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FREE

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Rochester Regional Health has announced the sixth class has graduated from the Potsdam-based Isabella Graham Hart (IGH) School of Practical Nursing. Back row from left: IGH Professor Marcy Blackmer; LPN graduates Nicole Gromer; Anastazia Finley; Nicole Martin; Elaina Lumley; and IGH Professor Anna Green. Front row: LPN graduates Kailey Abreu; Kaydance Bernard; and Taylor Ellsworth. Rochester Regional Health photo

Professional Connection Page 6

Boards present Community Service Awards

CANTON, NY – The Board of Directors from Rochester Regional Health St. Lawrence Region's (SLR) three hospitals recently presented their 2025-2026 Community Service Awards to three long-standing and tireless ambassadors of wellness and population health across the North Country.

The Canton-Potsdam Hospital (CPH) Board honored Clarkson University's Physician Assistant Program; the Gouverneur Hospital (GH) Board recognized Edward L. Reason, DO; and the Massena Hospital (MH) Board honored Byung S. Lim, MD.

"These awards celebrate the people and organizations whose commitment to caring for others extends far beyond their everyday responsibilities," said Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region President Donna McGregor. "Each of this year's honorees has helped improve the lives of North Country residents through service, compassion, and a dedication to building healthier communities."

CPH Board Chair Michael Griffin awarded Clarkson University's Physician Assistant Program. "Clarkson University's Physician Assistant Program has become an invaluable partner in strengthening healthcare across the North Country. Through its commitment to educating future providers, expanding access to care, and fostering a culture of service, the program is making a lasting impact on the health and well-being of our communities. Its students and faculty consistently demonstrate a dedication to helping others, both inside and outside the classroom. We are proud to recognize Clarkson University's Physician Assistant Program for its leadership, innovation, and unwavering commitment to serving our region," said Griffin.

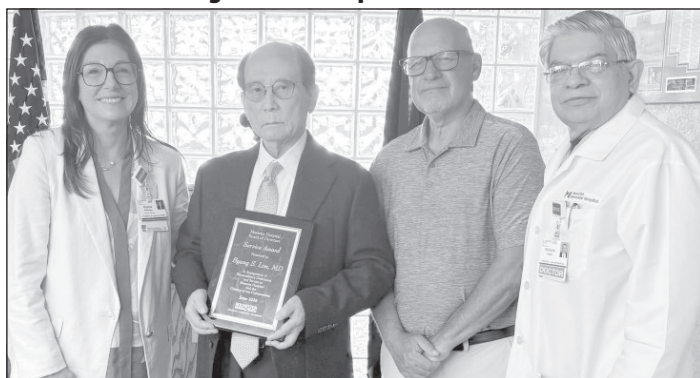
Donald Schuessler, MD, awarded Internist Edward L. Reason, DO. "For four decades, Dr. Reason has been a trusted physician, compassionate caregiver, and unwavering advocate for the people of Gouverneur and the North Country. He has dedicated his career to caring for



Donald Schuessler, MD, awarded Internist Edward L. Reason, DO. L-R: Pediatrician Donald Schuessler, MD; Dr. Reason; SLR President Donna McGregor; and GH Board Chair Andrew Leonard. Rochester Regional Health photo



CPH Board Chair Michael Griffin awarded Clarkson University's Physician Assistant Program. Back Row L-R: SLR President Donna McGregor; Associate Professor/Faculty Advisor for Students Without Borders (SWOB) Dr. Tushar Sirsat; Second-Year PA student and SWOB President Sarah Midavaine; Clarkson PA Program Director and Assistant Professor Christopher LaPoint PA-C; and CPH Board Chair Michael Griffin. Front Row L-R: Second-Year PA student and SWOB Member Jessica Ibrahim; SLR ED PA and Clarkson Adjunct Faculty Christopher Mueller PA-C; Didactic Director/Assistant Clinical Faculty Samantha Weller, PA-C. Rochester Regional Health photo



MH Board Chair Michael Cook awarded General Surgeon Byung S. Lim, MD. L-R: SLR President Donna McGregor; Dr. Lim; MH Board Chair Michael Cook; and Internist Nimesh Desai, MD. Rochester Regional Health photo

patients with kindness, expertise, and an extraordinary commitment that often extended far

See AWARDS H7

Jefferson County Suicide Prevention Walk planned

Clayton — The Jefferson County Suicide Prevention Coalition will launch a week of suicide prevention events with its Annual Suicide Prevention Walk in Clayton.

