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HAPPY HANUKKAH

New Year to our friends

SHOP LOCAL: Now is the time to support our local community businesses.

BIG BUCK WINNER: See the results of the Democrat Big Buck Contest.

Local leaders convene at Business of Healthcare Forum

STORY AND PHOTO
BY DEREK KIRK

MONTICELLO — There is a lot to talk about when it comes to the many facets of healthcare within Sullivan County, including the more business-sided aspects. To tackle some of these topics, a panel of local leaders who are familiar with the healthcare sector recently gathered to answer questions from the community.

The Business of Healthcare Forum was jointly hosted by the Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce and the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development at the Kartrite Resort and Indoor Waterpark on December 13.

The seven panelists were introduced by the question-and-answer emcees and hosts of the healthcare highlight event - Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce President Jaime Schmeiser and Sullivan County Partnership President Marc Baez.

Sponsors of the event included New Hope Community, Inc., the Center for Discovery, Garnet Health, and Advanced DRI.

Those on the panel included Jerry Dunlevy, Vice-President of Opera-



Seven panelists participated in the Business of Healthcare Forum hosted by Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce and Sullivan County Partnership at the Kartrite Resort on December 13.

tions at Garnet Catskills, Ellenville Regional Hospital's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Ashima Butler, President & CEO Steven Kelly, and Director of Human Resources and Marketing Keith Edwards.

Also present were Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, Sullivan County Health and Human Services Commissioner John Liddle, and Chief Operating Officer of New Hope Community, Inc., Karen Russell.

Before answering any questions, each of the panelists fully introduced themselves and their various positions within the business aspect of the healthcare field that exists in the county.

The panel answers
Concerns regarding the

various aspects of healthcare in Sullivan County sparked a handful of questions that were recognized, discussed and answered by members of the panel. These inquiries included sentiments on the changes that the healthcare world has faced in recent years, who or what is driving the healthcare industry, the importance of local pharmacies, which demographics are being spotlighted, and the slipping perceptions of healthcare in Sullivan County.

The question-and-answer session was started by Sullivan County Partnership President Marc Baez, who said that there must be more dialogue between business and healthcare. Moving into the questions, Baez asked the panel what were the big-

gest recent changes in the healthcare field.

Vice-President of Operations at Garnet Catskills Jerry Dunlevy told the crowd that the future is starting to evolve for healthcare in Sullivan County after retelling a personal story of a patient who preferred the healthcare and treatment of Garnet's medical staff and facilities as compared to their own local medical services that were offered to them at a time of crisis.

Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther answered in turn, stating that mental health services and addiction aftercare are what the new focus should be. Gunther also announced her intent to sponsor a bill in the State

PLEASE SEE HEALTHCARE, 3A

Hu

Thieves rob Christmas

BY FRED STABBE

MONTICELLO — During Thanksgiving Day, thieves broke into the performance barn behind Episcopal Church in Monticello, stealing 10 pews at over \$2,000.

"Isn't that terrible?" Brown, a member of the church's Vestry, said.

While the antique pews were not being used for day services, Brown said the church planned on selling the pews on their own to raise funds for the church.

"Those pews were worth money that would have gone to the church," Brown said.

The performance barn, which sits behind the church, "is a beautiful side," Brown said.

What makes the barn even more heartwarming is all the good the church does for the community.

"Our struggling community creates two succe-

New neighbors

HEALTHCARE: Forum addresses industry topics and community concerns

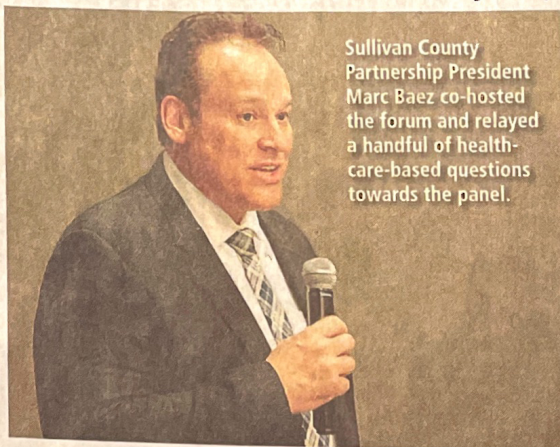
FROM FRONT PAGE

Assembly in the near future that would alter the legality of 'pill presses' within the region, aimed to help protect Sullivan County residents from deadly drugs, like fentanyl.

Sullivan County Health and Human Services Commissioner John Liddle said he is optimistic for the future of emergency mental healthcare. Liddle noted not only the work that's been completed alongside Dutchess and Ulster counties in the attempts to better the services provided, but also the connections and notations between the number 911 for physical medical emergencies, and 988, which is now registered nationally as the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The next question relayed by Baez was "who is driving healthcare decisions today and in the future, medical professions or insurers?"

Ellenville Regional Hospital President & CEO Steven Kelly said that the role of insurance is to spread risk, which is often being put back onto the patients. With this comes higher co-payments, deductibles, and premiums. He goes on to say that these are some of the driving deciders for many patients in



Sullivan County Partnership President Marc Baez co-hosted the forum and relayed a handful of healthcare-based questions towards the panel.

their journey to seek out care in the healthcare world.

"That is an area that needs to be looked at," Kelly said. "Particularly with the larger for-profit insurance companies that have been extraordinarily profitable."

The following question pertained to local pharmacies and their role in the healthcare process. Do they have a future considering insurance providers push for

online and direct mail alternatives?

Dunlevy said that family owned and local pharmacies are an extremely important part of rural health, but that they are not immune from what is happening with larger pharmacies and e-commerce.

He offered possible basic solutions in which local pharmacies could persist against the competition by

considering diversification or investing in new options for innovation.

"The national chains have really started to penetrate in terms of primary care," Dunlevy said. "I just think a cautionary tale with regard to e-commerce is if you look at Amazon Health...[which] is failing ... I don't know that e-commerce or the big box is always the best option."

Baez then asked a question regarding demographics. He inquired on how we can provide good healthcare to senior and elder citizens that will allow them to maintain their independence via living situations and transportation. He asked if there is a lack of this autonomy?

Kelly said that for seniors, there must be programs that will help them manage inflation, among other issues that affect the elderly community.

After opening up the floor to the crowd, one attendee inquired on what is currently being done to change the perception of Sullivan County's healthcare sector, stating

that some in need of medical services would either choose or recommend an outside medical institution rather than one in Sullivan County.

Panel members responded that the county needs to fight the downplaying of the skills, technology, and medical prowess of those institutions in Sullivan County, with negative self-talk and a defeatist attitude being major blockers of forming trust.

Sullivan struggles

One major issue that was nearly universally shared from each of the panelists

representing the various healthcare organizations was the ongoing struggle with finding and maintaining healthcare employees and staff all around the nation and the region.

Additionally, Sullivan County's struggle with a dense amount of drug use and over availability has contributed to the county's consistently low health ranking of 61 out of 62 in all of New York State.

It was reported that 15 percent of all deaths in Sullivan County in 2021 were attributed to the overdose epidemic.

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