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**Sept. 2024**

## *Necessary addition*

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From left front row: Mary Jo Richards, Tina O'Neil, KI LaClair, Tom Carman, Mart Liinve, Denise Young, Shannon Mastro, Mayor Sarah Pierce, COL Christine Buchner. From left back row: Meredith George, Jon LaFontaine, William Johnson, Zane Buckingham, James Uhlinger, Lisa Weber, Tim Reutten. Samaritan photo.

**NORTHERN NEW YORK'S FOREMOST  
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# JCC students set out on path to nursing careers

By JONATHON WHEELER

jwheeler@wdt.net

WATERTOWN —

**R**yan J. Washburn was among 60 students who began their long health care career journey with a short walk across the stage at Jefferson Community College's Sturtz Theater on Tuesday to receive their white coats — officially starting their journey as a nurse.

Washburn admits that he was going to be nervous when he put on the coat for the first time.

"There's been a lot of work just to get into the program," he said.

Despite the nerves, he said he also felt a sense of pride.

"It's difficult to get into the nursing program. Just to get in is an accomplishment," he said. "I've got goals and plans for my future and I just want to make sure that I'm doing everything I can."

Washburn said he hopes to work in the pediatrics department after his son was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

He said he wants to work "with acute and critical kids, like how my son was when he was diagnosed at a young age."

To get accepted into the competitive program, students need to complete prerequisite programs either at JCC or at the high school level.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing projects that the United States will experience a shortage of registered nurses that will intensify as the baby boomer generation continues to age.

"Compounding the problem is the fact that nursing schools across the country are struggling to expand capacity to meet the rising demand for care," its website states.

Kady L. Hoiston, director of nursing for JCC, says "the shortage is real."

"It's critically important that we help to meet the need of our community and help to meet the needs of the nursing workforce," she said. "We are committed to helping to provide quality nurses for the workforce and our community."



**Students receive their white coat Tuesday, signifying their acceptance into JCC's nursing program.** Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times



**Nursing students walk across the stage and put on their white coat during a ceremony Tuesday afternoon at JCC.** Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

This is Hoiston's eighth year at JCC and she says that there has been "a pretty steady increase" in interest in the college's nursing program.

She commended the students' hard work and said she is excited for their future.

Adah J. Simpson is also getting ready for her career. She said she was "very excited" to be accepted into the program.

"I did a lot of hard work to get here and I'm very happy that I get to have this opportunity," she said.

Simpson said she wanted to become a nurse because she has a lot of family members in health care. Seeing the struggles in the nursing field made her want to join the profession to help support nurses and other people in the hospital.

"If you could bring a little bit of light to a place that isn't necessarily happy, then why not," she said.

Simpson is originally from Lewis County and she said it is her plan to stay local.



**A crowd of people look on as their loved one puts on their white coat, signifying their acceptance into JCC's nursing program.** Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

## Register now for JCC's versatile late session courses 8-week courses online, on-campus and off-campus

JCC invites you to explore its versatile late-session 8-week courses, starting October 21, 2024. Whether your goal is to start or complete your degree, demonstrate your dedication to professional development, or enhance your skills for career advancement, Jefferson's flexible course options fit seamlessly into any schedule. JCC offers a variety

of online instruction modalities as well as in-person classes held on campus and at the Fort Drum Army Education Center.

Active-duty military personnel can also earn college credits towards earning promotion points, making this a valuable opportunity to advance their career.

Late session classes wrap up by December 21, 2024.

# 2024 COMMUNITY HEALTH STUDY

By **HOLLY BONAME**  
FDRHPO

**WATERTOWN** — The 9th Annual Community Health Survey of Adult Residents in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties has been completed for 2024. This year's participation reached 1,878 individuals across the region, resulting in an average margin of error of  $\pm 2.7\%$ . To date, 15,691 individuals have participated since the first survey in 2016.

The survey aims to collect the most up-to-date data regarding residents' health and their perceptions of our healthcare system in the region. These findings will be utilized by stakeholders in the three counties to evaluate the impact of past initiatives and to make data-driven decisions in future planning of initiatives and programs.

Survey questions are developed and updated yearly by North Country Health Compass Partners, a group comprised of representatives from Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence County public health departments, hospitals, healthcare facilities, behavioral health clinics, and a wide array of community-based organizations that focus on the wellness of our community. Some questions remain constant from past years, while other new questions are developed each year to reflect current needs.

"The Community Health Survey is a resource that our stakeholders look forward to each year," said Kayla Burns, Population Health Coordinator at Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO). "The data collected and released showcases the needs of the current regional healthcare climate and we can tailor the survey questions from year to year as we monitor health trends from previous years. It's a valuable resource for our partners and our communities."

Below are 10 key findings from this year's survey:

**1.** While most North Country adult residents (82%) report having one person or medical



office they think of as their primary care provider, only half (52%) reported "always" feeling that they and their values are respected at the doctors.

**2.** The percentage of North Country residents reporting having visited a dentist or dental clinic within the past year for a routine cleaning is continuing to recover from low of 55% in 2020, to 63% in 2024.

**3.** A large majority (78%) of North Country residents ages 45-75 reported having had a colonoscopy or colorectal cancer screening in the past 10 years. This is at an all-time high since first measured in 2022.

**4.** Amongst female participants ages 40-75, 4 in 5 (80%) have had a mammogram within the past two years.

**5.** North Country residents report experiencing challenges/difficulties accessing dental/oral health (31%), primary care (30%), and eye care services (25%) locally within the past 12 months. These have all increased significantly from last year.

**6.** Self-assessments of mental and dental health as 'excellent' or 'very good' have been slowly recovering since the pandemic, while self-assessments of physical health are at a low of 39%.

**7.** Approximately six-in-ten North Country residents report having been diagnosed with at least one of the eight studied chronic conditions, with high blood pressure and obesity being the most commonly reported.

**8.** 1 in 12 North Country residents report that their current living situation is not steady (0.5% homeless, 7.5% have a place to live but are worried about losing it in the future).

**9.** Approximately 2 in 5 North Country residents report participating in 1-5 hours

of planned exercise per week. Overall, North Country residents report that they are less physically active than they were when they were last asked in 2016.

**10.** The consumption of fruits and vegetables has de-

See **STUDY T20**

## Alice Hyde Celebrates 75 Years of American Hospital Association Membership

By **PHILLIP RAU**

University of Vermont Health Network

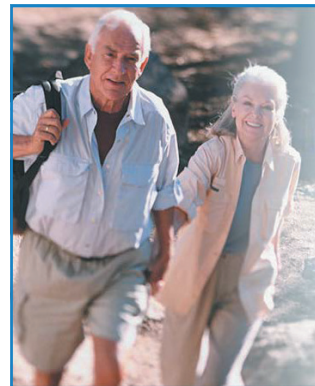
**MALONE** — University of Vermont Health Network – Alice Hyde Medical Center was honored Tuesday as a 75-year member of the American Hospital Association (AHA), a nationwide network of thousands of hospitals, health care systems and providers of care that provides insight and education for health care leaders, tracks industry issues and trends, and helps drive health care policy development.

Michael Draine, AHA Regional Executive, presented an award celebrating the hospital's leadership and AHA par-

ticipation to Michelle LeBeau, President of Alice Hyde, calling its dedication to caring for North Country communities essential and laudable.

"The American Hospital Association is proud to recognize Alice Hyde Medical Center for seventy-five years of membership in the AHA and for their dedication to the North County," said Draine. "We thank their leaders, medical staff, caregivers and other colleagues for providing a full range of medical care that is tailored to each patient's needs."

See **75 YEARS T20**



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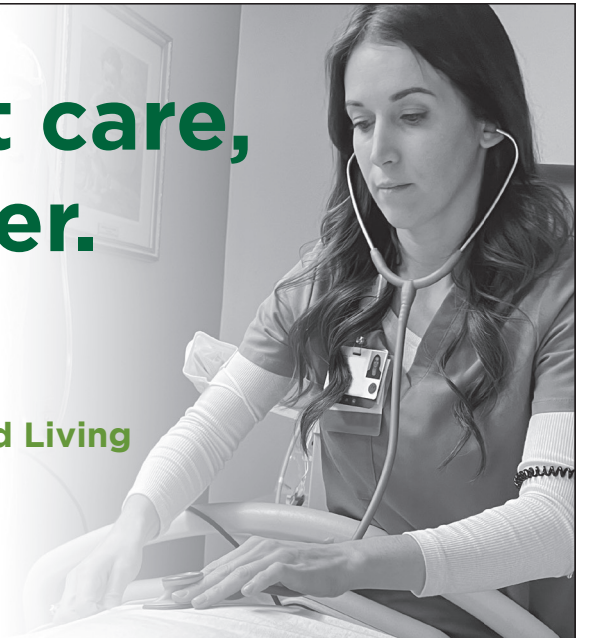


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HEALTH NETWORK

Alice Hyde Medical Center



# Harrisville Family Health Center opens

## NEW PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT: Persons hired to staff clinic

Staff report

HARRISVILLE — The Harrisville Family Health Center, 14214 Church St., opened Aug. 28, following approval by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) for the Lewis County Health System's certificate of need and an onsite review resulting in the issuing of the occupancy certificate.

"This is great news for the Harrisville community," said Gerald R. Cayer, CEO, Lewis County Health System. "We are pleased to be able to provide patients in the Harrisville area with local access to health care. This would not have been possible without the support of the hospital Board of Managers, town of Diana, Legislator Herb Frost and former Legislator Phil Hathaway."

The health system worked to revitalize and modernize the health center and ensure the facility met all the NYSDOH requirements.

The health center will be staffed by a physician assistant, a licensed practical nurse and a physician office assistant. R. Brian Shambo will serve as medical director of the clinic.

Lewis County Health System has hired physician assistant Amanda Persons to see patients and provide a full range of primary health care services for the entire



### Persons

family five days a week at the Harrisville Health Center.

"I am thrilled to welcome Amanda Persons to assist LCHS in providing full-time access to care for the residents of Harrisville, Diana, and surrounding communities," said Mr. Cayer.

Ms. Persons earned her master of science physician assistant at the State University of New York at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse. She received her bachelor of science in medical technology from the State University of New York at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, and a bachelor of arts biology with a minor in chemistry at the State University of Oswego.

"Dr. Shambo and his nurse helped to recruit Amanda Persons to join them in caring for the Har-



The Harrisville Family Health Center on Church Street, Harrisville, has reopened. Elaine M. Avallone/Johnson Newspapers

risville community," said Dr. Sean Harney, LCHS Chief Medical Officer, Employed Medical Practices. "With her experience and enthusiasm for delivering the highest quality of family medical care, she will be a great addition to our team, and serve our patients well."

Ms. Persons came to Lewis County from Canton where she served as direc-

tor/physician assistant at SUNY Canton Davis Health Center. She supervised the staff and operations of the health center and provided patients with a wide range of medical care for patients of all ages, from infants to geriatrics, with wellness needs, acute care, and chronic condition management. Ms. Persons also worked as a physician assis-

tant at Healey Medical Practice and Maplewood Nursing Home in Canton.

The Harrisville Health Center will be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information call the Harrisville Health Center at 315-537-5041.

A community open house celebration will be scheduled in early October.

## New York officials plan campaign to increase awareness of the 988 hotline

By ALEX GAULT

agault@wdt.net

September is national Suicide Prevention Month, and in New York, officials are putting a few new programs into place to address suicide, self harm and mental illness.

On Monday, Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul signed a handful of bills into law that are aimed at expanding access to and awareness of suicide prevention tools like the 988 hotline.

The state is launching a \$5 million public awareness

campaign for the 988 hotline, which serves as a resource that anyone can contact at any time to get help in times of psychological crisis or when having suicidal thoughts, or if a close friend or family member is in crisis. Callers are put in touch with licensed counselors who can provide talk therapy over the phone and connect the caller with supportive services nearby.

The 988 hotline went live in 2022, replacing the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and its 10-digit number. The 988 hotline can be called or text-messaged toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

New York's campaign is titled "We Hear You," and will be extended across social media and web ads, billboards, college campuses, sporting events, radio and television, and will feature some community-specific messaging.

Information about the 988 hotline will also now be printed on college student identification cards at public and private campuses across New York, and colleges will be required to annually distribute information on the hotline to students.

See **HOTLINE T23**

# SMC unveils expanded emergency department Behavioral Health Unit

By ANNA DOLDO

Samaritan Medical Center

WATERTOWN – Samaritan Medical Center officials unveiled the newly expanded Behavioral Health Unit within the Emergency Department with an open house and ribbon cutting event on Friday, September 6, 2024. The Mart Linve Behavioral Health Unit expansion was designed to meet the increased need for mental health services in our region.

“This ribbon cutting and open house event allows us to showcase true community support of mental health resources in our community and the help of our extremely generous supporters and community mental health partners,” said Thomas H. Carman, president and CEO. “Today we are celebrating a needed expansion inside our busy emergency department to stabilize and care for the patients, adults and children, who are having a life-threatening mental health crisis.”

The new space features 12 secure rooms, an increase of seven, four comfort rooms with special padding on the walls and floors that will be safer for patients with special needs, larger rooms for the patient, their families and the care team, an overall more calming space for patients, and a more secure space for staff.

Samaritan’s Emergency Department sees approximately 40,000 patients a year. Of these patients, many are facing a mental health crisis and may be a danger to themselves or others. Samaritan is the only hospital in Jefferson County that can treat and stabilize patients that need hospital care for a mental health emergency. Under the New York State Mental Hygiene Law, Samaritan is what is called the designated 9.39 hospital in Jefferson and Lewis Counties, and as such can offer adult patients access to inpatient treatment if necessary and can hold pediatric patients until proper inpatient placement is available to them. In 2022, Samaritan cared for 1,712 adults and 446 children. In 2023, cared for 1,804 adults and 428 children. And year to date for 2024 have seen 847 adults and 240 children.



