TIMES UNION | TIMESUNION.COM • SUNDAY, MAY 11, 2025

## TIMES Salute to NURSES





A Member of Trinity Health

Thank you

## A Special THANK YOU to Nurses

At St. Peter's Health Partners, we recognize that nursing is grounded in a dedication to patients, families, and community, with a commitment to providing and improving care for all.

From our hospitals and nursing homes to our primary care offices and surgical suites, nurses are critical to our goal of providing the highest quality health care to the communities we serve. This is why we are proud to once again sponsor **Salute to Nurses**, in partnership with the *Times Union*.

We could not do what we do without the expertise, talent, and dedication of the nurses who work across the diverse clinical settings of St. Peter's Health Partners.

Nurses are caregivers and communicators. They are patient advocates and teachers. They are expert problem solvers and proficient learners, always looking for opportunities to expand their knowledge and technical skills.

I have great confidence in the power of compassion. The exceptional care and gentle, human touch extended by our nurses and other colleagues during challenging times has brought relief and healing to those in need.

On behalf of the entire St. Peter's Health Partners community, I would like to take this time to salute those nurses who have given so much to their profession, to their patients, and to the community. For your resilience and for your compassion, I cannot thank you enough.

Sincerely,

1-1-

Steven Hanks, MD, President and CEO



A Member of Trinity Health

## WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF NURSING.

We are honored to celebrate all the dedicated nurses in the Capital Region and are especially proud to recognize our nurses for their achievement.

#### **2025 NURSE OF THE YEAR**

**Katelyn N. Dwon, MS, FNP-BC,** Clinical Nurse Educator, Emergency Departments, Albany Memorial & Samaritan Hospital; SPHP Nurse Residency Program Coordinator

#### **2025 NURSE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS**

**Lindsey Brenenstuhl, RN, PALS,** Adult & Pediatric Traumatic Brain Injury, Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital

Jodie Broughton, RN, Director of Nursing, Schuyler Ridge Residential Healthcare

#### A Commitment to Excellence in Nursing

At St. Peter's Health Partners, we offer opportunities to practice in the most diverse nursing settings in northeastern New York. We offer and encourage ongoing professional development opportunities while recognizing the need to build flexibility into the lives of our nurses and staff.

To learn more about opportunities within our organization, please visit our website at **www.sphp.com/careers** 



A Member of Trinity Health



Katelyn N. Dwon, MS, FNP-BC



Lindsey Brenenstuhl, RN, PALS



Jodie Broughton, RN



## Celebrating Nurses Week & The Power of Nurses

NURSES WEEK • MAY 6-12, 2025

American Nurses Association New York



AORN New Yor



#### IMES Salute to NURSES



CONTENTS

**6-8** Top 10 Nurses

**11, 16** Mark Wahl Tribute

**12-13, 15** 15 Finalists

**17** Our Sponsors

CREDITS

**Copy Editor** Susan Shultz **Designer** Jill Ginac

Advertising Erin Rosa erosa@timesunion.com

Cover Photo: Adobe Stock

<image>

IMMEDIATE OPENINGS FOR RNs, LPNs AND CNAs







honors the healthcare heroes who have made a profound difference in our community

his year's exceptional group of winning nurses and finalists deserves praise not only for their expert patient care and clinical skills, but for their compassion, empathy, ability to adapt, leadership, and their unwavering dedication to their profession.

These nurses have contributed to the future of their profession, through mentorship of the next great class of nurses; to their workplaces, in spearheading different programs and initiatives to improve patient care; and to their communities, by developing creative solutions to find resources for the most vulnerable.

This year's nurses are described as "the epitome of what a nurse should be," "an amazing caregiver," "the hardest working people I know," and possessing a "wealth of knowledge." Our communities are better served and cared for because of what they do, everyday, for their patients.

We salute this year's class of winning nurses who continue to overcome adversity and who make their patients feel safe, heard, and cared for. The future of healthcare and nursing is strong, as you'll see in the following testimonials of 2025's ten winning nurses and fifteen finalists. Congratulations to all and thank you.





#### LAUREN BURCH

GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL Emergency Department -Registered Nurse/ Forensic Examiner

Nominated by Melissa LaTour

Colleagues said Lauren Burch is not only an amazing nurse but "one of the best human beings I know." The mom of two little boys is a full-time student studying to be a family nurse practitioner. Burch has worked in the Emergency Department for eight years and "was an amazing nurse from day one."

Burch consistently demonstrates exceptional compassion, clinical expertise and goes above and beyond her duties to provide outstanding care, always going the extra mile to address all of the needs of her patients and their families, colleagues said. Burch works the overnight shift which often times means working with a skeleton crew without an IV team. This is one of Burch's strengths. Fellow nurses said she is always happy to help staff throughout the hospital and has been unsuccessful in placement of the IV she was called upon to place.

Patients are often anxious or are experiencing pain because IV access has already been attempted prior to her arrival. She takes her time to help calm the patient when needed and addresses any concerns or questions they have before she even makes the attempt always explaining what she is doing to help decrease their anxiety and it does not go unnoticed by her coworkers or the patients who appreciate her great care.

