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FEBRUARY 10, 2022

SUCCESS STORY

Hughson & Benson Associates acquires Walter **0**. **Rogers agency**



Hughson & Benson Associates Richfield Springs **Office. (Submitted photo)**

Catholic Charities maintains community support through pandemic



Assemblyman Joseph Angelino, John Franco from the R.C. Smith Foundation, Mary Davis from the R.C. Smith Foundation, Commerce Chenango President and CEO Kerri Green, Catholic Charities Executive Director Robin Cotter, donor Donald Westcott, Catholic Charities Board President Steve Natoli, and donor Jeff Chesebro at the Leilani's Way ribbon cutting ceremony. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)

Hughson & Benson Associates is happy to announce that we have acquired the Walter O Rogers agency.

I am John Ryland, president of Hughson & Benson Associates. We are excited to be a part of Norwich, with which I have a personal connection. I lived in Morris for many years and spent a lot of time in Norwich shopping and taking my daughter to dance classes.

Hughson & Benson was founded in 1933 in Oneonta. I started working for Tom Hughson 32 years ago and am proud to keep our agency locally owned and operated. We have seven offices in Chenango, Otsego, and Delaware counties.

We have over thirty employees and represent many insurance carriers, including local carriers such as New York Central Mutual, Preferred Mutual, Leatherstocking Insurance, Utica National, Otsego County Patrons and Otsego Mutual. We also represent many national companies such as Erie Insurance, Travelers, Hartford, plus many more. Given our large selection of companies we can competitively write just about any individual or business.

Sense of community is very important to us. As we acquire new offices, we understand we are acquiring parts of a community. We strive to continue to be a contributor to the local economy. It is important that the current Walter Rogers employees are staying with us to continue its relationships.

I believe this was a large part as to why Mark and Elke Rogers placed their trust in us, to take care of their customers and keep their legacy going.

If you are a current customer, we thank you and look forward to continuing to serve you as we have in the past. If you are not a customer, I invite you to call us to see what we can do for you.

I am excited for Hughson & Benson and know we have a bright future in Norwich.

By Sarah Genter Sun Staff Writer

CHENANGO COUNTY Catholic Charities of Chenango County is a nonprofit group that is part of a seven county network of charities, and has been a pillar of support for the Chenango County is ded-

provided support through poverty reduction services, food insecurity services, job skills and education training, mental health services, and so much more.

community since 1970. In icated to caring for those that time, the agency has in need while promoting human development, collaboration and the elimination of poverty and injustice," said Catholic **Charities Executive Director** Robin Cotter. "We strive "Catholic Charities Of to empower those served to transform their lives in

the spirit of God's love and compassion."

Over the years, the organization has received several accolades for their service, including the Governor's Award for Excellence in Youth Services, awarded in 2002, and the Non-profit of **Continued on Page 50**

New York Pizzeria, an icon of **New Berlin's downtown**

By Tyler Murphy Sun Managing Editor

NEW BERLIN - On January 13, New York Pizzeria celebrated its 40th year.

The restaurant has become a local icon over the last four decades. The business is well known for their quality food and and friendly atmosphere.

"When you really want to do something, you start it yesterday," said owner Frank Baio.

Many residents see the pizzeria as a a community hub and a highlight of downtown New Berlin.

New York Pizzeria is owned by Frank and Betsey Baio, along with

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New York Pizzeria celebrated its 40th anniversaryin Jan. and were honored by state and local officials. Assemblyman Joseph Angelino (R,C,I-Norwich), New Berlin Mayor Peter Lennon, Owners Frank and Betsey Baio, NY Sen. Peter Oberacker (51st district), Owners Meredith and Rosario Baio. (Submitted photo)

Catholic Charities maintains community support through pandemic –

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the Year award presented by Commerce Chenango in 2004.

They also became a founding member of the **Chenango County Housing** Counsel in 1992. Cotter said the agency "continues its efforts as an active member to this day."

Chenango County was also the fourth county to join the Continuum of Care (COC), now known as the Homeless Coalition of the Southern Tier (NY-511), in 2010. The Homeless Coalition of the Southern Tier is still going strong in 2022, with six counties now a part of the organization, and Catholic Charities maintaining their participation.

