

# 2025 PROGRESS CHENANGO

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## Going all INN for community support

**SARAH GENTER**

EVENING SUN

**CHENANGO COUNTY** — Improve Norwich Now (INN) is a Norwich-based nonprofit that aims to support Chenango County by removing barriers and providing services.

Their mission statement is to “remove barriers and provide supports, so all community members can reach their full potential.”

The organization strives to achieve this mission through literacy and housing initiatives, as well as by being the supportive base for other nonprofit organizations, such as Fostering Futures New York Chenango County (FFNYCC), the Paperback Book Exchange (PBX), and Aunt Mary’s House (AMH).

### Literacy initiatives

One of the branches of the INN tree is their focus on literacy within the Chenango County community, which they promote through several initiatives.



Improve Norwich Now held a symposium to give an update to the community on what they’ve been working on and their plans for the future with literacy initiatives, Fostering Futures, the Paperback Book Exchange, and Aunt Mary’s House. (Submitted photo)

Most notable are their One Community, One Book events, which are held in the spring and fall each year.

In the spring, INN partners with the Norwich City School District to provide

the event, which focuses on a chapter book for about a month.

INN Co-founder Jen Westervelt said students spend the month reading the book, and participating

in a scavenger hunt around downtown Norwich, which has approximately 14 local businesses participating.

In the fall, INN takes the One Community, One Book event to Saturday in the Park

with Chobani, where local children can listen to live readings of that year’s featured book and enjoy craft activities. The fall event also includes a scavenger hunt in downtown Norwich, which

is available for one to two weeks.

Westervelt said they also collaborate with organizations like Guernsey Memorial Library and The Place for the fall event, and Emmanuel Episcopal Church generously donates the funds needed to purchase copies of the featured books.

Westervelt said in 2024 they were able to add prizes to the event, thanks to the generosity of local vendors.

“We were able to ask those scavenger hunt locations if they would like to donate any items toward a prize,” said Westervelt. “Basically they’ll put the completed map into a collection box at the library, and then of those youth who complete the scavenger hunt — they need to visit at least seven locations — we ended up drawing two names because the businesses were so generous we had enough items to have two prizes.”

An exciting development for One Community, One

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## Transformative years bring constant improvements to UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital

**MELISSA STAGNARO**

EVENING SUN

**NORWICH** — UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital has been the site of a great deal of investment over the last decade.

Over \$100 million worth, to be precise.

According to Richard Stone, who was recently promoted to Vice President of Support Services at the Norwich hospital, those investments have helped transform much of the hospital’s first floor into flexible modern spaces including a new Walk In Center, Emergency Department, an in-hospital MRI suite, consolidated Diagnostic Imaging, Cardiology, Cardiac Rehabilitation, laboratory, main entrance and more.

These developments are only Phase One of the hospital’s multi-phase Chenango Medical Neighborhood Plan, which it embarked on with a goal of transforming its delivery of care to the greater

Chenango community.

“Phase Two, which is now underway, will include the creation of a dedicated Women’s Diagnostic Imaging Center, an Infusion Center, a Medical Specialty Clinic, a new Medical/Surgical and ICU unit, and redevelopment of the parking area and entrance facing South Broad Street, as well as the relocation of UHS Orthopedics Norwich and General Surgery into the main hospital,” Stone said.

At the same time these enhancements to clinical spaces have been taking place, there has also been extensive investment into the facility’s infrastructure — including its HVAC, electrical and other systems — to support current and future services at the Norwich hospital.

“When we add it all together, we’ve invested more than \$110 million in this facility over the last decade,” Stone said.

These investments and the



Dr. John Lalor - pictured at right with his UHS Primary Care Sherburne colleagues Mary Strong, FNP-C, and Dr. James Simcoe — is one of eight new medical providers recruited by UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital since November. (Submitted photo)

service enhancements they support have made a marked impact on the experiences of patients and their families.

