NNY Health

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FREE

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Samaritan Medical Center and Saint Agatha Foundation has unveiled a state-of-the art Contrast-Enhanced Mammography (CEM) diagnostic system for Samaritan's Women's Wellness and Breast Care Center (WWBC). The installation was commemorated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony this afternoon. Contributed.

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center unveiled a contrast-enhanced mammography system Thursday, expanding access to advanced breast cancer imaging in the north country.

The equipment at Samaritan's Women's Wellness and Breast Care Center was funded by a $575,000 grant awarded by Saint Agatha Foundation in July. Hospital and foundation representatives marked the installation with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 15.

The system can highlight areas of increased blood flow, a characteristic associated with cancer, to help physicians identify suspicious tissue, according to Samaritan. It also can help monitor how tumors respond to chemotherapy and inform treatment decisions.

"For people facing a potential breast cancer diagnosis, timely access to advanced imaging can make all the difference," said Dr. Kelly McAlarney, a breast radiologist at the center.

"Thanks to Saint Agatha Foundation's generosity, we can now offer this level of care right here in Watertown, reducing the need for patients to travel long distances and ensuring more people across the region can access the care

See IMAGING T2

SAINT AGATHA FOUNDATION CONVENES NEARLY 30 REGIONAL PARTNERS TO ADVANCE BREAST CANCER CARE ACROSS CENTRAL NEW YORK

HEALTHCARE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS GATHERED DURING BREASTCANCERAWARENESS MONTH TO DISCUSS ADVANCES IN EARLY DETECTION, EXPAND ACCESS TO CARE, AND STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COLLABORATION

SYRACUSE – Saint Agatha Foundation — dedicated to providing support, comfort, and care to breast cancer patients — today convened nearly 30 healthcare and community partners from across Central New York for its annual gathering during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Representing a growing network of organizations supporting New Yorkers across 12 counties, attendees gathered to celebrate the Foundation's impact over the past year, discuss advances in breast cancer detection and treatment, and identify new opportunities to expand access to care and supportive services for people across the region.

"Working alongside our dedicated healthcare providers and community partners, Saint Agatha Foundation is proud to have helped thousands of patients and families across Central New York," said **Saint Agatha Foundation's Board President Kathleen Mezzalingua**. "A breast cancer diagnosis can bring tremendous financial and emotional challenges, and no one should have to worry about how they will afford the care they need. By bringing our partners together, we can strengthen our impact, remove barriers to treatment and recovery, and ensure more patients and families have the resources they need during one of the most difficult times in their lives."

Beyond the physical and emotional challenges of a breast cancer diagnosis, patients and their families often face significant financial burdens, from medical bills and treatment costs to transportation and everyday living expenses. Through its network of partners, Saint Agatha Foundation helps alleviate these pressures so people can focus on their health and recovery. The Foundation serves women and men with breast cancer living in 12 counties: Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Jefferson, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Otsego, Oswego, Saint Lawrence, and Tompkins.

This year's convening follows an unprecedented $2.3 million investment by Saint Agatha Foundation in eight regional healthcare partners to expand access to high-quality breast cancer care across Central New York. Announced earlier this year, the funding is helping bring advanced diagnostic technology and other critical resources to communities throughout the region, improving access to early detection and life-saving care.

"Early detection is one of the most powerful tools we have to improve outcomes in the fight against breast cancer," said **Dr. Stephen Montgomery, Director Emeritus of Crouse Hospital'sBreastImaging Program**, and keynote speaker at the convening."Through its investments in advanced technology and its strong partnerships, Saint Agatha Foundation is helping transform access to breast cancer detection and treatment across Central New York. Meetings like this create valuable opportunities for providers to share knowledge, enhance collaboration, and ensure that more people can benefit from the latest advances in care."

Saint Agatha Foundation currently partners with nearly 30 nonprofit partners across Central New York to provide financial assistance and other essential resources to breast cancer patients. Through grants to local hospitals, healthcare providers, and community organizations, the Foundation helps eligible people cover a wide range of expenses, including medical treatments, co-payments, medications, transportation, and everyday living expenses.

