



NNY Health

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Daily updates: NNY360.com October 2026

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River Hospital partnership expands access to free cancer screenings



A new clinic at River Hospital has been created at River Hospital and now free cancer screenings are offered to qualified individuals.

ALEXANDRIA BAY — A new partnership between River Hospital and Oswego County Opportunities' Cancer Services Program of the North Country will connect eligible uninsured adults with free breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings.

Patients at River Community Clinic may be referred to the screening program, which serves qualifying uninsured adults ages 40 to 64.

The partnership builds on the clinic's work to provide free primary and preventive care to uninsured adults throughout the Thousand

Islands region. The clinic, located in River Hospital's Medical Office Building at 4 Fuller St., serves patients age 18 and older by appointment.

"This partnership expands access to essential preventive care and helps more community members

receive potentially life-saving cancer screenings," said Carolyn Handville, the cancer services program manager.

River Hospital established the clinic in partnership with founding donor

See RIVER H2

*Learn more
inside*

Professional Connection Page 9

Susan Peters Nurse Practitioner Scholarships announced

WATERTOWN -- Samaritan Medical Center Foundation of Northern New York is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2026 Susan Peters Scholarship: Ashlie Machnaigh and Charlotte Beach, registered nurses in Samaritan's Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Machnaigh and Beach are both pursuing their Family Nurse Practitioner degrees.

The Susan Peters Nursing Scholarship was established in 2018 to help cover education costs for registered nurses who are continuing their education, specifically to pursue Nurse Practitioner degrees. The scholarship awards two \$2,000 scholarships each year.

Mrs. Peters graduated from the former House of the Good Samaritan School of Nursing

and retired from Samaritan Medical Center as a Certified Oncology Nurse; prior to that, she had served as a staff RN and for more than 20 years as a Nurse Manager of Medical/Surgical, Orthopedic, and Alternate Level of Care Units. Susan passed away in 2020.

Nurse Practitioners can provide many of the same services as physicians, including developing treatment plans for their patients, ordering tests, performing minor procedures, and prescribing medication.

For more information, please contact the Samaritan Medical Center Foundation at 315-785-4584, visit samaritanhealth.com/scholarships, or email info@shsny.com.



Recipients of the Susan Peters Nurse Practitioner Scholarships. Contributed.

River

From H1

Gretchen Scott, whose support will fund its initial years of operation. The hospital is contributing clinical space, diagnostics, technology, scheduling and administrative support.

Scott, who built a national fashion brand, drew inspiration from her father, the late Dr. George Sturtz, a pediatrician known for his commitment to local families, and her longtime friend, the late Judy Randall, a River Hospital Auxiliary volunteer and community advocate.

Hospital leaders said the clinic was created to address barriers that can cause uninsured residents to delay routine care or struggle to manage chronic illnesses.

"We shared the same concern about people in our communities delaying care, struggling to manage chron-

ic illness alone, or falling through the cracks entirely because they do not have insurance coverage," River Hospital CEO Kelley Tiernan said in a news release announcing the clinic.

Services include routine checkups, vaccinations, chronic disease management and care coordination. The clinic also helps patients explore insurance enrollment opportunities and connect with longer-term health care resources.

The clinic generally operates Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., although hours may vary depending on provider availability. Appointments are required.

To schedule an appointment or learn more about the clinic, call 315-482-1291 or visit riverhospital.org. For information about the cancer screening program, call 855-592-0830 or visit oco.org.



Oswego County Opportunities (OCO) Cancer Services Program of the North Country Manager met with River Hospital Community Clinic staff to discuss how their programs connect uninsured community members with free primary care and cancer screening services. For information about the Cancer Services Program Partnership of the North Country, call 855-592-0830, visit OCO's website at www.oco.org, or follow the program on Facebook. To schedule an appointment at River Community Clinic, call 315-482-1291. Pictured above (L-R) River Hospital's Clinical Coordinator Nicole Downs, River Hospital Dr Daniel Randall, OCO Cancer Service's Program Manager Carolyn Handville and River Hospital.

Walmart and Sam's Club Campaign Raises \$106,000 for Children's Miracle Network of Northern New York

A fundraising campaign by Walmart and Sam's Club employees, customers and members raised more than \$106,000 for Children's Miracle Network at Samaritan Medical Center.

