Breast Cancer Coalition

VOICES of the RIBBON

Autumn 2026 • Volume 27, Number 4

Serving those with a breast or gynecologic cancer diagnosis

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Growing and Grounded in Community

By Christina Thompson, Executive Director

Christina Thompson

Fall has always felt like a season of transition. The days grow shorter, routines shift, and the world around us reminds us that change is both inevitable and necessary. At the Breast Cancer Coalition, this fall feels especially meaningful as we reflect on where we have been, where we are going, and the community that continues to move our mission forward.

advocate for themselves and others. It is about continuing to bring attention to the realities of breast and gynecologic cancers while ensuring that every person impacted knows there is a community ready to stand alongside them.

This season also comes at a time of change for the Coalition. Our organization continues to grow and evolve as we listen to our community, expand our reach, strengthen our programs, and consider what the future of the Coalition can and should look like. Change can bring uncertainty, but it also creates opportunity. It gives us the chance to ask important questions, challenge ourselves, and make thoughtful decisions that will sustain this organization and its mission for years to come.

"Our organization continues to grow and evolve as we listen to our community, expand our reach, strengthen our programs, and consider what the future of the Coalition can and should look like."

September marked **Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month**, followed closely by **Breast Cancer Awareness Month** in October. For us, awareness is about more than wearing a ribbon or recognizing a month on the calendar. It is about making sure people have access to trusted information, meaningful support, and opportunities to

Through all of that change, one thing remains constant: you. Our participants, volunteers, advocates, donors, medical and research partners, and friends make this work possible. Your belief in our mission allows us to continue showing up for people impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers in meaningful ways.

As we enter this important season of awareness, thank you for your commitment to the Coalition, for growing alongside us, and for continuing to be part of this community.

Christina Thompson

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Our in-house editor, graphic designer, writers, and support staff work together to ensure our publication is economically produced, and our printers assure us that we are getting the best rates possible.

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PERSONAL JOURNEY

LIFE is My Purpose, My Special Occasion!

By "B" D-E, breast cancer survivor

"B" D-E

"LIFE is a Special Occasion!"

That's a mantra recently recanted by Ashley Pinkeney, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and past group facilitator for the Breast Cancer Coalition's monthly Sisters of Color Discussion Group (currently under review).

Life is a journey we optimally embrace and traverse collectively with dignity, insight, and purpose.

"I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you."

"I will guide you all along the way."

"No weapon formed against you will prosper."

Not only did God speak these truths, but so did my Breast Cancer Coalition peer mentor, my "PAL" Patty Y., and the late Pat Battaglia.

Continue to advocate for yourself and for others that have walked and will walk in your shoes. Let your light and your voice shine. (Thank you to Vicki Nugent, the facilitator of the Breast Cancer Coalition's Newly Diagnosed & In Active Treatment Discussion Group who is also a retired oncology surgical nurse, for sharing this encouragement.)

Life is purposeful and is one to be given thanks to. While the journey can feel circuitous at times, it is a journey that requires faith and testimony.

So, when a routine mammogram revealed the presence of invasive AND non-invasive cancer in one breast, with a questionable mass in between the two identified locations, my husband and I were in a state of flux. We received this news the week leading into Thanksgiving. When we were advised by our initial surgeon to decide on a mastectomy or double mastectomy within a month, we sought a need for quiet solitude and reflection.

Through the support of the "Women of Color" support group at Rochester's Cancer Support Community and its facilitator, Toni Phelps, we were strongly advised to seek an oncologist and a second surgical opinion. With gratitude, the second surgeon also strongly advised us to procure an oncologist. We were then referred to Dr. Alissa Huston, an oncologist at the Pluta Cancer Center. Upon closer examination, it was determined that the cancer diagnosis also encompassed a "triple negative" label, meaning it wasn't driven by estrogen or progesterone and makes little or no HER2 protein.

With God as our anchor, we exercised spiritual guidance, realigned our medical team, and wisely and faithfully opted for the oncology regime recommendation of three months of intensive chemotherapy and ultimately 19 radiation treatments. (The thought was to reduce the mass). This approach was in direct contrast to the initial surgeon's recommendation of either a mastectomy or a bilateral mastectomy.

We decided to begin the treatment regime four months after the initial diagnosis. This allowed time for us to fully process the gravity of the disease, and to share our news with our pastor, select family members and friends in the order in which God directed. (Most accepted and respected our treatment decision.)

Continued on page 21.

Facing Breast or Gynecologic Cancer in Rural Communities:

Investigating Disparities and Common Barriers to Care

By Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

In the United States, roughly 20% of individuals live in rural parts of the country, but only about 3% of oncologists practice in those areas.[1,2] When an individual is diagnosed with cancer, access to timely and organized care is essential. Even before a diagnosis, individuals need access to screenings like mammography for breast cancer and pap tests for cervical cancer. Such resources can be extremely limited in rural communities.

Here in Rochester – an urban community – we are very fortunate to have access to medical institutions, like Wilmot Cancer Institute at the University of Rochester Medical Center and Lipson Cancer Center through Rochester Regional Health. Though in the greater Finger Lakes region, individuals can experience significant barriers to care when facing a cancer diagnosis. This reality is one that is shared by many rural communities across the country.

In line with the Breast Cancer Coalition's Strategic Plan, the following article aims to bring awareness to underserved rural communities that need access to cancer care, providing greater opportunity for equity across the cancer continuum.

Rural Disparities in Breast and Gynecologic Cancers

When it comes to breast and gynecologic cancer diagnoses in rural areas, there are clear disparities in terms of cancer diagnosis and prognosis. From the stage at which individuals are diagnosed with cancer, to insurance barriers and survival rates, those impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers who live in a rural community face additional psychosocial challenges that those living in urban areas may not experience in the same ways.

Helana Shumway

Breast Cancer

For breast cancer,[3] an analysis by Sogade & Margenthaler (2026) published in the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* reported the following:

- Individuals in rural communities

Continued on page 5.

were more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer at an advanced stage compared to those living in urban areas (13.6% versus 12%, respectively).
- Adults in rural communities are more likely to be on public insurance (Medicaid) or without insurance coverage. Women who have Medicaid coverage were found to be almost three times as likely to be diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer compared to women with private insurance.
- Racial disparities in breast cancer diagnoses for rural communities are also at play, with Black women 58% more likely and Hispanic women 52% more likely to receive a stage III breast cancer compared to their white counterparts.

Gynecologic Cancer

- One study found that between 2015-2019, the mortality rate from cervical cancer in rural counties was 42% higher compared to urban counties. Notably, this disparity had increased compared to the 28% higher mortality rate in rural counties between 2005-2009.[4]
- The same study found that individuals in rural counties were 25% more likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer compared to urban counties.[4]
- Ackroyd et al. (2021) found that across the United States, more than 90% of counties did not have a gynecologic oncologist practicing in the county.[5]

Regional Barriers to Cancer Care

To address the disparities in cancer care in rural communities, it is necessary to consider the barriers to accessing the care in the first place. Jennifer Hatch is the Program Director at Pivital Public Health Partnership, a member organization that serves public health departments in the Finger Lakes region. Along with support from Executive Director Michele Foster and in partnership with Wilmot Cancer Institute,

"People aren't avoiding prevention because they don't care, but they're balancing the realities of their everyday life. They're focused on their basic needs: food, housing, childcare, working … preventative care such as cancer screening or paying more attention to cancer risk factors – it becomes a lower priority when the daily survival needs are more urgent."

~ Jennifer Hatch, Program Director at Pivital Public Health Partnership

Jennifer Hatch

Hatch led "Rural Voices for Cancer Prevention," a community listening tour across several rural counties in the Finger Lakes region to explore residents' perspectives and barriers related to cancer prevention, screening, diagnosis, and care.

Common themes throughout the listening tour included a delay of follow-through for cancer prevention, screening and care, fragmented care between primary care and oncology, transportation barriers and low trust in the health care system.

Participants reported delay in follow-through due to fear of receiving a cancer diagnosis, what would come after a diagnosis and the daily stressors of life.

"People aren't avoiding prevention because they don't care, but they're balancing the realities of their everyday life," said Hatch. "They're focused on their basic needs: food, housing, childcare, working … that when looking at preventative care such as cancer screening or paying more attention to cancer risk factors – it becomes a lower priority when the daily survival needs are more urgent."

Participants also reported fragmented care between their primary care and oncology. This can lead to delays in diagnosis, a misdiagnosis, or delays in starting treatment. Some individuals may not have access to a primary care physician and rely on urgent

Michele Foster

care for medical needs, making the communication between providers even more challenging.

It can be very overwhelming for individuals who need to come to Rochester for treatment due to the long travel distances, said Foster. Depending on where individuals live in the Finger Lakes region,

Continued on page 21.

Life is Good Until It Isn't:

My Journey to Dig in and Fight

By Shirley B., member of the Common Ground group

So, I'm cruising along, getting my annual mammograms as recommended. Then in the late 1980s – BOOM – a lump – biopsy – benign. Whew! Life is good.

