

Central New York's EXCLUSIVE Women's Magazine

S Y R A C U S E
WOMAN
magazine

COVER STORY

**KATHLEEN
STRESS**
**Feeding
New York State**

Special Feature The ripple effect of generosity *For a Good Cause* Curve balls and care bags
Healthy Woman What every woman should know about lung cancer
Healthy Eating The healing power of sharing a meal
Inspire Marybeth Donovan, Christine Makhuli Cotton, Tamika Owens

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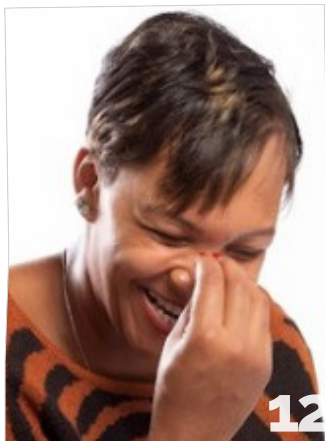
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Katie Hanlon

Contributing to your community

EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING TO GIVE

We all have something special to offer — our time, our talents, our resources, and, most importantly, our hearts. Every one of us has the power to make a difference in our community by contributing. Giving back has been woven into my life since I was a little girl.

It's something my family values deeply, and it's something I'm determined to pass on to my own children. Today, as the chief

community officer at United Way of Central New York, I'm grateful that I get to help others find meaningful ways to give back every single day.

Contributing to the community has been at the heart of United Way of CNY since the very beginning more than a century ago. It's who we are and what we do. We bring people together to identify local needs, find solutions, and create a stronger, more connected community. There truly is a place for everyone to get involved.

As we move into the season of giving, I'm reminded how powerful even the smallest acts of kindness can be. Dropping off a winter coat, reading to a child, or donating a simple bar of soap might not seem like much, but to someone in need, it can mean the world. The beauty of giving back is that it doesn't have to be grand to be meaningful.

At United Way of CNY, we like to say we make it easy to make a difference. Here are just a few ways you can join in and contribute this season:

Care Package Project

A bottle of shampoo. A bar of soap. Simple items that many of us take for granted; but for someone without access to these essentials, they bring dignity and comfort. The CNY Care Package Project collects personal care items and assembles them into kits that are distributed to people in need through local human service agencies. Collections run through November 23 — visit cnycarepackage.com to learn more.

CNY Children's Book Drive

There's something magical about opening a brand-new book, especially for a child. Each December, we distribute more than 5,000 new books to children in our community through the Christmas Bureau Distribution Day event. These books, for ages 0–17, not only spark joy, they can inspire the next generation of readers. We're collecting books through December 14 — visit cnybookdrive.com to help bring that magic to life.

Share the warmth

Here in one of New York's snowiest cities, we all know the comfort of a warm coat on a freezing day. Our Share the Warmth drive collects new and gently used coats, plus new hats, scarves, and gloves, to help our neighbors stay warm all winter long. Donations are distributed across the community through our Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service with the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, in January. Collections run through January 15th — visit warmcny.com for details.

VolunteerCNY

If you've ever wanted to volunteer but weren't sure where to start, VolunteerCNY.org makes it simple. It's a free online resource where local nonprofits post opportunities, everything from one-time events to ongoing projects, and individuals and companies can go on and find something that aligns with their interests. You can search by impact area, location or availability. It's also where we host our annual Day of Caring, the largest single volunteer day in Central New York. However you choose to give your time, there's a perfect fit waiting for you.

Book Buddies

For those who love working with kids, Book Buddies is one of our most heartwarming programs. In partnership with the Syracuse City School District, volunteers spend just an hour a week helping elementary students strengthen their reading skills. We rely on more than 600 volunteers each year and so many tell us it's the highlight of their week. You can learn more or sign up at cnybookbuddies.com.

Whatever way you decide to contribute this year, just know that it will have an impact. As United Way of CNY Board Member Alan Marzullo says in our 2025 Campaign video: "Every dollar, every hour, every act of kindness counts. When you contribute, you're not just helping someone else; you're strengthening your own community."

And that's really what it's all about — connection, compassion, and community. We each have the power to make an impact, right here in CNY. #UnitedWeDoMore

Katie Hanlon, a native Central New Yorker, has been in the non-profit world for over 14 years and is the chief community officer at United Way of Central New York.



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CNY CARE PACKAGE PROJECT

October 1 - November 23, 2025 | cnycarepackage.com

A bar of soap, shampoo, or deodorant. It's the little things that make a big difference to a person in need. Join our annual effort to create 1,000 personal care packages.



CNY CHILDREN'S BOOK DRIVE

November 1 - December 14, 2025 | cnybookdrive.com

Our contribution to the annual Christmas Bureau Distribution Event. Join the effort as we collect, sort, and distribute over 6,000 new books to children ages newborn to 18.

SHARE THE WARMTH

December 1, 2025 - January 15, 2026 | warmcny.com

Our annual winter clothing drive collecting new/gently used coats and new winter accessories for men, women and children in need through the MLK Day of Service.



UNITED FOR MOMS

April 1 - May 3, 2026 | unitedformoms.com

Every mom deserves to feel special on Mother's Day. Join our annual effort to collect personal and self care items for women in need at local programs and shelters.

CNY DAY OF CARING

August 6, 2026 | volunteercny.org

Don't miss the community's biggest day of volunteer service. In 2025, over 1,300 volunteers completed 100+ volunteer activities for local nonprofits.



UNITED WAY
Central New York

Loretto Foundation is 'Sailing Away for a Cause'

The Loretto Foundation held its 17th Annual Hope Celebration, "Sail Away for a Cause," on Oct. 9 at Middle Ages Brewery, raising nearly \$260,000 to fund critical programs and initiatives for Loretto residents and employees. The event featured a live auction, raffle, drinks, food by Meier's Creek and entertainment by the yacht rock group, Gridley Paige AM Gold. Community leaders Charlotte "Chuckie" Holstein and Nancy Kern Eaton were honored at the event, each receiving an award for their work that has uplifted non-profits like Loretto and positively impacted the lives of many in Central New York.





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Photos by Sarah Heppell Photography



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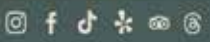
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WOMEN IGNITING THE SPIRIT
OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

FEATURED ENTREPRENEUR

Yarden Carroll
Founder, Crowned Creative Marketing

When Yarden Carroll launched Crowned Creative Marketing in 2022, she envisioned more than a consulting firm — she wanted to create a space where entrepreneurs could find clarity, confidence, and their own authentic voice. As a marketing consultant and growth strategist, Yarden helps coaches, consultants, and creatives develop offers that feel natural and sustainable, rather than forced.

She calls herself an “offer engineer,” a title that perfectly captures her unique mix of artistry and analytical thinking. “I’m a creative at heart, but I think in systems and frameworks,” she explains. “I help people package their brilliance in ways that make sense to them — not in ways they’re told they ‘should.’”

That philosophy grew out of her own experience learning what not to do. Before becoming an entrepreneur, Yarden spent years as an electrical design drafter in the utility industry — a role that left little room for creativity. “It was stable but unfulfilling,” she says. “I realized I was building things for other people’s vision, not my own.”

When her father passed away in 2020, she realized just how much of herself she had lost. “He noticed before he died that I wasn’t creating anymore,” she recalls. “After he passed, it was dark for a while. I had to find my way back.” That loss became her turning point. She returned to school to earn her bachelor’s degree in marketing, determined to merge her creative instincts with her analytical mind. What began as a personal rebirth eventually became a professional calling.

Like many first-time entrepreneurs, Yarden’s early years were unpredictable. She struggled to shift from an employee mindset to owning her role as a business leader, while juggling motherhood, ADHD, and self-doubt. “I always felt like I was too much, too loud, too different,” she says. But over time, she stopped apologizing for that.

Her turning point came after a difficult experience investing in a business coach who promised fast success but delivered little value. The misstep left her with debt and questioning her path. “I wasn’t operating from my values, and it cost me. But it also taught me to trust my own voice.”

That lesson led her back to the WISE Women’s Business Center, where she found both structure and support. “The Accelerate Business Plan Intensive helped me put things into motion,” she says. “I knew I was on the right track, but now I have a plan.”



More than that, she found a community of women who truly saw her. Her WISE counselor has been especially pivotal: “She holds me to the fire. She sees me. It’s hard not to feel poured into in this community.”

Today, Yarden is channeling that same sense of purpose into new ventures, including her upcoming podcast, *Booked and Unbothered*, which explores marketing, mindset, and “the messy middle” of entrepreneurship. She’s also developing consulting services for corporate clients, expanding her reach while staying true to her roots.

Looking ahead, Yarden is preparing to launch her podcast, *Booked and Unbothered*, which will explore marketing, mindset, and the real stories behind entrepreneurship. She’s also expanding into corporate consulting, bringing her message of authenticity and alignment to new audiences. Through every challenge, Yarden has learned that growth doesn’t come from perfection — it comes from persistence. “Fear will always be there,” she says, “but courage is what builds the business.”

WISE HAPPENINGS:

► Check out www.wisecenter.org for a complete list of upcoming events!

