

The Evening Sun presents Progress Edition 2019. A look at the community's recent past and future.

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In Your Own Words

Christine Battaglini

Greene Elementary Physical Education Teacher and Field Hockey Head Coach

Growing up in Greene I always remember the excitement all of my second grade friends and I would have as the T-ball parade approached. Every T-ball, softball, and little league player would gather at the Moore Memorial Library to prepare for the trek up to the Lion's Park. If you were lucky, you would have a game to play on the well-groomed fields that await. As a kid who loved sports, I looked forward to days like that. Fortunately, our small town along with other Chenango County communities had so much to offer when it came to youth sports programs.

As I got older, new sports became just as exciting because my community offered opportunities to try new things. Basketball, soccer, swimming, dance and field hockey were just some of the programs youth athletes could be a part of. Coaches, parents, teachers, and beyond would volunteer their time to help children find something they love to do, something they are talented in, a place to meet new friends, and a chance to learn more than just the rules of a sport.

Eventually in middle and high school, you would choose which sport to play during each season. If someone wanted to play multiple sports throughout the year or one sport year round, the opportunities were available. Players from different teams in Chenango County would join forces on all-star teams, senior classics, and summer leagues. Neighboring teams, coaches, and players would quickly become familiar with each other and would turn into a great level of camaraderie. At the end of the day, we would all be rooting for each other. Some of my best and most favorite memories of my community and the surrounding areas in Chenango County involve me playing a sport. Whether it was having tailgates after our Oxford Field Hockey Tournament games, or playing in my first Gus Macker Tournament in Norwich, to watching the baseball team play their rivals at the Ball Flats in Greene.

Fast forward to 2018 and I am lucky to be able to see, as a coach and teacher, that our communities of young athletes are still able to experience the excitement of parades, t-ball games, field hockey tournaments, wrestling matches, Sunday football games, and so much more. The successes of our athletes and teams in Chenango County are a true testament to the youth programs and all involved. Every year we hear of multiple athletes signing letters of intent to play their respective sports in college, teams winning state championships, and scholar athletes being recognized as Valedictorians of their class. In most of those cases, a youth program began the athlete's or team's journey. Locations, facilities, equipment, and uniforms might be a little different, but the time and effort contributed by so many caring community members to make such incredible programs possible have and will always remain the same.

It is my hope that the programs will continue to encourage both new and experienced athletes to try new activities and sports which can help keep our school programs thriving.

Hospice serves most patients ever in 2018; looks ahead to relocating this year



Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County Executive Director Kendall Drexler and Development Coordinator Brianna Curley at the future headquarters of Hospice, located at 33-39 Court Street in Norwich. (Grady Thompson photo)

BY GRADY THOMPSON
The Evening Sun

CHENANGO COUNTY – Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County had a monumental 2018 which saw a record-high number of patients and the purchase of a property

to become the organization's new headquarters.

Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County Executive Director Kendall Drexler reported that the organization reached the highest number of patients ever served multiple times in 2018, with an average

daily census of 29.6 patients—a big jump from 2017's average of 18 patients.

“When we tell people that in the community and they're not connected to us, they assume that more people are dying. But really more people are just making different choices

about what their end of life looks like,” said Drexler, noting that the number of deaths in a year remains generally static. “And opting not to die in a hospital or at a nursing home, and [instead] coming home and having a more peaceful end of life.”

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Norwich Family YMCA upgrades infrastructure and welcomes new staff

BY ZACHARY MESECK
The Evening Sun

NORWICH – The Norwich Family YMCA made several upgrades to its infrastructure and security for its 156th year, and continues to grow despite increasing financial burden.

After a challenging year of growth and infrastructure investment, Norwich's non-profit YMCA continues to serve members of the community with the help of compassionate and dedicated individuals.

Norwich Family YMCA History

According to Executive Director Jamey Mullen, YMCA has a rich history of volunteerism throughout history, with the first YMCA's creation in London England around 1844.