Back to cruising along. I retire from a 34-year career in teaching and administration. Still cruising along, still getting annual mammograms, until 2017 when there's another lump – ultrasound and biopsy. This one was malignant. Damn! A lumpectomy and 39 sessions of radiation later, and I'm good to go. I get back to golfing, traveling, biking, and enjoying life with my wife.

Annual mammograms as prescribed – BOOM – another lump, actually several, in the same breast – not a lot of choices. I had a mastectomy in 2024, and then on to ride the treadmill of constant worry and check-ups. Every new lump or bump is cause for concern. In 2025, a suspicious lump appeared, probably nothing, but let's biopsy it as a precaution to be sure. And sure enough, it's back! Scans, tests and lots of waiting for results: metastatic, stage IV. And the bottom dropped out of our world.

After the initial fear and anger, the practicality of the situation was at hand. How do I tackle this? Great doctors helped develop a treatment plan for me. Medicine helps but the side effects can be harsh.

Needing to understand how to fight this disease, I reached out to the Coalition. I took the four-session Breast Cancer Coalition series: **Surviving and Thriving on Aromatase Inhibitors**. I read about the **Common Ground Discussion Group** in the Coalition newsletter and joined them for lunch. They are amazing. We can talk about this scary demon and realize that we're not alone.

My cancer isn't curable. It's chronic and treatable, so I dig in my heels and prepare to fight. I've always been an active person, so I renew my commitment to personal fitness to give my body the best chance I can to fight. I try to get at least 30 minutes of cardio activity every day, usually walking, sometimes on a stationary bike. I try to do weight training two to three times each week. I'm learning to embrace yoga, with a little water aerobics along the way.

I have participated in some classes at the Coalition like Gentle Yoga and Tai Chi. I participated in the New York State and Rhode Island Senior Games and came home with some gold medals. I am a proud Cortland graduate – go, Red Dragons! I'm an avid Yankees fan, and I have visited every major league baseball park for a game. I'm a Buffalo Bills fan, too.

Shirley, her wife, and their dog

There are a lot of positive things in my life – my wife who is an excellent caregiver, our 20-month-old bernedoodle, supportive family and friends, a small cottage on Honeoye Lake, the Common Ground Discussion Group, great doctors and a good outlook on life. It's still hard but overall, life is good.

COMMON GROUND is the Coalition's free in-person and hybrid discussion group for individuals living with metastatic breast or gynecologic cancer. Connect with others who understand in a welcoming community built on compassion, shared experiences, and support. **Call (585) 473-8177 or email info@bccr.org today to learn more.**

Everyone is welcome to attend.

Breast Cancer COALITION
Est. 1998

Advanced Breast and Gynecologic Cancer Webinar Series

Tools for the Journey

OCTOBER 2026

Learn more and register by scanning the QR code or visiting: bccr.org

FREE

Jacqueline C. Riorden, CTFA, CEPS, AEP®, RP

Sara D. Moore, LMSW, CHt, IEMT Practitioner

Sofia Fernandez, Esq., Attorney

Dolly Malik, PhD

October 7, 2026 • 12:00 - 1:00PM

Estate Planning

Jacqueline C. Riorden, CTFA, CEPS, AEP®, RP

Planning for the future after a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. Jacqueline Riorden will explain the basics of estate planning in a clear, easy-to-understand way. Learn how having the right documents in place can help ensure your wishes are known and make things easier for you and your loved ones.

October 14, 2026 • 12:00 - 1:00PM

Chronic Pain Management Strategies

Sara D. Moore, LMSW, CHt, IEMT Practitioner

Many people living with or after cancer experience ongoing pain that can affect sleep, mood, energy, and daily life. Sara Moore, a licensed social worker trained in mind-body approaches, will share strategies for healing and pain management, and for coping with chronic pain.

October 21, 2026 • 12:00 - 1:00PM

Navigating Cancer's Financial Burdens

Sofia Fernandez, Esq., Attorney

A cancer diagnosis can bring concerns about medical bills, insurance, work, and income. Join us for this informative webinar with Sofia Fernandez, Staff Attorney at Triage Cancer®, to learn about health insurance, disability insurance, and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) in clear, easy-to-understand language.

October 28, 2026 • 12:00 - 1:00PM

PTSD Treatment Options

Dolly Malik, PhD

A cancer diagnosis and treatment can leave lasting emotional effects, including stress, fear, and, for some, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dr. Dolly Malik will discuss treatment approaches and coping strategies that can help individuals manage symptoms and support emotional healing.

Financial support for this program is provided by M & T Bank.

In Memory of Cindy L. Dertinger, who died of metastatic breast cancer in March 2003.

Announcing the *Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative*:

Paving the Way for Groundbreaking, Innovative Discoveries

By Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

The Breast Cancer Coalition is proud to launch the ***Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative***, a new funding opportunity that will advance innovative research and improve outcomes for individuals affected by gynecologic cancers.

This newly established initiative will fund gynecologic cancer research relating to prevention, screening and early detection, cause, prevention or control of metastatic progression, cure and treatment innovation, and quality of life and survivorship. It may also bridge funding for promising gynecologic cancer research already in progress.

"As an ovarian cancer survivor, I am beyond excited to learn of the Coalition's *Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative*," said Lenora C. "Greater awareness, earlier detection, more effective treatment modalities and ongoing care, and, most importantly, increased research, are so desperately needed. The Coalition's initiative gives me hope that we can change the narrative by investing in meaningful, ongoing research – research that can lead to earlier diagnoses, better treatment options, and ultimately better outcomes for women facing gynecologic cancers."

Lenora C.

In line with the Coalition's Strategic Plan and dedication to promoting equity in all areas of our work, projects addressing disparities in access, culturally responsive care, underserved populations or barriers to diagnosis and treatment are strongly encouraged.

This is not the Coalition's first foray into funding research. Since 2003, the Breast Cancer Coalition has awarded over $1.3 million in seed funding to researchers in New York State studying the cause, prevention, prevention of metastasis and cure of breast cancer. The Coalition's *Breast Cancer Research Initiative* has funded innovative research that has yielded groundbreaking results, and we expect the same impact for our *Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative*.

"Research is a foundational element of the Breast Cancer Coalition," Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman said, Research Administrator at the Coalition. "Our funding will play a critical role in advancing knowledge and progress in gynecologic cancer research and bridges the gap between existing problems and cutting-edge new treatments to cure gynecologic cancer."

Researchers investigating gynecologic cancer from institutions in New York State can apply for two grants: the Gynecologic Cancer Research Trainee Grant ($25,000) and the Julie Jeffries Gynecologic Cancer Research Faculty Grant ($50,000), named in memory

Continued on page 9.

Julie Jeffries with her sons Bo and Denis

of Julie Jeffries, a dear member of the Coalition community who passed away in 2025.

Julie lived with metastatic cervical cancer and was very involved in the Coalition's Common Ground Discussion Group. She was strong and full of compassion for others. In her memory, Julie's two sons Bo and Denis Jeffries have established the research faculty grant to honor her continuing legacy.

"It's just such a natural fit, and we're proud to carry on Mom's legacy with the Coalition," said Denis.

Once research proposals have been submitted, the Coalition's Research Advisory Board (including scientists, clinicians and experts in the field) and a cohort of gynecologic cancer survivor advocates will review and score proposals to determine the two recipients. Survivor advocates receive training prior to the review day to ensure they have the tools to appropriately review and score proposals.

"Survivor advocates bring an essential perspective to cancer research – one grounded in lived experience," Executive Director Christina Thompson said. "By empowering survivors to participate alongside scientists in the research process, we ensure that the questions being asked and the work being funded reflect what matters most to the people whose lives are directly impacted by gynecologic cancer. Their voices don't simply inform this initiative; they are an integral part of it."

The initiative will also address a major gap in funding for gynecologic cancer research. Rachael B. Turner, MD, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Medicine and Gynecology at the James P. Wilmot Cancer Institute. "Gynecologic cancers represent some of the deadliest reproductive malignancies, yet research funding severely lags behind other major cancers like breast and prostate," Dr. Turner said. "Uterine and cervical cancers consistently rank among the three least-funded cancer types globally.

Rachael B Turner, MD, PhD

"Accelerating federal and private research funding is vital to closing this gap and transforming survival outcomes for patients worldwide."

The *Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative* is an important first step in paving the way for groundbreaking, innovative discoveries. Similar to our *Breast Cancer Research Initiative*, we anticipate that our seed grants will act as the first stop in the pipeline for gynecologic cancer researchers to pursue federal funding and continue toward clinical trials. As a small but mighty grassroots nonprofit, we are determined to fund research that will ultimately lead to a cure for gynecologic cancers.

Requests for proposals will open on December 1, 2026. If researchers have questions about the application process, Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman is available to assist. She can be reached at silvia@bccr.org.

"Gynecologic cancers represent some of the deadliest reproductive malignancies, yet research funding severely lags behind other major cancers ... Accelerating federal and private research funding is vital to closing this gap and transforming survival outcomes for patients worldwide."

Rachael B. Turner, MD, PhD

Bipartisan Support is Growing for the Metastatic Breast Cancer Access to Care Act, but New York Needs One More Cosponsor

By Holly Anderson, Advocacy Committee Member

Holly Anderson

Every moment is precious when living with metastatic breast cancer (MBC).

