



Young Professionals

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**SULLIVAN COUNTY
DEMOCRAT**

March 22, 2022
Section Y
Callicoon, NY



Congratulations, Marinella DiVita on becoming Town Clerk of Roscoe-Rockland!



We always knew you would succeed in the future because you were always an ambitious little girl. You have the traits and virtues that allow you to achieve big goals in life. It is your "Go Getter" attitude that will set the foundation for your success. This has shown already with the nomination you have received as Town Clerk. We are all very happy for you and Congratulate you on your achievement. You deserve all the success in the world!

Love, Zio Gaetano and Zia Lucrezia

Congratulations to our beautiful daughter. We are very proud of you! - Mom & Dad

Marinella has a great personality and is full of positive energy. She grew up with a family of hard workers and I believe that has helped her tremendously with her work ethic. Becoming the Town Clerk/Tax Collector at such a young age is an accomplishment that she should be very proud of. I know that Marinella has a great future ahead of her and I wish her all the best! - Nancy Buck, Sullivan County Treasurer and good family friend



Congratulations to my sister. Keep reaching for the stars!!
- Angelica DiVita

Congratulations to our wonderful, hard working niece.
- Uncle Charlie and Annamaria Aiello



Congratulations Marinella!
You are so deserving of this honor and recognition. You may be young but you are admired for your hard work and dedication as Town of Rockland, Town Clerk. You have always strived to reach the goals you set and you do. Your eagerness and willingness to learn is a wonderful and ambitious trait. Your love and bond for your family and community does not go unnoticed. Marinella, keep climbing that ladder, we need more youth involvement. Do not stop! You have the motivation and ambition that you will succeed in anything and everything you set your goals on. So proud of who you are! Don't stop believing! You got this!

Love you, Lilly Constant

AIMONDO
restaurant & Pizzeria



Marinella Di Vita

STORY AND PHOTO
BY ANTHONY MORGANO

Becoming an elected official at 25 is not something that many people can say that they have accomplished. Marinella Di Vita, who just celebrated her 26th birthday on March 7, is one of the few that can, after being elected as the Rockland Town Clerk in November.

Born and raised in Roscoe, Marinella's family owns Raimondo's, a pizzeria in the center of town. As a child, Marinella would watch her mother prep and cook, spending time in the kitchen and learning the value of hard work.

When she was old enough to get her working papers, Marinella began bussing tables at the restaurant, slowly becoming more comfortable with the job until becoming a server.

"Working in the restaurant taught me a lot of skills that have helped me in my life, like working under pressure, being able to communicate and just a general work ethic," Marinella explained.

Marinella graduated from Roscoe in 2014 and tried a few local colleges that ended up not being what she was looking for. So, like a bird leaving the nest, Marinella flew to Florida, where she attended Florida Technical College. After obtaining her Bachelor's Degree, she moved back to Roscoe, where she knew she wanted to stay. However, working at the restaurant was not the only thing she wanted to do. "I didn't just want to wait tables, so I started working at the Town Clerk's office, and when I found out [Caroline Devoe] was retiring, I decided to run."

Being elected as the Town Clerk for the Town of Rockland, Marinella said, "Running in the election was exciting, and winning was definitely an accomplishment."

Marinella won the election, but that does not mean she has forgotten her roots. She still spends plenty of time at the restaurant,

helping out and filling in when needed. Marinella makes the server schedule, handles some of the paperwork and orders from their distributors.

"It's a nice change of pace to spend time at the restaurant after I get done with work at the office," she said. "It's my family's business and I know a lot of the customers so I like spending time there."

Marinella had originally wanted to be a police officer, earning her BA in criminal justice.

"I haven't decided what my next step is going to be," she said. "I want to stay in politics or working for a municipality, which I never would have thought of when I was in high school and college."

Marinella has attended various seminars for Town Clerks that

have given her new ideas for the Town of Rockland office. "I asked a lot of questions to help make the office run smoothly," she explained. "I want to make sure the job gets done right and that people are happy."



Marinella Di Vita

Marinella shared advice for other young people that are trying to figure out what comes next for them. "Search high and low to figure out what you want to do. You don't have to settle for your first idea of a degree."

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**CONGRATULATIONS
MARINELLA!**

Keep reaching
for the stars.

