



# REACHING OUT

*A Campaign to End Rural Poverty*



**ROC**  
RURAL OUTREACH CENTER

ASSIST • EMPOWER • ELEVATE



## DEAR FRIENDS,

With hundreds of non-profit organizations working to help people who live in poverty...the problem should already be solved. But more than 60% of the people living in poverty in our region live in communities dispersed over a large area outside of Buffalo's urban footprint. And the complex and varied needs of our neighbors in these rural areas are often hidden or invisible. You can help.

The Rural Outreach Center is a model program that most communities can only dream of having. Through our unique approach that teaches accountability and responsibility, we offer the powerful gift of hope.

Families, some of whom have been suffering for generations, now have a path out to reclaim their lives, craft a second chance, and achieve their full potential.

The Rural Outreach Center is a very special place and thousands of families have already been helped.

Concurrent strategic planning process, generously supported by the John R. Oishei & WNY Foundations, set a clear and exciting plan for the future that will expand programming and triple the number of families touched. On our existing property in the southtowns, we plan to construct a full-service building that will allow us to bring everyone together in an efficient and coordinated approach.

This new centralized facility is critical to implementing our innovative model of care. Without centralization it is virtually impossible to bring together staff, partners and committed volunteers to address the multiple complex needs of our rural neighbors.

The Reaching Out Campaign takes our commitment to a new level – and we are so grateful for the many gifts of support that have already been pledged from the philanthropic community.

Thank you for helping make life better for everyone in our region by both learning more about this serious problem, and considering a gift to help people living in rural poverty direct their



**Vicki Feine**  
*Chair of the Board of Directors,  
The Rural Outreach Center*

**Frank J. Cerny**  
*Executive Director,  
The Rural Outreach Center*

# OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE THE DIFFERENCE

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Vicki Feine  
Christye Peterson, *Campaign Chair 2020* & Peter Grogan  
Michael Sawicki



*Christye Peterson & Peter Grogan*



*Judith Van Nostrand & Paul W. Babbitt*



*"I was attracted to the ROC by its unique mission. To assist, empower and elevate those in need means to me that we help those in need to help themselves. More than a charity, the ROC provides the tools and guidance to allow those in poverty to become self-sufficient through their own efforts. And to the extent that they succeed, there is a better chance that their children and succeeding generations will not be trapped in an endless cycle of poverty. Not only do those who succeed create a much better life for themselves and their children, the benefit to society is obvious. I find it fulfilling to be able to contribute to the important work that ROC does."*

**- Mike Sawicki**





## RURAL POVERTY CAN BE ERADICATED

There are many faces of rural poverty, and each situation is different. The vision of The Rural Outreach Center is to realize sustainable rural communities in Southern Western New York through the development of individuals and families that can fulfill lives free from poverty.

Poverty invades every aspect of a person's life. The lack of food, decent housing, transportation, job opportunities and appropriate clothing can be all consuming – leaving no time for meaningful life goals. The effect on young children growing up in poverty can be debilitating: a form of emotional trauma that repeats itself in the next generation.

To break that negative cycle, ROC helps people of all ages direct their own path to self-sufficiency, changing the future of families for generations to come. Each day, ROC assists those who have made the decision to improve their lives and learn a better way of living.

Providing an array of services to meet the multiple, complex needs of the rural population, programs have been developed over the past decade, based on input from those who have already been helped. Each program is carefully developed and evaluated to eliminate rural poverty and the debilitating effects it has on families, adults, seniors and especially children.