On top of her responsibilities as an ED nurse she is also a forensic examiner. She does forensic exams across the lifespan and also provides exams and services to domestic violence survivors. This is an area that requires specialty training, continued education and on-call time above and beyond her hours in the ED. "Lauren is a nurse we are very fortunate to have in our ED and our patients are thankful to receive care from," her colleagues said.



#### **KATELYN DWON**

#### ST PETER'S HEALTH PARTNERS -SAMARITAN HOSPITAL Nursing Professional Development/ Clinical Nurse Educator

Nominated by Deidre Dunn, Pamela Barrall, Ann Bentzen, Julie Brott, Johanna Flanigan, Christine Pruett, Katrina Cutting, Judy Flynn, Linda Amadon, Ginger Kehn, Judith Naske, Gina Picarillo, Linda Alling, Ann Mahoney, Tracy Kuehn, Deborah Kufs, Sharon Weinlein, Carol Crucetti, Denise Glasser, Anne LaMora, Jean Colaneri, and Patricia Auer.

Numerous colleagues of Katelyn Dwon say the Capital Region Nurses Honor Guard wouldn't be what it is today without Dwon's vision.

Dwon founded a local chapter of the Nurses' Honor Guard, which honors those nurses who have passed, in 2022. Under Dwon's leadership and tireless efforts, the group has expanded to 6 counties and currently has over 170 members.

"As a retired nurse and member, I have personally experienced the gratitude and sentiment of the family and friends of the nurses we honor," a colleague said.

Dwon accomplished her goal while working full-time at SPHP as an Educator, attending school to advance her education, and raising her family, said another colleague.

"The Cambridge English Dictionary defines selflessness as 'the quality of caring more about what other people need and want than about yourself' - this defines Katelyn, in part. What's missing is dedication, compassion, and commitment," said one colleague.

Dwon is an Educator in the Emergency Room as well as Coordinator of the Nurse Residency Program. The Residency program helps new nurses that are hired meet their educational needs and ensure their overall well-being and success as new nurses to St. Peter's Health Partners. Katelyn's unwavering dedication to nursing is unparalleled.



#### SAMANTHA CLEVELAND

#### ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER NICU (RNC-NIC)

Nominated by Kim Shepardson

Samantha Cleveland, RNC, knew that she wanted "to take care of babies," for as long as she could remember. She never wanted to do anything else. NICU nursing was her calling.

Cleveland started in the Neonatal Intensive Care unit here at Albany Medical Center 33 years ago. Over the

years, colleagues said she has cared for thousands of babies and their families. Cleveland has supported families through the best and worst of times and gives 150% of herself to her patients 100% of the time, they said.

Cleveland is an expert in her field. She is a resource for all, sharing her knowledge and clinical skills and is often called to do labs or start an IV because of her expert level skills. Staff knows that she is there to help in any way. From answering questions, or helping care for a baby, "Sam is always willing to lend a hand and share her knowledge and expertise with younger nurses," colleagues said.

She is a strong charge nurse, leading the team through hectic times. She has won a safety award, and she has been a Daisy nominee (multiple times).

What makes Cleveland an amazing NICU nurse is her compassion for her patients. "Samantha Cleveland is the nurse that we should all strive to be," colleagues said.



#### BRITTANY DWYER

ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER Registered Nurse - D2-N Intensive Care

Nominated by Cyndy Wilber

Patient Cyndy Wilber spent several weeks in the hospital in 2024 after back surgery, a three-way heart bypass further complicated by a collapsed lung, suffering from severe pain.

"There were days when the pain was so intense that all

I wanted to do was close my eyes & shut out the rest of the world. As busy as D2 was, Brittany always showed up with a smile, encouragement, and help," Wilber said.

Dwyer gently encouraged Wilber to move and was her biggest cheerleader with every bit of progress she made. With such intense pain, Wilber said she often broke down in tears while trying to walk. Dwyer would stay by her side, guiding her back to her bed, and was ready by her side with pain relief.

"She never once gave up on my making progress each day. She was never cross or hurried with my care, though I knew I was not her only patient. It was because of the care from nurses, like Brittany, that I was able to recover," Wilber said.

## TOP TEN WINNERS



#### JAMIE EDDY

GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL Obstetrics

Nominated by Nicole Vance and Siobhan Frandino

Colleagues call Jamie Eddy the "nurse that can do it all." "You have a question? Call Jamie. Need an IV? Call Jamie. Need a suggestion for a position to help rotate a baby in utero? Call Jamie. Need advice? Call Jamie. Need a good laugh? Call Jamie. Need a good cry? Call Jamie," they said.

Eddy is a source of knowledge that she generously is willing to share, coworkers said. "On top of the amazing nurse she is, she also is the Snuggery's bereavement coordinator. She will come in day, night, or on a day off to help mom's and their family navigate through the difficulties of losing their infant," her coworker said.

