



The doors of UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital's new Emergency Department and Walk-In Center opened to the public on Tuesday, January 25. (Photo from CMH)

## UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital: Shaping the future of healthcare in Chenango County

By Melissa Stagnaro  
UHS Communications

NORWICH – “It stops me every time we walk in. Looking at the old versus the new – it’s jaw dropping,” said Hans Franklin, as he stood surveying UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital’s new 16,000 sq. foot Emergency Department and Walk-In Center.

Franklin, who serves as the Norwich hospital’s Emergency Management lead in addition to his role as Logistics Service Line Manager, was tasked with conducting walk-throughs with local EMS in the weeks prior to the January 25 opening. As a long-time volunteer fireman himself, he relished the opportunity to show off the state of the art space to first responders he knew would be as impressed with the scale, functionality and aesthetics as he is.

“Many of them never imagined we’d have a facility like this in Chenango County,” he said.

Tanya Harkness-Huggins, Nurse Manager of

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Moving supplies for UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital’s new Emergency Department and Walk-In Center. (From CMH)

## Helping Hands hosting giveaway nights all year



Volunteers setting up for a Helping Hands giveaway night in October 2021. Giveaways are held at 6:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month, in front of the Norwich Family YMCA. (Photo from the Helping Hands Facebook page)

By Sarah Genter  
Sun Staff Writer

NORWICH – Local volunteer group Helping Hands has planned a full year of giveaway nights to continue their mission of helping the community.

“[We’re] providing for the community as a whole, anyone that’s in need,” said Helping Hands Founder Lorri Race. “There’s no criteria, you don’t have to fill out

a form, you don’t need to fall in a certain bracket. It’s anybody that’s in need.”

Helping Hands was founded in January of 2020. Race said she felt compelled to start the program after speaking with individuals from the area, who shed light on circumstances and needs within the community.

Since its inception, the organization has partnered with other local groups, seen a massive participation from

the community, and now serves around 150 to 200 individuals a month.

### How it works

Giveaway nights always take place on the third Thursday of every month, rain or shine, at 6:30 p.m. in front of the Norwich Family YMCA.

“Third Thursday at the YMCA, we don’t ever change that. 6:30 [p.m.],” said Race. “The only time that we’ve

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### Helping Hands 2022 Giveaway Dates

- Thursday, January 20
- Thursday, February 17
- Thursday, March 17
- Thursday, April 21
- Thursday, May 19
- Thursday, June 16
- Thursday, July 21
- Thursday, August 18
- Thursday, September 15
- Thursday, October 20
- Thursday, November 17
- Thursday, December 15

All giveaways start at 6:30 p.m., at the Norwich Family YMCA.

## sfcu focuses on the future

By Zachary Meseck  
Sun Contributor

SIDNEY – As the pandemic lingered on throughout 2021, Sidney Federal Credit Union (sfcu) made a big push towards going digital; offering many more ways to interact and keep its members safe online.

According to President CEO of sfcu James Reynolds, sfcu is a full-service financial institution focused on providing the tools and resources their members need to make banking easy and convenient. Reynolds said the not-for-profit credit union was founded in 1949, and has reached approximately 60,000 members.

“As a credit union, we value members of our community,” he said. “Most credit unions always like to hang their hat on the service philosophy, but I think what sets us apart really comes down to our people and how we deliver our service.”



sfcu, a not-for-profit credit union, was founded in 1949 and has approximately 60,000 members. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

“On paper, most institutions offer the same types of products and services, but what really differentiates us is our internal culture and the value that we have with a member centric and member first philosophy.”

Reynolds said sfcu continued to expand through the

pandemic, with a big push in different ways to connect with members remotely. He said digital transformation was a key piece in the change that occurred in his credit union throughout the year.

### Digital Transformation

“Technology is one of the big things financial institu-

tions were trying to embrace, and trying to encourage membership to use like adoption rates, but once COVID-19 hit people started going 100 percent remote,” Reynolds added. “We opened up a virtual branch that was unveiled

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## Helping Hands hosting giveaway nights all year —

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closed is COVID, because we were forced to close. Otherwise, we like to keep the same time, same date, so you don't ever have to take a guess."

Volunteers set up stations along the YMCA front driveway, and area residents can either drive or walk through to collect items such as food, hygiene items, and cleaning supplies, all provided through community donations.

