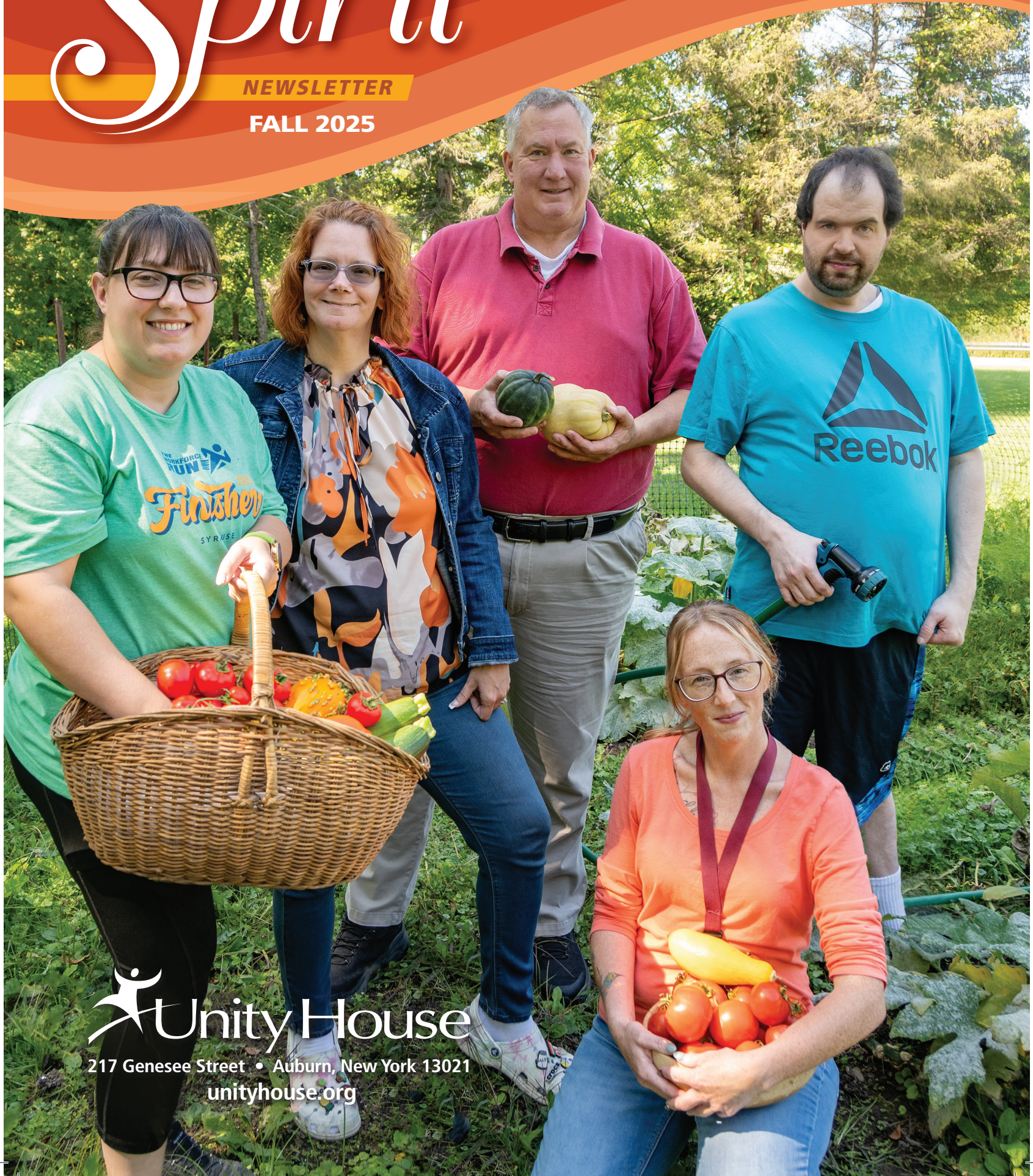


Spirit

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2025



 **Unity House**

217 Genesee Street • Auburn, New York 13021

unityhouse.org



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Unity House
217 Genesee Street
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Editor

Kelly D. Buck
Director of Marketing & Development
315.253.6227 x 313
kelly.buck@unityhouse.org

Writers & Photographers

Nicole Hube
Chris Iven

To be added to the Spirit e-mail list or to
opt-out, please call 315.253.6227 x 358 or
e-mail nicole.hube@unityhouse.org.
Learn more about Unity House's services
and how you can support Unity House
at www.unityhouse.org.

