



NNY Health

A Watertown Daily Times and Malone Telegram publication

Daily updates: NNY360.com

June 2026

FREE

MASH Camp incoming

■ **A Connection of Caring:**
The story of Dr. Toby Cosgrove and the many NNY residents helped by his career in medicine.

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■ **Kinney Drugs has a new 'man' on their team**
who resembles their first man

PAGE 7



LifeNet Flight Nurse/Paramedic, Rod Kester, speaks with students on the landing zone at Carthage Area Hospital during the 2025 Summer MASH Camp. (Holly Boname/FDRHPO)

Two new sites, including Army Medical Experience

WATERTOWN — Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO) is expanding our popular Summer MASH Camp program for 2026, adding two new locations – the North Country Family Health Center (NoCo)

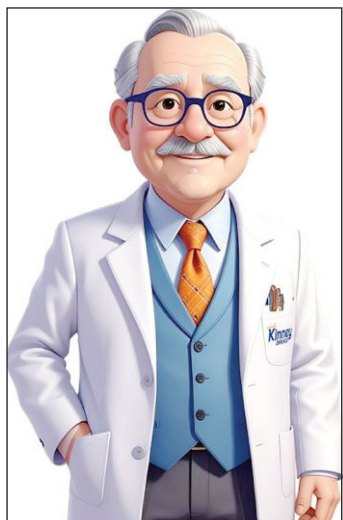
and a first- of- its- kind Army Medical experience through Fort Drum’s MEDDAC. The additions mark a significant step in FDRHPO’s ongoing effort to strengthen the region’s healthcare workforce pipeline.

MASH Camp, a no- cost program for students in grades 8– 12, offers hands- on exposure to healthcare careers through interactive activities, department tours, and real- world demonstrations. Students can apply on-

line through June 5, 2026, at 5 p.m.

Beth Solar, Workforce Outreach Manager at FDRHPO, said interest in this year’s sessions is already high.

See MASH H7



The virtual assistant, Ask Burt. Kinney Drugs

Professional Connection Page 3

A connection of caring

FORTUITOUS BOND BETWEEN NORTH COUNTRY AND CLEVELAND CLINIC AN ELIXIR WORTH SHARING FOR DPAO FOUNDER

By Chris Brock

cbrock@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — When Community Broadcasters set up shop here 20 years ago, the deal was preceded by something that President and CEO James L. Leven says still amazes him.

“It’s one of the most remarkable stories,” he said.

It’s a story of a delayed business transaction, illness, the fortuitous connection Watertown has with a world-famous heart surgeon and a brotherhood of caring, sharing, sickness and healing that has been repeated dozens of times over the years.

Leven said it all makes him realize, “There are angels in this world.”

Two decades ago, Leven and business partner Bruce Mittman were finalizing a deal to take control of seven north country radio stations owned by Clancy-Mance Communications, Watertown. Leven, whose background includes stints as a media consultant, radio program director and television weatherman, was preparing to relocate to Watertown to become the stations’ general manager.

“I was living in New York City and called Dave Mance and told him, ‘We might have to delay the transaction. My mom is very sick, and we have to figure out what to do,’” Leven recalled.

Sylvia Leven of Bloomfield, Connecticut, was in her 80s at



In 1996, Watertown native and former Cleveland Clinic CEO Dr. Toby Cosgrove performed the first minimally invasive heart valve surgery. He later shared the technique with doctors around the country. This type of surgery made recovery time for patients quicker than traditional heart surgery. Cleveland Clinic

the time. “The doctors in Hartford said, ‘Well, it’s time for nature to take its course,’” Leven said. “I said, no way. We have to figure this out.”

Mance called Leven to talk about his mom’s health and the delay.

