

THE VOICE



Spring 2024



The fight to Save SUNY Downstate

UUP mobilizes for hospital's survival

UUP EXPERTS' COVID Q&A • BIG WINS FOR BARISTAS, BALLPLAYERS AND BUDTENDERS

The Voice is a publication of United University Professions (UUP), bargaining agent for the more than 38,000 academic and professional employees of the State University of New York.

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ON THE COVER: A grateful New Yorker sends a powerful message on why Brooklyn needs Downstate. Photo courtesy of Corning Place Communications.

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BROOKLYN NEEDS DOWNSTATE

February 29 was a sunny, blustery day in Central Brooklyn, perfect for holding a rally in front of SUNY Downstate University Hospital to tell SUNY and Gov. Kathy Hochul to quit their plan to close this life-saving facility.

So, we shut down Clarkson Avenue, built a stage in the middle of the road and held a loud, attention-grabbing rally. The Rev. Al Sharpton was there. So was state Sen. Zell-nor Myrie, AFT President Randi Weingarten, and some of Brooklyn's most influential faith leaders.

By noon, the street was packed. More than 1,200 people, many of them Downstate doctors, nurses and other medical staff, filled nearly half a city block, waving signs that read "Brooklyn Needs Downstate!"

And we let Brooklyn, Albany and the rest of the state know that we will not stop fighting until the governor and SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. abandon their sham of a plan to close Downstate.

It's imperative we take this stand. Brooklyn needs Downstate.

The state Department of Health said as much in a Feb. 1 report that found that communities in East and Central Brooklyn—and especially low-income people of color—have poor access to health care. Imagine how much worse it would be if Downstate's hospital is closed.

More than 400,000 patients receive care there annually—and nearly 90% of patients are on Medicaid, are underinsured or have no insurance. If the hospital closes, the most vulnerable will be hurt the most.

It's against this backdrop that SUNY and the governor plan to dismember Downstate, moving its kidney transplant center and other vital services to other hospitals. What's left will be crammed into a wing at Kings County Hospital Center.

In spring 2020, as the coronavirus

was ravaging New York City, Downstate was indispensable. As the state's sole COVID-only hospital, Downstate treated tens of thousands of people with the deadly disease. The 342-bed hospital was full. The hospital's cafeteria became a holding area for COVID patients.

And UUP members on the frontlines of the pandemic saw the horror of those early days of COVID firsthand.

They remember the ventilators. They remember the patients, who whispered their final goodbyes to loved ones over cell phones. And they remember the rows of refrigeration trucks used as makeshift morgues.

Yet, just four years after a pandemic, the governor and SUNY see fit to close Downstate because it loses money and is too expensive to repair. This is as incredible as it is shortsighted.

As a state teaching hospital, Downstate was never meant to be a money-maker. Downstate lost \$160 million in revenue as a COVID-only hospital, dollars that weren't reimbursed by the state. Is it any wonder that the hospital is running a multimillion-dollar deficit?

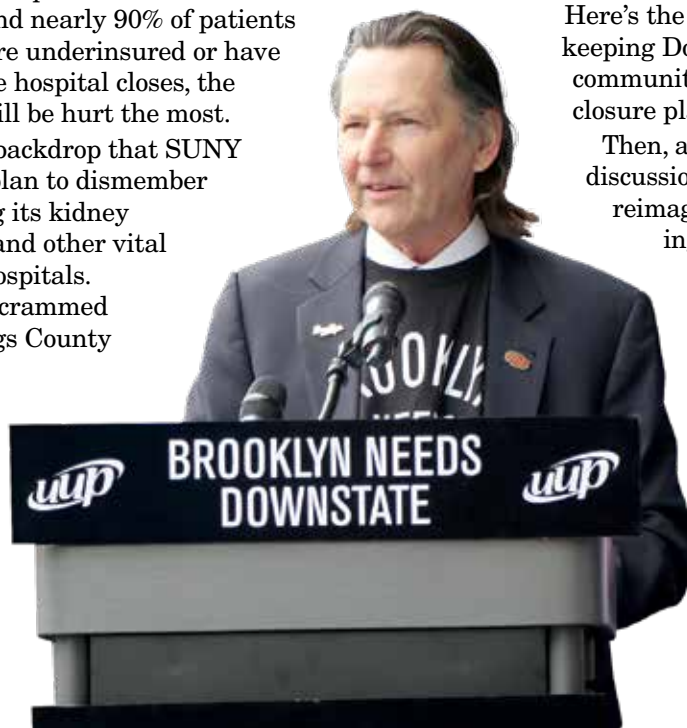
I have toured Downstate hospital and while repairs are needed, Downstate is not the dilapidated, rundown facility the chancellor describes anytime news cameras are around. In fact, more than \$150 million in construction upgrades are ongoing at the hospital.

Here's the bottom line: UUP is committed to keeping Downstate hospital open and serving the community. The first step is to kill the hospital closure plan.

Then, and only then, can we have meaningful discussions with SUNY and the governor about reimagining Downstate as a viable, vital teaching hospital that serves the unique needs of Brooklyn, New York City and the state.

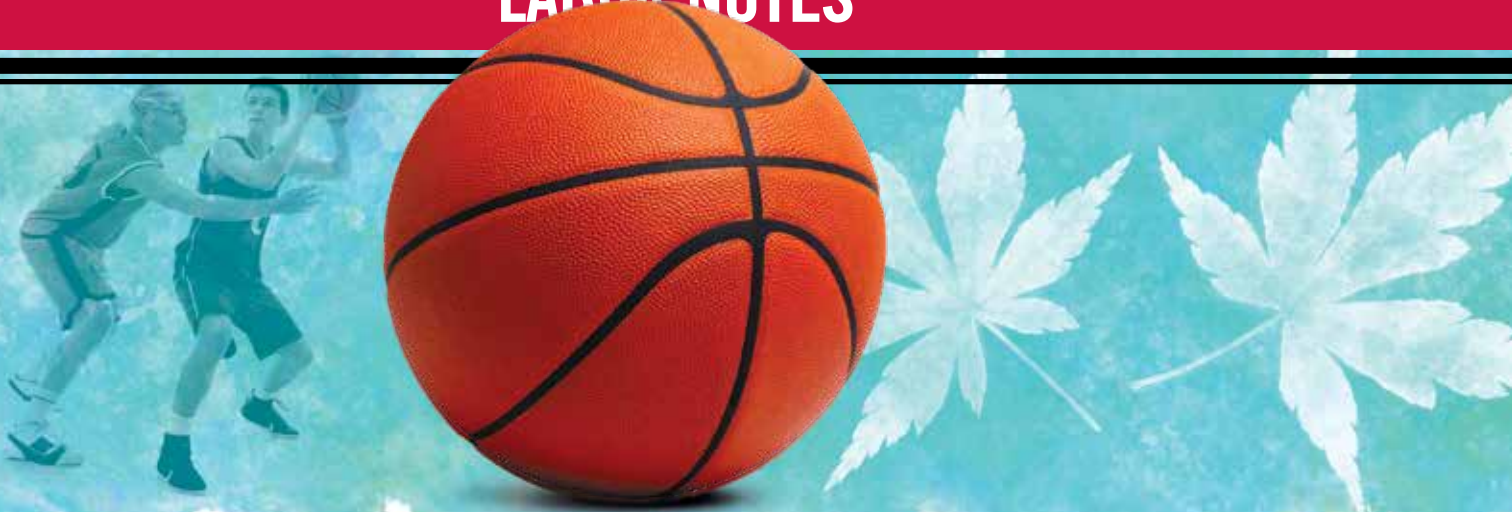
If Downstate closes, people will die.

