

PROGRESS

CHENANGO

2021

VOLUME SIX

AN EVENING SUN PUBLICATION

Alvogen works to keep employees safe during the pandemic



Norwich Pharmaceutical has been a staple in Chenango County's businesses since 1887, it continuously grows technologically, and it invested in the area with its more recent building expansion approximately six years ago. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

BY ZACHARY MESECK
Evening Sun Reporter
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CHENANGO COUNTY – Norwich Pharmaceutical has a long history of caring for its community, and that history continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Norwich Pharmaceuticals Senior Site Director Tami Watson, Norwich Pharmaceutical is an Alvogen company which originated in the City of Norwich in 1887.

“The Alvogen manufacturing facility is located just north of Norwich on State Highway 12 and was constructed in the late 1970’s. Over the past six years, there has been significant investment in the facility, bringing it into modern standards of pharmaceutical production.”

Watson said Alvogen is a global, privately owned pharmaceutical company focused on developing, manufacturing and selling generic, brand, over-the-

counter (OTC) and biosimilar products for patients around the world.

The company is headquartered in Reykjavik, Iceland with commercial operations in 20 countries with 1,700 employees with 550 in the US of which 300 are based in the Norwich facility, and operates four manufacturing and development hubs in the U.S., Korea and Taiwan.

Watson discussed the progression and challenge

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Norwich Pharmaceuticals Senior Site Director Tami Watson started her new leadership role during the pandemic, but has years of working in the building which helped her with the transition. (Submitted photo)

Success Story

Norwich Business Improvement District

Progress in the year 2020 looked much different than in previous years for the Norwich Business Improvement District (BID).

When the lockdown in March began, our board, like many others, thought it was temporary – a pause to get the virus under control that would end after a few weeks when normalcy could return. Slowly it became apparent that wouldn't be the case and our downtown district would be greatly impacted. Thus, BID began looking ahead to the future and what that would bring.

With many local businesses having to remain closed during this time, the BID knew that there were some struggling and looking for any assistance to stay afloat. The Norwich BID Board came together and helped to create the Norwich Downtown Relief Fund – a one-time grant that businesses and organizations in the district could apply for to assist with things like rent, utility bills, PPE, or other needs. Letters were sent asking local businesses to contribute to the cause and the BID matched those funds up to \$15,000. In all, over \$42,000 in donations were distributed to those that applied for funds. Many thanks to The Chenango Foundation, Chenango Valley Electric, The Flanagan Foundation, The Greater Norwich Foundation, Hearth Financial Partners, Loral Management, NBT Bank, Mirabito Energy, SFCU, Unison, Visions Federal Credit Union and all the private individuals that supported the downtown district with their donations.

Even with the upheaval that cancelled many of the BID's plans for 2020, there were definitely a few highlights worthy of taking note of. When restrictions were lifted, the BID decided to go ahead with the “Saturdays in the Park” market sponsored by Chobani. This fall harvest market series was truly a bright spot during this time of uncertainty. Our parks allowed the vendors to be spaced out so that COVID safety measures could be in place. Mindy Chawgo, Market Organizer, stated that “shoppers adhered to the mask guidelines and were able to get out and enjoy the weather, support local businesses and vendors and also maybe say hi to a friend or two.” The BID also recognized Paul Eaton and Mike McCormack during the market series as the recipients of the BID Commitment to Community award, thanking them both for their hard work and commitment to improving our downtown.

The Norwich BID also ensured our parks and streets were highlighted with beautiful flowers of purple and white (Go, Norwich!) during the spring and brought cheer to the district with additional lights and décor during the holidays. With the cancellation of the traditional tree lighting ceremony, BID invested more time and funds into lighting up the parks with special lights for all to enjoy. Special thanks to the volunteers from CV Free Church, Ken Behn at Pro Audio Consulting, Rhett Genung and the City of Norwich for assisting with making all the holiday magic happen.

As always, the Norwich BID will continue looking for ways to improve our downtown district in 2021 and encourages everyone to SHOP SMALL. SHOP LOCAL. SHOP NORWICH, NY.

Rogers Education Center: Dedicated to staying open for the community



The winner of the Rogers Center Tesla raffle was Virginia Huerfeld, she picked up her new electric car in October with her son Christian Grieco, presented by Rogers Executive Director Simon Solomon.

BY TYLER MURPHY
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The Friends of Rogers is a nonprofit organization that relies on local community support, financial donations

and volunteers.

