

APRIL 2016

# CLIFTON PARK

AN EXCLUSIVE MONTHLY PUBLICATION  
FOR RESIDENTS

# Neighbors

Heather  
Morrison  
Oppedisano

Making a Difference  
One Storm at a Time



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Please submit your content by the 10th of each month.

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### ON THE COVER

Heather Morrison  
Oppedisano

## Hello CLIFTON PARK RESIDENTS

We may have had a mild winter this year, but I think we're all still happy to see spring finally upon us. I don't know about you, but there is something about the "new beginnings" of spring that seem to inspire me. I always feel ready to try something different or to find fresh ways to make a positive impact in the world.

What inspires you? We would like to know! Email me at [jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com) to tell me the things in the Capital District that inspire you. It could be as simple as a beautiful area of the park. Or maybe it's an inspirational person, or perhaps a teacher at your child's school. Maybe it's a local non-profit that is making a difference in your area.

In fact, I feel so inspired that I have another challenge for you: *What can you do to make a difference in some small way? What are some ways that you see your neighbors making a difference?*

Our cover story this month (page 6), Heather Oppedisano, was inspired by her children's educators. Their family began their own non-profit to help out other kids in the Capital District because of the great work they saw in their own school. Basement Systems (page 9) came up with a patented design that can now keep basements dry, permanently, without the mess of other systems. Both of our businesses featured in the Chamber Spotlight (page 10) are putting a new spin in the local restaurant scene. Keller Williams' realtor, Beth Grzybowski (page 11), had a life-altering realization from a simple statement by her doctor and has now forever changed the lives of two children plus her own, and is working to provide many other Clifton Park residents their own piece of home.

There are many wonderful stories going on in Clifton Park each day. So many of you make a difference in both big and small ways, and each one has an impact on this wonderful community we call home. There are only just so many stories that I can get from my desk, so that's why I'm counting on you to fill me in on what I may be missing.

Let's catch each other doing something great! Did someone do something nice for you today? Do you know of a fantastic non-profit in the area? Have you started a new project yourself? Send me a message and let me know. In this world that often focuses on the negative, let's celebrate all the positive around us every day!

*Jenna Caputo*

CONTENT COORDINATOR



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"Old Pete," a pencil sketch by Sandra Bowden, c. 1972

# Old Pete, the Clifton Park Hermit

By John L. Scherer, Clifton Park Historian

During the 1960s and 1970s, Clifton Park had its own hermit known as "Old Pete." He lived as a hermit in back of the Gage and Gifford Farms on Vischer Ferry Road, across from the Gifford farmhouse. The farmhouse is now surrounded by Vischers Landing and the Summer Hill subdivision now occupies the area across the road. Jack Kittell, now a veterinarian in Washington County, grew up on a neighboring farm and would ride his horse into the area where Pete lived. He remembered his little shack and the fact that Pete made a hole in the ground to store his meat. Pete hunted and ate wild game. There was also a stream in back of the shack that made it easier to get water.

A path led from Vischer Ferry Road back to Pete's shack along the Gage property (Summer Hill). Pete would often be sighted walking along Vischer Ferry Road to Rosen's Store at Grooms and Vischer Ferry Roads where Stewart's is now located. According to Isabel Prescott, he had wild hair. Pete was a big man, tall and heavy, and some of the kids were afraid of him. His hygiene was not the best and he was surrounded by a foul odor. According to Cuiquita Smith, he was a really nice guy but stank to high heavens. He would take odd jobs such as digging ditches or cutting down trees to earn some money. Pete did not want to pay taxes so his annual income never amounted to very much. He also enjoyed drinking beer, and was often three sheets to the wind.

