

# OPINION

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### OUR VIEW

## Grin & Groan

#### GRIN

The Schuyler County Humane Society cut the ribbon last week on its new \$1 million facility.

The bright, spacious animal shelter is located at 124 Marina Drive in Montour Falls. It replaces two small, cramped facilities located in Watkins Glen and Alpine.

Volunteer labor was critical to keeping construction costs down, shelter officials say.

We applaud the folks who donated their time to see this important project completed.

The abundance of natural light and much quieter environment will help alleviate the stress that dogs and cats experience in shelter life and make them more adoptable, officials say.

Also, the new shelter will be more welcoming to folks who found the previous locations too depressing and stayed away.

Please visit the shelter; and if you can't adopt, consider volunteering.

For more information, please visit [schuylerhumane.org](http://schuylerhumane.org).

#### GRIN/GROAN

The city of Corning quietly reached a deal recently on a contract with its largest employee union.

A five-year deal with the Civil Service Employee Association includes yearly salary increases for about 40 employees. Health insurance and pension costs remain unchanged.

Both sides seem happy with the deal, which was reached without the drama

we're seeing elsewhere.

For example, the village of Bath, where the officials and Police Benevolent Association are still unable to agree on a deal after several months of off-and-on negotiations to replace a contract that expired in May 2014. Both sides say staffing and salary disputes are holding up a deal.

The PBA recently hired a new negotiator. We're hoping the move results in a deal soon. The negotiations are costing taxpayers and creating bad blood between the village and its police force.

Not good for the residents of Bath.

#### GRIN

There was good news last week for Bath residents - and the area as a whole.

Officials are moving forward with their plans to upgrade the country fairgrounds — 0 located not far from the village business district.

They've hired consultants to study possible uses for the fairgrounds, which sit idle for most of the year.

A showplex - a type of event center - is one use eyed by officials that excites us. Events such as equine shows attract hundreds of visitors to other locations. Why not bring them to Bath?

Hotels, restaurants and other attractions would all see a major boost in business during the events, which often span a few days.

We join village officials in eagerly awaiting the results of the study.

### POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

## Size of state budget discourages public awareness of what's in it

The state's roughly \$142 billion budget consists of several volumes of documents, some of them the thickness of a big city telephone book. One consequence of the budget's size is that only a small sampling of its annual impact ever truly sees the light of day, at least as far as widespread public awareness is concerned.

That's understandable but it also leaves us with having to fill in the information gaps however we can. If you're interested in all of the budget's details, a link on my Senate website provides access to budget bills, briefing books and other analyses (click on "Get the Facts" in the left-hand column of the home page). And over the coming weeks — before we embark on what promise to be chock-full and controversial months at the Capitol — I'll highlight a few other key budget decisions including a stronger state commitment to local infrastructure, broadband development, environmental conservation and key economic sectors like agriculture.

Let's start with agriculture. Some good economic news came out of Steuben County's agricultural industry recently with the announcement that Crop Production Services, a leading fertilizer supply company, plans to undertake a \$5 million upgrade of its Cohocton facility. This expansion will preserve more than 20 local jobs, possibly create new jobs and keep the company from relocating. As noteworthy as anything else, it serves to highlight the importance of the ag industry to so



SEN. TOM O'MARA

many local economic sectors. That's exactly why the newly enacted state budget includes actions that can help keep our next generation of farmers competitive for the long haul.

In particular, the new budget continues important support for farmers and the agricultural industry across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide. We can't risk our farmers being taxed, regulated and priced out of business. With this goal in mind, I've joined my colleagues on the Senate Agriculture Committee over the past several years to advance what we call "Grown in New York," a comprehensive legislative strategy aimed at keeping New York State's leading industry competitive for the next generation.