Your friends,
David and Janet Will

Connor Buckles

BY DEREK KIRK

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Connor Buckles

Twenty-nine year old Connor Buckles is a Commercial Real Estate Appraiser for Capital Appraisal Group Inc. in Monticello. In this position, Buckles is tasked with placing monetary values on real estate both commercial and residential. From property inspections to writing reports, Buckles oversees the appraisal process from start to finish.

To begin his career path, a further education in his field was required.

"I graduated [from high school] here in Monticello, and then I went on to graduate from SUNY New Paltz with a marketing degree, and then I also had to take a lot of real estate appraisal courses through the Appraisal Institute in New York City," Buckles said.

Buckles also completed an apprenticeship program for two and a half years in order to acquire his state-regulated appraiser's license. In 2018, he acquired his Appraiser's Assistant License, and in 2021, his Certified General License.

To Buckles, the most fulfilling aspect that comes with his current position is the ever continuing education that comes with meeting new people.

When Buckles is not working, he enjoys a multitude of hobbies including traveling and visiting new places, spending time at the gym, enjoying all that the outdoors has to offer, and hitting the slopes on his snowboard.

Buckles also hopes to continue to broaden the horizons of his career and engage in continuing success.

"My biggest goal right now is another designation called an MAI," Buckles said.

MAI stands for Member, Appraisal Institute. The Appraisal Institute is an international membership association of professional real estate appraisers.

"It's the next level up," Buckles said.

This next target requires even more education, but Buckles is preparing to tackle these challenges as he has in the past throughout his appraisal career.



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Kelsey Conklin

BY DEREK KIRK

Thirty-year-old Kelsey Conklin works as the Assistant Loan Servicing Manager for Jeff Bank.

The position comprises various responsibilities, including customer service both internally with her team and externally with her customers, among other duties to carry out.

Loans, understanding money, and banking as a whole can be tricky topics to most, but Conklin takes joy in using her experience to assist in educating her colleagues, customers, and even herself when questions arise on the many processes that go on in the banking world.

"I truly enjoy helping people understand every aspect of a loan after it has originated. If the questions come from my col-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Kelsey Conklin

leagues, I try my best to help them understand the answer. I'm giving them so that in the future they can do their job more effectively and confidently. If the questions come from customers, I try to take my time to explain the answer in terms they will understand and in a way that they can relate to," said Conklin. "Helping people helps me too because if it's something I don't know the answer to, then I can learn right along with them."

"My cash handling experience and customer service experience are what helped me get a teller position at Jeff Bank in 2013. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do but knew I had the skills and knowledge to excel at being in banking. I was a teller for a little over two years and then got promoted to Senior Teller. I worked as Senior Teller for a year and then wanted a change, so I started from square one as a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7Y

Congratulations

to all of the 2022 Young Professionals & to our very own Kelsey Conklin!



Kelsey Conklin
Assistant Loan Servicing Manager



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Jenny Sanchez

BY MATT
SHORTALL

Sullivan 180 was founded with the mission of improving Sullivan County's health rankings one degree at a time. Jenny Sanchez, Grants and Mental Health Program Manager for Sullivan 180, is playing an integral part in that mission.

Sanchez brings seven years of mental and behavioral health experience to her role at Sullivan 180, including years of experience in leading crisis intervention, community relations and social support programs.

"I really care about the health of my home county, and I'm very passionate about the work we're doing," Sanchez said.

When people think of building healthier communities, they often think about physical exercise and good nutrition. Sanchez says mental health plays an essential role in someone's overall well-being.

"It has a large impact on your

physical health outcomes," Sanchez explains.

In her mission to move the conversations in a more positive direction, Sanchez has helped organize workshops on a variety of mental health topics throughout Orange and Sullivan Counties.

Sanchez holds a Bachelor of Science degree in social work and a master's degree in business administration. She's worked in several different roles throughout the mental health field before beginning at Sullivan 180. She is a certified Youth Mental Health First Aid Instructor and QPR Gatekeeper Instructor.

The QPR Institute specializes in a method known as "Question, Persuade, Refer - Three steps anyone can learn to help prevent suicide."

As part of her role at Sullivan 180, Sanchez addresses suicide prevention, increasing community knowledge about mental health and avail-

able resources, as well as addressing stigma surrounding mental illness.

Sanchez serves on several committees and coalitions to support youth mental health and substance use prevention.