Children's Miracle Network of Northern New York uses donations to purchase pediatric equipment at Samaritan and provide financial assistance to families with children facing medical crises. The assistance helps cover out-of-pocket expenses, including travel, co-pays and equipment not covered by insurance.

"The teams at Walmart and Sam's Club locations across the North Country are all-in when it comes to supporting CMN and local kids," said Angie VanWormer, director of

Children's Miracle Network at Samaritan Medical Center. "The funds they raise are helping make miracles happen in our community, and we are so grateful for their dedication to our mission."

Walmart and Sam's Club have raised more than \$1 billion for children's hospitals nationwide since 1987, according to the announcement. This year, their 39th as a corporate partner of Children's Miracle Network, they raised more than \$39 million for 170 member hospitals.

For more information, contact Children's Miracle Network at Samaritan Medical Center at 315-785-4053 or cmninfo@shsny.com.



CMN National Champions Walmart photo. Contributed.

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Lewis County Health System adds two orthopedic physician assistants

LOWVILLE — Physician assistants Karen Fish and Sarah Finnigan have joined Lewis County Health System's medical staff and will see patients at Lewis County Orthopedics on the main hospital campus in Lowville.

Both are board-certified physician assistants with military and civilian medical experience. They previously worked with North Country Orthopedic Group in Watertown.

"As demand for orthopedic services and sports medicine care continues to grow across our region, expanding our provider team is vital and allows us to expand access for North Country residents," said Jeffery Hellinger, the health system's CEO.



Karen Fish.



Sarah Finnigan. Contributed.

Fish, a retired Army major, has more than 20 years of experience in orthopedic surgery, primary care and combat casualty care. She earned a master's degree in physician assistant studies and a bachelor's degree through the Uni-

versity of Nebraska College of Medicine's Interservice Physician Assistant Program in Omaha, Nebraska. She also holds an associate degree in medical laboratory studies from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Fish is a member of the American Academy of Physician Assistants.

Finnigan has more than 15 years of medical experience in the Army and civilian practice. She earned a master's degree in physician assistant studies and a bachelor's degree through the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Interservice Physician Assistant Program in Omaha. She also holds a bachelor's degree in public relations and advertising from Loyola University Chicago.

Finnigan is a member of the American Academy of Physician Assistants and the American Association of Surgical Physician Assistants.

Both have orthopedic training and surgical assist-

ing experience and received honors and awards for their military service, according to the health system.

Dr. Sean Harney, chief medical officer of employed practices, said the additions would strengthen the orthopedic team.

"Two additional advanced practice providers will strengthen our clinical depth, further enhance surgical support, reduce wait times, and provide improved continuity of care from the clinic to the operating room," Harney said.

Fish and Finnigan join Drs. Steven Kaplan, Greg Keller, Carolyn Hettrich and Shane Woolf, along with physician assistant Evan Leibelsperger.

Lewis County Health System sponsored blood drive Oct. 14

LOWVILLE — Lewis County Health System is sponsoring an American Red Cross Blood Drive on Wednesday, October 14, 2026, from 10:30 am to 2:30 pm at the Lowville VFW Banquet Room, 7744 West State Street in Lowville. Fall into the habit of donating. All presenting blood donors who come in to give blood September 21-October 18 get a \$15 e-gift card.

Please remember all blood donated through this Lewis County Health System sponsored blood drive helps patients in our community. It only takes about an hour of your time, and your one donation could help save up to three lives!

Consider a Power Red Cell donation if you are O, A, or B negative or O positive. You can also streamline your donation experience and save up to 15 minutes by visiting RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass to complete your pre-donation reading and health history questions on the day of your appointment.

Rochester Regional Health offers no-cost genetic screening

ROCHESTER — Rochester Regional Health (RRH) is proud to introduce GenoWell, a first-of-its-kind community health research program designed to empower individuals with knowledge about their genetic health risks. In partnership with Helix, a national leader in population genomics and precision health, GenoWell provides no-cost DNA screening to help identify genetic risks for certain cancers and a cause of heart disease that can be missed without genetic testing. By uncovering this information earlier, participants and their providers can move toward quicker diagnoses and more personalized care.

"For us, GenoWell is deeply personal," said Richard "Chip" Davis, PhD and Chief Executive Officer at Rochester Regional Health.

