



News Release

KENNETH W. JENKINS, Westchester County Executive

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Contact: Catherine Cioffi

Communications Director

Office - (914) 995-2932

Cell- (914) 954 -5579

CCioffi@westchestercountyny.gov

THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH PRESENTS THE 2025 PUBLIC HEALTH AWARDS

Honors go to United Community Center of Westchester; Student Samantha Pfeiffer of Edgemont; Parul J. Shukla, MD, and the Cancer Support Team

[Watch the Water Safety Video](#)

[Watch the 2025 Public Health Award Honorees Video](#)

(White Plains, NY) - Together with Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins, the Westchester County Board of Health presented the 2025 Public Health Awards, recognizing outstanding contributions to public health in Westchester by two individuals and two nonprofit agencies. The award ceremony was held in honor of National Public Health Week, and highlighted the vital role that public health plays to preserve, protect and promote the health of Westchester residents.

Jenkins said: "Today, we honor two individuals and two agencies whose work helps to save and extend the lives of Westchester residents, whether through preventing tobacco use or drowning or through the detection, prevention and treatment of cancer. I want to thank the dedicated staff of our Health Department, Health Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler, and the volunteers who serve on our Westchester County Board of Health, for their essential service to our community. With their extraordinary concern for others, these volunteers set an example for all of us. I congratulate the winners and encourage other residents to choose this path."

Board of Health President Dr. Robert Baker presented the 2025 Dr. Harold Keltz Distinguished Public Health Service Awards to United Community Center of Westchester, a New Rochelle nonprofit agency, for its commitment to tobacco and vaping use prevention education for children and teenagers, and for smoking cessation for adults.

The Board awarded the 2025 J.R. Tesone Youth Public Health Service Awards to Samantha Pfeffer, an Edgemont High School senior who has become a passionate advocate for drowning prevention. In 2022, Pfeffer took over the management of the Water Guardian Foundation, founded by her family in 2016 to advocate for water safety, four years after her two-year-old sister, Saige, drowned.

Baker said: “These honorees inspire us with their determination to improve the health and well-being of their fellow Westchester residents. We are proud to honor the United Community of Westchester, Samantha Pfeffer, Dr. Parul Shukla and the Cancer Support Team. We hope other residents will step forward to collaborate with us to improve public health.”

Founder and Executive Director of the United Community Center of Westchester Jackie Agudelo said: “I am deeply honored by this recognition from the Westchester Board of Health and grateful for my dedicated team. Over 20 years ago, we saw a great need in New Rochelle’s West End and took action. What began with health insurance navigation has grown into a one-stop center serving people of all ages. Among our many services, we provide case management, a food pantry, domestic violence support, immigration and labor advocacy, homeless prevention, English for Speakers of Other Languages, computer literacy, and workplace health and safety training. Last year, we were proud to join the Westchester County Executive’s tobacco cessation initiative, approved by the Department of Health (DOH). Through this collaboration, we educated hundreds of children and teens on vaping and smoking prevention, and helped a good number of adults permanently overcome smoking.”

Pfeffer said: “I am honored to receive this recognition of my commitment to educating and sharing Water Guardian lanyards with families who have young children, to remind parents and other adults of the importance of avoiding distraction when children are in or around any pool, beach or lake. Drowning can happen in seconds and is silent; it is a devastating tragedy we want to prevent other families from experiencing.”

Amler presented the Commissioner’s Award to Dr. Parul J. Shukla, a colorectal cancer surgeon and the Chief of Colon and Rectal Surgery for Phelps and Northern Westchester Hospitals – Northwell Health.

Amler said: “I am grateful to Dr. Shukla for his dedication not only to compassionate care, but to sparking a collaboration with the County Health Department to prevent colorectal cancer deaths by improving public awareness of the importance of screening and increasing the rate of colorectal cancer screening.”

Shukla said: “I am honored to be given the Commissioner’s Award by Dr. Amler. I value the collaboration of the Health Department and look forward to working together to increase public awareness about the need for timely colorectal cancer screening, so we can boost screening rates and save lives.”

Amler presented the Special Recognition Award to the Cancer Support Team, which for nearly 50 years has addressed the emotional, physical, psychological and financial needs of cancer patients and their families through counseling, case management, grants and management of pain and side effects.

Executive Director of the Cancer Support Team Tania Weiss said: “It is truly an honor to accept this award on behalf of the entire team who work so hard to find ways of making the cancer journey a little easier. In addition, we appreciate our close relationship with the Department of Health. In giving this award to CST, you are helping us spread the word about our free services. The need for our services is great; yet so many do not know we are here to help.”

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