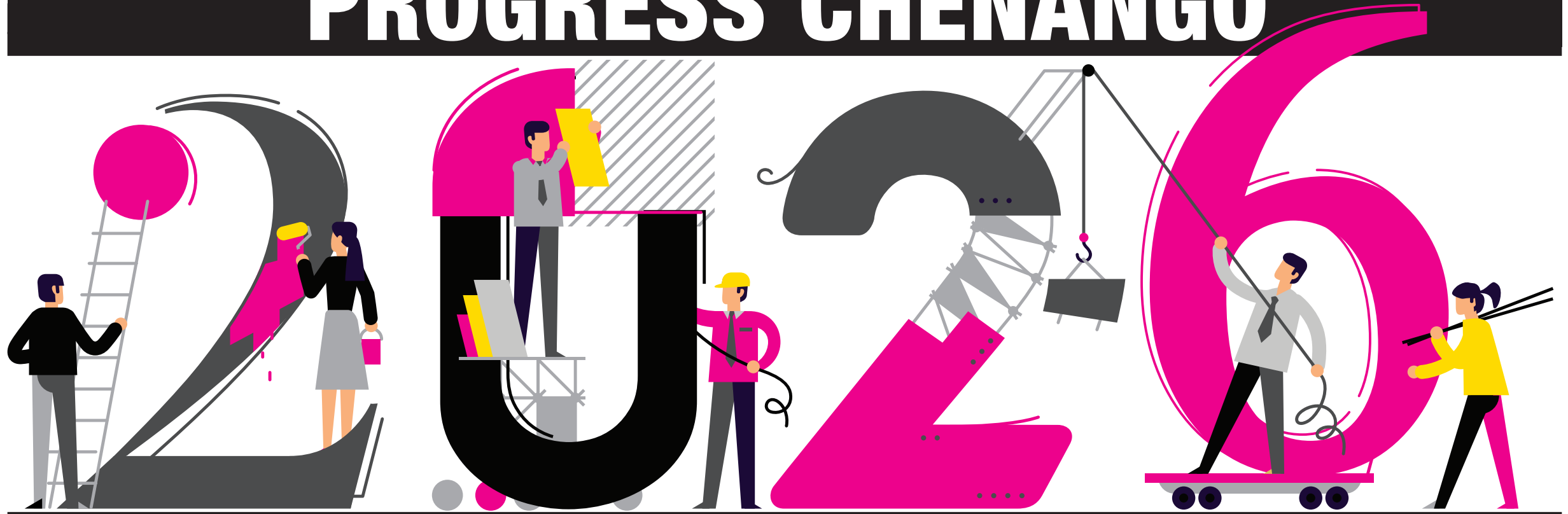


PROGRESS CHENANGO



VOLUME 10 • FEBRUARY 13, 2026 PUBLISHED BY THE EVENING SUN

The Impact Project Battles Ongoing Housing Crisis with \$550,500 in Funding From SFCU

ZACHARY MESECK
EVENING SUN

GREENE - On Friday, February 6, 2026, local leaders gathered at The Impact Project's office in Greene to discuss a staggering reality: Chenango County's housing vacancy rate has climbed to more than double the national average.

According to The Impact Project Founder and CEO, Jim Willard, Chenango County has over 6,000 vacant homes, and the situation has been getting worse with each year that passes.

"25. percent of all the homes in Chenango County are completely vacant," he said. "That's twice the national average."

"In Chenango County, two to three homeowners per week leave their homes. Housing has come to a tipping point, and if the county doesn't band together things will get worse, especially for the individuals who cannot afford the cost of home repairs."

Census data supports Willard's claims. Six years ago, Chenango County showed signs of distress with a total housing vacancy rate of 20.5 percent. At that time, roughly 5,142 out of the county's 25,057 housing units sat empty. A few weeks ago,



SFCU President and CEO Jim Reynolds, Greene SFCU Branch Manager Sharon Wilson, and Impact Project Director Jim Willard following the Housing Crisis Meeting on February 6th. They are joined by others including SFCU Staff, Village of Greene Mayor Jessup DuMond, and Town of Greene Supervisor Bernie McDermott. SFCU's community investment, a combination of project loans and operational donations, is designed to help homeowners stay in their homes and combat the housing crisis. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

the 2026 Housing Inventory Estimates were released. That data shows that the total vacancy rate in Chenango County has climbed to 25.2 percent.