“The feedback we receive on a daily basis from our

patients and community reinforces our commitment to this transformation,” said Chris Kisacky, who serves as Vice President of Service Coordination &

Development.

The investments are also helping UHS Chenango Memorial gain a competitive edge when it comes to recruiting and retaining high

quality staff and providers. The latter of which is often a challenge for rural hospitals.

“Since November, we’ve recruited eight new medical providers, four of whom have recently started in their new roles,” said Kisacky, who oversees provider recruitment in partnership with Dr. Thomas Genese, UHS Chenango Memorial’s Vice President of Medical Affairs & Community Health Outcomes.

Those new providers include Dr. John Lalor, a family medicine physician based at UHS Primary Care Sherburne; Nurse Practitioner Sara Spaulding, who has joined the Walk-In Center provider team; Physician Assistant Adam Lamont, a new addition at UHS Primary Care Norwich; and Dr. Bahman Sadeghi, an OB/GYN with the UHS Women’s Health Center in Norwich.

Over the next few months,

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# Chenango Story



On October 9, the Northeast Classic Car Museum (NECCM) in Norwich, held the drawing of the annual Ford Mustang Sweepstakes. Michael Abrams from Merrick, NY, was the lucky winner of the 2024 Red Ford Mustang Convertible. Pictured from L to R; NECCM Executive Director Robert M. Jeffrey; City of Norwich Mayor Brian Doliver; Chenango County Board Chairperson Jeffrey Blanchard; Northeast Classic Car Museum Board President Edward O'Reilly; and Northeast Classic Car Museum Vice President RC Woodford. (Submitted photo)

## Northeast Classic Car Museum had another outstanding year in 2024



NORWICH - In 2024, the Northeast Classic Car Museum saw a significant increase in admissions and group visits, from car club tours from across the Mid-Atlantic States and Mid-Western States.

This past year, the Northeast Classic Car Museum also saw an increase in visits from school groups from across New York State.

The Northeast Classic Car Museum (NECCM) continues to attract more visitors each year and in 2024 had another outstanding year for admissions. The NECCM continues to see an increase of visitors from outside of Chenango County and from across the United States.

In 2024, almost 98% of the Museum's visitors were from outside of Chenango County. Approximately, 10% of the Museum's visitors were from outside of the United States from Countries such as Canada, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia, China, Japan, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Israel.

The NECCM also continues to bring new and exciting exhibits to visitors. In 2024, the museum unveiled a first of its kind exhibit with "Back to the 80s." This

exhibit brings the newest vehicles to the Northeast Classic Car Museum.

The exhibit features 26 cars of the 1980s including the iconic DeLorean, the car that took Marty McFly to the past and future in the classic 80s movie trilogy, "Back to the Future." Other easily recognizable 80s cars include a 1984 Chevrolet Chevette, 1984 Plymouth Voyager Minivan, 1988 Pontiac Fiero, 1989 Ford Taurus SHO and many more. This exhibit will be on display through May 2025.

Thanks to the efforts of local businessman, George E. Staley and his family, the Museum has grown into a major first-rate tourist destination.

"The museum would never have made it to our 27th Anniversary year if it was not for our Donors, Exhibitors, Supporters, Volunteers, Staff and dedicated members of the Northeast Classic Car Museum's Board of Trustees." Robert Jeffrey, NECCM executive director stated.

"The museum thanks the late George Staley who made our museum possible and to the Staley family for their continued support of our wonderful world-class museum," Jeffrey added.

In 2024, 35 volunteers generously donated over 4,300 hours of their time and energy to make the Northeast Classic Car Museum a great place to visit.

Jeffrey stated "The number one factor to the Museum's success is the level of dedication displayed by the volunteers, staff and the Museum's Board of Trustees."

The NECCM is an educational facility dedicated to the collection, preservation, and exhibition of vehicles related to the evolution of transportation, with particular emphasis on the role of the automobile and its impact on American culture.

Additionally, it is the Museum's mission to impact positively on the local economy and promotion of the region by bringing visitors to the area.

