



# Outlook

A 16-page special section **2021**

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Devastating. Crippling. Cruel. Pick any of the three and you will have summed up the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of our lives and the vibrancy of our community.

A year that began with such promise last January has now tumbled into 2021, but as the vaccine roll-out begins to loosen the virus's grip, it is time, once again, to begin looking ahead.

At the BDC and IDA, we envision a return of vitality to our streets and public spaces, a reinvigorated arts and performance scene, a resurgent tourism economy, a slow but steady recovery by the service sector, and renewed commitments to capital spending and job creation.

There is much work to do, and it will take some time, but there will be good stories to tell as we travel the road to recovery.

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*If you want an analogy for what the world will look like as it climbs out of the coronavirus pandemic, look to a sunrise.*

*It starts with darkness. The stars have winked out, one by one. The moon has set. From across the valley, street lights are turning off; cars on the highway no longer stand out for their moving lights.*

*It's dark, and there's nothing to look forward to in the next three months, except for the promise of a coming day.*

# THE DAWN — 3 MONTHS

## Expect little but the promise of change

### From Staff Reports

#### HEALTH

The COVID-19 night has been dark and long. Around the world, more than 106 million people have contracted the virus. It has killed more than 2.3 million. In America, more than 27 million have contracted it; it has killed more than 463,000 — 15 times as many people as a typical strain of influenza.

In the next three months, as a dawn begins on a coronavirus-free day, don't expect to see much lightening of the darkness.

Dr. Chris Morley, chairman of the department of public health and preventive medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, said the greater Cortland area will look much as it does today.

The post-holiday spikes in cases will be subsiding but the virus will still be around and therefore people will still have to follow mask and social distancing guidelines.

"There are still new cases being diagnosed every day and new spikes are possible," he said.

Restrictions will be lifted as cases decrease, but that will take time and occasional spikes will need dealt with until herd immunity is reached.

Expect pauses on activities, balanced by a need to take into account any ramifications like the effect they could have on the economy, he said. It will be about finding a balance.

"We will need to balance those needs with safety, and remain vigilant and cautious," he said. "Keep masking, and continue to avoid crowds."

#### BUSINESS

"People are ready for the sun to come out," said Garry VanGorder, executive director of the Cortland County Business Corp. and Cortland County Industrial Development Agency.

But the sunrise, itself, comes later. For the next couple of months, expect businesses to continue the struggles of the past year, when many had to close at least temporarily and those that remained open had to reinvent their work habits to protect themselves and their customers.

"Our business community has grown accustomed to what they need to do to keep people safe," said Bob Haight, executive director of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce. "They can keep us safe as we start to gather in larger crowds."

He looks forward to resuming meetings with local businesses, which he expects will start with outdoor gatherings at restaurants.

Some businesses have closed, some have struggled and adjusted, yet others have continued apparently unaffected because they are essential businesses with a steady demand for



Kevin Conlon/city editor  
Steve Franco, owner of Bailey Place Insurance, chats with employee Mary Turturro, who works in account support for the company.

### What do you think Cortland will look like three months from now?



#### Susan Benedict, 75, of Cortland

"It will look pretty much as it does now. I think people will be wary."



#### Matt Kriever, 25, of Cortland

"I would hope, as far as the restaurants and bars, that they can stay open. Hopefully the government can do more to provide incentives for them to come back. Hopefully we are trending in the right direction."

their products.

"2020 was a brutal year, as everybody knows," VanGorder said. "I am amazed at how resilient

the local business community was. People were brilliant to stay within the rules."

Steve Franco, owner of Bailey Place Insur-

ance, said his company has struggled, but it avoided layoffs in part because it invested in technology in recent years. The nature of the insurance business and the safety precautions helped.

Meeting with clients remotely was easier with technology the company had already been implementing, he said.

"Insurance has traditionally been a face-to-face business," Franco said. "We hope to be having face-to-face meetings again."

#### EDUCATION

Schooling — more specifically classroom instruction and the methods in which it is given — might look the same come May as it does in February at the Homer Central School District, said Superintendent Thomas Turck.

Pre-kindergartners to sixth-graders have been doing in-person learning five days a week while the older students have done a hybrid model of some days in class and some days remote.

Some of his staff have already received COVID vaccinations but Turck said he hopes all staff will have the vaccine by May.

But by May, the seniors will be looking to prom and graduation. Can they?

"We're trying to get some semblance of normalcy that they've had in the past and that they would want moving forward," Turck said.

At the Moravia Central School District, administrators are looking to bring back all elementary students on Wednesdays — which is a remote day for all students — said Superintendent John Birmingham. Additionally, the district is looking to bring back students in all grades who have been struggling academically this year.

Elementary school students rotate between morning and afternoon schedules for in-person learning while middle and high school students take a hybrid approach like Homer, Birmingham said.

That's half the classroom time Birmingham would like students to get, and hopes they can get if his staff can be vaccinated by spring.

"The magic that happens in the classroom is irreplaceable so we have a committee that is trying to bring back kids on Wednesdays," Birmingham said.

#### ENTERTAINMENT

Carol Fitzgerald said it is tough to think how the Cultural Council of Cortland County will host events this May. The COVID-19 pandemic has blown up art shows, live theater and concerts.

Still, Fitzgerald, executive director of the council, wants her agency to bring people together again.

"It was heartening to me to see the number of artists participating in the Arts Challenge," Fitzgerald said. "It was nice to see all the support."

See DAWN, page 3A



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## LOOKING AHEAD

The sun shines a little more each day, and it's not just because we're nearing the end of winter. The world is thawing all around us, after a year seemingly frozen in time.

We can finally begin thinking of life after the pandemic, and the *Cortland Standard's* Outlook 2021 special section is an excellent primer for what to expect this year and beyond.

I'm ready for a little more optimism, and I suspect you are, too. Our journalists asked experts, business owners and community leaders what they predict will happen over the next three months, six months, even a year.

While we aren't promising



all these predictions will come true, this information represents the best guesses for what a post-COVID-19 world

will look like in the greater Cortland area.

As frightening as it may be, a great many things won't be the same as they were before. A lot has changed since we first heard about "social distancing" and "PPE," and some of those changes will likely stick around into the future. But there's a lot of opportunity at such times, and I'm excited to see this community embrace the possibilities.

I hope you enjoy Outlook 2021, and that we can all stay safe and healthy as we watch the sun rise again over Central New York.

Evan Geibel  
Publisher



# Business from the back deck:

## A new normal includes flexibility

By **BOB HAIGHT**  
Contributing Writer

We're all ready for normalcy but what will that look like?

I've watched our community mask up, keep their distance, forgo handshakes, and do all the drive-bys and drive-ups possible.

I want to be safe just like all our local business leaders, and our businesses deserve to be congratulated for all they've done to keep our community safe.

But let's look at next year. What have we learned and what will we keep from a 2020 we'd like to forget?

First, we've learned we can trust our best people to work from home and perform at or better than the bar we use to judge them by.

Second, we've learned we don't need all the physical tools and spaces we're accustomed to for us to get our job accomplished. Or at least to maintain the status quo of our businesses, we operated for months in that realm.

Next year, though, when we're out of this hole I feel like we're in, I want to come out fresh, invigorated, ready to tackle more challenges. I surely don't want to do that by meeting with my team virtually, I don't want to meet with my statewide or nationwide partners virtually.

And of course I don't want to see you through a mask and bump your elbow only to be sure I sanitize after we meet.

Our team needs the interactions we have in our office, bouncing ideas off each other, yelling down the hall when we have the perfect answer to challenge anyone to find a hole in our idea.

We need to see our partners face to face to share ideas, challenges, smiles, and looks of surprise. Most of all I need to see you, our members and our community. I won't do it virtually, I'll look you in the eye as I shake your hand.

Our work place will be different. I know if you choose to work from home while caring for a loved one you can do it. I know if my team tells me they want time to work from their deck in the summer I can trust them to do it and do it well.

Where does that leave us? I see a hybrid approach taken by many. We'll be in our office to see each other and greet you but there will certainly be times we'll offer the option of remote working.

Much of what we do is "high touch" and I appreciate seeing business owners and hearing and seeing their successes and challenges, so I look forward to being back in their place of business.

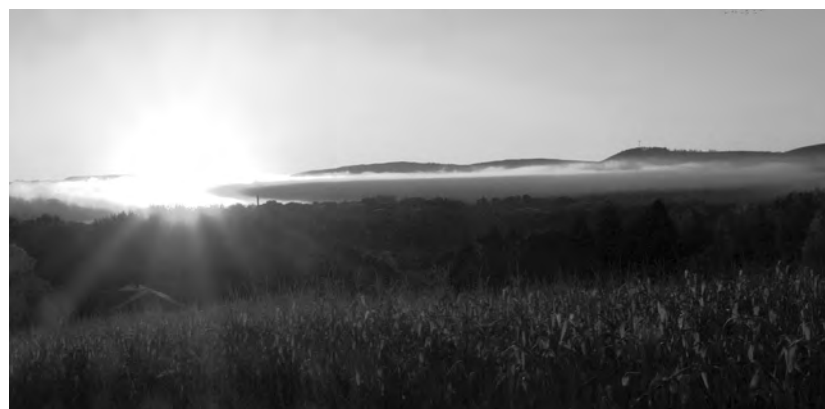
There are those tasks, however, that simply require a chair and a computer and I'm not sure anyone cares if it's in my office, or at BRU 64, or on my deck.