*“America is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Yet a number of markers suggest that our wealth is not translating into better lives for large segments of our society. Perhaps the starkest of these indicators is that our mortality rate is now rising, a trend which is unique to the U.S. among wealthy countries. Poor health and preventable deaths such as suicide, opioid overdose, and alcohol poisoning, primarily among uneducated whites, drive this trend. Mortality rates for blacks and Hispanics, in contrast, have continued to fall—narrowing the gap with whites.”*

**- Carol Graham, Brookings Institution** The Loss of Hope in Low-Income America posted on May 24, 2017

# REACHING OUT CAMPAIGN GOALS

- Capital Improvements. Build a new Outreach Center facility
- Enhance program support to triple the number of families touched through parent support groups, school backpacks, employment training, financial literacy, education and social services.
- Establish an Endowment for future sustainability.



*For a over a decade we have been firmly committed to our mission:  
To break the cycle of rural poverty. We assist, empower and elevate."*

**- Steve & Sarah Tasker, Honorary Campaign Chairs**

## THE NEED

The poorest families, the most desperate, are often the least visible.

Rural areas in the Southern Tier and throughout Western New York are hiding 60% of our region's impoverished families. They are the young single mother of twins who has no running water, a family of five without a working refrigerator or car, or an elderly man who can no longer manage his grandson's addiction. Serious problems that require myriad support services but no or limited access to them.

Currently, ROC is located in a small, repurposed FEMA office trailer, which due to COVID-19 is too small to safely comply with guidelines. In 2017 ROC's total home/office sessions totaled 722. Total home/office sessions increased to 2881 in 2019, an exponential increase of 300% over 24 months. The current site is an inadequate resource for the expanding geographical reach and the dramatic increase in the need for services. Now a new centralized facility is not only needed but critical to the success of this innovative model of care. Without this centralization it is virtually impossible to bring together staff, partners and committed volunteers to address the complex problems associated with rural poverty.

Our response to the COVID-19 crisis has been swift and fluid. Not only is our building too small, it does not allow us to safely serve the numerous rural families that have come to us for assistance lately. Some of the most alarming trends we have seen due to the pandemic are:

First, an increase in demand for food. ROC has a box stocked with food where people can access it anytime. It is replenished every day or so. ROC is collaborating with FeedMoreWNY, The Sabres, and The Bills Foundation with the USDA Farm to Families program and Nourish NY to distribute wellness boxes as well. These include fresh produce, meat, dairy, and other needed items. Over 100 families are coming to ROC for food every week. This is a dramatic change from before.

Increased housing insecurity. With already thin resources, increased unemployment has made it difficult to pay rent. Even working parents are struggling more because they now have their kids home and the children are hungry. We are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of families at risk of eviction and an increased number of homeless.

Greater academic stress leading to regression. Because of connectivity issues, many rural families are unable to attend or keep up with school, lessons, or homework. For many of their children this inability to meet academic expectations also is a source of increased mental health issues and anxiety.

Increases in mental-health-related problems. Stress, anxiety, and concerns about the future are causing a need for more counseling. Staff are offering remote sessions, when possible, and in-person counseling sessions are being offered outdoors and only indoors when CDC guidelines can be followed. The current trailer is not a safe environment for social distancing. "Amanda, a single parent of three small children, two of whom have mental and physical challenges, was eligible to receive social services. She had no personal transportation so to receive benefits she had to take the 6:00 am bus, that is no longer running.







Once in Buffalo she had to find the building where she could sign up for assistance and navigate an unfamiliar system. She then learned that she was lacking some paperwork. This meant waiting for the afternoon bus back to Holland, and a return trip the next time she could afford and find a babysitter. Once she again navigated the initial steps toward assistance, she was told she would have to go to several other places for additional, expanded, resources.

We simply cannot find a building that will support all of the unique needs of ROC programs.

At this point Amanda simply gave up.

However, once connected with the ROC, her situation got much better. With coordinated multiple sources of assistance, including many offered right at ROC, Amanda was able to navigate the existing system, provide most of what she needed to stabilize her children and her family's life, and help them all move forward."

A centralized building brings together resources to eliminate the burden of transportation faced by rural families. Transportation services ensure that people like Amanda can not only get the services they need, but have the confidence to know that when circumstances might change, they know where to go. They are no longer alone.