Grown in NY, which we've updated (or replanted, so to speak) every year since 2013 has helped initiate critical new laws and programs, including new programs last year to provide start-up grants to beginning farmers and begin a college education loan forgiveness program. This year's budget includes additional provisions of the Senate's 2015 Grown in NY initiative and will also:

- Expand an existing exemption from the state sales and use tax currently provided to wineries at tastings to include the beer, cider and spirits industries;

- Allow petroleum business tax refunds for farm use of highway diesel motor fuel;

- Provide additional support for school-based agricultural education, including Future Farmers of America;

- Increase funding for the New York Wine and Grape Foundation;

- Increase funding for a critical farm safety program, the Tractor Rollover Prevention Program;

- Initiate a statewide expansion of Cornell Cooperative Extension's successful Harvest NY program to increase access to locally grown foods;

- Create up to five local transportation cooperatives where farmers can arrange to move their products to New York City and other major metropolitan areas; and

- Expand the United States Department of Agriculture's "Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program" to reach more senior consumers across the state.

We're hopeful that we can enact even more pieces of our Grown in NY strategy this session.

#### Two final notes:

Note 1: The budget also includes \$30 million of targeted assistance for farmers in 11 counties across the Southern Tier, including Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Tompkins counties. The new "Southern Tier On-Farm Enhancement Program" will allow eligible farmers to apply for state grants to help cover the costs of on-farm construction projects including barns, silos, fencing, greenhouses or

processing facilities. The renovation of existing facilities and environmental enhancements, such as irrigation and drainage, will also be permitted.

Note 2: A new law enacted last year highlighted the potential value of broadband to state farmers and authorized a study on the economic and environmental benefits of "precision agriculture systems." It's been shown that farmers utilizing this evolving technology — which, of course, requires broadband-based, global positioning services — improve efficiency, cut costs, potentially lower prices for consumers, enhance food safety and protect the environment. This year's budget provides funding to undertake a state-level report on precision agriculture, including making recommendations on implementing it — a move which, as I'll explore in a later column, could also be addressed as part of the "universal broadband" initiative approved in this budget.

The farther we move into the 21st century will bring increasingly compelling reasons to close the digital divide — particularly in rural, Upstate New York so that citizens of these communities, including farmers, can access a broadband and telecommunications infrastructure that's second to none.

—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.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Volunteers drive IHS program

National Volunteer Week is April 12-18, and The Institute for Human Services, Inc. would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteer drivers who support our Steuben Coordinated Transportation program.

These dedicated volunteers provide transportation throughout Steuben County and beyond for a variety of clients. They make it possible for those without transportation to access medical care at area doctors, dentists, clinics and hospitals. These volunteers also help people with food-related trips to grocery stores and food pantries, as well as initial trips to human service agencies to access benefit programs.

Our rural location in beautiful Steuben County can mean hardship for residents who do not have

vehicles or access to public transportation. The Steuben Coordinated Transportation volunteer drivers give generously of their time and personal vehicles to ensure that people in need of transportation are able to access essential services. They provide safe, accessible transportation with courtesy and friendliness.