In addition to her official role at

Sullivan 180, Sanchez also serves on the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) board for Sullivan County. She added that Sullivan 180 has recently partnered with numerous other local organizations to create the Sullivan Resiliency

CONTRIBUTED
PHOTO
Jenny
Sanchez



SULLIVAN 180

Congratulations Jenny!

Your dedication, tenacity and professionalism are admirable and you are helping to build a healthier Sullivan County!

Your work to secure funding and deliver mental health programs to our community will have lasting impact, and we are so proud of you!

Your Friends at Sullivan 180



Jenny Sanchez - Sullivan 180 Grants & Mental Health Program Manager

Coalition.

"Something I really enjoy about being at Sullivan 180 is that we have a chance to work with a lot of community partners that support health and wellness, not only in mental health but also substance use prevention, youth mental health and other facets of wellness."

On the funding and grant side of things, Sanchez says she enjoys finding the best ways for Sullivan 180 to continue offering these valuable resources to the community.

During the height of the pandemic, Sanchez said they worked with Cornell Cooperative Extension and Gerry Skoda to help farmers secure federal funding through things such as the Paycheck Protection Program.

"That was really rewarding to be able to help [Farmers] after hearing all of their stories and what they were going through," Sanchez said.

Sanchez says one of the most enjoyable aspects of her job is the opportunity to do so many different things to help the community and partnering with other talented people in order to achieve that.

KELSEY CONKLIN: Assistant Loan Servicing Manager

FROM PAGE 5Y

Clerk in Loan Servicing. I quickly worked my way up the ladder and within four years got promoted to the position I have now."

Conklin got her start after she graduated from Sullivan West High School in 2009 and went on to get both an Associate's Degree of Applied Science in Liberal Arts and a Bachelor's in Business Administration in Hospitality Management at SUNY Delhi.

The reach of her professionalism is not isolated to just her current occupation, but as a part of her career as a whole within her various jobs she held growing up in the area.

"All through high school and college I worked at Jeff Pharmacy starting as a cashier then becoming a pharmacy technician. I also had a few summer jobs; I worked at the Museum at Bethel Woods and as a barista at the Villa Roma," Conklin said. "All of

these jobs, and both my parents owning multiple businesses throughout my childhood, taught me how to work hard, take pride in my work, work efficiently and effectively toward goals both big and small, and how to make a customer happy."

In her free time, Conklin keeps up the hustle with her three small businesses in crafting, dry nail polish, and home fragrance. When the day is done and the work has been completed, she enjoys cuddling on the couch with her three cats and dog Penny.

Conklin and her husband Ronny share a hobby of collecting and restoring cars, and have over 20 registered and insured vehicles between the two of them.

"Many of his cars are muscle cars so we enjoy driving them around in the summer and taking them to car shows," Conklin said. "We definitely know how to

stay busy!"

Conklin said that her biggest accomplishment so far has been becoming a supervisor and officer at a relatively young age. "I have almost always been the youngest person in every job and department I've worked in and I've never let it stop me from excelling and working my way up the ladder."

But Conklin doesn't want to stop there! She plans on pursuing greater things long into the future.

"My long term goals are to eventually become a member of Senior or Executive Management at Jeff Bank, travel the world, own a home, start a bed and breakfast with my mom, and collect my dream cars! In pursuit of my dreams I plan on living life to the fullest and soaking up every moment possible with friends and family," Conklin said.

Congratulations Jenny!

You are an inspiration among
young professionals!

Thank you for all that you do.



Jenny Sanchez, Sullivan 180 Grants & Mental Health Program Manager

Jean Paul Medina & Sarah Banks

Before Jean Paul Medina (36) and Sarah Banks (33) grew into the movers and shakers of the hospitality world that they are today, they grew up just a few neighborhoods apart in Fresh Meadows and Jamaica, Queens respectively.

Sarah, currently the Director of Sales at Foster Supply Hospitality, began her career in the City working in retail management, training and operations. She spent several years with retail juggernaut Alex and Ani, working at some of their flagship stores at a multitude of different channels. There she trained a number of employees at different stores, but was also mainly focused on client relations, customer service and the company's brand.

Jean Paul, or "JP" as he is called by friends and loved ones, is currently the executive chef at Callicoon Hills. He grew up in the kitchen with family dinners being a big part of their household, so he would always help his mother cook. He worked in a num-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jean Paul Medina and Sarah Banks during a trip to visit some alpacas.

