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Feb. 2026

SUNY Canton celebrates decade of Student EMT Services

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*Learn more
inside*



SUNY Canton's EMS program is celebrating its 10th anniversary of operation. Pictured from left in back row: Ricky Yerdon of Potsdam, Gage Halavin of Moira, Tashmir (Taz) Eggleston of Newburgh, and Abriana Briggs of Utica. Front row: Alivia Gilson of Potsdam, Olivia Degraw of Pulaski, Ava Wilson of Lake Placid, Abby Fessette of Plattsburgh, and Isaac Lane of Cadyville. SUNY Canton photo

SUNY Canton's Student Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Squad has seen more than 150 members and responded to over 300 emergencies during its first decade of operation.

"SUNY Canton EMS is one of the most valuable student organizations on our cam-

pus," said Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs Courtney Bish. "It provides real-world experience that helps build confidence, leadership and professionalism. Those are lessons that will aid them in their careers after graduation.

In 2014, Director of Stu-

dent Affairs Technology Richard (R.J.) Thayer originally proposed creating a team of students who could provide medical support for the on-campus community. After gathering support, securing funding and training interested students, the squad earned state certification as a Basic

Life Support First Response agency in 2016.

"Since our inception, SUNY Canton EMS has operated as a student-run, non-transporting emergency response team that provides round-the-clock medical coverage on campus,

See SUNY EMT H7

Professional Connection Page 5

Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization Supports Regional Community Health Planning for 2025–2030 Prevention Agenda Cycle

By Holly Boname
FDRHPO

Local health departments and hospitals across New York State are implementing a new Prevention Agenda to improve population health, prevent disease, and reduce health disparities.

Every six years, local health departments and hospitals across New York State are required to complete a comprehensive Community Health Assessment (CHA) and submit related plans to New York State for review. Public health departments submit a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), and hospitals submit a Community Service Plan (CSP). This work is guided by the New York State Department of Health's Prevention Agenda, and the current cycle runs from 2025 to 2030. Together, these plans are designed to align public health and hospital strategies with the most pressing health needs identified within each community.

"The Community Health Assessment serves as the foundation for this work," said Pat Fontana, Deputy Director for Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO). "It provides a comprehensive picture of a county's health by gathering and analyzing health-related data."

This includes local, state, and national health data, as well as information collected directly from communities, specifically from FDRHPO's Annual Community Health Survey. When combined, these findings help to identify health outcomes, disparities, and other factors that impact health across the region.

Patti Hogle, Senior Public Health Educator at St. Lawrence County Public Health Department, says that the Community Health Survey proved invaluable in developing the Community Health Improvement Plan/Community Service Plan.

"This collaboration enhanced the quality of data and the analysis provided by the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization, which informed the identification of priority health needs, deepened our understanding of health disparities, and ensured the plan was evidence-based to effectively guide planning and action across the county."

She added, "The planning and writing of the Community Health Assessment, Community Health Improvement Plan, and the Community Service Plan could not have been completed without the survey and the hard work of the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization."

During the planning cycle, public health departments and hospitals in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties collaborated with FDRHPO to assess the regional healthcare system and address identified community needs. FDRHPO supports regional coordination by convening partners, analyzing health data, and assisting healthcare and public health organizations in developing actionable, data-driven plans.

In partnership with the public health departments and hospitals, FDRHPO prepared each county's CHA in the summer of 2025. County partners then used

See FDRHPO H3

Samaritan getting \$20M to upgrade electronic records

Times staff report

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center has been awarded more than \$20 million from the state to upgrade its electronic medical record system.

The grant is from the state's Health Care Facility Transformation Program IV and V, which is aimed at improving health information technology.

Samaritan officials said the \$22 million will "modernize Samaritan's infrastructure, streamline clinical workflows, and significantly enhance the patient experience by providing one secure, easy-to-navigate patient portal for online health information."

"This funding comes at a critical point in our EMR journey," Tom Carman, president and CEO of Samaritan Medical Center, said in a news release. "We started the project management and needs assessment before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cost to upgrade and update our back-end infrastructure and main EMR system has been daunting. Without this critical funding, this project would have been delayed several more years, since there are only so many capital funds each year to



Samaritan Medical Center, 830 Washington St., Watertown. Watertown Daily Times

allocate."

Samaritan officials said that operating multiple EMR systems created inefficiencies for staff and required patients to navigate up to three different online portals to see their medical records. They say the grant represents an important step in addressing the challenges and ensuring Samaritan's technology "keeps pace with the care it delivers and meets patient's expectations."