"Rochester has always been a region of innovators, from the founding of Rochester General and St. Mary's

to the breakthroughs we continue to deliver today. Long before population health became a national priority, our system helped pioneer one of the country's first Accountable Care Organizations, GRIPA, which set the stage for the proactive, preventive care that GenoWell now advances. Serving our communities with compassion and cutting-edge care is in our genes, and GenoWell brings that promise into the 21st century."

Over the next five years, GenoWell aims to reach more than 100,000 adults, age 18 and older, across the region. Participation is voluntary, confidential and comes at no cost, and no insurance is required. Results will provide insight into conditions such as inherited breast and ovarian cancer, colorectal cancer, and high cholesterol. Participants can then consult with their providers to make informed, proactive decisions about

their health.

Through GenoWell, Rochester Regional Health joins leading health systems across North America that are part of the Helix Research Network. This collaboration accelerates the integration of genetic information into everyday clinical care and expands opportunities to bring novel clinical trials and research to local communities.

To enroll or learn more about GenoWell: <https://www.rochesterregional.org/services/genowell>

For eligibility, collection process or privacy: <https://www.rochesterregional.org/services/genowell#FAQ>

You can also call or email with questions: GenoWell@rochesterregional.org (585) 922-4366.

Pumpkin Run returns to Malone

By Alexander Violo

aviolo@mtelegram.com

MALONE — Alice Hyde Medical Center's pumpkin run, a community race to support workforce development programs and career growth for employees at the local hospital, returns to the village this weekend.

The annual 5 K Pumpkin Run and Munchkin Mile, hosted by Alice Hyde, is set for Saturday at the Malone Rec Park, according to a prepared statement from the University of Vermont Health Network, which states the event celebrates fitness for all ages and abilities.

The event's Munchkin Mile begins at 10 a.m., followed by the 5 K run at 10:30 a.m., according to the press release, which states participants can register online at www.uvmhealth.org/PumpkinRun.

Registration for Satur-

See PUMPKIN H5

Red Cross urges fall blood donations, schedules North Country drives

WATERTOWN — The American Red Cross is urging people of all blood types to donate blood or platelets this fall to help maintain a steady supply for patients.

The organization supplies hospitals nationwide with more than 6.5 million blood products annually, according to a news release. Its appeal coincides with National Preparedness Month in September.

People who come to donate Sept. 21 through Oct. 18 will receive a \$15 electronic gift card to a merchant of their choice. Details are available at RedCrossBlood.org/Fall.

Appointments can be made at RedCrossBlood.org, through the Red Cross Blood Donor App or by calling 800-733-2767.

The following donation opportunities are scheduled in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties through Oct. 6.

Jefferson County

Sept. 22: 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., American Red Cross North Country Chapter, 203 N. Hamilton St., Watertown.

Sept. 23: 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Samaritan Medical Center, 830 Washington St., Watertown.

Sept. 24: 1 to 6 p.m., Airport Christian Fellowship, 17315 state Route 12F, Dexter.

Sept. 25: 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., USO, 10502 S. Riva Ridge Loop, Fort Drum.

Sept. 26: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.,

American Red Cross North Country Chapter, 203 N. Hamilton St., Watertown.

Sept. 28: Noon to 5 p.m., Recreation Park Pavilion, 602 S. James St., Cape Vincent.

Sept. 29: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thousand Islands High School, 8481 County Route 9, Clayton.

Sept. 29: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Dulles State Office Building, 317 Washington St., Watertown.

Oct. 1: 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Jefferson Community College, 1220 Coffeen St., Watertown.

Oct. 5: Noon to 5 p.m., BOSS Center, 10650 Fifth Armored Division Drive, Fort Drum.

Lewis County

Sept. 29: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Elks Lodge, 5600 Shady Ave., Lowville.

St. Lawrence County

Sept. 23 and 24: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., SUNY Canton Miller Campus Center, 34 Cornell Drive, Canton.

Sept. 25: 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Hammond Central School, 51 S. Main St., Hammond.

Sept. 25: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Norwood Norfolk Auditorium, 7852 state Route 56, Norwood.

Sept. 28: 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Hermon DeKalb Central School, 709 E. De Kalb Road, De Kalb Junction.

Sept. 30: 1 to 6 p.m., Sullivan Student Center, 90 Park St., Canton.

Sept. 30: 12:30 to 5 p.m., New



The American Red Cross will be hosting blood drives throughout Northern New York. SUNY Canton photo

Hope Community Church, 33 Grant St., Potsdam.

