

A PUBLICATION OF UPPER HUDSON PLANNED PARENTHOOD  
SERVING ALBANY, COLUMBIA, GREENE & RENSSELAER COUNTIES •

# CHOICE

# REMARKS

SPRING 2012

## The Movement is in Good Hands

Brittni Gulotty comes from a small town called Worcester in western N.Y. and has one older sister. Nita, whose parents immigrated to the U.S. from the Indian state of Kerala, grew up in Port Chester on Long Island and has one younger sister. Brittni is a senior at the University at Albany majoring in women's studies and public policy, while Nita is a biology and graphic design major at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. But both young women have a lot in common when it comes to their passion for reproductive rights.



Whitman.

"I see personal freedom and decision making as part our basic American principles," wrote Brittni in a recent letter to the editor. "Yet, again and again women are questioned or denied when they try to make thoughtful personal decisions about their own reproductive health!"

Nita agrees and adds that "too many young people are uncomfortable or unable to talk about sex and relationships. They don't know where to get basic reproductive health services or are too embarrassed to ask questions about their own health or options. They

rely on the internet, or rumors, and often get misinformation."

There are probably many other young people who share these concerns, but few who step forward to lead organizations that will address these needs. Both Nita and Brittni are such leaders. They are presidents of pro-choice student VOX chapters at their mutual campuses.

Appearing left to right at the photo on the left, Alexa Previto, Nita, Brittni and Maureen

Whitman. Brittni has been a UAlbany VOX member since freshmen year after hearing about it from a friend. In fall 2011, Brittni became president and is working to increase membership and collaboration with other UAlbany student groups. Information tabling is a regular group activity.

"Students come by the table and ask "Where do I get birth control?"; "How can I get birth control if I don't have insurance?"; and "Where is Planned Parenthood?" explains Brittni. "They want to know about personhood laws

### SAVE THE DATES

#### UHPP ANNUAL MEETING AND RECOGNITION RECEPTION

May 23, 2012  
5:30 pm to 7:30 pm

**Location:**  
First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany

**Guest speaker:**  
Ellen Gertzog, Director, Affiliate Administrative Operations and Security, PPFA

#### PLANNED PARENTHOOD YOUNG LEADERS (PPYL) TRIVIA NIGHT

June 14, 2012  
6 pm to 8 pm

**Location:**  
Revolution Hall, Troy

#### CELEBRATION FOR PATRICIA MCGEOWN

August 2, 2012  
5:30 pm to 8 pm

**Location:**  
Normanside Country Club, Delmar

For more information, contact Amber at (518) 434-5678, ext. 121 or email [amber@uhpp.org](mailto:amber@uhpp.org).



As you know, just a year and a half ago, UHPP moved our largest health center and administrative offices from our longtime home on Lark Street in downtown Albany to a bigger, state-of-the-art facility at 855 Central Avenue in Albany. As intended, our move has resulted in improved access for our target population and an increase in patient numbers.

In order to accomplish this major move and expansion, it was necessary to conduct a capital campaign. So, in the middle of one of the worst economic downturns in recent memory, UHPP undertook its first ever million dollar plus capital campaign. And we were successful! In just over two years, we raised \$1,611,850. This remarkable achievement reflects the dedication and generosity of our many supporters and the hard work of our wonderful

**UHPP**  
Deborah Rosen Zamer  
Chairperson,  
Board of Directors

Patricia A. McGeown  
President/CEO

Blue Carreker  
Editor

#### LOCATIONS

**ALBANY**  
Health Center/Administrative  
Offices  
855 Central Avenue  
Albany, NY 12206  
(518) 434-5678

**HUDSON**  
190 Fairview Avenue  
Hudson, NY 12534  
(518) 828-4675

**TROY**  
Hendrick Hudson Bldg.  
200 Broadway, Second Floor  
Troy, NY 12180  
(518) 274-5640

[www.uhpp.org](http://www.uhpp.org)

## President's Corner

From Patricia A. McGeown, President/CEO

Capital Campaign Steering Committee. Our beautiful and modern new facility finally matches the compassionate and high-quality service that we have always provided. The facility and the fundraising are remarkable achievements and it is because of so many of you that we were able to raise so much support in such a short time. We recently celebrated our success with a lovely reception at which the donor wall and individual donor plaques were unveiled.