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Unity House's mission: to empower
and enrich the lives of people in recovery,
coping with a mental illness, and/or
diagnosed with a developmental disability.
This is accomplished by offering services
and supports in an inclusive, person-
centered environment.

CEO'S PERSPECTIVE *A Legacy of Respect*

I grew up on Long Island. I was just 11 in 1972
when I saw Geraldo Rivera's exposé on the
Willowbrook State School for developmentally
disabled children on nearby Staten Island. This
state-funded institution was worse than a dog
kennel: no rehabilitation, 50-to-one staff ratios,
disgusting conditions.

I was appalled. It changed me.

From then on, I had a calling. I knew that people
with disabilities were humans worthy of respect,
support and care. When I later learned that there was a movement to de-institutionalize
people, to integrate them into the community and help them live their best lives, I
wanted to be part of it. I made it my career.

Today, as I look back on my nearly 40 years in this field - 30 years at Unity House,
including 16 years as CEO - I'm proud to say that it was everything I had hoped it would
be. I've built long-lasting relationships with the people we support. I've watched them
learn, grow and thrive. I've watched our organization grow from supporting a few
dozen residents to empowering nearly 800 people each year.

This work has always been my passion. As CEO, I got to dream big, knowing that Unity
House had a whole family of staff, volunteers and donors ready to make it happen.
That's you! And you did make it happen. How lucky am I?

This work has been the best gift a person could ask for.

Thank you.



Liz Smith
Chief Executive Officer



Scan the QR code
to see a video of Liz
sharing reflections on
her career.

On the cover: North Street Road IRA staff members Krystal Whitehead, Nicole Longway,
and Angela Bianco join Unity House board member Chris Sloan and resident Anthony
in the home's new vegetable garden. Together, they showcase their first harvest of squash,
tomatoes, and zucchini. Read more on page 6.

A New "NEW LIFE"



Thanks to Unity House donors and a new state grant, seven people with disabilities will soon get to live in a new, fully accessible home.

In August, New York State awarded a \$647,000 Health Care Facility Transformation Program IV grant to purchase land and build a new group home in Cayuga County. Donations from Unity House supporters will cover remaining expenses, estimated at about \$100,000.

The residents currently live in a former farmhouse that, in 1993, Unity House turned into its first IRA (individualized residential alternative). Costs to maintain the IRA, known as "New Life," have steadily increased over the years. More importantly, the two-story home requires residents to climb stairs, which becomes more difficult and dangerous as residents age.

"New Life II" will be built as a single floor home, with accessible features throughout. That means residents won't have to move away as their mobility decreases with age, said Amy Santobianco, director of PWDD residential services.

"I'm thrilled about this and am so happy for the residents," Amy said. In the new home, residents will "age in place with dignity, surrounded by people they care about, in a setting that supports their changing needs."

By giving residents more autonomy, the new home will also ease the physical strain on staff members, who help residents move about and take care of themselves.

For information on contributing to the construction of New Life II, contact
Chris at chris.iven@unityhouse.org
or 315-252-6227 ext. 360.

EMPLOYEES OF THE QUARTER

We couldn't deliver on our mission without our amazing employees. Employees of the Quarter are nominated by their peers. Each breathes life into Unity House's core values: honesty, integrity, and respect. Congratulations to our most recent honorees:

**Support Staff
of Q-3 2025:**



MEGHAN EDDY
Assistant Program Manager,
Self Direction, Auburn

"Meghan goes above and beyond to assist the Self Direction program. She consistently takes on extra tasks, and was a huge asset in helping me transition when I first started as Program Manager. Meghan advocates for the people we support and is always willing to help in any way possible. She also completes all work ahead of when it's due."

-Danielle Fisk, Program Manager

**Direct Support Professional
of Q-3 2025:**



BRITTANY RANDOLPH
Senior Counselor, Hector
Street IRA, Ithaca

"It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Brittany. She is respectful and responsible. Her compassion and professionalism are unparalleled. She is always 15 minutes early to her shift, in a good mood, and more than happy to help with any task that may require her assistance. Brittany has helped me and trained me in every aspect of being the best DSP I can possibly be."

