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Former Skater Finds New Role as Healthcare Volunteer at United Hebrew of New Rochelle

After Traumatic Injury, Local Mom Brings Cheer and Kindness to Residents of Westchester-based seniors' Community

For many years, Catherine Ryan glittered on the ice rink; now she's adding sparkle to the daily life of residents at [United Hebrew](#) in New Rochelle. Catherine volunteers twice weekly in the new nursing home's rehabilitation floor, which is managed on-site by Burke Rehabilitation Hospital staff. She is helping to feed and transport patients, and assist during their physical therapy sessions. She is one in a legion of volunteers who dedicate their time and talents at United Hebrew's 7.4-acre Westchester, NY, campus of residences and services for older adults, which includes a new [nursing home and rehabilitation center](#), [Willow Towers assisted living](#), [independent living](#) and [home health care](#) services.

As a former ice dancer, Catherine taught figure and hockey skating at Hommocks Rink in Larchmont, NY, for nine years. But a serious leg injury in 2008 took her off the ice and onto the operating table. After surgery on her shin, she was sent to a physical therapist. "That experience taught me a lot," she says. "I learned that physical therapy is a hard science combined with kindness; the therapists have to be knowledgeable about muscles and cartilages, while creating a partnership in which they help you heal. They tailored the therapy specifically to me; it was amazing."

Having discovered a new world of human kindness, Catherine was inspired to find a place where she could continue to be involved in physical therapy as a volunteer. She surfed the Internet and quickly found United Hebrew near her Mamaroneck home. “The website says that all volunteers report to a person at UH who will train them,” said Catherine. “That is so important; it shows that they take volunteering seriously.” When she met with Linda Forman, United Hebrew’s Vice President of Community Relations, Catherine was not sure what she wanted to do. Because of Linda’s skill as an interviewer, the pair soon created a volunteer role suited specifically to Catherine’s interests and experience.

“The therapy gym is where miracles happen,” says Catherine. “The therapists here are so knowledgeable and so kind. I love seeing them transform people. Patients come here in despair after surgery – and I know that feeling. The therapists use care to rekindle patients’ excitement about everything – even getting a cup of coffee for themselves.” In Catherine’s experience here, the culture of kindness extends to the nurses and aides, as well as the physical therapy staff. “There is a bottomless well of patience and caring,” she says.

Catherine encourages others to give volunteering a try, especially mothers of teenagers – a time of life when many women tend to have extra time and want to try something a bit different. “United Hebrew offers a chance to tailor your activity to your interests,” says Catherine. “Here you can have an adventure and explore another side of yourself. You can even forget about the stress of your life in this little city! There are many characters here; there is one man who is like the mayor, for example! I love to tell my two teenage sons about what I do here.” One of her favorite stories is about the resident who recently showed his appreciation by making a sign for Catherine. His sentiment, written in glitter, read: “Volunteers add Sparkle”.

For information on how you can add sparkle to your life and the lives of others by becoming a United Hebrew volunteer, contact Linda Forman at 914.632.2804 x1224, e-mail lforman@uhgc.org, or visit www.uhgc.org. United Hebrew is located at 391 Pelham Road, New Rochelle, New York 10805.

About United Hebrew***The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus***

United Hebrew is a vibrant not-for-profit, non-sectarian, multi-service senior living campus serving the Westchester, NY, metropolitan area since 1919. United Hebrew offers a rich array of skilled and community-based programs and services that encourages and supports a life of dignity and spirituality and promotes the highest possible quality of life. United Hebrew serves over 600 clients daily in its Harry and Jeanette Weinberg campus facilities -- Willow Towers, a 126-unit assisted living residence; a 296-bed nursing and rehabilitation center staffed with Burke Rehabilitation professionals; the 135-unit Soundview Apartments for seniors; a Long Term Home Health Care Program; and the AZOR Home Health Agency. United Hebrew recently opened its new home, which combines world class care with state-of-the-art features.

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