Eddy goes above and beyond for patients and family members who are experiencing a pregnancy loss, through a miscarriage or stillbirth. She has a bereavement certification that she voluntarily obtained to expand her knowledge and professional growth.

"During one of the most difficult times of someone's life, Jamie is a shoulder to cry on. She is extremely supportive, compassionate, informative, and truly present in the moment for staff caring for the patient and the patient and their family members," her coworkers said.

Colleagues said Eddy deserves this recognition for her continuous, compassionate care.



#### CORTNEY JACKSON

ELLIS MEDICINE ICU Nurse Manager E1 and E2, former COVID Nurse Manager

Nominated by Elizabeth Jackson

Not a year into Cortney Jackson's new unit, COVID-19 struck. Jackson went from being a brandnew first-time Nurse Manager of a new skillset, to being thrust into the middle of a pandemic stricken, locked down unit, all while being pregnant.

"She never once wavered, even when she found out she was miscarrying our first baby. She never once wanted to throw in the towel. She took it head on, never questioning what she was doing," Jackson's wife, Elizabeth, said. Jackson always made sure her staff was fully equipped with the necessary PPE and made sure they always did what they needed on the unit to keep them all safe and protected from this virus. She never once questioned jumping into assignments when needed or necessary, or doing whatever was asked of her, Elizabeth said.

She was a constant support system to so many of her nurses and techs. When the staff was dwindling, she stayed strong and fought for more help. She fought for the little staff she had because she believed in them. "I have seen firsthand the empathy she had for her team as well as the lives of many patients and families she has touched.

"She did all of this while losing one baby and being pregnant with baby number two! She may not be at bedside 24/7 but she sure did, fearlessly, lead her team with pride," Jackson's wife said.



#### JUSTINE LAVALLEY

COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HEALTH Staff Nurse, Emergency Department Nominated by Stephanie Hisgen

Justine LaValley has dedicated her career to taking care of patients in a community that she calls her home and has raised her children in, her administrator said. Most of her career has been spent taking care of the most critical patients in Columbia Memorial's Emergency Department. LaValley's dedication and spirit has never wavered.

LaValley has been recognized numerous times internally both as a Daisy Award recipient, as well as a recipient of numerous facility awards for her attention to detail, compassion for caring, and ability to identify errors to prevent patient harm. These accolades alone make her stand out as an exceptional nurse.

However, colleagues said what makes LaValley more deserving of recognition is how she holistically takes care of everyone around her including patient family members and her peers. She treats not only their medical emergencies, but she also lifts their spirits. Her personality is infectious and brings a much-needed dose of happiness to a place where people end up with their most serious problems. She will often be seen dancing and singing through the department as she completes her nursing duties.

"Justine is a person that truly possess the heart and soul of a nurse," her colleagues said.



#### **KIRSTIN LAWLESS**

ALBANY MEDICAL (MELODIES CENTER) Pediatric Registered Nurse

Nominated by Jennifer Daniluck, Nicholas Wulczyn, Diana Cibelli, and Sarah Roberts

The family of one special patient, five-year-old Natalia, sings Kirstin Lawless's praises as they journey through two years of chemotherapy sessions.

"Kirstin is our daughter, Natalia's nurse during her chemotherapy treatments at the Melodies Center at

Albany Med. She's been a part of our journey since March of 2023. Natalia needed to have 42 chemo treatments over the course of 13 months. She has currently completed 36," said Natalia's mom, Diana.

Kirstin has gone above and beyond to become "fast friends" with Natalia, including learning the names of her My Little Ponies, and celebrating her love of unicorns. Natalia sings a song to distract her from her port being de-accessed and Kirstin sings it with her. Natalia is also nervous with Band-Aid removal, so Kirstin makes sure to give her unicorn Band-Aids for sensitive skin and uses "magic spray" to help ease the removal.

"Her disposition is always energetic and happy. We will miss her so much after we finish treatment this spring. She is a great asset to the team of nurses up there. Anyone who has a child visiting that department knows all the anxiety and stress that comes with it. Kirstin makes it a warm and pleasant experience," Diana said.

"We love chatting with her while she's in the room and Natalia runs off the elevator to go find her as soon as we arrive. In our book she deserves to be nurse of the year because this last year has been a little easier with her on our team," she said.

Natalia's aunts and uncles also praised Kirstin's work with Natalia, calling her "an angel sent from heaven" and said she is "changing lives, one smile at a time."



## TOP TEN WINNERS



#### MARK "POP" WAHL

MARIA COLLEGE OF ALBANY RN/ Veteran/ Nursing Instructor

Nominated by Julia Mason, Kimberly Castelluccio, Mckenzie Pleat, Ginni O'Malley, Marianne Miller, Ashley Sandstedt, Kristen Kolach, Michael Monday, Dayne Wahl, Shirley Farrell, Liz Kelly, Kelly Honsaker, Pamela Regner, Erin Pachucki, Mary Deato, Rachel Mentor-Warner and Heather Gleason

Described as husband, friend, Navy veteran, nurse, nursing instructor, mentor, and more, Mark "Pop" Wahl, who recently lost his battle with cancer, "touched countless lives, colleagues and students," friends and family said.

