

Fall
2022

A publication for Hartford HealthCare colleagues

moments

Help for heroes

How COVID
has changed
healthcare forever

Also in this issue:

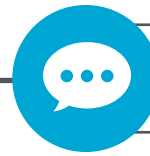
- Sailor Rides Life's Waves
- Capturing Summer in Photos
- Hospital President's Hit Parade

Hartford
HealthCare 

Colleagues at Hartford HealthCare come from all over the state, as well as New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Here are the top 50 cities and towns they call home.



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Dear Colleagues

New England comes alive in autumn. The tang in the crisp air invites us on walks and hikes. The brilliant foliage and the falling leaves let us revel — for a few precious weeks — in our region's deep natural beauty.

Fall is also a special time for us: It's our "new year" — the start of a fiscal year on Oct. 1. So, while the rest of the world waits three more months to ring it in, I want to be the first to wish you and those you love a Happy New Year.

In the year that has now passed, you helped Hartford HealthCare achieve many firsts, earn deserved national recognition — and, most importantly, continue to find new ways to serve those who rely on us.

Our Access Center and Neighborhood Health programs celebrated their second and first anniversaries, respectively. These initiatives are powerful examples of how we are taking the concept of "access" and making it real for all people in new and meaningful ways.

Because of your efforts, the safety and quality of our care earned an unprecedented number of awards from respected third-party organizations. This type of recognition is a symbol of the value we all place in personalized, coordinated care.

We faced challenges, to be sure. We are just now rounding out our third year in a global pandemic, and economies worldwide are under pressure. But we have a clarity of vision, and a bedrock commitment: To provide care that is more accessible, affordable, equitable and excellent.

We will continue on that path this new fiscal year, thanks to you. And I hope, in your own time this fall, that you take the opportunity to explore paths, too — maybe along Connecticut's many trails or in its splendid parks.

Happy New Year — and happy autumn!

Jeffrey A. Flaks
President and Chief Executive Officer



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Editor: Susan McDonald

Cover story: Susan McDonald

Contributing writers: Elissa Bass, Kate Carey-Trull, Steve Coates, Keith Fontaine, Ken Harrison, Tim LeBouthillier, Libby Marino, Susan McDonald, Brian Spyros, Robin Stanley, Bonnie Tormay, Hilary Waldman, Maggie Werner, Levell Williams and Chris Wojcik

Photography: Jeff Evans, Rusty Kimball, Chris Rakoczy

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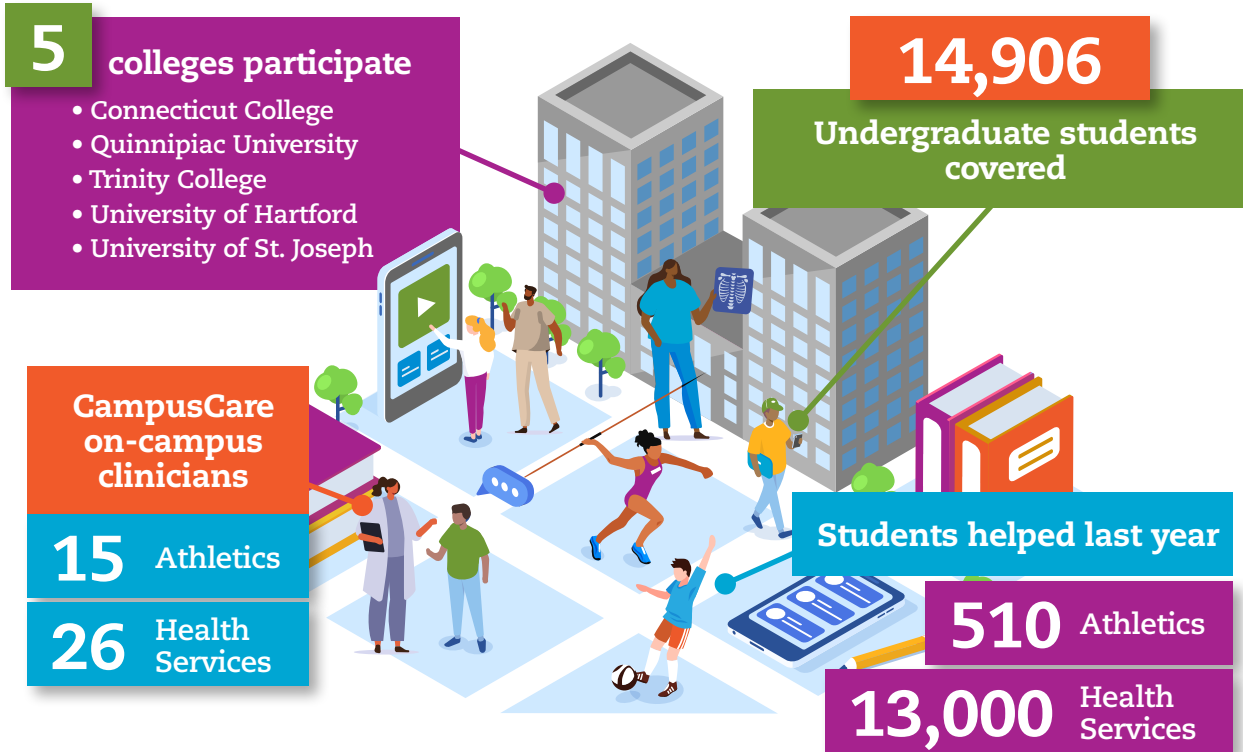
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Back to School With Care

CampusCare is a partnership between Hartford HealthCare and area colleges and universities that brings essential healthcare services onto the campuses to benefit the students — including athletic training and behavioral health services. Wendy Nichols, director of CampusCare, provided the following numbers:

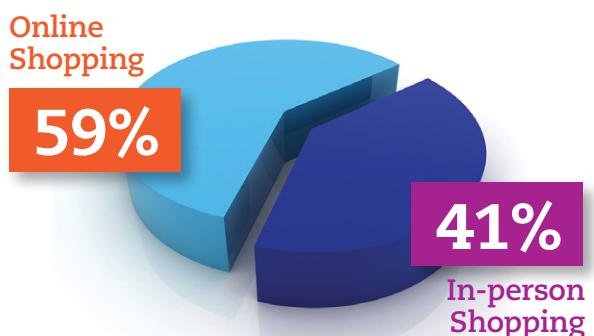


THE POLL



Will you be shopping the end of season sales and for back to school in person or online?

In spite of economic troubles, retail sales have been causing cash registers across the country to ring. We wanted to know how you planned to take advantage of the sales for your back-to-school or other fall needs.





Winning Star Dancer Dedicates Number to Mom

Digestive Health Center Director Lindsey Meehan took home top honors at Hartford Healthcare's third annual Stars Dancing for Parkinson's in May.

During the Beatles-themed event, which raised almost \$85,000 for Parkinson's research, Meehan and her dance partner, Vlad Astafiev, performed to "Let it Be." It was an emotionally poignant performance as Meehan dedicated the night to her mother, Marilyn, who passed away in 2002 after a battle with multiple sclerosis. Meehan chose the song because Paul McCartney has said his inspiration for writing the Beatles standard was a dream he had of his mother Mary, who died when he was 14.

"This event and raising money for movement disorders is very special to me. I know my mom will be here in spirit with me," she said before the event.

Stars Dancing for Parkinson's, originally scheduled for May 2020 before the pandemic hit,

benefits wellness programs offered for free at the David & Rhoda Chase Family Movement Disorders Center, part of the Hartford HealthCare Ayer Neuroscience Institute.

Other participants in this year's competition were: Dr. Evan Fox, medical director of psychiatry consultation liaison services at Hartford Hospital; Stefan McKosky, a member of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Parkinson's Disease Association Board; Carla Nunziante, vice president of growth and acquisitions with the Hartford HealthCare Medical Group; Lynn Rossini, vice president of philanthropy at Hartford Hospital; Eric Smullen, senior vice president of the Hartford HealthCare Community Network; Dr. Sandeep Varma, chief of medicine at Backus Hospital; and Dr. Cunegundo Vergara, medical director of Hartford Hospital's community health clinics.

—Steve Coates



Lindsey Meehan and her dance partner, Vlad Astafiev, performed to "Let it Be" by the Beatles.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy



St. Vincent's Boasts State's PA of the Year

Brooke Sullivan has had many “firsts” in her career as a physician assistant (PA) at St. Vincent's Medical Center (SVMC) — she was one of the first PAs then the first lead PA in the emergency department and SVMC's first advanced practice manager.

It should come as no surprise, then, that her pioneering career earned her the esteemed title of Connecticut Academy of PAs (ConnAPA) Physician Assistant of the Year.

“She is a PA leader who has paved the pathway for many others to follow at St. Vincent's,” said Mark Turczak, a physician assistant in the SVMC ED who nominated Sullivan for the award. “She is always there to teach and guide her fellow PAs, bringing out the best potential in others and setting the foundation for strong teams.”

Sullivan started at SVMC in 2008 as one of two PAs in the emergency department. As other PAs were hired, she took on the role of training and onboarding. Now in her position as advanced practice manager, she oversees PAs and APRNs in the ED, acute care surgery/trauma, heart failure and maternal medicine. She also serves as a leader for PAs and APRNs for the Hartford HealthCare Medical Group in the Fairfield Region.

“I am very proud to be a physician assistant and the career path I've had,” Sullivan said. “The field of advanced practice is growing and I like being able to pave the way for future PAs and APRNs. It is a privilege to be able to advocate for the APPs at St. Vincent's and be a leader for them.”

“She is a PA leader who has paved the pathway for many others to follow at St. Vincent's.”

Sullivan graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in nutritional sciences but knew that being a PA was her true calling. After working as a nutritionist for a few years,



Mark Turczak, PA, left, poses with Brooke Sullivan, PA, after she was named the Connecticut Academy of PAs Physician Assistant of the Year. Turczak nominated her for the recognition.

she went back to school and received a master's degree in health sciences and certificate of completion as a physician assistant at Quinnipiac University.

On being named the ConnAPA PA of the year, Sullivan said, “I was completely surprised and very humbled. I know some of the award recipients from previous years and I have an incredible amount of respect for them. Peer recognition is truly the highest form of recognition, and I am very grateful to receive that honor. This award is extremely meaningful to me and a highlight of my career.”