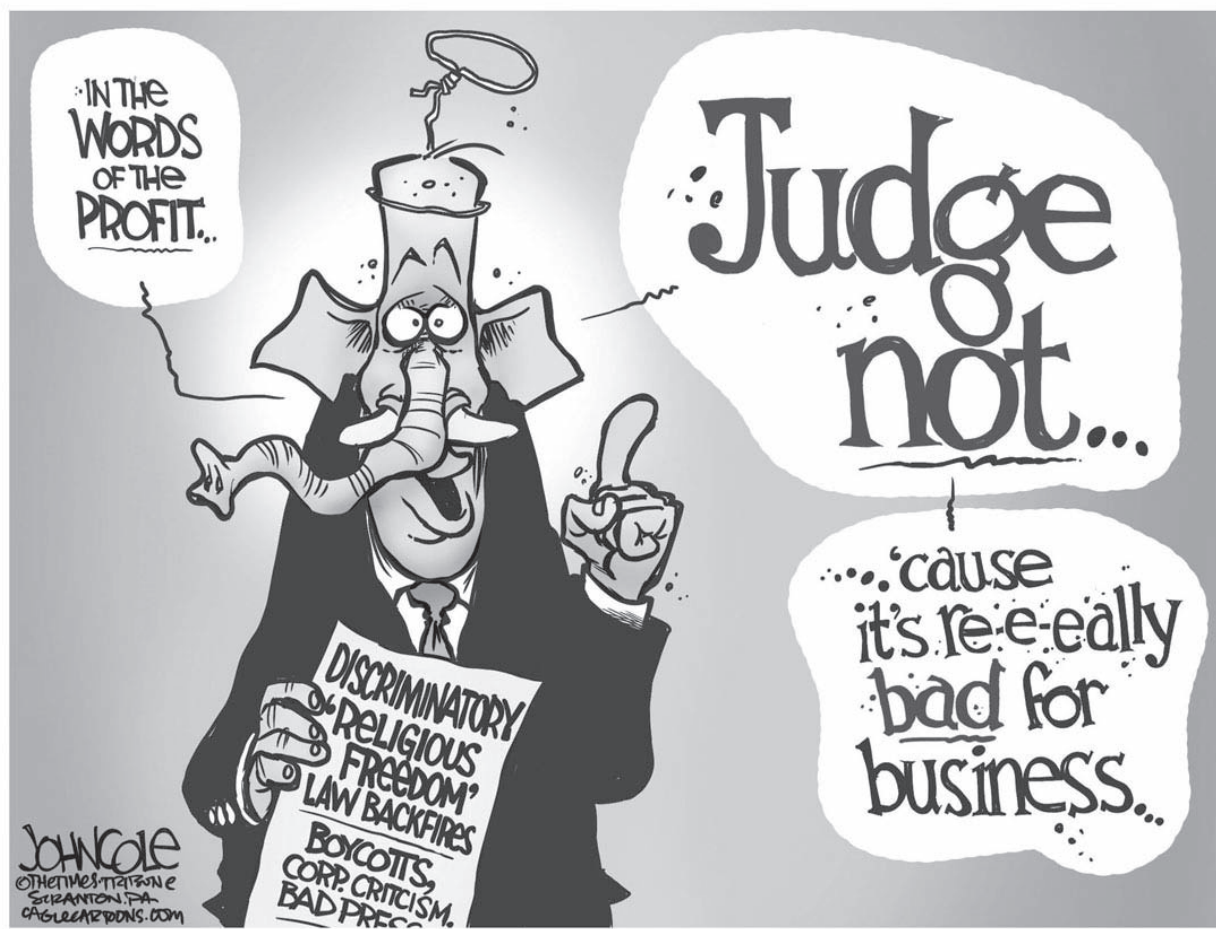
Our volunteer drivers exemplify the theme for National Volunteer Week — "Celebrate Service." These individuals do not seek recognition. They simply want to make a difference.

We extend our sincere thanks to those individuals who are taking action and working to solve significant problems in our community.

#### Allison Pierce

Director, Steuben Coordinated Transportation-Volunteer Program, Institute for Human Services Inc.

### ANOTHER VIEW



### WHAT FOLKS ARE SAYING

**Facebook:** We received several responses to recent posts on our Facebook page. Here are a few:

Chamber and the instructors for making this happen!"

nothing changed but the name of the place."

is it in Painted Post?"

#### Young entrepreneurs pitch business ideas to investors:

**Chemung Canal Trust Company:** "Congratulations to all the students, and thanks to the Corning

#### Kwik Fill buys Erwin Brownies:

**Thomas Halstead:** "Good now we have American gas closer."

**George Tuma III:** "Went there today for lunch. Same pizza and subs. A girl stocking the cooler told me

#### New ice cream shop opens in Painted Post:

**Danielle Lisa:** "And within walking distance of my house. So excited! Can't wait for summer to get here."

**Lynn Creeley:** "I have to admit I clapped my hands when I saw this post. Where

**Ed. note |** It's just down the road from the middle school.

— We welcome readers to comment on our Facebook page. But remember, kindness matters. No swearing, bullying or abusive language will be tolerated. Thank you!

## The LEADER

The Leader (ISSN #10501983)  
 The Leader is published daily at  
 34 West Pulteney Street, Corning,  
 New York 14830

by Liberty Group Corning  
 Holdings, Inc. Periodical postage  
 paid at Corning, N.Y. 14830-0817.  
 USPS code | 0586-160

Postmaster:  
 Send address changes to  
 The Leader, West Pulteney Street,  
 Corning, New York 14830

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#### Postal rates

**Steuben County**  
 One month \$33.50  
 Three months \$100.50  
 Six months \$201.00  
 One year \$402.00

#### ELSEWHERE IN USA

One month \$43.00  
 Three months \$129.00  
 Six months \$258.00  
 One year \$516.00

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