

*A Village ENGAGED Magazine*

**free**

# WE QUARTERLY

HAMBURG

**ISSUE NO. 2**

**WINTER 2025**

*Celebrating Community*



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# Welcome to Village ENGAGED

Empowering Neighborhood Growth, Action, Goals, Empathy & Dignity



**The VE  
Mission**

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN VILLAGE ENGAGED

The Village ENGAGED mission is to encourage intentional connections by empowering the WNY community through thoughtful programming and engagement.

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN VE QUARTERLY

VE Quarterly seeks to be the written expression of Village ENGAGED's mission that you can hold in your hands. In these pages we will encourage you to introduce yourself and to get to know your neighbors, we will encourage broader and more inclusive participation in our community, we will invite you to share your talents, we will ask you to be an active part of creating a safer and more supportive community, we will share knowledge and resources, and we will most definitely celebrate people.

It is with this grand mission in mind that you will find inside these pages our awesome board president sharing about her first Christmas without her dad, you will read poetry that will move you and invite greater understanding, you will see a special car that a teenager worked her ass off to buy, you will meet a guard dog that just wants to be loved, you will get advice from a lawyer about improving your workplace, you will see the not-so-sh\*tty crafts created at the Sh\*tty Craft Club, you will be offered advice about taking it a little easier on yourself in this season of New Year's resolutions, you will see the

## Did you know?

Sponsoring VE Quarterly is not just for businesses. If you are looking for a creative way to congratulate someone, to wish that special somebody a happy birthday, or to become the first person to propose marriage in the Quarterly (all while supporting a great cause and for a very reasonable, tax deductible donation), contact us now to secure your spot in the next issue!

beautiful artwork of a talented 8-and-three-quarter-year-old, you will get a song recommendation from a bona fide music aficionado, you will be handed a recipe for a corn casserole that is a beloved holiday tradition in the family of the former Catering Manager for the Buffalo Bills (this guy has hung out with Josh Allen), you will take in world class photography, you'll hear from a real wise ass dad joker who we asked for one joke and had to cut him off at three, and you'll hear a lot about what people love about winter. And it's all free because of donors like **Roofs by Bryan**, the **SPCA**, **Village Yoga & Wellness**, and **Cooke Doyle** who believe in the mission and put their money where their mouths are.

## THANK YOU SPONSORS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

What we are really hoping you find in the pages of VE Quarterly is reminder after reminder about all of the things that bind us together into one big Western New York family. In short, we wish you love - it's the stuff that makes us who we are.





# Message From The Prez

By Annamaria Masucci, VE Board President

**Happy New Year to our VE Community!**

To be candid, this holiday season has been particularly challenging for me on a personal level. Earlier this year, I lost my father, and his absence has had a profound impact on our family. While this is the “first” holiday season without him—and I’ve heard it’s often the hardest—I find that I struggle more with the reality of facing every holiday without him. I share this experience with you for two reasons: first, I love storytelling, and second, if you’re finding this holiday season less than merry, know that you’re not alone.

This reminded me of how Village ENGAGED came to be. It was formed by a community of women who felt isolated in their despair but transformed their love into something beautiful. If Village ENGAGED had a slogan, it would be “Come as you are.” There are times when we feel as if we’re dancing on rainbows with unicorns, and other times when we feel trapped in the Pit of Despair. Regardless of how you feel, remember that you truly are not alone.

Village ENGAGED has undergone significant evolution over the past year. We have been balancing the foundational principles that led to its creation while recognizing the need to adapt to changing times. New board members have joined, and some of the Founding Mothers are stepping down as we welcome a new year and a clearer vision for Village ENGAGED. However, one thing that will always remain constant is that you are always welcome to come as you are.

Whether you are celebrating moments of joy or navigating waves of sorrow, Village ENGAGED is here to embrace you with open arms. We understand that life is a tapestry woven with both light and shadow, and our community thrives on supporting one another through it all.

As we look ahead, we’re excited to introduce new programs and initiatives that aim to foster connection and empowerment. Workshops, support groups, and creative endeavors are just a few of the ways we hope to engage and uplift our members. We believe that by sharing our stories and experiences, we can create a ripple effect of compassion and understanding.

