

Fall  
2020

A publication for Hartford HealthCare colleagues

# moments

## Surrounded by **HEROES**

Hartford  
HealthCare

### Also in this issue:

- Keeping the team safe
- Fiery performer
- Small gestures, huge impact



## Food stokes the collective soul

As COVID-19 demanded clinicians at Hartford HealthCare work longer and more taxing hours to care for those seriously ill with COVID-19, the public responded with generous donations of food, drinks and snacks. At St. Vincent's Medical Center, philanthropy logged an astounding number of donations, including:



## What one thing would you want on a deserted island?

Maybe you enjoyed a staycation or a getaway close by this summer, but COVID-19's travel restrictions had many of us dreaming of a tropical beach vacation. We asked you to tell us the one thing you'd take to a deserted island, and this is what you had to say:

Significant other/BFF **58%**

Books **15%**

Hammock **8%**

Music **8%**

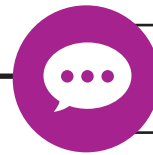
Wine **6%**

TV **4%**

Social Media **1%**



On the cover: William "Will" Gerjes, director of Environmental Services in the East Region, says it's his team of hard workers who deserve all the credit for the work they have done during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Title?

To come



With gratitude,

Jeffrey A. Flaks  
President and Chief Executive Officer

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# Spiritual Care team wraps patients, families and colleagues in support

By Anne Rondepierre-Riczu

The Spiritual Care Services team traditionally provides spiritual support face-to-face, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, members system-wide were called upon for support in numbers and ways they never imagined.

“Once visitor restrictions came into play, it was imperative we support family members who were on the outside and struggling with not being able to see or communicate with their loved ones,” recalled Deacon Tim Bolton of St. Vincent’s Medical Center. “Many of these patients were intubated and not able to speak for themselves. A process was put into place quickly which enabled us to contact next of kin and provide appropriate reverential support.”

In the process, he said poignant relationships were forged with family members. Prayer and sacraments was offered over the phone and family members were invited to St. Vincent’s daily virtual mass.

“We would offer a specific prayer during that mass for anyone on the COVID list,” Bolton said. “We conferred the Sacrament of the Sick during mass from the altar and this meant a great deal to their loved ones.”

Doreen Bottone, chaplain at MidState Medical Center, also experienced profound change in her role as COVID-19 set in.

“Never, in my 20 years of experience, had I ever seen anything like it, and I hope to never see it again,” she said. “There were days when I had two pages of deaths. The suffering was palpable and overwhelming. I knew I had to help in any way I could.”

Bottone called family members and helped them through their grief from afar. “They had questions, and often wanted to offer thanks, knowing their loved ones were surrounded by people doing all they could and did not die alone.”

MidState converted waiting rooms in the ICU and Emergency Department into meditative spaces for staff who could not leave those units.

“I would make rounds and talk to staff,” Bottone recalled. “Managers could call on me when they sensed there was a need, perhaps after an unexpected, devastating loss.”

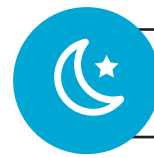
“Beyond the sadness, I witnessed a new sense of respect and teamwork develop amongst colleagues. This experience will stay with every single healthcare worker and impact them forever, professionally and personally.”



*MidState Medical Center and The Hospital of Central Connecticut both opened tranquility rooms for staff near the ICU and Emergency Department. The spaces were fitted with soft lighting, relaxing music, water, fruit, yoga mats and comfortable chairs so employees could take breaks while adhering to social distancing.*

*Father Hyginus Agu, left, and Deacon Tim Bolton make the rounds at St. Vincent’s Medical Center on Easter morning, offering readings from the Gospel, blessings and song.*

*Photos by Danielle Swift*



# Independence at Home live-in care

By Ken Harrison

When all the lights go out at Jefferson House and the night grows dark and silent, residents of this skilled nursing facility can rest easy knowing they have a dedicated group making sure they are safe and secure.

Team members like N'Mey Ndoua and Yawavi Simpini work overnight shifts at Jefferson House, a skilled nursing facility that is part of Hartford HealthCare Senior Services, as part of their jobs with Hartford HealthCare Independence at Home.

"As a private care worker, it is my job to constantly be at our client's side to watch over them and make sure they are ok," Ndoua said. "That means helping them get into bed and get settled, making sure they have had all of their medication and, most importantly, being there all night in case they need anything or have to get up."

Compassion and companionship are important aspects of their job, but even more important is physically being there to summon help in case of an emergency.

"We work closely with the nurses and medical staff to get help in case they are needed for any reason," Simpini explained. "It means so much to be a part of such a great team of dedicated people who all care about the same thing — taking the best care of these residents as possible."

Despite the challenges both Simpini and Ndoua, with all their Jefferson House colleagues, have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, they keep a positive attitude because they that their work is making a difference in someone's life.

"I have always loved working with seniors and I love what I do," Ndoua said. "It can definitely be challenging at times, especially these days, but we just do what we have to do and make sure we have a smile on our faces. Sometimes, just having a meaningful conversation with someone you are caring for can be the most rewarding feeling."

*N'Mey Ndoua works the night shift at Jefferson House, making sure patients have everything they need, especially emotional support. It's a job she loves because it leaves her feeling like she's made a difference in people's lives.*

*Photo by Rusty Kimball*







*The Access Center is a centralized hub connecting the right people to the right care at the right time.*

Photo by Rusty Kimball

## CHH donates life-saving chest compressors to first responders

Understanding that local first responders are on the front lines for cardiac arrests, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital purchased and donated four life-saving LUCAS chest compression systems to departments that did not have the device.

The device is placed on patients experiencing cardiac arrest to help deliver safe, effective chest compressions. Used in the field and during ambulance transport to hospitals, they allow for fewer interruptions compared to manual CPR, leading to higher compression ratios and increased blood flow to the brain. The devices also utilize Wi-Fi® connections and have data integration capabilities to enhance post event analysis. They also deliver post-event reports and asset notifications by e-mail to help with quality improvement efforts.

“The state-of-the-art devices are a critical part of the continuum of care for our patients and support our mission to improve the health and healing of the people and communities we serve.” said Fred Rosa, emergency medical services manager at CHH.

—Tim Lebouthillier

## Hartford HealthCare launches new Access Center

On August 24, Hartford HealthCare launched its new Access Center, a centralized hub created to quickly and easily connect the right people to the right care at the right time.

With a single call, new or existing patients can schedule individual or multiple appointments with a number of healthcare providers — from primary care to specialists — across the entire system, all at once. More than just a standard “call center,” our Access Center creates an easy, centralized patient scheduling experience, and maximizes the efficiency of providers’ schedules.

The Access Center is located in downtown Hartford, in the system’s newly-renovated space at 100 Pearl St.

—Chris Wojcik



*Charlotte Hungerford Hospital donated and provided training on a Stryker LUCAS chest compression device to the Torrington first responders.*

Photos by Tim Lebouthillier





## Partnership delivers food to Hartford HealthCare at Home clients in need

Hartford HealthCare at Home partnered with Greater Hartford's regional food bank, Foodshare, to offer pre-packaged food pantry boxes to clients in need. These boxes contain enough nonperishable food items to feed one person for up to one week. The boxes also include information on resources such as Meals on Wheels, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and HHC Center for Healthy Aging.

"The vulnerable elderly population greatly benefits from increased collaboration with health and social service entities such as Foodshare, along with the Department of Social Service's Protective Services for the Elderly Program, to help them age safely in place across the state," said Laurel Reagan, director of behavioral health services for Hartford HealthCare at Home.

Reagan explained that, during home visits, HHC staff noticed that many seniors lacked basic food necessities. This and concerns about behavioral health issues led to the partnership.

