

# PROGRESS CHENANGO



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## From grit to growth: Commerce Chenango charts course for 2026

SHAWN MAGRATH  
EVENING SUN

NORWICH – In the heart of downtown Norwich, nestled on the eastern end of the business district, Commerce Chenango is closing the books on a year defined by grit and opening a new chapter focused on growth.

As the organization reflects on the trials and triumphs of 2025, the message from the “hub of Chenango” is clear: the foundation is set for a vibrant 2026.

For 65 years, Commerce Chenango has been Chenango County’s go-to for bolstering economic vitality and forming business partnerships. The organization plays a leading role in economic and community development in all four corners of the county, offering services from education and training programs, to business planning, to business financing and tracking local business data.

Today, Commerce Chenango and its seven full-time staffers face unprecedented challenges for Chenango County while also touting tremendous success stories that have culminated from years-long endeavors. Its mission, according



Commerce Chenango President and CEO Sal Testani cuts the ribbon to the new home the Commerce Chenango administration offices on East Main Street in Norwich, marking the start of a new chapter for the organization. (Photo submitted by Commerce Chenango)

to Commerce Chenango President and CEO Sal Testani, is to position the county as a major player in economic development – a place that can attract visitors,

foster economic growth, and be a home for the people who work here.

“We want to make this a better place to live by focusing on the things almost

everybody agrees on,” said Testani, citing collaborative efforts between Commerce Chenango and countless other entities in and around Chenango County. “If you

ask me what’s our greatest strength, it’s our economic diversity. I challenge anyone to find another area with the economic strength and diver-

Continued on page 2 ►

S&S TV and Appliances receives Dealer of the Year Award for excellence in retail

NORWICH – S&S TV and Appliances of Norwich, was named the BrandSource Dealer of the Year for the North Atlantic Region at the BrandSource National Convention & Expo at the Gaylord Texan in Dallas.

Co-owners Tom and Joan Brauer were honored at the annual awards ceremony, which was held amid the hoopla of its four-day convention.

With showrooms in Norwich and Hamilton,, S&S serves the greater Madison and Chenango County communities with a wide selection of home appliances from such premium brands as Amana, Danby, Electrolux, Maytag, Monogram,

Continued on page 6 ►

## Catholic Charities of Chenango County moves community forward

KELLI MILLER  
EVENING SUN

NORWICH --Catholic Charities of Chenango County (CCofCC) was founded in 1970 in the city of Norwich and is the Chenango County arm of the Catholic Charities of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse Corporation. Over the past 56 years, CCofCC has been the most diverse and one of the largest human service providers within the region.

“We currently serve more than 10,000 Chenango County residents per year within our programs, which is more than 21 percent of the county’s entire popula-

tion,” said CCofCC Executive Director, Robin Cotter.

“Through this work, we support all demographics of people and have extensive experience in providing services for people who are diagnosed with substance use disorders(SUD), Serious Mental Illness (SMI), Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), and the more complex dual diagnosed populations,” Cotter said.

Additionally, CCofCC has experience with all other low-income populations including victims of crime and domestic violence, poverty, victims of



Continued on page 4 ►

In 2025, Catholic Charities of Chenango County purchased the property at 1 O'Hara Drive through Opioid Resettlement funds. (Submitted photo)



# From grit to growth: Commerce Chenango charts course for 2026 -



An excavator clears away debris of the demolished facility at Woods Corners in Norwich. The site, once home of several Chobani administration offices, was leveled in December to prepare a “shovel ready” site in hopes of attracting future private developers. Commerce Chenango has teamed with Chobani to identify best uses of the location. (Photos by Shawn Magrath)



**Chenango Memorial Hospital**

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**You catch a bug, and now you're running a high fever, coughing and more...**

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- Animal or insect bites
- Coughs
- Cuts
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Eye injuries
- Fever
- Headache
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Rashes
- Sinus pain
- Sore throat
- Urinary tract/ bladder infections
- Vomiting



**PRIMARY CARE or WALK-IN**

- Animal or insect bites
- Broken bone
- Burns
- Concussion
- Coughs
- Cuts
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Eye injuries
- Fever
- Headache
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Rashes
- Sinus pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sore throat
- Urinary tract/bladder infections
- Vomiting



**EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**

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- Seizure
- Shortness of breath (if severe)
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# From grit to growth: Commerce Chenango charts course for 2026 -

Continued from page 1 ▶

sity we have in Chenango County.”