Contributed.



Contributed.



Contributed.

“When the original Mart Linve Behavioral Health Unit was opened in 2010, the five-

bed secure behavioral health unit was adequate space for the patients being treated,” said John Green, RN, vice president patient care services and chief nursing officer. “In 2021 Emergency Department leadership and administration recognized the need for a significant investment and re-tooling of current space to accommodate

our increased average census and allow a better space for patients.”

“This new construction allowed us many more amenities for the safety of patients and staff,” added Tina O’Neil, director of mental health services. “Beyond simply adding more rooms for patients, the space is less institutional, more

therapeutic and outfitted to withstand the challenges that come from a mental health crisis. The space is more inviting and calming for all.”

During the ribbon cutting event, Mr. Carman thanked the generous donors who supported the need for in-

See UNIT 7



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# Build Better Habits with Samaritan's Healthy Lifestyles

By SAMARITAN MEDICAL CENTER

**I**t's no surprise that those who live healthier lives can live longer—but how much longer?

Depending on where you look or what you read, you'll find studies that have found individuals who exercise regularly, maintain a healthy diet, and don't smoke can live as much as 14 years longer than those who don't.

That's a lot of extra days to spend with family and friends, pursue favorite activities, or enjoy some peaceful (and healthy) time alone—and at a time when hours seem to be flying by, we'd all like to extend our lives as much as possible. Acknowledging this is the easy part.

Do you think changing habits is hard? If so, you're not alone.

"Whether with ambitious diets or New Year's resolutions, pursuing drastic changes can set even the best-intentioned people up for failure," says Dr. Joseph Wetterhahn, primary care physician at Samaritan. "Making big changes starts with small steps, like finding a program that can support your individual health goals."

This is how Samaritan's Healthy Lifestyles program has worked for many people.

## A HEALTHIER YOU, BY YOU

Good health doesn't happen in days, weeks, or overnight. It takes planning, information and support with the help of professionals, then a commitment from the individual to use what they've learned and make beneficial changes permanent.

Samaritan's Healthy Life-



Contributed by Samaritan Medical Center.

styles is designed to provide direction to those interested in pursuing healthier habits and teach how to self-manage one's own health, fitness routine, and overall wellness in the years ahead.

"Through our Healthy Lifestyles program, we're able to show people healthier ways to live," says Teresa Intorcchia, a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) with Healthy Lifestyles. "With a combination of education and helpful guidance, we can support each individual as they make changes that, little by little, can lead to big results."

Monitored by Samaritan physicians, the program uses a comprehensive approach to chronic disease treatment and prevention that includes nutrition, ex-

ercise, and behavior therapy for those in need. Health education is provided in both group and individual settings; and as each enrollee advances through the program, reports are provided to their individual physicians to inform of their ongoing progress.

"These progress reports can provide both information and motivation, and that motivation is certainly a goal of the program," says Dr. Wetterhahn. "Maintaining one's health isn't an easy job, so we're happy to provide a push to those pursuing a better life."

## WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM HEALTHY LIFESTYLES?

All children and adults could benefit from guidance available through Samaritan's

Healthy Lifestyles program.

But the program can provide essential help for those currently suffering from diagnosed medical conditions such as:

- obesity
- diabetes
- Celiac disease
- eating disorders
- heart disease
- lipid/cholesterol
- cancer
- hypertension
- lung disease
- failure to thrive
- tube-feeding
- and much, much more

All services within the Healthy Lifestyles program require a physician referral. Please contact your insurance company to verify coverage.

## AN ADDED FOCUS ON WEIGHT MAN-

## AGEMENT AND WELLNESS

Saying no to food can be hard—especially when excessive eating can provide comfort in the most stressful of times.

If you're looking for help focusing specifically on managing these urges, then the Healthy Lifestyles Weight Management and Wellness program may be for you. It's designed to give adults the tools they need to be successful in achieving their initial weight loss goals, and then manage a healthy weight for life.

"Weight loss success can be as simple as having the right tools," says Intorcchia. "With this segment of our Healthy Lifestyles program, we try to provide as many tools as possible, all to help with the individualized needs of each enrollee."

Led by a team of nutrition and weight loss professionals, enrollees can learn how to:

- develop healthy eating habits
- make a menu within a budget
- shop smart at the supermarket
- get energized with exercise
- pursue and practice healthier habits year-round

To learn more about Samaritan and the various aspects of its Healthy Lifestyles program, visit <https://samaritanhealth.com/service/healthy-lifestyles-program/>, or call (315) 785-4667.



## Unit

From T5

creased mental health services in our community. The leading donors to this project were Mart Liinve, Jefferson County Community

Services and Board of Legislators, Mary and Ted Mascott, Children's Miracle Network of Northern New York at Samaritan, Samaritan Medical Center Foundation donors along with Foundation event proceeds from A North Country Festival of Trees and the Thousand Is-

land Golf Tournament. A special thank you was given to Tim Reutten, Jefferson County Director of Community Services and county officials who were instrumental in making this expansion possible by allotting some of the County's opioid settlement funds to this project.

# 'RAVE REVIEWS'

INAUGURAL ADIRONDACK NATURE FESTIVAL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DRAWS A CROWD

Plan is to hold new event at Paul Smith's College VIC again

By **AARON MARBONE**

Adirondack Daily Enterprise

**PAUL SMITHS** — The organizers of the first-ever Adirondack Nature Festival for People with Disabilities last weekend say they are getting "rave reviews" from people with disabilities who attended. They plan to make the event an annual gathering and have already set a date for next year — Sept. 13, a Saturday.

Kim Hill Ridley, who was named as the state's first-ever Chief Disability Officer in 2022, attended the first festival last Saturday and said it was amazing to see people with a variety of disabilities participating in nature the same way as able-bodied people.

Nick Friedman, the founder of Accessible Adirondack Tourism and co-chair of the festival's planning committee, said Hill Ridley was profusely

grateful to be there, which he found odd, because he was profusely grateful to have her there.

Festival founder and planning committee co-chair Helene Gibbens estimated there were around 134 attendees, and Friedman estimated there were around 200 people attending the event, including people who did not enter through the main building.

Gibbens had said they'd be measuring success at the festival in terms of smiles. She said there were plenty during the guided and self-guided walks along the trails at the Paul Smith's College Visitor Interpretive Center, birding sessions, craft workshops, story sharing around a campfire, and around the live music and art from people with disabilities.

"It's only going to grow,"



**Attendees of the first Adirondack Nature Festival for People with Disabilities take in the forest of the Paul Smith's College Visitor Interpretive Center on a sensory walk led by festival co-founder Helene Gibbens, left, on Saturday.** Provided photo/Sydney Schmidt

Gibbens said.

She said there are already

people making plans for new events at next year's festival. Gibbens and Friedman thanked their volunteer staff, donors and sponsors for bringing the festival together.

Friedman said an event like this has been a long time coming.

One in five people in New York have a disability according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Disabilities can include mobility difficulties, developmental disabilities or mental health disorders. They can be visible or invisible, too.

Friedman said the event was well received, even with the rainy weather.

"The rain didn't damper a single smile," he said.

The nature walk started with the largest group Gibbens has led — with around 40 people on the trail. Many of these people had visual impairments, she said, so there was a focus on the other senses — touching the bark of trees, feeling the rain, hearing, the burbling of the waters and smelling the pine.

Afterward, Gibbens said

attendees told her they felt at peace and relaxed from the experience.

Gibbens said there is always support and community in nature to be found in the birds and boulders.

"Accessible trails are in extremely short supply," Friedman said.

He could think of five accessible trails in the area.

The VIC only has one wheelchair accessible trail — the Barnum Brook Trail — and it is only accessible if traveled counterclockwise. Gibbens said VIC officials plan to make the trail fully accessible.

Friedman said people ask if the Adirondacks really need more accessible trails. He said they do. He's excited for Adirondack Land Trust's plans for accessible trails at its Glenview Preserve tract in Harrietstown and another preserve at the corner of state Route 73 and the Adirondack Loj Road in Lake Placid.

At the festival, Mary Lamica, the interim executive director of Tri-Lakes Center for Inde-

See **PAUL SMITHS T20**

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# Students get hands-on medical experience

By **ELAINE M. AVALLONE**  
eavallone@lowville.com

**L**OWVILLE — This summer, Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization's Health Workforce MASH Camp offered a no-cost, hands-on learning experience for area students interested in healthcare career fields.

MASH — Medical Academy of Science and Health — Camp is a unique opportunity for students in grades 8-12 to experience and explore the healthcare industry in an interactive way. By participating in hands-on activities that highlight various career opportunities, students learn about the educational requirements, skills, typical job duties and personal qualities of specific healthcare professions.

"Students are given the opportunity to participate in various hands-on activities, shadow in the hospital, clinics and other departments, where they observe patient care, interactions, procedures



**Participating in the Carthage Area Hospital MASH were, from left, Autumn Strader from South Jefferson High School; Mya Brown, Watertown High School; Morgan Wheeler, Indian River High School; Payton Kirby, Gouverneur High School; Victoria Wood, Carthage High School; and Jenna Dinzler, South Jefferson.** Photo provided by FDRHPO

and even administrative activities," Beth Solar, FDRHPO workforce outreach manager. "When students apply for MASH Camp they are asked to identify their top three areas of interest, with that we try to pair their rotations at MASH camp that are in those areas or align with them."

Six students took advantage of the opportunity at Carthage Area Hospital in July and seven attended the program at Lewis County General Hospital in August.

The Carthage MASH included a visit from Life Net and the Lewis County program observed a drone demonstra-

tion provided by Lewis County Sheriff's Office and saw how triaging is done in a major catastrophe by participating in a mock mass casualty incident.

During both programs, the students rotated in various departments of the hospital to observe the daily activities and job duties of many professionals and received CPR training

In total, 79 students that participated in MASH Camp amongst all the locations — Carthage Area Hospital, River

Hospital, Canton-Potsdam Hospital, Gouverneur Hospital, Samaritan Medical Center and Lewis County Health System.

These camps are held over three days, typically from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the summer and then again during the February break. This is open to any student in grades 8 to 12, in any school district throughout Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties.

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# First responder efforts praised after helicopter crash in West Carthage

Times staff report

CARTHAGE — Local first responders have been recognized for their efforts after a helicopter crash in West Carthage this summer.

LifeNet of New York 7-10 clinicians Luke Gasowski and Rod Kester, along with other emergency medical service agencies, were honored Sept. 12 by New York Assemblyman Kenneth D. Blankenbush, R-Black River, for their exceptional teamwork and critical care response following a helicopter crash. While the patient succumbed to his injuries, all involved EMS agencies — LifeNet 7-10 based in Watertown, Guilfoyle Ambulance and Carthage Area Rescue Squad (CARS) — were recognized for their efforts.

“The patient passed away at the hospital. While this is never an outcome we want to see, everyone involved at the scene worked as hard as they could to resuscitate and stabilize the patient as best they could,” CARS Captain Ashley Gillis, said of the July crash that killed Carthage resident Gary R. Johnson, 65. “In my years of service, I’ve never seen teamwork flow like it did that day. The professionalism and display of care for both the patient and everyone involved in this call were outstanding.”

Initial response was provided by Guilfoyle Ambulance, CARS and Carthage Fire Department. Due to the patient’s need for critical care and rapid transport, LifeNet 7-10 was dispatched and safely landed through a coordinated landing zone, arriving as close to the patient as possible. Upon LifeNet’s arrival at the scene, West Carthage Fire Department and Fort Drum personnel were also on scene



Those involved in caring for the victim of a helicopter crash in West Carthage in July were recently honored by Assemblyman Kenneth D. Blankenbush. Provided photo

assisting where needed.

“Arriving to a handful of different EMS agencies is a fairly unique occurrence. Often times with multiple response agencies, there can be a feeling that ‘there are too many cooks in the kitchen,’ but it didn’t feel that way at all,” said Gasowski, LifeNet flight paramedic and clinical base lead. “The way everyone came together to give that patient the best opportunity at survival felt almost rehearsed, like we’ve trained together for years for this type of incident.”

Blankenbush personally thanked the EMS teams not

only for their collaboration and teamwork in patient care but for their dedication to the community.

Each person received an award plaque for their patient care service.

“This is the reflection of teamwork by our local EMS,” Blankenbush said. “We are extremely fortunate to have their services and devoted personnel putting community safety first.”

Kester, LifeNet flight nurse, echoed the assemblyman’s sentiment saying, “This recognition is truly for the ground EMS teams who did a

tremendous job working with everyone, thrown together from multiple agencies and synergizing into more than the sum of parts. It wasn’t the normal experience, and regardless of patient outcome, the ability to come together deserves recognition for those teams.”

The LifeNet team is certified and has state-of-the-art specialty care training that provides the same level of care one would receive in the hospital during air medical transport from the scene or for interfacility transports.

Equipped with indus-

try-leading equipment and medical devices, the team carries and has the ability to administer whole blood in flight, provide advanced airway intervention, cardiac and blood flow monitoring, medication administration, and other advanced surgical procedures.

LifeNet is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems (CAMTS) — the highest standards in safety, clinical practice, quality assurance and training in the industry.