“UUP IS COMMITTED TO DOING ALL WE CAN TO KEEP DOWNSTATE HOSPITAL OPEN AND SERVING THE COMMUNITY. THE FIRST STEP IS TO KILL THE HOSPITAL CLOSURE PLAN. IF DOWNSTATE CLOSURES, PEOPLE WILL DIE.”



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Kowal".

Frederick E. Kowal
President, UUP



The unexpected newly unionized: Cannabis workers and college athletes

A marijuana dispensary in Edwardsville, Illinois, filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board to unionize in early February, seeking representation for both full- and part-time budtenders.

Cloud9 Cannabis has filed its petition in conjunction with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a union based in the United States and Canada which represents around 1.3 million blue- and white-collar workers.

New York state legalized adult recreational marijuana use in 2021, but the rollout of legal dispensaries has been rocky. New York's Office of Cannabis Management reported nearly 7,000 applications to open dispensaries last year, but the OCM has seen numerous legal problems involved with granting licenses to sell marijuana, and Gov. Kathy Hochul's initial plan to fund early dispensaries has gone nowhere.

College athletes union

The Dartmouth men's basketball team voted March 5 to unionize, becoming the first unionized college sports team in the United States.

The team's 15 players, who are considered employees of the school by the National Labor Relations Board, now make up one of the smallest and most

unconventional unions in the country.

Forward Cade Haskins was one of the principal organizers, having begun his labor journey after helping to launch the Student Worker Collective at Dartmouth with other students working in campus dining. Students won COVID sick pay and increased wages

Unions roll out into a budding industry and make a play for higher ed sports

through the union. These wins inspired Haskins to fight for similar benefits for his basketball team, whose players put in 30-plus hours a week while also juggling homework and other jobs.

The vote was 13 to 2 in favor of joining Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 560.

The debate on whether college athletes should be classified as university employees has been ongoing for years, with similar cases playing out at schools in California and Pennsylvania. The NCAA and universities maintain that athletes are students, not employees, and Dartmouth attempted to halt the election before being denied by the NLRB. Trustees for the school hope to have the results of the union election overturned.



Read more on the Teamsters' dispensary outreach

<https://bit.ly/IBTmarijuana>



Read more on New York state's cannabis rollout

<https://bit.ly/NYScannabis>



Read more on college athletes' employment status

<https://bit.ly/AthletesUnion>



Starbucks must reinstate Buffalo barista/organizer

A judge for the National Labor Relations Board has ordered Starbucks to reinstate Jaz Brisack, a barista and labor union organizer who resigned in 2022.

Brisack, who uses they/them pronouns, was instrumental in the unionization of the Elmwood Avenue Starbucks in Buffalo in late 2021. That was the first Starbucks store to unionize in the United States. Nearly 400 Starbucks locations across the country have since unionized. Starbucks has opposed unionization efforts for decades.

Brisack resigned after their scheduling requests were repeatedly ignored by Starbucks management. They then went to work full-time for Workers United, the union organizing Starbucks workers with which Brisack collaborated to create that first union in Buffalo.

The judge's decision about Brisack's reinstatement is pending review by the National Labor Relations Board, and could be enforced via court order if approved.

Read more at
bit.ly/StarbucksReinstate



TN VW workers to join the UAW

A majority of the over 4,000 employees at a Volkswagen plant in southern Tennessee are set to join the United Auto Workers less than sixty days after announcing their intention to unionize.

The Volkswagen Chattanooga Assembly Plant is the first of dozens of non-union auto plants where grassroots organizing has occurred in the past year to announce majority support for a union.

This past fall, around 145,000 UAW members at Ford Motor Company, General Motors and Stellantis went on strike. Those workers emerged in October with wage increases and an end to a two-tier wage system which classed some workers as "temporary" in order to pay them less. In the months since, UAW organizers have attempted to extend similar victories to other non-unionized plants in the United States.

Read more at
bit.ly/VW-UAW



VOTE-COPE: Strength through political action

VOTE-COPE is the nonpartisan political fund-raising arm of NYSUT, which coordinates voluntary contributions of members and supports NYSUT-endorsed candidates and campaign committees that are pro-public education and pro-labor.

No union dollars are used to support candidates or campaign committees.

Last year, your colleagues contributed nearly \$8 million to VOTE-COPE, which stands for Voices of Teachers in Education- Committee on Political Education.

UUP also operates the UUP Higher Ed Action Fund (HEAF), a political action committee. NYSUT gives 40% of UUP con-



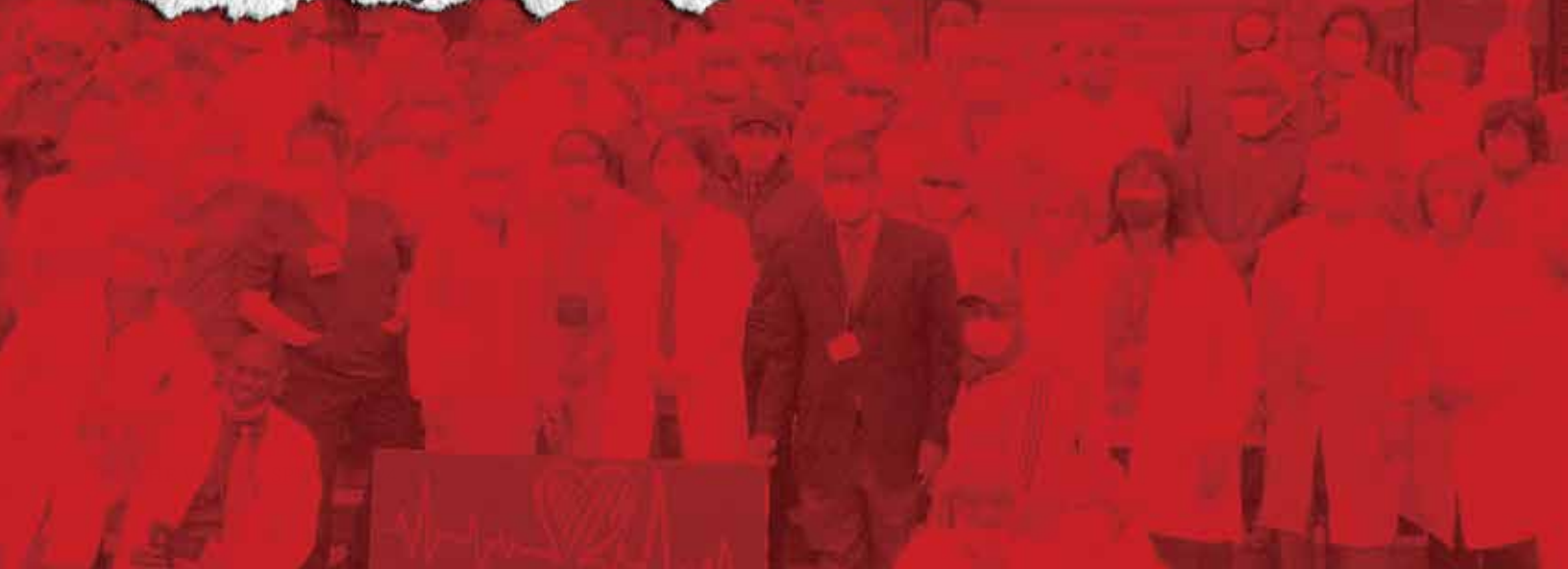
tributions to VOTE-COPE back to HEAF.