I have some exciting personal news as well. Late in 2011, I announced to the UHPP Board of Directors that I will step down from my position as President and CEO in August of 2012, after 17 and a half years of service to UHPP. I believe that now is a good time to make a change – for me and for the organization. UHPP is a strong

organization with an active, engaged Board of Directors and skilled, experienced staff. Although the threats to reproductive rights continue to increase and intensify, UHPP is well positioned to weather the challenges and obstacles that confront us.

Leading UHPP has been the defining experience of my professional career, and I am proud of all that we have accomplished. We have expanded services; won awards for our marketing and education programs; and led advocacy efforts on the local, state and national levels. Throughout it all, I have benefitted enormously from supportive boards, generous donors, dedicated supporters and smart, hardworking staff.

It has truly been my honor to lead this incredible organization. Thank you for all your support. ●

## UHPP Receives National Recognition for "Thank You" Campaign

UHPP representatives flew to Portland, Oregon in late March to receive a national award for affiliate excellence in advertising and marketing from Planned Parenthood Federation of America at the national conference. The award specifically recognized UHPP's 2011 "Thank you Planned Parenthood" videos and viral branding campaign featuring patient testimonials from current and former patients over a six-week period in the fall of 2011. UHPP worked with the Troy advertising firm Smith and Jones.

The patient stories were uploaded to YouTube and then promoted by UHPP staff and supporters through messages and links on email and Facebook, accumulating 2,000 views in three months. The campaign was supported with print ads and a TV spot featuring combined excerpts from each patient story.

"This was a thrilling campaign to watch unfold," said UHPP President/CEO Patricia McGeown. "First, our own UHPP Board of Directors made the bold decision in difficult economic

times to allocate extra marketing dollars to both promote our new health center and simultaneously respond to the national attacks on Planned Parenthood. Then, we were overwhelmed by the number of current and former patients who came forward to share their stories. Finally, the stories our patients told were so compelling. The award from PPFA is greatly appreciated, but the appreciation communicated by our patients through these videos was a great reward unto itself."

The branding campaign proved to be a success. Patient visits at the new UHPP Albany health center increased about eight percent compared with the previous year. ●



## Making the Connection: UHPP Launches a Mobile Community

Connecting with patients and supporters through the latest technology is a top priority at UHPP. Now, UHPP has partnered with mGive, the leading mobile giving service provider, to reach out and connect to supporters through our new mobile community.

Members are recruited through an email invitation. Anyone can “opt-in” to join the UHPP mobile community by texting UHPP to 27722. Supporters also can donate \$10 to UHPP by texting CHOICE to 27722.\* UHPP will continue to promote the mobile community through [uhpp.org](http://uhpp.org), Facebook, CHOICE Remarks, advertisements and marketing materials.

Our mobile community members receive periodic text messages on their mobile phones including links to timely news, trivia questions with opportunities to win prizes, invitations to upcoming events, opportunities to sign petitions, and requests for donations. Members are also encouraged to invite their friends to join UHPP's mobile community by forwarding the invitation or sharing their contact information. All invitees are encouraged to provide feedback on their experiences with UHPP.

“Texting is extremely popular and convenient,” says Laura Alpert, Vice President for Development. “Nearly 100 percent of text messages are opened, so we know this is an important and effective way to make a connection.” ●

\*Message and data rates may apply.

### GYT: Get Yourself Tested

For the fourth year, UHPP joined the national GYT (Get Yourself Tested) campaign to promote STD testing and provide young people with the information and opportunities they need to take control of their sexual and reproductive health. The campaign is a partnership between Planned Parenthood, MTV, the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The campaign is held in April during National STD Awareness Month. UHPP VOX groups and interns distributed information to young people in our community. Visit [gyt.org](http://gyt.org) for more information.