Walter and Lee Gifford, who now live in New Hampshire, remembered when in 1958 Pete stopped at their farm on Vischer Ferry Road and offered to trim their hedge line. Pete had no place to live and the Gifford's offered him a chicken coop in the back part of their farm. This became Pete's shack. There was a fresh water spring nearby. He had a dog, Buster, a beautiful red bone hound. The dog would catch coons, and Pete was able to catch fish

in the Gifford's pond with his bare hands. He cut trees on the Gifford farm and on the farm of Vincent Secada, now part of Clifton Knolls. He peeled the bark off the trees and sold it for pulp.

The Giffords looked after Old Pete, inviting him and his dog for Christmas dinner and to spend cold nights in their farmhouse. They would fill his Christmas stocking with dog food and canned food. Eventually the winters became more difficult for Pete to endure and Lee would take him to the County home in Saratoga for the coldest months. Buster would stay with the Giffords, enjoying the warmth of the stove. According to Lee, "Pete had a heart of gold, loved children and animals; he was a wonderful guy with a big heart."

The Community Church on Moe Road soon lent a helping hand to Old Pete, giving him food and shelter on various occasions. He loved the attention lavished on him by the women of the church – especially the weekly bath they gave him. Members of the church, Bob and Sandra Bowden of Grissom Drive, often looked after him in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was a frequent guest at their home for dinner. He would also come for dinner occasionally at the home of Peter and Elizabeth Clinton, neighbors of the Bowden's on Grissom Drive. It was during this period that Sandra Bowden sketched the portrait of "Old Pete."

Pete died at the Saratoga County Infirmary in about 1979, but the sketch remains as a reminder of the colorful folk hermit who practiced the simple life in the wilds of Clifton Park. How ironic that an upscale housing development now occupies the site of Old Pete's shack.

As for the sketch, it has been donated to the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library, and will be preserved with the history collection for both the present and future generations to enjoy and wonder that a self-sufficient hermit once lived in our now bustling metropolis of Clifton Park. ■

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*By Rebecca Carman, Shenendehowa Central Schools*



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## COVER STORY

# Heather Morrison Oppedisano

## Making a Difference One Storm at a Time

*By Jenna Caputo  
Photos by Niki Rossi Photography  
Necklace courtesy of S. Saxon Jewelers*

Heather Oppedisano has always been fascinated by weather, but she didn't know just how much it would end up playing into her life.

Always an active girl, Heather was a leader from an early age. She played little league for several years as the only girl on the team. She participated in various clubs in high school and also helped form the first female lacrosse team at Columbia High School in East Greenbush, where she was recently inducted into the Alumni Hall of Fame.

She knew from a young age that she wanted a career in broadcast news and wasn't afraid to work hard to reach her goal. Her first stint on air was for WRPI radio at the age of 18. She then put herself through college by taking on several jobs throughout her academic career. Heather started in the radio-television broadcasting program at SUNY Adirondack before finishing her BA degree in film, video and media studies at Western Michigan University.

While completing her degree in Michigan, she worked on campus as a digital television director and assisted in commercial shoots for the Post Cereal Company. Shortly thereafter, she landed her first job working for ABC in Battle Creek, Michigan before becoming a director at the CBS affiliate in Lansing, Michigan. She then went on to UPN 9 in New Jersey as a weather assistant. Now a charter employee of Time Warner Cable News, Heather is going on her 14th year as a meteorologist for Channel 9.

Heather began creating weather graphics while working at ABC. That hands-on experience inspired her to continue her education and pursue meteorology. While at CBS, the news director found out she was back in school and gave her a shot to be on air as a fill-in weather anchor. It was Super Bowl Sunday and blizzard-like conditions outside. "My news director called it trial by fire – when you put on a microphone and go

for it," says Heather. "I absolutely loved delivering weather on air and I am forever grateful that she gave me a shot." She continued her education while working and finally made it official after completing the Mississippi State University Broadcast Meteorology program.

She's busy providing us with our weather, too. On a typical day, she does the forecast for at least three Time Warner News stations for Albany, Middletown/Poughkeepsie and New York City's NY1, as well as providing radio forecasts for several markets across the entire state seven days a week. Locally, she broadcasts throughout the day on Talk 1300AM and B95.5FM. She also emcees many charity events and mentors college students throughout the year.