Carolyn Kube, UUP statewide vice president for professionals, is the officer in charge of UUP's VOTE-COPE campaign. Kelly Keck, president of the UUP Delhi Chapter and a UUP statewide Executive Board member, is the VOTE-COPE coordinator.

Kube said that VOTE-COPE "gives UUP visibility in the Legislature by contributing to candidates who champion our causes, and the contributions back into HEAF help highlight UUP's growing political power."

To register for VOTE-COPE,
visit uupinfo.org/votecope/





The fight to save Downstate

**UUP rallies
against the
state's sudden
plan to close
SUNY's vital
Brooklyn
teaching
hospital**

By Kate Morano

Thousands of Brooklyn residents owe their lives or the lives of loved ones to SUNY Downstate University Hospital, which has provided health care to New Yorkers for more than 150 years. Now SUNY is repaying that service by trying to shut the hospital down.

SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. announced in January a plan to shift most of the Downstate Hospital's services to other Brooklyn hospitals, including Kings County Hospital Center across the street. This plan was developed without the input of state health officials or community members.

A closure by any other name

“SUNY is calling its vision for Downstate a transformation, but it is anything but that,” UUP President Fred Kowal said. “Let’s call this what it is: SUNY is closing Downstate.

“If you moved the programs offered at my home campus, SUNY Cobleskill, to nearby colleges and turned the campus into a shopping center, do you still have a SUNY Cobleskill?” Kowal asked. “Of course not. And that’s what’s happening at Downstate. If there is no building, there is no hospital.”

The closure plan is a slap in the face to the staff members at SUNY Downstate and the community they so faithfully serve, and UUP responded in kind with a series of scathing press release and a campaign to save the hospital. The outpouring of support from hospital staff and community members since King’s announcement sends a strong message to the governor: Don’t close this hospital, because people will die.

More than 500 UUP Downstate members gathered for a meeting at the hospital with Kowal Jan. 29. All were eager to fight for their hospital. The following week, UUP held a rousing press conference at the Capitol’s Million Dollar Staircase; over 100 UUP mem-



UUP Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols (left) speaks at a Feb. 6, 2024, event held in Albany.

Downstate Medical: A history of serving the community

1856

The German General Dispensary is opened in Brooklyn by a small group of physicians to care for poor immigrants.



1858

The Long Island College Hospital of the City of Brooklyn is officially chartered by the state. It is authorized to operate a hospital and confer medical degrees.



1860

LICH graduates its first new doctors. It is one of the only 11 medical schools in the U.S. to admit Black students.

1931

The medical school is rechartered as the Long Island College of Medicine.



1950

LICH’s collegiate division, the Long Island College of Medicine, signs a merger contract with SUNY to become the medical college at what will be known as SUNY Downstate, to distinguish it from SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

bers attended, brandishing signs reading “Brooklyn Needs Downstate.” Labor leaders and elected state officials spoke at the conference; all expressed their support for keeping the hospital open.

Kowal went on a 90-minute tour of the hospital Feb. 12, accompanied by AFT President Randi Weingarten and NYSUT President Melinda Person, both of whom have thrown the weight of their union membership behind UUP’s fight. King has painted a dreary picture of Downstate as a decrepit, broken-down hospital but the union presidents instead found a hospital in workable condition, with some obvious repairs needed.

“ SUNY DRAFTED ITS PLAN TO CLOSE DOWNSTATE HOSPITAL IN SECRECY AND WAS HAPPY TO MOVE FORWARD WITHOUT INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN ANY WAY, SHAPE OR FORM. ”

— UUP President Frederick E. Kowal

Meanwhile, SUNY entered damage-control mode. In what UUP referred to as a “shoddy public relations stunt,” SUNY moved to assemble themed focus groups to ascertain public opinion about the transformation plan. These announcements came weeks after SUNY announced the plan.

As *The Voice* went to print, SUNY still had not released a report detailing findings and recommendations from the community sessions--which SUNY said would be published in mid-March.

“SUNY drafted its plan to close Downstate hospital in secrecy and was happy to move forward without involving the community in any way, shape or form,” Kowal said in testimony before the state Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means committees Feb. 8. “This is a complete

POVERTY IN BROOKLYN

Brooklyn is the second poorest of the five New York City boroughs, after the Bronx. Black and Latino residents in Brooklyn form a disproportionate share of those living below the poverty line, as they do in New York City overall and in New York state.

At Downstate University Hospital, this poverty is reflected by the fact that nearly 90% of its patients are enrolled in Medicaid.

In Brooklyn:

population: 2,561,102

below poverty level: 507,449 (19.8%)

Black and Latino residents make up 47% of the population overall, but 55% of those living below the poverty line.

In New York City:

population: 8,198,037

below poverty level: 1,497,382 (18.3%)

Black and Latino residents make up 51% of the population overall, but 83.4% of those living below the poverty line.

Brooklyn residents make up 31% of the population of NYC overall, but 34% of NYC residents living below the poverty line.

In New York state:

population: 19,185,089

below poverty level: 2,734,819 (14.3%)

54.8% of those living below poverty level live in NYC

Brooklyn makes up 13.3% of NYS residents, but 18.5% of those living below the poverty level

Black and Latino residents make up 34% of the state’s population, but represent 51% of the state’s poor.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

1964

The nation’s first federally funded dialysis unit, SUNY Downstate/Kings County Hemodialysis Program, is established.



1966

The University Hospital of Brooklyn opens.

1977

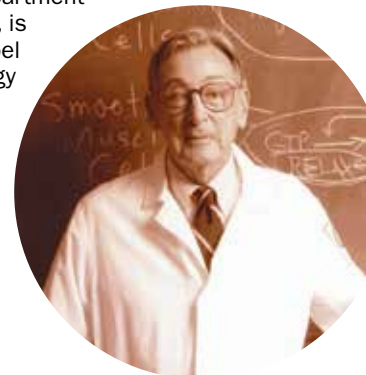
The first MRI images of humans are produced at SUNY Downstate by Dr. Raymond Damadian (left).

1991

The gene responsible for Marfan’s syndrome, a connective tissue disease, is discovered by a group of doctors at SUNY Downstate.

1998

Dr. Robert Furchgott, chairman of Downstate’s Department of Pharmacology, is awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work in cardiovascular health. He is SUNY’s first Nobel laureate in any discipline.



scam. It's nothing but smoke and mirrors, a disingenuous move to make the community believe they will actually have a say in what happens to this hospital."

