

Getting to know Christine Sanchirico, IPEI's first executive director

By Erin Barrett reporter@ithacatimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, August 28, 2013 12:00 am

Christine Sanchirico joins the Ithaca Public Education Initiative this September as its first Executive Director.

With more than 10 years experience directing local non-profits, including Catholic Charities, the Ithaca Breast Cancer Alliance and Literacy Volunteers of Tompkins County, Sanchirico has a drive to connect local families with the resources they need to ensure the best education for their children.

Ithaca Times: You have had a long career in non-profit administration in the area, what is your motivation for this type of work, what keeps you doing it?

Christine Sanchirico: My first job after college was at Cornell, where I worked in positions related to my undergraduate coursework in agriculture and biology. After 12 years at Cornell, I felt the need to move on and explore a new career, and accepted a position at Literacy Volunteers of Tompkins County (now Tompkins Learning Partners). I absolutely loved the work. It was incredibly fulfilling to assist people who needed help with reading, math and English to achieve their dreams. I also enjoyed connecting the many generous people in our community with individuals in need of support. After a year as interim Executive Director at Literacy Volunteers, I returned to school, where I studied issues such as non-profit leadership, diversity, and intercultural communication. I received a Master's degree in Organizational Communication from Ithaca College in 2000. I then worked for several local non-profits: the Women's Community Building, the Ithaca Breast Cancer Alliance (now the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes), and Catholic Charities. In each position I had the opportunity to learn about and support different challenges in the community. I just spent two years working at Cornell again, but felt a very strong pull back to non-profit work because of the direct impact I can make on people's lives. IPEI's focus on education is especially appealing to me because I have witnessed firsthand the struggles families in our community face when they do not have the appropriate skills to succeed.

IT: As the first executive director of IPEI, you will be responsible for setting a precedent for the position and the organization, what legacy do you hope to create for both?

CS: I have very big shoes to fill. IPEI was founded by an incredibly dedicated and energetic group of community leaders who, as a voluntary Board of Directors, led and operated the organization for over 15 years. I am very humbled by the results they achieved and hope to carry that legacy forward by creating sustainable systems for fund development and grant making that can continue well into the future. I believe one of the major strengths of IPEI is its commitment to remaining an independent organization while also staying close to the pulse of the Ithaca City School District. I think this strategy works, and I would like to make sure we remain true to the vision of the founders

to enhance the education of students in the district through strong community connections and support.

IT: What are some of your goals for IPEI, both short-term and long-term?

CS: IPEI is at a very exciting point in its growth, having just moved into its first office space at the Just Be Cause Center for Not-for-Profit Development and hiring paid staff. My primary goal at IPEI is to work with the Board to create a strong infrastructure and ensure that resources are in place that will allow the organization to thrive into the future and continue its mission of connecting community, students and teachers through engagement, collaboration, gifts, and grants.

IT: One of the missions of IPEI is to foster community connections with local schools, what are some of the ways the organization has been successful in the past in your opinion?

CS: Engaging the community in the education of our children is absolutely critical for the success of our students. By funding teachers, students, schools and non-profit organizations, IPEI has become an important point of intersection between school and community. IPEI's Community Collaboration Grant Program is an exciting initiative that promises to support innovative ideas for creating new programming that will achieve this objective.

IT: Which IPEI initiatives are you most eager to tackle in your new role?

CS: I am very committed to projects that link students, teachers, families and the community. I have witnessed both successes and challenges in our educational system both in my own family and through the other organizations I have served, and am excited by IPEI's support of *all* students. I hope to see continued collaboration with others in our community on projects that work to eliminate educational inequities by reaching broad groups of children and engaging them in projects that are accessible to all.

IT: What is it like working in the non-profit field in Ithaca?

CS: Ithaca has an amazing network of individuals working at our area non-profits, and it is incredibly stimulating to work within such a dedicated and diverse community.

IT: What are some ways the public can get involved with IPEI? What initiatives need more public support?

CS: There is so much to be accomplished, and volunteers and donations are always needed and welcome. I invite all who are interested to visit IPEI's website (www.ipei.org) to find out about initiatives such as *Kids Discover the Trail!* and *Teacher Grants*, to learn about our affiliates, and to find ways to get involved on the *How You Can Help* section of the website.