Oct. 1: Noon to 4 p.m., Gouverneur Community Center, 4673 state Route 58, Gouverneur.

Oct. 2: 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Parishville-Hopkinton Central School, 12 County Route 47, Parishville.

Oct. 3: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., West Stockholm Fire Department, 143 County Route 57, Potsdam.

Oct. 3: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Trinity Church, 8 Maple St., Potsdam.

Oct. 6: 1 to 6 p.m., Morristown High School, 408 Gouverneur St., Morristown.

Oct. 6: 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Claxton Hepburn Medical Center, 214 King St., Ogdensburg.

Donors must bring a blood donor card, driver's license or two other forms of identification. They can save time by

completing the required reading and health history questionnaire on the day of their appointment through the app or at RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass.

The Red Cross also is seeking volunteers to greet and check in donors at blood drives and transport blood products to hospitals. For information, email joineny@redcross.org or visit redcross.org/volunteer-today.

Pumpkin

From H4

day's race is \$25 for adults and \$10 for children before the race, according to the press release, which states race-day registration, online or on-site, is \$30 for adults and \$15 for children. Check-in at the rec park opens at 9 a.m. on Saturday.

Saturday morning's Munchkin Mile covers a one-mile route within the park and each participant receives a pumpkin bag and goodies, according to the press release, which states the day's first race is open to participants 10-years-old and younger.

This weekend's Pumpkin Run covers a scenic course through the rec park trails, according to the press release, which states all par-

ticipants in the 5K run are eligible for a share of more than \$2,500 in prizes, including cash and a season pass to Titus Mountain.

"The Pumpkin Run is a great opportunity to come together as a community, enjoy a beautiful fall morning and support a cause that makes a lasting difference," Chantelle Marshall, director of philanthropy for Alice Hyde said, in the press release, "Proceeds from the

event help individuals pursue health care careers while providing opportunities for our employees to continue learning and growing. We're grateful to everyone who participates and helps us invest in the future of health care in our region."

According to Marshall, multiple sponsors supported the upcoming event including Bond, Schoeneck and King, Hudson Headwaters Health Network,

Red Roof Inn Malone, Ellis Automotive, Kinney Drugs Foundation, H&R Block, Casella Waste Services, Con-Tech, CKON 97.3, TruNorthern Federal Credit Union, NuMed for Children, Stafford Owens, Malone Ford, SeaComm, Dannemora Federal Credit Union, Stewart's Shops, the American Legion Auxiliary, Jreck Subs, Collins Oil, and IBC.

Rochester Regional Health welcomes new MD to Emergency Medicine team

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Dalton LaBarge, MD

POTSDAM — Rochester Regional Health’s St. Lawrence Region is pleased to welcome Dalton LaBarge, MD, to its Emergency Medicine team, expanding access to emergency care for patients across the region.

Dr. LaBarge, a first generation physician, completed his Emergency Medicine Residency at the University of Rochester Medical Center, where he also served as Chief Resident. He earned his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. He previously completed post-baccalaureate studies at the University of Rochester School of Arts & Sciences and earned his Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University.

Throughout his medical training, Dr. LaBarge has distinguished himself through clinical education, leadership, advocacy, and community service. As Chief Resident, he helped lead administrative, educational, and interprofessional efforts within the University of Rochester Medical Center’s Emergency Medicine Residency program, while fostering a culture focused on growth, excellence, and

Doctor

From H6

inclusivity.

“S k e n n e n k ó : w a Wa’tkononhwerá:ton’, Peace and greetings with gratitude,” said LaBarge. “After many years of being away to complete my training, I am over the moon to return home to Ahk-wesáshne and the North

Country; and to have this new opportunity to care for our incredible community! This is a dream come true for me and I greatly look forward to this next chapter in life working within Rochester Regional Health’s St. Lawrence Region to deliver the highest quality emergency care for our patients and their families.”

Dr. LaBarge has received numerous honors recognizing his leadership, service,

and commitment to medical education and patient care. He is a member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society and Gold Humanism Honor Society. His honors also include the American College of Emergency Physicians Student Professionalism and Leadership Award, the American Medical Association Foundation Physicians of Tomorrow Award, the University of Rochester Change Maker

Award, and the Dr. Lemuel Rogers Memorial Award from the Black Physicians Network of Greater Rochester.