Funding Growth: Small Business Path to Capital
Nov 13th, 6 - 8 PM
@ Gordon Student Center, OCC
More info at wisecenter.org

WISE Orientation
Offered Monthly!
Nov 11th, 12 - 1 PM
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More info at wisecenter.org

Building Blocks for Starting Your Business
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CHF honors Patrick Mannion at Gala

The Crouse Health Foundation honored Patrick A. Mannion at the 2025 Tribute Evening Gala on Friday, October 3. Patrick's dedication to the well-being of our region is woven into the very fabric of Crouse Health. While his tenure as chair of the Crouse Health Board of Directors has concluded, his commitment remains steadfast as he continues to serve as a valued board member, ensuring the hospital's enduring strength and vision. Patrick's dedication to public service is further evidenced by his 2024 election to the New York State Board of Regents for the 5th Judicial District, where he will help shape the future of education. Crouse Health Foundation Tribute Evening proceeds of \$750,000 will be used to support the work of Crouse Health Foundation, including purchasing special equipment, underwriting new initiatives and funding educational programs and scholarships. View photos, videos and more at crouse.org/tribute2025.





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The ripple effect of generosity

ONE ACT OF GENEROSITY MAY FEEL SMALL, BUT ITS RIPPLES CAN TOUCH SHORES YOU MAY NEVER SEE

Angela Moonan

Say the word “generosity” out loud. What do you feel? Warmth? Love? Wholeness? Where does your mind go when you hear the word? When I think about the word generosity, my mind immediately goes beyond the idea of writing a check or giving away material possessions. It feels like generosity is far more expansive. Like the way we give our presence in a conversation. Or how we extend trust to someone before they’ve fully proven themselves. Maybe it’s choosing to believe in someone’s potential when they can’t yet see it themselves.

For women, here in Central New York and around the globe, generosity is not a side note to our leadership. It is the essence of it. Whether in boardrooms, nonprofits, classrooms or kitchens, the women of Syracuse and beyond are showing that generosity is not something extra. It is how we lead, how we build trust and how we create balance that lasts.

And at the center of it all is Grace—the ability to give without condition, to meet people where they are, and to whisper the invitation every woman longs to hear: “Come as you are.”

Redefining generosity

Generosity has often been defined too narrowly—mostly in terms of financial philanthropy. Albeit that’s wonderful, too. But when you expand the definition, you begin to see the many forms it takes in everyday life:

- Generosity of time. Sitting down with a young professional over coffee to mentor her through a career decision.
- Generosity of spirit. Offering encouragement, compassion or a listening ear when someone needs it most.
- Generosity of trust. Giving someone the chance to lead a project or initiative—even when you could do it yourself more quickly—because you believe in their growth.
- Generosity of presence. Putting down the phone, closing the laptop and being fully there for your children, your colleagues or your community.

Grace is what makes these forms of generosity possible. It’s what allows us to give without keeping score, to forgive shortcomings and to create spaces where others feel they don’t need to prove or polish themselves before being welcomed. Grace is generosity in motion.

Generosity as leadership strength

There’s a misconception that generosity in leadership is somehow soft, or that it comes at the expense of results. I’ve seen the opposite to be true.

Take, for example, CH Insurance in downtown Syracuse. Over the past decade, their leadership leaned into a culture of generosity—not only toward clients and vendors, but internally, toward employees. The result? A workplace built on loyalty, trust, and resilience.

Their generosity of listening, of encouragement and of opportunity created an environment where people wanted to stay, grow and give their best.

The company’s brand promise I created for them nearly 15 years ago, “In Your Corner,” isn’t just a tagline. It’s lived out generously every day, with grace at its core, and it shows on the balance sheet as much as it does in community trust.

That’s the hidden power of generosity: it’s not subtraction. It multiplies. A generous leader doesn’t lose by giving away credit, support, or time. She gains influence, trust, and a team that is willing to go the extra mile because they feel seen and valued.

“True generosity doesn’t demand self-sacrifice; it emerges from self-worth and the grace we extend to ourselves first.”

Continue on page 18



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Moonan is a storyteller, strategist and speaker whose work centers on the power of trust, generosity and presence to transform leadership and community impact. She helps leaders and organizations define and align around their promises, tell stories that inspire action and create cultures built on trust. Ready to explore how generosity and trust can ripple through your own leadership? Connect with Angela at AngelaMoonan.com.

“Healthy generosity is not about pouring from an empty cup—
it’s about giving from balance, not burnout.”—Angela Moonan



The ripple effect of generosity FROM PAGE 17

The health connection

Countless studies show that giving—whether through time, resources or kindness—reduces stress, increases happiness and even lengthens our lives. But it comes with a critical caveat: we must give from balance, not burnout.

Women in leadership often carry heavy loads. We give at work, we give at home, we give in our communities. Without boundaries, generosity can tip into depletion. The healthiest, happiest leaders I know are the ones who have learned that generosity is not about pouring from an empty cup. It's about creating practices of rest, reflection and self-care so that giving becomes regenerative instead of exhausting.

Grace plays a role here too. Grace with ourselves when we can't do everything. Grace in saying "no" when it's not aligned. Grace in remembering that the most powerful generosity is sustainable, not self-sacrificial. Burnout is not a badge of honor, despite what our culture has ingrained in us. Burnout is a result of decisions stacking up that were not made from a place of self-worth. True generosity doesn't demand self-sacrifice; it emerges from self-worth and the grace we extend to ourselves first.

Generosity is healthiest when it is aligned with values and purpose. Saying "yes" to the causes and conversations that matter most—and having the courage to say "no" when it doesn't—is an act of generosity to yourself, and ultimately, to everyone around you.

"That, too, is a gift we can extend: Come as you are. You are already enough. You already belong."

Trust and generosity

If there's one thing I've learned in my own journey, it's this: the most generous gift a leader can extend is trust.

Trust says: I see you. I believe in you. I'm willing to stand alongside you even before the proof is visible.

When trust is extended with grace, it tells people: Come as you are. You don't have to be perfect to be welcomed, believed in or included. And grace whispers alongside generosity: Come as you are. You are already enough. You already belong. That, too, is a gift we can extend.

Generosity in practice

One story I'll never forget is that of Thuy and her son, Chip, residents of The Chadwick Residence—a place of safety and new beginnings for women and children escaping domestic abuse. Through our non-profit, Music for the Mission, we organized a concert at the Redhouse Arts Center to benefit The Chadwick Residence. That night was a masterclass in community generosity.

- The Redhouse Arts Center donated their theater.
- SubCat Studios donated and ran sound equipment.
- Local musicians donated their time and talent to accompany me on stage.
- Chinatown Furniture stepped in to fully furnish Thuy and Chip's new apartment.
- Stanley Law contributed airtime through Music for the Mission to raise awareness.

Together, we raised thousands of dollars to support women and children in transition.

That evening wasn't about money. It was about an entire community saying, "Come as you are. You belong here. You deserve a fresh start. We're in this together."

The ripple effects of that generosity are still being felt today—not only by Thuy and Chip, but by everyone who was touched by the spirit of that night.

"Healthy generosity is not about pouring from an empty cup—it's about giving from balance, not burnout."

Generosity, balance and boundaries

It's important to acknowledge that generosity without boundaries can drain us. Many women I meet in leadership roles wrestle with this tension. They want to give to every cause, attend every fundraiser, mentor every young leader. But true generosity is not indiscriminate. It is intentional.

Here are three ways I've seen healthy leaders practice generous balance:

1. Align with purpose. Give where your values are strongest. If your passion is healthcare, education or the arts, concentrate your time and energy there.
2. Set time and energy limits. Boundaries don't mean you're less generous. They ensure that your generosity is sustainable.
3. Model self-trust and grace. When leaders show they can trust themselves—and give themselves grace to be human—they give others permission to do the same.

Generosity with boundaries isn't smaller generosity. It's wiser generosity.

A call to women leaders

Every woman reading this—whether you're a CEO, a nonprofit volunteer, an artist, a teacher, or a mother—has the power to embody generosity in leadership.

Your generosity doesn't need to look like anyone else's. Maybe it's mentoring one young woman who reminds you of yourself. Maybe it's writing a note of encouragement to a colleague. Maybe it's taking a stand for integrity in a tough business decision.

Generosity is leadership in its purest form. It's the quiet choice that says: I will give, even when I don't have to. I will trust, even before the evidence. I will show up, fully present, even when it's easier not to. And grace whispers alongside generosity: Come as you are. You are already enough. You already belong. That, too, is a gift we can extend.

The ripple effect

The truth about generosity is this: you never know how far it will go. One act of generosity might feel small—a kind word, a moment of listening, a donation that seems modest. But generosity doesn't stop at the point of giving. It ripples.

Like skipping a stone across Skaneateles Lake, the first splash is just the beginning. The rings expand outward, touching shorelines you may never see. That's the magic of generosity. It multiplies. It transforms. It leaves a legacy that outlives us.

As women leaders, as healthy women, as generous women—we have the power to create ripples that change the very fabric of our communities. And it all begins with one generous choice, extended with grace, and rooted in the invitation that transforms everything: Come as you are. SWM



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KATHLEEN STRESS

Feeding New York State

FEEDING NEW YORK STATE'S LEADER
DRAWS FROM THOSE WHO'VE SHAPED
HER LIFE

Jeremiah S. Papineau

Kathleen Stress has understood the importance of giving back since childhood. She remembers watching her parents give to their church donation basket each week — something that left a lasting impression, if only at first, in the back of her mind.

"[It] was something I never thought about until I was older," she said.

However, it was always there, shaping her outlook on the world.

"My parents instilled in me 'the walk a mile in their shoes' philosophy and those values have always guided me," she said.

Kathleen grew up in a middle-class family on a budget, in which her parents raised four children. Her father was an avid gardener and her mother would vacuum seal or can harvested items to enjoy in the winter. The thriftiness she witnessed stayed with her as much as the lesson of generosity.

