

2025 PROGRESS CHENANGO

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Chobani focuses on community impact in 2024

SARAH GENTER

EVENING SUN

SOUTH EDMESTON — Chobani has closed out another successful year full of new developments, growth, employee support, and a positive impact on their community.

Founded in 2005 by Turkish immigrant Hamdi Ulukaya, Chobani has grown to be the number one Greek yogurt brand in America, manufacturing high-quality yogurt, oat milk, and creamer with natural ingredients and no artificial preservatives. They also began selling cold-pressed espressos and lattes on tap at cafes nationwide, and Ready to Drink (RTD) coffee beverages at retail establishment after their acquisition of La Colombe in 2023.

“Chobani is a purpose-driven business that puts people over profits with a mission

to bring better food to more people. But our commitment goes beyond the food we make – how we make it, the ingredients we choose, and the positive impact it has on the world matters,” said Chobani Senior Vice President of Operations Nate Gundlach. “That’s why we put our suppliers, our people, and the communities we call home at the center of all we do.”

“Chobani believes in innovation that results in nutritious food, accessible to everyone. We’ve now grown beyond yogurt, evolving with the changing behaviors of consumers to expand in dairy and non-dairy foods, always delicious, and always nutritious,” he added.

The Chobani plant in South Edmeston employs over 1,000 people, and globally,

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Chobani is committed to fighting hunger, so in 2024 they launched Super Milk, a high-protein, fiber-rich, and shelf-stable dairy product for donation purposes only. (Submitted photo)

Catholic Charities of Chenango County focus on the unhoused



Catholic Charities of Chenango County offers services and support to all vulnerable populations within the service region and serves more than 10,000 Chenango County residents each year and is predominately funded by federal, state, and local grant funding and Medicaid billable services. (Submitted photo)

KELLI MILLER

EVENING SUN

NORWICH — Catholic Charities of Chenango County (CCofCC) is a diverse human service agency serving the greater Chenango County area and offers addi-

tional programming located within surrounding counties.

Catholic Charities offers services and support to all vulnerable populations within the service region and serves more than 10,000 Chenango County residents each year and is predominately funded by federal, state, and local

grant funding and Medicaid billable services.

The non-profit organization brings funding into the local community and is invested directly into the community through salary and employment, purchasing of goods and services, and service delivery.

“Catholic Charities feels that our most important resource is our community and the collaborations we have with other community partners,” said Catholic Charities Director of Operations Jeff Chesebro.

“The county is fortunate to have such a high level

of partner engagement, and community dedication,” Chesebro added.

Catholic Charities Executive Director Robin Cotter said one of the most important projects they worked on was developing a warming center for the unhoused, located on

Mechanic Street.

“Chenango County unhoused population was our focus and finally we got the center up and running through grant funding which allows the center to be open year round, not just from

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Chenango Story



Free hot meals are available at the Norwich Community Kitchen every Tuesday at the St. Bartholomew's Parish Center, located at 81 East Main Street in Norwich. (Photo by Sarah Genter)



Every Tuesday the Norwich Community Kitchen provides free dinners that are open to all. The weekly meals include the main dish, a vegetable, dessert, Chobani yogurt, and drink options. Doors open at 4 p.m. and volunteers begin serving dinner at 5 p.m. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

Norwich Community Kitchen offering free meals to those in need

SARAH GENTER

EVENING SUN

NORWICH — The Norwich Community Kitchen serves up free hot meals every Tuesday at the St. Bartholomew's Parish Center, located at 81 East Main Street in Norwich. The doors open at 4 p.m. and volunteers begin serving dinner at 5 p.m.

The Community Kitchen was founded in 2010 with the goal of meeting the needs of the community and to encourage community involvement.

Norwich Community Kitchen Spokesperson JoAnn Testani emphasized that the free meals are open to everyone in the Chenango County and surrounding communities, no questions asked.

Volunteer workers with the Community Kitchen said the weekly meals are not just for those in need, but also for people to come together, make new friends, visit with old friends, and enjoy each other's company.

"It's a special point to attend the weekly gathering, not only for the free meal but also for the conversation. It's an important part of our community. It really brings people together, and we find that it's a family friendly type of atmosphere," said Testani. "Everyone in the community is welcome to attend. We enjoy anyone that would like to help or just come down for a nice dinner."

"We have little place mats for kids with crayons that they can color, to keep them busy," she

added. "[For] Halloween we made little trick or treat bags. We try to make it a little more, not just some place to come and eat your dinner and then get out."