### Triumphs of 2025: Grants, Growth, and Childcare

The past year saw Commerce Chenango pivot toward a more specialized approach to growth. By adding John Axle as director of finance, the organization bolstered its ability to manage significant investments and complex grant applications.

One of the year’s most celebrated achievements, said Testani, was securing a \$1 million state grant to establish an early learning center in downtown Norwich. Partnering with the City of Norwich and Sharon Vesely of “The Place,” the project aims to solve a “childcare desert” that has plagued the county for nearly two decades.

“When you open a facility like that, you have to think about how you can afford it and how you can run it,” said Testani. “By getting the state grant, we’re able to bear the burden of that remodel and create a Montessori-like environment for kids. Imagine the vibrancy in our community that that will create.”

The undertaking to sow a childcare facility in downtown Norwich is a years-

long endeavor that began with the transaction of the former Preferred Mutual Insurance building on East Main Street. After vacating the premises in 2020, Preferred Mutual attempted to secure a private buyer, but no deal materialized. The Industrial Development Agency (IDA), a sister agency of Commerce Chenango which had occupied a rental space on Broad Street in downtown Norwich, stepped in with a long-term solution: The IDA would purchase the two-story building from Preferred Mutual, locate Commerce Chenango administrative offices on the second floor, and work with partnering agencies to install a licensed daycare facility on the ground floor.

The plan gave Commerce Chenango plenty of office work space while promising room for the county’s first licensed daycare facility in nearly 20 years.

“The grant we got truly shows you what people can do when we can work together. It’s something that we’re really proud of,” said Testani. “It’s truly been a cooperative effort.”

Aside from the daycare facility project, Commerce Chenango also invested in its long-term vision in 2025, securing a \$100,000 state

grant for a three-year strategic plan which it aims to complete by year’s end.

The organization additionally received \$50,000 in state funds to study critical water and wastewater infrastructure at Woods Corners, once a manufacturing hub for Proctor and Gamble and, more recently, housing for a significant portion of Chobani’s administrative operations. Chobani paid to demolish the facility in December, citing unsuccessful efforts to sell it to a private buyer. Chobani has since partnered with Commerce Chenango to transform the location into a “shovel ready” site in hopes of attracting a private developer to the area.

Commerce Chenango and the Chenango IDA are partnering with Norwich city planners to evaluate the feasibility of extending water and sewer infrastructure to the site. Public water and wastewater lines end at NBT Bank on State Route 320, just a few hundred yards west of the demolished facility. The study will examine the challenge of extending water and wastewater lines to the east side of the Chenango River and up the Route 12 corridor, as far north as the Lt. Warren Eaton Airport two miles from the Norwich city limit.

“The development of public water and wastewater districts have been a topic of discussion for my 35 years of dealing with Chenango County,” Chenango IDA Chairman RC Woodford said in December. “It’s been a somewhat common issue over the years. This project is an opportunity where the IDA, whose mission is to go after job creation as well as increase taxable value and the local tax base, is a great opportunity.”

### Addressing the Hurdles

Despite these successes, 2025 highlighted persistent challenges. Chenango County faces an aging and declining population, which dropped by 2.6 percent according to the last U.S. Census.

“Our county is getting smaller. It’s continuing to age. And that’s not a recipe for success,” Testani said.

Furthermore, while manufacturing is growing, a lack of available housing has led to an “exodus” of residents, forcing many workers to commute from outside the county. Testani emphasized that the county must bolster its housing stock to attract more permanent residents.

Blighted properties are also a target area for Commerce Chenango in

2026. Testani said he and his colleagues are now working with regional lawmakers and consulting firms to explore the possibility of a county-wide land bank which would provide communities a specialized, legal, and operational tool to acquire and transform vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties into assets.

“One of the challenges we have throughout the community are properties that are in disrepair, properties that we would like to see taken care of,” Testani said. “There’s lots of challenges associated with that. We believe forming a land bank would be a valuable tool to help address some of those challenges.”

To address a growing slate of challenges for further economic development, Commerce Chenango and its sister agencies find themselves partnering more often with professional consulting firms to overcome obstacles in the most proficient way, partnering local resources with proficient insider knowledge. By tapping into consultant expertise, Testani says Commerce Chenango is extracting the greatest value from its state funding.

“The state is trying to make sure they invest in

places that show the ability to take advantage of current investments. I think that we have momentum. I think that our pivot to this focus has paid dividends; and I think, honestly, our chamber members are recognizing that,” he said.

