

T.H.E

BRIGHTLOOK



A publication for NVRH employees, volunteers, Corporators, & Board members

December 2025



A holiday greeting from CEO Shawn Tester

Here we are again, welcoming the holiday season in our beautiful Northeast Kingdom. It's time to reflect on the year behind us – a year marked by change, resilience and progress.

Healthcare in Vermont continues to evolve, shaped by an increased regulatory environment and rising costs. These pressures challenge hospitals near and far, including here at NVRH. Yet through it all, we remain grounded in our mission: to provide exceptional care close to home.

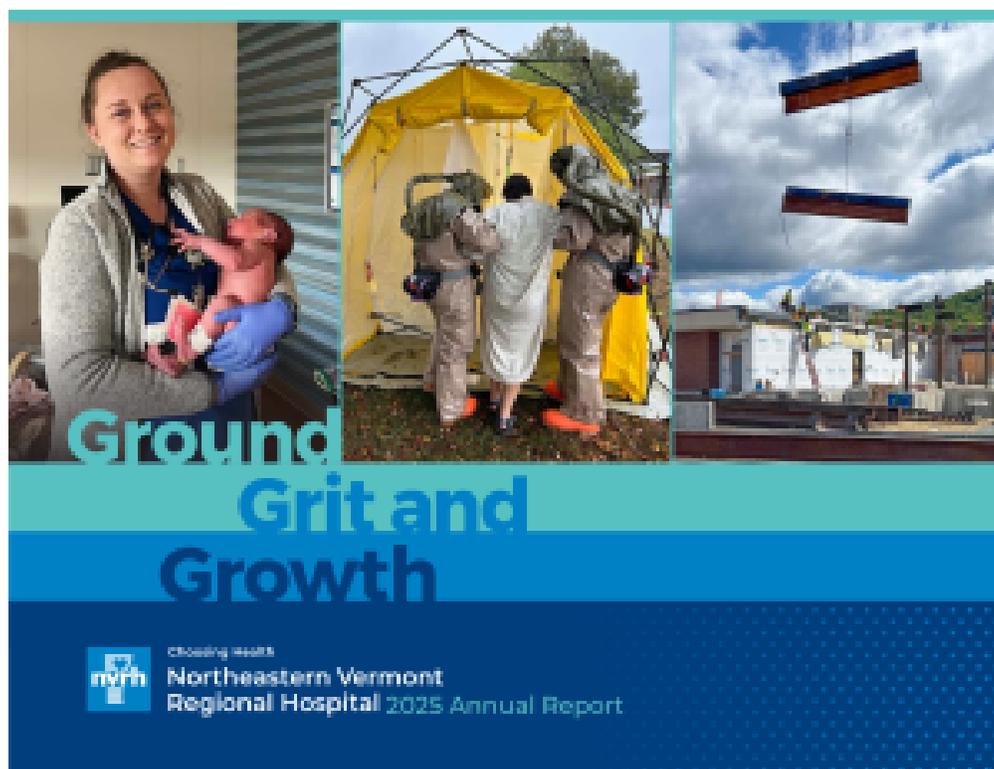
This year, the NVRH story revolves around Ground, Grit, and Growth. It reflects our steadfast commitment to the essentials – our core services, compassionate patient care, and the relationships that define our purpose. It speaks of the resilience we've shown in navigating a complex healthcare landscape, making difficult but necessary decisions to ensure long-term sustainability. And Growth which shines through in the milestones we've achieved together: breaking ground on the West Wing Expansion to revitalize our aging Emergency Department, and welcoming new physicians and support staff to strengthen care for our community.

We continue to be guided by our S.E.R.V.I.C.E. values – safety, empathy, respect, vision, integrity, community, and excellence. These principles remind us that healthcare is not about buildings, insurance coverage or regulations, but about people: our patients, our staff, and our neighbors.

As we celebrate this season, we are deeply grateful for your trust and generosity. May this holiday season bring peace, joy, and health to you and your loved ones.