—Robin Stanley



Collaborative Leader Steps in as HHC MG's First Director of Nursing

In an effort to align with the system's goal of elevating nursing, Hartford HealthCare Medical Group (HHC MG) recently appointed Stacy Bentil, DNP, its first director of nursing.

In this new role, Bentil focuses on advancing professional nursing practice and working with HHC MG and system leadership to achieve excellence in patient care and experience.

The new position was created within HHC MG also follows the system's aim to build systems that support the ability of nurses to practice at the top of their license. With more than 400 nurses and medical assistants providing care across HHC MG, this role underscores the commitment to supporting a growing team providing care to patients in both primary and specialty care settings.

Bentil brings a lifetime of experience in nursing, starting as a CNA before advancing to RN. Her professional career has focused mainly on

ambulatory care, and she worked in a skilled nursing facility, a wound care center and, most recently, an endoscopy center.

Having recently earned a doctorate in nursing practice from Quinnipiac University, Bentil described her leadership style as inclusive and transformational, as she turns to nurses with a collaborative approach to improving processes and workflow.

"When building a team, they need to know you are there for them," she explained. "You need to be an authentic leader, transparent, build respect with the staff and have interdisciplinary relationships."

—Chris Wojcik



Stacy Bentil, DNP

IOL Leader Earns a Top Canadian Honor

Dr. Javeed Sukhera, chair of psychiatry at the Institute of Living (IOL), received one of Canada's most prestigious awards for work done to advocate for safer communities and assisting those in need.

Dr. Sukhera was one of 22 people to receive the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship, the Canadian province's second highest award for civilians.

According to an official government release, recipients are ambassadors of Ontario Spirit and role models for everyone in the province. The Honorable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, lieutenant governor of Ontario, and Billy Pang, parliamentary assistant to the minister of citizenship and multiculturalism, presided at a virtual investiture ceremony.

"The Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship recognizes exceptional long-term contributions to our province. We have learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that the most simple and obvious actions can be exceptional," Dowdeswell said. "The intention, kindness and commitment to community demonstrated by the 2019 and 2020 medal recipients inspire me and so many fellow Ontarians. I am pleased to be able to thank them,

on behalf of a grateful province, for their meaningful and vital service."

Formerly an associate professor at Western University in Ontario and past chair of the London Police Services Board, Dr. Sukhera has relocated to Connecticut. In addition to his IOL role, he is chair of psychiatry at Hartford Hospital.

"To be given such a distinguished honor so early in one's career is a testimony to Dr. Sukhera's impact now and gives us a window into all he still has to contribute in his field. We are so incredibly grateful that he has chosen to build his career here with us," said Dr. John Santopietro, senior vice president of Hartford HealthCare and physician-in-chief of the Behavioral Health Network.

—Tim LeBouthillier



Dr. Javeed Sukhera



HHC MG Manager Lands in Top One Percent

Laura Stebbins of the Hartford HealthCare Medical Group falls into a prestigious category only achieved by 1% of people in her field.

Stebbins, manager of continuous improvement for population health and process manager for patient prep Lean pillar, was named to the National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS), the nation's largest accredited leadership honor society.

Created to recognize, cultivate and honor leaders while making a lasting, positive change in the world, NSLS is an elite organization. Only 8% of students nationwide will be nominated and only 1% will complete its certification process.

Stebbins is now in that 1%.

Enrolled in Capella University's flexpath bachelor's to master's program for health administration, her outstanding 3.8 cumulative grade point average, combined with her interest in additional educational opportunities for leadership growth, led to her NSLS nomination.

"The knowledge I have gained from participating in the NSLS program has been extremely meaningful and impactful in my work," she said. "Through NSLS workgroups and peer support opportunities, I learned tactics that incorporate not only into my own work, but

also into the work of those around me. Through live educational broadcasts from successful leaders such as former presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush, I learned how to communicate in a meaningful way and how to approach situations in different ways."

Hearing the varying backgrounds and paths these leaders took to reach where they are today proved inspiring for her.

"A quote from President Obama that stood out to me was, 'The people who do great things is not because they did everything perfectly, but because they had clarity about direction and what matters to them.' To me, this highlights progress, not perfection. Not everything goes perfectly on the first attempt, but if the first approach doesn't work, change the approach but never the goal," Stebbins said.

—Maggie Werner



Laura Stebbins

BJI Central Processing Educator Named to International Board

Sarah Cruz, quality education program development coordinator for the Hartford HealthCare Bone & Joint Institute, was elected to the Healthcare Sterile Processing Association (HSPA) Board of Directors.

Cruz, who also supports sterile processing education across Hartford HealthCare, was selected among 50 nominees for one of three open director positions.

"I am beyond honored to be given the opportunity to serve my industry and represent

frontline sterile processing professionals at this level," Cruz said.

HSPA is the premiere organization for sterile processing professionals worldwide, serving more than 40,000 members and certification holders.

—Steve Coates



Sarah Cruz

Saving Time in an Emergency? There's an App for That

A new app that combines the immediacy of Twitter with the patient triage process to save time in emergency medical situations recently debuted at Hartford HealthCare to ensure patients receive timely, well-coordinated care.

Dubbed Twiage, the app is a pre-hospital, two-way communication system that allows EMTs and paramedics to communicate directly and effectively with doctors, nurses and medical personnel before arriving with a critically ill or injured patient. Hartford HealthCare is the first fully integrated healthcare system in the northeast to use Twiage.

"Twiage is a game-changer when it comes to patient care," said Kevin Ferrarotti, senior system director for Hartford HealthCare Emergency Medical Services. "Ordinarily, when an EMS company is en route to a hospital, they depend on radios, which can sometimes be intermittent based on service. Passing along information can also involve multiple people. It's like playing a game of telephone."

Twiage eliminates communication barriers by directly supplying clinical teams at the hospital

with real-time information. An EMT or paramedic can send the information in 20 seconds or less, whereas it would sometimes take a few minutes over the radio, Ferrarotti said.

For example, if someone is involved in a serious car accident, EMTs can use Twiage to pre-register the patient and send detailed, confidential information to the hospital about vital signs and injuries. Photos can even be sent.

Hospital staff can assess the situation, determine the best course of action for the patient, activate their trauma team if needed, and have everyone in place and ready to go so the moment the patient arrives so care begins right away.

"This results in faster treatment for the patient because we've already assembled the care team based on the information coming to us through Twiage. We can even track EMS arrival by GPS so we know exactly where they are and when they'll be coming through our doors," said Dr. David Buono, chief of emergency medicine at The Hospital of Central Connecticut.

—Brian Spyros



Backus Emergency Medical Services coordinator Jeffrey Way shows off the new software platform Twiage.

Photo by Jeff Evans



Colleague of the Month Celebrated on Cafeteria Line

When colleagues honored Peter Adelsberger as the Institute of Living (IOL) Colleague of the Month, he received overwhelming praise, a certificate, lapel pins, cupcakes and something unique — a burger or sandwich named just for him.

"Delicious!" Adelsberger exclaimed as he savored the first bite of the exclusive Peter Pepper Jack Adels-Burger, available at the IOL cafeteria.

"I feel much pride in how the Institute provides really good care for our clients."

The reward came after 45 years of service to the IOL. A unit leader in the PHP Schizophrenia Rehab Program, Adelsberger handles timekeeping for several departments and assists with time cards for others. He began his career as a psych tech, and then managed the Buckingham House group home from 1990 to 2008. He then moved to psych rehab and has worked in various units throughout the years.

"I feel much pride in how the Institute provides really good care for our clients," Adelsberger said. "Wherever I have worked throughout my years, people have really helped each other and it's very gratifying."

Adelsberger also serves as a liaison between the IOL ambulatory programs and Veyo, the company that coordinates medical taxi rides for Medicaid patients. His colleagues had many positive words about him during the nomination process, noting that he exemplifies the H3W Leadership Behaviors in a multitude of ways such as keeping things running smoothly, and focusing and advocating on the patients.

Adelsberger, his nominators said, also has a good therapeutic rapport with patients who trust him and feel comfortable reaching out to him for

things like insurance, rides, clean clothes and even when they are having a difficult day. Others commented it is easier to ask what Adelsberger doesn't do. He makes people's days better just knowing he is at work.

IOL Colleagues of the Month are personally recognized by hospital leadership, added to a virtual display on the IOL internet and celebrated with a special sandwich named for them in the cafeteria.

"I've really cherished the meaningful interactions I have experienced with my clients. The extent that our patients remember our staff over the years is very rewarding. We make short connections for brief periods of time, but then we see someone 15 years later doing well with their new families and jobs and we are excited to see they have a whole new life," Adelsberger said.

—Tim LeBouthillier



Peter Adelsberger prepares to sink his teeth into the hamburger named in his honor as the Institute of Living's Colleague of the Month.

Photo by Tim LeBouthillier





The Best Patient Experience Begins with Access

By Chris Wojcik

At 9:45 on a Tuesday morning, a Patient Service Liaison (PSL) at Hartford HealthCare's Access Center took the 10th call of the hour — a 59-year-old Bridgeport woman who wanted to see a doctor for worsening shortness of breath, wheezing and a sudden breakout of hives.

The woman didn't speak a word of English. Without batting an eyelash, the PSL communicated in fluent Spanish, gathered critical information and, in less than five minutes, scheduled an appointment to see a nearby doctor before lunchtime the same day.

The success that colleague achieves on every patient call is no lucky coincidence. It's made possible by a comprehensive support system, work done behind the scenes, to help all Access Center PSLs quickly and easily get the right patient to the right provider at the right time.

To ensure the best patient experience, all PSLs (Access Center colleagues answering patient calls and scheduling appointments), undergo a rigorous five-week training before taking any calls. Extending beyond basic instruction on the computer, which puts up-to-date provider and practice information at their fingertips, much of the training focuses on interpersonal skills needed when speaking to patients on the phone.

Being mindful of tone of voice while offering empathy and compassion helps PSLs improve the capacity to establish an immediate connection and effectively communicate with patients.

Learning doesn't end once training is complete. Through the use of the Calabrio software platform, the Quality Assurance team records and archives phone audio and screen visual for

every incoming patient call to the Access Center. The calls are routinely reviewed against specific quality measures to give PSLs practical feedback and identify opportunities for improvement.