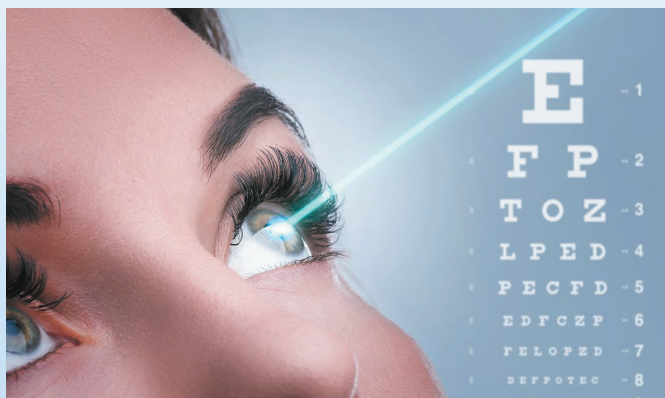
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# Children's Home expands services to Lewis County

Johnson Newspapers

WATERTOWN — The Children's Home of Jefferson County, the area's long-established nonprofit organization, has announced the expansion of its mental health services to Lewis County.

The Children's Home will be providing services at the Lewis County Social Services Department, 5274 Outer Stowe St., Lowville, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every Monday and Tuesday.

The Children's Home's clinic site offers comprehensive

mental health services that address the diverse needs of the community.

Services include:

- Diagnostic Assessments: Thorough evaluations to understand the unique needs of each client.

- Individual and Group Therapy: Personalized and group-based therapeutic approaches designed to support mental health and well-being.

- Medication Management: Ongoing evaluation and management of medication to ensure effective treat-



ment.

- Crisis Intervention: Immediate support and intervention for clients experiencing mental health crises.

- Telehealth Services: Convenient and accessible mental health services available remotely.

"We are excited to bring our

mental health services closer to the residents of Lewis County," said Kristy Auman, marketing and events coordinator at The Children's Home. "Our team is dedicated to supporting client recovery and enhancing overall functioning through a wide range of services that are now more accessible than ever."

To schedule an appointment or for more information about services, contact the Watertown office at 315-782-7445.

## Lead found in several ground cinnamon products tested by Consumer Reports

By TEDDY AMENABAR

The Washington Post

A new study by Consumer Reports has found concerning levels of lead in one-third of tested ground cinnamon and cinnamon spice blends, nearly a year after a recall of millions of cinnamon applesauce pouches alarmed consumers around the country.

Experts say trace levels of the heavy metal can often be found in the spice, and all of the tested spices had detectable amounts of lead. But 12 out of the 36 products contained levels of lead above at least one part per million.

"I think, if we actually tested more, or tested over time, we might even have found more," said James Rogers, director of food safety research and testing at Consumer Reports.

There's no safe amount of lead exposure, health officials say. Prolonged exposures to high levels of lead at a young age can stunt growth, delay puberty and lead to lower IQ levels or learning disabilities.

Although Consumer Reports used a threshold of one part per million to evaluate lead levels, there are no federal guidelines for heavy metals in spices. The Food and Drug Administration has been posting public health alerts regarding cinnamon products that have greater than two parts per million of lead.

The Consumer Reports study included ground cinnamon as well as spice blends, such as five-spice powder and garam masala, purchased online and in 17 stores in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.

Consumer Reports recommended that consumers not use and throw away the 12 products that tested above 1 ppm.

Among the 12 brands that fared the worst in testing, the highest levels of lead were detected in Paras cinnamon powder (3.52 ppm) and EGN cinnamon powder (2.91 ppm).

A distributor for EGN told The Washington Post it has removed the product from stores. A representative for Apna Wholesale, a former distributor of Paras cinnamon powder, said in an email that the company "immediately sent a recall letter" when it learned of the high lead content in the spice. "We also stopped buying or importing any cinnamon powder," the email said. "We have

taken all the necessary steps."

A spokesperson for Wakefern Food Corp. said its products, which include Shoprite's Bowl & Basket ground cinnamon, have tested "well under" accepted worldwide benchmarks. "The quality of our products is of the utmost importance and our cinnamon meets all safety and quality standards."

Representatives for Mimi's Products, Three Rivers, Rani Brand and Badia didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. The Post could not determine contact information for Deep, Zara Foods, Spicy King, Yu Yee Brand and BaiLiFeng.

Laura Shumow, executive director of the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA), said in an email that the U.S. spice industry is "committed to ensuring spices remain safe," and that the trade group has established guidance levels for metals in spices, including two parts per million for lead.

"The limit of 1 ppm used by Consumer Reports is lower than the levels being used by ASTA, FDA, the European Union and other regulatory authorities," Shumow said.

Consumer Reports said that 18 products tested showed relatively low lead levels and were "okay to use." The testers said six brands with only trace amounts ranging from 0.02 ppm to 0.15 ppm were "best to use."

John Tillison, director of operations for Penzeys Spices, which had three products in the "okay to use" group, said in an email that raw materials are "tested prior to grinding." "With all of our spices, if we can get certified metal testing done by a supplier, we will accept that. If not, we have it tested by a certified lab before processing or packaging."

A spokesman for Amazon, which owns the brand Happy Belly, which was also in the "okay to use" group, said the findings from Consumer Reports show that the company's products meet current regulatory and industry standards for spices. (Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

Shumow said there's a difference between trace levels of lead found in spices and "excessive lead levels" that are the result of economically motivated adulteration. After the applesauce pouch recall, the Food and Drug Administration detected up to 5,110 parts per million of

lead in cinnamon collected at the manufacturing facility in Ecuador that produced the recalled pouches.

"The levels of lead in the cinnamon used in the tainted applesauce were thousands of times higher than the lead levels in the cinnamon reported in the Consumer Reports article and recent FDA investigation," Shumow said. "ASTA considers the intentional adulteration of spices the most serious public health threat related to the potential presence of lead in spices."

A spokesperson for the FDA said in an email that companies are not required to test ingredients or products for heavy metals, but the agency is seeking to change this and require the industry to do so, as well as expand its oversight capabilities.

Asked about the Consumer Reports study, the spokesperson said the agency does not comment on "non-regulatory sample results."

### SHOULD I AVOID USING CINNAMON?

Cinnamon is made from dried shoots of harvested tree bark and is largely grown in Indonesia, Vietnam, China and Sri Lanka.

Lead may be found naturally in soil, but contamination also can occur because of nearby industrial activity, roadways or even volcanic ash.

Some experts say the amount of lead in one serving of cinnamon at the levels detected in the Consumer Reports study wouldn't typically be of concern to human health. But consistent exposure could pose a risk, especially for those most vulnerable to lead's harmful effects, including infants and young children.

"It's a question of how much you're swallowing, how old the child is, and the concentration, of course," said Jack Caravanos, a clinical professor of environmental public health sciences at New York University. "If I was advising my daughter feeding her kids, I would say I wouldn't quite worry about this right now. I would stay with name-brand products, and spices."

Francisco Diez-Gonzalez, director of the Center for Food Safety at University of Georgia, said the safety threshold for lead - and the difference in risk between 1 ppm or 2 ppm - remains a "gray area."

# High cancer rates found near former Air Brake

STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT REPORT RELEASED AFTER 12 YEARS



**James Barker, a northside resident with concerns over alleged contaminants from New York Air Brake in Kelsey Creek, is pictured in 2015 at the bridge by North Watertown Cemetery on Bradley Street.** Watertown Daily Times

By **CRAIG FOX**  
cfox@wdt.net

**WATERTOWN —** James P. Barkerb feels validated by a recent state health department report on the health impacts from the toxic contaminants possibly dumped at the former New York Air Brake plant on Starbuck Avenue decades ago.

Twelve years ago, north side residents prompted the state Department of Health to conduct the environmental study on the former plant after expressing various health issues. The report was released on Wednesday.

In an interview on Thursday, Barker, 52, who grew up on East Division Street and moved back to live in his childhood home in 2017, wasn't surprised that the Health Department investigation found higher cancer rates among residents living near the old Air Brake plant.

About a dozen years ago, Barker, his brother, Scott, and childhood friend An-

drew G. Williams, who lived next door on East Division Street, conducted their own research about the potential health issues caused by the plant after hearing about so many people dying of cancer in the neighborhood over the decades.

The report proves what they already knew, he said.

"I appreciate the effort," James Barker said. "But I don't know its value. I think it validated what we knew."

They were convinced that the toxic chemicals from the plant caused high cancer rates and muscular and neurological illnesses of many people in those neighborhoods.

According to the report, the environmental investigation conducted by the health department found that the number of cancer cases in males were "statistically significantly" higher living near the Air Brake plant, compared to expected numbers based on rates for people in the state.

The report also showed moderately low birth weight births and small ges-

tational age births "were significantly elevated" when compared to the state average.

However, the "health outcomes review" did not reveal those kind of cancer rate elevations for females living near the Air Brake plant compared to the state.

The cancer review included all types of cancers diagnosed among residents in the area from 1996 to 2019. According to the report, a total of 548 cancer cases were reported to the state's Cancer Registry in the area of the Air Brake plant, with 281 cases observed in males and higher than the 238 expected in the state.

While the study looked at 18 different kinds of cancers, the most common types of observed cases of cancer for males included prostate with 67 cases (65 cases expected), 52 lung cases (33 cases expected) and 34 colorectal (22 cases expected).

The investigation found that 94% of the males with lung cancer smoked. The report also attributed the



**Construction crews work on a water diversion project on Kelsey Creek in Watertown in 2016.** Watertown Daily Times

birth rate outcomes to potentially being tied to mothers who smoked.

The health department took on the investigation in 2012 after the Cancer Surveillance Report received a request from an Ogdensburg woman who grew up near the plant and later had two sons who suffered from a rare brain disorder.

For years, residents expressed concerns about site-related contaminants impacting the surrounding area and via soil-vapor intrusion. They were concerned about chemicals and metals that were dumped and later found in nearby Kelsey and Oily creeks and other tributaries.

They were particularly concerned about levels of trichloroethylene, or TCE,

and Polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs, found in the neighborhood over the years. TCE and PCBs are carcinogens, while TCE also can cause nerve disorders.

For decades, the plant consisted of a foundry, die-cast facility, machine shop and other operations in support of its manufacturing process for the railroad industry in the original Starbuck Avenue facility.

When they received an email from the Health Department on Wednesday, the two brothers were not expecting the results of the 13-page report after not hearing anything about its status for years.

James Barker's first thoughts were: why did it



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# Carthage

## Area Hospital

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# Raising Awareness and Offering Support During Suicide Prevention Month

By JESSICA BOWLINE

Carthage Area Hospital

September is Suicide Prevention Month, dedicated to raising awareness, supporting those affected, and encouraging conversations around mental health. Millions are impacted by suicide each year, either directly or through the loss of loved ones. During this month, organizations like Carthage Area Hospital (CAH) focus on recognizing warning signs, offering support, and understanding the role of mental health services in prevention. Recognizing these signs and taking action early can make a life-saving difference, empowering friends, families, and communities to help those in need.

**Suicide Rates Across Age Groups and Populations: Key Statistics**

In 2022, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death in the United States. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention there were nearly 49,476 deaths and 1.9 million attempts (2022). Suicide affects various age groups and populations in different ways. For instance, it is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10-34 in the United States. Among older adults, particularly those aged 85 and older, suicide rates are also alarmingly high, possibly due to factors such as isolation, illness, or loss of independence. The LGBTQ+ community, veterans, and individuals in rural areas also face heightened risks for suicide due to a range of complex social,

economic, and mental health factors.

Understanding that suicide does not discriminate by age, gender, or socioeconomic status helps us approach prevention in a more holistic way, encouraging the recognition of risk factors across all walks of life.

**Common Warning Signs of Suicidal Thoughts**

Recognizing warning signs of suicidal thoughts is a crucial first step in helping someone who may be at risk. While every individual is unique, some common behaviors may indicate a person is struggling. These include:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself: Even if it seems like a casual comment or a joke, any mention of suicide should be taken seriously.

- Increased substance use: Turning to alcohol or drugs more frequently can be a sign of distress.

- Withdrawal from friends, family, and activities: Social isolation is a common behavior seen in individuals with suicidal thoughts.

- Extreme mood swings: Sudden mood shifts, such as going from deeply depressed to unusually cheerful, can be a red flag.

- Engaging in risky or self-destructive behavior: This could include reckless driving, drug abuse, or other dangerous activities.

- Feeling hopeless or trapped: Expressing thoughts like "There's no way out" or "I can't take this anymore" is a sig-

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# FDRHPO and NCI Projects address unmet healthcare needs



**Pictured is Nicole Koster, ARC Jefferson-St. Lawrence Physical Therapist who is one of two therapists now credentialed as a Balance and Falls Specialist thanks to the grant funding received through North Country Initiative. Nicole works with Sharon on her balance at The Arc Jefferson - St. Lawrence Article 16 Clinic located at 420 Gaffney Drive in Watertown.**

**By HOLLY BONAME**

FDRHPO

Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO) and the North Country Initiative (NCI), a partnership of clinical and community-based organizations serving people in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties, strategically pinpointed several unmet healthcare needs in the North Country. This unique partnership resulted in successful outcomes that increased access to care, improved quality of care, and directly impacted the health and wellness of patients.

Funded by NCI's 2023-24 round of "Promising Practices" awards, an initiative developed to support best healthcare practices and test innovative pilots to fill physical, social, and behavioral healthcare needs, NCI strategically invested in three priority areas through its latest Promising Practices Fund round of awards: preventing and/or managing chronic disease, increasing preventive/primary care, and behavioral health and/or substance use prevention and management. This initiative took place from April 2023 through

March 2024 and was selected by a community review committee.