“The first YMCA in the United States was made in Boston during 1851, and

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2018 was a year of investment for the Norwich Family YMCA, with replacements to floor tiling, countertops, and upgrades to security. (Frank Speziale photo)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Chenango County has 924 businesses employing 14, 213 people.

While this year's YMCA Turkey Trot was a cold one, runners still participated from all over the county to overcome the 5k. (Norwich Family YMCA photo)



The Norwich Family YMCA's Gus Macker event was successful again this year with hundreds in attendance between teams and spectators. (Frank Speziale photo)



The Norwich Family YMCA installed a new five boiler system with 95 to 96 percent energy efficient water boilers, and made it so the system could swap between them when one needs maintenance. (Norwich Family YMCA photo)



After losing one of its water boilers in January of 2018, the Y worked hard to ensure members wouldn't have to swim in a cold pool again by upgrading their boiler heater system. (Frank Speziale photo)



The Y's Y-Camp averaged about 50 kids per day in attendance, and over 150 kids signed up for the event, marking another successful year for events held at Camp Thompson. (Zachary Meseck photo)



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Norwich Family YMCA —

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Norwich wasn't too far behind in the late 1860's," said Mullen.

"Norwich has had a Y ever since, and our board of directors wants to ensure we're operating effectively and wisely, and that we're being fiscally prudent."

He said it's important to consider the Y's history as a non-profit when discussing potential costs, as the goals and principles the Y was founded on contribute to its identity as a community based non-profit.

"It's important to ensure everyone has access to the Y because the Y is the community," said Mullen. "The Y represents everybody in our community, and we need to provide opportunities and resources to ensure that the doors are open for everybody."

He said to help support this concept, funds raised from last year were directed towards the Y's Open Doors Scholarship Program.

Each year the YMCA awards thousands of dollars in financial assistance to many deserving youth, teens, adults, seniors and families. Through the Open Doors Scholarship Program those who might not otherwise be able to afford YMCA's membership fees are given a membership at reduced or no cost.

YMCA's Finances

The Norwich Family YMCA relies on membership fees, program fees, charitable donations, and trust accounts established for the Y as its main sources of income.

"All of our rates, membership fees, and program fees add up to the real cost to operate our program. In fact they may even be under market value because we do receive funds from our trust accounts that help subsidize our operations," said Mullen. "If we didn't have those in our operating budget, the only way we'd be able to get that money back to keep us running would be through membership and program fees."

He said due to rising minimum wage, each year the YMCA has to find a way to pay approximately \$5,000 more, and as a non-profit generally the only answer is to ask the community for its support.

"With rising minimum wages we may have to ask our members for more throughout the next couple years," said Mullen. "Because of the rising minimum wage, we're scheduled to raise membership fees by a dollar in 2019."

Rising minimum wage wasn't the only challenge the Norwich Family YMCA faced in 2018, Mullen said there were a number of equipment needs that needed to be met as well.

"When we really sit back and look at 2018 in a nutshell, it's been a very challenging year, financially, for the Y and I would say a lot of other not-for-profits are in that same boat," he said. "Although last year's annual support campaign chairs raised over \$103,000 through 292 different donors, the Y still had several challenges to face."

Boiler Project

In January of 2018, one of two boiler heaters the Y's used to heat its facility had failed, disrupting several conveniences that regular members had come to appreciate including warm pool temperatures.

"One boiler went down completely, and the other one wasn't strong enough to keep the whole building warm at times," said Mullen. "Right away we decided that we had to put together a plan to manage the heat in the building and look at investing in a boiler project."

He said the Y's boilers were industrial sized, around 18 years old, and they were both being utilized everyday, all year long.

"We decided on a plan

that would allow us to have backup boilers to ensure that this didn't happen again, and we put everything onto paper and put it out to bid," said Mullen.

The Y's new boiler system has five boilers, with a designed loop that allows it

individuals that have legacy accounts set up to ensure that there will be a Y in our community for many, many years."

