverse Erie reaffirms its dedication to fostering conversations on the enduring value of diversity, equity, and inclusion within Erie County. Join us as we continue our journey towards a more equitable and inclusive community.

By investing in initiatives and ideas that advance equity in Erie County, Diverse Erie works to create an environment where all people of color are welcome and included.



Diverse Erie leverages public resources to attract private resources to be invested toward generational impact, focusing on three strategic areas where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) face large disparities:

TRAINING & EDUCATION

HOMEOWNERSHIP

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

## Commissioners



**Ricardo Escajadillo**  
*Chair*



**Jonathan Atkinson**  
*Vice Chair*



**Marie A. Wells**  
*Treasurer*



**Brandy Cortes**  
*Secretary*



**Tiffany L. LaVette**



**Sarah Carter, M.D.**



**Saeedullah Taraky**



**Paul Kokhanevich**



**EJay Fyke**

## Diverse Erie Team



**Gary N. Lee**  
*Chief Administrative Officer*



**Devan Mitchell**  
*Administrative Assistant*





**TOTAL ASSETS**

**\$2,774,046**

GRANT INCOME

\$-

**TOTAL REVENUES**

**\$2,774,046**

**TOTAL  
EXPENDITURES**

**\$1,602,660**

**OPERATING  
INCOME (LOSS)**

\$-

**NET POSITION**  
(as of Dec. 31, 2023)

**\$1,171,386**

## MOVING THE NEEDLE

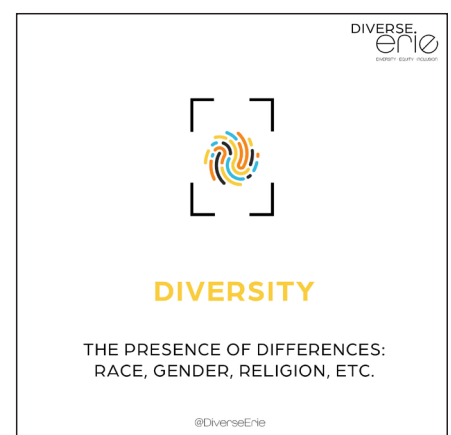
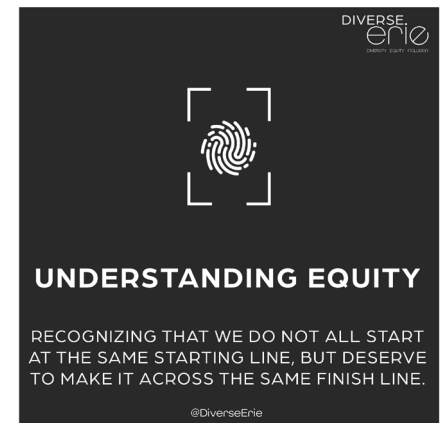
Two years ago, recognizing the racial disparities in our healthcare system, local leaders unanimously created the Erie County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission, now known as Diverse Erie. Since then, Diverse Erie has invested nearly \$2.5 million in grants to local businesses and organizations, including the recent launch of a grant tailored for small business owners.

In light of the national debate surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, Diverse Erie remains steadfast in fostering a constructive dialogue. Understanding the real challenges faced by BIPOC communities and viewing DEI as tangible objectives rather than abstract concepts are pivotal. Education serves as the initial step towards knowledge and growth.

Diversity is measurable — for example, how many teachers or police officers in Erie County are BIPOC? Inclusion is a feeling — can everyone come to work as their whole selves and feel part of the team? Equity is a key part of the pie ensuring that all people, regardless of where they start, have the resources they need to succeed. It recognizes that each person has different circumstances and can be achieved when everyone has the resources and opportunity they need to succeed — ensuring all people can thrive, which benefits us all.

As an organization, Diverse Erie is dedicated to being a part of the conversation — and it can be difficult, but the quest to end racism must begin at home. Unconscious bias exists in all of us. Unconscious bias affects how we perceive and react to others based on biases, and once they are recognized, the conversation truly begins.

By engaging in DEI initiatives, we are starting to move the needle, but there is still more work ahead. It's time we all engage in it, so we continue to create an environment where all people of color are welcome and included. Join the #DiverseErie conversation.