"Many clients didn't have enough food or, worse, the food that was there was spoiled and inedible," Reagan said. "Staff started flagging the issues and reached out to Foodshare. They were able to help by providing these pre-packed boxes of food for our staff to bring into patient homes. It's been a wonderful program and we could not be happier with the results."

—Ken Harrison



Boxes of foods are assembled to deliver to senior clients of Hartford HealthCare at Home.

Submitted photo

## 2020 Year of the



### CORRECTION

In the Summer 2020 issue of *Moments*, we accidentally omitted the names and photos of some nurses honored as Nightingales in the East Region. East Region Nightingales this year are:

#### East Region



Jennifer Clachrie  
Backus Hospital



Pamela Kelley  
Backus Hospital



Amanda Lester  
Backus Hospital

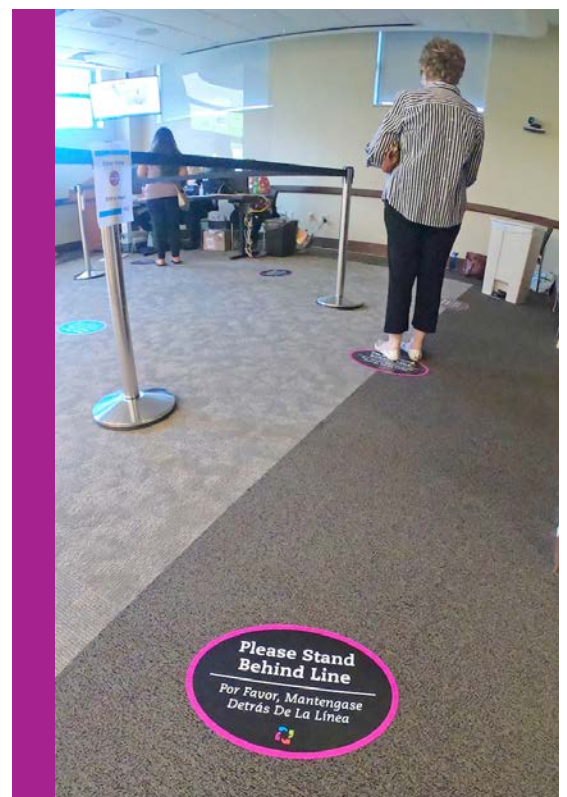


Terry Rankin-Carle  
Backus Hospital



Pamela Harazim  
Windham Hospital





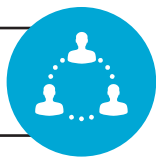


## Staff safety

As Hartford HealthCare colleagues lived the system's mission and continued to provide outstanding care for people in communities across the state during the COVID-19 pandemic, many measures were put into place to protect and care for them as well. Cleaning processes were enhanced, personal protection equipment (PPE) supplies stocked, Plexiglas shields installed, testing opportunities widened and daily temperature checks initiated.

*Photos by Jeff Evans and Chris Rakoczy*





Hartford HealthCare might be where we work, but when we asked you about where you find fun, relaxation or deeper meaning in your lives, we were astonished at the variety of hobbies and avocations you pursue in your spare time. Here are a few of those stories, and we'll have more in upcoming issues of *Moments*. To share your hobby, email [susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org](mailto:susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org).

## Escaping to serenity on the trails

**Jonathan Coler**

**Patient Administrative Associate,  
Hartford Hospital Emergency Department**

### **How long have you been hiking and what inspired you to start?**

I've been hiking for more than 30 years and started when I was a college student in New York City. My attraction to hiking and the outdoors is a love for nature and the enjoyment of escaping the city life for the solitude and tranquility the trail affords.

### **What is your favorite hike?**

I especially enjoy hiking different sections of the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut and Massachusetts but I haven't hiked the complete trail yet. That's a dream for retirement.

### **How do you prepare for your hikes?**

For longer hikes like the Appalachian, it's challenging to prepare for the strenuous demands of being on the trail. Most hikers would say just "get out there and hike" and eventually you develop what is colloquially referred to as "trail legs."

### **What is your favorite part of being on the trail?**

I'm inspired by the solitude and tranquility and experiencing the oneness with nature. Being alone on the trail in the middle of the woods is serene despite the challenges presented by the terrain, finding water sources and staying safe from the changing elements.

*Jonathan Coler poses on October Mountain in Massachusetts, part of the Appalachian Trail.*

*Photo submitted*

### **What was one of your most challenging experiences?**

One very challenging situation during one of my hikes was sustaining an injury to my right ankle. I tried to negotiate a six-foot drop and my ankle twisted. The nearest road was six tenths of a mile and I was unable to weight-bear on my ankle so it took me three hours to make it to the road. I then hitchhiked to the nearest hospital where I was diagnosed with a third-degree sprain. That was the end of my hiking activities for the season.

### **What advice would you give others interested in hiking the Appalachian Trail?**

Despite risks, I encourage others to get out there and hike. Gear is expensive but worth every cent as being well equipped and outfitted opens a door to an immense world of natural beauty.

—Tim Lebouthillier





# This girl is on fire

## Amber Monson

**Nurse navigator/case coordinator,  
Hartford HealthCare Bone & Joint  
Institute**

By day, Amber Monson MSN, RN, CNL, helps patients smoothly make their way through treatment. In her free time, she is a professional fire performer and co-owner of Ravenbane's Fire Craft, a troupe that performs throughout the Northeast.

### **How long have you been involved in this hobby?**

I have been "fire spinning" for almost 10 years and performing professionally for eight years.

### **How did you get started?**

I had a friend who introduced me to the fire spinning community and events that teach flow arts — juggling, object manipulation and fire spinning.

### **What preparations are taken for performances?**

Fire performing is dangerous. We practice our choreography, skills and safety protocols regularly.

### **Have you ever had a close call?**

I have had some minor injuries. We train and drill our safety practices regularly. We take a risk every time we practice or perform and take it very seriously.

### **Are there any parallels you can draw between your job and your hobby?**

Being a performer and a nurse are both part of who I am. Being comfortable in front of a crowd has helped me be more confident and comfortable when presenting at meetings or education classes.

### **What excites you about this hobby?**

I love connecting with the audience when I'm performing. It's a great feeling to see the look of awe and wonder in people's faces when they watch our shows. Also, I get to dress up like a pirate, mermaid or fairy on a semi-regular basis!

### **Any advice for someone considering this hobby?**

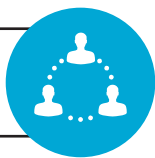
Please do not try to learn from YouTube or other online videos. There is a lot of dangerous and incorrect information on the internet. If someone is interested, I'm happy to provide some resources.

—Brenda Kestenbaum



*Amber Monson has trained for years to safely dazzle audiences with her tricks.*

*Photo submitted*



## Hanging out with her city chicks

### Melissa DePasqua

**Case manager, Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network**

Last summer, Melissa DePasqua and her husband added a touch of country living to their home in downtown New Britain when they decided to start raising three chickens in their backyard. DePasqua said she got the idea from her husband's friend who had chickens at his home. She was inspired to try and adopt a "live off the land" lifestyle despite her urban setting. After planting some fruit trees and berry bushes, she and her husband added a chicken coop they dubbed "The Fluffy Butt Hut."

#### What is the best part of having chickens?

We have had so much fun raising these chickens. It's a lot of work feeding them, keeping their coop clean and collecting the eggs, but we have really enjoyed it. They are a combination of White Rock egg-laying females and Rhodesian Red males that produce large brown eggs which are absolutely delicious! We have been donating eggs to people in the neighborhood since they are hard to find in

stores right now. It's great to be able to help people in a small way.

#### How is it going so far?

It's been wonderful! They have become like members of the family. They are very friendly, love to be held and have their own unique personalities. Even our dog has learned to love them and lays near their coop to watch over them. One did escape the enclosure when we were bringing them home and was loose in the car, but other than that it has been great.

