

# Overcoming COVID's Challenges

## *Leadership Ulster Graduates 18*

Vanessa Shea moved to Ulster County three months before COVID-19 and didn't expect to make many connections once the pandemic struck, but thanks to the Leadership Ulster program, she was able to do just that in her role at SUNY Ulster.

"As we come out of a very difficult year, I can say I've never felt more connected to a community as I do to Ulster County," Shea said during the program's graduation celebration on June 14 at Diamond Mills Hotel & Tavern in Saugerties. "I am eager to use the new leadership skills and tools that I have acquired from this program to become more involved and positively impact our community."

Several of the 18 graduates at the celebration referenced the pandemic, which led to an all-virtual program in 2021. Class President Brianna Keary from Ulster Savings Bank said COVID made Leadership Ulster harder than she thought, but she also saw unintended blessings.

"In the end, I know that it made my classmates and I stronger leaders of our community," she said. "I learned so much about myself, my community, and people in general, but I can't help noticing the growth of my peers and myself through this program."

"This program has been so educational and inspiring that I now have a deeper love for my community and the people in it."

Leadership Ulster, which is run by the Chamber's Foundation and Executive Director Ingrid Kulick, was started in 1992 by former Chamber President Len Cane to develop community leaders. The program, sponsored by M&T Bank, has trained well more than 400 leaders to serve on the boards of local non-profits and community organizations and will mark 30 years in 2022.

This year's class featured eight employees from Ulster Savings Bank, including Keary, Maria Moreno Amado, Karisa Finch, Alyssa Miller, Robert Naccarato, Jean Peters, Sierra Stitt and Phyllis Tabler.

Other graduates included Meagan Bianco of Ellenville Regional Hospital, Kaleigh Borneman of Bank of Greene County, Sarah Szabo of Rondout Savings Bank, Tasyka DeRosalia of RUPCO, Amanda Grant of Hudson Valley Credit Union, Shane Henneberger of M&T Bank, Rhea Paniesin of the YMCA, Heather Powell of Adams Fairacre Farms and Amy Summers of Raising HOPE Women's Mentoring.

The graduation celebration gave each class member a chance to share about their experiences and the camaraderie that developed. For example, Bianco said Leadership Ulster gave her "a connection to this amazing



community" and she called the program "a gift and an honor."

Powell was one of many who joked about meeting via Zoom.

"When COVID turned the world upside down, this program helped us to refocus, to find our direction again," she said.

Several speakers thanked the community leaders who addressed the class, such as Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan, SUNY New Paltz Dean of the School of Business, Dr. Kristin Backhaus, John Eickman of HITS Endurance and Chamber President Ward Todd.

"I feel like each of them brought something different, but a lot to connect the community and show the amazing things the Chamber has done for the community," said DeRosalia.

Several had kind words for Kulick. Finch noted that "not even the pandemic could stop her" from putting together the speakers and program.

Grant said Leadership Ulster taught her "many important tools," such as conflict resolution, and to "learn from failure, move on and grow."

Peters said she uses many of the skills she learned every day at work.

"It has helped me gain confidence not only in my career, but also in my personal life," she said.

Summers said she joined for the networking but found so much more in the area of leadership development.

"I met women and men who are emerging leaders in

their field and who care about courage and integrity," she said.

The program kicked off last September at The Venue Uptown and then proceeded with biweekly virtual sessions.

"This class really rose to the occasion, made the best of it, and found ways to welcome, to communicate, to engage and to include – all key actions for leaders," said Kulick.

"Challenge and creativity are hallmarks of leadership and have certainly been pushed to the test in the last year and a half. Who would have thought that Leadership Ulster could go totally virtual? But we did it."

Several speakers also referenced the class project, which this year involved collecting 1,200 COVID-related hygiene items at 22 locations of Bank of Greene County, Ulster Savings Bank and Rondout Savings Bank.

"I love the work that we do at the Foundation," Kulick said. "We work with great leaders to help people see that there's leadership inside them because there is. Every one of us has a purpose, everyone has a way of contributing to our communities."

The Chamber Foundation is now recruiting for the 2021-22 class. Applications are due Monday Aug. 2.

*Information and applications for Leadership Ulster are available online at [www.ulsterchamberfoundation.org](http://www.ulsterchamberfoundation.org) or you can contact Ingrid Kulick at (845) 338-5100, ext. 106.*

**Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce**

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For information contact Ingrid Kulick  
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# 1st Post-COVID Networking Mixer!

## Keegan Ales Will Be Chamber Host

It's been a long 17 months with no in-person Chamber Mixers, but that's all about to change on July 26 when the iconic Keegan Ales hosts the July Networking Mixer from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at 20 St. James St. in Kingston.

The event will also be a chance to reflect on the life and legacy of founder Tommy Keegan, who died April 30. Keegan started Keegan Ales in 2003 and was at the forefront of the craft brewery movement that has flourished across the state and the nation.