With much of their school programs and events canceled, donations and federal relief help keep the organization afloat in 2020, as it kept the property open during the pandemic and even saw an increase in visitors.

“There was absolutely no way we could shutter our staff, shut our doors, go home and wait for this to be over and come back and think it's going to be brighter on the other end,” said Rogers Executive Director Simon Solomon.

“So being relevant, to be there for the community, to write knowledge on our natural environment, to allow our community to retain their memories from coming to the Rogers Center as kids and now

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Friends of Rogers: Dedicated to staying open for the community —

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they're grandparents coming to Rogers and bringing their grandchildren. So, we just want to be able to be here for the community the entire time, and I really want people to come out to the Rogers Center and just check it out."

The center operates with only two full-time employees right now and two part-time staff. There are also about four or five temporary positions that are grant-funded interns and staff.

The Rogers Center started as a game farm in the early 1900s, and the game farm transitioned into an environ-

mental center in 1967. In 2011 it transitioned into a not-for-profit when the state halted funding. Now it is a community based nonprofit organization called the Friends of Rogers.

Rogers has six miles of hiking trails and 600 acres of land and is located just outside the village of Sherburne on State Highway 80. They are open 365 days a year from dawn to dusk.

Typically, the group's operating budget is somewhere between \$250,000 and \$300,000 annually.

The center was in the process reviewing possible

changes in staff and other programs when COVID hit, meaning it was in a good position to adapt.

"Prior to COVID we were working on some of our education staffing and looking to go in a different direction. So coincidentally we had gone a different direction with some of our education staff and then COVID struck. So, in a way it was a blessing in disguise because we didn't have to let anyone go due to COVID. We took a strategic direction in the spring of last year to revamp our environmental education initiative, and once COVID struck, at that point we were not forced to let any of our staff go," said Solomon.

Federal relief made a big difference

The federal government's Payroll Protection Program, or PPP, helped the center deal with the direct impact of the pandemic.

"It helped us keep our head above water this past year," he said. "In addition, all of our local community foundation support has been top notch. I began in 2013, and I know they had funded the Rogers Center slightly in prior years, but our local foundations that are based out of Norwich and out of Chenango County in general, those grants and local foundation support has been a huge help to the Rogers Center to continue to stay afloat not only this year, but in years prior," Solomon said.

The Friends of Rogers was strategic with invest-



The Friends of Rogers received a grant from NYS Parks and Trails for exhibits in 2020. Rogers Executive Director Simon Solomon is presented with the ceremonial \$36,000 check from NY State Parks and Trails Board Member Elizabeth Martyn.

ments a number of decades ago involving their support board for the New York State DEC. Those long-term plans have always helped the center deal with irregular years or unforeseen impacts to funding and it has also helped during COVID.

"Initially it was called the Mid York Conservation Fund. They changed their name in 1994 to Friends of Rogers. Prior to that, in the early 90s they had saved away little bits of money just for hit or miss events, maybe some program supplies, to offset DEC funding that could have helped justify the expense. So, there's a little bit of a nest egg, but it's a small nesting," said Solomon. "If we're going to have a deficit year, then we budget for a deficit year and we're strategic about how we're going to make it up. We want to be true to ourselves."

The Rogers Center 2020 just about broke even, in terms of funding, in 2020 and 2019.

The federal PPP funding essentially offset the funding shortfall from the cancellation of the center's summer camp program and school attendances.

A lot of the same challenges Rogers faced in 2020 persist in 2021. Somethings that have been impacted the most are educational programming and visits by school groups. Many events were slimmed down or canceled, such as the Winter Living Celebration, which was unable to offer horse-drawn sleigh rides.

