

## 2015 Hometown Hero Honoree Profiles

### ***Corporate Philanthropy Award – Praxair, Inc.***

Praxair is receiving our Corporate Philanthropy Award in recognition of their commitment to making giving back to the community a priority for their company and its employees. It is this commitment from the top executives of the organization that sets Praxair apart. We recognize Praxair as “Best in Class” for their generous philanthropic giving and sizable company match, designated entirely to United Way of Western CT. Praxair also has over 80% of its employees participating in our annual United Way campaign. Praxair employees who coordinate our annual campaign have shown strong leadership and creativity with many engaging special event fundraisers including a live auction, balloon pop, and penny race; all which help raise additional funds and increase the company’s overall level of giving.

Praxair champions our United Way at the highest level as a Charter Oak sponsor, giving us monetary support for marketing, special events and volunteerism programs. Each year, we can count on groups of Praxair employees to be enthusiastic volunteers at our annual UWWC Day of Action. Praxair employees also annually sponsor a team of runners at our King of the Hill 5K race in Danbury.

### ***Corporate Volunteer Award – Pitney Bowes***

Our Corporate Volunteer Award is being presented to Pitney Bowes in honor of their leadership in promoting volunteerism as a part of their corporate culture. Their focus on volunteerism dates back throughout Pitney Bowes’ 94-year history. Senior leaders at Pitney Bowes make volunteerism a top corporate priority.

There is no better example of this commitment than their October 2014 *Dedication to Education Week*. Over 475 Pitney Bowes employees volunteered at 30 community projects benefiting 23 educational nonprofits across Fairfield County. This type of large scale effort to mobilize employees to support education and organizations that make a difference for students throughout local communities is remarkable. Volunteer projects included providing a career workshop for Danbury High School students, working with middle school students in Danbury to install a ropes course, and beautifying several school properties and improving playgrounds throughout greater Danbury. Pitney Bowes shared with us that their employees feel enriched, energized and grateful for the opportunity to serve as volunteers.

### ***Small Business Hero Award – DPZ Group and Dawn M. Blom***

DPZ Group and Dawn Blom are receiving our Small Business Hero Award in recognition of their leadership, commitment and generosity within the greater Danbury community. Dawn, Owner and Master Artist, opened Dawn’s Pizzazz Artistic Group & Day Spa, now known as DPZ on West, in Danbury in June of 1986. In April of 2012, Dawn opened her second location, DPZ North, in Litchfield, CT. Having a clear vision of what she wanted to accomplish, the salon and

day spa has steadily grown over the years to become not only a leader in the beauty industry, but a strong partner in the community in which she does business.

Dawn was inducted into the Henry Abbott Regional Vocational and Technical School Hall of Fame for not only her continued success, but for her commitment to the community. Dawn focuses on ongoing education and training, and fosters a sense of community among her team of dedicated professionals. Dawn is known for hosting numerous fundraising events including cut-a-thons, fashion shows and golf tournaments, to raise funds for community programs close to her heart and for local people in need. Often, those in need are themselves customers of the salon. A sign prominently hangs at the salon noting the importance of 'paying it forward.' This past holiday season, Dawn launched her 'Pay it Forward' campaign, offering each of her customers a complimentary service to 'pay forward' to a friend or family member, spreading acts of kindness one service at a time.

### ***Lifetime Hero Award – Dr. James W. Schmotter***

We are honored to recognize Jim Schmotter with our Lifetime Hero Award. Jim has served on our UWWC Board for seven years and acted as Chairman of the Board since 2012. After only a week of being appointed Chairman in 2012, Jim's leadership was immediately called upon to help steer UWWC's response to the tragedy of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. He has led the organization through a transformative time, with the full integration of volunteer center services and a more focused approach on community funding have continued to evolve. Jim has also been a long-time member of our Northern Fairfield County Community Council.

This recognition is also a way to celebrate his upcoming retirement after more than ten years as President of Western Connecticut State University. During his tenure, enrollment increased along with student achievement — with five Fulbright Scholars in the past six years, a near-100 percent pass rate for nursing graduates on the state licensing exam, a heralded honors program and debate team, the strongest philanthropic success in the university's history, the creation of the only School of Visual and Performing Arts among the four state universities, and the construction of a \$97 million Center for Visual and Performing Arts, which opened this year on the Westside campus.

Community partnerships have produced such programs as a nationally recognized college readiness program in partnership with Danbury and Bethel high schools; a restructuring of the university's partnership with the Ives Concert Park; and the October 2012 lectures on campus by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The University has partnered with United Way and many other community organizations on projects such as the Community Health Report Card to better the lives of our residents and community.