-William Ingraham,
Residence Counselor

JOIN US IN

Celebrating Liz

After 30 years of leadership, guidance, and friendship, Chief Executive Officer Liz Smith is retiring at year's end. We will miss her, and we're excited to celebrate all she has given to Unity House and our community.

**Please join us for a retirement
open house in Liz's honor:**

**Thursday, December 11
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.**

**Cake and remarks at 2:30 p.m.
West Middle School Community Room
217 Genesee St., Auburn**

Come share your memories and well wishes as we send Liz off into this new chapter with the gratitude she deserves.

Kindly email ronaele.king@unityhouse.org
to let us know if you'll be attending

— we'd love to see you there!

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE: *Celebrating Our Staff*

We're always grateful for our 360+ amazing employees. Every September, we step it up, with a full month of special activities aimed at valuing them and keeping our team thriving.

September features Direct Support Professional Appreciation Week: our chance to say a heartfelt "thank you" to the caregivers who make a difference every day. This year, our 200+ DSPs were treated to:

- Wellness perks, such as 20-minute professional chair massages
- Healthy snack packs, plus sweet deliveries from local bakeries
- Gifts. Every DSP received a deep tissue massaging Theragun and Bluetooth tracking tags.



Congratulations to the overall winning Unity Games team, Alpha Squad (Auburn Day Hab staff members Ryan VanDoren, Megan Baran, Jill Chayka and Tim Mitchell).

We also proudly celebrated the employment milestones of 56 dedicated Unity House staff members. Employees marking 3, 5, 10, 20, and 30 years of service were honored by their colleagues, recognized for their commitment, and presented with gifts of appreciation.

This year's Unity Games brought a month-long lineup of team challenges, including a scavenger hunt, dress-up days, and talent show. Seventy-six staff members competed for medals and points, while co-workers cheered each other on.

Unity Games culminated with an event September 30 at Fillmore Glen State Park in Moravia. Staff enjoyed lunch and rooted for their peers in a live game of Family Feud. Trophies and medals were awarded, and champions proudly celebrated their victories.

Giving THROUGH **DAFs**



Mary and Scott Simpson support Unity House by making regularly scheduled gifts through their donor-advised fund

Donor-advised funds have been growing in popularity lately. DAFs are a tax-advantageous way to support your favorite charitable organizations, and they're easy to set up.

Mary Simpson, Unity House's Outreach Coordinator, recently made the switch. For several years, Mary donated to Unity House through regular payroll contributions. When her husband, Scott, retired from the military last year, they met with their financial advisor and set up their own DAF to support their chosen charities.

"Seeing the good work Unity House does first-hand made it easy for me to maintain my commitment in the future," Mary said. "A DAF is the way to do it. My money goes to a good community cause instead of taxes. It's a no-brainer."

It's important to Mary and Scott that their donations stay local.

"We don't want the charitable organizations that are near and dear to our hearts to become secondary," continued Mary. "We are financially healthy now, and we can be more generous. It's easy to see that our donations are well-needed and well-utilized at Unity House."

Interested in exploring how a donor-advised fund can benefit you? Please contact your financial advisor or Chief Advancement Officer Chris Iven at 315-253-6227 ext. 360 or chris.iven@unityhouse.org.

Golf for a good cause

Beardsley Architects + Engineers hosted their 21st annual charity golf tournament in August at Highland Park Golf Course in Auburn. For the third consecutive year, Unity House was honored as the tournament's beneficiary.

Twenty foursomes competed across 18 holes, followed by dinner and an awards ceremony. Thanks to the generosity of participants, sponsors, and volunteers, the event raised \$12,700 to support Unity House's mission of empowering people with disabilities.

Unity House extends its sincere gratitude to Beardsley Architects + Engineers, the 18 hole sponsors, the golfers, and the following tournament sponsors for making the day possible:

Beardsley Architects + Engineers	M.C. Townsend Construction
Boyle & Anderson, PC	NUCOR Steel Auburn, Inc.
Bush Crane, Inc.	Plan & Print Systems, Inc.
Jacobs Press, Inc.	Scottie's Auto Detailing
James P. Reagan Agency	



The winning team of Ryan Benedict, Caddy Catalano, Joe Urban, and Carl Black came in at 13 under par (58).