Our offices will be moving to 83 Main St., Cortland, very soon and while I know we can promote local business better than ever with that location and I'm sure I'll break new records for visiting with businesses, but I also know I'll connect with you in ways we didn't dream of just 12 months ago.

I know many of your businesses are changing also and I invite you to share what's working with us and your neighbors. As we create our new normal, I expect us to be better than ever and for many, more efficient than they ever dreamed.

I know you join me in looking forward to 2022 and our transition to get there.

*Bob Haight is the president and CEO of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce.*



# A new day requires patience, but it does eventually rise

By **GARRY VAN GORDER**  
Contributing Writer

After nearly a year of lockdowns, executive orders and fretting over daily case counts, hospitalizations and deaths, we're finally beginning to think about life after COVID-19.

It is pleasant to think about, but we need to be realistic:

■ We get closer to "a brand-new day" with vaccinations, but most experts agree that it is a variety of factors — not the least of which is a vaccine supply that does not yet meet demand, that will likely take us well past mid-year before we can, maybe, begin to breathe again.

■ A leading laggard will be consumer confidence and mobility as people hesitate to immediately trust that the worst is behind us. That's not the best news for small businesses and the service sector that have been damaged so badly, but attitudes and comfort levels should gradually improve as the case numbers wane.

■ Huge local economic drivers like SUNY Cortland, Tompkins Cortland Community College and tourism, while still adhering to some restrictions through at least mid-year, will help restore some vibrancy and vitality that is so important to who we are as a community.

■ Public health institutions ravaged by the pandemic will begin to recover as people see their doctors and begin, once again, opting for surgeries and treatments that have been put off for far too long. That's good for employment, good for the institutions and good for the overall health of our citizens.

■ We're going to get our kids back in school.

■ The employment picture should gradually improve, but don't expect a return to the typical workday. Working from home, which was steadily gaining traction as an employment option before COVID-19, will remain an option for many. There are some benefits to this for workers and for companies, but watch out for a negative impact on commerce centers so dependent on office-worker foot traffic.

■ Large employers may not soon return to workforce levels seen before the pandemic as many have done more with less and remained productive. A robust national and international recovery will be a key here because that's what will drive significant recovery and business growth locally.

There will be much to know and learn about the recovery in the days ahead, and we will have to be more patient than we want to be. But we will get there. A brand-new day — a brighter day — is coming.

*Garry VanGorder is executive director of the Cortland County Business Development Corp. and the Cortland County Industrial Development Agency.*

## DAWN

continued from page 2A

By May, though, Fitzgerald wasn't sure how the cultural council, which traditionally hosts art shows, bus trips and other events, would work.

"We're looking at moving to a hybrid model, to obtain software to do online events like the Community Arts Challenge," she said. "We are going to discuss activities. We want to look at becoming more active online."

The council worked with the Center for the Arts of Homer to stage its annual January art challenge exhibit. The center offered individual or family tours of the show and an opportunity to see the collection online. An award ceremony took place via Facebook and the event saw 80 works from some 60 artists, about the same participation as non-COVID years.

Before COVID-19, Chris Merkley had planned to offer a 2020 fall lineup of music at American Vintage Production's stage at 19 Church St. When the pandemic hit, he instead put together a series of concerts and interviews of local musicians, broadcast live on radio and then with excerpts of music and interviews online.

Expect more of the same by May, he said. "In general, a lot of event planning is kind of a wait and see basis. For now, AVP is concentrating on broadcasting and virtual shows."

Ty Marshal, executive director at the Center for the Arts of Homer, didn't want to put a time frame on what the center could do. It offers live concerts, art shows, classes and educational talks, much of it

canceled during the pandemic. But it had a 24-hour virtual telethon in December, bringing together musicians and non-profits to raise money.

It also had a series of socially distanced dinners in the fall.

"For us, the Center for the Arts only closed during the initial lockdown," he said of March and April 2020. "We have been open. We have been providing opportunities of different kinds."

Getting back to normal will be slow, he said, but inevitable.

Warmer weather will help, as will a growing number of vaccinated people.

"At this point, we are planning for those futures," Marshal said. "We are rethinking everything. The way we do tickets. The way we do seating. The way we look at volunteers."

"It feels like things change every day," said Kerby Thompson, artistic director of Cortland Repertory Theater, which traditionally hosts a summer theater season at the Pavilion Theater in Little York and a fall, winter and spring season at Cortland Repertory Theatre Downtown on Port Watson St. All those shows were canceled, although the theater hosted two successful drive-through outdoor parades at Dwyer Memorial Park, one in July and the other in October.

This year, Thompson will attend virtual audition conferences where actors try out for theaters. Thompson usually only attends two, because of the travel and hotel expense.

"This year I am going to five," he said. They're cheaper done virtually. He is building a stock of actors and technical

people who he wants to hire for that day when it can stage shows again.

"We have not announced anything for the summer yet," Thompson said. "We are hoping to do something outside."

That comes with a risk of a 10-minute storm, but it's possible to host a drive-in theater event where people stay in their cars. Also, perhaps the theater could have a full intern company in the summer and maybe do two or three shows, he said. By mid-May, Thompson needs a sense of what it can do to prepare for summer.

"We are looking at all these options."

### SPORTS

Some high school soccer, field hockey and cross-country teams could compete last fall, and high-risk winter sports were finally given the green light, but that doesn't mean everything is fine and dandy for interscholastic athletics.

In fact, at SUNY Cortland and Tompkins Cortland Community College, it's been the opposite. The Red Dragons and Panthers have lost a full year of intercollegiate athletics, except for TC3's cross-country team, which has been able to compete.

But there's a glimmer of hope. TC3 committed to outdoor sports this spring and the SUNY Athletic Conference is in talks to determine how to play spring sports safely.

But it's hurt recruiting, all the same.

With high school athletics largely shut down, coaches at SUNY, TC3 and colleges across the country have had to rely on old data, especially for se-

niors who would normally have signed by now, except their final high school seasons were canceled. Remote viewing and little direct communication with an athlete is a poor substitute.

"We normally identify potential student-athletes in the fall proceeding their admission to college," SUNY men's hockey coach Joe Cardarelli said. "This year is no different, but all of our recruiting is via Hockey TV, an online video broadcasting service. Without the ability to contact potential recruits in-person, this has been the hardest recruiting year in my 15 seasons."

Some junior hockey leagues

have been able to play the past few months, allowing Cardarelli and his staff to study players.

"Even with some shutdowns, we've heavily relied on this season's performance," Cardarelli said. "The bigger concern is since we are only able to watch what is on the screen, we miss the intangibles a potential recruit possess: what is their body language on the bench, how do they 'see the ice' when they don't have the puck, et cetera. Statistics are only a part of the assessment."

For the athletes already on campus, staying engaged and active means getting creative

with social distancing.

"We spent the summer and start of the school year doing Zoom meetings both with individual players discussing self-evaluations and goal setting as well as full-team Zoom meetings to provide information and have some sense of camaraderie," Cardarelli said. "We haven't been able to do anything in person and with all of the students' classes being online, we've done much less with the full group and relied on individual texts and calls."

*S.N. Briere, Kevin Conlon, Sam Feeley, Katie Keyser and Colin Spencer contributed to this report.*



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# Real ideas, virtual delivery

## Libraries stay open to people even as doors are closed

By PRISCILLA BERGGREN-THOMAS  
Contributing Writer

The day started with hope that we'd figure out how to keep the library open and functioning, but as phone calls and emails poured in it became apparent that the unimaginable was going to happen.

By the end of that day last March, we were reeling from the realization that the library was being closed, like so many other businesses, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It seemed unimaginable. Nothing in living memory had prepared us for that moment.