“He said, ‘You’ve come to the right place, because the guy who runs Cleveland Clinic, Toby Cosgrove, is a Watertown guy, and I’ll hook you up.’ I had no idea that it was Joe Rich who was doing the hookup. It

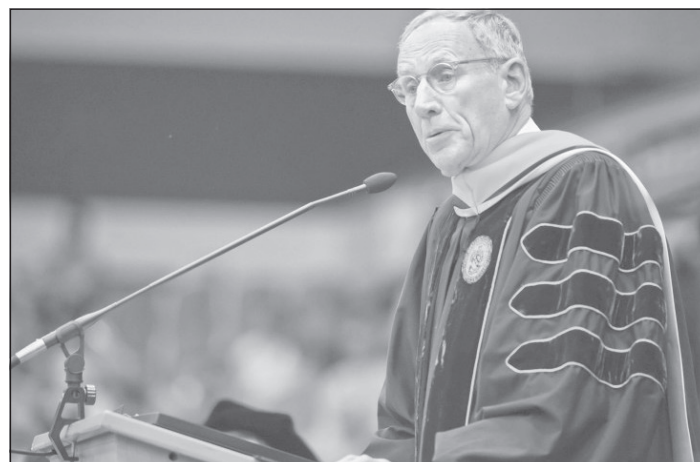
went through Dave, who went through Joe,” Leven said.

THE RICH-COSGROVE CONNECTION

Joseph L. Rich, retired founder and director of the Disabled Persons Action Organization, has known Dr. Delos M. “Toby” Cosgrove since they were classmates at Watertown High School. Cosgrove graduated from WHS in 1958, and Rich in 1959. Both in 2001 became Wall of Achievement Honorees at the school.

The 1958 Watertown High School yearbook photo of Cosgrove notes he was in several student organizations, was inducted into the National Honor Society and played basketball and baseball. He also became an accomplished sailor. In 2014, Cosgrove told the Watertown Daily Times he didn’t know he was dyslexic until he was 34. He finished in the bottom of his class at University of Virginia Medical School, but he credits his learning disability with giving him an innovative way of thinking.

The 1959 WHS yearbook notes that Rich was a wrestler, played intramural basketball



After receiving an honorary degree from Clarkson University in Potsdam in 2022, Dr. Delos M. “Toby” Cosgrove III spoke to the graduates about failure and not to fear it, but to learn from it. Watertown Daily Times

and volleyball, bowled and was a correspondent for the Watertown Daily Times.

Both yearbooks have brief biographical descriptions, not penned by the graduates, published next to their yearbook photos.

Cosgrove: “An outstanding young man with a great personality who will be successful in any field and every court.”

Rich: “A very quiet, but nice guy.”

A CAREER AT CLEVELAND

Cosgrove trained at Massachusetts General Hospital and Brook General Hospital in London. In 1967, he was a surgeon in the U.S. Air Force, earning a Bronze Star. In 2022, he received an honorary doctorate from Clarkson University, Potsdam.

Cosgrove joined Cleveland Clinic, a nonprofit academic medical center, in 1975 and chaired the Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular surgery from 1989 to 2004. Before retiring from surgery in 2006, he performed over 22,000 operations and earned an international reputation in valve repair. He holds 30 patents for medical innovation. As CEO of the Cleveland Clinic from 2004 to 2017, he reorganized services, improved outcomes and patient experience, and strengthened the organization’s finances.

As a tribute to when Cosgrove stepped down in 2017, the Cleveland Clinic community

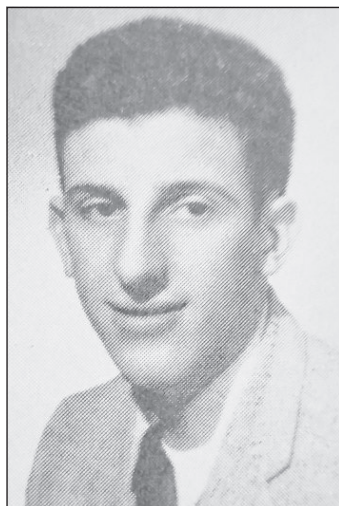
came together to raise over \$50 million for the Cosgrove Transformation Campaign to honor his career and legacy.