Additionally, Calabrio analyzes audio patterns and detects heightened emotions in patients' voices. By understanding these trends and identifying positive words or phrases, the team can help PSLs improve patient interactions.

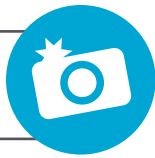
Access Center leadership is committed to staff success, and provides colleagues with regular coaching. Supervisors work closely with PSLs to understand their personal development goals, and provide guidance to achieve them. Supervisors may also observe live calls, providing instant positive performance feedback, and identifying opportunities to further develop their skills.

Although there is no average daily call quota at the Access Center, it's possible one PSL could take as many as 60 patient calls before their day is over. However, with the support they have behind them from managers, specialists and peers, they do so with confidence knowing they have the skills and the tools to schedule appointments efficiently and accurately. By working together, Access Center teams can constantly improve their performance, ensuring the delivery of the best patient experience.

Access Center team members — Julia Ott, patient services liaison (left), and Ithaca Mitchell, training team member — spend much of their days on the telephone.

Photos by Chris Rakoczy

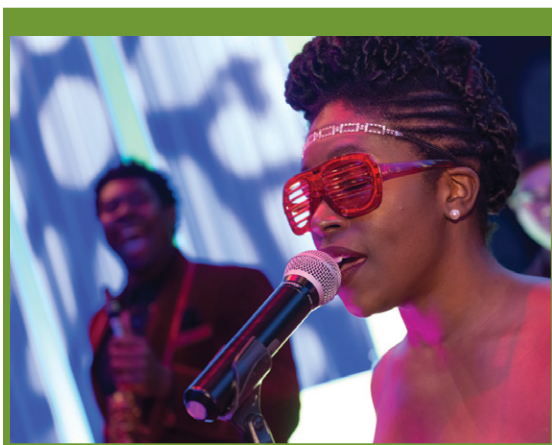




Summer Fun from Bridgeport to Norwich

In New England, as soon as the days lengthen and the sun warms, we're outside finding ways to enjoy ourselves. Across Hartford HealthCare, summer months are also filled with celebrations of our culture in Juneteenth and our identity in Pride Month, and packed with athletic excitement at the Yard Goats for Healthcare Heroes Night, or on the links for the annual Travelers Tournament. Whatever the event, Hartford HealthCare colleagues are there, pitching in and having fun. Our photographers are everywhere, too, capturing the spirit of caring and compassion the system embodies and shares in the community.





Photos by Jeff Evans, Rusty Kimball and Chris Rakoczy

Continued on page 16







The Hits Just Keep on Coming in the Fairfield Region

By Robin Stanley

When Bill Jennings became president of the Fairfield Region in July 2021, he brought with him a unique tradition: At the beginning of each Fairfield Region Leadership Forum, he plays “arrival music,” a song he carefully chooses as colleagues arrive at the meeting, both in person and virtually.

Jennings has been using arrival music at the start of meetings for several years, inspired by the walk-out songs played when Major League Baseball players come onto the field from the dugout.

“Music is everywhere in our lives,” he said. “Music is at celebrations, it’s at weddings, it’s at college football games, it’s at dances, it’s at church. It’s everywhere in our life except work.”

Jennings said he chooses songs with upbeat, positive vibes. Sometimes, the tunes reflect the seasons, such as Halloween and Christmas.

“I think it helps start the meeting very subtly, in a positive manner,” he said. “It’s such a small thing, but even if it brings a tiny bit of joy as we gather, mission accomplished.”

Director of Clinical Operations-Nursing Elizabeth Carrena agreed.

“Athletes such as boxers, runners and swimmers walk into their competitive venues with music playing loudly or headphones on, playing preselected playlists that build up their confidence and foster the mentality of a champion. Music helps these champions get into a winners’ mindset and a zone that renders them invincible and fearless,” she said. “Playing music prior to leadership forum facilitates celebration and recognition of leaders as champions who can get the work done. Keep the music playing!”

For the record, funk is Jennings’ “go-to” music genre. Favorites include Sly and the Family Stone, Jimi Hendrix, Ohio Players, The Commodores, Parliament, Average White Band, The Gap Band, Dr. John, Kool and the Gang, Earth Wind & Fire, Chic, B.T. Express, Loose Ends, Shalamar, The S.O.S. Band, The Whispers, Cameo and the Bar-Kays.

Bill Jennings' Playlist

July 2021–June 2022

July 2021	"Frankenstein" <i>The Edgar Winter Group</i>
August 2021	"Atomic Dog" <i>George Clinton</i>
September 2021	"Fanfare for the Common Man" <i>Emmerson, Lake and Palmer</i>
October 2021	"The Monster Mash" <i>Bobby Pickett</i>
November 2021	"Charlie Brown Thanksgiving Theme" <i>Vince Guaraldi Trio</i>
December 2021	"Happy Xmas (War is Over)" <i>John Lennon and Yoko Ono</i>
January 2022	"Mr. Blue Sky" <i>Electric Light Orchestra</i>
February 2022	"Sir Duke" <i>Stevie Wonder</i>
March 2022	"Are You Gonna Go My Way" <i>Lenny Kravitz</i>
April 2022	"Seven Nation Army" <i>The White Stripes</i>
May 2022	"Dance to the Music" <i>Sly & The Family Stone</i>
June 2022	"Jump Around" <i>House of Pain</i>



St. Vincent's Medical Center President Bill Jennings, foreground, likes going out on the road to visit the team. Here, he takes a selfie with, from left: Nurse Manager, Kara Diffley; Department of Psychiatry Chair, Dr. Andre Newfield; Behavioral Health Services Director, Joyce Platz; and Quality & Patient Safety Coordinator, Jamie Gilbert.



‘Just Say Yes’ Mantra Guides HVI Leader

By Steve Coates

Wheatley Wentzell, senior vice president of operations for the Hartford HealthCare Heart & Vascular Institute, was named one of the *Hartford Business Journal*’s Top 25 Women In Business for 2022. The awards are an annual opportunity to recognize women in the forefront of their fields. Nominated by readers, 25 women are chosen by a panel of independent judges each year.

Who has had the biggest influence on your career and why?

Karen Goyette (Hartford HealthCare executive vice president and strategy and transformation officer). Karen recruited me for her team almost seven years ago and from the moment I met her, I noticed not only her tremendous skill as a leader and strategist but also her ability to build meaningful relationships with her colleagues, her team and anyone she interacts with. She is the type of leader that inspires you and makes you want to perform at your best — one you do not want to disappoint. I strive to do the same thing in my work and am very lucky to consider her a mentor and friend.

The other honorable mention goes to my husband, Brett. When I started grad school for my MBA, a field outside of my historically more clinically focused comfort zone, he said, “You’ll get some great education at grad school but you really need to leverage your time there to build relationships and seek additional opportunities to learn.” I took that advice to heart and ended up getting a job opportunity by doing exactly that.

What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?

I am not sure if this is attributed to anyone or if I just adopted it, but it’s what I share — “Just say yes.” Say “yes” to those projects that intimidate



Wheatley Wentzell was named one of the Hartford Business Journal’s Top 25 Women in Business for 2022.

you. I’ve grown the most from those types of projects — the ones that scared me a little bit to take on. You don’t have to be the expert in everything you take on. Leaving your comfort zone promotes personal and professional growth.

Your advice for young leaders?

Just say yes! Develop relationships with your colleagues and network. Don’t be afraid to ask for guidance and create informal mentor relationships. It is always good to get different perspectives and input.

What’s the last TV series you binge watched?

Not really a binge but I enjoyed “The Staircase.”

What are the top five songs on your playlist?

I’m an Apple playlist music fan. My current favorite is “Beach Vacation,” a mix of new songs, older ones and classics. I have a pretty varied taste in music and am notorious for getting all of the lyrics wrong.

Favorite vacation spot?

Anywhere that has a lot of outdoor activities in nature, new cultures and experiences.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I love to keep active — in particular with any activity outdoors (gardening, running, hiking, golfing, biking) and my five dogs. I just started pottery this past year and am totally hooked.

'I'm Here to Transform The Way We Deliver Care'

By Hilary Waldman

Joel Vengco was heading into his third year of medical school at Boston University and starting a concurrent PhD program in biostatistics when a professor made an off-hand comment that changed the course of his career.

The right data in the right hands, the professor said, could help 1,000 patients in the same time a physician might treat or cure only one.

"I realized," Vengco said, "that the creativity required to harness data was key in transforming healthcare."

He quit medical school, earned masters' degrees in biology and medical informatics at Harvard and started his career developing data and digital strategies at BayState Medical Center. His work there earned him recognition as one of Becker's Hospital Review's "Top 100 CIOs to Know" for the past 10 years.

Earlier this year, Vengco, 48, brought his vision for a more Amazon- or Disney-like healthcare experience to become Hartford HealthCare's senior vice president and chief information and digital officer. He spent the first six months on a listening tour across the system, meeting people and assessing technology.

He said he discovered that our culture — the reason he chose Hartford HealthCare — is strong, and credited that culture and CEO Jeff Flaks' vision for enhancing access over the past decade.

"That's why I chose to come here," Vengco said. "Those are the ingredients for success."

He also found that while our tech basics are sufficient, we need to focus on harnessing data to create a "frictionless" experience for clinicians and a "delightful" experience for patients and consumers.

"We want to be like Netflix or Amazon," he said.

If a heart failure patient were to have a Netflix experience, for example, a Hartford HealthCare provider would see them in either the hospital or an outpatient setting. When the patient went

home, they might receive a text or a message in MyChartPlus that says, "Patients like you also have benefited from

visiting a nutritionist. Would you like to make an appointment now?" Then, with one click, that follow-up visit could be scheduled.

"I'm not here just about technology," Vengco said. "I'm here to transform the way we deliver care."

He estimated that HHC is about two years away from delivering a digital patient experience comparable to what we expect now from Netflix, Target and even luxury cars.

Vengco's ambitious vision is firmly grounded in his immigrant roots. Trained as accountants, his parents' degrees were not worth much in Sacramento, where they settled and struggled to provide opportunities for their children. A photo of Vengco's father on an airport tarmac, leaving his family behind in the Philippines while he went ahead to find work, hangs in the dining room of Vengco's East Longmeadow, Mass., home.