"Being a good steward of funding stems from my parents' lifestyle," she said. "Sometimes in life, actions teach more than words."

Kathleen carried these teachings into adulthood. They became essential tools as she began her path to her current role as deputy director and interim executive director of Feeding New York State, a nonprofit serving as the statewide association of 10 regional food banks "to alleviate hunger in New York by supporting the state's network of food banks and advocating for effective public policy and resources."

"In my current role, I help advance statewide initiatives that support all 10 food banks by securing grants and fostering connections with regional farmers and dairy producers," she said. "Helping to provide additional produce along with program funding support is amazing to be a part of."

Though her ability to make an impact is on a much larger scale today, her beginnings were humble. Kathleen worked her way through college in child development, at first to earn money, but realizing along the way that she loved working with kids — and was good at it. When she moved to Syracuse, she was hired at The Salvation Army to lead their After School Child Care Programs. As she got to know the children, her empathy grew.

Photo by Alice G. Patterson

Continued on page 22

The impact of giving FROM PAGE 23

“Many times, during those years, I had children share with me that they might not have enough food at home,” she said. Snacks were available during the program, giving staff the ability to send home extra fruit and cookies. The Salvation Army also offered a food pantry where parents could access items.

“I have an indelible memory of two young children who were so delighted to pick out drinkable yogurts as part of their food package, those smiles were undeniable and to this day I get goosebumps thinking of how such a small thing was such a great deal to them,” she said.

While she became familiar with the agency’s food pantry, the idea of a food bank — an organization that collects food items on a larger scale and distributes them to pantries — was not yet on her radar. That would soon change.

As she marked the completion of a decade with The Salvation Army — during which she gained a wealth of knowledge and experience — she found herself embarking on her next chapter, a career at Food Bank of Central New York. She was hired in 2007 to assist with policy development, staffing plans and oversight of a new strategic plan. The work included overseeing the organization’s move to a new distribution center in 2010 while serving as chief operating officer and eventually led to her becoming executive director when her mentor retired. Kathleen remained in that role, continuing her predecessor’s work for seven years, helping to grow the food bank’s brand, mission and human service components.



"Building on the strategic groundwork of my predecessor, we deepened its community relationships and strengthened the capacity of our partner agencies," said Kathleen. "What I'm most proud of is how we elevated the organization's brand and nurtured a talented team — many of whom I saw emerging as strong leaders and who continue to carry the work forward today."

Her impact grew when she joined Feeding New York State, where she now supports statewide initiatives across all 10 food banks.

"This role allows me to apply experiences throughout my career while furthering impact beyond New York State," she said.

Feeding a need

The mission at Feeding New York State is leading a unified effort for a hunger-free New York, said Kathleen. Since its inception in 2004 — originally as the Food Bank Association of New York State and later rebranding to align with Feeding America — its mission has centered on three main pillars: Advocacy, Produce Procurement and Food Recovery.

"We have led a remarkable advocacy effort," said Kathleen. "Since 2020, New York State has consecutively increased funding for anti-hunger organizations through 2025. In tandem, our Produce Program has distributed 198 million pounds of fresh produce across the network, strengthening partnerships with small and mid-sized growers and producers."

"Most recently, we celebrated reaching 63 million pounds of recovered edible food through our Food Recovery Program," she added.

The organization partners with farmers and the food industry to encourage donations to food banks, fosters relationships with all levels of government, educates the public, and collaborates with other organizations to fight hunger. That collaboration is increasingly vital as nonprofits face cuts at the federal and state levels.

"We have been very successful in securing funding that supports these efforts and allows our members to have access to additional funding and food resources," she said.

However, as governmental funding decreases, nonprofits like Feeding New York State will rely more on support from individual donors.

"This will continue to be critical as federal programs have been terminated or dismantled," she said.

How to make a difference

Regardless of where things stand at the state and federal levels, the impact that can be made locally by individuals can be significant. Some may question whether they can make a difference. Kathleen said the sage advice of an African proverb can help them to understand the impact they can make: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

"Together, as community members, we can make a difference," she said.

While some may feel you need to donate lots of money to help a cause or make an impact, Kathleen said that's not the only way. "If the average person can dedicate 40 hours throughout the year to a cause they care about, that organization will truly appreciate and benefit from their support," she said.

There are countless opportunities to get involved, she added. The key is to discover the role that brings you the most satisfaction.

"That time investment is so critical to the child you read a book to, to the family that receives a food package, to the senior who has nourishment and companionship," she said. "Your dedicated time is so impactful to that individual and that organization."

"It may seem cliché, but time is a treasure," she added.

Volunteering is meaningful not only for the organization but also for the volunteer, offering valuable social interaction and proven health benefits.

The important thing is to find a way to give back that fits your life and interests, knowing every effort makes a difference.

"Find your why," she said.

Outside her position with Feeding New York State, Kathleen fosters rescue dogs through Seventh Heaven Rescue.

"I love to foster a dog to give it a great start," she said. "Even when I can't foster, I still help — with transport arrivals, emergency placements, or application reviews. Volunteers are vital to rescue success. Fostering gives a dog a safe home, keeps them out of a shelter and helps them learn to thrive."

"Talent is just as worthy as monetary support; at times it's more valuable," she continued, adding many nonprofit organizations use volunteers to enhance their programming.

"If you can dedicate your gift of time to help, that is a valuable gift," she said.

And, if you are able to give back monetarily or with physical donations like canned goods, blankets or clothing, those contributions, too, do not have to be in large amounts.

"Every dollar matters — one dollar alone may not buy a meal, but when combined with a few others, it can," said Kathleen. "Skipping just one cup of coffee and donating that amount to The Salvation Army Red Kettle helps fund housing, food, and transportation for those in need."

She remembered one senior citizen who sent in \$2 each year, saying it was all she could give.

"Her gift, joined with others, helped expand our programs," said Kathleen. "No amount is too small to make a lasting difference. Even the smallest gifts can create a big impact."

If you're interested in making a gift or volunteering in your community, Kathleen suggests reaching out to an organization to learn more about them. If you're interested in learning more about Feeding New York State, visit www.feedingnys.org. swm

**"The mission at Feeding New York State is leading a unified effort for a hunger-free New York"—
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Iris Buczkowski

Happy Holidays

The Art of Giving

The holidays are my favorite time of year for several reasons! I find that no matter where I go people are generally happier, caring and more helpful because that is the true spirit of the season. There is simply just something magical about it. Webster Merriam defines philanthropy as the desire to promote the welfare of others, expressed especially by the generous donation of money to good causes. I think it is safe to say that most people agree it is good to help people and causes that need additional assistance and support, but there is no one way to do it.

In my practice I am often tasked with helping clients achieve their goal of leaving a legacy. Most times legacy planning is centered on their families, but several people have joined a continued movement to leave a legacy to help others. Charitable giving has become very popular over the past few years. What most people don't know is that you have ways to leverage your money to make a more meaningful impact to those you wish to support. A few examples would include the following:

1. **Charitable Trusts:** A charitable trust allows you to place assets into trust and generate an income to yourself while you are alive, or to your charitable recipients with the promise for them to receive the principal in the future time of your passing. This is popular for those with the good fortune to have highly appreciated securities in their portfolio and can use these assets for tax planning purposes. The most common types of charitable trusts are called remainder trusts and lead trusts, with the difference being how you structure the income derived from the trust while you are alive.
2. **Donor Advised Funds:** Donor advised funds have become increasing popular because they are easy to administer and do not require the use of an attorney to establish them. Many custodians have a donor advised fund platform that allows you to work with your financial advisor to open an account where you may choose several charities you wish to support. This allows you to make charitable contributions with more flexible terms and grow the contributions you make over time through investing in the financial markets.
3. **Using Life Insurance:** Many people have policies they have taken with accumulated cash value they may not need or where premium payments are no longer due. You can donate life insurance to a charity and take a deduction for the gift in the present. When you pass away, the charitable entity receives the death benefit. Philanthropists of any age can do this as part of their planning. For example, a healthy 40-year-old person could buy a \$100,000 life insurance policy with an annual premium of \$1,000. The life expectancy of this person may be 45 years. If they live to be 85, the \$45,000 they paid during their lifetime will give a gift of \$100,000 at their passing for a gain on their investment of \$55,000. This can be a very effective way to give if your goal is to make a larger, longer-term impact.
4. **Using Employer Sponsored Charitable Programs.** Many companies offer their employees the opportunity to give to charity through payroll deduction. This makes giving very easy because it is done automatically as you receive your paycheck. Inquire if this is available to you and if it is not, ask your human resource department if they would consider setting this up as a benefit to their employees as it will likely cost them very little or no money at all. Sometimes you can donate to a general agency that supports many smaller not-for-profit companies in your local community or donate directly to agencies of your choosing.

A core tenant of how I live is with the belief that you cannot get ahead in life unless you give back. Money is not the only way to do this because you also have your time and talent. If you combine the three you accomplish what science says you get from philanthropy – a healthier mind and body experience because our whole being medically benefits from the psychological impact of giving back. Along with the science though is the art you can create. You can use some or all of these strategies and if you do you will complete a beautiful masterpiece that will live far beyond you with your personal style embedded in it. That is the true art of giving back.

Iris Buczkowski is the founder of Birch Wealth Management (birchwealth.com). Original content provided by Iris is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as investment advice.