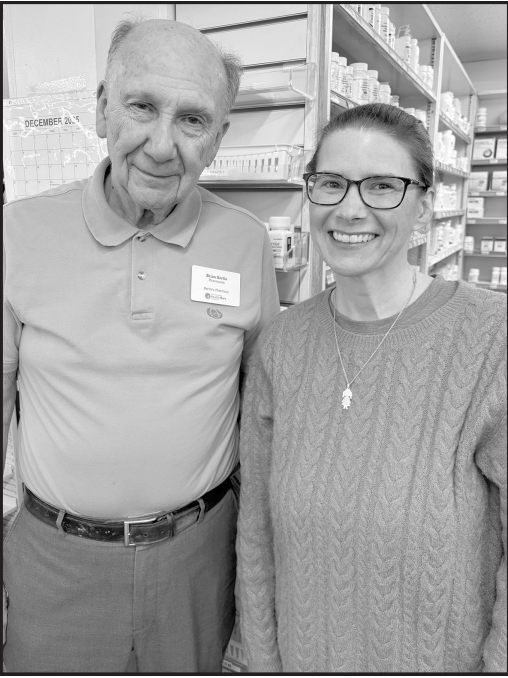
### Looking ahead

Regardless of future challenges, Testani emphasizes that Commerce Chenango remains dedicated to fostering a pro-business climate by aligning with the specific needs of each local community. It’s a philosophy that has doubled Commerce Chango’s membership over the last three years, and it safeguards a community that’s economically healthy enough to thrive.

“I truly believe that by definition, Chenango County is the best place to live. We have a strong sense of community that runs throughout the county that a lot of communities don’t have,” said Testani. “It’s easy for us to look around and criticize all the things we would like to see improved. It takes optimism and effort to make things better. By staying positive and surrounding yourself with the right people, you truly can make a difference.”

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# Catholic Charities of Chenango County moves community forward -



Catholic Charities of Chenango County expanded its warming center capacity with the purchase of 1 O'Hara Drive in Norwich. (Submitted photos)

**Continued from page 1 ►**

child abuse, homeless, Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE), high-cost Medicaid utilizers, as well as others.

They offer many programs including Emergency Services Food Pantry (Roots & Wings), Adult and Children's Health Home Care Coordination,

Safe Options Support, Chenango County Warming Center (WRAP), OMH Licensed Supportive Housing, Housing First, OMH Licensed Apartment Treatment Program, OPWDD Licensed Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA), Social Care Navigation. Cotter said they are dedicated to caring for those in need while promot-

ing human development, collaboration, and elimination of poverty and injustice and strive to empower those served to transform their lives.

"We are a true community minded organization utilizing a holistic approach to providing resources to the community which address the needs in it," Cotter continued. "By doing this, we

help to provide a beautiful place for all members of the community."

**Major Developments in 2025**

CCofCC purchased the property at 1 O'Hara Drive to expand the Warming Center capacity through Opioid Resettlement funds and since opening, Cotter said they have served 147 unique indi-

viduals and moved 54 into permanent housing.

She said they have also completed 480 referrals to local resources, and 32 individuals have entered inpatient rehabilitation.

Cotter said additionally they received grant funding to expand the warming center to a full time status, developed a Warmth, Recovery, and Assistance Program

(WRAP) to provide space for community opportunities and programs, received 25 additional Housing First Beds in Broome, Chenango, and Otsego County and through Roots and Wings emergency Services Food Pantry, supported over 10,000 individuals and provided 104,167 meals.

**Continued on page 5 ►**





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# Catholic Charities of Chenango County moves community forward -

Continued from page 4 ▶

### Plans for 2026

Funding awarded through The Opioid Resettlement Fund allowed CCofCC to purchase the building at 1 O Hara Drive to increase the Warming Center to 15 beds and develop their new WRAP program.

Additional funding through a Solutions to End Homeless Grant allows the WRAP center to remain open year-round.

Cotter explained half of the building will allow the community space to provide collaborative services to assist this population to engage with others and support them as they reintegrate at their own pace.

She noted many local organizations and agencies will be available during the day along with DSS outreach workers and the SOS team members.

“We see this as a win for both our guests and the community as they work together to overcome challenges and provide opportunities,” said Cotter.

