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#### **HEALTH CARE**

## Care delivery changes reshaping hospital landscape

Walsh: Rethinking needed as 'iconic parts of communities' face threats

By Colin A. Young State House News Service

said Monday.

Health Care last year resulted in Fall River, Haverhill, Methuen the transfer of six hospital campuses, the closure of two others, and a reshaping of the state's health care world. That might be just the start of a rethinking of the role hospitals can play in Massachusetts, Health and Human

grossed in Steward's bankruptcy, a saga that concluded Oct. 1 when The splintering of Steward hospitals in Boston, Brockton, and Taunton were handed over to new owners. Steward shuttered Carney Hospital in Dorchester and Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer about a month earlier. Walsh and Gov. Maura Healey arranged for a state aid package to-Services Secretary Kate Walsh taling at least \$417 million over three years to help the new opera-

Walsh spent most of 2024 en- tors, and the state convened local task forces to address health care desserts in the areas Steward fled.

> The secretary's musing on the future of hospitals came in response to a question from a member of the Nashoba Valley working group, Rep. Margaret Scarsdale of Pepperell, at a budget hearing Monday in Attleboro.

> "I think we all have to think differently about what hospitals are

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Nashoba Valley Medical Center closed Aug. 31, 2024.

CRAIG SANDLER -

#### **MERRIMACK VALLEY**

# UTEC fights food insecurity



Employees from the Massachusetts Department of Correction line up for a hot lunch at UTEC's new Breaking Barriers Kitchen food truck on March 14, 2025. Operating in high-traffic locations like universities and large workplaces, the food truck will help generate revenue to support UTEC's programs, including culinary initiatives and made-by-UTEC food products.

### New food truck brings free, low-cost meals to vulnerable residents, everyday customers

By Melanie Gilbert

mgilbert@lowellsun.com

**LOWELL** » For more than 25 years, UTEC has been about transforming the lives of young adults. Now, through a pandemic-inspired program called Madd Love Meals, those young people are transforming the lives of others through an innovative new outreach program, the Breaking Barriers Kitchen food truck.

"Access to nutritious food is essential, yet too many of our Social Enterprise Officer Ricardo Febles said. "We're committed nutritious meals to those who need them most - no questions

In response to the federal funding cuts to area food assistance programs, the nonprofit is work-

ing to provide fresh, high-quality and culturally inspired meals to vulnerable residents throughout the Merrimack Valley with both its emergency food assistance program and the food truck.

The truck also serves as a mobile learning lab providing young adults hands-on culinary training, customer service and entrepreneurship skills.

With the launch of our new food truck, we're excited to provide authentic cultural foods to the community, showcasing the neighbors are struggling," Chief talent and skills of our young adults in UTEC's culinary department," food truck operator and to filling this gap by delivering former UTEC young adult Ginny Chhuon said by email.

It's both a pivot from and a continuation of the food space the youth violence intervention and

**UTEC » PAGE 8** 



Ginny Chhuon, a food truck operator and former UTEC young adult, shows UTEC young adult Raymond H. the ropes. The food truck serves as a mobile learning lab, offering young adults real-world experience in customer service, culinary operations and entrepreneurial skills. This training prepares them for future careers in food services and beyond.

### **ENERGY DEAL**

### Lawmakers took paid power trip

Tour of Canadian hydropower facility picked up in part by utility

By Chris Van Buskirk

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A group of Massachusetts lawmakers who visited Canadian hydroelectric facilities in March were ferried there on the dime of a public utility company that runs a power line between Quebec and Ayer, according to documents obtained by the Herald.

The cadre of elected officials, which was made up of three senators and eight representatives, touted the three-day trip as an "alternative energy fact finding" mission.

A spokesperson for Senate budget writer Michael Rodrigues initially told the Herald that senators were responsible for paying for their transportation, lodging, and expenses.

But a batch of ethics disclosures show part of the trip's tab, including flights to and from and meals at various sites, was picked up by Hydro-Quebec Energy Services, a U.S. affiliate of the public utility company Hydro-Quebec that runs a power line between Canada and Ayer.

Each of the lawmakers disclosed that Hydro-Quebec Energy Services paid for \$1,308 in trip-related expenses, according to copies of the ethics disclosures on file with the State Ethics Commission and House Clerk's Office.

In an ethics filing dated March 11, or two days before the trip, Rodrigues said he planned to visit Hydro-Quebec facilities in Canada to "learn about the interconnections supporting the New England power system," including the power line that runs to the Sandy Pond substation in Ayer.

