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## **Infinite Erie Announces \$1.028 million Funding to Expand ECAT's Construction Trades Training Program**

*Funding to address gaps and work to break down barriers  
in residential construction ecosystem*

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**ERIE, PA (September 12, 2024)** — Infinite Erie and partners, including Erie Insurance, the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), and The Erie Community Foundation, announced today an additional \$1,028,000 million funding to expand the Erie Center for Arts & Technology's (ECAT) Construction Trades Training program.

With this additional funding, ECAT in partnership with Build Community Development Corporation (BUILD CDC), will expand an existing licensed Construction Trades Training program to include supervised On-The-Job Training (OJT).

“Not only is this a priority project identified in Erie's Investment Playbook, but the need was confirmed as we convened the neighborhood revitalization practitioners,” said Kim Thomas, Executive Director of Infinite Erie. “We quickly recognized that this industry-wide worker shortage would first have to be addressed in order for them to meet their collective goals of providing access to safe, affordable housing.

“Through Infinite Erie's strategic framework that lives on collaboration, local funding partners were easily able to coalesce around the impact of this initiative and approve the investments accordingly.”

The Construction Trades Training Program will expand training opportunities in construction trades for Erie residents to create employment opportunities and meet the current and future demand for residential contractors. This will work to further address a demonstrated, long-standing gap in the residential construction ecosystem and remove a barrier to the success of other projects focused on increasing affordable housing opportunities in Erie County.

“Recent studies have shown that we are facing a nation-wide shortage of construction workers to meet the industry demand, and that shortage has become a barrier to utilizing resources and

scaling up neighborhood revitalization work here in the Erie community,” said Daria Devlin, Director of Social Impact, Hamot Health Foundation and Executive Director of BUILD CDC. “This investment allows us to expand ECAT’s existing, successful program and build a pipeline of skilled construction workers while simultaneously providing individuals with the opportunity to earn family sustaining wages.”

Local investment includes \$105,000 – broken down to 35,000 for three years – from Erie Insurance to ECAT for classroom training supplies, \$693,940 over 2 years from the Erie Community Foundation to BUILD CDC for OJT and program expansion, and \$229,060 over 2 years from ECGRA to BUILD CDC for OJT and program expansion.

“Addressing the multifaceted needs of Erie’s unhoused population has been a pressing concern for years, but we also need the physical homes built,” said Karen Bilowith President & CEO of The Erie Community Foundation. “By supporting the Construction Trades Training Program, students are learning valuable skills and will be the pipeline of builders for the needed homes.”

“We can change the trajectory of lives and strengthen the local economy in the process,” said Dr. Perry Wood, Executive Director of ECGRA. “Investing in training for the trades is not just about filling jobs – it’s about shaping the future.”

The program will also incorporate OJT opportunities for students that will include rehabilitation of properties within four key neighborhoods in the City of Erie. The Construction Trades Training Program Expansion is a part of “Building Up Erie,” a larger initiative to increase access to affordable housing opportunities in Erie’s most disinvested neighborhoods. Additionally, properties improved through this project could be made available to an aligned initiative for community-wide supportive housing for Erie’s unhoused individuals and families.

“Since our company’s founding nearly 100 years ago, Erie Insurance has recognized the power of education. We know how important education has been to our company’s success and how critical it is to the success of our region,” said Christine Blashock, ERIE’s chief diversity and community development officer. “Expansion of ECAT’s Construction Trades Training Program will advance the revitalization of our community by preparing participants to enter long-term family sustaining and in-demand jobs.”

Below is the full breakdown of the project and funding partners working to make this happen.

Project partners:

- The Erie School District
- The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie
- The Bayfront Eastside Taskforce
- Our West Bayfront
- The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
- The Hamot Health Foundation

Funding partners:

- The Erie Community Foundation
- The Hamot Health Foundation
- Erie Insurance
- ECGRA

## **ABOUT INFINITE ERIE**

Infinite Erie is a community and economic development strategy designed to harness funding opportunities, unify diverse public, private, and civic stakeholders around a common vision, and advance equitable economic development across Erie County. Coordinating inclusive growth strategies for transformative change, Infinite Erie brings together a cross-sector coalition with shared goals to:

- Foster economic growth
- Promote vibrant neighborhoods
- Build a diversified economy that benefits everyone

At the heart of Infinite Erie's strategy is Erie's Investment Playbook, a dynamic, living roadmap informed by input from more than 50 community stakeholders and a range of community-informed strategic plans. The Playbook outlines a pipeline of projects that align with community needs and transformative goals and guides stakeholders to align around priority projects that enhance community equity, drive market momentum, and contribute to Erie's economic vitality.

Through projects that tackle homelessness and create safe and affordable housing to revitalizing main street corridors and advancing equity, Infinite Erie is supporting inclusive growth strategies from ideation to implementation and every stage in between. Utilizing its "Project Portfolio" framework for tracking progress and as a platform for considering new projects as community needs evolve. Each portfolio addresses key community priorities in the following areas: Neighborhoods and Main Streets; Anchor Investments in the Greater Core; Industry Clusters and Infrastructure; and Inclusive Entrepreneurship.

This effort is empowered by the Erie Action Team that includes cross-sector leaders and dedicated practitioners who are on the ground driving Erie's economic growth efforts.

Infinite Erie is committed to coordinating solutions of excellence to overcome complex challenges and to putting plans into action - ultimately catalyzing transformational growth and driving Erie County toward a more vibrant, equitable future.

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