

A Record 31 Graduate from Chamber Program

“A Community Is Like A Ship; Everyone Ought To Be Prepared To Take The helm” - Henrik Ibsen

Thirty-one rising stars are now poised to shine professionally and lead with impact, empathy and purpose. They are the recent graduates of Leadership Ulster, a nine-month program administered by the Ulster Chamber Foundation that creates confident and capable leaders at every level.

The Class of 2026, which graduated on June 9 at Novellas in New Paltz, was the largest in the 33-year history of the program formerly known as the Ulster Leadership Development Institute. The participants ranged in age from their 20s to their 50s and represented five counties and eight different business sectors.

Class President Michaela Roycroft called it an eye-opening experience, particularly as it relates to her own growth and how she learned to branch out and make the most of those interactions.

“I learned what it takes to be a part of the management track, and it’s a little different from the everyday work that we are used to,” said Roycroft, a social media marketing specialist at Ulster Savings Bank. “I found it valuable because I’m gaining the respect of my colleagues and forming a natural network for myself that I get to utilize throughout my life.”

“I now know 30 other people throughout Ulster County who are fellow professionals that I can rely on as well as all the panelists we heard from throughout the county. I can now call them and talk to them for mentorship. I can ask for advice.”

After the kick-off retreat last September at Diamond Mills Hotel, participants attended 19 bi-weekly sessions to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop skills to build empathy, communicate clearly, think strategically and enhance team collaboration.

Another way they learn is through interactive sessions with leaders in local government, business, banking, education, health care and the nonprofit sector. Some of this year’s presenters included author and motivational speaker Jay Riftenbary, Kingston Mayor Steve Noble, Rondout Savings Bank President and CEO Cheryl Bowers, People’s Place Executive

Director Christine Hein and Chamber President Ward Todd.

Jose Torres, the class vice president, said although he wasn’t quite sure of what to expect, as the program progressed, he saw its value through the connections he made and the ways it made him look at himself.

“Growing up in life, I was never the one to ask for help,” said Torres, the deputy district director for state Sen. Michelle Hinchey. “It was always instilled in me to figure it out for myself, but during this program, I realized that asking for help really isn’t a sign of weakness. It’s a sign of a good leader knowing when you need your team to help you become successful.”

Stacie Schoonmaker, the class co-vice president, added that the program presented new ways to view leadership.

“I think the key takeaway would be how important networking and collaboration is and how being a leader doesn’t necessarily mean you have to be the strongest. It means that you have to be the most vulnerable,” said Schoonmaker, a team lead at Hudson Valley Credit Union.

Schoonmaker said Leadership Ulster also helped her set career goals and showed her the value of networking. “It taught me a lot about myself personally and professionally and how important it is to lean into the empathy piece of things. You don’t have to be a hard person to be a good leader.”

Since 1993, 539 people have graduated from the program. Many Leadership Ulster alumni lead teams in their businesses, government jobs, nonprofit organizations and community associations.

This year’s graduates included:

Tarek Abu Zaid (Ellenville Regional Hospital), Daisy Aguirre (Gateway Hudson Valley), Julia Betts (Adams Fairacre Farms), Kristen Bielefeldt (The Arc Mid-Hudson), Madeline Boyd (M&T Bank), Cynthia Bruno (Hudson Valley Credit Union), Jo Ann Campise (The Arc Mid-Hudson), Diana Castro (Brads Barns & Gazebos), Alycia Cates (Hudson Valley Credit Union), Suzanne Chadwick



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Ulster Chamber Foundation Executive Director Su Marcy said what really stands out about the class is how everyone was “all in” from the start of the retreat.

“They were eager to learn and wanted more than just surface answers,” said Marcy, one of the class facilitators. “They really wanted to

know the why’s, how’s, and when’s to apply the new tools and skills they were learning throughout the cohort year. They were highly motivated and incorporated what they learned into their workplace and life situations immediately. They were willing to challenge the status quo and reflect on the ensuing discussions.”

The 2026 curriculum was intentionally designed to highlight leadership skills and create opportunities to practice skills building, with the goal of increasing participant confidence with these new skills. Other topics they focused on were public speaking, board roles and responsibilities, volunteerism, time management, networking and self-care.

Marcy added that participants conceived, planned and executed several class projects. That included raising \$5,500 for the Len Cane Memorial Scholarship Fund and coordinating service projects to benefit the Snowflake Festival, Broadway Bubble patrons and the Regional Food Bank.

The next Leadership Ulster class begins with an overnight retreat at the Soyuzivka-Ukrainian Heritage Center, 216 Foordmore Road in Kerhonkson, Sept. 14-15. To learn more about the program or enroll, go to ulsterchamberfoundation.org.

