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Harrisville, Lyons Falls pharmacies now taking back old pharmaceuticals

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HARRISVILLE — Two independent pharmacies in Lewis County will accept old prescription drugs for free through August as part of a drug take-back pilot program.

“I think it’s a great thing,” said Justin M. Besaw, owner of Bonaparte Pharmacy, 8210 Main St.

“We’re very happy with it,” added Brianna L. Flynn from Falls Pharmacy, 6805 McAlpine St., Lyons Falls.

The two Lewis County pharmacies — along with Garro Drugs in Utica and U&I Pharmacy in Vernon — now have collection receptacles for proper disposal of over-the-counter and prescription drugs through a six-month pilot program being administered by the Product Stewardship Institute and the New York Product Stewardship Council. Prepaid mail-back envelopes are also available to take home and mail out old medications for disposal.

“Pharmacies are the most convenient, accessible location for residents to safely dispose of their unwanted medications,” said Scott A. Cassel, chief executive officer and founder of Product Stewardship Institute, Boston, Mass.

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration for the past several years has organized drug take-back days. However, those all required a law enforcement presence, and many of the drop-off locations have been at police stations.

A law signed by the governor last fall directs the state Department of Health to oversee a drug disposal program at locations like pharmacies, long-term care facilities and narcotic treatment programs.

The pilot program here is being funded through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, and pharmacies had to modify their DEA registration to participate.

“Every year more than 1,000 people in New York State die from a drug overdose — most commonly from prescription drugs,” Jan M. Oatman, regional recycling coordinator of the Development Authority of the North Country, said in a statement. “Along with our Lewis County partner, we are honored to be working with an impressive coalition of pharmacies, local government agencies, non-profits and waste managers to offer this collection service and negate the environmental and health effects leftover drugs pose to our communities.”

More than \$1 billion in leftover drugs are flushed down drains, tossed in the trash or left in medicine cabinets each year, and improper disposal can lead to water contamination, the release states.

“Equally dangerous, drugs left in the home can find their way into the hands of children or potential addicts,” it adds.

Representatives at both of the local pharmacies said they have historically accepted old vitamins or pills they could legally dispose of, but this program expands that service. Old needles may not be put into the collection boxes, but drugstores accept them and periodically take them to local hospitals for proper disposal.

Mr. Besaw said he is excited about the new initiative, both as an added service to the community and, potentially, as a way to get more people through the door of his small business.

“It’s just another way to help clear out old medications,” Ms. Flynn said.

A guide detailing best practices for establishing and operating pharmacy-based medication collection programs in rural communities is to be produced following the trial. “We hope this will be a model for others around the state,” Mr. Cassel said.

Bonaparte Pharmacy is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and its telephone number is 537-5032. Falls Pharmacy is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, and its number is 348-8121.