"He cared for his wife, even as he was fighting his own battle with cancer. Even as he posted their long journey online, he never stopped trying to lift us all up," a colleague said.

"The absolute best, most compassionate nurse. Has taught and influenced so many future nurses. He is the reason there are so many amazing nurses," another said.

A teaching colleague noted he was extremely devoted to his nursing students, and said Mark always had an open door and helped them no matter what time it was.

Others said Mark treated everyone around him with respect and kindness. He made everyone around him comfortable and happy. He always had a smile on his face and his positive attitude was contagious. He helped so many students throughout the years become amazing nurses by listening, supporting and guiding them.

"He touched so many lives. He will be missed greatly," another said.

One student said that as a professor, Wahl didn't just teach the science of nursing—he "taught the soul of it." He made every student feel seen, capable, and valued, fostering confidence in those just beginning their journey into healthcare. His pride in his students didn't end at graduation; he continued to champion and celebrate their successes throughout their careers.

"Even as he faced his own battle with cancer, Mark remained a pillar of strength for those around him. He never stopped encouraging, teaching, and spreading light. The ripple effect of his kindness and wisdom is immeasurable, living on in every nurse he mentored and every patient those nurses go on to serve," another said.

The establishment of the Maria College Mark Wahl Scholarship in his honor is a testament to his lasting impact on the nursing profession. This scholarship will continue to inspire and support future nurses, ensuring Mark's legacy lives on.



SALUTES OUR NURSES in the Capital Region!

518-280-7715 www.hoffmanlawllc.com

A legal practice limited exclusively to matrimonial, divorce and family law matters throughout the Capital District





#### MADISON ZUK

ELLIS MEDICINE RN, ICU

Nominated by Katie Clifford and Laurie Resila

Patients said that Madison "Maddy" Zuk is "what nurses should be all about."

"Maddy was so understanding and knowledgeable and made us feel calmer," one patient said.

Another said that Zuk goes out of her way to have a positive, upbeat, caring, yet honest and factual review of

the patient situation. She talks to the family members and tells it like it is, but in a kind way. She doesn't sugarcoat things, yet she does try to have a positive tone of voice and a great attitude.

Another patient said that Zuk was her husband's one-to-one nurse in the ICU over the Thanksgiving holiday "when she could have chosen to be at home with her family."

"She was there when our world was turned upside down. He was intubated for 11 days, and it took him six days to wake up once he was removed from sedation. Even after he was moved to another floor, Maddy came to visit us," the patient said. Days later, Zuk brought the couple cookies and wrote a beautiful card, including the names of all family members!

"I have had several surgeries myself over the years in various hospitals, and I can say she has a heart of gold," the patient said.



TIMES UNION | TIMESUNION.COM





## Celebrating the Nurses of Today *and* Tomorrow

#### What's in a name? Everything when it's a Russell Sage Nurse.

With more than 500 students enrolled in our undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, we're proud to shape the careers of those called into this critical and noble profession.





NOW OFFERING A DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE (DNP) PROGRAM!

€ Learn more: sage.edu/nursing-programs/





## Nurses Week reminds us all that compassion is a career choice.

MariaCollege.Edu



#### Mark "Pop" Wahl – Nurse, Teacher, Veteran, Friend

By Jessica McNally, DNP, FNP-BC, CNEcl Department Chair of Nursing Maria College

he passing of Mark "Pop" Wahl leaves a profound emptiness in the hearts of those fortunate enough to know him. A devoted husband, father, grandfather, teacher, veteran, and friend, Mark lived a life defined by compassion, commitment, and service to others.

Mark proudly served in the United States Navy from 1974 to 1994, participating in Operation Frequent Wind—the final evacuation of the Vietnam War. After retiring from active duty, he moved to Delmar, where he became a fixture in the local community. His continued service included over 40 years as a member of the American Legion and VFW. He served two terms as Commander of American Legion Post 1040, during which he reinstituted the Sons of the American Legion Squadron. He was a past president of the Capital Area Chief Petty Officers Association, a member of the Bethlehem Memorial VFW Post 3185, and the Bethlehem Masonic Lodge 85. Mark also played a vital role on the Veteran's Memorial Park Committee from its inception in 2001 through its dedication on Memorial Day 2006.

Beyond his military service, Mark found a second calling in nursing. As a distinguished male nurse and esteemed faculty member at both Maria College and Capital Region BOCES, he became a mentor and inspiration to countless students. Mark had a natural ability to connect with everyone he met, whether as a teacher, colleague, or caregiver. His students didn't just learn from him—they respected and adored him.

Continued on page 16

# <section-header>

**MAY 1 – MAY 31** Together we can break new ground.





#### **GARRETT BOVAIR**

Nominated by Christopher Casey Glens Falls Hospital/ Oncology/ MS

"Garrett Bovair is so very impressive," colleagues said.

