



thank  
you

# Leadership Message

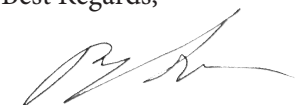
The change that the collective trauma of the past two years has brought upon the world has forced people to adapt at an uncomfortable, even sometimes painful pace, and we have felt that discomfort and pain within the walls of our organization and within our community. Throughout the upheaval and emotional turmoil of the pandemic, our staff has demonstrated an astonishing ability to push through each day with ingenuity, selflessness, relentless commitment, strength, compassion, dignity, and grace. This is our Northern Maine Medical Center team. They are our inspiration. They are our story. We are humbled and honored to serve with them.

When supply chains were disrupted and when we needed additional space, our team worked with our community, other health care providers, and pharmacies to bridge gaps and maintain a seamless experience for our patients. When staffing was challenged with workforce shortages and increasing demand, our team sacrificed vacations and much needed time off to meet the rising need. When emotions were high, our team provided support and encouragement to each other and to their patients. When patients felt isolated from their loved ones, our team, recognizing the importance of connection to health and healing, found ways to keep families communicating.

Protecting our patients required establishing protocols for social distancing, using personal protective equipment, extra cleaning and sanitizing, administering vaccines, and assuring quick, easy access to testing. Our team rose to the challenges, examining patient flow, rearranging spaces, putting on the gear, reinforcing our already high standards of cleaning and sanitizing surfaces, and being the first to stand in line to receive their vaccines so they could turn around and volunteer at our mass public vaccination clinics. Even former team members came out of retirement to volunteer or work at screening desks, vaccine clinics, or to offer swabbing.

Through all of this, we have maintained our commitment to providing quality health care to the people of the St. John Valley with our ongoing investment in our facilities and in the most advanced equipment so our highly competent providers can offer a broad range of services in our rural region. This has allowed our patients to remain closer to home for their medical treatments, eliminating the added stress of unnecessary travel, especially during these anxiety-producing times. We reaffirm our promise that we will not spare any energy or resources to keep you safe as we forge forward to face any new changes and challenges yet to come.

Best Regards,



Peter J. Sirois  
President & Chief Executive Officer



Donald Guimond  
Board of Trustees Chairperson



BEFORE



AFTER

## Investing in the Future

The first sections of a historic four-story, 15,600 square foot expansion project opened in 2021, which, as those spaces were occupied, allowed for demolition and remodeling to begin in the former locations of the services. The new operating rooms located on the third floor opened to host surgeries, and the gymnasium adjacent to the Children's Psychiatric Unit on the second floor became available for use. Construction on the expansion and renovation of the vacated spaces in the original hospital building continued into the 2022 fiscal year.

While construction continued, plans were being developed for a new capital project – the construction of an all-new nursing care facility across the street and up the hill from the hospital, on land adjoining the existing Forest Hill. Contractors began clearing the land in the fall to prepare it for construction to break ground in the spring of 2022. *(see page 4 & 5 for more on this project)*

Investing in the future is also about ensuring that our patients have access to equipment and technology that gives them an opportunity to stay close to home for their testing and treatment needs. It is about being able to attract, recruit, and retain physicians, nurses, and other health care workers to the St. John Valley by offering them an opportunity to work in a state-of-the-art facility in one of the most beautiful and unique regions in the country. Investing in the future is making certain our patient experience is one that lets people know how privileged we feel to be entrusted with their health care. We remain committed to investing in those endeavors.



### Updated Technology

In addition to our construction projects, we also invested in new health information management software to improve patient's connections with their providers and to streamline records processes for clinical staff. Our new, single-source electronic medical records software, Cerner, replaced multiple software platforms that had previously been used to maintain different pieces of a single patient's records. Combining those multiple platforms into a single platform capable of all the same functions enhanced safety and improved reliability in records management. Cerner went "live" on April 12, 2021.





## Cancer Care Close to Home

Like so many have experienced before her, Karen Daigle's life took an unexpected turn when doctors told her at the beginning of 2021 that she had cancer, but Northern Maine Medical Center (NMMC) offered her light during a dark time.

Karen comes from a large family and is a lifelong resident of the St. John Valley. She received her education here and has worked at Acadia Federal Credit Union for 25 years, now as their vice president of operations.