The Impact Project is a non-profit organization founded in Greene and dedicated to keeping homeowners in their homes by provid-

ing essential home repairs. The group specializes in addressing emergency housing needs including collapsing roofs, failing furnaces, and handicap accessibility that residents oftentimes cannot afford.

Willard said while funding for their projects is always a concern, partners like SFCU

have continuously stepped up to help.

"The need and the challenge of the housing crisis is real," said SFCU President and CEO Jim Reynolds. Reynolds said supporting The Impact Project highlights the union's mission to "do well to do good."

At the meeting, Reynolds

said SFCU has pledged \$550,500 towards The Impact Project as part of their effort to help Southern Tier Communities, and provided Willard with several checks.

SFCU's contribution included two major streams of funding for The Impact Project, \$500,000 in project

Continued on page 2 ►

Visit Chenango County Outdoors

Balsam Pond Pharsalia, McDonough

Small motorboats or canoes. 153 acres, average 9' depth, warm water fishery. Hand launch 2 mi. south of the Village. Fish: Norlunge, largemouth bass, yellow perch, sunfish and chain pickerel

Brookfield State Forest

Hubbardville/ Brookfield, NY (607) 674-4017

130 miles of trails spread over 13,000 acres for: X-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling. Facilities: Pavilion, picnic area, hand-capped mounting platforms for horseback riding.

Genegantslet Creek McDonough,

Smithville Flats, NY

The Genegantslet Creek not only supports trout populations, it is considered to be one of the premiere trout streams in the region. This stream holds native brook trout and is annually stocked with brown trout. This DEC fishing access site is located just outside of Genegantslet State Forest. There is a small accessible fishing platform with parking.

Guilford Lake

Rte. 8 Guilford, NY

Lake is privately owned, but there is public access for car top boats only. Fish: Bass, pickerel, sunnies and bullhead.

Hunts Pond State Forest

2 miles southwest of New Berlin
New Berlin, NY 13411
NYS DEC (607) 674-4017

Continued on page 3 ►

Chenango County Dairy Day celebrated everything agriculture in 2025

KELLI MILLER
EVENING SUN

NORWICH - On June 21, under sunny skies and warm temperatures, families and friends visited the annual Dairy Day event at the Norwich Fairgrounds.

Scores of local residents turned out to learn all about the dairy industry and sample a few dairy products.

Assemblyman Joe Angelino and Chenango County Farm Bureau (CCFB) President Terry Ives visited with visitors and celebrated everything dairy.

Angelino noted it was a beautiful day for the crowds to learn about the dairy



Dairy Day Ambassadors created a nine gallon ice cream sundae and served visitors at Dairy Day. (Submitted photo)



Children enjoyed racing through the hay bale maze at Dairy Day. (Photo by Kelli Miller)

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The Impact Project battles ongoing housing crisis with \$550,500 in funding from SFCU -

Continued from page 1 ►

loans with an interest rate of half a percent, and a donation to the nonprofit of \$50,500 as part of SFCU's community building campaign called, "A Million Reasons."

Filling the Financial 'Doughnut Hole'

The funding targets a specific demographic that Willard calls the "doughnut hole," which are households that earn too much to qualify for federal poverty assistance but lack the thousands of dollars required for emergency repairs.

"If you're beneath the federal poverty level, we do the repair for free," Willard explained. "But if you're in that 'doughnut hole,' over poverty but within HEAP guidelines, you typically qualify for nothing. That's where this program changes lives."

For a family of four, the 2025-2026 HEAP monthly income limit is \$6,680. Thanks to the funding from SFCU, Chenango County families in this bracket can now qualify for up to \$15,000 in repairs at a record-low 0.5 percent interest rate.