"Our success and stability as an agency is based on our stringent, strategic planning process to review and ensure that all of our programs continue to align with, and are funded, to provide services that meet the needs of the community," said Cotter. "This allows the agency to continuously meet the needs of the community while also ensuring the ongoing viability of the agency."

Throughout the pandemic, Catholic Charities continued to serve the area with much needed resources. The organization also saw some new developments and growth, as well as the inevitable struggles brought on by COVID-19. Services

Catholic Charities of Chenango County has offered a wide array of services and resources to **Chenango County residents** over the years.

A comprehensive list provided by Cotter includes "scattered site supportive housing programs, homeless prevention and intervention, congregate housing services, apartment treatment services, rapid rehousing services, poverty reduction services, food insecurity programs, nutrition assistance, selfhelp services, job skills and education training, mental health services, developmental disability services, counseling services, crime victims and domestic violence services, child advocacy services, adult and children's case management, adult and children's care coordination, preschool services, juvenile housing programs, in addition to Roots and Wings program many other projects."

Their facility, the Leilani Way Community Center, contains the Roots and Wings Emergency Services Program. Roots and Wings provides residents with access to a food pantry, thrift store, prescription assistance, the Food Sense program, SNAP assistance and pre-screening, and disaster relief assistance.

Other programs that partner with Catholic Charities to serve the community at the Leilani way facility include WIC, the Office on Aging, Fidelis Insurance, Cooperative Extension, and Molina.

Some groups even volunteer their time to help out at the Leilani Way facility. Volunteers from Colgate University joined in on serving the Chenango County community by assembling 300 Christmas food baskets to be distributed in December 2021.

Volunteers included Professor Nicole Simpson, and students Elizabeth Shaw, Hilary Almanza, Bonnie Chin, Keilani Blas, Katrina Obermaier, and Eliza Lloyd.

has also provided assistance with expenses related to rent, utilities, transportation, and prescription medications. They offer sliding fee counseling and care coordination for both adults and children as well.

While their services have been invaluable to the residents of Chenango County for several decades. Catholic Charities became even more of a necessity during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to be a necessity today.

Past and present challenges

COVID-19 brought on new obstacles and struggles for individuals and families across the globe. In Chenango County, residents were looking to Catholic Charities more than ever for assistance with COVIDrelated struggles.

The two biggest challenges for residents seen by the agency were food insecurity, and living in quarantine. Catholic Charities doubled their food services and offered deliveries to households, but it was a financial hit to the organi-The Catholic Charities zation, and also took a toll on staff members, according to Cotter.

"We partnered with the Oxford Taste and See program to deliver warm meals to over 300 people twice a week, which mainly were elderly and homebound," she said. "The meal packages at Roots and Wings were doubled to include a 10 day supply for each family once a month. The costs for the agency to provide this level of food was extensive, as well as the toll it took on staffing."

In addition to their partnership with the Taste and See program, the agency has also teamed up with local government, who Cotter said are educating themselves on the needs of the county and the services Catholic Charities provides.

"Local government has been working hard to educate themselves on the specific needs we see, and are working to address those issues together," she said. "It is important to understand the needs, and also understand the services that are provided in the county. Together, we can only improve our community." Catholic Charities of

Chenango County Board

President Steve Natoli also highlighted the staffing challenges within the organization, and said maintaining adequate levels of staff has been difficult.

"COVID has had a significant impact on the organization, not just on our population that we serve but also with our staffing levels," said Natoli. "We've had a very difficult time maintaining staff in order to do the important work that we have."

But, Natoli said that despite the short staffing, the organization is continuing to work tirelessly to address the needs of the community.

"We've served some of those vulnerable populations in the county. So it's not just people being sick, but it's also some people that are out of work," he explained. "[They] have needs, whether it be help with rent or utilities or food issues, and we are working as hard as we can to try to address all those issues."

Staffing challenges at Catholic Charities have continued on into 2022, in addition to the lingering

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effects COVID-19 has had on the organization, and the community.

"COVID was a top concern a year ago. The challenge continues to be how that has played out in our community and affected our residents," said Cotter. "For our agency, our biggest concern is staffing and how we can recruit and retain staff."

