



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'MARA VISITS SOUTHEAST STEUBEN LIBRARY TO SEE STATE AID IN ACTION: Praises local libraries for public outreach and information throughout COVID-19 response

THOMAS F. O'MARA | October 28, 2020

| ISSUE: **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**



Our libraries and their staffs and volunteers have been remarkable lifelines helping to keep our communities together and moving forward. We can't thank them enough.

**Corning, N.Y., October 28**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today visited the Southeast Steuben County Library in Corning to get a firsthand look at some of the upgrades the library has accomplished with the assistance of state library construction grant

funding.

O'Mara also took the occasion to praise local public libraries throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions for their ongoing efforts and initiatives throughout the regional COVID-19 response.

**O'Mara, who in 2016 received the "Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award" from the New York Library Association (NYLA), said,** "A public library is a fundamental resource for area families, seniors, and countless other community residents. That point has been driven home like never before over the past eight months when throughout this COVID-19 response our public libraries have been centers of public outreach and information. Our libraries and their staffs and volunteers have been remarkable lifelines helping to keep our communities together and moving forward. We can't thank them enough."

**Southeast Steuben County Library Director Pauline Emery said,** "We appreciate the continued support for libraries demonstrated by Senator O'Mara, Assemblyman Palmesano, Assemblyman Friend and other supportive New York State legislators. The success of their efforts in restoring library construction aid is realized in improvements to libraries large and small throughout the Southern Tier."

Construction grants are awarded through the state's Construction Aid for Libraries Program, which received \$34 million in the 2019-20 state budget to allocate this year's awards – including a \$75,152.00 grant for the Southeast Steuben County Library to install new safety and security equipment that will eliminate hazards and improve building access and security. Through a previous grant, the library replaced its old HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) system with a new, energy-efficient, Variable Flow Heat Pump System with MERV 13 filtration and other health and safety advantages.

O'Mara, together with the region's Assembly representatives -- including Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, Assemblyman Chris Friend, Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes, and Assemblyman Joe Giglio -- have long been strong advocates for the Construction Aid for Libraries grant program.

**O'Mara said,** "We are always hopeful that these grants will help local libraries better afford and address their renovation needs. Public libraries, especially in many rural, upstate communities and regions, are New York's leading digital literacy educators, just one of many vital community roles our libraries fulfill. This role will expand in future years. These ongoing investments will help more and more of our public libraries stay ahead of the curve to continue meeting the increasing demand. It's an investment in education, economic growth, and quality communities."

According to the New York State Library, which administers the grants, surveys have estimated that the cost of public library construction and renovation needs statewide totals more than \$1.7 billion. More than 51% of the over 1,000 public library buildings across New York are over 60 years old. Another 33% are more than three decades old. Many of the state's local public libraries are unable to accommodate users with disabilities, and cannot provide Internet, computer, and other electronic technologies to users because of outdated and inadequate electrical wiring. They also do not have sufficient space to house the library's collection and lack sufficient space for public access computers.

The construction grants help libraries and library systems make renovations and upgrades, update electrical wiring to accommodate computer technology, renovate facilities to provide wheelchair accessible entrances and become fully accessible to persons with disabilities, and provide community meeting rooms.

In 2015, O'Mara, Friend and Palmesano sponsored a new law (Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2015) that, for the first time, included "installation and infrastructure of broadband services"

as a specific project category eligible to receive funding through the Library Construction Grant Program. Prior to the law's enactment, libraries were unable to access funding through the popular grant program specifically for broadband purposes including cable, wiring and modems, and network terminals and access points.