BY JOSEPH ABRAHAM

ber of fields, spending time as a plumber, electrician, etc, but got back into cooking when he and his mother started their own catering company. While an enjoyable experience, JP was motivated to elevate the value, presentation and quality of the food and knew he had to get a job at a restaurant. He worked at Michelin star rated restaurants BLT Fish, then BLT steak, quickly climbing the ladder from doing veggies and sides to becoming roast cook. He then spent time at Washington Market Tavern, L'Apicio, L'Artusi, Uncle Jack's Steakhouse and Hill Country Barbecue.

JP and Sarah's paths collided when they met at a mutual friend's party. He was heading into the house to use the restroom and she was coming out, and had tripped over a door ledge. JP fondly remembers her making a quirky comment that made him laugh and the two struck up a conversation.



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The rest was history.

Heading upstate

One day JP mentioned the idea of moving to the Catskills.

"I thought he was crazy," Sarah explained. "I was a city girl born and raised."

However, that life wasn't foreign to Sarah, whose family would spend a couple weekends in Ellenville each summer.

"There was kind of this nostalgic feeling to being in the Catskills and longing for that experience I had growing up because it pretty much molded my childhood," she said.

In the Spring of 2017 they made the jump. JP and Sarah had a mutual friend in Justine Hoskin, who was the Director of Operations at Foster Supply Hospitality (FSH), and had worked with JP in the city. Their Catskill careers began at two different FSH properties.

Sarah started in guest services at the Arnold House, but quickly learned she had a passion for events. In addition to working the desk, she started booking events at the property, and excelled at it, increasing their event platform over

50 percent and expanding packages that range from corporate retreats to community fundraisers to private dinners, buyouts and other special occasion events. She then became FSH's Director of Sales, working to maximize revenues across all of their properties.

"I think the thing that I probably love the most is to celebrate life moments with our guests, and give them a setting and an experience that lets them walk away with as many memories as they would have," she said. "If someone's choosing us to host their wedding, that's the greatest feeling and trust in the world, because that's the biggest day of their life."

JP worked at the DeBruce, which in 2018 was recognized with a Conde Nast Traveler's Hot List Award and was No. 6 in Esquire's best new restaurant rankings. He was the restaurant's Chef de Cuisine, where he was responsible for the kitchen and worked under the Executive Chef. After about a year and a half, the opportunity to be the executive chef at the North Branch Inn, another FSH property, presented itself, and he went for it.



PHOTO BY
LAWRENCE BRAUN
Jean Paul Medina

He led North Branch Inn's kitchen until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Watching friends and family getting sick, JP felt it was a time to

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Congratulations

To all of the 2022 Young Professionals



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FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

take a step back and reprioritize, so he left the company, but speaks highly of his experience at FSH.

"What I love most about Foster Supply is that whatever you want, you can go for it," he said. "They allowed me to really develop whatever skills I felt I needed ... whatever programs I wanted to run ... It was very free."

Through the height of the pandemic he worked as a consultant for Spruce Home Goods in Callicoon, and when things began to improve, the itch to get back in the kitchen returned.

JP saw an opening for the position of executive chef at Callicoon Hills, and during the interview, said he had a beautiful and organic conversation with them. They felt he was the perfect fit for the job, and he's been there since their opening in 2021.

JP states that at Callicoon Hills he has the same freedoms he did at the North Branch Inn, with the added bonus of being able to teach and lead future professionals from SUNY Sullivan and the Culinary Institute of America.

Impact

Through his love of cooking, JP also has a passion to create, as well as teach.

"I have that opportunity, a responsibility even, to extend who I am and what I do to people who are deciding if this is a passion for them," JP explained.

Sarah adds that for both of them working in the hospitality industry,



PHOTO BY LAWRENCE BRAUN

Sarah Banks

the impact they have on a daily basis is another thing they enjoy.

"The hospitality industry is full of unsung heroes," said Sarah, "because of the impact that every single person you might meet in a hotel or restaurant has. They truly have the ability to shape someone's day."

Advice to Young Pros

Sarah implores other young professionals to not be afraid to take risks and go after what they want.

"You also have to grind a bit," she explained. "You're not gonna show up and have the opportunity hand-

ed to you on a silver platter. You've got to really put in the work if you want another opportunity to come your way ... And don't be afraid to be passionate, because I think passion is what fuels and drives every single successful business in this area and county and I can argue it's the one trait that most businesses often overlook."