As part of the same program, North Star Health Alliance received \$4.9 million to modernize and improve technology at Clax-

ton-Hepburn Medical Center in Ogdensburg, Carthage Area Hospital and Meadowbrook Terrace assisted living home in Carthage. North Star plans to use the money to improve cybersecurity tools, install backup and recovery computer systems and improve health records systems for staff and patients.

"These investments will help ensure that hospitals have the tools they need to safeguard patient data, expand telehealth services and deliver a healthier future for all New Yorkers," Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul said in a statement earlier this month.

Clarkson assistant professor named Fellow

POTSDAM — Lauren Petley, assistant professor of psychology at Clarkson University, has been accepted as a Fellow of the Psychonomic Society, an international honor recognizing excellence in the experimental study of cognition.

Petley is an inventor and cognitive neuroscientist in Clarkson's Department of Psychology. She holds a Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Ottawa and a B.S. in behavioral neuroscience from Laurentian University.

After completing her doctorate, Petley spent nearly a decade working in industry and industry-partnered settings, developing novel

technologies and diagnostics that leverage neurophysiological methods such as electroencephalography (EEG) to address the needs of patients with auditory disorders and brain injuries.

At Clarkson, Petley's research examines the cognitive components of listening, with a recent emphasis on executive function — the highest level of behavioral and attentional control. She is an expert in auditory cognition, clinical research in neurology and audiology, and neuroscience methods development, and serves as secretary of the Auditory Perception and Cognition Society.

The Psychonomic Society Fellows program, established in

2014 by the Society's Governing Board, recognizes members who demonstrate independent scholarship, sustained engagement in methodologically rigorous and theoretically significant research, and evidence of an emerging national or international reputation for excellence in the psychological sciences.

Founded more than 60 years ago, the Psychonomic Society is widely regarded as the preeminent international organization for the experimental study of cognition. Its more than 4,300 members conduct research on memory, learning, attention, perception, language, decision-making and problem solving.

Samaritan first in nation to use new system

By JONATHAN WHEELER
jwheeler@wdt.net

Calling it “a milestone achievement for both the organization and region,” Samaritan Medical Center on Friday announced it has implemented the first GE HealthCare Portrait Ecosystem in the country.

The Portrait VSM vital signs monitor units will replace Samaritan’s “aging technology,” a news release states.

The wireless devices have a connected workflow and Electronic Medical Record integration to give accurate

readings for blood pressure, pulse rate, oxygen saturation, body temperature and respiratory rates.

“This patient monitoring technology represents a significant leap forward in patient care, workflow efficiency, and clinical insight,” John



See MILESTONE H6

FDRHPO

From H2

those findings to identify priority needs and select strategies aligned with the New York State Prevention Agenda.

“This cycle differs from previous ones in an important way, with a stronger emphasis on Social Determinants of Health (SDOHs). These are the conditions that impact health beyond medical care, including housing stability, transportation, access to food, economic security, and access to services,” said Mr. Fontana.

Addressing these factors often requires coordination across multiple sectors, not just health-care.

While each county’s plan reflects its specific needs, there is some overlap in what all three counties are working to address. These include increasing access to services, enhancing coordination among services, improving

mental health, and addressing basic needs that directly impact health. The overlap in priorities across counties highlights common challenges and creates opportunities for improved collaboration. Recognizing these opportunities is a key aspect of FDRHPO’s role in aiding local planning efforts.

This work does not end with the completion of a report.

“FDRHPO will continue to support counties and hospitals throughout the Prevention Agenda cycle by helping track progress, gather and analyze new data, and adjust strategies as community needs change,” said Mr. Fontana. “This approach helps keep health planning active and responsive to real community needs.”

Ongoing collaboration among public health departments, hospitals, and regional partners strengthens the region’s ability to address challenges and improve health outcomes for residents in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties.

Nonprofit helping Oswego County teen in need of transplant

Times staff report

MEXICO — With the cost of a life-saving transplant often exceeding \$800,000, most transplant families are unable to shoulder that financial burden. To assist in that burden, the Children’s Organ Transplant Association is dedicated to organizing and guiding communities in raising funds for transplant-related expenses.

In Oswego County, volunteers are raising funds for COTA in honor of transplant patients like local teenager and Mexico High School junior Zachary “Zach” Johnson.