He said if the Y didn't have legacy accounts in its operating budget, the only way it would be able to get that money back to keep it running would be through membership and program fees.

Upgrades in the Y

The Y also made security and aesthetic upgrades to its facility in 2018, with the installation of more security cameras along with new paint, flooring, and countertops.

"This past year we put a fresh coat of paint through the majority of the building, we've retiled hallway floors, and some folks question why we go back to this product versus the other product," said Mullen. "We're trying to be very thoughtful and strategic in our thinking, because if we put the same product down every year we'd still have to strip and wax the floors."

He said with the upgraded tiles, the Y doesn't have to strip and wax the floor, all it has to do is continue to

wash and clean it, which is going to save the non-profit money in operations and supplies. He added that the company also upgraded the countertops in its bathrooms and washrooms.

"The new countertops should last approximately 20 to 30 years, whereas with the old countertops water would break them down and cause them to bubble and crack," said Mullen. "Any of the improvements we've made, we've done so with operations and longevity in mind."

He said the Y also invested in about \$30,000 of new spinning bicycles, and \$100,000 in cardiovascular equipment to stay current and provide members with newer health and fitness technology.

A Community Based Organization

He added that another operations and longevity minded improvement the Y made was its increase in security that continued into 2019.

"We want to be known as one of the safest places in Norwich," said Mullen. "Currently we have 47 cameras, and we'll be adding another 26 cameras to this system, and upgrading camera styles in the other ones throughout the building."

He said many of the Y's neighbors use the cameras

the assist with challenges they've faced on their property, and the police have been able to use this asset for many things as well.

He added that the Norwich Family YMCA isn't just a gym, but it's more importantly a community of people dedicated to ensuring individuals reach their potential in youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.

"We could have differences in politics, religion, and ways we should raise our children, but when you open the door to the Y and you come in, those differences are on the outside," said Mullen. "When you're on the inside of our facility, we know that we're all here for different reasons."

He said some come to the YMCA for sports, others to learn how to swim, and many families go to its childcare program so they have a safe place for their children while they're at work.

"We have the wealthy, the poor, men, women, children, and I don't know of any other organization that can bring people together like this," said Mullen. "We want to work with other agencies and other groups because if our facility isn't being utilized than shame on us."

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"We want to work with other agencies and other groups because if our facility isn't being utilized than shame on us."

to swap boilers more easily if one of them needs maintenance.

"Before if our domestic hot water went down we would be without hot water until someone could come out and repair it," said Mullen. "Now we have a backup that we can switch over while it's being repaired."

He said the new boiler system is more efficient than the older ones, which may help save the Y in future costs.

"The ones we put in 2002 were about 84 percent efficient and these new ones are 95 to 96 percent energy efficient," said Mullen. "So we're hoping with our reduced gas usage during these colder months, that we'll see some cost savings which would help the YMCA."

The cost of the project was approximately \$200,000, he said, and the Y didn't have to turn to its membership or raise its rates for further funding at that time.


"We have a board of trustees that oversees financial accounts and property, and they manage our accounts and were able to set aside some money to offset that capital repair," said Mullen. "The money that was generated was from

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SUCCESS STORY

The Artists Palette

The past ten years have gone by in nothing more than an instant. Continuous change, growth, and of course struggle. When I ventured into this business, I was not sure what to expect. All I knew was I wanted to create something special, something lasting, and something unique to this community. As I reflect on the past decade, I think about the people who helped to make my dreams a reality, the people who lent their talents and their knowledge to me along the way, without them, this never would have worked. I reflect on the original ideas of what I hoped this business would become and now relish in the fact it became that and so much more. Not a day goes by that I don't look forward to coming into work, meeting new people, and continuing to expand what I can offer.

In August of this year, The Artists Palette will celebrate 10 years in business and 5 years at its current location in downtown Norwich. This hardly seems possible to me as I feel as though I am just getting started. Throughout this year, I will offer discounts and special events in preparation of a larger celebration scheduled for August 9th, my original date of opening in 2009 in a 300 sq. foot living room.