JP adds that it is important to be driven, focused, to work hard, but also have a willingness to learn.

"There's growth and opportunity coming your way at all times," he said, "so be humble, be dedicated ... enjoy it and grow with it."

PAIGE: Barn manager

FROM PAGE 15Y

expanded the animals to include Guinea Pigs, chickens, and Bear the dog.

When she is not working with the individuals at New Hope Community, LaPolt – Peloso likes to spend her summers at the race track in the pit crew or hiking, fishing and hunting.

And in the winter, she likes to hit the snow trails with her snowmobile, trekking 1,500 miles last year.

She loves to garden, spend time at the lake, and play first base for the Sullivan County Women's Softball League and their co-ed league and loves her three dogs, Bear, Mr. Mush, and Hank.

LaPolt – Peloso wanted to make Sullivan County her home and said her family being here has made it even more special.

"I really had a great childhood. I was able to explore and go hunting and fishing with my uncle, grandpa, and dad. I have a lot of family members that serve the community," said LaPolt – Peloso.

She further explained, "My grandfather was a town constable; my other grandfather worked with the highway department. My uncle works in the highway department, and I have several volunteer firemen [in my family] including my dad."

She said one of the keys to her success at New Hope Community has been, "Surrounding myself with great people; I have a great team here that works so well together."

Furthermore, she said, "I think that the biggest thing is being creative and constantly changing, and I think that applies to life, too. You have to be willing to make yourself vulnerable and take chances and stick to your core beliefs."

She said she would love to see the program at New Hope expand and grow with more animals in the future.

She added, "Fostering those relationships [at New Hope] is my favorite part of the day. I feel very fortunate that I'm able to impact people's day. It's not something that I take lightly. I try to make every interaction and every experience that they have here a positive one."

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MEGAN GAVIN: Insurance agent

FROM PAGE 13Y

of the community."

When it comes to the world of insurance, Gavin said she tries to get to know her clients and understand their unique situation as well as their needs and personal circumstances.

"It's a really cool job where I get to help people all the time," Gavin said. "I think with the year that we've had, people are more aware than ever just how much they need more support when it comes to insurance. I think coming into this industry at this time, the conversations are more important than they've ever been."

When Gavin thinks about where she wants to be in ten years, she says she really wants to help inspire other young professionals in the area, especially women and mothers who are just finishing school or starting a new career.

Gavin is a member of the Liber-

ty NY Rotary Club and she sits on the committee for the Sullivan and Orange Alzheimer's Walk. She has also been involved in the Sullivan County Young Professionals, which is a task force of the Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce.

Gavin said she also loves to play golf and is quick to join any kind of fundraiser that involves that sport.

"I'm always signing myself up," she said with a laugh. "Sometimes I get to do those outings as networking or fundraising events. I'm fortunate enough that some days I don't have to be working in front of my computer but actually playing golf."

With that and more, Gavin says she sees plenty of opportunity in her hometown, with more on the horizon.

"The county is growing and things are happening. I feel fortunate to be here."



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BY JOSEPH ABRAHAM

Margaret Bruetsch

Margaret Bruetsch wrote her first book in the first grade. Looking back, there is little the now 28-year-old Editor of Catskills Confidential remembers about her first masterpiece, other than the plot was centered around a blue bird and a fox.

Not long after, Bruetsch asked her father if she could take a youth writing class at the Western Sullivan Public Library's Callicoon Branch. The class, led by local author Clara Gillow Clark, was for children eight years or older. By rule, Bruetsch, then seven, would have been unable to attend. However, when her parents reached out, Clark made an exception for her.

That started a friendship that continues to this day, as Bruetsch calls Clark a mentor. She also helped Bruetsch get into a professional writing class a few years back at Highlights magazine.

When Bruetsch isn't writing, you'll often find her lost in the pages of a good book. This was something her parents, Carl and Eileen, used as an incentive for Margaret and younger sister Leeann growing up. They could stay up an extra 30 minutes if they asked their parents to read them another chapter.

"I can't remember a time when I didn't have a book in my hands," affirmed Bruetsch.

Today she enjoys reading anything from historical fiction to mysteries or memoirs.

Career in newsprint

Bruetsch, upon graduating from Sullivan West in 2012, attended Marist College, where she double majored in Communication (Journalism) and English, with a minor in Creative Writing.