The Kitchen offers a variety of meals, which includes the main dish, a vegetable, dessert, and drink options. Testani said Chobani also generously donates a supply of yogurt each month for the weekly dinners.

Some of the meals served at the Community Kitchen include macaroni and cheese, barbecue chicken sandwiches, chicken and biscuits, spaghetti and meatballs, hamburgers and fries, beef stew, and more.

Testani said the weekly menus are posted on community Facebook pages each week, such as

Chenango County Scanner Nerds, Chenango County Community, Chenango County Community Resources, and more.

The Norwich Community Kitchen opens in September each year and serves free meals every Tuesday until the end of May. They also follow the Norwich City School District calendar, and close on school closing days as well as snow days.

Each week the Kitchen is able to serve an average of 80 people, and it's all thanks to the dedicated volunteers who set up, cook the meals, serve dinner, and clean up afterwards.

Volunteer workers with the Norwich Community Kitchen said they have benefited greatly from the kindness and generosity of

community members, organizations, and businesses whose contributions make the free weekly meals possible.

"Thank you to the support of the many individuals who help make our Community Kitchen a great success. Without their generosity or support, it wouldn't be available," said Testani. "We're very, very fortunate to have such a great community that we have so many people who support us."

For more information on the Norwich Community Kitchen or to inquire about volunteering opportunities, contact the St. Bartholomew's Parish Center Office at 607-337-2215.

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Catholic Charities of Chenango County focus on the unhoused -

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October through March," said Cotter.

"When we see a problem in the community, our mission is to find solutions for that issue," Cotter said. "We work tirelessly for the community with no regrets."

"One of the best parts of serving Chenango County is just being part of the wonderful community itself," she said. "Most of our staff and Board members live in Chenango County, so it makes our work very personal and rewarding."

Cotter explained they always receive strong support from members of the community and continue to work with individuals, families, businesses, agencies and local government with their projects and services, to ensure they are addressing the needs the community members feel are important to them, not just what is available to offer.

Major Plans for 2025 and challenges

Chesebro said CCofCC received \$7.84 million in new contracts over the past two years and most of their new programming is related to serving the homeless population in the area.

"The funding that we have received is a combination of capital and operating funds," said Chesebro.

"We are currently working on a project in the Town of Norwich where we are developing 12 tiny homes that will provide permanent supportive housing and emergency housing to homeless individuals in our community," he said.

"This program will offer seven day a week support to people who are chronically in need and require a level of service that is not provided by traditional housing opportunities," Chesebro added.

He also noted this increase in new funding has led them to offering many new job opportunities within the community and additional employment opportunities will be available as projects progress.

Chesebro said the unhoused are not associated with where they come from but where they are at the moment.

"Homelessness is a "where found" problem in the eyes of the state and local government," Chesebro said. "In regards to where they come from, whether they are local or not, if they are in our community, they are local."

Cotter agreed, adding they are seeing an increased number of individuals and numbers are increasing across the country.

"There is very little housing anywhere," she said. "But the unhoused are looking for a place to live, yet it's difficult as resources are limited."

Chesebro said they see familiar and unfamiliar people but just because they're not familiar doesn't necessarily mean they are from



Catholic Charities of Chenango County Executive Director Robin Cotter was joined by Former Norwich Rotary President Ann Smith at a meetign last year to explained the vast array of programs the agency offers, which include Roots and Wings, Health Home Care Coordination, Scattered Site Supportive Housing, Individual Residential Alternatives, Emergency Respite and more. (Submitted photo)

somewhere else.

They focus a lot of time and energy on the unhoused and have continual services in housing.

Cotter said they are also planning on expanding the warming center to include a hybrid model to meet the needs of Chenango County for sheltering.

Chesebro noted they're working closely with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to identify the needs of the community and trying to design a program that not only meets the needs of the local community but is also a cost effective approach.

He said the Chenango small rural community isn't funded as well as larger urban areas.

"Basically, what we've come up with is the idea of co-locating resources together in order to maximize the benefit and minimize the cost of the program," he said.

"So, we're looking to relocate the warming center to a single site and on that site, we would co-locate other resources with some of the county staff, hopefully including some of the DSS Staff and the Safe Options Support (SOS) program," said Chesebro.

He stated it would work as a continuous program from the bottom up so people could enter with very minimal requirements and exit to permanent housing in the end and still have all of the supportive services added in.

The focus has shifted over the years

Chesebro said Catholic Charities has changed over the years by moving from a quantitative approach to a qualitative approach.