The museum is open year round, seven days per week, except on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and Easter Sunday. The museum is on one level, wheelchair accessible and scooters are available.

If you would like more information about volunteering at the Museum, call (607) 334-2886 or visit our website at [www.classiccarmuseum.org](http://www.classiccarmuseum.org)

### Leatherstocking Veterinary Group gives back with Angel Fund Donations

"As a small privately owned business, LVG is extremely grateful for the support of our local community. We are pleased to donate a portion of the profits from our online pharmacy sales to our Angel Fund, supporting individual animals in need and animal related groups."

*LVG Leadership Team*



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### New Berlin Vet Clinic Expansion



**New Berlin Vet Clinic will be opening the spring of 2025. Stay tuned for the grand opening!**

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The existing clinic was built in the mid 1960s mainly as a large animal clinic. NBV outgrew the space and is now focused only on companion animals. Now is the time to expand and provide a modern facility that will serve our growing community pet needs. The new clinic will offer state of the art amenities for appointments, surgeries and comprehensive care in a 8,000 sq. ft. building.

The current staff of 4 DVM's, licensed Techs and support staff are excited and eager to move in to a sparkling new facility and provide excellent care! The current New Berlin Clinic will be renovated to house our central business offices that support all 4 clinics within LVG.



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## Going all INN for community support -

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Book is their new partnership with local children's author Suzanne Bloom. Westervelt said they will be featuring one of Bloom's books for the fall event each year, and she will be the guest reader at those events.

"Every fall, One Community, One Book will focus on a book that Suzanne Bloom has written. And we're so glad to have her in that role because she is such a staple for our community. Such an embedded local positive influence who really cares so much about our community and about literacy," Westervelt said. "It was a real win-win, because we're honored to have her want to have that role, and she's honored that we would like her in that role. So we're just happy all around."

In 2024, INN also revitalized their All INN for Reading Initiative. Westervelt said the program places bags and bins of books at local restaurants and businesses for children to read while parents shop or they wait for food at a restaurant.

"There are local businesses who have bags of books so that while people are visiting the business, children can read. Several of our local restaurants have bags available and it's worked out well that if children, while the food's being prepared, [are saying] what do we do? Well, we could read," said Westervelt. "So that's something that we were very



Local children's author Suzanne Bloom reading to children at an INN One Community, One Book event. INN has announced that Bloom will be their featured author for their fall One Community, One Book events. (Photo from INN)

intentional about, restocking those bags and reconnecting with those business owners. So that has worked out well."

Furthering their mission to improve literacy and remove barriers to literacy in the Chenango County community, INN brought the Paperback Book Exchange under their umbrella in 2023.

### Paperback Book Exchange

The Paperback Book Exchange (PBX), located

in Tabryn's Marketplace at 17-19 South Broad Street in Norwich, is a book trade-in service that allows area residents to turn in their used, paperback fiction books printed in 2000 or later for store credit toward purchases of other used books supplied by PBX.

PBX Coordinator Kisten Giglio said they were close to shutting down before being brought into the INN umbrella, and the partnership has allowed them to stay afloat

while also further support literacy initiatives in the community.

"We exist because we're able to be under INN, so we're super thankful for that. I don't know if we'd still be around if INN was not willing to be an umbrella organization for us. So we're very, very thankful for that," said Giglio. "So in 2024 we had a goal of staying solvent, and we did. We stayed afloat, we kept the Paperback Book Exchange open."

The PBX supports the One Community, One Book event in the fall by providing volunteers to help out, as well as being one of the locations for the scavenger hunt.

PBX also celebrated a year of successful Paint and Sip classes, which are held on the third Wednesday of each month. Giglio said the funds from these programs help to support the PBX, but they're interested in putting some of the funds toward other community supports as well.

"We're not making a ton extra a month, but there's a little cushion there; what else could we support in the community?" Giglio said. "We have a little bit of a monetary base, we could contribute toward something. So we'll start to look to expand and branch out and see what those things might be. I think that's what we look at in 2025."