She added that other contributors to the staff shortage are "transportation issues," and that "many of the younger employees would prefer to live in a more urban setting."

An additional hurdle for the organization is decreased funding. Due to the low population and rural location of Chenango County, Cotter said it has made it difficult for Catholic Charities to receive grants.

"Challenges are related to high need and decreased funding. We have been bypassed on certain grants due to the rural nature of our community and low populations," she explained. "For example, when there are grant awards across the state, many of the awards will go to areas with larger populations."

Currently, the agency is trying to move forward and get through the aftermath of the pandemic. Natoli said **Catholic Charities is seeking**

community input and assistance to help them serve the area.

"We're just trying to deal with the hurdles that COVID's put in front of us," he said. "We're always looking to get as much input and help from the community as possible, whether that's volunteer work or fundraising. And if anyone wants to reach out to us, we're happy to accept any help we can get."

Catholic Charities is also hiring for their residential programs and care coordination. Those interested in working with Catholic Charities, or volunteering, can call the main facility line at 607-336-7897.

New developments

While the last two years presented new challenges for the organization, Catholic Charities was still able to grow. In the spring of 2021, the brand new Leilani Way **Community Center, located** at 6081 County Road 32 in the Town of Norwich, was completed and opened to the public.

"We were looking at options of renovating our current facility that we have on Berry Street for building a new facility," Cotter explained. "The cost for us to renovate far exceeded the cost of us building this new facility outside of the town." Efforts to open the

facility first began in 2018. In three years, Catholic Charities raised the \$1,110,000 needed to complete the project, and purchased and renovated the building that now stands as Leilani Way.

Local organizations and donors made the project possible. Contributors included Don and Karen Westcott, Care Compass Network, the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation, the Greater Norwich Foundation, the Follett Foundation, the R.C. Smith Foundation, and more.

Natoli said the community center has proven to be a great asset to the community, and is more accessible and prominent than the prior Roots and Wings facility.

"It's a great location that allows for bus traffic, and it's not quite as hidden as the last location as far as Roots and Wings is concerned," he said. "It's been going great."

The property purchased doesn't just hold the center, however. It also contains a sizable portion of land that Catholic Charities hopes to turn into a community of tiny houses.

"We have just received notification that our agency was awarded an Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative Grant (ESSHI) for our tiny home commu-



Food items being delivered to the Leilani's Way food pantry. The facility also houses the Addiction Center of Broome County, the Chenango County Behavioral Club, the Roots and Wings program, a household goods thrift shop, and offers insurance and food stamp enrollment assistance. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

nity- Shadow's Rest. This grant will provide the staffing supports for the project, [and] we will be working on raising the funds for the capital portion of the project," Cotter explained. "We are working on developing a community of ten units of permanent supportive housing and one unit of transitional emergency housing at our property."

According to Natoli, the tiny home community is still in the early planning stages. But, he said he's hoping the project will get started as soon as possible.

"It's difficult to say

exactly when it's going to get move on from there." started. There's a lot of moving parts to that," he said. "But we have a homeless population here, and people that are having a lot of difficulty receiving housing and maintaining housing, so the sooner we get that the better.'

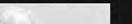
"Our goal is to have a comprehensive program where we can address not just housing needs, but also abilities for people to get back into employment, and assistance," he added. "So it's not just a place to stay, but we also want to give them the skills necessary to

During and after the tumultuous past two years, Catholic Charities has continued to serve area residents who need them. The organization continues to grow, and shows no signs of slowing down.

"We pride ourselves in partnering with other agencies and the local community to always adapt to and address the current needs of our community," said Cotter. "We meet people where they are at, and strategize ways to move them forward."

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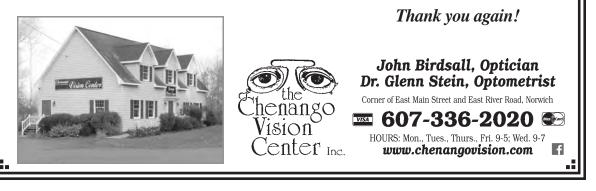


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New York Pizzeria, an icon of New Berlin's downtown -

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their son Rosario and his wife Meredith. Rosario practically grew up in the business and has been a constant presence at the front counter and in the kitchen since he was 13.