Celebrating Innovation

WMCHHealth HealthAlliance Hospital To Host August Mixer

HealthAlliance Hospital is one of the most technologically advanced community hospitals in New York State, according to its leaders. It has the kind of technology that exists at larger hospitals, and with its ongoing expansion of technology and services, it’s able to expand and enhance patient care.

Those are a few impressions that Elizabeth Walsh, director of community relations at HealthAlliance, hopes will translate loudly and clearly to the business community at the next Chamber Mixer on Aug. 5 from 5-7 p.m. The networking event will take place at the HealthAlliance auditorium in the administrative building at 75 Marys Ave., Kingston.

“Through a landmark partnership with Philips, more than \$60 million in advanced medical equipment and technology have been brought to this campus, ensuring patients throughout Ulster County have access to sophisticated, lifesaving care without having to leave the region,” Walsh said.

That includes innovations such as the da Vinci robotic surgical system, a groundbreaking advancement offering greater precision, shorter recovery times and improved outcomes for patients, she added. The system is being used in general surgery, urology, gynecology, thoracic surgery, surgical oncology and colorectal surgery.

Another source of pride is the Hologic 3D Mammography technology at the Kingston campus. The state-of-the-art technology enhances medical teams’ abilities to detect early signs of cancer, improving the regional standard for women’s health care and breast cancer diagnoses in Ulster County, Walsh said.

Many of the Philips health technologies found at HealthAlliance Hospital are the same systems used at

WMCHHealth’s Westchester Medical Center and other hospitals both nationally and globally that stand at the forefront of healthcare delivery, according to hospital officials.

On top of all that, great progress has been made at the Medical Village, the site of the former Kingston Hospital, which is being transformed into a “centralized hub” for outpatient health and wellness services.

Walsh noted that while the technology and upgrades are impressive, it’s the dedicated people who define HealthAlliance Hospital.

“Every day, within its walls, lives are saved, quality of life is restored and new lives begin,” she said. “The physicians, nurses, caregivers, technicians and support staff bring exceptional skill, compassion and commitment to the patients and families they serve.”

“The new hospital environment reflects that same patient-centered philosophy. Designed to create comfort, dignity and peace of mind, the hospital features private patient rooms and modern healing spaces focused on both clinical excellence and the overall patient experience,” she said.

The campus includes a new emergency room with dedicated behavioral health accommodations, a state-of-the-art cardiac catheterization lab, critical care unit, inpatient behavioral health unit and an enhanced family birth center — all supported by advanced imaging, laboratory, pharmacy and caregiver support services.

Walsh said the team at HealthAlliance is looking forward to welcoming Chamber members back for another Mixer



to update them on all the improvements and treat them to special tapas prepared by its executive chef as well as refreshing mocktails.

For more information on HealthAlliance Hospital, go to wmchealth.org or call (845) 331-3131.

Chamber Mixers are a great way to network and promote your business. Be sure to bring plenty of business cards. Mixers are open to Chamber Members 21 years of age and older. There is no charge for Chamber Members to attend but reservations are required. Call (845) 338-5100 or register online at www.UlsterChamber.org. Prospective Members interested in attending, please contact Jess Davis (845) 338-5100 x4 or Jess@UlsterChamber.org.

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Moon Landings

Two Ulster Eateries Illuminating Hudson Valley & Beyond

Once in a blue moon, an out-of-this-world idea grows into something so spectacular that it catches the planet, or, in this case, the state by storm.

Such is the case for two Ulster County-based businesses that were born five years ago out of that “what if” mentality. The mission was simple: Create something uniquely stupendous that people would salivate over it and wait in long lines to get it.

Moonburger, a plant-based burger drive-thru, got its start in Kingston, while Moonrise Bagels, known for its irresistible stuffed bagels, launched in Woodstock.

Both establishments hatched during the COVID-19 pandemic, and both have skyrocketed in popularity so much that they’ve each opened several locations, including the Big Apple.

Jeremy Robinson-Leon, owner of Moonburger, said his restaurant grew out of creating a “totally new, totally exciting burger stop” built on the history of America’s great burger joints, yet modern in every sense.

When it debuted in the fall of 2021, the public was moonstruck and the enthusiasm never ebbed, he noted.

“It feels like 100 years and five days since we started,” said the former PR professional from Manhattan. “The journey has been a wonderful whirlwind of many highs and many challenges—but always surrounded with the love and support of our communities in Kingston and Ulster County.

“I’m so grateful that Jess, Ward and the whole Chamber staff have been so supportive of us since the beginning,” Robinson-Leon added. “One of my very first calls to anyone in the business community was to Jess, and she was immediately welcoming to us. We’ve been blessed to have earned so much support from our community over the years.”

