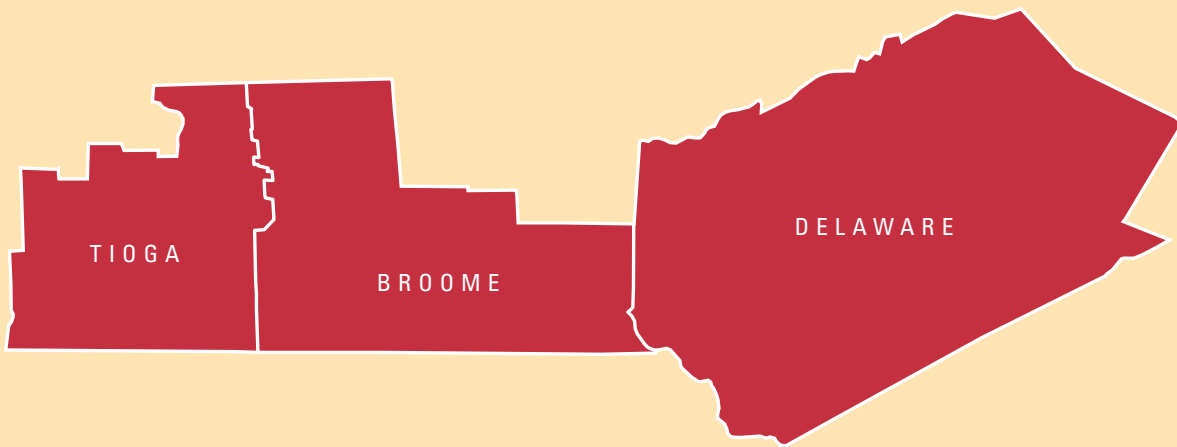


The Rural Health Network of South Central New York, Inc.

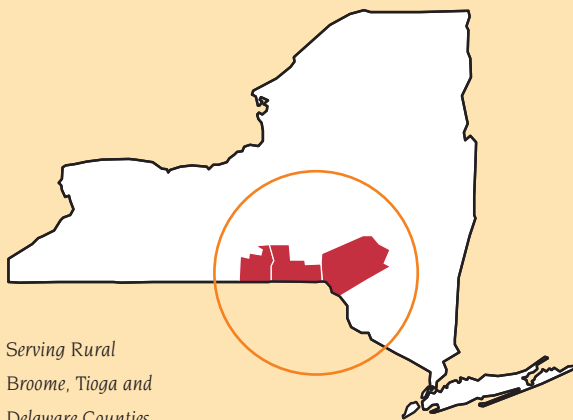
2008 ANNUAL REPORT





### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York, Inc. is to promote and improve the health of rural communities and strengthen each community's capacity to respond to health needs by reducing barriers and improving access and use of health and human services through advocacy, communication and partnerships.



*Serving Rural  
Broome, Tioga and  
Delaware Counties*

### **Our Vision of Success**

The Rural Health Network of South Central New York works toward optimal individual and community health and wellness, which are supported by:

- Individuals and families with adequate and affordable health insurance;
- Accessible, efficient and collaborative health and human service delivery systems driven by best practice models;
- Reduction in health disparities for the most vulnerable populations;
- Strong community norms for healthy lifestyle choices and optimal physical and mental health.

Our vision of success is predicated on the strength of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York, its commitment and participation of our stakeholders (Board, staff and community partners working together), and the availability of resources required to achieve desired results.

# Leadership Message

“During difficult economic times, when organizations such as ours are needed most, the RHN has stepped up to the plate and continued to assist in bringing needed services to rural residents and capacity building to many agencies serving the health needs of our region.”

— Natalie Thompson, President RHNSCN



Natalie M. Thompson  
President



John (Jack) C. Salo  
Executive Director

In reflecting on 2008, two Rural Health Network initiatives exemplify this commitment to rural health:

### Bringing Services to Rural Residents:

Those living in rural communities are often at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing health information. Many health education programs and resources are available only in urban and suburban areas. In response to the health education needs of rural residents in Delaware and Tioga

Counties, the Simply Health Program was initiated by the Rural Health Network in 2006\*. Simply Health is a nine-week health education program designed to provide participants with the information and skills necessary to live a healthy life. This program focuses on nutrition, physical activity and emotional well-being. Health indicators and self reported behavior changes are tracked for participants to help measure progress.