As a survivor, advocate, and former President and Executive Director of the Breast Cancer Coalition, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles faced by those living with this incurable disease. I am proud that the Coalition, now under Christina Thompson's leadership, continues to collaborate with advocates nationwide to advance legislation and build bipartisan support for meaningful change.

People with MBC endure aggressive, debilitating treatments while carrying overwhelming financial burdens. For many, there is no option to stop working. They continue through treatment, exhaustion, pain, and uncertainty because they need income and health insurance to access the care they need to stay alive. They are fighting a terminal disease while also fighting to remain financially secure enough to continue that fight.

For those who can no longer work, the system imposes another cruel burden: mandatory waiting periods for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Medicare. Under current law, those under age 65 who qualify for SSDI must wait five months for benefits, followed by an additional 24 months for Medicare coverage. For someone living with MBC, these are not abstract bureaucratic delays. They are months of treatment, medical bills, lost income, and uncertainty. Tragically, many patients die before receiving benefits they have earned.

H.R. 2048, the Metastatic Breast Cancer Access to Care Act, would eliminate both waiting periods for people under age 65 living with MBC.

We are proud to have obtained the support of nearly all New York State Representatives, regardless of party. After all, breast cancer has never been a partisan issue. Republicans and Democrats both die from this disease. Yet Rep. Claudia Tenney (NY-24) remains the holdout, despite having previously supported this legislation. We are not asking her to support something unfamiliar; we are asking her to stand with us again. Advocates have been unable to secure her renewed support during the last two congressional sessions, and our efforts to meet with her have been unsuccessful.

Passing H.R. 2048 is not simply about policy; it is about human lives. No one living with MBC should have to choose between working through debilitating treatment, keeping the health insurance that pays for it, and accessing the disability benefits they have earned. Eliminating these waiting periods would mean less time fighting the system and more time focusing on treatment, family, and whatever time remains.

Representative Tenney can do more than return her name to the list of cosponsors. She can **LEAD**, using her position on the House Ways and Means Committee to help move H.R. 2048 forward and turn bipartisan support into **ACTION**.

We urge every reader to appeal to Representative Tenney: **ask her not only to support H.R. 2048, but to LEAD THE WAY toward its passage.** These patients should not have to wait for the help they have earned. They deserve the dignity, security, and fighting chance to focus on their health, their loved ones, and the precious time they have left.

Representative Tenney's Canandaigua office can be reached at (585) 869-2060, and her Washington, D.C., office can be reached at (202) 225-3665.

Expanding Access to Breast Health Information Through Our Partnership with RIT/NTID

By Christina Thompson, Executive Director and Deb Bishop, Director of Communications

At the Breast Cancer Coalition, we know that providing information is only meaningful when people can truly access, understand, and use it. That belief is at the heart of our exciting collaboration with the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)/National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) focused on expanding breast health education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

Our work with RIT grew from an important question: How can we make breast health information more accessible to people whose primary language is American Sign Language (ASL)?

Working with our RIT partner Elizabeth Ayers, MS, RDMS, RVT, Senior Lecturer in Science and Mathematics, we have been part of a community-driven project exploring how breast health information can be communicated in ways that are culturally and linguistically accessible. The work goes beyond translating existing materials into ASL. Instead, Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants are helping shape how the information is presented, understood, and ultimately shared.

The project team itself reflects that approach. Lauren and Emily, two Deaf nurses, provide clinical and educational expertise; Sally and Jodie, Deaf breast cancer thrivers, bring their lived experience; and Sophie and Amber, Deaf graphic illustrators, are developing visual narratives to support learning. As Executive Director and Director of Communications, we have participated from the project's inception, attending planning sessions, focus groups, and debriefs to consider how to strengthen the Coalition's own resources through what we are learning.

The educational experience

Christina Thompson

Deb Bishop

combines ASL-centered breast health information with visual narratives, web-based resources, and hands-on learning using breast models. Participants provide feedback throughout the process, allowing the team to continually refine the materials based on what the community says is most useful and accessible.

Elizabeth Ayers, MS, RDMS, RVT

Reflecting on the project, Elizabeth Ayers shared, "This project demonstrated the power of bringing experts and community members together. I learned so much from our team and from the research participants who shaped every stage of this work, resulting in multimodal educational materials grounded in lived experiences. Their insights transformed the content and reinforced the importance of community input in making breast health education accessible for ASL users as well as English Language Learners."

For the Coalition, that process has been equally valuable. It has challenged us to look more closely at our website, educational materials, programs, and processes through an accessibility lens. This collaboration is part of our broader commitment to continually ask an important question: Who may not be accessing the Coalition's resources, and why?

Sally, who has been part of the Coalition community for years, shared what this work has meant to her: "The Coalition strives to empower Deaf individuals experiencing breast cancer by providing accessible programs, services and support. I'm truly grateful for the pioneering work Liz has done

Continued on page 25.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Learn more!

The Coalition offers a variety of supportive and educational programs specifically tailored for individuals living with a diagnosis of breast or gynecologic cancer, whether you are newly diagnosed, in treatment, or navigating life after treatment. At the Coalition, you're not alone – you'll find strength in connecting with others who've walked a similar path.

Our programming is designed to fulfill the diverse needs and interests of our community and is offered in a variety of ways:

- In-person at 1048 University Avenue, Rochester, NY
- Hybrid (both in-person and virtual)
- Virtual (via Zoom)

With advance notice, we can provide language interpreters (including American Sign Language) with no charge to the individual. We have a bilingual member of our team who can assist individuals who speak Spanish. Please contact us to request an interpreter.

All of the Coalition's programs and services are free of charge.

FIRST STEPS

Breast or GYN Cancer 101 & 201 are **one-to-one sessions** to assist newly diagnosed individuals in managing the complex tasks and emotions of a breast or gynecologic cancer diagnosis. We empower people to be self-advocates as they proceed through treatment, recovery, and survivorship. Also valuable for a gynecologic or breast cancer survivor at any stage of their journey. ***Contact us at*** info@bccr.org ***for an appointment.***

The **Peer Advocates Lending Support (PALS) Mentor Program** is a peer mentor program that follows a Breast or GYN Cancer 101 session. Our mentors are breast and gynecologic cancer survivors who reach out to those who are new to the disease, providing the reassurance of one-to-one contact with "someone who's been there." PALS participants feel the program empowers them to connect with needed resources and instills confidence during a difficult time.

HEALING ARTS INITIATIVE

Healing Arts Initiative includes: African Drumming, Gentle Yoga, Groovin' Yoga, Mindfulness & Meditation, Movement & Motion, Qi Gong, and Tai Chi along with Voices & Vision classes. Sessions are offered throughout the year. Healing Arts are offered in virtual, in-person, and hybrid environments.

GIVE AND GET SUPPORT

Discussion Groups are an important resource for people diagnosed with breast or gynecologic cancer. The Coalition's Discussion Groups help individuals expand their networks, share knowledge, resources, and experiences, and foster a sense of camaraderie through mutual support and shared understanding. Discussion Groups are professionally facilitated.

LEARN

Studies have shown that **patient education** has a positive effect on health outcomes during and after treatment, including emotional and physical health. The Coalition works with area oncologists, researchers, and other professionals to offer a wide variety of **Education Webinars** throughout the year. Our **Webinar Library** is available online at: bccr.org/webinar-library/

Journeying Together Through Connection, Compassion, Collaboration and Community

How listening to our community led to a new partnership with New Life Ministries

By Tori Toliver Powers, Grants and Community Liaison

Tori Toliver Powers

Cue "Happy" by Pharrell Williams, because that perfectly describes my sentiments as I witness and I am honored to celebrate our partnership with New Life Ministries and the launch of the **Women on a Journey Discussion Group**.

During our African American Focus Group in the summer of 2025, participants shared that it would be beneficial to offer Coalition programs within the community rather than requiring community members to come to us. Those conversations continued with participants, volunteers, and trusted partners. Through discussions with Dr. Gloria Morgan, a two-time breast cancer survivor, the need for a community-based support group became even more apparent.

Dr. Gloria Morgan

Dr. Morgan, a New Life Ministries congregant, played an integral role and helped establish a connection with Pastor (Lady) Tina McNeill, laying the foundation for what has become a meaningful collaboration. This initiative is one of several community-focused ministries and outreach efforts that New Life Ministries provides to serve the Rochester community.

For me, this collaboration also speaks to my community roots. Growing up in Rochester's 19th Ward, I attended Wilson Magnet High School, walked home along Wellington Avenue, and took swimming lessons at the former Arnett YMCA branch. Having lived in the neighborhood for more than 30 years, many families who are near and dear to my heart have long called New Life Ministries home. To now be part of building this partnership truly feels like a full-circle moment.

This collaboration reflects the Breast Cancer Coalition's 2025–2027 Strategic Plan to strengthen our core, enhance programs, optimize outreach, and reduce barriers to care by meeting people where they are. Through trusted community partnerships, we are making our free support services more accessible, ensuring that more individuals can receive the education, resources, and compassionate support they deserve.

