

# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

January 2025

Vol 3

## Good Neighbors

By Amy Gagan

**B**roome Head Start partners with the Good Neighbors Program on a monthly basis. In October, 103 food bags and 113 packages of bread were given to our families. That equals 920 pounds of food. Our families are able to sign up for this program at the first home visit and have opportunities to get more food outside of the monthly giveaways based on individual need.



Founded in early 2020, Good Neighbors was initiated by Heather and Tim after observing local businesses discarding usable food. During the pandemic, Heather connected with over 125 businesses to distribute surplus food to those in need. Despite lockdown challenges, the Good Neighbors FL branch grew to over 100 volunteers, providing food for over 1,000 people weekly. In 2021, the NY branch was launched, quickly expanding its efforts to support the underserved. Both branches have programs to assist seniors, children, the disabled, and others in need. The organization aims to further extend its reach in the future. For more information, visit [www.goodneighborsfl.org](http://www.goodneighborsfl.org).

## Happy New Year, Greater Opportunities Team!

By Mark Silvanic

**A**s we step into a new year, I want to take a moment to wish each of you a happy and healthy 2025. I am incredibly proud to work at this agency, and I deeply appreciate and respect every one of my coworkers. Your dedication and hard work make Greater Opportunities a beacon of hope and support in our community.

This past year has presented us with numerous challenges as a non-profit organization. We have witnessed an increase in drug use, crimes, and mental health issues. These are daunting problems, but I am confident that we will continue to rise to the occasion. We will provide education and tools to better prepare our staff to face and overcome these challenges. Together, we can make a difference.

Since COVID-19, we have struggled with staffing issues, but we seem to be on the upside of this problem. As you will read in this issue, our agency continues to move forward, making our community a better place. We also remain financially strong, which is a testament to our resilience and commitment.

In these times, the world has become increasingly divisive. Politics have reached a point where they are even turning family members against each other. It is crucial that we find a way to listen to one another without placing condemnation and harsh judgments. We must strive to understand and respect each other's perspectives, even when we disagree. This political stress can cause uneasiness, especially in our field, where these problems can result in closures and cuts. I can assure you that we will be ok.

Many of our funders are pushing us in one direction or another on these political issues. However, we must remain focused on our mission. As an agency, it is important that we do not play into partisan politics. We cannot allow differences in opinions to turn us away from each other. Instead, we must turn toward each other, united in our common goal of making a positive impact in our community.

I leave you with this inspirational quote:

**"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much." – Helen Keller**

Let's make 2025 a year of growth, unity, and positive change.

## Monster Tales

By Danelle Nolan

**D**uring the peak of COVID, we began producing a variety of virtual videos for our social media platforms. The Chenango Head Start team used costumes, puppets, and basic editing techniques to create more engaging content for families.

What began as a simple idea has now expanded into an exciting vision of creating our own educational puppet show!

As we develop this thrilling concept, we still need names for all our puppets. We hope that, with suggestions from our staff, we can come up with a name for this specific puppet. Please email any name suggestions to Danelle Nolan.



Additionally, we have hidden a picture of the puppet somewhere in this edition of Opportunity Knocks. If you find it, email Danelle Nolan with the correct location of this blue monster, for a chance to win a \$25 gift card.

We are also seeking individuals who are interested in performing as puppeteers or providing voices for our monster friends. If this sounds fun to you, please get in touch with Danelle.

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## Election Day at Pine Street

By Scott Montgomery

On November 5, 2024, the Pine Street Veterans stepped forward to support the community by organizing a thoughtful initiative to feed those in need. Recognizing both the significance of Election Day and the importance of civic engagement, they collaborated with a local church to arrange for donations of hotdogs, buns, and chips. The goal was to offer a meal to anyone in the area, underscoring a sense of community and care in conjunction with the day's focus on civic duty.

With the Broome County Library serving as a major voting hub nearby, the event quickly drew interest and became a gathering point for people of all backgrounds. Thanks to the generosity of the church and the efforts of the Pine Street Veterans, over 250 free hotdog meals were served, providing a warm meal to those who needed it most. The veterans worked with enthusiasm and commitment, reinforcing the spirit of service that brought them together in the first place.

This initiative was more than just a meal; it was an outreach that created a sense of unity and encouragement in the community. As voters participated in their civic duties, the Pine Street Veterans reminded everyone of the power of community and kindness, making Election Day 2024 one to remember for the positive impact it had on the lives of those in need.



## Preserving the Harvest

By Karen Randall

Recently, our Chenango Head Start parents were offered a special training all about canning! We were excited to start the training with a full house of ready-to-learn parents!

Once again, the wonderful Alexis Woodcock from Cornell Cooperative Extension lead the class.