“Jess is one of the most thoughtful, selfless, community-minded people I’ve ever met in my career,” he said. “She just cares about people, businesses and employees, and she’s been such a powerful force for all those.”

Moonburger got such a buildup from the Ulster Chamber social media posts that motorists waited in long lines in the initial weeks to try the plant-based burger they had heard so much about.

Known for its plant-based smashburgers, tangy fries, cheese sauce, decadent shakes made from oat milk, and its new premium hand-breaded, zero-antibiotics chicken sandwich, Moonburger has grown into six additional stores in New Paltz, Poughkeepsie, Williamsburg, Brooklyn and two in Manhattan.

“We want to show the world what Ulster County has to offer,” Robinson-Leon said, hinting that more may be on the horizon. For now, it’s “day by day and one foot in front of the other,” he noted.

While also carrying a lunar moniker, Moonrise Bagels differs from Moonburger in that the star attraction is the hand-crafted bagel stuffed with everything under the sun (and moon).

Imagine a cheese pizza stuffed bagel or a pastrami Reuben

stuffed bagel. They also feature one stuffed with buffalo chicken and another with crispy bacon, scrambled eggs and American cheese.

“What started as a COVID accident in 2021 has turned into a successful bagel business with three locations, including Woodstock, Poughkeepsie and Manhattan,” said Jeremy Rhodes, who co-owns the business with his wife, Ali Chetkof Rhodes.

“We were making pizza for New Year’s Eve dinner (going into 2021) and preparing bagels for a big brunch the next day. We had too much pizza sauce left over and had the crazy idea to stuff a pizza inside the bagel. Pizza turned into other comfort foods we liked to eat.”

A star was born that night, and as word got out about the couple’s invention, Rhodes and Chetkof got busy selling them out of their apartment. From there, they introduced them at farmers’ markets and within six months, they landed at the Woodstock store at 68 Tinker St.

The Poughkeepsie store followed, and the couple later opened a pop-up in Midtown Kingston. Moonrise arrived in New York City’s Greenwich Village in 2025.

“We didn’t set out to start a business,” Rhodes said. “We created a new food people wanted, and we followed the momentum.”

“The support was pretty immediate once people tried the product,” she added. “There’s a real appreciation for good food here, and people were excited by something new. We feel really honored to be part of the Hudson Valley’s food ecosystem in a meaningful way.”

The owners of both food establishments laugh at their obvious similarities. Lunar-inspired food businesses based in Ulster County and run by guys named Jeremy (who happen to resemble each other) can sometimes lead to confusion, but Rhodes and Robinson-Leon blame it on the moon.

“It’s such a funny coincidence, and we’re all good friends,” Rhodes said.

“I’ll tell you what’s even more confusing,” added Robinson-Leon. “Our legal business name is Moonrise Hospitality. The moon is unbelievably special. It’s united us in so many ways.”



Jeremy Rhodes and Ali Chetkof Rhodes



Jeremy Robinson-Leon

Chetkof added that the city’s reception has been cosmic. “Bagels are having a moment right now, and we knew we wanted to be part of the action,” she said. “We were already getting attention nationally, but we wanted to make a bigger splash. We got an opportunity to open in Manhattan and found such a perfect location that we couldn’t say no.”

Like Robinson-Leon, the couple is grateful for the support of the Hudson Valley—the place where it all started. “We wouldn’t be anywhere without this community,” Chetkof said. “Growing up here, I always knew it was a special place, but running a business here gives that a whole new meaning.”

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Nominate a business, business person, or organization online @ www.UlsterChamber.org

For a nomination to be valid, the Nomination Form must be complete and submitted no later than 12 noon on Friday, July 24, 2026.

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@ WMCHealth HealthAlliance Hospital
75 Mary’s Avenue | Kingston, NY
There is no cost for Members and Prospective Members. Reservations are required.
Sponsor: Bank of Greene County

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More Info and Registration UlsterChamber.org
Questions (845) 338-5100

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Jewish Federation Marks 75 Years

Living Out Tikkun Olam In Ulster County

Did you know the oldest known surviving Jewish dwelling in North America is right here in Ulster County? That's just one of the more amazing facts about the Jewish community as the Jewish Federation of Ulster County marks 75 years.

Federation President Mark Grunblatt notes that Jews have lived happily in Ulster County since 1714, when Luis Moses Gomez built a house and mill in what is now Marlboro.

"Our roots run deep here," Grunblatt said. "Ulster County has welcomed waves of Jews through the centuries."

Grunblatt noted that Sephardi Jews escaped the Spanish Inquisition to the Caribbean, and their descendants moved north to New York and the Hudson Valley.