The seven healthcare-related organizations and their projects included:

- ARC Jefferson-St. Lawrence - Reducing Fall Risk of Intellectually/Developmentally Disabled Residents - Provided training to staff, purchased 100 gait belts, 102 slip-resistant mats, 15 wheelchairs, and two sit-to-stand trolleys which resulted in a 13% fall reduction and two new certified balance and fall specialists.

- Bolton's Pharmacy - Diabetes Self-Management Education (DSME) & Support Program - Reconfigured space to allow for 10-15 DSME participants; purchased a bariatric weight scale, blood pressure machine, projector, classroom material, and take-home blood pressure monitors; provided participant incentives (gas cards, water bottles) and blood glucose monitoring kits; and created marketing and outreach plans which resulted in Bolton's becoming a Medicare-approved DSMES site with 6 payor contracts pending, 40 patients having Continuous Glucose Monitoring and 4 patients participating in 1:1 DSMES with one experiencing a 1-point A1c

decrease.

- Credo Community Center (now known as "THRIVE Wellness and Recovery Inc.") - Targeted Case Management for High-Risk Individuals - Targeted Case Manager (TCM) provided care management & coordination to high-risk patients resulting in 364 completed health-related social needs screenings, TCMs engaged with 482 patients (discharge follow-ups, referrals to clinical & social services), one patient with high volume of ED visits not having any since the engagement, and 2 TCM staff who continue work post-award.

- Pediatric Associates of Watertown - Improving Quality of Care in the Pediatric Population - Acquired resources to increase outreach to Managed Medicaid patients due for a well-child visit and overcome the barriers to attending the visit which resulted in 440 well-child visits complete (29% of total Medicaid population).

- Pediatric Wellness of NNY (formerly "Watertown Pediatrics") - New Home for Pediatric Wellness of NNY - Added four new exam rooms, a conference space, providers, an in-house lead and hemoglobin testing



**Pediatric Wellness of Northern New York. Contributed.**

machine, a sensory room, interactive toys, and a reading corner which resulted in a 30% patient visit increase, 100% lead screening rate, longer visit time for children who required a nebulizer and in the future they plan to incorporate a mental health counselor and purchase a spirometer and bilirubin blankets.

- South Jefferson Rescue Squad - Fall Prevention Program - Engaged with patients at high risk for future falls in Southern Jefferson communities and conducted home inspections; rearranged cords, decluttered walkways, installed mobility equipment/night lights, demonstrated exercises; and connected to services. This resulted in working with 50 people ages 56-94 who have a fall history; 24 group sessions with patients/caregivers; a 38% decrease in 911 fall calls among patients with a history of them, and a 62% decrease for patients who experienced their first fall call during the grant period.

- Watertown Urban Mission - Addressing Social Determinants of Health through the CARE Center - Provided/connected under-resourced individuals with services to address

social & healthcare needs. This resulted in 457 individuals engaged in the CARE Center, each with social determinant of health screening; 90% who screened positive received referrals for services they otherwise were not aware of; seasonal events and 3 blood drives; and 9 people have become stably housed, have health insurance and SNAP benefits after using the drop-in center in the winter.

"We are honored to have been able to support these seven partner organizations and their projects," said Erika Flint, NCI Director. "The awardees span a range of health & wellness provider types, including social care, primary care, behavioral health, emergency services, pharmacy, and intellectually/developmentally disabled services. This is a testament to the diversity of services in our region, and to the utility in involving multiple service types in projects that seek to impact health and wellness across populations. These projects demonstrate measurable impacts in those they served, and we look forward to seeing their work continue post-award."

# USPS launches new Forever stamps honoring healthcare community

By **DALLAS GAGNON**  
masslive.com

**T**he U.S. Postal Service and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have teamed up to launch a new commemorative Forever stamp that will “pay tribute to the healthcare community,” according to USPS.

“USPS will recognize the healthcare community, as these individuals dedicate their lives to protect our health, safety and well-being, often at great personal risk,” the postal service said in a release.

The healthcare community consists of physicians, surgeons, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, lab technicians, orderlies, home health aides, hospital custodians and emergency medical workers and among others.

The stamp features a



USPS

“THANK YOU” note made of various health-related icons including a silver and green caduceus, a microscope,

bandaids, a stethoscope, heart monitor and caring

hands. Across the lower right corner of the stamp reads “Healthcare” in gray and “Community” in surgical green.

Read more: USPS plans to increase shipping costs — here’s when and how much

It is available for preorder and will go on sale on Oct. 1, in panes of 20.

As a Forever stamp, it will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price, which is 73 cents per stamp.

Stamps can be purchased through the Postal Store at [usps.com/shopstamps](https://usps.com/shopstamps), by calling 844-737-7826, by mail through USA Philatelic or at Post Office locations nationwide.

Additional information on stamps, first-day-of-issue ceremonies and stamp-inspired products can be found at [StampsForever.com](https://StampsForever.com).

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Regular dental visits are important for a healthy smile, but you can take these steps between checkups to ensure your dentist sees your oral health at its best.

1. Brush up on your dental routine. “A consistent routine of brushing and cleaning between your teeth is essential,” said American Dental Association (ADA) dentist, Mirissa Price, D.M.D. “My patients often ask me, do I really need to floss if I’m brushing regularly? The answer is always yes.”

The ADA recommends brushing twice daily with a soft brush and fluoride toothpaste to remove cavity-causing plaque and help prevent harmful conditions like gum disease. A worn toothbrush won’t clean as effectively, so replace the brush every three or four months, or sooner if the bristles are frayed.

2. Skip the spoonful of sugar. “I’m a dentist but I still enjoy a cupcake now and then, so

it’s not about cutting out sugar completely,” said ADA dentist, Erinne Kennedy, D.M.D. “Rather it’s the small changes, like choosing fresh fruit instead of juice or eating a snack that balances protein and carbohydrates, such as whole wheat toast and cottage cheese, that can go a long way to protect your teeth.”

Plaque bacteria use the sugar you consume to produce acids that attack the hard surfaces of teeth, leading to tooth decay.

3. Nix the nicotine. “Despite the influx of nicotine products claiming to be better for you, there is no such thing as ‘good for you’ nicotine or a safe amount of nicotine,” said Dr. Kennedy. “All products pose risks to your dental and overall health, whether you’re a habitual or casual user.”

E-cigarettes, also known as “vapes,” come with their own risks. Researchers have found harmful materials in vape cartridges, including chemicals known to cause cancer.

# YMCA focuses on living with, through and beyond breast cancer

By MICHELLE GRAHAM  
YMCA

Laurie's Light is a Watertown Family YMCA program specifically design for those who are living with, through, or beyond breast cancer and includes a family membership that can be a vital component of the recovery process after breast cancer, offering both physical and emotional benefits to survivors and their loved ones. After the intense treatments involved in breast cancer recovery, such as surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation, patients often experience physical fatigue, loss of strength, and emotional stress.

Watertown Family YMCA provides a welcoming, supportive environment where survivors can engage in low-impact, guided exercise programs tailored to their needs. Regular physical activity has been shown to improve strength, reduce fatigue, and enhance the overall quality of life for cancer survivors. The YMCA's variety of wellness programs, including swimming, yoga, and strength training, allows individuals to regain their physical stamina at their own pace in a safe and encouraging atmosphere.

Beyond the physical recovery, a family membership at the Watertown Family YMCA fosters emotional healing and reconnection. The journey through cancer can often isolate patients and their families,

creating feelings of anxiety and stress. A family membership allows survivors and their families to spend quality time together in a fun and uplifting environment. Whether it's participating in group fitness classes, swimming together, or enjoying recreational activities, the YMCA offers opportunities to rebuild relationships and strengthen family bonds that may have been strained during the difficult treatment process. Being surrounded by a supportive community helps survivors and their loved ones feel less alone, fostering a sense of belonging and hope.

Watertown Family YMCA promotes overall well-being with support programs for breast cancer survivors providing them a chance to connect with others who have experienced similar challenges, creating a network of understanding and empathy. Sharing experiences and learning from one another can be an important part of emotional recovery.

The YMCA's family-focused approach ensures that the well-being of not just the survivor, but their entire family is nurtured, recognizing the holistic impact of cancer on loved ones and fostering resilience together.

Watertown Family YMCA-building healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

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# LAURIE'S LIGHT

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For those who are living with, through, or beyond breast cancer.

## Program Includes FREE FAMILY 1-YEAR MEMBERSHIP TO WATERTOWN FAMILY YMCA

### YOUR PATH BACK INCLUDES

#### FREE FAMILY 1-YEAR MEMBERSHIP TO WATERTOWN FAMILY YMCA

Membership entitles you and your family use of the facility and programs and access to all three Watertown Family YMCA locations including Fairgrounds, Downtown, and Carthage.

#### LIVESTRONG® AT THE YMCA

This 12-week exercise and group support program focuses on improving the survivor's strength, fitness, and quality of life. In addition to physical benefits, the program also focuses on the emotional well-being of survivors and their families.

#### NORTH COUNTRY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

If you have been diagnosed with breast cancer, you may want to connect with others who understand how you feel, share stories, ask questions, and feel supported.

#### ACCESS TO A VARIETY OF Y PROGRAMS

Your family membership will allow you access to multiple programs including health & wellness, group exercise, swimming classes, yoga, and a variety of sports programming.



Laurie Mezzalingua 1968-2009  
Founder, Saint Agatha Foundation

Laurie Mezzalingua, a breast cancer patient for 12 years, established the Saint Agatha Foundation in 2004 to provide financial assistance to individuals in Central New York State who are afflicted with breast cancer. The Foundation is dedicated to providing support, comfort and care to breast cancer patients through financial assistance programs. The Saint Agatha Foundation provides support, allowing patients to focus on their treatment, not their bills.

### PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- Recovering from breast cancer.
- Strong personal desire to participate.
- Inform your physician that you plan to join the YMCA.
- Complete screening form and health questionnaire.
- Give permission for the YMCA Project Manager to contact your healthcare provider if necessary.

### YOUR PROGRAM GOALS

- Improve energy.
- Rebuild muscle mass and strength.
- Increase flexibility and endurance.
- Improve functional ability to do everyday tasks.
- Reduce the severity of therapy side effects and prevent weight gain.
- Develop an ongoing physical fitness program.
- Learn to live a healthy lifestyle not only as part of recovery but as a way of life.
- Enjoy a safe space to heal your mind, body & soul.

For program questions contact:  
Michelle Graham  
Email: [mgraham@nnnymca.org](mailto:mgraham@nnnymca.org)  
Phone: 315.755.2133



In collaboration with the Saint Agatha Foundation, WATERTOWN FAMILY YMCA will be a beacon of light and support leading breast cancer survivors down the road to recovery.



WATERTOWNYMCA.ORG

# New providers join Hudson Headwaters

## *Center expands hours, accepting new patients*

Malone Telegram

**MALONE** — Three new providers joined Hudson Headwaters family health center in Malone earlier this month.

As of September, family nurse practitioners Susan Foster, Wilhelmina Sheridan and April Worlock are practicing in Malone and are accepting new patients, according to a prepared statement from Hudson Headwaters Health Network.

Hudson Headwaters Family Health, a primary care health center on Third Street by the Alice Hyde campus, has also expanded its hours to Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with two onsite providers available each day, according to the press release.

“Susan, Wilhelmina and April each bring a deep commitment to Hudson Headwaters, united by a shared passion for expanding health care access to every member of the community,” Melissa Gooley, the regional practice leader at Hudson Headwaters said, in the press release, “These providers will be convenient assets to patients in Malone, conducting checkups, managing chronic conditions, providing family planning services and other preventative care to individuals and families across all ages.”

Each new provider has connections and experiences serving rural communities, according to the press release.

The press release states Foster’s experience includes working with pa-

**April Worlock****Wilhelmina Sheridan****Susan Foster**

tients struggling with substance abuse and also serving as a pediatrics and ER nurse prior to becoming a nurse practitioner.

In addition to being passionate about health care, Sheridan is an active member of the Saranac Lake Voluntary Health Association and Rotary of Saranac Lake, as well as a ski instructor at Titus Mountain in Malone, according to the press release.

Worlock, who is originally from Malone, is raising her family in the region and looks forward to expanding preventative care options within her hometown.

“I was excited to see Hudson Headwaters come into the small town that I grew up in,” Worlock said, in the press release, “I am proud to be part of a non-profit health network that provides care to all regardless of ability to pay.”

Hudson Headwaters Family Health at Malone opened in December 2023 as a temporary center to address primary care needs in Malone and surrounding communities.

According to Dr. Tucker Slingerland, CEO of

the Hudson Headwaters Health Network, who spoke at the Malone Golf Club, last week during a town hall event, Hudson Headwaters first became interested in opening a clinic in the village after taking into account how many patients from Malone were utilizing their services elsewhere.

“We realized we had about 500 to 600 patients from Malone using our services in Saranac Lake, Champlain, and Plattsburgh,” he said, “People were driving an hour, sometimes, one-way just to get some of the access they needed.”

The health network is currently working to expand primary care access as it constructs a larger 13,000 square foot facility on the Alice Hyde campus.

Demolition of medical office buildings, formerly located at 183 Park and 24 Fourth streets, started early in June.

Hudson Headwaters plans to open the new facility, which will be named Malone Family Health, by late 2025 or early 2026 depending on weather and construction timelines,

according to the press release.

During last week’s forum at the golf club, Slingerland said Hudson Headwaters offers basic procedures related to family medicine including Pap smears and behavioral health.

