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into everything she does

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Remembering Nikky Fiorello

WOMEN'S HEALTH

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Kristy Smorol

This year, 'Be the Beat'

February is one of my favorite months of the year. It's American Heart Month! As a marketing and communications director for the American Heart Association, I spend my February days wearing red, talking about heart health, and reminding women that heart disease is their biggest health threat.

This February is a little different. I'm not just talking about how to prevent heart disease. I'm also talking a lot about what to do in a cardiac emergency. On Jan. 2, I watched Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapse on the field. The world watched as he received CPR for several minutes before an ambulance took him away. We all waited for news and we all cheered when we heard about his incredible recovery.

The American Heart Association encourages everyone to learn the lifesaving skill of Hands-Only CPR, but I have never seen an interest in CPR like I saw in the days following Hamlin's collapse. Nationally, we saw a 200 percent increase in traffic to our CPR website. I spoke to dozens of media outlets around Central and Western New York about educating the community on how to perform CPR and how to use an automatic external defibrillator (AED).

When my 5-year-old son asks me what my job is, I always tell him I help people keep their hearts healthy. After all, it's not easy to explain to a child what a marketing and communications director is. The days and weeks after that Monday Night Football game were some of the toughest I've had at this job, but also some of the most rewarding. While we all wish Hamlin had never collapsed, it's been inspiring to see such a positive reaction. I am certain lives will be saved in the future by people who learned CPR because of Damar Hamlin.

If you saw a teen or adult suddenly collapse, would you know what to do? There are about 350,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests each year in the U.S. and, unfortunately, about 90 percent of them don't make it. CPR, especially if performed immediately, can double or triple a cardiac arrest victim's chance of survival. Women are less likely to receive CPR, partly because of fears about accusations of inappropriate touching or injuring her. Black and Hispanic people are less likely to receive bystander CPR. We should all be ready to help anyone in an emergency.

It's important to remember that cardiac arrest is not the same thing as a heart attack. Cardiac arrest is an electrical problem. The heart stops beating unexpectedly. A heart attack is a circulation problem. Blood flow to the heart is blocked and the heart muscle starts to die if the blocked artery is not reopened. Heart attacks are a common cause of cardiac arrest, but they are not the same thing.

This February, the American Heart Association wants you to Be The Beat for someone you love. Learn Hands-Only CPR and you can be the difference to keep that heart beating. Hands-Only CPR is two steps: 1) Call 911 and 2) Push hard and fast in the center of the chest until help arrives. If other people are in the area, assign someone to call 911. If you are out in public, assign someone to find the nearest AED. Immediate CPR and AED use helped save Damar Hamlin's life. You have the power in your hands to save someone else's.

Learn more about CPR, find a certification course near you, or take one minute to watch a Hands-Only CPR demonstration video at www.heart.org/CPR. Be the Beat and save a life. *SWM*

Kristy Smorol is the communications director for the American Heart Association of Central and Western New York.

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I have never been one to get overly excited about what I consider to be Hallmark holidays, but this year I am actually excited for Valentine's Day. This is not because I have grand plans waiting in the wings, but more because I am looking forward to spoiling my husband and children with a nice breakfast, which we don't do often enough together, and spending the day with each other after work and school playing games, hanging out and just having quality family time. Coming out of the pandemic, the one thing I miss is spending more time at home with my family. We always used to be on the go and have learned the art of slowing down, but life quickly became busy again.

Now, I am a self-proclaimed history nerd, so I did some research on how Valentine's Day came into existence. Valentine's Day is a day in which we celebrate Saint Valentine, who according to history may have been a couple of different martyrs, but most notably this day is the celebration of Saint Valentine of Rome who died on February 14th. The day became associated with romance and love, particularly in early history as this time of year was when courtships occurred as "lovebirds" connected in the early parts of the year, and in more modern history where people began exchanging gifts as expressions of love. Hallmark was founded in 1911 and quickly commercialized the holiday with mass printing of cards and valentines, and today Valentine's Day accounts for billions of dollars spent on dinner, flowers, jewelry and candy purchased.

We all know there are some people who curse Cupid and do not get excited about a day devoted to love. Some people may actually protest the day depending on their circumstances. No matter what your relationship status is, on a day that is symbolic of love, trust and commitment I think there is no better time than now to show your finances some love. Single or not, this is a gift that everyone can give to themselves in the form of committing to your personal growth for yourself, or for your partner and family. Here are a few things you may consider:

1. Set your goals. It doesn't matter if you are in a relationship or not, everyone in life has goals and you should set the ones that impact your finances. You may want to start to vacation now that the world seems to be open to travelling, possibly booking trips that you had to cancel. Or maybe you are like me and despise the cold weather so you are considering a second home in warmer climates. No matter what your goals are, it is important to write them down for yourself, and also to share them with your partner. Having a written plan can come in many forms - make a list, create a vision board. Give yourself something to look at and motivate you to stick with your plan.

2. Give Yourself a Budget. Having a plan is all well and good but now you need a roadmap to get you to the finish line. Create or review your budget. See where you can find savings that can go toward your goals from above. Make sure you also leave room for not only taking care of your needs, but recognizing your wants. Living is a game of balance and so is managing a budget. Now I'm not saying go out and buy fourteen pairs of shoes (or books in my case!), but make sure all of your hard work towards your goals is recognized by small rewards along the way.

3. Review Your Investments: I cannot stress this enough when I say to make sure you are familiar with your investments and try to understand them. This is whether you are single or not! I have seen far too often where one spouse controls the financial well-being of a household and the other is blissfully ignorant. Be committed to your wealth and make sure that you understand what you own and the levels of risk within your investment strategy align with your goals. Things will undoubtedly happen in your life that will affect the way you feel about your money. If you haven't checked in on this in a while, now may be a good time to do so.

4. Give Yourself Free Money. What?! Free money?? Yes, it does exist in many cases. Most notably, if you work and your employer has a retirement plan, get the details and sign up to participate in it. Many companies offer benefits in the form of matching contributions. Always take advantage of this when you can!

It doesn't matter if you plan to work at one place for the rest of your life or not because most of us don't, but do make sure you are receiving your benefits because in most cases they are portable with you. Other ways anyone can give themselves the gift of free money is look at money saving apps like Rakuten, where you can earn cash back on online or everyday purchases, or reviewing the incentives offered by your credit card company. Most have a cash back option.

These tips are just a few things to get you started and as I've said many times before, work with a partner to keep you on track. It can be an actual partner, a professional one life myself, or both.

On a day we know will occur each year, put an annual date on your calendar to check in with yourself around tax filing time to ensure you remain on track. We may not all celebrate Valentine's Day, but we do all have to file our taxes. Making a commitment to yourself or your family will help you reach your goals, and it doesn't matter if you are lucky in love or not, you can have a fortune in wealth by showing it love along the way.



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American Heart Association®



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While National Go Red for Women Day is Feb. 3 this year, the American Heart Association of Central and Western New York holds events throughout the year to raise awareness and funding for women's heart health. The Go Red for Women Luncheon, held in October at the Oncenter Convention Center, is the culmination of the year-round Go Red movement. The event, along with year-round activities, raised a total of more than \$300,000. Don't forget to mark your calendars - the 2023 Go Red Luncheon will take place Tuesday, Oct. 24 at the OnCenter.

Photos by Edges Photography





**NATIONAL
WEAR RED DAY**
 FOR WOMEN'S *heart* HEALTH

 FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2023



REMEMBERING NIKKY FIORELLO:

The rhythms of an unforgettable woman

Kate Hanzalik

Brilliant dancers feel the rhythm in their bodies. When life-long dancer Nikky Fiorello danced, she felt the rhythm. Today, three years after the 30-year-old's sudden death from cardiac arrest, her mother Kate Fiorello describes some of the qualities that make Nikky forever loved and unforgettable to so many people.