Over the years the business shifted from offering art retail to having gallery spaces, special art services, a photography studio to its current state where all of that exists but is

now also a home to Cottage Bakery, Willow Primitives and Boutique, and Creative Works Inc, a non-profit created in 2017. Together, we cater to hundreds of people in hundreds of ways. Together we have built a community art center. This venture has allowed me to encourage the growth of other small businesses, create a space where people gather with friends and family, people come to heal, escape their worries, learn, explore their inner creativity, and most importantly the moment they walk in they find friends, someone to hear them, and an atmosphere where no matter the day, they are welcomed.

I am excited to see what is still in store for this business. I would like to thank all of the individuals who have helped make this business what it is, the ones who have worked with me, the countless volunteers, the ones who have helped brainstorm, bounce ideas off, calm me when things get tough, the ones who have made everyday enjoyable and to the community that makes it all happen. Thank you for 10 years of artistic and personal success. From my heart to yours.

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In Your Own Words

John Antonowicz

2018 was certainly a year to be proud of in my own books, but I am only one person in our little Norwich.

In a small but blessed community, we all are challenged with the facts of life that in a large city would not be the case. We all know each other, the positive and negative changes we endure as we try to be productive citizens in a world that has changed so much in the last few decades, the last few years, but even within the last week.

I live in the City of Norwich and am proud of it. I have always said, our little Norwich has the "Cheers" effect from the 1982 – 1993 television show. The opening lyrics go as such "...sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see the troubles are all the same. You want to be where everybody knows your name."

Could this statement be anymore true?

As a young adult, of course I know the world has so much more to offer. With the internet and other social media platforms, I can search anything my heart desires, from the scores of a local game, to something across the ocean in another country.

As some of my friends from high school have all gone off to change the world, with hopes of passion, purpose, and creativity, I remain here in the same town I grew up in. As they come home to visit from their adventures trying and hopefully being productive citizens to society around their own worlds, our small town that got them started, is able to give the "Cheers" effect. They are welcomed home with open arms to see how Norwich has adapted.

Recalling sometimes why they left, they often describe how small Norwich is and how everyone knows their business, the good they have started elsewhere, and sometimes the reason they left. Of course, as they leave our little region for the beyond lands they are trying to change, they often wonder if Norwich will ever change.

The truth is Norwich is like any other city: what the residents put in is what Norwich will get out. Any reader would have to admit we have issues, some of which are commonly known, and so many that are hidden yet to appear in 2019 and afar. What does this mean for a small city in upstate New York trying to attract a young population to an ever-increasing older region?

As a community we need to unite.

We are all in this small world together, and what Norwich does affects the outside communities around us. The facts of reality are around us from substance abuse to poverty, but only focusing on the negative and no way to make a change will only result in less progress.

The positive individuals within Norwich keep it moving forward with the times, whether we want to or not. Without a positive force of young and mindful citizens, Norwich would not and will not continue to move forward. In my little bubble of Norwich, "Where everybody knows your name." I find daily hints why I choose to stay. From being able to walk into the bank and see someone I know, to knowing how I like my cheeseburger cooked at the Ontario, these are the things that keep me wanting "to be where you can see the troubles are all the same," because we are in this together.

As a resident of Norwich, I could do two things: I could watch the world infiltrate around me and not do a thing to keep the "Cheers" effect and always point out the negative with no mention of any positive, or I could watch the world seek its way into my city and keep the "Cheers" effect pointing out the positive and why Norwich is still a place to be. "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see the troubles are all the same."

I am proud to live in Norwich, where everyone knows my name and where all my troubles are the same to solve for a better Norwich tomorrow.

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Hospice serves most patients ever —

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The number of patients served peaked in November 2018 at Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County, when the local Hospice served 36 patients. Before April 2018, the organization had yet to ever reach 30 patients.

Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County Development Coordinator Brianna Curley said, “In comparison when I first started here three years ago, our average daily census was like 12 [patients]. So this is a huge jump the past year-and-a-half, two years, and we’re staying right up there so it’s really exciting for us.”

Most patients ever at local Hospice

Drexler said the spike in patients served can be attributed to a number of things, including the Affordable Care Act, more individuals processing the end of life on their own terms, and the organization making a conscious effort to speed up the period between referral and admission.

“We decided that if somebody is calling us we want to be as responsive as we can be,” said Drexler. “So we cut down the time from referral to admission from four days to like, 24 hours. And I think when people call us, they’re in cri-

sis, and when they’ve finally gotten the courage to make that call, they don’t want to wait four days, they want it right then.”

The Affordable Care Act resulted in a number of chronically-ill young people having feasible access to health insurance, thus allowing themselves to be admitted to Hospice. Drexler estimated an overall five percent increase in Hospice’s Medicaid population after the passing of the act.

“Since the Affordable Care Act rolled out, every year we’ve seen a steady increase in Medicaid patients that are younger, so I think that has helped us out a lot,” said Drexler. “The Affordable Care Act was huge for us; this national understanding that health-care is important and that people need to have good access to it and help paying for it.”

Curley added that another contributing factor is Hospice’s increased efforts to be more present in the community. “We’ve been trying to attend other events. Anytime that anybody asks us to speak, we’re there just trying to really get out there in the community with our outreach and education.”

Moving to a new location

One way of being more present in the community is moving from Hospice’s current location — a Victorian

home in a residential area at 21 Hayes Street in Norwich, where it has been located since 1995 — to a new, much larger facility at 33-39 Court Street, which was the former office of Dr. Anthony Cicoria, MD.

Hospice staff announced the upcoming move in September, when it kicked-off a capital campaign to raise funds to design the interior of the location in order to best fit Hospice’s needs.

“Right now we’re in this Victorian home, which is beautiful but it’s not conducive to providing a medical service,” said Drexler. “Right now if you walk through, there are medical supplies shoved in every shower, shoved in the pantry. And the new place is just really going to allow us to step up our professional game.”