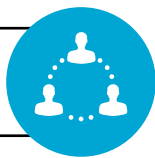
"It's my reminder," he said, noting he approaches every decision with an equity lens, asking himself and his team, "Who did we leave out?"

Vengco and his wife, Leigh, are raising three daughters, Lily, 18, Grace, 16, and Teia, 14. Led by their dad on guitar, the girls are accomplished musicians who enjoy family jam sessions playing classic rock, jazz and blues.



Joel Vengco shifted career gears in medical school to focus on using data to help patients.

Visit the online version of Moments to see Vengco and his three daughters cover the Foo Fighters hit "Times Like These" in their studio <https://youtu.be/1C4vY10jsbM>



Hartford HealthCare might be where we work, but when we asked you where you find fun, relaxation or deeper meaning in your lives, we were astonished at the variety of hobbies and activities 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).

Sailor Seas-es the Day

Eric Smullen

Senior Vice President, Hartford HealthCare Community Network

Eric Smullen has worked at Hartford HealthCare since 2005. He started as a physical therapist and was recently promoted to senior vice president of the Hartford HealthCare Community Network. When he is not working, he can be found on the water — sailing and kitesurfing.

When did you start these hobbies?

I have been sailing for almost my entire life. My parents would take me when I was an infant. About nine years ago, I purchased a daysailer and have been going ever since. My earliest memory boating was when I was really young, my parents would put my brother and I on the foredeck (the front-most deck of the boat) and they would tie our life jackets to the mast.

I started kitesurfing about seven years ago. While I was on vacation in the Turks and Caicos Islands, I was on the beach and saw about 15 kitesurfers and I watched them for hours, amazed. An older couple came and popped up a kite and launched it and off they went kitesurfing. I was thinking to myself, if they could do it, I could, too.

The first time I did it was in Turks and Caicos. I did really well at first, I picked up

on things that I already knew how to do, like flying a kite. However, I struggled for about three years until I decided I had to go all in and took lessons in North Carolina.

What do you enjoy most about sailing and kitesurfing?

When it comes to both, you have to be pay attention and be actively involved working with the wind and the boat or board. Sailing is something I can do myself and it's peaceful, relaxing and alone time.

What advice would you give others who are interested in trying these sports?

My advice is to take a lesson, prioritize safety and commit to it. When you're learning, you also have to respect Mother Nature and the wind gusts.

Do you have any favorite memories?

My favorite memory sailing is when I chartered a boat with my family and parents and took a trip sailing across Chesapeake Bay. When it comes to kitesurfing, there is nothing better than kiting a sunset session.

Are there any skills that you learned from sailing that you apply to your everyday life?

You have to be always aware of your surroundings and constantly adjust.

—Bonnie Tormay

Eric Smullen has always enjoyed the freedom and peace of water sports.



He Asked, “How Could I Not Do It?”

Anthony Cernera

Director of philanthropy, St. Vincent’s Medical Center

Anthony Cernera has dedicated his professional life to helping others as director of philanthropy for St. Vincent’s Medical Center. In 2015, when he saw a friend’s Facebook post about donating a kidney, he saw an opportunity to do so in his personal life as well. But, being a three-time living organ donor is only one part of his story. He is also a semi-professional skydiver, practicing Buddhist and hospice volunteer.

What made you want to be an organ donor?

My good friend Wendy posted about giving a kidney to her best friend’s son. She had this comment about how if this was only going to mildly inconvenience her and save somebody’s life, then how could she not do it? I saw that and I thought how could you live with one kidney and not be in a constant state of medical crisis? I did a little research and, sure enough, it turns out you can live with one kidney. I am a practicing Buddhist and every morning I meditate and set my intentions to try to be a good person and do good for the world. Knowing I did not need a kidney and it could save someone’s life, how could I not do it?

You are a semi-professional skydiver. Can you talk more about that?

I do video for a competitive skydiving team. I have been doing this for three years and skydiving for eight. I work for teams that compete in the United States Parachute Association National Championships. These teams get together, train for months and then compete. The camera guy is a vital part of the team because they can’t be judged

for making their formations without the video proof. It’s a pretty fun weekend job.

How did you get into skydiving?

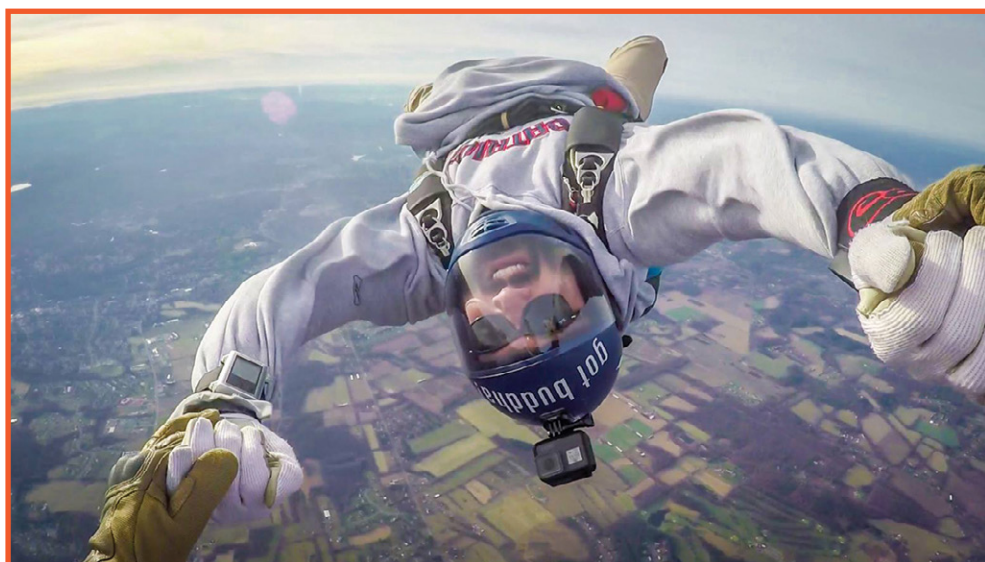
I have always wanted to fly ever since I was a little kid. I was in my 30s and newly single when I moved to Long Island. Not knowing anyone in the area, I decided to sign up for Groupon experiences and do fun things with new people. The first that came through was for skydiving. I was instantaneously hooked. I was licensed a few months later and I stopped counting after I got to a thousand jumps a few years ago. I can’t imagine not skydiving because it’s an amazing community of rad people.

What else are you involved in outside of work?

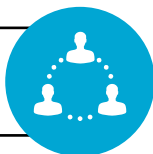
I have been a hospice volunteer for about a decade and, most recently, have been doing that with Hartford HealthCare at Home, which is made up of a team of real-life saints. I am about to defend a dissertation for my doctorate in developmental psychology. I am a meditation instructor. I got into Buddhism about 20 years ago and it has been a very meaningful part of my life. I have a wonderful partner who is involved in state politics, so we do a lot of volunteering, campaigning and advocacy for her policy work. I also play chess almost every day.

—Robin Stanley

Anthony Cernera loves the feeling of floating on air while skydiving.



Continued on page 18



Like the Legislature, Her Garden is Different Every Year

Kim Harrison

HHC vice president, government affairs

When Kim Harrison bought her house in Manchester seven years ago, the landscape consisted of grass and overgrown rhododendrons. When she's not sitting in on state legislative sessions representing Hartford HealthCare, she spends her free time after work and on weekends studying plants, mostly perennials, designing garden vignettes for all corners of the one-acre lot, planting, pruning, dead-heading, re-planting and waging a constant battle against the deer, woodchucks, rabbits and other wildlife intent on making her beautiful blooms into a delicious dinner salad.

What do you enjoy about gardening?

I love it, it's really soothing. I think I love that every year, there's something different. It's continually evolving. I hate to say this, but it's similar to the legislative session. It's never the same from one year to the next.

How do you know what to plant and what will do well and look great in your gardens?

I was in the Manchester Garden Club and I'm a member of the Horticulture Society. I go to every lecture I can. When I'm done with my professional career, I can't wait to take the Master Gardener class at UConn.

Do you have a favorite plant or flower?

I'm a big hydrangea fan. (Editor's note: Harrison's hydrangeas come in all shapes and sizes, although almost none are the showy blue ones vacationers might see all over Cape Cod. Some have variegated leaves, some boast tiny pin-sized blossoms, others have only beautiful leaves and no blooms at all.)

Kim Harrison tends to the various plants and flowers in her garden.

Photo by Hilary Waldman

How do you repel the critters that want to eat your handiwork?

I use repellent sprays. I use them all. You have to spray all the time and switch out the product so when they get used to one, you try another.

How much time do you spend in the garden during an average summer week?

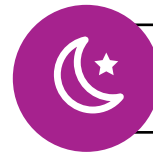
I spend a good five or six hours a week planting, watering, weeding, dead-heading (removing dead blooms off of plants to encourage new blooms to grow). It's a hobby.

Has your house ever been on a garden tour?

My old, little Cape house had a spectacular garden that had been on two tours. My current home sits on an acre, only some of it is "gardenable." I've done a lot in seven years, but I still don't think it's "tour-worthy" yet.

—Hilary Waldman





Drawing on Each Other to Get Through the Nights

By Libby Marino

The work healthcare employees do every day is hard, physical and emotional, so why would people add the stress of coming in on a shift that's opposite the majority of the working world?

Amber Moyer, regional lab manager in the East Region, said there's a variety of reasons her teams choose to work off-shift, and while much of the work they do is the same as their day shift colleagues, they can face different demands and situations.

"The teamwork that has to happen on second and third shift is really miraculous. They really have to work together to really get it done, and they are great at it. They are an amazing crew," Moyer said.

Some people, she continued, craft a specific routine and workflow that is most efficient for them at night and like being able to maintain it.

"When you are working with a lot of people, they all do things a little differently and if you don't like that, it can be challenging. Plus, nights are quiet! It's just the sound of the analyzers running," Moyer said.

Nightshift crews, she continued, develop a special camaraderie.

"They have each other to bounce things off of, whereas most of the time on dayshift they have someone in leadership there," she said.

At Backus Hospital, third shift has just two lab technicians compared to the handful of technologists and phlebotomists working days when clinical departments are also fully staffed.

While clocked in overnight, lab colleagues process the cascade of emergency request and blood test needs, surrounded by a cacophony of beeping alarms and running feet.