The Rural Outreach Center brings together resources, staff and volunteers, creating a sense of community, belonging and caring. For many living in the isolation of poverty, this sense of community is emotionally empowering.

Your gift to the Reaching Out Campaign will help construct a new, carefully designed building that features flexible, sharable space. Offices will be used on a rotating basis by partners offering services. Open spaces have moveable walls so that the same space used for play therapy during the day can be used for a community dinner in the evening. Attention has been paid to the character of the building so that it is welcoming



and unpretentious, while not leaving the impression that it has been built sparsely because it only serves the poor.

Some of the generous gifts from Pathways Christian Fellowship, include but are not limited to, 7.3 acres of land - currently the home of ROC, infrastructure, upgrades to the existing site and storage facilities. Without the support of our founders, Pathways Christian Fellowship, the Rural Outreach Center would not be in existence, working to eradicate rural poverty. We are ever grateful for their continued support.

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After working with ROC for several months, Jim had found a new fulltime job, started a savings account and was on a path to success in supporting himself and his four children. Then, just a few months later, his apartment burned down. He and his children lost everything. ROC helped him get back on his feet quickly, so he missed almost no time at work.

But the financial strain of the fire took its toll. Just a few weeks later, he came to ROC with \$10 in his pocket until payday, and no gas in his car to get him to work on Monday. His commute cost about \$80 per week in gas. Even worse, on his way to work three out of the first four days he had flat tires, making him late and draining his savings. Again, he was helped to find the resources he needed to make sure he didn't miss work during his probationary period. His company sees great potential in him, and this job is Jim's family's path to success.

## FOR GOOD

### ROC provides long-term support:

- For a young single mother, mentoring, providing school readiness for her children, job training, and the opportunity to connect with other mothers in similar situations.
- For a middle-aged man who has depression, long-term counseling, accessing support systems, and a one-on-one volunteer to be there for him during his most challenging days.
- For the child who worries about food each weekend, a weekend Snack Pack filled with nutritious food, a warm coat and boots for winter, and a backpack filled with school supplies.
- For the grandmother who is suddenly raising her grandchildren, furniture and household supplies, counseling, assistance finding a job, and play therapy for the children.



*"ROC is a faith-based organization. We are founded in the clear scriptural directive to care for one another - especially the widows, orphans and foreigners in our midst. Jesus clearly said that how we treat those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, in prison is an important part of the life of disciples. Our passion for our work is matched by our compassion for those who come to us."*

**- Frank J. Cerny**

Today, Jim is steadily rebuilding his savings, and soon will qualify for assistance in securing a more reliable car. His children are participating in support programs such as play therapy. Jim knows the safety net provided has helped him continue to work. The comprehensive, robust service model ensures that he (and many others) can continue to find a path out of poverty.

Your gift to the Reaching Out Capital Campaign supports a stronger regional economy through access to programs that prepare people for jobs and once employed, staying in the workforce.

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Before Kayla walked into ROC, her life had hit its lowest point. She and her husband were unemployed and living day-to-day. They didn't have the basics we all take for granted - important things such as food and comfortable housing, and little things like cleaning supplies and enough toilet paper.

ROC helped them with their immediate needs, and more importantly, ROC helped them see the big picture. After two years of hard work with ROC's team of caring professionals, Kayla and her husband began achieving great things. In 2016, Kayla came back to see us, excited about their new lives. They both work full-time; they own a house, and their kids are doing well in school.



*"The Oishei Foundation has been honored to support the Rural Outreach Center over the years. The ROC has served as a pathway of hope to individuals facing poverty in the County's rural southern tier. Their clients aren't seeking a hand out but a helping hand toward self-sufficiency, which the ROC provides faithfully."*

**-Larry Cook, John R. Oishei Foundation**

# THE VISION

Planning by staff, volunteers, services partners, Pathways Christian Fellowship members in focus group meetings over many months developed the space needs that were entered into a matrix for space synergies to optimize potential interactions and collaborations. the Space will be:

- Multi-purpose
- Usable by both ROC staff and our many collaborators
- Flexible for use by both large and small groups of people.