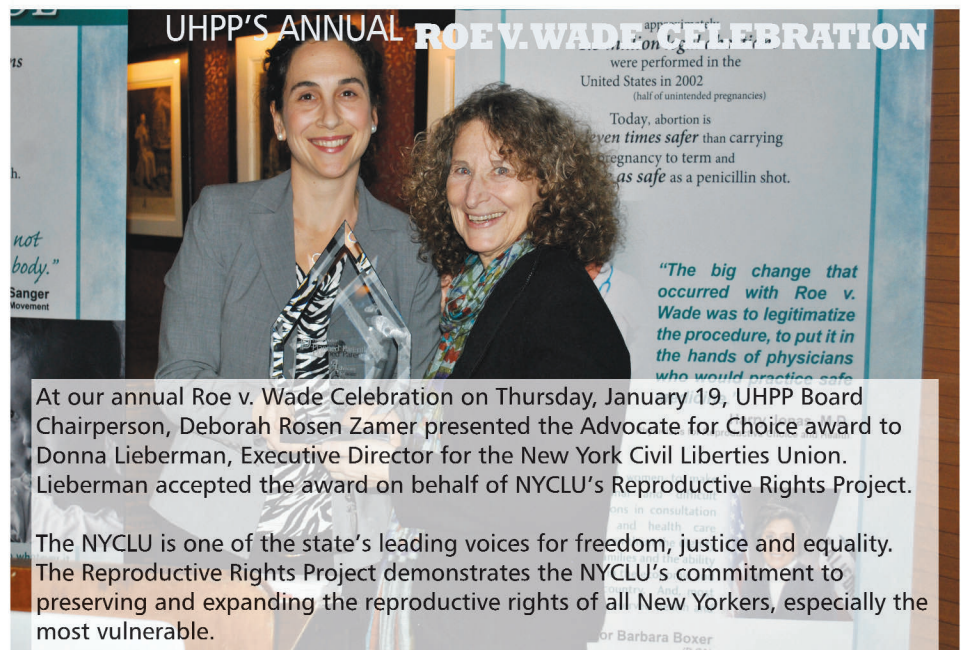
## Young Professionals Support Choice!

Building upon recent widespread support for Planned Parenthood's mission, young professionals came to the Midtown Tap & Tea Room in Albany on Thursday, February 16 to support reproductive choice. UHPP's “Cocktails for a Cause” hosted a record 58 men and women.

At the event, UHPP Board Chairperson Deborah Rosen Zamer and Volunteer Manager Alicia Ortiz emphasized the importance of sex education, advocacy and reproductive health services. In preparing for the event, both women found they shared past experiences volunteering in West Africa where each helped provide basic sex education to women and girls—experiences they shared with the audience.

“Planned Parenthood deals in reality,” Zamer said. “In the United States, one in five women has received services at a Planned Parenthood at some point in her life. A country without Planned Parenthood would be a dangerous step back in time.”

“Cocktails for a Cause” is presented by Planned Parenthood Young Leaders (PPYL), a group of 40ish and younger professionals who support Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood's mission. The goal of PPYL is to build a new generation of supporters and advocates for reproductive choice. ●



At our annual Roe v. Wade Celebration on Thursday, January 19, UHPP Board Chairperson, Deborah Rosen Zamer presented the Advocate for Choice award to Donna Lieberman, Executive Director for the New York Civil Liberties Union. Lieberman accepted the award on behalf of NYCLU's Reproductive Rights Project.

The NYCLU is one of the state's leading voices for freedom, justice and equality. The Reproductive Rights Project demonstrates the NYCLU's commitment to preserving and expanding the reproductive rights of all New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

CHOICE  
4  
REMARKS



NYS Senate Switchboard: (518) 455-2800 NYS Assembly Switchboard: (518) 455-4100

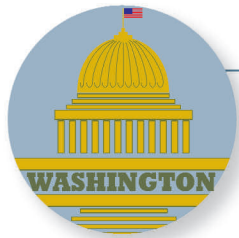
## Reproductive Health Act (S2844)

This bill would update New York State's abortion laws, which were written in 1980, and ensure access to both birth control and abortion in New York State if federal protections were to be overturned. A recent poll conducted by Celinda Lake for Family Planning Advocates of NYS reported

that seven in 10 New Yorkers, including 70 percent of Catholics, support passing RHA because "we hold as a core value a woman's ability to make her own personal, private health care decisions, especially when her health is endangered." The Assembly has pledged support for the bill, but the Senate majority used a last minute procedural rule to lock the bill up in its Rules Committee. At this time, it is expected it will take strong public pressure and the personal intervention of the Governor to move the bill forward. More than 5,000 emails supporting RHA were sent to the Governor in March.