Jim is active in many local community groups throughout greater Danbury. In addition to his service on UWWC's Board, Jim is also on the Boards of Ethan Allen Interiors, Connecticut Campus Compact, Fairfield County's Community Foundation and Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce. He is past president of the Little East Athletic Conference and past chair of the NCAA Division III Presidents' Council and is a former member of the NCAA Executive

Committee. He and his wife, Dr. Daphne Jameson, a retired professor of management communication at the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University, live in Bethel.

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### ***Bethel – Lieutenant Commander Mark Dwinells and Master Sergeant Joe Meehan***

Lt. Commander Mark Dwinells and Master Sgt. Joe Meehan coordinate and run the Junior ROTC program at Bethel High School, and have been doing so for 13 years. With participation by more than 200 students, it is one of the largest Junior ROTC programs in CT. They are dedicated to facilitating the involvement of cadets with local organizations such as Brotherhood in Action and Bethel Chamber of Commerce through various community projects. In addition, they inspire and encourage the cadets to conduct their own service projects including Operation Sweet Tooth, which annually collects donated candy for our troops overseas. Last year, they also honored 38 veterans from Bethel and surrounding areas during a Veterans Day Ceremony. They also generously support Bethel students through scholarships. Lt. Commander Dwinells joined the Navy in 1979 and began his active duty specializing in Meteorology after graduating from Bethel High School. Master Sgt. Meehan enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1979 and specialized in weapons repair. Both men received countless personal awards for their years of military service.

### ***Bridgewater – Reverend Peter Hammond***

As a young man, Peter heard the call to devote his life to helping others. He serves as full time pastor at the Congregational Church in Bridgewater leading worship services and providing pastoral care, family support, group leadership, facilities maintenance and administrative support. Peter also heard the call to serve as a volunteer firefighter and EMT. Peter is a first responder to motor vehicle accidents, other medical emergencies, house and car fires, and search and rescue activities. He mans the ambulance during all hours of the day and night and participates in year-round drills to remain certified. Peter is an essential member of the dedicated volunteers who comprise the region's fire and emergency services. Peter says that in all his 32 years of ministry and service, he's never been bored, and credits his wife Kim for her unrelenting love, support and encouragement. A busy man - in time of need - never too busy to care or act.

### ***Brookfield – Marianne Seeber***

Marianne has been a volunteer with Brookfield CARES and its predecessor organizations for over five years. After four drug-related teen deaths occurred in Brookfield over a period of six weeks, Marianne worked to get a support group started, modeled after Newtown Parent Connection. They now host Brookfield CARES hope and support groups every Monday night, facilitated by licensed drug and alcohol counselors, and run a student support group at Brookfield High School. She has facilitated more open community discussion about drug and

alcohol use among teens. Last October, she led a public forum, Courageous Kids Dare to Discuss Drugs, with more than 500 attendees, during which three former Brookfield students spoke about their own drug and alcohol issues. She is hosting a follow-up program this April, Courageous Parents Dare to Discuss Drugs. Marianne has been a resident of Brookfield for nearly 20 years.

### ***Danbury – William Beattie***

Raised by his mother in North Philadelphia, Bill was an at-risk kid mentored by his youth pastor and high school chemistry teacher. Following a profound personal experience in 1996, he sensed a calling to serve God among the at-risk youth of his community and founded Pathways Danbury, which enlists men from several metro-Danbury urban and suburban churches to mentor at-risk boys. Currently, 50 boys are in the program. Since the founding of Pathways Danbury, about 80 percent of the boys have graduated from high school, and 80 percent of those have gone on to college. In 2005, Bill felt called to assist other Christian agencies serving Danbury and founded Jericho Partnership, Inc., a collaboration of church partners, ministry partners and foundation partners serving the youth, homeless and other at-risk populations of Danbury. Bill and his wife Kathie were married in 1960 and have three children and seven grandchildren. They have lived in Danbury since 1980.

### ***Kent – The Davis Family (Gary Davis, Audrey Davis, Marie Roze)***

In May 1974, Charlie and Anne Davis founded Davis IGA, Inc. in Charlie's hometown of Kent. Since 2006, their son Gary has been the president of Davis IGA with his sisters Audrey and Marie as his partners. The Davis family supports local fundraising with donated food and monetary contributions, and has proudly done so countless times for more than 30 organizations. Last year, they celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an outdoor party during which they donated the proceeds of hamburger and hot dog sales to UWWC. Another example of their ongoing generosity is their annual "Holiday Hope for our Overseas Troops" campaign run in partnership with the American Legion Post in Kent. Items collected are sent to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan during the holidays. The Davis siblings are equally as proud to offer young people their first place of employment at the store.