In 2010, Pathways Christian Fellowship purchased 7.3 acres of land on Olean Road in East Aurora. In 2013 a re-purposed FEMA office trailer was placed on the site, with generous support for site development by Pathways Christian Fellowship and the John R. Oishei Foundation. The increased visibility of the trailer prompted an immediate increase in walk-in traffic and allow for better service delivery.

The planning team continued to meet to refine the philosophical rationale, potential program and staffing needs. Lemur Construction was selected for construction after bid review.

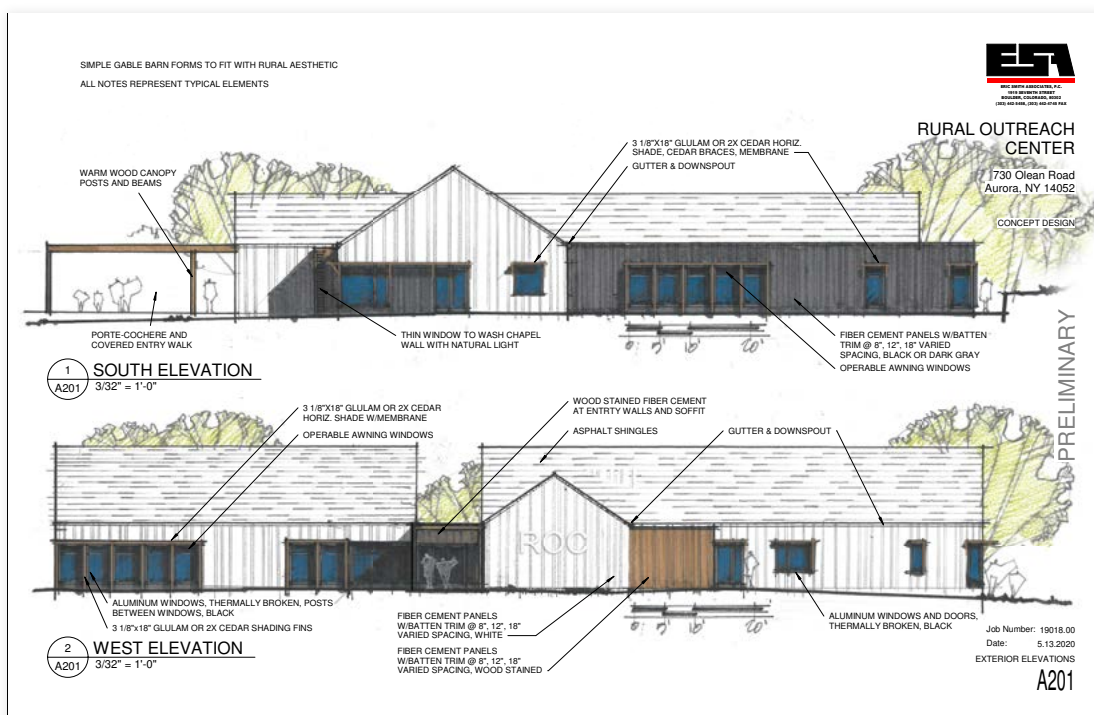
The exterior design of the building will reflect the wooded nature of the lot and projects an inviting presence. The new building has been designed to be unpretentious while sending a message that those who enter are important and cared for.

“A 9,300 ft2 multi-use and counseling center, the focus of this campaign, will be built first to meet our most urgent needs. This building will include offices, a large, open, dividable area for children’s programming including play therapy, larger community gathering spaces, and small group sessions. A chapel will provide a space for spiritual comfort. Friends and neighbors will have rental opportunities and access to the building for worship, private parties, and other community events. ROC Central will be a community asset, designed to be a welcoming place for all.”