In 2016, Cosgrove was a Fortune Businessperson of the Year. Three successive presidents of the United States have consulted him on healthcare issues. He now serves as an adviser on the health system and has spoken around the globe, including at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, in Washington, D.C.

A CAREER OF CARING

DPAO was founded in 1974 by Rich, and the nonprofit, originally called, Foundation for the Handicapped, was incorporated in 1976. Rich retired as executive director and CEO of the agency in 2008. He was later president of the DPAO Foundation and now serves on its board, in an advisory, non-voting role.

Rich went to college at the Brown Institute of Broadcasting Electronics, Minneapolis, where he had family. He then joined the Army. For nearly three years, he was public information officer at Schweinfurt, Germany, and was discharged in 1963. He later graduated from the New York School of Broadcasting and Announcing in Rochester. Before his career at



The 1959 Watertown High School yearbook photo of Joseph L. Rich.



The 1958 Watertown High School yearbook photo of Delos M. Cosgrove III.

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTION


is featured each Wednesday, Saturday as well as in NNY Business. This is found at your local Chamber of Commerce and in the third Thursday of each month's Watertown Daily Times.



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Connection

From H2

DPAO, he was a news anchor at WWNY-TV.

For decades, DPAO was partially funded by concert series of

nationally known acts. In February, the North Country Music Project presented a plaque to Rich, which reads: "In recog-

inition of over 40 years of dedication and support for both national stars and local talent in Watertown ... With heartfelt gratitude for bringing music legends to Watertown while nurturing local artists and supporting a worthy cause."

In 1998, Rich's relationship with Cosgrove went from personal to one of doctor and patient when he was diagnosed with a heart ailment.

Rich made a call to the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio to see if he could be taken on as a patient after being told he needed an aortic valve replacement: a procedure to treat diseased heart valves (narrowing or leaking) by replacing them with mechanical or biological valves. He said he was told he could be a patient, but it would take six months.

"I then called Toby, and he said, 'What are you doing tomorrow?' Honest to God, that's true," Rich said.

Rich packed up and went to Cleveland Clinic.

"I was so scared," he recalled. "I got there, and everybody was walking around with stitches from their neck all the way to their stomachs. That's how they did heart surgery back then."

Rich pulled Cosgrove aside and nervously asked him: "Is that what I'm having?"

Cosgrove told him to relax; he would be having a "brand-new" procedure, involving an incision not more than 4 inches long.

A PIONEER

In the late 1990s, Cleveland Clinic, led by surgeons like Cosgrove, pioneered minimally invasive heart valve surgery, focusing on smaller incision. Cosgrove performed the first minimally invasive heart valve surgery in 1996, specifically replacing the aortic valve through a 10 cm right parasternal (adjacent to the sternum) incision, avoiding a full sternotomy. The innovative approach significantly reduced patient recovery time and improved post-operative outcomes compared to traditional methods.

Since the minimally invasive approach to valve surgery was pioneered by Cosgrove, it has been increasingly adopted by cardiac surgeons worldwide.

"He had to tell doctors around the world what it was,"

Rich said.

Happy with his successful outcome, Rich wanted others to experience what he experienced at the Cleveland Clinic, and the word got out. People began contacting him for referrals.

"Over the last several years, and I've counted them up to a point, its been over 100 that I have referred to that office," Rich said.

A 2024 Reddit discussion notes that getting into Cleveland Clinic as a patient "can be difficult due to high demand, long wait times for specialists, and a complex phone-based scheduling system."

CLINIC LIAISONS

"That office," that Rich referred to is a program that is specifically meant for people in the north country. Rich assumes it was set up because Cosgrove was tired of him calling him directly for referrals.

"I called Toby once and he was in Italy, getting ready to ski down a hill. He always answered my calls. But I can still call him directly, but I don't like to bother him."

Instead, a "buffer" has been set up, and Cleveland Clinic referrals from the north country are done through an executive liaison. People contact Rich, and he contacts Christine Courtwright, the liaison.

"They've been reaching out to Joe when they have some type of health problem and they're not getting the answers they want, or they need a second opinion or whatever it might be, and they are looking to see if the Cleveland Clinic can help them," said administrative program coordinator Christine Courtwright.