His professional interests extend beyond the emergency department. Dr. LaBarge has contributed to research involving tick-borne illness in emergency medicine and pediatric THC ingestions and has published research in *Regenerative Medicine* and *Annals of Plastic Sur-*

gery.

To learn more about emergency care and other services available through Rochester Regional Health’s St. Lawrence Region, visit rochesterregional.org. To learn more about Dr. LaBarge visit rochesterregional.org/providers/dalton-t-labarge.

New doctor joins RRH St. Lawrence Region Emergency Medicine team

POTSDAM — Rochester Regional Health’s St. Lawrence Region has welcomed Charles Kolkin, DO, to its Emergency Medicine team serving patients at Canton-Potsdam Hospital.

Dr. Kolkin completed his Emergency Medicine residency at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse and earned his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine. Before pursuing medicine, he served for nearly a decade as a firefighter and paramedic in Maryland, bringing extensive pre-hospital emergency care experience to his role as a physician.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kolkin has demonstrated a strong commitment to education and leadership. He served as a paramedic instructor with the Baltimore County Fire Rescue Academy, training future EMTs and paramedics, and later facilitated simulation-based education for emergency medicine residents at SUNY Upstate Medical University. He has also presented on a variety of emergency medicine topics and is involved in ongoing clinical research.

Additionally, he earned Firefighter of the Year honors and



Charles Kolkin, DO

a Unit Citation Award for his actions during a house fire rescue. His firsthand experience responding to emergencies provides valuable perspective in caring for patients in the emergency department.

“RRH has a phenomenal team that I’m very lucky to be a part of; I look forward to caring for the citizens of St. Lawrence County,” said Dr. Kolkin.

For more information about Rochester Regional Health’s Emergency Medicine services in the St. Lawrence Region, visit rochesterregional.org, or to learn more about Dr. Kolkin, visit rochesterregional.org

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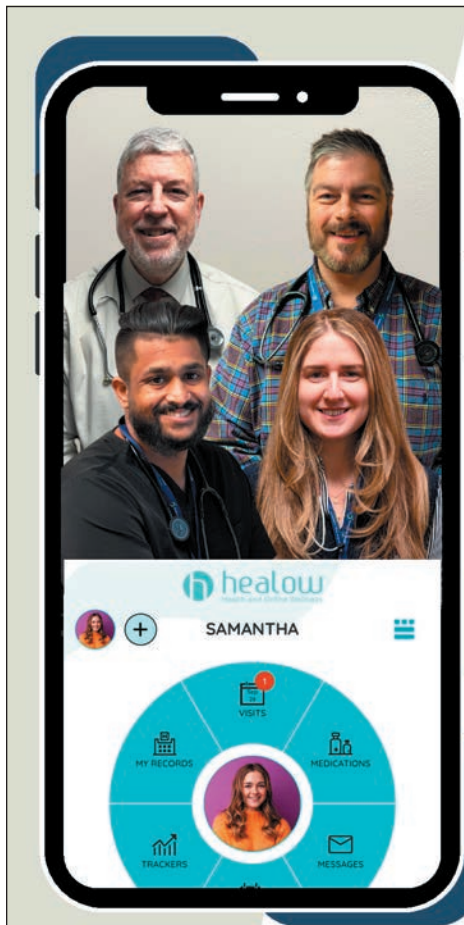
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Club gets ‘Morgan’s Message’ on mental health awareness, support out to Plattsburgh campus

By **Gerianne Downs**

Associate Director of Communications

PLATTSBURGH — If Abby Guasconi had her way, there would be no need to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month because mental health would be on everyone’s radar every day.

The junior fitness and wellness leadership major from Ogdensburg is president of the local chapter of Morgan’s Message, an organization on campus and across the country that at its core advocates for student-athletes’ physical and mental health.

The organization, founded in memory of Duke University lacrosse player Morgan Rodgers, who died by suicide in July 2019 at age 22, empowers student-athletes to speak up, support one another and normalize conversations around mental health.

But at SUNY Plattsburgh and elsewhere, Guasconi wants the message to extend beyond athletics.

“There’s a stigma around athletes,” said Guasconi, a member of the university’s women’s lacrosse team. “They’re perceived as being stronger, tougher, that they can handle things better than the typical non-athlete student can.”

Want to fight own battles

“Most athletes want to fight their own battles — they might not want to reach out for help, not realizing they have problems with their mental health,” she said.

Anna Bissell is the club’s faculty adviser and coach of the Cardinals women’s lacrosse team.