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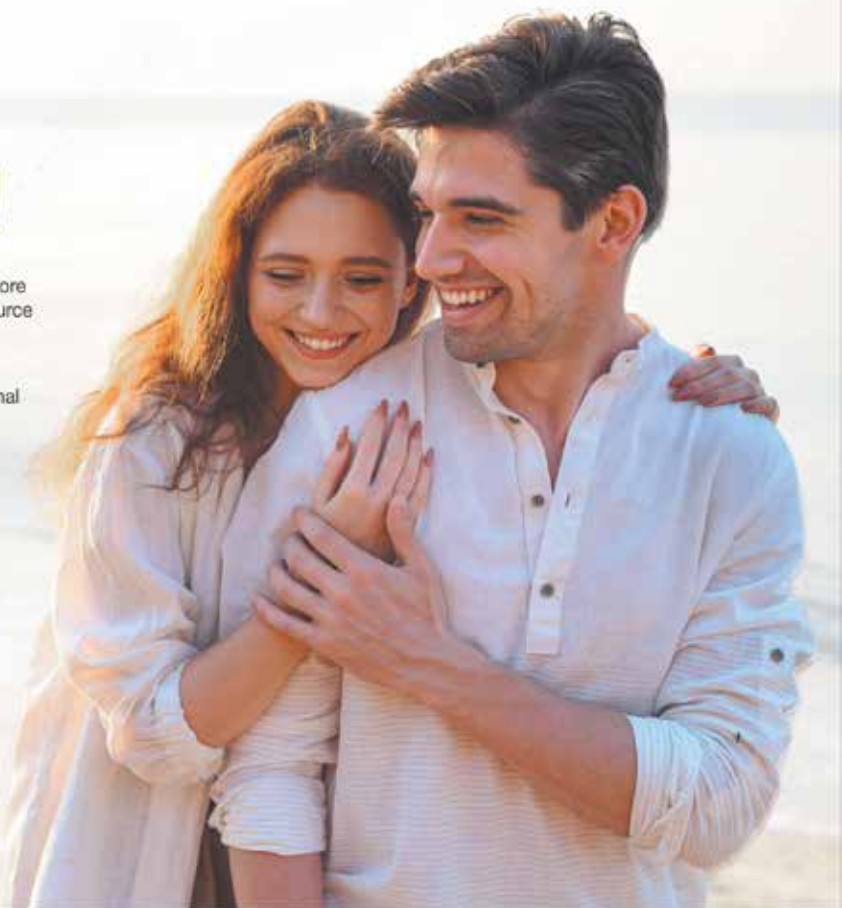
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A FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO HELP OTHERS THROUGH HARDSHIP

Elena Ehrhart



Life for Jennifer Saterlee has been an unending curveball that I found myself understanding completely. Originally from Corning, Jennifer never imagined herself moving up to the Syracuse area – something I never imagined for myself either as a fellow Corning transplant. Her surprised laughter rings out when she discovers we are from the same small town; even more so when she learns who my family is and realizes she graduated with my oldest uncle and rode the school bus with my mother. Small world, right?

Jennifer moved to the area after graduating from Utica College with her husband a little more than 20 years ago. Since then, life has thrown her another curveball: her two sons, Jack and Noah were born with a primary immunodeficiency among other health issues. She then had to change her career goals; from a full-time occupational therapist, Jennifer found herself needing to change her hours to part-time to

take care of them. This included trips to children's hospitals in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Albany, Rochester and of course, Syracuse at the drop of a hat. Despite their health challenges, both Jack and Noah have made strides to find the positive with their parents at their side.

"Something I've always tried to teach my kids is the importance of service," Jennifer said, beaming. "That's kind of how the whole thing came about."

The "thing" Jennifer referenced is the charity Noah started eight years ago, when he was just 12 years old: Noah's Care Bags. What began as a project for his Bar Mitzvah after Jennifer encouraged him to take on something meaningful has turned into so much more.

After noticing the struggles his own family went through when they found themselves in the hospital for extended periods of time without their toiletries and other living essentials, Noah decided he wanted to

collect items to create what he calls 'care bags.' The bags include toiletries, a sweet treat and a nice note from Noah, letting the recipient know they are not alone in their challenging moments.

"We never imagined it would get this big," Jennifer said.

After reaching out to friends and family on Facebook, Jennifer and Noah were able to put together and distribute the first 200 bags. Now, the charity is on the verge of breaking 10,000 care bag barrier.

Aside from aiding in the gathering of supplies and donations from loved ones, community members and fellow organizations, Jennifer also helped Noah manage the financial side of the charity with the help of some financial advisors she reached out to for support.

"I really wasn't sure about it," Jennifer said with a laugh. "I didn't want to do anything illegal."

Now that Noah is older and in college, he runs the charity himself with his parents still supporting him in his mission to provide for other struggling families.

"We remind him every now and then to do a social media post, but other than that it's really his charity," she said.

While it could be easy to be a nervous mother, Jennifer has learned to take a step back as her sons get older; still there for support and when needed, but able to let her boys go. It has not been an easy task, but watching Jack

and Noah make their own decisions and forge their own paths in life is all worth it.

Despite the challenges she and her family have overcome, Jennifer is grateful to be able to see the positive in every situation. Her journey

has shown her the importance of finding inner strength and using it to be able to speak up, not only for herself, but for her children, too.

"I've repressed a lot of emotional trauma from all of this and I think the bags have really helped me. There's always a positive, you just have to look for it."

Looking back on all that she has learned from what she and her family have been through, Jennifer has realized that she has knowledge and the courage to ask questions.

"It can be hard to push people who are in higher positions than you, whether medical or educational, but they need to learn too. I'm a part of the

team, not just a consumer. I've changed a lot as I've grown and I'm continuing to find activities out of my comfort zone."

Although her children are almost grown, Jennifer continues to share the knowledge she gained advocating for children with medical hardships, including challenging the kids' school district to support Noah when he was sick by providing better access to educational resources. And she has seen how her actions have impacted others.

"I recently heard that another family has been asking about the same resources we needed and they are now able to get them," she said. "It isn't just about Noah. It's about every kid after and teaching others." *SWM*



What every woman should know about lung cancer

Stefania Morbidini, M.D.



When most women consider deadly cancers, breast cancer is likely the first to come to mind. However, few are aware that lung cancer is actually the deadliest cancer in the United States among women and men. It claims more lives annually than breast, colon, and prostate cancers combined. While that's a grim statistic, there is hope.

Improvements in prevention, early detection, and advanced treatment are altering the meaning of a lung cancer diagnosis today. The American Lung Association's (ALA) 2024 State of Lung Cancer Report found that lung cancer survival rates have improved 26% in just five years and the national five-year survival rate is now at 28%.

That improvement comes as a result of advancements in early detection through CT scan imaging for lung cancer screening, the development of targeted therapies for specific genetic mutations, and the widespread use of immunotherapy and modern radiation techniques. Together they are altering the meaning of a lung cancer diagnosis today.

Pay attention to your health

Early lung cancer detection greatly enhances survival rates. However, it can be difficult to diagnose early-stage lung cancer before symptoms appear. This again highlights the importance of performing regular screening for detection of lung cancer which is often curable in its early stages. In further efforts to increase early detection, women need to be aware of lung-cancer warning signs such as:

- A persistent cough that last more than 3 weeks or worsens over time
- Chest or back pain that worsens with deep breathing or coughing
- Coughing up blood
- Shortness of breath even during light activity
- Wheezing or a high-pitched whistling sound when breathing
- Hoarseness or a change in voice such as a raspy or hoarse tone
- Unexplained weight loss or fatigue
- Recurrent bronchitis or pneumonia
- Swelling of the neck or face

These symptoms can easily be ignored or blamed on less serious medical issues, which can lead to delays in diagnosis. Women need to understand that the persistence of these symptoms definitely calls for a doctor's appointment. Follow your gut. If something feels off, trust your instincts and ask for testing.

Knowing the risks

Smoking significantly increases the risk of developing lung cancer and is linked to about 80 to 90% of lung cancer deaths. Quitting smoking significantly lowers that risk and those with a history of heavy smoking should talk to their doctor about getting screened. Even non-smokers can develop lung cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, about 10 to 20% of lung cancer cases in the United States occur in people who have never smoked.

Risk factors for lung cancer also include:

- Exposure to secondhand smoke
- Radon gas exposure
- Family history of lung cancer
- Previous radiation treatment to the chest at a young age
- Workplace exposure to toxins such as asbestos or arsenic
- Exposure to fine particle matter and air pollution
- Hormonal and genetic factors may also play a role

The good news is that many of these risk factors can be reduced or eliminated with knowledge and action.

Preventing lung cancer

The best preventive action is to never start smoking or quit as quickly as possible. Even after many years of smoking, quitting leads to significant reductions in risk over time. Smoking cessation programs, counseling, and nicotine replacement therapy all help.

Other steps to reduce risk include:

- Testing your home for radon with do-it-yourself kits
- Avoiding secondhand smoke with smoke-free homes, vehicles, and workplaces
- Using protective equipment at work if you work around chemicals or dust
- Keeping lungs strong with regular exercise, a balanced diet, and managing chronic respiratory conditions like COPD or asthma
- Reducing exposure to air pollution from heavy traffic areas
- Using indoor air filtration if needed

Lung cancer screening saves lives

One of the greatest advances in treatment for lung cancer care is low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) screening. Because lung cancer can progress unnoticed, LDCT allows doctors to detect disease early, when it's most curable.