Garrett is active in getting to know his patients, their family members and his RN Precepts as he sees the importance of not just putting a face to a name or a name to a task - he wants to know about the people in his charge. He sees it as a valuable addition to his plan of care and uses the connections to treat the patients as a whole individual.

He's very experienced and is able to quickly apply his exceptional level of knowledge to manage his care to his patients when he's reviewing his orders, taking a look at medications or reviewing the charts to try to add to his understanding of the patient.

Garrett goes out of way to have honest, informative conversations with his patients in a way that they best understand what's happening," his colleague said.

"Garrett sets a strong example for our unit and our profession, and it's been a pleasure working with him at Glens Falls Hospital," he said.

#### LINDSAY BRINENSTOOL

#### Nominated by Anonymous

Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital/ Registered Nurse on Neurology unit

Lindsay Brinenstool is described as "an absolute ray of sunshine" and a "bright light at the end of the tunnel" by a patient.

"Her compassion for nursing and taking care of people shines in everything she does, and she treats you as if you were her family," the patient said. The patient said Lindsay took the time to explain things in a way that not only made sense but gave them hope in some of my darkest times.

"She sat beside me when I knew she had many other patients to tend to and things to do, and she made me feel as if I was her only priority and that meant the world to me," the patient said.

The patient said Lindsay was so positive and upbeat "and always put a smile on my face."

"She is very humble, despite having a wealth of knowledge under her belt. She has a true gift and is a blessing to the nursing profession," they said.

#### **JODIE BROUGHTON**

#### Nominated by Kamryn Ilgner

Schuyler Ridge Residential Healthcare/ Director of Nursing

Jodie Broughton is the epitome of what an excellent nurse embodies, colleagues said. She began her career as a Certified Nurse Aide, then graduated to a Licensed Practical Nurse, and finally to a Registered Nurse where she worked in several different capacities, from a Floor Nurse to a Nurse Manager, Assistant Director of Nursing, and finally Director of Nursing.

She has grown in her career at Schuyler Ridge for the past 31 years and has held her commitment to the staff and residents throughout all of that time there.

As the years have passed, it has become inherently difficult to staff nursing homes given the staffing crisis of CNAs and LPNs, paired with the insufficient funding from NYS and CMS for the reimbursement of care, colleagues said. Jodie can be found either helping the units to ensure adequate staffing is in place or working on the units herself to uphold our high standard of care.

Jodie continues to carry through her days with a smile on her face and willingness to do what is needed! It is true that Schuyler Ridge would not be the same place without her, colleagues said.

#### **KARLEIGH COMBS**

Nominated by Bradley Barcher, Jeannine Barcher, Rhianna Torpey, Carissa Bashford, and Joyce Bendon Albany Medical Center/ Labor and Delivery RN

"Karleigh Combs was the most amazing nurse I could've ever met while having my first child at Albany Med," one patient said. "She put me at ease with her soothing voice, coaching me through contractions and provided a wealth of emotional support to both myself and my spouse through unknown territory," she said.

"Karleigh takes so much pride in the job that she gets to do. She worked extremely hard to get the job she always dreamed of. Seeing the joy come from Karleigh telling the stories of her time working is one of my favorite things," friends and family said.

Colleagues said Karleigh gives each patient her undivided attention and treats them as if they are her own family. Each patient she holds close to her heart.

"She truly tries to give every patient their dream labor experience and always puts their safety first," one colleague said.

Karleigh truly has found her place in the nursing world in labor and delivery and takes pride in the job she has been rewarded with, they said.

#### **CANDY CROSS**

Nominated by Stephanie Maybury Saratoga Hospital/ D1 Cardiac

Candy Cross's colleagues called her a fantastic nurse.

"Many of the new night nurses have had the opportunity to learn how to become a cardiac nurse under her direction and supervision," one colleague said.

Candy's colleague said they were able to witness Candy's care on one occasion that showed what it is to be "a nurse of excellence."

While caring for a new surgical patient with cardiac concerns on our unit, she effortlessly cared for additional critically ill patients, while still finding time to sit with the new patient.

"She allowed him to express his thoughts and emotions concerning his hospital stay. This patient expressed how grateful he was to Candy to me," the colleague said.

"I am proud to work with this nurse as she is a prime example of the wonderful patient care you will receive not only at Saratoga Hospital but in the Capital District," they said.

#### **CONSTANCE (CONNIE) DILALLO-TAFT**

#### Nominated by Meghan Monthie Saratoga Hospital/ Registered Nurse Care Manager

In her roles as triage nurse and more recently Registered Nurse Care Manager at Saratoga Hospital Medical Group Primary Care Scotia-Glenville, Constance (Connie) Dilallo-Taft brings positivity, energy, and passion to work each and every day to augment her office's care of patients, efficiency, and team morale, according to a physician.