Women on a Journey is a welcoming, compassionate discussion group where women affected by breast and/or gynecologic cancer can be seen, heard, supported, and empowered. Whether newly diagnosed, in treatment, living with metastatic disease, or years beyond diagnosis, women can tackle the challenges of cancer together, celebrate victories along the way, and support one another as they walk through their cancer journey with hope, strength, and community.

We are deeply grateful to Senior Pastor Bernard McNeill, Pastor (Lady) Tina McNeill, and the entire New Life Ministries family for embracing this partnership. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected community where support is not limited by location and where no one has to face breast or gynecologic cancer alone.

Women on a Journey meets on the third Monday of every month at New Life Ministries, 330 Wellington Avenue, Rochester, NY 14619. Snacks and beverages are provided, and ***all*** are welcome.

Celebrating Our Newest Grant Recipients

By Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman, Research Administrator

The Breast Cancer Coalition funded two research scientists during the 2026 Award Ceremony on June 16. The recipients were Dr. Daniel Steven Reynolds of Binghamton University and Yu-Wei Chang of Cornell University. With this year's grantees, the Coalition has awarded over $1.3 million in seed funding since 2003.

Special guests in attendance included our grant recipient Dr. Reynold's mother and Dr. Robert Weiss, long-time member of the Coalition Research Advisory Board and mentor to our recipient Yu-Wei Chang.

The annual grant ceremony opened with an address by Executive Director Christina Thompson, who announced the creation of the ***Gynecologic Cancer Research Initiative*** set to launch in 2027 (see page 8 for more information).

Dr. Weiss, of Cornell University, spoke to the fact that Coalition seed money plays a critical role in early-stage research providing recipients with the necessary preliminary data to secure future larger funds.

Daniel Steven Reynolds, PhD

Daniel Steven Reynolds, PhD, was the recipient of the 2026 Sylvia Cappellino Breast Cancer Research Faculty Grant for his research proposal titled, "*Bioprinted Human Triple Negative Breast Cancer Models to Investigate Novel Peptide-Based Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors*."

Dr. Reynolds' research aim is to establish a novel 3D bioprinted human breast cancer model composed of triple negative breast cancer (TNBC) cells and immune cells. 3D bioprinting is an emerging field which integrates biology, engineering and material science to fabricate, as in this study, TNBC tumor models and its complex tumor microenviroment. The primary goal is to use these models to help investigate new peptide-based checkpoint inhibitors and ultimately improve immunotherapy in breast cancer. The research project is a collaborative effort between the Reynolds Lab's µPOROS bioprinting platform and Dr. John Fetse Lab's library of peptidomimetic analogs. Dr. Fetse's laboratory will provide peptide-based molecules to be screened to identify the next successful drug.

Dr. Reynolds received his PhD in Biomedical Engineering from Boston University and completed his postdoctoral training at Harvard University. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Binghamton University, where he leads the Biofabrication and Cancer Engineering Lab. His lab integrates principles of mechanical engineering, materials science, and biology.

Dr. Reynolds stated, "My cancer research career actually began in Rochester when my mother was diagnosed while I was an undergraduate. Thanks to a scientific breakthrough before her diagnosis, a life-saving drug has kept her in remission for over 15 years."

Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman

Yu-Wei Chang form Cornell University received the 2026 Pamela Delp Polashenski M.D. Breast Cancer Research Trainee Grant for his proposal titled, "*Regulation of Exosome Secretion by Sirtuin 1 as a Determinant of Breast Cancer Metastasis.*"

Yu-Wei Chang, PhD Candidate

Chang's research project explores how the loss of the protein Sirtuin 1 in triple negative breast cancer increases the release of small extracellular vesicles (EVs), commonly known as exosomes. These vesicles travel through the bloodstream to distant organs, effectively priming them for cancer colonization and metastasis. By uncovering how Sirtuin 1-regulated exosomes drive the spread of cancer, Chang's work holds the potential to

Continued on page 15.

The PAL Connection: Forward Together

By Lindsay E., PALS Mentor, Emerging Leader

When I was first diagnosed with breast cancer at 38, the world felt like it shifted on its axis overnight. I was thrust into a blur of medical jargon, overwhelming treatment decisions, and a quiet, persistent fear that loved ones – despite their best efforts – couldn't fully grasp. The turning point came when I was connected with a mentor through the PALS (Peer Advocates Lending Support) program.

Connecting with someone who had walked in my exact shoes changed everything. My mentor was a testament that there was a light at the end of the tunnel. She provided a safe harbor where I could voice my deepest anxieties without fear, offering practical comfort that only a fellow survivor could give. Navigating that journey as a young survivor, finding that kind of shared strength and lifelong connection wasn't just helpful – it was vital to my healing.

That profound experience is precisely why I decided to pay it forward and become a PALS mentor.

The core of the PALS program is simple yet extraordinarily powerful: pairing newly diagnosed individuals with trained survivors who understand the true weight of those early, uncertain days. As a mentor, my goal is to serve as a grounded, empathetic sounding board. It means listening without judgment, celebrating treatment milestones, and helping someone regain their agency when life feels out of control.

What makes the Coalition so special is its deep roots in our Rochester community. The warmth and genuine care embedded in the organization ensure no one in our region faces a diagnosis in isolation. Mentoring has shown me that healing is a collective effort. Being allowed into someone's life during their most vulnerable chapter is a privilege, and transforming the support I once received into strength for someone else remains one of the most fulfilling choices of my life.

Lindsay E.

Grant Recipients, continued from page 14.

Melinda Goldberg, Coalition Past Board Chair; Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman; Robert Weiss, PhD, Coalition Research Advisory Board; Daniel Steven Reynolds, PhD; Yu-Wei Chang, PhD Candidate; Christina Thompson, Coalition Executive Director; Umbereen Mustafa, Board Chair; and Mel Callan, Coalition Board member

left: Mel Callan and Melisande Bianchi, Coalition Advisory Council member

below: Jody Dietz, Coalition Board member, and Rachel Rosen Simpson, Coalition Program Manager

unlock groundbreaking new diagnostic tools and targeted therapies.

Originally from Taiwan, Chang is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the Biomedical and Biological Science program at Cornell University, specializing in molecular oncology. He earned his Master of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the National Yang-Ming University in Taiwan before pursuing his doctoral studies at Cornell in 2021.

After the ceremony, the audience and many breast cancer survivors enjoyed casually chatting with the grant recipients and guests. We shared stories and connections wrapping up an inspiring day.

An Amazing Turn Out for the 24th Annual Tee'd Off at Breast & Gynecologic Cancers Golf Tournament!

By Meredith Utman, Director of Special Events

Meredith Utman

On July 27th, the Breast Cancer Coalition hosted its **24th Annual Tee'd Off at Breast & Gynecologic Cancers Golf Tournament** at Midvale Country Club. It was a gorgeous, sunny day out on the course! 236 golfers, 46 sponsors, 30+ raffle prizes, 115 silent auction items, a spirit spin, a 50/50 raffle and more helped to raise $57,000! Proceeds from the event help the Coalition fulfill our mission of empowering those touched by breast or gynecologic cancer through education, support, advocacy and research.

A BIG thank you to our dynamic Planning Committee: Sean Patton, Lee Cordero, Susie Smith, Colleen Dupuis, and Kitty Picardo. Their leadership, enthusiasm and determination are keys to this event's success. Many thanks also to our fantastic "day of" volunteers: Jody Dietz, Colleen Dupuis, Julie Overbeck, Sonia Olsen, Kitty Picardo, Dawn Russell, and Mimi Youngman for helping the day run smoothly. And finally, much gratitude to our Coalition staff members on site that day: Arelis Aponte, Amal Aweis, Deb Bishop, Jennifer Buonomo, Yvonne Paul, Lisa Martin, Andrea Reynolds, Taneisha Rodgers, Rachel Rosen Simpson, Helana Shumway, and Christina Thompson. What true teamwork!

TEE'D OFF
AT BREAST CANCER
GOLF TOURNAMENT

Special shout out to our beverage donors: Gates Keystone Club, Genesee Brewing Co., and Wright Beverage Distributing, for providing drinks to quench our golfer's thirst on the links. And a round of applause to The Hart Agency and Southern Wines for providing complimentary tastings all along the course. As I always say, *it takes a community to serve a community!*

Golf Award Winners:

- Men's 1st: Bob Continelli, Dave Continelli, Craig Eichas, Kyle Tudor
- Mixed 1st: Leslie Renzi, Alex Renzi & Guests
- Women's 1st: Mary McConville, Ann Mulberry, Debbie Eberhardt, Donna Coggins
- Women's Longest Drive, Hole #8: Terry Daum
- Women's Closest to the Pin, Hole #13: Cindi Spezio
- Men's Longest Drive, Hole #10: Nick DiLucia
- Men's Closest to the Pin, Hole #4: Greg Van Lare

Men's Skins Winners:

- Hole #10 – Eagle: Ed Parrone, Jake Coon, Ryan Coon, Russ Coon

Women's Skins Winners:

- Holes #2 & 8 - Birdie: Brenda Pitts, Sue Traniello, Tara Henry, Kelly Kaye
- Hole #4 – Birdie: Sally Quist, Mary Dougherty, Becky Ortiz, Danielle Williams
- Hole # 7 – Birdie: Maggie Cook, Anna Weiss, Sam Ramos, Kaitlin Leonard
- Hole #14 – Birdie: Stella Slaight, Jane Silverstein, Terry Daum, Kim Ekiss

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In Kind donations are listed on page 29.