Happy Holidays,
– Shawn Tester

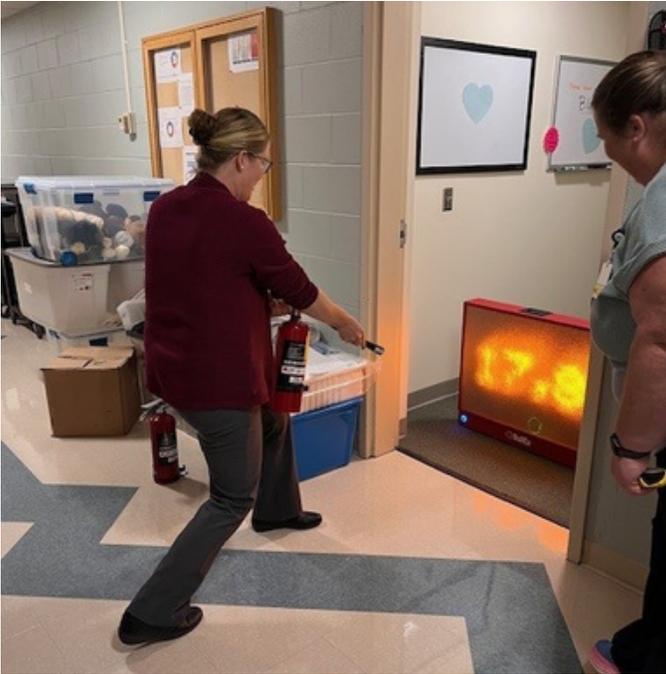
P.S. See highlights and familiar faces from around the hospital in our 2025 annual report – visit [NVRH.org/about-nvrh/annual-report](https://www.nvrh.org/about-nvrh/annual-report).



NVRH Stories

Safety & Preparedness at NVRH: Mission Possible

By Alissa Fontaine, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator & Safety Officer



NVRH employees all step up. Left: VP of Community Health Improvement Diana Gibbs practices for a fire emergency by dousing a digital "fire" with a simulated fire extinguisher. Right: Employees participate in an evacuation drill using mannequin patients and an Evacusled.

At NVRH, safety isn't just a checklist – it's a culture. Every department, every role, and every shift contributes to keeping our hospital resilient, ready, and responsive. From planning large-scale drills to addressing daily safety observations, our work in Emergency Preparedness and Safety Management focuses on one goal: ensuring that everyone who comes through our doors is cared for in a safe, secure environment.

Recent Highlights

Over the past six months, we've made exciting progress across multiple initiatives – and we've had a little fun along the way.

Safety SQUAD: Mission Possible

October's Safety Week transformed our usual fire and emergency preparedness education into a full "agent training" experience. Staff across all departments – including our offsite locations – joined in themed missions like "Contain the Breach," "Stay Cool Under Fire," and "See What Others Miss." Participants completed puzzles, hands-on activities, and department challenges, all while reinforcing life-safety knowledge and teamwork. With over 200 staff engaged and daily prize drawings, this was an extremely interactive Safety Week!

Fire Marshal & Department Readiness

Our Fire Marshal program was launched this year, empowering department subject matter experts to lead their own unit-based drills and serve as safety resources. Each Fire Marshal now has access to a tailored toolkit with quick references, drill templates, and scenario cards to make fire safety practice relevant and efficient, facilitating ongoing fire safety training moving forward.

HERT & Decontamination Training

Our Hospital Emergency Response Team (HERT) has had a busy year of trainings and drills, working with partners both internally and externally. This included decontamination procedures, PPE use, and patient flow during external events. These sessions strengthen interdepartmental collaboration and ensure readiness for any large-scale emergency that could affect our region. We now have members able to provide education to new members and we are excited to watch our team grow over the next year!

Trauma-Informed Code Language

This fall, we also introduced an important language update: replacing “Security Alert – Disruptive Individual” with “Safety Support Request.” This change reflects our commitment to trauma-informed care, emphasizing compassion and safety while maintaining clear communication during behavioral emergencies. This also coincides with and supports the workplace violence work that is being done across our organization.

Safety Management Team

The Safety Management Team has been rebooted with a renewed focus on collaboration between Risk Management, Project Leadership, and Employee Health. Together, we’re prioritizing safe patient handling, environmental safety, and ergonomic awareness to prevent injuries and improve workplace wellbeing.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the next quarter, several exciting initiatives are underway:

- Fire Extinguisher Simulator Trainings will return – offering a safe, hands-on way for staff to practice extinguishing techniques.
- Environment of Care Rounds will begin, along with Workplace Injury Investigation team visits to help identify general risk hazards and ensure survey readiness
- Planning for our 2026 full-scale hospital drill, which will test internal communications, leadership roles, and HICS (Hospital Incident Command System) structure.
- Join the Safety SQUAD!
- Preparedness isn’t a solo mission – it’s a team effort. Every staff member has a role to play in creating a safe environment. Whether you volunteer as a Fire Marshal, join HERT, participate in upcoming drills, or simply report a safety concern, you’re helping NVRH stay strong and ready for the unexpected.
- “Preparedness is everyone’s mission – and every action we take strengthens our hospital’s resilience.”