"While there are many examples of how much of an asset Connie is to our office, I am most impressed by the support that she has provided to our patients and their families who are dealing with prolonged hospitalizations, life changing diagnoses, and grief," the doctor said.

Connie is a team player through and through, and an undeniable leader as a nurse and advocate in our office and the general hospital system as a whole.

"As a physician, I feel wholly supported by Connie for the medical, social, and emotional needs of our most complex patients and trust Connie's judgment without an iota of reservation. She is truly an extension of me as a doctor, and I would simply not be able to do my job without Connie," the doctor said.

## <sup>15</sup> FINALISTS

#### **ANTOINETTE FISCHER**

Nominated by Stephanie Hisgen Columbia Memorial Health/ Nursing Recruitment Specialist

Antoinette Fischer is the Nursing Recruitment Specialist at Columbia Memorial Health where she focuses on recruitment of RNs, LPNs, and ancillary staff. In 2024, she helped to recruit more RNs into the organization than in the past three years. It is her quick connection with applicants and the knowledge of the organization that make her superb in her role, colleagues said.

Antoinette is also an adjunct faculty member at Columbia Greene Community College Nursing Department. In December 2024, she led the nursing leadership team's quarterly service project by Adopting-A-Senior from Home Sweet Home Assisted Living.

Since 2020, she has partnered with the local school to create a community food drive. Each class contributes specific items that are then assembled into meal kits, ensuring families have everything they need for a warm meal without the burden of rising food costs.

This remains completely free and open to anyone in her community.

#### **STEPHANIE HISGEN**

Nominated by Bernadette Hisgen and Antoinette Fischer Columbia Memorial Health/ Chief Nursing Officer/ VP Patient and Clinical Services

Stephanie Hisgen has served as the Chief Nursing Officer at Columbia Memorial Hospital since 2022. In her time at CMH, she has developed structures that support nursing excellence and ensure that the frontline RNs have a voice in the decision-making process. She in partnership with nurse leaders and direct care RNs developed the CMH Nursing Strategic Plan which was reviewed and revised in 2025.

She established a Night Shift Nursing Council to support and improve the practice environment for nursing and ancillary staff who work overnight.

Colleagues describe Stephanie as an extraordinary leader, showing unwavering commitment, compassion, and exceptional leadership, especially during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stephanie's open-door policy has made her an accessible, approachable leader, colleagues said.

As an advocate for nursing excellence, Stephanie actively promotes professional development, offering scholarships for nurses to gain certifications in their areas of expertise. "She embodies the core values of nursing compassion, integrity, excellence, and leadership, and has left a lasting impact on our organization and the lives of those around her," one colleague said.

#### **CASSIE HOLMES**

Nominated by Karen Schaak Saratoga Hospital/ A3/ C3 - Med Surg - Registered Nurse

Cassie Holmes is an outstanding nurse who exemplifies excellence in patient care, leadership, and mentorship, colleagues said. Her superior critical thinking skills and calm demeanor make her a trusted resource among both patients and colleagues. As a frequent charge nurse during both weekdays and weekends, Cassie consistently demonstrates strong leadership, adaptability, and a commitment to teamwork.

Cassie is a compassionate and dedicated patient advocate, always prioritizing high-quality, patient-centered care. Her strong communication skills allow her to collaborate effectively with interdisciplinary teams, ensuring the best possible outcome for patients. As a chemo-certified nurse, she frequently administers chemotherapy to inpatients, demonstrating expertise and attentiveness in this aspect of care.

Her compassion extends beyond clinical responsibilities; she recently helped organize a celebration for a patient completing their final chemotherapy treatment in the hospital, a thoughtful gesture that left a lasting impact on their care, colleagues said.

#### KATIE HORAN

Nominated by Angel-Rose Weber Ellis Medicine/ Emergency Room

Katie (Kate) Horan consistently demonstrates exceptional dedication to patient care at Ellis Hospital. She is a skilled and effective leader, frequently serving as the charge nurse in the emergency department. In this role, she expertly manages critically ill patients, triages patient care concerns, leads ER rounds every two hours, and provides crucial support to the interdisciplinary team.

"As an ER pharmacist, I have had the privilege of working with numerous nurses both at Ellis Hospital and at other institutions. However, few can match Kate's clinical expertise, leadership abilities, and emotional intelligence, all of which she has honed to an extraordinary level," one colleague said.

"In addition, I regularly attend code blues, stroke codes, STEMI codes, and sepsis codes in the emergency department. Every time Kate is on duty and responds to these critical situations, it is clear that her leadership, clinical excellence, and seamless communication contribute significantly to the smooth execution of our codes," the colleague said.

Even in the most challenging situations, patients consistently speak highly of her warmth and reassuring presence, which is especially comforting in the high-stress environment of the emergency department, colleagues said.

#### SHONTA MONK-BURT

Nominated by Nidira Johnson, YuQuan Oliver, Ashonte Burt-Cancer, Saytra Green, Sherry Branch, Galal-Aldeen Cancer and Sandra Fowler Fusion Recovery/ Addiction Medicine/ Director of Nursing

Shonta Monk-Burt has been in the nursing field for over 25 years. She began her career as an aid and has worked tirelessly to grow professionally while always providing outstanding care and concern for her patients.