"She was very passionate, with joy and anger! She was quick-witted and could spot-on impersonate. She had a great singing voice, but really only used it comedically. I thought she would have been ideal on Saturday Night Live. When she was little, she would jump around and dance whenever music was on, particularly when her dad was playing guitar or banging it out on the piano. Most fun for me was watching her and her sister Danielle dance it up at weddings, the DJs always loved them. Her friends called her NikkyBoots because her eyes were as wide as the fearless hero from Puss in Boots."

One morning while a senior at SUNY Albany, a friend couldn't wake her up, her eyes rolled into the back of her head. "By the time the EMTs had arrived, Nikky was awake," Kate said. "When we got to the hospital she said that it was 'crazy that I'm in the hospital, I am fine.' The doctor said she had some type of seizure but could do no testing as it was the weekend.

Life went on. After college, Nikky earned her MBA at Union Graduate College and moved to NYC. Working in compliance she started with FINRA, then Deutsche Bank and Morgan Stanley, climbing the corporate ladder, often questioning her career path even with her success. One morning, Nikky called Kate. "Mom, I just woke up on the bathroom floor. I must have passed out on the way to the shower."

Still, life went on. At 30, she was an assistant vice president at BNP Paribas. By then she had her own Manhattan apartment, her circle of friends and loved ones had grown. She dreamed of starting a family. She had her health, or so it seemed. She ate right, exercised, even took Salsa lessons. After an evening kickboxing class on January 6, 2020, she went home, made lunch for the next day, talked to her cousin Clare and went to bed. The next day she was found dead on the bedroom floor.

It was later determined that she died from congenital LongQT Syndrome (LQTS) 3, a condition where the heart's electrical impulse was delayed and her heart did not beat, causing sudden death. The median age of death for those who have LQTS is 32. "People with LQTS may be at a greater risk when they exercise (LQT1), when they have an adrenaline rush (LQT2), or as in Nikky's case, when they are asleep (LQT3)" said Kate.

Meanwhile on January 7th, 9 a.m. rolled around at BNP Paribas, and Nikky hadn't shown up at work. Her coworkers immediately started texting her and reaching out to their boss. By 9:30, now alarmed, they contacted anyone who might know where she was. By 10:30, Dominic heard from Nikky's friend that she hadn't shown up for work. Nikky's siblings Anthony and Danielle were already aware because of their mutual friends. "We all had different things going through our heads. My son thought someone may have harmed her. Danielle, knew something was off, as Nikky would always respond to check-ins."



Several friends went to Nikky's apartment, but the superintendent refused to open the door until the police arrived. By 11:30 a.m. the NYPD found Nikky on her bedroom floor, no one was allowed in. Dominic was on the phone with them begging for answers. "Please, I'm her father. Can you just tell me if she is alive?" "I'm sorry. She's not."

"I kept walking around saying 'this can't be, this can't be' but I immediately understood that life would never be the same. I believe she had a peaceful death, that she just stood up and collapsed. Having read so many books on the afterlife I truly hope that she was just pulled into this great peace and light that she couldn't resist. And that's how I get through it."

By 1 p.m., January 7, 2020, Nikky's parents were on Interstate 81 driving the familiar drive to Manhattan, this time unable to think straight. They needed gas, got off at the Cortland exit, went to Starbucks for caffeine, got back on the highway and realized they forgot to get gas. The drive was arrhythmic, both like and unlike the past. One beat of Nikky's life was a sequence of seizures, syncope, and sudden death, what Kate calls "a textbook definition" of LQTS. The other, a perfectly repeated pattern of pulses inscribed in the heart of Nikky's father. "One of my husband's fondest memories was driving back from NYC with Nikky, singing to the Beatles and Elvis Costello together for the entire drive."

Early morning on Jan. 8th, they met with Nikky's friends, and later the coroner, who struggled to find the cause of death until a genetic test gave them answers pointing to a condition the family hadn't heard of.

Continued on page 14



The rhythms of an unforgettable woman from page 13



“Nikky had a variant in the SCN5A gene, which controls the sodium channels to the heart,” Kate said. “I believe it was a perfect storm, she had this variant, was slightly dehydrated from the kickboxing class the night before, and had been prescribed one of the many medicines with a warning statement ‘caution with prolonged QT.’ Together they caused a long QT interval and her heart didn’t beat.”

Just three months before COVID, they were able to hold a funeral for Nikky in Cicero, where friends and family expressed love and reached out. “Maybe life isn’t supposed to be easy,” she said, later adding, “I’m grateful we had her for 30 years, the love never dies. When Nikky is remembered, when her friends reach out to us, it means so much.”

CMC Dance Company, where Nikky danced growing up in Cicero, now has an annual Memorial Scholarship that covers the one-week summer Dance Intensive program for the awarded dancer. At their 25th anniversary banquet, CMC did a beautiful video tribute to Nikky and the first scholarship was presented.

The family is now focused on raising awareness about LQTS. Last April, they participated in the Syracuse HeartWalk, raising over \$40,000 for the American Heart Association. They hope to achieve similar goals for this year’s walk on April 16, 2023. To learn more about Nikky’s story and LQTS, please search the 2023 Syracuse HeartWalk, We Love NikkyBoots Team under The Bonadio Group. *SWM*





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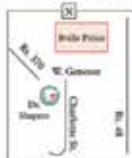


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Sleep joins 'Life's Essential 8'

Kristy Smorol

When was the last time you actually felt rested? Women lead busy, stressful lives and sometimes a good night's sleep seems like the thing we can give up to make room for something else. However, according to the American Heart Association, that rest is vital to your cardiovascular health. It's so important that the association updated its scoring system for heart and brain health, adding sleep to create "Life's Essential 8."

"The new metric of sleep duration reflects the latest research findings: sleep impacts overall health, and people who have healthier sleep patterns manage health factors such as weight, blood pressure or risk for Type 2 diabetes more effectively," Dr. Donald M. Lloyd-Jones, Sc.M., FAHA, and immediate past president of the American Heart Association. "In addition, advances in ways to measure sleep, such as with wearable devices, now offer people the ability to reliably and routinely monitor their sleep habits at home."

Sleep can help your body heal and repair cells and tissues, strengthen your immune system, improve your mood and energy, and help brain functions like decision-making and focus. Poor sleep may put you at risk for cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, depression, obesity and more.

Studies show too little or too much sleep can be associated with heart disease. Adults should aim for an average of 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Babies and children need more depending on their age. Ages 5 and younger should get 10-16 hours per 24 hours, kids 6-12 years should get 9-12 hours, and teenagers should get 8-10 hours of sleep.

The good news is, there are ways to clean up your sleep hygiene and catch more Zzzzs. You can start with some tech tweaks. Charge your phone far away from your bed to help cut back on distractions. Before bed, try to put down your devices as you wrap up for the night, or at least dim the screen or use a red filter app. The bright blue light coming from your screen can impact your body's daily rhythms. Put your phone on "do not disturb" overnight so those notifications won't keep waking you up.

Adults can benefit from bedtime routines just like babies and toddlers. Set an alarm to remind you to go to bed at a regular time every night. Spend a few minutes preparing for the next day, like writing a to-do list or setting out clothes. This can help ease a racing mind as you try to fall asleep.

In the morning, try to avoid hitting the snooze button. That extra few minutes may leave you feeling groggier when you wake up for the second time. Get out of bed and move your body to help yourself wake up and even sleep better the next night.

It may be tempting, but holding out for extra sleep on the weekend doesn't work. A study in 2017 showed women who spent two or more hours catching up on sleep over the weekend were more likely to have poor cardiovascular health. That means we can't repay our sleep debt, or the hours of sleep we're not getting during the week, when we have extra time on the weekend. Try to stick with a regular bedtime and wake up time even on the weekends.