The Paperback Book Exchange is open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

Books available at the PBX are priced at 50 percent of the cover price, with no books priced higher than \$5. Individuals can also turn in their used paperbacks for 25 percent of the cover price in store credit, or \$2.50 for books priced over \$10. The credit can be used to purchase more books from PBX, or donated for future visitors to the store.

### Fostering Futures

Another branch of INN is Fostering Futures New York Chenango County (FFNYCC), a nonprofit organization whose goal is to "support foster and kinship families in building better futures and community connections for children and youth," according to Coordinator Cathy Albrecht.

The organization was created by Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI), and implemented through the Chenango County Department of Social

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# Recycle The Right Way



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- 2) All paper dry & free of plastic
- 3) In the right bin

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#2 - colored plastic jugs & bottles = #2 HDPE Colored

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#5 - tubs = #5 PP

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For all recycling and trash disposal questions call 607-337-1792



## Going all INN for community support -

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Services (DSS). In 2019, DSS was tasked with finding a Chenango County nonprofit to run FFNYCC, and selected Improve Norwich Now (INN) to handle the program.

Since then, Fostering Futures has created several teams with an average of five volunteers that each support a foster or kinship family through monthly interactions, childcare assistance, homework help, assistance with minor household maintenance tasks, special events and activities, and more.

"People will say to me, what does an interaction look like? It depends. It depends on what the family needs, it depends on what the volunteers can do, it depends on hobbies and skill sets," Albrecht explained. "Interactions can look anything like dropping off a dinner, grocery shopping, helping with laundry, helping with small projects around the home, having a pizza delivered."

"One particular team that I'm thinking about has a couple of volunteers that go over and have dinner with them, because the family really wants that social interaction. So it's not just about dropping and going, it's about building relationships with their families," she added.

Fostering Futures had a lot to celebrate in 2024, including their fifth anniversary of supporting foster and kinship families, more than 15 children in the FFNYCC program being adopted or permanently



The Paperback Book Exchange was brought under the INN umbrella and has flourished with their support. In addition to providing a used book trade-in service, PBX also hosts monthly Paint and Sip classes throughout the year. (Photo from PBX)

placed in loving homes, a successful Christmas party for the families they serve, and overwhelming support from the community.

FFNYCC celebrated the holiday season with a Christmas party that provided a date night for foster and kinship parents, a fun evening of activities for the kids, and an opportunity to partner with several other organizations.

The event was held at the Norwich Family YMCA, where Albrecht said they utilized the pool, the community room, both gymnasiums, and the Kids' Gym.

"We had our volunteers come and they hung out with the kids, and it worked out nicely because these are volunteers that know the kids.

So parents were very comfortable," said Albrecht. "We had Santa Claus there, we had crafts, they got to play in the kids gym, swim, or play in the big gym, and some of them kind of did some of each, and Christmas carols and crafts."

She said they received Christmas cookies donated by the Splendor Inn and a vendor in Sidney, and Nina's Pizzeria donated pizza, chicken, and salad.

Albrecht said she was also able to utilize the help of Human Services students from the SUNY Morrisville Norwich Campus.

"Part of one of their projects was to find a need in their community and try to help solve it," Albrecht explained. "They found that there were

parents or people that need childcare, and it's very expensive."

"So they were offering free babysitting, and I happened to see a flier come across my email through the Inter-Agency Council, and I contacted them and they sent three young college women and they helped with childcare and just playing. It worked out nicely, and it was another connection," she added.

Albrecht and Giglio, who is a Fostering Futures volunteer, said the work they do truly has an impact on the families and kids they serve.

"We had a match meeting ... so that means that the entire team is going into the foster family's home, and it just so happened to be that three of

the kiddos had been in a previous foster family, and they had a team," Albrecht said. "When I came into the house, one of the young men I said, 'hey, do you remember me?' He said, 'I sure do.' From August when I met him, he remembered me, he remembered some of the volunteers, so our one interaction a month, our match meetings, whatever it is, they're impactful to these kids because we're positive core memories."