“As we continue to solidify these services we will also begin to look at more permanent supportive sheltering options and breaking

ground on “Shadow’s Rest” Tiny Home Community,” she added.

### Milestones and Growth

The agency’s plan is updated every two years and reviewed every six months with their Board of Directors keeping their mission in the forefront of decision making.

“Each one of our programs, including new programs, are evaluated using a program rubric,” Cotter continued. “We evaluate programs based on mission, fiscal viability, experience, community need, etc.”

Cotter said there are times programs have been eliminated, yet other times when community has dictated the direction their agency moves.

She gave one example of the crisis of the unhoused population and said it seemed to be increasing, which led them to help develop the homeless coalition, increase awareness and education and to develop and recently expand the warming center to a year-round operation and provide Safe Options Support (SOS) Homeless Program to Chenango, Otsego and Broome Counties.

“We also survey the clients we serve to determine their needs. Through that we

**“We currently serve more than 10,000 Chenango County residents per year within our programs, which is more than 21 percent of the county’s entire population.”**

**- Catholic Charities of Chenango County Executive Director, Robin Cotter**

added more autonomy to our behavioral health programs, relocated and expanded Roots and Wings to provide a more robust Emergency Services/Community Center at Leilani Way,” said Cotter.

### 2025 Highlight

In 2025, CCofCC helped two unhoused individuals when they first came to the Warming Center through the Safe Options Support (SOS) program. They were also experiencing significant mental health challenges, requiring multiple interventions during that time.

Cotter said through consistent, relationship-based support and connection to services, they were able to move into a Housing First apartment. There, they experienced their first winter safely indoors.

Since becoming stably housed, she said they have had zero negative incidents and are thriving in their new life together.

“This past Christmas, they baked cookies in their own home and generously donated them back to the Warming Center,” Cotter added. “A powerful full-circle moment that reflects both their growth and the impact of The Warming Center and SOS and Housing First in action.”

**Chenango County Advantages and Limits**

Cotter noted the greatest benefits include great collaboration with community partners and stakeholders, adding they are small

enough to know their community and the needs that exist.

She said there have been challenges related to high needs and decreased funding.

“We have been bypassed on certain grants due to the rural nature of our community and low populations,” Cotter added. “When there are grant awards across the state, many of the awards will go to areas with larger populations.”

### Workforce and Talent

With transportation being one of the more difficult issues they face, Cotter said they also have a hard time hiring staff with college degrees or hiring clinical staff with a competitive salary.

She said Hybrid scheduling as well as providing clinical supervision and loan forgiveness has helped attract professional talent. Cotter also pointed to the lack of quality in the existing housing inventory and affordable housing. Key community partners

CCofCC works with local officials at Chenango County Behavioral Health, DSS, Office of Aging, Public Health, United Way, Greater Opportunities, Chenango Health Network, local

schools, hospitals, law enforcement, Commerce Chenango, Chobani and all non-profits.

They actively participate in several local coalitions in Chenango County including the Homeless Coalition and Chenango County Hunger Partnership.

“It is our belief that we can move our community forward and better meet needs when we are all working together to solve problems that relate to our specific area,” said Cotter.

They directly advocate with local and state government officials as well as Office on Mental Health (OMH), Office of People with Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities,

(OPWDD) and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) Community events and programs

CCofCC encourages their staff to volunteer and participate in numerous community events. They have navigators and staff that table at many events to promote offered services and connect individuals to additional services. CCofCC volunteers at events such as Colorscape and Blues Fest.

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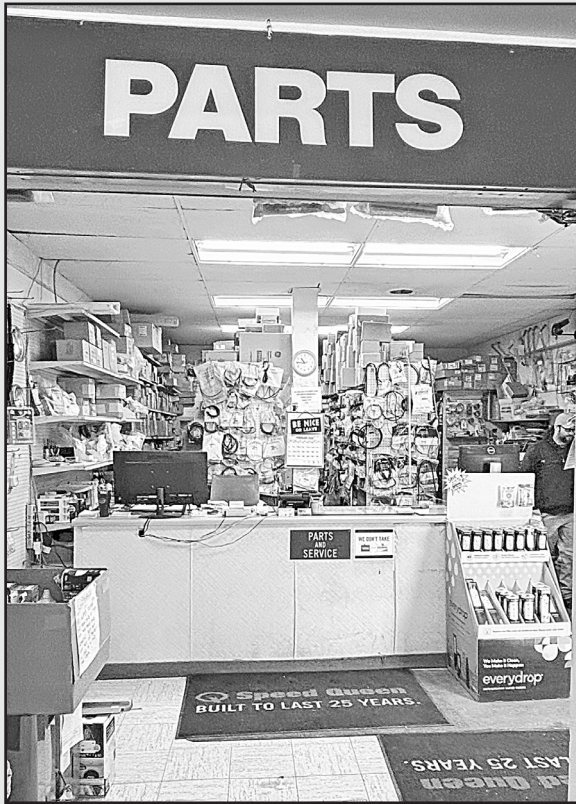
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S&S TV and Appliances receives Dealer of the Year Award for excellence in retail -