Patients and their families can find more information at: https://saintagathafoundation.org/patient-support/ Interested 501(c)(3) organizations based in the Foundation's 12 counties of operations should visit: www.saintagathafoundation.org/for-providers/

Kinney Drugs offers free 'Lunch & Learn' webinar series for National Family Caregivers Month

Series brings together AARP, the Alzheimer's Association, David's Refuge, Upstate Poison Center and Kinney Drugs to support family caregivers across New York and Vermont

GOUVERNEUR — Kinney Drugs is marking National Family Caregivers Month in November with four free virtual "Lunch & Learn" webinars to inform and support family caregivers. The series begins Oct. 28 and continues on consecutive Wednesdays through Nov. 18. Caregivers may register for one or more sessions at kinneydrugs.com/webinars.

"Caregiving has become a defining experience for families across Kinney's footprint," said Judy Cowden, senior director of marketing for Kinney Drugs. "In Upstate New York alone, more than one million people serve as caregivers for aging parents, spouses, children, or loved ones with disabilities or chronic conditions."

Caregiving can be rewarding, but it is also frequently physically, emotionally and financially demanding. To help caregivers manage those

See KINNEY T3

Imaging

From T1

they need when they need it," she said.

Dr. Stephen Montgomery, director emeritus of Crouse Hospital's breast imaging program, said the technology provides another imaging option for patients unable to undergo or tolerate a breast MRI.

Previously, the nearest contrast-enhanced mammography systems were in cities such as Syracuse and Rochester, Montgomery said.

Hospital officials said travel for advanced imaging can create barriers for rural patients, including transportation costs, weather-related difficulties and insurance limitations.

Samaritan's breast care center performs nearly 55 mammograms daily, according to the hospital.

"At Saint Agatha Foundation, we believe that everyone deserves the right to advanced breast cancer care, no matter where they live," said Kathleen Mezzalingua, the foundation's board president.

Founded in 2004, Saint Agatha Foundation provides financial assistance for breast cancer treatment and recovery, particularly for uninsured and underinsured patients in central New York.

Alice Hyde Medical Center expands imaging capacity

Malone Telegram

MALONE - Alice Hyde Medical Center in Malone and Champlain Valley Physicians Hospital in Plattsburgh recently expanded its imaging capacity that is geared to allow patients faster access to X-ray, ultrasound, CT scan and mammography services, according to the University of Vermont Health Network, which oversees both facilities.

"When people need diagnostic imaging, they want quality care without unnecessary delays or long drives. We are committed to helping patients get the testing they need sooner and closer to home so they can spend less time traveling and more time focused on their health," AHMC Director of Radiology Services Kaela Bonesteel, said in a statement.

With a physician referral, appointments can be scheduled on MyChart or by calling scheduling at AHMC 518-483-3000, or CVPH at 518-562-7340.

While AHMC and CVPH maintain their own imaging departments and appointment schedules, both hospitals share the health network's commitment to providing timely, high-quality care close to home, according to a press release.

"Our radiology team has looked for ways to expand hours of operation and

See ALICE T4



Before capturing an image, Alice Hyde Medical Center (AHMC) Lead X-Ray Technologist Shannon Tatro makes final adjustments.

Kinney

From T2

challenges, Kinney Drugs has partnered with AARP, the Alzheimer's Association, David's Refuge and Upstate Poison Center to offer the educational webinars.

2026 caregiver "Lunch & Learn" webinar schedule

All sessions take place from noon to 1 p.m. Eastern time.

Wednesday, Nov. 4: Understanding Alzheimer's & Dementia, with the Alzheimer's Association.

Wednesday, Nov. 11: Caregiver Burnout, with David's Refuge.

Wednesday, Nov. 18: Caregiving & Medication Safety, with Upstate Poison Center.

"Caregiving is one of the most important jobs there is, and it can also be one of the most exhausting," Cowden said. "This webinar series is one of several ways we work to make sure the caregivers in our communities know they aren't alone."

All four webinars are free and open to the public. Registration is available at kinneydrugs.com/webinars.

Kinney's Caregiver Resources page lists local and national organizations serving caregivers in New York and Vermont. Kinney Drugs also offers free prescription delivery, which can help caregivers save time and make managing a loved one's medications more convenient.

