

# leading

## THE WAY

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**WORKING TOGETHER  
TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS**

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*Wyatt Schroeder, Karen Bilowith, and Boo Hagerty of the Erie Supportive Housing Project Team meet to discuss ways to address homelessness and create affordable housing solutions.*



# WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS: A WALK IN PATRICK'S SHOES

**When you see someone experiencing homelessness, what comes to your mind?**

**Imagine a man named Patrick.**

Patrick slides the key into the front door. It clicks affirmatively, as if it was destined to fit. His case manager stands behind him, knowing how unlikely the moment may feel to Patrick. It is not just a front door; it is *his* front door. Patrick is moving into an apartment with a lease in his name for the first time in three years.

It has been difficult for Patrick to navigate life in Erie; his two co-occurring disabilities have made it hard for a caring community to know exactly which program is right for him. He has become a common sight at the emergency room and many of the downtown businesses know him by name. The local service agencies serve him a meal each week and ask how he is holding up in the winter. But still it has not been enough to grant him a home. Too many times he has been told he will get a permanent home only when he accomplishes this or overcomes that, never reaching the top of the list. It is always his responsibility to adapt to the needs of the community, and never the other way around.

That day can come. Patrick can be home. Unfortunately, today, Patrick is not home yet.

Changing that is the vision of the newly formed Erie Supportive Housing Project Team. Patrick could represent one of 149 households sitting on Erie County's "master list," the centralized waiting list for people experiencing homelessness with deep need for supportive services to navigate them to permanent housing. He may spend some nights inside a shelter and others outside, bouncing from one uncomfortable night's sleep to the next.

The issue is complicated, but the answer is simple: No one has designed housing that meets Patrick's needs.

A recent article in *The Atlantic* called housing "the obvious answer to homelessness." This is where the Erie Supportive Housing Project Team is focusing its time, resources, and energy: how can we design housing that combines a permanent, safe, and affordable home with the supportive services Patrick needs to maintain long-term stability? That is called "supportive housing," the simple equation that *permanent housing + individualized supportive services = stability*. No more waiting lists, no more laundry lists of conditions that Patrick needs to meet prior to having a safe place to call home. Just the moment when Patrick slides the key into the door.

When that beautiful moment occurs and a group of people like Patrick move into their homes in Erie, they will not be there alone. There will be a dedicated team of supportive services staffers downstairs every day to work on the root causes of their homelessness and build a care pathway to their definition of health.

It may be a dream today, but one that is markedly achievable in Erie. More achievable than in most communities.

Every year, between 900 and 1,200 people touch Erie County's homeless response system — the network of nonprofits and government agencies that shelter, serve, and house people who lost their housing. Of those people, around 37% have experienced homelessness before. Despite the myths to the contrary, a large majority of people are experiencing homelessness for the first time, victims of the cruel math of stagnant wages minus increasing rent.



***“The Housing First model recognizes and prioritizes housing security as key to success in other areas, such as employment and sobriety.”***

**Karen Bilowith**  
President and CEO of The Erie Community Foundation

The combined forces of Erie’s charitable and government sectors move mountains to house around 400 households each year. And each year, people overcome the odds and resolve their own situation. Stability is within reach for many with help of a case manager and short-term assistance with rent.

But still there sit 149 people on that central list.

It is a harsh road that leads an Erie resident to this point. Seventy-five percent of people on that list have a disabling condition, with one out of five experiencing tri-morbidity, suffering three disabling conditions at once. People like Patrick are likely to have experienced homelessness for longer than a year.

Community leaders were increasingly restless. They saw the growing numbers of people living unsheltered. As a leader said, we were taking “baby steps to a harsh truth” that we needed to do more. But where to start? Funders like The Erie Community Foundation and Hamot Health Foundation were discussing an investment in a comprehensive strategy; the Erie Home Team was discussing the oppressive housing market and the need for more partnerships with housing providers; the city was discussing how to leverage federal funding; and housing providers were discussing how to be better stewards of their tenants with deep service needs.

The streams of conversation soon merged into an ocean of possibility, as the 11 different agencies came together as the Erie Supportive Housing Project Team, co-chaired by Karen Bilowith, CEO of The Erie Community Foundation, and Boo Hagerty, president of Hamot Health Foundation. The list continues to grow and includes City of Erie, Erie County, Erie County Care Management, Erie Home Team, Gannon University, HANDS, Highmark and Allegheny Health Network, Housing Authority of the City of Erie, and Mercyhurst.

The Project Team is a branch of Infinite Erie, a community-wide investment strategy to attract public and private sector funding for transformative projects. Infinite Erie, like its supportive housing effort, transcends politics to positively shape Erie’s future.

It was time. One convening. One strategy. One intentional investment in housing our most vulnerable neighbors.

The Erie Supportive Housing Project Team is basing their work on the evidence-based model called Housing First. It is a model that believes that people with severe co-morbidities achieve the most stability when they are quickly connected with stable housing instead having to wait for sobriety or other significant prerequisites before moving in.

By having a stable place to live, people like Patrick can overcome their addictions, achieve independence, and live a healthier life. The science,



***“We like to call ourselves the coalition of the willing. A like-minded group of people who are working together to reduce the number of unhoused people in our community.”***

**Boo Hagerty**  
President of Hamot Health Foundation





Members of the **Erie Supportive Housing Team** work together to improve housing security in Erie.

confirmed through over 36 studies, has shown that over 80% of people housed through a Housing First effort are stably housed long-term as they show decreased rates of substance use, a decreased use of emergency services, and increased rates of satisfaction. It works. And it fits neatly with a belief that everyone deserves a safe and stable home.

