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Cybersecurity Focus of Suffolk Conference
Presiding Officer Gregory, Legislator Hahn partner with college to address cyber threats and assess IT skills gaps

Above: At the L.I. Cybersecurity Conference are, from left: Suffolk County Legislature Chief of Staff Lora Gellerstein; keynote speaker Michael Balboni, president and managing director of RedLand Strategies; Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory; Legislator Kara Hahn; and Suffolk County Community College President Dr. Shaun McKay. **Right:** Presiding Officer Gregory chats with Michael Balboni.

BRENTWOOD, N.Y. – With cyberattacks a growing threat and a shortage of cybersecurity professionals to protect against them, Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and Legislator Kara Hahn joined Suffolk County Community College in presenting the L.I. Cybersecurity Conference on June 9.

Held at the college's Michael J. Grant Campus in Brentwood, the conference addressed cybersecurity challenges and the need to develop the workforce required to safeguard digital information. To that end, the college recently announced the launch of a Cybersecurity and Information Assurance Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree program to prepare students for an entry-level career in the cybersecurity field.

"Cybersecurity is not some obscure concept anymore; in this digital age, it is an industry of critical importance that we all need to start thinking about," said Presiding Officer Gregory. "This conference began an important discussion about the impact cybercrime can have on our local businesses, which not only must learn to protect vital information from cyber threats, but which are also looking to hire competent cyber professionals. If we want to make sure our graduates can find jobs, their skillset needs to match the needs of our business community, and Suffolk County Community College is addressing this skills gap head on with the birth of its new cybersecurity degree."

In his keynote address, speaker Michael Balboni, president and managing director of RedLand Strategies, discussed the most devastating cyberattacks in history and explained that healthcare institutions in particular are frequently the target of hackers because medical data can be easily monetized. He also touched on the significance of an attack launched by another nation state.

"We think about missiles and tanks and ships, but there are a lot of countries in the world thinking about computers as weapons," said Balboni, who conveyed the urgency for workforce training. "There is a scarcity of cyber professionals and a need to get the best and brightest into the field."

With breakout sessions and a panel discussion, the conference also offered regional businesses the opportunity to network as well as discuss practical steps they can take to protect their companies from identify theft, data breaches and cyber-related challenges.

"Cybersecurity threats are real, however, we don't need to live in fear as long as we live smarter about the ways in which we store and share information online. I am pleased to have been able to offer this presentation in collaboration with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and Suffolk County Community College, so that more of our residents and businesses can protect themselves from digital dangers," said Legislator Hahn. "We at the Legislature are doing all we can to grow our economy, not only through housing and investing in our downtowns, but also by building a skilled workforce, of which Suffolk County Community College is a part. It is important to have the conversation about what we need to grow the workforce, and at this moment, that includes cultivating special skills like knowledge of cybersecurity."

Presiding Officer Gregory and Legislator Hahn thanked the college's president, Dr. Shaun McKay, for leading this collaborative effort between industry and education to ensure that the programs offered at the college are meeting the needs of the Long Island business community.

"Suffolk County Community College is assuming a leadership role in the education and training of cybersecurity professionals," Dr. McKay said, highlighting the college's new cybersecurity program. "The just-concluded conference co-sponsored with Suffolk legislators is the first of what we envision as an annual gathering of the best and brightest in the industry who will share the latest information and techniques to secure the information systems that are vital to not only e-commerce, but the efficient and orderly function of businesses throughout the county, state and nation."

From left: Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and Legislator Kara Hahn get ready to head into a breakout session with panelist Benjamin Sondgeroth, principal cybersecurity engineer at CA Technologies; panelist Peter DiSpirito, vice president and chief information security officer at Flushing Bank; and Mary Lou Araneo from Suffolk County Community College.

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