The U. S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends annual lung cancer screening with LDCT in adults 50 to 80 years old who are:

- Current smokers with a history of 20 pack-years or more (i.e., one pack a day for 20 years or two packs a day for 10 years, etc.)
- Former 20-pack year smokers who quit within the past 15 years

If you meet those criteria, LDCT screening is one of the most important preventive steps you can take.

Why screening matters

A low-dose CT uses far less radiation than with standard CT scans and finds abnormalities in the lung, including nodules that are too small to be detected on a chest x-ray. Early detection of lung cancer dramatically increases survival rates. Research shows low-dose CT screening can reduce lung cancer deaths by up to 20% in high-risk individuals.

Participating sites such as HOA's Lungs for Life Program in East Syracuse and Camillus, offer low-dose CT scans as part of a coordinated care program. Yearly screening is reimbursed by the majority of insurance companies including Medicare for people who qualify. For patients without insurance or those choosing to pay directly screenings generally cost around \$250, which may vary geographically.

The HOA "Lungs for Life" program

The Lungs for Life program offered by Hematology-Oncology Associates of Central New York (HOA) makes lung screening convenient and easy.

It offers:

- Annual LDCT scans for eligible individuals
- Accredited imaging in East Syracuse and Camillus
- Help with insurance coordination and low-cost self-pay options
- Navigation to guide patients through scheduling, results and follow-up
- Ongoing monitoring for those with identified benign lung nodules
- Free community screening events during Lung Cancer Awareness Month*

Treatment advances provide hope

Early detection and intervention of lung cancer are often curative. Non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) occurs in approximately 85% of cases, and small cell lung cancer (SCLC) is less common but more aggressive.

Treatment depends on the lung cancer's stage, type, and genetic makeup. At HOA, care is personalized and multidisciplinary, combining:

- Surgery for early-stage disease
- Radiation therapy, including CyberKnife®, a highly precise, noninvasive treatment available exclusively at HOA in Central New York
- Targeted therapies that block specific cancer-causing mutations
- Immunotherapies that use the body's immune system to fight the cancer
- Chemotherapy often used strategically in combination with other treatments

Opportunities for clinical trials are also important because they provide access to next-generation treatments before they are available to the general population. Supportive services such as nutrition counseling, rehabilitation, and emotional support also are integral to every care plan.

Lung cancer is no longer a hopeless diagnosis. With awareness, early discovery, and modern treatments, more and more women are living and even thriving beyond treatment.

This Lung Cancer Awareness Month, take charge of your lung health. Talk with your provider, learn about your risks, and schedule your screening. Awareness may just save your life. *SWM*

Dr. Stefania Morbidini is a board-certified radiation oncologist at Hematology-Oncology Associates of CNY.

**The 2025 Free Lung Cancer Screening offered by HOA in partnership with CRA Imaging follows USPSTF guidelines and is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 8, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at HOA's East Syracuse and Camillus offices. Appointments are required by calling 315.472.7405, extension 1301.*

The healing power of sharing a meal

Chef Eric Rose



Life has a way of knocking us down — sometimes it's illness, sometimes loss, or simply one of those seasons that feels heavier than we can carry on our own. In those moments, words of encouragement are valuable, but there's something timeless and deeply human about showing up with food. A warm casserole, a loaf of bread, or even a simple dessert can speak volumes: You're not alone. You are loved. We're in this together.

Food nourishes more than just the body — it nourishes the soul. When someone is sick, overwhelmed, or grieving, a meal can take one burden off their plate while adding comfort to their day. The simple act of heating up chicken noodle soup can feel like a hug in a bowl.

What's beautiful is that these meals often carry memories too. A grandmother's casserole recipe, a neighbor's famous cookies, or even a pot of chili can remind someone of home and familiarity at a time when their world feels upside down. It's not about perfection — it's about presence.

Organizing a meal train — where friends, family, or neighbors sign up to bring meals over a period of time — is one of the most practical and heartfelt ways to support loved ones during challenging seasons. It ensures they're not only eating but also reminded daily that people care.

Meal trains aren't just for grief or sickness either. They're a blessing for new parents adjusting to sleepless nights, caregivers balancing countless responsibilities, or families going through a major life transition. At its heart, a meal train is community made tangible — people showing up, one dish at a time.

Tips for a successful meal train

Keep it simple. Choose recipes that travel well and reheat easily.

Communicate. Check dietary needs (allergies, vegetarian, gluten-free).

Label everything. Include reheating instructions, portion sizes, and even whether it's freezer friendly.

Add small touches. A side salad, a loaf of bread, or a little dessert can go a long way.

Think practical. Disposable containers can save the family from worrying about returning dishes.

The best meals aren't the fanciest — they're the ones made with love and practicality in mind. Here are three tried-and-true recipes perfect for sharing. Each one is easy to prepare, comforting, and guaranteed to bring a little light to someone's day.

Imagine how powerful it is: a mother recovering from surgery who doesn't have to cook, a grieving family who feels cared for at their dinner table, or a new parent who finally eats a warm meal between diaper changes. Your dish may seem simple to you, but to them it might feel like a lifeline.

When life gets hard, meals become more than just food — they become acts of love. They remind people that they don't walk through struggles alone. Whether it's a pot of soup, a baked casserole, or a plate of brownies, your effort will linger in their memory long after the dishes are gone.

So next time someone you care about is facing life's challenges, consider organizing a meal train. Because while food may not solve everything, it certainly makes the journey a little lighter — and a whole lot warmer. SWM

The perfect chicken noodle soup

Yield: 4-6 servings

A classic comfort that heals from the inside out.

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsp olive oil	2 cups egg noodles or (frozen cheese filled tortellini)
1 medium onion, diced	1 tsp dried thyme
3 carrots, peeled and sliced	1 tsp parsley
3 celery stalks, sliced	Salt & pepper to taste
3 garlic cloves, minced	Juice of half a lemon (optional, for brightness)
8 cups chicken broth	
2 cups cooked chicken (shredded, rotisserie works great)	

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large pot, heat olive oil. Add onion, carrots, celery, and garlic. Cook until softened, about 5 minutes.
2. Pour in chicken broth and bring to a boil. Add noodles and cook until tender.
3. Stir in chicken, thyme, parsley, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Finish with a squeeze of lemon for freshness and add additional water if needed.

Tip: Pack in a container with crackers or bread for a complete gift.

Chicken and tater tot casserole

Yield: 4 servings

Hearty, filling, and freezer-friendly — ideal for meal trains.

INGREDIENTS

4 Tbsp unsalted butter	1 cup whole milk
2 carrots, cut into ½-inch-thick rounds	3 dashes of Frank's Hot Sauce
2 stalks celery, cut into ¼-inch half-moons	4 cups shredded cooked chicken
1 onion, chopped	3 cups frozen potato tots, such as Tater Tots, thawed
Garlic powder, kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper	1 tsp fresh thyme leaves
¼ cup all-purpose flour	
2 cups chicken broth	

Continued on page 36



The healing power of sharing a meal FROM PAGE 35

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F.
2. Melt the butter in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat until hot.
3. Add the carrots, celery and onions and season with 1 teaspoon salt and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are golden, about 12 minutes. Stir in the flour and then whisk in the broth, hot sauce and milk and bring to a boil, whisking. Boil until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes.
4. Stir in the chicken. Transfer to a 2-quart baking dish.
5. Pulse the tots in a food processor with the thyme until medium ground. Scatter over the top of the casserole and bake until the filling is bubbling and the topping is golden and crisp, 20 to 25 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

Tip: Deliver with foil on top so it's easy to reheat in the oven.

Easy chocolate chip blondies

Because sometimes dessert really is the best medicine.

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsalted butter, melted	1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup brown sugar, packed	$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder
1 large egg	$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
1 tsp vanilla extract	1 cup chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8x8-inch baking pan.
2. Stir together butter and brown sugar until smooth. Add egg and vanilla.
4. Fold in flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix until just combined.
5. Stir in chocolate chips. Spread batter evenly in the pan.
6. Bake 20–25 minutes until golden brown. Cool before cutting.

Tip: Wrap in parchment, tie with a ribbon, and it instantly becomes a thoughtful gift.



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MARY BETH DONOVAN



Finding purpose through paws

Janelle M. Davis

When Mary Beth Donovan's husband Bill passed away after 50 years together, she faced a choice: curl up in a ball and do nothing, or find a way to pay forward the comfort she'd received during her darkest days. The answer came in the form of a four-year-old black lab named Bruce, with a constantly wagging tail and an uncanny ability to know exactly what people need.

An unexpected beginning

Mary Beth's journey into pet therapy began years earlier while volunteering at Francis House, a local hospice facility. One day, a woman walked in with a golden retriever wearing a bandana around its neck. Curious, Mary Beth asked about the dog and learned it was a therapy dog, not a service dog or emotional support animal, but a companion trained to bring comfort to others.

"I didn't do anything with that information until after Bill passed away," Mary Beth explained. But she never forgot that encounter.

Bruce originally belonged to Mary Beth's daughter Lauren, who lives nearby in Syracuse. When Bill got sick, something remarkable happened. The playful lab who had spent countless hours wrestling with Bill and swimming in the lake suddenly changed.

He became gentler, more present, standing quietly by Bill's side instead of demanding attention. "Bruce went from wrestling on the floor with my husband all the time to just being there with him," Mary Beth said. "It's like they know." On the day Bill died, Bruce was right there on the bed with him.

Turning grief into purpose

After Bill's death, Mary Beth remembered that therapy dog at Francis House. She thought about how much Bruce had helped both her and Lauren through their grief by just by being there, providing companionship and unconditional love in their suddenly quiet homes.