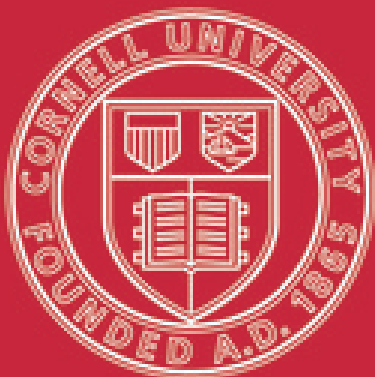
Canning is an important, safe method of food preservation if practiced properly. The canning process involves placing foods in jars or cans and heating them to a temperature that destroys microorganisms that could be a health hazard or cause the food to spoil. Canning also inactivates enzymes that could cause the food to spoil. Air is driven from the jar or can during heating and as it cools a vacuum seal is formed. This vacuum seal prevents air from getting back into the product bringing with it microorganisms to recontaminate the food.



Participants were eager to learn the techniques that would allow them to preserve fruits, vegetables, and even meats, ensuring a supply of nutritious food throughout the year. Alexis demonstrated the process with precision, emphasizing safety steps such as sterilizing jars and using the proper canning method for different types of food.

The hands-on experience was invaluable. Parents rolled up their sleeves, chopping and prepping fresh produce, while Alexis guided them through the step-by-step process of creating jams, pickles, and sauces. The room buzzed with excitement as jars were filled, sealed, and set aside to cool, each representing a successful effort in food sustainability.

By the end of the session, everyone left with a sense of accomplishment and jars full of homemade goodness. The skills they acquired not only empowered them to provide for their families but also fostered a renewed appreciation for the traditions of preserving food. It was a day of learning, sharing, and community building, all centered around the age-old practice of canning.



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## Create your Ops

By Kelly Robertson

In case you missed it, we recently launched our video series titled “Create Your Ops.” This series was designed to provide our clients and staff with a clearer insight into our programs through one-on-one interviews that address frequently asked questions we commonly receive.

Kristi Perez engaged in a conversation with Tina Gilmore at the Bay 44 Studio in the Chenango Office. The outcome was a captivating video that we’ve shared on our Facebook page, mobile app, and YouTube channel!

If you haven't had the opportunity to watch it, now is your chance to learn all about our Home Rehabilitation Program



Approved clients participating in the Home Rehabilitation program receive funding assistance on high-priority home repair items including:

- Wells
- Septic systems
- Electrical
- Heating
- Structural repairs

If you have a client you feel may qualify for the Home Rehabilitation Program, please have them contact Kristi Perez at our Chenango Office.

## Bouncing Back: The Power of Staying Active and Connected

By Max Ginty

For our East Hills community, the pandemic years were a tough chapter. With social activities on pause, many felt the weight of isolation and inactivity—an unwelcome combination that affected both body and spirit. Research highlights what we all felt during those quiet months: that staying socially active and engaged in meaningful activities is vital to a healthier, happier life, especially as we grow older. Studies show that seniors who keep busy and maintain community connections live longer, more fulfilling lives.

At East Hills, we’ve made it a mission to get our community back on track, and it’s been inspiring to see. Our neighborhood center is now a bustling place where people come together daily. Whether it’s chair exercises, games, karaoke, spiritual gatherings, or community meals, these activities have become more than just events—they’re lifelines to a better quality of life.

The benefits are felt across our community. As one resident, Kathy, shared: “I’m walking so much more—and so much better—since the activities have increased at the neighborhood center. I’ve even improved by helping my neighbor get to events!”

Others echo Kathy's sentiment, noting the power of these gatherings to boost morale. Tom remarked, “I think it’s uplifting for a lot of people. Folks are coming out who never used to join us.” Karen added, “It’s been more inclusive, getting me out of my own space and around people who are positive about getting older. We really need each other to stay healthy and happy, realizing aging is not a bad thing.”

Fran, another resident, highlights the renewed sense of purpose brought by these activities: “When I arrived here, the pandemic had just about ended, but motivation levels were really down. It’s been wonderful to finally get out and about, going from walking to attending three or four groups a week at the neighborhood center. I’m very satisfied.” And Denice shared the security that comes from connection, saying, “Knowing my neighbors makes me feel safe and more connected.”

These firsthand stories remind us of the immense impact of community involvement on overall health and well-being. In Fran’s words, “I’m really enjoying the community center. Being able to socialize has been a huge lift—I was feeling depressed with no one to talk to. Now, I’m grateful for scheduled activities like Chop and Chat that help me take better care of my health and mental well-being.”

If you’re part of a neighborhood or senior community, consider organizing a schedule of activities that brings people together. It doesn’t have to be complex; it could be as simple as hosting arts and crafts around a kitchen table, trying out a recipe together, or organizing a gentle exercise class. Anything that gets folks moving and connecting will benefit both body and mind.

One of our mottos here at East Hills is, “Keep on keeping on.” It’s about resilience and joy, no matter the challenges age may bring. Life is short, and we’re here to make the most of it, together. So, as we all grow a little older and perhaps a little more fragile, remember: there’s always something to do, and there’s always someone to share it with.



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## Community Resources

Since 1915, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chenango County (CCE-Chenango) has been delivering unbiased, research-driven information and education tailored to the needs of local residents. Their mission focuses on enhancing lives and communities through collaborative partnerships that leverage research knowledge. CCE staff and volunteers provide programs on a variety of subjects, such as agriculture, health, finance, and sustainable resources, effectively linking community needs with university resources. Operating as a tax-exempt subordinate governmental agency under Cornell University, CCE is part of a nationwide cooperative extension system. Each association is independently managed, striving to fulfill both local and broader objectives. We are thankful for the incredible partnership established with the Chenango Head Start Program and look forward to continuing our work together. For more details, please visit their website at <https://ccechenango.org/>.



