

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Pool's open in Corning?

We weren't surprised to hear last week that officials are considering closing at least one of the city's two pools.

The facilities at Denison and Stewart parks are in need of repairs and upgrades that are estimated to cost several million dollars to complete.

Officials say that's just too much, and we agree. There are other issues - such as our pothole-filled roads - requiring our attention and money.

It still stinks.

The locations are an affordable summer hang-out for families, and school groups and summer recreation programs also frequent the facilities. In 2015, about 8,600 residents used the 40-year-old pool in Denison Park.

Unfortunately, too little has been spent over the years on maintenance, and

now there are problems too big to ignore. The Denison pool's to-do list includes repairs to the base and decking, mechanical and filtering systems, water service and slide tower, at an estimated \$2.2 million.

So officials must now weigh their options. They're planning to hire an engineering firm to consider whether to fix or tear down the facilities. They are also reaching out to the school district and YMCA in hopes of working out a deal that would open their pools to the community.

We urge the city to do what it can to make sure a pool is open for its residents this summer, and that swimming continues to be affordable for all residents.

And if a city pool must close, we hope it isn't left to rot like the one in Painted Post's Craig Park. Tear it down, plant some grass. Put the site to good use.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Strangers help woman on journey

TO THE EDITOR | The kindness of strangers! On Jan. 21 I was delayed starting out to visit a friend at 3 Rivers. I had been to the facility once years ago and I thought I knew the location but got off track.

A very kind person had me follow her car and led me to my destination. Before I left, Emily, the receptionist, wrote out several steps to assist me getting back on 86 west. As I went to my car I was pleased it was still light out but quickly darkness descended.

I knew I needed to make a left onto 15 north, and as I tried to locate that entrance a car passed me and showed me the way.

These instances assisted me in having a safe, successful journey.

I am thankful and will attempt to make daytime trips ... at least familiar territory trips.

Carol Battaglia,
Hammondsport

TO THE EDITOR | Yogi was right: "It ain't over 'til it's over."

Yes, New York State courts have told the Village of Painted Post that it cannot sell Chemung Aquifer water to Pennsylvania gas frackers. Why? Because the village did not precede their decision with a proper environmental study of the results of that withdrawal. What is the effect on communities downstream? What impacts the village during transport? What are the limits of supply - both geologically and climatically?

Only rainfall and snow melt can maintain and replenish the aquifer. On these we depend. Let's see how seriously the village considers these conditions. And have a look at small democracy. Enjoy an evening of watching how it works, and while you're at it, be on guard that we don't lose our water resources like the city of Flint, Michigan, where inattentive citizens lost theirs.

The next inning begins at the Painted Post Village Hall, Monday, Feb. 8 at 7 p.m. See you there. Thanks for the reminder, Yogi.

Jean A. Wosinski,
Corning

WHAT FOLKS ARE SAYING ...

We've received several responses to recent posts on our Facebook page. Here are a few ...
Northside Blodgett's boiler

woes:

■ Just raise the taxes to pay for repairs on an empty building. Problem solved. - Chip Sonner

POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

A property tax crisis in waiting

"New York State as a whole relies heavily on volunteer fire departments. Of its 1,795 municipal fire departments, 89% are volunteer. Volunteer firefighters are most prevalent in smaller, suburban and rural communities that have a lesser tax base than larger towns and cities. That these communities rely on volunteers testifies to cost savings from volunteer departments, and conversion to paid departments would be a particular burden for these localities."

And so the warning continues. The above statement comes from a new economic impact study released last week by the Firemen's Association of New York State (FASNY). Among numerous findings, I find this one particularly alarming (and it's not new): it would cost local communities and local property taxpayers statewide more than \$3 billion to replace our volunteer fire departments with all-paid fire services. It's especially alarming here at home when viewed in the context of FASNY's statement that "volunteer firefighters are most prevalent in smaller, suburban and rural communities that have a lesser tax base than larger towns and cities."

In other words, the diminishment of our volunteer firefighter ranks (not to mention volunteer ambulance personnel) would be devastating to already overburdened local property taxpayers. While FASNY notes that federal SAFER grants and other efforts, including the organization's annual RecruitNY campaign (scheduled this year for April 23-24), have bolstered volunteer ranks statewide in recent years, the recruitment and retention challenge in many places remains a serious one. It's been a troubling trend for some time, one that I've joined together with area Assemblymen Phil Palmesano and Chris Friend to attempt to keep before the Legislature's attention.

Every year for as long I can recall in the Legislature, we've enjoyed occasions to honor our volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers for their service. Often it's a recognition of



TOM O'MARA

heroic, life-saving action. At other times, it's a nod to dedicated community outreach. We especially look forward to the chance to pay tribute to longevity - to salute those remarkable citizens who have given 40, 50, 60 and sometimes even more years of service to their volunteer departments and squads.