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Gouverneur Hospital Auxiliary donates two phlebotomy carts to hospital



The Gouverneur Hospital Auxiliary recently purchased and donated two phlebotomy carts to Gouverneur Hospital. The mobile carts help transport the equipment and supplies throughout the hospital, supporting even more efficient blood draws and further enhancing patient care. Pictured are Gouverneur Hospital Auxiliary members and hospital team members celebrating the donation.

Alice

From T3

streamline their processes to accommodate patient needs. Their efforts and commitment to the people we care for shows in everything they do," Jay Gonyea, CVPH director of radiology services, said in a statement.

MyChart is UVMHN's patient portal offering a way for patients to: Make appointments – including mammograms, lab/blood draw appointments; communicate securely with physicians; check on imaging test results; receive reminders about upcoming visits or recommended vaccinations; begin the check in process a week before the scheduled appointment or procedure; and pay a bill.

Learn more about MyChart and create an account with the University of Vermont Health Network at UVMHealth.org/MyChart.

Medical aid in dying two months in: how has NY program to help terminally ill patients die comfortably gone?

By Alex Gault
agault@wdt.net

After years of debate, New York's medical assistance in dying, or MAID, program has been in effect for about two months, giving terminally ill patients who are predicted to die within six months the right to end their lives on their own terms.

The state legislature passed the MAID bill last year; it had been introduced and debated every year for more than a decade before enough lawmakers finally agreed to the premise. Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul signed the bill into law earlier this year, after negotiating some changes aimed at strengthening protections for patients and preventing New York from becoming a destination for people from elsewhere looking for medical assistance in dying.

The law took effect on Aug. 6, and while data is not collected broadly on its use to track how many people have engaged with the MAID program, providers have confirmed that some people have made use of the program.

David Atkins is co-founder of Quietus, a New York City-based healthcare company that focuses exclusively on medical assistance in dying. Atkins founded the company earlier this year and started taking patients when the MAID program went into effect in August.

Atkins, a licensed clinical social worker with a background in hospice care who also spent 17 years as a Buddhist monk in South Korea, said he had for years seen hospice patients requesting help in dying.

"They felt there was nothing to live for, there was no quality of life for them," he said.

But he wasn't able to help; medical providers helping their patients to die was seen as murder under the law as it was.

At the time, he and Quietus co-founder Daniel Cogan were working together, and started to discuss their own feelings on medical aid in dying.

"This was 2023, and we basically decided that if this law ever passed in New York, we would start a company dedicated to medical aid in dying, to providing this for folks as an option," he said.

Quietus was available to patients on the first day MAID was legal in New York. Atkins said that as of Sept. 17, the company had helped 10 patients complete the process, and had received a little more than

See MAID T5

MAID

From T4



Former Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, D-Manhattan, left, shakes hands with Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, D-Westchester, congratulating her on the Assembly's impending passage of her bill to authorize medically assisted death for people with terminal illnesses in April 2025. Alex Gault/ Johnson Newspapers

40 referrals for patients potentially interested in medical assistance in dying. More referrals come in every day, Atkins said.

Quietus doesn't have a main facility; it's medical providers mostly meet patients at their homes, where a bulk of hospice care is now delivered.

Their first step is an intake form, all of which are reviewed by Atkins personally.

"I read through them, see which cases really seem plausible, and then I reach out to the family, to the patient," he said.

For people who want to move forward, Cogan, a licensed nurse practitioner, does a financial consultation and meets in-person with the patient to discuss their case and their goals.

Quietus works with a team of doctors around New York City and the Hudson Valley; the attending physician who meets with the patient always has a direct relationship with the company, and most visits can be made within days of a patient deciding to move forward. That doctor records a video of the patient requesting, in their own words, medication to help end their life.

The consulting physician, who also has to sign off on the MAID request, typically meets with the patient via video call.

Quietus also works with a team of psychologists, who are also required to sign off on MAID requests.

Once the patient and team of doctors have signed off on the appropriate documents, a five-day waiting period starts. Once that has elapsed, Quietus doctors reach out to the participating pharmacy to secure the life-ending medications. A Quietus physician will be present when the patient ingests the medicines, and can help to mix the cocktail of drugs, but cannot help with the patient ingesting it. Under the law, MAID patients have to be able to take the medicines themselves.