Courtwright is the first contact. "A referral from Dr. Cosgrove sends it over to the liaisons in our current CEO office. Those VIP liaisons help to get people into the clinic."

Courtwright said there are two liaisons, who may set up an appointment, a virtual appointment, a second opinion or "whatever it may be" in Ohio or one of its facilities in Florida.

In Leven's case, he said that Mance contacted Rich, who then contacted the Cleveland Clinic and told officials about Leven's mother. From there,

See CONNECTION H5



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Connection

From H4

things happened fast.

"I got a call in my apartment in New York City, maybe half-an-hour later from Toby Cosgrove's secretary, who asked, 'Can your mom be here in 24 hours?' I said, 'Excuse me?' I didn't think anybody could quickly get into the Cleveland Clinic for heart work."

Leven said his mom had a cardiologist in Hartford, Connecticut. She was given less than a year to live. "We were raised never to give up on anything. My mom wanted to. She said, 'I'm old and everybody dies.' I said, 'I want to keep you going.'"

Put in charge of the case was Dr. Bruce W. Lytle, a renowned cardiovascular surgeon who spent 38 years at Cleveland Clinic. He was a specialist in complex heart surgery, including valve repair and re-operations. He helped elevate the clinic to the nation's top-ranked heart program.

It was an eight-hour operation. "He had to replace the linings around her heart," Leven said. "I don't know if anyone else on Earth could do it."

Leven's brother, Sam, also traveled to Cleveland from Florida to be with their mom, who further explained the delicate surgery.

"Like many women, my mother suffered from silent heart attacks," Sam said in a phone interview from Florida. "They didn't show up on the images because they were up against her breast plate. As a consequence, the part of the heart where they needed to put the bypass in was damaged. So, the surgeon invented. He took a part of the sack around the heart, created patches, sewed them on the heart, and attached the bypasses to those patches."

Sam added, "It was as close to a miracle as you can imagine. After the surgery, the assistant surgeon told my brother and me, 'When you have an injured part of the heart, this isn't Detroit. You can't call out for spare parts. You have to invent,' and that's what happened."

James Leven said he stayed with his mother throughout the ordeal and recovery. "As soon as they told me she'd be OK in her assisted living place in Bloomfield, I came up here, and Dave, being the saint that he is, was terribly patient."

In 2005, David W. Mance was awarded the Israel A. Shapiro Award, which extols community leadership. Rich received the award in 2018.

"My partner Bruce and I did the deal, bought the radio stations and started Community Broadcasting," Leven said. "We named it that because we broadcast on behalf of the community. Maybe that sounds egotistical. But we do our best and we have a lot of fun and have amazing people."

Sylvia Leven died in December of 2014 at the age of 92.

"My mom would have been dead in a few months," Sam said. "Instead, she had a very full life for nearly another 10 years."

"It ultimately was a result that came through Joe Rich, which I didn't know," James said. "I later got to know him incredibly well through his heroic work with DPAO and the community at large."

But the Leven family wasn't finished with Rich's Cleveland Clinic connection.

A 'FALSE ECHO'

"I had a dread diagnosis requiring delicate heart surgery that was made here in south Florida," Sam Leven said. "It didn't make a whole lot of sense because I was healthy up until then. But surgery seemed to be

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critical. Of course, I called my brother."

Through his brother James and Rich, Sam was put in contact with the Cleveland Clinic.

He shared his X-rays, and the clinic took their own.

"The cardiologist up there took one look at the pictures and asked me a question: 'Have you

been taking statins?'" — prescription drugs designed to lower levels of LDL or "bad" cholesterol.