Over the last five years, Rosario has taken on an ownership role of the pizzeria and is now a co-owner.

"There are not enough words to thank the community for the wonderful support over the last 40 years," said Frank. "In New Berlin, South New Berlin, Edmeston, they are strong communities. We will be here for another 40 years."

The restaurant was greatly impacted by the pandemic and is slowly returning to normal.

"We closed our dining room with the onset of the COVID restrictions, which was, of course, a major change for our business," said Betsey. "Like most businesses in the area, we've had to struggle with staffing shortages and supply chain issues, including rising food cost prices and availability of produce."

"We are grateful for the staff that stayed with us during the last two years, all of whom have worked hard under difficult cir-



New Berlin Pizzeria is a cornerstone of downtown New Berlin. (Submitted photo)

cumstances. We had to shift hours and roles for some of our employees to keep them on, and all of them have been willing to be flexible to keep things running smoothly," she said.

"We've shared countless birthdays, anniversaries, proms, graduations – we're grateful to have been part of so many celebrations and gatherings through the years," said Betsey.

"We've seen so many changes to our little village over the last four decades. The tearing down of the

old bank and the Eagle Inn, the building of a new fire department, and the moving of the school out of the village. Our area has also benefitted from the Chobani facility and has given us the opportunity to meet wonderful and interesting people through the years," she said.

Frank arrived in America in 1972 from San Giuseppe Jato, Sicily.

Traveling through the area one fateful September day in 1981, Frank took an alternative route and found himself admiring downtown New Berlin. Having already opened two other pizzerias in neighboring areas, he quickly noticed there was no pizzeria in New Berlin. "The perfect opportu-

nity to open a pizzeria. It was like love at first sight," Frank said.

His vision was to create a pizza that would bring an authentic taste of Sicily to upstate New York.

Drawing from his early experience as a baker when he first arrived in America, Frank mastered the art of creating pizza dough. He then created his signature pizza sauce from a Sicilian

family recipe for marinara sauce. Finally, with a dedication to serving only the highest quality Grande mozzarella and freshest toppings to complement his craft, the legendary New York Pizzeria pizza was born.

Initially, Frank admits he liked the area but saw the business as a possible investment. However, within about a year of opening, in 1982, he met his wife Betsey and the two began to build a permanent home in the area.

"I love the area, I love the looks. My idea was to start it up and I was going to sell it and go back to my country, but I met my wife and all I have to say is: I am so lucky to live here," said Frank.

He said Betsey is the heart of the pizzeria and very active in the community.

The couple's marriage was first blessed with the arrival of a son, Rosario, who is now upholding the family pizzeria tradition.

The couple also welcomed two daughters, Pietra and Francesca. Their Continued on Page 53



Husband and wife pizza shop owners Frank and Betsey Baio from decades past. New York Pizzeria celebrated its 40th anniversary in January anNd were honored by state and local officials. (Submitted photo)

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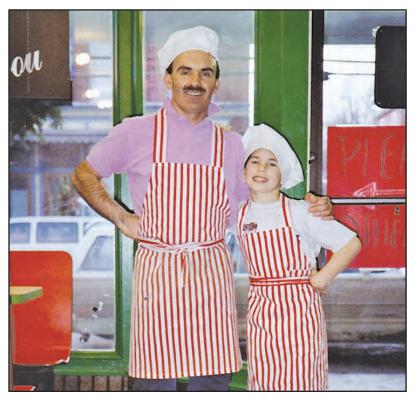


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New York Pizzeria "The best thing local



Years past, New York Pizzeria father and son co-owners Frank and Rosario Baio. The New Berlin pizzeria celebrated its 40th year recently, as a new generation joins the business. (Submitted photos)

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commitment and presence at the business has also been a welcoming part of New York Pizzeria over the years. Current restaurant co-owner Rosario married Meredith in Sicily in 2013, and they welcomed daughters Sofia and Carina to the family in 2014 and 2017.

In 2002, the pizzeria was remodeled in the Tuscan style and expanded to a full-service restaurant, featuring traditional Italian cuisine, with the finest in pastas, meats, and seafood. To keep things interesting the restaurant also serves specialty dishes often highlighting the tastes of the seasons.