#### Did you name them?

Yes! Their names are Agnes, Blanche and Gertrude. We gave them old-fashioned names after patients that I have cared for and had special connections with. The names are also fitting because they look a little prehistoric.

#### Do you have advice for people looking to raise chickens?

Only that I would highly recommend it! We have had a lot of fun and are even thinking of adding to our little inner city farm.

—Ken Harrison

*Melissa and Christopher DePasqua pose with a few of their girls*

*Photo by Rusty Kimball*







## COVID heroes come in all forms at HHC

Thank  
You

Not all heroes wear capes, as the world discovered during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across Hartford HealthCare, heroes push mops and mop foreheads, they make phone calls and call codes, they hold hands and hand over test results. It was an incredible time to be in healthcare, but our heroes shone brighter than ever before. Here are some of their personal stories.

*Staff attend a “pop up concert” by Hartford-native Javier Colon, while socially distanced on the front lawn at Hartford Hospital, in celebration of Nurses Week, during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### Dialing for PPE: Long nights on the phone kept providers and patients safe

By Hilary Waldman

In January 2020, there were no reported COVID-19 cases here, but the team keeping Hartford HealthCare stocked with supplies knew it was time to go shopping.

Watching reports from China, where a mysterious virus was exploding, HHC's Supply Chain Management team felt it was a matter of time before coronavirus hit home and, as China locked down to contain the disease, factories providing medical supplies would close too. In preparation, they stockpiled masks, gloves, gowns and other supplies needed to keep colleagues safe in an outbreak.

As COVID-19 cases in Connecticut climbed, the scramble was on and the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) became critical.

Dan Pak, HHC's vice president for Supply Chain Procure to Pay, was part of the team planning pandemic response by day. At night, he called or texted Chinese factory managers to ensure orders were not hijacked by higher bid-

ders, working the phones into the pre-dawn hours.

One night, Pak called to check on an order of 200,000 masks and learned they were sold to another buyer offering more money. Price gouging drove up the cost of critical items — N-95 masks, normally \$1.50 each, were fetching up to \$20, and procedure masks, typically 10 cents, were going for 10 times that.

Another risk, according to Milrose Mercado, HHC's senior vice president for Supply Chain Management, was getting counterfeit or substandard products that could endanger providers.

As the Chinese products became harder to get, Mercado and Pak worked with suppliers in Vietnam, Korea and Malaysia. When hospitalizations began to decline, they focused on ensuring masks are available to all patients, visitors and colleagues entering HHC buildings and preparing for a projected resurgence in the fall.

"When it mattered most, [HHC's systems] allowed us to make sure our colleagues, patients and communities were as protected as they could be," said President and CEO Jeff Flaks.

#### BY THE NUMBERS



### Pandemic purchasing: A 'round-the-clock challenge

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the HHC Supply Chain Management Department worked day and night to ensure we had enough protective gear to safely care for all the patients who needed us. **Here is a look at the personal protective equipment (PPE) we used from March through May, by the numbers:**



**Procedure masks**  
**1.3 million**



**N-95 masks**  
**100,000**



**Pairs of gloves**  
**10 million**



**Isolation gowns**  
**1.1 million**



**Face shields**  
**50,000**



## Clean team sanitizes East Region

By Emily Perkins-Gravell

Will Gerjes has faith. It is his personal faith and faith in his family and team that help him do whatever he can to make the East Region safe for others.

Director of regional environmental services, Gerjes and his team are tasked with the critical job of keeping facilities clean and safe. When COVID-19 made its way east in Connecticut, they became a more important part of the frontline response than ever before.

They were tapped to rigorously clean high-touch areas, scour COVID-positive rooms and even find new and creative ways to rearrange waiting areas and break rooms so colleagues, patients and visitors can socially distance. They worked around the clock, donned added personal protective equipment and followed rapidly-changing protocols communicated almost daily.

"In the beginning, we were all scared and worried, but my team is engaged and committed to doing the right and the safe thing," Gerjes said.

When it was time to clean the first COVID-positive room, he said Yaitza Maldonado, environmental services manager for the region, told him tearfully that she wanted to clean the room because she didn't want anyone on her team to have to be the first.

Veteran EVS colleague Roger Piper ran daily calls keeping the team and supplies organized throughout the region. He even packed his car full of supplies like hand sanitizer and disinfectant spray, delivering them to departments across the region.

Colleagues took turns coming in early to clean the EVS break room so others could find a safe respite.

"No matter what I asked them to do, the response was always 'We're on it,'" Gerjes said. "With a good team, you can accomplish anything."



Natchaug Hospital's Housekeeping Manager Yaitza Maldonado has had plenty of changes and adjustments to make in the work she and her staff are doing at the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health facility she calls her home.

Photo by Jeff Evans

With three daughters at home, he admitted the first wave of COVID-19 was difficult. His faith and love notes his daughters left on his windshield helped him head into work, where he never knew what the day would bring.

### Managing a flood of community good will

By Anne Rondepierre-Riczu

As the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a desperate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) nationwide, a rising tide of good will washed over St. Vincent's Medical Center, providing PPE and many other things for frontline colleagues.

Lyn McCarthy, director of philanthropy for St. Vincent's Foundation, was tapped to accept, manage and distribute donations throughout the facility and beyond, to other sites of care and testing stations.

"We were flying by the seat of our pants," she recalled. "Everything happened so fast and there was not a process in place for this deluge of donations."

With 13 years of experience helping to manage disaster relief the Red Cross, however, McCarthy was certainly up to the task.

"It started with gowns, masks and gloves. Never did we expect to be contending with public GoFundMe pages, food donations from restaurants and caterers across the region, and the safe

creation and distribution of home-made masks."

McCarthy and her team worked around the clock to ensure all donations were safe and fairly distributed.

"My donation spreadsheet was my bible," she explained. "The first donations were to the ICU and COVID floors, but, over time, we made sure every department was fed, from environmental services and security to the lab, central supply, testing sites and beyond. All in all, we distributed approximately 12,000 meals, accommodating every shift."

Distribution itself was a careful process with strict visitor restrictions in place. They had to be appropriately packaged and labeled by department, delivered to the hospital lobby, then retrieved by department staff.

"I would have been up there with them if I could," McCarthy said of frontline staff. "This is the one thing I could do to help with what they were going through. It was such a morale booster."

"The outpouring of love and support for our front line was truly remarkable. We are forever grateful."

The SVMC security team received countless deliveries of food for colleagues from local restaurants and caterers.

Photo by Danielle Swift





## From East to West, nurses bring care on the road

By Emily Perkins-Gravell

In March, St. Vincent's Medical Center (SVMC) was quickly filling with very sick COVID-19 patients.

"The census was bursting at the seams. We opened multiple ICU units and didn't know how we were going to staff them," said Sue Skoog, director of critical care and nurse manager of inpatient cardiology.

The hospital needed more than twice the nurses for the surge. Through the Hartford HealthCare Emergency Operations Center, resources from around the system — supplies, equipment and staff — were redeployed. The labor pool sent nurses, respiratory therapists and LIFE STAR team members to help during March and April.

"The East Region was fortunate enough to be able to lend a hand because we were not seeing the volume of COVID patients the other hospitals were," said Laura Currie, East Region vice president of patient care services. "I am so proud we have such skilled and compassionate nurses in the East Region."

Melinda Dolan, Backus Hospital's nurse manager for clinical services, spent a week at SVMC, saying, "It's not every day you get to go into another hospital's ICU and see how they do things." The 25-year veteran served mostly as a runner, fetching supplies for nurses inside COVID rooms to help preserve PPE.

Backus float nurse Tina Durnik traveled back and forth to SVMC for a month, spending nights in a hotel paid for by the system. The two weeks Backus nurse Cody Stober spent in Bridgeport were "intense."

Pam Purcell, a Windham Hospital Emergency Department nurse, spent five weeks in Fairfield.