The founding of Housing First is informative to Erie's current plight. Dr. Sam Tsemberis was practicing street medicine as a psychologist in New York City. He noticed the same people there, day after day. They cycled from the emergency room to the shelter to the jail and back again. Getting connected to services did not seem to change the game for those living with mental illness and a substance use disorder. They were given everything New York had to offer, except a home. Tsemberis took an initial cohort of severely disabled people living on the street and moved them into an old hotel; this was their home without condition. They paid rent, under the rules of a HUD-based voucher, and were given deep services including psychiatric care, intensive case management, nursing support, and connections to their basic needs. It worked. That initial cohort saw over 90% stay stably housed, which is a fantastic achievement. From this humble starting point, Housing First became federal policy.

Here in Erie, the Erie Supportive Housing Project Team wants to bring Housing First to a community-wide scale by working to house the 150 people currently waiting on the centralized master list.

They intend to take a two-pronged approach to the task:

1. Develop a Housing First building that can house between 30-50 people experiencing homelessness, including hosting an integrated care team on-site to serve the residents.
2. Launch a community-wide campaign to recruit 100 housing units throughout Erie County to serve people experiencing homelessness, and to match those units with a mobile care team that will work with residents to keep them stable.

It is a bold undertaking, but an important one for Patrick and the other 148 people waiting.



Written by **Wyatt Schroeder, MBA**  
Supportive Housing Consultant,  
Bowling Business Strategies

### Erie Supportive Housing Project Team

- *Charlie Barber*
- *Karen Bilowith*
- *Peter Burke*
- *Dusti Dennis*
- *John DiMattio*
- *George Fickenworth*
- *Mike Fraley*
- *Matthew Good*
- *Boo Hagerty*
- *Colleen Hammon*
- *Renee Lamis*
- *Lana Rees*
- *Brenda Sandberg*
- *Wyatt Schroeder*
- *Debra Smith*
- *Dr. Keith Taylor*
- *Kim Thomas*
- *Mary Tredway*

# ENDLESS EXPLORATION

## BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Beth Burnside, PhD

Hamot Health Foundation's board of trustees chair, Beth Burnside, is the kind of person who is driven to find solutions to problems — to get to the root cause and create real, transformational change — and that makes her a valuable asset to a foundation like ours.

### *Driven to Improve Lives*

When she realized that local businesses were often disadvantaged by their lack of IT knowledge when it came to choosing a support provider, Beth sought a solution. And when she couldn't find one in Erie, she created one. In 2007, she started an IT consulting firm called CMIT Solutions of Erie.

She was drawn to the business model of managed IT services as opposed to an hourly "break-fix" model, which sometimes resulted in customers paying to fix issues, even if they were caused by the IT company's own error.

She believes that if you do the right thing, success will follow for your business. And it's proven to be true for her. The company started with zero revenue, serving northwest Pennsylvania. Fifteen years later, it's now a significant business serving clients in several states.

This service-oriented forward thinking paid off for her business. But since she's always looking for ways to improve, she went back to school and



*HHF board chair Beth Burnside is perfectly positioned for upstream community health strategies.*

*"It's been a pleasure to work with both UPMC Hamot and Hamot Health Foundation — they are shining examples of transformational organizations in our community."*

*— Beth Burnside, Hamot Health Foundation Board Chair*

earned a PhD from Gannon University at age 50. Her degree is in organizational learning and leadership, and her qualitative research was focused on analysis of high-growth, women-owned businesses and how they overcame the barriers that hold others back.

### *Upstream Thinking*

You may have heard the story about the three friends who come upon children drowning in a river. One jumps right in to start pulling the children out. One builds a raft to save as many children at a time as possible. Beth is the friend who goes upstream to stop the children from falling in the river in the first place. The other strategies are integral to community health, to be sure. But true transformational change comes from leaders who think like Beth.

What does going upstream look like? Beth is passionate about investigating social determinants of health, like early childhood education, affordable housing, and equal access to health care. So, for her, going upstream means contributing to efforts dedicated to resolving these root causes of poverty.

In a recent community-needs survey, a top priority articulated by the community was trusted access to health care, with an emphasis on trust. Beth looks at this as an exciting opportunity for HHF to marry results from the survey with known societal determinants of health and then focus on those initiatives that will create impactful results for the health of our community — such as affordable housing, which has a huge impact on health.

Transformational initiatives take time and strategic thinking — and patience — to see results. She's not looking for point solutions for any one cause and says, "We're asking stakeholders to go on a journey with us. All the stars are aligning, with the right leaders at the right places in organizations in the community, to come together and make an impact."

### ***The Power of Collaboration***

Working among such high-performing leaders has been very motivating and engaging for Beth. "It's been a pleasure to work with both UPMC Hamot and Hamot Health Foundation — they are shining examples of transformational organizations in our community."

Serving on the board of both HHF and UPMC Hamot has given her insight into the complexities involved in hospital administration and has allowed her to witness the commitment and dedication to clinical excellence firsthand. "It's really amazing. I love the attitude of always thinking there is room for improvement, without using environmental challenges as an excuse for less than exceptional results. You don't find that attitude everywhere."