## Health Benefits Exchange

A requirement of the Affordable Care Act, the Health Benefits Exchange will serve as a centralized system that eligible individuals, families and small businesses can use to access affordable commercial and public health insurance programs that meet their needs. Enabling legislation passed in the Assembly earlier this year, but was then blocked in the Senate. A recent attempt to include the legislation in the budget agreement was similarly blocked. As a result Governor Cuomo decided to create a health benefits exchange through executive order, enabling the important work of establishing the exchange to begin.



Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121

## Birth Control Coverage

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of the Department of Health and Human Services has issued a series of proposed rules necessary to implement the administration's policy of requiring employee health insurance coverage to include all forms of prescription birth control without co-pays. Rules have been issued specifying implementation by non-profit organizations, religious organizations, including religiously affiliated hospitals and universities, and student health policies.

A major campaign was launched by the National Conference of Bishops, and supported by House Republicans, opposing the implementation of this rule based on religious conscience. Planned Parenthood helped form a coalition of advocacy, labor, provider and health organizations to counter the opposition. Across the country, and here in the Capital District, women of all ages and faiths stood up for birth control access and helped the administration stand strong.

## The Blunt Amendment Defeated

The Senate voted 51 to 48 to reject the amendment to the Affordable Care Act, sponsored by Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) that would have overridden the administration's new contraception coverage rule and allow any employer to refuse to cover any kind of health care service by citing "moral reasons." New York Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand voiced early and strong opposition to the amendment.

## The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court heard arguments in late March on the Affordable Care Act (ACA); including whether the individual mandate—which requires all covered persons (exemptions are allowed for persons unable to afford to purchase insurance) to obtain health insurance—is constitutional. The Obama administration argued that the individual mandate is essential to the effectiveness of ACA and that if the individual mandate is ruled unconstitutional, then the ban on preexisting conditions, minimum expenditures on health care and other essential regulatory protections for health insurance consumers must fall with it, as they are inextricably intertwined with the individual mandate. A ruling could come anytime in the next four months.

## House Passes Ryan Budget

As expected, the House of Representatives passed Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-WI) Republican budget proposal. Ryan's budget would turn the Medicaid program into a block grant, enabling states to eliminate coverage for family planning services, repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut funding for Title X, the national Family Planning Act. The Ryan budget is unlikely to pass in the Senate. U.S. Representatives Paul Tonko and Chris Gibson voted against the Ryan Budget.

## House Bill Puts Teens At Risk

On March 27, the House Judiciary Committee passed the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act (CIANA), HR 2299. CIANA puts teens at risk, prohibits doctors from protecting the health and safety of teens in medical emergencies and overrides the laws of states, like New York, that have no parental involvement mandate. Democrats offered 13 amendments to the bill, including exceptions for incest and health of the minor. None of the amendments passed. At this time, CIANA is not expected to move in the Senate.

Special Note: Didi Barrett, a pro-choice Democrat, was elected to represent the 103rd Assembly District in a special election in March. She takes the seat of Marcus Molinaro who resigned to take a county position. Barrett will need to run again in the fall election to retain her seat.

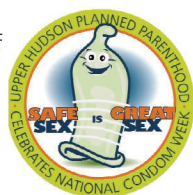


## UHPP Celebrated National Condom Week!

This year's National "Condom Week" outreach efforts were a huge success! Four "pub crawl" style events were held in Troy, Hudson and Albany where 750 safer sex kits and 500 "matchbook" condoms were distributed.

During the weeklong event, UHPP's team of 18 volunteers visited 24 bars and gave out more than 2,000 condoms! Our Facebook ad had 2.2 million impressions and 545 people clicked for more information.

The volunteers engaged patrons in "Fact or Crap" trivia about issues of sexuality and sexual health and had demonstration models to illustrate proper condom use.