“One thing we do a lot of is behavioral health. We typically embed a behavioral health specialist in the health center,” he said, “That’s been a really nice addition. I think for patients it feels better to be in a waiting room with all comers and that’s been a really nice service that we provide.”

Slingerland said ideally there would be a counselor and a nurse practitioner to provide behavioral health services in Malone.

Care management is another service that is offered, according to Slingerland.

More information on primary care with Hudson Headwaters Family Health at Malone is available over the phone at 518-824-2562 and online at HHHN.org.

## *Shining a light on prostate cancer awareness*

**By SAMARITAN MEDICAL CENTER**

September marks National Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, drawing attention to one of the most prevalent cancer types diagnosed in men in the United States.

Locally, Samaritan’s Urology Center provides a range of screening options, including the advanced UroNav system, which integrates MRI and ultrasound images to enhance the detection of prostate cancer during biopsies.

Dr. Kevin Chandler, urology medical director for Samaritan Medical Center said, “This system and our ability to offer in-office prostate biopsies can improve outcomes for our patients.”

For individuals diagnosed with prostate cancer, Samaritan Medical Center offers a pre-treatment solution for patients undergoing radiation therapy. The Walker Center for Cancer Care utilizes SpaceOAR™ Hydrogel, the first FDA-cleared spacer, to minimize rectal complications and support patients in preserving their quality-of-life following radiation treatment.

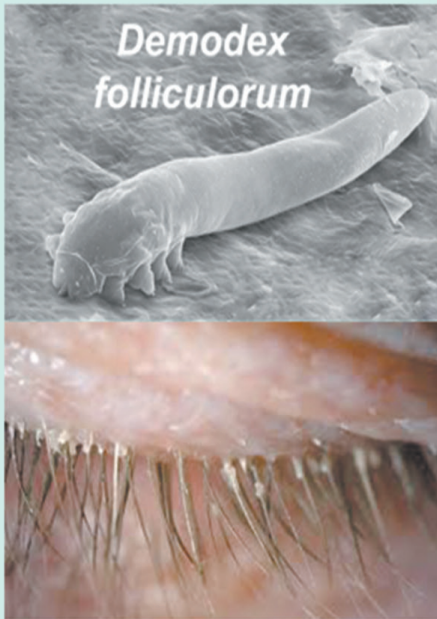
SpaceOAR Hydrogel allows the doctor to complement the patient’s radiation treatment to target their cancer better while preserving healthy tissue. The hydrogel spacer remains in place for about three months. After about six months, the hydrogel is naturally absorbed and cleared from the body in the patient’s urine.

Dr. Justin Budnik, radiation oncologist at the Walker Center said, “We understand men diagnosed with prostate cancer have some difficult decisions to make but knowing that an option like SpaceOAR Hydrogel can help limit the risk of damage to other organs during radiation treatment will hopefully make a few of those decisions easier.”

To inquire further about Samaritan’s comprehensive range of services, please visit [www.samaritanhealth.com](http://www.samaritanhealth.com).

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# 75 Years

From T3

Michelle LeBeau, in accepting the AHA award, said Alice Hyde's work caring for North Country communities goes together with its focus on addressing longstanding challenges that impact health care for rural communities and the health care organizations that serve them.

"Alice Hyde Medical Center is proud of our partnership with the American Hospital Association," said Michelle LeBeau, President of Alice Hyde Medical Center. "Improving health care and addressing the many challenges facing rural communities and the health care organizations that care for them requires strong partnerships and innovative solutions. We look forward to continuing to advance the health of individuals and communities throughout the North Country."

Established in 1913 with the support of philanthropic donations from communities throughout Franklin County and named in honor of a major donor's beloved niece who had recently passed away, Alice Hyde Medical Center filled a critical need for residents of North Country communities who, until the hospital's founding, were forced to travel long distances to receive medical care.

Throughout the proceeding decades, the hospital continued to add space and services, constructing a pediatric ward in the 1930s that was funded through a generous donation by the American Legion supplemented by community fundraising. In the 1950s and 60s, the hospital added a five-story building housing medical, surgical, obstetrical and nursing units – as well as dietary, x-ray and emergency services. In 1968, the hospital established the Alice Hyde Nursing Home to provide 24-hour skilled nursing care for Franklin County's aging population.

As medical technology continued to develop at a rapid pace, Alice Hyde' opened the Ben and Irene Bregman Memorial Wing in 1989, housing a fully computerized pharmacy, emergency department, ambulatory services, laboratory and medical imaging services.

In the 1990s, Alice Hyde dramatically expanded its presence in communities throughout Franklin County, establishing four community-based health centers – Besette Health Center, Dwyer Health Center, Leroux Health Center and Tower Health Center – to provide basic laboratory services and primary care. The centers, which are staffed by physicians and advance practice providers, earned federal certification as Rural Health Clinics in 2019. The hospital also established

the Reddy Cancer Treatment Center, a hemodialysis clinic and orthopedic and rehabilitation centers on its campus in Malone.

In 1999, the hospital was renamed Alice Hyde Medical Center, reflecting its evolution from an acute care facility to an organization offering a broad suite of primary and specialty services. That year, Alice Hyde also added an MRI suite to its imaging services.

The past two decades have seen Alice Hyde continue its commitment to connecting North Country communities with leading-edge health care. In 2009, the hospital was named Organization of the Year by the Malone Chamber of Commerce, celebrating its efforts in pursuit of innovative medicine, growth and community programs and recognizing Alice Hyde's economic impact as one of the largest employers in the community. In 2013, the hospital celebrated its 100-year anniversary.

In 2015 the hospital opened The Alice Center, a state-of-the-art long term care facility that includes a 135-bed Skilled Nursing Facility and a 30-bed Assisted Living Program. The first facility of its kind in the region, The Alice Center provides residents with a home-like atmosphere designed to promote privacy and dignity.

In 2017, Alice Hyde joined University of Vermont Health Network, becoming the fifth hospital to join the health

system and strengthening its ties to University of Vermont Medical Center, with which it had been affiliated since 1997. Alice Hyde's commitment to regional partnerships, both with UVM Medical Center and Plattsburgh-based UVM Health Network – Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital (CVPH), continues to bring a variety of specialty services to Malone, ranging from Cardiology, Oncology, Pulmonology and Vascular Surgery to Interventional Radiology.

In 2020, Alice Hyde' constructed a new inpatient pharmacy on the hospital's second floor. The expanded space improved safety features for medication mixing, expanded space to accommodate increasing demands for inpatient and outpatient medication support, and provided a state-of-the-art space for a pharmacy team that provides medication support for clinical departments ranging from cancer treatment to long-term care. The project, funded by grant money from New York's Statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program, cost approximately \$1 million.

In 2022, Alice Hyde established an advanced clinical simulation laboratory on the hospital's third floor. Featuring advanced clinical training mannequins purchased with the help of philanthropic donations, the lab hosts dozens of clinical trainings each year and draws student groups,

medical residents and established physicians, nurses and clinical teams from throughout the region served by UVM Health Network.

In 2023, Alice Hyde became a Critical Access Hospital – a designation that improves financial reimbursements from the federal government and allowed the hospital to integrate sub-acute care into its Medical-Surgical inpatient unit. The program, known as Swing Beds, allows patients to receive skilled nursing care and other sub-acute services they would otherwise need to transfer to a skilled nursing facility to receive.

In 2024, Alice Hyde began working with Hudson Headwaters Health Network to expand access to primary care for residents throughout Franklin County. Alice Hyde relocated numerous on-campus primary and specialty care clinics to newly renovated areas on the hospital's Ground Floor and Second floor, and demolished buildings near the heart of its campus. The land was sold to Hudson Headwaters, which plans to construct a new Primary Care Medical Facility on the 2.4-acre parcel. Construction on that facility is expected to begin by the end of the year.

## Paul Smiths

From T8

pendent Living, was awarded the National Council on Independent Living's 2024 Diana Viets Memorial Award for Excellence for her work advocating for children with disabilities in local schools and helping young adults with disabilities find employment. She was one of two people in the U.S. to get the award this year.

"It hasn't sunken in," she said on Monday of receiving the award.

"It was amazing," she said of the festival. "The smiles said a lot."

Not everyone can climb a High Peak, but they all deserve the inner peace found in the woods, she said, and the festival is a way to meet people where they're at.

Bill Miller, the former TLCIL director, presented the award and called Lamica a "deserving advocate and good friend." Assemblyman Billy Jones, D-Chateaugay Lake, presented her with a recognition from the state Assembly. And Isabel Williams from Scotts Florist brought surprise flowers for her, Hill Ridley and Gibbens.

Lamica said she's been with

the TLCIL for six years, after leaving the health care field because of a disability. She said she has team there that goes "above and beyond."

Around a year ago, Lamica said a number of parents and organizations started calling the center and asking for help. She saw there was a need and had to learn really fast what educational advocacy was.

Friedman said Lamica is "unstoppable."

Paul Smiths's College President Dan Kelting said he was honored to help host this event and said everyone should have access to nature's healing and restorative powers.

## Study

From T3

creased since last measured in 2016, however, most North Country residents report having at least one serving of fruit (67%) and one serving of vegetables (78%) in a typical day.

Certain behaviors and outcomes are beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels. Now in its 9th year, the annual Community Health Survey provides valuable data on community health perceptions and behaviors, helping stakeholders

monitor health trends as residents reestablish their regular healthcare routines.

"The insights gained from the Community Health Survey are invaluable. This data not only highlights the unique challenges our rural communities face but also empowers stakeholders to develop targeted, effective solutions that address the specific health-related needs of Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties," said Pat Fontana Deputy Director at FDRHPO. "Our goal is to leverage these findings to make informed decisions that will improve health outcomes across the region."

# Malone ambulance service changing

## Northern Ambulance owner talks transition plan at forum

By ALEXANDER VIOLO

aviolo@mtelegram.com

MALONE — A public forum on health care in the community that featured Hudson Headwaters Health Network and the University of Vermont Health Network, also included an update on the future of an ambulance service with over 50 years in the community.

Vicki Rockhill, owner of Northern Ambulance, spoke at the Malone Golf Club, Tuesday, reflecting on the past 51 years of the ambulance service's history, her upcoming retirement, and what the future looks like for Northern Ambulance.

Rockhill was introduced by Rebecca Shutts, Alice Hyde Medical Center's Chief Nursing Officer.

"As many of you know for the last 51 years they (Northern Ambulance) have been a household name in Franklin County, providing interfacility transports back and forth from one hospital to another, and some 911 coverage as well," Shutts said, "A short while ago Vicki let us know that she would be planning her retirement, her well deserved retirement, at the end of this year."

Shutts said Alice Hyde works closely with Northern Ambulance.

"Of course that caused a little concern for all of us because we rely heavily on her services and her team," she said, "Vicki has worked very hard to make sure the transition plan is a good one for the community and she has partnered with us to do so."

According to Rockhill, in order to ensure a smooth transition after her retirement she is negotiating with another ambulance company to take over.



**From left, Rebecca Shutts, Alice Hyde Medical Center's Chief Nursing Officer, looks on as Vicki Rockhill, owner of Northern Ambulance, talks about the future of the Malone-based ambulance service during a public forum on health care in the community Tuesday evening at the Malone Golf Club.** Alexander Violo/Malone Telegram

"I can see where it would be a concern for the hospital and for you as community members to say I'm closing doors," Rockhill said, "I know that's what the panic probably was when I first said I was leaving. That's not my intent. It never has been my intent."

Rockhill said she reached out to Alice Hyde in April to plan for the future.

"We worked tirelessly together, figuring out options, when I was fortunate enough to find a company that is long-standing and their goals are similar to mine, their style is similar," she said, "After some 43 years of a very rigorous schedule, with long days and nights, with sorrow and

some trepidation my husband and I are going to be walking away from the company but it will not close."

Rockhill said she is not allowed to name the company involved citing the ongoing nature of negotiations.

"They are going to keep my staff, some of my staff have been there for 20 years," she said, "I'm very proud of them, they love their community and they love what they do."

Rockhill said she will stay on in an advisory capacity until the transition is complete.

"It looks like it will be a perfect fit and likely it will be younger blood with more vim and vigor than I have," she said.

### History

According to Rockhill, in the 1950s and 1960s there was no formal emergency medical services and it was 1989 before the Department of Transportation established a standard criteria for the various EMS certification levels.

"EMS is fairly new. It was 2000 before it was a requirement for EMTs to be in some of the volunteer EMS squads, certified professional services had to have an EMT," she said, "Franklin County followed suit around that time."

Rockhill said her father, Jack Harwood started Northern Ambulance, and her father and mother, Wilma, took

their first certification course in 1970.

"We find that was the first partnership with Alice Hyde because there was no actual certification course available at that time, no formal program," she said, "That's when they found there was a need for transporting patients from the hospital to tertiary care and that nobody was doing it."

Rockhill said Northern's first paying patient was transferred on April 13, 1973.

"We use that as our start date," she said, "That year we did a whole 130 transfers, not really enough to keep people going. They used a lot of volunteers and my parents worked as EMTs."

According to Rockhill, she started working for Northern Ambulance, part time, in 1980 moving into a full-time position in 1982, taking her first certification as a basic EMT in 1983, and on October 1, 1990, Northern Ambulance officially became an advanced life support service.

Rockhill said her parents ran the company from 1973 to December 2003 when they retired and she officially took over the ambulance service in January 2004.

Between 1973 and 2003 the ambulance service handled a volume of 14,906 calls, according to Rockhill, who said over the last 20 years the volume of calls has jumped to 36,939.

