

equinox news

Winter/Spring 2020

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New Decade Brings New Opportunities, New Partnerships

Equinox met the new year, and new decade, with a new CEO. Virginia (Ginger) Golden joins the Equinox family with more than 40 years of healthcare experience, most recently as the President of St. Peter's and Albany Memorial Hospitals. Prior to that, she held various leadership positions with St. Peter's Health Partners, including Vice President of Strategic Planning & Chief Integration Officer, and Vice President of Clinical & Corporate Services.

Virginia has certainly hit the ground running, taking the lead at a time when the pace of changing how behavioral health and human services are provided continues to escalate.

"We need to continue to provide all of our services in the most effective means possible today while we create, innovate and transform how we serve our clients," she said. "To be successful in the future, we must explore new affiliations, collaborations and partnerships. Equinox is working on several exciting opportunities to ensure that our mission remains vibrant in the future."

Potential Merger with Whitney M. Young Jr. Health Center

As you are most likely aware, Equinox has entered into an evaluation phase to explore a potential merger with Whitney M. Young Jr. Health Center (WYH). WYH is a community-based non-profit corporation providing affordable, accessible primary and preventative medical, dental and behavioral health services to the uninsured and medically under-served residents of the Capital Region. WYH serves more than 20,000 adults and children annually.

Equinox and WYH share a common mission and offer complementary services. A merger could provide improved services for our clients while also improving our financial position in the future. The agencies have successfully collaborated for years. Most recently, WYH's mobile health unit has been providing medical and dental services to youth in Equinox's Transitional Living Program. The Swinburne project, scheduled to open in August, is a partnership between Equinox, WYH and Regan Development. The mixed-use building at 526 Central Avenue in Albany will include a WYH primary care and prompt care clinic, a pharmacy and an Equinox satellite mental health clinic, among other Equinox services and support areas.

"The potential merger has been widely supported by community leaders and is recognized as strategically important for the Capital Region. We will keep you updated and invite your input if we move ahead with the merger," said Virginia Golden.

Boys & Girls Club of the Capital Area and Equinox

Kathy Fletcher, Equinox Chief Operating Officer, brought together youth-related organizations and teens to evaluate the needs of the youth served by the Youth Outreach Center (YOC) and the needs of the community. Youth and stakeholders agreed that there was a duplication of some services by the YOC and the Boys and Girls Club of the Capital Area (BGCCA).



Message From CEO, Virginia Golden A Life Coming Full Circle

This is my first CEO message for the Equinox newsletter, and little did I know that we all would be facing the challenges of COVID-19. So first I want to express my gratitude to the Equinox staff for focusing their efforts to maintain services for our clients while coping with all the challenges facing their own family, friends and colleagues. I am profoundly grateful. Please visit the Equinox website www.equinoxinc.org to see how we are continuing to provide essential services to the community.

The remainder of this article is what I originally wrote (pre COVID-19). My thoughts and feelings have only grown.

I want to start by acknowledging the extraordinary contributions of John Henley, my predecessor. During his 18-month tenure at Equinox, John addressed several strategic and operational imperatives and advanced a culture of inclusion, empowerment, dignity and compassion for our clients and each other. We are all indebted to him for the leadership he brought to Equinox.

Having just completed my first three months, I am in awe of my Equinox colleagues. During my brief time here, I have observed many demonstrations of how very special they are in meeting the needs of our clients.

On Christmas Eve, I met Equinox Chef Ken Myers who was delivering meals to our facilities to make sure that all our residential clients would have a wonderful Christmas dinner. I heard Dominic Ruggeri, Director of Facilities and Youth Services, describe dressing as Santa to bring presents to the children spending Christmas at the Domestic Violence Shelter. I watched Jeff McKenzie, Chief of Behavioral Health Services, leave a meeting to help a client who was at her physician's office crying and confused about how to find her way home. I listened to the stories of clients receiving mental health services who arrived at our sites having been physically beaten and needing comfort, counseling and stabilization.