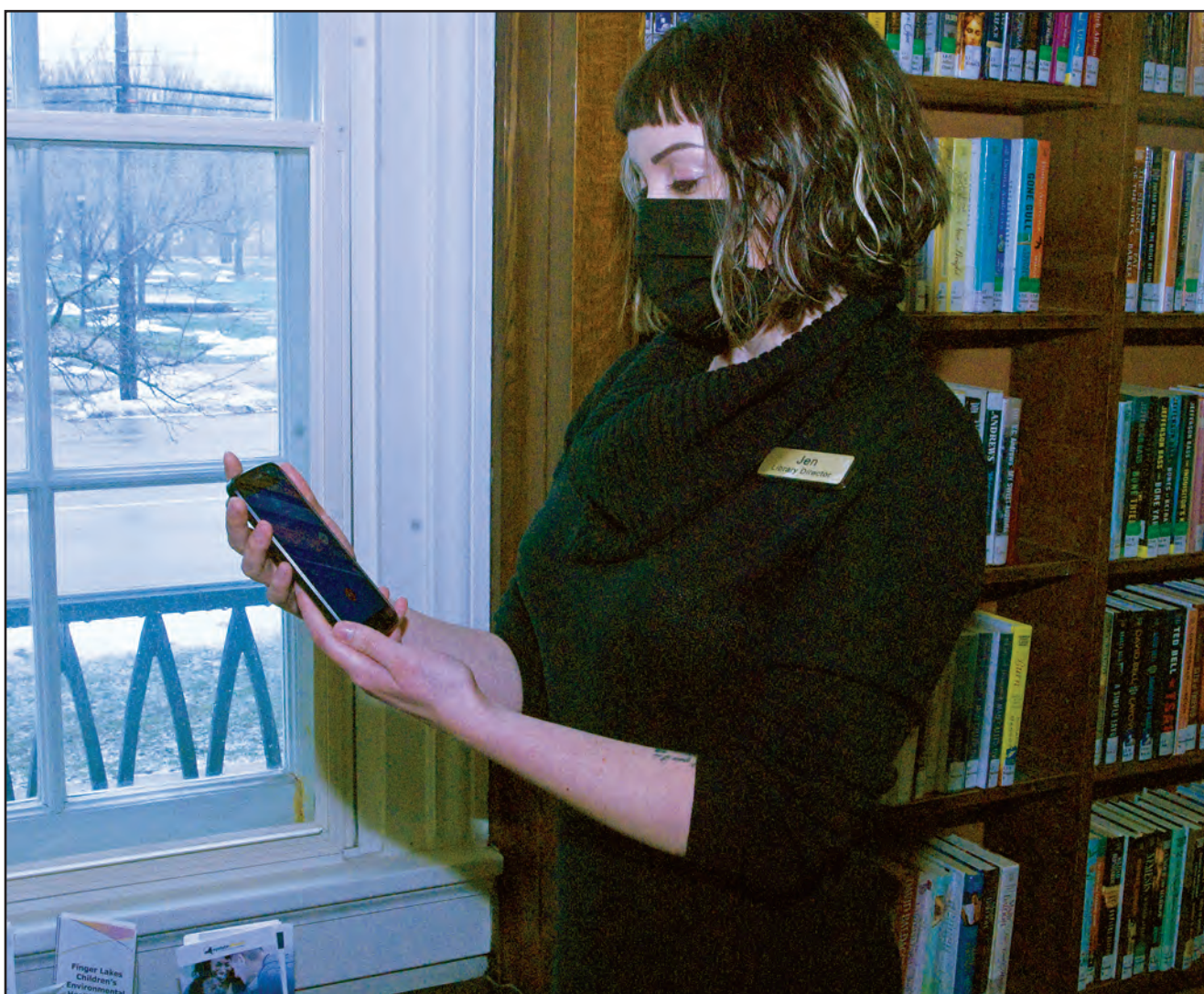
The shock lasted for a few days, and then librarians and libraries did what they always do. We figured out how a library is a library when everything changes. In this case it was, how to be a library when we couldn't open our doors to the public.

Over the coming months, we moved our book clubs, story times, Lego clubs online, meeting on Facebook Live and then Zoom. We increased our downloadable collections, shifting budgets from physical books to ebooks and downloadable audio. We changed technology so people could sign up for library cards online, no longer needing to come into the building to get a physical card.

We increased our presence on Facebook, blogs, created podcasts, learned how to make virtual reading rooms.

As things were starting to reopen, we spent hours developing protocols for handling returned materials.

Questions we never imagined having to answer became our major, sometimes only, topic of conversation. How long do things need to be quarantined? How do we keep staff safe when handling returned materials? How does curbside service work



Jen Graney, the director of the Cortland Free Library, holds her phone while listening to a story. The library has a Dial-a-Story service that lets listeners call a number and hear a short story or poem.

Colin Spencer/file photo

at a library?

Now, looking into the future, librarians, like everyone else, wonder what "normal" will actually be.

We take everything we've learned in the last 10 to 12 months and plan for a new normal that we hope will arrive in the next year.

Here's what we know. Some things are just better in person. We can

do a virtual story time, but actually having children in the room, dancing, singing, laughing together will always be better. Online book clubs are adequate, but the activities that go along with them like crafts and science are always better together. Hands-on we can offer a level of learning, interaction and help that is more satisfying and effective

than online.

We've done cooking projects via Zoom, which is always good for a laugh, but it will never beat dividing up the tasks, smelling cookies baking, and sitting down together to enjoy our efforts while we discuss a good book.

Still, I can see hybrid book clubs becoming a normal part of what we

do. Having some participants physically there, while others join us remotely will allow us to include those who don't have a ride today, or those who have moved away but still want to discuss books with old friends.

We've seen an increase in the use of ebooks, but it is small compared to the circulation of actual physical books. So ebooks will stay, but there will still be people who want to browse the stacks, check out the new books, just be in the library.

When we can finally gather together again, tutoring, people needing a computer, or wanting a place to meet friends and study together will be what continues to make the library a community center. Being able to sign up for a library card online or calling in and requesting curbside service seem like things we will want to continue to offer to make life simpler, because we all need life to be simpler.

In the end, libraries will go back to being community gathering spaces, as well as the educational, informational and entertainment services we provide. We've learned to be inventive and find ways to do that virtually and online. Those new skills will inform much of what we do long into the future.

Yet, we look forward to reopening our doors and having our buildings be filled with children's laughter as they learn, with friends gathering or individuals enjoying a quiet space, with tutors providing students with extra help, or community members seeking help with technology, because the library is first and foremost a place where all are welcome.

Priscilla Berggren-Thomas is the director of Phillips Free Library in Homer.



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# The future is accessible and flexible

By AARON BAIER  
Contributing Writer

While the pandemic has slowed many areas of work and has left people feeling isolated, it has not stopped people with disabilities from dreaming of a more accessible and flexible future.

At Access to Independence, we are hopeful for a future where people with disabilities can continue their pursuit of independent living, even if it means doing things a little bit differently.

As an employer, the pandemic has challenged Access to Independence to explore new ways of doing business. We have enabled staff to work remotely, meet consumers in new virtual settings and even perform outreach in those settings.

However, virtual settings have proven to be inaccessible for many people without broadband internet and who do not have necessary ac-

cess to transportation. These are the first areas we look forward to working on in a post-pandemic world.

Access to Independence has had to slow the pace at which we modify people's homes due to slow funding and due to slowdowns in manufacturing and supply chains. We have continued to provide these essential modifications throughout the pandemic, because two or three accessible homes is better than none. This is the second area that we will look forward to improving in our post-pandemic world.

One of the most requested and widely missed aspects of Access to Independence's services are our social events. We absolutely miss seeing people at our Craft Club, our movie nights, our ADA Picnics and at other in-person events. Social interactions are an important and beloved part of what we do for people with disabilities and our community. This is the

third area that we are looking forward to in our post-pandemic world.

Access to Independence is already looking at these three areas — outreach and education, home modifications and social events — and planning to make them a reality as soon as it is allowable.

At the same point, we will not let go of the valuable lessons and technologies that we have gained during the pandemic. We will continue to support a partially remote work force and virtual events.

However, we will also provide a location for people to participate who may not have had the opportunity before. We are looking into internet access point services and other ways to advocate for improved broadband access in our community.

Access to Independence is seeking ways to enhance and grow our Accessibility Modification Program so we can provide more people with dis-

abilities the ramps, bathrooms and other adaptive technology that they need to be independent.

We are anxious to assist the people who have continued to seek our services throughout the pandemic but who we have had to add to our waiting list. The demand for home modifications will not stop until universally designed homes become the norm in our community. We will look forward to making strides to this goal in the coming year and beyond.

Finally, we all are feeling the pain of not seeing our friends and families around the community. All of our staff and consumers continue to tell us what they want to do and ask for events that they are craving. We want our Sunday Strikers bowling league, our weekly craft classes and other regularly occurring events to come back to our office and locations around the community.

In our post-pandemic world, we

look forward to bringing back a BIG Americans with Disabilities Act Picnic and hosting our first Universal 5.5K race. While we don't know when, we are not giving up on making these events happen for all of us who cannot wait to gather with our friends and loved ones.

The pandemic makes us feel isolated, but Access to Independence wants to share a message of hope that we are here, we are not going away, and we are excited for a future that is accessible and flexible. We want all people with disabilities to be included and have the opportunity to participate in a community that continues to grow and learn together.

For more information on Access to Independence and our services, please call 607-753-7363, or email [info@aticortland.org](mailto:info@aticortland.org).

Aaron Baier is executive director of Access to Independence.

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Our Staff (from left to right): Nancy Richards, owner; Debbie Pelowski, Bev Berry, and Martha Bush.

## WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE 2021 REAL ESTATE MARKET?

It's now no secret that over the past 12 months Cortland County has seen a surge in real estate activity resulting in an exceptional market for sellers. Buyer's have also benefited by being able to lock in interest rates at previously unheard of levels; most recently 30 year fixed rates at sub 3.0 numbers. However, it remains extraordinarily important that expectations are reasonably set, and realistically informed. Are you interested in knowing the highest value you can expect? Do you want to be sure you pay fair market value for a property, and not sure where to begin? Let one of our professional agents and our top performing firm work on your behalf to ensure success in the 2021 real estate market!

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The midnight-blue sky lightens through a greyness, to a deep royal blue, to a cyan. The mood lightens along with it. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a spot on the horizon turns red. The clouds reflect a deep purple and violet.

Below it, the community remains in shadow, as much darkness as light. But the promise is undeniable.

Then the sliver of yellow peeks over the horizon. It's here, finally. Daylight pours over the eastern horizon, filling the sky all the way to the west, leaving only a sleepy community below it beginning to awaken.

# THE DAY BREAKS — 6 MONTHS

## The changes accelerate

### From Staff Reports

#### HEALTH

Six months from now, people will likely be partaking in many of the activities they were last year in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We managed to move lots of activities outside and our transmission rates and new cases were relatively low," Dr. Chris Morley, chairman of the department of public health and preventive medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse.

Summer's long days and warm weather will combine with two things to make life easier: an increasing immunity as more people are vaccinated and herd immunity begins to slow the rate of infection; and an awareness of how much people can do to avoid spreading a virus.

"We have what we know worked last summer, coupled with the fact that more people will have some level of immunity from either vaccination or previous infection, to allow us some more freedom of movement then," Morley said.

But the greater Cortland area won't be out of the woods, yet. Morley said that people will need to keep an eye on coronavirus variants, such as the more-infectious United Kingdom variant, "which may offset the gains we have made."

#### BUSINESS

"Six months from now, I hope we are getting to the point that feels normal," said Bob Haight, executive director of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce.

He said he is encouraged by the federal government's plans to expand vaccinations. It's estimated that 70 percent of the population will be inoculated by the end of the summer — about the level at which the benefits of herd immunity begin to develop.

This will help manufacturers whose employees work in conditions that make wearing masks difficult, such as machine operators and welders, Haight said.

Restoring a sense of "normal" will be critical. Garry VanGorder, president of the Cortland County Business Develop Corp. and Industrial Development Agency, said he hopes that summer outdoor activities, like concerts, will return.

Other keys are restoring SUNY Cortland and Tompkins Cortland Community College to full operation and the careful reopening of businesses, he said.

"We will continue to see things ramp up," VanGorder said. "Some things are going to come back more slowly. People are still going to need to be cautious."

Steve Franco, owner of Bailey Place Insurance, said he hopes interactions with customers will increase, but the form that takes will depend on the customers' preferences. The business used to be very oriented on face-to-face meetings. It will need to be flexible.

"We hope in the future we will be able to conduct business as customers want us to," he said.

"We hope our service will be improved by this."

#### EDUCATION

By August, around the time schools are starting up for the 2021-22 school year, the Homer Central School District will probably look much the same as it did last August, said Superintendent Thomas Turck.

Most students will be learning in-person, but the district will still offer remote learning for those who want it.

"We probably start next school year looking the same," Turck said. "We're in a pretty good place right now."

The district will focus on expanding resources to help students with their social and emotional needs, which have been shunted aside by remote learning and isolation.

At the Moravia Central School District, Superintendent John Birmingham said he's looking to have 90% of his staff have their vaccinations and be back to in-person learning five days a week



Colin Spencer/file photo

Greg Moller as Geppetto and his son Calvan Moller as Pinocchio greet guests last July during Stories in the Park at Dwyer Memorial park in Preble.

## What do you think Cortland will look like six months from now?

### Valerie Cleland of Homer



"I'm optimistic that our departments and our local governments are going to work together to try to find the best solutions to some of our issues that we have. There's ongoing challenges but I think with the new vaccines that are coming out, and the new plan going forward to try to distribute those vaccines in an efficient way, is going to be successful. We live in a great community here in Homer and Cortland and everybody wants the best and there's a lot of agencies reaching out to people to try to support them so I just remain optimistic that things will get back to some type of normal soon."

### Charbel Karam, owner of Pita Gourmet on Main Street in Cortland



Karam said he hopes the business climate will begin to improve, but he is skeptical. "I would love to see it get better," he said, "but I don't think so."



Travis Dunn/file photo

Callum Arthur, 1, at the 13th Annual Arts and Wine Festival in 2019 at Courthouse Park. The Cultural Council of Cortland County is trying to find a way to resume the event in August.

in all grades.

Today, elementary students rotate between morning and afternoon schedules for in-person learning — a half-day rather than a full day. Middle and high school students spend two days in-person and three days remote.

#### SPORTS

For athletes already on campus at SUNY Cortland, staying engaged and active means getting creative with social distancing.

"We spent the summer and start of the school year doing Zoom meetings both with individual players discussing self-evaluations and goal setting as well as full-team Zoom meetings to provide information and have some sense of camaraderie," SUNY Cortland men's hockey coach Joe Cardarelli said. "We haven't been able to do anything in person and with all of the students' classes being online, we've done much less with the full group and relied on individual texts and calls."

The summer will be spent planning for an actual meeting

"Since we normally recruit across North America, we historically text and call recruits on a regular basis and that hasn't changed during the pandemic since we haven't been able to have them on campus or even go to meet them at other venues," Cardarelli said. "The athletic ability is fairly easy to identify compared to evaluating if a recruit is the right fit for our program in the locker room, in the classroom and in the community."

"Being a good teammate and embracing the team's culture is most important, and the hardest part of the evaluation process when you can't have them on campus to spend time with the rest of the team," he added.

Cortland swimming and diving coach Brian Tobin is a little more handicapped, however. His team cannot travel or participate in meets until next fall at the earliest. Summer will be spent in something more virtual.

"What we're going to do is run some time trials to give the kids the opportunity to compete some, and give us a metric to see what we're capable of," Tobin said. "It's not the same as competition, but this year we simply have to adjust to the situation that has been presented."

#### ENTERTAINMENT

The Cortland Arts and Wine Festival, an icon of August, is a possibility, with its wine tent, live music, artists and crafters. But what will it look like?

"Can we look at offering an in-person festival that's scaled back? We're looking at a hybrid festival that is both online and face to face," said Carol Fitzgerald, executive director of the sponsor, the Cultural Council of Cortland County.

"What can be done online to feature area wineries?" she asked. "We could have live artists stream online and do social distancing for in-person events."

The council received a grant that can go toward software to pull this off, but it must look at costs for the wine fest in-person and online.

"With online, you can reach people with disabilities, people that can't attend ... so there's some positives as well," Fitzgerald said.

However, Chris Merkley was non-committal about August and what he might be able to offer in live entertainment through American Vintage Productions in Cortland.

"It's tough to see because everything has been constantly changing," he said. "We'll see how things are going."

However, Kerby Thompson is a bit more hopeful with Cortland Repertory Theatre. The theater group has already learned to stage drive-through entertainment, like a drive-through storybook last summer at Dwyer Park in Little York.

He expects the theater to begin hosting its typical lineup of musicians, comedians and plays at its venue in the fall, "along the lines we are used to."

S.N. Briere, Kevin Conlon, Sam Feeley, Katie Keyser and Colin Spencer contributed to this report.



# MANUFACTURING

## Expect growth and opportunity, but at a cost

By KEVIN THOMPSON  
Contributing Writer

The global COVID-19 pandemic upset normal life for nearly everyone on the planet. All industries have been impacted and manufacturing has certainly shared in the burden.

Industry-wide shutdowns, disruptions of global supply lines and staffing shortages due to COVID-related quarantines have all played havoc with manufacturers.

As the world becomes hopeful for a return to some form of normalcy, the question arises, "What is the new normal?"

The new normal may end up being a boon for American manufacturers. The disruption of supply chains stretching around the world showed how disastrous, and deadly, that could be.

With much of the American supply of medicines, medical supplies and equipment and personal protective equipment being produced overseas, the pandemic showed that we can be at the mercy of countries not always friendly to America.

Similarly, much of the technology that we rely upon is produced overseas, from smart phones to computer chips, which can also leave us vulnerable during periods of global crisis.

I believe this awareness will create opportunities for expansion of domestic manufacturing as the powers that be recognize the risks of a heavy reliance on imports of critical items. That desire for domestic production should enable a growth in American companies that can manufacture those critical items, even if it is at a higher cost than the imports.

However, while this may be good for manufacturing companies, there is a cost associated.

American workers typically earn more than their foreign counterparts. Much of the reason behind moving production offshore is to reduce costs so, by reason, moving that production back to America will



Dylan Winters welds a rail in February 2020 as employees of Marathon Boat Group finish fabricating and assembling their first pontoon boat for sale.

Todd R. McAdam/file photo

increase costs for those products.

Major retailers have consistently pushed for lower and lower prices in order to gain more customers for themselves. This push forces manufacturers to move jobs offshore in order to maintain their presence in these major retailers.