The 2026 Suicide Prevention Walk will take place Sunday, September 20, at the Clayton Volunteer Fire Department, 855 Graves St., Clayton. Registration begins at 11 a.m.

Last year's walk, held Sunday, September 14, 2025, raised \$5,900 for local suicide prevention initiatives. This year, the coalition aims to build on that support and expand prevention efforts throughout the year.

The annual walk brings together families, friends, and community members to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and offer hope. Participants walk in solidarity to remember loved ones lost to suicide, support those who are struggling, and raise funds for suicide prevention training, education, and resource coordination across Jefferson County.

"We are incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support this event has had over the years," said Beth Solar, Co-Chair of the Jefferson County Suicide Prevention Coalition. "Community support continues to show just how important this annual event is and how prevention and awareness resources are needed in Jefferson County."

Solar said funds raised through the walk help the coalition expand key prevention resources, including mental health training, community engagement and education, gun safety kits, and other local supports.

Event proceeds come from community donations from businesses and individuals, a

50/50 raffle, and a silent auction. Organizations throughout Jefferson County also participate by sharing information about services and resources that support mental health initiatives and suicide prevention efforts.

The coalition will also host "Chalk the Walk" from September 20–26 to continue raising awareness. Businesses, schools, organizations, and community members are encouraged to create inspiring sidewalk messages that show support for people struggling with mental health challenges and honor those lost to suicide.

The week will conclude with the new Color Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention: Run with Purpose, Run for Life on September 26 at Thompson Park in Watertown. Participants will pass through multiple vibrant color stations while raising awareness about mental health and suicide prevention.

Sponsorship opportunities, vendor spaces, and informational tabling will be available for the Color Walk/Run. Additional details are expected in mid-July.

The Jefferson County Suicide Prevention Coalition is made up of health agencies, community organizations, and individual members united by a shared commitment to preventing suicide deaths. Through collaboration, the coalition provides suicide prevention training, coordinates local resources, and supports diverse and inclusive community partnerships to advance its mission.

For more information or to register for the 2026 Suicide Prevention Walk, visit www.jeffersoncountysuicideprevention.com.

Health corner: Notes from medical school

HOW TO KEEP AMISH BUGGIES SAFE ON THE ROAD

By Rachel Milone

Upstate Medical University

As a medical student completing rotations in the North Country, I visited an Amish family at their farm outside of Canton while they recovered from serious injuries after a buggy accident. The mother had a pelvic fracture, and her infant suffered a traumatic brain injury. Mom and her daughter spent weeks in Upstate University Hospital recovering.

When I saw them at their home, mom was still unable to walk without a walker. They had a hired hand, a teenage girl from a nearby Amish family, helping with the cooking, children, and housework. Dad was home too, helping around the house and caring for his wife the best he could. He was not yet back to his farm and carpentry work, which is what supports the family financially.

Their story is not unique. Among the nearly 5,000 Amish in St. Lawrence County, almost every family has a relative or neighbor who's been in a serious or deadly buggy accident. Amish communities represent one of the fastest-growing subpopulations in the United States, with dozens of new church districts forming across New York over the past decade. The North Country is no exception. With the growing Amish population, buggies are more frequently encountered on North Country roads. Buggies are also traveling in areas where locals are not used to seeing them.

Growing up in St. Lawrence County, I learned early on to slow down when driving and pay attention in areas where Amish buggies share the roads. I also understand how difficult it can be to see these dark, slow moving vehicles in dim light and during the inclement weather we so frequently experience. What I wasn't aware of until medical school was how severe these injuries can be and how deeply these accidents impact Amish families.

Several factors contribute to these crashes: Most buggies have only small, dim kerosene lan-



Rachel Milone. Contributed.

terns, and only some groups of Amish in the North Country permit a singular reflective orange triangle on the rear of buggies. While buggies travel between 5-10 miles per hour, motor vehicles are often traveling 55 miles per hour or faster through winding and narrow country roads. Sometimes vehicles simply don't have time to stop to avoid hitting the slow-moving vehicles. Distracted driving also plays a role in some accidents. A recent study suggests that most Amish buggy crashes are attributed to motor vehicle drivers, while a much smaller proportion are due to buggy operators. Buggies, unlike standard vehicles, don't have airbags and seatbelts. Children are particularly vulnerable, as they are often unrestrained passengers in the rear of the buggy.

What many people likely don't realize is how life-altering these accidents can be for Amish families and their broader community. Prolonged hospitalizations mean extended time away from the farm, lost income, and significant disruption to daily life. In many cases, entire families travel to stay with hospitalized loved ones for the duration of their treatment.