If stress is keeping you awake, you're not alone. There is a strong connection between sleep, mental health, and overall physical health. Some of the other lifestyle factors included in Life's Essential 8, like a healthy diet and regular exercise, can directly reduce your risk of heart disease and help you sleep better, which could reduce your risk even more.

Life's Essential 8 is a common way for doctors and patients to rate and discuss a patient's heart and brain health, as well as being a key research tool. Sleep duration joined the original seven modifiable risk metrics – maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, being physically active, eating a healthy diet, and controlling blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. Sleep can also impact those other seven metrics.

Other new elements in the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8 update include accounting for secondhand smoke and vaping instead of just traditional cigarette use, using non-HDL cholesterol instead of total cholesterol to measure blood lipids, and expanding the blood sugar measure to include hemoglobin A1c, a key measure to assess Type 2 diabetes risk.

There are factors outside Life's Essential 8 that can greatly impact your physical health. Mental health and the conditions in which you are born and live can also play a role. Life's Essential 8 can provide some guidance on the risk factors we have some control over.



“The idea of optimal cardiovascular health is important because it gives people positive goals to work toward at any stage of life,” said Lloyd-Jones.

You can learn more about Life’s Essential 8 and get your heart health score at www.heart.org/lifes8. SWM



Kristy Smorol is the communications director for the American Heart Association of Central and Western New York.

SHAMIN THAKUR

Bridging the gap between Western medicine and holistic healing

Alyssa Dearborn



"So, when I first wanted to start my own business in holistic medicine, I didn't know where to start," said Shamin Thakur, holistic medicine specialist and owner of Wellness of Being, when asked about how the WBOC helped her start her business. "So someone had suggested this group. I went to the first meeting and it was so informative and then they gave me a mentor to help start my business. They gave me so much invaluable teachings, which I wouldn't have ever known because I'm new to the business world. They gave me the steps to follow to start my business."

Shamin grew up in Syracuse and earned her medical degree from Bangalore University in India. She eventually used what she learned about both conventional and holistic medicines to start Wellness of Being in Fayetteville, where she gives clients the tools they need to live a holistic life.

"I started my business back in 2019." She said, "I've always had an affinity towards holistic medicine. My background and education is in conventional medicine from India and I wanted to delve deeper into seeing the whole aspect of a person in regards to health. Not just the physical, but all the other areas that contribute to your health, whether that's nutrition, your sleep, your lifestyle, all that. So that's why I went into holistic medicine, because I wanted to be the change that was lacking in healthcare at the time."

Wellness of Being offers many holistic practices to clients, including reiki. But an ancient science from India called Ayurveda is one of Shamin's specialties and a practice that helps guide her business's offerings.

"Ayurveda is an ancient science from India, which is over 5,000 years old." Shamin explained. "And being of Indian origin, we do

use aspects of Ayurveda in terms of herbs and spices to help with some ailments you might have. So that was part of the culture, but I didn't know the depth of it until I started studying it and got certified. It looks at the whole person and individual instead of just certain aspects. It encompasses everything that I wanted to do for my clients in terms of their health and wellbeing."

Although modern, conventional medicine and holistic medicine practices like Ayurveda offer different ways of seeing a patient's condition, according to Shamin, the two types of medicine can work together to help a patient.

"So modern medicine, let's say you go to your doctor's office, they will give you a diagnosis...most chronic conditions are related to lifestyle, your diet, your stressors, your sleep. So there's many factors that contribute to your diagnosis. And then the doctor would give you maybe a prescription and they'll tell you, to help with this condition, to do certain things. Ayurveda tells you these are the things that will support your health to maintain balance with your mind and body. So, the condition is that it bridges the gap between your doctor visits. Most patients don't know how to bring about changes to their health, so Ayurveda gives you these teachings and tools to help."

Shamin explained that holistic practices like Ayurveda are considered complementary medicine, meaning that they should be used to complement a conventional practice. It is not a practice that is effective on its own, but it is still a valuable supplement for a healthy lifestyle.

"So complementary medicine, it complements Western medicine in the fact that it's not to negate from what Western medicine is," she explained, "It means you add to it to help you increase the health benefits, like, to increase the management. It's not to say 'don't take the prescription', 'don't go to your doctors', instead, it's saying 'do all that, but also this.' It's complementary, not negating from."

But Shamin wants to not only tell patients about the value of complementary medicine, she wants to encourage other healthcare professionals to learn about it as well.

"I think doctors have to be open to helping their patients," she continued, "know that there are tools out there for them to bridge the gap between holistic health and the doctors. I think that's important to know. There's more that patients can do for themselves." Like most people who strive to work in healthcare, Shamin has made it a mission to help those who come to her business for help. Helping her clients and providing them with the tools to live a more holistic life is something that makes her work worthwhile.

"It's really giving my clients the tools to work with, to educate them, to actually see the difference it makes." she said when asked about the most rewarding part of her work, "Giving them that, their own power, to know that they can affect their own healthcare because each one of us has the ability to overcome any challenge regarding our health. To give that support and that journey, that's what's rewarding. And the hope that things can be improved and things can be better. You are not your diagnosis, but you can take from that diagnosis and improve upon it." SWM

If you want to learn more about Wellness of Being and Ayurveda, visit www.wellnessofbeing.life.

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FELISHA LEGETTE- JACK

**SU hoops hero puts
her heart into
everything she does**

Norah Machia



FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK

SU hoops hero puts her heart into everything she does

Norah Machia

When Syracuse University Women's Basketball Coach Felisha Legette-Jack unexpectedly lost a close friend to heart disease, it was both a shock and a wake-up call.

Her friend had undergone open heart surgery, and the odds for a successful recovery seemed to be in her favor. But that optimism was short-lived. At age 62, the coach's long-time friend, who had seen her through both the good times and the bad, passed away.

Legette-Jack knew if that could happen to her friend, it could happen to any woman, including herself. In fact, cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) is the leading cause of death among women in the United States. The American Heart Association estimates that one in three women die from heart disease each year, yet most cardiovascular diseases are preventable with education and lifestyle changes.

Legette-Jack is determined to raise awareness about the risks of heart disease in women by encouraging friends, family and colleagues to openly discuss the issue, and the steps that should be taken toward a healthier lifestyle. Teamwork, she said, is essential for success, both on and off the basketball court, she said. Women should support each other in the battle against heart disease, because "we are all stronger together."



Photo by Alice G. Patterson

It was just a few months after starting her new coaching position at Syracuse University that Legette-Jack accepted an invitation to be a keynote speaker at the Syracuse Go Red for Women annual luncheon. The event was one of several held throughout the year by the American Heart Association to increase awareness of cardiovascular disease in women and to raise funds for lifesaving research.

Lifestyle changes recommended by the American Heart Association to prevent cardiovascular disease include lowering cholesterol, controlling blood pressure, staying active, eating healthy, managing weight and quitting smoking. It's also important to be aware of any family history of heart disease.

The American Heart Association is an organization that Legette-Jack has supported for many years, and she was happy to connect with the local chapter in Syracuse, she said.

S 203C

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK
HEAD COACH

Women often dedicate much of their time and energy into caring for their families and/or building their careers, and as a result, it's easy to ignore their own health care needs. But this must change, Legette-Jack said.

"It starts with taking care of yourself, because you can't help others if you don't first help yourself," she said. That includes regular check-ups, learning your risk factors for cardiovascular disease and taking steps to prevent it.

For Legette-Jack, as with so many women, it's an on-going challenge to carve out time for daily exercise and maintain a healthy eating plan. But the coach has taken several initiatives to incorporate both into her busy schedule.

She has a treadmill set up in her office at the Carmelo K. Anthony Basketball Center on the SU campus. Legette-Jack often walks on it while reviewing the films from previous games (talk about multi-tasking), and aims for a 3-mile daily walk.