“Student-athletes have been conditioned to ‘suck it up and be tough,’ but being a student-athlete is like working two full-time jobs,” Bissell said. They’re athletes



Abby Guasconi. Gerianne Downs photo.

with all that entails, and they’re students, with all that entails, she said.

“They also have social lives. And in any of those areas is the pressure of failure,” Bissell said. “Morgan’s Message gives student-athletes the tools to open up, to find resources.”

These pressures can take a toll on mental health, said Sarah Erno, wellness and health promotion coordinator.

“Athletes have a responsibility on field and off, but to always be expected to perform at your best is added stress,” Erno said.

Peer-to-peer support

By normalizing conversations and providing peer-to-peer support, Morgan’s Message has created a community where athletes can feel less alone.

“Peer-to-peer support is so important, but it’s also awesome because you’re looking at someone across from you — they may be same age, same year, maybe even with the same issues — and you think, ‘If they can do it, I can do it.’”

“A lot of students never admit they need help; they’ve



Ellie Graney. Photo by Gerianne Downs.



Anna Bissell, Abby Guasconi and Sarah Erno of Morgan’s Message. Gerianne Downs photo.

never reached out for help,” Guasconi said. “They’re supposed to be stronger.”

Bissell pointed out that social media adds another layer, “another ripple.”

“When people post on so-

See MESSAGE H11

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTION

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FDRHPO releases findings of 11th Annual Community Health Survey

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- Mental, Emotional & Behavioral Health
- Health Information Technology
- Health Workforce
- Emergency Medical Services
- Value Based Care

By Holly Boname
FDRHPO

2026 survey highlights increased preventative cancer screenings, identifies affordability pressures, and challenges accessing care

Watertown —The 11th Annual Community Health Survey of adults in Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties is now complete. The 2026 results show encouraging gains

in routine cancer screenings and dental care, while also identifying affordability, declining self-reported health, and growing barriers to local healthcare as key concerns.

Each year, the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO) conducts a Community Health Survey to better understand the health behaviors, concerns, and needs of residents

across Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties. The 2026 survey examined affordability and food security, housing stability, concerns about aging, chronic conditions, self-reported physical, mental, and dental health, trust in health information, healthcare access, and use or consideration of GLP-1 weight-loss medications.

Survey questions are developed and updated annually by North Country Health Compass Partners, a group that includes representatives from Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence County public health departments, hospitals, healthcare facilities, behavioral health clinics, and a wide range of community-based organizations dedicated to community wellness. Some questions stay the same from previous years, while others are newly created each year to address current needs.

“The Community Health Survey is a resource that our stakeholders look forward to each year,” said Kayla Quinn, Population Health Coordinator at Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO). “The data collected and released showcases the health needs of the community, 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.”

Key findings:

Routine cancer screening participation remained strong. Among adults ages 45 – 75, 84% reported having a colorectal cancer screening, a significant increase from 66%. Among women ages 40 – 75, 85% reported having a mammogram within the past two years, the highest rate recorded.

Routine dental care also showed a positive rebound. 67% of North Country resi-

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Samaritan to host senior living seminar Oct. 8

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center will host a free senior living seminar from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8, at Samaritan Summit Village, 22691 Campus Drive.

The event is open to people planning for retirement or senior care, as well as those helping others make those plans. Topics will include financial planning, legal matters and care options.

Scheduled speakers include attorney Catherine Burns Quencer of Schwerzmann & Wise, financial professionals Jay Ringenbach of First Command

Financial Advisors and Jeffry Weldon of Coach Weldon, and a Medicaid specialist.

A financial planner will be available after the seminar for individual questions about finances and planning for the future.

Attendees can tour Summit Village and speak with representatives of community organizations offering senior care resources, including Lincare, the Jefferson County Department of Social Services and the North Country Library System.

Lunch from Embellished Catering will be provided, and each participant will be entered in a drawing for an iPad.

To register, call 315-785-4584 or complete the online form at samaritanhealth.com/upcoming-event/seniorseminar.

Summit Village has 120 assisted living beds and 168 nursing home beds and offers rehabilitation services, including speech, occupational and physical therapy.

Message

From H8

cial media, they make their lives look perfect, but you don't know what happens behind closed doors. Morgan's Message brings awareness to different levels. Mental health is a struggle — it is more pervasive than people may realize," she said.