"Thanks to the community that provides donations we are able to give food items such as macaroni, pasta, we always do breads, we do milk, we do eggs," said Race. "We do hygiene items, so things like shampoos, deodorants, chapsticks. And then we do cleaning items, so we will have bleach, which is really important during this time, hand sanitizer, dish soap, bar soap, laundry pods."

Other items that are sometimes available include blankets, handmade hats, gloves, and scarves, holiday themed treats, pet food, back to school supplies, and more.

"If it's back to school time we'll do back to school items. Valentine's is coming, so even though it's the Thursday after we will have a little Valentine's treat for children. We try to do a Christmas type of gift or craft that we give out," said



A station set up at a Helping Hands giveaway night. Items distributed by Helping Hands include food items, cleaning supplies, and hygiene products. (Photo from the Helping Hands Facebook page)

Race. "So we try to make a little special gift in there as well that we give each month."

She said items at each station will be packaged separately, and each individual or vehicle is welcome to take one bag per station. Volunteers will load them into the cars, and assist individuals that came on foot in any way they can.

### Community involvement

The Helping Hands pro-

gram has seen an outpouring of support from several other individuals, organizations, businesses, churches, and schools, through donations of items, monetary donations, and volunteering. According to Race, the list of contributors is too many to name.

"It's just amazing how within two years, the community has just stepped up. And that is just exactly what

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In the fall of each year, Helping Hands tries to gather supplies for students returning to school. (Photo from the Helping Hands Facebook page)

Bags of cleaning supplies assembled for distribution at a Helping Hands giveaway night. Thanks to the generosity of local individuals, businesses, and organizations, Helping Hands is able to provide needed items to 150 to 200 individuals each month. (Photo from the Helping Hands Facebook Page)



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I was hoping for. It's amazing, behind the scenes what so many agencies and businesses put into this," said Race. "The volunteers are fantastic. Like, this is not a Lorri Race operation, this is about volunteers and the community."

In addition to their partnership with the Norwich Family YMCA, the agency also works closely with the Chenango United Way. Race said she reached out to United Way when she founded Helping Hands, because they are a valuable resource in the area that has worked with several organizations.

Since then, the two groups have worked together to keep track of donated and distributed items, and United Way has acted as a sounding board to make sure the program is the best it can be.

"When I first came up with the idea, I went to them just because I know that they're a huge benefit to our community, and that they're involved in all sorts of areas and agencies. So I went to them as kind of advice, and they were just absolutely phenomenal, and kind of took me under their wing," she said. "I tell them what our success was for the month, how many numbers, how much did we give out, how much did we collect in for donations. And then it's a sounding board, they give me advice back. It's just another

checks and balances."

Other organizations and businesses in the area quickly jumped on board, and began contributing to the program in whatever ways they could.

"We also have a great relationship with Tops, which is now changing to Grand Union, and they've already been in touch with us, with Helping Hands. They're on board to continue to be a part of the community," Race explained. "Chobani is fantastic. They're always there for us, and they give us the yogurt ... NBT, they send volunteers, they're wonderful. All the churches, I want to say pretty much all of them, the majority, support Helping Hands every month."

Area churches that have gotten involved include cvFree Church, which holds monthly donation drives with the Norwich Police Department called Cram the Cruiser, the UCC Church donates hygiene items, and the Broad Street Methodist Church donates cleaning items.

The Emmanuel Episcopal Church provides monetary donations, and also coordinated their dinner nights with the Helping Hands giveaway nights, so any leftover meals can be brought to the giveaway and distributed.

Other contributors to the program include Southern Tier Pet Food, the Norwich Middle School Wellness

Club, Holy Family School, Go Sneakers, the Chenango Hungry Hippo Dream Team, the Dollar Tree, and many more, plus the countless individuals who volunteer, donate goods, or provide monetary donations.

**Getting involved**

Those looking to volunteer can reach out Race

***"We have an Amazon wish list that's on our Facebook page. It's very easy, especially during COVID, to get on and it's automatically sent to the address, either United Way or the YMCA," said Helping Hands Founder Lorri Race. "It goes right to us, which is great."***

through the Helping Hands Facebook page. There are three volunteering options, but Race said availability has been limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the organization has begun a waiting list and rotates in volunteers.

"We do have restrictions right now on the volunteering a little bit because of COVID. So we kind of split the volunteering up right now into the Friday shopping time, and then the Monday packing, and then the Thursday giveaway," she said. "So there's really those three types of volunteering."