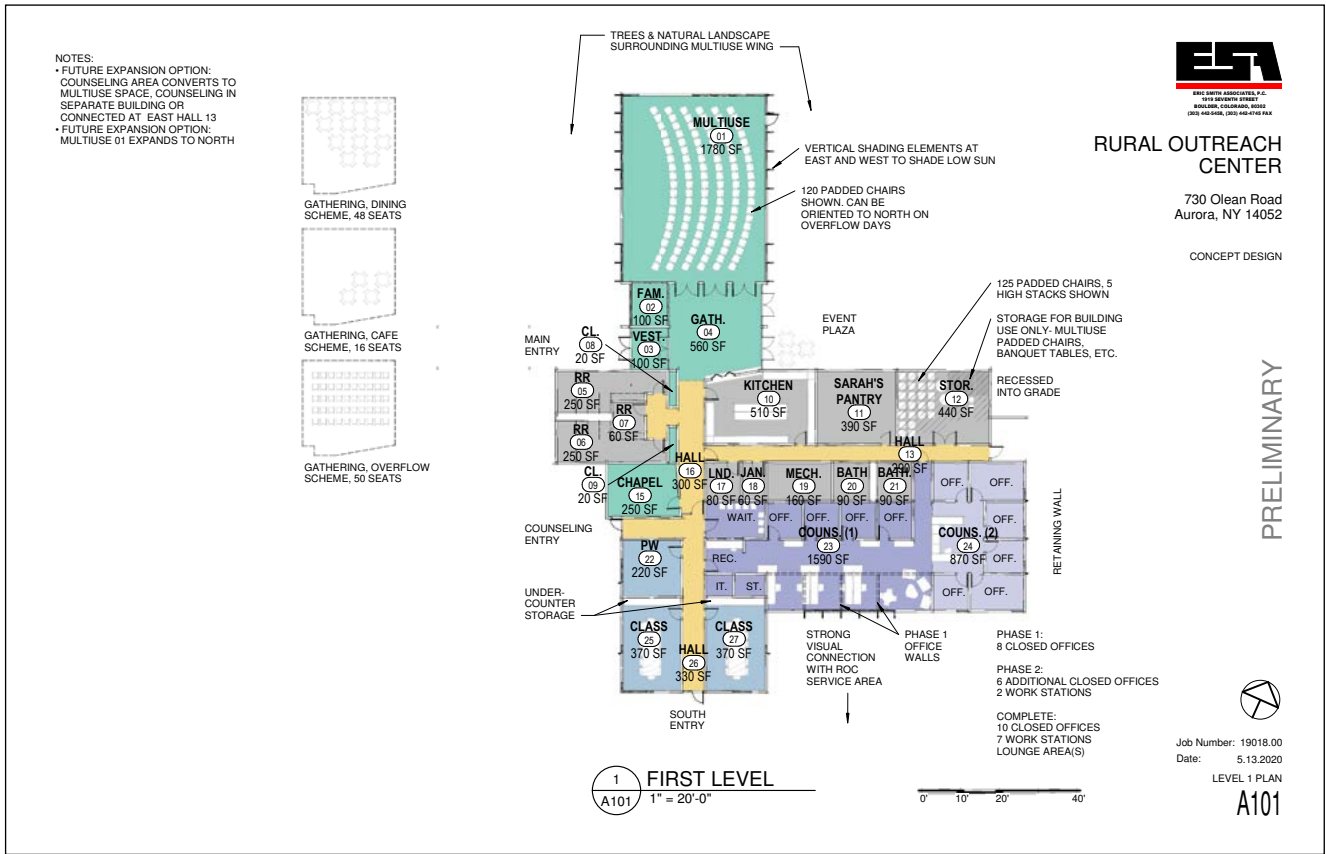
Administrative and program staff will be located at a near-by site until funds become available for a second phase.

The treed back area of the property includes a mediation walk with benches and a large labyrinth.