### ***The Loves of Her Life***

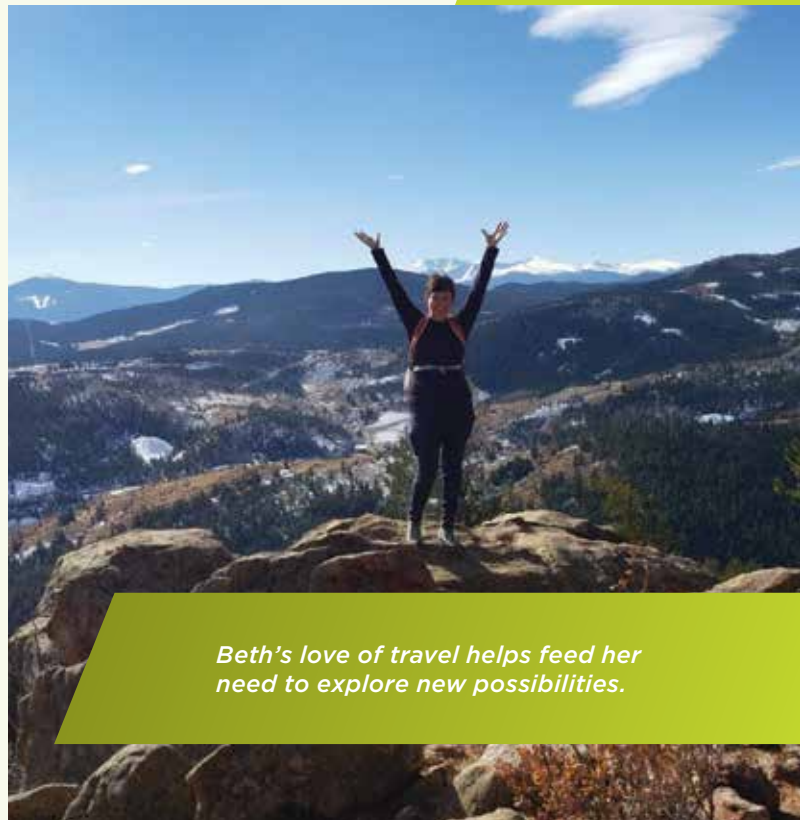
What really makes Beth light up? Her children and the memories she's made traveling the world with them. She has two grown children. Her son, 26, now lives and works locally. Her daughter, 21, studies biomedical engineering at the University of Virginia. And her pride for both of them is apparent.

School trips with Erie Day School exposed her family to the thrill of travel and they began to explore the world with EDS teachers Virginia Rogers and Denise Padden, now both retired. These trips gave her family experiences that have made lasting impressions on all their lives. Years later, the love of adventure persists. She visited Europe twice in 2022 — visiting Spain last summer and then Scotland last fall. She lights up as she relives the memories she's made and jokes that now she works so that she can travel.

### ***The Journey Ahead***

One of the things that she loves about travel is that it breeds more open-mindedness to other people's situations and different ways of doing things. She also believes it helps reduce the ego. "We're not the only ones struggling to find solutions for problems that are often shared by communities around the world, and somebody's doing something right somewhere." Community organizations benefit exponentially when stakeholders and leaders are willing to take models that have worked elsewhere and customize them for local initiatives.

Reflecting on her 10-year board tenure and looking ahead to the potential she sees, Beth says, "The best is yet to come. It's cliché, but I truly believe that." Her excitement for the foundation's journey ahead is palpable, and we are excited to take the next steps with her.



***Beth's love of travel helps feed her need to explore new possibilities.***





# Success Worth Celebrating

## Inaugural Class Graduates From the UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot

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In the Strong Vincent auditorium, 48 diverse graduate nurses celebrated the culmination of their studies with laughter, tears, and excitement. Each of them successfully conquered a rigorous curriculum to become a registered nurse (RN), tackling coursework at Wayne School and Gannon University, as well as 900 hours of hands-on learning at UPMC Hamot.

Throughout the recent graduation ceremony, guests heard inspiring stories. Some graduates were following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents by becoming nurses, while many forged a path they hoped their own children might follow. Each student made countless sacrifices, both financially and in time committed, justified by their deep desire to serve as a nurse. Nearly every graduate expressed a genuine sense of gratitude for those who helped them reach their goal — faculty, peers, and donors alike.

The UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot was launched to meet the hiring demands that dominate modern health care, as well as to extend an accessible job training opportunity to the community. By all accounts, achieving both goals is well underway. The first group of graduates to take their NCLEX board exams have passed with flying colors; UPMC Hamot anticipates hiring 80% of the first class. These much-needed new hires will serve in departments from intensive care to pediatrics, and represent the fact that success is possible for local individuals from all walks of life.

Hamot Health Foundation extends warm congratulations to the graduates!

**We wanted to hear more from a few of our new graduates about their journey through nursing school. We asked them the following questions:**

- 1) What was your motivation to attend nursing school?
- 2) What was the biggest challenge you faced in nursing school?
- 3) What was your greatest joy during nursing school?
- 4) If you could give a piece of advice to those interested in nursing school, what would that be?
- 5) How has nursing school shaped you as a person?



## Terinique Keys

*Working at UPMC Hamot.*

**1)** I wanted to provide a better life for my family. There were many jobs I was interested in and unable to apply for because I didn't have the right level of education. I knew that advancing my LPN to an RN degree would open more avenues for advancement in my career. I wanted to gain more knowledge to work in different areas in the health care system, such as working in an ICU or even as a clinician heading my own department. This fed my internal hunger to be better. In turn, I would be able to offer a better life for my children if I could move up the ladder.

**2)** My greatest struggle was with my personal and financial life. As a single mother of four, it was not easy as I was not able to work as much as I wanted to. It was hard to coordinate everyday life, like how my kids were getting to and from school, making sure we ate a good meal every night, finding time to spend with them, and focusing on homework. It was very stressful at times. Hamot Health Foundation and places like ERIEBANK and Career Link were able to help BIG TIME with scholarships and financial backing. It helped ease a lot of the burden of getting through school.

**3)** The friendships and bonds I created with students and staff. We were really like family! They were a bunch of people I could laugh and cry with. Everyone was supportive, and we all

had a common goal and worked together to accomplish it. The staff at the nursing school is exceptional! They are there to support you in any way and truly helped me get through this program. I don't think without their push and genuine goal in wanting ME to succeed, I would have made it. They really went above and beyond to help all the students in any way they could. My greatest joy was being inducted into the UPMC National Honor Society! It was truly a great achievement, and I am so proud of myself for that.