The full cost of MAID from Quietus is $12,000 and federal law prohibits insurers from paying for most costs related to medical aid in dying, but Atkins said they work with patients on a sliding scale. They've handled some cases for free, some for a total of $50, and some at the full price.

The medications themselves cost about $1,000; Quietus's doctors prescribe the cocktail of drugs recommended by the Academy for Aid In Dying Medicine, a group of physicians and healthcare providers who advocate for MAID. The mix of five drugs is mixed into a small portion of apple juice and given to the patient.

"The amounts of these medications that are being used in this cocktail are like 100 times what would normally be a therapeutic dose," Atkins said. "So the idea is that a patient is usually unconscious within a few minutes, and they die within a couple hours, a very, very peaceful death, done in a dignified manner, without suffering."

Once the process is complete, the doctor present declares the time of death. The death certificate will list their cause of death to be whatever terminal disease they were diagnosed with.

The MAID bill was heavily debated by medical professionals, religious groups and disability rights groups as it marched closer to becoming law. Once the legislature passed it last year, groups including the state's Catholic Conference asked Hochul to veto it, and lawsuits from disability rights groups in state and federal court have sought to pause or undo the program, thus far without success.

The state's Hospice and Palliative Care Association, which represents the various hospice providers across New York, did not take a position on MAID at any time in the debate. Jeanne Chirico, president and CEO of the association, said in an emailed statement that hospices across the state are seeing some patients requesting MAID. Hospices themselves don't provide that care in most cases, rather working alongside the caregivers that do provide it like Quietus.

"What we are seeing anecdotally is much more focused on supporting patients and families as they navigate their end-of-life choices," she said. "Hospices are responding to questions from patients and families, continuing to care for patients who may be pursuing MAID through participating physicians, and, when requested and consistent with an organization's policies, providing support to patients and families at the time of ingestion."

She said she hasn't heard or seen any evidence of a sudden wave of people seeking MAID, nor have they heard of any providers, hospice or otherwise, leaving the medical field because of MAID's availability.

"The priority for hospice providers remains ensuring that every person facing serious and life-limiting illness understands the full range of care and support available to them," Chiciro said. "Patients should have access to information about hospice and palliative care, receive excellent symptom management and psychosocial support, and be able to make informed end-of-life decisions that reflect their individual goals and values."

She also said that hospice providers are still working through their own policies and approaches to MAID at individual levels, a process she said the state association will continue to assist with.

The New York law, crafted with years of negotiations between lawmakers and the governor's requests, largely follows the model used in Oregon, the first state in the U.S. to enact medical assistance in dying, with more safeguards. After implementations, Atkins with Quietus said he thinks it's been properly crafted to ensure vulnerable people aren't pressured into pursuing MAID, but he did have one suggestion for how the law could be changed.

"Nurse practitioners and (physicians assistants) right now have the ability to prescribe medications independent of a physician, but the way New York's state law is written now only physicians can certify and prescribe for medical aid in dying," he said. "NP's and PA's cannot. I would love to see a future version of the law expanded to allow nurse practitioners to step into that role as well, as they do in New Mexico and other states. I think that's a major thing that would really benefit many people because it would expand access."

CPH Physical Therapy helps Madrid woman

POTSDAM — When Anna Campbell was asked to share her experience with the Canton-Potsdam Hospital Physical Therapy team, she said she felt humbled.

But, the Madrid resident also welcomed the opportunity to recognize a team she says changed her life. "They greatly enriched my life, not only through physical therapy, but by building the confidence that I can do this," Campbell said.

Campbell's journey with the Physical Therapy team at the E.J. Noble Building in Canton began when knee pain and an Achilles tendon problem made walking increasingly difficult. After treatment for her Achilles tendon, she continued physical therapy and eventually reached a point where years of knee problems could no longer be ignored.

She had received injections to manage her knee pain for approximately 16 years, but eventually decided it was time for knee replacement surgery. Before undergoing the first of two knee replacements, her Orthopedic team required physical therapy to help strengthen the muscles surrounding her knees and prepare her for surgery.



Physical Therapist Sarah Thayer, left, celebrates with Anna Campbell, whose determination and hard work helped her regain strength and mobility following two knee replacements. Rochester Regional Health photo

For Campbell, that preparation went far beyond exercise. "The team marries those two things together so well—physically and mentally preparing you," she said. "You have to put your head in the right space while you're trying to get your body and muscles in the right space."

