



Health

NNY

FREE

Samaritan
receives
\$575,000 grant
for advanced
breast cancer
imaging system

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center Foundation has received a \$575,000 grant to purchase a new breast imaging system aimed at improving cancer detection and expanding access to advanced diagnostic services in Northern New York.

The grant from the Saint Agatha Foundation will fund a contrast-enhanced mammography system for Samaritan's Women's Wellness and Breast Care Center. The equipment is expected to be installed by the end of the year.

The award is part of a \$2.3 million investment by the Saint Agatha Foundation in eight health care organizations providing breast cancer services across Central and Northern New York.

"The donation from Saint Agatha Foundation enables Samaritan to continue to lead local breast care with the purchase of our first contrast-enhanced mammography equipment," Samaritan Medical Center President and CEO Thomas H. Carman said.

Mr. Carman said the technology will provide another tool for detecting breast cancer earlier and helping patients move more quickly into treatment.

See IMAGING H6

A Watertown Daily Times and
Malone Telegram publication

Daily updates: NNY360.com

Sept. 2026

New York urges measles vaccinations as cases rise in rural areas

ALBANY — State health officials are urging New Yorkers to check their measles vaccination status as confirmed cases increase in rural parts of upstate New York.

The state has recorded 29 measles cases this year, including six in New York City and 23 elsewhere in the state, according to the New York State Department of Health. The increase includes cases linked to local transmission and travel in the Capital Region and central and western New York.

"It is important we work together to contain this recent uptick in cases of confirmed measles," state Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said. "Measles is highly contagious and can cause serious illness, including pneumonia and hospitalizations, yet is effectively prevented with up-to-date measles immunization."

The Health Department is working with county health departments and other local partners to investigate reported cases, trace contacts and provide measles, mumps and rubella vaccines to unvaccinated people who request them.

Health officials recommend that New Yorkers ensure they are current on their MMR vaccinations, particularly before international travel or visiting parts of the United States experiencing outbreaks.



A nurse mixes a dose of the measles, mumps and rubella virus vaccine at a pop-up clinic at the Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD Administration Building in Carrollton, Texas, on Friday, March 7, 2025. (Liz Rymarev/The Dallas Morning News/TNS)

One dose of the MMR vaccine is 93% effective against measles, while two doses are 97% effective, according to health officials. Travelers should be fully vaccinated at least two weeks before departure.

Infants ages 6 to 11 months may receive an early dose of the MMR vaccine before travel or when they are at risk of exposure. Children who receive an early dose should still receive the

two routinely recommended doses on schedule.

Most people born before 1957 are considered immune because they were likely exposed to the virus. People vaccinated between 1963 and 1967 may have received a less effective version of the vaccine and should ask a health care provider whether they need another dose.

Symptoms and transmission

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People also can become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth, though that form of transmission is less common.

Symptoms may appear seven to 21 days after infection and can

See VACCINE H4

Professional Connection Page 3

Health Corner: Notes from Medical School

By **Kyle Wollner**
Upstate Medical University

NEGLECTED TEETH OFTEN SEEN IN CLINIC EMERGENCY VISITS FOR SINUS PAIN

While working in primary care last fall in the Adams and Watertown area, I saw dozens of locals come in for emergency visits. They complained of sinus infections, jaw pain, and swollen necks and asked to receive their regular antibiotic concoction to reduce the pain



Kyle Wollner. Contributed.

for a few months until it inevitably returned. After a thorough physical exam and a peek inside their mouths, we knew

that these issues were being caused by broken, neglected teeth, or long-standing dental cavities.

Neglecting regular dental care can quickly lead to chronic pain, frequent hospital visits, and expensive medical emergencies. Your local primary doctor can knock out the infection, reduce the swelling, and buy you a few weeks pain-free with the recommendation to visit a dentist, but too often the story ends here.

So exactly why is it so difficult to see a regular dentist in New York and rural Jefferson County? It's not just the North Country's snow-covered winter roads, the long distances, or the extra time off needed during a busy farming season. Since 2007, newly-graduated dentists, who have already completed four years of dental school, must also complete an additional year of hands-on training, called a residency, before they are able to prac-

tice independently in the state of New York. This may make it less desirable for new grads, eager to start working right away and begin paying back dental school loans, to choose to settle in New York when they could immediately start working in other states. The result is fewer dentists entering the local workforce, especially in rural areas that already have trouble recruiting medical professionals.

According to the New York State Comptroller's 2025 report on rural health shortages, there are 8.3 dentists for every 10,000 residents across the state. However, within our 16 rural counties, including the North Country, that number drops to a staggering 3.6 dentists per 10,000 residents. Dental access is classified as a serious problem for over 65% of all rural households. This translates to an increase in primary care office visits for dental related issues, more unnecessary antibiotics being prescribed, and more Watertown citizens living with tooth pain for so long that they have accepted it as a normal part of life.