"Everybody wants to do the giveaway on the front

line, which is fantastic, and I would love the more the merrier. But because of COVID, we are inside to begin with when we're getting all the stuff ready, and bringing it out," she continued. "We just have to be careful, especially to respect the Y, and the more you get the harder it is to keep track of the mask

wearing. So right now we do try to monitor a certain number."

For those looking to donate, Race emphasized that while the organization will always accept pantry items, they are always in need of more hygiene and cleaning supplies.

"Always we're looking for the hygiene [items]. Shampoos, conditioners, bar soap, deodorants, shavers. Those are really the main, popular things," she said. "We're always looking for bleach, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizers, those kind of things ... Women's feminine products, because they're so costly, that's a huge help

for donations. Toothbrush, toothpaste. You know, those are things we take for granted. Those are huge."

There are three ways to donate to Helping Hands: the Helping Hands Amazon wish list, the Chenango United Way website, and the Norwich Family YMCA collection days.

"We have an Amazon wish list that's on our Facebook page. It's very easy, especially during COVID, to get on and it's automatically sent to the address, either United Way or the YMCA," said Race. "It goes right to us, which is great."

"We have the United Way website. You can make a monetary donation on there, there's a little box that you just check for Helping Hands, and it goes directly into our account," she continued. "The second Friday of every month we shop at the Dollar Tree. So any monetary donations that have come in through the United Way, we take that and we go shop."

She added that Helping Hands will post a list of things they need as a distribution day approaches, and items on that list can be purchased and dropped off at the YMCA. Donations can be left at the front desk any time, or they can be brought in on collection days the third Monday of each month, from 4 to 6 p.m.

"I want to say kudos to the Y," said Race. "Jamey Mullen, him specific-

ly, leaving that racquetball court open for us for storage, and allowing us to have people drive through every third Thursday. He just really supports the mission, and it's phenomenal."

Race spoke to the power of volunteering, explaining that it's not just a way to give back to the community, but a way to connect with others in the area.

"We have made so many friends, and even the friendships of working together with other volunteers that you've never met. Like, that's another huge aspect to this, is that community building piece and bringing all of us together that volunteer and give. We have so much fun on Thursday night," she said.

All in all, volunteers and visitors alike can expect a welcoming atmosphere of community togetherness and hospitality at the monthly giveaway nights.

"This is about the community, and the community has rallied around the community. That's the best that we can hope for, and just a great thing to see happening and unfolding," said Race. "We don't judge. It's not for us. We're not the ones who are going to decide who gets what or any of that. We don't judge by your car, whether you walk, what you look like ... We're your friend, we're happy to see you."



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# UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital: Shaping the future of healthcare in Chenango County —

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Emergency Medicine at UHS Chenango Memorial, also had the opportunity to show off the new space in the days leading up to the grand opening. In addition to helicopter flight crews, landing for the first time at the facility's newly re-commissioned helipad, the nursing leader took time out of her preparations to do a Facebook live.

"This changes everything for our community," she said, as she gave UHS's social media followers a special sneak peek of the new space and explained the flow of both the new Emergency Department and the Walk-In Center.

The new Emergency Department replaces the 6,600 square foot emergency room which has served the community for the last 25 years. It sits next to the new Walk-in Center, which is the only urgent care facility of its kind in Chenango County. According to Harkness-Huggins, only a handful of health care facilities across the country have a similar hybrid model.

"Our community spoke to us," she said, explaining that feedback received from patients, area businesses, local EMS and other stakeholders guided some of the most important decisions in developing the space, particularly the Walk-In.



Ribbon cutting for the new Emergency Department and Walk-in Center (From CMH)

"Now, we finally have a facility worthy of the patients and community we serve, as well as our caregivers."

Both Franklin and Harkness-Huggins speak with pride when they talk about the new spaces, and rightfully so. They, along with many of their colleagues were actively involved with the design and build of the custom-designed spaces - a highly collaborative process that spanned more than five years and involved a multitude of clinical and non-clinical staff, medical providers, construction partners and

other stakeholders.

"There was a very large team of people that made this happen," explained Richard Stone, Director of Support Services and Construction Administration at UHS Chenango Memorial. "Without the vast knowledge of these multidisciplinary teams, we could never have made this new emergency department and walk-in center a reality."

According to Stone, patient privacy, patient safety, patient flow, staff work flows and convenience were all key considerations as the

planning team worked to create flexible modern spaces capable of meeting the constantly evolving health needs of the community.