Volunteer Spotlight

Julie O.

By Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

Julie O. (center) with Wendy G. and Jeanne V. at the 2026 Research Grant Announcement

Our volunteers are a true gift to our organization. Not only do they make our work possible, but they also become an extension of our community. Many individuals have been actively involved as volunteers for years and have watched the Coalition grow and expand to serve those impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers in our region.

One volunteer who is at the heart of much of what we do is Julie. She has been involved as a volunteer for over 15 years and has always been willing to lend a hand whenever needed.

"Julie has been an invaluable member of the Research Advisory Board for decades," said Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman, Research Administrator. "Serving on our review panel, she has evaluated dozens of research applications, bringing both her medical background and her personal experience with breast cancer to the table. Julie is always ready to volunteer her time and lend a helping hand. I always look forward to chatting with her whenever we work at the volunteer table together during our many events. We are so incredibly grateful for everything she does."

Julie has also participated in our annual Pink & Teal Challenge either as a walker, a fundraiser or a day-of volunteer since the event took place in Charlotte over two decades ago. For years, she has volunteered at ACTober (then called ARTrageous) and our Tee'd Off at Breast and Gynecologic Cancers Golf Tournaments. As Meredith Utman, Director of Special Events, reflected, "Julie's attention to detail and 'can-do' spirit makes her a fantastic volunteer at our special events!"

Julie was a mentor during the first year of our Emerging Leaders program, connecting with young survivors to prepare them for future work in breast and gynecologic cancer advocacy and research. She attended the National Breast Cancer Coalition Advocate's Leadership Summit in 2022 with other leaders from our community.

Additionally, each quarter, Julie helps us deliver copies of *Voices of the Ribbon* throughout our community. She also supports us at community outreach events.

All in all, Julie is a shining light here at the Coalition, and we wish to thank her for her years of dedication and service as a volunteer. Juile, thank you for being such an integral part of our Coalition family!

Are you interested in volunteering with the Breast Cancer Coalition?

There are many ways to get involved. Whether you would like to participate at community events to spread awareness about our services, you want to join us day-of at our annual events like the Pink & Teal Challenge and ACTober, or you would like to join one of our committees (like Advocacy or Research), we want to connect with you! Email info@bccr.org to learn more today.

Introducing the Circle of Impact: Support for the Next Generation

By Jennifer Buonomo, Major Gifts Officer

Jennifer Buonomo

At the Breast Cancer Coalition, we see every day how powerful community can be when someone hears the words "You have cancer."

It happens when a newly diagnosed person connects and receives support and trusted education to make informed decisions for what's next, when someone in the midst of treatment finds comfort in a discussion group with people who understand, or when long-time members continue to show up to support the people they've come to know and love.

As the need for Coalition services has grown over the past several years, we've been thinking not just about those impacted by breast or gynecologic cancer today, but about those who will need us 10, 20 and 30 years from now.

We're honored to introduce the *Circle of Impact,* which recognizes individuals who have chosen to include the Coalition in their estate planning. These legacy gifts help ensure that our free support services, advocacy efforts, educational programs and dedication to funding breast and gynecologic cancer research remain strong for generations to come.

A legacy gift isn't reserved for the wealthy. Most gifts are included in a will as a percentage of an estate or as a designated beneficiary of a retirement account; both cost nothing today. Many people are surprised to learn that including a charitable gift in their estate plans is one of the simplest ways to support the causes they care about, while also providing for the people they love. As breast cancer survivor and *Circle of Impact* member Jody Dietz put it, *"This is my way of paying it forward, both literally and figuratively."*

If you've already included the Breast Cancer Coalition in your plans, please let us know so we can thank you and welcome you as a founding member of the *Circle of Impact*. If you're curious about legacy giving or want to learn more about the benefits of membership, we'd be happy to send you information and answer your questions, without any obligation. Please visit our website or contact me directly at jennifer@bccr.org.

Together, we can help ensure that future generations always have a community to turn to and that no one has to face cancer alone.

"This is my way of paying it forward, both literally and figuratively."

~ Jody Dietz, Coalition Board Member, Circle of Impact member

Friends Remembered

We celebrate all who set an unwilling foot on this path, along with our friends and supporters.

Janet Clark
Jane "Jean" Colombo
Patricia Posato DeBrine
Daniel P. Kelly
Martin W. King
Michelle Murphy
Betsy Palozzi
Barbara Ann Smithgall
Tarah Lynn Sproul
Stephanie S. Wesp

Sankofa: Carrying Wisdom Forward

By Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

"Sankofa" is a Twi word that is derived from the Akan Tribe of Ghana. Its loose translation is "go back and get it," which reflects the significance of looking back to honor and learn from our past while bringing those lessons with us into the future.

The Sankofa bird is a symbol that often represents this meaning: the bird has its feet pointed forward, but its head is looking back. It carries an egg or a pearl on its back or held within its beak – a representation of the wisdom we have cultivated from past experiences that inform our future.

"Sankofa reminds us to bring forward all that is good that has come before us," said Khadijah Tillman, LCSW-R and CEO of Sankofa Family Counseling Services. "This gives us strength and purpose in the present, while helping us to create and define what we leave behind."

The Breast Cancer Coalition hosted its annual Common Ground Retreat in July, and one of the activities was a discussion about the meaning of Sankofa as it relates to living with metastatic disease. It was led by Tillman and Common Ground Discussion Group facilitator Theo Munson.

"During the session, participants focused on lessons they carried from their own pasts, in the Sankofa tradition," said Munson. "The women shared prominent experiences from previous generations and family traditions that they carry forward in their own lives. These 'pearls' give them dignity, self-awareness and courage as they face challenges of cancer treatment and uncertain futures."

Khadijah Tillman, LCSW-R

Theo Munson

The uncertainties; the unknowns that accompany living with a stage IV breast or gynecologic cancer diagnosis; the conversations with loved ones about what comes next in treatment; the grief that comes in many forms, some smaller and some seemingly much too large.

In every edition of our newsletter, we dedicate space to remembering those we have lost to metastatic disease. Pat Battaglia, the Coalition's longtime voice of compassion and courage (and staff member for 15 years), set an unwilling foot on the path of metastatic breast cancer. Before she passed last year, she bestowed many lessons upon us. One such lesson could be related to Sankofa, or the idea of "going back" for something. With her feet planted forward, facing the unknown, she continued to look back and care deeply for the Coalition community and its people. She taught us – and showed us – what it meant to *live* with metastatic breast cancer, not die from it. And she lived with love.

We take this moment to recognize the lives of so many in our community who have been impacted by metastatic breast or gynecologic cancer. To arrive at our doors, an unwilling foot on the path, but also to find camaraderie and joy in quiet moments; in moments of laughter and tears; in moments of going back for those lessons and bringing them into what comes next. We see you, we honor you, and we love you.

LIFE is My Purpose, My Special Occasion, continued from page 3.

In conjunction with spiritual and medical intervention, we gradually sought out healing and restorative practices. Through a combination of cancer-based supportive services, I eventually embraced acupuncture, massage, mindfulness meditation, yoga, and talk therapy.

When I could no longer walk, at will, I learned to allow my body to rest. I learned to accept help. I learned to allow "angels" around me, whether it be the angel who helped to clean and organize my home when I could not, or the support of the myriad of well-wishers and doers who spoke for me, who conducted research on my behalf…

I was told that my hair would fall out shortly after beginning chemotherapy. Well that wasn't true for me! My hair held onto me for months, with my new and evolving "red carpet" hairdo variations. When I realized that local wig coiffeurs did not have a compatible range of hairstyles for the texture of my hair, local "friends"(and even my Coalition "PAL") offered their private inventory. I ultimately opted to wear my hair in its natural state as the regiment progressed, often coupled with hats as seasonal climate dictated.

In addition to losing the hair on my head, I gradually lost facial accent hair, along with nasal, underarm, pubic, and leg hair.

Through various virtual meetings offered by the Coalition, I listened, wept and shared. I began to speak repeatedly about the importance of actively communicating with the "care team" God had orchestrated. With empathy and compassion, I listened to stories of others along this path (both locally and far away) and began to offer snippets of strategies that had worked for me. In addition, I spoke about the importance of utilizing the skill set of the entire care team, and sometimes replacing team members that were not as advantageous as I/ we thought they should/could be.

We were pleased and ecstatic to learn that the vigorous chemotherapy had reduced the mass "beyond medical expectations"! All that remained was the bed on which the cancer had resided. Only a lumpectomy was warranted.

To God is given ALL the Glory and honor. With gratitude, praise is given to the intuitive insight of our wisely selected second surgeon, Dr. Rachel Farkas of Vega Plastic Surgery and MedSpa, and Pluta oncologist Dr. Alissa Huston.

While the journey is not one I would have readily chosen, it's a journey that was chosen for me. My journey required a faith-based walk. My journey required a village. This purposeful journey is My Special Occasion.