With the start of a new year, let us find comfort in the warmth of community and the shared strength of those who have walked similar paths. Whether you join us through volunteering, donations or just spreading the word about us, we extend an invitation to be part of this vibrant tapestry of resilience and hope.



Be sure to check out all that’s happening  
at Village ENGAGED’s sister organization the  
Rainbow Collective of Western New York  
*RainbowCollectiveWNY.com*



# Around Village ENGAGED

## *A Stroll Through What's Been Going On*



## COMMUNITY CLOSET

### DONATION GUIDELINES

Our goal is to provide members of our community with essential clothing, free of charge and judgment, to ensure that what they wear reflects their true selves, boosting confidence and preserving their dignity. To help us achieve our goal, please follow these guidelines when donating to our Community Closet. Thank you for your generosity!



CLOTHING MUST BE CLEAN, GENTLY USED OR NEW



FREE OF ODOR, INCLUDING CIGARETTE SMOKE



NO RIPS, EXCESSIVE WEAR, BROKEN ZIPPERS, OR STAINS\*



NO USED UNDERWEAR, SOCKS, OR BODYSUITS



NO HOUSEHOLD ITEMS, LINENS, TOYS, OR BOOKS DUE TO STORAGE LIMITATIONS\*



\*HEARTS FOR THE HOMELESS ACCEPTS THESE ITEMS. VISIT THEIR WEBSITE FOR DETAILS AND DONATE VIA THE RED BINS THROUGHOUT THE VILLAGE

### *Community Discussions*

It's critical to the VE Mission to keep the discussion going and to invite as many people to the table as possible. That's why we are always seeking to create opportunities for public discourse and face to face interaction. Please reach out to [Beth@VillageYogaWNY.com](mailto:Beth@VillageYogaWNY.com) if you have an idea for a community discussion.

### *It Takes a Village Postpartum Support Circle*

We offer a safe, non-judgmental space where moms can connect and build community. This group is led by moms who believe in the power of peer support, authenticity, and community connection.



### *Youth Village Engaged*

The Maker Space Series for Grades 3, 4 & 5 was a huge success in Fall 2025. Series for Grades 6, 7 & 8 start in January! Check out the VE website for all of our great youth programming in 2026!

### *Halloween Classic Recap by Mary Prohaska*

There's no time limit on having something to look forward to- am I right?? Readers may remember an advertisement in our inaugural issue for the 2nd Annual Halloween Classic. It is an annual Halloween party thrown by VE members- the Russo Gang and Prohaska families. The 2025 party was on the evening of October 18th at the Knights of Columbus in Hamburg. If you made it out, thank you for helping us make such a fun and unforgettable evening that ended in an euphoric balloon ball pit! And if you didn't make it out, here is your 9 months or so early invite for next year, exact date and location TBD- VE will share those details when the time comes! At the classic you can expect a playlist to keep you dancing, classic Halloween movies playing from a projector, spooky lighting and vibe setting, prizes and trophy's for various best costume categories, free snacks and a cash bar all for a very low priced ticket so it's accessible to everyone. 2026 will be our 3rd year throwing this party, and we are hoping for a great turnout as it is customary that any proceeds from the night go to benefit Village ENGAGED. Stay weird and stay tuned 🧛

# How to Maintain a Happy Workplace

By Kim Wallace, *Special Guest Contributor*



## **Happiness at work is not a luxury—it is a strategic business imperative.**

Employees deserve to be happy at work, and organizations with open communication, transparent policies, and a strong commitment to mental and physical safety consistently outperform those without these foundations.

Research by Gallup, Google's Project Aristotle, Harvard Business Review, and NIOSH shows that workplaces that cultivate trust, psychological safety, and employee well-being experience higher productivity, engagement, and overall organizational performance.

Creating a happy workplace is not always easy. The foundations of a happy workplace – open communication, policy transparency, and accessible safety-centered procedures – require intentional design and ongoing commitment from leadership. The investment pays off, as employee happiness directly affects productivity, innovation, and retention. Employees who feel heard and protected are more engaged, loyal, and resilient. It's worth it to invest in happiness in the workplace.