Giglio said the commitment from volunteers is small, with each volunteer only spending an hour or so with their family each month. But with around five people on each team, the family is receiving support and assistance on a weekly basis.

"Because there's people on the team, the foster mom gets support almost weekly. So that team concept and that kind of approach, you're doing a piece of a much larger puzzle that really helps that family a lot. And it's the simple little things like not having to cook dinner one night, or having games," said Giglio.

Albrecht said these interactions are "to be able to show these kids that these are the things that healthy families do, and healthy families are doing this with the support of this team because they need it."

What's more, the Fostering Futures program is completely free for foster and kinship families, meaning they get a network of support with no financial burden.

"I actually had a family about a month ago say to

me, 'well how much does this cost?' And I said, 'well it's not going to cost you anything.' And she said, 'well I had to ask this because my mother said there's no way people would come do this for free. And I said, 'yes there is, it's called Fostering Futures,'" said Albrecht. "It was kind of freeing to be able to say, it doesn't cost you anything. It's going to be so impactful for you, and it doesn't cost [anything]."

### Future plans

Despite their busy and successful year, INN has no plans to slow down. Looking into 2025, their goals are to recruit more volunteers, create more teams for Fostering Futures, and continue to look for needs in the community they can help to address.

Improve Norwich Now, Fostering Futures, and the Paperback Book Exchange are all in need of volunteers, and are flexible with roles and time commitments to make volunteering work for anyone who wants to get involved.

"When we're looking for volunteers, they don't necessarily have to be prepared to go onto a team and assist families. It could be they're volunteering to help with social media. We really need help with social media. It could be helping with graphic design. It could be helping with celebrations. It could be offering to assist with Saturday in the Park," said Albrecht. "If somebody feels they have a calling or they have a talent

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**2024 PERFORMANCES**

- Oneonta O.W.I.	- Unadilla
- Colesville	- Pathfinder Village
- Sidney	- Colorscape Chenango
- Fort Plain	- Greene Applefest
- New Woodstock	- Chenango County Museum
- New Berlin	



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that they're great at and they want to help, we'll take it. We'll figure it out."

In 2024, Fostering Futures was contacted by local Boy Scout Drew Westervelt, who was interested in creating a recruitment video for the organization as his Eagle Scout project. The video can be viewed at [ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures](http://ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures).

Volunteers with Fostering Futures will be background checked, then trained and coached by FFNYCC staff. Individuals who are interested in volunteering can visit [ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures](http://ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures).

The Paperback Book Exchange is also seeking volunteers to help run the store. Giglio said volunteers can work at the store as much or as little as they'd like.

"You get to pick and choose. We'll take an hour, we'll take ten hours," she said.

Individuals interested in volunteering at PBX can contact Giglio at 607-316-0999.

Improve Norwich Now is looking for volunteers to assist with a wide variety of tasks, such as social media assistance, tabling at local events, fundraising, coordinating volunteers, and helping out at Aunt Mary's House, which is now its own 501(c)3 nonprofit.

Aunt Mary's House will provide emergency and transitional housing for pregnant and parenting mothers aged 18 and older. The organization will connect them with resources such as healthcare,

education, financial literacy, and more, and teach them life and parenting skills so they can become self-sufficient.

"Those volunteer opportunities range from people who are going to come and assist moms with some childcare relief so that moms can take a shower or work on some homework, things like that. They range from that to women or men who are going to come and help with family meal opportunities, because we're hoping that at least once a month we can have some volunteers come into the home and actually cook a meal alongside our guests, and then sit with them and have a family dinner together," said Westervelt.

"In addition, there could be opportunities for things like coming and checking smoke detector batteries, making sure the fire extinguishers are good to go. There's a whole range of volunteer opportunities, and even back-end things like the social media updates and all of that. Advertising, fundraising, community relations. If you want to help, we'll find a way."