After surgery, the team was there again. Campbell remembers being apprehensive about those first appointments. Her therapists carefully explained what to expect, monitored her pain, and helped her understand why each exercise and movement mattered.

She particularly remembers the professionalism and encouragement of Physical Therapist Assistant Laurie and Physical Therapist Sarah and the confidence she developed knowing she had an entire team supporting her recovery.

"You could trust what they were telling you," Campbell said. "If they didn't have an answer, they would find it. There was a lot of comfort in knowing, 'I've got a lot of work ahead of me, but I have a support team helping me do this.'"

That expertise became especially important following Campbell's first knee replacement. Significant scar tissue made it difficult for her knee to bend, and her surgeon discussed the possibility of another procedure to improve

See MADRID T7

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Madrid

From T6

made it difficult for her knee to bend, and her surgeon discussed the possibility of another procedure to improve her range of motion.

The Physical Therapy team asked Anna if she was willing to try some additional techniques first. She was. Using specialized positioning, gravity, and manual therapy, they gradually helped her knee begin to bend, avoiding another procedure. For Campbell, it was another example of a team willing to adapt treatment to the individual patient rather than simply following a routine. "They stayed with you in the moment where you are," she said.

Campbell also worked with physical therapy students from Clarkson University that were on clinical rotations with us during her rehabilitation. She embraced the opportunity, knowing her recovery could become part of their education as future physical therapists. She remembers one student, Pete, who initially approached her exercises cautiously. Before long, Campbell was the one asking whether they should tackle another round of stairs.

"Being able to share my learning and my physical therapy experience with someone who will go on and assist many, many others—that was a big moment in my life," she said.

Her progress continued. Campbell learned how to safely get down onto the floor and, more importantly, how to get herself back up. She learned how to walk with proper alignment and how to gradually increase her activity. And, when formal therapy ended, the team's advice remained with her: keep doing the exercises, keep moving, and keep walking. She did.

Following her second knee replacement in July, Campbell logged 93 miles of walking that October. Today, more than a year after her second surgery, Campbell is no longer in physical therapy. But, the lessons she learned continue to influence her life, and others.

At 69, Campbell is president of a local senior club, where she encourages fellow members to stay active and shares some of the principles she learned during rehabilitation, while reminding them to consult their own healthcare providers.

One of her conversations with the Physical Therapy team has even helped inspire discussions about a future program to teach seniors about strengthening, fall safety, and ways to safely get up from the floor.

For Campbell, that ripple effect reflects what rehabilitation can accomplish. It is not simply about bending a knee, strengthening a muscle, or completing an exercise. It is about helping people regain the ability and confidence to participate fully in their lives.

Her relationship with the Canton team has continued long after her final appointment. Every few months, she stops by with fresh fruit or another small surprise to thank the people who helped her.

And, she still talks to her new knees. Campbell nicknamed them "Linus" and "Lucy" after the beloved *Peanuts* characters—a little humor that helped her through two major surgeries and months of recovery. "Come on, Lucy, we've got to go for a walk," she will sometimes tell herself when a knee feels stiff.

Behind the humor is a recovery Campbell once could only look forward to. That is why, during National Rehabilitation Awareness Week, Campbell hopes sharing her experience will encourage someone else who may be facing rehabilitation, surgery, or the uncertainty of starting physical therapy.

Her description of the team that helped her captures what she believes made the difference: "They meet us in the moment that we are in, but they give us an outlook for the future." For Campbell, that future now includes two new knees, miles of walking, an active role in her community, and a determination to keep moving forward.

Visit this link to learn more about Physical Therapy services and you can move with greater strength and confidence. rochesterregional.org/services/physical-therapy-and-rehabilitation.

Rochester Regional Health welcomes new member of hospitalist team

POTSDAM — Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region welcomes Yohannes Tilahun, MD, to its hospitalist team. Dr. Tilahun brings experience in acute inpatient care, critical care, and the management of complex medical conditions.

As a hospitalist, he oversees patients' care throughout their hospital stays, including evaluating and treating acute illness, managing chronic medical conditions, ordering and interpreting tests, coordinating care with other specialists and members of the healthcare team, and helping prepare patients for a safe transition home or to another level of care.

