



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

## Genesee County Resident and Mental Health Professional Sue Gagne, R.N., Honored as 2024 Woman of Distinction

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Recognized for decades of service to those with mental health and substance use disorders

BATAVIA, NY - Surrounded by family, friends and colleagues, Sue Gagne, a respected mental health professional and Genesee County resident, was honored Monday by Senator George Borrello as a 2024 New York State Senate “Woman of Distinction.”

Local officials as well as past and present colleagues from the mental health field gathered at the City Church Generation Center to recognize Gagne for her dedication and achievements. Pastor Ryan Macdonald of The City Church opened the event by welcoming guests and giving the invocation.

Sen. George Borrello said he selected Gagne as this year's honoree in recognition of her more than two decades of service to those struggling with mental health and substance abuse challenges.

"Sue Gagne made a conscious decision to use her talents and dedication to help the most vulnerable individuals in our community. Since then, she has devoted herself to making critically needed services more widely available and ending the stigmas that hold back so many hurting people from seeking the help they need," **said Sen. Borrello.** "Her efforts have literally been lifesaving for many. Through outreach and public education, she has helped to remove barriers and dispel misconceptions about mental health and substance use disorders, and those contributions have had an even wider impact."

First connected to the mental health field when she was seeking help for a family member, Gagne soon realized it was an area where she could make a difference and fulfill her desire to help some of the most marginalized members of society.

"Sue's empathy, leadership skills and vision have been the fuel for extraordinary achievements and the development of innovative programs that have had a lasting impact in the mental health area and those it serves," said Sen. Borrello.

Starting at the Mental Health Association of Genesee and Orleans Counties in a part-time support position, Gagne rose to become the executive director during her 16-year tenure. Among her achievements was the launch of Visions of Hope Recovery Center, a peer-driven

program aimed at helping individuals with mental health challenges reach their full potential.

As the Dual Recovery Coordinator for Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming counties she worked to bridge the substance use disorder community and the mental health community. She was also instrumental in the founding of GCASA's (now UConnectCare) Recovery Station, which helps individuals who've completed treatment for substance use disorders build the skills and resilience to sustain recovery long-term.

In 2019, she decided to fulfill a long-held goal by becoming a registered nurse and enrolled in a program at Genesee County Community College, graduating in 2023.

Most recently, Gagne has started a new position as the Outreach and Engagement R.N. for UConnectCare, a treatment and recovery center for those impacted by substance use disorder. She is also contracted through the Genesee County Mental Health Department to serve as the Suicide Prevention Coordinator where she leads various suicide prevention efforts.

“There are many words that I can think of and use to describe Sue’s passion and dedication to the field; words like humble, genuine, resilient, advocate, committed, inspiring and persistent. But I think the one word that encompasses all of Sue, is the word, extraordinary. To describe someone as extraordinary means that this person has special qualities, more so than most people. Sue is one of the most extraordinary people I have ever worked with, and it is a true honor to be part of her recognition today,” **said Lynda Battaglia, director of the Genesee Co. Office of Mental Health & Community Services.**

“Spending a year with Sue in LG 2005 created a 19-year friendship that has enriched my life tremendously. Her unwavering support for believing in each person’s humanity is a rare

characteristic in a world of judgements. Sue's advocacy is unparalleled because she doesn't seek attention for her work, she seeks recovery and acceptance for everyone who has suffered from substance abuse and mental illness. If you asked me to describe Sue in one word, for me it's 'extraordinary,'" said **Peggy Marone, the director of Leadership Genesee** and the individual who nominated Gagne for the award.

Sue is very active in professional organizations and community programs, with roles that include serving on the state board of the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), serving as a co-chair of the Family, Loved Ones & Allies committee of the region's opioid task force and serving as a representative to the WNY Regional Planning Consortium. She is also active in her church, hosting a weekly fellowship group and serving in a variety of other roles.

Her efforts have been recognized by several organizations. She was recently one of four women to receive the "2024 Women of Inspiration" award from the YWCA of Genesee County. She was also the recipient of the GCC Nursing Leadership Award in 2023 and the Kiwanis Criminal Justice Award in 2015 for her efforts to provide law enforcement professionals with greater understanding of mental illness and criminal behavior.

"Sue Gagne has built a life and career centered around helping people in need and strengthening her community. Grounded by a strong faith, her greatest reward is seeing people who had lost hope, restored to stability and on the path to a better life. Although she has never sought recognition or accolades for anything she has done, she is truly a role model who can inspire others," said Sen. Borrello. "I am grateful for her contributions to the residents of my district and proud to present her with the Woman of Distinction award."

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