"We've shifted our focus to more of a qualitative approach and put a lot of effort into expanding the quality of the resource we provide to people, which in turn looks more like an expanded level of service as opposed to focusing so much on the quantitative approach," he said.

"The hybrid shelter is

an example by providing a cost-effective quality service at one site that hopefully exits people to a successful outcome," Chesebro added. "Instead of just meeting their basic needs at where they're at, it gets them to a point where they are self-sufficient."

Hopes and challenges in 2025

Chesebro said they are currently working on Shadows Rest, their tiny home development, which should be under construction in early 2025 and finished within that year.

"We are also currently working with numerous community partners to secure a location that will be used for a Homeless Services Center which will include a Drop-in Center, Low Barrier Shelter and co-located community services all at one location to address the growing homeless needs in the community," he added.

He said many private and public entities and individuals are collaborating to develop and design this innovative project and it will be located on East River Road.

"We are hopeful that parts of this project will be established in 2025, and complete development will be finished within the following years," said Chesebro.

Chesebro said some of the

benefits of the local rural communities is a high level of collaboration from other local parties, both public and private.

"That doesn't happen frequently and is usually found in bigger urban areas," he said. "That allows us to help address needs in a more refined way and we are able to target those needs without a lot of issues."

He also noted other challenges come with limited resources and a lower population density.

"The way a lot of our Catholic Charities programs operate is based on the number of services we provide or the capacity to provide that service," he said.

"So for us to find that funding to provide additional programming is a little more challenging because the number of people we serve is sometimes not high enough to meet the requirements for grant funding," Chesebro added.

He stated that is the reason why they have to be unique in their approach with projects, such as the hybrid shelter model.

"It's a realistic solution for a rural area because we don't have the population density enough to have all three programs individually," he added.

"But collectively on one site, it gives us the ability to

meet the current needs of the community and address the financial hardships that are presented by our lower population," said Chesebro.

Cotter said they've been very successful in attracting professional talent and even have someone with a doctorate on staff.

"We've stabilized over the past couple of years and our retention rate is high," she said. "We're not seeing a lot of turn over and I think people come here because of the mission and the programs we operate."

Yet, Cotter concluded, "It's a challenge to keep entry level positions filled."

Chesebro said, "Oftentimes, our entry level positions are a stepping stone to what someone really wants to do."

"We get a lot of college students and once they receive their desired degree, they go toward the path they were educated in," he added. "And as a non-profit we can't always compensate at the same level as private entities, with the same type of entry level, and often that plays into the factor."

Changes and future plans

Chesebro said in the last few years they've seen an increase of poverty and unhoused people.

"That's been a very big change for our community and trying to adapt to changing culture here and being such a rural area, we were one of the last to actually see the physical street homeless people and possibly one of the last to react and adjust to that culture of people," he said.

Through their programming, they have adapted with the change to try to meet the community needs and address the needs of the people in the community.

Cotter agreed and noted those in need also include the elderly and the ALICE population. She said ALICE stands for Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed population and is a common utilizer of services, food and rental services.

Chesebro added, "Their lack of funds are not because they're unemployed or under employed, it's because they can't meet the current inflation with the income they have."

He explained the Catholic

Charities program provides food security through their 'Roots and Wings' program and supportive housing to eligible people with a rental based subsidy, care coordination for people with chronic medical needs and more.

Cotter said, "We meet people where they're at and try to connect them to the services we currently offer. If we don't offer those services, we try to come up with solutions."

"Catholic Charities provides services to more than 10,000 individuals a year in Chenango County," she said. "All these individuals meet the requirements for services as established by funding sources, which include low-income thresholds."

According to the 2023 CENSUS data Chenango County has 45,920 residents which means that Catholic Charities supports more than 21% of the entire population of Chenango County in some way.

CCofCC currently employs 66 people, many of which have a bachelor's degree or higher education.