# CREATING GENERATIONAL IMPACT

On Thursday June 15, 2023, Diverse Erie voted to award \$200,000 in the second round of the Generational Impact Grant program.

Funded with American Rescue Plan dollars, the Generational Impact Grant addresses the growing, exacerbated inequities BIPOC face as a result of the pandemic. The grants support capital projects that will have generational impact.

The recipients – two organizations that are either BIPOC-owned or primarily impact the BIPOC community within Erie County – will put this investment to work to serve as a catalyst for generational change for BIPOC living in Erie County.

**“The Generational Impact Grant is creating just that, generational impact. Because of this grant, we are now able to provide the best services to our community and equip entrepreneurs with the technology to help them succeed. By planting the seeds through the resources we offer, generations will forever sow the benefits of it.”**

– Kyra Taylor, Co-Founder/Executive Director, Erie’s Black Wall Street



- Erie’s Black Wall Street plans to offer workshops and informational sessions focused on how BIPOC entrepreneurs can start and maintain businesses. Support and mentorship for entrepreneurs will also be provided as part of the project.
- The Youth Leadership Institute of Erie will use the funds to expand its core programming model – Connected In 5: Impacting Tomorrow’s Leaders and Strengthening the Erie Community. It will also work to improve its headquarters on East Lake Road in Erie along with the Booker T. Washington Center to bring forward a scholastic initiative known as Life>Violence (Life is Greater Than Violence).

Through programs that educate and support entrepreneurs, provide creative spaces, and engage our youth, the investments will assist in reducing challenges in the BIPOC community while giving future leaders the tools they need to succeed – something that would not have been done without the mission of Diverse Erie.

**Erie’s Black Wall Street**

**\$100,000**

**Youth Leadership Institute of Erie**

**\$100,000**

**Total**

**\$200,000**



## INVESTING IN BIPOC-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES

Diverse Erie invested \$300,800 in Small Business Mini Grants to 29 small businesses on July 21, 2023. Through these grants, Diverse Erie is investing in small, for-profit, BIPOC businesses in Erie County by promoting equity and creating sustainable generational impact, all while directly creating a stronger, more resilient economy.

Grants are funded with American Rescue Plan dollars and invested in businesses owned by and serving members of the BIPOC community. Grant recipients are businesses located in Housing and Urban Development Qualified Census tracts that primarily serve beneficiaries earning less than 60% of the median income in Erie County.

**"The support we have received from Diverse Erie has been a great success. After investing in our business with a large machinery purchase, the funds from Diverse Erie helped us get the new equipment up and running smoothly. It really made our shop more efficient and streamlined."**

– Armando R. Reyes, Owner, Lake Erie Woodworks





# 2023 Annual Report

## Organization

## Amount Awarded

A Taste of Love	\$15,000
Barb's Corner	\$5,000
Barb's Family Daycare	\$15,000
C. Barney & Smith Memorial	\$10,000
Crockett Rentals LLC	\$25,000
Dapper Don's Styling Lounge	\$5,000
Dinner is Served by Lisa	\$15,000
Diverse Hands Daycare	\$15,000
Divinely Crown'd LLC	\$5,000
FitKing Co.	\$5,000
Handled with Care Childcare	\$20,000
Hill Top Mart LLC	\$5,000
Hooks Catfish Kitchen	\$15,000
Lake Erie Woodworks	\$5,800
Manus Enterprises	\$25,000

## Organization

## Amount Awarded

Materialistic Boutique	\$5,000
Mompreneur Renovations LLC	\$5,000
Moore's Painting & Services	\$5,000
Photos by Dai	\$5,000
Premier Manufacturing LLC	\$10,000
Priority Care Unlimited	\$10,000
Smoke n Barbeque	\$5,000
Stacie Brown	\$7,500
Tender Loving Care Place LLC	\$5,000
Triple D's Tasty Grill	\$15,000
True Sports LLC	\$5,000
Ty's Healthy Healers	\$15,000
WHM Working Capitol	\$7,500
Wonderful Chippers Food Group	\$15,000

**Total**

**\$300,800**







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**DiverseErie.org**

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