Dr. Tilahun completed his Internal Medicine Residency at Rochester General Hospital and earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Addis Ababa University College of Health Sciences in Ethiopia.

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HUDSON HEADWATERS HEALTH NETWORK

SUNY Canton announces new health care studies program



Nicole Patire of Mahwah, N.J., and Emery Crossley of Stittville work with their patient, Oliver, in the college's Newell Veterinary Science Technology building. The college will begin offering a new program for students who want to work in allied health animal care, among other options. SUNY Canton photo



SUNY Canton Nursing students Genesis Tallman of Malone and Alyvia Roberts, also of Malone, check each other's vital signs during a lab. The college just announced a new major with a track allowing pre-nursing majors to meet competitive prerequisite program requirements. SUNY Canton photo

CANTON — SUNY Canton is launching a new program for students interested in health care, allied health, or animal care careers, and who may also be interested in continuing their education.

The college will begin offering a new Associate of Applied Science degree in Health Care Studies for fall 2027. The online program offers a flexible pathway that combines coursework, hands-on learning, and the college's signature microcredentials.

"This program creates a career-focused alternative for students pursuing our healthcare-related careers," said School of Science, Health, and Criminal Justice Dean Michele A. Snyder, Ph.D. "It is positioned as a new opportunity for students and a workforce development initiative, using our college's resources while addressing healthcare and animal care labor shortages in the North Country and New York State."

Each of the three flexible career pathways, or tracks, combines degree coursework to prepare students for in-demand college programs:

— Track A allows pre-nursing majors to meet competitive prerequisite program requirements.

— Track B is flexibly designed to meet the needs of an allied health career-seeking student, with several microcredentials available in direct support professional, medical coding, and health care management.

— Track C offers an allied health animal care option and a microcredential for students interested in working at a veterinary office or in an assisting career.

"Healthcare is highly collaborative, and exposing students to different healthcare professions early in their education can help them better understand the variety of roles that contribute to patient care," said Assistant Professor & Nursing Department Chair Angelina Glover, D.N.P. "I see the Health Care Studies program as an opportunity to meet students where they are, provide them with a clear pathway toward a healthcare career, and help them develop the academic and professional foundation necessary for success."

Assistant Professor & Veterinary Science Technology Department Chair Dr. Wendy Kuceyeski noted that the program provided a new way to gain admission to the college's highly competitive veterinary science programs and to learn foundational skills. "The new program will also offer more electives for our Veterinary Science Technology students and provide a pathway for students who would like to earn a Veterinary Assistant certificate without committing the time necessary to complete an associate or bachelor's degree," the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine said.

Due to the multi-track approach integrated into this program, students have several career paths available after graduation. Each of those fields is expected to grow as fast as the average, or faster, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, with median salaries ranging from approximately $35,000 to $62,000 annually.

Health Care Studies is the college's 21st associate degree and joins a wide selestion of programs available online or through the college's signature flex classes. Like many programs, it is designed to lead students directly into several of SUNY Canton's bachelor's degree programs. It is one of at least three new academic programs expected to begin next year.

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2026 North Country Community Health Hero Awards Honor Dedicated North Country Professionals

INDIVIDUALS FROM JEFFERSON, LEWIS, AND ST. LAWRENCE COUNTIES TO BE HONORED AT COMMUNITY HEALTH HERO AWARD LUNCHEON

Watertown, NY, October 22, 2026 –Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO) and North Country Health Compass Partners are pleased to announce the 2026 Community Health Hero Award recipients.

One Health Hero was chosen in each of Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence counties who have exhibited a deep sense of dedi-