Nick Shrimpton (far right) won the putting contest. Out of the four finalists, he was closest to the hole on the 50-foot putt.

It's a **FATHER & DAUGHTER** Thing



Dale and Gale Campbell are two peas in a pod. Even though she lives in her own apartment in Ithaca, Gale still stays with her dad in Lansing three nights a week. The pair wouldn't have it any other way.

Diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability at 10, Gale attended Lansing schools and then TST BOCES until she graduated at age 21 in 2001. Like most young people, she wanted to live more independently, and in 1998, moved into an Ithaca group home managed by Homes, Inc. Unity House soon took over the home's operations, and Gale has lived with us ever since.

Over the years, Gale has held a number of jobs and volunteer roles, including at Borg Warner, NYSEG, Bill Cooke Cadillac, and the Greater Ithaca Activities Center.

Dale lives in Florida half of the year, and appreciates that Gale gets what she needs:

"Knowing she's well cared for makes life easier for all of us," he said. "We value what Gale gets out of her time with Unity House."

"My gifts two or three times a year help Unity House continue their operations and express my appreciation for all they do for Gale," Dale said. "I hope others will make donations, too."

"We are very appreciative of what Unity House does for her, and it's important to support their work."

PROGRAMS THAT *Empower*



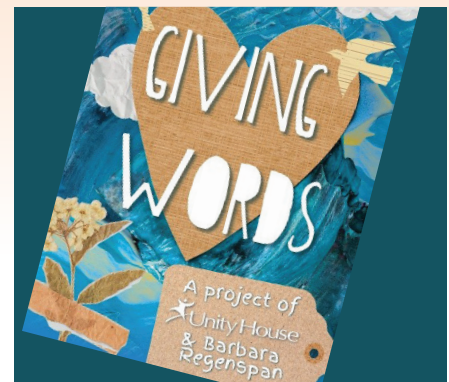
A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

Earlier this year, North Street Road IRA staff members Angela Bianco and Krystal Whitehead dreamed up a vegetable garden as part of their NADSP DSP-III credentialing project. With support from Unity House board member Chris Sloan, contract staff Chip Cheney, CountryMax, Home Depot, Dickman Farms, and many helping hands, that dream was realized. Residents tended the garden and then enjoyed their very first harvest of squash, tomatoes, green beans, and eggplant — grown right in their own yard. We're so grateful to everyone who made it possible, and we look forward to many more years of fresh veggies.

POETRY FROM THE HEART

Ithaca Day Hab participants have created a new poetry book, *Giving Words*.

Written in weekly workshops with local poet and former Colgate University professor Barbara Regenspan, the collection showcases participants' imagination, humor, and heartfelt memories. Each session began with the reading of a published poem for inspiration, sparking conversations that led to original works written largely in participants' own words. Special thanks to Barbara and Gnomom Copy in Ithaca for helping bring this project to life. To view the book, visit our Publications page by hovering over the 'Stories' tab at unityhouse.org.



"DRIVERS, START YOUR ENGINES!"

North Street Road IRA resident Herman, a lifelong racing fan, recently shared that he had always wanted to see a NASCAR race. In August, Chip made that wish come true, taking Herman to Watkins Glen for the 2025 NASCAR Cup Series Go Bowling at The Glen. The two had a fantastic time, and thanks to financial support from our friends, we're proud to help make one of our residents' dreams a reality. Herman especially enjoyed cheering on his favorite driver, Kyle Larson, in the No. 5 car.

NEW WHEELS FOR UES

Transportation is one of the biggest barriers that the people we support face. Thanks to grants totaling \$18,125 received from four CNY foundations, Unity Employment Services now has a new vehicle. UES recently purchased a 2022 Ford EcoSport SUV that is already providing dependable, safe transportation for our folks to and from their jobs, interviews, volunteer assignments, and more. We've hired a part-time driver, and a ride schedule is being developed. Special thanks to the French, Metcalf, and Columbian Foundations of Auburn, and the Polisseni Foundation in Rochester for making this possible.



SUMMER MEMORIES AT THE FAIR

This year, The Great New York State Fair partnered with Unity House to provide another meaningful opportunity for summer fun — at no cost — for people with disabilities. Thanks to this partnership, many of our residents were able to enjoy the fair. Our folks who live at South Street, Oak Drive, East Street, Hector Street, New Life, and North Street Road were grateful for this generous support and the chance to create lasting memories.