Even small bursts of exercise add up, said Legette-Jack. She takes stairs instead of elevators as often as possible and parks a distance from any store to walk across the parking lot. "Taking that empty cart back into the store" adds a few more steps into the daily total, she quipped.

Legette-Jack tries to eat a healthy diet by following the "80/20 rule," a guideline calling for nutritious food to be eaten 80 percent of the time, and allowing for "favorites treats" the other 20 percent. It's easier to stick with this eating plan for the long-term because it doesn't deprive someone from occasionally having a favorite snack or meal, she said. She also strives to eat all her meals within an 8-hour time frame.

As a result of her regular exercise routine and eating plan, Legette-Jack feels healthy and energetic. She consistently has an optimum blood pressure reading in the 110/70 range, she said. Legette-Jack was hired as the SU Women's Basketball Coach last spring, and this is her first season coaching the Orange. But she is no stranger to Syracuse University basketball.

Her career started at Nottingham High School, where she led her team to two state championships. Since a young age, it was her dream to play basketball at Syracuse University. Legette-Jack had a record-setting career with the Orange from 1984 to 1989. She was named the 1985 Big East Conference Freshman of the Year, led the team to its first Big East championship, and played in Syracuse's first NCAA tournament game. During her time at the college, she became a four-time All-Big East selection and a two-time All-America honorable mention.

When she graduated from Syracuse University (with a dual degree in child and family studies and psychology), Legette-Jack was the program's all-time leading scorer and rebounder. More than three decades later, she became the first female athlete to have her jersey retired by Syracuse University.

**"We are
all stronger
together."
—Felisha
Legette-
Jack**

Continued on page 26

SU hoops hero puts her heart into everything she does from page 25

Legette-Jack started her coaching career as the girl's varsity basketball coach at Westhill High School in Syracuse. She later became an assistant coach at Boston College, and then returned to Syracuse University, where she worked as an assistant coach from 1993 to 2000. She became head women's basketball coach for Hofstra University, and later Indiana University. Most recently, Legette-Jack was head coach at the University at Buffalo, where she led the women's basketball team to play in four NCAA tournaments. She finished her career at Buffalo with a record 202 wins in 10 seasons before accepting the coaching position at Syracuse University.

Interestingly, Legette-Jack is not the only athlete and coach in her family. Her husband, David Jack, played on the Jamaican Men's National Volleyball team, and coached both the men's and women's national teams. Jack has also coached youth volleyball teams in schools and clubs throughout Central New York. He is a licensed real estate professional with Howard Hanna Real Estate Services.

Their son, Maceo Jack, recently graduated from the University at Buffalo, where he was a member of the men's basketball team. He is currently playing for the Cheshire Phoenix in the British Basketball League.

Legette-Jack has set another goal for off the court – helping youth in the Syracuse area make positive connections through basketball. Having grown up in public housing owned by the Syracuse Housing Authority, Legette-Jack is familiar with the many life challenges faced by residents, especially younger people.

The coach credits her mother, Thalia, who worked as a janitor and cook, for instilling in her a strong work ethic and teaching her not to get too caught up in job titles. Her mother's advice has kept her grounded throughout her basketball coaching career, Legette-Jack said.

"My goal has always been to empower everyone to be part of the team," she said. "We all have a stake in this journey together."

After graduating from Syracuse University, she helped organize three annual youth summer basketball camps for hundreds of children at Syracuse Housing Authority sites throughout the city. Legette-Jack is planning to return to those same locations in the near future.

"I would like to get in the community more and stop by some of the Syracuse Housing Authority sites to meet with the kids," Legette-Jack said. "I would just like to show up, maybe go to an open gym program. It would be a low-key approach, no television cameras."

She smiled and added "I'll just tell them I was in the neighborhood." *SWM*



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This Valentine's Day... make a food memory at home

Chef Eric Rose



Valentine's Day, celebrated annually on Feb. 14, is a day dedicated to honoring love and affection between intimate partners. The holiday has its roots in ancient Roman history, where a festival called Lupercalia was held in mid-February to celebrate fertility and the coming of spring. The festival included rituals such as the sacrifice of goats and dogs, as well as a lottery in which men would draw the names of women to be their sexual partners for the duration of the festival.

Over time the celebration evolved, and by the 5th century, the Catholic Church had established Saint Valentine as the patron saint of love. The church likely chose this particular saint because there were multiple early Christian martyrs named Valentine, and the church could not determine which stories and legends belonged to which martyr. It wasn't until the 14th and 15th centuries that Valentine's Day as we know it began to take shape. Courtly love, a medieval European concept of expressing love and admiration, became popular, and romantic love became a topic of literature and poetry. By the 18th century, Valentine's Day was a popular occasion for lovers to express their love through gifts such as flowers and candy.

In America, the holiday took on a more commercial aspect in the early 20th century, with the advent of the greeting card industry.

Today, Valentine's Day is a major event in the American retail calendar, with millions of dollars spent on gifts, flowers, and cards each year. The grocery stores have barely put away the Christmas items when it's time to stock the shelves and endcaps with candy, flowers, and chocolate dipped strawberries. It has become an event with huge expectations around it, especially for couples.

Food has always been an important part of Valentine's Day celebrations. Many couples choose to celebrate by going out to dinner, often to a fancy restaurant. However, in recent years there has been a trend towards couples staying home and cooking a special meal together to celebrate the occasion. My guess is that this trend has a lot to do with the pandemic as well as the younger generation being more enthusiastic about cooking from growing up watching the Food Network and other cooking shows. With meal kits and food delivery services becoming more popular, it is even more convenient. You can have everything you need to make a meal, complete with instructions, delivered to your house.

Staying home can be a more intimate and meaningful way to celebrate, as couples can create a meal that has special meaning to them. Cooking together is a fun and bonding activity that allows couples to share the responsibility of meal planning and preparation.

Continued on page 30

Make a Valentine's Day food memory at home from page 29

It's a great way to spend quality time with your significant other. It allows for open communication and teamwork as you navigate through recipes and cook a delicious meal together. It also gives couples the opportunity to learn new skills and techniques from one another, making the experience even more enjoyable.

When planning your Valentine's Day dinner, it's important to choose a recipe that both partners are comfortable with and excited to try. This might be a dish that one partner has always wanted to learn how to make, or a recipe that holds special meaning to the couple. It's also a good idea to plan ahead and make sure you have all the ingredients and equipment you need before starting to cook.

One romantic idea for Valentine's Day dinner is to recreate a dish from a special memory or vacation that you shared together. For example, if you and your partner fell in love over a plate of

spaghetti and meatballs in Italy, make that dish together for your Valentine's Day dinner. It will not only be delicious but it will also bring back fond memories of your time together. Another option is to try a new cuisine together. Cooking a meal from a different culture or country can be a fun and exciting way to learn about new flavors and techniques. It's also a great way to introduce your partner to a new type of food they may not have tried before.

Finally, don't forget the finishing touches. Set the table with candles, flowers, and your best dishes to create a romantic ambiance. And of course, don't forget to pour a glass of wine or champagne to make the meal even more special. *SWM*

Chef Eric Rose is a certified health coach and professional chef



Quick Sourdough Bread

Serves 4 +

This Quick Sourdough Bread recipe uses added yeast to create a rustic sourdough bread that's ready to bake in about 90 minutes. Same day sourdough bread—easy and foolproof!