"That's a 247 percent increase," she said, "We can see that ambulance are definitely needed in Franklin County."

In 2020, Rockhill said she achieved her paramedic status.

"That is the level we currently operate on 24/7 365 days a year," she said.



### Why you need dental insurance in retirement.

Many Americans are fortunate to have dental coverage for their entire working life, through employer-provided benefits. When those benefits end with retirement, paying dental bills out-of-pocket can come as a shock, leading people to put off or even go without care. Simply put — without dental insurance, there may be an **important gap** in your healthcare coverage.

**When you're comparing plans ...**

- ▶ Look for coverage that helps pay for major services. Some plans may limit the number of procedures — or pay for preventive care only.
- ▶ Look for coverage with no deductibles. Some plans may require you to pay hundreds out of pocket before benefits are paid.
- ▶ Shop for coverage with no annual maximum on cash benefits. Some plans have annual maximums of \$1,000.

**Medicare doesn't pay for dental care.<sup>1</sup>**

That's right. As good as Medicare is, it was never meant to cover everything. That means if you want protection, you need to purchase individual insurance.

**Early detection can prevent small problems from becoming expensive ones.**

The best way to prevent large dental bills is preventive care. The American Dental Association recommends checkups twice a year.

**Previous dental work can wear out.**

Even if you've had quality dental work in the past, you shouldn't take your dental health for granted. In fact, your odds of having a dental problem only go up as you age.<sup>2</sup>

**Treatment is expensive — especially the services people over 50 often need.**

Consider these national average costs of treatment ... \$222 for a checkup ... \$190 for a filling ... \$1,213 for a crown.<sup>3</sup> Unexpected bills like this can be a real burden, especially if you're on a fixed income.

1 "Medicare & You," Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2024. 2 "Aging changes in teeth and gums", medlineplus.gov, 4/17/2022. 3 American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, 2020 Survey of Dental Fees, Copyright 2020, American Dental Association.

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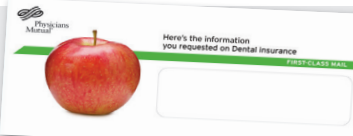
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The Washington Post

If you have mild to moderate hearing loss, your AirPods could soon function as hearing aids.

The Food and Drug Administration said Thursday it has approved a piece of software that will transform the latest model of Apple's AirPods Pro earbuds into over-the-counter hearing aids. The company's hearing aid feature will be pushed to eligible devices through a software update in coming weeks, Apple said.

The move, which comes two years after the FDA first approved over-the-counter hearing aids, could help more Americans with hearing loss start getting help, the FDA said in a statement.

The feature works by amplifying some sounds, such as voices, while minimizing others, such as ambient noise. Users can take a hearing test in the Apple Health app, and their AirPods will adjust sound level automatically based on the results. The feature is only available on the AirPods Pro 2, which cost \$249.

The FDA says it tested Apple's hearing aid feature in a clinical study with 118 subjects who believed they had mild or moderate hearing loss. The study found that people who set up their AirPods using Apple's hearing test noticed

similar benefits as people who had a professional set up the earbuds.

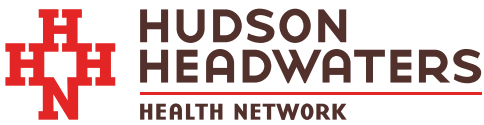
Over-the-counter hearing aids are best for people with mild to moderate hearing loss, audiologists say, many of whom don't seek treatment. A consumer device that doubles as a hearing amplifier could act like a "bridge" for people who otherwise wouldn't seek hearing help because of cost, access or cosmetic concerns, said Jackie Clark, a clinical professor in the audiology program at University of Texas at Dallas.

"We know that even with a mild hearing loss, individuals lose some quality of life by isolating themselves from their community," Clark said. "I would see the AirPods as offering a bridge for hard of hearing consumers to get back in touch with the some parts of the world of sound that they have been missing."

Apple is one of the most popular headphone brands, with 19.2% market share globally, according to market research firm IDC. Some people already have a pair of AirPods Pro 2, while others may find the earbuds a more attractive option than traditional hearing aids, which require a hearing test, prescription and often thousands of dollars up front.

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# Support

From T14

nificant sign that someone may need help.

It's important to note that these signs can be subtle, and individuals may try to hide their feelings out of fear, shame, or not wanting to burden others.

How to Approach Someone Who May Be Struggling

If you notice warning signs in someone you care about, knowing how to approach the situation can feel daunting. However, initiating a conversation can make all the difference. Here are some guidelines:

Choose the right time and place: Find a private and comfortable setting where you won't be interrupted.

Be direct but compassionate: Use open-ended questions like, "I've noticed you've been acting differently lately, and I'm concerned. Is everything okay?" It's okay to ask directly if they are thinking about suicide.

■ Listen without judgment: Allow them to express themselves without interrupting or offering immediate solutions. Sometimes, just being heard is a significant first step.

■ Offer support and follow up: Reassure them that they're not alone and that help is available. Encourage them to seek professional help or offer to accompany them to a mental health appointment if they're comfortable with that. Even if the person initially declines help, continue to check in on them. Consistent support can create a safe space for them to reach out when they're ready.

It's essential to avoid dismissing their feelings or minimizing their pain. Statements like "It's not that bad" or "You have so much to live for" may invalidate

their emotions and make them feel more isolated.

The Role of Mental Health Services in Early Intervention

Mental health services play a pivotal role in early intervention for suicide prevention. Professional support, such as counseling and therapy, can help individuals develop coping strategies and address underlying mental health conditions like depression or anxiety. Specialized therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), have been shown to reduce suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

In addition to therapy, hotlines like the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offer immediate support for those in crisis by calling or texting 988. Many communities, including ours, have local behavioral health clinics, crisis centers, and peer support/education groups such as the North Country Veteran and Active Service Member Suicide Coalition and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Moreover, educational programs on mental health awareness equip community members to recognize and respond to signs of distress in others. These programs focus on reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness and encouraging individuals to seek help early.

Together We Can Save Lives

Understanding the signs of suicide and knowing how to intervene can save lives. During Suicide Prevention Month, take the opportunity to educate yourself, check in on loved ones, and spread awareness about the importance of mental health. By fostering open conversations and encouraging early intervention, we can work together to prevent suicide and offer hope to those who need it most.

## Walmart and Sam's Club Campaign Exceeds \$100,000 for Children's Miracle Network of Northern New York



Contributed.

By ANGIE VANWORMER  
CMN

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center is thrilled to announce the successful conclusion of the recent Walmart and Sam's campaign (June 10- July 7) in support of Children's Miracle Network Hospitals (CMN). Thanks to the generosity of our community and the unwavering support of Walmart and Sam's Club locations in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties, this campaign raised an incredible \$107,857 to support local children in need.

CMN of Northern New York allocates donated funds to

support pediatric equipment and projects at Samaritan. In addition, they provide financial assistance to families with a child facing a medical crisis, assisting with out-of-pocket medical expenses such as travel, copays and equipment not covered by insurance.

"This campaign is a testament to the generous spirit of our community, and these funds will help countless children who are facing health challenges," said Angie VanWormer, director of Children's Miracle Network at Samaritan Medical Center. "Every penny raised stays local to ensure the best healthcare is available

and accessible to North Country children. Thank you to the community for supporting the successful campaign."

Your donations make a tangible difference in the lives of local patients and their families. Samaritan extends its heartfelt gratitude to Walmart and Sam's Club for their partnership and commitment to our community. Their support has enabled Samaritan to continue providing vital care to children in the region.

For more information about Children's Miracle Network, contact Samaritan Medical Center at 315-785-4053 or [cmninfo@shsnyc.com](mailto:cmninfo@shsnyc.com)

# Hotline

From T4

In this year's state budget, \$60 million was appropriated for the 988 crisis contact centers in New York. These are nonprofit organizations contracted to provide suicide prevention services in their communities and run their 988 contact centers using state and federal grants. There are 15 contact centers in New York.

The closest centers for the north country are Contact

Community Services in East Syracuse and the Mobile Crisis Assessment Team of the Neighborhood Center in Utica.

Centers take calls based on geographic proximity to the person calling, and are meant to provide localized care to callers.

"The best way to prevent suicide is to ask for help early if you're feeling down, depressed or troubled," said Dr. Ann Sullivan, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Health. "One of the most effective ways to get help is to call 988 and speak with a trained counselor and get whatever assistance you may need."

Since the call centers opened in 2022, the New York lo-

cations have taken 478,388 calls, 75,661 texts and online chats, as well as 77,000 calls routed to the specialized 988 Veterans Crisis Line.

Suicide is the second largest cause of death for New Yorkers ages 25 to 34, and the third largest cause of death for people ages 10 to 24.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 1,765 New Yorkers died of suicide in 2022, for a per-capita rate of 8.5 per 100,000 residents. New York has the third lowest suicide rate of all states and Washington, D.C. — far lower than the national average of 14.2 per 100,000.



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Meadowbrook  
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# Nonprofit finding success with specialized care for cancer patients

By **CHRIS BROCK**

cbrock@wdt.net

**S**ongstress Monica Behan Purcell has found a new voice and her calling in compassion when it comes to cancer patients.

"It seems like trauma and tragedy inspire a lot of things in my life," Behan Purcell said a few weeks ago over her tea at Pad-dock Arcade's CaffeineHolic. "And as I think about it, that in-spires a lot of songs. You take a situation that's not so great and you are taking your experience from it and turning it into some-thing else."

Behan Purcell, a Watertown native, has turned the begin-nings of a relatively new non-profit she created into an early success story. The Compassion-ate Care Foundation, founded in 2022, was created to provide the north country cancer com-munity with access to comple-mentary, integrative therapies that improve quality of life and patient experience. Its roots are planted on the proven benefits of integrative medicine, which employs therapies that work in tandem with conventional medi-cine to treat the whole person—mind, body and spirit.

Its motto: "Redefining the Northern New York cancer ex-perience."

There are few people, Behan Purcell said, that cancer has not touched.

"Cancer is the great equal-izer," she said. "It's something that doesn't matter how much money you have, what race you are and where you are in your career. Everybody knows some-body they care about who has been touched by cancer."

That includes Behan Purcell. Two diagnoses helped to influ-ence the creation of her founda-tion. Her mother, Mana Ar-letta Behan of Saratoga Springs died in 2014. Before retiring, she served as director of religious studies at St. Patrick's Catholic School in Watertown and was a reading specialist for Lyme Cen-tral Schools. In Saratoga Springs, she was known as a gifted spiri-tual counselor and yogi.

Mana was diagnosed with uterine cancer. Behan Purcell said she died of something else 30 years after her cancer diag-nosis. "My mother chose to ap-



**Founder and Executive Director of The Compassionate Care Foundation, Monica Behan Purcell, at her home on the Black River in Dexter. Kara Dry Photography LLC**

proach hers in a more holistic way and we were fortunate that it worked," she said. "I think it was because maybe her cancer wasn't as aggressive."

Behan Purcell's husband, Eric, was diagnosed with a rare form of prostate cancer five years ago.

"My husband did the conven-tional route," she said. "Coinci-dentally, I feel the combination of the two is the best bet. That's why many best-practice hospi-tals are doing it."

Compassionate Care Foun-dation's integrative therapies include: massage, Reiki, yoga, meditation and breath work, acupuncture, nutritional coun-seling, wellness coaching, sup-port groups, cranial sacral ther-apy, lymphatic massage and sound therapy.

The foundation has part-nered with the Walker Center for Cancer Care, Watertown; Clax-ton-Hepburn Medical Center at the Richard E. Winter Cancer Center, Ogdensburg, and Hos-pice of Jefferson County.

"We have a wonderful cancer center so people don't have to travel far to get treatment," Be-han Purcell said. "But it seemed to me that it was time to raise the level of care to what was happening out in the rest of the world and bringing that here."

The foundation, which serves Jefferson, Lewis and St. Law-rence counties, has nearly 30 practitioners who provide its services. They are not volun-teers.

"The reason we're not doing it on a volunteer basis is because

dation.

Also, her business back-ground is well-suited to her executive director role at Com-passionate Care. Several years ago, she worked with a group of cosmetic chemists to create the Modicum line of products, a skin cell nutrient system containing antioxidant benefits for cellular rejuvenation. The line of organ-ic-based products offers anti-ag-ing benefits, and helps to treat skin conditions such as scarring, acne, eczema, burns and psori-sis.

A traumatic snowmobile ac-cident a decade ago served as catalyst for the development of the Modicum line. During a

trip to the Canadian Rockies, Behan Purcell's snowmobile unexpectedly plunged into a deep crevasse, and she was left with several broken bones, fa-cial lacerations and a fear of permanent nerve damage and scarring. Plastic surgery was sug-gested by her physicians, but in-stead, she turned to the healing power of plants. Her motivation came from her mother, who had raised a large family and was a strong believer in the health su-per powers that could be found in nature. Behan Purcell began to extensively research plant chemistry and created a restor-ative plant-based skin healing

See **SUCCESS T28**



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# New nurse practitioner added to endocrinology clinic

WATERTOWN — The North Star Health Alliance (NSHA) and North Country Orthopaedic Group (NCOG) have announced the addition of Elizabeth (Liz) Verno, FNP-C, to the NCOG Endocrinology Clinic. Liz brings a wealth of experience as a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) and will play a pivotal role in delivering high-quality, patient-centered endocrinology care to the North Country community.