Thank you to the "we" in my team, my husband Greg – my earthbound anchor, supporter and advocate – with additional support from our son Cory and other family members.

Thank you, local (and national) cancer support organizations.

Thank you, Breast Cancer Coalition, for your ongoing support and advocacy.

Rural Communities, continued from page 5.

Rochester may be upwards of a two-hour drive away. In the winter months, those commutes can be longer and more difficult.

With the additional barriers of no public transportation or access to car services like Uber or Lyft in parts of the Finger Lakes region, it can be extremely burdensome for patients to get to their appointments. If they get a ride to the appointment, they may not know the time it will end – an additional challenge for organizing transportation.

Looking Ahead

The barriers to cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment can contribute to patients feeling dismissed and not listened to, leading to an overall lack of trust in the health care system.

To address these barriers and develop more trust, Hatch discussed the importance of listening to patients, incorporating their voice into cancer care and building stronger partnerships between local providers in rural communities and regional oncology providers. Additionally, incorporating cancer prevention and care into a broader conversation around health and wellness can help to destigmatize fears or concerns surrounding cancer.

For those in the Finger Lakes region who have received a breast or gynecologic cancer diagnosis, the Breast Cancer Coalition remains an available resource. Many programs – including discussion groups and Healing Arts classes like yoga and tai chi – are available in a hybrid or fully virtual setting, allowing for those in rural areas to access our services. All services are free of charge and available from the point of diagnosis onward for those impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers. To learn more, email info@bccr.org, call (585) 473-8177 or visit bccr.org.

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Credit:istock, Kateryna Bon

GLP-1s and Breast Cancer –

Recent Findings Suggest a Reduction in Risk, but Caution is Warranted in Interpreting the Data

By Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

The Breast Cancer Coalition does not recommend or provide medical advice. Individuals should consult with their medical or oncology teams with any questions related to their health care.

Recent headlines announced that studies have found that GLP-1s – the increasingly common weight loss drug prescribed to those who are living with diabetes or are overweight – are linked to a reduction in breast cancer incidence or potential recurrence reduction. While this news may seem groundbreaking, many experts are recommending caution until there is significant scientific evidence.

Dr. Alissa Huston is a triple-board certified physician at the Pluta Cancer Center and Wilmot Cancer Center through the University of Rochester Medical Center. "The early evidence surrounding GLP-1 medications and breast cancer is intriguing in that they not only appear safe for use in those with a history of breast cancer, but they may also provide protective benefits particularly given the relationship between obesity, metabolic health, and breast cancer outcomes," Huston said.

"However, we are still in the early stages of understanding what these medications may mean for someone who has already been diagnosed with breast cancer and need formal, prospective research specifically in breast cancer populations to determine their role in cancer prevention, recurrence reduction, or survivorship care."

Alissa Huston, MD

A Review of the Study

The headlines surrounding the connection between GLP-1s and breast cancer are based on a few studies. One is from Penn Medicine, where researchers performed a retrospective analysis of over 110,000 women who were between 45 and 80 years old.[1] A retrospective analysis means that the study was observational and used existing data to analyze findings.

The analysis showed that women from the cohort who took a GLP-1 had a roughly 30% less chance of developing breast cancer compared to women who did not take the drug. While this finding seems highly significant, the 30% reduction is what is known as a relative risk reduction as opposed to an absolute risk reduction, wrote Gary Schwitzer, a renowned health care journalist with more than 50 years of experience reviewing health news, in his article "What you should know about claims that GLP-1 drugs cut breast cancer risk by 30%."[2]

Gary Schwitzer

To further explain this concept: Penn's study found that 2.3% of women not taking a GLP-1 were diagnosed with breast cancer, whereas 1.6% of women taking a GLP-1 were diagnosed with breast cancer. This results in less than a one percentage point difference,

Continued on page 23.

Gary Schwtizer helps explain the difference between relative and absolute risk.

but a 30% relative difference when comparing 1.6 to 2.3%.

Both data are considered accurate, wrote Schwitzer, but regarding the number of women who developed breast cancer versus those who did not based on taking a GLP-1 or not, there was less than one percentage point difference.

An additional caveat of this observational study is that other variables were not accounted for, such as the type of GLP-1 prescribed, the length a woman was on the drug, breast cancer type and stage, and genetic predispositions. Not accounting for such variables could impact the resulting data. Penn Medicine reported plans to continue this research with a multi-site clinical trial.

Other researchers have been examining the use of GLP-1s as it relates to breast cancer survival and rates of recurrence, but these are also early-stage studies and indicate the need for further investigation.[3,4]

Key Takeaways

GLP-1s have been proven to help individuals lose weight and reduce blood sugar levels in the body.[5] Being overweight is a known risk factor associated with breast cancer,[4] and some experts believe that the potential benefits associated with breast cancer risk from taking a GLP-1 may be due to the overall improvements in metabolic health.[3]

Importantly, being overweight is only one of many risk factors associated with breast cancer. Conversations surrounding the use of GLP-1s – whether an individual is a breast cancer survivor or not – should be done in consultation with a medical professional.

To summarize, while headlines have reported findings regarding the connection between GLP-1s and breast cancer, it is too early to prove a causal relationship based off retrospective analyses. Further randomized trials are needed to examine if the use of GLP-1s statistically and significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer incidence or recurrence.

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"The early evidence surrounding GLP-1 medications and breast cancer is intriguing ... However, we are still in the early stages of understanding what these medications may mean for someone who has already been diagnosed with breast cancer and need formal, prospective research ...."

~ Alissa Huston, MD

A Busy Summer of Community Outreach!

By Arelis Aponte, Bilingual Programs & Outreach Coordinator

It has been a busy summer for the Breast Cancer Coalition, and we wouldn't have it any other way! Our team and volunteers have been out across the Rochester community, tabling at health fairs, festivals, markets, and neighborhood events, as well as canvassing alongside community partners.

Each event gives us an opportunity to meet people where they are, share information about our free programs and resources, listen to our community, and build relationships with other organizations serving our neighbors.

Where we have been this summer (as of early August):

- Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church Health Fair
- Town of Irondequoit Pride Market
- African American Health Coalition Healthcare Rodeo at Edgerton Park
- Changing Lives House of Prayer
- VA Finger Lakes Women's Health Day
- Action for a Better Community Take Charge Event
- Rochester Juneteenth Festival
- Senator Pam Helming's Senior Resource Fair
- Connected Communities Community Courtyard Bash
- ROC Pride Picnic & Parade
- Gospel Jubilee at the Rochester Public Market
- 56th Annual Puerto Rican Festival & Parade
- Neighborhood of the Arts Summer Social
- Jordan Health Center Front Porch Festival

Our monthly community canvassing efforts, led by the Urban League of Rochester alongside many community partners, have also taken us throughout all four quadrants of the City of Rochester. Going door to door gives us the opportunity to connect directly with residents, share resources, learn about the needs of different neighborhoods, and strengthen relationships with organizations doing important work throughout our city.

Our outreach is also opening the door to deeper conversations. In early August, we held our first Latino health focus group in partnership with Ibero-American Action League. Several participants were people we first connected with while out in the community. Their experiences and feedback will help guide our continued efforts to better reach and support Rochester's Latino community.

Rochester Pride Picnic

We look forward to continuing to show up, listen, connect, and serve throughout Rochester. If you are interested in learning more about our community outreach efforts or would like to get involved, please email me at arelis@bccr.org.

~

Seguimos comprometidos a escuchar, servir y trabajar unidos por la salud de nuestra gente.

¿Quieres saber más o involucrarte?

Escríbeme a arelis@bccr.org. ¡Nos encantaría contar contigo!

Poder 97.1 Radio Interview

ROC All In Community Health Partnership Convened by Urban League of Rochester – Community Canvassing

Our Partnership with RIT/NTID, continued from page 11

Sally S.

to make breast health information available and accessible to young Deaf people as well as to the general Deaf population. I'm also grateful for the Coalition's partnership with Liz's work to make available her work to the Rochester Deaf community."

The work is already informing meaningful additions to the Coalition's website, with a larger vision of creating ASL videos, visual narratives, and accessible breast health resources that can be shared well beyond this project.

Jodie reflected on the experience as well: "Being part of this project was a meaningful experience that connected me with an inspiring community dedicated to making a difference. It gave me the opportunity to contribute to something greater than myself while learning from and supporting others."