'We support you'

"Which is why Morgan's Message can belong to everybody," Erno said. "Morgan was an athlete, but she was also a student. With this organization structured as a club on a college campus,

it says, 'We have a space for you, and we support you.'"

Guasconi said that at monthly meetings, officers — including Vice President Ellie Graney, who staffed the Morgan's Message table during Thrive Fest — give members discussion topics as well as tools to combat the issues being discussed.

"Morgan's Message (nationally) does a really good job creating the curricula for each meeting," Guasconi said.

At SUNY Plattsburgh, Morgan's Message became a club four years ago. Guasconi was introduced to the organization by a former lacrosse teammate, Rachel LaMar, a

2025 graduate who founded the local chapter.

Way to expand to student body

"I'd always heard of Morgan's Message from playing lacrosse, and I'd noticed she'd started the club," Guasconi said. "Once I came here, I thought, 'I want to be a part of this.' There are monthly meetings and dedication games where many of our sports teams participate by dedicating a game to Morgan's Message. It's a way for awareness to be spread out to the different sports but also a way to expand to the whole student body."

Students who are interested in starting a chapter

apply to become Morgan's Message ambassadors. As of 2026, the organization had more than 1,850 campuses with chapters.

"We participate in a group chat with ambassadors across the country where we all bounce ideas off one another," Guasconi said.

She had a personal connection with mental health, sharing that her younger sister struggled in the past.

"It was hard for me to help her," she said. "This is a way for me to help other people."

That is what motivates Guasconi to want to reach out to all students, not only those who play sports.

"No one should feel like

they're alone," she said.

"There are so many resources available," Bissell said. "That's one of the best things about being in college — the number of resources that help you connect with others who can help you learn how to understand your mental health and continue that past graduation."

For more information on the SUNY Plattsburgh chapter of Morgan's Message, contact Bissell at 518-564-4127 or email abiss003@plattsburgh.edu. For available resources, contact Erno at 518-564-4830 or email serno001@plattsburgh.edu.

Survey

From H10

dents reported having a dental cleaning within the past year, up significantly from the 2020 low of 55% and now in line with pre-pandemic reporting.

More than one in five residents (21%) reported eating less or skipping meals in the past year because there was not enough money for food.

Housing stability worsened: 16.4% reported that their current living situation was not steady, including 15.9% who were worried about losing their housing and 0.5% who were homeless. Concern about losing housing more than doubled from 7.5% in 2024.

Confidence in covering an

unexpected \$500 expense declined. The share who were "very confident" fell from 51% in 2025 to 46% in 2026, while those who were "not at all confident" rose from 16% to 23%.

Two-thirds of adults (67%) reported having been diagnosed with at least one chronic condition, with particularly notable recent increases in obesity and mental health conditions.

From 2018 to 2026, the share of respondents rating their health as "excellent" or "very good" reached record lows, declining to 34% for physical health, 25% for mental health, and 17% for dental health.

Healthcare providers remained the most trusted source of health information at 65%, down from 70% in 2016. Reliance on personal experience, intuition, and in-

stinct rose from 12% in 2016 to 23% in 2026.

More than half of residents (53%) reported difficulty accessing local healthcare in the past year, up from 42% in 2023. Long wait times were the leading challenge at 48%, followed by a lack of available providers at 18%; cost of care was cited by 8%.

Eighteen percent of adults reported currently taking a GLP-1 weight-loss medication. Among those not taking one, 20% said they were considering discussing the medication with their primary care provider, an estimated combined 34% of adults taking or considering a GLP-1 medication.

"The annual Community Health Survey helps turn local data into meaningful action. The 2026 findings show that

affordability, housing stability, chronic conditions, and timely access to providers are the most pressing challenges for North Country residents. These results give our partners a clearer picture of where focused outreach, collaboration, and resources are needed most," said Pat Fontana, Deputy Director at FDRHPO.

Now in its 11th year, the annual Community Health Survey continues to provide valuable data on community health perceptions, conditions, and behaviors. The 2026 insights will help regional stakeholders identify disparities, align resources, and target the most pressing needs of North Country residents.

"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 Mr. Fontana. "Our goal is to leverage these findings to make informed decisions that will improve health outcomes across the region."

Questions and comments can be directed here. For a full copy of the 2026 Community Health Survey, please contact FDRHPO.

For additional information, please contact Kayla Quinn by emailing kquinn@fdrhpo.org.

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