



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Former NFL QB Ryan Leaf to Share Story of Addiction and Recovery with North Country Students and Families

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Senator Patty Ritchie and the Northern New York Community Foundation today are announcing that former NFL quarterback Ryan Leaf will visit the North Country to share his struggles with behavioral health and addiction, and to carry a message of hope and recovery to North Country students and families.

After a highly decorated college football career, Leaf was the second overall draft pick in the 1998 NFL draft. Unfortunately, Leaf's playing career was cut short due to his inability to cope with the stresses of the NFL, and as he puts it, "live on life's terms". The end of his football career weighed on Leaf heavily, both emotionally and mentally. He began to abuse prescription drugs, and what ensued was a decade-long battle with substance abuse that ultimately led to a failed suicide attempt and a near three-year stint in prison.

While serving his sentence, Leaf addressed the source of his mental and emotional anguish. He dealt honestly with his problems and came to understand the importance of accountability and self-worth. In 2014, when he left prison, Leaf was humbled and had a new outlook on life. He has since dedicated his life to recovery and has traveled the country in hopes of helping others through his cautionary tale for young people.

"I am pleased to be able to partner with the Northern New York Community Foundation and to have Ryan share his message with North Country students and families," said Senator Ritchie. "Local mental health and substance abuse organizations, as well as law enforcement and other community leaders work tirelessly to address the drug epidemic on a daily basis and need help getting their message out. I am hopeful that Ryan's presentation will help personalize these issues and give hope to those struggling with mental health and addiction."

"Every day, our young people are faced with challenges from a variety of different sources which often stand in their paths to success. The more we collectively and proactively address this reality, the stronger our communities will be," said Rande Richardson, Executive Director of the Northern New York Community Foundation. "The Community Foundation is honored to partner with Senator Ritchie to give students, families and the public the opportunity to hear from Ryan Leaf, learn from his story and be inspired by the way he overcame life's challenges and is now helping others make our world a better place."

On May 24th, Leaf will be speaking to approximately 1,600 high school students from Jefferson, and St. Lawrence Counties at Watertown High School. That evening at 7:00 p.m. at the Watertown High School auditorium, there will be another forum for parents and families. At both sessions there will be allotted time for Q&A with the evening session being open to the public.

Seating for the evening event is limited and those wishing to attend must pre-register on Senator Ritchie's website by clicking [here](#) or by calling (315) 782-3418.

A preview of Ryan's presentation can be viewed by clicking [here](#).