Long supply lines are a major problem for manufacturers and most would source domestically if the price and quality could be maintained. It is the market forces

driven by the big-box retailers that have pushed many of these jobs offshore.

Bringing them back will certainly cause inflationary pressures and retailers will need to react to the higher manufacturing costs by increasing prices to consumers. Higher minimum wages will increase these inflationary pressures felt by consumers as all businesses will see increased costs and will feel the need to pass those on to their customers.

To offset the higher labor costs, I feel that manufacturers will be looking to automate as much as possible. Automation, in particular robotics, has been increasing in recent years as prices have dropped, and I believe the pandemic will cause the adoption of automation to increase.

Robots can run non-stop for hours or days and they don't need COVID quarantines, personal protective equipment or social distancing. Plants filled with robots can contin-

ue to function with a skeleton crew of technicians and mechanics as long as raw materials are available and the end product can be transported away.

Many manufacturers will seek to increase use of automation to protect themselves from pandemic-related mandates such as split crews, limited workforce availability, and social distancing, which is not possible for all jobs.

We have already seen this as smart phone apps enable customers to place orders and schedule deliveries without ever speaking to a human.

American workers, particularly lower-skilled workers, will see the greatest negative impact from these changes. Higher mandated wage rates and pandemic protocols will lead more manufacturers to automation.

While there will be job growth in manufacturing, it will be at higher skill levels rather than the entry level. Employers will be less likely to add untrained workers as the cost of training will be higher. At the same time, inflationary pressures will mean that a trip to a restaurant, grocery store or other retailer will be more expensive.

One of the great benefits to Americans from the manufacturing move offshore has been a reduction in prices for many items like TVs, smart phones and other consumer products. A shift to domestic production, while also seeing a limit on low-skilled job growth, will cause prices to rise while more low skilled workers have difficulty finding jobs.

I see the net impact to be an increase in American manufacturing and manufacturing jobs, but at the expense of lower-skilled workers. People with job skills and training in computerized manufacturers will benefit but at the expense of those lacking skills, who in reality need the jobs the most.

Kevin Thompson is president of Marathon Boat Group.

## Buying a home will remain an emotional, personal experience

By JASON HAGE  
Contributing Writer

A new normal will cultivate our environment in many aspects as a result of the coronavirus pandemic we have been experiencing for the past year.

No one actually knows what it will look like as we are hopefully nearing an end to it. However, it is safe to say that we will be living in a new normal.

The real estate market nationwide and, especially, the local market has stayed very strong during this pandemic despite what we might have thought when this first hit.

Before March 2020, we were experiencing more than an average number of buyers and less than the average inventory of homes available to these buyers. Perhaps the baby boomer generation prefers not to move out of their homes they have.

This coupled with the fact that an all-time historic low for interest rates became even lower through the pandemic. Also, buyers need change because now they are facing more time at home, more time with family and more need for in-home office space.

This results in the homes that do become available on the market tend to sell quickly. Prices may have increased a little, but for the most part, they remained steady.

The real estate process has changed a bit as homes are being viewed more online or virtually and closings have become less personal with fewer people around the table. Real estate offices have

become less occupied as most Realtors have started working from home. Contracts for buyers and sellers have mostly been done through online signing software.

With all of this being said, there is still a personal touch when it comes to selling houses. Despite the virtual showings, buyers do get into the house to see for themselves before they make a final decision.

Realtors and buyers are wearing masks and maintaining a social distance from one another. Fewer family members and friends are coming into houses with buyers. Buyers are looking at fewer houses because they tend to rule some out through online viewings rather than seeing them themselves and then ruling them out.

Buyers are still getting inside the home they are seriously interested in. This personal touch with home buying will probably not change. I believe that when we get to the new normal, houses will still be viewed personally with a larger emphasis on virtual showings first.

More Realtors will continue to work from home and contracts will continue to be signed through online signing software. We may never get back to the way we used to do business, but buying and selling a home will continue to be emotional for most and, in my opinion, will continue to be a very personalized experience.

Jason Hage is associate broker with Hage Real Estate in Cortland.

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The sun is above the horizon. The purples and violets and oranges that reflected from the clouds have merged into a puffy white.

The sky is a uniform blue from horizon to horizon, and beneath it, the community awakens and starts the day.

But what kind of day will it be? Will it be filled with joy and triumph? Will it be loaded down with toil and dejection? Typically, the day will offer all that, in measure.

Still, if the end of the day can't be foreseen, the day has begun. And every dawn offers promise.

And hope.

# A NEW DAY — 1 YEAR

## Unknown potential and promise

### From Staff Reports

#### HEALTH

With more vaccines coming and continued actions to stop spreading the virus, Dr. Chris Morley, chairman of the department of public health and preventive medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, said he's hopeful that in a year people could start participating in activities that were once deemed normal.

Morley also said in a year there may be new rapid tests that can help determine who has the virus faster and are reliable to use to screen people who don't have symptoms.

COVID, however, is unlikely to go away forever, he said.

"I do suspect that we will have 'booster shots' or an annual vaccination regimen for COVID-19, like we do for influenza," he said. "However, the technology exists for that now. It will be a matter of keeping vaccine formulations ahead of new variants that emerge."

#### BUSINESS

The long-term implications of the pandemic for businesses are difficult to predict, but business leaders say it will include an evaluation by workplaces.

Many will continue or expand on flexible work arrangements, which were being introduced into some businesses in recent years but mushroomed during the pandemic.

"Our office spaces may not be as full as they once were," said Garry VanGorder, president of the Cortland County Business Development Corp. and Industrial Development Agency. "Employers are finding out that employees, in some cases, can be more productive from home."

This will also help businesses by expanding the area from which they can draw employees, who could live far from the physical site of an employer, he said.

"There may be some kind of hybrid," said Chamber of Commerce President Bob Haight, noting some people may work in an office while others work from home.

A remote worker may have some advantages, but it comes with a trade-off.

"There is nothing better than bouncing ideas off each other," Haight said, explaining his preference to having employees working in the same location. "That works best in person. That is where some of our best ideas come from, when we are hashing things out."

The pandemic has also brought attention to the space in which people work.

Steve Franco, owner of Bailey Place Insurance, said the company plans to expand its Cortland office by 2,000 square feet within a year, in part to accommodate two new employees but also to spread out the rest of the staff.

"A year from now, we are very optimistic that life will have returned to normal," Franco said. "I think business owners are a very optimistic bunch."

#### EDUCATION

A year from now, Homer Central School District Superintendent Thomas Turck said, he hopes the pandemic has been eradicated or is



Cortland Standard file photo

Parker Elementary in 2016 in Cortland. You might not see a scene like this in 2021, but it's very likely you might in 2022 as the coronavirus pandemic lifts.

### What do you think Cortland will look like a year or more from now?



#### Sharon Lanphear of Homer

Lanphear said she doesn't believe the county will be in a full-blown pandemic, but isn't sure people will be able to go without masks or social distancing.

Perhaps, she said, "businesses will be back open and we will feel more comfortable going out to eat, shopping, and back to doing recreational things."

She also said she would like to think seniors will feel more comfortable leaving their homes.

"We are an easy to please bunch – we just like to be together and do group things," she said.



#### Sara Knobel of Groton

Sara Knobel said she thinks Cortland will still be in a pandemic in a year "but to a lesser degree."

"I think Groton will flourish and continue to grow in community building and bonding," said Knobel, director of the Groton Library. "This is a wonderful area and people are reaching out to help."



Cortland Standard file photo

New York City actor Jon Steige talks with audience members in 2016 during a Cortland Repertory Theatre production of "The Story of Ebenezer Scrooge" in Cortland.

under control enough that all of the students can return and not have to worry about social distancing, which has shifted how teaching has operated by limiting the number of students in classrooms.

He wouldn't even mind if masks were still required.

"Until we get away from the 6 feet of social distance, we're not going to see our full complement of kids at school," he said.

To get things back to how they were pre-pandemic will require more staff — along with students — to be vaccinated.

As situations with the pandemic rapidly change for day to day and week to week, Moravia Superintendent John Birmingham said his district isn't planning any further away than next fall.

"To put a plan together for next January is a little far out of reach," he said.

If possible, he said he wants as many students learning in-person while still offering remote learning to students on a case-by-case basis.

#### SPORTS

If there's one sport that's handcuffed more than any other during the pandemic, it's wrestling. And there's no telling what the future looks like for SUNY Cortland head coach Brad Bruhn.

"We are hoping that they let us move to actual wrestling practice at some point," Bruhn said. "As for now, I will take the opportunity to work with the guys a few days a week lifting and conditioning. It is very important to get the new guys more involved and integrated in the team. Only time will tell."

#### ENTERTAINMENT

A year: "It's tough to think that far ahead," said Carol Fitzgerald, executive director of the Cultural Council of Cortland County. "Just bring the community together. I think that's one important piece for the future."

Kerby Thompson, producing artistic director of Cortland Repertory Theatre, said he may be naive, but since the pandemic started, he has always believed life will return to normal. He's banking on a full slate of shows at CRT Downtown next year.

