



Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive

Norman Jacknis, Westchester County Chief Information Officer, DoIT

THE LAPTOP REPORT

# A Message from the Chief Information Officer

Westchester's Department of Information Technology is in the midst of exciting times. Our existing and emerging projects, ranging from a new wireless data network to an expanded health surveillance system, highlight the county's dependence on information and technology to meet the challenges of our increasingly global and mobile world.

The essence of the department presented here can be summarized by our mission: to use technology

to improve government efficiency, make government more accessible to the people we serve, and ensure the safety of Westchester residents.

I'd like to invite you to visit [www.westchestergov.com/doit](http://www.westchestergov.com/doit). And thank you for your continued interest in Westchester's use of technology.

Norman J. Jacknis  
Chief Information Officer



DoIT strives to meet the challenges of an increasingly global and mobile world.



With gas prices rising to all-time highs, residents are turning to technology to save dollars at the pump.

## Concerned about rising gas prices? Call and Listen Up!

*"Welcome to the Westchester County Information Line. Please say 'heating oil prices' or 'auto gas prices.'"*

The long-awaited revolution in speech-based technology is arriving, bringing new services into everyday life.

With crude oil prices rising to record high levels in recent months and growing concerns of volatile gas prices, there is renewed relevance in our voice-recognition service designed to inform residents of the lowest gas and heating oil prices. Callers dialing **914-995-8710** are given dollar-saving data about the cheapest prices in their area, information previously available only online, at [www.westchestergov.com/consumer](http://www.westchestergov.com/consumer).

Acknowledging the need to ascertain gas prices and station locations on the road instead of on the computer, Norman Jacknis, CIO for Westchester County, says, "It's expanding the definition of e-government. E-government goes beyond web-based services - it's technology serving people even when they're away from their computers."

Since gas and heating oil prices fluctuate frequently and vary by as much as 20 percent within only a few blocks, interest

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## Concerned about rising gas prices?

in finding the lowest price fuel has risen dramatically. Use of the telephone service more than quadrupled last spring after gas prices soared.

Richard Levy, Assistant CIO for Physical Facilities, attributes the service's success to its straightforward, no-nonsense approach: "We spent a lot of time fine tuning this service, studying the way people would interact with it. We made a sincere effort to make it work the way users would expect."

This technology has been shown to work best when built to quickly deliver a specific piece of information. "Ours is a predictable and consistent dialogue between the person seeking information and the system that provides it," says Levy. The low



Conscientious consumers can now find the lowest gas prices in their area by dialing the info-line at 914-995-8710 before going to the pump.

number of hang-ups recorded to date signals this approach is working.

Prior to the line's launching in October 2003, the VoiceGenie engine fueling this technology had to be trained to recognize local pronunciations. For example, the street name "Mamaroneck" was defined to match its colloquial, everyday pronunciation, not according to normal English

pronunciation rules.

Voice recognition technology will continue to be refined and expanded - more locational information based on GIS data will gradually be made available over the phone. As for the Westchester County Information Line, later this year, users will be able to refine their search by speaking their street names.

## Technology Lends a Helping Hand

Westchester County is stepping up efforts to combat homelessness with some technology of its own.

An expanded case management system, now being piloted in Westhab homeless facilities throughout the county, represents the latest collaborative effort between Westchester's Departments of Information Technology and Social Services.

"The thrust of this effort is to establish an automated system that allows Social Services and homeless agencies in Westchester to access and deploy their available resources right away," says Diane Stern, Associate Commissioner for the Department of Social Services. "By coordinating services and efforts, case management



By streamlining homeless management in Westchester, technology is helping more people achieve self sufficiency.

systems get to the core of the problem and help people achieve self sufficiency."

DoIT and the Central Placement Housing Unit of Social Services first teamed up in 2003 to migrate the old legacy homeless management system to a superior web-based version. Initially sparking this effort was a shared vision of a system that streamlined the day's most time-consuming tasks, such as calling agencies to locate clients and check shelter availability.

## CHES Makes Its Next Move

Why IT is so crucial to bioterrorism response and bioterrorism detection

At first, bioterrorism - whether it is inhalation anthrax, smallpox, pneumonic plague or something else entirely - may feel like the flu. You will go to your local drugstore, clinic, maybe an emergency room. Doctors across the county may notice a small upswing in patients with flu-like symptoms. But no one will see the pattern until it is too late.

That is, unless a sophisticated surveillance system could analyze patient data and detect outbreaks before they spread.

Following two years of effort and coordination with local hospitals, in January 2003, the Westchester County Departments of Information Technology and Health jointly launched a

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## CHES makes its next move

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computerized early warning surveillance system capable of doing just that. Today, 100% of hospitals with emergency departments and selected outpatient clinics are participating in the Community Health Electronic Surveillance System, or CHES.

An integral part of the county's efforts to improve emergency preparedness, CHES is used daily to track and statistically analyze unusual levels or patterns of disease. "Having all hospitals with emergency departments connected to this reporting system greatly enhances our ability to detect disease outbreaks more quickly than before," said Commissioner of Health Dr. Joshua Lipsman.

While the development of CHES began prior to 9/11, the aftermath of the attacks and the threats of anthrax and other forms of bioterrorism provided an even stronger impetus for establishing a real-time surveillance system.

Fortunately, there have been no large-scale public health emergencies identified by CHES to date. Still, its sensitivity to spikes in the syndromes being monitored has been demonstrated several times, including identifying the beginnings of flu season the past two winters.