"When I first arrived, the volume of critically ill patients was unbelievable. They had 43 intubated patients and 106 COVID patients."

By the end of April, hospitalizations decreased and many redeployed colleagues were called back to regular assignments.

Skoog said she's grateful for the help.

"It's beautiful to see how we came together and got the job done," she said. "It's nice to talk about the good things."



From left to right: Melinda Dolan, Backus Hospital's nurse manager for clinical services; Tina Durnik, Backus float nurse; Cody Stober, Backus nurse and Pam Purcell, a Windham Hospital Emergency Department nurse.

Photos by Jeff Evans

## Connecting to the elderly through technology

By Ken Harrison

Innovation was key for some Hartford HealthCare geriatric health providers searching for solutions that would allow them to treat patients safely and effectively during the pandemic.

Virtual health services, they decided, could connect patients to the care they need. After getting this demographic comfortable with the technology used, they found an audience that was willing, eager and able to participate in the new form of caregiving.

"There was some skepticism about the older generation being able to adapt to a new way of accessing healthcare, but after overcoming initial challenges, we saw the trend change," said Dr. Sowmya Kurtakoti, medical director of geriatric services for the Hartford HealthCare Medical Group. "This also helped us make greater connections with families, including those in different parts of the country who can now be present for some visits."

Dr. Kurtakoti said her team now sees almost 80 percent of their patients through Zoom and FaceTime.

Adrianne DeVivo, CDP, a dementia specialist with Hartford HealthCare's Center for Healthy Aging, also began using virtual and telehealth when the pandemic hit and said the technology has been a great way to keep families more involved with loved ones' care.

"It has been so great to get the families of our patients involved in a more meaningful way because the technology allows everyone to be present all at once," she said.

The technology, DeVivo said, has been particularly successful with the virtual dementia caregiver's support group, offering a valuable resource for families to stay connected to care.

"People have really responded to this and it has been amazing to see how we have connected with people we may never have been able to in the past," she said. "The success we have seen with virtual health has accelerated our desire to do more of this kind of work."



Sowmya Kurtakoti, MD, conducts a virtual wellness checkup via a telehealth video conference.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy

## Commanding the system's response

By Elissa Bass

As part of Hartford HealthCare's response to the coronavirus pandemic, colleagues were redeployed to the Community Care Center (CCC) to take calls from a panicked public.

Clare Cryar, a Hartford Hospital clinical social worker, was designated a CCC lead manager when it opened March 6 with a mix of physicians, APRNs,

nurses and others fielding questions around the clock about coronavirus, quarantine, risk and testing.

As Connecticut experienced its coronavirus surge through March and April, call volume also surged.

"Staffing evolved from a few to 20 people on the phones," Cryar explained. "It just exploded. You couldn't even hang up the phone and it would ring again. The public was panicked."

Staff made sure they were up to date on the



latest COVID news, HHC policies and procedures, as they also fielded calls from system employees.

"We ended up doing triage, not just for COVID-19 but for things like heart attacks," Cryar recalled. "People were panicked and paralyzed. The hotline was a place to turn."

Of the hundreds of calls Cryar took, one stands out. A woman in her 20s called just before her shift was to end at 11 p.m.

"She had extreme shortness of breath, she was alone in her apartment, scared because she couldn't breathe and scared to call 911 because she was afraid to go to an emergency department. I had a colleague call 911 while I stayed on the line with her to try and alleviate her panic and help her breathe," she said.

Emergency personnel arrived and transported the caller to the hospital, where she was treated and sent home.

"My clinical background is crisis management,"



Clare Cryar was redeployed to work in the Call Center in Newington to help with the COVID-19 response efforts.

*Photo by Chris Rakoczy*

Cryar said. "Working in the Center gave me a unique opportunity to grow professionally. Working in a grassroots setting like this lets you know that what you're doing is making an impact on people. I made a difference in people's lives."

## A nurse returns to care for COVID-19 patients

By Elissa Bass

Emily Lewis started her nursing career five years ago on Hartford Hospital's High 12 at the bedside, but found a more relaxing pace at Connecticut Children's Hospital where she transferred in July 2019 to work as an ambulatory float pool nurse.

She stayed in touch with her High 12 colleagues, however, and when the pandemic hit Connecticut, they asked her to come back. The 46 beds on High 12 were being converted to a COVID-19 unit, and they needed help.

"I love doing outpatient with the kids, but during the pandemic, I felt that this was just the right thing to do," Lewis said. "I had the skills and it was the right place for me to be."

As for the unit, she called it a "top-notch team," and

"among the best I've ever worked with."

"There was a tremendous 'we're all in this together' attitude," she said.

The highs and lows of treating COVID-19 patients were extreme. Lewis recalled starting one shift discharging a patient who had recovered, wheeling the person outside the hospital to be greeted by sobbing family members. She ended the same shift using an iPad so a dying patient could FaceTime with weeping family members and say goodbye.

"This has definitely reaffirmed for me what a unique privilege and honor it is to be a nurse," Lewis said. "To be invited into these most intimate moments in people's lives, to have them trust you — a stranger — with these moments, it's an honor, and you always have to make good on that."

*Photo by Chris Rakoczy*



### The little things make the biggest impact

By Elissa Bass

In her work as a retail supervisor for Compass One at Hartford Hospital, Tina Tromba realized early on in the COVID-19 pandemic that hospital colleagues needed more than breakfast, lunch and dinner.

As shortages of toilet paper, paper towels and disinfectant wipes made the news, she and food services management talked about what more they could. To help, they opened a “convenience store” in the cafeteria, selling paper goods, wipes, deli meats, milk, butter, cheese, eggs and other basics.

“We knew these things were hard to find,” said Tromba, who has worked at Hartford Hospital for 29 years. “We knew people were working long hours and, by the time they got to the grocery stores, they were either closed or wiped out. We knew we could provide this extra service.”

Meanwhile, Tromba identified another need

based on her own experience wearing protective face masks for hours each day. The masks caused chafing, burning, blisters and rashes behind the ears. On Facebook, she saw that someone had knitted “mask extenders” to take pressure off the backs of ears.

“I can’t knit, so I bought some headbands and I cut them up and sewed buttons on each end so it takes the pressure off your ears,” she said.

This worked so well she made them for her staff. And then her grandchildren. And then neighbors. And then the gas station attendant who saw hers and said his ears were killing him, too. And then anyone who appeared in the hospital cafeteria asking for one.

Since the end of March, Tromba made and gave away more than 500 extenders.

“This is my therapy,” she said. “After dinner, I watch some TV, and I make 20 or 30 extenders. I found something I can do for people, and it’s a stress reliever for me.”

Tina Tromba, Retail Manager with Hartford Hospital’s food services, shows off “ear protectors” she makes and passes out to help staff reduce the discomfort of wearing face masks.

*Photo by Chris Rakoczy*





## Bringing care where it's needed most

By Ken Harrison

Nurses go where the patients are, especially in a crisis.

In an initiative lead by Jeffrey L. Cohen, MD, executive vice president and chief clinical operating officer for Hartford HealthCare, Hartford HealthCare at Home nurses were deployed to Stamford Hospital in May to help with a surge of COVID-19 patients.

The staff spent several weeks working alongside teams at Stamford Hospital, caring for patients on the hospital's COVID-19 acute care floor and witnessing a marked improvement in the number of patients needing critical care services.

"After a week or two of adjustment, we have now made great friends on the unit (of) hardworking and dedicated professionals," said Paulette Sementilli, manager of strategic partnerships for HHCAH and one of the nurses deployed. "I'm looking forward

to returning to life at Hartford HealthCare, but I know that these new colleagues will be missed and I'm hoping that we keep in touch."

"We cannot say thank you enough to the nurses who deployed to Stamford Hospital during these unprecedented times," said Laurie St. John, vice president of Hartford HealthCare at Home. "The synergy and cultural alignment between our two organizations made for an exceptional, although challenging, experience for our colleagues and those at Stamford Hospital as they fought this terrible disease. We are grateful for their service and bravery."