From Domestic Violence Outreach and Shelter staff, I heard heartbreaking stories of clients they are helping –from an elderly gentleman who has been victimized by a relative to undocumented victims for whom aid is unavailable and who may have to make the unthinkable decision of returning to a country where some face almost certain death. I also learned that the NYS Office of Children and Family Services considers our DV program's collaboration with Child Protective Services to be a key factor in increasing safety

and support for victims in our community. And I listened to the incredible story of our staff evacuating our Cohoes residence when it was flooded by a main sewer back up. A team of a dozen staff mobilized themselves on a Saturday afternoon to relocate 11 clients overnight – kept them safe and well taken care of while our facility staff swung into action; within 24 hours the residents were safely returned.

“My life goal at this stage of my career is to give back to the community in a meaningful way. What I did not expect from joining Equinox was the healing impact I would experience working side by side with an incredible team.”

I chose to take the CEO position because I was convinced by our Board members and John Henley that I would experience an organization deeply dedicated to its mission and to those members of our community who face the most challenges with the least resources – a passion for me given my own life experiences with domestic violence and mental illness, which resulted in the suicides of my father and older brother. Given all the blessings I have experienced and received, my life goal at this stage of my career is to give back to the community in a meaningful way. What I did not expect from joining Equinox was the healing impact I would experience working side by side with an incredible team.

Every day our staff show compassion, empathy and respect for the human dignity of each of our clients. That has given me great comfort. I believe that as my brother traveled his path for 50 years in and out of various facilities and programs, he was touched by similar staff to those I have encountered at Equinox. I am now more at peace and see that my life has come full circle – from experiencing what many of our clients live through, to being able to contribute so others can recover and heal.

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Equinox Community Connections

Foundation Grants March 2019–December 2019

Equinox is grateful to all the private foundations that generously support our programs and the thousands of individuals we serve.

B'nai B'rith Gideon Fund/The Community Foundation of the Greater Capital Region • \$20,000

for Project Independence for homeless youth

John D. Picotte Family Foundation/The Community Foundation of the Greater Capital Region • \$14,000

for the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth

Seymour Fox Memorial Foundation • \$10,000

for the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth

Bank of America Charitable Foundation • \$5,000

for the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth

Cohoes Savings Foundation • \$2,000

for the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth

We are also grateful to the following community partners for their support of our youth and domestic violence programs: Albany County Bar Association, New York State Department of Labor, WGY Christmas Wish, Stewart's Shops Holiday Match, Emma Willard's Philanthropy Club and Bryant Asset Management.



Many thanks to The Empire State Society of Association Executives (ESSAE) for selecting Equinox as the recipient of the proceeds from its holiday party silent auction: \$3,723! L-r: ESSAE Board Chair Brian Buff; Equinox COO Kathy Fletcher; ESSAE Executive Director Vanessa LaClair; and Equinox CEO Virginia Golden.

Many thanks to AAA Hudson Valley! Staff and members raised \$5,000 for DV Services, collected personal care items for the DV Shelter, and donated boxes of clothing to GreatFinds Thrift Boutique. Pictured (l-r): AAA HR Manager Michael White, Equinox COO Kathy Fletcher, AAA President & CEO Michele VanEpps, Equinox Dir. of DV Services Christine Rodriguez and Dir. of Development & Marketing Christina Rajotte.



Our deepest gratitude to Mohawk Honda! Equinox was one of 10 organizations to receive \$10,000 in honor of their 100th Anniversary in business. Thanks also to the Mohawk Honda team, including President Jeff Haraden and the Haraden family, for helping with Thanksgiving preparations.



On December 24, a community effort called "Morning of Kindness" saw families from throughout the Capital Region dropping off needed items to local charities –and Equinox was honored to be one of them! Thank you to all, like the Dashew family, who donated new pillows, blankets, personal care items and toys.