"One of the exciting things about the new space is the efficiencies and multiple capabilities that we built into it," he said. "That includes five exam rooms that can be walk-in, emergency room or even observation. We also have the ability to have a full decontamination suite with full isolation suites occupying the same spaces. And we've built in efficiencies with shared registration and staff

areas, as well as provider and nursing spaces."

UHS Chenango Memorial had planned to have the new Emergency Department and Walk-In Center open in late 2021, but COVID-19 got in the way.

"A capital investment of this scale and scope would be a major undertaking under normal circumstances - and the last two years have been anything but normal," Stone said.

"The pandemic made it extremely difficult to stay on schedule due to numerous delays in material. We've also

dealt with staffing shortages and, at times, we've had to shut down the job site to ensure the safety of our construction partners as well as our staff, patients and community from the virus."

That said, according to Stone, having construction crews on site turned out to be a blessing in disguise at times - especially in the early days of the pandemic.

"We were able to quickly pivot to add extra negative pressure rooms and modify the flow of some of our spaces to not just meet the rapidly evolving COVID situation, but also position us to more effectively and efficiently respond to future pandemics," he said.

"We've already taken some of the lessons learned during these last two years and applied them both with this project and to inform our future plans."

Instead of the fanfare of a grand opening, January 25th had the feel of a soft opening. The Emergency Department staff officially transferred their operation in the early hours of the morning, at which time the lighted signs on its new canopy and the neighboring walk-in entrance were unveiled.

Plans for a larger celebration were put off due to the resurgence of COVID infections in the community.

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According to Stone, a more formal grand opening and dedication, which will honor all those who brought the project to fruition, will take place later in the spring.

That ceremony will celebrate not only the Emergency Department and Walk-In Center, but the completion of Phase 1 of the Chenango Memorial Neighborhood Plan. The \$26 million project is the largest concentrated investment in the Norwich hospital's facility in more than 50 years.

The Norwich hospital was able to leverage \$10.5 million in state grants, along with more than \$6 million raised through a historic Capital Campaign and over \$9 million in cash and borrowing to fund the important work.

"None of this would have been possible without the tremendous support we received from both New York State and our community," Stone said.

He also credited the hospital's banking, construction and design partners for the success of the work to date.

"We've been very fortunate to have partners like NBT Bank, Chianis + Anderson Architects, LeChase Construction Services, and our colleagues across United Health Services, who have been with us every step of the way," he said.

While the opening of the Emergency Department and Walk-In Center is argu-

ably the largest milestone of Phase 1, a number of other important milestones have been achieved over the last three years. That list includes a new laboratory; a new Cardiology suite with embedded Cardiac Rehabilitation services; relocation and expansion of nuclear medicine services; opening of the new Main Entrance; consolidation of Diagnostic Imaging; a new MRI; new technology to support Telehealth expansion; a dedicated entrance for emergency vehicles; parking enhancements; and a major investment in the hospital's utility and technical infrastructure.

"Our goal was to redesign ambulatory services to preserve critical safety-net capacity and create new space for a range of ambulatory care and social services," said Stone. "And that's exactly what we're doing."

In tandem, but funded separately, UHS Chenango Memorial has also made additional investments in infrastructure, staffing and services - totaling roughly \$10 million - to support the overall mission of the Chenango Medical Neighborhood Plan, he said.

Work kicked off on the first stage of Phase 1 in early 2018. Crews broke ground on stage two - which included the Emergency Department and Walk-In Center - in November 2019.

"We're really very fortunate that we were already

underway when the pandemic started," Stone said.

Work progressed, even as care teams in every area of the hospital flexed and adapted to the rapidly evolving pandemic. From emergency screening and triaging procedures to personal protective equipment and supply shortages; caring for long-term care residents and COVID positive patients; ramping up COVID testing capabilities; a vaccination effort that has administered more than 9,500 doses to date; and more - the nearly 110 year old health care institution never faltered in its mission of service to the greater Chenango community.

While construction was paused at times, Stone said hospital leaders never seriously considered putting off the important investment.

"If anything, the COVID pandemic has reinforced the need for us to transform care delivery and increase local access to health care services, and assure the sustainability of our hospital," he said.

"These last two years have brought the key role our hospital plays, and its interconnectedness with all aspects of our community, further into focus. That's why we have to push forward with our Chenango Medical Neighborhood plan - to ensure our friends, neighbors and loved ones always have access to the care they need close to home."