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Chenango County

## Broome County Clothing Banks

The generosity of the community is what keeps these clothing banks thriving. Volunteers work tirelessly to sort, organize, and distribute clothing to those who might otherwise struggle to find suitable attire. By participating in this initiative, either through donations or volunteering your time, you become an integral part of a network that champions dignity and care for all residents.

Additionally, these clothing banks often partner with local agencies to provide not only clothing but also information on other available resources such as food pantries, housing assistance, and educational programs. This holistic approach ensures that individuals receive comprehensive support, empowering them to face challenges with greater confidence and resilience.

For those interested in making a difference, consider reaching out to your local clothing bank to learn more about their current needs or volunteer opportunities. Together, we can create a warmer, more supportive community for everyone.

[Click here for a full list of Clothing Banks in Broome County.](#)

## Be prepared for driving during the winter months

By Brett Dean

To winterize your car, follow these tips alongside annual maintenance:

- Test battery; it loses power in cold.
- Ensure the cooling system works well.
- Install winter tires with deeper treads or check all-season tires for sufficient tread.
- Check tire pressure as it decreases with temperature.
- Replace wiper blades if needed and use -30°F rated wiper fluid.
- Keep the gas tank at least half full to prevent freezing.

Also, stock your emergency kit and prepare before driving:

- Clean camera lenses and mirrors.
- Remove dirt, ice, and snow from sensors.
- Warm up the car in frigid weather, but never run it in the garage.
- If weather is bad, wait it out and share travel plans if you must go.

Driving tips from AAA to avoid crashes:

- Don't use cruise control in wintry conditions.
- Steer into a skid to regain traction.
- Accelerate and decelerate slowly.
- Maintain an 8 to 10-second following distance.
- Avoid stopping on hills.

If visibility is poor due to a whiteout, safely pull off the road and wait for conditions to improve, avoiding the shoulder unless it's an emergency.

**If you do get into an accident in a work vehicle, remember the following procedure:**

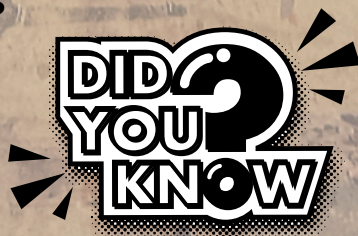
- Take immediate action to prevent further damage/Injuries:
- Pull onto side of road
- Put on hazard lights
- Call 911. Request assistance as needed
- Notify your Supervisor
- Remove Vehicle Accident Report from the glove compartment and fill it out
- Secure names and addresses of all witnesses to the accident
- Vehicle Accident Report must be sent to Facilities Director

**Did you know that you can easily find important agency documents on Payco?**

These documents include:

- Office phone lists
- 2025 holiday schedule
- Employee handbook
- Nationwide forms
- Labor law posters, and much more!

To access these documents, click on the "My Info" tab, select My Company, and then choose the Documents option. It's that easy!



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## Happy Work-a-versary September, October, November, December

We appreciate your dedication and hard work daily. Your efforts significantly impact our organization. Please continue your outstanding work, knowing your commitment is recognized. Thank you for your valuable contributions!

### September

- Patty Gallagher-Green- 8 years
- Christine Williams- 33 years
- Katlyn Roe- 2 years
- Maxwell Ginty- 1 year
- Cara Squires- 2 years
- Kaylia John- 2 years
- Gina Cruz- 3 years
- Melinda Mandeville- 5 years
- Grace Mohrien- 28 years

### October

- Keeshia Delee- 2 years
- James Tropa- 13 years
- Kiyana Mack- 1 year
- Jennine Justice- 10 years
- Ashley Lamb- 3 years
- Chantel Thomas- 7 years
- Kelsey Carmean- 2 years
- Barbara Ann Megale- 8 years
- Cheryl Marble- 2 years
- Justin Roberts- 14 years

### November

- Catherine Berger- 18 years
- Briana Miller- 7 years
- Deanna Dewey- 5 years
- Miranda Boyer-Lee- 2 years
- Tammy Hyde- 22 years
- Jacey Baudendiestel- 3 years
- Ashley Franklin-Shaw- 10 years

### December

- Catherine Sherman- 4 years
- Zoriana Sanyshyn- 20 years
- Airyana Buetow- 2 years
- Dennis Eaton- 12 years
- Melissa Grant- 13 years
- Brett Dean- 15 years
- Maureen Giblin- 9 years

## **Bouncing Back: The Power of Staying Active and Connected continued from page 3**

The following resources highlight the importance of resilience, social connections, and shared activities for seniors:

- Resilience and Joy in Community Living
  - The National Institute on Aging discusses the benefits of building resilience as we age.
  - Positive psychology and its role in aging well: American Psychological Association - Positive Psychology and Aging.
- Benefits of Eating Together
  - How sharing meals can enhance physical and mental well-being: Harvard Health - The Importance of Eating Together.
  - Eating together in senior communities promotes connection and health: A Place for Mom - Dining and Nutrition in Senior Living.
- Community Donations and Supporting Social Gatherings
  - Donating furniture like dining tables can make a big impact in shared spaces: Furniture Today - Furniture Donations and Community Impact.
  - The role of communal resources and spaces in improving seniors' quality of life: National Council on Aging - Social Engagement for Seniors.