Unlike most patients, Amish families do not have health insurance or own personal vehicles. As a result, transportation to even local healthcare centers can be difficult, let alone travel to regional tertiary care hospitals. In severe

situations, church districts pool resources to help cover medical expenses and support affected families. Still, the financial and emotional strain can be substantial, particularly when the father is unable to work and take care of the farm for an extended period.

Buggy accidents are not just simple traffic incidents. They are events that ripple through families, farms, and entire communities. The results can be devastating.

Before medical school, I saw these accidents as unfortunate headlines. Now, I think about that Amish mother I met outside of Canton recovering in a pelvic brace while caring for her infant daughter healing from a traumatic brain injury. I think about the father, in the house, explaining how he could no longer keep up with the farm work and describing which neighbors had stepped in to help.

So, when you encounter a horse-drawn buggy, slow down. Give space. Stay alert. A few extra seconds of caution can make all the difference.

Rachel Milone, a Pitcairn native and 2018 graduate of Clifton-Fine Central School, is a fourth-year medical student at Upstate Medical University and part of the Rural Medical Scholars (RMED) Program. Inspired by her rural upbringing, she is passionate about improving access to healthcare and plans to pursue a career in Med-Peds serving rural and underserved communities.

Samaritan Medical Center again nationally recognized for Commitment to Excellence in Stroke Care

THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION PRESENTS GET WITH THE GUIDELINES® - STROKE GOLD PLUS AWARD FOR DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT TO DELIVERING EVIDENCE-BASED, LIFE-SAVING STROKE CARE

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center has once again received the American Heart Association's Get With The Guidelines® - Stroke Gold Plus quality achievement award for its commitment to ensuring people experiencing stroke receive timely, appropriate treatment based on nationally recognized, research-based guidelines, ultimately helping to save lives and reduce disability.

Get With The Guidelines brings the expertise of the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association into hospitals nationwide, ensuring patient care is aligned with the latest research- and evidence-based guidelines. Get With The Guidelines - Stroke is an in-hospital program designed to improve stroke care through consistent adherence to these guidelines, which can minimize long-term effects of stroke and help prevent death.

Stroke is the number four cause of death and a leading cause of disability in the U.S., according to the American Heart Association's 2026 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Report. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel supplying the brain is blocked by a clot or ruptures, preventing blood and oxygen from reaching brain tissue. When this happens, brain cells begin to die. Early detection and rapid treatment are critical to improving survival, minimizing disability and supporting faster recovery.

"At Samaritan Medical Center, we are committed to providing the highest quality

stroke care by ensuring every patient receives timely, evidence-based treatment when every minute matters," said Samaritan President and CEO Thomas Carman. "Receiving this recognition from the American Heart Association reflects the dedication of our physicians, nurses, EMS partners and clinical teams, who put proven science into practice every day. By adhering to the latest treatment guidelines, we're helping improve outcomes, reduce disability and give more patients the opportunity to recover and return home to their families."

Each year, participating hospitals qualify for this award by demonstrating how their organization has committed to providing quality stroke care. In addition to following clinical treatment guidelines, Get With The Guidelines participants also provide education to help people manage their recovery and ongoing health at home.

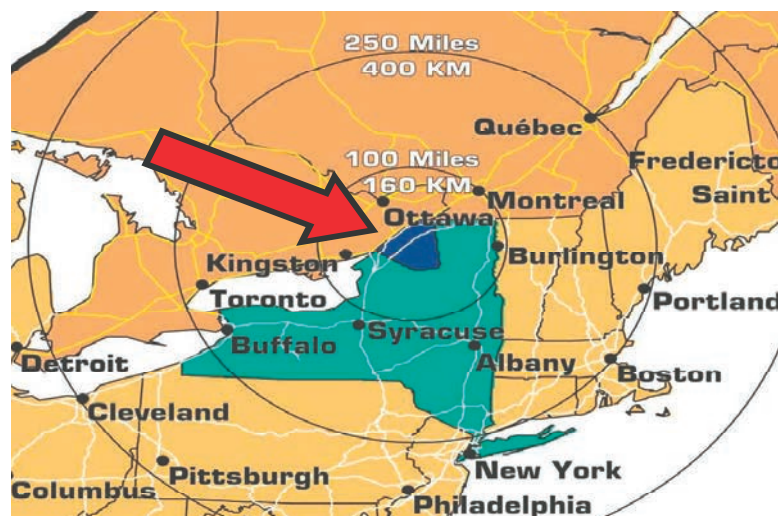
This year, Samaritan also received the American Heart Association's Target: Type 2 Diabetes™ Honor Roll award. Target: Type 2 Diabetes aims to ensure patients with Type 2 diabetes, who might be at higher risk for complications, receive the most up-to-date, evidence-based care when hospitalized due to stroke.