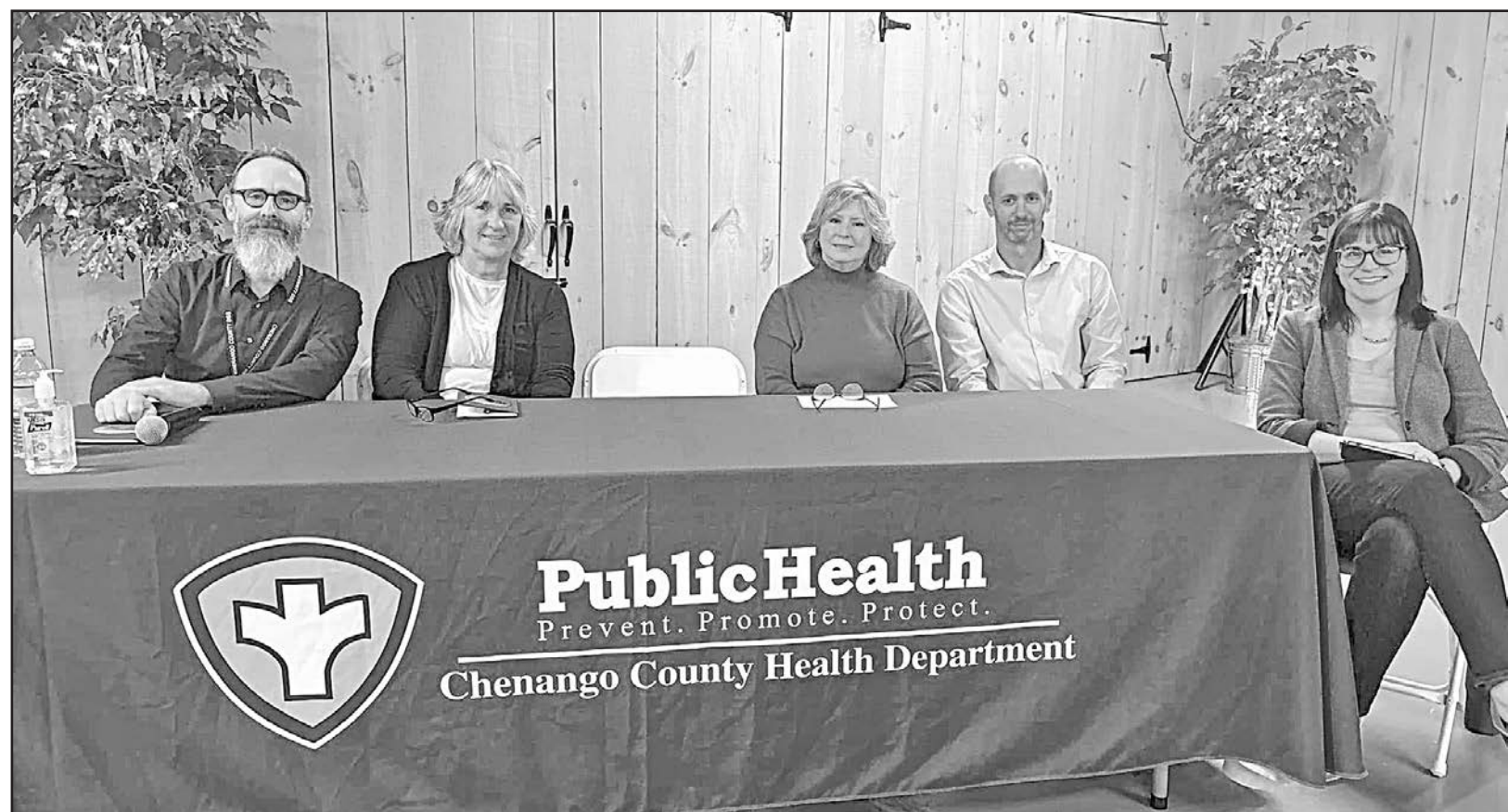
The Main Office location that hosts numerous case management and housing services is open Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Fridays, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Emergency services center, Roots & Wings is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Fridays 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Residential and housing programs are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day throughout the year.

CCofCC is one of six Catholic Charities organizations within the Catholic Charities of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse Corporation and represents the Chenango County arm of the Corporation. CCofCC is led locally by an autonomous Board of Directors that are from Chenango County.

To learn more, call the main office anytime at 607-334-8244.

The website is currently being updated but anticipates current information and new programming to be updated by end of the year.



The Health Partner Summit in 2024 offered collaborations between Chenango County Health Department Commissioner Dan Auwarter, Chenango County Department of Social Services Patti Hodge, Catholic Charities Executive Director Robin Cotter and Director of Operation Jeff Chesebro, along with Liz Warneck from Chenango County Behavioral Services. (Submitted photo)

Chobani focuses on community impact in 2024 -



In 2024, Chobani launched their Mobile Food Pantry, which serves the Chenango and Otsego County communities. (Submitted photo)



Volunteers with Chobani assisted Helping Hands by bagging items for a monthly giveaway night. The giveaways are held at 6 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month in front of the Norwich Family YMCA. (Photo from the Helping Hands Facebook page)

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Chobani employs more than 3,000 people at four manufacturing facilities, including plants in Idaho and Australia.