"Currently working in a field where many believe that her patients are criminals and not sick, she fights for them daily to help ensure they continue to get what they need. She does everything she can to make sure each person is treated with fairness and cared for in a nonjudgmental way," one colleague said.

Another said that Shonta is the epitome of what a caregiver should be. She is currently in school completing a Nurse Practitioner program so she can continue her work on a greater level in addiction and mental health.

"She has a very good heart. Recently she did a hats, coats, scarves and sock drive for our clients. She is always thinking outside the box," one colleague said.

Others described her as devoted, efficient, compassionate and a champion in her patients' recovery.

#### ASHLEY OSTRANDER

Nominated by Mary Jacox, Melissa Jacox, Krystal Backus, and Travis Petteys Glens Falls Hospital/ Snuggery

Ashley Ostrander is dedicated to her job and goes above and beyond for her coworkers and patients.

Others said Ashley pours her heart and soul into her patients. She displays again and again the importance of being a patient advocate, especially when those patients are unable to do it themselves.

Another pointed out how Ashley was calm and level headed at their loved one's bedside during the final days of their life.

"She was with me in the hospital while my significant other's life was ending. She treated the staff with compassion and respect," the patient's family said. "She asked the important questions that needed to be asked and she helped make decisions from her knowledge and experience."

#### 2026 Salute to Nurses nominations start in October! www.tusalutetonurses.com



#### happy NURSES WEEK 2025!

#### To the incredible team of OVER 100 NURSES at the Center for Disability Services —this week, and every week, WE HONOR YOU.

Your specialized skills, compassionate hearts, and unwavering dedication reflect the foundation of our mission. Thank you for your empathy, your comfort, and the difference you make. Your commitment to the people we support is invaluable.





**cfdsny.org** Where people get better at life.<sup>M</sup> Adult Services Center Health Care Services Children's and Education Services Prospect Center Residential and Respite Services St. Margaret's Center

## <sup>15</sup>FINALISTS

#### RYAN REDMOND

Nominated by Tiombe Farley Ellis Medicine/ Interventional Radiology

A patient's father noted that Ryan Redmond recently provided his daughter exceptional care. "She was extremely anxious about having a PICC line placed, as she was already feeling unwell due to an infection in her foot. However, Ryan's calm, patient, and engaging approach completely transformed the experience for her," he said.

The father added that Ryan took the time to explain each step of the procedure to his daughter in a way that made her feel involved and reassured.

"By including her in the process and allowing her to see the needle placement, he turned what could have been a frightening experience into an educational and empowering one. In fact, she was so inspired by his approach that she is now considering a career in the medical field," he said.

The father continued to add that Ryan exemplifies everything a patient hopes for in a nurse - his ability to ease fears, instill confidence, and provide compassionate care is truly remarkable.

#### **KENNETH SCHUMACHER**

Nominated by Melissa Mansfield and Juliana Mansfield Albany Medical Center/ RN on unit M4

"I was in the hospital about 40 days with sepsis. Kenneth Schumacher made me feel like I was his only patient," one patient said. They added when they saw Kenneth deal with other patients in the same compassionate way, they knew they were in good hands.

"I think nurses are angels and he is one of them," the patient said.

Another patient's family member said when they were being treated for a long illness with serious complications, Kenneth took the time to get to know them and how to best handle their issues.

"They had issues with memory, sense of reality, and many medical needs. He would take a minute, hold her hand, and reassure her about whatever was happening. Even if it meant again and again," the family member said.

They added that one roommate's family was unable to visit her, and she kept asking if she was dead. Kenneth would come in and calmly explain no, she was at Albany Medical Center, hold her hand and reassure her.

"For such a young man to already have the technical skills and the compassion was truly remarkable to witness," they said.

#### **CARLY VREUGDE**

Nominated by Laurie Milligan Glens Falls Hospital/ ICU RN

A fellow nurse said she has "the utmost pleasure and pride of working beside Carly Vreugde." She said she is constantly inspired and invigorated by her presence and work ethic.

Colleagues said Carly has immaculate work integrity and continues to shine even on the hardest days. Carly actively listens to her patients and family members. She is present and truly allows her patients to feel validated and heard.

Carly is an advocate, going above and beyond for her patients, whether it is a basic need, to comfort a fear, to nurse someone's survival through a miracle (including managing lifesaving machines and medications) all the way to insisting on dignity and grace with a dying patient.

"I am beyond proud to work with someone like her. Carly isn't just a phenomenal nurse, but a wonderful human and shows all of us an example that we should strive to be more and more like each day. Carly truly gives all who encounter her hope that there really is still goodness and genuineness in this world," her colleague said.

#### 16 | SALUTE TO NURSES | SUNDAY, MAY 11, 2025

Continued from page 11

His warmth, wit, and supportive nature made him a favorite in every classroom. And of course, no day with Mark was complete without one of his classic "dad" jokes—groan-worthy and heartwarming all at once.