Fortunately, there are actionable, straightforward steps we can take at home to help prevent and minimize dental emergencies, as well as new policies on the horizon to expand dental care in rural areas.

We can start with the overlooked basics, which have a tremendous impact on the health of our teeth long term: Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste (yes, even bubblegum flavor will work!), along with once daily flossing. Limit sugary drinks and acidic sodas, especially before bedtime. And importantly, try to establish regular dental care with a dentist or a cleaning with a dental hygienist proactively, just like how we swap for our snow tires before the first snowstorm and our car gets stuck on Arsenal Street.

More great news for our moody molars and irritable



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Health

From H2

incisors: Just last year the New York Senate passed Bill S3157, allowing for licensed

dental hygienists to expand their scope of services, specifically in rural areas. For the first time, hygienists can enter a written agreement with a dentist that will allow them to provide these services without the dentist needing to be

physically present in the office. They are now able to provide cleanings, fluoride treatments, sealants, and expert oral-health counseling in the places that need it most. While dental care is still a team effort and an experienced dentist is

still involved in the oversight of your pearly whites under this agreement, now preventative care can reach the small towns, farms, and back roads of Jefferson County before that tooth ache can turn into root canal.

In rural New York, a toothache doesn't tend to stay hidden in the mouth. Dental issues spill into primary care and emergency rooms. But a patch-up with penicillin isn't the answer and only temporarily masks more serious and chronic issues. According to the American Heart Association, gum disease is associated with a higher risk of heart attacks, stroke, and chronic inflammation. Consistent dental care is an essential partner in preventing unnecessary primary care visits and improving our long-term health and well-being.

The vast open fields, green forests, and quaint communities are what draw many to live in the North Country. But with so much free space and distance, simple errands can quickly become difficult journeys. Visiting the dentist can feel like travelling a world away, but a couple minutes of prevention at home and planning today can spare future pain, expenses, and lost time tomorrow.

Kyle Wollner is a former Army Captain and current fourth year medical student at the State University of New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical University going into family medicine.

Urgent Care or Emergency Department: Where should I seek care?

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CARE

- Allergies
- Cold/flu
- Congestion/cough
- Mild asthma
- Pink eye
- Rash
- Sinus infections
- Sore throat
- UTIs
- Ear or eye pain
- Migraines
- Back pain
- Sprains
- Animal & insect bites
- Minor cuts or burns
- Dental pain
- Possible broken bone (not protruding through skin)



EMERGENCY
DEPARTMENT

- Chest/abdominal pains
- Heart attack or stroke
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Poisoning
- Coughing or throwing up blood
- High/persistent fever
- Trauma/head injury
- Trouble breathing
- Fainting/severe dizziness
- Broken bones with severe trauma (bone through skin, excessive bleeding)
- Seizure
- Severe burns
- Pregnancy-related bleeding
- Fever in infant less than two months old

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Vaccine

From H1

include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Rash that typically begins on the face and spreads down the body

The rash generally appears three to five days after other symptoms begin. A person's temperature may rise above 104 degrees when the rash appears.

An infected person can spread measles from four days before the rash appears until four days afterward. Health officials said people exposed to measles should quarantine for 21 days after exposure. Those who test positive should isolate

See VACCINE H5

North Country Connect-to-Tech project launches to expand internet access, devices and digital skills in seven Northern New York counties

By Holly Boname
FDRHPO

WATERTOWN — A project to improve access to the internet, internet-enabled devices and digital skills for Northern New York residents is now underway.

North Country Connect-to-Tech, or NC2T, is being conducted by the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization in partnership with Adirondack Health Institute and the North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition, with support from New York State’s ConnectALL Digital Equity Program Capacity grant.

The initiative aims to help residents use the internet and digital devices — including computers, tablets and smartphones — for health care via telehealth,

education, job searching and retention, shopping, personal finance, accessing government services and information, and maintaining social connections.

“For rural residents of our communities, these functions are not only convenient, but are sometimes the only way individuals can realistically engage in these activities given our harsh winters and the long distances people may face to access healthcare facilities, local libraries, stores, banks, and other destinations,” Joanna Loomis, project manager at FDRHPO, said. “However, individuals may experience barriers to accessing digital services, such as not having reliable or affordable internet, an internet-enabled device,

or digital skills.”

The 18-month grant ends in November 2027. FDRHPO will focus on Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties; Adirondack Health Institute will serve Clinton, Essex, Franklin and Hamilton counties.

The project is aimed at adult rural residents of those counties, with emphasis on low-income people, older adults, veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals and people with disabilities.