"It we all do what we are supposed to do, we can get back to normal," he said.

"It's all speculative of course," said entertainer and producer Chris Merkley. "The optimist in me says in a year we will be looking at something that more closely resembles a year ago."

"It think it's going to be slow. It's a process that is slow. I think people will adapt to their comfort level," he added. "Some are more willing to come back to shows and some are less willing."

COVID-19 has allowed Merkley to step back and gain perspective, to see a level of appreciation for what Cortland has and doesn't have and a new appreciation about ways to adapt and think about building community.

"I look forward to the day we can do things in person," Merkley said.

S.N. Briere, Kevin Conlon, Sam Feeley, Katie Keyser and Colin Spencer contributed to this report.





# STAYING UNITED

# Nonprofits pivot to respond, rebuild lives

By **CHRISTELLA YONTA**  
Contributing Writer

As the United Way for Cortland County addresses the greatest challenges in our community, we continue to adapt our strategies and investments to meet our priorities of improving the health, education, and financial stability of residents in Cortland County.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted lives in ways that will have lasting effects on the Cortland community. It has impacted many, but none as profoundly as those who were already struggling — 44% of individuals, families and children in our county, according to a 2018 United Way study counting people who are asset-limited, income-constrained and employed.

During the initial stages of the pandemic, we were able to quickly adjust to meet emerging needs because of our extensive network of community partners. We took a leadership role in communicating continually changing information for multiple programs and served as a hub to organize mass food and supply distributions with several groups.

Investments that were previously made in technology enabled remote work and allowed our United Way staff of two to not only function but fast-track new initiatives and systems to continue our regular work.

The Cortland community was responsive and generous with their support during the pan-



Colin Spencer/file photos  
**ABOVE:** Dave Schmit, left, and Bill Webster during the United Way of Cortland County's 25th annual Day of Caring. **TOP:** Jenny Robinson carries a box of donated items.

dem. While current patterns are encouraging, annual campaign contributions are still much lower than they were a decade ago due to

changes in the workforce. This makes diversifying our funding streams critical to our ongoing success.

Like other nonprofits and businesses, United Way for Cortland has been compelled to adjust daily operations to achieve our goals. The needs have not gone away which places a premium on innovative solutions to community-wide issues.

Personal interaction and connection have always been at the heart of how we approach our work. As COVID-19 vaccination programs lead to immunity, the United Way can incorporate a hybrid approach of conducting our business: in person to engage our supporters and digital and print communications to continue stewardship.

Collaboration with other nonprofits and businesses during the pandemic proved of value as we all operated with reduced staff yet had even more work to accomplish. Moving forward, collaboration will continue as an efficient way of delivering services to those in need.

Since the Cortland community at large is the ultimate beneficiary of everything we do, the United Way is uniquely positioned to act as facilitator and trusted broker — allowing us to help area nonprofits meet their individual goals. Increased efficiencies derived from sharing available resources, best practices, and staff to create common ground.

As United Way looks to the future and longer-term recovery, all nonprofits will play an important role of rebuilding lives and addressing persistent problems.

Christella Yonta is executive director of the United Way of Cortland County.

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## 2021 Expectations?

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# THE SHOW MUST GO ON



Scenes from Cortland's 2018 Arts and Wine Festival. This year the Cultural Council of Cortland County is hoping to have a hybrid digital version of the event, which includes live performances and artists. *Cortland Standard file photos*

## Pandemic inspires hybrid live-digital arts events

By CAROL FITZGERALD  
Contributing Writer

The Cultural Council of Cortland County's mission is to support the arts and culture in Cortland County. The post-COVID-19 world with the restrictions that come with it forced a reevaluation on how to deliver our mission without our in-person events and the funding support that comes with them.

The arts and creativity are important to our community, keeping us connected especially during these times. It was necessary to find innovative ways to bring events to our members, artists, and community.

We received grant funds to help bridge some of our funding and our organization is fortunate to have active board members who volunteer their time to support our mission.

Knowing how important it is to keep the community connected while everyone was cocooning at home, we moved to a digital model for events.

"First Fridays," events were on the first Friday of the month with live events and special exhibits for the public to celebrate the variety of artistic talent in Cortland and the venues that support them. With live events no longer possible, we moved to a "Virtual First Fridays," where the community can go online to our website and Facebook page for links to visit the galleries or studios of participating artists and still enjoy the collaborative events.

We then began hosting events in a hybrid digital platform on our website, such as our juried Regional Photography Exhibit, the entries were exhibited at the Cortland Free Library with an online virtual gallery of the entries and a live stream of the awards event.

Again, with the Community Arts Challenge in partnership with the Center for the Arts in Homer, with an online gallery of the visual arts exhibits, links to music and written works and a video



of the awards event.

With both events, people were still able to go to the venue and view the exhibit, but we were not able to have the awards or opening events as we usually did. Many people were hesitant to go to public venues even with safety protocols and limits in place and the awards and opening events were out of the question.

Digital delivery methods allowed people to experience them safely, also reaching new audiences and serving people with disabilities.

The silver lining that the digital and hybrid digital platforms offer is that new avenues have been created for people to experience the events, allowing access and a broader reach.

Our plan is that when physical spaces reopen, we will continue to offer the degree of access that digital platforms provide in addition to our in-person or live events. Our largest endeavor will be with our Arts and Wine Festival this year, creating a hybrid digital event with live performances, artists and more.

With digital platforms we will be able to offer both the live events and a portion of all events digitally so that anyone can access them online and share them with others. More engagement through digital delivery methods present challenges, requires more time, software and equipment to make it meaningful.

There is no substitute for the in-person viewing and atmosphere of an art exhibit, concert, play, festival or other arts event. However, hybrid events are a way for people who cannot attend in person to experience the event, for people to share them with family and friends that live far away and for the Cortland County Cultural Council to deliver on its mission.

*Carol Fitzgerald is executive director of the Cortland County Cultural Council.*





Todd R. McAdam/file photo

Matt Dehart of Anderson's Market on Route 281 takes inventory of his produce. Anderson's stocks its stores using smaller, regional food processors in an industry model that food experts say can avoid disruptions in a pandemic.

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## The Cortland Rotary Club

Cortland Rotary President, Harriet Higgins, at the Chicken BBQ Fundraiser

Past President, Evan Geibel, flips pancakes at the Election Day Pancake Breakfast

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# Food: It's a system, and COVID-19 helped grow new ways of getting it

By **AVERY BARBER**  
Contributing Writer

As a recent college graduate, I am hopeful about the future of our food systems, both local and nationwide. During my college career, I was able to delve into the nuances of the food systems we have in place.

As a sustainability major, with a concentration in food studies, I am always looking at our food systems with a critical lens and eye toward improvement.

The definition of sustainability is multifaceted, which allows it to be sculpted to fit the users' needs. There are three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic. The term sustainability itself is most often broadly used to describe programs and initiatives directed toward the preservation of a resource.

There is a huge crossover between sustainability and food systems, and in my opinion, the need for increased sustainability within our food systems.

Even before COVID-19, local foods had begun to gain popularity. Within and around Cortland County microbreweries, CSAs, and other small agricultural and food businesses have popped up.

When the pandemic hit, and with the lockdowns, these businesses struggled. However, the community rallied and small businesses in the County may yet make it through.

My observations as a student actively studying food systems during the pandemic:

- ◆ We have seen an uptick in homesteading, hunting, gardening, food preservation and generally people reconnecting themselves to the land and their food. This is good! There is a disconnect between consumer and producer, leading to issues such as food waste due to overabundance of food in stores, increased fossil fuel emissions from food transport, etc.
- ◆ It is my thinking that the pandemic has created stepping stones to bridge this gap in the food system and mitigate some of these negative effects.
- ◆ I also believe that we will begin to see people building more community around food. It is easy to overlook a small, local Cortland business when there are perhaps more options in Syracuse, Ithaca or Binghamton. With the lockdowns, many of us are not traveling and are looking to places close to home more and more

frequently. As we are somewhat forced to stay near home, we may also become more invested in those local areas.

◆ I believe that this pandemic has been the nudge we needed to begin shifting our food system away from food grown on big farms on the opposite coast or in the South. As consumers, rediscovering food preservation methods such as canning, fermentation, freezing and drying to change the way we eat.

Not looking toward foods that are out of season in our area, such as strawberries from Mexico during January is one example. Instead, buy those local during June and freeze them for the winter months when dreary weather calls for a touch of bright color and sweet summer nostalgia.

Eating local eliminates economic and environmental costs of travel for the food we pick up at the grocery store. By examining our role in the food systems, we can then adjust to improve our ways of life. We may begin to all come together around local foods and small businesses and start to heal, as a community.

*Avery Barber has been a Cortland County dairy ambassador and Farm Bureau scholarship winner.*

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# Brittle food distribution system gives way to new, stronger, practices

By **SUSAN NEWTON-WILLIAMS**  
and **GABRIELLE DIDOMENICO**  
Contributing Writers

Seven Valleys Health Coalition works in the food system in Cortland County through many activities with the overarching umbrella being our local food policy council, the Cortland Food Project.