Liz joins NCOG with extensive expertise in managing both acute and chronic medical conditions. In her most recent role at Vibrant Health FQHC, Liz provided comprehensive primary care to a diverse patient population, excelling in patient education, treatment plan development, and collaboration with health-care teams to deliver optimal outcomes. Her vast experience also includes positions at Charleston Pain and Rehab in South Carolina, where she specialized in chronic



**Verno**

pain management and family medicine, and UC Health in Colorado, where she provided emergency care in high-pressure environments. Liz's commitment to patient advocacy, advanced treatment options, and care coordination will enhance the endocrinology services provided at NCOG.

Liz holds a Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner degree from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, where she grad-



**Fish**

uated with a 3.891 GPA. She is board-certified through the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) and holds active APRN licenses in New York, South Carolina, and Kansas. Liz's strong leadership qualities and adaptability in fast-changing environments will greatly benefit the growing endocrinology clinic.

Dr. Claudia Fish will begin a partial retirement at the end of October, scaling back her patient visits to two days



**Lafrance**

per week. However, she will continue as Clinical Director, overseeing consultations and reviewing all new patient cases, as has been the practice in the Diabetes, Osteoporosis, and Endocrine Center. Dr. Fish's leadership and expertise have been integral to the clinic's success, and she will remain deeply involved in maintaining the high standards of care that patients have come to expect.

Jolene Lafrance, NP, who

has been with the practice for over seven years and has more than 20 years of endocrinology experience, will continue her full-time role. Jolene's dedication and extensive experience further strengthen the clinic's ability to deliver exceptional care to the community.

We are excited to welcome Liz to our endocrinology team," said Dr. Claudia Fish, Clinical Director at NCOG. "Her background in delivering high-quality, comprehensive care across various settings will be instrumental in continuing the exceptional services we offer to our patients. We are proud to have such a talented and dedicated team of providers, including Liz and Jolene, ensuring that our patients receive the best possible care."

For more information or to schedule an appointment with Liz Verno, FNP-C, please visit <https://www.ncortho.com/meet-the-providers/endocrinology/> or contact NCOG at 315-786-0224.

## MA Supplemental Benefits Address Gaps in Traditional Medicare

By DENISE SMITH

Medicare Advantage (MA), also known as Medicare Part C, is a managed care alternative to traditional Medicare coverage offered by health plans. In recent years, MA membership has grown substantially and MA plans have been permitted to add new benefits to better address members' needs.

In particular, changes in regulation and legislation have allowed MA health plans, like Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in New York, more flexibility in designing specially tailored benefits that support a person's overall health and wellbeing. These supplemental benefits are unique to MA and can help address gaps in traditional Medicare.

Supplemental benefits historically included "primarily health related" benefits like dental, vision, and hearing services and, more recently include services that support health-related needs such as help purchasing nutritious food and transportation to access plan benefits.

According to the National Academy of Medicine, what's typically considered "medical care" only accounts for 10% to 20% of contributors to health outcomes. Other factors that have an impact on a person's health include their access to grocery stores, relationships with friends and family, and home and workplace environments. These are known as social drivers of health, and they account for

the remaining 80% to 90%.

Thanks to the expansion of MA supplemental benefits, plan members are now better able to get the help they need to improve their whole health. For example, while medically tailored meals have been offered as a conventional supplemental benefit for a while, some MA plans are now able to offer additional nutrition benefits such as grocery cards, which provide a monthly allowance that give members the ability to purchase produce and other food items at participating grocery stores.

A study published last year found that a vast majority of a MA health plan's members used at least one supplemental benefit in 2022, with many accessing more

than one benefit. In addition, members who used at least one supplemental benefit were more likely to live in areas with fewer resources, such as food deserts and areas with lower socioeconomic status, suggesting that these benefits are helping to address social drivers of health.

Another recent study suggested that use of supplemental benefits is associated with an increased likelihood of having a preventative screening or annual wellness visit and a decreased likelihood of having a hospitalization or emergency room visit for a non-emergent issue.

Today, more than 32 million people have chosen to enroll in a MA plan. That's

more than half of all eligible Medicare members, showcasing the critical value that MA plans, including supplemental benefits, provide for older adults and people with disabilities.

With the Medicare Annual Enrollment Period fast approaching, from October 15 to December 7, it's a crucial time for all Medicare-eligible individuals. Take this opportunity to review your options carefully to ensure that your MA plan is working for you. Don't overlook the supplemental benefits, as these can significantly contribute to overall health and wellbeing.

*Denise Smith is Medicare Market President for Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in New York.*

# The Who, WHAT, When and *Where* of Hospice:

## IV Fluids and Hospice

By THERESA HAYMAN, RN

**A**s your loved one progresses through their disease process, they begin to struggle with maintaining an adequate level of hydration. This is usually when family and/or friends caring for individuals ask, "How do we keep our loved one from developing dehydration?"

Dehydration results from the individual's inability to eat or drink safely and lack of desire to eat or drink. It may also result from gastrointestinal illnesses that cause diarrhea or organ failure as the disease progresses.

Dehydration in the terminally ill patient does not cause pain or make them feel thirsty. End-of-life dehydration is a result of organ failure that allows endorphins, natural pain-relieving hormones, to be produced. This enables the person to slide into a state where they are less mentally aware, experience less pain, and experience increased sleep.

In most cases, patients find more comfort without IV hydration. At this stage, it is unsafe to receive hydration as the body must work harder to absorb the fluid, leading to potential discomfort. Therefore, the decision to forego IV hydration can often lead to a more comfortable experience for the patient.

IV hydration does not extend the individual's life expectancy or relieve dry mouth. Studies have shown that artificial hydration does not affect the patient's survival.

Our mission is to continue to keep patients comfortable and help them achieve the best quality of life possible at this time. It is about making every day matter, feeling as well as they can for as long as they can, and spending time with family and friends.

### MYTH:

IV fluids are critical to a patient at the end of life.

### FACT:

At Hospice, we do not administer IV fluids to our patients as it does not improve their quality of life at this stage of their disease. More hydration can lead to the patient experiencing significant discomfort.



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# Success

From T25

serum with a combination of essential oils and organic-based ingredients. The serum not only helped to rejuvenate her skin naturally, but she was left with no scars from her accident.

She later established a sister company, Modicum Compassionate Care, selecting the word “compassionate” as part of the new line to reflect her strong belief in the power of helping others heal by showing them tremendous acts of compassion. “The mind and body benefit when people realize they are not alone in their struggle,” she told NNY Living magazine in 2022.

That compassionate theme was a natural fit when naming the foundation, but getting it launched was no easy task, but being “oblivious” to that fact was an asset, she believes. “I didn’t realize how much work it was, but every step of the way, I just kept going to the next step. We had no idea where we would get funding from, and it’s just been a blessing. We’ve been building it in flight, if you will, and our community has been absolutely supportive of it, and financially, along the way.”

Also gratifying for Behan Purcell: “We have not yet turned down a patient.”

## NO REPRIEVE

The cancer diagnosis for Nancy L. Vecchio of Watertown came on very fast, said her mother, Joan Vecchio. Nancy, who was synonymous with the sport of girls lacrosse in the north country, died in April at the age of 56. “When Nancy found out, it was very fast. It was three months and she was gone,” Vecchio said.

She said that Nancy at first thought she had a thyroid tumor, but when it was removed, she was diagnosed with cancer following weeks of study. It was a rare cancer type, she said, which was finally identified at Sloan Kettering.

“It took them two weeks to find it was a very, very rare cancer and it will definitely kill you in a short time,” Vecchio said. “You might have a little reprieve, but Joan didn’t.”

The diagnosis was uterine sarcoma, which starts in the muscle and supporting tissues

of the uterus. Nancy’s mom said, “After chemo, it started to get worse fast.”

Vecchio said a friend of Nancy’s knew Behan Purcell and hooked them up.

“Monica stayed right with her, went to the doctors with her and asked the doctors different questions that Nancy hadn’t thought of,” Vecchio said.

Behan Purcell earned a certificate in a basic level of Reiki — a Japanese healing technique that uses gentle touch to manipulate energy flow in the body. The International Center for Reiki Training says its benefits include “relaxation and feelings of peace, security and wellbeing.”

“It’s a form of energy therapy,” Behan Purcell said. “It’s not a religious practice of any sort. But it’s one of the most effective treatments for people who have depression and anxiety” related to cancer.

“It was all kinds of things that medicine doesn’t take care of — that’s what Monica did,” Vecchio said. “And she would talk to Nancy. I think she probably talked to Nancy daily before she was on the ventilator. She’d talk to her all the time and set up stuff that Nancy would be comfortable doing and what she wanted. I don’t know how to praise Monica. She was just there.”

Behan Purcell also brought her music into Nancy’s final days. She is known for blending folk, blues and jazz and has recorded with RCA Records and Chrysalis Music Publishing and written for film and television. “I try to perform at least once a year at a decent-size performance, because that’s my heart and soul,” she said.

Her songs have been heard on the Fox, Lifetime, CBS, UPN, TNT and Disney networks. She has given several benefit performances at Clayton Opera House. But nothing is quite like her Compassionate Care audiences.

“At the end of life, people may request a certain song and I sang to Nancy her favorite, which was an Alicia Keys song.”

“Lifeline” is the name of the song. It begins: *“Darling, this world ain’t for the faint of heart (nah) / Feels like we were made to fall apart.”*

“She has the faith,” Vecchio said. “Monica was like a rock, I guess. She had the compassion

to say the right things to Nancy, even at the end.”

## AGROWING MOVEMENT

As of mid-August, Compassionate Care had 28 practitioners, serving nearly 250 patients with over 1,400 services. Most patients go to the providers. “I would say in-home sessions/care is about 20 percent,” Behan Purcell said.

The only treatment covered by insurance is acupuncture, she noted.

“But that’s a mission down the road I’d like to be part of — people who are creating this movement to have insurance cover these things that are being utilized in best-practice hospitals to support the patient, because it’s evidence-based. While conventional medicine treats the disease, these mind, body and spirit practices support the person, the immune system and they support the psyche of the person.”

Compassionate Care charges a flat fee of \$75 for its sessions, with acupuncture therapy costing a bit more.

“People get to choose their therapies themselves, which ones they want to utilize, and that has an effect on the emotional state of being because then you are in the driver’s seat, not a helpless passenger otherwise,” Behan Purcell said.

An underrated cancer-related trauma, Behan Purcell said, is hair loss. “It’s something they’ve identified with ever since they were a little girl. There’s so much trauma around cancer. I never knew that until I got into this field. But that’s the greatest collateral damage and side effect of it all.”

## SERVICES THAT ENHANCE

When Christine E. Strobert of Watertown was diagnosed with chordoma, she contacted Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston to receive her initial treatment. The hospital has specialists in chordoma — a rare, slow-growing type of bone cancer that can develop in the spine or skull. The Cleveland Clinic it affects about one person for every 1 million people per year.

At Massachusetts General, Strobert also took advantage of its program of integrative therapies. “They believe, as Monica believes, that these are the things that are going to help people re-

gain their lives,” Strobert said.

The Mass General Cancer Center’s Katherine A. Gallagher Integrative Therapies Program offers free wellness services, such as acupuncture, yoga and music therapy for patients with cancer and their loved ones.

“When I came back to Watertown, I ran into a friend who happened to work with Compassionate Care as a provider,” Strobert said.

Through Compassionate Care, Strobert has taken advantage of acupuncture, massage, Reiki and the program’s group therapy.

“It has helped tremendously,” Strobert said recently following an afternoon gardening session. “When you go to a large cancer facility, they treat more than the disease. They treat you as a whole person. So, all of these things that I used at Compassionate Care were part of my treatment at Mass General. It was surprising to come home and find that there was somebody that also understood that a cancer patient needs more than your traditional therapy.”

She used Compassionate Care’s services for about six months and now advocates for it.

“Doctors and patients now understand that it’s mind, body and spirit that needs to heal,” Strobert, retired manager at Watertown Savings Bank, said. “All of those services just enhance. It’s absolutely not a replacement for your traditional radiation, chemo, surgery or whatever. It’s meant to enhance a person’s recovery. It’s great that we have it available in this area.”

Compassionate Care, Behan Purcell said, has developed weekly in-house services at Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center in Ogdensburg, offering acupuncture, massage therapy and Reiki. CHMC is the home of the Richard E. Winter Cancer Center.

“We’re trying to expand services because there’s a wait list,” she said. “We’re also starting our in-house services at Samaritan’s (Medical Center) Walker Center for Cancer Care. We finally have a partnership with them, which is wonderful. We’ll have in-house services there every Friday in the treatment room.”

Compassionate Care also has a partnership with Hospice, in

which practitioners go to homes.

Reiki, Behan Purcell said, is also popular in those situations. “In end-of-life situations, there’s a lot of anxiety. Reiki helps to relieve that for the person.”

## SHARING THE ENERGY

Crandah L. McKenzie of Clayton is a Reiki master and a practitioner for CCF. “They say Reiki finds you, and over three years ago, Reiki found me.”

She has lived with multiple sclerosis for 25 years.

“Due to the influential shift in the energy system of my body, I felt the need to educate myself and to learn about Reiki and sharing that modality with the rest of the region,” she said.

By March of 2021, she completed training in the (Mikao) Usui system of Reiki — level one and two. By March of 2022, she had become a Reiki master and began working with CCF and its clients.

“I’ve seen such a major shift in all of the clients that I work with,” McKenzie said. “I’ve had such a great opportunity to be able to watch these people evolve in their own journey of their health and wellness.”

But McKenzie said there are many people who may not have heard of Reiki, and took the opportunity to further define it.