INGREDIENTS

150 g (½ cup + 1 tbsp) sourdough starter (*disregard if you don't have one*)
 300 g (1 ¼ cups) water, lukewarm 480 g (4 cups) white bread flour
 2 tsp rapid rise yeast 2 tsp salt
 2 tsp sugar Olive oil spray for the bowl

DIRECTIONS

1. Measure the starter into a large bowl and pour in the water. Stir well to combine (I use a dough hook).
2. Add the flour and yeast. Stir again to combine and make sure there are no dry pockets of flour.
3. Sugar and salt go in next – continue mixing with your dough hook or you can use your hands. Your dough will be very sticky and shaggy.
4. Spray the bowl with olive oil, cover the bowl with a clean towel and place somewhere warm to rise. I usually place it in the microwave or the oven (or another closed space) with a pot of boiling water. The steam will speed up the process.
5. Check when the dough has doubled in size. This should take only an hour, but if your room or ingredients are cold it can take up to 90 minutes.
6. Mist your countertop with olive oil and scrape the dough onto it. Use an oiled bench scraper to fold the edges over towards the center to create a round loaf. Oil a square of parchment paper and transfer the loaf onto it.
7. Lift the paper by the edges and place in a bowl to rise for a further 30 minutes. Meanwhile, place your cast iron pot in the oven and preheat to 420°F.
8. Lift the bread out of the bowl using the baking paper and carefully drop into the pot with the paper (be careful; it will be very hot). Score the top using a knife (if the dough is very sticky then you can skip the scoring). Cover the pot and bake for 30 minutes.
9. Uncover and bake for 15 more minutes. Carefully remove the bread from the pot – it should sound hollow if tapped on the underside. Cool completely on a wire rack before slicing.

Creamy Braised Short Ribs

Serves 4

Flavorful braised short ribs with a delicious creamy gravy, veggies, and perfectly tender beef. It's cozy comfort food at its finest and I know you'll love the recipe!

INGREDIENTS

5 pounds Bone-in English cut short ribs, room temperature
 1 Medium to large yellow onion, sliced 2 Stalks celery, diced
 2 Carrots, diced 8 Cloves of garlic, smashed
 ¼ cup Balsamic vinegar 1 Tbsp Tomato paste
 2½ cups beef broth 2 Dried bay leaves
 2 Bundles fresh thyme 1½ Tbsp Arrowroot starch
 1 cup Full fat coconut milk 8 oz Baby Bella mushrooms,
 Parsley, for serving sliced (optional)
 Mashed potatoes or mashed cauliflower, for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Heat a large dutch oven over medium-high heat. While the dutch oven is heating, liberally season the short ribs with salt and pepper.
3. Once the dutch oven is hot, add the olive oil. Then, place half the short ribs in the pot. Sear the short ribs for 4-5 minutes per side until they have developed a deep brown crust. Remove the short ribs from the dutch oven and repeat this process with the other half of the short ribs.
4. Once all of the short ribs have been seared and removed from the pan, turn down the heat to low.
5. Add the sliced onion, diced celery, diced carrot, smashed garlic and mushrooms to the dutch oven. Cook the veggies for a minute and then stir in the balsamic vinegar and tomato paste until well combined.
6. Return the short ribs to the pot, nestling them amongst the sautéed veggies. Pour in the beef broth and add the thyme and dried bay leaves to the pot. Place the lid on the dutch oven and then place in the oven. Braise the short ribs at 350 degrees for 2-3 hours until they are fork tender, checking them after 2 hours.
7. While the short ribs are braising, whisk together the coconut milk or half and half with the arrowroot starch until well combined. Set aside.
8. Remove the short ribs from the dutch oven and use a spoon to skim off any excess fat from the top of the braising liquid. Heat the dutch oven over medium heat. Bring the braising liquid to a simmer. Stir in the coconut milk arrowroot slurry mixture. The braising liquid will thicken into a gravy. Return the short ribs to the pot, nestling them in the gravy and ensure that everything is heated through before turning off the heat.
9. Serve the short ribs and gravy over mashed potatoes or mashed cauliflower and enjoy!

Chocolate Mug Cake with Banana Ice Cream

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1½ Bananas 1 cup All-purpose flour
 1 cup White sugar 8 Tbsp Unsweetened cocoa powder
 ½ tsp Baking soda ½ tsp Salt
 ¾ cup Milk ½ cup Canola oil
 ¼ cup Water 1 tsp Vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt together in a large microwave-safe mug; stir in milk, canola oil, water, and vanilla extract.
2. Cook in the microwave until cake is done in the middle, about 1 minute, 45 seconds.

Banana Ice Cream

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

2 Bananas (ripe)

DIRECTIONS:

Slice bananas into coins and freeze on a sheet pan. When frozen put them in a blender and pulse until smooth. Serve immediately with the Chocolate Mug Cake.



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Keep your heart happy - Less stress is best

Diamond Thaxton

We all know what constant stress can do to your mindset, but did you know that it can also wreak havoc on your heart? Stress can lead to increased inflammation in your body, leading to high blood pressure, thus, a negative impact on your health. Life is full of challenges, and stress is unavoidable, but luckily there are many things you can do right now that can help you manage stress healthily.

Create a healthy mindset that is adaptable to stressful situations. Every morning, say positive affirmations to prepare for the day's stressors. Affirmations are positive statements you repeat to promote change and ease your distress. Using positive affirmations is like practicing positive self-talk. Here are some examples of these positive affirmations that you use right away:

- 1. I am capable of dealing with whatever the day brings.**
- 2. I will only focus on things I can control.**
- 3. I have the power to make positive changes in my life.**

Another way to combat stress is to be sure you are entering a flow state once daily. Positive psychology defines flow as a state of mind in which a person becomes fully immersed in an activity. During the flow state, you will find yourself losing track of time and experiencing feelings of serenity.

The great part about getting into the flow state is that it can be achieved anywhere. All you need to do is engage in an activity you enjoy that keeps your interest that isn't too challenging or mundane. You will also need to eliminate distractions like putting your phone on do not disturb! Most people find that they can achieve flow in creative pursuits such as journaling or painting, but you can even achieve flow in the workplace. When you're at work, choose one task you focus on and try to do it differently, or set a goal to do it in a specific amount of time. People who can enter flow states daily become less stressed because they find tasks more enjoyable and rewarding.

Self-care should always be noticed when seeking to lessen stress in your life. One of the most significant forms of self-care is to be sure you are getting enough adequate sleep. Often when a person has a stressful day, they can engage in what is called revenge bedtime procrastination. Bedtime procrastination is seen as a way of getting "revenge" on daytime hours with little or no free time. So, you may stay up an hour more than you should, scrolling on social media or binge-watching a couple of episodes. A sleep-deprived mind is a breeding ground for stress to have a significant negative impact on your mindset.

Ask for help! Often women feel that they must do it all and that asking for help may make them look inadequate or don't want to be a burden to others. Lean on your support system when stress is becoming heavy on your mind. The ability to ask for and obtain help is a valuable life skill. Here are steps on how to get comfortable asking for help.

- 1. When you have unhelpful reasons not to ask for help, remember that these thoughts are not always accurate and that you don't have to listen to them.**
- 2. Be specific about what you need help with and why. Use this prompt: 'I've been struggling with _____. Would you be willing to ____?'**
- 3. Let go of control when asking for help; the person might not do things perfectly, and that's okay.**

The gold standard for dealing with stress is to practice the art of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's happening around us. Essentially, mindfulness is the ability to quiet your mind and embrace your inner peace. Try this mindfulness exercise:

- 1. Engage your five senses! What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell?**
- 2. Give yourself a hug with large deep breaths, and feel your lungs expand and release.**
- 3. Actively feel your clothes on your skin. Do you notice the different textures?**
- 4. Take a second to look at nature and ask yourself how does it make you feel? Give thanks to the nature around you.**

Lastly, inventorying your life stressors is another way to deal with stress. You want to eliminate as much stress as possible that is under your control. Perhaps you engage in people-pleasing behaviors and overwhelm yourself with doing things for others because you have difficulty saying no. Perhaps your relationship is a significant stressor due to ineffective communication, and you haven't addressed it. Remember, you deserve peace, and don't break your own heart with stress!

Diamond Thaxton is a doctoral-level licensed psychotherapist, adjunct professor of psychology and addictions and Chief Transformation Officer at Thaxton Therapy in Syracuse.





