



A BENEFIT OF LOVE — Bonnie and Ray Flor of Amherst, left, visit with Ray's mother, Bernice Graff, and benefit attendee Kathleen Naples, during a fundraiser held for them on Sunday at St. Mary's Parish Center. A Benefit of Love was organized to help the couple pay medical bills, as both are battling cancer. For information, visit the Web site www.florbenefit.org.

Photo by Joe Eberle
Purchase color photos at www.BeeNews.com

Community News

The Hartford Estates - North Bailey Homeowners Association will hold a general meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 31 at the North Bailey Fire Hall, at Sweet Home Road at Homecrest Drive.

The Amherst BelCanto Choirs held a pancake breakfast fundraiser at the Applebee's on Transit Road in Williamsville on Jan. 12, serving more than 200 breakfasts. Choir members provided table service and a talent show. Proceeds support the choir's planned New Orleans tour in the summer of 2009. Applebee's provided the breakfast.

The Sandy Beach Yacht Club Women's Organization recently installed the 2008 officers, including Amherst residents Margot Smith, membership chair, and Marilyn Bush, publicity chair.

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Agreement reached; St. Joseph's Hospital to remain open

by **KEATON T. DEPRIEST**
Cheektowaga Editor

Nearly 14 tumultuous months after St. Joseph Hospital was mandated to close under New York State law, the facility has officially won the fight to remain open.

The Catholic Health System, the company that owns the hospital, finalized an agreement with the state Department of Health on Jan. 17.

Following months of negotiations with the Health Department and state representatives, CHS was finally able to reach a common ground by creating a plan to redevelop the hospital campus.

The plan will keep 125 beds, core services and the hospital's state-of-the-art emergency department in operation on the Harlem Road campus on the sponsorship of CHS-owned Sisters of Charity Hospital.

The emergency department, which opened in 2005, cost \$10 million to construct and cares for more than 27,000 patients each year.

"We believe this plan is an enormous victory for our community, including the large number of seniors in Cheektowaga and families throughout growing eastern suburbs," said Joseph McDonald, CHS president and chief executive officer.

He said keeping the facility open will ensure hospital and emergency room capacity for the

community in cases of a catastrophic event, such as the October 2006 snowstorm.

"St. Joseph Hospital is a critical community resource and our action plan preserves patient care, saves money and jobs, avoids disruption of services and maintains the campus as an economic engine in the community," McDonald said.

On Nov. 2, 2006, the Commission on Healthcare Facilities in the 21st Century listed 50 hospitals in the state to be restructured, nine of which were slated for closing, including St. Joseph Hospital.

The organization is also known as the Berger Commission, named after its chairman, Stephen Berger.

Since the Berger Commission's list became law on Jan. 1, 2007, CHS and hospital representatives have been pursuing several legal cases against the state to try to prohibit the facility's closing.

The current CHS litigation against the state will enter into settlement discussions as a result of the new agreement.

Under the new plan, which McDonald said meets the recommendations of the Berger Commission, St. Joseph Hospital will surrender its operating certificate and its 208 licensed beds, including 127 beds currently in operation.

The facility would then reopen as the eastern campus of Sisters of Charity Hospital, with 125 un-

used beds from Sisters Hospital and an operating license on a date yet to be determined.

McDonald said the agreement also:

- Eliminates 200 beds, as recommended in the Berger Commission report, while creating an even distribution of beds across CHS, which will receive \$8 million to fold its operations into the Sisters Hospital network.

- The current employees of both facilities will maintain their jobs, while St. Joseph Hospital may still plan to expand its senior services department to meet the needs of the rapidly growing senior population.

State Assemblyman Dennis Gabryszak, D-Cheektowaga, said the hospital is an asset to the surrounding community, and keeping the hospital open has been his main priority since being elected to the Assembly.

"This is a major victory for the residents of Cheektowaga, Lancaster and all of Western New York," he said.

U.S. Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, also called CHS' agreement with the state a solid plan for the future of health care.

"The hospital has operated in the black and has been financially viable for the past six fiscal years, while its admissions and emergency room visits have steadily grown," he said. "This is a solid plan, and I'm happy the state and CHS will be working together to finalize the details."

Nominations for Service Academies include Amherst residents

East Amherst resident Christopher Cassidy has been nominated by Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-New York, to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Nominees were chosen from a large group of applicants based on the recommendations of a selection committee appointed by Clinton, as well as factors including academic record, leadership potential and overall achievement.

"Our nation's military academies represent a commitment to excellence and are distinguished by a unique dedication to duty, honor and courage," Clinton said. "I am very proud of this year's nominees, and I wish them every success in fulfilling their dreams of becoming the future leaders of our nation's armed services."

Rep. Thomas Reynolds, R-Amherst, also submitted nominations — Elliot Hoy, a graduate of Williamsville North High School now attending the University at Buffalo, to the Naval Academy, Annapolis; and Adam Danni, Williamsville South High School, Merchant Marine Academy.

"Our nation's Service Academies have a long and well-deserved reputation for excellence," Reynolds said. "I know these Erie County students will continue that tradition of excellence and serve our country with honor, duty and character."

To receive a nomination, students had to complete an application and appear before Reynolds' Service Academy Nomination Review Board.

Candidates are considered for the Air Force, Military, Naval and Merchant Marine academies.

Valentine's Day cards being collected by Main Street chiropractor for soldiers

Dr. Brian A. Pokorski, of Chiropractic Lifestyle and WNY Disc Decompression Center, is trying to collect 1,000 cards from the community to send to soldiers serving overseas on Valentine's Day.

The effort is part of the Have a Heart campaign.

"I cannot think of a better way to show our gratitude and ap-

preciation than by sending cards with heartfelt messages to the soldiers overseas," he said.

The local base representative, retired Col. James Germain of the 914th Family Readiness Unit, said the troops are appreciative of the campaign.

"It lets them know that they are not alone and gives a real

boost to their morale," Germain said.

Pokorski is collecting cards at his office, 4796 Main St., Snyder. He will deliver the cards to the Niagara Falls Air Force Base on Feb. 1.

Anyone interested in donating a card or getting involved with the Have a Heart campaign should call 635-9742.

School News

Mark Coley, a student at Amherst High School, has been awarded a competitive scholarship from the University of Findlay. His activities include Amherst Youth Court, National Honor Society and orchestra. Coley was one of a select group of 148 students from around the country invited to com-

pete for merit scholarships worth up to \$5,000. Students were selected based on high school grade point average and ACT or SAT scores. Only 29 students from this group were awarded a scholarship. He is the son of Mary Ann and Mark Coley of Amherst.