Zach, 16, is the son of Ellen Johnson and has been diagnosed with chronic pancreatitis. The transplant team at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, recommends a lifesaving islet cell transplant — a medical procedure that transfers insulin-producing cells (islets) from a donor pancreas into a person with type 1 dia-



Funds are being raised for the Children’s Organ Transplant Association to assist Zachary Johnson and family who live in Mexico, Oswego County. Photo courtesy of COTA

betes. Volunteers are raising \$60,000 for COTA to assist with transplant-related expenses.

For the past seven years, Zach has been dealing with severe abdominal pain after nearly every meal. Early on, doctors encouraged lifestyle changes, such as eating healthier, exercising more, and being more active, unaware that something far more serious was happening

inside his body. As the years passed, the pain became constant and exhausting, forcing Zach to miss school and preventing him from participating in sports and other school activities. Along with the pain, he has endured chronic fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, shortness of breath, and abdominal tenderness.

He went through numerous tests and procedures, routine blood work every three to six months, multiple endoscopic procedures, colonoscopies, biopsies and various scans — yet answers remained elusive.

A physician experienced in pancreatic disease became involved in Zach’s care and ordered genetic testing. It revealed Zach is a carrier of the Cystic Fibrosis gene, ultimately identifying the cause of his condition: chronic pancreatitis. This condition is seldom seen in children.

Because of the long delay

See TRANSPLANT H7

YOUR HEALTH MATTERS

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FDRHPO
Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

FDRHPO is committed to strengthening our region’s patient-focused system for health

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Army Public Health: Fort Drum's Front Line of Preventative Health



FORT DRUM, N.Y. – Judi McKee-Sanders, a nurse supervisor with Fort Drum's Army Public Health Nursing, provides a 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldier with information on the APHN clinic during a Public Health Week event on Fort Drum, N.Y., April 10, 2025. The event focused on educating the force on preventative health measures designed to sustain long-term Soldier readiness and reduce the need for acute medical treatment. (U.S. Army photo by Warren W. Wright Jr., Fort Drum MEDDAC public affairs)

by Warren Wright

FORT DRUM, New York – Total force readiness starts with preventative measures, ensuring Soldiers are armed with the knowledge and resources to maintain their health and wellness, limiting their need for healthcare treatment that can take them out of the fight and away from their units.

At Fort Drum, the agency at the forefront of preventative health is Army Public Health Nursing, a multi-disciplined clinic dedicated to sustaining military readiness through health promotion and disease prevention activities.

"What's so unique about the military and Army Public Health Nursing is that we focus on the military community," explained Maj. LaJuana Dixon, the chief of Fort Drum's APHN clinic. "So, we're talking about deployment assessments and training. We inform to prevent climate-related injuries, vector-borne disease, and foodborne illnesses. These are things that directly impact our force health protection and force readiness."

The combined Soldier and civilian team of professionals at the APHN clinic supports more

than just the military mission at Fort Drum; they serve the entire community by spearheading essential public health initiatives, including vaccine campaigns, disease prevention, health education, and community health research.

"They believe in the power of education and know that if their voice is heard, they are helping someone," said Col. Kylee J. Jewett, Guthrie Army Health Clinic's Deputy Commander for Nursing. "You won't find the team just sitting in their offices waiting for people to come to them. Rather, they are always actively looking for ways to be involved with the community."

A recent milestone for the team was their second annual flu vaccine campaign. This multi-week, walk-in clinic allowed service members, their families, and civilian employees to receive vaccinations at their convenience without the hassle of an appointment. Operating from October through December, APHN successfully administered approximately 1,152 vaccines, a 45% increase from the previous year.

"The team completely improved the process based on



FORT DRUM, N.Y. – Staff members with Fort Drum's Army Public Health Nursing clinic stand for a photo at their clinical offices on Fort Drum, N.Y., Dec. 18, 2025. APHN is comprised of a multi-disciplined team of professionals who support public health initiatives through public health promotion and disease prevention activities. (U.S. Army photo by Warren W. Wright Jr., Fort Drum MEDDAC public affairs)

feedback and lessons learned to improve overall compliance and created easier access to care to obtain the vaccine," Jewett said. Due to the measurable impact of APHN's efforts, "The flu vaccine compliance rate for GAHC alone has increased from 72% to 99% in the past three years."