CHES also caught what has been informally dubbed the "Clinton effect" - immediately following revelation of the former President's heart problems, there was a noted spike in the number of patients reporting to emergency departments with chest pain.

In addition to being nominated for a National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award, CHES was presented at the Second National Syndromic Surveillance Conference in October 2003 and is being used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a model program for other county and state health departments.

## Just DoIT: Read about some recent accomplishments.



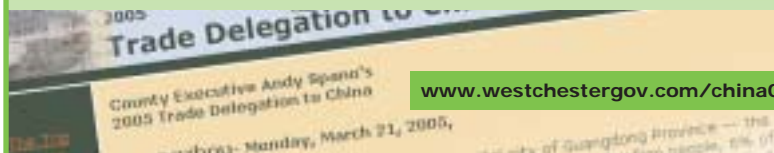
Westchester County CIO Norm Jacknis was included in Government Technology magazine's list as one of the "Top 25 Doers, Dreamers and Drivers," noting that his use of technology for government "broke bureaucratic inertia to better serve the public." The list of 25 men and women was the cover story in the March issue of the national publication geared toward top government executives. Jacknis, who has headed the Department

of Information Technology since 1998, was recognized for creating innovative software, a 500-mile fiber optic network, voice recognition technology, an upcoming wireless data network and the county's Web site - which attracted 1.4 million visitors last year.



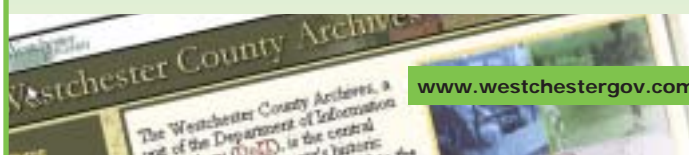
[giswww.westchestergov.com/website/emap/wc1.htm](http://giswww.westchestergov.com/website/emap/wc1.htm)

Westchester was recognized for being the **first county in the nation** to add its geospatial maps and data to the federal **Geospatial-One Stop**, joining a small number of state and local partners on what officials hope will become a government-wide Web portal. The information that Westchester added to the portal allows visitors to use the "Mapping Westchester County" (<http://giswww.westchestergov.com/website/emap/wc1.htm>) geographic information system application that the county hosts. Among other things, users can also download data about the county's transportation options, political districts and environment, such as streams and rivers. Bringing together the information from multiple federal, state and local agencies, the goal is to allow users to link data such as how local school districts overlap with public health concerns.



[www.westchestergov.com/china05](http://www.westchestergov.com/china05)

Norm Jacknis, County CIO, took part in a distinguished **trade delegation to China** led by County Executive Andy Spano. Results of the 10-day mission are already being seen here in Westchester: Lenovo, the world's third largest personal computer manufacturer, recently committed to locating its headquarters to Westchester. Pace University established groundbreaking cultural and educational partnerships with two prestigious Chinese universities. Interested in learning more about the delegation's activities? Visit the web site created by Dr. Jacknis: [www.westchestergov.com/china05](http://www.westchestergov.com/china05)



[www.westchestergov.com/wcarchives](http://www.westchestergov.com/wcarchives)

The **Westchester County Archives and Record Center** recently launched its new and improved web site, featuring an impressive mix of documents and photos dating as far back as the 17th century. Featured in the New York Times and Journal News, [www.westchestergov.com/wcarchives/](http://www.westchestergov.com/wcarchives/), is certain to become a favorite among history buffs and everyday Web surfers.

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## Technology Lends a Helping Hand

The system's client placement feature automatically reserves resources in a facility on behalf of a client. Roster, or agency attendance, is another important piece of information that will be automated and made readily available to users through the new system. Other notable features allow for creating, viewing and updating of cases, automated placement request, scheduling a move between facilities, and adding, activating and deactivating social workers assigned to a

case.

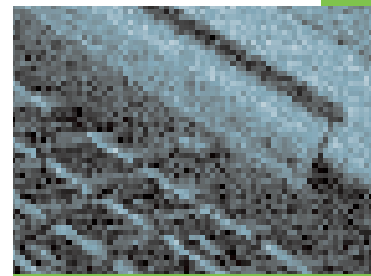
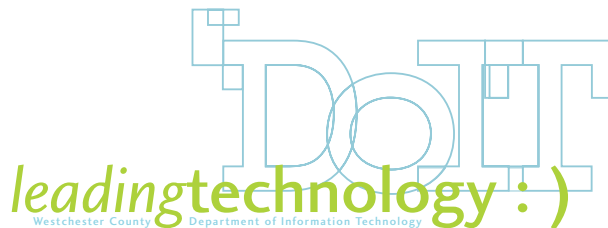
From the outset, the system was designed with strict authentication and workflow in mind. For example, a district office employee can place a client in a homeless facility, while someone from the central placement unit must approve the placement. Once the placement has been approved, all users, including the vendor, are prevented from making any further changes to the case and placement information while the client is residing at the facility.

Even with its initial deployment underway, this system continues to expand. Nearing completion is the payment component to be

integrated with the New York State Welfare Management System (WMS). Even more exciting though is the expected inclusion of an integrated expert system that would use a knowledge base to match clients with their ideal county facilities.

Describing the system as "flexible" and "adaptable," John DiPirro, one of the system's chief architects, feels very confident about the future of homeless management in Westchester: "there is a strong foundation for extending the system to further empower Department of Social Services staff and their partners to better resolve the problem of homelessness."

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Department of Information Technology  
148 Martine Avenue  
White Plains, NY 10601

Postal Customer

Standard Mail  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 5432  
White Plains, NY

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