"I am so proud of our colleagues who stepped forward during such a challenging time and partnered with Stamford Health to meet the needs of our communities," said Dr. Cohen. "In a time of crisis, it is incredibly reassuring to know we have a culture that fosters discretionary effort, teamwork and collaboration."



The teams from Hartford HealthCare and Stamford Hospital came together in the fight against COVID-19.

Submitted photo

# Happy One-Year Anniversary, St. Vincent's Medical Center

By Anne Rondepierre-Riczu

Founded in 1903 by the Daughters of Charity, St. Vincent's Medical Center (SVMC) has been a beacon of hope and health throughout Fairfield County. In acquiring SVMC, which became its second largest hospital, Hartford HealthCare (HHC) brightened that beacon, seizing the opportunity to extend vital services and access into the southern portion of the state, since dubbed its Fairfield Region.

## Day one

SVMC officially became part of HHC on October 1, 2019. The day was marked with employee celebrations, media coverage and an official signing ceremony at which system leaders were given a book filled with the signatures of SVMC employees who pledged to keep the founders' flame alive.



## Look at us now

Just one year later, the number of providers in the Fairfield Region has grown by 170. HHC and SVMC significantly expanded the coverage area geographically, opening medical office buildings in Westport and Stamford, and developing plans for Milford and Wilton.

"Our true north direction is making St. Vincent's a destination center and providing new access points within our communities," said Fairfield Region President Vince DiBattista, who took the helm at SVMC. "By offering personalized, coordinated care, we are helping people live their healthiest lives."

The system recruited renowned physicians to build programs in the Fairfield Region that are integrated into its Institute model and represent the Cancer, Ayer Neuroscience, Connecticut Orthopaedic, Tallwood Urology & Kidney, and Heart & Vascular institutes and the Behavioral Health Network.

This first year has been full of transition for SVMC colleagues and full of challenges for all of us. The onset of COVID-19 put plans and people to the test, but we can remember 2020, the first HHC year for SVMC, as one marked by perseverance, dedication and success.

*Continued on page 26.*



On October 1, 2019, Hartford HealthCare President and CEO Jeffrey A. Flaks signed his pledge to keep alive the flame, pictured at left and given to St. Vincent's by hospital founders, the Daughters of Charity upon their departure in 2014.

*Photos by Rusty Kimball*



## More access and expertise for our community



### EXPERTISE

- 170 new primary care and specialty providers, including PACT and Soundview
- Robust recruitment and program development for Hartford HealthCare Institutes: Cancer, Ayer Neuroscience, Heart & Vascular, Behavioral Health, Tallwood Urology & Kidney, and Connecticut Orthopaedic — as well as Community Network, Hartford HealthCare Medical Group (Primary Care, Specialty Care)
- Even more advanced procedures, including mitral valve repair surgery
- Partnership with Advanced Radiology improves coordination for imaging services
- Added robotic technology including Globus for precise spine surgery and Mako for joint replacement
- Pandemic response; more than 400 COVID-19 patients returned home
- Enhanced scores in public reporting of quality metrics, including improved performance in hospital-acquired infections

October 1, 2019



## St. Vincent's became part of Hartford HealthCare

In just 12 months, look what we've built together in the Fairfield Region!

### ACCESS



- Four new medical office buildings
  1. 2660 Main St., Bridgeport
  2. 623 Newfield Ave., Stamford
  3. Spine Wellness Center, 300 Post Rd. W., Westport
  4. 205 Subway Dr., Milford
- Cardiology practices launch Epic electronic medical record. Next: December launch for St. Vincent's Medical Center and ambulatory practices
- New Center for Healthy Aging location at St. Vincent's Medical Center
- Opening of Transplant Clinic to care for patients before and after surgery

### COMMUNITY

- Mission-oriented outreach to the underserved, including COVID-19 tests, Mobile Food Pantry and Farmers' Market
- Capital investments to expand operating rooms and modernize patient areas
- Increased awareness of programs and services through enhanced news coverage, marketing and media
- American Heart Association Get With The Guidelines awards for heart failure and stroke care excellence



## Happy One-Year Anniversary *Continued from page 24*

### Look to a bright future

“We have reshaped how we deliver care,” DiBattista said. “We have implemented extra precautions to protect patients and employees from COVID-19 and recalibrated business plans to bring our focus back to growth initiatives for the future of the Fairfield Region.”

Happy anniversary, Fairfield Region. Here’s to many more years of innovation and growth with Hartford HealthCare!

need captions for new pics  
to come Oct 1

## COMMUNITY CARE



## New senior resource coordinator shifts gears during pandemic

Hartford HealthCare’s newest Center for Healthy Aging at St. Vincent’s Medical Center (SVMC) — an opening temporarily put on hold by the COVID-19 pandemic — has proven a valuable resource for employees and loved ones in the meantime.

Resource Coordinator Marleine St. Juste, using telephone and email, has been helping people connect with supportive services to achieve the optimum quality of life. Her assessments determine the most appropriate services, whether it be home care, medical alert technology, home modifications, state programs, veterans’ services or education.

St. Juste, who started at the onset of the pandemic, has spent nearly 15 years in social services working with older adults and families as well as people with

mental health issues, developmental disabilities and substance abuse problems.

“Whenever I am able to help even one person with the simplest tasks in life, either with a referral to important resources or by pointing them in the right direction, that brings me joy knowing that I was able to make a difference,” St. Juste said.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Center for Healthy Aging is currently providing services to staff and loved ones’ providers only by telephone and email. The new location at St. Vincent’s Medical Center will be open to the public when it is safe.

For help, SVMC colleagues can call 877.424.4641 or email [Marleine.St.Juste@hhchealth.org](mailto:Marleine.St.Juste@hhchealth.org).

—Ken Harrison





## HHC names Deavens new Board of Directors chair

Gregory E. Deavens — executive vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer of Independence Health Group, where he is responsible for all financial functions and plays a key role in strategic planning — was named the newest chairman of the Hartford HealthCare (HHC) Board of Directors.

HHC President and CEO Jeffrey A. Flaks praised Deavens as a person of great integrity, a bright and committed leader who has made significant contributions to the system's financial stability during his seven years as a board member, including as vice chair.

"I have always valued Greg's expertise, passion and vision and I am excited to partner with him to continue Hartford HealthCare's growth as the premiere healthcare system in our region," Flaks said. "Greg brings strong strategic planning and leadership skills to the role, as well as tremendous vision. He shares my passion for culture, for building a true system-of-care that is a model for the nation. Together, we are committed to building a more diverse and equitable health system."

Deavens succeeded David Hess, who remains on the Board of Directors.

"We have an ambitious path ahead of us, as, together, we transform healthcare in Connecticut and beyond, with a clear focus on the Hartford HealthCare mission to improve the health and healing of the people and communities we serve," Deavens said. "I am also encouraged by and share Hartford HealthCare's commitment to eliminating health disparities in underserved communities."

Before joining Independence Health Group in January 2017, Deavens was senior vice president and corporate controller at MassMutual Financial Group. Previously, he served as senior vice president and chief financial officer for MassMutual's U.S. Insurance Group. His earlier experience includes financial leadership roles with New York Life Insurance Company, CIGNA, GE Capital and PriceWaterhouse.

In addition to his leadership on the HHC board, Deavens serves on the board of The Exec-



Gregory Deavens  
Submitted photo



*We have an ambitious path ahead of us, as, together, we transform healthcare in Connecticut and beyond, with a clear focus on the Hartford HealthCare mission to improve the health and healing of the people and communities we serve.*



utive Leadership Council, the African American Museum in Philadelphia and BCS Financial. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the National Association of Corporate Directors. Deavens holds a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from the Florida A&M University. He and his wife, Beverly, have three grown children.