Right from the start, Karen was confident about the quality of care she would receive from the clinical staff at NMMC, but her choice to receive her care in the St. John Valley was as much about the comfort and support she knew she would feel staying closer to home for her treatments.

Karen's cancer journey began just before the holidays in 2020 when she first noticed two strange bumps on her neck. With a family history for cysts, she was unalarmed and waited until January for her annual appointment with Dr. Silwana Sidorczuk, MD at Acadia Family Health Center in Madawaska. After a round with antibiotics, a needle biopsy, and ultimately a full surgical biopsy that NMMC's general surgeon David Coffman, DO, performed, Karen learned that she had cancer in her left tonsil that had spread to her lymph nodes. Over the next few months, Karen had several procedures and exams both closer to home at NMMC and farther away – a breast exam, colonoscopy, CAT scan, PET scan, blood work, and more. Ultimately, doctors determined the cancer was from a virus that quite possibly had been in Karen for decades until one day something triggered it to start growing. "It just goes to show, anyone can have something in their body and not know it," said Karen, highlighting the importance of regular exams and preventative screenings.



The diagnosis upended everything in Karen's life. Her 15-year focus on her personal health and fitness seemed pointless. "I finally reached my weight loss goal at the beginning of the year, and then I got diagnosed with cancer. Why did I work so hard to get to this point when you can still get sick?" To add to her frustration, she was advised to regain some of the weight she had worked so hard to lose because she was sure to lose more during her treatments. And she did lose – another 38 pounds below her goal weight.

Karen had to receive 35 back-to-back radiation treatments every day for more than a month, and was scheduled for four weekly chemo treatments on top of that. "That's when, oh man, my body shut right down. It was rough," she said. She had to take a leave of absence from her job, and her husband, who worked out of the area each week left his job to come home to help care for her. Finances tightened, adding to the stress of treatment. Fortunately, insurances through her employer and assistance from the Edgar J. Paradis Cancer Fund helped to alleviate some of the costs for Karen and her husband.

Karen said she knew absolutely nothing about cancer when she first heard it was inside her body. She appreciated the straightforward style of Tyler Stoliker, FNP-C in oncology who presented her with

### Edgar J Paradis Cancer Fund

Since the establishment of the Edgar J. Paradis (EJP) Cancer Fund in 1978, 1,598 families have received assistance totaling \$1,276,722. Reported on their website, in 2021, 40 families received assistance totaling \$71,807.98. The EJP Cancer Fund provides financial assistance so cancer patients have support traveling to and attending appointments. Beyond that financial assistance, the EJP Cancer Fund also offers education and a monthly cancer support group for cancer patients and their families.



## Maine Cancer Foundation Grant



During the first year of a Maine Cancer Foundation Transportation and Lodging grant, 95 people with cancer and their families received supplemental support totaling \$20,000 for mileage for more than 1,100 round trips to appointments and some lodging associated with their cancer diagnoses and treatments. This added support came at just the right time as 2021 saw the beginnings of substantial increases in fuel and lodging costs. This two-year grant will allow the EJP Cancer Fund to continue offering this supplemental support for another year.



options and guided her through what information she needed to know to make her own decisions. As a result, Karen said she always felt in control of her own treatment.

Stacey Theriault, RN has seen the physical and emotional impacts of cancer on all of their oncology patients. That may be why she seems to have a sixth sense when her patients might need a little more than a standard treatment. There were many days during treatment when Karen felt like giving up. One time she had a panic attack during her radiation treatment and at her next appointment, Stacey just knew there was more on Karen's mind that day. "Stacey asked how it was going, and I tried to brush it off, but she could tell I was not myself. She asked me again, how's it going. So, I opened up to her," said Daigle. When Stacey heard about the anxiety, she asked if Tyler could join their conversation. Tyler sat next to Karen and simply talked – about her anxiety, about the radiation treatment, about techniques to help her breathe through her anxiety, and he offered her personal reassurance that she would be okay. "And I trusted him, I put that in my head the rest of the time. I just needed that one-on-one conversation. They took time out of their busy schedule to give that to me. They probably don't even realize how much they helped," said Karen.