Mark had a gift for making people feel truly seen and heard. He was always willing to lend a hand, share advice, or simply be present. Whether you were a friend, co-worker, or student, Mark had a way of making you feel like you were the most important person in the room. Over time, he became more than just a mentor—he became a lifelong friend and source of encouragement to many.

#### ...he became more than just a mentor—he became a lifelong friend and source of encouragement to many

Above all else, Mark was deeply devoted to his family. He cherished his wife, sons, grandchildren and took great pride in the life they built together. He was also an active gardener, happily spending time outdoors and taking care of the home he loved.

Mark "Pop" Wahl lived a life of purpose, integrity, and heart. He touched countless lives through his service, his teaching, and his enduring kindness. He will be remembered not only for what he did, but for who he was—caring, compassionate, devoted, and deeply loved. <text><text><text>

broadviewfcu.com

## Thank you!

We appreciate all our nurses for their hard work and dedication in making New York a healthier place to live. Become part of our team. Now hiring in Albany and across the state.

Enjoy rewarding work and a generous benefits package valued at 65% of your salary.

- Geographic pay differentials of \$20,000 to \$35,000
- Paid Holiday, Vacation, Personal and Sick Leave
- Health, Dental and Vision Benefits
- Pension Membership in NYS Employees' Retirement System
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness Opportunities

#### Make more than a career. Make a difference. Apply now at **health.ny.gov/employment**

The New York State Department of Health offers opportunities for career growth. Help protect, improve, and promote the health, productivity and well-being of all New Yorkers.





Department of Health





Thank you or your support



A Member of Trinity Health

— CONTRIBUTING SPONSORS —











#### Caring for those who care for us — Ask about our 10% medical professional tuition discount.

You shape our schools and communities every day, and we're honored to help shape your child's future.

At Doane Stuart School, we are proud to support the medical professionals who give so much to care for others — including the incredible school nurses who care for young students each day.

As a small token of our appreciation, we offer a 10% tuition discount to medical **professionals and their families.** As a school that values service, we're honored to walk alongside those who live it every day — for their children and our shared future.



# Celebrating our TOP NURSES.

#### **Salute to Nurses Finalists**

**Garrett Bovair, RN** Oncology GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL

Karleigh Combs, RN The Birth Place ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER

Candace Cross, RN Cardiac Care Unit SARATOGA HOSPITAL

**Constance DiLallo-Taft, RN** Nurse Care Manager SARATOGA HOSPITAL

Antoinette Fischer, RN Nurse Recruitment Specialist COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HEALTH

**Stephanie Hisgen, DNP, RN** Chief Nursing Officer, Vice President of Patient and Clinical Services COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HEALTH

**Cassie Holmes, RN** Medical Surgical Unit SARATOGA HOSPITAL

Ashley Ostrander, RN Joyce Stock Snuggery GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL

Kenneth Schumacher, RN Medical Surgical ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER

Carly Vreugde, RN Intensive Care Unit GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL Thank you for providing trusted, compassionate care to our communities.



#### ALBANY MED Health System

ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HEALTH GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL SARATOGA HOSPITAL VISITING NURSES

albanymed.org

Times Union Salute to Nurses



Lauren Burch, RN

**Emergency Department** 

GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL



Jamie Eddy, RN Joyce Stock Snuggery GLENS FALLS HOSPITAL



Samantha Cleveland, RN Neonatal Intensive Care Unit ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER



Justine LaValley, RN Emergency Department COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HEALTH



Brittany Dwyer, RN Cardiopulmonary Surgery ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER



Kirstin Lawless, RN The Melodies Center for Childhood Cancer & Blood Disorders BERNARD & MILLIE DUKER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL



## Invest In You

The time is right to make a change. Invest in yourself – and in the career of a lifetime.

### Our nursing schools are among New York's best, and *we're accepting applicants now*.

Our experienced faculty and small class sizes are backed by more than a century of educational excellence. In fact, we've earned accolades from Nursing Schools Almanac<sup>\*</sup> which analyzes data from more than 3,000 nursing schools across the country.

Don't delay. Application fee is only \$60. (Fee waived for SPHP employees AND the Practical Nurse program.)

#### Apply TODAY at SPHP.com/son



Samaritan Hospital School of Nursing

> ST PETER'S HEALTH PARTNERS A Member of Trinity Health

1300 Massachusetts Ave., Troy (518) 268-5130

#### St. Peter's Hospital College of Nursing

ST PETER'S HEALTH PARTNERS A Member of Trinity Health

714 New Scotland Ave., Albany (518) 525-6850

#### **NEW YORK'S BEST**

Nursing School Rankings\*

Samaritan Hospital School of Nursing

- **#6** Associate Degree in Nursing
- **#7** Licensed Practical Nursing

St. Peter's Hospital College of Nursing **#5 Associate Degree in Nursing**