—Rebecca Stewart



## Donations boost community partners in Mystic

As Hartford HealthCare (HHC) broke ground in 2019 on its Mystic facility, representatives met with local nonprofit leaders whose work speaks directly to the system's mission to "improve the health and healing of the people and communities we serve."

As a result, HHC decided to make one-time donations to five nonprofits to celebrate the opening of the Mystic HealthCenter, which opened on Perkins Farm Drive at the end of January and is home to primary care, cardiology and vascular services, neuromuscular services, neurosurgery, pain management, movement disorders, imaging and physical rehabilitation therapy.

"These small organizations do really mighty work," said Donna Handley, president of Backus and Windham hospitals and HHC SVP. "These nonprofits all benefit the health and wellbeing of residents across Groton, Stonington, Pawcatuck and Mystic, and we are pleased to be able to support them as a way to celebrate our strong presence in the region."

### Recipients of the \$2,020 grants are:

- **Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, Weekender Backpack Food Program for Children.** This program benefits about 300 children from Mystic, Stonington, North Stonington and Westerly. Every Friday, each child receives a "backpack" containing about 45 pounds of food to make breakfast, lunch and dinner. Menus change weekly.



*Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center Executive Director Susan Sedensky oversees a variety of activities at the center on Chase Street.*

- **Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center's Giving Garden at Coogan Farm.** The Garden grows fresh produce to benefit New London County's 23,000 food insecure residents via the Gemma E. Moran United Way Labor Food Center, which distributes food to 63 programs serving 91 feeding sites across the county. The volunteer-run Garden donates more than 6 tons of food annually.



*Emma Sutphen checks on the condition of the plants in the Coogan Farm Giving Garden in Mystic during a day of welcome rain in August.*

- **Home, Wheels to Work program.** With a mission of preventing family homelessness, the organization serves families with minor children, helping parents achieve stability so they can focus on their children's well-being. Wheels to Work provides funding for car repairs or service, and purchases cars for families when needed.



*Diana is one of the many people and client families that Always Home assists through its Wheels to Work program.*

Photos by Jeff Evans



- **Groton Community Meals.** This collaboration of local churches provides the needy a hot meal every Monday and Wednesday night at two Groton locations. The organization feeds 100 to 150 people weekly entirely with donations and volunteers.



*Groton Senior Center van driver Andy Plasse, right, and volunteer Jan Miller, left, set up their food distribution location at the TVCCA Center.*



*Stonington Middle School student, Nora Fanning, demonstrates how students have been making face shields at the Stonington Community Center as Victoria Witte, STEAM Director, looks on.*

- **Stonington Community Center, Youth STEAM and Makerspace programs.** Hundreds of kids each year cycle through these programs, which include Girls Who Code, Tinkering Tuesdays, Design for 3D Printing and Family Maker Fridays (laser cutting and other activities).

—Elissa Bass

## HOCC taps endoscopy tech to diagnose, treat lung cancer

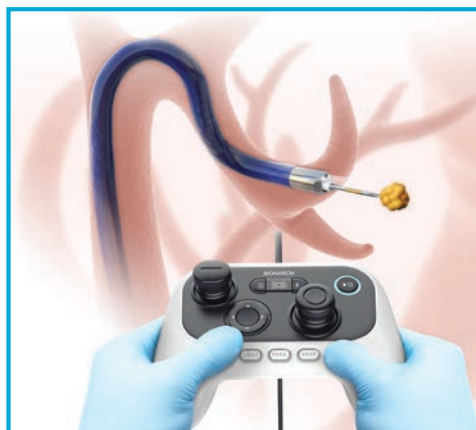
The Hospital of Central Connecticut (HOCC) introduced new endoscopic technology, the Monarch® Platform by Auris Health, for diagnostic and therapeutic bronchoscopic procedures.

This leading-edge, robotic navigational technology gives doctors more precision and mobility to access and biopsy pulmonary nodules, diagnosing them as cancer, infection or inflammation. The technology promises earlier and more accurate diagnosis for patients at risk for lung cancer.

“Unfortunately, there are a significant number of people — about 20 percent of our patients — who never smoked a day in their life and still get lung cancer. This is a minimally-invasive way of diagnosing those patients at a very early stage,” said Dr. Stefan Kachala, a thoracic surgeon at the Hartford

HealthCare Cancer Institute at HOCC.

HOCC is the first in Hartford HealthCare to use the Monarch® Platform, which uses a device similar to a gaming controller to maneuver a flexible endoscope with a camera attached to the edge of the lung. It combines traditional endoscopic views into the lung with computer-generated navigation based on three-dimensional models of the patient’s lungs, providing continuous vision throughout.



“I have more precision in my movements,” said Dr. Kachala, the first person in the system trained on the platform. “We are able to diagnose early lung cancers using a safer, highly precise method. It allows us to then perform surgery or radiation in patients who aren’t candidates for surgery, and treat the cancer.”

—Brian Spiros



Every day, our team does amazing things to benefit patients and the community. Email your moments that matter to [susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org](mailto:susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org).

## Officer's motto: 'Be the light in a bad situation'

A family in the MidState Medical Center Emergency Room was having a very bad day when Public Safety Officer Juan Casanova and his canine partner, Alaska, paid them a visit.

For the family, who wound up at MidState after a serious collision that destroyed their car, kindness and a little puppy love turned out to be the best medicine.



Officer Kevin Calitri, MidState Medical Center  
Photo by

Casanova, who goes by John, overheard technicians talking about a little boy whose sneakers had gotten lost between a crash on the highway

and arrival at the hospital. Neither the boy nor his parents were seriously injured, but he had no shoes.

One techs had a son about the same age, so Casanova asked her to estimate the patient's shoe size. During his break, he dashed to a nearby mall and picked out a pair of red, white and blue Under Armour sneakers.

Casanova, an Air Force veteran, is also the hospital's canine officer with his Dutch Shepherd, Alaska, who knows many commands, including carrying packages using her mouth. Casanova asked her to hold the bag of sneakers while he gently knocked on the exam room door.

"I said I heard they were having a rough day and my canine Alaska has a surprise for you," he said. "I said if they're the wrong size, I can run across the street and exchange them."

The family was delighted. The sneakers fit perfectly, and unknown to Casanova, were the colors of the boy's favorite hockey team, the New York Rangers.

A few weeks later, a note arrived from the family, who live on Long Island.

"There are not enough words to express our gratitude for your kind gesture. You truly made things better during an extremely stressful day," the boy's mother wrote.

Casanova, who lives in Southington, said he and his wife are deeply religious and helping those in need is part of their everyday life.

"We try to be the light in bad situations," he said.

At Hartford HealthCare, we call that making every moment matter.

— Hilary Waldman



# Pandemic scores tell the story:

## *We made every moment matter when it mattered most*

During the COVID-19 crisis, Hartford HealthCare's clinical teams provided not only the highest quality medical care, but a level of compassionate care that exceeded patient expectations. In May, HHC's patient experience scores, measured through post-visit surveys, were the highest recorded since October 2019.