Her husband, Tom, is a decorated, certified PGA golf pro and they have two boys – Thomas, 12 and Vincent, 10. Their family has had experience with the autism spectrum and it has taught Heather a few lessons. Expect the unexpected in any situation is one lesson, but it has also demonstrated what it means to have passion.

"Our children have incredible talent and strong passion in certain areas of their lives," Heather explains. Thomas is a strong academic and also is a talented freehand artist, concentrating on drawing movie monsters. He recently created his first HD stop motion animation monster movie, which was shown on the big screen at Proctors GE Theatre during "ICFS It Came From Schenectady's Godzilla Night." He's also an animal expert and is often invited to a behind the scenes tour when they visit animal attractions across the country. Vincent is a big gamer and easily masters anything digital. An avid cat lover, he also has a great sense of humor, an ear for music, dances and is very athletic.

Heather says the guidance and support their family has received from the boys' schools has made a huge impact on their success in life. They started at the Helping Hands Preschool in Clifton Park and were instantly drawn to the bright, engaging and energetic environment. Deciding to give the boys an alternative atmosphere for the rest of their education, they have since been attending the Saratoga Academy of the Arts & Sciences, also in Clifton Park. Heather says that the Saratoga Academy "lends itself to a positive, whole-person learning, in



which the students are appreciated and encouraged. The results of such a well-rounded education are incredibly talented, smart, well-mannered, kind students."

The Oppedisano family was so inspired by their experience in a school where the children are not stuck at their desks all day, encouraged to think outside the box and experience learning in different ways that they decided to start their own non-profit foundation – ABLE: Alternatives for Better Learning Environments. "ABLE is a scholarship foundation created to help kids find an alternative to public school that really need something different and cannot afford it. We define special

needs on both ends of the educational spectrum, the kids who learn differently and the gifted who need a little more. There are other options where children can thrive in an educational environment in a happy and successful way, but families are not always prepared for the cost of an independent school. This is what ABLE strives to help with," says Heather.

When she's not predicting the weather or working for ABLE, Heather and her family are very active. They love nature and can often be found hiking in Kinns Road Park or enjoying a visit to their favorite eatery, Venezia Pizza. They donate time and resources to several charity organizations, and try to attend shows at SPAC and Proctors whenever they can.

Heather classifies herself as a lifelong learner and is always seeking to continue her education. She loves jazz music and would like to learn how to play an instrument. She is passionate about her life and continuously says

how grateful she is for all they have.

Heather and her family have lived in Clifton Park for nine years now and love it. "We are fortunate to have settled down in such a beautiful community," she says. "We have GREAT neighbors here. We are proud to call Clifton Park our home."

Heather's job may be about predicting the storms, but stormy weather won't stop her from enjoying her life and making a difference along the way! ■

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at [jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:jcaputo@bestversionmedia.com).

# Go to Your Doctor, a Clinic, or the Emergency Room?

By Ellis Medicine



Whenever an illness or injury occurs, you need to decide how serious it is and how soon to seek medical care. Consideration must also be given to whether it's best to call your doctor, go to an urgent care clinic or head to an emergency department right away.

Treatment in an emergency department can cost two to three times more than receiving the same care in your doctor's office. Think about that and the other issues listed below when deciding where to go for care.

## When to Go to an Emergency Department

Go to an emergency department or call 911 for help for problems such as:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Passing out, fainting, sudden dizziness
- Pain in the arm or jaw
- Unusual or bad headache, especially if it started suddenly
- Sudden inability to speak, see, walk, or move
- Sudden weakness or drooping on one side of the body
- Dizziness or weakness that does not go away
- Inhaling smoke or poisonous fumes
- Sudden confusion
- Heavy bleeding
- Possible broken bone, loss of movement, especially if the bone is pushing through the skin
- Deep wound
- Serious burn
- Coughing or throwing up blood
- Severe pain anywhere on the body
- Severe allergic reaction with trouble breathing, swelling, hives
- High fever with headache and stiff neck
- High fever that does not get better with medicine
- Throwing up or loose stools that do not stop
- Poisoning or overdose of drug or alcohol
- Suicidal thoughts
- Seizures