"The commonwealth faces a number of challenges in energy policy, including, but not limited to, the high energy costs facing residents and the need for a reliable, competitively priced supply of electricity," the Westport Democrat said. "Touring Hydro-Quebec's facilities will inform my work in the Massachusetts Senate in this area and support future policymaking to address the energy challenges facing the commonwealth and its residents."

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UTEC staff members Tony and X prepare to deliver Madd Love Meals boxes to one of nine community partners in the Merrimack Valley, including: Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Coalition for a Better Acre, Community Action, Inc., Emmaus, Haverhill Council on Aging; International Institute of New England, Recovery Cafe, THRIVE Communities of Massachusetts and SISU.



Ginny Chhuon, UTEC's food truck operator and former UTEC



Exterior shot of UTEC's main building, located between Warren and Hurd streets in Downtown Lowell on April 8,

### participant, puts the finishing touches on fresh, hot meals served through the Breaking Barriers Kitchen food truck.

### **UTEC**

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reentry and advocacy program already occupies. The agency runs See Beyond Catering, a UTEC social enterprise that offers second chances to the young adults through its culinary program.

That program features full event catering such as breakfast and lunch platters, as well as a la carte selections. A charcuterie spread includes the keepsake board handcrafted by the young adults in UTEC's woodworking program.

Based on the numbers, food insecurity in the Merrimack Valley is on the rise. Pandemic relief funding was scaled back shortly before food prices started rising. Adding to the food security struggle was \$1 billion in cuts made last month by U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins to food assistance programs used by food distribution networks like the Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

We have had \$208,323 worth of food deliveries cancelled, totaling 3,806 cases of food," MVFB Executive Director Deb Callery said in an email.



UTEC is committed to addressing food insecurity in its target communities of Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill. On designated days, the food truck will offer hot, healthy and culturally appropriate meals through "pay what you can" or free meal options, ensuring access to nutritious food for all. The truck is pictured in Downtown Lowell in March 2025.

"These cuts don't just exsheet — they are taking of families in Massachusetts who rely on food pantries for a little extra help to make ends meet," MVFB Director of Communications & Public Relations Kelly Proulx said in a statement released by the Healey-Driscoll administration.

ist on paper or in a spread- a combination of vendors that support of Madd Love food directly off the plates Meals and the food truck, Communications Manager Michelle Murphy said, including corporate, nonprofit and regional providers such as Boston Glean-

> It works with Gaining Ground, a nonprofit organic farm in Concord that grows

UTEC sources food from the help of several thousand community volunteers, the vides fresh, high-quality farm-to-table operation donates all of its fresh food to dents and youth/teen proarea meal programs and food pantries.

Madd Love Meals supplements that food with supplies from regional corpo-Baldor, Performance Food Group and Sysco, who provegetables and fruit. With proteins, disposable prod-

ucts, recyclables and cleaning supplies.

The emergency assistance programming has become a cornerstone of UTEC's food relief efforts. Madd Love Meals creates meals that directly benefit food-insecure individuals and families in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill; families of incarcerated individuals served by UTEC's reentry programs; and proven-risk young adults participating in UTEC's street outreach and workforce development programs.

Young adults at UTEC prepare and distribute between 1,650 and 2,000 meals each month in collaboration with six community partner agencies: Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, Emmaus Inc., Northern Essex Community College, Recovery Cafe, THRIVE, and Alternative House.

"Madd Love Meals promeals for our shelter resigram," said Liz Brown, events and engagement coordinator for Alternative House, a support provider for survivors of dorate food distributors like mestic abuse and violence. "Access to nutritious food is essential, and their supvide canned and dried bulk port helps us to ensure no one goes without."

The Breaking Barriers Kitchen food truck further extends that reach by bringing both low-cost and free meals to high-needs areas. Each week, the food truck sells approximately 70 meals while distributing an additional 25-40 hot, prepared meals free of charge or on a "pay what you can" basis on designated days. When deployed as a for-profit enterprise to festivals, farmers' markets, community events or workplaces, the food truck will help generate revenue to support UTEC's culinary initiatives and programs.

In addition to servicing the area near UTEC on Warren Street in Downtown Lowell, the truck serves unhoused individuals in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill, and students at a local community college campus where meal vouchers cover the cost of a free meal.

Since launching Madd Love Meals, UTEC has made food relief a permanent part of its culinary social enterprise program. The food truck extends that food access outreach and helps support the organization's mission to end systemic poverty and violence.

To learn more about UTEC's programs or to support its mission, visit utecinc.org.