"Expanding the pizzeria into a full restaurant in 2002 gave us the opportunity to share many special moments with the families in our community," said Betsey.

She also said things had changed since COVID restrictions began over the last two years, and the restaurant is still looking forward to a time when it can open the dining room again, with the full hospitality and services. government can do for us is let us have the freedom once again to run our business without interference or further restrictions," she said.

"We are hoping for a return to normalcy and that we can re-open our dining room with full dinein service. We are currently offering limited self-service dine-in, but we would love to bring our waitstaff back for full service again," Betsey said.

Asked if they would go back and change anything, Frank laughed at the question. "What a question, no, no, I would not change anything at all. There are no easy ways, to be successful today you have to work hard. God bless this country for giving you that chance."

"I thank my family and the staff, I never would have done what I did without them. I would not change anything," he said.

Betsey added, "I would tell myself to be prepared to work hard and know that when you run a family business, there is never actually any off time. There are many joys in running your own business but it is also going to occupy a huge part of your life – so you better love what you do, as we do!"

SUCCESS STORY

Norwich Rehabilitation & Nursing Center: Meeting challenges together

Ask anyone working in healthcare right now, and they'll tell you the last two years have been the worst in their careers.

Between ever-changing guidelines, wave after wave of pandemic variations and the sheer volume of healthcare worker leaving the field, "challenging" doesn't even begin to describe what it's like to deliver quality care right now.

Our own local Norwich Rehabilitation & Nursing Center is ready to meet that challenge.

"Five years ago, we recognized that we offer an outstanding rehabilitation program, with patient outcomes far outpacing the national average," said administrator Edith Revoir, "so we've grown that program so we can help more people in our community remain in their homes."

In that time, Norwich Rehab has converted almost 50 percent of their beds to short-term rehab with continued success in helping their patients return home, often in cases that may have resulted in permanent nursing home residency.

"We have an outstanding team here," Revoir said. "The last two years in particular have been extremely difficult, but our focus in delivering our promise to our residents: we will exhaust every option we can to help you spend your final years the way you want."

In fact, as the COVID-19 pandemic was reaching a crescendo in 2020, Norwich Rehab was awarded the American Health Care Association's Silver Award for Quality of Care, one of only five skilled nursing facilities that year to receive such recognition.

"We're on the road to Gold," said Revoir. "We're rolling out programs for our staff and residents that will help us continue to thrive in these unprecedented times." Norwich Rehab has already substantially raised rates for all their employees and plans to implement a Wellness Program this year that supports their employees in all facets.

In addition to investing in their staff, a major building renovation will begin this March, with an eye to programs and facility expansion in 2023.

There are plans in the works for an outpatient therapy clinic to offer patients transitional therapy on discharge home. "Most of all, our goal is to be a partner in this community that we all love," concluded Revoir.

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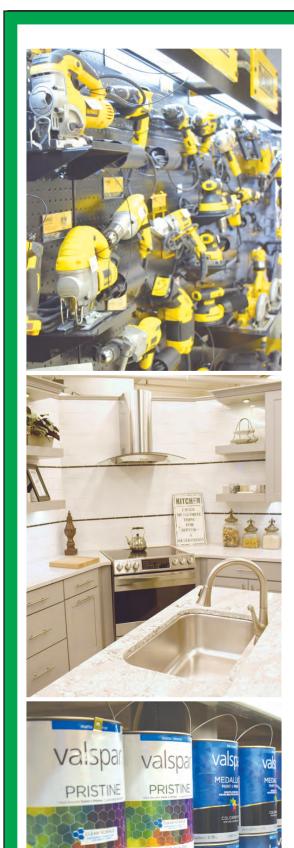
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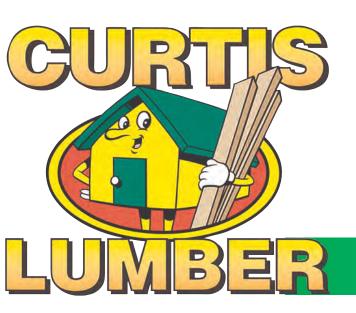
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