**4)** I would say to get a job at UPMC Hamot or another hospital. I had worked as an LPN for three years in medical-surgical oncology prior to entering the program and I understood more educational concepts, medications, labs, and disease processes through my experiences every day at work. I was able to grasp concepts more quickly and understand more in the classroom because of my experience and knowledge I gained as a working as a bedside nurse.

**5)** Nursing school has helped me realize I can do anything! I feel stronger and more confident as a person. Right now, I feel the wind at my back and the sky has no limits! I feel I have become a better nurse through the education I gained at UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot.



## Andrea Palmer

*Working in the UPMC Hamot Medical Intensive Care Unit.*

**1)** My motivation for coming to nursing school was the endless opportunities that nursing offers. I wanted to join a career that would make an impact in the lives of others and as a nurse, I will.

**2)** My biggest hurdle during school was my lack of experience in the health care setting compared to many others who had been patient care technicians or LPNs prior to school.

**3)** My greatest joy during school was learning from wonderful nursing and clinical instructors. I also loved the many opportunities we had for clinicals. I learned and experienced so much!

**4)** Be prepared to learn and study a lot. It will be difficult, but so well worth it.

**5)** Throughout high school, I was very shy and introverted, but nursing school has helped me to become more assertive and to stand up for myself and for others.



## Marissa Morales — Class valedictorian

*Working in the UPMC Hamot Medical Intensive Care Unit.*



**1)** My grandma was my motivation. She was the matriarch of our family and the glue that held us together. She had 10 kids and an endless list of grandchildren, and she would always be there for everyone. She was a beautiful person with a good heart, and she was selfless. She was diagnosed with cancer in 2006, and I knew that I wanted to try and repay her for all the good she put out into the world. So, when she got sick, I helped in any way that I could. When she passed, I knew that I wanted to be that person for other people. Being there for her made me realize what an honor it is to help someone in their most vulnerable times. Nursing gives me the means to do that.

**2)** Juggling family, school, and work has been a balancing act. But nursing school taught me prioritization and time management, and I was able to do it.

**3)** My greatest joy was the friendships I made. Nursing school is a tough journey and not easy by any means, but it's so much better when you find a group of people who you can share the journey with. It's a bond cemented by laughter,

early mornings at clinicals, late-night studying, and collective stress about upcoming exams. They understand you in a way only fellow nursing students can. I was lucky enough to have amazing parents, friends, and coworkers to support me, but then I also gained the support of newfound friends.

**4)** Do it. Don't let the fear of failing stop you from trying. I also had that fear, and it can be crippling, but now that I'm graduating, I thank the person I was 16 months ago who took that leap of faith. The confidence in your abilities and intelligence will come, but growth only happens outside of your comfort zone.

**5)** Nursing school gave me every opportunity I needed to gain back my confidence. The only thing I was certain of when I was starting was that I wanted to be a nurse and I wanted to help people. I was taken out of my element where I had comfort but no challenges. It taught me that everything you're capable of is on the other side of the work that you're reluctant to put in. I find myself now seeking out opportunities for new experiences and knowledge.

## Marissa Minehart

*Working in the UPMC Hamot Medical Intensive Care Unit.*



**1)** My biggest motivation for going to nursing school was my son. I had gone through a very difficult personal situation and had to move eleven and a half hours back to my parents' house. I wanted to have a better life for my son, so I knew I needed to do what I have always been attracted to and decided to take a leap of faith and enroll in nursing school.

**2)** My biggest hurdle in nursing school was the balancing of being a mom, working, and going to school all at the same time. With this there were many sacrifices that I have made, such as missing many important events and milestones including my youngest's first day of kindergarten, my oldest son's swim meets and soccer games, and many family functions. Luckily my family has been so supportive in making sure that the kids are always taken care of and that there's always someone there to cheer them on when I couldn't.

**3)** Being rewarded with incredible opportunities like being right next to the surgeon when an open-heart surgery was performed. I was walked through the entire five and a half hours

of surgery and saw the patient from open to close. While the surgery was incredible, I was also able to take care of the patient the next day and see them walk, talk, and thrive afterward. I have had the opportunity to see many very sick patients and be actively involved in their care. The instructors always encouraged us to never pass up on an opportunity and I was blessed and privileged to see everything that I did.

**4)** Take the leap of faith and do it. Nursing school will tear you down and sometimes make you question the choices you have made in life thus far. However, it can give you the most incredible friends that will always be there to support you, love you, cry with you, and make sure you complete your dream and your homework. This has been such an experience that I will never forget and will always be grateful for.

**5)** Nursing school has rebuilt me as a person. I have relearned strength, determination, critical thinking, compassion, and motivation. It has taught me a new world of skills that I will forever be grateful for, and it has shown me how strong I really am.

# LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Emily Shears, MPH



**Congratulations to Emily Shears, MPH, for her recent promotion to vice president, Operations at UPMC Hamot.**

Emily is a warm, familiar face at the hospital. She began her career at UPMC Hamot 18 years ago as director of Infection Prevention, immediately after securing her master's in public health in epidemiology from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. As her career progressed, Emily continued to take on new challenges, ceaselessly looking for additional ways she could improve the experience, quality, and environment for our hospital patients. Due to her passion and focus, her director role was expanded to include pharmacy, patient safety/risk, quality improvement, and regulatory and accreditation programs.

If not for an epidemiology course her junior year, Emily would have pursued a childhood dream of becoming a pediatrician. Through her studies though, she discovered a love for a whole new world based on study design, statistics, and disease prevention. Many may recognize Emily as being the “face” of UPMC Hamot, as she lent her expert advice on local news outlets, guiding the public through the pandemic. Emily’s gift for consolidating large amounts of data into relatable information helped both her peers and the community successfully navigate through a frightening and uncertain time. It was during this period that she was asked to fill the role of vice president, Quality, for UPMC’s northwest Pennsylvania and western New York regions just prior to her recent placement.