Karen's large "family" is a little larger now and includes all of the people who have been with her and continue with her on her journey. Although she has been cleared of her cancer for several months now, her healing continues. She was the first patient for a new service at NMMC. In the fall of 2021, Robyn Violette began offering specialized physical therapy for cancer patients to help them in their recovery from what the disease and treatment does to the patient's body.

"All of the staff, they truly cared for me. That's how I felt the whole time – like I was the only cancer patient in the world at that moment," said Karen about her overall experience.

## Tour de la Vallée

The EJP Cancer Fund's renowned annual Tour de la Vallée resumed as an in-person event in 2021, raising more than \$13,000 from pledges, donations, sponsorships and registrations in support of cancer patients in the St. John Valley. Dozens of participants walked, ran, or biked various length routes ranging from 3, 5 or 10 kilometers for those on foot, to 25, 50, 62, or 100 miles for those bicycling, and a 35-mile mountain bike route was also offered as an option. Returning this 31st year of the Tour was a virtual participation option that was introduced as a tour alternative during the first years of the Covid pandemic.



## Long Lake Ice Fishing Derby Makes Milestone Donation

Organizers of the annual Long Lake Ice Fishing Derby marked a significant milestone with their \$18,000 donation to the EJP Cancer Fund in 2021. With that donation, the Derby has donated \$100,000 since the event began 16 years prior.

Left to Right – Long Lake Ice Fishing Derby Chair Paul Bernier, Edgar J. Paradis Board President Travis Guy, Derby Treasurer Ryan D. Pelletier, and Edgar J. Paradis Board Member Donald Raymond.



# Forest Hill Project



RESIDENT ROOM



PATIO

In 2021, plans were drafted to build a new nursing care facility to replace the existing Forest Hill Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing Care Center. The new, single-story building will be approximately 46,000 square feet with four distinct wings – three residential and one containing common areas – able to accommodate 45 residents with private rooms, each with its own shower. Wings will feature unique design elements that complement the St. John Valley region, porches adjacent to open spaces and outdoor landscaped areas offering access to paths, patios, and gardens. The design provides residents quiet and comfort in a quaint, warm, and welcoming setting. Beyond the relaxing atmosphere of their individual rooms, the new facility will offer plenty of opportunity for socialization and activities in the large living and dining areas with a coffee shop, a spa, a salon, and an activity room.

The building site is just under seven acres, with views of the St. John River and neighboring Canada, and is located adjacent to

the existing Forest Hill to provide synergy for operations and staffing. A partial lower level will provide building support and serve as a staff and service entrance. Groundbreaking is anticipated to be in late spring of 2022, with project completion expected in 2024.

Leadership at Northern Maine Medical Center recognized that a new building would drastically improve quality of life for its long-term care residents, and began to explore options to consider the project. By utilizing a reimbursement mechanism for nursing homes that will allow the organization to pay for the project under a fixed cost over 30 years, NMMC was able to secure a state bond to fully fund the project. Options for the current Forest Hill building are being explored, but at this time it appears the downstairs will remain as it is, housing support services and NMMC's finance and billing departments.





NURSES' STATION



LIVING ROOM



DINING ROOM



Forest Hill Rehab and Skilled Nursing Center employees Reggie Murray, an infection preventionist, and JR Laferriere, who works with the activities department and is also a transporter for residents needing rides to appointments or services, received the Maine Health Care Association and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program's Maine 2021 Excellence in Long Term Care Award. The Excellence in Long Term Care Award recognizes employees statewide who have consistently exemplified a commendable level of caregiving, dedication, and professionalism in caring for their residents/consumers.

The ongoing pandemic has presented a plethora of unique challenges for residents at nursing care facilities across the country, including increased feelings of depression – a result of social isolation and distance from families as many facilities halted visitation from people outside of the organization for long stretches of time. Many staff, recognizing how the situation was impacting residents, found creative ways to make a difference and bring some joy to their residents' daily lives. With the need for transportation to outside of the facility reduced, JR adjusted his role from transporter to assisting with activities. He started his own personal daily group with residents where they all have coffee and donuts and simply discuss daily events, reported Forest Hill Administrator Travis Guy, RN, BSN.