"I'm thinking when my husband died," Mary Beth said. "I can roll up in a ball and just do nothing, or I can pay it forward and do something to add a little happiness to somebody else's day."

She contacted Pet Partners, a nationwide organization with a local Central New York chapter. The process wasn't simple; Bruce needed training and evaluation before becoming certified. He attended Lone Duck training with Bobby Owens for a month, followed by a refresher course before his final evaluation. In April 2025, Mary Beth and Bruce officially became a Pet Partners therapy team.

Making a difference, one tail wag at a time

Since then, the pair has visited hospitals, schools and college campuses throughout Central New York. Syracuse University even has its own dog therapy office in the Barnes Center, dedicated to helping stressed students. At Le Moyne College's library, Bruce saw 72 kids in just an hour and a half.

Students have often told Mary Beth how homesick they are and how much they miss their own dogs, describing the emotional meetings they have with Bruce.

Some visits were lighthearted, like the medical student at Upstate who hugged Bruce so tightly that Mary Beth couldn't tell where the student's dark hair ended and Bruce's black fur began. Others carry profound weight.

At St. Joseph's Hospital, a family stopped Mary Beth in the hallway. Their father had just emerged from a month in intensive care and missed his dog more than anything. The man, barely conscious, moved his hand over the bed to pet Bruce. He passed away shortly after they left.

A team effort

Lauren remains Bruce's primary owner, as she didn't complete the training and evaluation required to take him on therapy visits. But she's an essential part of the team, what they jokingly call being Bruce's "co-parents."



"When I put his bandana on and go pick him up, my daughter says, 'Come on, Bruce, you gotta go and volunteer, make someone's day,'" Mary Beth said with a smile. "And he just knows."

After each visit, Mary Beth returns Bruce to Lauren and shares the stories of their day - the homesick college student who'd just lost her black lab, the patient in the surgical waiting room, the countless smiles and moments of peace Bruce provided.

"It helps Lauren hearing the stories," Mary Beth said. "And, selfishly, this helps me too."

A glass half full

Mary Beth, who holds a degree in gerontology and child and

family studies from Syracuse University, has always been drawn to service work. But this particular form of volunteering stands out because it helps her as much as those she visits.

"When I go to bed at night, I ask, did I do one good thing today? Did I put a smile on someone's face?" she said. "Instead of sitting here feeling sad for myself, I try to turn it and say, let me do something for someone else."

Bruce, named after Bruce Springsteen, naturally, isn't perfect. He's an energetic four-year-old who's president of the "Red Ball Club" at Carm's Dog House of Cicero, where he maintains possession of his favorite toy. But, when he's wearing his therapy bandana, something shifts. He becomes exactly what each person needs.

For Mary Beth, who'd never been a "dog person" before Bruce entered their lives, the transformation has been profound. After losing the person she'd been with for 60 years, since eighth grade, she's found purpose in helping others navigate their own difficult moments.

"My glass is half full, not half empty," she said firmly. "You can turn it around. Even though you might be sad, you can do something for someone else to help you get through the grief."

And, with Bruce by her side, tail wagging, that's exactly what she does, one visit, one smile, one moment of comfort at a time. *SWM*

CHRISTINE MAKHULI COTTON

From **PORCHES** to pantries

SYRACUSE NATIVE WORKS TO COMBAT HUNGER NATIONWIDE AND BACK HOME

Jason Klaiber

About 15 years ago, when Christine Makhuli Cotton's middle schooler son came home one day asking for extra sandwiches in his packed lunches so he could put on pounds and bulk up for sports, she obliged, not thinking much of it.

But as the weeks went by, she noticed his weight somehow wasn't changing at all, at which point he admitted the added sandwiches were for his friend at the cafeteria table who didn't have enough to eat.

For Syracuse native Cotton, then a Parent-Teacher Association president with a background in pharmaceuticals, it was "eye-opening" realizing how many children and families were food-insecure around the town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina where she resides these days. That new awareness inspired her and two friends to launch PORCH Chapel Hill, the first chapter of a grassroots non-profit organization devoted to stocking food pantries and stopping hunger not only there but anywhere.

It all started with them calling on some friends to leave cans of tuna fish on their front porches for the volunteers to pick up and bring to a nearby pantry.

"We collected so much," Cotton said. "It was incredible just how generous people were and how easy it was. We realized we were onto a really great system of getting together and engaging our neighbors."

They then reached out to see what other types of food the local pantries were seeking for their shelves, and like that PORCH's adjustable "Most-Needed Items" list was born and circulated.

That wound up being the first chapter of many, as that initial monthly neighborhood food drive has since become part of a nationwide network that has grown to 70 chapters across 16 states, altogether contributing over \$15 million to hunger relief.

Created in 2017 as the structured organization overlooking those difference-making chapters of different sizes all across the country — from the pantries operating out of places of worship to school supply

closets teachers keep filled with snacks — PORCH Communities binds them to one single, simple purpose: providing food to people in need.

"Our mission is a PORCH in every community, and I don't see why that's not possible," said Cotton, the organization's CEO. "Every community can have neighbors leave a few cans or a bag on their front porch and find a volunteer once a month who's willing to bring it to a food pantry."

PORCH Communities' ever-expanding presence has stretched to states like Florida, Maryland and Tennessee to name a few, but now Cotton looks to get a more concentrated effort going in New York, and specifically in her hometown.

Cotton, a 1983 Jamesville-DeWitt High School graduate and 1987 Le Moyne College grad, said she has noticed that a significant amount of food insecurity exists in the Syracuse area. But what she knows firsthand is that Syracuse is a special place where — regardless of who they are or what their job is — residents are ready to rally together to assist their neighbors.

"There are so many people who need support and so many people that have the ability and capacity to support, so we all need to come together, because together we're one community," Cotton said.

She said all it takes to kick off a chapter is one person stepping up and signing on as a committed neighborhood coordinator. From there, things materialize as circles of people mobilize and spread the word from street to street, making the conscious effort to add pantry necessities to their supermarket shopping lists and set aside a small window of time on a routine basis to hand off the non-perishable donations they've bought.

Whether it's the second Thursday or third Saturday as the decided-upon date, the collection day is typically kept the same month to month so it sticks in the mind.

As the leaders for their areas, the individual coordinators are supplied with the right tools and ongoing guidance by the central umbrella organization, including help with outreach and personal website setup as well as materials like postcards, door hangers, yard signs, and templates for social media posts.

Then the neighborhood coordinators are tasked with initiating contact with their chosen pantry, building interest at the local level, and going house to house for the once-a-month food pickups.

Through regular forums over Zoom, PORCH's home office shares new developments, boosts camaraderie among the coordinators, and provides encouragement and pointers on how to proceed past certain obstacles, acting as a "shadow" of sorts from the first collection month to the dozenth and beyond.

"We don't come in heavy-handed with one prescribed way of doing things," Cotton said. "Whatever it is that works best in a particular community is where we want to help their people plug in." Cotton added that it's "a low barrier to entry" to be a PORCH participant since anybody and everybody can get involved, and any little bit given is helpful because it's something the pantry didn't have the day before.

The organization's neighbors-helping-neighbors model depends on consistency but it's flexible, allowing people to contribute only when



Cotton said the need to feed people persists year-round, not just during the holiday season, so she's thankful for the continued support of PORCH participants month after month.

they can and letting them off the hook if they're on vacation or unable to for any other reason. After all, "life happens" for everybody and so it's always about "meeting people where they are," Cotton said.

"It couldn't be easier, and the impact couldn't be greater," she said. "It could mean a family not having to worry about groceries for a month or getting over a rough spot and back on their feet humming along."

She said the impact is felt immediately too, the food often finding its way right to someone's dinner table that same night or the very next day.

But no matter what, it all lasts, from pasta boxes, low-sodium soups and canned vegetables to shelf-stable staples like cereal and peanut butter. PORCH Communities also works to make sure pantry visitors' gluten-free dietary restrictions and cultural or religious preferences are met, and that some of their favorite foods are offered too, even if it's just an ordinary yellow box of Cheerios.

Cotton said a separate goal is to "demystify" the issue of food insecurity and reframe it by removing the self-imposed or societally imposed feelings of shame attached to it.

She said it's important to not judge and to treat people who rely on pantries with dignity and respect because a variety of reasons could



Christine Makhuli Cotton began PORCH in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 2010 as a neighborhood food drive. The nonprofit, for which she's founder and CEO, has since gone nationwide, with chapters in 16 states.

land someone in such a situation, their financial difficulties perhaps stemming from unexpected vehicle repairs, a house fire, or medical bills for their child.

Given the state of the country currently, with federal cuts hitting the regional food banks and local pantries at the same time there are rising needs for hunger relief globally, Cotton said it's more pressing than ever to be the bright spot amid the darkness — and it might not be as complicated or as challenging to shine that positive light as someone would expect.

"We've learned that everybody wants to help, but most people maybe just don't know how to help, especially when it comes to food insecurity," Cotton said. "So by us saying this is what pantries need and we'll pick it up, you don't have to worry and we'll have it taken care of for you."

Expressing gratitude for the continued commitment of so many passionate people on behalf of PORCH, Cotton said people have the opportunity right in front of them to make a direct impact and make their own powerful

change, one porch at a time. *SWM*

For more information on the hunger-fighting nonprofit and how to donate or participate, visit porchcommunities.org



Cotton said the volunteering commitment for PORCH isn't overwhelming but it makes a dent, calling the organization's neighbors-helping-neighbors model "sustainable, consistent, easy and flexible." She said PORCH chapters have provided their community pantries with as much as half of the food they stock in many cases.