“I am very analytical and tend to look at the data to help tell the story of what is going on in a situation.”

In her new position, Emily will shift her focus toward supporting departments that are generally on the non-nursing side of hospital services. She will work with these teams on their strategic priorities, as well as identifying efficiencies within their processes, staff retention and recruitment, and future strategic planning. The biggest challenge she will face in the short term stems from the vast amount of change we have seen in the industry since the pandemic, namely, a shrinking workforce and interest in health care careers. Emily has a plan, however. “We need

*“I truly love what I do and the people I work with.”*



*Emily Shears enjoys taking time out for adventures, like hiking with her family.*

to develop solutions to support health care training programs and help create the next generation of our health care teams. We have seen these types of programs, like our school of nursing, be successful and that gives me hope.”

Emily has also been a model partner with Hamot Health Foundation. From the start, she has built relationships with her peers through some of our supporting programs including employee scholarships, rounding with snack carts, support for staff in times of loss, and the UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot. Her dearest relationships, however, are with her husband, Chris, and their two kids — Ethan, age 9, and Bria, age 7. You’ll often spot them in an athletic setting, at church, or off on an adventure together.



# THE SEED OF AN IDEA GROWS

By Gina N. Edwards

## How MWRI in Erie Is Sowing New Research, Collaborations Beyond Pittsburgh

Even big ideas start with the seed of a concept.

For Charles “Boo” Hagerty, president of Hamot Health Foundation (HHF), developing Magee-Womens Research Institute (MWRI) in Erie began with a conversation and an ambitious challenge.

Through discussions with MWRI leadership, Boo learned that Erie was a “genomic paradise,” meaning it was an ideal place to extend research happening in Pittsburgh by extracting data from different demographics, including rural individuals, and intergenerational families.

But creating a satellite location in Erie came with a hefty price tag: about \$25 million.

“I said, ‘OK, let’s try,’” Boo says, responding to the estimate. “They were kind of shocked by that because usually that [figure] stops the conversation.”

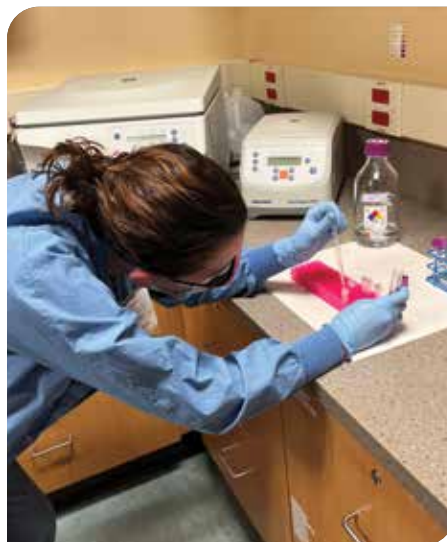
Undeterred, Boo set out to raise the necessary funds, beginning with a single project: extending the MOMI Biobank to Erie. After the Hamot Board of Corporators, a group of 350 business leaders, funded the MOMI expansion, the momentum began to take shape.

In 2018, The Erie Community Foundation (ECF) unveiled a \$30 million framework that included a call for large-scale grant proposals for transformational projects, and HHF and MWRI decided to apply. They engaged local leaders such as David Gibbons, president of UPMC



*“We are passionate about women’s health here. We know when women are healthy, families are healthy, and communities are healthy.”*

— Dr. Halina Zyczynski



MWRI in Erie research assistant, **Erica Velez**, at work in the Obstetrical Specimen Processing Unit.

Hamot, and the chancellor of Penn State Behrend, Dr. Ralph Ford, to get on board as well.

While HHF and MWRI wanted to advance and expand clinical research, trials, and services, ECF sought to add jobs to the local economy, and Penn State Behrend wished to broaden their major offerings.

As Boo remembers, “Everyone had a different motivation, and all of them aligned. It came together.”

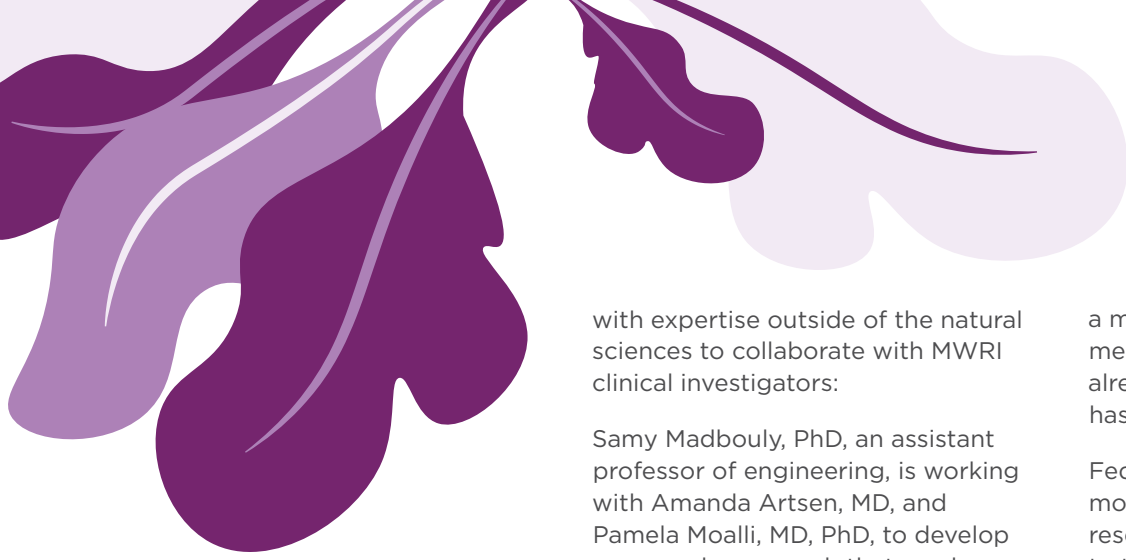
The \$6 million awarded by ECF was the largest ever in its 84-year history and was a critical piece of the combined \$26 million capital stack raised by the collaboration. Those funds supported building three labs and hiring of over two dozen people.