As a Red Fox, Bruetsch was on the student programming council, wrote for the college newspaper and loves to perform. Speaking of the latter, Bruetsch sings and plays guitar. In the past she has per-

formed with her Aunt and Uncle, Gloria and KC Garn, who have a band called "Windy Mule." Together, they've held concerts benefiting Ride 2 Survive.

In the summer of 2014, Bruetsch became an intern at the **Sullivan County Democrat**, covering anything from hard news to writing features, under the tutelage of then editors Frank Rizzo and Dan Hust.

As fate would have it, after graduating from Marist, Bruetsch applied to be an editorial assistant at the **Democrat**. While the position had been filled, she was invited to interview for a sales vacancy. She was hired soon after and has been the paper's In-House Marketing Rep and the Monticello Branch Office Manager since 2017.

In addition to those duties, Bruetsch occasionally lends her writing talents to the editorial team, covering local events and writing reviews of performances at the Forestburgh Playhouse and Delaware Valley Opera.

'A lifeline'

Bruetsch has maintained a diary throughout the years, paying more attention to it during the pandemic. She's also three quarters the way done with an Arthurian legend-inspired novel.

"Writing is a lifeline to me," said Bruetsch, who considers herself an introvert. "I enjoy it because it helps me sort out the things in my head, tell stories and tell other people's stories."

Bruetsch's love of writing is also due in part to her late cousin Thomas, a playwright who passed away at age 34 following a battle with Colon Cancer.

He'd often give Bruetsch books and encourage her to submit her works to be considered for publication. Bruetsch said he passed the family writing torch to her.

To date, Bruetsch has had both fiction and non-fiction pieces published.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Margaret Bruetsch

Catskills Confidential

The **Democrat** is a part of Catskill-Delaware Publications, which also produces 50-plus special sections annually, as well as Catskills Confidential, a visitors guide published eight times a year.

When Sullivan County's premier visitors guide had an editor opening this past summer, Bruetsch was offered the position.

Having always had aspirations to be a book editor, Catskills Confidential has given Bruetsch a creative outlet to continue to explore her passion for writing and editing, as well as photography (something she picked up from

her Uncle Bob who taught her how to edit/take photos).

"It's nice to get out and meet people, see places and do things I wouldn't otherwise," said Bruetsch, "and I've met some really great people along the way."

Bruetsch is still determining her long-term goals, but in the short term, she's excited to help make her best friend Siobhan Reid's wedding this July the best it can be.

In the meantime, her advice to other young professionals is as follows ...

"Take more chances. Don't always play it safe, and trust yourself."

Congratulations Margaret! Keep up the Great Work!

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Megan Gavin

BY MATT SHORTALL

Megan Gavin got into her line of work to help people live with confidence and know that the things important to them are always taken care of.

Gavin became a licensed insurance agent in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania and has been a sales representative with Liberty Mutual for over a year now. She said the role fits her like a glove.

Along with her supervisor and long-time friend, Katrina Graby, their mission is to assist their clients to get insurance products tailored to their specific needs, whether its coverage for Auto, Home, Umbrella, Life, Pet, Jewelry or just about anything else.

Gavin lives in Mountaintale along with her husband, Jonny, and their young daughter. She said she was excited for the challenge

the position at Liberty Mutual offered and quickly became one of their top performers.

Gavin has prior sales experience, including at WSUL. Gavin had first moved to Connecticut after attending SUNY Sullivan where she started working for a private property management firm. There she worked as a leasing agent for residential rental space on the Stamford waterfront.

While working in Connecticut, Gavin kept returning to visit friends and family in Sullivan County.

"I was trying to focus on myself and do a bit of soul searching," Gavin said. "I had accomplished enough in Connecticut that I felt like it was time to move back. I love living here and being a part

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BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Nolan Akerley

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS
Nolan Akerley

Nolan Akerley says the support he has around him from his parents and friends is a significant factor in his success thus far.

A corrections officer in the Woodbourne Correctional Facility, Akerley also serves the community as Fire Chief for the Woodridge Fire Department and an EMT for the Rock Hill Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Born and raised in Woodridge, Akerley went through the Fallsburg Central School District's grade school and high school and then made his way to SUNY Sullivan, where he earned his Associate's Degree in Fire Protection Technology.

For Akerley, being a volunteer firefighter means serving the community, but it also means carrying on the tradition set forth by his father Eric and his grandfather Harold, who were both volunteer firemen.