During 2007 and 2008, Simply Health conducted eighteen programs in Delaware and Tioga Counties. Of the 221 individuals who graduated (309 participants overall), 204 showed one or more health indicator improvements at the end of the program. These included reductions in blood pressure, weight, and/or waist measurements. Additionally, 184 of the graduates reported positive behavior changes related to diet and/or physical activity.

Simply Health has provided the residents of Delaware and Tioga Counties with access to valuable health and wellness information right in their local communities, making it possible for the participants and their families to live healthier lives.

### Bringing Critical Resources to Organizations and Community Groups:

In 2005, the Rural Health Network created a small pilot AmeriCorps National Service Program, the Rural Health Service Corps (RHSC). This innovative community service program matches the talent and energy of young adults with non-profit organizations and community projects that need help. Together RHSC members and their host organizations work to improve health and access to care for those living in Broome, Tioga, and Delaware counties.

In late 2008, the Rural Health Network was awarded \$230,000 in federal AmeriCorps funds. This federal funding combined with matching contributions from organizations benefiting from Rural Health Service Corps member services, and community donors will enable the RHSC to expand dramatically. With the expansion, RHSC will realize a six fold increase in the number of AmeriCorps positions and a nine fold increase in the number of service hours provided.

The focus of the expanded Rural Health Service Corps will be to reduce increasing rates of obesity and related chronic disease in the Southern Tier. It is projected that twenty-five Rural Health Service Corps members will provide over 30,000 hours of service in 2009. This program is an invaluable resource to our region as it not only assists in providing much needed services and brings together community partners, but it also engages our talented young people and enhances their connection to the community, compelling some to remain in the area after their RHSC term ends.

On April 21, 2009, President Obama signed The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act into law. This legislation will significantly increase federal support for the expansion of national service programs. With the passing of the Serve America Act, the Rural Health Network is excited about the prospect of further increasing national service opportunities to address rural health issues in our region.

\* Simply Health acknowledges the significant contribution made by Broome County's Mission Meltaway Program, upon which the Simply Health Program was modeled. Simply Health was made possible through a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the NYS Office of Rural Health and many Simply Health partners who contributed a wide range of services and materials.



# The Rural Health Network of SCNY Educates



For much of 2007 and 2008, the focus of the Rural Health Network Health Promotion team was introducing the Simply Health Wellness Program to rural residents in Delaware and Tioga Counties. Funded in part by the Appalachian Regional Commission, the NYS Office of Rural Health and the contributions of many local and regional partners, Simply Health educated over 300 participants on behavior and lifestyle changes for healthy living. Eighteen Simply Health Programs were held in workplaces, schools and community

organizations. Modeled on Broome County's successful Mission Meltaway program, Simply Health participants attend nine classes focusing on healthy eating, physical activity and stress management. Guest presenters and Rural Health Network staff lead the classes.

Simply Health has been a resounding success with 204 of 221 graduates realizing an improvement in one or more health indicators (blood pressure improvement, weight loss, etc.). Self-reported positive behavior changes in both diet and exercise were

also reported by 184 of 221 graduates. Plans for the future include a Simply Health for Kids Program and a more targeted workplace wellness initiative.

## Health Promotion Accomplishments

- Simply Health Wellness Programs: 18 (10 in 2007, 8 in 2008)
- Participants: 309 (189 in 2007, 120 in 2008)
- Graduates: 221 (129 in 2007, 92 in 2008)
- Graduates noting improved health indicators (weight loss, lower blood pressure, etc.): 204 (117 in 2007, 87 in 2008)
- Graduates reporting behavior change (more exercise, less fast food, more fruits and vegetables, etc.): 184 (112 in 2007, 72 in 2008)
- Participants in Simply Health for Teens: 20 (2008)

After his cardiologist suggested that he get involved in a health program, **Alan McDonald** noticed the poster in his workplace about the Rural Health Network's Simply Health program and decided to give it a try.