A key part of the efforts now in motion at MWRI in Erie include seed grants, or small-scale funding to boost new research projects. Seed grants allow researchers to gain critical data that underpins future proposals to entities with larger funding capacities like the National Institute of Health (NIH).

“The ultimate goal is to get enough seed grants going, get enough new projects going, and starting our own research here,” Boo says. “The hope is to attract researchers who want to live in and become part of the Erie area, and pull in national grants that continue to lift the projects and provide new employment opportunities in the community.”

Dr. Halina Zyczynski, medical director of MWRI in Erie and Magee-Womens Specialty Services at UPMC Hamot, echoes Boo’s sentiments about the potential impact in the area.

“Erie was a natural extension. We’ve spent a decade building a robust clinical subspecialty practice in women’s health here,” Dr. Zyczynski



said in an interview with UPMC about the MWRI in Erie expansion. “We are passionate about women’s health here. We know when women are healthy, families are healthy, and communities are healthy.”

Currently, there are 13 clinical and translational trials at MWRI in Erie, including four seed grant projects. Many of them include collaborations with Penn State Behrend.

“There could be a breakthrough that happens in one of these labs here in Erie that changes the world,” Boo says. “We think of this as a global, profound impact that we could have with this brilliance. We are part of something huge now.”

Looking toward the future, Boo is excited to watch MWRI in Erie continue to flourish.

“The full story hasn’t been told yet, but I’m excited about growth,” Boo says. “More partnerships and researchers getting together and talking about what’s possible.” The resources available to us through the larger Penn State research enterprise make Behrend the right fit for this.”

The college’s “open lab” model of learning, in which students and faculty members partner with businesses and community organizations to refine products and services and improve business processes, has broadened the MWRI-Erie partnership. A new round of seed grants is providing research funding for Behrend faculty members

with expertise outside of the natural sciences to collaborate with MWRI clinical investigators:

Samy Madbouly, PhD, an assistant professor of engineering, is working with Amanda Artsen, MD, and Pamela Moalli, MD, PhD, to develop a new polymer mesh that can be implanted in women who suffer from stress urinary incontinence.

Melanie Hetzel-Riggin, PhD, professor of psychology, and Christopher Shelton, PhD, assistant professor of clinical psychology, have teamed with Megan Bradley, MD, to study the knowledge gap among women diagnosed with asymptomatic bacteriuria — the presence of bacteria in the urine of a patient who has no signs or symptoms of a urinary tract infection.

Beyond an initial \$6 million grant from The Erie Community Foundation, including the lab funding, the MWRI-Erie funders — Hamot Health Foundation, Magee-Womens Research Institute and Foundation, Penn State Behrend, and UPMC — have each committed to investing

a minimum of \$5 million to expand medical research in Erie. Behrend already has raised \$3.2 million, which has been matched by Penn State.

Federal funding could have even more impact. MWRI is the largest U.S. research institute devoted exclusively to the health of women and infants. Since 2007, the institute has led the nation in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding for reproductive health research. MWRI expects to attract up to \$50 million in new funding over the next 10 years.

Keyes is finalizing an application for a three-year NIH grant. If awarded, the grant would provide funding for additional staff in Behrend’s translational research lab, freeing Keyes and his team to focus on new collaborations.

“At that point, the MWRI research in Erie will snowball,” Knight said. “NIH funding is a big benchmark. It will put us in a position to fund fellowships and new faculty positions. What we’re doing here will then really expand. It would be a big win for Behrend and for the Erie region.”



# Guided by Curiosity



Joyce Ravnikar-Kulyk (at right) with Renee Yosten, RN, recipient of the Irene Sutcliffe Scholarship and 2022 graduate of UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot.

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Joyce Ravnikar-Kulyk

### *A Curious Spirit*

Some people are energized by learning new things. They tend to be curious, and want to learn more. What may happen next is a dive into a whole new world. Hamot Health Foundation donor Joyce Ravnikar-Kulyk is one of those people.

Earlier in her life, she was donating to organizations and initiatives in the western portion of Erie County where she lives. In recent years, however, she shifted her focus to Erie's bayfront and downtown areas, as she challenged herself to get out, make new routines, and learn new things. She started taking classes at the Erie County Community College and volunteering at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center and the Yahn Planetarium at Penn State Behrend. She's met some of the people involved with the Erie Downtown Development Corporation, and through it all, she's been invigorated by the "can-do spirit" in Erie.

### *Repurposing History for the Future*

As she learned more about downtown and Erie's east side, she started to follow the Wayne building project. Formerly Wayne School, the 100-year-old building was purchased by the Erie Center for Arts and Technology (ECAT) in 2019. ECAT is a nonprofit organization that offers free education for at-risk youth and adults in need of job training. Part of ECAT's mission is to renovate the property into a multipurpose site benefiting the community. The building now houses Primary Health Network's Wayne Primary Care; Darling's Pharmacy; United Way of Erie County; UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot; a local peacekeeping initiative called Blue Coats; and ShanPull Sports, a training facility for youth and adult sports leagues.