Residents of Broome and Chenango counties have access to a range of centers and public spaces that offer engaging activities and gatherings for seniors and the community. Here are some great places to connect, stay active, and socialize:

### **Broome County**

- Johnson City Senior Center - Offers exercise classes, bingo, workshops, and lunch programs. 30 Brocton St, Johnson City, NY 13790.
- North Shore Towers Community Room - Hosts social events, exercise sessions, and movie afternoons. 24 Isbell St, Binghamton, NY 13901.
- Broome County Public Library - Regular community events like book clubs, crafting classes, and educational talks. 185 Court St, Binghamton, NY 13901.
- YMCA of Broome County - Exercise classes, swimming, and social activities for all ages, including senior-focused health programs. 61 Susquehanna St, Binghamton, NY 13901.

### **Chenango County**

- Norwich Senior Center - Offers meals, recreational activities, and health classes. 14 E. Main St, Norwich, NY 13815.
- Guernsey Memorial Library - Hosts events for seniors, including reading groups, tech workshops, and crafting sessions. 3 Court St, Norwich, NY 13815.
- Norwich Family YMCA - Offers senior fitness classes, social events, and recreational activities for community engagement. 68 N Broad St, Norwich, NY 13815.
- Chenango Valley State Park - An outdoor gathering space, ideal for walking groups, community picnics, and seasonal events. 153 State Park Rd, Chenango Forks, NY 13746.

These centers and spaces provide ample opportunities for engagement and wellness activities, fostering a stronger sense of community across Broome and Chenango counties.

## **IT Corner**

By Brian Presto



"It could be an expensive repair ... or it could just not be plugged in."

Shutting down your computer is like giving it a restful sleep, clearing clutter, reducing wear and tear, saving on electricity, and improving performance. It's akin to a mini spa day for your device. Here are reasons to shut it down:

- Memory Clean-Up
  - Shutting down clears RAM, improving performance and reducing glitches.
- Energy Saver
  - Turning off saves electricity, avoiding unnecessary energy use.
- Longevity Booster
  - Regular shut-downs protect hard drives and cooling fans, extending their lifespan.
- Update Time
  - A shut-down allows for smooth installation of updates.

# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## "HANK – THE OFFICE COMIC'S NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION"



The allure of a New Year lies in the idea that as the year shifts, we too can transform ourselves.

However, it's often much more challenging to effect personal change than simply flipping the calendar to a new page.

## All About The Month Of January

**H**ooray, the New Year has strutted into town! Time to toss the past out the window and kickstart a fabulous fresh chapter. Dive into these cheerful nuggets of wisdom that'll crank up your mood and have you waltzing into the New Year with a smile!

### Basic January Facts

- January is like a chilly ice cube in the Northern Hemisphere but warms up like a cozy blanket in the Southern Hemisphere.
- Flower: Carnation | Birthstone: Garnet
- Zodiac signs: December 22 – January 19 is Capricorn, and January 20 – February 18 is Aquarius.

### January Trivia

- 500 mysterious copies of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" hit the shelves in London without a name tag.
- Abraham Lincoln dropped the Emancipation Proclamation bombshell in 1863.
- The first New Year's ball drop in NYC? That started in 1908—talk about a party!
- In 1946, the first-ever United States computer was born in Pennsylvania's Moore School of Engineering.
- The History Channel made its debut in 1995—hello, binge-watching!
- The plum blossom is the star of January in China—fancy, right?
- January is named after Janus, the Roman god with a dual personality—one head peeking back, the other looking ahead!
- The Rose Parade kicked off in Pasadena in 1890 and now dazzles over 100 countries!
- January was a no-show in the original Roman calendar, which only had 10 months. Surprise!
- In 1959, Alaska waved hello as the 49th state of the USA.
- Ellis Island opened its doors on January 1st, 1892, welcoming over 20 million hopeful immigrants.
- And don't forget January 28—National Fun at Work Day! Let the good times roll!



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## Financial Literacy Can Be the Key to Your New Home

By Kelly Robertson

Buying a new home is a huge milestone, but it can also be quite overwhelming. That's why understanding financial literacy and seeking budget counseling can make a world of difference.

Financial literacy is all about understanding how money works. It includes knowing how to manage your personal finances, budget, and invest wisely. When you're buying a home, being financially literate means, you can make smart decisions about things like mortgage rates, credit scores, and the long-term costs of owning a home. Budget counseling helps you create and stick to a budget, manage debt, and plan for your financial future. When you're looking to buy a home, a budget counselor can help you understand your financial situation, set a realistic budget for your home purchase, and prepare for the costs of homeownership. You'll learn how to track your income and expenses, cut unnecessary spending, and save for your down payment and other homebuying costs. You'll be able to make smart choices about your home purchase, from understanding different mortgage options to avoiding predatory lending practices. Budget counseling helps you plan for ongoing expenses

like property taxes, maintenance, and insurance, ensuring you can sustain homeownership without financial strain.