See HEROES T11

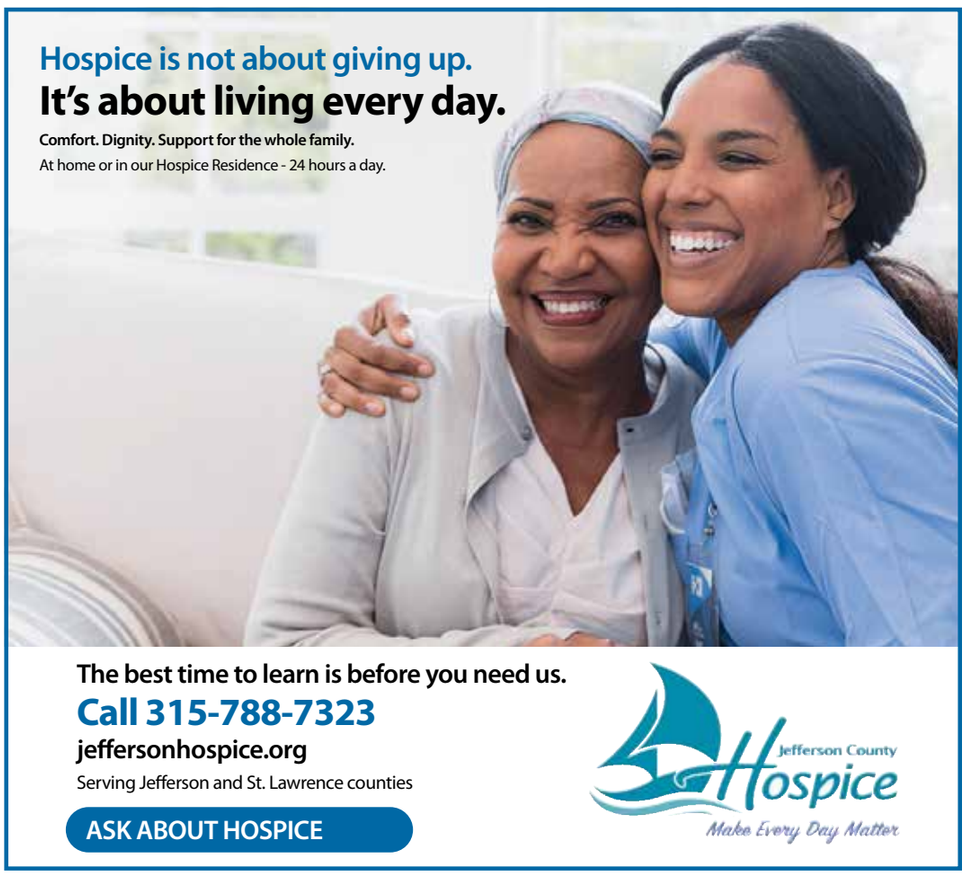
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- Health Information Technology
- Health Workforce
- Emergency Medical Services
- Value Based Care



Marcia Ashline. Contributed.



Melissa Planty. Contributed.





Eric Anderson. Contributed.

Heroes

From T10

cation, compassion, and selflessness in their efforts to address health-related issues and challenges that affect our local communities. Their contributions have led to positive and lasting impacts on the health of those they serve.

The 2026 Community Health Hero Award recipients are Eric Anderson of Jefferson County, retired operations coordinator for the Henderson Fire Department, Inc., and Ambulance Squad; Marcia Ashline of Lewis County, supervising public health nurse with Lewis County Public Health; and Melissa Planty of St. Lawrence County, community health worker with the Northern Regional Center for Independent Living (NRCIL). Together, they represent a commitment to improving community health through emergency services, public health, and recovery support.

Jefferson County recipient Eric Anderson dedicated more than 25 years to emergency services in Henderson as a firefighter, EMT, paramedic, and administrator. After a 23-year journalism career, he transitioned to emergency medicine, serving as Henderson Fire District operations coordinator for 16 years and a per-diem paramedic with the Town of Watertown Ambulance Service for 15 years. A longtime community leader, he also has served as Henderson town historian for more than 30 years and continues to volunteer with the Henderson Fire Department and Ambulance Squad following his 2026 retirement.

Lewis County recipient Marcia Ashline, Supervising Public Health Nurse with Lewis County Public Health, has spent more than 25 years advancing community health through hospital nursing, school health, and public health leadership. Since joining Lewis County Public Health in 2002, she has led key programs, including immunization and lead poisoning prevention efforts, and has served as the supervising public health nurse since 2011. Beyond her professional accomplishments, she is an active community leader, serving as a Village of Castorland trustee and long-time member of the Castorland Fire Company.