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LATHA RAMALINGAM, PH.D

SU researcher finds answers to unusual questions about heart health

Kate Hanzalik

The number one cause of death among American men and women is heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control. In fact, someone dies from the condition every 34 seconds. Numerous factors contribute to heart disease, ranging from congenital defects, genetic predisposition, lifestyle, and socio-economics, to name a few. Scientists are aware of the problem, but they want to expand our understanding of what goes wrong and what can go right with advanced research. At Syracuse University, Latha Ramalingam, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies in Falk College, is one such scientist.

In recent years, Dr. Ramalingam has been conducting studies funded by the American Heart Association that examine obesity and heart health in parents before and during pregnancy, and the impact nutrition may have on their children using animal models.

“If the mom is essentially eating food rich in saturated fat, then that acts as a catalyst, so the offspring have a high risk of diseases like Type 2 diabetes, heart disorders and liver disorders,” she said. To reduce the risk, she is studying the benefits of fish oil. “We all know fish is good for you; but if you take fish oil prior to pregnancy, how it benefits your offspring/ children is not known yet,” she said.



In one of her studies, she examined female mice consuming fish oil during pregnancy, and made important discoveries. “Fish oil reduces inflammation, triglycerides, not only in the women but also in their offspring. So, there is a generational effect you can see,” she said. “If the mom is consuming fish oil, the risk of these diseases is shown to be lower in their offspring. But all these studies are in mice, so it would take a while to translate to humans.”

In another study funded by the American Heart Association, she is also examining the health of male mice. “The fathers have never been in the picture. No one cares about what the father eats. So in this ongoing study, she is investigating if fathers healthy eating habits before pregnancy is beneficial for their children. We found some interesting findings in our animal studies, which is that if the father is eating healthy, and then the couple gets pregnant, then it reduces the risk of obesity in their offspring.” So, her recommendation is “fish or fish oil consumption in fathers, just to be healthy even before they attempt to get pregnant.”

Genetics, diet and exercise

Dr. Ramalingam is inspired to do her research because her father has Type 2 diabetes. “People suffering from obesity get Type 2 diabetes, so I started looking at obesity. I wanted to look at a way to reduce obesity, and wanted to do it through diet, that’s how I started.” She is also inspired to take extra precautions with her own health. “My dad has a risk of heart disease so I recognize the need for a balanced diet and being physically active. Additionally, I also get my blood pressure and ECG (electrocardiogram) checked so make sure I am not in the risk category.”

She recommends that others who are genetically predisposed to obesity be cautious. “If you know you have a risk of obesity or heart disease in your family, if you pay extra precaution to what you eat and go for regular check-ups, then you can avoid those risks.”

Whether or not you’re at risk, she offers some helpful advice: exercise 30 minutes a day for five days a week; supplement with fish

oil (~1000 mg) or eat fish twice weekly; cut out saturated fat and deep-fried food; add more fiber to your diet to reduce fat absorption.

“All the above is common knowledge but it’s hard for us to follow. I think we need a behavioral change to follow those things.”

She encourages people to seek out resources as well. If necessary, contact a registered dietician to improve your diet. Use food trackers, such as the MyPlate app or MyFitnessPal etc. Learn more about obesity and heart health by visiting the American Heart Association website at www.heart.org.



Women in the sciences

Dr. Ramalingam has made significant academic achievements and contributions to research at a time when the world of science is led by men. She has a Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biology from Indiana University School of Medicine, a master’s in technology from Vellore Institute of Technology’s School of Biotechnology, and a bachelor’s in pharmacy from the School of Pharmacy at Sri Ramachandra Medical College. She has received several national and international awards as well as funding to conduct innovative research, and she has published many articles in reputable scholarly journals. In addition to all of this, she is an advocate for women who want to work in the sciences.

“I’m passionate about bringing women to science. I have a lot of students who are women and minorities in my lab. We all know there’s still a lack of women in science, so we need to improve those numbers. We call it a leak in the pipeline because as the ranks go higher, there are less and less women in science. So, I try to immerse and help women in science.”

She encourages high school or college women who want to explore research to check out what Syracuse University has to offer in terms of research opportunities, including undergraduate summer research programs. For more information, you can contact Dr. Ramalingam at lramalin@syr.edu. SWM



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BRITTANY TAYLOR



Making a community-wide impact on heart health

Alyssa Dearborn

After joining the American Heart Association nearly one year ago as the organization's community impact director, Brittany Taylor has been able to make a difference in the lives of Central New Yorkers while seeing the Association's impact firsthand.

"As the community impact director, I work with both clinical providers and community-based organizations to create change within the community," Taylor said when asked about her role, "We have certain pillars that we work on including hypertension of course, nutrition security, women's health, tobacco and vaping, and CPR response. So we work with these—both clinical and community-based organizations—to implement change within the community, whether we're looking at policy or seeking out a need and fulfilling that need. So it can be working with a school district to update their tobacco and vaping code of conduct so that they have a more intervention approach versus a palliative approach. But it could also be working with a local food pantry and realizing that they need refrigeration to be able to expand their reach in working with a corporate partner to find the funds to do that."

"It's a very diverse job," she explained, "and there's a lot of opportunity to create sustainable change within the community." In her former role working at a local food alliance, she worked with community members on an individual level. At the American Heart Association, Brittany has the opportunity to see wider change. Experiencing this wider change allows Brittany to accomplish the most good for those in our community.

"Being able to see community-wide change, community-wide impact really is exciting. One thing that I found very interesting when I started my work at the American Heart Association is I think when people think 'American Heart,' the first thing they think of is hypertension or CPR. But we're so much more than that. Those things are great and they're impactful, but the work and research that's done towards maternal health, women's health, nutrition security, that's what drives a lot of the community impact work that I do."

The issue of women's health—particularly women's heart health—is important to the work of Brittany and the American Heart Association because, as she explained, many women do not know the signs of heart disease. A part of her work involves both creating awareness for women's heart health and empowering women to actively pursue healthy living. When asked what the most important thing women should know about their heart health, Brittany replied, "I would say the most important thing is to just be aware of your body, to pay attention to your body and seek help. A lot of time as women, we are the organizers of the family. We keep everyone else going and that leads us to neglect our own health. So, if women could definitely take the time and focus on their mental well-being,

their physical well-being, and their spiritual well-being, that will have amazing implications on their heart health."

When asked how she and the organization actively engage Central New Yorkers in the Association's mission, Brittany answered, "I think there's a lot of different ways. I think the most known is definitely through our Heart Challenge. The Heart Challenge this year will be on April 16. That is an annual walk and run where different organizations and community members come together to really campaign heart health and heart fitness. It's an opportunity for us to share awareness. We also work with different schools and different organizations to do CPR demos so that people are able to learn how to perform standard CPR. And our other large event is our Go Red for Women Luncheon. And that's really an opportunity to focus on women's heart health, especially because as women, we often ignore the signs and symptoms that lead to cardiac arrest or stroke. So, it's very important for us to celebrate women's health, but also spread awareness so we can have more women living longer in our community."

Even though the American Heart Association is a national organization, it is very involved in individual communities across the country, including the communities in Central New York. Having a widespread, local impact is what makes Brittany's work so exciting and personally fulfilling.

"I'm very proud to work for the American Heart Association because although we're a national organization, we're a local organization," she said. "We work really hard to improve the health of those living in the Central New York region. It's very important to us to spread awareness. Unfortunately, you know, the Buffalo Bills player that was injured [in January], all I could think about was work and everything that I've learned over this last year about heart health and about CPR and about the effects of going into cardiac arrest. I don't think I really would have known that stuff had I not worked for the American Heart Association. So one of my goals is to really make more of our information and research more widely known. There's a lot that we do locally including providing research dollars to local scholars so that they're able to continue the research that will impact the world."

