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WESTERN NEW YORK MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SUE GAGNE, R.N., SELECTED AS 2024 WOMAN OF DISTINCTION BY SENATOR GEORGE BORRELLO

BATAVIA, NY – Sue Gagne, a registered nurse and dedicated mental health professional, has been named by Senator George Borrello as the 2024 New York State Senate ‘Woman of Distinction’ for the 57th District.

Senator George Borrello said he selected Ms. Gagne as the district’s honoree because of her significant contributions to the mental health field and the vulnerable individuals it serves. Her work has spanned more than two decades and both the nonprofit and public service sectors. She currently serves as the Assistant Director of Adult Services at the Wyoming County Mental Health Department.

“At a time when our communities are experiencing unprecedented mental health crises, we have become acutely aware of the vital role of professionals like Sue Gagne. Her career has been focused on connecting struggling individuals with services and expanding the availability of resources and programs for rural residents,” **said Senator Borrello**. “Now, more than ever, her expertise and contributions are crucial to the well-being of our families and communities.”

“While the prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse is similar between rural and urban areas, access to services is typically far more limited in rural areas. Compounding the problem of fewer services are additional barriers, including the cost of care and higher levels of social stigma, both of which can discourage people from seeking help. Sue has been a warrior in the fight to eliminate these obstacles and others that prevent people from getting the help they need to live stronger, healthier lives,” **said Sen. Borrello**.

First connected to the field when she was seeking help for a struggling family member, Ms. 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.

Starting at the Mental Health Association of Genesee and Orleans Counties in a part-time support position, she rose to become the executive director. Among the achievements of her tenure 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.

Her next role was as the dual recovery coordinator for Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming counties where she worked to bridge the substance use disorder community and the mental health community.

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.

Today she is using her expertise and dedication as Assistant Director of Adult Services at the Wyoming County Mental Health Department. In this role, she works with individuals with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI) who are considered high needs, making sure they have the support they need. Ms. Gagne is also contracted through the Genesee County Mental Health Department to serve as the Suicide Prevention Coordinator where she leads various suicide prevention efforts.

She credits her 2005 participation in Leadership Genesee, a year-long citizenship education and leadership development program, with giving her the connections and confidence to stretch herself and make pivotal changes in her professional life. She was nominated for the Senate's Woman of Distinction Award by the organization's director, Peggy Marone, who cited her tremendous dedication and effectiveness as mental health advocate and leader as motivation for her nomination.

"I was fortunate to spend a year with Sue in Leadership Genesee 2005 and even more fortunate that we've remained friends ever since. Sue is a unique person that has an organic acceptance for everyone no matter where they come from, live or what they do. Her sense of humanity's well-being shows in every professional and personal calling she has. I am more than honored to have nominated Sue for this distinguished award," **said Peggy Marone, executive director of Leadership Genesee.**

Ms. Gagne 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.

Established in 1998, the New York State Senate Woman of Distinction Award is hosted annually to pay tribute to women who have demonstrated remarkable character, initiative, and commitment in serving their neighbors, strengthening our communities and acting as role models.

Ms. Gagne will be honored at a ceremony in Albany on May 14 along with honorees from across the state, and locally, on July 15.

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Sue Gagne