"What they are doing every night is the same thing they do on dayshift, just with less people," Moyer said.

The operating rooms are closed and patients are resting, so unless a patient is critical or needs specimens collected at very specific intervals, the amount of testing from the inpatient floors overnight is minimal. The overnight lab team does,



Caption xxx

Photos by Jeff Evans

however, see a lot of blood work and testing from the emergency department.

The skeleton crew processes blood work, urinalysis, COVID-19 testing, microbiology stains for bacteria and blood bank testing, Moyer noted. They're processed based on orders from the requesting clinician, some routine and others needing a faster turnaround time.

The "graveyard shift" can be tiring, especially for those with family and friends on complete opposite shifts.

"They all have different sleep schedules and different life circumstances that allow for them to maintain connections," Moyer said of her team. "Some sleep when they get home, some sleep in the afternoon and some take several long naps. They have adjusted to what works best for their lives."



Misdiagnosed man finds right answers to dance at daughter's wedding

By Bonnie Tormay

For 20 years, Garry Brooke fought a disease he didn't have. Once he was properly diagnosed and had surgery, he had one goal in mind: to dance at his daughter's wedding.

Originally diagnosed with — and treated for — multiple sclerosis, it wasn't until Brooke was 43, switched neurologists and had a MRI that he was correctly diagnosed with Arnold Chiari malformation and spinal stenosis.

Before then, his condition had worsened. Not only did the pain take a toll on his quality of life, but he lost the ability to stand on his own. "At night, I would often lay on the floor, crying from the pain," he said. "I came to the realization that I was not getting better and I needed help."

In March 2021, Brooke underwent spinal surgery at the Bone & Joint Institute with Dr. Brendan Killory and was transferred to the Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit where he worked with doctors, therapists and nurses to regain function and motor skills, including learning to walk again.

In late April, Brooke went home, but his recovery did not end there. Hartford HealthCare at Home teams continued physical therapy for weeks before he transitioned to outpatient therapy.

In January 2022, after caring for his father in Florida for several months, Brooke resumed therapy at the Hartford HealthCare Rehabilitation Network, with the goal of dancing with his daughter Victoria at her April wedding.

"I was scared to death when I shared my goal with the physical therapist," he said. "But, I knew how much it meant to Victoria and that's all that mattered."

For the next two months, Brooke worked diligently with his physical therapists. Knowing he had a long history of practicing and teaching martial arts, one physical therapist, Misty Durkee, incorporated familiar exercises into his therapy.

"I was not holding onto the walker at that

point," Brooke recalled. "I was shifting my weight, synchronizing movements with my hands, all while standing. I had not done that in 20 years!"

After weeks of hard work, he was ready. Not only did he dance with his daughter, he stood on his own to give a speech.

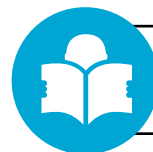
"Misty had me try different things to prepare for the big day," Brooke said. "I would practice, in

"I came to the realization that I was not getting better and I needed help."

my dress shoes, to the song I would be dancing to — moving side to side, subtle movements to help build endurance and core strength."



Hartford HealthCare teams helped Garry Brooke conquer a misdiagnosis and a spinal condition to dance at his daughter's wedding.



Extinguishing Burnout, Reigniting the Passion for Healthcare Teams

By Susan McDonald

Donna Summers sang about romantic heartbreak, but “I Will Survive” could very well be the mantra of the world’s healthcare workforce after enduring a deadly two-year pandemic, strained supplies, disrupted home lives and, now, staff shortages.

It’s called burnout, and it hits at all levels of healthcare organizations, affecting colleague wellness, budgets and the patient experience.

Yet, while burnout has been zapping the energy and passion of some in the field, causing them to leave for different work, or stop working altogether, others find themselves buoyed by the consistent call to serve and help others, leaning into the community’s need for quality care and adapting to new methods of delivering that care.

The challenge for members of the Hartford HealthCare Well-Being Department is to intervene at both the person level — providing support and resources to leaders, teams and individuals to stay happy and healthy at work — and the system level — making improvements to the system of

care and workplace culture to optimize workforce well-being.

The Department’s three-year strategic plan advances goals established by the National Academy of Medicine’s National Plan for Health Workforce Well-Being. The Well-Being Department’s three primary aims are to:

- **Measurably improve all colleague well-being.** By leveraging the system’s operating model, leadership behaviors and clinical expertise, the team is working to create a culture of well-being, increase workplace safety and efficiency, and improve personal and organizational resilience.
- **Generate innovative solutions and initiatives** that remove organizational barriers to well-being and provide evidence-based care for the caregiver.
- **Demonstrate independent expertise** — through education, training and research — to raise awareness and advance our understanding of challenges to healthcare worker well-being.

Continued on page 28



“Improving well-being culture and the system of care is foundational to this work and creates the environment in which our colleagues are able to thrive and find professional fulfillment,” said Well-Being Director Dr. Jennifer Ferrand.

To be effective, Dr. Ferrand explained the work must follow a multi-pronged approach that addresses the strain in the healthcare system and society as a whole.

“Well-being should be experienced in the organization as ‘how we do things’ instead of simply being ‘a thing we do,’” she said.

Workforce well-being should be considered when setting goals and expectations, designing processes and workflows, and addressing barriers to efficiency, she added.

“One of the ways we can achieve this is to leverage Hartford HealthCare’s core value of caring. When we show the same care and compassion for our healthcare workforce that we show to our patients, we cultivate a culture of well-being,” Dr. Ferrand said.

This culture change takes on a variety of innovative forms designed to make seeking support natural and easy for colleagues, according to Well-Being Manager Hillary Landry.

“We are focused on thriving, not the doom of burnout,” she said.

Toward that end, support (<https://intranet.hartfordhealthcare.org/clinical-resources/coronavirus/wellness/support-when-you-need-it>) resources aim to meet colleagues where they are, in the moments they need them most. They include:

- **Weekly well-being webinars on topics** like “Preventing Working Parent Burnout” and “Ways to Move More throughout Your Day.”
- **Well-being carts** that are wheeled around the system offering treats, items like essential oils and herbal tea to promote relaxation, decompression and mindfulness resources. They may even be accompanied by integrative

services such as chair massages.

- **Peer supporters** (see story on page 30), who are colleagues trained to support one another during times of both crisis and calm.
- **Well-Being support sessions and consults.**
- **A well-being mobile app** that contains tools, practices and resources for increasing personal wellbeing and addressing stress, anxiety, depression, pain and sleep issues. The app, which is also available to family members, includes mini moments of mindfulness to help practice me time on your time.

Landry, who has hosted stretch and movement breaks for colleagues at various locations across the system, said it takes practice for people who typically care for others to tend to their own needs.

“We need to practice ‘me time’, take a moment for ourselves whenever it works, whether it’s the beginning of the day, mid-day or at the end of the day,” she said.

Sarah Jones, well-being manager, added, “Everyone is exhausted. Even before the pandemic, healthcare professionals were being stretched to their limits. The pandemic helped shine a light on how important it is to create and maintain environments, cultures and structures that prioritize well-being.

“Our colleagues need to feel seen and heard. They need to see that the organization cares about a workforce that is emotionally resilient and well cared for, and that is the heart of the work we do as a department.”

Hillary Landry (center) leads a group in a peer support stretching exercise on the grounds of the Institute of Living. (left to right) Paulette Schwartz, Marlena Andrukiewicz, Hillary Landry, Stephanie Bourassa, Nicole Forest.

Photo by xx



Growing Through Life's Challenges

By Dr. Andrew Wong

Dr. Wong, a primary care physician in Westport, focuses on preventative medicine and “healthful living.” As regional medical director, he said his role is “primary care provider for providers.” He wrote about his personal experience with burnout.

During the pandemic, I went from being gung-ho, having lots of energy and looking forward to work to becoming more easily exhausted, sometimes dreading work and thinking more about retirement. I felt like an old phone battery — you charge it to 100%, then unplug it. You talk on the phone for 10 minutes and the battery is at 60% and you wonder, “Where did all that energy go?”

I felt I couldn't recharge myself. I was becoming cynical, telling myself to just grin and bear things since I couldn't do anything about them. I began to feel hopeless and lost enthusiasm. It was burnout and it was not just me, it was a lot of providers.

Burnout is different for each of us. For me, it came from being withdrawn from others. My gym where I play tennis and squash closed. I didn't realize not playing was affecting my physical and mental health. I couldn't focus on something besides work and didn't have the meditation that comes with exercise to reset myself.

Stuck in my private office all day doing telehealth, I was not communicating with other people in the office. That face-to-face connection we need as humans was gone. We didn't round, talk about operational issues or work together to care for patients. This missing communication led me to feel the way I did.

Several factors make providers particularly prone to exhaustion or burnout. Providers generally fall into three personality types — Lone Ranger, Superhero and Perfectionist. I embody Lone Ranger qualities, trying to do everything myself. To address that, I improved my communication, huddled more with colleagues and worked as a team to coordinate patient care.

What helped was when I was able to connect with friends, vaccines became available and gyms reopened. I played squash with friends in my “bubble.” It was something to look forward to

that was not work-related.

Realizing our personality type and the qualities we embody is the first step to learning how to overcome feelings of burnout. Are you the Lone Ranger, trying

to carry everything on your shoulders? Maybe you are a Superhero, always going the extra mile to take care of everyone while neglecting yourself. Or, are you the Perfectionist, making sure every note and order is painstakingly detailed, taking time away from your personal life? We need to accept change and realize the ways we have always done things in medicine may not be the most efficient or healthy for us. And, we need to remain open to fixing things that cause us stress.

These days, I feel a lot more in control. I set up a Zoom counseling session with Dr. Scott Sinisgalli, a psychiatrist at the Institute of Living who had heard about the challenges in primary care during the pandemic, for Fairfield Region providers. I didn't know what to expect — would anybody show up? Would everyone just complain about things like the electronic medical record? Would we begin to get to the heart of what's causing us stress? We had a good turnout and it was humbling to hear what other providers were experiencing.

During the pandemic, we all went through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. But, as the pandemic is not a one-time event, but an extended one, it remains a part of our everyday lives. I'd suggest considering a sixth stage of grief — personal growth after overcoming difficulty. Maybe as providers, we can grow from this experience and work to become more balanced human beings, both at work and in our personal lives.



