

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Developing a workforce, and some new thinking

It was nearly eight years ago when Corning Community College's Academic and Workforce Development Center opened its doors in Elmira and was hailed as an investment that would pay dividends for years to come.

It sure has made a difference for many area workers, and it's still going strong. Recently, in early March, CCC unveiled its long-awaited welding center and college President Kate Douglas said, "As we look around upstate New York, Chemung County is the strongest in advanced manufacturing. In order to support an aging workforce, we need to have folks prepared, skilled and ready to go into those jobs that are opening up."

President Douglas captured, I believe, a critical focus of future educational training, economic development and government policymaking at every level. She was referring to predictions from the state Labor Department identifying welding as a high-demand occupation in the Southern Tier, one that could see a five-percent growth rate over the next several years. She pinpointed a vision that was a driving force behind creating the welding technology program in the first place and, quite simply, will serve as an increasingly important model for the future: educators, business leaders and government officials working together to envision an economic future.

And there's no more important piece of that



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future than a high quality workforce.

That's far from a new idea, of course, and this welding initiative is not the first effort locally that stands out. From the previously mentioned Academic and Workforce Development Center in Elmira to the Hornell Chamber of Commerce's CSS Workforce NY program, and from the Leadership Schuyler Program to STEM education underway in so many area schools, this region has been well served in this arena.

But the welding center is the most recently exciting initiative. It's a high-energy hub of economic activity and training at a time when we really need it. Beyond the project's obvious benefits — workers employed, future jobs and other economic opportunities created — it can also help us send a message back to New York's leaders in Albany about the need to refocus the state's job training and workforce development strategies.

That's also the goal behind a new state Senate Task Force on Workforce Development that I'll be serving on as a member. The key question becomes: Are we doing enough in New York State to assist, develop and

encourage locally centered workforce development action plans? Our new task force will attempt to answer that question and many others. We're hoping to pull together a comprehensive, focused picture of how New York's trying to address the challenge and of how it can be done more effectively.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 5 million job openings nationwide as of January 2015. Yet many of these jobs are likely to continue to go unfilled due to an ongoing skills gap and an aging workforce.

The Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester detailed last April how 23,000 jobs in Monroe County in 2013 were unfilled, including many that remained persistently open because of the lack of a "middle skilled" workforce in the region qualified for health care, tech, manufacturing and other skilled labor, like welding and mechanics.

The new Senate task force plans to solicit input from leaders in business, education, and state and local governments, as well as other workforce experts to develop a better process to connect workers with regional employment needs. Having said that, late last week CCC announced a difficult decision to close its child care center at the end of May, a decision which highlights yet another challenge facing workforce development in today's economy: the need for accessible, affordable and high quality child

care services. It points to the complexity of this workforce development challenge, and the range of issues that the task force will be looking at.

And potentially as important as anything else is the need for public decision makers to better embrace an emerging mindset, a mindset expressed by Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli at the welding center's recent unveiling ceremony, "If we don't rise to the occasion and tell everybody there is life other than college, that there is life in manufacturing in our community where you can make good money, if we don't do it, those very businesses that we cherish will be forced to leave."

So it's a common sense challenge in many respects. We need good jobs to employ our workers and keep them here, but that goes hand in hand with taking steps to ensure that we have the workers to attract and maintain the jobs and industries. We've long made a strong case about the need for job-creating tax cuts and regulatory reforms, but maybe not enough's been said about the importance of job retraining and other opportunities to develop specific workforce skills for the economies of the future.

— 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.

OBITUARIES

Marion E. Stenger French

Hammondsport, NY — Marion E. Stenger French, 88, of 58 Main Street (formerly of Buffalo, NY) passed away Wednesday, March 25, 2015 at Ira Davenport Hospital, Bath, NY.

She was born March 16, 1927 in Buffalo, NY, the daughter of John J. Stenger and Margaret "Toots" Flynn Stenger.

Marion was a retired teacher of 39 years at Hammondsport Central School. Her passion was teaching and had fond memories of all her students. She graduated from Buffalo State Teachers College, Buffalo, NY and earned a Masters Degree from State University of NY at Geneseo.