The community-led effort culminated in a huge rally Feb. 29. UUP obtained a permit to close the block of Clarkson Avenue in front of Downstate Hospital, and more than 1,200 employees and supporters of the hospital gathered in front of a stage where more

“PEOPLE WILL LOSE THEIR JOBS. EVERYONE FROM WORKERS TO MEDICAL STUDENTS WILL SUFFER FROM LOSS OF INCOME, AND PATIENTS WILL SUFFER FROM THE LOSS OF SERVICES.”

— Maxine Bennett, asset manager at Downstate's Department of Property Control

than two dozen labor leaders, lawmakers, community activists and faith-based advocates for Central Brooklyn joined Kowal in urging Gov. Kathy Hochul to save Downstate. (See story page 12.)

A community scorned

While UUP went to bat for the hospital in Albany, Downstate Chapter members expressed their concerns and anger over the plan.

"This hospital means everything to me," said Marie Lauture, who works in technical services at Down-

state Hospital. "I like to help people. It's not the rich people coming here. These people need this hospital."

Maxine Bennett, an asset manager at Downstate's Department of Property Control, also noted the danger the closure posed to community members.

"People will lose their jobs," said Bennett. "Everyone from workers to medical students will suffer from loss of income, and patients will suffer from the loss of services."

The Central Brooklyn community relies on Downstate. The hospital treats over 400,000 patients annually. Nearly 90% of them are on Medicaid or have no health insurance. Most patients are also low-income people of color; around 20% of Brooklyn's population lives below the poverty line; over half those living in poverty are Black or Latino.

Rowena's legacy

This is not the first time SUNY has attempted to interfere with Downstate. In the early 2010s, New York state and the SUNY system announced a plan to downsize and privatize the hospital, which would have involved cutting hundreds of jobs. Labor leaders were angered by the proposal, none more so than the late Rowena Blackman-Stroud, then-president of UUP's Downstate Chapter. Blackman-Stroud assembled a faith-based coalition, held rallies at the hospital's Emergency Department entrance, and made sure that her union members were decked out in red "Save Jobs at SUNY Downstate" T-shirts.

2007

The Berger Commission report leads to an overhaul of New York's healthcare system, and prevents the first attempted closure of SUNY Downstate.

2010

SUNY Downstate celebrates 150 years of medical education.

2011

LICH is absorbed by SUNY Downstate, becoming the University Hospital of Brooklyn at Long Island College Hospital. It served as a clinical campus for Downstate medical students.

2013

Rowena Blackman-Stroud (right) mobilizes UUP members and a faith-based coalition from Brooklyn to save jobs at SUNY Downstate amidst plans to "restructure" the hospital.

2014

LICH is closed after a long legal fight between UUP and its allies and the SUNY Board of Trustees.

2020

SUNY Downstate is designated a COVID-19 only hospital for nine months during the pandemic.

2024

Without input from health professionals or the community, SUNY announces a plan that would amount to a de facto closure of Downstate.





“It’s like she was on the front lines of the battle,” said Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols. “She was Downstate, the one person everyone knew at Downstate.”

Blackman-Stroud’s efforts continued during the coronavirus pandemic. Then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo designated Downstate as the sole COVID-only hospital in New York in Spring 2020, and Blackman-Stroud was a driving force behind the effort to get adequate Personal Protective Equipment for frontline workers at the hospital.

Abrahams-Nichols believes Blackman-Stroud would be devastated by the current threat to Downstate.

“She put so much work into saving this hospital every time they came to close it,” Abrahams-Nichols said. “She gave her whole life for Downstate.”

“ I DON’T CARE HOW MUCH WE PUT INTO THIS; HOW MUCH WE HAVE TO DO. WE HAVE ONLY ONE GOAL IN THIS EFFORT: TO WIN. ”

— UUP President Frederick E. Kowal

UUP is fighting to win

Gov. Kathy Hochul included Downstate in her 30-day amendments in February, pledging \$300 million to support the “transformation” and \$200 million to cover deficits for the next two years. UUP and lawmakers including Sen. Zellnor Myrie and Assemblymember Pat Fahy were critical of Hochul’s support for the plan. SUNY’s timeline to close the hospital is unclear, but Kowal has promised to fight for the hospital for as long as necessary.

“I don’t care how much we put into this; how much we have to do,” said Kowal. “We have only one goal in this effort: to win.”

UUP Communications intern Vince Gasparini contributed to this story

LOUD AND CLEAR: BROOKLYN NEEDS DOWNSTATE

A powerhouse lineup of labor, lawmakers and faith leaders shut down part of Clarkson Avenue in Brooklyn Feb. 29 for a rally that sent a message from center stage straight to Albany: Governor Hochul, lives depend on this hospital. Don't close Downstate!

UUP planned the rally as a can't-miss show of strength, with speakers known for speaking truth to power. They called the threatened closure of a desperately needed safety-net hospital an act of injustice against a desperately poor but vibrant neighborhood.

A sea of supporters of the hospital stretched down the block in front of the entrance—UUP members, employees from other unions and Central Brooklyn residents who included many former patients.

They talked of the place that Downstate holds in their hearts. They talked of multi-generational connections to this hospital, of lives saved and children born. They talked of how the closure of Downstate will be a setback for hundreds of patients, the true measure of which may never be known except to grieving families whose loved ones lost precious time connecting with new services—or never made that connection at all.





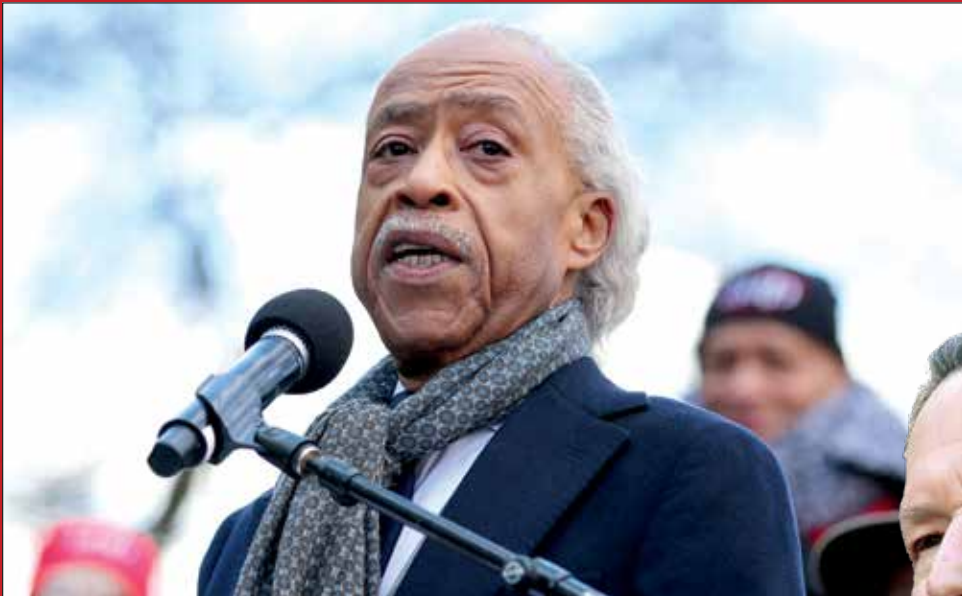
NATIONAL LEADERS CAME THROUGH FOR DOWNSTATE

AFT President Randi Weingarten (left) pledged the national power of her union's 1.7 million members.