What we saw as a repetitive conversation over the past year was that the response to COVID-19 reinforced the industrialization of our modern food system. One concrete example of this was our participation in food rescue.

We saw a glut of milk that couldn't get to hungry people because this industrialization had created a logjam in supply. There was plenty of milk but packaged for commercial use when now everyone was suddenly at home and buying more for home use.

We saw meat shortages in grocery stores and community members scrambling to understand how to redirect their dollars to local food purchases, which caused a backlog at local meat processors.

We saw increased food insecurity and massive influxes of food to local food programs, which needed to revamp their infrastructure to meet those increases.

As we discuss all of these issues almost a year into the pandemic, we reflect most on time spent in our work groups in the community bearing witness to our brittle national food security.

But in those conversations of struggle and vulnerability, we have also realized these areas

can also be the spaces of our greatest potential. Communities all over the country, including our own here in Cortland County, challenged this fragile food system structure with distributive food practices.

Locally we witnessed the pandemic lead to shifts such as community-led, truly grassroots mutual aid programs, interconnected webs of relationships within the more formal organization-level of our local food system like the Hunger Coalition, and both organic (no pun intended) and purposeful planning to uplift local food producers.

As we move toward a, hopefully, post-COVID-19 world where there is greater awareness around food, both the value and the vulnerabilities,

we expect that these local connections will continue to strengthen and we will see more opportunities to nurture a food system that is sustainable for our people, our land and our economy for the long-term.

*Susan Newton-Williams and Gabrielle DiDomenico work with the Seven Valleys Health Coalition.*

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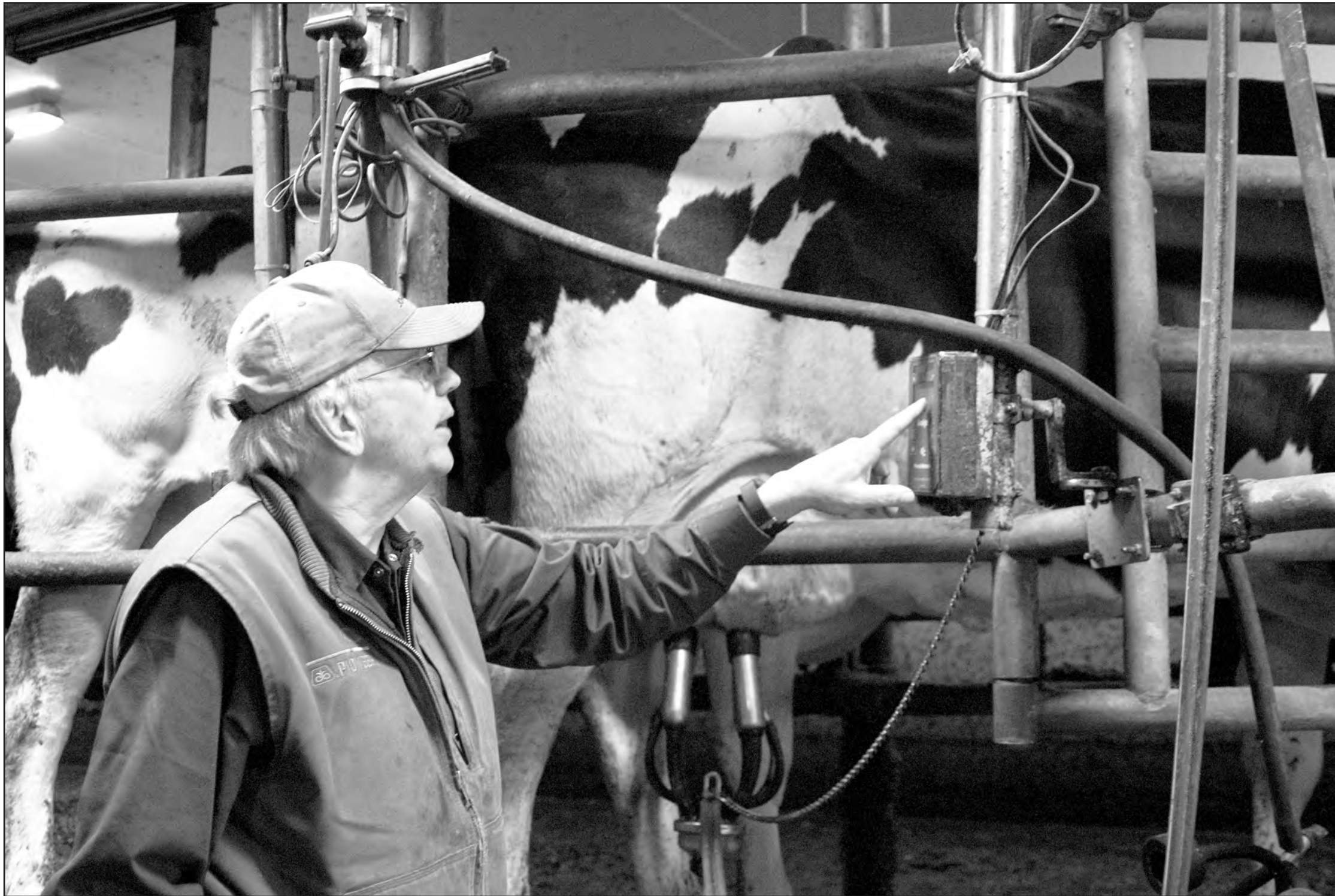
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# SEEDS OF CHANGE



Photos by S.N. Briere/file photo

Dairy farmers such as Stewart Young have had to dump some of the milk their farms have produced during the pandemic.

## COVID planted the ideas, but farming changes can continue

By **KATHIE ARNOLD**  
Contributing Writer

Every day on a farm, especially one with animals, is “A Brand New Day.”

A farmer’s day can’t be scheduled in increments ahead of time as one has to always be ready for the unexpected: the cow that calves 10 days early; the rain that was supposed to be a shower but turned out to be a downpour; the car that slides off the highway and through a pasture fence; the essential piece of machinery that breaks down.

The one constant with farming (as with many things) is that there will be change. The rise of COVID in 2020 was a change of large proportion, but change is always a way of life on a farm.

COVID has made apparent many weaknesses in our country’s food systems. The consolidation over the last decades has reduced the number of players in many sectors of agriculture, such as meat packers and slaughterhouses.

COVID helped induce more people to want to buy locally grown food, including meat. Although many farms in Cortland County can supply that demand, the bottleneck is that the meat has to go from on the hoof to in a package and there are no United States Department of Agriculture-inspected slaughterhouses in Cortland County to provide that service.

We have excellent custom meat processors that do provide the service for someone to have their own meat processed, but it is illegal to sell or donate meat if it hasn’t been processed in a USDA or USDA-equivalent state-inspected facility. There are USDA-inspected meat processors, but they are so booked up, it is usually months to get an appointment. So although farmers in this county could provide the beef for every eater who would like locally raised meat, the processing capacity is a limiting factor.

On the other end of the scale, many of the industrial-scale meat-packing plants in the U.S. are mas-



Tess Southern, right, of the Cortland County Dairy Promotion Committee, hands a bag of dairy products to a driver. The Dairy Farmers of America worked with United Way and Seven Valleys Health coalition to give away milk and other products.

sive and are so efficiency- and profit-driven that the employees work shoulder to shoulder and across the conveyor tables from another line of side-by-side workers. And in a cold environment—just the conditions to favor the spread of COVID. And catch COVID they did.

There were massive outbreaks of coronavirus in meat-packing plants and hundreds of workers have died, as few plants were allowed to idle, or idle long enough, to stifle the outbreaks. It is a system rife with risk to workers as the line keep speeding along.

For anyone wanting to support a more humane work environment and support local producers, it would be an improvement if there could be more local meat-processing capacity

in order for more Cortland County grown meat to end up on Cortland County dinner plates. Twenty-seven states have state-licensed USDA equivalent slaughterhouses. New York no longer offers state inspections, although there is certainly interest on the part of farmers for the state to again take on that role.

Another big COVID-driven change is the boom in home gardening—so much so that many seed vendors ran short of seed last season and now home garden seed suppliers are limiting orders to only commercial growers. If you intend to garden this upcoming season, don’t delay in getting your seeds secured.

I applaud Cortland County Mutual Aid for plans to start community gardens this season to supple-

ment the Mutual Aid food sharing cabinets around the county. While Cortland County was a big producer of cabbage, beans, peas and other produce many decades past, along with numerous associated processing plants, that had mostly disappeared.

However, recent years brought a welcome resurgence of farms and market gardeners growing food for local consumption, and some businesses processing that harvest. Their harvest and production can be found at farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture weekly box subscriptions, local stores and roadside stands.

Dairy farming has also seen disruption from COVID, especially early when all of a sudden, the markets

for food service packaging of dairy products was severely curtailed as schools and colleges closed and the hospitality, airline and restaurant industry retracted.