FDRHPO has trained digital navigators who will reach out to organizations that serve the target populations, including social services organizations, health care providers, libraries, colleges and universities, probation and parole, housing developments,

veterans organizations, offices for the aging, organizations serving people with disabilities, faith-based organizations, career centers and civic organizations.

“Digital navigators will then conduct needs assessments for interested people who are served by these organizations, and will provide individualized support in the form of internet hotspots, laptops, information about affordable internet connectivity options, and digital literacy training, including support for essential computer skills, accessing telehealth, and other common online tasks,” Loomis said.

Equipment distribution will be in person during scheduled

sessions coordinated with service organizations across the region. Participants will be required to take several hours of introductory digital skills training and complete a Device Use Agreement before receiving devices.

Digital skills training on a variety of anticipated topics will also be available to rural residents who do not receive a device, delivered through a combination of in-person and virtual sessions.

More information: <https://www.fdrhpo.org/ncdic> and <https://www.fdrhpo.org/nc2t>

Vaccine

From H4

until four days after the rash develops.

Measles can cause pneumonia, hospitalization, miscarriage, premature birth, brain swelling and death. A rare long-term complication known as subacute sclerosing panencephalitis can cause permanent

brain damage years after the initial infection.

People who develop possible measles symptoms should call before visiting a doctor’s office, urgent care center or emergency department so staff can take

precautions to prevent the virus from spreading.

Anyone unsure of their vaccination status should contact a health care provider or local health department. Providers should report suspected cases to

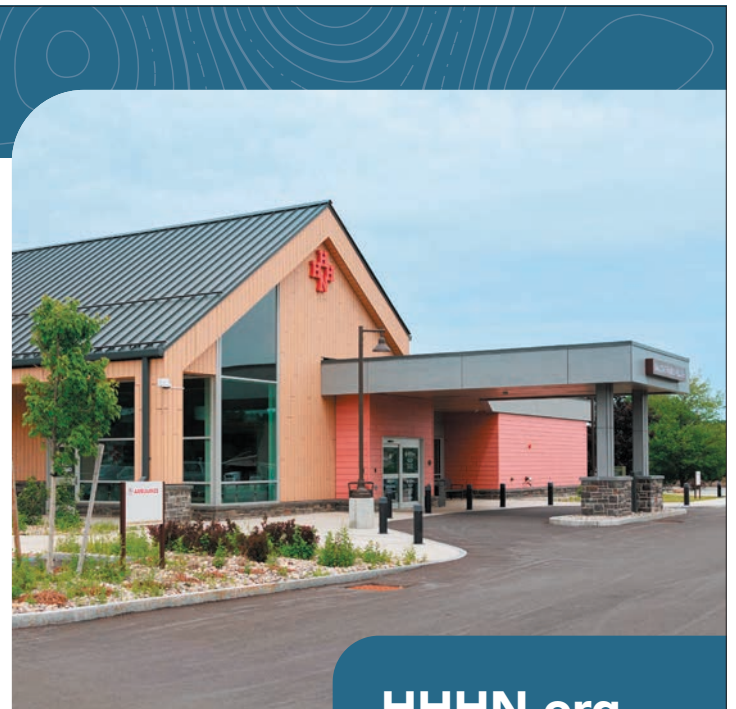
their local health department.

More information is available through the state’s measles travel advisory, measles information website and the federal government’s vaccine information page.

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Town of Watertown receives \$50K grant for new ambulance

By JONATHAN WHEELER

jwheeler@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — The Town of Watertown Ambulance services officially received a \$50,000 state grant, which the department used to purchase a new rig to transport patients.

The grant was presented by Assemblyman Scott A. Gray on Wednesday.

“A new ambulance is not necessarily a luxury. It’s the difference between the rig being ready to go out the door and one that’s worn out,” he said. “The EMS system is measured in minutes, we all know that right now. But to the people that it serves, it’s measured in lives saved.”

Gray said that volunteer services are undergoing “tremendous strain” in both fund operations and getting volunteers to respond to calls.

“It’s an opportunity, we always look at, make sure

that we’re funding our first responders, whether it’s fire departments or EMS services, make sure that they have the equipment necessary to provide the services to the communities that they’re working in,” Gray said. “I think it’s a basic obligation, on my part, as an elected official, to make sure that every opportunity that I have is to provide resources to public safety and to the first responders within the community.”

Town of Watertown board member Joanne McClusky thanked Gray for the funds needed to help purchase the new ambulance.

“This ambulance is critical to the town residents and beyond,” she said. “We appreciate being the beneficiary of these funds.”