## **Why Open Communication Matters**

Open communication builds psychological safety, reduces misunderstandings, and promotes trust between employees and supervisors. When communication flows freely, employers benefit from stronger team cohesion, earlier identification of emerging issues, increased engagement, better morale, and significantly higher retention. Employees benefit from a greater sense of belonging, clearer understanding of expectations, increased confidence in leadership, and reduced stress and ambiguity. So talk to your employees and co-workers.

The best type of communication is 1:1 with employees and supervisors or in a small group format. Employees should feel free to ask questions and seek clarity around work assignments and other workplace issues.

## **Clear, Transparent, and Accessible Policies That Prioritize Safety**

All organizations with employees should have employment policies that are easy to find and simple to understand. Foundational safety policies include anti-harassment protections, safety reporting procedures, accommodation processes, ergonomic practices, and mental-health resources. A thriving workplace requires ongoing evaluation. Organizations should use surveys, anonymous feedback, and open communication implement policies. Those policies should be reviewed annually to ensure they make sense for your employees and your workplace. Integrating employee well-being into leadership development, training, and strategic planning strengthens long-term organizational health.

## **One Lawyer's Opinion: A Case for Fostering Belonging in the Workplace**

Creating a workplace where employees feel 'at home' in a professional environment is a strategic necessity. In my work representing employers and employees in labor-related matters, I have repeatedly seen that employees who feel supported by both their supervisors and the organization, are happy, productive, and cause the least disruption. Employees who feel they belong in the workplace participate more openly, contribute ideas more readily, and help identify issues early.

Safety and belonging unlock vulnerability—an essential ingredient of growth. People cannot innovate when they are bracing for impact or worried about retaliation, judgment, or misunderstanding. But when employees feel comfortable, respected, and included, they gain the psychological bandwidth to excel even during stressful or uncertain moments. Treating employees as integral members of a shared mission is a high-return investment in performance and culture.

# Spotlight: Sh\*tty Craft Club

## Feature Craft

Air-dry clay sculptures by Teresa Galus



We asked Teresa what she loved about Winter. "I love the snow and appreciate the workout of shoveling (done safely!). If there's been a good snowfall, once we are finished clearing the driveway, I like heading to the backyard to treat myself to one good flop backwards into the snow and relax a moment.

*Teresa Galus*



Here is 5' 2" Teresa shoveling at her mom's in January 2024. She later climbed up the pile to shovel snow further into the yard so they could actually see down the street!

Thank You To Our Sponsor!!!

## No dozing in the doghouse!

POT OF GOLD RAFFLE  
Feb. 2-March 13

WINE, WAGS, & BREWS  
June 10

WILDLIFE BABY SHOWER  
March 16-28

PAWS IN THE PARK  
September 26

KITTEN BABY SHOWER  
May 4-23

LOW-COST VACCINE CLINICS, PET  
FOOD PANTRY, VET CARE,  
& MORE

TALE FOR TWO, PRESCHOOL, CAMPS,  
BIRTHDAYS PARTIES, & MORE  
All year long!

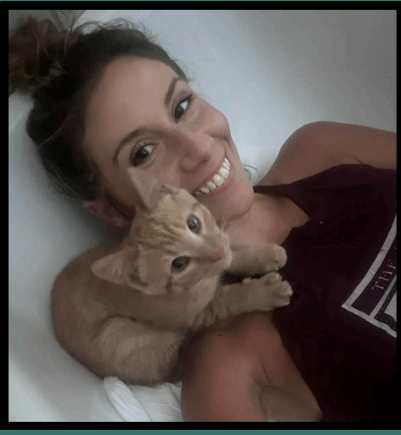
All year long!

More info: [YourSPCA.org](http://YourSPCA.org)



Catch every event coming up at the SPCA Serving Erie County in 2026!