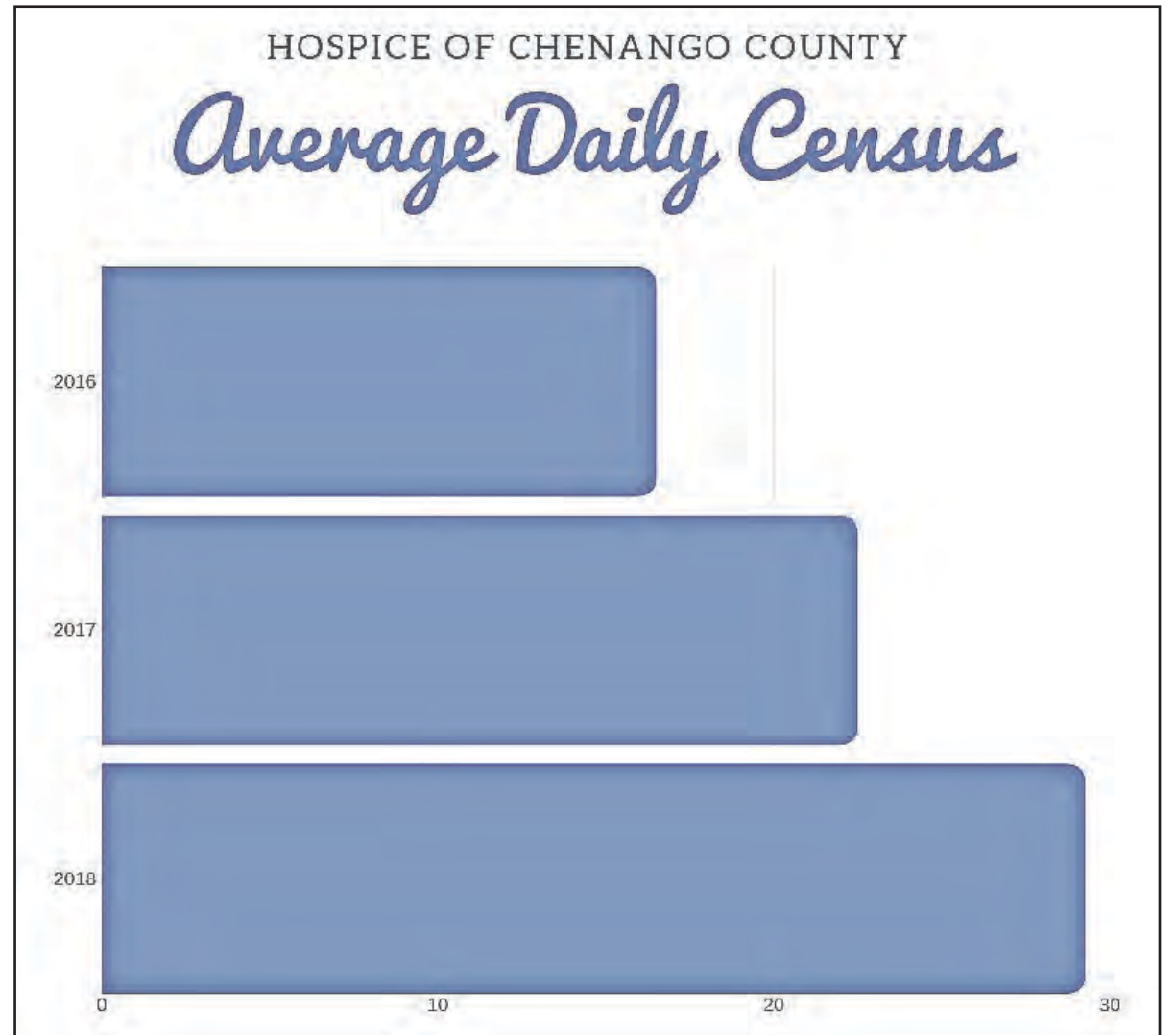
They plan to move into their new home in spring 2018, after which Curley said they can begin to better assert themselves as an ever-present community resource.

“We’re going to have so much more space over there to have some grief events, community collaboration, our board meetings,” said Curley. “It’ll just be a great space for everybody to come in and use whenever they need to.”

Along with the number of patients served, Curley said Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County’s grief services have also jumped in the past year, with the majority of beneficiaries being untied to Hospice families. In 2018, 36 people took part in 186 visits for grief services—a jump from 2017, when 27 people took part in 115 visits.

“I think that’s a thing that a lot of people in the community don’t know, is that you don’t have to be tied to Hospice [to take part in grief services], it’s for the whole community,” said Curley. “Everything’s free, we never even ask for an insurance card.”

Drexler agreed. “That’s another thing that people don’t really think of us for, but obviously not every death is going to be Hospice appro-



A graph illustrating the average number of patients in Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County over the last three years. (Submitted photo)

priate; people die tragically, people die suddenly, and we provide grief services totally free. We don’t even ask for insurance cards or ability to pay to anyone in Chenango County that is working through a loss.”

At the new facility, Drexler and Curley said they hope to amp up their grief services as they will have a new counseling room from which to provide their services. At their current location, the counseling is conducted in a sun-porch room, which Curley said, could be more private and comfortable.

Challenges ahead

While the future at Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County looks bright with the influx of patients, Drexler noted a concern is ensuring they have the funding to meet their needs. As a managed care model, Hospice receives \$141 per day per patient to provide that patient’s doctor oversight, RN case visits, social work case visits, bereavement visits, spiritual care, durable medical equipment, drugs, and any other service the patient wants.

Drexler said service costs vary from patient-to-patient, and while more patients means more money, it’s not

always equitable: “Some people come to us relatively healthy with low-needs and some people come to us with drugs that cost \$3,000 a month, and we blow through that per diem in the first week.” To meet the needs of the patients, Hospice hired a fourth nurse in 2018.