Through different speakers and presentations, the program taught him about better eating and drinking habits, especially about getting more fruits and vegetables and about paying attention to his portion sizes. Now, Alan says, "I have one helping of lasagna, not two." He also learned how to deal better with stress, using some of the strategies at work.

Over the course of the program, Alan noticed his body responding positively to the changes he was implementing in his lifestyle. At the end of the eight weeks, his blood pressure and cholesterol level had both dropped significantly, and he had lost twenty pounds. Additionally, Alan passed a stress test, something he had not been able to do at the start of the program.

Alan continues to practice the good habits that he learned. "I do a lot of walking now," he says. "I walk a minimum of 10,000 steps a day." Through Simply Health, the Rural Health Network was able to educate Alan and help him implement lifestyle changes that have reduced his risk of acquiring serious health conditions.



PHOTO BY TOM FORBES, EAGLE POINT IMAGES



**Deborah Breon** struggles with both chronic fatigue syndrome and the Epstein-Barr Virus. Her husband **John** is living with Type II Diabetes Mellitus and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), health conditions which have recently forced him to retire from his job. Between them, they have 23 different medications prescribed to manage their health conditions.

The Breons are working with two different insurance programs, but many medications are not covered. "Some of these medications are just so expensive," the Breons told us. "When we ran out, we just stopped [buying medications], because they were so expensive."

That's where the Rural Health Network comes in.

Through our Prescription Assistance Program, we have been able to connect the Breons with several programs that provide medication at discounted prices, or in some cases free of charge.

Now, instead of paying hundreds of dollars for a single prescription, Deborah and John can receive 90-day supplies of some medications for as little as \$20 and others for no charge at all. The Rural Health Network has helped to close the financial gap between the Breons and the medications they need, allowing them to better manage their health conditions.

## The Rural Health Network of SCNY Closes the Gap

For many Americans, the health care crisis has been a devastating reality for many years. Uninsured and underinsured rural residents compromise their health by foregoing basic health care and opting out of important screening and other critical health prevention services. Often, they seek the care they need only when their symptoms are so serious that there is no other choice. From the earliest days of

the Rural Health Network, closing the gap and improving access to health services for all rural residents in our service area has been a priority. In addition to prescription assistance, health insurance assistance (referral, screening and application), and vision services assistance, the Rural Health Network initiated a web-based transportation directory for Broome and Tioga Counties in early 2008. Transportation service information has become increasingly important as gasoline costs have made it prohibitive for increasing



numbers of low income and elderly residents to travel to medical appointments and other essential services. The link for the RHN Transportation Directory is: [www.RuralHealthNetwork.org/transportation\\_2e.aspx](http://www.RuralHealthNetwork.org/transportation_2e.aspx)

### Health Care Access Accomplishments:

#### Transportation

- Launch of online Transportation Directory (2008)
- Uses of the Transportation Directory: 1,240 (2008)

#### Prescription Assistance

- Patients assisted with obtaining free or reduced-cost prescriptions: 771 (405 in 2007, 366 in 2008)
- Number of free or reduced-cost prescriptions obtained: 2,832 (1,511 in 2007, 1,321 in 2008)
- Value of prescriptions obtained: \$842,832.68 (\$429,903.41 in 2007, \$412,929.27 in 2008)

#### Health Insurance

- Persons screened for health insurance: 667 (359 in 2007, 308 in 2008)
- Persons enrolled in health insurance: 347 (145 in 2007, 202 in 2008)

#### Vision Assistance

- Persons screened for vision assistance: 378 (281 in 2007, 97 in 2008)
- Persons enrolled in vision assistance: 170 (89 in 2007, 81 in 2008)
- Persons referred to other vision assistance programs: 123 (61 in 2007, 62 in 2008)
- Value of vision assistance obtained: \$30,525 (\$15,575 in 2007, \$14,950 in 2008)



# The Rural Health Network of SCNY Innovates



Good health is contingent upon many factors most of which have no direct relationship to health care. Economic status, education, environmental quality, diet, lifestyle, and social connections can all have a powerful impact on health and health outcomes.

