



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Heywood Healthcare

Danielle LaBarre

Director of Population Health and Strategic Communications

danielle.labarre@heywood.org | communityrelations@heywood.org

Heywood Hospital Celebrates Ribbon Cutting of New Helipad, Enhancing Critical Care Access

Gardner, MA - June 24th, 2026 - Heywood Hospital proudly marked a significant milestone today with the official ribbon cutting of its newly operational helipad, further strengthening its ability to deliver rapid, life-saving care to the community.

The helipad, now fully integrated into hospital operations, is already making an impact. Since becoming operational, four patients have been successfully transported via air to higher levels of care from Heywood, reducing critical transfer times and improving patient outcomes. This milestone follows eight months of planning and development to bring the project to completion. With this addition, Heywood Healthcare now has helipads in operation at both the Heywood Hospital and Athol Hospital campuses, further expanding access to emergency air transport across the region.

“This milestone is about people, not infrastructure,” said Rozanna Penney, President and CEO of Heywood Healthcare. “For more than 40 years, dedicated physicians, APPs, leaders, staff, board members, community leaders, and supporters have shared the vision of bringing this capability to Heywood Hospital. Every day, our teams provide exceptional emergency care close to home. When a patient needs services only available at a tertiary medical center, this helipad helps expedite access to that next level of care, where minutes can make all the difference. It also allows critical care transport teams to return to service more quickly, improving their ability to respond to the next emergency in our region. This is another important step in strengthening access to high-quality care for the communities we serve.”

The ribbon cutting ceremony featured remarks from key leaders and partners who played an essential role in bringing the project to completion, including Rozanna Penney, President and CEO of Heywood Healthcare, Shane Doherty, Vice President of Operations at Heywood Healthcare; and Nick North, Account Executive for Air Methods – UMass Memorial LIFE FLIGHT; and Patricia Pistone, AVP of External Affairs at UMass Memorial Health – HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital.



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The helipad project was the result of strong collaboration across departments and partners. Special recognition is extended to Robert Mackie (Security), Ross Weiner (Facilities), Shane Doherty (Operations), Dr. Wilson and Carol-Lynne Papa (Emergency Department), and Nick North from UMass Life Flight for their dedication and teamwork.

The addition of a second helipad builds on an already active air transport program. In 2025, Athol Hospital recorded 37 helicopter landings, including 14 occurring overnight, averaging approximately four per month. At Heywood Hospital, air transport volume is expected to be even higher, with an estimated 40 to 60 landings annually.

With helipads now operational at both Heywood and Athol Hospital campuses, Heywood Healthcare is better equipped to provide seamless, efficient care for critically ill patients, ensuring faster access to specialized services when every second counts.



From Left to Right: Kavita Babu, Rhonda Zbikowski, Ross Weiner, Carol-Lynn Papa, Dan Wilson, Nick North, Frank Sweeney, Shane Doherty, LifeFlight Crew, Patricia Pistone



Left to Right: Mayor Michael Nicholson, Rozanna Penney, Senator Peter Durant



Left to Right: Rozanna Penney, Mayor Michael Nicholson, Frank Sweeney



Life Flight Crew

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About Heywood Healthcare:

Heywood Healthcare is a non-profit, community-owned health system serving north central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. The system includes Heywood Hospital, a 134-bed acute care hospital in Gardner, MA; Athol Hospital, a 25-bed Critical Access hospital in Athol, MA; Heywood Medical Group; and multiple regional satellite facilities.

Heywood Hospital and Athol Hospital provide a full range of inpatient and outpatient services, including emergency care, surgery, imaging, rehabilitation, and specialty services. Heywood Medical Group, a non-profit physician organization with more than 75 providers, delivers primary and specialty care across a broad range of disciplines.

Together, the system provides coordinated, patient-centered care focused on expanding access and improving health outcomes across the region. Our mission is To be our region's first choice for quality, compassionate, patient-centered care.