Patients told us we made every moment matter when it mattered most. Here's a sample of their comments:

**"Hartford Hospital managed to get me in and out same day for this life-saving procedure during coronavirus. Wonderful execution in the midst of a terrible global crisis."**

—Patient, Hartford Hospital

**"I was very nervous about having my procedure during this pandemic, and I was quickly put at ease by the staff at MidState from the nurse checking my temp at the door to the time I left. Thank you!"**

—Patient, MidState Medical Center, ambulatory surgery

**"Staff was great! They were very friendly and paid attention to me. They also explained things clearly to me and made me feel comfortable even though my mother couldn't go in with me. Best hospital ever... and great staff."**

—Patient, St. Vincent's Medical Center

**"Overall, a very pleasant experience under the circumstances. I expected a much longer wait due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but was treated very quickly and didn't wait long at all between procedures. Ultrasound and x-ray techs were both professional with a little bit of humor to make the procedures more comfortable."**

—Patient, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital

**"Prior to the pandemic, the facility was always maintained at a high standard. Since the pandemic, sanitation has increased. Gym is always spotless. I've felt safe and comfortable continuing therapy during this pandemic."**

—Patient, HHC Rehabilitation Network

**"Due to the infectious nature of my illness, I had no visitors. However, I felt as if the compassion and empathy of the nursing staff came as close to actually having my own family there. They were truly exceptional in the level of compassion they showed me."**

—Patient, Backus Hospital

**"Everyone was so great about staying safe. The safety of the patient was notable and appreciated in these scary times."**

—Patient, Hartford HealthCare Medical Group, Neurology, Norwich

**"With the scare of COVID-19, I was beyond impressed with how quick and efficient everyone was."**

—Patient, HHC Radiology/Imaging

**"Every single person I spoke to before and during my appointment was extremely kind, professional and respectful, which put me at ease as a woman who gets very anxious for a medical appointment of any kind. I think, especially right now during such uncertain times, the medical staff I interacted with deserves gratitude and admiration for their bravery day after day and compassion for risking their lives for us."**

—Patient, HOCC Maternal & Fetal Medicine



## Virtual memorial service turns grief into celebration

“You would think that when we come together like this it is very sad, but honestly, it’s a celebration where we remember their lives, we remember cherished memories, we have the ability to say their name out loud again, so really, although it is sad, it is also very joyous.”

Those were the words of Laurie St. John, vice president of Hartford HealthCare at Home (HHCAH), as she began a virtual memorial service created as a way to offer support to the patients and families of the HHCAH hospice program who lost loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“These are families who were not able to be with their loved ones when they died because of the restrictions surrounding COVID and, in most cases, they were not even able to have burial or memorial services either,” explained Ann Olson, vice president of hospice services for HHCAH. “I am so humbled and proud of the team effort that has enabled this beautiful, meaningful and touching celebration of life for our hospice families.”

Filmed at St. Elizabeth Seton Church in Rocky

Hill, the service includes presentations and readings from HHCAH leadership and hospice team members as well as music from Cecilia Burns, HHCAH’s music therapist. All are non-denominational and without religious imagery to make the service inclusive.

The hospice team reached out to the more than 600 families to invite them to view the service, which was presented on the HHCAH website May 30. More than 300 families joined that day and the video remains online for anyone to see.

“The service was beautiful and moving,” a family member said. “Thank you for planning it and taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings. It has been so very difficult to lose a loved one and be unable to honor them with family and friends gathered together. This service was a touching farewell and meant so much to me and my family.”

**To view the service, go to <https://hartfordhealthcareathome.org/remembrance>.**

—Ken Harrison

Hartford HealthCare at Home Vice President Laurie St. John spoke during a virtual memorial service held for the families of hospice patients.

*Submitted photo*





## Surrogacy story: A labor of love

A Hartford Hospital labor and delivery nurse, Izabella “Izzy” Sierra participates in countless birthing experiences and has interacted with surrogates, women bearing children for someone else.

These experiences left quite an impression on Sierra, who has two children of her own, and, in 2018, she started the process to be a surrogate. Working with an agency, she was interviewed, tested and ultimately matched with Raz and Hana, a couple with a young son in New York City.

In August 2019, after an unsuccessful transfer effort and loss of embryos, one embryo remained. It was the smallest of the group and everyone knew the odds were against them. The transfer occurred, but the couple and Sierra were very cautious about getting their hopes up.

Ten days later, their prayers were answered in the form of a positive pregnancy test. Several days after that, at her first ultrasound, Sierra had the biggest surprise of all when there were two heartbeats!

“It was completely quiet in the exam room,” she recalled. “We were shocked. There was a two percent chance this could happen. The embryo split.”

For Hana and Raz, the revelation was overwhelming.

“We had all but given up hope of having another child, so the thought of identical twins was beyond words for both of us,” Hana shared.

Throughout the pregnancy, Sierra developed a close relationship with the couple, who attended exams and shed tears when the sound of two strong heartbeats filled the room. Sierra was the guest of honor at the baby shower, meeting the couple’s extended family and son, Orin. Every

week, a shipment of fruit corresponding with the gestational age and size of the babies arrived from the couple.

“At two weeks, we sent four boxes of blueberries, which is two times week two,” Hana explained.

“Avocados was a funny one. We sent 32 bags of avocados, which is two times week 16!”

The pregnancy progressed smoothly and, in Mid-April, two healthy baby boys, Arlin and Zahavi, entered the world at Hartford Hospital, completing Raz and Hana’s family.

“Izabella dedicated herself and her family to changing our lives and bringing us Arlin and Zahavi. The joy and gratitude we feel every day is immeasurable and overwhelming,” Hana said. “We can’t thank her enough and she will always be in our hearts as we raise our three boys to be happy, healthy, good human beings.”

So inspired by Sierra’s selflessness, the couple created a fund in her honor to help people who could not otherwise afford to grow their families through surrogacy.

Sierra is sometimes asked about her emotional state and connection to the babies she helped bring into the world. Completely grounded, she knew her sole purpose was to carry them to term for Raz and Hana, not to become emotionally attached.

“I always think back to that little embryo and now they are chubby, healthy baby boys. I helped that embryo turn into two beautiful little boys.”

**Donations to “Izabella’s Fund” can be made by visiting the Family Equality Council at <https://donate.familyequality.org/izabellafund>**

—Brenda Kestenbaum



*Far left: Izabella “Izzy” Sierra, a nurse at Hartford Hospital, poses while pregnant with the twins she carried as a surrogate.*

*Left: Raz and Hana, a New York City couple, pose with babies Arlin and Zahavi.*

*Submitted photos*



## Gold Medal Manager Kristin Parsons, RN, MSN

**Title:** Nurse manager

**Department:** E3/PCU and dialysis at Backus Hospital

**My job is:** support my staff so they can continue to provide wonderful care to our patients.

**High School:** Stonington High School

**Degree (s) from (college/university):** Bachelor of Science in Nursing, University of Rhode Island; and a Master's of Science in Nursing, with a specialty in executive nursing, Chamberlain College of Nursing, Chicago

**Major and why:** I went into nursing to be able to always help others.

**Home (is where the heart is):** Wherever my family and I are together.

**Which of the 10 H3W Leadership Behaviors would you like to get better at this year and why?** I think there are always ways to continue improving. I would like to make sure I am spending at least half my time helping to develop others (Behavior 10).

### Questions

**1. What did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be a veterinarian and an astronaut as a child.

**2. How did you end up doing what your do now?** I became a nursing assistant in high school and fell in love with working with patients. With good mentors, I was guided into nursing.

**3. Words to live by:** Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's learning how to dance in the rain.

**4. A successful day at work is when:** I am able to remove barriers for the staff and ensure they have what they need. Also, when I'm able to help and watch staff grow in their experience and confidence. I know they can do it, and watching them succeed is proof.

**5. What is your favorite lunch?** Pizza!

**6. What is your best achievement?** Being the only person in my family to attend college, and attain multiple degrees. Tied for best achievement would be creating a family with my husband, Josh, and two boys, eight-year-old Bowyn and five-year-old Wesley.