The Rev. Al Sharpton—the national civil rights leader and social justice activist who grew up not far from Downstate—set out the fight for the hospital as an act of determination in which right is on the side of the just.

“If we don't do our duty,” Sharpton said to deafening cheers from the crowd, “people will suffer.”

UUP President Fred Kowal (below) pledged, “We will not let Downstate close. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.”





« Brooklyn Assembly Member Latrice Walker delivered an impassioned speech in defense of Downstate University Hospital.



« “What more do we have to sacrifice?” asked state Sen. Zellnor Myrie (left), a Brooklynite who has excoriated the Hochul administration for backing the closure plan. “We deserve better.”









HOW TO HELP DOWNSTATE

You might be hundreds of miles from Brooklyn when you read this, but if you are a UUP member, you have already committed to the union belief that an injury to one is an injury to all.

Every member of this union owns this all-out effort to save SUNY Downstate University Hospital from closing. If we let SUNY and Gov. Kathy Hochul think they can get away with this, there will be no end to what they believe they can next do to a different SUNY campus. This fight is not just about Downstate; it's about your students, your colleagues, your campus, your community that is so intertwined with the life of the vibrant SUNY campus at its heart.

So please go to the below link—which you can also access through the homepage of the UUP website at uupinfo.org/BrooklynNeedsDownstate/. Then stand up for the patients that Downstate serves, and the community that needs this hospital so much. Once you're on the Downstate Action Page, you will see links that will take you to action letters you can send to Gov. Hochul and other elected leaders. You will see a way to sign up for information on forthcoming events and pledge your help for future events.

UUP has led a relentless effort to save this hospital, with rallies and news conferences, with bold statements that refute the misinformation spread by SUNY about Downstate, and with a belief that this is a just fight that will be remembered as being on the right side of history, and on the side of saving lives.

Kowal has said it more than once, but it bears repeating: “We will not let Downstate close.”

SCAN THE QR CODE TO SEND A LETTER URGING GOV. HOCHUL TO WORK WITH THE LEGISLATURE AND ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO COME UP WITH A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR SUNY DOWNSTATE.





A light for the overlooked

The artwork of Empire State University Chapter member Raul Manzano focuses on the oppressed

By Vince Gasparini, special to UUP

Using art as a tool to represent the struggles of underrepresented groups has always been a powerful way for artists to exercise their talents.

Empire State University Chapter member Raúl Manzano's art focuses on the oppressed.

"I have a kind of, if you will, diversified type of work that addresses many communities," Manzano said. His artwork targets a range of people, mostly focusing on groups that have a history of being oppressed in the United States.

"If I'm dealing with migration, most likely I will be targeting Latinos [or] Hispanic populations," he said. "If I'm raising an issue dealing with Black issues, obviously that's going to be targeting the Black community."

Manzano uses the Statue of Liberty heavily in his artwork, along with symbols from the cultures he is representing. He hopes to have his viewers find a connection with the paintings, as he strives to heighten awareness of issues that persist for underrepresented groups in the U.S.

In his painting "Believers/Creyentes," Manzano portrays a group of migrants, old and young, following Lady Liberty down a path into a glowing light. This piece was featured at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Abilene, Texas, in September.

"My idea is to make people think about the topics that I am presenting, [and] perhaps how they might

relate to them," he said. Manzano notes how he is able to highlight topics such as Black Lives Matter or immigration through his artwork.

"That's my goal, to bring that type of awareness to the public, to make them think about all these events and activities and issues that are happening in our society," Manzano said.

Manzano says he finds inspiration for his artwork from a variety of sources, including "from newspapers, from people I talk to, [and] from my surroundings."

Remembering the often forgotten

Pamela Malone, president of the UUP Empire State Chapter, has long admired Manzano's work for its strong sense of social justice and a message that speaks to the often-divisive public discourse of the last decade in the United States.

"His work is incredibly inspiring to me," Malone wrote in a tribute to Manzano's paintings. "With beautiful colors and impactful images, Raúl's works bring focus to the injustices and inequalities that exist in our society."

"His work is timely and he intuitively captures the emotions

we feel over current issues," Malone continued. "With his use of American symbols, his work serves as a reminder of our country's potential. Raúl is dedicated to sharing his talents and providing space and encouragement for his students. He is a faculty member who makes me proud to work at Empire."

In 2019, Manzano received an individual artist grant from the Puffin Foundation, a non-profit who looks to give a platform to marginalized and under-





Raúl Manzano's artwork uses the Statue of Liberty to highlight issues facing underrepresented groups in the U.S. Above: "Trump's Legacy II: Please Help!" (left) and "Grasping for Freedom, Grasping for Hope." Previous page: "Come Sweet Heart, Lean On Me" and "Blind Justice." All works are oil on canvas, 30x24 inches. Photo by Dagoberto Jorge.

represented voices. Using this grant, Manzano once again used the Statue of Liberty in his project "In the Eye of the Beholder," which highlights the struggles faced by immigrants, such as family separation and discrimination.

Manzano has been at Empire State University for 18 years, having served as a faculty arts mentor, co-advisor for the Metro Art Club and curator of exhibitions at the Livingston Gallery in Brooklyn. Manzano received his Master of Arts from the university in 2005.

He finds that by working with young artists, he is able to advise them on their prospective careers while also staying in touch with what is happening in the art world.

Said Manzano, "Working with the students, you are always getting fresh information."



To view more of Manzano's work, visit bit.ly/RaulManzano



UUP MEMBERS HAVE HAD MORE THAN **\$11.7 MILLION** IN LOAN FORGIVENESS!



**ALL UUP
MEMBERS
QUALIFY FOR
PUBLIC SERVICE
LOAN
FORGIVENESS!**

Virtual PSLF clinics held every payday.

Presented by your statewide Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee, jobryan@uupinfo.org

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UPCOMING UUP VIRTUAL STUDENT DEBT CLINIC WEBINAR DATES:

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 · 11:30 AM-1:00 PM via Zoom

Wednesday, May 22, 2024 · 5:00 PM-6:30 PM via Zoom



Register through the UUP Events Calendar
[UUPINFO.ORG/CALENDAR/](https://uupinfo.org/calendar/)



Q&A

COVID-19 AND RSV VACCINE MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

By Vince Gasparini, special to UUP

Almost three and a half years ago, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved emergency use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 for people age 16 and older, in an astonishingly swift response to a deadly pandemic.

Since then, almost 70% of the U.S. population and 77% of the population of New York state have completed the primary series of vaccinations against COVID-19. However, the reception of the most recent booster vaccine has not been nearly as strong. Only 17% of the U.S. population and just over 15% of the population of New York state are up to date on their vaccinations against the virus.

In New York, people age 75 and older have done the best job of getting boosters, with 42.2% of this age group receiving the most recent vaccine. Only 5.5% of New Yorkers ages 18-25 are up to date, along with only 7.9% who are between 26 and 34 years old.