The overarching umbrella organization PORCH Communities provides support but also creative freedom along the way to each individual chapter's neighborhood coordinator, checking in with monthly informative Zoom forums.

TAMIKA OWENS



Giving back runs in her DNA

Janelle M. Davis

For Tamika Otis, philanthropy isn't just a job, it's woven into the fabric of who she is.

As the philanthropy director for Key Bank, Otis oversees grant-making across Central New York, guiding investments that transform communities. But her commitment to giving back started long before she had a title, rooted in family traditions that spanned generations and continents.

"My connection to philanthropy started early on, before I even knew what philanthropy was," Otis shared. On her mother's side, her grandfather immigrated from the islands of Cabo Verde. Her father's side carries a different history, one marked by slavery. Yet both sides of her family shared something powerful: a tremendous sense of community and mutual support.

"I have always seen my family helping family and community," she said. "Being centered in community and wanting to empower and uplift and serve and support community is something that I've always known. I couldn't be or do anything different. It's really baked into the DNA of who I am."

Today, that DNA expresses itself through Key Bank's foundation work, where Otis helps decide which organizations receive funding across three main pillars: neighbors, education and workforce development.

The neighbors pillar is the broadest, encompassing affordable housing projects, small business development, food pantries and homeless shelters - anything that creates safe, stable, healthy communities. The education pillar supports traditional pathways while remaining open to diverse routes to credentials and workforce readiness. And the workforce pillar focuses on innovative approaches that don't just get people jobs, but help them keep and advance in those jobs.

Otis is drawn to programs that build what she calls "a fence" around workers, protections and support systems that create real trajectories for promotion and advancement.

About 70 percent of Key Bank's grants must align with Community Reinvestment Act requirements, meaning they focus on low-to-moderate income individuals, families or communities. But within those parameters, Otis and her team remain open to what each community actually needs.

"We have a very large footprint from Alaska to Maine," she explained. "Our foundation does not take a cookie cutter approach. We understand that different communities and different markets have different challenges and barriers and needs."

Recent partnerships reflect that tailored approach. Key Bank is preparing to announce a large, multi-year investment to On Point for College, supporting their work in Syracuse's inner city while expanding resources to rural communities. They've funded the Center State CEO's Growth and Equity Fund, which provides character-based, low-interest business loans with technical assistance for small business owners.

No two days look the same for Otis. One day might mean giving opening remarks at an event. Another could involve touring a potential grantee's facility. Sometimes she's simply at her desk, carefully reviewing grant applications.

"A typical day is just being grounded in people," she said. "It's never a dull moment. I definitely couldn't do monotonous. I'm not built for that."

The biggest challenge? All the organizations seeking funding are doing good work, but the budget can't accommodate everyone.

"I never like to just say no," Otis explained. "If I have to say no, I want to have other resources to connect them to that could potentially lead to their yes." She stays current on other funders and resources, and Key Bank has streamlined its application process to respect nonprofits' time. "We're always looking for a reason to say yes and not a reason to say no," Otis said proudly.

When measuring success, Otis looks beyond benchmarks and data points to a deeper question: Are people better positioned for life?

"Key Bank's mission is to help our clients, colleagues and communities to thrive," she said. "So many people are in survival mode. We ask, does this investment really position people to thrive in life? Are we creating systems where people thriving is sustainable and not just a temporary thing?"

Her advice to other corporations? Ground everything in people. "A lot of times, rightfully so, because of funding and things like that, we get hung up on data and numbers, and sometimes it takes our eyes off of the people," she said. "Never take your eyes off the people. When you do that, if you ground yourself in doing good for others, everything else works out. We all have a piece in standing up for humanity and taking care of one another, and we do that best when we never take our eyes off the people."

Otis is constantly moved by people's resilience and their innate desire to care for one another, expressed through innovation in communities everywhere.

Working alongside her Key Bank team, from market president Stephen Fournier, whom she credits as an amazing mentor and "beautiful example of compassionate leadership," down to the tellers, Otis feels she's found her calling.

Fournier returns the praise.

"Those who know Tamika can attest that she embodies the essence of true philanthropy," he said. "Her unwavering dedication to the Central New York community is nothing short of inspirational. Tamika works tirelessly to identify and address our community's needs and make a meaningful impact, whether it's affordable housing and community development projects, small business and home lending to low-to-moderate income individuals and communities or transformative philanthropy. Her compassion, generosity and commitment to service are evident in everything she does."

Tamika's efforts have not only transformed lives but have also fostered a spirit of giving and collaboration within the community. Her contributions continue to create lasting positive change in Syracuse, and she stands as a beacon of hope and kindness for all who have the privilege of knowing her.

"It's been really the honor of my professional career to be in this position," Otis said.

For someone whose family taught her that supporting community isn't optional but essential, Tamika Otis has found the perfect place to honor that legacy, helping others thrive, one thoughtful investment at a time. *SWM*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 1-2

'Ouroboros'

What: The Paul Phillips and Sharon Sullivan Ceramics Center transforms into a site for storytelling through an innovative public performance that blurs the boundaries between architectural intervention and performance. A series of 36 poles will be installed in the gallery space for dancers to interact with throughout chapters of the performance

Where: Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St., Syracuse

When: 1 to 2 p.m. matinee Saturday and Sunday, 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday evening only

Info: Admission: \$30 for the matinee; \$50 or \$85 for VIP for evening performance. For details visit everson.org.



Friday, Nov. 7 to Dec. 24

Art Mart

What: Sponsored by Syracuse Allied Arts, Inc, Art Mart is a pop up retail outlet featuring unique and original gifts created by local artists and crafters.

Where: 500 S. Franklin St., Syracuse

When: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday (excluding Thanksgiving)

Info: (315) 720-6305



Friday, Nov. 7 to Sunday, Nov. 9

Holiday Shoppes

What: The Junior League of Syracuse will celebrate 30 years of hosting one of Central New York's premier holiday shopping events.

Where: Horticulture Building, NYS Fairgrounds

When: Friday at noon to 4 p.m. Sunday

Info: <https://www.jlsyracuse.org/events/holiday-shoppes-2025/>



Friday, Nov. 7

'Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets' in Concert

What: Features the film in high-definition, on a giant screen, while a live orchestra performs John Williams' unforgettable score.

Where: Landmark Theatre, 362 S. Salina St., Syracuse

When: 7:30 p.m.

Info: For tickets and more information visit ticketmaster.com.

**Holiday Herbal Hors d'oeuvres**

What: During this workshop you will learn how to make several recipes of festive herbal hors d'oeuvres, just in time for the holidays. Also, learn about the culinary and medicinal uses of various herbs. Afterwards you'll get to sample the creations.

Where: Beaver Lake Nature Center, 8477 East Mud Lake Road Baldwinsville

When: 1 to 3 p.m.

Info: Registration: \$20 visit beaverlakenature.org.



Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 8-9

CNY Art Guild Fine Art Show and Sale

What: This show by the CNY Art Guild will feature art demonstrations and the chance to participate in an artwork raffle to benefit student art awards for high school seniors.

Where: The Aspen House, Radisson, 8550 N. Entry Road, Baldwinsville

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

Info: Free parking, admission; raffle drawing will be held Sunday, 3:30 p.m.



Saturday, Nov. 8

Spirit of American Women

What: A Fundraising Gala highlights the empowerment and accomplishments of women and girls in our community. Features hors d'oeuvres, dinner, dessert, speakers, dancing, and networking with peers who have a commitment to building a more equitable community.

Where: Bellevue Country Club

When: 5:30 to 10 p.m.

Info: Tickets: ywca-syracuse.org/spirit-of-american-women



Sunday, Nov. 9

Nutcracker Magical Christmas Ballet

What: Features an international cast, whimsical puppetry, opulent costumes and sets, hand-crafted by the finest artisans of Europe, Tchaikovsky's timeless score sets the stage for a Christmas your family will never forget.

Where: Landmark Theatre, 362 S. Salina St. Syracuse

When: 3 p.m.

Info: For tickets and more information visit ticketmaster.com.



Sunday, Nov. 16

Hope and Heels**Fashion Show and Brunch**

What: Raises ovarian cancer awareness and education across the community. Enjoy shopping from local vendors and artists, raffles, a silent auction, cocktails, brunch and beautiful fashions modeled by community leaders and cancer survivors. All funds raised benefit Hope for Heather.

Where: Traditions at the Links, 5900 N. Burdick St., East Syracuse

When: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Info: hopeforheather.org/events



Saturday, Nov. 22

Rocky Mountain High Experience - A John Denver Christmas

What: Led by Rick Schuler, this intimate, nostalgic journey back to the 1970s, will feature beloved John Denver classics.

Where: The Oncenter Carrier Theater, 411 Montgomery St., Syracuse

When: 7:30 p.m.

Info: For tickets and more information visit ticketmaster.com.



Saturday, Nov. 29

Night Market

What: An annual holiday pop-up market hosted by SKY Armory that brings 70+ Central New York's artisans, makers & retailers together under one roof for an evening of live, local entertainment, bistro-style food, cocktails, wines and craft beers.

Where: Sky Armory

When: 3 to 9 p.m.

Info: Tickets: nightmarketsyr.com



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Where: The village of Skaneateles

When: Noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays and noon to 2:30 p.m. Dec. 24

Info: Free admission. For more information visit skaneateles.com.