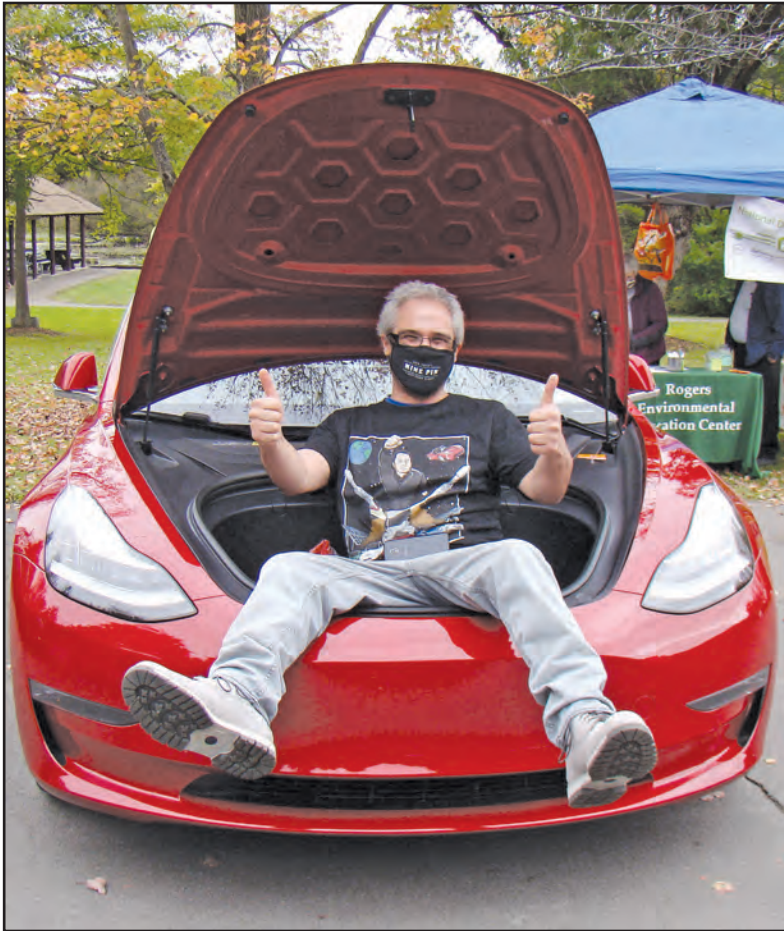
The Rogers Center summer camp was canceled in 2020 but organizers hope that at least a reduced program might be offered in this year.

"Unfortunately, a lot of our programming is restricted to a certain number count, so

right now we can have a maximum of 10 in attendance. We like to do summer camp, and we normally have 40 or 50 kids running around the property from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. every day. Doing that again is unlikely this coming summer, but we'll just have to see what happens with the vaccine and what opens up. We'd like to do something, maybe a Monday, Wednesday, Friday type summer camp, from like 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. We're still working things out," he said.

"The biggest change that we're going to see in 2021 is that we know the school kids are not going to be here necessarily. So, we have pre-recorded all of our school programs and set them up on YouTube. They're in restricted mode now, but if there are any school teachers or

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An owner in the front trunk or 'Frunk' of his Tesla. All participants and visitors wore masks and social distanced for the Rogers electric car fundraiser, with the vehicle being raffled off in October.

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environmental science educators that are interested in seeing any of our programs, we're happy to facilitate those out to the school groups."

The Rogers Center is better prepared for 2021.

"We had a full operating budget prior to COVID in 2020 and then COVID struck and I had to slash and start redoing my budget. So, for 2021, we went in strategically prepared and so far, so good. I'm feeling upbeat. We've been doing this now for nine or ten years, and we're really seeing a ramp up in the support that we're receiving from the community, and that's what we need," said Solomon.

"We're relying on the community. We don't have a nest egg. So, are we financially stable? Every year is just - we hope for the best and we do the best that we can. And so far, we've ended up on the other side, we're not in the hole. We're a pretty nimble organization."

A lack of reliable internet has been ongoing challenge for Rogers and many in our area, they also hoped county government will share more information with the public and reach out to the center for feedback.

"I know many people still struggle with that. We just so happened to be on a cable line. If we weren't on cable, we'd be complaining about it still," he said of internet access.

"I have not had too many conversations with local governments, except of course our local mayor and some individuals from Chenango County, but it would be great if local governments just wanted to proactively reach out to the organization. Let's collectively think outside of the box together."

New challenges and new focus

The center adapted to the changes the pandemic caused and shifted focus to things it could work on, allowing staff more time to focus on acquiring grants, rebranding and developing fundraising initiatives.

"COVID threw a wrench into a lot of our focus, but for many of our directives for 2020 we continued down the path as best we could," said Solomon.

In 2019 The Rogers Center applied for and, in 2020 they received a \$36,000 grant from New York State Parks and

Trails for educational and interactive exhibit initiatives inside their visitor center.

"Now, \$36,000 is nothing to sneeze about - unfortunately, it doesn't go towards daily operations support. It's restricted towards exhibit upgrades inside the Visitor Center, which I think everyone can say is kind of a needed thing at this point," he said.

The center will soon announce a rebranding initiative it completed in 2020.