"It has just always been something I've always been intrigued with and that I love doing," said Akerley. Being with the Woodridge Fire Department for close to 10 years, Akerley says it's a joy being in the firehouse and "being able to put on the gear, going out in the community, riding the truck, helping the community and working with your fellow brothers and sisters."

As a corrections officer, Akerley also maintains a connection to the fire service. He serves as Deputy Chief of the correctional facility as

part of the Fire Response Team as well as the Corrections Emergency Response Team (CERT).

In the past 10 years, Akerley said he has been through some tough calls, but he says it is part of the job, and training helps to do the job the best you can.

Akerley's father, Eric, was a corrections officer and encouraged Nolan to take the civil service test, and when an opening came up, Akerley jumped at the chance.

Akerley says his father is a role model in his life, and he is proud to follow in his footsteps by being a corrections officer and serving the community in the fire department.

"Just everything I do resembles the path that my father laid out," said Akerley.

Akerley's mother, Donna, is the Fallsburg Town Clerk, and seeing his mother serve the community all her life and being involved in politics has inspired him to get into politics in the future.

He said Eric and Donna did an excellent job as parents. "I think they're the reason that myself and my sister, Amie, are the way we are. We're both happy, and we're doing well in life. It's because of our parents and how we were raised," said Akerley.



Akerley says that communication is key to success in a leadership position as fire chief for Woodridge

Fire Department. He stressed the importance of, "Being able to communicate with the other members, the other line officers, making sure we're all on the same page, making sure everybody's being heard."

Furthermore, Akerley says he likes to lead by example by investing in fire training and exposing his crew to more instructors and training.

Moreover, having mutual aid training with other fire companies has been helpful and allows the companies to work together more

often.

"When we get together, we all know what to do; we know how each other operates. We know our strengths and our weaknesses," said Akerley.

He said for folks who want to live and work in the county, there are plenty of organizations that people can get involved with and that can positively impact their community.

Moreover, he said, "Whatever you put your mind to, just stick with it, keep going. It's not always going to be easy; it's not always going to be fun. But the rewards, in the end, are always going to be gratifying."

He added, "There really isn't graduating on what success is. As long as what you want to do in life makes you happy, and you enjoy it, I think you'd become successful."



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Paige LaPolt-Peloso



BY PATRICIO
ROBAYO

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Paige
LaPolt – Peloso

Paige LaPolt – Peloso has always loved the outdoors and horses, and is fortunate enough to have a career that encompasses both her passions.

LaPolt – Peloso is the Barn Manager for New Hope Community. She

was born and raised in Sullivan County and recently married her husband, Chris.

LaPolt – Peloso helps maintain New Hope Community's Stables at McCoy Meadow, which offers an array of Therapeutic Horseback

Riding/In House Program (THRIP) that provides equine and other animal therapies that enhance the lives of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"Just seeing the impact that it has on the people that I work with is just really special," said LaPolt – Peloso.

She recalls one individual who had minimal capability with their speech, but when they saw LaPolt – Peloso's dog Bear, they yelled out, "Dog!"

"It was just like one of those things that were just like, so monumental, I'll never forget that," said LaPolt – Peloso.

Growing up in Bethel, she went to Liberty High School, followed her passion for horses, attended SUNY Morrisville, and majored in Equine Science and Management, concentrating on breaking and training.

What made LaPolt – Peloso want to go into this field? She said she always had pets growing up, and one day her sister wanted to take horseback riding lessons.

And after she saw what it was like at the horse farm and watching folks ride,

she said she knew she wanted to do this.

When she was 13, she started working on the horse farm, taking care of the horses, and doing various chores.

When it came down to picking where she wanted to go to college and what to study, she went with her passion for animals and attended SUNY Morrisville.

She had the choice between racing cars or horses, and she went with horses.

She was an active race car driver at the Bethel Motor Speedway at one time, and that race track has seen three generations of her family race along with her husband.

Nowadays, LaPolt – Peloso can be seen in the pit crew helping to maintain her husband's race car.

When she earned her Associate's Degree from SUNY Morrisville, she came home for the summer and was told that New Hope Community was looking for a riding instructor.

She soon applied and was happy to accept and start her career in New Hope.

Nine years later, LaPolt – Peloso is now the Barn Manager at New Hope Community and helps oversee the stables and animals.

Since her time at New Hope, she has

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Paige LaPolt-Peloso

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