Gundlach said 2024 was another great year for the company, with the hiring on of more employees, employee development efforts, and investments to expand their ability to produce more product.

While it's no doubt Chobani finds great success with their products year after year, what truly stands them apart is their commitment to fighting hunger and offering a helping hand to their community.

Fight against hunger

"We also strive to make a positive impact not only with our products, but in our hometowns. We believe that when business is done right it has the power to change and strengthen our communities," said Gundlach. "Our continued success as a business has allowed us to support our communities in the fight against hunger and food insecurity."

Early last year, Chobani launched their Mobile Food Pantry, which serves the Chenango and Otsego County communities.

Since its inception, the

Mobile Food Pantry has served over 5,000 people experiencing food insecurity thousands of pounds of fresh produce, proteins, grains, and dairy.

They also launched Chobani Super Milk in 2024, "a delicious, high-protein, fiber-rich, and shelf-stable dairy product, meeting a critical nutritional need for those most vulnerable in our communities" made for donation purposes only.

Super Milk is distributed to those in need through local food banks and pantries in Central New York and Magic Valley in Idaho.

"Super Milk is also deployed in response to natural disasters across the country with the help of the American Red Cross and other local emergency response agencies," said Gundlach. "Last year we sent Super Milk donations in response to hurricanes Helene and Milton, and our most recent deployment was to Los Angeles in response to the wildfires."

In January of this year, Chobani sent over 80,000 cartons of Super Milk and partnered with the LA Regional Food Bank to get the product to California residents who need it.

By the end of January 2025, Chobani will have deployed 627,234 cartons of Super Milk since they launched the product in July 2024.

Chobani also supports communities in need through financial donations. The Community Impact Fund Grant Program provided more than \$100,000 to six organizations in Central New York in 2024.

"This year's grants will

fund programs like home-delivered meals for seniors, nutritious food-filled backpacks for at-risk youth, and programs that bring students together over healthy lunches," said Gundlach. "These projects embody Chobani's mission to support neighbors in need while fostering community wellness."

The company also launched Legacy Projects in 2024, which are donations of

\$250,000 to support a community infrastructure project in New York and Idaho.

Gundlach said they asked employees to pitch their ideas for a community project where Chobani could make a big impact, and the chosen projects will be announced soon.

Care for employees

Another part of the Chobani culture that sets them apart

from other employers is the care and support they have for their employees.

"One of our biggest assets at Chobani is the local talent pool that makes up our workforce," said Gundlach. "We value the local talent and we're proud to have built our plant in this community where people have had a vested interest in growing with us since the very beginning, almost 20 years ago."



Another way they demonstrate community involvement is the popular Saturday in the Park with Chobani held in Norwich throughout the summer and early fall. (Submitted photo)

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Chobani focuses on community impact in 2024 -

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“We’re fortunate to have such a tremendous local talent pool in the area and we’re committed to the growth and development of our people, regardless of their role at the company,” he added.

In addition to employee training opportunities, high starting wages, and childcare support, Chobani also added new supports for employees in 2024.

The company added a high-end fitness center to the South Edmeston facility, as well as a full service, health-oriented cafeteria.

Chobani offers employment opportunities in a wide range of fields, from operations to maintenance and finance to human resources. Gundlach said if a prospective employee has an interest in a specific field, it’s likely they have a role in that area.

“Our goal is to be a top tier employer in the region, so we build different pathways for everyone to be a part of our success,” he said.

Future plans

Looking toward the future, Gundlach said Chobani is anticipating another year of growth and success, and have “several projects in the

works that will increase our capacity and ability to continue to produce high-quality yogurt.”

He said they also plan to continue investing in their Chenango County plant and the development of their employees, as well as continuing their efforts to support the community.

“Our future plan is to continue growing as a business so that we can keep supporting our local neighbors in the community,” said Gundlach.

He said being located in Chenango County is a blessing to the company, due to access to great employees, some of the best dairy in the country, and opportunities to have an impact.

“Be proud, but be humble. Celebrate success while recognizing there’s always more to do and always more ways to use business as a force for good to help others,” said Gundlach.

“There are so many reasons that make being a part of the Chenango County community great – we’re incredibly proud that Chobani was born right here!”



Chobani employees giving out free cases of yogurt at the 2024 Parade of Lights in downtown Norwich. (Submitted photo)

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*2024 statistics from MLS. Otsego-Delaware Sub board.



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