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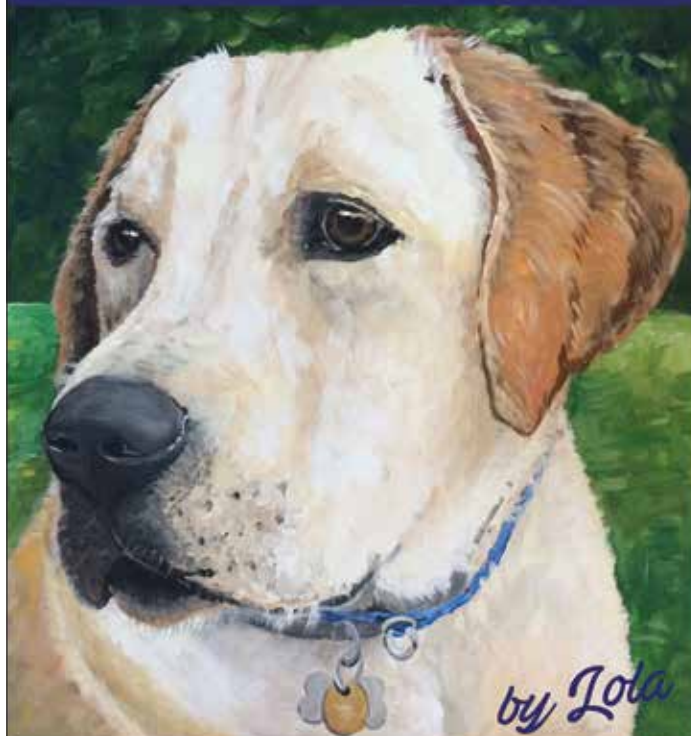
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Contact Renée Moonan
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Joins the St. Joseph's Health Cardiovascular Institute



Ghenekaro Esin, M.D.

St. Joseph's Health Cardiovascular Institute recently welcomed Ghenekaro Esin, M.D., to its cardiology offices in East Syracuse and Fayetteville.

Esin received her Bachelor of Science degree in biology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and went on to earn her medical degree at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, TN. While receiving her degrees, Esin served as a medical student tutor and mentoring chair and president of the Yale Minority Housestaff Organization.

"I have a strong belief in the importance of volunteering and using your talents to help others," said Esin. "It's part of why I decided to become a physician. My goal is to provide compassionate, comprehensive cardiovascular care while helping patients take an active role in their heart health. I'm thrilled to be in the Northeast and I'm looking forward to making new and lasting connections with patients and colleagues at St. Joe's."

Following graduation, Esin completed a residency and internship in internal medicine, as well as a Cardiovascular Medicine Clinical Fellowship, at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut. In 2023, she was a member of the Yale cardiology team that won the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology National Quality Improvement Challenge for their digital clinical decision support tool (Stressing Wisely) designed to assist physicians in selecting the most appropriate tests for evaluating cardiovascular disease.

Esin is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine in Internal Medicine and Cardiovascular Disease.

She is a co-author of Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC) abstracts and peer-reviewed manuscripts on several aspects of myocardial infarction with non-obstructive coronary arteries (MINOCA) which is a particular type of heart attack that happens without significant blockages in the arteries.

Esin recently got married and moved to the area with her husband, who is a physician at the Wynn Hospital in Utica. Their hobbies include traveling and trying out new restaurants and they hope to get into some winter activities now that they are Upstate.

Esin is seeing patients at: St. Joseph's Health Cardiology – Fayetteville, 4000 Medical Center Drive, Ste 103; 315-744-1570; and St. Joseph's Health Cardiology – East Syracuse, 4939 Brittonfield Parkway, East Syracuse; 315-634-6699.

Earns Gold Award for 'Middles and Mentors'

Rayna Reed, Girl Scout Troop 60500, launched the Middles and Mentors Program in 2024 as part of her Girl Scout Gold Award Project. The Gold Award is the highest award a Girl Scout (grades 9-12) can earn. Girls who pursue their Gold Award look to address a need in their community that also resonates nationally and globally.

Rayna can vividly remember what it was like in 4th and 5th grade to be disconnected from her friends and the physical space of her school that she loved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, she

remained enrolled in her school but also attended school online to stay on top of her learning. She avoided the learning gap some students experienced but missed the social aspects of school. She was pleased to have Girl Scouts and her good friends that remained in touch virtually. She stayed home an extra year to protect her grandmother.

She thrived at Christian Brothers Academy (CBA) as a 7th and 8th grader but wondered if most students had fully recovered from that disruptive time. In 9th grade she began doing research and speaking with school administrators and learned there is still a gap in student test scores nationally, especially in middle school students, compared to pre-COVID scores. Articles on this suggest the root causes of this persistent gap are connected to continued chronic absenteeism which makes keeping up with schoolwork and engaging with teachers difficult, social awkwardness which also impacts student willingness to reach out for help, and the limitations of the school year for fully catching students up academically. Tutoring and summer school are thought to be effective in eliminating the learning gap.

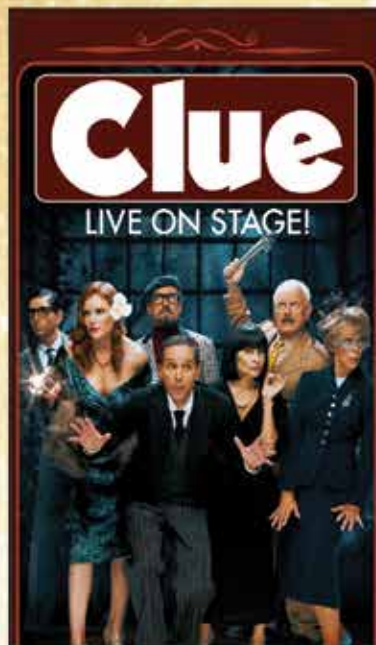
Many schools offer resources for students including online study guides, special resource teachers to help students with additional needs, and upper-class student tutors (often in National Honors Society). CBA has these resources plus an extra period where students can visit with their teachers and get extra help. Rayna believed 9th grade students could play a role by offering free tutoring to 7th graders because the middle schoolers may feel more comfortable approaching someone close to their age. She was excited to receive the support of her high achieving friends and her school to test this program idea.

The Middles and Mentors completed their first successful year and have recruited new mentors to continue the practice next year. Rayna and fellow mentor, Mia Enders, led a workshop about this effort at the United Nations Headquarters in NYC in October as part of the International Day of the Girl – Girls Speak Out event. Their hope is to encourage high schoolers at other schools around the country to launch peer mentoring groups of their own to address needs in their community.

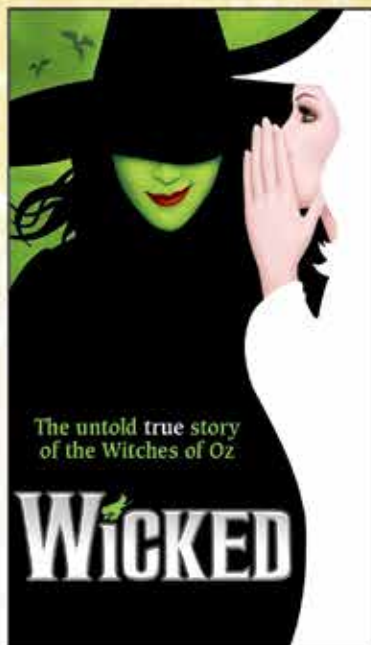


Middles and Mentors End of the Year Group Photo, pictured from left to right: Isabelle Benjamin, Ms. Sara George (group advisor), Gabriel Perez (partially in back), Jade Vavlo, Rayna Reed (partially in back and center), Ava Gale, Jaleel Barnwell (partially in back), Mia Enders, and Sanuth Rupasinghe. Not pictured: Giada Smith

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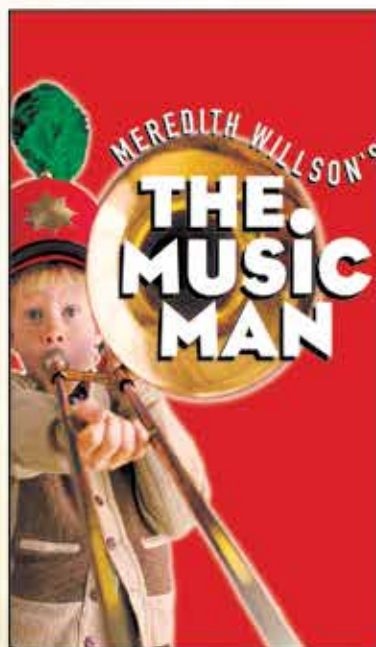
Oct. 28 - Nov 1, 2025



December 3 - 14, 2025



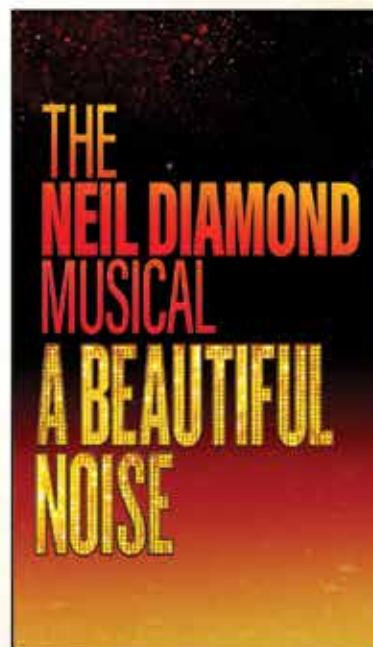
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