See CONNECTION H6









15th Annual 20 Under 40 Award Recipients

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Yen Maine	CEO, Nature's Storehouse	Lauren Prentice	Nutrition manager, Canton-Potsdam Hospital
Meade Piercey Lent	Nurse practitioner, Canton-Potsdam Hospital	Melissa Shova	Children's Home
Dr. Morgan Stevens	Chiropractor, Treating the Root	Isabelle Gates Shult	Village Administrator, Potsdam
Nathan Thompson	Thompson Veterinary Services	Shawnea Hull	Business Specialist, CAPC
Dr. Russell Reeves	Radiologist, Samaritan Medical Center	Nicole Hudson	Clayton Dental Office
Thomas Murphy	Jefferson County Supreme Court Clerk	Marc Piche	Banking officer, Watertown Savings Bank
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Connection

From HS

terol.

"I said, 'Yes, for years,'" Sam said. "He then said, 'This is a false positive on your X-ray. You are fine. You don't need surgery.'"

Sam, 77, seven years older than his brother, recalled it took less than a minute to get to that point. "I don't know for sure that it saved my life, but it certainly prevented critical surgery," he said.

He described his diagnosis as a "false echo." "I'm not going to practice medicine without a license, but I gather you have to have a substantial amount of statins in your system for this image to be created, which is a dark color on the X-ray. But you have to know a lot to know that that image is not something that requires surgery."

Before he retired, Sam said he did brain research, academically. "I still do, but not paid. My brother has lived a far more colorful life than I."

He added, "Joe has played a critical role in the life of my family in many ways. I'm incredibly grateful to him. It was his generosity that saved my mom's life and may have saved mine."

CLINIC CALLED 'WITHIN HOURS'

Two years ago, Watertown resident Elianna E. Primmer, now 15, began to have health issues. "She fainted a couple of times and had low energy," her dad, Ian Primmer, explained. "A friend mentioned Joe's name. I reached out to him, and he called me back the next day. And within hours, the Cleveland Clinic had called us."

About two weeks later, Elianna and family were at the clinic, where Ian said she was diagnosed with POTS Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, a condition that causes a number of symptoms when one transitions from lying down to standing up, such as a fast heart rate, dizziness and fatigue. There is no cure, but treatments and lifestyle changes can help manage symptoms. The treatments include increased fluid/salt intake, compression stockings, structured exercise and medications.

Elianna was also diagnosed with a heart condition, Long QT Syndrome — a heart signaling disorder causing the lower heart chambers to take too long to recharge between beats. The Cleveland Clinic says that many people have no symptoms, but when they occur, they include fainting, seizures or sudden cardiac death.

"She still has POTS, but they got her back to where her heart is good now," Ian said of his daughter. "They got her off the drugs she was on and prescribed different drugs. She's been going for checkups, maintenance and everything since."

Elianna plays soccer, basketball, softball and is an Irish step dancer. In March, she was named Irish Princess at the North Country Goes Green Irish Festival.

"Joe also got my dad (Joseph, a seasonal Florida resident) into the Cleveland Clinic," Ian said. "He had a heart problem. He went down to the Cleveland Clinic, had surgery and has been great since."

A SERENDIPITOUS MEETING

Wendy P. Decoste, Watertown, was at a low point in September, frustrated by her health issues and the care she said she received in the north country and in Syracuse to address them. Her diagnoses were grim, but she did find some encouragement and hope at a Watertown internist's office, and in September, and on the way out of that office, she happened to run into Rich.

"I was trying to put all my affairs in order," Decoste recalled. "I mentioned to him that if I passed away, I was seeking his help with my parents— to figure all that out. And he said, 'Well, how about Cleveland?'"

"I said, 'What do you mean?' He goes, 'I can make a call and get you into the Cleveland Clinic.' I was like, 'Absolutely!' I got a call the very next day, and four days later, I was at Cleveland with a heart doctor."

Based on her medical history, Decoste said her lineup of doctors at the clinic quickly expanded.

"The doctor ordered other tests. That led me to now having 19 specialists at the Cleveland Clinic."