# A Resolute Shift

By: Beth Licata Cooke, VE Board Member, ERYT 500 Yoga Teacher, Yoga Therapist, Owner of Village Yoga and Wellness, Mom, Step Mom and animal rescuer

**It's the time of year when everyone starts to peel through their catalog of internal shame for their New Year's resolution. The powers of the internet start turning our algorithm into a non stop pitch about detoxing, losing something, making something, being something, doing something, and for the love of everything holy stop feeling so lost in the mediocrity of the hustle and grind.**

As positive as it can be to have goals, this process has a tendency to lean towards our fears and not our strengths. It is no mystery that by February many people have given up on their resolution and filed the idea of it into the previously mentioned catalog of internal shame.

I am here as your little local yoga teacher to propose something different this year. Instead of thinking about one single change, or one single thing you want to change **start to think about the ethos of the why behind the change you want.**

For example.. If the resolution is "I want to stop spending so much money on stuff I don't need, and save a bunch of money this year" think about why you want to do that. Is it a sense of safety and security? Then maybe instead of being locked in to a few actions being 'good' or 'bad', think about shifting your life in ways that make you feel more secure. Look at all of it. The ways you communicate, the relationships you choose, the work you do... all of it. Pay closer attention to when you feel secure and amplify those things. Part of that might be saving more money, part of it might be getting closer to a person who you feel seen by. Shift toward security as a whole being. Check in with your sense of security daily and see how you can make it stronger. Sometimes that might be not shopping online after a few glasses of wine, and sometimes that might look like buying yourself the most soft blanket the world can sell you. **Hard lines lead to hard feelings.**

Another example, if the resolution is "I want to lose weight" think about the why. Is it that you feel low energy, or a lack of connection to your body? Instead of counting calories start shifting towards embodiment. Put little rituals into your day to bring you back into your breath. Deep breaths fuel our energy levels, and reduce stress hormones that lead to all sorts of nonsense. **Use your senses to feel the world around you.** Pay attention to movement that makes you feel exhilarated, but not depleted. Instead of going on a crash course to more self denial try shifting towards a more compassionate experience of your body. Listen closer to what you want to eat, and taste it while you are eating it. Unless there is a medically important reason stop weighing yourself, and instead investigate what foods give you energy and what foods make you feel less than great. Celebrate your process, and when you feel the insecurity creep up remind yourself that this is not a resolution, but instead its a shift. Lean into yourself instead of away.

The point is, don't let your algorithm tell you what to do. Ask yourself how you want to feel and shift towards it. You might not be able to put an exact number to your new goal, but you will be able to feel the shift along the way, and it will build instead of bust.

Be resolute in the shift of following the cues of your own truth, bathed in deep and consistent compassion towards yourself. When you lose track, that's okay! The great news about a shift is that there is not a deadline or some imaginary **finish line. We just wake up and serve ourselves with love so we can serve the world with love too.**

INTEGRITY YOU CAN TRUST. THE QUALITY YOU DESERVE.

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By Nora Park



my favorite thing  
in winter is when  
my elfs are hangi:  
out together!!!

# POETRY PRESENTATION TEE DOUGLAS

## ‘Made of Clay’ by Trans Teacher

**Shame burrows  
deep under my skin  
like a thorn  
in the sensitive pad of a bare foot:  
sharp hooked words  
digging into my very essence  
trying to tear it out,  
to purge,  
to exorcise,**

**but there is no demon within me;  
I too am made in God’s own image:  
my heart, made to love who it loves,  
me, made to be who I am.  
You can chip away at me  
with your insults and your ignorance,  
and like marble under the sculptor’s  
chisel,  
I become more whole.**

**Your barbed remarks cut deep  
but our pride is nestled deeper –  
denser –  
the singularity before the explosion  
and we will burst forth  
in blinding light.**

**You have made angels of too many of us.  
We do not belong in Hell but  
we do not belong in Heaven  
either:**

**We are claiming our place on Earth.**



Tee says, “One thing I like about winter is the holidays and the spirit that many people embody during that time. Winter brings families, biological and chosen, together, giving them space to reconnect. People tend to be a little kinder around the holidays, and it makes me think that if the world could carry that spirit throughout the entire year, we would all be better for it.”