The hospital's new Walk-In Center will be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. (Photo from CMH)

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## sfcu focuses on the future —

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this past fourth quarter of 2021.”

Reynolds said sfcu now offers remote audio and video chat options for members, which increases accessibility for people who aren't interested in the in-person branch interaction anymore.

“You still call a contact center or use the service as you normally would online, but now if you're on our website or on your mobile device through online banking, you can access the credit union face to face,” he said. “It all ties into our stance on personal service, we believe that's where the industry is going, and it continues to be one of our priorities.”

He said the investment in online capability proved to continue to be useful throughout 2021 as employees worked from home. He added that thanks in part to the great culture and working flexibility, sfcu managed to avoid many of the staffing issues other businesses and organizations faced.

“There were some challenges during June of last year, but we were able to quickly get back on track and get back to full capacity,” said Reynolds. “We're still at full capacity, but we will be adding some new positions as we move into 2022.”

### Service of the Future

sfcu recently opened its 10th branch located in Amsterdam, which fea-



sfcu was proud to be a sponsor of the 1st Annual Sidney United Way Golf Tournament in 2021. Pictured are sfcu Team #1; Anna, Jeanna, Rebecca, and Shannon (Photo from Facebook.com/sfcuonline)

tures two interactive teller machines (ITM) in its drive-up area, approachable kiosks instead of walls of tellers, and money machines that allow members to deposit coins directly into their accounts at no fee.

Reynolds said different style branch buildings are being tested, and the ITM machines located at the new Amsterdam branch is one example of how sfcu does things differently. He said an ITM machine is being installed at the Sidney branch as well.

“There is no tube and members interact with a touch screen kiosk similar to an ATM,” he added. “One of our member service repre-

sentatives will connect with you through easy-to-use two-way video chat if you call for assistance, and in the rare case that we can't complete your transaction through the ITM, we will offer priority service within the branch lobby.”

“However, if you want to get even more in-depth, you and your member service representative can move to a conference room or one-on-one table to review how sfcu can further serve you.”

Reynolds said within its branches members can now sign up for a new credit card rewards program, which includes credit and debit card designs created with the help of local photographers

and artists. Reynolds added that the cards also now have tap capabilities, which moves sfcu one step further in the race with major credit card companies.

In addition to stepping up its credit card service, sfcu is also investing in easier digital accessibility for mortgages and loans.

According to Reynolds, one of sfcu's big goals is to get an online program up-and-running for members to be able to access their credit without coming into a branch. Reynolds said in preparation for this goal, the credit union spent 2021 bolstering its cyber security.

“There are so many threats out there when it comes to cyber security, and you hear about incidents all the time - so that became a major focus for us,” he said. “We developed and have been focusing on our security infrastructure plan so that way we know we are doing what it takes to protect our members' information.”

“Quite frankly, we've brought some real talent in for that area and we're excited to be on the cutting edge of cyber security for our members.”

### Getting Involved in the Community

Reynolds said sfcu enjoys promoting financial education and volunteerism in its communities.

“We're aggressively pro-

moting financial education opportunities for members, along with students at local school districts,” he said. “We've had great inroads with Sidney Central Schools along with the Norwich Central Schools, and our goal is to bring quality financial education to as many students, teachers, and members as possible.”

He added that sfcu offers membership for people of all ages, with the assistance of a joint owner on the account if the individual is a minor.

“There are opportunities available to create an account and learn more right on our website, under the money easier tab,” said Reynolds. “We have an on-demand resource library, virtual presentations, and even in-person presentations that we can deliver in classrooms.”

“We hope that people will make the most of the educational opportunities we have to offer, but that's only one way we're staying active in our communities.”

Reynolds said from Little League sponsorship and breast cancer walks to college scholarships and neighborhood beautification, sfcu is proud to get involved in its communities. Reynolds added that while the credit union wants to support nonprofit and volunteer efforts, it doesn't force its employees to get involved.

“We really want our culture to promote volunteerism, and inspire people to get involved in the fields that they're passionate about,” said Reynolds. “We want their involvement to come from a really honest and heartfelt place.”

“In keeping in line with that honest thought process, we don't force our employees to volunteer; everyone gets involved because they want to, not because they have to.”

He said another way sfcu has gotten involved in its communities is with its new partnership with The Impact Project, which is a nonprofit based out of Chenango County that is focused on doing major home repairs for homeowners at no cost to them.