Decoste, a 1995 graduate of



Watertown teenager Elianna Primmer became a patient at Cleveland Clinic two years ago. In March, she was named Irish Princess 2026 at the North Country Goes Green Irish Festival. Jonathon Wheeler/Watertown Daily Times

South Jefferson Central School, where she participated in track and cross country, has health issues ranging from the rare to the more common and related to tragic happenstance: a 2019 car crash left her permanently disabled. Major injuries from that crash included severe cervical and lumbar injuries and a 69-month cervicogenic migraine, which originates in the spine.

"It was a crazy thing on that day that I happened to run into Joe. I don't know why I didn't think to call him, because he's always been my savior. When I was a teenager and very sick, he arranged for me to go to a special hospital on Staten Island."

Decoste is the sister of the late Steven L. Petrie, who died in 2017 at the age of 37. Steven, who was developmentally disabled because of a rare genetic disorder, was an advocate of DPAO funding as an adult. At the age of 12 in 1992, DPAO financed a trip by him and his parents, Lawrence and Carol Petrie, to the Institute of Basic Research and Developmental Disabilities on Staten Island for

two days of testing as part of a genetic research program.

"Joe was critical in keeping my brother alive," Decoste said. "He lived to be almost 38 years old, which is very rare for someone with his chromosome abnormality."

Decoste has a connective tissue disorder called Hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS), a heritable connective tissue disorder that causes generalized joint hypermobility, joint instability and chronic pain. Hypermobile EDS is also associated with a variety of other symptoms and related conditions that affect many different areas of the body, including cardiovascular issues. She was diagnosed in her late teens.

"My legs and arms go backwards, and I can do crazy things," Decoste said. "But that condition (hEDS) makes it very scary when you have an aortic aneurysm because the propensity for it to rupture is much higher."

Decoste was diagnosed with an aortic aneurysm — a bulge in the wall of the aorta — about nine months ago. It occurs when a weak section of the aorta, the body's main artery, stretches and swells. She said she had symptoms starting about two years ago.

"I knew something was wrong with my heart," she said. Aortic aneurysms can also cause gastroenterology symptoms, which she also had.

Meanwhile, Decoste said she has three prolapsing internal organs. The Cleveland Clinic defines pelvic organ prolapse as a condition where weak muscles in your pelvis cause one or more organs to sag. In more severe cases, an organ bulges onto another organ, or outside your body. It's also associated with an increased risk of bone fractures.

Decoste said that she also found that she has a dissected carotid artery — a tear in the inner layer of the neck's carotid artery, allowing blood to leak between layers, potentially causing blockages or strokes. She said it was a result of her car crash but it wasn't found until September at Cleveland Clinic.

Decoste said she is scheduled for colorectal surgery at the Cleveland Clinic in October. "If I didn't get to Cleveland Clinic

for my heart, I never would have been able to get the help I needed for everywhere else."

But her surgery could be delayed if her aortic aneurysm has grown. It is generally considered more dangerous for a person with an aortic aneurysm to undergo anesthesia compared to an individual without the condition. Anesthesia can cause drastic fluctuations in blood pressure, which can lead to cardiovascular collapse, rupture, or acute dissection of the aneurysm.

"It's actually two surgeries in one day that they are trying to do on me in October," Decoste said. "I need a lot of other departments to agree that they think they can put me under and that my heart would make it through it. The doctors are being very cautious, which I love. They are operating on two prolapsed organs. However, if they find the aortic aneurysm has grown past allowable levels, they would put off the colorectal surgery and heart surgery would take precedent. They would not be able to address them together."

She added, "But it has given me hope, knowing that if I do need heart surgery, or if I need this other surgery, that I am in the best place in the country. It has given me hope that I'm going to live."

Before her 2019 car crash, Decoste worked in the genetics and molecular testing field. In the span of 18 years, from 1995 to 2013 and while a stay-at-home mom, she took college courses in New Hampshire and Maine, where she lived with her now ex-husband on horse farms. She earned her associate degree at Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire and a bachelor's degree, a master's certificate and a master's degree at Southern New Hampshire University.

Decoste has been to Cleveland Clinic a total of four times. In September, she has a one-year checkup there, a month before her scheduled surgery.