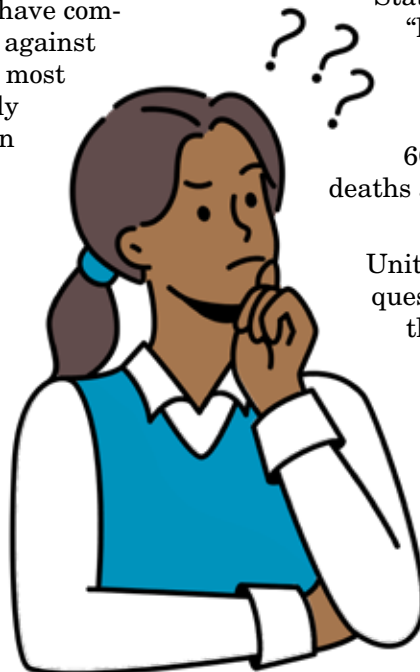
With the strikingly low response to updated COVID-19 vaccinations, and weekly death rates that have spiked up and down throughout the pandemic but have never been lower than

just below 500 deaths a week in the United States, infectious disease experts are trying to help people realize that a COVID-19 vaccination should not be a one-time occurrence. Instead, it should be viewed as a yearly vaccination.

Along with wanting to emphasize the importance of the COVID-19 vaccine, infectious disease experts also hope to spread the word about the RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccine. The FDA approved Arexvy in May 2023 as the first RSV vaccine in the United States. According to the FDA, RSV is a “highly contagious virus that causes infections of the lungs and breathing passages in individuals of all age groups.” Each year, RSV leads to over 60,000 hospitalizations and over 6,000 deaths among adults age 65 or older.

• • •

United University Professions posed questions to medical experts within the union at SUNY teaching hospitals about the COVID-19 and RSV vaccines, including why people should get the vaccines, why there has been such a large drop-off in the number of people choosing to get the COVID vaccine, and how we should expect to move forward. The answers have been edited for length.



Q The RSV vaccine is new this year. Why should people consider getting this vaccine, and do you think that information about the benefits of this vaccine will be lost in the constant news and updates about the latest COVID-19 vaccine?

A DR. SHARON NACHMAN: The RSV vaccine is for adults over 60 years of age. The clear benefit for the vaccine is that it prevents hospitalization as well as symptomatic disease. Adults over 60 have high rates of illness from this virus, and also high rates of hospitalization and even death. The vaccine is not a live vaccine so worries about getting 'sick with RSV' from it are simply not true.

The RSV vaccine for infants is not a vaccine. It's monoclonal. It boosts their immune response to the virus right away and does not require their immune system to make any antibody on its own. That means that it gives immediate protection to the infants for RSV.

DR. THOMAS A. RUSSO: RSV is as lethal as COVID, based on most recent data. In terms of risk groups, it's similar to COVID; almost all the individuals who had a lethal outcome with RSV were in the 60s-and-up crowd with underlying diseases.

I think there's little question if you're 60 and up, and you have significant comorbidities, particularly cancer, cardiopulmonary disease or are immunocompromised in any fashion, you should definitely get the RSV vaccine. The good news is it's much less common than COVID; in the most recent data it's 15-fold less common.

Q According to the CDC, nearly 70% of the U.S. population received a primary series of the COVID-19 vaccine. Data for the bivalent booster in the spring indicates that only 17% of the population received that shot. What do you think explains this drop-off and what do you think can be done about it?

A DR. SHARON NACHMAN: I wish I had the answer as to why people are not getting boosted. Some feel it is COVID discussion fatigue and some of it is people having had COVID and doing well with their infection, leading them to think, 'Well, I won't be any sicker with the next one.' Unfortunately, that may not be true. We saw lots

“ I TELL PEOPLE THAT EVEN IF THE VACCINE DOES NOT PREVENT THEM FROM GETTING ANY ILLNESS, IT TENDS TO PREVENT THEM FROM GETTING VERY SICK. ”

— Dr. Sharon Nachman

of illness with some of the COVID variants while we saw mild illness with others.

DR. THOMAS A. RUSSO: I think [one of the] most common reasons for people not to get vaccinated, and/or not to get additional [updated] doses of the vaccine is concerns for safety. And it's quite clear that in this country alone, with over 700 million doses of the COVID vaccine being administered, the safety profile is extraordinary, and the risk-benefit ratio highly favors getting vaccinated.



Dr. Sharon Nachman

SUNY Distinguished Professor and chief of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Stony Brook Children's Hospital



Dr. Thomas A. Russo

SUNY Distinguished Professor, Professor and Chief, Division of Infectious Diseases at Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the University at Buffalo



Dr. Stephen J. Thomas

Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse

There's been a concerted, well-funded, organized campaign to disseminate misinformation, and the COVID vaccine has been one of the targets of individuals behind these campaigns.

I think the second most-common reason is, 'Oh, well, I got the initial vaccine' or 'Oh, I subsequently got COVID so I'm good.' And what people have to appreciate is that immunity wanes over time, and the virus continues to evolve.

There's little question that with the new updated vaccine, most people are a year or so away from their previous COVID vaccination, and that they would benefit from this [updated vaccine.]

For older individuals, for those with underlying comorbidities—as we discussed for RSV—and for immunocompromised people and similar groups, the benefit is greatest. However, no one is risk-free if you get infected with COVID, even if you're young and healthy.

To be clear, vaccination is imperfect against preventing infection, but it's better than not getting vaccinated.

Beyond acute infection, vaccination also decreases the likelihood that you develop long COVID, which is an emerging problem in this pandemic as well.

DR. STEPHEN J. THOMAS: I believe there are many reasons people decide to be or not be vaccinated, and they encompass a broad spectrum of feelings and beliefs.

In some cases, people do not see themselves at risk

“IMMUNITY, WHETHER IT'S FROM PRIOR INFECTION AND/OR PRIOR VACCINATION, WANES OVER TIME, AND THE VIRUS CONTINUES TO EVOLVE.”

— Dr. Thomas A. Russo

from COVID either because they have already been vaccinated and do not think another vaccination is required, or they have already been infected, or both. In some cases, people did not like how the first vaccinations made them feel. Some people are hesitant about vaccines in general or COVID vaccines specifically and want additional information or proof of safety and effectiveness.

Finally, there are the small numbers of outliers who are anti-vax and subscribe to different theories which are really not about public health or science.



We need open dialogue between people and the clinicians they trust with their medical care so everyone understands the facts and can share in decision-making.

Q COVID deaths rose in the fall of 2023. In the next few years, how many annual deaths do you think we'll see, and do you think the country will simply accept that we will always have thousands of COVID deaths every year – similar to the way we accept 20,000 to 50,000 influenza deaths every year?

A **DR. SHARON NACHMAN:** I hope we never accept deaths from a preventable disease. That would be like saying, 'It's okay to be hypertensive, don't bother treating it. If people feel well, that's good enough, they don't really need medicine.'

DR. THOMAS A. RUSSO: Well, that is the reality with influenza. Accepting it, though, I think is an inappropriate word. I think we have the tools to do better and we're just not utilizing them.