ROBERT'S *Recipe* FOR SUCCESS

After leaving an unfulfilling job, Robert Youngs, 38, was unsure of where he would land next. Diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, he had long struggled with communication. It was hard to connect with coworkers — and even harder to ask for help.

That help came through Unity Employment Services (UES). Their 12-week food service training program marked a turning point for Robert and sparked his interest in cooking. The course covered kitchen safety, knife handling, food prep, and sanitization.

"Robert did very well memorizing facts like temperature and safety charts," said employment specialist Anthony Ortiz. "He was a little less comfortable with the physical mechanics. In the beginning, he was very stiff."

With help from UES staff, Robert gained experience at the Auburn Holiday Inn, learning to use a griddle, fryer, waffle iron, and various knives. Still, inclusive employment was hard to come by. Despite having spent 10 years in the maintenance department at *The Citizen* newspaper, many employers required experience Robert didn't have.

Anthony and Vocational Services Coordinator Steven Hurst worked with him to update his resume and practice mock interviews. That helped Robert secure a paid internship at Mamma Maria New York Pizzeria in Auburn. Robert's subsidized wages are supported through OPWDD while he learns on the job. He now washes dishes, measures exact portions, bags frozen ingredients, and keeps prep stations clean — essential roles in a fast-paced kitchen.

"I love it here. Everyone is kind to me," Robert said. "I'm hoping to learn more about rolling dough and mixing pizza sauce."

Anthony continues to provide on-site coaching to support Robert's growth.

"I'm proud of the confidence and level of autonomy he displays while working. Everyone deserves a fair shot to live the life they deserve."



Leadership Promotion

Ashley Manning has been promoted to Director of Mental Health Residential Services.

Ashley previously served for two years as Unity House's assistant director of PWDD residential services.

She also brings a wealth of experience from her prior roles at Glove House, St. Joseph's Hospital, Hillside Family of Agencies, CAP Cayuga/Seneca, and the William George Agency for Children's Services. She holds a master's degree in human services from Capella University and a bachelor's degree in community and human services from Empire State University.

Congratulations, Ashley! We look forward to your leadership in this new role.

Year-End Charitable Giving

With 2025 wrapping up, now is a good time to consider tax advantages. If you have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) and are at least 70½ years old, a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a powerful way to support the nonprofits you love. With a QCD, your gift goes directly from your IRA to Unity House — tax-free. You can avoid paying taxes on up to \$100,000 in income, and your gift also counts toward your required minimum distribution (RMD). Simply obtain the form from your IRA custodian's website and list Unity House of Cayuga County, Inc. as the recipient.

Contact Chris at 315-253-6227 ext. 360 or email chris.iven@unityhouse.org for assistance.



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Your Fall 2025
Spirit
newsletter is here!

Unity House PRESENTS:

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

PROVIDE FOR
YOUR FAMILY

PROTECT YOUR
ASSETS

SUPPORT YOUR
CHARITIES

Ensure that your values live on for generations to come.

Please join us for an insightful discussion on what you need to know to leave a legacy and strengthen your community. You'll learn how easy it is to name a charity in your will or to add a charity as one of the beneficiaries of a savings account or insurance policy. You'll also learn about how you can maximize tax savings by using DAFs (donor-advised funds), trusts and gifts of stock. Our

two expert panelists will answer your questions and help you take practical steps toward making planned gifts.



Jan Lane, CAP
SENIOR PHILANTHROPIC ADVISOR AT THE
CENTRAL NEW YORK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

She leads the foundation's legacy planning program and has been supporting charitable planning for families and organizations since 2013.



Michael Antonacci, CFA
PARTNER AND ADVISOR AT RIALTO
WEALTH MANAGEMENT

He's also an attorney, with more than a decade of experience in investment advisory, estate, and tax planning.

Thursday, October 30

9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Carriage House Theater

at the Cayuga Museum of History and Art
203 Genesee Street, Auburn, NY

Registration is **FREE** and encouraged.

Email nicole.hube@unityhouse.org
or call **315-253-6227 ext. 358** to sign up.

Light breakfast will be served.