Recognizing that the foundation of good health is both deep and broad, the Rural Health Network participates in projects and partnerships that work to strengthen the many factors that contribute to good health. Using an asset-based approach to this work, the Rural Health

Network engages a diversity of partners to develop volunteer resources, mobilize community and national service initiatives, develop a more regional food system, and build a healthier infrastructure.



SUSQUEHANNA RIVER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTER

## Innovation Accomplishments

- Growing Health Conference with 250 in attendance (2008)
- Farm to School Workshop with 40 participants (2008)
- Trails of the Southern Tier Conference with 44 participants (2007)
- Partner and administrative support for the Regional Community Food Project (2007-2008)
- Partner in the Tioga County Neighbors Helping Neighbors Program (2007-2008)
- 11,335 hours of service provided by 15 Rural Health Service Corps Members (2007-2008)
- Award of first direct grant to dramatically expand the Rural Health Service Corps (2008)

PHOTO BY JOY STALKER



When they were younger, **Howard and Cathy Schoonover** were the ones helping others. Now, due to complications with Howard's diabetes and Cathy's congestive heart failure, they are on the receiving end of a helping relationship through the Northern Tioga Neighbors Network (NTNN).

"We would be in serious trouble without the program," says Cathy. Cathy can use her motorized wheelchair to get to nearby meetings of the town council on which she serves, but a trip to the Triple Cities is practically impossible. The NTNN makes sure that the Schoonovers can access food and other basic necessities, as well as transportation to out-of-town medical appointments.

NTNN volunteer Emilie Stuhlmiller knows that doing small things can make a big difference. That's why she and her brother Bob have been assisting the Schoonovers with things like picking up groceries and medications, changing light bulbs, and taking out the trash—things that the Schoonovers cannot do on their own. Often, Emilie will stop by just to say hi and to check in on them.

Without the assistance of the NTNN, the Schoonovers believe they would be in a nursing home now. "There are no words to say what it means," say the Schoonovers.

The Rural Health Network has been a partner with NTNN since its beginning in early 2007, providing staff support and technical assistance. The RHN has made it possible for the NTNN to receive the services of two AmeriCorps members, who have worked with NTNN leaders to help recruit, train and connect the volunteers to the people they serve.

By supporting the NTNN, the Rural Health Network has used an innovative approach to help our elderly neighbors remain independent in their homes and connected to their community.

## Board Members 2007–2008:

Natalie Thompson – *President*  
 Shawn L. Yetter – *Vice President, Treasurer*  
 Anne Wolanski – *Secretary*  
 Grant W. Best, PAHM  
 Lucy Bianco  
 Thomas Briggs  
 Elaine Cichowski Doupe, RN, MS  
 Andrew Fagan  
 Pamela Stewart Fahs, DSN, RN  
 Patricia E. Fell, RN, MS, ANP  
 Murphee Hayes  
 Kathleen Henehan  
 Ruth Roberts, LCSW-R  
 James M. Savage  
 James Skiff, MD  
 Kathleen M. Spann, Esq.  
 Lynn Verduin, RN, MS, FNPC