### ***New Fairfield – Lori Vengalli***

Lori has been a long-time resident of New Fairfield for 18 years, and it's probably safe to say that if you have children in this town then you have benefited from Lori's habitual volunteering! She has held various positions on the PTO of all four schools in town, including acting as PTO Co-President. Lori shared with us that her favorite volunteering experience has been as a six-year Chair of the post graduation party, touching over 1,100 young graduates. For ten years, Lori was also a CCD teacher at St. Edward's Parish. Lori has a passion for helping others as shown by her work helping high school seniors with their college essays and applications, her ongoing volunteering with youth athletic programs and work with Relay for Life, and her initiative to organize donation collections and find alternative housing when two local families lost their homes in fires.

### ***New Milford – Dr. Diane D’Isidori and Dr. Evan Hack***

Dr. D’Isidori founded Candlewood Valley Pediatrics in New Milford with her husband, Dr. Hack in 1988. Dr. D’Isidori focuses her efforts on creating and teaching community programs that promote sustainable health and environmental stewardship. She is one of the co-founders of New Milford Hospital’s Plow to Plate coalition and its ongoing Youth Chef Advocacy Program, as well as the nationally recognized Sarah Noble School Walking Project. She is currently completing a United Way grant-funded initiative on pediatric obesity prevention at CVP. This initiative, Sustainable Health in Pediatrics (SHiP), educates and empowers families to make choices that foster lifelong health and well-being.

For many years, Dr. Hack has been New Milford and Sherman Public School’s medical advisor, VNA’s well child clinic physician volunteer, Healthy Community 2020 member, and part of Plow to Plate’s community coalition. More recently, he became an assistant clinical professor at University of Vermont and Quinnipiac University Medical Schools, mentoring medical students in the arts of primary care. Over the past decade, frustrated with the lack of access to pediatric mental health care, Dr. Hack was instrumental in creating a co-location model with Family & Children’s Aid, Greenwoods Counseling Services and CMHA, enhancing mental health services to the area’s children.

### ***Newtown – Robert Geckle***

Bob has served on numerous private and public sector boards and commissions throughout Western Connecticut. Over his many years of public service, he has served on the boards of CBIA, Western Connecticut Health Systems, United Way, Danbury Chamber of Commerce, Newtown Economic Development Commission, Fairfield Hills Master Plan Commission and Authority, and the Newtown C.H. Booth Library Board of Trustees. In addition, he has contributed to many of Newtown’s youth athletic programs and community development projects. Bob also served the Town of Newtown in the wake of the 12/14/12 tragedy by sitting on a small committee that helped coordinate the various large-scale donations and support from corporations, individuals, celebrities and athletes. Bob continues to serve as a key member of a team that is overseeing the multi-million dollar donation from GE to the Town of Newtown. Bob has over 45 years of industry experience as an executive with Fortune 100 and privately held industrial and technology based businesses.

### ***Redding – Peggy Palmer***

Peggy, a resident of Redding for the last 15 years, has made an indelible mark on the town through her many volunteer efforts over the years. Whether it is serving on Redding’s local governing boards of the PTA, PTSA, Boy Scouts, Mark Twain Library Art Show Gala committee, or as a past Deacon of the First Church of Christ, Congregational, Peggy is one of the first to say that she can help. Her commitment to the town of Redding and its children has made her “everybody’s Mom.” It’s a sight to see when she walks through the halls of the high school being greeted with big hellos from the many teenagers whose paths she has crossed over the years. Six years ago, Peggy also became certified as a CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams) member, which led her to become a certified First Responder. Peggy now volunteers

with the Redding Ridge Firehouse, Redding Fire & EMS Company #1. Peggy and her husband Scott have two sons Zachary and Garrett.

***Ridgefield – Valerie Jensen***

Valerie is an award winning filmmaker and advocate for adults with disabilities. Valerie is the visionary and founder of The Prospector Theater in Ridgefield, a four-screen, first-run movie theater that provides meaningful employment to people with disabilities. The Prospector Theater opened its doors to the public in November 2014. A long-time supporter of Special Olympics, Valerie was awarded the Special Olympics Hall of Fame Unsung Hero's Award in 2013. Valerie has received numerous awards for her community service including "The Spirit of Dr. King" Community Service Award from the town of Ridgefield and the "Behind the Scenes" Award from the Ridgefield Arts Council. Valerie received the "Broader Vision Award" from the Garden State Film Festival for her short film "Romeo and Juliet." Valerie is currently a member of the Board of Directors at Ridgefield Academy.