"We were looking to rebrand our organization The Friends of Rogers, the Rogers Center," said Solomon.

"We finished our rebrand halfway through 2020, and we will soon be unveiling that out to the community. With COVID it's weird because it gave us the opportunity to redirect some of our focus."

The center held a popular electric car raffle in in 2020, selling fundraising tickets and giving away a Tesla Model S.

Despite COVID the number of people coming to the Rogers Center increased in 2020, with an uptick in attendance. About 20,000 visitors traveled to the center in 2020 an increase from 2019 that had an estimated 17,500 visitors.

"Although we haven't had one-on-one programming as much, the property itself is doing very well. People are at home, they don't know what to do with themselves, but they're able to go to a park setting as long as they socially distance and that's what we're seeing people do. The fish feeders are off the charts this year with the amount of fish food that was fed to the fish. And that's why we're here. That's what we feel, that we're an opportunity for people to get solace when they here at the Rogers Center," said Solomon.

Like the rebranding of the Rogers Center many of the group's 2020 initiatives are being continued into 2021. Events such as the sugar and maple syrup operation will continue in partnership with Heartwood Maple in Sherburne.

At the Rogers Center more than 700 taps are installed on about 350 to 400 trees for maple syrup production. The process is done in a way not to harm the trees, with some of them having been tapped for 50-plus years.

"Heartwood has been instrumental in that assistance with us. They help us boil it

down, and then we work out a percentage of who gets what, but the community seems to really love the maple syrup product that we've been producing here. And who doesn't want to walk away with something that says 'Rogers Center' on it? So, we're going to continue to do that," said Solomon.

New York State has an initiative to help the center invest in updating the visitor center in 2021 as well, beginning in March or April. The upgrade will close the center into the early summer months.

The project plans to install new restrooms on the center's lower floor, expand classroom space upstairs, and will likely install an elevator, for better access for those with disabilities.

Currently the center is not actually open to the public on a day-to-day basis, but those attending schedule programs can enter come into the building.

"We did a Black Friday maple syrup sale the day after Thanksgiving, which was a success. I'd say we had about 100 people coming in and out of the center that day. We've been renting cross-country skis and snowshoes out to the public as well. We're requesting that the community or individuals who are interested either email myself, or my development staff and then we will set them up with what they need," advised Solomon.

Asked if Rogers has adapted to the pandemic Solomon responded, "Anyone heard of the group called Zoom? I didn't even know what that was a year ago."

"Zoom has really come in to play and it has just been a huge asset. I think Zoom is going to be here for the long haul, even after COVID."

The Friends group is in its 11th year of operation, and the group was formed to keep the Rogers Center open after the state tried to close it.

"We're a nimble organization. Back in 2010, 2011 the board was faced with a lot of adversity when the state closed the Rogers Center."

Initially the group had a shoestring budget back and knows how to make the best of limited resources.

"We focused a lot of time and efforts on property enhancements here because we couldn't do some of the things that we've done before. Funding is still a concern for sure, but we haven't missed a

beat," said Solomon.

Stable and optimistic for 2021

"I try to be optimistic, so that's what I'm going to say. I think we'll be in a better place. This year we knew what we were up against, and I think society as a whole will be in a better place," said Solomon.

The center hopes school will return by the fall of 2021 and summer camp will be able to resume.

"Everyone knows what they're doing now, you have to wear a mask to be safe in the public. So, if we can get past COVID, maybe we can de-mask and continue to do what we've done before, like our annual events and things like that. But as soon as COVID is over we're right

back to doing the things we've always done before, from the camp programs to kids' programming."

He, like many, hopes the vaccine will be a major turning point. He said the Rogers Center would continue to following masking and distancing guideline to help do its part to stop the spread. The current guidelines permitting only 10 people at events has been difficult.

"Of course, we're going to need to have those attendance level thresholds increased a little bit from 10. I'd like to see at least a minimum of 50 people able to attend events come July. I totally expect to offer our annual free Family Fishing Day event on the property and I fully expect to offer some sort of boating

program, possibly a day camp throughout the summer. These are just hopes and dreams of what we'd like to do in the next six months. You have to stay positive," he said.

"We've learned that we can be a lean organization and that we're agile," said Solomon. "Ever since COVID came and everything was shuttered, the properties never shut down. The DEC allowed us to keep the property open the entire time with appropriate signage and socially distancing on property. So, we've learned that through thick and thin it looks at this point like the property will continue to be open from here on out."