Everything the APHN team does is to prevent illness now to reduce the need for invasive healthcare in the future. By focusing on community-wide strategies such as promoting healthy lifestyles, expanding vaccine access and education, providing nutrition information, and more, APHN can improve the overall health of the Fort Drum community and reduce the burden on the healthcare system.

Dixon explained she wants to ensure preventative health, the first level of healthcare, is at the forefront of everyone's healthcare journey.

"We want to make sure that we inform the community, educate them, so that they can advo-

cate for themselves, make proactive choices in nutrition, manage chronic diseases, be immunized, and make informed decisions in regard to their healthcare," Dixon said.

These initiatives help improve access to care for beneficiaries by reducing the burden on other clinics, such as high-volume specialty clinics where appointment availability is often limited.

And the public health team's responsibilities don't stop at the gates of Fort Drum. In addition to working with other health agencies within the installation, such as child and youth services, other health clinics, and 10th Mountain Division leadership, APHN routinely collaborates with public health entities within the North Country community.

"When you talk about infection surveillance and providing recommendations and following up, we need every community partner," explained Dixon. "We have to be connected. We can't work in silo. The only way we are effective and public

health is successful is by having those ongoing conversations, those follow-ups, those networking opportunities to build relationships. These efforts are and have been instrumental in APHN identifying community health threats really early due to our collaborations and investigations."

Jewett emphasizes that APHN's success hinges on increasing public awareness of their services and fostering a deeper understanding of how preventive medicine supports the community's overall well-being.

"I encourage people to talk to them at the different events (they participate in) or even stop in their building and see what resources they provide," Jewett said. The APHN team is driven by a genuine "love to help and serve our community."

The APHN clinic is located at building P-36, 1st Street West, on Fort Drum and can be reached at (315) 772-6404.

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L to R: SLR VP Chief Nursing Officer Christina Latta; Massena Hospital VP of Nursing Amy Nugent; Chief Information Officer Lyndon Allen; Massena Hospital IT Department Systems Deployment & Implementation Coordinator Gina Bain; and Information Systems & Technology Manager Joe Mulvana.



L to R: SLR Chief Operating Officer Sinead Ingersoll; Assistant Director of Nursing Sandra Jensen; ED Registered Nurse Lexi Kennedy; SLR VP Chief Nursing Officer Christina Latta; and SLR President Donna McGregor.



L to R: Manager Food Services Corina Weems; Catering Associate Jason Randall; SLR Chief Operating Officer Sinead Ingersoll; SLR President Donna McGregor; and SLR VP Chief Nursing Officer Christina Latta.

St. Lawrence Region Team Members of the Third Quarter

Across Rochester Regional Health, our people are at the heart of everything we do. Today we're proud to shine a spotlight on the Ancillary and Clinical team members from Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region (SLR) who were recently named 'Team Members of the Quarter'. These individuals were selected among hundreds of nominees who received positive accolades from patients and colleagues throughout the previous quarter. Please join us in celebrating these outstanding individuals who truly

embody our mission every day.

Those recognized were Canton-Potsdam Hospital Nutritional Services Catering Associate Jason Randall; Canton-Potsdam Hospital Emergency Department Registered Nurse Lexi Kennedy; Massena Hospital IT Department Systems Deployment & Implementation Coordinator Gina Bain; Clinical Network Urgent Care Coordinator Registered Nurse Damien Razis; Gouverneur Hospital Registered Respiratory Therapist Jacob Hollis; Gouverneur Hospital

Emergency Department Licensed Practical Nurse Jennie Young; and Massena Hospital Medical/Surgical Nursing Assistant Christine Pomainville.

Milestone

From H3

Green, vice president of Patient Care Services at Samaritan Medical Center said in the release. "We're proud of the collaboration and dedication that made this possible, and even more proud to bring these advanced capabilities to our patients and staff."

GE HealthCare's Portrait Ecosystem is enhanced by

Portrait Mobile, which is a continuous wireless and wearable monitoring solution, allowing patients to move freely while having real-time continuous monitoring.

Samaritan says it achieved the implementation because of the GE HealthCare and the Samaritan Information Technology and Biomed teams. The units have been deployed across several medical/surgical units with additional devices scheduled for implementation in the coming weeks.

Pediatric Expansion

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Sunny Patel, MD
Pediatrician

Watertown Savings Bank presents \$33,000 donation to United Way of NNY



Amy Moore, Executive Vice President & CFO, WSB, (right) stands with Dawn Cole, CEO, United Way of NNY, (left) Contributed.

