As Love Rising celebrates its seventh year of bringing people together in mid-July to intentionally create more caring communities, this year's events invited participants to explore the theme of **hope**—how we choose it, nurture it together, and share it through acts of kindness and community.

Love Rising began in 2020 when a small group of volunteers from St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Burt sought a positive response to a season marked by the pandemic, social unrest, and deep social divisions. Rather than focusing on what separated people, organizers invited neighbors to spend part of July 15th reflecting on their place within the community and considering how they could contribute to a more peaceful and welcoming world.

What started as a single day of reflection has steadily grown into a community-wide movement. Over the years, Love Rising has explored themes such as building peaceful communities, creating belonging, promoting acts of kindness, and encouraging individuals to recognize needs around them and make a difference. Community conversations, sunrise services, children's events, neighborhood gatherings, service projects, and opportunities for personal reflection have all become part of the Love Rising experience. The organization has also expanded beyond the Newfane and Olcott communities, drawing participation from neighboring communities throughout Niagara and Erie Counties and partnering with congregations in Lewiston and Buffalo.

Pam Leibring of Burt, one of the original organizers, explains the ministry's mission: "At its most basic, Love Rising is about helping our neighbors recognize that we all play a part in creating a more caring community." She continues, "Hope isn't something we simply wait for. It grows through the choices we make every day—listening with respect, appreciating our differences, sharing our gifts, and caring for one another."

The 2026 Love Rising events began on Monday, July 6 at 7:30 p.m. with Love Rising: Community in Concert at Schulze Vineyards & Winery in Burt. Community musicians and singers presented an evening of music, reflection, and conversation built around the journey of hope. Through songs, inspirational readings, and opportunities for personal reflection and table conversation, participants explored what it means to choose hope, grow hope within community, and ultimately become people who share hope with others.

The celebration continued on Wednesday, July 15 at 8:00 a.m. with Rise in Love, a community morning service at Krull Park in Olcott, led by local faith leaders. Throughout the remainder of the day, individuals and families are encouraged to set aside time for reflection, meditation, and prayer, considering how they can bring hope and peace to their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

Love Rising's mission has remained unchanged since its beginning:
Intentionally creating caring communities
Through reflection and prayer...
Through opening our hearts and minds...
Through thoughtful conversations...
Through listening with respect...
Through appreciation of differences...
Through sharing our gifts...
Through acts of love and kindness...

As the mission statement concludes, **"Peace takes community."** That conviction continues to shape every Love Rising event, offering opportunities for people to connect, reflect, and discover that hope is something we create together. More information about Love Rising, its mission, and this year's events can be found at Love-Rising.org.