Thank you to every department and individual who continues to make safety and preparedness part of daily life at NVRH. Together, we’re making Mission Possible a reality.

Making the Season Bright!!

Bringing the holidays to life around NVRH



It's been a festive few weeks here at NVRH! Our wonderful NVRH volunteers spent hours on holiday decorations, including a Memory Tree to remember and honor loved ones who have passed away. Santa paid a special visit, greeting employees, patients, visitors, and two brand new NVRH babies. The Communications and Philanthropy Team held a gift wrapping event, the Joy Committee organized a Cocoa and Cookie cart, visiting departments to share holiday cheer, and we wrapped up the week with a Holiday Brunch.

The festivities at NVRH also included a special photo shoot with Santa for NVRH families! See all of the family photos from Santa's visit.

If you know someone who would be interested in volunteering at NVRH, please call Pat at 802-748-7310 or visit nvrh.org/volunteer/.



Partnering to prevent substance misuse

As a prevention lead, NVRH shares grant funding with schools, coalitions, and community organizations



At NVRH, caring for our community goes beyond the walls of the hospital. One important way we do that is through prevention work that helps reduce substance related harm before people ever need care.

Reducing substance misuse in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom and Lamoille Valley is a team effort. Prevention means supporting young people, families, and communities in ways that strengthen connection, build resilience, and reduce risk before substance use becomes a problem.

NVRH is proud to serve as the home of the Northeast Vermont Prevention Consortium, the Prevention Lead for Region 3. Through this role, we work across the St. Johnsbury, Newport, and Morrisville Health Districts to support community-based prevention efforts that promote health and well-being for people of all ages. This work reflects the same commitment our staff, volunteers, and partners bring to caring for people every day, whether inside the hospital or out in the community.

Our prevention work was initially supported through a two-year grant from the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Substance Use Programs. We are grateful to have recently received funding for an additional three years, allowing us to continue and expand this work across the region.

Funding received by NVRH is shared with schools, coalitions, and community organizations

throughout Region 3. These funds support programs in schools, youth groups, and community organizations across both the Northeast Kingdom and Lamoille Valley. Investments focus on reducing underage substance use and high-risk adult substance use, strengthening supports for LGBTQ+ youth and aging Vermonters, and building communities where people feel valued, connected, and supported.

In fiscal year 2026, a total of \$445,877 was awarded through competitive and non-competitive subgrants to partners working across the region. Together, these organizations are creating solutions that reflect the strengths, needs, and voices of their communities.

The following highlights sub award recipients serving the St. Johnsbury Health District, which aligns with NVRH's primary service area.

- Kingdom East School District received \$13,000 to offer PROSPER, Promoting School Partnerships to Encourage Resilience, for middle school students and their families.
- Kingdom Recovery Center received \$7,000 to implement A Window Between Worlds, an art-based healing model supporting adults in recovery from substance use disorder.
- Stable Connections received \$9,000 to support its Leading the Way program, strengthening confidence, connectedness, character, and leadership skills among youth participants.
- St. Johnsbury School District received \$15,000 to offer VermontHER, supporting safe and inclusive school environments through mentorship and leadership development.
- Northeast Prevention Coalition and 302 Cares each received \$100,000, with an additional \$2,000 each to expand supports for LGBTQ+ youth. Funding for coalitions supports ongoing and sustainable substance misuse prevention efforts rooted in local communities.



A new face for HR: Meet Brian Kerns



Chief Human Resources Officer Brian Kerns started at NVRH in early November and he's wasting no time getting into the spirit of things!

A native Vermonter, Brian has a Bachelor's degree in English and Sociology from the University of Vermont and later earned a Master's degree in Administration from St. Michael's College with a concentration in healthcare leadership.

Brian worked at Rutland Regional Medical Center for 21 years, the last 10 years as their Vice President of Human Resources. Before working in healthcare, Brian held various HR roles

with the retailer Office Depot. We spoke with him briefly during the annual Holiday Breakfast while he was preparing for the day's Ugly Sweater contest.

What drew you to Human Resources? What do you like about it?

From my education and early work experiences, I have been intrigued by the powerful workplace impact of having effective relationships and communication with individuals and teams of employees. I was drawn to working in HR because of having workplace experiences that I knew could be better for the employee and organization. Overall, I find great reward in helping employees be their best selves and providing tools and support for leaders to create high-functioning teams.

How are you finding the NEK so far?