### Tips for First-Time Homebuyers

**Start Saving Early:** Begin saving for your down payment and other costs as soon as possible. Automatic transfers to your savings account can help.

**Know Your Budget:** Use a home affordability calculator to figure out how much you can afford based on your income, debt, and where you want to live.

**Get Pre-Approved:** Before you start looking at homes, get pre-approved for a mortgage to know your budget and show sellers you're serious.

**Explore Assistance Programs:** Look into programs that offer financial help for first-time homebuyers, like down payment grants or low-interest loans.

**Work with a Real Estate Agent:** A good agent can guide you through the process, help you find the right home, and negotiate the best deal.

**Budget for Extras:** Don't forget to budget for closing costs, moving expenses, and any immediate repairs or upgrades your new home might need. Greater Opportunities offers a comprehensive First-Time Homebuyer Program designed to help clients become successful homeowners.

This program includes one-on-one counseling, group education, and online education for eligible participants. The program focuses on teaching clients everything they need to know about the homebuying process, from budgeting and credit management to working with real estate agents and lenders. Participants will receive guidance on: Budgeting and managing finances, improving credit scores, understanding affordability and the lending process, finding the right home and what to expect at closing, and assistance with funding and grants for down payments, closing costs, and home rehabilitation. Greater Opportunities also provides HUD-certified housing counseling, ensuring participants have a consistent resource for navigating the complex homebuying system.

We still have funding available for 2024 and are looking for qualified first-time home buyers to participate!!! For complete program requirements, income guidelines, and applications, please feel free to stop by our Main Office Building at 44 West Main Street Norwich, NY 13815 or call us at 607-334-7114. Applications and information are also available on our Greater Opportunities website at [www.greaterops.org](http://www.greaterops.org).



[WATCH VIDEO](#)

## Join our Pickleball League!

Whether you're a beginner or an experienced player, the league provides an excellent chance to connect with new people, enhance your skills, and engage in some friendly competition. Open to all ages and skill levels, this league guarantees a fantastic experience for everyone.

If you have any inquiries about joining the league, the schedule, or the new facilities at CV Gym, feel free to reach out to Max Ginty at [maxginty@greaterops.org](mailto:maxginty@greaterops.org).

Don't miss the opportunity to be a part of this vibrant community activity—pick up your paddle and join in on the fun!



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## Meet our Board Members

By Danelle Nolan

The Greater Opportunities Board of Directors is required to have a minimum of one-third of its members elected from the low-income community. Alongside representatives from the low-income sector, one-third of the Board must consist of public sector officials or their appointees, with the rest being from the private sector. In this edition of Opportunity Knocks, we are excited to introduce our two newest Board Members, Erin Micha and Joseph Gehl.



Erin Micha was elected to the County Legislature for the first time in 2022 to represent Legislative District 10. District 10 includes the Town of Chenango and the Hillcrest area in the Town of Fenton.

Erin was born & raised in Hillcrest, and she currently works in Commercial & Residential Real Estate. As well as holding a Degree in Occupational Health & Safety, she is involved in the Hillcrest Civic Association, the Broome Republican Women's Club, NYS Women Inc., Greater Binghamton Chapter, the NYS Association of Realtors, and as a CV Youth Sports Coach.

"The reason why I wanted to join the Greater Opps board was, I wanted to help make an impact on the lives of others within my community, by helping make a positive influence on the Greater Opps organization. It's important to me to help create opportunities for underprivileged populations & give them experiences that will help further their lives



Joseph Gehl is the Broker/Owner of an Independent Real Estate Company in Broome County and brings over 30 years' experience to the real estate industry. Joe has earned a B.A. in Business, Marketing & Entrepreneurship. He is also a New York DOS Approved Real Estate Instructor, RPR Certified Trainer, ITI graduate and holds the following designation; ABR, CNE, CRS, GRI, SFR, and SRES. Joe furthers his personal development by attending leadership training, serving on local and NYSAR committees and is currently Director of the Greater Binghamton Association of Realtors.

## Look for your W2's

By Christine Monsen

The W-2 form is a United States federal wage and tax statement that an employer must give to each employee and also send to the Social Security Administration (SSA) every year. Your W-2 Wage and Tax Statement itemizes your total annual wages and the amount of taxes withheld from your paycheck.

We ask that all staff members please make sure that their mailing address is correct in PAYCO to ensure everyone receives their W2 in a timely manner. Staff members can check all of their personal information, including their address by going to the "My Info" tab in PAYCO. Then click on "My Information" on the left side of the screen. Then click on "My Profile". If you then scroll down to the "Personal Information" section, you will see your information to ensure that everything is correct. If something is incorrect, please contact HR to ensure the information gets corrected.

Once W2 information is released, staff can access their digital W2 in PAYCO.