Forest Hill has consistently achieved five-star quality ratings recognition from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services across all five measured parameters. Even so, when the pandemic began, there was a need to step up quality and safety standards to a higher level, and staff at Forest Hill immediately set to the task of keeping their residents safe. Implementing safety measures and protocols was one step, and teaching people what to do and why to do it was another. Reggie stepped up to educate staff on safety during Covid, completing fit testing on all staff members, and rounding on floors to explain everything to both staff and residents, even changing her schedule to meet emerging needs.

The prestigious honor bestowed to these two employees is a testament to the same caring spirit all Forest Hill employees exhibit, all consistently going above and beyond, working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to ensure residents have the highest quality care and a place that truly feels like home.

◀ SITE WHERE CONSTRUCTION WILL TAKE PLACE AND THE FUTURE SITE OF THE NEW FOREST HILL NURSING HOME.

# Children's Psychiatric Unit Celebrates 20 Years



2021 marked a special anniversary for NMMC's Children's Psychiatric Unit (CAPU), celebrating 20 years of providing a vital service to the entire state as well as to the people in the St. John Valley. As the pandemic saw a dramatic increase in the need for mental health care of all types, we celebrated the only unit north of Bangor that services children in need of psychiatric intervention and offers hope and vital support to families faced with the tremendous strain of mental health crises.

Several of the original CAPU team are still with the organization, including NMMC's COO Alain Bois who oversaw the initial construction and staff development of the CAPU. The unit is a testament to what collaboration can accomplish. Donna Daigle, a CNA Psych Tech and Unit Caretaker, another original staff person, said the few other hospitals in the state with children's psychiatric units welcomed NMMC staff to offer the specialized training they would need for the new program to be successful. "I went to Acadia in Bangor and to Spring Harbor in Portland. I spent a week at each training," she recalled.

Bois added that in addition to the other units in the state working with NMMC on training and program development, the new unit received overwhelming support from the Department of Behavioral Health Services, a branch of DHHS. "A lot of people worked so hard," said Bois. "It was so much fun. Even some parents worked on it. One of the best experiences of my life was to work on that project, watch it come to life, and see it become successful."

Over time, the program structure, the staffing structure, and even the floor plan has changed in the unit. Even the types of health concerns children bring with them now differs significantly from 20 years ago, transitioning from more behavioral concerns to mental health concerns like depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Jill Soucie, RN, also an original staff member in the unit, said an interdisciplinary, team approach, where everyone in a child's life works together, from the medical staff to the families and caregivers and even the child's school, substantially increases the long-term success for the child. "What works for one child won't work for another because they're all so different. It's like a puzzle and everybody is a piece, including the patient and the family. To get a clear picture, you need all the pieces," said Soucie. The unit's size allows for this personal approach that is uniquely tailored to each child.

Coinciding with the timing of the anniversary, a new addition to the CAPU was completed in 2021 as a gymnasium adjacent to the unit and part of the new 4-story expansion to the hospital opened for use in the summer of 2021. The new gymnasium offers a wide-open space for children to be physically active even when the weather is cold outside. Built-in floor tiles offer designated spaces for games like 4-square and hop scotch, and windows in the room look out over the St. John River to a hillside landscape in neighboring New Brunswick.





## Spotlight on Care: Ronald Landry

One of the things that makes working in a rural hospital so unique is the sometimes-inevitable connections staff have with patients. Generations of families have populated the St. John Valley, making tight-knit ties throughout the community. It is common for our clinical staff to have personal connections to their patients, making the emotional toll of working in healthcare that much more acute.

Diane Landry worked for NMMC for about 17 years, first as a receptionist at Acadia Family Health Internal Medicine, and then doing billing for hospitalists until she retired in 2019. Diane and her husband Ronald had looked forward to their retirement together. As it turns out, Covid cut that plan short when it claimed Ronald's life in January 2021.

Ronald enjoyed woodworking, so occasional cuts and scrapes were relatively normal for him, but one Monday last January, he received a deep cut on his thumb and Diane knew he'd need stitches. They loaded into their car at their home in Frenchville and drove to the nearest emergency department. NMMC had Covid screening protocol in place and detected that Ronald had a high fever by the time he had arrived. His test came back positive for Covid. Emergency room staff tended to his thumb injury, and sent him home to begin his quarantine.