I was born in Rutland, Vermont and have lived throughout the country as I progressed through previous roles. My wife and our youngest child reside in Mendon, Vermont and I commute weekly to NVRH while our daughter finishes high school. I am no stranger to the NEK, making frequent trips to the area for

hiking, biking, and skiing. I love the strong sense of community in 'the Kingdom' and am very proud to be part of that.

What are you looking forward to about working at NVRH?

I am thrilled and honored to be part of the NVRH family and community and look forward to working with the organization's leaders, their teams, and the HR team to help advance NVRH as a great place to work and receive care. My goals are to lead the development and execution of an HR strategy that will enhance our reputation as an employer of choice and increase workforce resilience amidst the challenges facing healthcare in Vermont.

What keeps you busy when you're not at work?

My wife Lisa and I have 3 children (all residing in Vermont) and enjoy the great outdoors of and the opportunity for year-round activities that living here provides. We have a cat and a very fun and active Border Collie. We enjoy hiking, mountain biking, and backcountry skiing. I have been addressing some hobby bucket list items by recently learning to play the drums and am just beginning to learn how to play the electric guitar.

Welcome, Brian—we're glad you're here!

What our patients are saying...

"The triage service was excellent! Staff were knowledgeable, friendly – with a sense of humor, and I was seen immediately as I walked in!"

"My wife and I were very pleased with my treatment, Dr. Ghazali's presentation and personal approach with caring for me."

"Thank you so much for comprehensive and compassionate care that was also coordinated with other care needs and providers. I am so very grateful, appreciative and fortunate to be accessing top quality care in my own community from people I know and trust. Thank you all!"

"I would strongly recommend Dr. Prohaska, this facility and all the staff to others! They do an excellent job and I am very happy with the results."

"I was really excited to see so many students training - nursing, PT, & nurse anesthetist! They were all excellent, please thank them and let them know I'm doing great post-op, thanks to them."

"The comfort level and ease of talking to Becky, Chris, Dr Korsh and the office staff is second to none. Thank you for talking with me, educating me and keeping me comfortable through this process."

"I have faith in Northern PT. I trust and appreciate all of the staff there, both admin and clinical. They have always treated me with compassion and respect, and have done their absolute best to help me with whatever issue I am having. I would not trust my care to any other group of professionals."

"EXCELLENT care and compassion by ALL staff at all times."

On the Calendar

- January is Blood Donor Awareness Month
- Town Hall Meeting - Thursday, January 15, 3PM in Conference Rooms 126 - 127
- Healthy Hearts Support Group - third Tuesday of the month at 5:30 - 6:30PM in Conference Rooms 126 - 127

NVRH in the News

- [Vermont Chronicle – VT delegates reject shutdown ending](#)
- [CBS News – What to know about ACA premium tax credits](#)
- [Becker’s Hospital News – Trump floats sending ACA dollars directly to consumers](#)
- [ABCNEWS-10 – Southwestern Vermont Health Care hires new CEO](#)
- [VT Dept. of Health – Your health matters this cold & flu season](#)
- [WPTZ – Open enrollment for health coverage in VT is underway](#)
- [NVRH Celebrates Daisy and Bee Awards](#)
- [Vermont Biz – Copley Donates to New Green Mountain Birth Center](#)
- [Google/FB – NVRH Birth Center video](#)
- [NVRH Hosts exhibit of photographs by Patricia Shine](#)
- [VT Digger – Vermont bids for federal money to boost rural health](#)

Currently on Exhibit at the Gray Gallery



Kate Arslambakova

January 8 - March 8, 2026

Working primarily with oils, acrylic, collage on paper, and mixed media, artist Kate Arslambakova paints colorful imagery that evokes tangled landscapes, still lives of fruit and flowers, and anatomical illustrations.

“Since a young age, I have been fascinated by the world inside us,” Arslambakova says in her artist statement, “how these complex systems develop and work together to help us function.”

25% of all exhibit sales directly benefit NVRH. To learn more, visit the [Gray Gallery webpage](#) or contact gallery Curator Jennifer Layn at j.layn@nvrh.org or 802-748-7313.

Happy New Year!



At 2:42am on January 8, 2026, Certified Nurse Midwife Kathleen Mulkern delivered Liam Farley, the first NVRH baby of the new year. Liam is the first child of Abby Counter and Austin Farley of St. Johnsbury, VT. He measured 21 inches long and weighed 8 pounds, 6 ounces. Congratulations Abby and Austin!

Brightlook is a quarterly newsletter, and comes out in March, June, September, and December. Looking to submit a story or a recognition, or have a piece of employee news to share? Contact Sarah Lydon at S.lydon@nvrh.org.



Choosing Health
Northeastern Vermont
Regional Hospital