"Every 48 hours, a homeowner in Chenango County leaves their home," Willard said. "The final nail in the coffin is when the home is no longer safe and affordable."

He added that SFCU



SFCU President and CEO Jim Reynolds (right) presents two checks totaling \$50,500 in donations to The Impact Project Founder Jim Willard (center) and Greene Branch Manager Sharon Wilson (left) on Friday, Feb. 6, 2026, in Greene. The donation, part of the credit union's "A Million Reasons" campaign, will fund operational costs for local home repair projects. (Photos by Zachary Meseck)

has previously dedicated \$300,000 in loans towards The Impact Project's efforts, and a homeowner has never missed a payment.

"There are people that don't want things for free," said Willard. "As much as they know they got a deal, they still have some dignity and pride about where they're paying for something."

He added that SFCU's loan

provides people with the opportunity to pay for the repairs that they know their home needs, at a rate they couldn't get anywhere else.

Greene's Mayor on Worsening Housing Crisis

According to Village of Greene Mayor Jessup DuMond, the average home in the Village is 100 years old, and the oldest is 214

years old. Mayor DuMond said most are in good shape thanks to owners who have the pride and financial means to take care of them, but there are plenty, even in the village, that are vacant and in extreme disrepair.

"We literally have a house falling in on itself," he said. "This house has been abandoned for more than 10 years, and people ask me, 'Well,

why don't you just tear it down?' And I usually try to get out of the conversation as quickly as possible and I say, 'Well, it's private property. I can't just take it.' But it's deeper than that."

"From way back in our founding documents, private property is one of the most important God-given rights. And every individual and every American when asked

will have a different definition of the American Dream, but I would say most of them include buying a house."

Dumond said the number of vacant houses around Greene is a staggering number, but dealing with vacant homes is not what The Impact Project does. He added that The Impact Project is trying

Continued on page 3 ►

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The Impact Project battles ongoing housing crisis with \$550,500 in funding from SFCU -



Impact Project volunteers work on building a ramp for The Place at their new Bainbridge location. (Submitted photo)

Continued from page 2 ►

to stop that number from getting worse by helping people stay in their homes.

“The vacant homes in many cases, let’s just say it, the blight is on us - the elected officials in the villages, and the towns, and in the counties,” he said. “There is a process, and since I’ve become mayor we’re going through it, but it’s a long and expensive process.”

“No matter the circumstances, it’s hard to take private property; we established that 250 years ago.”

The Mayor said for the second time in a few years, his hometown credit union, the Sidney Federal Credit Union, is stepping up to the plate to make a big difference to help people keep their homes.

“And I want to thank the Sidney Federal Credit Union for their contribution to our community... thank you for

stepping up to help people in and around the Greene area repair their houses,” said Dumond. “In closing, I’d like to say congratulations to the Impact Project.”

“And if you’d like to help them with funding, get a hold of the Impact Project, call them, search them on social media. And if you have the capacity, lend a hand. Help them out. Help them help people.”

Helping Hundreds of Homeowners

The Impact Project is one of the only organizations remaining in Chenango County that can provide these services to homeowners. As of the time of writing this article, the organization has completed 290 projects through its more than 20 years of operation.

According to Willard, this has been made possible thanks to the generosity

of thousands of volunteers, key business partners including Blue Ox, Curtis Lumber, Alpine, and SFCU, and the dedication of his team.

“This is about saving people’s homes,” Willard concluded. “There is no better feeling than pulling out of a driveway after we’ve finished a roof, and it starts raining.”

“Because in that moment, you know you just saved their house.”

Willard recommends anyone who needs a vital home repair to reach out. He said if The Impact Project can’t help, they will work with homeowners to find an organization that will.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Impact Project can visit its Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/theimpactproject> or website at <https://theimpactprojectgreene.org> for additional information.