About “Made of Clay,” Tee says, “this poem is meaningful to me because it was written by a teacher of transgender experience for Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) and it resonates with me because it not only showcases the feelings and hardships that trans people feel and face everyday and especially on TDOR, but it also reminds the world that we are here, we belong here, and we are not going anywhere. It reminds people that this world was made for us, too.”

## Shateer “Tee” Douglas

Tee Douglas is an African American man of transgender experience, born and raised in a lively household in Niagara Falls, New York. He is a columnist and contributor for BlaqueOut Magazine and began his activism during the fight for marriage equality. Tee currently serves as the LGBTQ Youth Coordinator in Buffalo, NY.

He sits on the boards of Gender Equality New York— a fully translated nonprofit— and the Buffalo Niagara LGBTQ History Project, which documents and preserves LGBTQ history in the region. Tee is also a member of the international ballroom House of Comme Des Garçon/CDG Pro.

In 2020, Tee was recognized by New York State as a Trans Leader and featured in its Trans Awareness Month slideshow. He also appears in Transcending Love, a traveling photography exhibit by B. Proud, now permanently housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Outside of his professional and advocacy work, Tee volunteers as an administrative assistant with Vogue Buffalo, supporting programs that teach the art and history of ballroom and vogue to youth and young adults across Western New York. A proud Gemini, he enjoys traveling, biking, photography, and Afro-beats.

# FEATURED FURRY FRIEND DOLLY



Dolly's human Bryan Tramontana was fostering her through Hamburg Mutts when the two became inseparable. Dolly was found wandering around Amish country and needed some TLC. Now, the 2 year old shepherd lab mix works as office security at Roofs by Bryan. While she may sound ferocious, she really just wants to be loved. She knows when it's exactly 3 PM so she can start whimpering for her dinner about two hours early. Dolly's favorite thing about Winter is that the rabbit poop she usually has to search for is easy to spot in the snow. As for Bryan, he loves that it's so cold in the winter and everything looks pretty in the snow.



# THIS ISSUE'S HOT CAR

## LILY LICATA'S RAINBOW RIDE



Lily began saving for this car before she even had her license. At 15, she was waiting tables at Fox Run at Orchard Park socking away money shift after shift until she could buy her car outright along with some sweet customizations including rainbow rugs, rainbow window film, heart shaped blind spot mirrors, reflective metallic rainbow side view mirror stickers, cat themed license plate holders, and seat covers for when her furry friends are along for the ride.

Lily says: One thing I love about winter is the first fall of snow.

Lily's car is a 2014 Chevy Cruz



# PHOTOGRAPHER JEFF WOZER

Jeff says, "I crave the unvarnished awe of remoteness, which means I spend an inordinate amount of time in the backcountry trying to dismiss the realization of what I call a tent a bear calls packaging." Things Jeff loves about winter include stealing carrot noses from neighborhood snowmen for savory side dishes. He also likes skiing big arcing GS (giant slalom) turns on an untouched slope under a sun-buffed blue sky.



Snapped while paddling in the Adirondacks in early October when the sky collaborated with the lake to create one of life's rare, fleeting exclamation point moments.



False Kiva, located in the Utah desert. My favorite place on the planet. I visit it once or twice a year to, as favorite writer Jim Harrison would say, "Get back the present as a wild season rather than a ruse."

# WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT WINTER!

WHEN WE ASKED OUR PEEPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE WINTER MEMORIES, YOU ANSWERED!



Jesse Cooke likes staying cozy



Annie loves getting in touch with her inner sled dog



Paul Werner recalls bringing "my cats into the house after moving to Hamburg from Florida. A long car ride for my kitties! My first day in Hamburg in 2022 was a snowy one!"