Surviving are her daughter Patricia French of Canandaigua, NY, sons Michael (Sheridan) French of Rancho Cucamonga, California and Glenn (Robin) French of Hammondsport, brother Joseph Stenger of Cheektowaga, Brother Henry Pauly of Texas, sister-in-law Janet Stenger of Buffalo; Lillian Para, caregiver; Christie Heinrichsen, Jillian Hamm and Cory Lennon; eight great grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

Marion was predeceased by her husband, John and her parents John J. Stenger and Margaret "Toots" Flynn Stenger; and her brother John Stenger.

Calling hours will be Tuesday, 3/31/15 from 3-6 PM at the LaMarche Funeral Home, 35 Main Street, Hammondsport, NY. A Mass of Christian burial will be held Wednesday, 4/1/15 at 1 PM at St. Gabriels Church, 78 Shethar Street, Hammondsport, NY.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Hammondsport Volunteer Ambulance Service and/or Hammondsport Fire Department.

Virginia E. Bliss

Virginia E. (Ford) Bliss, 87, passed away on Friday, (March 27, 2015) at Homestead Manor in Penn Yan, NY after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's disease.

Virginia was born in Painted Post, NY on February 4, 1928, the daughter of Carlton E. and Mary A. (Audinwood) Ford.

On June 30, 1951, Virginia married Earl D. Bliss at the First Baptist Church of Addison.

Earl preceded her in

death on May 17, 2009. She was also predeceased by her daughter, Melody Rae Shupe, her son in law, Harry Shupe and her brother, William L. Ford. She graduated from the State University of New York at Fredonia with a degree in music education. She served the Jasper-Troupsburg Central School District as music teacher and band director from 1950 into the 1970s.

A very talented musician, Virginia's love affair with music continued beyond the reaches of her teaching career. Whether playing the piano and organ at her local church, playing the trombone in a community band or participating in a fundraising effort to build a park bandstand, Virginia loved music.

An avid scrapbooker, Virginia enjoyed chronicling the people and events of the Jasper Troupsburg area in scrapbooks she generously donated to the Jasper Historical Society's Wigwam Museum. Additionally, she was a proud member and officer of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) — Pennsylvania chapter.

She is survived by her grandson, Alexander Glenn Shupe, of Georgia, her nephews, Gary Ford (Lynn Myfelt) of Painted Post and Larry (Pat) Ford of Charlotte, NC, her niece, Betty (Mike) DelGrosso of Painted Post, her brothers in law and sisters in law, Arling and Jeanine Bliss, Melvin and Rose Bliss, Alan and Kathleen Bliss, Betty Wheaton, Audrey and Michael Stepanian, Judy and Joseph Ridgway, Bonnie and Dennis Cady, Eileen Bliss, Dolores Bliss and Dorothy Bliss and many Bliss nieces and nephews, special family friend, Luz Esther (Tety) Castellanos of Guatemala and former students.

Calling hours will take place on Tuesday, March 31, 2015 from 2 to 4 PM at the H.P. Smith & Son Inc. Funeral Home, 1607 Main St. Woodhull, NY. A funeral service in celebration of Virginia's life will take place at the funeral home immediately following calling hours.

Burial will be in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Troupsburg.

Memorials may be made to the Jasper Troupsburg Central School music department or the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

On line condolences and memories may be shared at www.hpsmithandsonfuneralhome.com.

DEATH NOTICES

Marguerite Yorio

Marguerite Yorio, 91, of Weedsport and formerly of Corning, died Wednesday, March 25, 2015 at Auburn Hospital.

Calling hours are from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday at Carpenter's Funeral Home, 14 E. Pulteney St., Corning, with the funeral service to immediately follow at the funeral home. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery in Corning.

Genevieve Mary Gronski

Genevieve Mary Gronski, 92, of Corning, died Friday, March 27, 2015 at Guthrie Corning Hospital.

Calling hours are 4-7

p.m. Monday at Haughey Funeral Home, 216 E. First St., Corning. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 222 Dodge Ave., Corning. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery in Corning.