When asked what the most meaningful part of her job is, she emphasized the importance of being able to see change in her community in real time.

"I think what I enjoy the most about my work is being in the community and being able to see change happen in real time. Working with our clinical providers, our community-based organizations, and knowing that you had an impact on improving the systems or improving policies so that more people are taken care of is really what keeps me going." SWM

ALLISON GRAFF

Strokes of luck—finding positivity in health scare

Jason Klaiber



• A survivor of four mini-strokes on top of a pair of heart conditions, Allison Graff has become a wellness-focused yoga instructor for those looking to restore their sense of self. This month she's teaching a class focused on self-respect called the "I Love Me Project" out of a desire to help others make better decisions not just for their health but for their overall lives.

• Graff says to keep an "emotional checkbook" on hand to avoid being spread too thin. That means letting go of overly firm expectations and giving automatic yeses less often. "You only have so much energy and choosing where that energy is spent is pivotal when understanding the needs of your own body and your own mind," she said.

• Graff considers yoga the "secret sauce" for life. "If you do yoga, then you almost feel like a different frequency and you see the world in a different way," she said. "I just wanted to share that with as many people as I could, because it had given me so much support."

• Though she hasn't needed certain therapies and treatments usually needed after strokes, Graff has called her recovery a gradual process. Her atrial fibrillation would typically be treated with blood thinners or anticoagulants to prevent more clots from coming about, but for moyamoya patients like her, blood thinners happen to increase the chances for hemorrhagic strokes. Graff has had a Watchman surgically inserted into her left atrial appendage, preventing any future clots from forming in that space, and 45 days after that surgery, she was able to stop taking anticoagulants, though she was prescribed baby aspirin for life. A defibrillator has also been implanted between the layers of skin above her heart, and a tiny lead inside her atria monitors the rhythm of her heart.

Though not the sign from the universe that she was expecting at the time, Allison Graff looks back at the series of four mini strokes she had on May 8, 2021 as something of a lucky break.

That particular Saturday, the North Syracuse resident was sitting by a fire with company when she noticed her lip was numb and her right arm was “moving around like a marionette” uncontrollably. When she made the exclamation for somebody to call 911, the words were incomprehensible.

With clots showing up on the left side of Graff’s brain, it was later determined at Crouse Hospital that the strokes were attributable to atrial fibrillation, which she was diagnosed with the prior autumn. Judging by a scan taken during that visit, a physician’s assistant pointed out that another condition was forming—a rare degenerative disorder known as moyamoya disease that constricts the carotid arteries and disrupts their supply of blood to the brain. In response, bundles of capillaries develop to circulate enough blood and thereby create an appearance on brain scans reminiscent of smoke, hence the word “moyamoya,” meaning “puff of smoke” in Japanese.

“Having the strokes actually saved my life because they revealed something bigger that was a threat,” Graff said. “If I didn’t have those strokes, my moyamoya condition could have worsened.”

Graff is also thankful for the friend who knew right away to call for help, the fact that the test results displayed zero bleeding in her brain, the short-lived nature of her speech deficit, and the absence of any other apparent limitations apart from slight memory loss and feelings of weakness here and there.

Reflecting on those ischemic attacks and her history of heart problems, including a hospitalization about a decade and a half ago for cardiomyopathy when she was only 32, Graff further concluded that stress brought on by workplace tension, custody battles, her father’s passing from ALS, the effects of COVID, and other energy-depleting and “blood-boiling” circumstances had contributed to her health-related issues over the years. That aspect of the equation would also slowly snowball with disregard of regular headaches and occasional losses of consciousness as the warning signs they were.

“I am a perfect demonstration of physically what happens if you ignore the stress and just keep pushing and pushing,” Graff said. “We’re designed to outrun a bear, and evolutionarily our brains and our bodies are meant for short-term stress because it keeps us alive, but we can’t marathon with a bear.”

Beyond that, she said health insurance costs, travel expenses for appointments, and struggles finding one’s specialist of choice end up exacerbating stress levels for patients like herself.

“When you’re sick, the last thing on Earth you need is your insurance company telling you something’s not covered,” Graff said. “I get it that there’s a problem with the system, but the patient should never feel that problem. My business is getting well.”

Not wanting to rely solely on pills or surgeries to reverse the breakdown of her body, Graff has sought to eliminate her built-up stress by spending more time in the kitchen to focus on food choices while also turning to the practice of yoga as a mind-stilling refuge.

Graff said she began relying on yoga after her now-eight-year-old daughter was born and separately when her father was ill, using the activity as both a leisurely escape and a way to work out her worries.

By stressing the power of the present moment, the returns to meditation and yoga on her part have helped her return to herself, especially as a sense of fear came into play and lingered following her health concerns.

“Our minds and bodies sometimes go in different directions,”

Graff said. “After my strokes I was very afraid because I had this looming threat of another stroke.”

Graff added that her temporary unwillingness to go all out with physical activity kept her from doing too many downward-facing dog poses or sun salutations, so she decided to mainly depend on inactive yoga.

That restorative style has since been incorporated into the teachings of Ginger Tea Yoga Company, the independent business she started in 2016. “My yoga teaching is less about kicking up to a handstand and where to put your feet and how deep to go with your lunge,” Graff said. “It’s about connecting with you.”

Because the company does not have a concrete location, Graff is able to bring yoga to people’s homes, churches,

places of business and events such as bridal showers.

“Yoga is needed everywhere, and it’s not necessarily confined within the boundaries of a brick and mortar, so my slogan is ‘wherever yoga’s needed,’” she said.

Under the banner of “a. graff, health coach,” she weaves in mindfulness, meditation and her qualifications as an integrative nutrition health coach to give those who sign up a toolbox to achieve their health goals, whether that’s losing five pounds, improving their focus, bouncing back in their recovery or cutting down on consumption of sugary beverages.

Integrative nutrition, as she explains, touches upon the idea that the health of human beings is impacted not just by what they eat but also everything else they ingest, from the news to the energy of their surroundings at home and at work.



Continued on page 44

Strokes of luck from page 43

While focusing on wellness and yoga instruction, Graff also works at a part-time capacity with the congregation Sisters of St. Francis, which has been her way of stepping back into “the 9-to-5 world.”

Previously she had worked for the American Heart Association as an event coordinator and at a different nonprofit as a development associate. For AHA, she organized heart walks and Go Red for Women awareness campaigns in multiple markets between Syracuse, Binghamton, Watertown and Poughkeepsie.

She said Go Red for Women, for which she attended three luncheons this past year, is an initiative that allows her to speak to others about why the physical and mental effects of long-term stress shouldn't be put on the back burner.

“It's an amazing opportunity to share my story of survival and to inspire other people to make changes that could save their lives,” Graff said.

She said she has also gained perspective hearing about fellow speakers' journeys and their tips on making it through the toughest of times.

“Life is always going to be a struggle, and challenges are always going to come up,” Graff said. “But how can we make something sweet out of that sourness?”



In that sense, it all comes back to seeing the glass half empty and making the best of every situation instead of “wallowing around in the pit of despair” as Graff put it.

That approach, and the policy to be honest with oneself, became solidified even greater for Graff when she broke the news to her mom on Mother's Day in 2021 that she had her four mini-strokes the day prior—a disclosure that she combined with her coming out.

“It opened up a door to let her know I was in love with a woman, and how beautiful it was for my mom to say, ‘I don't care who you love as long as you're happy and you're healthy,’” Graff said. “Some things don't really matter when you're talking about being here versus not being here.” *SWM*

For more on Allison Graff's endeavors, visit sites.google.com/view/gingerteayogacompany

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SRC, Inc. has hired Gwendolyn Sykes as Executive Vice President, Finance and Chief Financial Officer



Gwendolyn Sykes

In this role, Sykes will direct investments, pricing and cost analysis, and financial analyses of budgets, forecasts, and results. She will also review potential acquisitions and communicate SRC's financial results and health to the company's leadership.