Just follow these simple instructions:

1. Log into PAYCO
2. Click on My Info
3. Click on My Pay
4. Click on Forms
5. Click on W2

You will then see what tax years are currently available to view.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Fiscal or your tax professional.

## Free tax return preparation for qualifying taxpayers

The IRS's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs offer free basic tax return preparation to qualified individuals.

The VITA program has operated for over 50 years. VITA sites offer free tax help to people who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns, including:

People who generally make \$67,000 or less  
Persons with disabilities; and  
Limited English-speaking taxpayers

In addition to VITA, the TCE program offers free tax help, particularly for those who are 60 years of age and older, specializing in questions about pensions and retirement-related issues unique to seniors.

VITA and TCE sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls and other convenient locations across the country. To locate the nearest VITA or TCE site near you, use the [VITA Locator Tool](#)





# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## Staff Spotlight

In this edition, we will delve deeper into the roles of our Administrative Assistant in Chenango, Gina Bateman!

- **How long have you been with the company?** I began in October 2013, as Food Service Manager at the New Berlin Head Start Center, and then transitioned to the position of EHS/HS Nutrition Services Coordinator for Head Start in the fall of 2014 through November 2021. I returned to agency in October 2023, as a part-time Food Service staff, and was hired full-time in March of 2024 for the Administrative Assistant position at the front desk.
- **What does your job entail?** As the first point of contact for the agency, I deal directly with clients both in person and on the phone that come to the agency looking for help with housing services, Head Start and Early Head Start. I also help in any capacity that is needed for the agency at any given moment.
- **Who inspired you to pursue the career you have today?** My Grandmother, she was a helper, just like me.
- **What's the best advice you can give to someone who just started their career?** To pursue your dreams, and believe in yourself, regardless of how challenging life can get. Always focus on your goals! You can do anything that you set your mind to.
- **What are the toughest challenges you've had at work?** Not being able to always help and find resources for people that might need help or assistance
- **Who are some of your biggest inspirations within the company?** The staff that work in the classrooms with children each day, and the staff that support them. They are supporting and teaching the next generation, which can be extremely challenging at times. The work they do each day to support children and families is amazing!
- **Tell me something about you that most people don't know about you?** I am fascinated by all things paranormal.....I am always up for hearing all the stories ....
- **What are your interests outside of work?** I love to travel, garden, feed and watch birds, spend time in nature and improve my health through nutrition, mediation and self-care-also love teaching others the same. I am the biggest rock geek- I love crystals, gem stones and rocks of all kinds.....I most especially love spending time with my family, especially my two grandchildren!



## Chenango County Historical Society and Museum 2024 Parade of Trees

By Danelle Nolan

In December, The Chenango County Historical Society held its annual "People's Choice Parade of Trees" contest.

The event has been a long-running tradition where local organizations are invited to decorate a Christmas Tree provided by and displayed at the Historical Society Museum.

In 2019, this contest was established, where local community members could donate to vote for their favorite tree in person or online. The donations toward the winning tree are split between the winning organization and the historical society. Any donations made toward another tree are also collected by the historical society.

Interested organizations are invited to decorate a tree that they feel either represents their mission or how they support Chenango County or one that embraces and celebrates Chenango County history as a whole," said Operations Manager Joseph Fryc. This year, 18 other local organizations participated in the contest.

The Senior Management team, with Tina Gilmore taking the lead, decided to enter the contest with the theme for the Greater Opportunities tree being "Hope". Custom Greater Ops ornaments, made by Lindsey Conrad and Kelly Robertson were surrounded by hand-painted houses courtesy of the Senior Management team, and children's handprint garland made by the children at our Whitney Point Head Start Center.

It was announced on 1/2/2025, that the winner of the 2024 Parade of Trees was..... GREATER OPPORTUNITIES!

Our beautiful tree raised \$295.00. Mark decided to donate our portion of the winnings, back to the Historical Society. This was the highest amount raised by a single tree, since 2021. Great way to stay involved and be a part of community events!



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## That woman had impact, and it was all positive': Majeedah Razzaq remembered for toy drive

By: Kalyn Grant- Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin

The Broome-Tioga NAACP, Greater Opportunities and a number of other organizations continue the tradition of gifting toys to families in emergency housing during the holiday season.

The act of kindness was started by former employee Majeedah Razzaq, who was well known in the community for her uplifting spirit and acts of service. For children 17 and under, toys are collected and gift wrapped to be given out to local families, and this year, with the help of the community, 100 children will be receiving gifts. Some of the families receive a notice before getting the gift and others are caught off guard and "ecstatic" to be able to give their children something for the holiday.

Social media plays a big role in spreading the word and gathering donations. This year the NAACP raised over \$1,000 for the toy drive. Members of the Broome-Tioga NAACP go out and shop for the children, bring the gifts over to Greater Opportunities and separate the toys by family.

Two of Miss Majeedah's children came out to help wrap presents on Saturday at the gift-wrapping party hosted by the BTNAACP, and one of her daughters who lives out of town raised \$250 to contribute to the toy drive.