Yet as the years have gone by, opportunities to honor length of service have grown fewer and fewer. Always in the background, anytime we consider the importance of volunteer emergency services, is the fact of declining ranks. The number of volunteer firefighters statewide stood at around 140,000 in the early 1990s. Even with the recent boost noted by FASNY, that number stands at around 100,000 today. It's been reported that volunteer emergency medical technicians (EMTs) declined from more than 50,000 to 35,000 during the same period, with some rural counties experiencing as much as a 50-percent depletion of their EMT ranks.

That's alarming on many levels, not the least of which being the economic hit on local governments and property taxpayers.

I'll zero in on just one of the findings from the FASNY study, "Tax Savings and Economic Value of Volunteer Firefighters in New York." Replacing volunteer departments with all-paid squads would result in county property tax increases averaging 26.5% statewide. For regional counties, the increases would be much higher than the statewide average; Chemung (33.8%), Schuyler (36.1%), Steuben (40.3%), Tioga (48%), Tompkins (45.4%) and Yates (33.8%).

New York government faces stubborn economic and fiscal obstacles, as well as challenges in our schools, in maintaining local roads and bridges, and many more. But our long-term focus must include the recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency services personnel. There are factors outside of government's influence that contribute to declining ranks. But there are also actions that government can and should take to help reverse it. We've established tax breaks, tuition assistance programs, health insurance assistance and other incentives. The 2014-15 state budget included an important personal tax exemption for length of service award program (LOSAP) benefits - a long-time priority of FASNY and other advocates. Just a few examples.

This year, Assemblymen Palmesano and Friend have once again joined me

to reintroduce legislation (S.2780/A.4385), known as the "Omnibus Emergency Services Volunteer Incentive Act" that would offer a series of incentives, including a state income tax credit and the establishment of a college loan forgiveness program, to complement ongoing state-level efforts by FASNY and others to keep drawing attention to the volunteer recruitment and retention challenge.

The new FASNY study reaffirms the absolute importance of keeping our volunteer ranks as strong as possible. This legislation helps keep the challenge in front of the Legislature. Incentives aren't the only answer, but they can be an effective part of a broader response. The volunteer fire department has anchored so many of our communities for so long. We can't overlook the fact that many are at risk. It endangers the safety and security of cities, towns and villages throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide.

And as the FASNY report makes clear, it's a property tax crisis in waiting. You can read the full FASNY report online at: <http://www.fasny.com/EconomicStudy/>

- State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents New York's 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

OTHER VIEW | SACRAMENTO BEE

Another Super Bowl, another brain trauma casualty

It is ever harder to watch the Super Bowl without mixed feelings. This week, as football fans geared up for the high holy day of sports today, researchers at Boston University confirmed that the late, great NFL quarterback Ken Stabler was suffering from high Stage 3 chronic traumatic encephalopathy when he died in July.

Score one more for CTE, the degenerative brain disease increasingly linked with football. Few athletes were as charismatic as The Snake during his young, hell-raising years with the Oakland Raiders. And few men have endured a middle age as crippling.

His partner, Kim Bush, said on Wednesday that his 60s were a nightmare of memory loss, insomnia

and disorientation, with headaches so severe that he often spent whole days in silence. As he witnessed other retired athletes succumbing to dementia, depression and other neurological problems, he agreed to donate his brain to science; CTE, which is believed to arise from repetitive brain trauma, can only be diagnosed posthumously.

After Stabler died at 69 of complications from colon cancer, Ann McKee, a neuropathologist who has been among the leading researchers into the condition, immediately identified the telltale shrunken temporal lobe, small hippocampus, atrophy and shredded brain tissue.

With the diagnosis, Stabler joins more than 100 of his peers, including

more than a half-dozen Hall of Famers, who appear to have suffered from CTE, including Junior Seau, "Iron" Mike Webster and Frank Gifford. Bennet Omalu, a medical examiner and University of California at Davis professor whose work was the basis of the film "Concussion" has estimated that nine out of 10 NFL players have the affliction.

Though Stabler became increasingly private as his health degenerated, the news surprised no one who knew him. Like most pros, he had experienced football's occupational hazards for many years before football was his occupation. By the time he retired, had spent some 28 years being tackled, starting at age 9.

Omalu has questioned

whether there should be an age of consent for football, since the brain damage appears to worsen with the number of hits, and thus, the number of years of contact. Others believe the game needs to be changed at every level to limit trauma.

Of course, that's not what fans want to focus on now, and who can blame them? Football is thrilling, and it's hard to separate its mix of skill and violence and patriotism and marketing and nostalgia. Still, the casualties are mounting. Tuning them out won't be easy this weekend, as America waits for the kickoff and Stabler's survivors wait, shattered, for the cold comfort of possible admission to the Hall of Fame.

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