Visit Chenango County Outdoors -

- The pond area is open to fishing and car top boat launching. Camping around the perimeter of the pond is available with a free permit from the DEC Sherburne office from May 1 to September 30. Fish: large-mouth bass, chain pickerel & panfish. Hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting and trapping with permit.
- Jackson Pond**
Located on Pharsalia Wildlife Mngmt Pharsalia, NY
Canoes, 18-acres located on the Pharsalia Wildlife Management area. Fish: Northern pike, largemouth bass & panfish.
- Jeffery Pond**
3 miles northeast of Norwich North Norwich, NY
Canoes, 20-acres that are a part of the Whaupanaucan State Forest. Fish: Brook trout, largemouth bass, brown bullhead & sunfish.
- Long Pond**
Town of Smithville, off Rte. 41 Smithville Flats, NY
NYS DEC (607) 674-4017
Small motorboats or canoes. 117 acres. Chain pickerel, largemouth bass and tiger musky are the main gamefish found in the pond. Black crappie, yellow perch, bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish can also be found in the pond. Long Pond is a very popular ice fishing location.
- Millbrook Recreation Park**
Off King Settlement Road (County Road 29) New Berlin, NY 13411
(607) 217-8533
Open year round. Fishing, hiking, camping and cross country skiing. Swimming runs from June until Labor Day (weather and staffing requirements permitting.) A reservation for the pavilion or camping is made through the town office (847-8909).
- NY River Adventures**
100 Tall Pines Lane (off Rte 8 N) Bainbridge, NY 13730
(607) 563-8271
River Tubing, Canoeing & Kayaking Located on the Unadilla & Susquehanna Rivers we offer a beautiful, fun-filled adventure for singles, couples, families or groups with river tubing, canoeing and kayaking trips & rentals.
- Oliver’s Campers**
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6460 State Hwy. 12 Norwich, NY 13815
(607) 334-3400
Family owned and operated since 1966. We sell a variety of RVs including Travel Trailers, Fifth Wheels, Pop-Ups, and Toy Haulers.
- Pharsalia Recreational Vehicle Trail**
Pharsalia, NY
(607) 647-5739
18.2 miles of marked trails are available for X-country skiing, hiking and horseback riding.

- Pharsalia Wildlife Management Area**
Pharsalia, NY
(607) 647-5774
4,356 acres are available for bird watching, X-country skiing, fishing, hunting and trapping. In 1926, the area became the first game refuge acquired by the State. Access depends on the weather conditions.
- Pharsalia Woods State Forest**
Chamber Member
Plymouth, NY
(607) 674-4017
9,000 acres in the towns of Plymouth and Pharsalia, providing hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, trapping, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and skiing. The forest contains six miles of the Finger Lakes Trail. Features an accessible viewing platform overlooking the 25-acre Round Pond.
- Rogers Environmental Education Center**
Chamber Member
2715 St. Rte. 80 West Sherburne, NY 13460
(607) 674-4733
Operated by Friends of Rogers, they offer many demonstrations and programming relating to the outdoors. Hiking and other outdoor activities are also offered. Facilities include a visitor’s center and a picnic area.
- Round Pond**
1 mile west of Smithville Flats Smithville Flats, NY
Canoes, 26 acres on state forest land 1 mi. west of Smithville Flats. Fish: Chain pickerel and panfish.
- The Finger Lakes trail Conferene, Inc.**
NYS Finger Lakes Trail Center
(607) 334-3872
Spans NY State, 5 trail sections run through Chenango County-77.9 miles. Activities: Bird watching, cross-country skiing, hiking, photography, snowshoeing.
- Unadilla River**
So. New Berlin, off Rte. 8 & 23
Excellent canoeing, long, deep, slow pools; mostly tree-lined. Fish: Walleye, chain pickerel, large and smallmouth bass and panfish.
- Whaupanaucan State Forest**
North Norwich, NY
DEC (607) 674-4017
1,187 acres of trails that are available for X-country skiing and hiking. No motorized vehicles are allowed. Fishing is also available on Jeffrey’s Pond, a 10-acre impoundment.
- Wolf Mountain Nature Center**
Chamber Member
562 Hopkins Crandall Road Smyrna, NY 13464
(607) 627-6784
A nature center, dedicating to connecting people with the spirit of the wild. Visit our Timber Wolf packs, Eastern coyotes, and Arctic Foxes. Picnic area, gift shop (no credit/debit accepted). Tours available.