At a follow-up appointment later in the week at the respiratory clinic with Lisa Eno, FNP-C, Ronald was struggling with oxygen levels. He was referred back to the emergency department where they were able to stabilize his oxygen. He insisted on returning home, but by Friday his condition had worsened to the point Diane had to call for an ambulance to transport him back to the hospital. This time, he

was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit and Diane would not see him in person again. Diane herself had started with mild head cold symptoms on Wednesday that week and tested positive for Covid on Saturday morning and needed to begin her own quarantine.

Despite being unable to visit her husband, Diane spoke with him by phone a few times throughout the weekend and each time he seemed to be doing better. Diane said he complimented the nursing staff on their attentiveness, said he was enjoying the food and overall seemed to be in good spirits. Sunday afternoon, that changed, Ronald's condition began to deteriorate fast. Dr. Michael Sullivan, MD called Diane and let her know her husband might not make it through the day. Melissa Cyr, LSW, who understands the benefit of human connection, reached out to Diane to ask if the family would like to visit with Ronald via Zoom. Diane was on that Zoom call when Ronald passed away, with Dr. Sullivan and Dr. James Harris, MD, who had overseen Ronald's care over the weekend, both in attendance and both letting Diane know that neither she, nor Ronald, were alone in these moments – a comfort that Diane desperately needed and appreciated, especially knowing that her own Covid diagnosis would keep her quarantined from her daughters, Tina and Tania, and the rest of her family for the next week as she would face her husband's death alone at home.

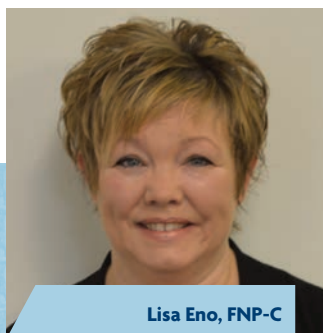
"I'm so proud to have worked for NMMC, they make you feel like family," said Diane. To the staff and physicians who cared for Ronald and, by extension, herself, Diane said, "Thank you for the care you gave Ron. Keep being there for the families of the patients you treat, with Covid-19, you are the only connection to our loved ones."



Dr. James Harris, MD



Dr. Michael Sullivan, MD



Lisa Eno, FNP-C



Melissa Cyr, LSW

# Staff Help Educate the Next Generation of Doctors



Always with an eye to the future, NMMC in partnership with Quinnipiac University Frank H. Netter, MD School of Medicine participates in a Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship that focuses on providing a full-immersion experience for third-year medical students interested in learning about practicing medicine in a rural region. The ultimate goal of this program is to increase the number of medical students who pursue careers in rural areas where there are issues with access to health care due to an acute shortage of physicians.

During the second year of the pandemic, NMMC welcomed five medical students – its largest cohort to date. The students completed studies in six disciplines during their time here, working side-by-side with NMMC staff members who are appointed as Clinical Faculty at Quinnipiac University Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine. The students live in housing next to the hospital, working varied hours as necessary to learn in areas of primary care/family medicine; in-patient, internal medicine; psychiatry; pediatrics; OB-GYN; and surgery. During their nine months with us, they attend didactic lectures and clinical labs, work in our facilities, get to know our patients – even following some through their medical journeys from the start, and live in and enjoy our community. Although not a requirement of their third year, the students spend a significant amount of time in our emergency department learning emergency care. In fact, many of a patient's initial experience with a student occurs when they come to the emergency department.

The 2021 cohort included: Lala Forrest from Shasta Lake/Redding California; Mercedes Forster who was born in Sydney, Australia and raised in Southern California; Alexandra Smith from Everett, Washington; Emilee Sirois from Caribou, Maine; and Joseph Malzbender from Palo Alto, California.

Students participate with patients in many ways, from “shadowing” the provider to assisting in examinations or performing minor procedures under direct supervision of the doctor. Patient participation in this hands-on training is encouraged, but completely voluntary. Overall, patients enjoy getting to know the students and have the added satisfaction of knowing that they are a significant part of properly training a future physician.