The dairy processing industry worked hard to retool to put more product into consumer-sized packaging to fit the demand, but that took time. Some milk produced in the region had no place to go for processing and had to be dumped.

All in all, though, it seemed like dairy processors did the hard work of making the changes needed to fit the market demand and ensure plant safety for staff. I don’t recall hearing of any dairy plants that had to stop operating because of COVID outbreaks. The lesson to be learned is to be prepared for disruption and change.

Small local dairy and other food processors saw increased demand for their products. They, too, had to adapt to meet the moment—from doing home deliveries to upgrading their facilities, processing and marketing. Again, there is that constant—change. The best of businesses are adaptable and flexible so they can survive and even flourish in times of change.

The agricultural support industry that we have abundantly in the county also rose to meet the need. They couldn’t shut down as their parts, equipment, supplies and services were necessary to keep farms producing. They are a big part of the why agriculture continues to be so durable.

Our local agriculture is strong and adapting. Please support our food producers with your food dollars. Without consumer demand, no amount of change in business structure can sustain a farm. We need to support what we want to have available.

Kathie Arnold is owner of Twin Oaks Dairy in Truxton and a member of the New York Farm Bureau in Cortland County.





Photo provided by Guthrie Cortland Medical Center

# New health care investments keep pace with changing times

By JENNIFER YARTYM  
Contributing Writer

As we approach the one-year anniversary of caring for COVID patients at Guthrie, we reflect on the challenges and accomplishments of the past year, as well as look forward to brighter days ahead.

The unprecedented times we have experienced over the past 12 months have forced us to quickly adapt and look at the way we deliver care in a new light. To better serve the Cortland community, Guthrie has made substantial investments in the future to ensure its patients have access to quality healthcare, close to home.

## Telemedicine

While our goal to deliver patient-centered, compassionate care has always been Guthrie's mission, the pandemic has shown us that increasing accessibility to that care, from the comfort of our patients' homes, is something our patients appreciate. Expanding our telemedicine services to include nearly 400 Guthrie providers in over 50 specialties, allows our patients to connect with their doctors using video technology, while not having to leave their homes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Telemedicine has allowed our patients to limit their exposure and spread of the virus and will continue to provide comfort and convenience to our patients in the future as they navigate through a "new normal" and resume busy daily routines.

## Electronic medical records

In October, Guthrie Cortland upgraded its electronic medical record system to Epic. A high-functioning records system is key to delivering the best possible care to our patients and Epic is one of the largest providers of health information technology. Epic allows providers at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center and Guthrie Medical Group to easily share information be-

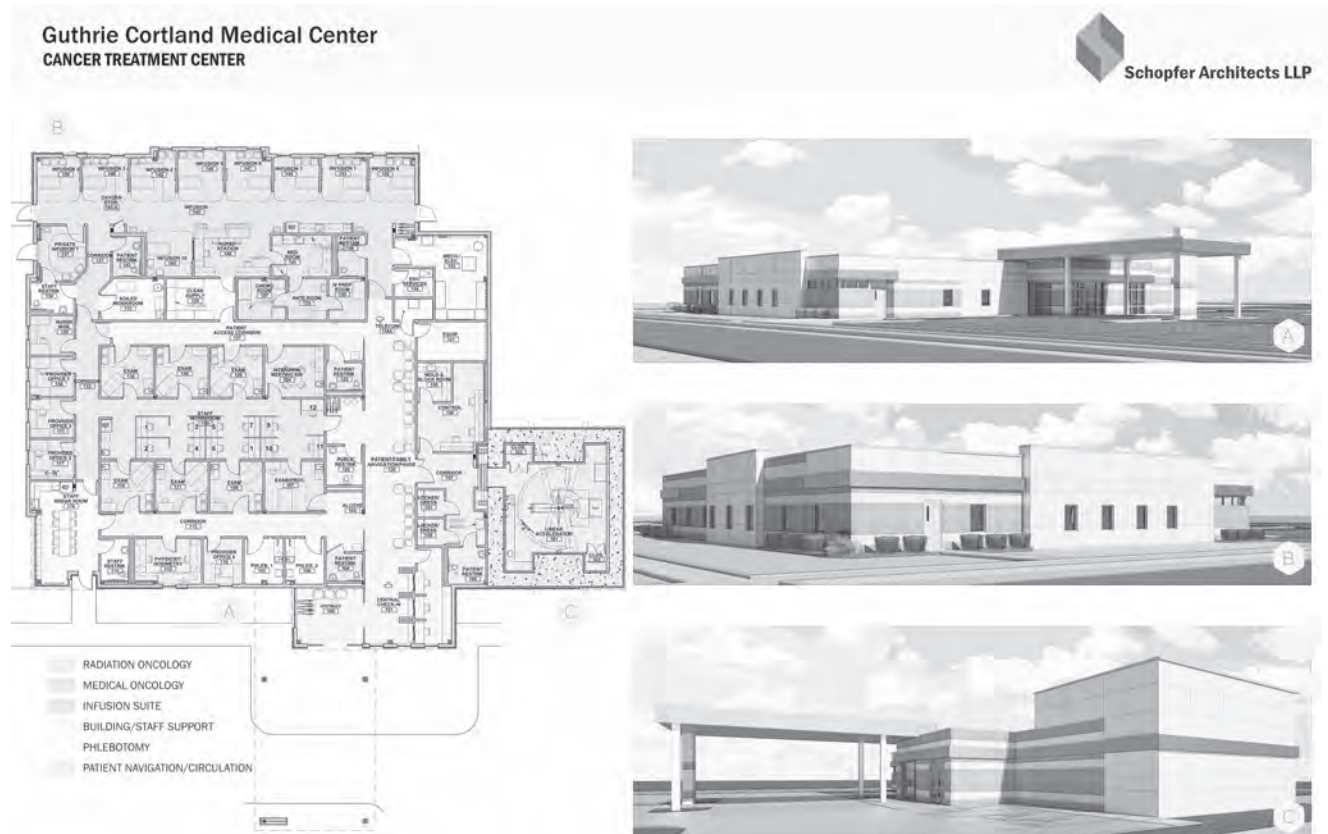


Image provided by Guthrie Cortland Medical Center

tween the hospital and other Guthrie locations where patients may receive care.

With the arrival of Epic, patients can take advantage of eGuthrie, where they can:

- ◆ View test results online.
- ◆ Request a prescription renewal.
- ◆ Securely message a provider from home.

- ◆ Check children's records and vaccination history.
- ◆ Access medical information via the MyChart App for Apple or Android.

- ◆ View an account, sign up for paperless billing and set a payment plan.
- ◆ Schedule a telemedicine visit.

As we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, and with a

sign of hope in the form of vaccines, we look forward to a brighter year and opportunities to continue to make a difference in the Cortland community. In the last half of 2021, Guthrie anticipates the opening of two projects representing an investment totaling \$41 million to care for the residents of the Finger Lakes region of New York.

## Cortland cancer center

With cancer the leading cause of preventable death in our region, and with cancer incidence rates increasing, Guthrie is committed to providing patients with the care they need, close to home.

With an anticipated opening in late summer, Guthrie Cortland's integrat-

ed Cancer Treatment Center will provide a single location where patients can access multi-disciplinary cancer care, eliminating the need to travel to other communities for care and reducing travel between treatment facilities locally.

The \$10.6 million, 10,000-square-foot facility will be located adjacent to Guthrie Cortland Medical Center at West Main and Loope streets and will include a state-of-the-art linear accelerator, used to deliver radiation therapy.

We are pleased to partner with SUNY Upstate Radiation Oncology, which will provide care at the new center, in conjunction with Guthrie's Radiation Oncology team.

## Ithaca medical office building

Guthrie's new medical office building in Ithaca, is part of a mixed-use property planned for Ithaca's City Harbor waterfront development. The building will house a mix of clinical services designed to meet the needs of the Ithaca community. The goal of this new facility is to provide residents of Ithaca and surrounding communities, including Cortland, with choices and access to more services.

The three-story, 60,000-square-foot building will include:

- ◆ Orthopedics and physical therapy.
- ◆ Primary care.
- ◆ Ophthalmology/optometry.
- ◆ Gastroenterology.
- ◆ Radiology/mammography.
- ◆ Other surgical specialties.

## New providers

Guthrie not only continues to make investments in new projects and facilities, but in those who will provide care as well. We recently welcomed the following new providers to our area: Dr. Matthew Denson and Dr. Kathryn Fitzgerald, general surgeons; Dr. William Laing, gastroenterologist; and Dr. Tamas Szombathy, cardiologist.

In the coming months, we look forward to additional providers joining our team.

These investments solidify Guthrie's commitment to the Cortland community and will ensure that we continue to provide high-quality care to its residents for decades to come.

Our thanks to the Cortland community for doing everything possible in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19. We recognize the many sacrifices made during these unprecedented times, and while we may not have a clear timeline of when things will return to "normal," we anticipate brighter days ahead.

Jennifer Yartym is president of Guthrie Cortland Medical Center.

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