Dr. Benjamin Weisman,
Dr. Gyeyee Shin, Dr. Andrew
Wong and Australian cattle
dog, Dude.

Photo by Amy Mortensen



Lending Colleagues an Ear, Shoulder to Lean On

By Susan McDonald

The Peer Support Program was established in 2019 by the Hartford HealthCare Well-Being Department to provide colleagues with the opportunity to give to and receive support from one another. Initially launched for physicians and advanced practitioners, the program was expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic to include all colleagues. The heart of peer support lies in recognizing the immense power of true, genuine human connection. The peer support program consists of volunteers throughout the system who have been trained to provide support, compassion, and connection to much needed resources. Our peer supporters consist of colleagues from a wide range of disciplines including physicians, nurses, advanced practitioners, social workers and chaplains.

The peer support program at HHC is completely free and confidential. It exists to combat burnout, decrease feelings of isolation and promote individual and collective well-being throughout our organization. It can be utilized after adverse events, during times of crisis or emotional distress, and also during times when things are going well as a way to maintain resilience, connection and overall emotional well-being.

The following are personal accounts from some of our peer supporters about the power of peer support.

“People don’t always need advice. Sometimes all they really need is a hand to hold, an ear to listen, and a heart to understand them.”

—Zig Ziglar

Scott Baylow

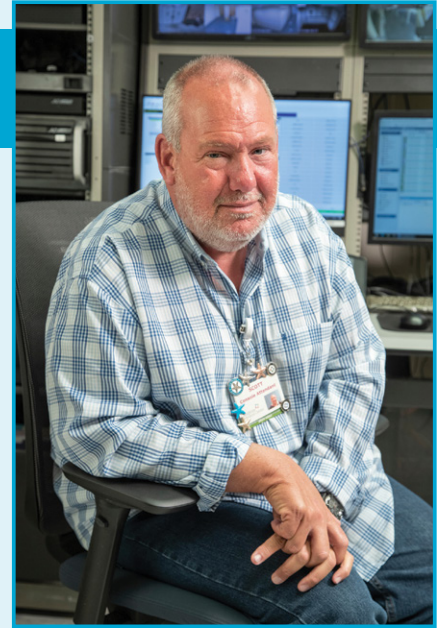
MidState Medical Center

I do this as a way to give my co-workers something they've given to me so freely over the years — support and understanding — in an environment free of judgment.

We provide colleagues the opportunity to process and reduce the emotional impact of traumatic events or critical incidents through debriefing. Colleagues can validate their feelings by sharing experiences, often gaining strength through the support and empathy of co-workers who may otherwise feel alone and misunderstood.

I recall one very sad incident in which MidState's Peer Support Team made a real connection with colleagues after the unexpected death of an infant brought into the emergency department. I remember how deeply and profoundly the death effected ER staff. We provided an opportunity to decompress by offering a caring and supportive environment in which they could speak openly, sharing the sadness and heartbreak they felt for the family, and the disbelief and grief they were experiencing.

Colleagues can contact/activate the Peer Support Team whenever they experience a traumatic event or critical incident, at work or in their personal life. These events include the death of a co-worker, instances of workplace violence, and internal and external disasters. Colleagues who seek peer support do so on a voluntary basis. No one is required to participate.



Dr. Elizabeth Deckers

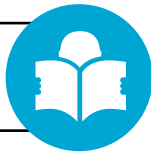
Hartford Hospital

It is really important to have this type of program to help provide support and resources to colleagues who may be having a difficult time. Healthcare providers are human as well and the circumstances we encounter providing care can be traumatic. It is helpful to be able to process our thoughts and emotions with someone who understands.

Colleagues can be referred to the program after an adverse event through risk management, or a manager may identify a team and ask for support after caring for a patient. People can also self-refer if they are feeling overwhelmed or burned out or want to talk about a particular situation. While peer support is offered routinely, I do wish it was used more often.

We want to help people normalize what they may be feeling, and provide them with resources if they need further support. People have expressed they are appreciative of the peer support after the phone call.





Anne Marie Carlson

St. Vincent's Medical Center

The changes and upheaval in healthcare over the past three years have been unbelievable, especially the strains that COVID imposed upon us. I work as a nurse in the emergency department, and there was a period when our volume was low, but patient acuity was high. The hospital nearly became one big critical care unit. Cocoons of plastic gowns, layers of masks, hats and shields took away chats, informal debriefings and reading support in the expressions of our team mates.



I took part in the formal peer support program as an outgrowth of the mentoring program we were growing at St. Vincent's. Being a peer supporter puts me in a position to informally reach out to coworkers, become an active listener and, when helpful, suggest making use of the resources we have, in person or virtually.

I think many healthcare workers are reluctant to reach out for help, so having "one of us" reach out and start a conversation can be very helpful, and sometimes better received.

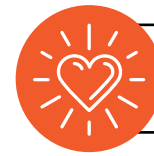
One day, I noticed an experienced team member was coming to work looking and saying she was very fatigued, with chronic headaches and not sleeping. I picked a quiet moment to tell her I was worried about her, and asked if she'd like to talk. She brushed it off, but I made more gentle approaches over the next two weeks.

She finally opened up about feeling overwhelmed, doubting her clinical abilities and life choices with all the horrors, deaths and pressures of the COVID experience. I think having a colleague available to provide the true peer support was valuable, for both of us.

Peer support can start with a conversational opportunity, so our Unit Practice Council sponsors informal "soup and bread" events to get people together for a bit over food. It helps people open up, hear that their fears may be shared, and get talking about things like the wellness check in app.



If you're going through a difficult time, call or email. If you know a colleague who appears to be struggling, reach out with compassion. You can refer them to Peer Support or contact the program directly to make a referral. To refer a colleague or start your own confidential conversation, call 860.972.2400 and choose option 3 or email providerpeersupport@hhchealth.org



Using Fruits and Veggies to Take Aim at Chronic Illness

By Levell Williams

Some of the most powerful medicine doesn't come in a bottle, it comes on a plate.

That's why Hartford HealthCare opened a grocery store in Hartford Hospital's Brownstone Building. The shelves are stocked with lean meats, fresh fish and colorful produce such as oranges and pineapples, squash and Brussels sprouts, and farm-raised eggs. This store, however, does not take cash, credit cards or coupons. Shoppers need only bring a prescription from their doctors.

The "store" is part of Food Is Medicine, a national movement, backed by research, focused on fulfilling the needs of people with medically prescribed diets. Hartford HealthCare's program is called Food4Health and serves eligible patients with chronic illness and pregnant women. In addition to healthy food, shoppers are given recipes and information about healthy meal preparation.

Jessica Soto's doctor gave her a prescription after she suffered a major heart attack at age 36. In an interview on National Public Radio's show "Where We Live," she said the program helps her provide for her two sons as she has been recovering from her resulting advanced heart failure.

"As much as 30% of Hartford County is food insecure," said David Fichandler, senior director of clinical operations at Hartford Hospital, who started the program with David Juros, Food Is Medicine consultant, and Greg Jones, vice president for community health and engagement.

The program partners with local organizations — including Food Share, My Local Chef and CTown — to stock the healthy food store, which is designed to look more like a doctor's office.

More than a colorful spread, the fruits and veggies on display can be life-changing for patients living with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension or obesity. These diseases can often be worsened by the inability to find or afford healthy food near home.

Fortunately, not everything has to change with a new diet. Food4Health offers culturally distinct ingredients, such as plantains, tomatillos and malanga, that may be familiar to the region's large Latino population.

Soto was pleased with the quality and selection of ingredients she received from the Food4Health Clinic.

"My boys and I are loving it," she said.

Additionally, Food4Health provides multilingual assistance through a live translation service and most flyers are in Spanish and English.

Future plans include expanding to serve more patients and opening the program to Hartford HealthCare colleagues who may need it, according to Victoria Okyere, operations manager for strategic programs and initiatives at Hartford HealthCare.

"We are committed to... the people and communities we serve and those who work tirelessly toward [our mission]," Okyere said.



Victoria Okyere and David Juros survey the foods ready for donation to the Salvation Army in Meriden.

Photo by Levell Williams



Central Region Partnership is Changing Lives

Here's something you may not know — it's estimated that 40% of all food in the United States goes to waste, according to hunger relief organization Feeding America.

The Hospital of Central Connecticut (HOCC) team has been doing its part to make a small dent in that statistic thanks to its partnership with the Salvation Army in New Britain. As of July 29, HOCC donated 804 pounds of food. All goes directly to the Salvation Army's Men's Shelter.

"It's opened colleagues' eyes and has gotten everyone excited to contribute to the community," said Joseph Spooner, executive chef for food and nutrition at HOCC, who is heavily involved in the food donation process. "Every Friday, the Salvation Army comes to the hospital and picks up the food we've set aside for them throughout the week."

The idea for this partnership came from Hartford HealthCare's food vendor, Compass One. Connecticut Foodshare then got involved to help HOCC identify an organization for donations through a methodical vetting process. That's when the Salvation Army's Men's Shelter was identified. It's important to note that all donated food never leaves the hospital kitchen and is strictly screened

before being donated.

"We've been able to set up this program and help men in the community by not only giving them a meal, but also helping them get their life back in order," said Whitney Bundy, senior director of guest services for Hartford HealthCare.

She explained that after learning that the Salvation Army has a program called Pathway to Hope, which helps men in the shelter find employment, Hartford HealthCare's talent acquisition team stepped in.

"They now work with the program and have been able to hire men from the shelter to join our food and nutrition team," Bundy said.

HOCC is the first hospital in the state to take part in this type of food donation program, serving as an example for other facilities at Hartford HealthCare and beyond. St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport more recently launched a similar program donating 329 pounds of food in the first few months and the hope is that Hartford Hospital and others will soon follow suit.

"This really is a win-win for everyone involved," Spooner said.

—Libby Marino



HOCC launched a partnership with the Salvation Army in New Britain, donating food to a men's shelter.

Photo by Rusty Kimball



Hospitalist Brings Medical Care to War-Torn Ukraine

As chief hospitalist for Hartford HealthCare's East Region, Dr. Mohammed Qureshi spends his days caring for patients at both Backus and Windham hospitals, and the work he and his team perform can be life-changing.