*“After one week as an RN, I have no doubt that this is the career I should be in. Helping people heal and feel their best is SO rewarding.”*

— Renee Yosten, RN

“I love when old buildings are repurposed instead of being torn down, and this project was fascinating. It’s being used to provide different services. So, when I heard Hamot Health Foundation was a part of the project and learned about the UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot, I was eager to help.”

Joyce’s relationship with Hamot Health Foundation is somewhat unique because her philanthropy isn’t based on a medical interest or personal experience. In fact, she didn’t have any connections to the hospital before she began giving to the foundation.

Her interest piqued when she donated to Erie Gives for a project to support a downtown neighborhood and learned that Hamot Health Foundation was supporting the same project with matching funds. Then she learned about HHF’s involvement with the nursing school in the Wayne building project, which she had also been following. She said, “I was hooked.”

### ***An Inspiration for New Beginnings***

What really moved Joyce to want to help the school was the nature of the students. Many of these students are looking to make a career change to improve their lives and they’re going back to school as adults. They sometimes find it hard to make ends meet as a student, but they’re working hard and trying to make a difference — and that kind of commitment is inspiring.

Joyce started a scholarship named for Irene Sutcliffe, RN, Hamot Hospital Association’s first nurse. She was the hospital’s first administrator as well as the only nurse, and she was of critical importance in the hospital’s success upon its founding in 1881.

The foundation’s development officer, Nick Cianci, sent Joyce a video of the first recipient’s reaction to receiving the scholarship. “Her excitement made me laugh, it was wonderful.” It’s that kind of infectious joy that gives donors like Joyce an immense sense of satisfaction and pride.

### ***Fulfilling High Expectations***

Joyce’s sense of giving came from her parents. “They were always giving of their time and talents.” Her late husband, Mark Kulyk, was raised the same way, and they carried on these values as they raised their two sons.

When asked why she gives, Joyce says, “To whom much is given, much is expected — that’s what I’ve always followed. I’ve been blessed and it’s my small way to be a part of the philanthropic efforts that benefit our community.”

### ***Structures for Success***

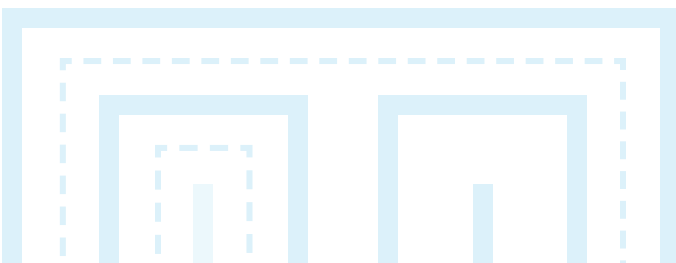
Joyce views the foundation as just that — a solid base that provides the structure for other projects to grow and succeed. Interestingly, she views the thought processes behind the projects more like a web, where one idea leads to another, is studied and mulled over to develop a solution or another fresh idea. This kind of thinking leads to the projects Joyce is drawn to — initiatives that seek not only to meet a need where it is, but then follow its evolution and determine what the next step will be.

For example, one of the foundation’s new initiatives for the UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot is to help provide funding to students whose financial struggles are obstacles to their studies. “HHF doesn’t just become involved in starting new initiatives, they follow through with the evolution of the projects and make sure they thrive. They’re truly invested in the projects and that gives me confidence that my donation is making a difference.”

### ***Matching Donor Interests***

One of the ways Joyce feels valued is by being heard. She says, “The foundation isn’t just good at explaining initiatives, they’re also good at listening to both my areas of interest and my ideas.”

“I want to be a part of the projects that improve lives and create better situations to help people be well. Too many people look at conditions affecting the community and say, ‘That’s just the way it is.’ But it doesn’t have to be. We can make changes for the better. Hamot Health Foundation does that and I want to be a part of it.”

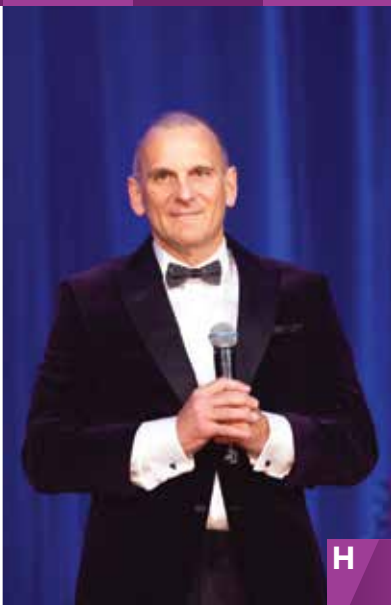


# OUR GREATEST SHOW

Hamot Health Foundation's 10th Annual Gala, presented by Rebich Investments, was truly "Our Greatest Show," celebrating the collective success of UPMC Hamot and Hamot Health Foundation. Over 550 attendees were brought back in time through the sights, sounds, and aroma of a classic carnival with jaw-dropping circus performances by local talent, enchanting audiences with fire juggling, aerial feats, song, dance, and much, much more. Thank you to all our many sponsors and host committee members, without whom this unforgettable evening would not have been possible.







H



I



J



K



L

**A.** A memorable feature of the cocktail hour was a bar built around a full-sized carnival ride.

**B.** Fire performer Jennifer Dennehy dazzles the crowd on the promenade of the Bayfront Convention Center.

**C.** Production company LUXE Creative designed a stunning backdrop for this Playhouse performer to enchant the crowd as they quickly found their seats before the show.

**D.** Our very own and very talented Boo Hagerty drew the crowd to its feet as part of a surprise duet during the performance of “The Greatest Show.”

**E.** In his remarks, our presenting sponsor, Todd Rebich of Rebich Investments, graciously described HHF as a group of people “committed to changing outcomes for people in our community and doing it with excellence and compassion.” He illustrated his message by sharing stories of HHF’s work with patients and the community.