COVID hasn't displayed the seasonal activity that influenza has, so there's many more cases and many more deaths, and straight up it's a more lethal virus. But we have the tools to minimize that. Most of those bad outcomes are occurring in unvaccinated or under-vaccinated individuals. So, getting the updated COVID vaccine will put a significant dent in those COVID deaths.

If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID, it's critical you test early to see if you have COVID.

If so, reach out to a health care provider to see if you would be a good candidate to get an antiviral such as Paxlovid, which we also know will decrease the likelihood of developing severe disease and having a bad outcome.

If you have symptoms and the home test is negative, you should consider either getting a PCR test, or retesting to ensure that you might not have COVID. Recent data suggests the viral load peaks at day four now, which is a little later than early in the pandemic.

DR. STEPHEN J. THOMAS: There are so many factors which can impact COVID infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths it is tough to try and model what could happen. Do we see a new variant? How many people decide to get the updated vaccine? What is happening in the rest of the world and what impact could this have on the U.S.?

I don't think influenza is an unreasonable comparator and yes, unfortunately, tens of thousands of Americans lose their lives to flu each year.



An aerial photograph of a globe centered in the frame, surrounded by a dense, lush green forest. The globe shows the Americas, with North and South America visible. The forest is a mix of various shades of green, suggesting a diverse ecosystem. The entire image is framed by a white decorative border with leaf-like patterns at the corners.

FIGHTING FOR OUR CLIMATE IS FIGHTING FOR OUR STUDENTS.

The time for action is now. We must act to combat the global climate crisis.
UUP believes SUNY and New York state should lead the way toward
renewable and sustainable energy sources.



**UUP SUPPORTS FIGHTING
THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CRISIS.**

HEAR THE VOICE

THE OFFICIAL PODCAST OF UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

Hosted by UUP President Fred Kowal, *The Voice Podcast* features interviews with state and national newsmakers on a wide range of in-the-news topics, like reproductive rights, gun violence and gun safety, the climate crisis and student debt.

The Voice Podcast is available on all major podcasting platforms, including Apple Podcasts and iTunes, Spotify.com and Audible.com.

You can also listen to *The Voice podcast* on UUP's podcast hosting website at: <https://thevoiceuup.buzzsprout.com/>



SYSTEMIC RACISM IN BUFFALO

Fred Kowal speaks with three leaders of Buffalo's Black community about systemic racism in Buffalo and the impact of the racially motivated May 14 mass shooting in Buffalo.

Guests include: Janique Curry, vice president of the Buffalo chapter of the National Action Network; Dr. Henry-Louis Taylor Jr., founding director of the Center for Urban Studies at the University at Buffalo and a professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the UB School of Architecture and Planning; and Pastor James Giles, co-founder of Back-to-Basic Outreach Ministries in Buffalo and leader of the Buffalo Peacemakers.

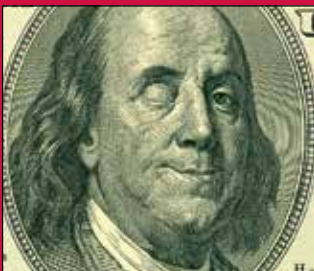


GET YOUR STUDENT LOANS FORGIVEN UNDER PSLF

Under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, borrowers who work in nonprofit or governmental jobs for 10 years or more and meet other program requirements can get their remaining student loans forgiven.

Sound simple? Navigating the PSLF program has been anything but easy.

In this episode, UUP statewide Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee talks about the PSLF waiver. O'Bryan-Losee runs UUP's virtual student debt clinics, which have helped thousands of our members get more than \$11.7 million in student debt forgiven through PSLF. O'Bryan-Losee has had \$74,000 in student loans forgiven under PSLF.



ADDRESSING ABORTION RIGHTS IN A POST-ROE WORLD

Guests are state Sen. Cordell Cleare, state Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas and UUP statewide Vice President for Academics Alissa Karl. Cleare and Gonzalez-Rojas are prime sponsors of the Reproductive Freedom and Equity Program. If approved, the bill would set aside \$50 million to fund grants to help women access safe abortion services—including women traveling to New York from states where abortions are illegal. Cleare is also sponsoring a bill that would require SUNY to offer abortion services at all of its campuses.

Kowal also speaks with Alissa Karl, who in addition to being UUP statewide Vice President for Academics is also the liaison to UUP's Women's Rights and Concerns Committee.



WHY IS CHILDBIRTH DEADLIER WHEN YOU'RE BLACK?

Much research has shown how maternal and infant mortality is dependent on one's race. A recent report showed in California, the wealthiest Black women die at twice the rate as wealthy white women. Poor Black women die at the highest rates of any population groups, along with indigenous women.

More needs to be done to rectify this serious situation, resulting from decades of systemic racism and neglect. Kowal talks with Dr. Camille Clare, chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, and a professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology in the College of Medicine; and Sarah Miller, a co-author of the National Bureau of Economic Research Study and an assistant professor of Business Economics and Public Policy at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan.

HOW UUP IS FOSTERING DEI INITIATIVES ON SUNY CAMPUSES

Pushed by a small but very vocal group of right-wing conservatives, attacks on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have escalated over recent months as they have been embraced by powerful Republican politicians. And more than a few have been directed at public higher education.

Discussion includes DEI and an initiative UUP launched in 2022 to expand DEI efforts on SUNY campuses, and create a DEI infrastructure within our union. Guests include UUP statewide Vice President for Professionals Carolyn Kube and Tiffany Richards, a DEI strategist with DEI consulting firm Tangible Development. UUP has been working with Tangible on DEI endeavors since 2022, part of an AFL-CIO Workforce Development Institute grant.



HOCHUL, SUNY AND TRUMP: A CONVERSATION WITH LIZ BENJAMIN

Kowal talks state and national politics with Liz Benjamin, an astute political insider who knows personally the movers and shakers in state politics. Last year, *The New York Times* printed her essay on Gov. Kathy Hochul, provocatively titled "Genial and Respectful? Why New York's Next Governor Is a Radical."

The discussion includes the 2023-2024 state budget, the effectiveness of Gov. Hochul and the state Legislature and how SUNY fared in the state budget. They also talk about recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and national politics, including Donald Trump's chances in the 2024 presidential election.



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Brockport's Lauren Lieberman helps open up sports to youth with visual impairment

By Vince Gasparini, special to UUP

When Lauren Lieberman first started working at SUNY Brockport in 1995, she already had years of experience working with children with visual impairment.

Having received her B.A. in adapted physical education from West Chester University and her M.S. in special physical education from the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse, Lieberman then worked at the Perkins School for the Blind for five years. She finished her education when she received her doctorate at Oregon State University.

While at West Chester, Lieberman, a Brockport Chapter member, volunteered for a program run by one of her professors for adults with visual impairment. "It was just so powerful to work with people who are blind and make a difference, so I decided that's what I want to do with my life."

Having found her calling, Lieberman arrived at Brockport and noticed something was missing.

"I realized our practicum programs that we ran for our students didn't have any kids with visual impairment," Lieberman said. "I was like 'How are my students going to know how to teach the kids with visual impairments?'"