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NYS Comptroller: Chenango faces ‘severe shortage’ in professional healthcare

SHAWN MAGRATH
EVENING SUN

NORWICH – In August 2025, Chenango County was named on a list of 16 rural counties that faces a severe healthcare professional shortage, according to a new report released by the New York State Comptroller’s Office.

The report highlights “alarming shortfalls” in primary care, pediatric, and obstetrician and gynecologist (OBGYN) doctors, dentists and mental health practitioners.

Most severe, the report states, is the shortage of mental health doctors. All 16 rural counties studied are designated by the federal government as areas having professional shortages.

The shortfall of healthcare workers in Chenango County adds another burden to an aging population of roughly 45,800 people. About 31 percent of the county (14,333 people) is enrolled in Medicaid – the third highest Medicaid enrollment of the 16 rural counties mentioned in the comptroller’s report.

Findings of the report note

that for every 10,000 people living in Chenango County in 2022, there were fewer than three primary care physicians available, and fewer than two family and general practice physicians, resulting in an underserved population of more than 12,000 individuals.

Other findings show that for every 10,000 people in the county, there are fewer than three physician assistants; 12 nurse practitioners; one OBGYN; three dentists; and four mental health practitioners (resulting in about 14,000 underserved individu-



UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital in Norwich. A new report from the NYS Comptroller’s Office highlights the severe shortage of healthcare professionals in Chenango County. (Photo by Shawn Magrath)

als). There were zero pediatric physicians when numbers were gathered in 2022.

All this leads to a severely underserved community, said New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, and may present problems for future health care and the ability to attract new people to rural regions.

“The ability to access health care is an essential quality of life issue,” DiNapoli said. “As the population of rural areas of the state ages at a faster rate, the healthcare needs of these New Yorkers will increase, and if unaddressed, shortages will get worse.”

In addition to Chenango County, the report examined healthcare professional access in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Delaware, Essex, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Lewis, Schuyler, Steuben, Sullivan, Washington, Wyoming, and Yates counties.

Key findings of the study conclude that the professional healthcare shortage in Chenango County falls below national guidelines set by the Graduate Medical

Education National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) which is used to assess the supply of physicians across all different fields of healthcare. What’s more, the U.S. The Health Resources and Services Administration gave a low rating in each field of healthcare. A full copy of the report can be found on the New York Comptroller’s website, osc.ny.gov.

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/08/dinapoli-rural-counties-face-shortage-health-professionals>

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On December 8 the New Berlin Boy Scout Troop 41 welcomed new members and thanked supporters for help.

Boy Scouts thank supporters and celebrate recruitment boost

NEW BERLIN – Zappone, Schuchman, and Dink Pope, Jr. of the New Berlin Boy Scout Troop 41, along with the rest of the troop, are key to ensuring the future of the organization. The troop is currently in the process of recruiting new members, and the community is encouraged to support them. The troop is currently in the process of recruiting new members, and the community is encouraged to support them.



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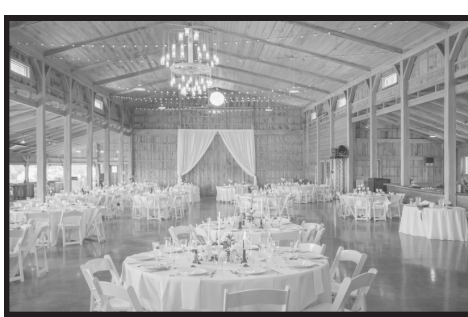

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A woman with dark hair and a purple halter top is sitting at a table, smiling and holding a paintbrush. A young boy with dark hair and a blue plaid shirt is sitting next to her, looking at her. They are outdoors, with green plants and a building in the background. The table is covered with a pink cloth and has various items on it, including a blue fan and a white cup.

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