Razzaq was not only a mother of seven, but she also worked with organizations like Urban League, Citizen Action, NAACP and worked with Greater Opportunity of Broome for over 10 years. Her coworkers described her as a beam of light, reflecting on not only a former coworker but a dear friend who enjoyed 70s TV shows like Starsky & Hutch and her love for music. She was "an old soul but a new soul" because Miss Majeedah used to keep up with the current trends while still sharing her wisdom she picked up along her journey. Although her tough love approach was admired by many and disliked by few she was always there when someone was in need. Miss Majeedah was the person kids would go to for a quick peanut butter and jelly which she would happily make with a side of sass.

Jahaira Liz works as an Intensive Family Advocate at GOBT and had the opportunity to work with Razzaq for three years. Liz shared memories that bring both tears and laughter. Liz remembers Miss Majeedah as someone who was there for everybody. "She would never let anyone take her blessings, because they were her blessings so when she passed away she can tell her angels what she did for people," she said. Miss Majeedah has ignited a movement that continues to pour love and blessings into the community even after her passing.

## Munsell Street Project

By: Kelly Robertson

The City of Binghamton ARPA and NYS Homes and Community Renewal Small Rental Development Initiative (SRDI) project at 29-31 and 32-34 Munsell Street is a significant initiative aimed at providing safe and affordable housing for individuals and families in Binghamton, New York. The project involves the construction of two six-unit buildings at 29-31 Munsell Street and 32-34 Munsell Street. These buildings will serve individuals aged 62 and older, including those with documented disabilities, as well as low-income families. Each building will feature laundry facilities and adequate storage space for residents. The project is funded through a combination of COB ARPA and SRDI grants for a total project cost of \$3.2 million. We started construction on the new buildings in August 2024. The foundations of both buildings have been constructed.



For the building located at 32-34 Munsell (pictured above), the exterior and interior walls have been constructed, the roof is 90% completed, the building is about 65% sided, all windows and doors have been installed and the interior has begun to be sheet rocked. The building has also been fully plumbed and has been completely wired for electric.

The building at 29-31 Munsell (pictured below) has been plumbed and is in the process of being wired for electric. The roof has been put on the building and all windows and doors installed throughout the building. The laundry room and office area have also been constructed. The completion of this project will add a total of twelve safe and affordable housing units to the community, providing much-needed housing for seniors and low-income families.



This initiative is part of Greater Opportunities' ongoing efforts to improve housing conditions and support vulnerable populations in Broome County. The project is expected to be completed by September 2025.



Homes and Community Renewal



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

## Wellness Corner

By. Tina Gilmore

As the winter months roll in, many employees face a drop in energy and motivation, leading to decreased productivity and potential mental health struggles. The chill and shorter days can contribute to a sense of lethargy, while reduced sunlight impacts mood-regulating neurotransmitters. The good news? Winter wellness challenges offer effective strategies to combat these winter woes and keep your team vibrant and engaged.

### THREE WINTER WELLNESS CHALLENGE IDEAS

Here are a few winter wellness challenges designed to uplift your spirits, promote physical and mental well-being, and foster a supportive work environment. From creative crafting to getting your heart pumping a little, these activities not only address seasonal challenges but also encourage teamwork and personal growth.

#### 1. Winter Craft Therapy Challenge

The Winter Craft Therapy Challenge is a fun and creative winter wellness challenge where employees get to make winter-themed crafts like terrariums, home decor, wreaths, snow globes, candles, scrapbooks or even knitted items like scarves and sweaters. It's perfect for everyone—whether you're new to crafting or already have some experience.

Supervisors can divide employees into teams and assign specific tasks to be completed within a set time frame. For example, a winter wreath challenge could encourage participants to decorate their wreaths with a Christmas theme, perfect for the holiday season. Each person can bring their unique touch to the project, showcasing their individual style. At the end of the challenge, another program or a judge could choose the best wreath, with the winner receiving a prize or reward as a fun incentive.

Benefits of the Winter Craft Therapy Challenge:

- Emotional Outlet
- Healthy Coping Tool
- Relaxation through Repetition
- Mind-Body Integration
- Inspires Creativity
- Strengthens Team Bonds
- Soothing Aromatherapy
- Builds New Skills



#### 2. Random Acts of Kindness

Helping others is beneficial for mental health as it reduces stress and enhances emotional well-being. Incorporating a winter wellness challenge, such as a Random Acts of Kindness Challenge, can amplify these benefits. When you do good, it often comes back to you. Practicing acts of kindness can rewire your brain and boost your mood.

When someone is kind, oxytocin—a stress-reducing hormone—is released, which lowers cortisol levels and reduces blood pressure.

Benefits of the Random Acts of Kindness Challenge:

- Reduces Stress
- Improves Mood
- Deepens Connections
- Increases Self-Esteem
- Fosters Empathy and Compassion
- Alleviates Loneliness
- Promotes Cardiovascular Health



#### 3. Snow Day Workout Challenge

Instead of sitting or following a sedentary lifestyle during the winter season, you can take part in a Snow Day Workout Challenge with activities like building snowmen, having snowball fights, and more. These activities improve physical health and can be done by employees either together or individually at home or the office. The goal is to keep participants active and engaged, even when they might be stuck inside due to weather.