"We are proud to recognize Samaritan Medical Center for its commitment to caring for people experiencing stroke," said Steven Messe, M.D., volunteer chair of the American Heart Association Stroke System of Care Advisory Group. "Participation in Get With The Guidelines is associated with improved patient outcomes, including greater likelihood of being discharged home, fewer readmissions and lower mortality rates — a meaningful benefit for health care systems, families and communities."

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Help is here: Free career support arrives for residents pursuing healthcare

By Holly Boname
FDRHPO

North Country residents working toward careers in healthcare will soon have a new source of free, personalized support. ICAM Thrive, launching August 3, will accept applications from residents across Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Clinton, Essex, Franklin, and Hamilton counties.

The program offers one-on-one career coaching, case management, resource navigation, and financial assistance to support participants in completing their healthcare education and training. Every participant is paired with a case manager who provides individualized guidance and connects them to the resources and support they need to succeed.

The ICAM Thrive program is funded by the New York State Department of Health through its Healthcare Education and Life-skills Program (HELP) and is administered locally by the Northern Area Health Education Center (NAHEC) in partnership with the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO).

The program arrives as the North Country continues to face significant healthcare workforce shortages. Rural geography, paired with limited local training options and the cost of postsecondary education, can make it difficult for residents to enter and complete healthcare training. ICAM Thrive is designed to remove those barriers through direct, personal support.

The program serves residents pursuing a wide range of healthcare careers, including nursing, medicine, behavioral health, emergency medical services, social work, community health work, and technical certifications such

as Medical Assistant and Licensed Practical Nurse.

"Healthcare employers across the North Country continue to face significant workforce shortages," said April Bennett, Workforce Case Manager at FDRHPO. "ICAM Thrive strengthens our local workforce pipeline by helping residents complete their education and launch careers in the communities that need them most."

The ICAM Thrive program goes beyond tuition assistance by addressing common barriers such as transportation, childcare, training supplies, and academic support.

"Participants are also eligible for a host of free resources and services through All One Health, including counseling and financial consultation," said Bennett.

"We're excited to partner with FDRHPO to provide this level of individualized support to North Country residents," said Vanessa Falzon, ICAM Program Manager with the Northern Area Health Education Center. "By helping more people complete their training and enter healthcare careers locally, we're investing in both our workforce and the health of our communities."

North Country residents age 18 and older who are enrolled in, or planning to pursue, a healthcare education or training program are encouraged to apply. During the program's first year, priority consideration will be given to underserved populations and individuals expected to complete their training within 12 months.

Applications are now free and open through the Institute for Career Advancement in Medicine (ICAM), a statewide initiative that connects aspiring healthcare professionals with education, ca-

reer resources, and workforce support. To apply or learn more, visit hwcollab.org or contact abennett@fdrhpo.org or vanessa@hwny.org.

YOUR HEALTH MATTERS

WWW.FDRHPO.ORG

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FDRHPO
Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

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

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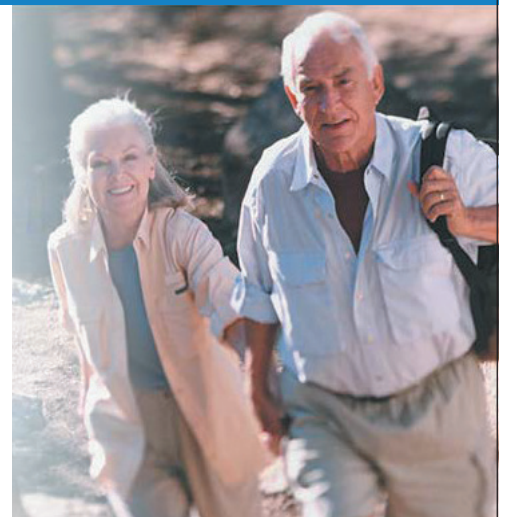
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Nominations Sought for NNY Community Health Hero Awards



Individuals from Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties to be honored at Community Health Hero Award luncheon

Watertown, NY – July 18 – Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRH-PO) and North Country Health Compass Partners are asking residents of Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties to nominate an individual in their community whom they consider to be a “Community Health Hero.”

Anyone who has demonstrated outstanding public service and a commitment to improving the health and wellness of their community can be nominated, and one individual from each county will be chosen to receive a 2026 Community Health Hero Award.