**F.** The crowd gasped as Aimee Hagerty played piano alongside David Gibbons for his debut singing performance. David feigned stage fright as a hoax leading into a surprise introduction of our featured entertainer, Loren Allred.

**G.** Our audience was dazzled by a surprise performance by Loren, the voice of the multiplatinum hit single “Never Enough” from the Oscar-nominated and Grammy-award-winning *The Greatest Showman* soundtrack and film.

**H.** UPMC Hamot President, David Gibbons, drew parallels between the work and mission of Hamot Health Foundation with the themes from the Oscar-nominated film, *The Greatest Showman*, including diversity and inclusion, resilience, extending a helping hand to those who need it most, and making your dreams come true when you work together for a common goal.

**I.** Joined in a grand finale with Erie Playhouse performers, Loren and her new friends brought the audience to their feet with roaring applause with her rendition of “This Is Me.”

**J.** A crowded dance floor cheers on talented dancers from the Erie Playhouse.

**K.** The incredible Gary Racan and his 14-piece Studio e Band kept the crowd moving and dancing all night long.

**L.** The Hamot Health Foundation team alongside Loren at the conclusion of a smashing show.

*Be sure to mark your calendars for **October 7, 2023**, to see how we top this triumph next year.*





Photo credit: <https://investors.dicks.com>



# IT TAKES A TEAM:

## DICK'S SPORTING GOODS, HHF PARTNER TO DO (MORE) GOOD

Dick's Sporting Goods (DSG) is one of the largest sporting goods chains in the United States, with equipment, apparel, and footwear for athletics, outdoor recreation, and more.

A recent HHF newsletter showcased DSG's generosity, seen in donating thousands of pairs of slippers to our health care heroes and the patients they serve. Hamot Health Foundation worked with local trucking, brokerage, and warehousing experts Team Hardinger to facilitate smooth storage and distribution of the footwear.

In December, the generosity of DSG was seen yet again, with another batch of over 3,000 slippers gifted to Hamot Health Foundation.

When seeking a meaningful way to use these slippers, HHF found a perfect fit. Each year, UPMC Hamot sponsors an employee "Wish Tree" for employee-to-employee support for holiday gifts. This year, nearly one-hundred employee families not only received Walmart gift cards, but cozy slippers to supplement their Christmas gifting.

Call it a slam dunk, a touchdown, or a homerun — DSG's generosity paired with HHF's commitment to UPMC Hamot and our community is a winning combination.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## June 21

### BOB-A-THON

WHERE: 94.7 BOB FM STUDIO, ERIE, PA



Hamot Health Foundation and 94.7 BOB-FM radio team up for an all-day radio-a-thon to raise awareness and financial support for the Children's Care Fund. Hear firsthand stories of those in our community supported by this important fund.

◆ For sponsorship opportunities, contact Katie King at 814-877-7922 or [kingk9@upmc.edu](mailto:kingk9@upmc.edu). For details, go to [HamotHealthFoundation.org/events](https://HamotHealthFoundation.org/events).

## August 21

### HHF OPEN

WHERE: THE KAHKWA CLUB, ERIE, PA



Annual signature golf outing at the Kahkwa Club to support the SLM Breast Cancer Fund. Each foursome includes lunch, gifts for each player, 18 holes of golf with a forecaddie, followed by a cocktail hour and dinner celebration.

◆ For sponsorship opportunities, contact Katie King at 814-877-7922 or [kingk9@upmc.edu](mailto:kingk9@upmc.edu). For details, go to [HamotHealthFoundation.org/events](https://HamotHealthFoundation.org/events).

## October 7

### GALA

WHERE: BAYFRONT CONVENTION CENTER, ERIE, PA

Annual signature black-tie event to celebrate the impact of Hamot Health Foundation in our community.

◆ For sponsorship opportunities, contact Katie King at 814-877-7922 or [kingk9@upmc.edu](mailto:kingk9@upmc.edu). For details, go to [HamotHealthFoundation.org/events](https://HamotHealthFoundation.org/events).

## November 21

### BRIGHTEN THE NIGHT

WHERE: VIRTUAL EVENT



Unique annual fundraiser creating awareness for Family Hospice of Erie and quality end-of-life care. Participate in thoughtful remembrances, inspirational reflections, and music to remember those who have passed and to honor someone who is special in your life.

◆ For sponsorship opportunities, contact Katie King at 814-877-7922 or [kingk9@upmc.edu](mailto:kingk9@upmc.edu). For details, go to [HamotHealthFoundation.org/events](https://HamotHealthFoundation.org/events).

*Interested in hosting an event to benefit Hamot Health Foundation?*

*Contact Katie King to share your ideas!  
814-877-7922 or [kingk9@upmc.edu](mailto:kingk9@upmc.edu)*



## HAMOT HEALTH FOUNDATION

302 French Street  
Erie, PA 16507  
814-877-7020

[HamotHealthFoundation.org](http://HamotHealthFoundation.org)

### OUR MISSION

Hamot Health Foundation will lead our community to better health.

### OUR VISION

Hamot Health Foundation will transform the health and well-being of our community with an unwavering commitment to our 4 C's:



#### Clinical Excellence

We will proactively seek opportunities to help our providers enhance health care delivery and patient outcomes.



#### Community Health

We will work collectively to eliminate societal barriers that hold people back from leading healthy, vibrant, and productive lives.



#### Cutting-Edge Research

We will join with partners to financially support scientific research and clinical trials that drive answers to the most pressing questions in health care.



#### Career Development

We will help fund the education of current and future health care providers and create pathways where opportunities do not exist.

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Danielle Bates, CPA — *Vice Chair*  
Charles “Boo” Hagerty — *Chief Development Officer*  
Carrie E. Ennis — *Secretary*  
Bradley N. Dinger — *Treasurer*

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