Those interested in volunteering with Improve Norwich Now can visit [ImproveNorwichNow.org](http://ImproveNorwichNow.org).

Individuals who would like to volunteer with Aunt Mary's House can visit [AuntMarysHouse.net](http://AuntMarysHouse.net) for a list of volunteering opportunities and applications.

In addition to their search for volunteers, Westervelt said their goal is to sustain the quality and success of their programs and initiatives, while also being open-minded to any new opportunities

that arise.

"Keep being open-minded to new branches that may grow off the trunk of that tree, because you never know where the interconnections may happen," said Westervelt. "But at the same time, it is important to know your mission and vision and make sure that you are connecting with opportunities that are going to further that mission and vision."

"We have just grown so much so quickly, that our focus right now is sustaining the quality and success of what we have developed," she added. "We're always looking for team members to join our efforts. We're so diversified, there really is something for everyone. So we're just looking to focus on building the good that's already happened to make sure that we can sustain that level of quality."

For more information on Improve Norwich Now, visit [ImproveNorwichNow.org](http://ImproveNorwichNow.org) or the Improve Norwich Now Facebook page.

For more information on the Paperback Book Exchange, visit the Paperback Exchange Facebook page.

For more information on Fostering Futures New York Chenango County, visit [ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures](http://ImproveNorwichNow.org/fostering-futures).

For more information on Aunt Mary's House, visit [AuntMarysHouse.net](http://AuntMarysHouse.net) or the Aunt Mary's House Facebook page.

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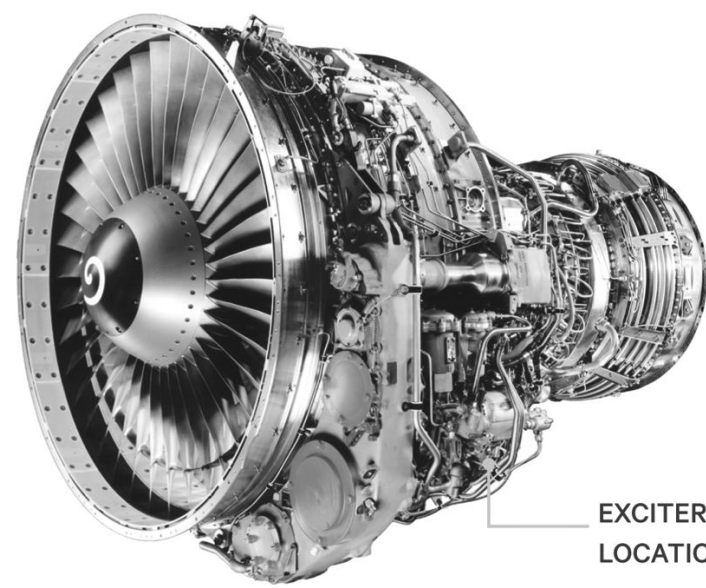
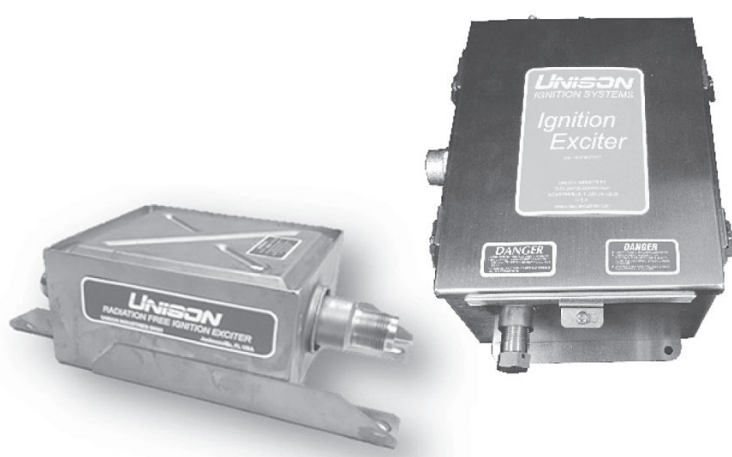
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# Transformative years bring constant improvements to UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital -

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there will be new additions in Pediatrics and Nephrology, as well as two new providers in Cardiology, according to Kisacky.