**7. What do you do for fun?** I love hiking, camping, gardening and fishing while hanging out with the family.

**8. What makes you angry?** Dishonesty

**9. What's your motto?** Always look to find a positive in every situation, even in the worst situations.

**10. What is the first thing you do when you wake up/start your day?** I check my email!



Photo by Jeff Evans



# thank you



## THANK YOU NOTES

*In addition to the skilled physicians and nurses, the rest of the staff was wonderful, from housekeeping to the kind and friendly transport staff. I experienced prompt, attentive, highly-skilled and compassionate care throughout my stay.*

—Patient, Hartford Hospital

*During this COVID-19 precaution time, noted GOOD precautions throughout. Note: I'm a retired RN so very aware of care. Great job!*

—Patient, MidState Medical Center

*The entire staff was pleasant, efficient and had wonderful senses of humor during situation that was not at all life or death. They took care of things before it could get to that point with kindness and smiles.*

—Patient, Backus Hospital

*From the moment I was wheeled into the emergency room door, I felt concern, kindness and an overwhelming sense of competency from all medical personnel that attended to me!*

—Patient, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital

*I was very nervous about going to the ER due to COVID-19, but everything was set up safe and I was treated quickly and very efficiently.*

—Patient, The Hospital of Central Connecticut

*I work in healthcare and have not seen such communication and follow-through as I have seen in your facility. It is the best — consistent, timely, don't get shuffled around, care team is knowledgeable and get answers to your questions without transferring me two to three times.*

—Patient, HHC Cancer Institute, Manchester

*Office and medical staff are always friendly and courteous. I felt very safe in regards to the COVID-19 virus. Dr. Czarnecki is always friendly and professional.*

—Patient, HHCMG, Glastonbury

*Please thank the wonderful staff as I don't leave my home often due to COVID-19. I appreciated their patience and kindness.*

—Patient, Hartford HealthCare Radiology/Imaging



# Team building at HHC: STRONGER TOGETHER

By Elissa Bass

The term “team building” has been overused enough in the world of corporate jargon that it can send employees running when the memo goes out; but if done right, it can be an important and effective component of management.

According to The Team Building Directory, an organization promoting corporate activities, “In terms of corporate development, team-building exercises are important not for the immediate experience of the activities performed by the team, but also for the group skills, communication and bonding that result. The activity is merely the means to the end: a high-impact learning experience. Team-building programs provide realistic experiences that empower individuals to contribute to common goals. The success of most organizations depends on the ability of individuals to build effective teams.”

Nowhere is the importance of working as a team more important than in healthcare. Pre-COVID, we asked about team-building activities at HHC, and here are some things you’re doing:

## Christina Sutherland

Laboratory manager, Hartford Hospital  
Center for Anti-Infective Research and  
Development

Sixteen members of the department participated in an escape room activity, the first off-site event they did. “This let us have some fun together outside of the workplace. We got to know each other better, we got to know a little bit more about each other’s strengths when working in a group to solve these problems,” Sutherland said.



Escaping together, in the front row from left to right, are: Nicole DeRosa and Elizabeth Martin. In the back row, from left, are: Kamilia Abdelraouf; Tomefa Asempa; and Christina Sutherland.

Submitted photo





## Melinda Lodge

ICP project coordinator, Wethersfield SSO  
site leader

With a team of more than 125, “team-building” activities allow us to get outside of our normal work environments, collaborate and get to know each other on a more personal level, Lodge said.

Creating a silver lining while working from home during the coronavirus pandemic, Lodge said, “To keep in touch with each other virtually, we set up weekly all-staff virtual Zoom meetings on Thursday evenings. This is open to any staff able to join and gives us the opportunity to virtually meet ‘face to face’ with one another. It has also given us the opportunity to virtually meet our coworkers’ spouses, children and pets; and keep us all connected during this time.”



The ICP Health Economics Team stepped up for an axe throwing session. From left to right are: Rick Hein; Steve Gilbert; Alisha Daines; Jeremiah Sievers; Jack Grad; Audrey Larkin; Dan D’Amico; and Eric Wester.

Submitted photo

## Elizabeth V. Szymanoski

Manager of philanthropy, Hartford  
HealthCare Central Region

Nine team members spent an afternoon “crafting” at Board & Brush in Southington. Everyone chose a project and the company provided materials and instructions. The team brought snacks during their three hours of creative time.

“I think this time helped us to get to know one another more on a personal level,” Szymanoski said. “We hadn’t done something like this and we have a small team and our structure and team members had changed over the last year. It was a nice opportunity to do something together that didn’t involve our professional work and gave everyone an opportunity to learn more about one another.”



Getting creative, in the front row from left to right are: Nancy Honore; Rhea Highsmith; Amanda Nardiello; and Elizabeth Szymanoski. In the back row, from left, are: Cheryl Belomizi; Regina Woltmann; Tina Fabiani; Laura Libby; and Nicole Kaczmarczyk.

Submitted photo

## Historic perspective

# Charlotte Hungerford Hospital was built in response to a pandemic

By Tim LeBouthillier

As early as 549 AD, humans recorded and practiced quarantining people with infectious diseases. The word, meaning “forty” in Latin, derives from 1300s Venice where they established the first formal system requiring ships and sailors to lay anchor in the harbor for 40 days to help stem the spread of the Black Death. Over the centuries, people tried everything to escape and control plagues and quarantine has been a steadfast tool.

The remoteness of northwest Connecticut did not spare inhabitants from deadly outbreaks of contagious diseases like typhoid, tuberculosis and influenza in the early 20th century. Modes of transmission were not well understood and cures not readily available. According to the Centers for Disease Control, continued outbreaks of yellow fever finally prompted Congress to pass federal quarantine legislation in 1878. State and local governments made sporadic attempts to impose quarantine requirements, but were the decision-makers when it came to how their communities dealt with public safety.



In the early 1900s in Litchfield County, Dr. Elias Pratt (left) was Torrington's health officer and school physician and went on to become Charlotte Hungerford Hospital's first medical staff president. As the local health expert and authority, it was his decision

to close local theaters, schools and churches, and cancel parades, funerals and sporting events during outbreaks such as the Typhoid Fever outbreak of 1911. Wearing muslin or gauze masks in public was also encouraged, although it's hard

to believe a gauze mask offered any protection.

Torrington officials and medical professionals also directed isolation of anyone infected with communicable diseases in church basements and high schools as needed. Their goal was to care for patients somewhere away from others to stop disease spread. Even early hospital leaders feared bringing viruses into their facilities.

Records show that when Charlotte Hungerford opened to the public in 1916, its rules and regulations stated that no patient having a contagious disease would be admitted. Fear of infection spreading through large open wards was a real concern, even though the hospital featured more private rooms with silver tea service, oak beds and personal nurses. Unfortunately, these accommodations were not affordable to most at the hefty cost of \$6 a day.



*Charlotte Hungerford's first maternity ward offered limited social distancing but had a solarium to enjoy healing sunlight.*



### 1918 through a local lens

By 1918, the “Spanish Flu” pandemic had spread worldwide, infecting about 500 million and claiming 9,000 lives over three waves.

In Torrington, more than 3,400 contracted the disease and more than 80 died, evidence that simple curtains between hospital beds was an inadequate form of infection control.

Luckily, a year before, two insightful sisters, Ella Coe and Adelaide Godfrey of Litchfield announced plans to build an isolation hospital in memory of their brother, Edward Turner Coe. They opted to donate the money to build at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital rather than build a separate facility. In 1920, the Edward T. Coe Memorial isolation unit building began admitting patients and the northwest region had a state-of-the-art building for such specialized care. The new rooms did not feature today’s regulated air pressure and filters, but it was start!

### Patient privacy: Then and now

During America’s Typhoid Fever epidemic of 1911, newspapers not only reported numbers of new cases but also the names and addresses of those afflicted.

In the *Torrington Register*, under the headline “Typhoid News,” one could see names with phrases such as “reported today to be ill with Typhoid Fever” or “considerable improvement is reported in the condition of...” This was, in part, out of necessity as many did not have telephones. Newspapers were the only source of information besides conversation. This was allowed because there were no HIPAA Privacy Rules or established national standards to protect individuals’ medical records and other personal health information. Anyone’s illness was basically everyone’s business. How times have changed!



*The Edward T. Coe Memorial isolation unit was a separate but close-by building.*





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