Continued from page 1 ►

and Whirlpool. They also recently added a new line called THOR Kitchen Appliances. The company also carries TVs and assorted A/V gear and accessories, and its specially trained, in-house technicians are prepared to service all that S&S sells.

The BrandSource Dealer of the Year awards are presented annually to a member who has shown continued support of BrandSource and its direct suppliers. The Dealer of the Year must support the group by attending regional meetings as well as national events such as the Convention and Summit.

The 14 winners, which were selected by each region's membership, demonstrate a continued commitment to excellence in the retail industry and to

their fellow BrandSource dealers.

BrandSource is the leading merchandising organization for independent appliance, home furnishings and consumer tech dealers. Its parent company, AVB, is a \$19.5 billion member-driven co-op that provides merchandising, financing and digital marketing services to nearly 5,000 independent dealers in the U.S. and Canada. BrandSource's sister divisions and affiliates include ProSource (consumer tech and custom integration); TRIB Group (rent-to-own); Mega Group (Canada); and HFA Buying Source, serving home furnishings dealers nationwide.

S&S TV and Appliances also received the New York State Senate Empire Award that was presented by Senator Frederick J. Akshar II of the 52nd senate District. This award is

in recognition of outstanding contributions and dedication to the growth, prosperity and betterment of their community in New York State.

One of the main reasons that S&S had so much inventory last year was due to their New Buying Group that S&S became a part of called the N.E.A.G. This buying group has allowed them to keep their inventory full and order any appliances much faster.

S&S Appliances would like to welcome Kurt and Alyssa Brauer to the team! They are also expanding their team by bringing on three new additional hires. Make sure you stop in and see them for all your TV and Appliance needs. S&S would also like to thank the community for making 2025 such a great success.



S&S TV and Appliances of Norwich, was named 'Dealer of the Year for the North Atlantic Region' at a national convention and expo in Dallas. Business owners Co-owners Tom and Joan Brauer were honored at an annual awards ceremony. The store has locations in Norwich and Hamilton. (Photos by Rebecca Laibowitz)

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# Volunteers unite for 12th annual Alvogen Day in Norwich



Alvogen volunteers working in the community to clear garbage, repair landscaping, wash windows, and even remove harmful debris including discarded needles. The work was supported by other community groups, the city DPW and Norwich Police Department. (Photos by Tyler Murphy)

## TYLER MURPHY EVENING SUN

NORWICH – Hundreds of Alvogen employees gathered in East Park on September 12 to kick off the company’s 12th annual community service day, a tradition that sees employee cleaning up downtown Norwich.

Employees divided into teams and dispersing throughout the city to complete dozens of improvement projects.

The event was coordinated in partnership with city departments and more than two dozen local organizations, including the Chenango SPCA and the Norwich

Business Improvement District (BID).

“We do everything from landscaping to cleaning, painting lampposts, organizing, and fixing sandboxes; we do a variety of projects,” said Alvogen spokesperson Luke Murphy. “It’s a day we look forward to every year and giving back right here in Norwich.”

Murphy said many team members shared a personal connection to the area and desire to help improve their community. “I’m very fortunate to live in this community,” he said. “It’s always a community of giving and making sure everyone is taken care of. I couldn’t imagine living any place else.”

The company’s service initiative is part of a larger global tradition observed across Alvogen’s locations in 35 countries.

The company, which employs approximately 2,300 people worldwide, has made civic engagement a core part of its corporate identity. Norwich Pharmaceuticals, Alvogen’s local subsidiary, has been a fixture in the city since its founding in 1887.

Volunteer teams took on tasks such as landscaping, painting, building repairs, park maintenance, and seasonal clean-up in preparation for upcoming fall and winter holidays.



## Chenango County’s Hometown Daily Newspaper since 1891

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