## When to Go to Urgent Care

When you have a problem, don't wait too long to get medical care. If your problem is not life threatening or one that risks you becoming disabled, but you are concerned

and you cannot see your doctor soon enough, go to an urgent care clinic. The kinds of problems an urgent care clinic can deal with include:

- Common illnesses such as colds, the flu, earaches, sore throats, migraines, low-grade fevers and limited rashes
- Minor injuries such as sprains, back pain, minor cuts and burns, minor broken bones or minor eye injuries

## If You Aren't Sure, Ask Someone

If you are not sure what to do, and you don't have one of the serious conditions listed above, call your doctor. If the office is not open, your phone call may be forwarded to someone. Describe your symptoms to the doctor who answers your call, and find out what you should do. Your doctor or health insurance company may also offer a nurse-staffed telephone advice hot line. Call this number and tell the nurse your symptoms for advice on what to do.

## When to Call 911

How quickly do you need care? If a person or unborn baby could die or be permanently disabled, it is an emergency. Call 911 to have the emergency team come to you right away if you cannot wait, such as for:

- Choking
- Stopped breathing
- Head injury with passing out, fainting, or confusion
- Injury to neck or spine, especially if there is loss of feeling or inability to move
- Electric shock or lightning strike
- Severe burn
- Severe chest pain or pressure
- Seizure that lasted three to five minutes

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"Basements are imperfect concrete structures built in soils that vary. Water in the soils leaking into basements is a problem that has troubled homeowners for over 100 years. This water will enter the basement through the walls, floors and joints between them. Over the years, contractors and engineers have developed a wide variety of methods to keep basements dry. Some of these methods are more effective than others. Among the best of these methods is to install a sub-floor drainage system along the perimeter of the floor – there are a few challenges to this method however. One of the biggest challenges is how to keep that drain from being clogged by mud and debris that builds up over the years. Many homeowners can go years without a water problem and then develop one because of existing sub-floor and sub-surface drains getting clogged. Another challenge is setting up a system which can accept water from the walls without leaving a large unsightly gap at the edge of the floor which can then collect dirt and debris from the floor, also clogging the drain." —Lawrence Janesky

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By Sheryce N. Stewart

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# Welcome to the Neighborhood

By Pete Bardunias, President/CEO, the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County



Longtime DZ Restaurants chef Nick Porreca, wife Nicole and their family celebrated their taking over ownership of Pasta Pane in Clifton Park ([www.pastapane.com](http://www.pastapane.com)), with a "Raising Dough" donation of \$500 to the Southern Saratoga County Chamber Angels. Chamber of Southern Saratoga County President/CEO Pete Bardunias and Vice President Nigar Hale were on hand to accept the donation, which will be used to help provide holiday cheer to young people during the holiday season. Although it's a holiday gift program, the Angels toil all year to prepare to meet the needs of young people. Pasta Pane recently started a Sunday brunch menu, from 10AM to 2:30 PM, to go along with their popular menus and bar selections, and is considered one of the area's finest Italian restaurants.

Frank Carnivale (center, holding scissors) and wife Dawn are in the middle of a major renovation at the Park Manor Hotel near Exit 9 (formerly the Comfort Suites). This past February, the CSSC staff and volunteer Ambassadors joined Clifton Park Town Supervisor Phil Barrett, Assemblyman Jim Tedisco, and Senator Hugh Farley's representative Mike Mansion in dedicating a new American bistro, called Seven, at their 7 Northside Drive location. Seven offers breakfast, lunch, dinner and room service! It's a great venue for a business lunch, an afternoon drink or a pleasant social evening. For more information on the Park Manor Hotel and Seven restaurant visit [www.theparkmanorhotel.com](http://www.theparkmanorhotel.com).