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Alvogen works to keep its team safe during the pandemic —

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es of Alvogen in 2020 and said an ongoing capital project and creating a COVID-19 team were some of the major initiatives. "In addition, Alvogen received a Workforce Development Institute Grant in 2020 applied to the managerial coaching program."

"We have an on-going three-year capital project underway in support of the high complexity products manufactured at the facility," Watson said, "During the initial phase of the pandemic, we delayed due to COVID-19."

She said as of the fourth quarter of 2020, they have re-engaged and are moving forward on this project. "We will be continuing with our capital project and have multiple product launches planned for 2021."

Watson said in addition to its ongoing projects, a Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) COVID-19 team was established in 2020 which is responsible for ensuring the site safety and well-being of the employees as well as ensuring they are always current with the DOH, NYS and Federal guidelines.

"This team is the 'Go To' for any questions or concerns our employees may have, which ensures consistency across all departments and functions," she said. "In addition, all communication for the site



Norwich Pharmaceutical is an Alvogen company that originated in the Town of Norwich in 1887, and continues to be an active part of the community. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

is provided by the CORE COVID-19 team."

"This includes facility signage, team meeting updates and email communication which includes links to applicable resources."

She said the company then established a second team responsible for the overall incoming supply chain with supporting mitigation and contingency plans for any potential supply chain disruptions.

She added that going forward they will proceed to utilize these two teams while they continue the recovery process.

"Extremely fluid guidance changes at the onset of the pandemic were challenging to ensure continued compliance," said Watson. "The CORE COVID-19 team assigned members to continually monitor all state and federal guidance as well as have a member attend all

Chenango County DOH briefings."

"This enabled the site to ensure best practices with all DOH & State guidance."

Watson said as with most companies, the employees at Alvogen that are not manufacturing or directly supporting the manufacturing of products have been working remotely.

She said in some cases, this required reorganization of resources responsible for certain processes. She added that for both the in plant and remote workforce, adapting to a virtual meeting format.

"In addition to our workplace communications, we also ensure we are communicating to our employees any guidance that may affect them outside of the work environment," said Watson.

"As we continue to navigate through the COVID

landscape our focus will stay with the protection of our employees and product supply assurance."

"We have not had reduction in staff but have increased our staff through local temporary employee agencies, this has allowed us to offset COVID related absenteeism with quarantine needs," she added. "Some of the temporary employees have been hired for permanent opportunities."

"Our biggest asset is our employees and their resilience which have enabled us to and continue to overcome challenges and be able to continue to produce lifesaving products. Some of the challenges required process changes implemented due to having employees remote and have resulted in benefits that we will continue moving forward."

Watson also discussed some of the challenges

besides COVID-19 and ways Chenango County government assisted during the pandemic.

"In the past five years we have seen increased activity in the area with our corporate neighbors and organizations with regards to growth and development, which comes with the challenge for securing talent," she said. "One of our biggest challenges is retention as it pertains to hiring of college graduates."

"We have seen a pattern of employment length of two to three years for the individual to gain experience and then moving on to other opportunities and relocating to various regions."

She added local governments could help with that issue by continuing to lead and develop opportunities for people to stay within the communities in terms of retention and attraction to the community.

Watson said one of big community events that had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 was Alvogen Day as well as the impact the virus had on other charity efforts as well.

"As many of our employees and families reside in the community, over the past several years we have put significant focus on our 'Alvogen Day' where we close the site for a day and all of our employees perform community service and clean-

up projects," she said. "In addition to this Alvogen runs an internal United Way Campaign, Food Drive and Charitable Golf Outing."

"Although we were unable to hold our 'Alvogen Day' and Golf Outing Fundraiser this year, our employees held a virtual United Way Campaign raising more than \$24,000 during the pandemic which is a huge achievement by the employees. A variation of our yearly food drive was also completed whereby employees donated cash versus canned and dry goods."

Alvogen Senior Human Resource Manager Luke Murphy also spoke about the organization's non-profit efforts and said not being able to be as active in the community was difficult, but necessary to keep everyone safe during the pandemic.

"It was certainly a huge letdown for all of us, but we're hopeful that we can put all of that extra energy into an event for 2021," said Murphy. "We really want to credit any and all efforts that were made in 2020 to the hardworking teams we've got here at Norwich Pharmaceuticals."

"They helped make the best out of a very difficult situation, and we're extremely grateful for that."



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