# Caring for the Community

Our team, along with our peers across the world, eagerly and anxiously awaited the rollout of the Covid vaccines. Once vaccines had received their final approvals and distribution began, so did the complex logistics of how to widely administer them. Everything from communication, to managing supply, to scheduling patient appointments and volunteers to staff the clinics, came with challenges. Vanesa Pelletier took the reins and became our Vaccine Clinic Coordinator. “Everyone just kind of came together and helped make it possible,” said Pelletier. “For months, either we were in clinics or we were preparing for a clinic.”

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) announced phased release of the vaccines to certain restricted groups in an attempt to get the vaccines into the arms of people working on the pandemic’s front lines and to those considered to be at the highest risk. NMMC opened a call center specifically to handle the anticipated high volume of calls and were inundated from the moment the center opened. People were eager and everyone had a good reason for wanting the vaccine, but unfortunately, some people simply did not fall into the CDC-restricted categories to receive the first shots. Supply issues further complicated the process.

At first, rural hospitals only received small allotments of the vaccine, and weeks would go by after the initial availability before the numbers of vaccines we received started to increase. We advocated fiercely on behalf of our region to receive additional doses, using every single dose within a day of its arrival. Other times, weather or shortages would delay a shipment by a day or more, causing a flurry of last-minute re-scheduling of patients. During this time, we

worked with the other three hospitals in Aroostook County, as well as with pharmacies and health centers, to share and coordinate vaccine shipments in an effort to vaccinate as many people as possible, as quickly as possible.

Eventually, we needed sites where we could host mass vaccination clinics that could accommodate a safe traffic flow for large numbers of people. The Knights of Columbus in Fort Kent and Madawaska both stepped up, offering their respective facilities. We advertised clinics on radio, on our social media pages and website, and in the local newspaper. We required pre-registration to manage how many people would be in the facility at one time, set up “clinic kits” to tote all of the supplies back and forth – including the special coolers needed to keep vaccines at the required temperatures, and recruited many volunteers from across the Valley.

Those volunteers came from everywhere. We needed people to greet and assist people with paperwork and to continually sanitize surfaces, as much as we needed people with clinical training to administer shots. Students from UMFK, NMMC staff from every department, whether it was a regularly scheduled workday for them or not, nurses from local schools, retired NMMC employees, and plenty of other people who simply just wanted to help answered the call. Even local restaurants donated pizzas and other meals to people working the clinics. By fall, the first boosters arrived and most people who wanted their vaccines had received them thanks to the tremendous, months-long, unprecedented community effort.





**MARK MORNEAULT**

# Dedicated Service

## RETIRING MEMBER OF THE NMMC BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Mark A. Morneault, CPA, retired from the Board of Trustees at the end of 2021 after serving his last of ten years with the board as Chairman.

Mr. Morneault and his wife Lisa share a great sense of community. Together they weighed the opportunity for Morneault to serve as a trustee against the demands his tax business already placed on his family time, ultimately feeling the opportunity was well-worth the time and energy the commitment would require. “Fort Kent and the surrounding towns are blessed to have NMMC. Having NMMC, with the level of care that it offers, provides the comfort of knowing that the facility is in our back yard; filled with competent caring staff,” he said.

Morneault has always been active in the community, being a member of the Lion’s Club, Fort Kent Downtown Committee, Fort Kent Knights of Columbus, 10th Mountain Club, Fort Kent Golf Club, and Finance Chair for St. John Vianney Parish. At NMMC, Morneault was a voice of strength and reason as the hospital completed major renovation projects in the emergency room area and, more recently, the operating room expansion project and also embarked on the first planning phases for the new long-term care facility. “Sadly, I also saw NMMC survive the first two years of COVID-19. It is difficult to put to words my appreciation for all the hardworking staff that battled the pandemic. I cannot take credit for any of those accomplishments but take pride in having worked with so many dedicated people during that time,” said Morneault.

NMMC thanks Mr. Morneault for his leadership and ten years of service.

“Our trustees care deeply about our patients and are incredible stewards of the mission at Northern Maine Medical Center. Mark Morneault has served as a trustee for ten years and stepped up to lead our Board with full knowledge of the challenges of the pandemic and major construction project the board was in the midst of navigating. That demonstrates his dedication and resolve to ensure NMMC continues to offer the highest quality care and services to the St. John Valley community as one of its most valuable resources for the people who live here.

I sincerely thank Mark ”

– Peter J. Sirois, President and CEO



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