"We are thrilled to welcome Gwendolyn to the team," said Kevin Hair, President and CEO of SRC. "She is a proven leader with a deep understanding of federal and non-profit accounting that will help us manage our financial strategy and use our

investments to empower our employees in achieving our mission."

Sykes brings over 31 years of fiscal financial management that has enabled several organizations to achieve new strategic goals all while ensuring financial acumen in growing the enterprise. In her most recent role as the U.S. Secret Service chief financial officer, she was responsible for the execution, development, and stewardship of the organization's resources. Prior to the Secret Service, Sykes was the first female to serve as a Political Appointee/Senate confirmed chief financial officer for the National Aeronautics Administration. Sykes has also served as the chief financial officer at two academic enterprises – Yale University and Morehouse College. Her government experience includes working within the Department of Defense as comptroller and in the Office of U.S. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska.

Sykes holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Catholic University and a master's degree in public administration from American University, where she continues to serve as an adjunct professor in the School of Public Affairs. In May of 2022, Wilson College conferred upon her an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

Solvay Bank announces recent promotion



Alda Jerome

Solvay Bank is pleased to announce the recent promotion of Alda Jerome. Alda Jerome is advancing her career to Senior Mortgage Loan Processor in the Residential Mortgage and Home Equity Department at Solvay Bank. She joined the bank in 1994 and has over 15 years of experience in the mortgage industry. Alda is a graduate of West Genesee High School.

The Board of Directors of the Onondaga Historical Association announces the appointment of Lisa Romano Moore as Executive Director



Lisa Romano Moore

"Lisa brings a wealth of nonprofit and leadership expertise to OHA, where she has served as director of development since February 2020," said Board President James Stoddard, Jr. "Her strategic vision, collaborative skills, and dedication to OHA's mission have been essential to OHA's success over the past three years, making her the best choice to lead the organization into the future."

Before joining OHA, Romano Moore was the Vice President for Development and Executive Director at the Onondaga Community College Foundation from 2015-2019. Other prior roles include serving as Vice President of Development and Marketing at the CNY Community Foundation, the Director of Development for Say Yes to Education – Syracuse, and a variety of advancement roles at Syracuse University, including Assistant Dean for Advancement at the College of Arts and Sciences.

"I'm honored to be given the opportunity to lead our wonderful staff and serve my community," said Romano Moore. "OHA is a dynamic

participant in the growth and development of this region. Our work is relevant to all ages, all walks of life, and all cultural backgrounds, including the Haudenosaunee. As we prepare for new changes and challenges on the horizon, our programs, activities, and exhibits throughout the community will remind newcomers to this area of our rich history, and the generations of people who influence and inspire the pride we have in this place. I look forward to collaborating with OHA's partners, staff, visitors, and supporters to continue to build on this important work."

Michele Fernandez appointed to Home Headquarters board Syracuse



Michele Fernandez

Solvay Bank is pleased to announce that Michele Fernandez, Vice President, Enterprise Risk Manager & CRA Officer, has recently been elected to join the Home Headquarters' board as a private sector member. Michele joined Solvay Bank in 1991 and leads the Enterprise Risk Management department. In addition to being elected to join the HHQs' Board, she currently serves as a member of the Board Development Committee. Michele serves as Treasurer at Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Syracuse and is a member of the Government Relations Committee with the Independent Community Bankers Association of New York State. She was recognized by Syracuse University's Whitman School of Business as a "Forty Under 40" award recipient. Michele resides in Solvay, New York.

Nascentia Health announces three promotions



Jennifer Allen, DHN-PHRL, RN

Jennifer Allen, DHN-PHRL, RN, is now vice president of patient services, overseeing the organization's certified home health agency and licensed home care services agency. She has expertise in quality assurance, public health, and telehealth programs, and focuses on improving patient outcomes and reducing rehospitalizations. She has been with Nascentia Health for three years. Jennifer is a registered nurse with more than 25 years of experience in healthcare. She received her doctorate in nursing practice, public health nurse leader from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She lives in Whitney Point.



Jo Miller

Jo Miller is now vice president of customer experience and outreach, overseeing Nascentia's call center, customer service team, outreach staff, and licensed agents. She has more than 30 years of experience with customer service and sales and 10 years of experience in the healthcare industry. She is a licensed insurance agent and a founder of Resources and Advocacy for the Aging and Disabled, a nonprofit with chapters statewide that focuses on improving access to social services for adults. Jo has been with Nascentia since 2020. She is a graduate of SUNY Empire State College. She resides in Bradford.



Dino Duracak, PT, DPT

Dino Duracak, PT, DPT, is now the director of quality assurance, performance improvement and telehealth for our certified home health agency. He ensures that our clinicians provide the best care to patients to better monitor patient health in between clinician visits. He is a licensed physical therapist with nearly 10 years of experience with hands-on patient care. He received a doctorate and bachelor's degree in physical therapy from Utica University. He resides in Utica.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday February 9

Valentine's Day Wine Experience

What: Hosted by Jim Beckman, Regional VP of the American Wine Society. Have fun while you taste and learn about wines that reflect the spirit of the occasion.

Where: The Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St, Syracuse, NY 13202

When: 6 to 8 p.m.

Info: \$12 for members, \$15 for nonmembers



Orders accepted through February 21

Daffodil Days

What: The American Cancer Society is ready to say goodbye to winter! The daffodil represents a campaign that brings hope to cancer patients, their caregivers, and families while providing funding for research and programs.

When: Orders taken through February 21 to be delivered the week of March 20

Info: For flower prices and more information, email robert.elinskas@cancer.org or call 315-741-5409.



February 15 to March 5

Espejos: Clean

What: It's White Lotus meets real life at a resort in Mexico. The Syracuse Stage presents its first bilingual production; an eye-opening story about the ties that bind us together.

Where: Syracuse Stage, 820 E Genesee St, Syracuse, NY 13210

Info: Visit syracusestage.org for ticket information



Saturday February 25

Love & Ladies: Drag Show and Brunch to Benefit the American Heart Association

What: Fabulous queens and tasty brunch for a good cause! Ticket price includes appetizers, a complementary cocktail, cash bar, brunch entree and dessert.

Where: Marriot Syracuse Downtown, 100 E Onondaga St, Syracuse, NY 13202

When: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Info: Tickets start at \$107. Visit www.eventbrite.com for more information.



Sunday February 19

Winterfest

What: Enjoy food trucks, family art classes, craft beer, ice carving demonstrations, yard games, and a human dogsled race! All proceeds benefit Helping Hounds Dog Rescue.

Where: Syracuse Inner Harbor, 328 W Kirkpatrick St, Syracuse, NY 13204

When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Info: Free event admission and free parking.



Sunday February 26

Music & Message: Black History Month - Music by Black Composers

What: Student organists and choral ensembles celebrate Black History Month with a concert in a variety of styles.

Where: Hendricks Chapel, West Zone, Syracuse, NY 13244

When: 4 p.m.

Info: Free



Sunday February 19

Music & Message: EXILE - Malmgren Concert featuring Incantare

What: Incantare explores music of the modern Jewish diaspora and EXILE explores the influences of Italian, German, eastern European and Jewish culture.

Where: Hendricks Chapel, West Zone, Syracuse, NY 13244

When: 4 p.m.

Info: Free



Sunday March 5

Colloca Estate Winery Bridal Show

What: Calling all brides! Enjoy a fashion show partnered by Bliss Bridal & Formal Wear, wedding and bridal vendors, and complementary champagne.

Where: The Fair Haven Event Center at Colloca Estate Winery, 14678 W Bay Rd, Sterling, NY 13156

When: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Info: Tickets are \$10 at the door or online at www.collocawines.com



Please join us in recognizing our five star, amazing and talented Branch Managers!



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