Construction is expected to be completed in 2021.





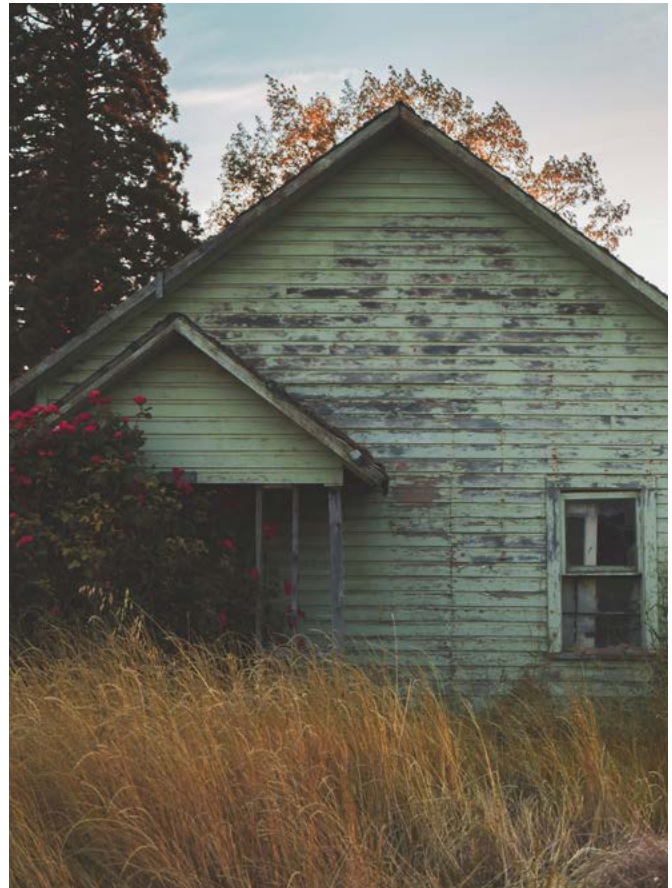


## YOUR GIFT

Thank you for considering a gift. Rural Outreach Center is a 501(c) 3 and gifts are tax-deductible as allowable by law. Making a contribution will directly impact the future for those living in rural poverty... and it is easy to do.

Please let us know how we can help ensure that your gift has the impact you desire. We know giving is very personal and we are eager to hear to your ideas to make it special and important to your family.

Pledges over a number of years may make it possible for you to contribute a more significant gift. Gifts of cash, check, credit card, and appreciated securities are welcomed. Gifts from retirement funds and insurance policies are other options. Please contact your tax advisor or attorney for more detail regarding your particular financial situation.



