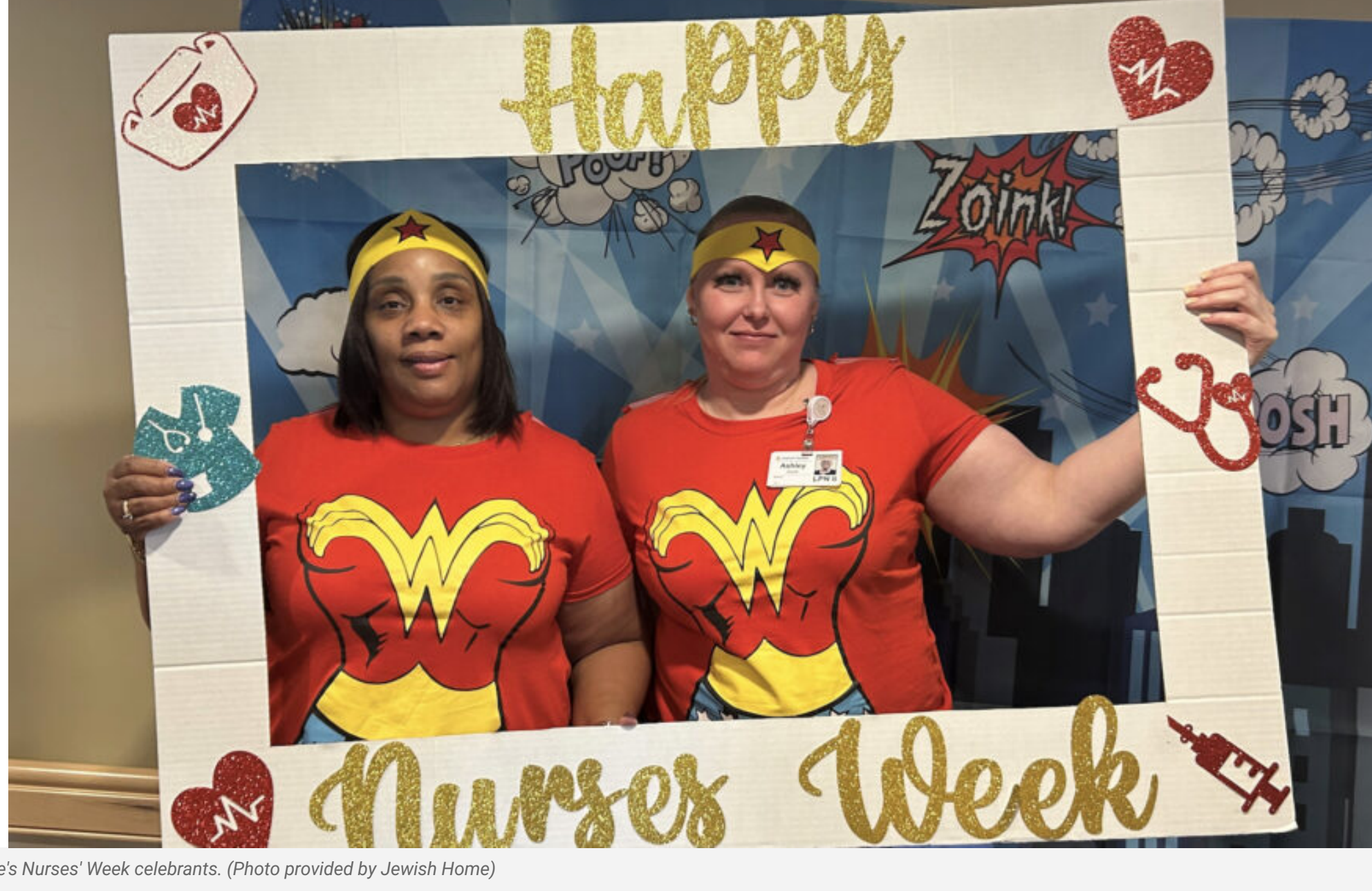


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Jewish Home's Nurses' Week celebrates. (Photo provided by Jewish Home)

Jewish Home and Episcopal SeniorLife advance staff training in Rochester

Caurie Putnam // April 8, 2026 // 6 Minute Read

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With more than seventy million Americans projected to be over age 65 by 2030, demand for senior living continues to grow at a record pace. We spoke with local industry leaders about how professional development is helping them support staff and care during a time of rapid change.



Christine Van Vessem

"Upskilling and education in senior living are not just professional benefits — they are strategic necessities," said Christine Van Vessem, senior vice president of human resources and quality at Jewish Home.