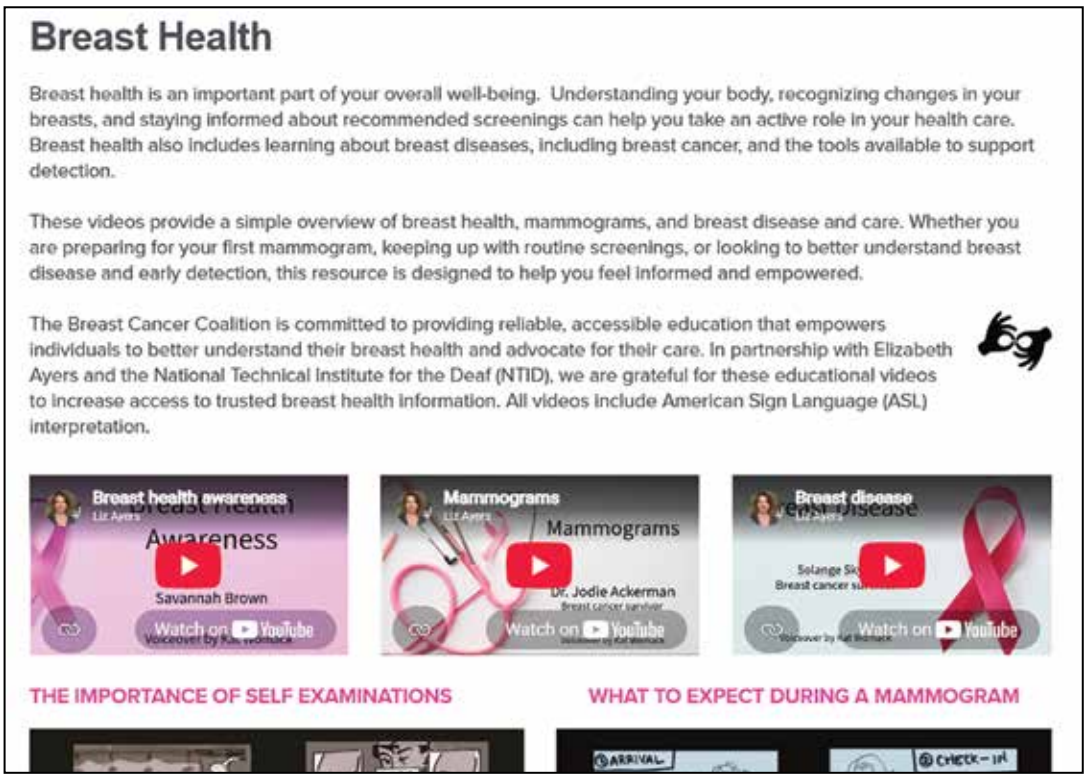
Ultimately, we want every person affected by breast or gynecologic cancer to know that the Coalition is a resource for them. Reaching that goal requires us to listen, learn, and be willing to change how we deliver information and services.

This collaboration reflects the Coalition's commitment to our Education Pillar, which is dedicated to providing accurate, evidence-based information that empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health. We believe education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of language, culture, or communication needs. By partnering with RIT/NTID and learning directly from Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members, we are expanding how breast health information is shared

Jodie A.

and ensuring that educational resources are meaningful, inclusive, and accessible. Through initiatives like this, we continue working toward a future where every person has the knowledge and tools they need to advocate for their own health and well-being.

We are grateful to Liz, the RIT team, the ASL interpreters who have supported this work, and especially the Deaf community members who have shared their experiences and expertise. Their voices are not simply informing this project – they are helping us become a more accessible Coalition.



Scan the QR code to visit bccr.org/education/

Screenshot of the Breast Cancer Coalition website displaying information and educational resources.

WOMEN FOR wineSense

A heartfelt thank you to **Women for WineSense** for including the Breast Cancer Coalition in ***A Tour of Italia*** and for their generous support of our mission! This wonderful event raised **$783** to support individuals impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers. We are so grateful to the Women for WineSense community and everyone who participated, donated, and helped make the event a success. Your generosity helps us continue providing support, education, and resources for participants.

A huge thank you to **Pat Cole, Karenne Roberts, and the LPGA Amateur Golf Association - Rochester Region, NY Chapter** for their incredible support of the Coalition! Their ***2nd Annual PINK Golf Tournament***, held at FarView Golf Club on June 28, raised an amazing **$11,004** to support individuals and families impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers – doubling what they raised at their inaugural tournament last year! We are so grateful to Pat, Karenne, the tournament participants, sponsors, and everyone who helped make this event such a success.

We are grateful to **Connor McCann**, who turned his ***senior honors project*** into an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals affected by breast cancer! As a senior undergraduate student studying Physical Education at SUNY Cortland, Connor created a 5K focused on promoting physical activity, bringing his community together, and supporting those impacted by breast

cancer. Connor's 5K raised **$1,245.48**, which he generously donated to the Coalition. Thank you, Connor, and to everyone who participated and supported the 5K! We are honored to be the recipient of your generosity.

We are incredibly grateful to **Carmel O'Kane**, Treasurer of the Webster-Fairport Elks, for her extraordinary generosity and thoughtfulness. Her peers at the **Webster-Fairport Elks** raised funds to contribute to Carmel on her personal journey, however, she chose to donate the entire **$4,000** to the Breast Cancer Coalition so that it could help others in our community facing breast and gynecologic cancers. We are honored to receive your gift and grateful for your commitment to making sure others have support when they need it most.

We are incredibly grateful to **Kimberly Reap, Laurie Scheg, and all of the Celebration of Dance for Breast Cancer** participants for your generous gift to the Coalition through your annual ***Celebration of Dance for Breast Cancer fundraiser***, held at Willink Middle School in Webster Central Schools. Congratulations on raising an amazing **$2,074**! We are truly appreciative of your continued support and commitment to our mission. Because of caring community members like you, we can provide vital services free of charge to individuals impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers. Thank you for helping us make a difference in the lives of those in our community.

A big thank you to the **West Irondequoit CSD, Mrs. Jennifer Gottfried, the students, and their families** for their support of the Breast Cancer Coalition. Through their ***2nd Flapjack Fundraiser at Applebee's***, they raised funds and donated to five organizations. The Coalition was the recipient of **$346**. Thank you for helping us continue to support those affected by breast and gynecologic cancers.

We are extremely grateful to the **Penfield Country Club Women's Association** for hosting their annual ***Pink Ribbon Rally golf tournament***! This year's event raised an amazing

Continued on page 27.

$12,000. A special thank-you goes to **Sue VanStrydonck and Nancy Reiser**, Event Co-Chairs, for organizing such an incredible golf tournament. Much gratitude to all participants, sponsors, volunteers, and everyone who helped make this tournament such a success.

A huge thank you to **RIT Athletics' Student-Athlete Advisory Committee** for giving back in such a powerful way through their ***"Bench Press 2 Beat Cancer"*** event! Students, faculty, and staff came together for this inspiring fundraiser, with sponsors pledging donations based on the number of bench press repetitions completed. Together, they raised **$2,371** for the Breast Cancer Coalition! A special thank you to **Ryan Kelly**, Head Strength and Conditioning Coach, for coordinating this incredible event alongside the **Student-Athlete Advisory Committee**. We are grateful to everyone who participated, sponsored, and supported this effort. Your teamwork, energy, and generosity are making a meaningful difference for individuals impacted by breast and gynecologic cancers.

We are grateful to **Genesee Regional Bank** for hosting a ***donation day*** in support of the Breast Cancer Coalition and generously contributing **$306** to our mission! Every act of generosity makes a difference, and we truly appreciate your partnership and support.

A heartfelt thank you to **LeChase** and the ***EmpowerHER Expo*** for your incredible generosity and for raising **$2,030** in support of the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester! We are grateful to everyone who supported the EmpowerHER Expo and helped turn this event into an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those in our community.

We are incredibly moved and deeply grateful for the generous donation of **$40,000** from our amazing friends at **VanBortel Subaru**! This incredible gift comes courtesy of the annual ***Subaru Share the Love campaign***. These funds go directly toward fueling our mission and making a difference right here in our community.

We want to extend a special, heartfelt thank you to **Kitty VanBortel**. Kitty's unwavering partnership, leadership, and dedication over the years means the world to us. She doesn't just run a business, she truly embodies what it means to build a stronger, more compassionate community. Thank you, Kitty, and the entire VanBortel Subaru team, for always choosing to *Share the Love*!

YOU can make a difference!

Each year, Fundraising Friends support the Coalition by hosting fundraisers in their communities.

Have an idea or a question? Contact Tori at (585) 473-8177 or tori@bccr.org to talk today!

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE for neighbors diagnosed with breast and gynecologic cancers!

Thank you so much for your continued support!

Thank You Donors

We are truly amazed at the many ways our generous donors support our work at the Coalition.

Some host fundraisers among their peers on social media or in person; others donate directly through their payroll with the help of an employer and/or the United Way. And there are those who respond to our annual fund campaigns, honor a loved one with an honorary or memorial gift, or simply return the donation envelope enclosed in this newsletter.

We are grateful to all donors for their valuable contributions and their commitment to our mission. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this list. We apologize for any errors. Please join us in thanking the following individuals, companies, and organizations for their contributions between **April 1 - June 30, 2026.**

IN HONOR OF

Stephanie
Steve Cohen

Holly Anderson
Jennifer Ulrich ✱ !

Wendy Bachhuber
Sally Zelonis

Melisande Bianchi
Susan Nicolais !