## Day of Advocacy

Almost 50 UHPP staff and community supporters participated in the annual statewide Day of Action organized by Family Planning Advocates of New York State on the first day of the 2012 state legislative session. In total, 375 participants came from across the state to hear from legislative leaders and to lobby their representatives. New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli; Congressman Paul Tonko; and Assembly Leader Sheldon Silver were among those who addressed the advocates. Many members of the Pro-Choice Bipartisan Legislative Caucus were also present for the opening reception and pledged support for our 2012 initiatives.

## People of Faith Speak Out



In early February, UHPP hosted an early morning brunch for interested supporters with Cathie Hutchinson, regional spokesperson for the national organization Catholics for Choice. Hutchinson spoke eloquently about the scriptural definition of "church" as representing all its adherents, and not just the hierarchy; of the individual responsibility to exercise conscience; and of the broad support among practicing Catholics for birth control and reproductive choice.

Local pro-choice clergy also participated in the annual statewide Clergy Lobby Day on April 18, urging legislators to pass the Reproductive Health Act, and at the annual University at Albany "Faith and Choice" forum on April 24, which this year featured clergy authors and activists Rabbi Dennis Ross and the Reverend Tom Davis. ●

## Komen Controversy

"We are at a thrilling time in history," said UHPP President/CEO Patricia McGeown, "when people from all levels of society can come together and, using the power of social media, rally to win critical battles for a greater good."

On February 3, after a firestorm of public and media reaction, the Komen Foundation reversed a controversial decision to terminate all grants to Planned Parenthood affiliates for breast cancer prevention, education and screening.

UHPP was not directly impacted by either decision—we do not currently receive grant funds from the Komen Foundation. But we gave media interviews and communicated with our supporters, encouraging them to speak out. UHPP activists and patients joined the tens of thousands of women who voiced their concern, their disappointment and, ultimately, their outrage—and who also gave generously to support breast cancer services at Planned Parenthood. ●

## Get Involved!

### Volunteers

Spring is here and volunteers are needed for a variety of activities: patient escorting, door-to-door canvassing and outreach, GOTV efforts and staffing information tables at community fairs and events.

**Needed:** young adult volunteers and interns to serve as educators and mentors during the UHPP weekly drop-in teen clinic. Contact UHPP Volunteer Manager Alicia Ortiz at Alicia@uhpp.org or 434-5678 x 135 if you are interested and available.

### A Critical Election

With so many attacks on women's health and Planned Parenthood over the last two years, the importance of an informed and engaged electorate is obvious. If you are interested in getting involved and helping to get out the vote in November, please contact Blue Carreker at blue@uhpp.org or 434-5678, x 133.

# Education Connection

## “Change is Good” for UHPP’s CAPP and S.T.A.R.S. Peer Education Program

2012 has brought substantial and exciting change to the UHPP Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) and S.T.A.R.S. (Seriously Talking About Responsible Sex) peer education program. Under our new state grant contract, we were challenged to engage a larger number of youth in the peer education program, while also increasing the number and diversity of students reached through our evidence-based sexual health education programming—all with no increases in funding. UHPP staff rose to the challenge and developed a new approach that is both feasible within the budget and effective in reaching our goals.

Previously, the S.T.A.R.S. peer education programs lasted for an entire academic year and involved

## Columbia County Supporters Gather for Update

Our enthusiastic and tireless Columbia County supporter Toby Cassuto organized another very successful advocacy event in Chatham. Cassuto personally reached out to friends and associates throughout the county with an original invitation headlined *Don't Let them Do It!* “Now is the time to learn more about threats to reproductive health...” said the invite. “Attend a Seminar. Listen to Involved Speakers. See How You Can Help!” Cassuto provided a wonderful, light dinner including wine and dessert. Almost 60 people turned out to hear from NYCLU and UHPP staff—a standing room only crowd and a tremendous success!

between eight and 12 students in both Albany and Hudson. Beginning this year, we are instead providing three “concentrated” S.T.A.R.S. peer education programs in Albany, and one “concentrated” S.T.A.R.S. program in Hudson during school breaks. Each program will offer participating students basic sex education, peer education skills and opportunities to share their new knowledge and apply new skills in outreach to parents, other youth and their community. The program will also provide positive youth development opportunities including college visits and informational sessions on financial literacy.