King Family Pathways to Success Fund

Making a Lasting Impact on Youth



For one young man who grew up with an absent father and drug-addicted mother, the King Family Pathways to Success Fund has meant that he can now see a path to a stable future. The King Family Fund assists youth and young adults whose lives have been devastated by a parent or guardian's substance abuse and addiction.

At 16, Knieco entered the Equinox Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth. He was quiet and withdrawn. "It took a while for me and (program manager) Donna to connect. But then, when we got

that connection, things started going good," he said. "When I started trusting the staff, they started trusting me." After graduating from high school, Knieco entered Project Independence, through which he was able to move into a one-bedroom apartment, and he enrolled at HVCC. Equinox paid part of the rent, but with only a part-time job it was difficult for him to cover his portion as well as other living and transportation expenses. He had also decided he wanted to train for his Commercial Driver's License, but did not know how to make that happen –the \$9,000 tuition for CDL School alone was daunting.

Today, the generous support of the King Family Fund has set him on a path to success. Now age 20, Knieco has been able to purchase a reliable used car to get to school and work, and has received rent and tuition assistance. Knieco admits that it has been a tough road for him, but he is determined to work hard and make a better life for himself. What will a stable career in the trucking industry mean to him? "To be successful in life, to have money, not to have to worry. I don't want my kids some day to have to worry or struggle like I have."

"Equinox is humbled to have this special role in honoring the memory and legacy of Kara and Tyler (King)," said Christina Rajotte, Director of Development & Marketing. "We are deeply grateful to the King Family for its faith in Equinox, for its generosity, and for providing our youth with this meaningful opportunity."

A Message from the Kings

We feel very fortunate for the opportunity to work with Equinox, who has shared our vision of what The King Family Pathways to Success Fund could achieve. We are also extremely grateful for the tremendous support and donations we have received from our network of colleagues, family and friends.

To date, we have allocated funds towards two high-potential young adults who are receiving assistance to help them with their career and education goals as they prepare for a life of fulfillment and independence. Your contributions and the help of Equinox have truly made a fast and lasting impact on these individuals.

Griffin King and Jane Khoury & J. Eric King and Kathy Thiel

To donate to the King Family Pathways to Success Fund, contact Christina Rajotte, Director of Development & Marketing, at 518.434.6135 x5366; crajotte@equinoxinc.org.

New Decade Brings New Opportunities, New Partnerships

(Continued from pg. 1)

However, the YOC's Supportive Services component – including intensive case management and clinical social work services – was identified as both unique to Equinox and highly valued. As a result, Equinox and BGCCA will partner to offer youth and the community a new after-school option that, in a cost-effective structure, will integrate the best of both programs, and better meet the needs of the youth who count on us.

The Changing Reimbursement Landscape

We are also preparing for a change in how Equinox is reimbursed for its behavioral health services – mental health and addiction. Like other providers, Equinox will be moving away from payment for the services provided ("fee for service") to receiving payment based on both the quality of the outcomes for our clients and the cost that is incurred. This latter model, called value-based payment, is part of New York's effort to reduce the cost of Medicaid and improve outcomes for clients. Below are some of the steps we're taking to be ready for this changing landscape.

- **MVP, Healthy Alliance IPA and Equinox**
Equinox is partnering with Healthy Alliance Independent Practice Association and MVP in our first value-based contract, with a goal of improving health outcomes for our behavioral health clients. With a grant from Healthy Alliance/MVP, Equinox will hire two individuals who will work one-on-one to help clients enroll in and navigate health benefits, refer clients to primary, preventive and specialty health care, and refer clients to other supportive services that address social determinants of health, such as housing, food, and transportation.

- **Capital Behavioral Health Network and Equinox**
Equinox is also participating in the Capital Behavioral Health Network (CBHN) Independent Practice Association. This IPA is composed of multiple providers who serve those with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. CBHN was created to achieve better health outcomes at lower costs and is a critical venue for collaborating and partnering with our colleagues in the community to transform care. Equinox CEO Virginia Golden serves on the CBHN Board.