### **Hospitals**

### FROM PAGE 1

and what they'll be in the future. Hospitals are such iconic parts of communities; people are born there, they die there, they get better there, it creates a lot of by changes in how people street because people forget health care is delivered.' to bring their lunch," Walsh said. "I grew up working in president of Massachusetts Dec. 31, 2024 — the first hospitals. I love hospitals. I

hate to see them close. The until 2002, executive vice sad fact is, across our country, there are 1,300 critical access hospitals — there's one in Massachusetts, in close. The small community threatened. It's threatened ministration.

president and chief operating officer of Brigham and Women's Hospital from 2004 until 2010, and spent Athol – and a third of those 13 years as president and hospitals were projected to CEO of Boston Medical Center Health System behospital is, it's just really fore joining the Healey ad-

hospitals financial report Walsh was senior vice for the quarter that ended

in which Steward was no Monday that "what I think longer an operator of Massachusetts hospitals.

The data show the statewide median operating margin for hospitals was -0.7% and that 55% of Masexperienced negative operating margins during that timeframe.

"CHIA's quarterly reports are no longer a warning sign; they are a red alert for years." the painful financial conditions our local hospitals are enduring. After half a decade of economic turmoil for Massachusetts healthcare providers, the consequences have become more dire and visible than ever packed EDs, or reduced investments in new technol-McHale, senior vice president of healthcare finance Health and Hospital Association, said.

Walsh told lawmakers tional sense.

we need to do here in Massachusetts is a little bit of what's happened as a result of the closures at Carney and Nashoba."

"I think at Carney we'll sachusetts hospitals re- see a combination of health ported negative operat- care delivery, a school and tals and affiliated physician cess looks like and I say that practices) told CHIA they acknowledging that it's very hard for communities to give up their hospitals," she said. "But this is not the last conversation like this we'll have in the next couple of

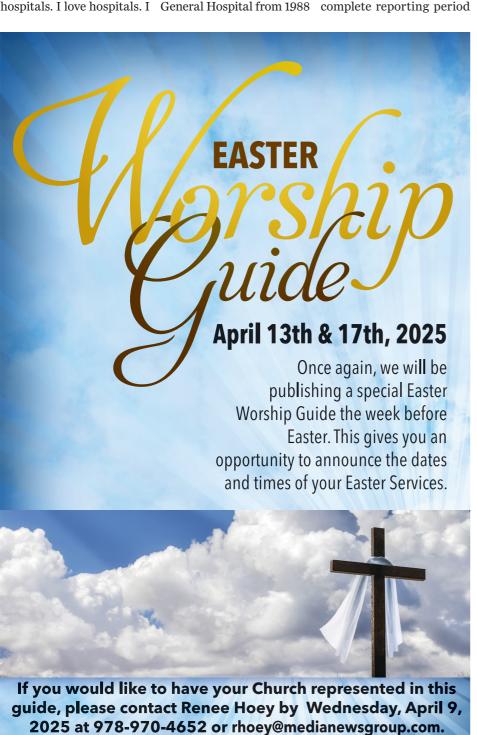
The secretary said the primary goal would be to make sure that people have access to the services they need in the most effective way they can be delivered. She said "everybody thinks, 'Oh, I have cancer, I have - whether they be layoffs, to go to the hospital'," but most cancer care today is done in outpatient infusion ogies and facilities," Daniel centers. She also mentioned ambulatory surgery, imaging and screening as the and policy at the Mass. kinds of in-demand services that can be delivered without a hospital in the tradi-

UMass Memorial Health, the largest nonprofit health care system in Central Massachusetts, announced in January that it plans to establish a new standalone emergency department in the Nashoba Valley region and also offer "certain iming margins during the fi- housing. That's great for aging services." Walsh on Last Wednesday, the Cennal three months of 2024. that neighborhood. I think Monday told Scarsdale that jobs, it's a center, it sup- live their lives, it's threat- ter for Health Information Sixteen of the 21 report- that we just have to think her district will have "a satports the deliguy across the ened by changes in how Analysis (CHIA) released its ing health systems (hospidifferently about what successful to the successfu that people won't be in the back of ambulances, you know, very worried that they're taking their last breath."

"I think that we have the beginnings in the Nashoba Valley of a more durable and sustainable health care delivery system," Walsh said.

The secretary said she is hopeful for the Nashoba Valley region because "what we had was an empty community hospital that people just weren't using.'

"Because if somebody was using it, it would have been more economically viable [to buyers]. I mean, person after person went through that facility, buyer after buyer went through that facility, and said, 'We just can't make it work,' she said.



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