The new approach will also free up UHPP education staff to provide more classic, evidence-based sex education programming to schools and organizations. According to Meaghan Carroll, UHPP’s Director of Education, “we anticipate these changes will result in a substantial increase in the number of unduplicated youth participating in evidence-based comprehensive sex education programs in our service area. Our new design will also enable us to reach new pockets of youth who traditionally are underserved in our community.”

Already this year, UHPP CAPP and education staff have provided comprehensive sexual health programming at Parsons Child & Family Center, Albany High School, Hudson High School, Boys and Girls clubs, Equinox Inc., Trinity Alliance, Columbia Opportunities Inc., Questar and BOCES programs, as well as Albany and Hudson high schools after school programs. The first school break session of the peer education program was offered in February. Participants received three days of training on Planned Parenthood services, safer sex and healthy relationships; went on a college visit to Russell Sage College in Troy and held a parent-youth movie night. A similar peer



**S.T.A.R.S.**  
Seriously Talking  
About  
Responsible Sex



S.T.A.R.S. peer educators Meghan C., Dyashia H. and Tahurah B.

education training was held in April around spring break.

The new model was warmly received by our funders at the New York State Department of Health, and praised for its “creative sustainability and innovation.” Parents are excited because students who want to participate no longer have to choose between the peer education program and other after school activities, plus the program will provide community youth with structured activities and supervision while they’re out of school. ●

S.T.A.R.S. peer educators Nicole D., Sidavia W., Andrayra R., Azhame S. and Medina B.





## Donor Profile: Betsey Swan

Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood donor Betsey Swan is deeply concerned about “the strong movement afoot to rescind progress in women’s reproductive rights. As a woman who has exercised reproductive control over my own body, I find it abhorrent that we could be put in a position to give up what we’ve fought for so hard.”

Swan serves as president of The League of Women Voters of New York State, a nonpartisan political organization that works to influence policy through advocacy. The League proudly joined UHPP and Family Planning Advocates in the New Yorkers United for Marriage coalition. Swan and her colleagues also collaborate with staff at Family Planning Advocates to fight for women’s reproductive rights.

Growing up in Rochester, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, Swan appreciated the impact of her parents’ community service. Her mother fought for fair housing as a member of New Detroit, a coalition of leaders working to ensure economic and social equity. Her father helped to build a new library while serving as president of the library’s Board of Directors.

Swan recalls that in high school, “I was concerned for many of my peers who became sexually active without having access to birth control or to legal abortion.” As an adult, Swan says, “I have always wanted to financially support the causes that I intellectually support.”

Swan realized her intentions through a year-end stock donation to Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood’s Capital Campaign. She also invested in Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s Pooled Income Fund. Swan and her husband will receive variable earned income payments during their lifetimes and establish a legacy for UHPP.

To learn more about ways to support UHPP’s mission to provide exceptional services, honest education, and fearless advocacy, please contact Laura Alpert, Vice President for Development, at (518) 512-9027 or [lauraa@uhpp.org](mailto:lauraa@uhpp.org). ●

## Vagina Monologues Performances Benefit UHPP

Many thanks to Amanda Brinke of ABB Event Productions for producing, directing and hosting three benefit performances of The Vagina Monologues at Café 217 in February. Once again, UHPP was selected to receive partial proceeds from this fabulous show, resulting in a \$1,425 donation. UHPP is truly grateful to be the recipient of generous community support from our friends!

### Gifts in Tribute

Giving tributes is a meaningful way to remember or honor someone special, while helping others in our community. If you would like more information about tributes, please call (518) 434-5678, x121.