“It’s a non-invasive, hands-on technique with extraordinary healing benefits,” she said. “It’s a modality that positively affects the human energy system. By doing that, it stimulates the body’s own natural healing abilities.”

The Reiki practitioner, McKenzie said, is not channeling their own energy.

“They are channeling the universal energy that is around us that we don’t necessarily see and putting that energy into the patient. As a result, I’ve seen some major transformations.” Those include reduction of stress, anxiety and related symptoms such as depression and sleep deprivation, she said.

“It also releases toxins in the body and also helps with any kind of medications or treatments they are taking and enhances the effect,” McKenzie said. “It provides a deep relaxation for the patient, and certainly emotional and mental stability for them as they’re going through this journey.”

# Cancer

From T13

take so long to complete?

The state also didn't include former Watertown residents who lived near the plant and suffered from health issues. He personally knew two women who had a total of nine stillborns but are not part of the data. Women who lost babies also aren't in the findings, he said.

He also pointed out that the report only looked at the years after 1996. Perhaps because it's before the internet was so readily available, so the state did not pursue the large undertaking of looking at paper documents for its research, he surmised.

Williams stressed that the state investigation looked just at cancer cases and not at muscular and neurological illnesses that many neighborhood residents were stricken with.

"The state doesn't take in those accounts," he said.

The report also doesn't contain information about whether people were still alive or have died, or whether the Air Brake plant caused the illnesses, James Baker said.

"However, it cannot prove that a specific environmental exposure caused a change in the rate of a specific health outcome within a community, and it cannot tell us anything about an individual and their health problems," according to the report.

State department officials could not be reached for comment.

Scott Barker, now 60, lived most of his life in their parents' house at 149 E. Division St. until moving out of state in 2000.

He remembered looking up and finding obituaries of hundreds of residents who died of cancer after the 1970s, many of them on the street that they lived during his childhood.

The two brothers also put together a map of households with residents who died of cancer.

The two brothers and Williams have suffered varying health issues. While the two brothers don't know if they can attribute their health problems to the plant, Williams is convinced that his ailments were caused by Air Brake.

Scott Barker has unexplained tremors in his right hand. His brother suffers from some kind of nerve damage in his knee.

Suffering from a rare nerve disorder for years, Williams was prone to getting infections from a feeding tube that he must use due to his illnesses.

He was frequently going to the emergency room for infections, caused by leakage from feeding tubes. It often resulted in hospitalization. He nearly died in 2016.

Several years ago, he moved close to the Cleveland Clinic, where he now gets his treatment.

Back in 2012, the three men were instrumental in garnering community interest in the environmental impacts from the old Air Brake plant and on the

residents who lived on the nearby streets.

Before the investigation was initiated, the health department and the Department of Environmental Conservation agreed to meet with residents who expressed health concerns.

Dozens of north side residents packed into the North Elementary School auditorium to describe their health issues including stillborn babies, rare birth defects, family members who died of cancer and a variety of neurological illnesses.

But state officials would say that they found the chemicals only on-site and possibly underneath an East Hoard Street home when an environmental investigation was completed in 2008.

State officials blamed pollutants on the SPX Corp., the North Carolina company that previously owned Air Brake and operated the plant decades ago. Another company continues to own the facility. At one point, the two brothers and Williams attracted the interest

of the California law firm made famous in the movie about environmental activist Erin Brockovich.

They hoped that Vititoe Law Group would represent residents who believe they suffered health problems from the toxic chemicals.

More than 100 people signed up to be part of a lawsuit. But it never went forward. Brockovich's firm could not find other attorneys to invest in legal proceedings.

Much of the momentum then faded when James Barker and Williams moved out of state. Barker is skeptical that those responsible for the pollutants will ever be held accountable.

In the years since, the DEC completed two remediation projects associated with the contamination from the plant. Both starting in 2016, a \$1 million cleanup project focused at the former Air Brake site on what was known as the Allison Test Room, where contamination was first noticed in 1992 during the cleanup of a hydraulic oil spill.

While that work was being done, remnants of PCBs and cadmium, a poisonous metal, were removed from a small section of Kelsey Creek, on a half-acre site in the middle of the North Watertown Cemetery off Bradley Street.

Over the years, the SPX Corp. and the current New York Air Brake company spent more than \$25 million.

There was also major remediation work completed during the 1990s.

In 1995, DEC dredged Kelsey Creek and removed contaminants and soil. But residents believed pollutants got into the ground and spread off site and back into Kelsey Creek.

In 2008, the DEC conducted "vapor intrusion" tests and found unacceptable levels of TCE, an industrial solvent used at the plant decades ago, in four on-site buildings and a house at 431 E. Hoard St., which subsequently was equipped with air-mitigation systems.



Construction crews work on a water diversion project on Kelsey Creek in Watertown in 2016. Watertown Daily Times



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**Lewis County  
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## Lewis County Health System welcomes Purcell

LOWVILLE — Certified family nurse practitioner (FNP-C) Joshua Purcell has joined the Lewis County Health System and Lewis County Family Practice medical staff. Purcell joins Dr. Monica Kwicklis, Dr. Lynn Pisaniello, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) Shirley Tuttle-Malone, DO John Wat, FNP-C Keith Bates, FNP-C Kathy Der and FNP-C Stacey Walton. He will see patients at Lewis County Family Practice, located in the Medical Arts Building, Suite 320, on the health system's main campus in Lowville.

"We are very fortunate that Joshua is returning to the area to provide health care where he grew up," stated Gerald R. Cayer, Chief Executive Officer at Lewis County Health System. "It is special and uniquely wonderful when a native of Lewis County returns home to practice medicine."

Purcell is a native of Croghan and a 2012 graduate of Beaver River Central School. He is certified by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and earned his Advanced Study as a Nurse Practitioner at SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Utica. Joshua received his master's degree in nursing education and his bachelor's in nursing from Le Moyne College, Syracuse. He completed his associate's degree in nursing from St. Joseph's College of Nursing in Syracuse.

"Joshua Purcell, FNP-C, is a great addition to our Lewis County Family Prac-



**Purcell**

tice group," stated Sean Harney, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Employed Medical Practices. "He is energetic, compassionate, and highly motivated to provide local access to quality health care for patients."

Purcell has diverse nursing experience in the acute care setting and working with hematology/oncology patients. He served as Clinical Assistant Professor at Upstate Medical University and Program Director of the Upstate College of Nursing RN-BS program. He also serves on the Central New York Collaborative to Advance Research and Evidence-Based Practice Board of Directors.

Purcell is the son of Tony and Amy Purcell of Croghan. When not at work, he is an active outdoorsman who enjoys hunting, fishing and canoeing, and he likes making furniture and small building projects like decks.

"I am thrilled to be back home and looking forward to providing health care for my patients," Purcell said.

# Schumer makes stop in Plattsburgh to tout lower drug costs for seniors

By **JOE LOTEMPLIO**  
 Press Republican

**PLATTSBURGH** — A new federal program that is lowering prescription drug costs will aid seniors who are trying to make ends meet and stay healthy.

“For folks here in the north country, that’s a real shot in the arm,” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer said during a visit to Condo Pharmacy in Plattsburgh.

“We have a high senior citizen population and medication cost for our seniors is one of the very highest expenses people have.”

## 10 DRUGS

The program will lower the cost of 10 of the highest cost drugs in Medicare, and in January, a cap of \$2,000 per year of out-of-pocket costs for seniors on Medicare will be implemented.

“When you ask people about inflation and the high cost of things, one of the first things they talk about is the high cost of prescription drugs,” Schumer said.

“These are great drugs. They’re life saving. The companies do a great job coming up with them, but they have become so expensive that we have had instance after instance where people take a dose every other day, cut a pill in half, decide whether to buy food or take the drug, go on a little vacation or take the drug, or whatever.”

Schumer said he has been working to lower costs, and three weeks ago, the federal government announced, for the first time in history, lower, fairer prices for 10 common prescription drugs for seniors, he said.

The ability to negotiate prices was the key Schumer, a Democrat from Brooklyn, said.

“Medicare has huge buying power for many of these drugs. It’s 40 or 50% of the purchase. So in a normal transaction, Medicare would say, hey, we’ll buy these drugs. They’re great, but we want a 20 to 30% reduction because we’re buying it in such bulk. Unfortunately, decades ago, some people, at the behest of pharma, the pharmaceutical industry, put in a provision that Medicare can’t negotiate. It’s been the goal of our senior citi-



**U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer displays a chart describing prices of popular medications during a visit to Condo Pharmacy in Plattsburgh on Thursday.** Joe LoTempio/Press Republican

zens organizations throughout the country, including the AARP and many others to remove that provision and start negotiating.”

Schumer said in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, there was an agreement to allow negotiations on price.

“The prices have been announced, and it’s a great, great thing,” Schumer said.

For example, Eliquis, a blood clot drug, went from \$521 for a 30-day supply to \$231; Xarelto, a blood clot and heart disease drug, went from \$517 to \$197 and Jardiance, a diabetes and heart failure drug, went from \$527 to \$113.

“These are some of the most common drugs and they deal with some of our most serious problems, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, blood clots... I’ve heard story after story about a senior citizen who goes to the doctor, and the doctor says, ‘look, you have a really serious illness, that’s the bad news. The good news is there’s a drug that’ll stop it.’ The senior says, great... but it is \$1,000 a month and the senior citizen says, well, what the heck am I going to do?” Schumer said.

## SENIORS HAPPY

Richard Wunderlich, a senior from Peru, said he was paying \$90 every three months for El-

iquis, but because of what is known as the “Donut Hole,” which is a temporary gap in prescription drug coverage where prices go up, his cost went to \$250.

He also takes another drug that cost \$30 a month, but is now \$150 per month.

“When these two drugs come together, it’s a lot of money,” Wunderlich said.

Lynda Guest of AuSable said she takes seven drugs, and two of them are in the Donut Hole. She said drug advertisements that portray a celebration of the drug, are annoying.

“I am so appreciative that you are working on this,” Guest said of the program to reduce costs.

“And if they (drug companies) complain, suggest they stop doing those commercials.”

Schumer said they are continuing to work on closing the Donut Hole to bring more relief on prices.

“We’re going to close that Donut Hole,” Schumer said.

“We got Part D prices down under George Bush (former President George W. Bush), but there is that Donut Hole.”

Former City of Plattsburgh Mayor Donald Kasprzak, who is running for mayor again this year, was a guest of Condo

Pharmacist Dr. Steve Moore. Kasprzak said he is taking some medication that is on the list of reduced prices.

“My family and my wife’s family have been coming here for generations, and through his (Moore’s) family, they are wonderful and they take good care of the north country and their staff is outstanding,” Kasprzak, a Republican, said to Schumer.

“I appreciate what you’ve done and keep doing what you are doing.”

Wendell Hughes, a Clinton County Legislator from the city who is running against Kasprzak for mayor, was at the event, but did not speak.

State Assemblyman Billy Jones (D-Chateaugay Lake) said the lower drug costs will make a big difference.

“It will help our seniors and all of our citizens here in the North Country, so great job,” Jones said.

## BIG IMPACT

Schumer said lowering costs as much 79 percent will make a big impact in the region with about 46,000 people in the North Country, including about 8,000 in Clinton County, on Medicare Part D.

“They are all going to benefit from these things,” Schumer

said.

The impact of the new lower costs on these 10 drugs will be similar to the impact of lowering the cost of insulin to just \$35 per month from as high as \$678 for many two years ago, Schumer said.

With such high costs for insulin, many patients would not take it and wind up with more severe problems that often led to amputations or other complications, which cost the government even more money, he said.

“Now people are so relieved and that is what is giving us a push.... to try and get this now for everybody,” Schumer said.

“People are so happy when they hear they can actually afford these miracle drugs.”

The other measure that will be a big help, Schumer said, is the \$2,000 yearly cap on drug costs starting Jan. 1, 2025.

Through that program, seniors can also sign up for monthly payment plans at much lower costs.

“There will be about 261,000 New York seniors who are going to get their drug prices lowered because of this new cap,” Schumer said.

## REMOVE BARRIERS

Moore, from Condo Pharmacy, said lower costs for prescription drugs are critical for many.

“Anything we can do to remove that as a barrier to care we certainly appreciate it,” Moore said.

The improvements help customers navigate the system of drug payments, which can be tricky and can sometimes lead to sticker shock when a patient arrives to pick up their meds.

“The surprises are less and less,” Moore said.

Schumer said it has been a long time coming to get drug companies on board with lowering costs.

“Prescription drug companies are still making profits, and I’m not against companies making profits, especially when they spend time investing in the research to find these life-saving drugs, but it’s a monopoly, and the profits were too excessive,” he said.

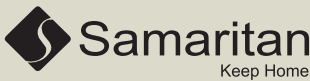
“Now we’re getting back to a decent level.”

# Samaritan Keep Home— *Personalized Nursing Home Care*

Samaritan Keep Home has provided North Country families with exceptional residential care nursing home care for over 50 years. Our residents benefit from skilled nursing assistance, rehabilitative therapies, special memory care units, and social and recreational activities. A dedicated team of providers, nurses, nursing assistants and social workers and so many more provide care and place to call home.



Take a virtual tour:  
**Scan the QR code or visit**  
[samaritanhealth.com/ltc](http://samaritanhealth.com/ltc)



# Assisted Living. *Exceptional Life.*

## Senior Living at Samaritan Summit Village

When you or your loved one needs a little extra help, we offer affordable, independent, sophisticated senior living in a beautiful facility overlooking Watertown. The services needed by residents may vary widely, but the goal of our care is always the same:  
*helping seniors to live exceptionally.*



Take a virtual tour:  
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