"We're happy to have the Chamber back for an in-person mixer—the first one since COVID—and happy to be co-sponsoring it with Timely Signs, our neighbors and dear friends," said Lisa Hantes, who was Keegan's life partner. "We will be honoring the memory of Tommy Keegan. Keegan Ales is open six nights a week and we're continuing to brew every day. We're not rolling up the bricks and closing the shop down. That's not what he would want after 18 years."

Hantes said she and Keegan's ex-wife and business partner, Christy Keegan, are working together to be the face of the company and to fill those big shoes Tommy left behind.

"We've lost the founder and the brewmaster, but he strove for 18 years to make the brand what it is today, and we feel that it would be disrespectful to not continue in his name," Hantes said. "We have a strong brew crew, a very dedicated staff, a supportive family and overwhelming community support to keep us moving forward. I cannot express enough the amount of community support that has been given. It's a credit to his name and all that he did for his community."

The legacy of Keegan, a larger-than-life Kingston businessman, will be acknowledged, Hantes said.

"We don't want it to be a somber event, but we thought it would be impossible not to acknowledge his passing in some way," Hantes said. "It will be very much a traditional Chamber Mixer. We expect it to be the same as always. But there will be pictures on display and there may be words spoken, just nothing too maudlin. Tommy built this place for people to come and have a good time. So, we'll celebrate his life and his legacy."

"We'll likely release a new beer that night. We also have a big, beautifully tented outside area, which is perfect for this sort of thing. So, people won't have to cram inside and feel uncomfortable in close quarters."

Hantes said business leaders will also have access to food trucks, which have served as the kitchen for Keegan Ales during the pandemic. There also will be live entertainment, a Keegan staple.

"Keegan Ales is all about live music," Hantes said. "We have live music five nights a week. We have trivia on Tuesdays. The only day we're closed is Monday, which is the day we'll have the Mixer, so it makes sense that we'd have food, we'd have some music, and I think we'll have some games to play—that kind of stuff. The usual 'Keegan shenanigans.' That's a Tommy Keegan quote."

Keegan started the business after learning about an empty building on St. James Street that nobody would buy because there was a defunct brewery inside. The structure was built in the early 1800s and was formerly the home of the Woodstock Brewing Co.

After months of cleaning and rebuilding, Keegan Ales brewed



its first batch of beer on Aug. 1, 2003. Keegan then set out hand-selling beer to local bars and restaurants the next month.

Keegan's has gone on to win several awards over the years, including Best Brewery in The Hudson Valley and Best Brewery in New York State, both in 2009. The Chamber honored Keegan Ales as its Small Business of the Year in 2010.

"Tommy and I worked side by side together for the last eight years," Hantes said. "I ran the front of the house and he ran the back of the house and the brewing side of it and did all the wholesale; I was in charge of all the retail and the restaurant and the bar."

Keegan's hosted its first Chamber Mixer in October 2003 and was the host for several others over the past 18 years. Tommy loved hosting Chamber Mixers and having business leaders mingling at his venue.

"I just like that the Mixers get people in the same room at the same time and gives the people who have been around a long time a chance to meet the new people to the Chamber," Hantes said. "They strengthen the community and especially the business community."

Hantes said this one will be special given the circumstances of COVID and Keegan's passing.

"Keegan Ales has always been a staunch supporter of the Chamber and of



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the community," she said. "It's always been sort of a hub of Kingston. We're honored to be the first to have the in-person Mixer and it makes sense because we've done it so many times and we've always been such a big supporter of the Chamber and [President] Ward [Todd] and all the things that they do."

*Chamber Mixers are a great way to network and promote your business. Be sure to bring plenty of business cards. This free networking event is open to Chamber members and prospective members. Reservations are required and can be made by calling the Chamber office at (845) 338-5100 or by registering online at [www.ulsterchamber.org](http://www.ulsterchamber.org).*

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[www.zenarec.com](http://www.zenarec.com)

## WILTWYCK GOLF CLUB



404 Steward Lane, Kingston, NY  
[wiltwyck.org](http://wiltwyck.org)

# Ribbon Cuttings

## AMERICAN THUNDER



352 E Chester Street, Kingston, NY

## THE PINK ELEPHANT CAFE



1090 Morton Blvd., Kingston, NY  
[www.thepinkelephantcafe.us](http://www.thepinkelephantcafe.us)

## MILLSTREAM TAVERN



114 Mill Hill Road, Woodstock, NY  
[www.millstreamtavern.com](http://www.millstreamtavern.com)

## STEP ONE CHILD & FAMILY GUIDANCE CENTER ADDICTION SERVICES



500 Aaron Court, Kingston, NY  
[step1ny.org/kingston-new-york](http://step1ny.org/kingston-new-york)

## YWCA ULSTER COUNTY



209 Clinton Avenue, Kingston, NY  
[ywcaulstercounty.org](http://ywcaulstercounty.org)

## THE MELTAWAY BAKERY



3189 Route 9W (Barclay Heights), Saugerties, NY  
[themeltawaybakery.com](http://themeltawaybakery.com)