"I believe I'd be dead, or on my way to being dead if it wasn't for Cleveland Clinic. The doctors take the time to truly listen to you, and answer all of your questions. You never feel rushed. And when you walk out, you feel like you have a game plan to where you are going."

New Kinney Drugs virtual assistant helps with vaccine questions

By Chris Brock
cbrock@wdt.net

If you have questions on vaccines, “Ask Burt,” and you shall receive.

Ask Burt, introduced by Kinney Drugs, is the company’s new virtual assistant that helps individuals determine which vaccines they may be eligible to receive this year. Burt is named after the company’s founder, pharmacist Burt Orrin Kinney, who established the first

Kinney Drugs in 1903 in Gouverneur.

“We are thrilled to introduce this new tool to help people find out which vaccines they may be eligible for,” John Marraffa, president of Kinney Drugs, and a career pharmacist, said in a news release. “We know that many factors go into determining who is eligible for which vaccines, and at what times. In this way, perhaps people can have some fun with learning,

as there’s an interactive, engaging element to this.”

Kinney Drugs said that when people use Ask Burt, they are tapping into a knowledge base that carries the latest updated guidance for vaccine eligibility for a range of vaccinations, including COVID, influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), pneumonia and shingles. As vaccine guidance continues to evolve, Burt will be able to help patients to stay up to date.

Anyone may use the Ask Burt tool — you do not need to be a patient or customer at Kinney Drugs. To try it out, visit kinneydrugs.com/burt and open a chat with the avatar Burt.

Kinney Drugs was founded in 1903 at 29 Main St. Gouverneur, by Burt Orrin Kinney. Eventually, he became a drug store clerk in the Draper store. His next employers were the druggists “A.W. Dewey and Perrin,” according to Water-

town DailyTimes files. Burt’s boss, Dewey, saw a future for the pleasant, hard-working young man, and urged him to enroll in the Albany School of Pharmacy, with Dewey footing the bill for tuition. Burt left for Albany in 1899.

Two years later, he was filling prescriptions in Dewey’s store. In 1903, Dewey sold the business to his protege. Kinney died in 1966 in Gouverneur at the age of 83.

MASH

From H1

“With the addition of two new locations, including our first-ever Army Medical experience, students will have even more opportunities to explore healthcare careers in dynamic, real-world settings,” Mrs. Solar said.

Each camp runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., offering students a chance to observe healthcare professionals, explore hospital departments, and participate in activities with local fire departments and medical air transport services.

MASH CAMP LOCATION AND DATES:

- River Hospital: July 6–8
- Samaritan Medical Center, Session #1: July 13–15
- Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center: July 21–23
- North Country Family Health Center: July 22–23 (*New 2-day camp location*)
- Fort Drum MEDDAC / Army Medical Experience: July 27–28 (*New 2-day camp; location TBD.*)
- Lewis County Health System: July 28–30
- Gouverneur Hospital: July 28–30
- Samaritan Medical Center, Session #2: August 10–12
- Carthage Area Hospital: August 12–14
- Samaritan Medical Center, Session #3: August 24–26

Due to our region’s rural location in the far northern corner of New York state, recruiting and retaining an adequate supply of healthcare professionals has always been a struggle for our local providers. For years, however, FDRHPO has been com-

mitted to assisting with this process through its long-term regional Recruitment, Retention, and Education (RREC) program, and is dedicated to building a strong regional healthcare workforce by offering healthcare career exploration programs to elementary students through adults, working with higher education to increase access to healthcare education, and educating our community on the range of healthcare career opportunities available. Our efforts are aimed at continuously enhancing healthcare excellence within the community.

In addition, FDRHPO partners with the Workforce Development Institute (WDI) to fund MASH Camp as a FREE program for area students.

Students and other individuals interested in exploring healthcare careers can also take advantage of FDRHPO’s Job Shadow program, an exciting opportunity to step inside real healthcare settings and see the profession in action. By connecting participants with local healthcare professionals and clinical environments, the program offers a valuable firsthand look at the skills, teamwork, and day-to-day experiences that shape today’s healthcare careers, helping inspire the next generation of providers and guiding participants toward informed education and career choices.