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# Making Dreams Come True Right Here in Clifton Park

By Beth Grzybowski, Keller Williams Capital District

Imagine . . . growing up believing life's rewards are earned by hard work. You follow the rules, listen to your parents (most of the time), work through college, graduate school, marry the love of your life, and even buy your dream home. But, you discover that one of the most magical miracles of life eludes you – no matter how hard you work, no matter how hard you try. It's a story all too familiar to Clifton Park native and realtor, Beth Grzybowski.

Grzybowski has seen Clifton Park grow from a farming community "up north" to a sprawling suburb and hub for southern Saratoga County. She remembers shopping the Clifton Country Mall upon its opening in the mid '70s and delighting at seeing the first McDonald's arrive on the scene. But, little did she know that children's happy meals wouldn't be in her near future.

Beth and her husband, Chris, her Shenendehowa high school sweetheart, discovered that having a family wasn't going to be easy or simple. Years passed with no success. After numerous procedures, a doctor finally posed a life-altering question: "What's more important? Nine months of pregnancy or a lifetime of parenting?" Grzybowski knew

that instant that adoption was the answer and set forth to find her children!

The couple took a direct approach, searching for a birthmother seeking a loving family for her baby. Grzybowski mailed out more than 1,200 adoption biographies across the country and handed out hundreds more to family, friends and coworkers. Her perseverance, tireless energy, and networking skills paid off. Within nine months of their first biography mailing, their son was born at Ellis Hospital in Schenectady. Three years later, he would get a little sister born at Samaritan Hospital in Troy.

Today, Grzybowski is raising her family in Clifton Park and believes her children have taught her a valuable lesson, "If you want something badly enough, you'll find a way to make it happen," says Grzybowski. It's a lesson she says works not only in her personal life but also in her profession as a Keller Williams' realtor. Grzybowski found her dream home, her family, and pledges now to help others create their forever memories – through hard work and following, at times, unconventional rules! ■

## Your Journey Home begins with Beth Grzybowski

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## Sunday, April 3

### GARDENING 101 IN CHANGING TIMES

@Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library

Join Susan Beebe, Association Issue Leader for Agriculture & Assistant Director with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County, in a discussion on proper conditions for our gardens & yards, and how to have success while supporting the environment. Come prepared with questions. Registration recommended. [www.cphlibrary.org](http://www.cphlibrary.org) or 371-8622

Time: 2pm

Cost: FREE

## Friday, April 15

### SINATRA 101

@The Hilton Garden Inn, Clifton Park  
Enjoy dinner and a show with Jerry Gretzinger from News Channel 10 singing Frank Sinatra. Tickets include the show, one complimentary cocktail

hour (cash bar after) and dinner.

Tickets at [mazzonehospitality.com/tickets/Sinatra](http://mazzonehospitality.com/tickets/Sinatra) or 690-0293.

Time: 6-9pm

Cost: \$55

## Tuesday, April 19

### FAMILY WELLNESS SERIES: SPRING INTO ACTION!

@Northeast Spine & Wellness, Clifton Park

Seminar with Dr. Joseph Gulyas to offer families valuable information on raising healthy children in today's world with a holistic, drug-free approach. Register at [CHIROGUL2@aol.com](mailto:CHIROGUL2@aol.com) or 518-371-4800.

Time: 7-8pm

Cost: FREE

## Wednesday, April 20

### CLIFTON PARK NURSERY SCHOOL OPEN HOUSE

@344 Moe Rd, Clifton Park

Check out the Clifton Park Nursery

School! 371-5850 for questions.