This realization inspired Lieberman. She began writing grants, and in 1996, she successfully obtained funding which allowed her to found Camp Abilities. She is now a Distinguished Service Professor at Brockport and remains impassioned about expanding sports to kids with visual impairments.

Camp Abilities, as Lieberman describes it, is an "educational sports camp for children who are visually impaired, or blind, or deaf-blind." Students with visual impairments are



« Lauren Lieberman
SUNY Brockport

given the opportunity to participate in an array of Paralympic sports, including cycling, gymnastics, basketball, and even blind tennis, which Lieberman says they are starting with for the first time this year.

All of the coaches at the camp are students, undergraduate or graduate, getting their degrees in physical education or adapted physical education, with many of them focusing on special education and visual impairment.

Lieberman's camp was an immediate success—so much so that she realized they were going to need to scale up the operations.

“It was just hard because I couldn't even host the kids from New York because so many kids from other states were coming,” Lieberman said. “So, then we started off in Alaska, then Maryland, Connecticut, Arizona, and then it just took off.”

Camp Abilities now has camps in eight countries, with more than 20 locations in the United States, and it is still growing. The federal government recognized the reach of Lieberman's idea when it awarded her



A Camp Abilities participant, above, learns how to swing a baseball bat through a technique called tactile modeling—in which the instructor helps the student learn the action by feeling it as it is demonstrated. Another instructor, below, guides a camper through a session of physical-assistance gymnastics.

“ I REALIZED OUR PRACTICUM PROGRAMS THAT WE RAN FOR OUR STUDENTS DIDN'T HAVE ANY KIDS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT. I WAS LIKE 'HOW ARE MY STUDENTS GOING TO KNOW HOW TO TEACH THE KIDS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS?' ”



a Global Fulbright Scholarship in the fall of 2019. Lieberman used her Fulbright to start camps in Ghana, Ireland and Brazil. She has told about Camp Abilities' global journey in a book published by SUNY Press. (<https://www.campabilities.org/camp-abilities-story-memoir.html>)

The success of the camp is apparent in the effect it has had on its campers. In 2016, former camper Martha Ruether competed in the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Lieberman has also gained the respect of colleagues who realize that her work is a calling. UUP member John Foley of Cortland, a Distinguished Professor and director of the Activity and Movement Pedagogy Lab at the SUNY Cortland Department of Physical Education, met Lieberman more than 20 years ago. He's worked on research projects with her, and two Cortland faculty members are former Brockport students who worked at Camp Abilities and whose experience there made lasting impressions, Foley said.

“Last year, while giving a talk at a conference, I mentioned how important it is that our field has people like Lauren, a person who is so optimistic and

such a strong advocate for children with disabilities,” Foley wrote in an email. “She is very energetic and brings that positive energy to every project we work on. If you look at her CV it is apparent that she is a collaborator who loves bringing people together, and that she is a person that people want to work with. I hold her in the highest regard both as a friend and a fellow researcher.”

Camp Abilities' achievements have not gone unnoticed outside of Lieberman's professional circle. HBO's “Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel” did a segment on the camp, and a 25th anniversary documentary about the camp was also made. Lieberman chronicles her journey with Camp Abilities in her book, “The Camp Abilities Story.”

“It's just amazing how far I've come, and I still have a lot of time to do more,” Lieberman said. “COVID put us behind a little bit, but I feel like we can certainly expand a lot more.”



THE CELEBRATION CONTINUES ...

There's no such thing as a quiet year for UUP—at least, not within recent memory.

The coronavirus pandemic, budget battles, cuts to programs and services or outright eliminations of academic programs have been almost daily fare in some years. Now, UUP is dealing with the threatened closure of SUNY Downstate University Hospital (See pages 6-17).



All this union business has kept members pretty busy in the last decade, but that doesn't mean there's no time to stop and consider how far UUP has come in a half century.

The celebration of UUP's first 50 years

will continue through the UUP spring and fall delegate assemblies. Events and commemorations will include:

- A survey for retirees who have a story or insight they want to share (see below).
- A display of photos and artifacts at the Spring DA.
- Also at the Spring DA, Delegates will be invited to donate a new pair of socks, in exchange for a pair of responsibly manufactured UUP commemorative socks (left). The donated socks will be donated to help homeless people.
- A commemorative magazine that recounts significant events and challenges the union has faced, which will be published in conjunction with the Fall DA.



Got a retiree story or insight you want to share for the 50th Anniversary?

In continued celebration of UUP's 50th anniversary, retirees are invited to share their union knowledge and wisdom for UUP's archival records. UUP Research will be conducting an open-ended survey and interviews starting in Spring 2024.

The open-ended survey aims to collect historical information, memorable moments, lessons learned and advice for UUP leaders and activists. Both an online version and a paper hard-copy version of the survey will be available.

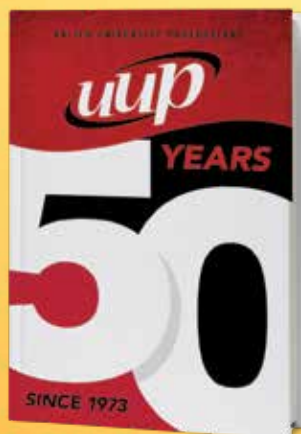
To sign up to receive the survey, please scan the QR code or visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/HistoryUUP. Help document UUP's rich history and honor the hard work and achievements members over the years—your voice is important!



NOT EVERYTHING FROM 1973 STILL WORKS TODAY.



BUT UUP WORKS BETTER THAN EVER.



United University Professions has worked for the interests of academics and professionals at SUNY's state-operated campuses and hospitals since 1973.

Help us celebrate our silver anniversary by sponsoring an ad in our commemorative book, coming out early in 2024.

Sponsorship opportunities are available, with proceeds to benefit the Rowena Blackman-Stroud Memorial Scholarship Fund.

For information, contact uup50@uupmail.org.



STAY CONNECTED!

UUPConnect is the newsletter that collects union happenings, current events and issues that affect you, your field and your career each week.

From Supreme Court decisions to issues in education, from changes in the health care profession to the latest news from the SUNY system, UUPConnect keeps you connected.

To receive UUPConnect in your in box, email UUP Communications Director Mike Lisi at UUPconnect@uupmail.org.

As small colleges struggle, so do their towns

This is becoming a sadly familiar story in many college communities around the country: As enrollments shrink and small colleges merge or close, how do the communities around these campuses always really, as this story explains?

Read more [HERE](#).

At last: A focus on diversifying medicine

It's a topic related to that of access in the mental health professions, and also new attention on the difficulties of increasing the number of physicians of color in the United States.

This also has been an important issue for UUP, which promoted the idea of the [Physician Educational Opportunity Program](#) at SUNY, and which backed the [related decisions](#) to create this program.

Want to get rid of your federal student loans? Read this.

If you work for SUNY and you have outstanding federal student loans, you are eligible to apply for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. And if you're a UUP member, you don't have to go it alone; your union will guide you through the application process.

Attend a free, virtual UUP clinic on PSLF and Income-driven Repayment Plans, led by statewide Secretary [Tara...](#)



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