St. Lawrence County recipient Melissa Planty, a Certified Community Health Worker with NRCIL and CA-SAC-T credential holder, has transformed her lived experience with homelessness and mental health recovery into a career of service. For more than seven years, she has helped individuals access treatment, housing, employment, and recovery resources while providing peer support as a recovery coach and Recovery Warm Line volunteer. Her person-centered approach empowers individuals to overcome barriers, build confidence, and achieve lasting recovery.

Presented in honor of National Rural Health Day (November 19, 2026), the Community Health Hero Award recognizes North Country residents who demonstrate exceptional public service and a commitment to improving community health and wellness. Community members submitted nominations, and the North Country Health Compass partners selected the recipients.

"Each year, Health Hero nominations highlight the extraordinary people making a difference in our communities. We are honored to recognize this year's exceptionally dedicated, compassionate, and inspiring awardees," said Pat Fontana, Deputy Director for FDRHPO.

This year's guest speaker will be Richard Merchant, CEO of four nonprofit organizations: Northern Area Health Education Center in Canton, Central New York Area Health Education Center in Syracuse, Brooklyn Queens Long Island Area Health Education Center in Brooklyn, New York, and Health WorkForce New York with its administrative offices in Canton.

An awards luncheon will be held on November 18 at the Hilton Garden Inn Watertown/1000 Islands from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tickets to attend the luncheon are $20, and registration is required. This event is open to the public. To register for the event, visit https://shorturl.at/lQIuO. For more about National Rural Health Day, visit https://nosorh.org/nrhd/.

For more information about the 2026 North Country Community Health Hero Awards, contact Holly Boname, Communications Coordinator at FDRHPO, by emailing hboname@fdrhpo.org.

New York receives $10 million to expand mental health care in primary care practices

New York will receive $10 million in federal funding over five years to expand behavioral health services at eight federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics, according to Gov. Kathy Hochul's office.

The ACCESS-NY initiative, administered by the state Office of Mental Health, will focus on practices serving high numbers of patients with complex physical and behavioral health needs, including communities facing barriers to care.

The program is expected to serve about 1,750 people ages 6 and older who have chronic physical conditions alongside mental health or substance use challenges.

"All too often, New Yorkers who experience physical health issues are also in need of behavioral health care," Hochul said. "The funding through this initiative will help more providers integrate these services into primary care settings and eliminate some of the barriers New Yorkers encounter in the less-populated areas of our state."

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provided $4 million for the first two years. An additional $2 million is planned for each of the final three years.

The initiative will expand the Collaborative Care model, which adds a psychiatric consultant and behavioral health care manager to primary care teams. The model supports treatment and medication management in the same setting where patients receive physical health care.

New York began supporting the model in 2012, and it has expanded to more than 450 physical health practices statewide, according to the announcement.

ACCESS-NY also will strengthen partnerships between primary care practices and community mental health centers, provide staff training and support technology that works with electronic health records.

The initiative will develop online training and examine ways to involve credentialed mental health support specialists and registered nurses in care teams.

State Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said the approach offers an opportunity to address patients' mental health needs in a familiar setting.

State Sen. Samra Brouk, chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee, said rural residents often face obstacles to obtaining care.

"I applaud this funding to expand the Collaborative Care model and invest in rural providers and community-based specialists delivering quality mental health care," Brouk said.

The announcement did not identify the eight participating practices.

Rochester Regional Health welcomes new Surgical Services team member

POTSDAM — Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region is pleased to welcome Aiden Tam, PA, a North Country native, to its Surgical Services team.

As a Surgical Assist at Canton-Potsdam Hospital, Tam will be working directly alongside all surgical subspecialties in the operating rooms, including orthopedics, general surgery, and OB/GYN. Additionally, he will be rounding and providing post-surgical care to patients who require admission onto the medical-surgical unit. In full collaboration with all members of the surgical and inpatient teams, he assumes a crucial role in ensuring the success of surgical procedures and providing safe and effective patient care.

Tam earned his Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from Albany Medical College in Albany, NY. He previously earned a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Technology from Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, graduating magna cum laude.

As part of his physician assistant training, Tam completed clinical rotations in several specialties, including thoracic surgery at St. Peter's Hospital, Albany, surgical oncology and plastic surgery at Albany Medical Center, and orthopedic surgery with Capital Region Orthopaedic Group and Albany Medical Center.



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