The federal government released a wage index for Hospice looking at all the money spent in the last year and calculating how much would be awarded in the coming year, and Drexler said they are on par to receive a two percent decrease of the \$141 per diem in 2020.

“The state of where we’re at is scary for us, and 90 percent of our annual budget is Medicare dollars,” said Drexler.

Other issues on Hospice’s radar include the ballooning price of opioid drugs, which can increase eight percent every year while reimbursement funds decrease, Drexler said, and also ensuring UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital remains vibrant in the community.

Regardless of what happens in the community or at the national level, Drexler said, “The board and staff have kind of decided that no matter what happens our plan

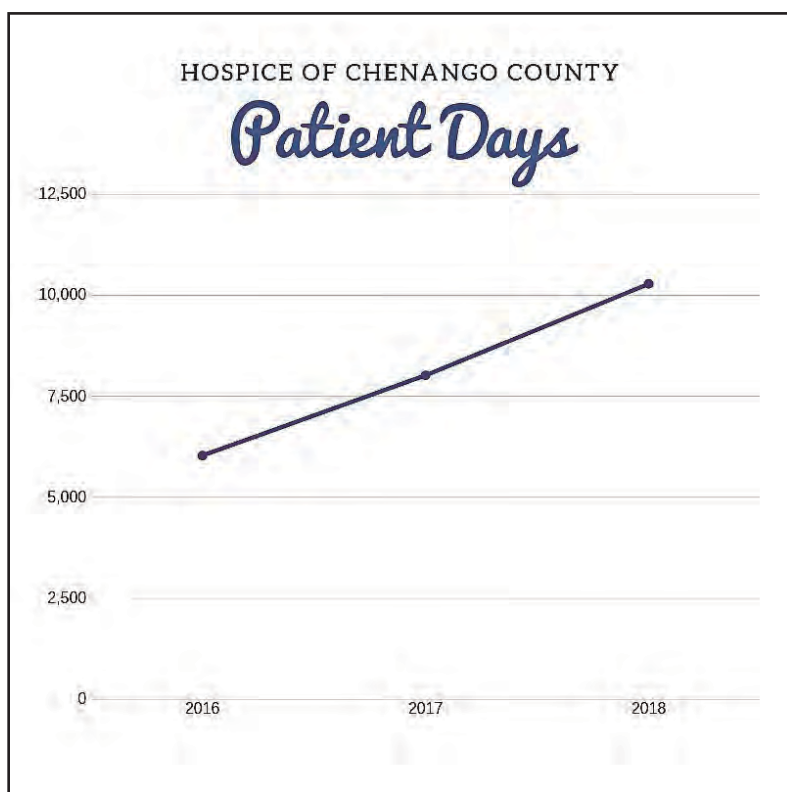
is to be an independent, not-for-profit Hospice for as long as possible.

“There’s going to be opportunities to merge with other Hospices, there’s going to be opportunities to merge with health care systems, there’s going to be just a plethora of opportunities as this landscape changes,” said Drexler. “We just can’t really imagine that anything is going to be best for Chenango County residents other than us providing the service to them right here in Norwich.”

For some of these issues, Hospice is not facing them alone: they will have rippling effects on other local organizations, communities and municipalities. But those at Hospice remain hopeful that these issues can be overcome if the community comes together.

“Anytime we can work out a way where we can all come together and improve the overall quality of life for our community, whatever that looks like, it would benefit us,” said Drexler.

To learn more about Hospice & Palliative Care of Chenango County or to contribute to its capital campaign, visit www.HospiceChenango.org.



A graph illustrating the average number of days patients spent under the care of Hospice of Chenango County over the last three years. (Submitted photo)

Fantastic! They are on time for appointments, friendly and personable, and do their best to work with patients. I highly recommend them! —Hilary W.

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