Michele Chantra
Julie & John Chantra !
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Anne Virgil
Linda Wilcox

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A Different Point of View
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Big Oak Driving Range
Bill Gray's Restaurants
Bjs Restaurant & Brewhouse
Black & Blue
Buffalo Sabres
Champion Hills Country Club
Cheesy Eddies
Chico's
Chipotle Mexican Grill
Clean Cheats Fitness Foods
Continental School of Beauty
Country Club Liquor Mart
Eagle Cleaners
Galleas Florist & Greenhouse
Gates Keystone Club
Genesee Brewing Company
Greystone Golf Course
Hart Agency
Hedonist Chocolates and Ice Cream
Hoffend's Discount Liquor
Iron Smoke
Izzo Golf
Landmark Family Restaurant
Lima Country Club
Lisa Liquor Barn
McArdle's Restaurant
Memorial Art Gallery
Midvale Country Club
NY Beer Project
NY Brew Company
Pet Supplies Plus
Pinnacle Hill Chiro
Pittsford Farm & Dairy
Pittsford Pub & Grille
Powers Farm Market
Red Wings
ROC Paper Straw
Rochester Amerks
Rosey's Italian Cafe
SARTI Spritz
Savoia Pastry Shoppe
Seabreeze Amusement Park
Seneca Park Zoo
Shadow Lake Golf Course
Sole Mates
Southern Wine & Spirits
The Bird House
The Garden Factory
Top Dollar Gold and Silver
VanPutte
Wright Wisner
Zweigles

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Jeanne Byrnes
Troy & Colleen Dupuis
Deb Eberhardt
John Eberhardt
Sam & Jeanne Feldman
Lee Gibson
Melinda Goldberg
Judy Johnson
Linda MacKenzie
Lisa Martin
Jennifer McCabe
Jeanne McElhinney
Dr. Peter Mulbury
Ellen Muto
Ed Nelson
Marty Nott
Doug Phelps
Bernadette Rizzo
Brad and Dawn Russell
Patty Seeberg
Julie Shaw
Carol Sherbinski
Susie Smith
Lola Thompson
Lucy Thompson
Bruce & Debbie Treat
Robin & Bob Vavrina
Carolyn and Carl Yaekel

✻ **President's Circle**
The Coalition recognizes individuals who have made leadership level annual fund or United Way gifts of $1,000 or more in the calendar year through the President's Circle.

♥ **Coalition GEMs** are a special group of dedicated supporters who help the Coalition throughout the year by making a monthly gift. Monthly gifts offer a steady and cost-effective source of income.

❗ **Coalition Loyal** are individuals who make an annual fund or United Way gift – of any amount – for two or more consecutive years as part of our Coalition Loyal Giving Society.

Meet Amal: Giving Back Through Purposeful Work

By Amal Aweis, Finance Coordinator

Amal Aweis

Hello, my name is Amal Aweis, and I joined the Breast Cancer Coalition back in April 2026 as the Finance Coordinator. It is an honor and a privilege to be part of such a devoted, caring and dedicated team – one that touches so many lives every day.

Rochester has truly become home for me. I've lived here for more than half of my life. It's where I earned my degree in accounting, got married and raised my children. So, when I think about being a part of an organization that gives back to the community I call home, it makes this opportunity especially meaningful to me, because this community has given so much to me and my family. Being able to give back is something I value deeply and enjoy most.

I have been working in the nonprofit field throughout my entire career since 2007. One of the things I love most about nonprofit work is knowing that what we do can make a real difference in someone's life. It is more than just a job for me; it is a way of giving back and being a part of something bigger than myself. It also gives me the opportunity to use my experience and skills to support organizations that affect a meaningful difference in people's lives.

In my role here, I help maintain accurate and up-to-date financial records. I am committed to supporting the organization's financial integrity, accountability and transparency so that we can continue to fulfill our mission and serve our community effectively. So, seeing how passionate and compassionate everyone is about the work we do and the people we serve here … I'm grateful and excited to continue learning, growing and contributing to the amazing work being done here at the Breast Cancer Coalition.

Catch Up on a Year of Learning

By Deb Bishop, Director of Communications

Whether you missed a presentation or want to revisit a topic that resonated with you, our growing library of educational webinars is available whenever it's convenient for you.

Throughout the year, experts share valuable information. These free educational programs are designed to help you stay informed, empowered, and connected to trusted resources. Scan the QR code or visit bccr.org/webinar-library.

Exploring Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy in Cancer Care
By Rob Horowitz, MD

Spotting Pseudo-Science in Healthcare Headlines
By Gary Schwitzer

Finding and Accessing Clinical Trials
By Rachael B. Turner MD, PhD, Ajay Dhakal, MBBS, and Phyllis Jackson, RN

Everyday Home Exposures and Cancer
By Katrina Korfmacher, PhD and Becca Lauzon, PhD

From Healing to Pleasure: Reclaiming Sexual Wellness & Body Compassion After Cancer
By Pebble Kranz, MD

Cancer Genetics: What We Do and Don't Know
By Kim Provenzano, NP

Dental Health During and After Cancer Treatment
By Cynthia Kuang, DDS, RN

The Art and Science of Anti-Cancer Cooking
By Iluminada Vilca, MSHP, BSND and Isaac Harris, PhD

Rob Horowitz, MD

Gary Schwitzer

Rachael Turner MD, PhD

Ajay Dhakal, MBBS

Phyllis Jackson, RN

Katrina Korfmacher, PhD

Becca Lauzon, PhD

Pebble Kranz, MD

Kim Provenzano, NP

Cynthia Kuang, DDS, RN

Iluminada Vilca, MSHP, BSND

Isaac Harris, PhD

Board of Directors Spotlight: Catherine Thomas

By Catherine Thomas, MS, Coalition Board Member

Catherine Thomas, MS

How did you first connect with the Coalition?
I first connected with the Coalition during my employment at Wilmot Cancer Center as the Director of Community Outreach and volunteer coordinator.

What has inspired you to stay with us?
I have been most impressed with the growth of integrating and educating the community about an organization that is rich in resources but has not been shared within the marginalized communities as broadly as it could or should have been historically, in my humble opinion, into a much-needed resource that has typically not served many people of color. The leadership has been very intentional about integrating and diversifying the board to serve the collective community of Rochester, which is a huge part of my "why" to continue to serve on the Board.

What does serving on the Board mean to you?
Serving on the Coalition Board has provided me with a way to use my voice of reason and influence within my community to embrace my lived experience as a breast cancer survivor. Oftentimes, we as people of color tend to isolate after being diagnosed for many reasons. Being on the Board affords me an opportunity to uplift and encourage other women and men who are on the journey to reach out and embrace the supports that are available. It also offers reassurance that you are not alone.

Are there certain accomplishments you and the Board have made that are especially meaningful for you?
Since coming on the Board in 2024, I was appointed as the Governance Chair. We have done an amazing job reviewing our bylaws. We have collaborated in many areas as we have revised, reviewed, and updated policies that reflect the organization and the community. Our primary goal is to provide a blueprint for the organization that is inclusive, diverse, and represents the voice of the overall collective communities that we serve. We share and dialogue consistently to ensure that we are aligning with our Strategic Plan and other committees.

How do you feel about the future of the Coalition?
I feel that the Coalition is on track for growth that represents the community. I have seen a significant change in the overall culture of the organization. We are much more visible in the community. It is very refreshing when people in the community say, "Oh, I didn't know." That alone affirms that we are on track to expand community awareness.

What's ahead for you?
My goal is to continue to work with the Coalition in any capacity that I can, while I can, to help spread the word about all the great work and resources available. I also plan to focus on Board engagement, what it means and how we can impact the organization in a more meaningful way. As the saying goes, "Many hands make light work." There's a lot of work to be done.

BREAST CANCER COALITION TEAM

STAFF:

Christina Thompson, Executive Director

Arelis Aponte, Bilingual Programs and Community Outreach Coordinator

Amal Aweis, Finance Coordinator

Deb Bishop, Director of Communications

Jennifer Buonomo, Major Gifts Officer

Silvia Gambacorta-Hoffman, Research Administrator

Lisa Martin, Special Events Coordinator

Yvonne Paul, Program Administrator

Tori Toliver Powers, Grants and Community Liaison

Andrea Reynolds, Program Assistant

Taneisha Rodgers, Office Coordinator

Rachel Rosen Simpson, Program Manager

Helana Shumway, Public Relations Coordinator

Meredith Utman, Director of Special Events

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Colleen Molina
Anthony Selvaggio
Catherine Thomas
Patricia Cataldi, Chair Emeritus
Phyllis Connelly, Chair Emeritus
Christina Thompson, President

Breast Cancer Coalition

Mission Statement

To cultivate community among those affected by breast or gynecologic cancers; to empower informed decision-making through education, compassionate support, and advocacy; and to advance regional research with an ultimate goal to eradicate breast and gynecologic cancers.

To keep up to date on all Coalition happenings, follow us on social media:

Find us online: bccr.org

Breast Cancer COALITION
Est. 1998
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Rochester, New York 14607

If you prefer to receive *Voices of the Ribbon* via email please let us know.

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Lives Touched, Lives *Celebrated*

October 28, 2026, 7:00PM at the Coalition

Join us as we honor and pay tribute to those who have been touched by a diagnosis of breast or gynecologic cancer.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Pink&Teal CHALLENGE

presented by Van Bortel SUBARU Ford CHEVROLET

May 8, 2027
Monroe Community College

Early bird registration December 1