WATERTOWN, NY – Watertown Savings Bank donates \$33,000.00 as part of their continued annual support of the United Way of Northern New York.

Watertown Savings Bank is proud to present its annual donation in the amount of \$33,000 to the United Way of Northern New York, reaffirming the Bank's long-standing commitment to supporting local organizations that strengthen the communities it serves. This contribution helps fund vital programs and

services across the region, providing essential resources to individuals and families throughout the North Country.

The United Way of NNY provides much needed programming to meet the critical needs of vulnerable populations while striving to enhance the lives of so many in our community. Watertown Savings Bank values its partnership with the United Way and recognizes the meaningful impact these funds have in addressing local needs and im-

proving quality of life.

Since 2018, Watertown Savings Bank has donated nearly \$3 million to local businesses and nonprofit organizations throughout Jefferson County. "Investing in our community is at the heart of everything we do," said Amy Moore, WSB's Executive Vice President & CFO. "Our continued support of the United Way and other local organizations reflects a genuine commitment to strengthening our community now and into the future."

Transplant

From H3

in diagnosis, his pancreas has suffered significant and irreversible scarring. Zach was referred to a highly specialized team at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, one of the few facilities in the country that treats complex pediatric pancreatic cases. The facility is an eight-hour drive from Zach's home in Oswego County.

Chronic pancreatitis does not heal. Over time, it causes permanent damage and scarring and can lead to severe complications, including kidney failure, breathing problems, infections, malnutrition, osteoporosis, diabetes and even pancreatic cancer.

Zach and his Mom traveled from New York to Ohio twice, each visit lasting a week, for extensive evaluations and procedures. After careful consideration, his medical team determined that the only option for long-term relief is a major surgery known as TPIAT — Total Pancreatectomy with Islet Autotransplantation.

Because his pancreas will be removed, Zachary will become diabetic and will rely on an insulin pump for the rest of his life. While this is a significant adjustment, it also represents hope for a future without constant pain and the chance to live the active, fulfilling life.

Zach loves riding his four-wheeler, dirt bike, fish-

ing, camping, and has a natural talent for mechanics.

HOW TO HELP

Individuals and groups interested in more information may contact co-campaign coordinator Sue Bakos at baksue20@gmail.com or 315-806-1790.

COTA, a nonprofit charity, helps transplant families avoid financial devastation. Transplant procedure costs range from \$100,000 to more than \$800,000. Once the transplant is complete, families face significant transplant-related expenses, including medication; transportation to and from the transplant center; lodging; and expenses while parents are out of work and often living with the hospitalized child far from home. These out-of-pocket expenses add up to tens of thousands of dollars annually. In cases where a shortfall exists, COTA helps bridge the financial gap.

Zach's family has asked for assistance from COTA. All funds raised for COTA in honor of patients assist with transplant-related expenses.

Contributions may be sent to the Children's Organ Transplant Association, 2501 West COTA Drive, Bloomington, Indiana, 47403. Checks should be made payable to COTA, with "In Honor of Zach's Journey" written on the memo line. Secure credit card gifts are accepted online at COTA.org/COTAforZachsJourney.

SUNY EMT

From H1

assists county responders, supports campus events, and offers extensive training opportunities," Thayer said.

The squad has covered nearly 1,000 events as stand-by medical personnel and trained hundreds of members of the campus community in

CPR, first aid, and other emergency response scenarios.

Anthony Romano, a 2019 graduate of the college's Homeland Security program, served as the squad's first chief and said the experience was one of his personal defining moments. Romano continued as an EMT in Rotterdam.

"It taught me the true meaning of leadership, teamwork, and compassion with lessons that continue to guide me in every step of my career," he said. "SUNY Canton EMS shaped who I am today and

built the foundation for my current career in emergency services."

Tashmir (Taz) Eggleston, a sophomore majoring in Homeland Security from Newburgh, now serves as the chief of the organization.

"SUNY Canton EMS has pushed me to become a better version of myself," he said. "Being part of a team that supports our campus community reminds me every day that the work we do matters. We grow through the trust our community places in us, and that con-

nection motivates us to keep learning, keep improving and keep giving back."

In addition to responding to campus emergencies, the squad provides an opportunity to teach students valuable skills and has sponsored nearly 50 students to earn their Emergency Medical Technician certification. Those students then teach others how to respond to medical emergencies through on-campus CPR, first aid, and opioid-overdose trainings.

Have news to share?

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