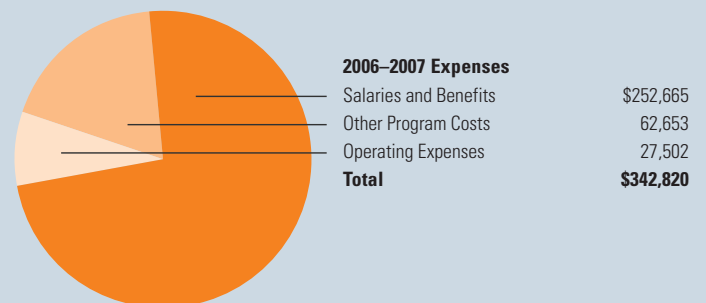
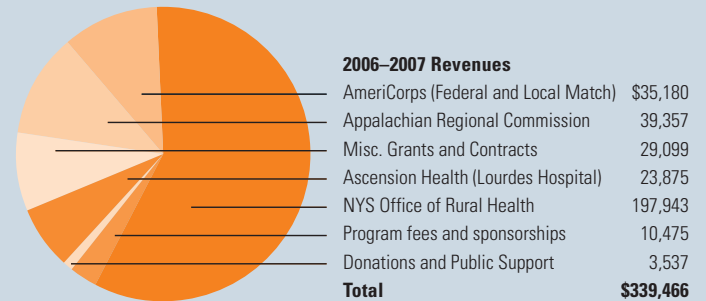
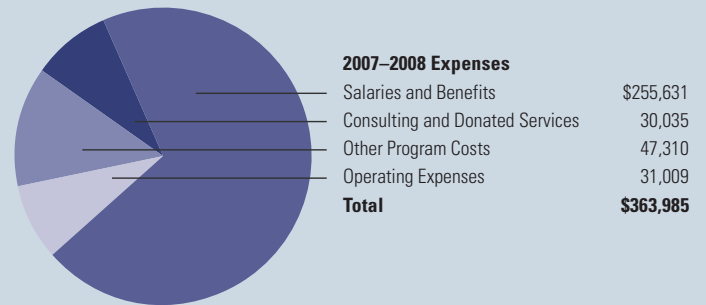
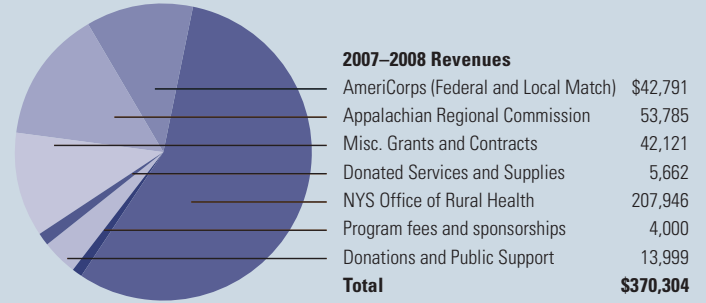
## Staff 2007–2008:

Danielle Berchtold, *Director, Rural Health Service Corps*  
 Christine Berwald, *Director, Health Care Access*  
 Penny DeFavero, *Finance Director*  
 Nicole Hall, *Health Insurance Enrollment Associate*  
 Joanne Murray, *Administrative Assistant/Health Care Access Coordinator*  
 Joy Stalker, *Director, Health Promotion*  
 John (Jack) C. Salo, *Executive Director*

## Rural Health Service Corps Members and Interns 2007–2008:

Lindsay Bilodeau, *Program Assistant (06-07 Program)*  
 Anne Bollinger\*, *Special Projects Internship (06-07 Program), Ithaca College*  
 Jessica Duncan\*, *Primary Care Program Specialist (06-07 Program)*  
 Katelyn Glasgow, *Community Care Network of Nichols Associate (07-08 Program), SUNY Brockport*  
 Drew Hanessian, *Community Development Associate (06-07 Program)*  
 Hadassah Head, *Rural Health Associate (06-07 Program)*  
 Katie McCloe, *Rural Health Access Associate (07-08 Program), Binghamton University*  
 Melissa Mills, *Health Promotion Associate (07-08 Program), SUNY Cortland*  
 Meredith Pascale, *Health Promotion Associate (07-08 Program)*  
 Ben Raindorf, *Transportation Project Coordinator (06-07 Program)*  
 Samantha Schatz, *Healthier Lifestyle Mentor Project Coordinator (06-07 Program)*  
 Erin Signor\*, *Health Promotion Associate (06-07 Program)*  
 Delana Spaulding, *Health Care Access Associate (07-08 Program)*  
 Amanda Stanton, *Rural Health Access Associate (07-08 Program), Binghamton University*  
 Angela Wiiki, *Rural Health Associate (06-07 Program)*

\* Also served as staff after RHSC service was completed.





*of South Central New York, Inc.*

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**[www.RuralHealthNetwork.org](http://www.RuralHealthNetwork.org)**

*Serving Rural Broome,*

*Tioga and Delaware Counties*

**Check out our web site at [www.RuralHealthNetwork.org](http://www.RuralHealthNetwork.org) to see how the Network can benefit you or your organization in our quest for building healthy lifestyles.**