Whether short-term rehab or long-term care, older adults are also coming into senior living organizations with higher acuity needs and more chronic conditions, making it imperative that staff are trained to reduce adverse events, improve resident outcomes, and increase family trust, Van Vessem notes.

For example, Jackie Felker, vice president of nursing services at Jewish Home, led a strategic initiative to create an IV Center of Excellence, providing competency training for nurses to place and manage a peripheral catheter into a vein to administer medicine or fluids.

Since this initiative launched last year, fifteen nurses have completed the competency training, and because of this upskilling, forty-four patients/residents, to date, have been able to avoid hospitalization since their care could be managed at Jewish Home.

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"Jewish Home leadership has been elevating employee programs and resources over the last decade to ensure employees are providing the best care, as well as feeling empowered and supported," said Van Vessem, who notes the organization's workplace development programs range from entry-level on-the-job training to executive leadership coaching.

The roster of resources at Jewish Home includes tuition reimbursement, healthcare certifications, English-language lessons, and mental-health programs.

"The array of Jewish Home employee offerings is gathered collectively under the name Your Path Forward, and the resources have resulted in not only a supportive work culture but also strong staff recruitment and retention programs," Van Vessem said.

Van Vessem has seen Jewish Home's robust efforts in this area contribute to improved employee turnover rates, particularly first-year (12-month) turnover.

"Engaging and retaining the employee within the first 12 months of hire is a key focus for us," she said. "In the nursing department alone, we have reduced turnover of nurses and certified nursing assistants in the first year of hire by 25% between 2023 and 2025."

This decline is due, in part, to these intentional workforce development strategies for active and prospective Jewish Home employees, said Van Vessem, who notes learning and development are among the most effective retention and engagement strategies available, thereby leading to consistent staff caring for patients/residents.

At Episcopal SeniorLife Communities (ESLC), Michelle Halloran, vice president of human resources and organizational development, says upskilling and educational opportunities are essential because they ensure staff can meet the evolving needs and expectations of those they support with confidence and care.

"Healthcare, like the broader work environment, continues to change rapidly, particularly with the adoption of technology such as electronic medical records and advanced medical equipment," she said.

Halloran says teams must understand best practices and emerging trends and be well-versed in care models such as memory care and trauma-informed care. They must also be prepared to support a broad range of individuals, many of whom have complex clinical conditions.

"Ongoing learning opportunities, as well as consistent training, help staff stay current, deliver safe and personalized care, and enhance quality of life for those we serve," she said. "We are committed to providing the tools and resources that create meaningful pathways for career growth within long-term care as a way to attract and retain talent."

Michelle Halloran

ESLC offers a wide range of professional development opportunities designed to support both personal and career growth. Through partnerships with LeadingAge, the Finger Lakes Performing Provider System (FLPPS) and New York State Workforce programs, team members have access to workshops, online courses, mentoring and classes at local colleges.

"For example, staff participate in leadership programs at Monroe Community College and can pursue LPN or RN degrees with tuition reimbursement," Halloran said. "Attendance at conferences and seminars is also encouraged, helping bring new ideas and best practices into everyday work."

In addition, in 2024, ESLC launched its Empower Leadership Academy, designed to cultivate leadership skills, strengthen internal talent, and prepare team members for advancement opportunities.

The program, which focuses on the basics of management and soft skill development such as teambuilding, emotional intelligence, people management and effective communication, has graduated five cohorts and is preparing for its sixth to begin this month.

"We recognize that we are only as strong as our team members, and we focus on understanding what matters most to today's workforce while creating an environment that reflects our organizational values, quality service, and the priorities of the individuals who work here," Halloran said. "Our goal is to foster an empowered workforce."

The organization takes pride in offering a well-rounded compensation and benefits package, she said, while also creating a culture where team members feel valued, supported and a true sense of belonging.

"When individuals feel valued and supported, engagement grows and career development follows, ultimately strengthening both recruitment and retention," Halloran said. "We see the impact of these efforts reflected in long employee tenure, strong internal promotion rates, positive engagement survey results, and employee referrals for open positions. When people enjoy where they work, they naturally encourage others to join."

Ongoing education and training also ensure that team members are equipped with the most current knowledge, best practices, and specialized skills, allowing for the delivery of the highest level of care and service.

"Our investment in professional growth helps ensure that residents and participants are supported by highly capable, well-trained individuals who are prepared to meet their evolving needs and expectations," Halloran said. "When staff members feel confident, valued, and empowered, turnover is reduced, which supports continuity of care and service for residents and program participants."

Caurie Putnam is a Rochester-area freelance writer.

Tags: Jewish Home, Monroe Community College, Episcopal SeniorLife Communities, Leadership Academy, senior living, professional development

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