Time: 5-7pm

Cost: FREE

## Thursday, April 21

### AHA BENEFIT CONCERT: MATT MAGUIRE

@Troy Savings Music Hall, Troy

Join us in the fight against heart disease for the Capital Region and families in need in the City of Rensselaer. 100% of proceeds go to the American Heart Association and Circles of Mercy. Enjoy Matt Maguire, pianist, singer & songwriter, playing his own pieces as well as some of your favorites from the Beatles, Billy Joel, Coldplay, and more! Buy your tickets before they sell out! [http://www.troymusichall.org/shows\\_and\\_tickets/Matt\\_Maguire\\_148\\_event.htm](http://www.troymusichall.org/shows_and_tickets/Matt_Maguire_148_event.htm)

Time: 7-8:30pm | Cost: \$25

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# Introducing Lambert & Spratt Financial Partners

By Christopher J. Spratt

- Can I retire and not outlive my assets?
- How exposed am I to stock market drops?
- When should I begin taking social security?
- Will I be able to send my kids to college and still retire when I want to?
- Will the IRS inherit more of my Estate than my heirs?

These are some recurring questions we hear every day.

At Lambert & Spratt Financial Partners, we strive to provide financial peace of mind for our clients and a sense of purpose for our team.


What differentiates us from other firms is our level of engagement with our clients. We know it's not sufficient to merely see our clients once a year, or to give them a "plan." We've all read books on exercise but that does not mean we're physically fit. If you take the important step of hiring a personal trainer, it's much more likely you will get into shape.

We apply this same mentality to your personal finances knowing it's not a plan that makes you successful; rather, it's the person taking the journey with you. We see our clients four times per year to monitor and adjust along the way as

events shape your life.

In our first visit, we get to know each other and assess the type of relationship that suits your needs. We then prioritize goals and look at all of your information such as cash flow, investments, insurance coverages, essentially all the things that impact you financially to see how they fit together. During this time we would like to get to know about you and your family and to see in which ways we can help and if you'd like our help.

The team is made up of founding partner and Guilderland resident, Ryan Lambert CRPC® APMA™, who is the senior financial planner. Saratoga Springs resident, Christopher Spratt, who is also the team's financial planner and marketing strategist. Nicole Codi is the group's associate financial planner, Dan Miller is the property and casualty specialist and Lauren Mueller is the practice manager. ■

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Thurs. 8:30 - 8:00

Fri. 8:30 - 5:00

Sat. 10:00 - 2:00

EVENINGS BY APPOINTMENT

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Scotia, New York 12302

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### IMPORTANT TOWN PHONE NUMBERS

Town Supervisor *Phil Barrett*.....371-6651  
 Town Board Members.....371-6651  
 Animal Control Officer.....371-6756  
 Town Attorney *Tom McCarthy*.....371-6651  
 Assessor *Walter Smead*.....371-6460  
 Building & Development Director  
*Steve Myers*.....371-6702  
 Building & Grounds Director  
*Mike Handerhan*.....371-6651  
 Town Clerk *Pat O'Donnell*.....371-6681

Town Court, 5 Municipal Plaza.....371-6668  
 Community Development Director  
*Barb McHugh*.....371-6651  
 Town Comptroller *Mark Heggen*.....371-6651  
 Storm Water Management Technician  
*Scott Reese*.....371-6054  
 Director of Communications & Tech  
*Dahn Bull*.....371-6651  
 Highway Superintendent  
*Rick Kukuk*.....371-7310

Parks and Recreation Director  
*Myla Kramer*.....371-6667  
 Planning Director *John Scavo*.....371-6054  
 Receiver of Taxes *Lorraine Varley*.....371-5720  
 Director of Safety and Security  
*Lou Pasquarel*.....348-7311  
 Town Security Officers.....369-6651  
 Sewer Director *Mike O'Brien*.....348-7313  
 Transfer Station Supervisor  
*Jeff Vedder*.....371-6669

If the person you wish to reach is not on the list above, please call 371-6651 to speak to a receptionist who will direct your call to the appropriate individual or department. The Town's office buildings are open from Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm, excluding holidays. The Town Clerk's Office is open until 7pm every Thursday. The Building and Parks and Recreation Departments are open at 8am Monday through Friday.



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