

Mental Health Board Hires Diane Taylor

SANDUSKY — Erie County's new mental health and recovery board has hired a woman with deep Sandusky roots to serve as its new director. Diane Taylor, who has served as interim executive director for the ADAMHS Board of Erie County, was named executive director, beginning Jan. 1. Her contract runs through the end of June 2023, when the next fiscal year will end. She'll earn \$98,000 a year.

Also at Tuesday's regular board meeting, held at Erie County's downtown office building, board officials announced they've sold the board's old building at 1907 E. Perkins Ave. The building sold for \$340,000 to Tarina Sidoti, who owns Realty Executives Select Group. Taylor is a Sandusky High School graduate who moved back to Sandusky in 2017 and took a job serving as the criminal justice director for the mental health board in Cuyahoga County, working with the judges there and other court officials.

In 2018, she was named deputy director of what was then the Mental Health and Recovery of Erie and Ottawa counties. When the director, Brenda Cronin, left in summer 2021 as the Erie County commissioners dissolved the agency and replaced it with a new one, Taylor was named interim executive director.

Watching Taylor serve as the interim director gave the board confidence she'd do well as director, said Tom Tucker, chairman of the ADAMHS board. "We all assumed it would go as well as it did," Tucker said. And because Taylor also had served as deputy director, "it isn't like we've only known her for six months," Tucker said. He said Taylor has forged good relationships with local providers of mental health and substance abuse services. "She's really reached out and knows a lot of the local providers and has a lot of credibility with them," Tucker said. Taylor thanked the board and told the Register that serving as the interim director has been a joy. It allows her to serve the community she lives in, noted Taylor, who lives in Sandusky.

Taylor said she has three goals moving forward as the new director. One is for the ADAMHS board to be fiscally sound. The second is to provide an array of services to address the needs of the community. The third is to help local providers address workforce issues. That's an issue Taylor spoke about earlier in the meeting, explaining that local providers have been struggling to have enough nurses, case managers and other employees. This isn't a problem peculiar to Erie County, as health care employers all over have staffing problems. "This is a state issue. I venture to say it's a national issue," Taylor said. And the issue comes as drug overdoses have risen during the pandemic, and young people have struggled with mental health issues. "We have an increase in demand, and a decrease in the number of providers who can provide the service," Taylor said. Taylor said she proposes to hold a summit with local providers early next year, to discuss if there is a way to partner better to share staff and resources and figure out where the gaps are.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has pledged to provide money to help with workforce issues, for example by paying for interns, Taylor said.

The sale of the former board offices at 1907 E. Perkins Ave. ends the last joint program of the former two-county board for Erie and Ottawa counties. The \$340,000 from the sale will be split between the two counties, with 52% going to Erie County and 48% going to Ottawa County.

The property did not pay taxes when it was owned by the local government agency and it will pay taxes now that it's owned by a private business. "It moves on the tax rolls and contributes to the tax base of the county," said Caleb Stidham, Erie County's treasurer. On Facebook, Tarina Sidoti announced that the building, a former Civista bank branch before the mental health board occupied it, will be the new location for her real estate offices. "We are so excited to announce the Grand Opening of our new location this

April! We can't wait to share the new space with you and meet in 'The Vault' - where we can talk all things real estate, no appointments needed!" Sidoti wrote. Sidoti told the Register the real estate company she bought two years ago, Realty Executives Select Group, has grown from four agents to 21 and has outgrown its current space. The movers will show up Thursday, she said. The vault in the former bank building will be turned into a space resembling a coffee bar where clients are invited to hang out, and the teller spaces in the former drive through area will be enclosed and used for storage. Sidoti said her company has often been tops in sales in the area. "We need more space," she said.