These innovative kids used a television box and come creativity to invent "hobo sledding" in 2017

Carol Lee Rubeck recalled:

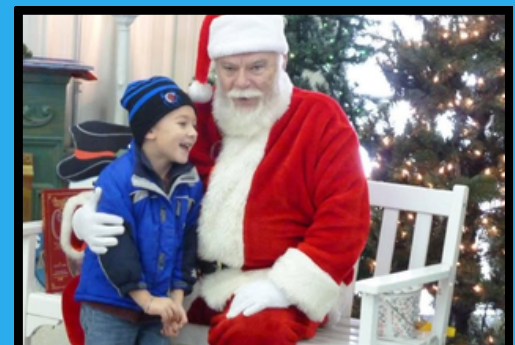
Blizzard of 1977 !! Left an hour early for work Vlg of Hamburg to Vlg of Lancaster. Only got as far as McKinley Pkwy (Fairground entrance) I think, turned around, went back home. It was over an hr later. My Boss was mad, really didn't believe me. Said they had barely any Snow up there. Spent the rest of that day, next few days shoveling & enjoying all the people who stayed at our home. A few from my sisters bank & my boyfriends friends. Cooked, Played cards. My Mom ALWAYS had plenty of food in the basement pantry. Not much money, but somehow she pulled it together & everyone felt welcomed & safe!!



Erin and Dan Selig's dog Birdie can't wait for winter weather



Jenny T says, "That's my Dad: Edward Tomasiak, out there taking a shoveling break with an icecream cone here in Hamburg NY. From the Snowvember 2014 storm.



Jennifer Norris loved visiting with her grandson Jack and Santa in 2011

# Recipe Resource Brian Jewitt

## Mom's Corn Casserole (A Christmas Staple in our Family)

Mix together 1 box of Jiffy Cornbread Mix, 1 Can of Drained Corn, 1 Can of Cream Corn, and 1 Cup of Sour Cream, 1 Egg and 4 tbsp of melted Butter. Pour into a greased casserole dish and bake at 375 for 45-60 minutes based on how creamy you want it!



Brian is the Director of Dining Services at D'Youville University. Born and raised in Hamburg, NY, he has lived in Colorado and California, worked as a Sous Chef for a ski-in, ski-out restaurant in Colorado at 12,000ft elevation, and was the Catering Manager for the Buffalo Bills.

## This Issue's Feature Song



**WHAT JON'S LISTENING TO:  
ULVER - HOLLYWOOD BABYLON**

**WHY HE'S LISTENING:  
ULVER IS A NORWEGIAN BAND I'VE ADMIRER FOR YEARS, KNOWN FOR REINVENTING THEIR SOUND WITH EVERY ALBUM. THE SONG HOLLYWOOD BABYLON PAIRS A POP SENSIBILITY WITH SHARP, TIMELY LYRICS.**

**ONE THING JON LOVES ABOUT WINTER:  
FOR ME, WINTER IS A TIME OF REFLECTION. ITS QUIET ATMOSPHERE NATURALLY INVITES INTROSPECTION.**



**DAD JOKER**  
**BRIAN PUNTURIERO**

**HOW DO YOU FIND WILL SMITH IN THE SNOW?**

**YOU FOLLOW THE FRESH PRINTS!**

**WHY DO SNOWMEN GO TO THE GARDEN?**

**TO PICK THEIR NOSES!**

**WHERE DO SNOWMEN PUT THEIR MONEY?**

**IN THE SNOWBANK!**

**WHEN ASKED WHAT BRIAN LOVES ABOUT WINTER, HE SAID:**

**“I LIKE SLEDDING WITH THE KIDS, AND PLAYING IN THE SNOW. SEASON ITSELF IS TOO LONG.”**



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**We're different than other law firms.**

For starters, we understand the importance of shitty  
crafts, poetry slams, dad jokes, and great dogs like  
Dolly.



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Dates, investment and reviews can be found on our website. Reach out to [Beth@villageyogawny.com](mailto:Beth@villageyogawny.com) for an application!



Early Bird Pricing for limited time

# Ways to get involved

**VOLUNTEER!** We need help in our community closet as well as fresh ideas and good company!

Make a monetary donation (monthly or one time) through our website!

Follow us on social media, and like and share our posts!

Sometimes the hardest part of helping is making sure people who need support know that support exists!

**SHOW UP!** Come to our community events, support circles and discussions. We need you to help build the village!

Place an ad for your business or purchase ad space for a loving tribute in the VE Quarterly!



Let us know if you know a photographer, poet, dog, car owner, dad joker, sh\*tty crafter, artist, recipe resource, music lover or any other community star that should be featured in the VE Quarterly!