Start with a warm-up that includes jogging, high knees, butt kicks, walkouts, and stretching. Play some motivating music to set the tone. Then move on to cardio exercises like jumping jacks, lunges, and burpees. Afterward, include a strength blast with exercises like wall sits, sit-ups, and squats. Finally, cool down by doing deep breathing exercises, hamstring stretches, and other relaxing moves.

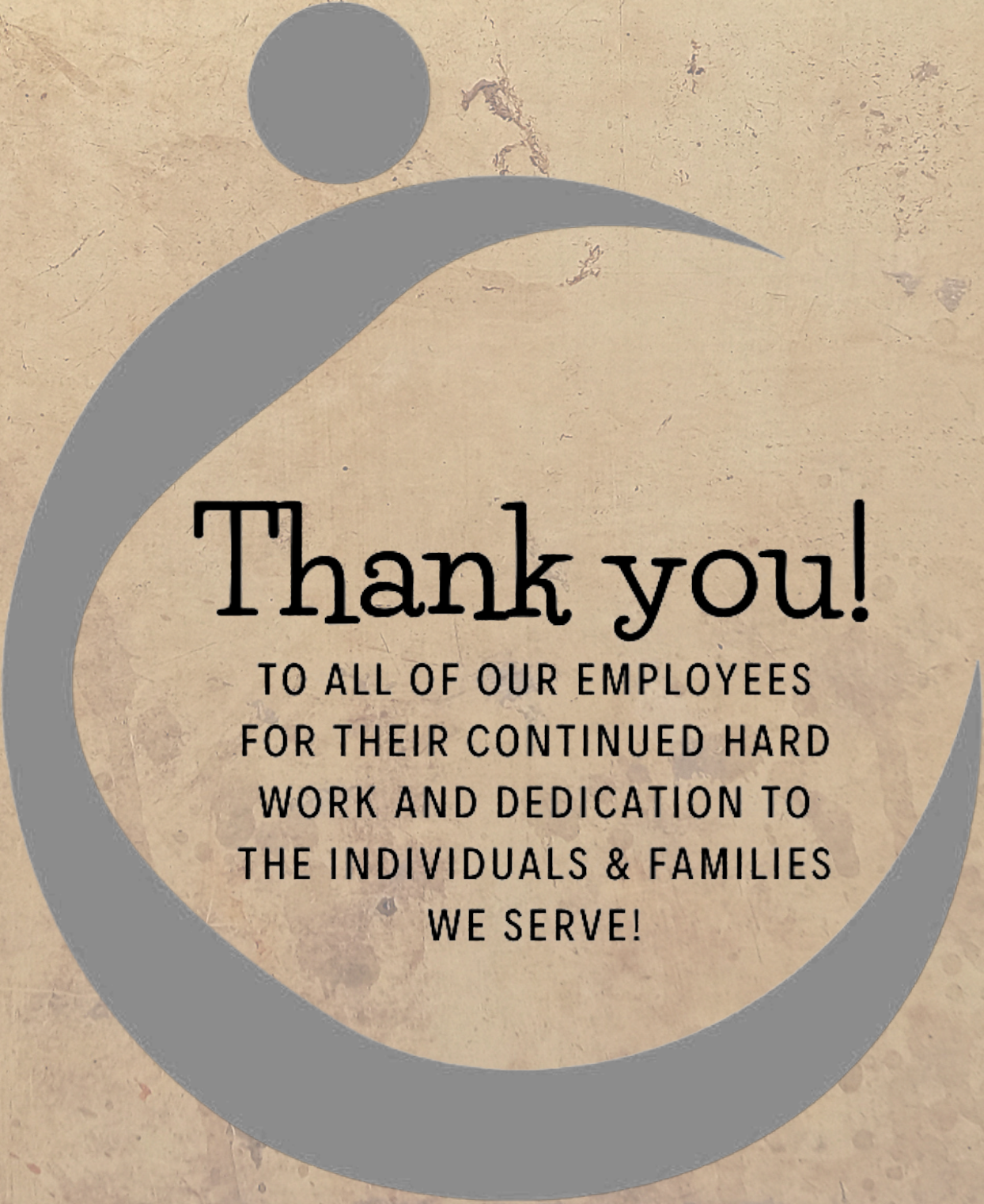
Don't forget sledding, ice skating, snow showing, skiing and snowboarding all count as work outs as well!

Benefits of the Snow Day Workout Challenge:

- Bone Health
- Cardiovascular Fitness
- Endurance and Balance
- Cardiovascular Health
- Hamstring Strength
- Running Performance
- Lower Body Strength
- Flexibility and Balance

# Our Mission Is To Create **Opportunities.**

The Mission Of Greater Opportunities Is To Educate, Advocate, And Empower Individuals And Families To Improve The Quality Of Their Lives Through The Development Of Self-Reliance, While Promoting A Culture Of People Working Together To Help Themselves, One Another, And Their Community.



# Thank you!

TO ALL OF OUR EMPLOYEES  
FOR THEIR CONTINUED HARD  
WORK AND DEDICATION TO  
THE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES  
WE SERVE!

