

The Suffolk Times.

Volunteers are priceless

Editorial 1/22/2026



Charlie Manwaring doesn't give back to the North Fork community for recognition. He does it to see the smiles on his neighbors' faces.

Nonetheless, his popular Lobster Bash during Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital's annual fishing tournament over the past eight years has helped raise \$600,000. The hospital recognized him for that service last week.

SBELIH needs more of that spirit right now. The hospital foundation is seeking volunteers to support its five major fundraising events throughout the year: the ELIH Foundation Golf Classic, the 5K Family Walk/Run, the Fall Fishing Showdown and the Dancing on the Dock and Summer Soiree galas. The golf outing alone requires about 20 volunteers for an all-day commitment. Multiply that across five events, and the need becomes urgent.

These aren't the Pink Ladies, the famous hospital auxiliary members who volunteer at the medical center itself. This is a separate call to action for people willing to work behind the scenes at fundraising events — the setup crews, the registration tables and the cleanup teams that make these efforts successful.

Linda Sweeney, vice president of foundation and external affairs at SBELIH, framed it perfectly: "Volunteers don't make any money, but they're priceless."

She's right. And here's why it matters. SBELIH is the reason North Fork families don't have to rush to Riverhead during emergencies. It's the reason a fishing crew doesn't lose half a day's work for stitches. It's the reason our elderly neighbors can age in place with medical care close to home.

The foundation's fundraising events help ensure that the hospital remains strong, equipped and ready to serve us. Without volunteers, those events struggle. Without those events, the foundation's ability to support the hospital weakens. Without that support, our community's medical safety net frays.

Even an hour of your time makes a difference. Not for recognition. Not for accolades. For the simple knowledge that you helped protect something our community cannot afford to lose.

Paul Connor, SBELIH's chief administrative officer, said it plainly: "We need more people like Charlie in our community to do things like this to support our hospital."

He's right. And that person could be you. To volunteer for SBELIH Foundation fundraising events, call 631-477-5164.