**In honor of Mary Gail Biebel’s birthday**

Ms. Sara P. McWilliams

**In memory of Arlene Boochever**

Mr. Herbert Gordon and Ms. Shirley Gordon

**In honor of Blue Carreker**

Ms. Ethel Silverberg

**In memory of Ruth Fleishman**

Emma Willard School, Mr. Thomas M. Julius and Ms. Barbara A. Bryce, Mr. Leo S. Levy and Mrs. Martha Levy, Mr. George and Ms. Marcia M. Handelman, Ms. Carol Oko, Ms. Loretta M. Parsons, Ms. Christine W. Ward

**In honor of Shirley Gordon’s birthday**

Mr. Harry and Ms. Anne Rosenfeld

**In honor of Bob and Karen Kelley**

Ms. Peggy Bush

**In honor of Cathie Love**

Ms. Sara Love

**In honor of Pat McGeown’s service to UHPP**

Judith H. Rettig, M.D., Anonymous

**In honor of Georgiana and James Panton**

Ms. Lois Wilson

**In honor of Jill Parchuck**

Ms. Pamela Gelgud

**In honor of Larry Phillips**

Ms. Karen Kelley

**In memory of Elinore Posner**

Charles Kite, M.D. and Tara A. Lindsley, Ph.D.

**In honor of Jill Rafferty-Weinisch’s birthday**

Ms. Alana Akacki, Ms. Laura B. Alpert and Mr. Christopher S. Morano, Ms. Carol J. Bailey and Mr. Ronald A. Bailey, Ms. Jessalyn Ballerano, Ms. Stacey Bridge, Ms. Robyn Diaz, Ms. Catherine Diggins, Mr. Don Dworkin, Ms. Marie Glotzbach, Ms. Mary Ellen Hern, Ms. Julie Kabat and Dr. Wayne Shelton, Mr. Anthony Kibort, Mr. Jim Lanahan, Ms. Judith Lerman, Ms. Carrie Moore, Mrs. Karen Opalka and Mr. Chester Opalka, Ms. Jeanne O’Shea, Ms. Jacqueline Pezzulo, Ms. Beth Rafferty, Ms. JC Rafferty, Ms. Joan Sharp, Ms. Laura Skladzinski, Ms. Jan Smith, Ms. Aurora Wennstrom

**In honor of Jenn and Roger Rennels**

Mr. and Ms. Richard Ramsey

**In honor of Alice Shapely and Edwin Schauble**

Ms. Kristen Carbosiero

**In memory of Doris Stein**

Ms. Anita Stein

**In honor of Carol Stenger**

Anonymous

**In memory of Anthony Sroka, Jr.**

Ms. Inez M. Haettenschwiller

**In honor of Alison Zajicek**

Ms. Beverly Bendix

This list is inclusive from November 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012. Please notify us if we have made any errors and accept our apologies.

## Movement Continued from page 1

and the recent controversy about insurance coverage for birth control at religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood provides us with fact sheets, brochures, safer sex kits and general information, so we can provide students with the information they need.”

Nita’s RPI VOX group finally achieved official status as a student group this year, which is a terrific achievement. The group has also been busy staffing information tables in the campus center and at student events. She feels “we are making it more comfortable to talk about sex and people’s needs with regards to sexual health and relationships by being present with resources and answers to questions.”

Aside from tabling, both VOX groups organize educational and fun events. At RPI, the VOX members delivered 393 “Condomgrams” for Valentine’s Day and conducted pub crawls with safer sex messages and kits for Get Yourself

Tested (GYT) month in April. They recently sponsored a Birth Control 101 presentation with representatives from UHPP and the RPI health center. Both groups have held several film screenings, often in collaboration with other student groups, and on April 24, the UAlbany VOX members sponsored their annual and very well attended Faith and Choice forum. This year’s forum featured local pro-choice clergy and authors, Rabbi Dennis Ross and the Reverend Tom Davis who spoke about religious conscience and access to reproductive health services.

At every VOX event, petitions and postcards are available to enable students to weigh in on current advocacy issues impacting reproductive health. Students from both campuses brought petitions to the Albany office of Senator Kirstin Gillibrand on April 18 as part of a statewide Campus Week of Action.

Both Nita and Brittini also serve as

UHPP patient escorts and are active with other campus-based and community groups. Nita ultimately wants to be an ob/gyn with plans to attend the University of Chicago’s Pritzker School of Medicine. Brittini is a senior at UAlbany and plans to pursue her graduate degree in women’s studies. Both plan on continuing their efforts to secure and expand reproductive rights.

Says Brittini to women who have been fighting this fight for a long time, “the movement is in good hands. We won’t drop the ball. Our voices are being heard.” ●