“A robust medical staff is a hallmark of a high quality, high reliability healthcare organization and is a critical factor in maintaining and growing access to vital services in Chenango County,” she said. “We’re thrilled to welcome these new additions to support our mission.”

Even with these successes, however, Kisacky knows her work isn’t done. There are still a number of physician vacancies left to fill, and a few key members of the medical staff nearing retirement.

“We are able to fill some of those gaps with locum tenens,” she said, a term used for visiting physicians. “However, that’s only a temporary solution.”

Kisacky and her colleagues have spent nearly a year and a half working on a longer-term strategy to address the hospital’s physician recruiting needs. Just last week they received news that could be a game changer in that regard: UHS Chenango Memorial’s plan to start a new Rural Family Medicine Residency Program has received accreditation through the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. “Graduate Medical



Over the last decade, UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital has invested over \$110 million in infrastructure and capital improvements at its Norwich campus.

Education is the vital step in a physician’s professional development that takes place between medical school and autonomous clinical practice,” Kisacky explained. “This is where residents learn to provide optimal patient care under the supervision of faculty members who not only instruct, but truly serve as role models for them.”

In addition to the importance of this time to a new physician’s development and foundation in their career, the new program will also benefit the hospital long-term.

“This will help us establish a new recruiting pipeline, elevate care in our community, and positively impact our image and reputation as a healthcare organization,” she

explained.

According to Kisacky, the hospital plans to welcome its first cohort of residents in mid-2026. In the meantime, there is still work to be done to prepare for the launch of the program – including recruiting a program director. Dr. Jocelyn Young, Program Director for the United Health Services Hospital’s

Residency Program, is filling that role on an interim basis.

“We’re very thankful for the support and collaboration we receive from our partners at UHS,” she said.

Phases One and Two of the Chenango Medical Neighborhood Plan are part of a pattern of transformational investments happening across the United Health

Services footprint, a major milestone in which was the grand opening of the new UHS Wilson Main Tower last year.

“It’s an exciting time for us at UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital, and across UHS,” Kisacky said.

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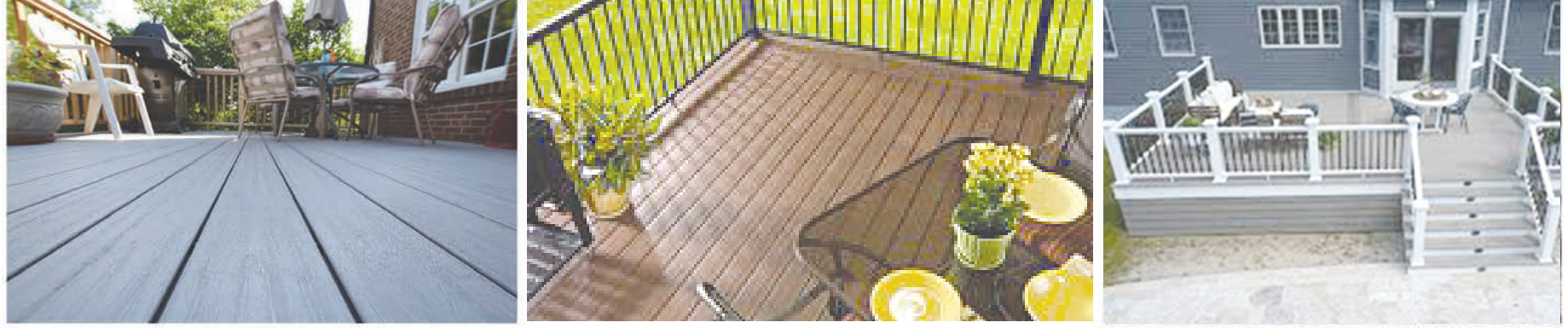
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