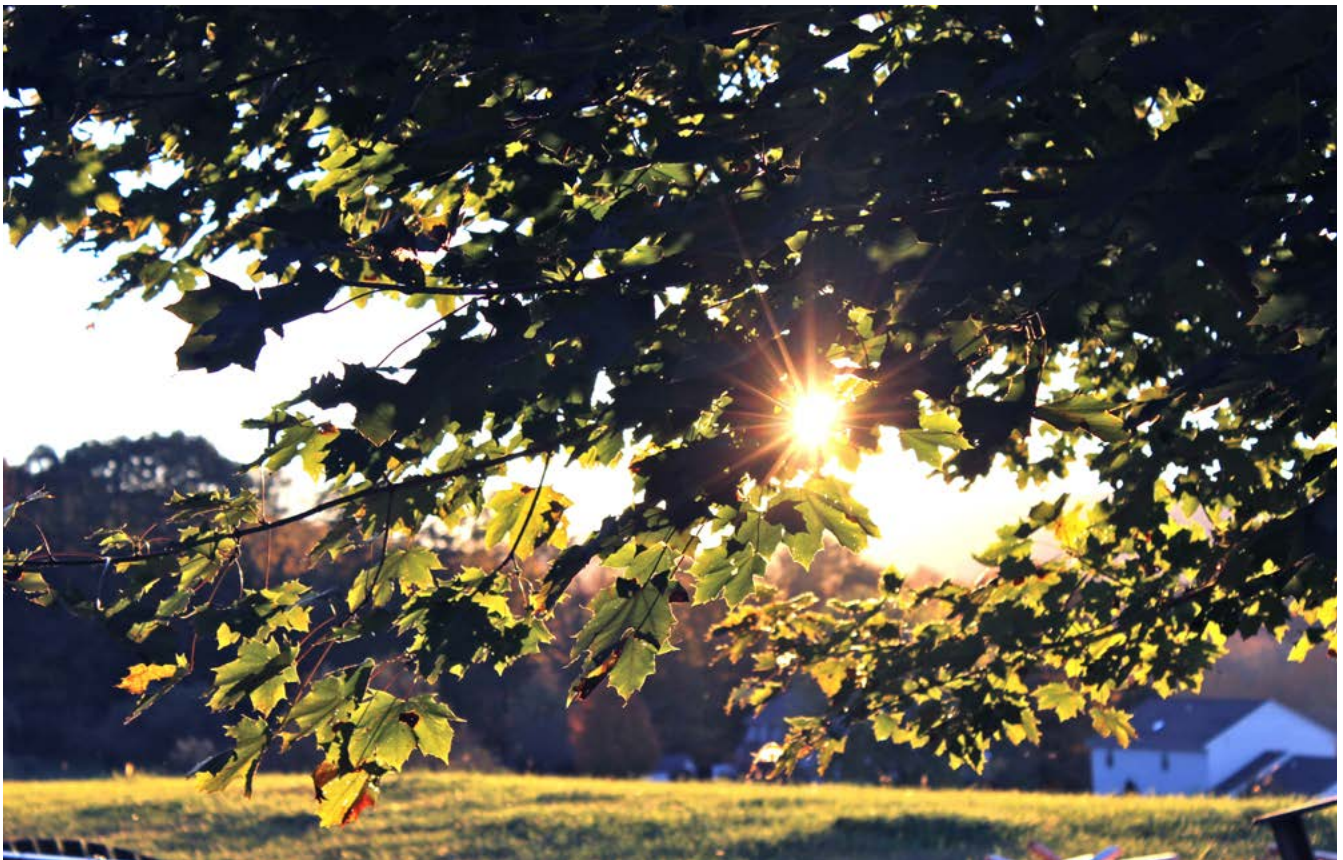


"Dad loved hiking in the southern tier. He always wanted to be outdoors. We knew he would have loved being remembered this way – making a gift to Rural Outreach Center was a wonderful opportunity to honor his memory because of those living in the place he enjoyed the most."

*- from his daughter*

Perhaps you would also like to make a gift in honor or in memory of a special person. Perhaps you would prefer to remain anonymous. We appreciate your generosity and respect your wishes.

Please let us know how to customize your gift acknowledgment. Naming rights are available upon request.



*"It has been my pleasure to work with Frank Cerny and the Rural Outreach Center staff. They have demonstrated a compassion and ability to serve those among us that are less fortunate and often unseen. The agency is committed to education, outreach, service with dignity and collaboration."*

**- Marie Cannon, Commissioner of Social Services**



## **FOUNDING HISTORY**

The Rural Outreach Center grew out of the mission-based work of Pathways Christian Fellowship, founded in 2006 by the Reverend Frank Cerny. Along with a church, the group was committed to founding a community outreach program to help people through love and service. A survey, and a consultation with an expert in rural poverty showed that this population was not just underserved, but not served at all. Volunteers began by holding free monthly community meals to listen and consult with rural neighbors about what was needed to solve the issues. As more families got involved, the model and evolution of services began. The Rural Outreach Center is an independent 501(c) 3 with a unique focus: to serve all people living in rural poverty.







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