“The Impact Project has the ability to serve the needs of people under the ALICE (Asset

Limited Income Constrained Employed) through their work, and we're filling in to help people with a very low interest rate loan,” he added. “We've got a great relationship with The Impact Project, and enjoy helping to raise awareness towards the housing situation many of our communities are facing.”

“Many individuals who can't afford to repair their homes end up losing it, and we want to help prevent that.”

### Modern Products and Programs

sfcu has a number of products that helped the credit union stand out and grow, including its skip a payment option.

Reynolds said the organization will continue to look at ways it can provide financial products to people that help them achieve their goals as economically as possible.

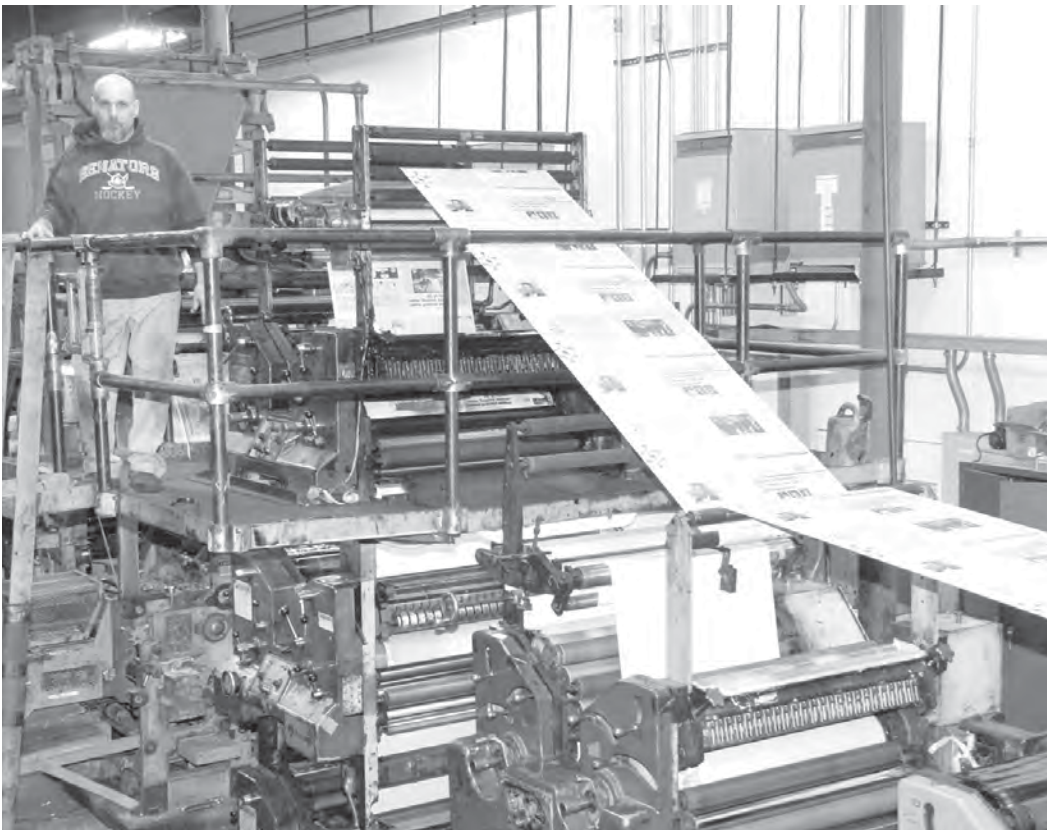
“Our goal isn't to make as much money as possible for the credit union, we're here to serve our members and a big part of that includes getting them the best rates we can,” he said. “Right now we've got several great programs which help people avoid unnecessary debt, including our debt consolidation program, which offers debt consolidation loans as low as 4.99 percent APR, and our 'Kwik Kash' which is a line of credit attached to sfcu accounts which automatically advances money to cover any overdraft occurrence, up to the member's available line of credit.”

“The face of the consumer is rapidly changing, and we're trying to be prepared to reach out to the different generations and create programs that help the members instead of hurting them.”

Reynolds said as sfcu expands it will need new talent and fresh perspectives to help guide the credit union into the future. He said as the organization grows it will continue to do what it can to put its members first and invest in technology and products that make sense for everyone who does business through them.

Anyone interested in learning more about the opportunities offered by sfcu can visit its website at sfcuonline.org or follow its Facebook page @sfcuonline for additional information.

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