The word "life-changing" took on a whole new meaning, however, when Dr. Qureshi traveled to Eastern Europe this year to offer medical aid to people in Ukraine who had been wounded or injured during Russia's invasion.

Working with the organization Humanity First, Dr. Qureshi joined a team of doctors, nurses and other healthcare specialists in a field hospital set up just over the Ukrainian border in the village of Medyka, Poland, where they provided treatment to the refugees fleeing their war-torn country.

Dr. Qureshi's main role was as an internal medicine doctor, although he said he found himself treating patients with a wide range of injuries and conditions, almost always with a translator by his side or using a translation service on his phone when one was not available. From the hospital, patients were then transferred to healthcare facilities throughout Europe.

"Nearly all of the people we treated were women, children and the elderly," he recalled.

Despite the tragic reason for his trip, Dr. Qureshi said he was inspired by the people he worked with and the people of Poland who welcomed refugees from the neighboring country with open arms.

"Poland has more than four million refugees and it was amazing to see how they have opened their country and their hearts to the people of



Dr. Mohammed Qureshi, right, in a lighter moment while providing medical aid in war-torn Ukraine.

Ukraine," he said. "Equally inspiring was the tireless work of all of the doctors and nurses who were there to help."

"You are a role model and an inspiration to all of us," Donna Handley, East Region president, told Dr. Qureshi at Leadership Forum. "We are all incredibly proud of you for what you have done."

"I have learned that we have to count our blessings and look at what others are going through to put things in perspective," said Dr. Qureshi, who also traveled to New Orleans to provide medical care after Hurricane Katrina. "Whenever you see the opportunity to help, I hope you will."

—Ken Harrison

HHC Ambulance Lending Help in Ukraine

A Hartford HealthCare ambulance left for Ukraine in late June, carrying thousands of dollars worth of medical supplies to provide lifesaving support to civilians and soldiers in the war-torn country. The ambulance was sent to Irpin, a devastated area that operated 109 ambulances prior to the war but fewer than 10 remained due to extensive shelling and bombing as part of the Russian invasion in the region.

The ambulance was stuffed with thousands of dollars in medical supplies to provide lifesaving support to civilians and soldiers in Ukraine. Many were collected by first responders in the Northwest Region, including stair chairs, PPE, bandages, backboards, stretchers and splints. Two portable ventilators were shipped separately.

—Brian Spyros



Air National Guard Descends on Hartford Hospital.... For Training

In a groundbreaking agreement, Hartford Hospital now provides training to Connecticut Air National Guard medical personnel to help them be deployment-ready.

The Connecticut division of the Air National Guard includes 26 medical personnel who serve as medics and nurses.

“This partnership will allow us to more readily meet and maintain our training requirements of logging 40 hours at a Level 1 Trauma Center,” said Jennifer Monahan, an emergency and critical care nurse at Backus Hospital and chief nurse for the division. “In the past, if someone was deploying, we would need to arrange special training for them at a medical base that met the criteria.”

Now, “this is a huge, huge, huge opportunity for us,” she said.

Members of the Connecticut Air National Guard all have regular “day” jobs and serve in the Guard one weekend a month and two weeks each year. They are often called up to assist with natural disasters domestically or overseas.

Dr. Charles Johndro, a Hartford Hospital emergency physician and lieutenant colonel in the Connecticut Air National Guard where he is part of the ground surgical, was instrumental in hammering out the training agreement. He does the training for Guard members in the hospital’s emergency department one Sunday a month and about 10 other days during the month.

“Our medics and nurses did not have the opportunity to train these skills close to home,” Dr. Johndro said. “The Hartford Hospital ED environment can be very similar to what you might encounter when you are deployed — a high volume

of patients in acute situations. The opportunity to train in that environment is invaluable.”

For Sunday trainings, Dr. Johndro is off the hospital clock and dresses in fatigues.

“We work on skills with the mannequins, we can see the patients in the ED but I’m not involved in their direct care so I can teach the case. I can break it all down for them, from the (patient) arrival on,” he said.

When Dr. Johndro is on shift, Guard members “can see everything that I see, and get a more in-depth view because I am actually working with emergency patients. These folks wouldn’t typically have access to the opportunities this partnership provides.”

The agreement between the hospital and the Guard, he said, is groundbreaking for the whole country.

“I think Connecticut is way ahead of the curve on this,” he said. “There’s a lot of challenges nationwide getting the required training. We are fortunate because Jennifer and I are involved in both sides of it. After we establish a safety record with this, I would love to grow this program. It is such a great opportunity for all our Connecticut personnel.”

—Elissa Bass

Taking part in medical training at the Center for Education, Simulation and Innovation at Hartford Hospital, from left, are: Maj. Jennifer Monahan, a trauma performance improvement nurse at Backus Hospital; Lt Col. Charles Johndron, MD, a physician in the Hartford Hospital Emergency Department; and Sgt. Anitress Delgado, with the Connecticut Air National Guard.



Nurse 'Fills her Cup' on Costa Rica Mission

When Hartford Hospital nursing coordinator Cheryl Mitchell found out about his medical mission trip to Costa Rica, she joked it would be her last opportunity to go on a field trip with her son, a college senior at the time.

They laughed, but when he asked trip organizers if they needed another chaperone who was a licensed nurse, they jumped at the chance to include her. Mitchell and her son, 21-year-old Richard, headed to Costa Rica for a week with 16 other students and two nursing professors.

"With the way things have been in the world, this was a fantastic opportunity," Mitchell said, adding that her son, a nurse who graduated from Norwich University, started work for Hartford HealthCare this summer.

"He will be a fourth-generation nurse. It makes me very proud," Mitchell said.

Mission trips are also a family tradition and they went to Uganda in 2012.

"I wanted my kids to understand that they are more fortunate than they realize, and to instill the importance of giving back," she said. Daughter Olivia, 23, lives in Spain, teaching English and applying to PA school.

The Costa Rica trip gave Mitchell an opportunity to talk with the other students about giving back in their communities.

"It was a great, inspiring trip, but you don't have

Cheryl Mitchell and her son, Richard, took a medical mission trip to Costa Rica together.



to travel to give back," Mitchell said. "I said plenty of people in their own towns have needs they likely don't even know about."

They volunteered through Corner of Love, a non-profit initially based in Nicaragua. After the government there made humanitarian aid illegal in 2018, organizers fled to Costa Rica.

Volunteers organized supplies, set up a relief center and assessed medical and social needs for intake. Problems such as advanced urinary tract infections due to dehydration and lack of safe drinking water were common.

"It becomes a cycle. They are afraid to drink the water because of parasites. They may not have housing or access to safe water or good nutrition," she said. "We would connect them with other services for housing, employment opportunities and education."

Trips like these fill her cup and re-energize her, said Mitchell, a Hartford Hospital nurse since 2005.

"We all push ourselves and burn the candle at both ends, but this helps bring you back to your why, why I am a nurse," she said.

—Kate Carey-Thull

It's a Zoo Out There

As part of expanding system presence in Fairfield County, Hartford HealthCare, through the Pediatric Care Alliance with Connecticut Children's, sponsored a pair of Zoomobiles at Beardsley Zoo.

The Zoomobiles are wrapped with colorful animal designs and are ready to zoo-m throughout the region to educate children in schools, camps, and other facilities about popular zoo animals. The vehicle, which always has three to four live animal ambassadors on board, also travels out of state. Past venues have included The Berkshire Museum in Massachusetts and the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum in New York City.

Sponsoring the Zoomobile is one way the two



Hartford HealthCare and Connecticut Children's have sponsored two Zoomobiles bringing animal education to kids at Beardsley Zoo.

health systems are doubling down on efforts to support the optimal development and health of all children.

—Keith Fontaine



SVMC Drives Address Basic Needs

Separate efforts at St. Vincent's Medical Center in early summer generated almost 250 pairs of shoes and 1,000 pairs of socks that can help those in need in the area.

The committee organizing the Share a Pair Shoe Drive hoped to collect 200 pairs of footwear, but colleagues across the institution — including the 9 East behavioral health team with a haul of 84 pairs — boosted the effort.

The shoes — in various sizes and styles — will be stored at St. Vincent's to help ensure patients

can leave the hospital with their feet protected and can be tapped by community health workers throughout the City of Bridgeport.

The socks — collected through the efforts of Jennifer Nascimento, APRN, Ayer Neuroscience Institute stroke coordinator, supported by the Mission Services team, were donated to The Thomas Merton Center to support its Shower Program, which serves 80 people per week.

—Robin Stanley

Sock drive: Posing with a sampling of the sock donation, from left to right, are: Edna Borchetta, mission services/pastoral care; Daisy Rodriguez, mission services/pastoral care; Bartosz Szczypiorski, case manager; Bill Hoey, vice president of mission services; Jennifer Nascimento, stroke coordinator; and Aimee Valle, pantry coordinator.



Shoe drive: The Share a Pair Committee includes, from left to right, Teresa Peterkin, emergency department; Coreen Martin, behavioral health; Debby Botticelli, mission services/pastoral care; Alice Lennon, behavioral health; Marianne Blanco, case management; Deborah Duva, case management; Ann Gorton, emergency department; Edna Borchetta, mission services/pastoral care; and Kathy Beck, mission services/pastoral care.

Community Health Team Combines Meals and Wheels

What started as a fun way to offer nutritious information accelerated in June when the East Region Community Health team pedaled the inaugural "blender bike" into a Franklin senior living complex to whip up some shakes.

Working with a team of Norwich Tech students, the Community Health team — Director Joseph Zuzel, nurse Michele Brezniak and dietitian Shannon Haynes — put the pedal to the metal, modifying an exercise bike with a working blender.

"I was looking for way to make our presence at community events more hands-on and meaningful," Zuzel said. "I thought it would be a great way to not only educate people about healthy eating and exercise but have them take part in it."

Although blender bikes are sold online, Backus Development Manager Gen Schies suggested he reach out to Norwich Tech for help building one. Students in the automotive shop class were tapped for the task.

"I love taking a need like healthy food and nutrition and cascading that into multiple sectors of our community to see how we can all work together to address that need," Zuzel said.

The bike hit the road this summer for

community health events. As the peddler produces healthy smoothies and hummus, recipes for the treats are available courtesy.