Thousands of Ashkenazi Jews expelled from Russia in the 1800s and 1900s landed at Ellis Island and moved here and farmed the rocky soil. Others created the Borscht Belt and World War II brought new waves of displaced Jews to America, and Ulster County embraced them.

"I am grateful for the warm welcome of Kingston and Ulster County to my religious community and am proud that our Federation has been able to give back to our neighbors through support for local organizations for 75 years and counting," he said.

The organization was originally established as the Kingston Jewish Community Council, Inc. The organization evolved in name and scope over time, becoming the Jewish Federation of Greater Kingston, Inc. on Feb. 9, 1979, and later the Jewish Federation of Ulster County, Inc. in December 1992.

Dr. Joseph Cohen was elected the first President of the Jewish Federation of Greater Kingston, making him one of the youngest individuals to lead a Federation.

In its early years, the Kingston Jewish Community Council operated a summer camp and recreation center off Hurley Mountain Road, serving as a vibrant gathering place for families. Over time, the Federation expanded into a broader humanitarian and community-building organization rooted in the core Jewish values of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) and Tzedakah (charity and social justice).

Several important initiatives grew from this mission, including Jewish Family Services (JFS), an independent nonprofit providing social work and mental health services to households of all faiths across Ulster County.

The Federation also received the historic Reher Bakery as a gift from the last of the bakers, Hymie Reher in 2004 and helped transform it into what is now—the Reher Center for Immigrant Culture and History in Kingston's historic Rondout. The Federation also played a meaningful role in global

humanitarian efforts, such as helping resettle Russian Jewish families fleeing persecution in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Additionally, it participated in support efforts connected to Operation Moses (1984–1985), the covert airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

Today, the Federation enriches the region through programs such as Israel Day celebrations, a reenactment of the Exodus, and performances like the Rehovot Youth Orchestra concert at the Strand Theatre.

Guided by the principle of Tikkun Olam, the Federation has long supported a wide range of nonprofit organizations, including Angel Food East, Circle of Friends for the Dying, Hudson Valley LGBTQ+ Community Center, Jewish Family Services, My Kingston Kids, PJ Library, People's Place, R.Y.A.N. House and the Ulster Immigrant Defense Network.

One of the Federation's signature initiatives, Fall for Art, has also directed funding and artistic contributions to numerous organizations since 1999. Fall for Art is a juried art show, sale and fundraiser that has supported Hudson Valley artists and community organizations for nearly 30 years.

Founded in 1996 through the vision of Judy Polinsky, Katharine L. McKenna and Barbara Cohen, the Federation calls the event a "celebration of creativity, compassion and community." This year's event is Nov. 7 to Nov. 13.

Today, Fall for Art operates as a virtual gallery, showcasing a wide range of artistic media, including ceramics, fiber, glass, jewelry, painting, photography and more. Artists receive 70 percent of sales, making it both a meaningful economic platform and a creative showcase.

"The event has helped emerging artists gain visibility



and provided collectors with direct access to regional talent," Grunblatt said. "At the same time, proceeds have supported numerous local nonprofits."

You also can find the Federation offering a host of other programs and initiatives, including scholarships for sleepaway camps, Israel summer programs and academic study in Israel.

The Federation also offers two publications—Kolenu: Our Voice (three times annually) and Kadima

(monthly online).

Meanwhile, the organization helps combat antisemitism through advocacy, education and support services. The Federation helps congregations with everything from energy audits to support for special programs to security reviews, video cameras and coordination with local and state police.

Grunblatt said for 75 years, the organization's volunteers have been the "heart and soul," and every generation has contributed.

"The staff these past 75 years has provided unwavering dedication, guidance and daily effort that have been instrumental in sustaining and growing the Federation's impact," he said.

Looking ahead, Grunblatt said he hopes the Federation returns to its charitable focus, supporting the Jewish tenets of tikkun olam (healing the world) and tzedakah (charity).

"It is our Federation's aim to help the Ulster County community support our friends and neighbors toward a better, safer and more charitable home for us all through giving our time, energy and resources to those in need and worthy local organizations," he said.

The Jewish Federation of Ulster County, located at 390 Aaron Court in Kingston, can be reached at (845) 338-8131 or ucjf.org.



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Ulster Chamber Vice President Jess Davis with Mixer Host & Sponsor Rondout Savings Bank President & CEO Cheryl Bowers.

Rondout Savings Bank
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Our Mixer Host & Sponsor Rondout Savings Bank President & CEO Cheryl Bowers (front center) and staff.



Evan Rothfuss (Rondout Savings Bank), Kristabelle McDermott (Modern Shacks), Joe Ciardi (Rebuilding Together Hudson Valley), and Pari Forood (Miles of Hope Breast Cancer Foundation).



Linda Dubilier, Lydia Stover, and Jennifer Troccia (all with Woodstock Spa).



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