All nominees must...

- live or work in Jefferson, Lewis, or St. Lawrence counties (not necessarily in the healthcare field);
- dedicate time and resources toward the improvement of community health and wellness; and
- how a level of care and compassion that exceeds that which an average citizen demonstrates.

“Each year, in celebration of National Rural Health Day, we honor three Community Health Heroes at our North Country Community Health Hero Event. Since 2017, we have recognized 24 individuals from Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties for their

compassion, selflessness, and dedication to improving health and wellness in our rural communities,” said Kayla Quinn, Population Health Coordinator. “We encourage residents across the three-county region to nominate someone who reflects the spirit of a Community Health Hero—whether a healthcare worker, volunteer, business owner, advocate, or anyone making a meaningful difference in local health and wellness.”

Community members may submit one nomination for consideration. Volunteers from the North Country Health Compass Partners will then select one recipient from each of the counties (three awards total) based on the following factors: relation to health and wellness, scope of impact, depth of impact, social influence, volunteerism, and uniqueness. Recipients will be honored locally during the Community Health Heroes Luncheon in November on a date TBD, and throughout New York State on November 19, National Rural Health Day.

The nomination form can be found by clicking this [LINK](#). All nominations must be submitted by Friday, September 4, by 4 p.m. Nominations submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

For more information, call or email Kayla Quinn, Population Health Coordinator at FDRH-PO at 315-755-2020 ext. 21 or kquinn@fdrhpo.org.

Rochester Regional Health announces LPN graduates



Rochester Regional Health has announced the sixth class has graduated from the Potsdam-based Isabella Graham Hart (IGH) School of Practical Nursing. Back row from left: IGH Professor Marcy Blackmer; LPN graduates Nicole Gromer; Anastazia Finley; Nicole Martin; Elaina Lumley; and IGH Professor Anna Green. Front row: LPN graduates Kailey Abreu; Kaydance Bernard; and Taylor Ellsworth. Rochester Regional Health photo

CANTON — Rochester Regional Health has announced the sixth class has graduated from the Potsdam-based Isabella Graham Hart (IGH) School of Practical Nursing during an official ceremony on June 18.

The students have earned their Practical Nurse Program Certificates. To date, five of the seven graduates have signed on with the St. Lawrence Region to provide care locally. There are currently 15 students enrolled and the next graduation will be held in June 2027.

“Congratulations to our newest cohort of Licensed Practical Nurses on this remarkable achievement,” said

SLR Vice President, Chief Nursing & Patient Care Officer Christina Latta. “Their dedication, compassion, and perseverance have brought them to this milestone, and our communities will be stronger because of their commitment to caring for others. We are incredibly proud and look forward to the positive impact they will have on the future of healthcare.”

“Graduation is more than the completion of a program; it is the beginning of a career dedicated to serving others,” said Senior Vice President, Associate Chief Academic Affairs Officer, and President of Rochester General College of

Health Careers/Isabella Graham Hart School of Practical Nursing Dr. Victoria Record, Ed.D., RN, AGPCNP-BC, CNE. “This class has demonstrated exceptional perseverance, compassion, and a commitment to excellence. They are entering the profession with the knowledge, confidence, and clinical skills to provide outstanding patient care, and we are honored to have been part of their journey. We celebrate their achievements and look forward to the difference they will make in strengthening the healthcare workforce and improving the health of our communities.”

Awards

From H2

beyond normal working hours. Whether treating critically ill patients in the hospital, leading as ICU Medical Director, or caring for individuals in his office practice, he has always put the needs of others first. His lifelong passion for serving his community makes him exceptionally deserving of this Community Service Award,” said Schuessler.

MH Board Chair Michael

Cook awarded General Surgeon Byung S. Lim, MD. “For more than five decades, Dr. Byung Lim has exemplified the very best of community medicine through his unwavering dedication to the communities of Massena and Akwesasne. He has built a reputation for always putting patients first, providing compassionate care whenever and wherever it is needed, and never allowing circumstances to become a barrier to treatment. His willingness to support colleagues, mentor future healthcare professionals, and answer the call in times of need

has earned him the respect and admiration of generations of patients and caregivers alike. Dr. Lim’s extraordinary service, selflessness, and commitment to improving the lives of others have left an enduring legacy that will be felt throughout the North Country for years to come,” said Cook.

Award recipients are chosen by each hospital’s Board of Directors from a slate of nominees. For information on how to nominate an individual or group for the 2026-2027 awards, email corporatecommunications@rochesterregional.org.



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