Celebrating a Generous Community

The 2019 ThanksGathering Celebration, held at the Albany Capital Center, began with a champagne toast saluting the 50th Anniversary of the Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner. Guests enjoyed delicious food, local wine and craft beer, the Smile Lounge photo booth, and fabulous music by The Accents that kept the dance floor crowded all night.

In honor of the 50th Anniversary, Equinox presented The Reverend Robert Lamar Memorial Award to community members who have played an extraordinary and ongoing role in the long-term success of the Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner (T-Day). The late Rev. Robert Lamar was a civil rights activist and former senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Albany. Congratulations to our award recipients First Presbyterian Church, the T-Day Committee, and the NYS Office of General Services.

A very special thank you to our Presenting Sponsor Equinox Companies—Property Development & Management. Their commitment to Equinox and the community makes this a perfect partnership. Many thanks to our media sponsor, Albany Broadcasting; and to our other major sponsors: Hannay Reels, Marshall & Sterling Insurance, Regeneron, and the Times Union. We are grateful to all our generous sponsors, our more than 200 guests and to those who donated items to the raffle and gift card pull—raising over \$100,000. This support helps us continue to provide essential services to more than 5,200 individuals every year.



Jennifer and Jerry Pittz had a great time on the dance floor! Many thanks to Jen for her outstanding volunteer work on Equinox events.

Pastor Rev. Miriam Leupold, second from left, accepted the Rev. Robert Lamar Memorial Award on behalf of the First Presbyterian Church of Albany. Presenting the award were: Jim Lamar (far left), Margaret Lamar King, and Paul Lamar.



Long-time Equinox supporter Hannay Reels joined the celebration. President and CEO Eric Hannay and his wife Tina (far left) joined by their guests.

Giving Thanks for 50 Years!

What began in 1969 as a small holiday meal for college students and local youth stranded by a snow storm, has grown into the Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner, one of the largest and the oldest community dinners in the country. Many things have changed over the decades, but not the generosity of our amazing community.

Our 50th Anniversary year brought out more than 4,000 volunteers who helped plan, prepare—chopping, peeling, cooking, cleaning—and deliver more than 10,000 meals throughout the Capital Region. At the First Presbyterian Church of Albany, site of the 1969 dinner, volunteers served another 500 dinners. Working with the Food Pantries of the Capital District, a corps

of volunteers delivered 100 gallons of turkey soup, along with any extra meals and pans of food, to local food pantries, soup kitchens, missions and shelters.

Our deepest gratitude to all the individuals, families, businesses, farms, schools, congregations and organizations that contributed food, money, time and hard work! A very special thank you to Tri City Rentals for their generous support of the 50th Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner, along with our lead community partners: NYS Office of General Services, Price Chopper/Market 32, Hannaford Supermarkets, NYSCOPBA, and H.L. Gage. We are grateful to all of you—our “T-Day” family—for making our dinner a cherished community tradition.



Showing off their 50th Anniversary T-Shirt—one of many families sharing in the T-Day tradition.



Team of employees from Tri City Rentals joined in the meal preparations on “carrot duty.”



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We're in this Together"



That message goes straight to the heart of Equinox—from its founding to today, especially today.

During these challenging times, if you are looking for a way to help our community, please consider a gift to Equinox. So many of our clients—who have so few resources to begin with—are struggling daily. We are working hard to meet their needs while our own resources are stretched thin.

We're in this together. And together, we will continue to change lives and strengthen communities.

Visit equinoxinc.org to see how we are providing essential services to the community while protecting our clients and staff.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused fear and anxiety, sometimes overwhelmingly so, in many adults and children. During Mental Health Awareness Month in May, follow us on Facebook and Instagram for information about coping with the stress, what to watch for in those you love, and resources to help you through this difficult time.