—Elissa Bass and Jeff Evans



Hartford HealthCare East Region President Donna Handley rides the blender bike created by Norwich Tech students and Backus Hospital to promote exercise and healthy eating.

Photo by Jeff Evans

Check out the bike in action at <https://vimeo.com/716416138>

5K Raises \$10,000 for Purple Light Project

The second annual Purple Light 5K Race and Fun Walk on the Institute of Living campus in late August was a resounding success, raising more than \$10,000 to support Behavioral Health Network (BHN) patients in need.



Ninety registered runners participated and walkers of all ages finished the one-mile fun run.

Erica Moura, event organizer and the director of human centered care at the BHN, said she has been able to purchase and distribute basic items such as like clothing, food, hygiene items, blankets, and taxi/bus vouchers with the money raised.

One runner understood the need for such help personally, having received support during and after admission to the IOL.

"We're fortunate to have so many give of themselves in support of our patients, and our staff who are privileged to care for them," said James O'Dea, PhD, senior vice president at the BHN.

—Kate Carey-Trull

More than 100 runners and walkers joined in the fundraising 5K to benefit the Purple Light Project.



Every day, our colleagues do amazing things to benefit patients and the community. Email your moments that matter to susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org.

Life Comes Full Circle for Teen Volunteers Turned Medical Professionals

At Backus Hospital, the volunteer program could easily be mistaken for a farm team of sorts.

Just as baseball has minor league teams training players so they can move up to the Bigs, so too does the Backus junior volunteer program have a reputation for creating medical professionals.

Tyler Fitzgerald was a student at UConn in 2017, studying physiology and neurobiology with an eye toward medical school when he contacted Mary Brown, volunteer and guest services manager at Backus, to get involved.

As a high school sophomore, Angelica Royer Blackburn joined Backus' Summer Junior Volunteer Bridge Program. Today, Blackburn is a nurse at Backus' Ambulatory Medical Center Infusion Center, having graduated from college in 2014.

"I always knew I wanted to do something in the healthcare field," Blackburn said, adding her father's death from cancer gave her personal experience with illness. "Getting to know his hospice nurses, I couldn't see myself doing anything else."

Delivering food trays and helping with patient discharges put her in close contact with lots of

nurses. During college, she worked as Brown's junior volunteer coordinator and, after college, "I didn't really picture myself coming back to Backus, but that's what I did. And, I didn't think I wanted to be in oncology but the universe worked it out that way."

Fitzgerald started volunteering as a patient representative in the Emergency Department, going from patient to patient to offer help, blankets, pillows, beverages or food. In 2020, he was hired part time as a patient sitter, staying at the bedside of a patient who needs oversight, either because they are a fall risk, undergoing detox from substance abuse, or attempted self-harm or suicide.

He now works as a mental health worker at Backus, but heads to UConn's School of Medicine this fall, interested in endocrinology, psychology, neurology, maybe even primary care.

"I remember during his (volunteer) interview he expressed a desire and determination to attend medical school and we are so proud that his dream has been realized!" Brown said.

—Elissa Bass



Angelica Royer Blackburn



Tyler Fitzgerald

Photos by Jeff Evans

Honor Guard Pays Tribute to Fellow Nurses

Dressed head to toe in vintage white nursing uniforms, accented by blue and red capes, one small group of women literally stand out in a crowd.

The women are part of the Connecticut Nurses Honor Guard, active and retired nurses who voluntarily honor other nurses by attending their funerals or memorial services and presenting a tribute to those in attendance.

As part of efforts to form nurses honor guards in all 50 states, Athena Mains, Care Connect instructional designer for Hartford HealthCare, was interested in starting a Connecticut chapter.

“As I was thinking about how to do this, two other nurses reached out and the three of us got to work right away to make it happen,” Mains said.

The Connecticut chapter officially formed in January 2021 with the motto, “We Take Caring to the Next Level.” They took part in their first tribute that October.

“I never thought in a million years I’d be 50 years old attending funerals so often, but it’s been such a rewarding and humbling experience to honor the women and men who’ve dedicated their lives to a profession that’s held in such high regard,” Mains said.

Wearing outfits resembling Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, the Honor Guard actively participates in funeral services, presenting the family with a white rose and a nightingale lamp as a keepsake. They also read a poem that symbolically releases the nurse from duties.

“It’s a beautiful thing to do for the nurse who’s passed, but it’s also wonderful for the family because it validates the role that nurses play in the lives of their patients during the course of their career,” Mains said.

The Connecticut Nurses Honor Guard has about 20 active members and they hope to grow numbers across the state to help accommodate funerals since the majority of current members live and work in central Connecticut.

“We need all kinds of members. The only requirement is that you have to be a nurse who is actively working, retired or even a student,” Mains explained. The group is also looking for ways to fundraise to help pay for the items given to families.



Pictured at top, from left to right, are: Cheryl Mitchell, RN; Athena Mains, RN; Michele Backus, RN; Judy Niedzielski, RN; Shaina Hamel, LPN; and Karen Fasano, vice president, Patient Care Services, Central Region. In the bottom photo, from left to right, are: Cheryl Mitchell, RN; Athena Mains, BSN, RN; Maria Cusano-Sanzo, RN; and group co-founder Meghan Brennan, RN.

Photos by Brian Spyros

“We’re proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish so far and the impact it’s had on so many people. It’s a meaningful way to pay tribute to our nurses who are so deserving of this type of recognition,” Mains said.

For more information about the Connecticut Nurses Honor Guard, or to become a member, contact Athena Mains at Athena.Mains@hhchealth.org.

—Brian Spyros



Many refer to their units, departments or hospital as “one big family.” Maybe it’s because we spend so much time together, or because some invite relatives to apply because it’s a great place to work. This section is about those connections. We want to hear your story. Email susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org.

It’s No Act: Doctor’s Son in Netflix Show

By Kate Carey-Trull

From creating home movies on an iPhone and acting in school plays, Griffin Santopietro has parlayed his love of acting into a career at the young age of 16, including his current gig on the Netflix original series “Cobra Kai.”

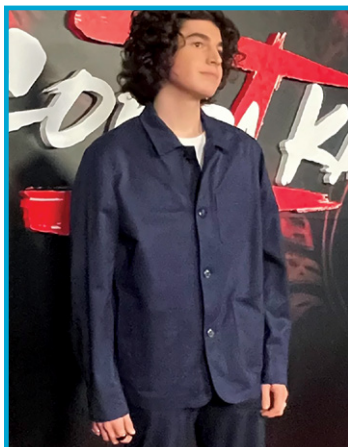
His father, Dr. John Santopietro, physician-in-chief of the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network, said his acting career, which includes independent films and appearances on shows like “Bull” and “New Amsterdam,” has been a combination of things unfolding organically and focused hard work.

Griffin, the middle of three boys, followed older brother, Max, 19, into musical theater at a young age (younger brother, Beckett, is 12). Max is studying musical theater in college.

“None of my boys were heavily into sports,” Dr. Santopietro said. “When Griff was in second grade, he performed in a children’s theater program and he really transformed on stage, even at that young age.”

Dr. Santopietro said his son was introverted, but starting taking acting lessons and

performing in local theater. The three boys often made movies with an iPhone, acting out characters from Marvel movies or impersonating family members.



Griffin Santopietro, son of Dr. John Santopietro, physician-in-chief of the Behavioral Health Network, is photographed on the red carpet at the premiere of “Cobra Kai” season five, which hit Netflix in early September.

“Once we saw how dedicated he was, we knew had to support him,” he said. This included bringing Griffin to auditions in New York City. His mother, Kathy, helped navigate the world of child acting. “You do need to be willing to flex and bend and make sacrifices so they can follow their passion. Griff had a natural comedic ability, and that got him early attention of agents. He did have to learn to deal with rejection, because he would almost get a lot of roles.”

A supporting role in the Adam Sandler movie, “Week Of,” starring Sandler and Chris Rock, was his first real job. Dr. Santopietro said it was a good experience, giving Griffin the chance to learn and meet people of different ages involved in acting careers.

Actors under 18 must have a parent with them on set, so Kathy usually travels with him but sometimes Dr. Santopietro goes to Atlanta where they film “Cobra Kai.” In its fifth season, the sequel to the 1980s “Karate Kid” movies, starring Ralph Macchio, is scheduled to be out in early September. Griffin plays Macchio’s son, Anthony, whose role expands over the seasons.

Last year, he filmed an episode of “New Amsterdam,” a medical drama set in New York City. The episode focused on the character’s mother who had Capgras syndrome, a delusional misidentification syndrome where she could no longer recognize her son.

It’s interesting, Dr. Santopietro said, to see Griffin in the role, and playing Macchio’s son.

“They put out a Father’s Day message with a photo of the two of them, which was a little weird, but cool,” he said “It’s a remarkable experience — a whole different world in the television and film industry.”

thank you



THANK YOU NOTES

You never think an accident will happen to you, until one day it does, and before you know it, courageous healthcare workers come to your rescue. In April, I was cutting down a tree on my property when a limb came crashing down on me, knocking me unconscious. I was airlifted by LIFE STAR to Hartford Hospital for specialized care for a traumatic brain injury. It could have turned from horrific to tragic had it not been for the selfless healthcare workers taking the proper immediate actions to save my life. Your actions, your professionalism and your care saved my family from a tragedy. I will never be able to fully express my deepest and sincerest gratitude. Because of your incredible work ethic, expertise and care, I met my first grandson in August, and for that I am forever thankful.

—Michael Longsdorf and family, Quaker Hill

Hospice care was well done. I was honored to be with my husband as he died. I gave him a great send off! Thank you for your help.

—Spouse of Hartford West Hospice patient

Although the procedures I underwent — biopsy, SpaceOAR, radiation — were not difficult, they do cause a certain degree of anxiety. What impressed me is not the new technology, which is amazing, but EVERY staff member I encountered at Backus Hospital. They were a wonderful combination of competence, compassion and good humor, thereby relieving that anxiety.

—Tom Sullivan

My recent stay at Backus Hospital was an excellent experience, as always! Dr. Hairong Lu was informative and eager to answer any concerns I had and I had complete trust in her diagnosis and her desire to make me understand my treatment. Drs. Adam Neidleman and Mahesh Kabadi are also excellent doctors. I would only consider going to another hospital if I could not get the treatment I needed at Backus!

—Harriet Hoyle, Norwich



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