For more information about MASH Camp or Job Shadow opportunities, follow this link, email workforce@fdrhpo.org, or call 315-755-2020 ext. 25.

Samaritan celebrates nurses during National Nurses Week



Front L-R: Jody Waugh, LPN; Joyce James, RN; Ali Bell, LPN; Melissa Elmer, RN; Sara Cummings, RN; Diane Jesmore, RN; Mary Peters, RN; Jessie Smith, RN. Not pictured: Jen Castle, RN. Back L-R: Dr. Caleb Atkins; Dr. Vijesh Patel; Dr. Rory Sears; Dr. Jeffrey Amidon; Dr. Biren Chokshi; Dr. Marylene Duah; Dr. Maja Lundborg-Gray; Dr. Brian Zafonte; Chris Phinney, RN. Contributed.

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center and its medical staff held a reception and awards presentation May 7 at Samaritan Summit Village to honor nurses during National Nurses Week.

The event recognized registered nurses and licensed practical nurses for contributions to patient care and long-term care. Medical staff nominated nurses in categories including excellence in nursing practice, education and mentorship, innovation, leadership, quality and safety, dedication and service, patient advocate and rookie of the year.

Tom Carman, Samaritan’s president and CEO, opened the event. Dr. Marylene Duah served as master of ceremonies.

“Throughout every patient experience, our nurses truly embody this year’s Nurses Week theme, ‘Champions of Care,’ through their compassion, ex-

pertise and commitment to those they serve,” said John Green, Samaritan’s vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer.

Honorees:

Excellence in Nursing Practice (Medical Center): Joyce James, RN, 4 Pavilion. Nominated by Dr. Vijesh Patel.

Excellence in Nursing Practice (Long Term Care): Melissa Elmer, RN, Samaritan Keep Home. Nominated by Dr. Jeffrey Amidon.

Excellence in Nursing Practice (Clinics): Jody Waugh, LPN, Watertown Family Health Center. Nominated by Dr. Caleb Atkins.

Education & Mentorship: Jen Castle, RN, Emergency Department. Nominated by Dr. Maja Lundborg-Gray and Dr. Sarah Delaney-Rowland.

Innovation: Sara Cummings, RN, Samaritan Orthopedics.

Nominated by Dr. Biren Chokshi.

Leadership: Ali Bell, LPN, Samaritan Pulmonology. Nominated by Dr. Rory Sears.

Quality & Safety: Chris Phinney, RN, Surgical Services, operating room. Nominated by Dr. Brian Zafonte.

Dedication & Service: Mary Peters, RN, Emergency Department. Nominated by Dr. Maja Lundborg-Gray and Dr. Sarah Delaney-Rowland.

Patient Advocate: Diane Jesmore, Infusion. Nominated by Dr. Marylene Duah.

Rookie of the Year: Jessie Smith, RN, Emergency Department. Nominated by Dr. Maja Lundborg-Gray and Dr. Sarah Delaney-Rowland.

The awards are part of Samaritan’s annual recognition of nursing professionals across the system.

**JUNE IS NATIONAL
CANCER SURVIVORS MONTH.**

**Samaritan Cancer Services
Patients and Their Caregivers
Are Invited to our Annual
Cancer Survivor Day Event.**

Saturday, June 6, 2026
Noon – 2 p.m.

Samaritan Summit Village
Multi-Purpose Room
22691 Campus Drive, Watertown, New York
(Off Washington Street)

Enjoy activities,
BINGO, lunch by Embellished Catering,
shared sentiments, and live music.

This event is free for Samaritan Cancer Services
patients and their caregivers.
RSVP is required. Use the code below.



samaritanhealth.com/upcoming-event/hope-grows-here

Please contact
Natalie Barraco at 315-755-3625 with questions

*Kindly let us know if you require
gluten-free or vegan options.*



CANCER SERVICES



**HOPE GROWS HERE
CELEBRATION**