Rolly Churchill, president of the board of directors for the ambulance service, said the new ambu-



The new ambulance.

lance is a way to get the best tools for the staff to work with.

Executive director for the ambulance service Scott Lennox thanked Gray for the grant and said “it’s gone to good use.”

Imaging

From H1

Contrast-enhanced mammography, or CEM, uses contrast material to highlight areas of increased blood flow, which can be associated with breast cancer. According to Samaritan, the technology has sensitivity comparable to breast MRI and can help reduce unnecessary biopsies. It can also provide an alternative for patients who cannot undergo or tolerate an MRI.

The technology can also be used during cancer treatment to determine whether a tumor is shrinking, remaining stable or progressing during chemotherapy, helping physicians make treatment decisions.

Samaritan said access to contrast-enhanced mammography is limited in Northern New York, with

the nearest systems primarily in larger metropolitan areas such as Syracuse and Rochester. The hospital said adding the technology in Watertown will reduce the need for North Country patients to travel for advanced breast imaging.

The investment comes as several counties in Samaritan’s service area have breast cancer incidence rates above the state average.

According to state Department of Health figures provided by Samaritan, about 16,700 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in New York each year and about 2,500 die from the disease.

From 2018 through 2022, Hamilton County had the highest breast cancer incidence rate in the state at 168.2 cases per 100,000 residents. Lewis and Jefferson counties also had rates above the statewide average of 135.5 cases per 100,000.



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Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund marks 25 years; walk set for Saturday, Oct. 3

The Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund is marking 25 years of serving the North Country and will hold its 25th annual Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Walk on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026, organizers said.

The fund traces its origin to a group of women who lost a close friend, Donna Weldon, to breast cancer and wanted to help newly diagnosed patients with the financial burdens of treatment and recovery. After two women attended a walk supporting others facing the disease, a group of six organized the first Gouverneur Breast Cancer Walk in 2001

and raised just under \$20,000.

Over time the effort expanded beyond Gouverneur to assist patients in St. Lawrence County, followed by Jefferson, Lewis and, around year nine, Franklin County. By the time of the organization's 25th anniversary, the fund said it has assisted more than 1,400 patients and distributed more than 4,000 recovery gift bags across the four-county area. Some patients receive assistance once or twice, organizers said, while others require repeated help or assistance after a new diagnosis of metastatic breast or ovarian cancer.

The organization changed course after losses within its leadership. Founding director Becky Fiocco died in 2021 after a battle with ovarian cancer. In 2022 the group changed its name to include ovarian cancer; another director, Carolyn Pistolesi, died just weeks before the announcement after a short bat-

tle with ovarian cancer. Those deaths helped prompt the board to include ovarian cancer in its mission, organizers said.

Run entirely by volunteers, the fund provides financial assistance with travel, mortgages, rent, car payments, insurance, utility bills, medical and prescription co-pays and bills, and

other expenses based on individual patient needs. "We want our patients not only to survive but to live!" organizers said.

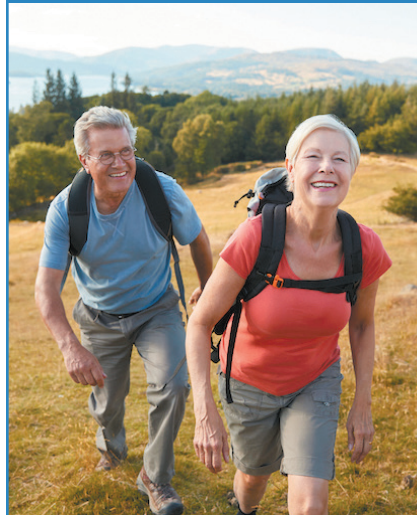
For more information, to download a walk pledge sheet, or for assistance, visit www.gouverneurbreastovariancancerfund.com.

SeaComm donates \$60K to expand Massena Hospital Outpatient Lab



SeaComm Federal Credit Union has donated \$60,000 to the Massena Hospital Foundation's Code Help Campaign, which raised money to expand and renovate the Hospital's growing Outpatient Lab. The expansion will make it more comfortable for the community to have blood drawn by adding an additional room and making the existing spaces bigger. The waiting area was also refreshed with new furniture. In honor of the gift, the space will now be known as the SeaComm Outpatient Lab. Pictured: Massena Hospital Associate Chief Operating Officer Brent Bishop, Massena Hospital Foundation Board Chair Amy Page, SeaComm Vice President of Retail Operations Rick Maloney, SeaComm Executive Vice President Sherry Thompson, Massena Hospital Foundation Executive Director Julia Rose, Rochester Regional Health St. Lawrence Region President Donna McGregor, SeaComm Board Chair Myron Burns, and SeaComm President and Chief Executive Officer Scott A. Wilson. Submitted photo

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