Walter E. Duvall

Walter E. Duvall, 72, of Horseheads, died Friday, March 27, 2015 at Arnot Ogden Medical Center in Elmira.

The family will welcome relatives and friends to Walt's graveside service at 11 a.m. Wednesday at Ashland Cemetery in Wellsburg.

Arrangements are by Sullivan's Funeral Home in Horseheads.

STATE BRIEF

7 injured in apartment fire

NEW YORK — The fire department says a fast-moving blaze in a Brooklyn apartment injured seven people, including three critically. FDNY said the blaze broke out at about 9:15 a.m. Saturday. The victims,

including at least one child, were taken to a hospital. The blaze was brought under control about 9:40 a.m. The cause was under investigation. Officials said one person was in serious condition and three others had minor injuries.

— The Associated Press

NATION EXTRA

Attorneys: Sterilizations were part of plea deal talks

By Sheila Burke
The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Nashville prosecutors have made sterilization of women part of plea negotiations at least four times in the past five years, and the district attorney has banned his staff from using the invasive

surgery as a bargaining chip after the latest case.

In the most recent case, first reported by The Tennessean, a woman with a 20-year history of mental illness had been charged with neglect after her 5-day-old baby mysteriously died. Her defense attorney says the prosecutor assigned to

the case wouldn't go forward with a plea deal to keep the woman out of prison unless she had the surgery.

Defense attorneys say there have been at least three similar cases in the past five years, suggesting the practice may not be as rare as people think and may happen more often outside

the public view and without the blessing of a court.

Sterilization coerced by the legal system evokes a dark time in America, when minorities, the poor and those deemed mentally unfit or "deficient" were forced to undergo medical procedures that prevented them from having children.

SCHLECHTER

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be backed by the Governor's billionaire hedge fund supporters, but that have not been shown to have any educational merit and, in many cases, have nothing to do with schools in the Southern Tier.

It is important for Albany politicians to ask how to best allocate educational resources based upon the needs of students and the financial capacity of taxpayers. They must also ask how State funding for education can best be used to help as many students as possible in the most cost effective way and how the education budget can make our communities stronger. Instead, the Governor dangles an inadequate aid increase in front of our public school students, while telling them that unless all of his policies are accepted, the money will be taken away. He has chosen to hold our

public school students hostage to force the implementation of policies with no proven value to anyone, especially students. This is petty politics at their worst. The Governor is playing games with our tax dollars and he is harming our students.

He is also leading an unwarranted and unprovoked verbal attack on our public schools and our teachers.

The Governor suggests that our entire public school system is broken, with teachers to blame, but even a report recently issued by his own office stated that only less than 4% of the schools in this State are considered "failing" (based primarily on the results of standardized tests). He continually argues that more funding is unnecessary because New York already spends more money per pupil than any other state, but a research report from the Education Law Center found New York's method of funding schools to be among the most regressive

in the nation, as the State aid formula fails miserably to close the considerable gap between rich and poor school districts.

It is unacceptable for any student to not receive a quality education and responsible reforms are needed.

But placing the blame for poor student performance solely on teachers does nothing except provide political cover for the Governor and his supporters so they can continue to dismantle public education, strip away local control, and ignore the true issues affecting the delivery of quality education to all: poverty and income inequality.

Public schools are not monopolies that need to be broken, but are vital community institutions that take on the collective responsibility of educating our children. Those who challenge the Governor's policies and who offer well reasoned responses to his proposals are not pawns of the teachers' unions but informed citizens

concerned about our children's education.

It is time for all Southern Tier residents, who care about their communities, their schools and their tax dollars, to contact their Governor and their legislators. We must insist that Albany rescind the GEA and fund our schools at a reasonable rate without subjecting our students to a litany of untested proposals that do nothing to provide opportunities for the next generation of citizens.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Bath CSD Legislative Action Committee.

—Mark Schlechter is a member of the Bath Central School District Board of Education and chairperson of the district's Legislative Action Committee, a voluntary group of concerned parents, students, teachers, administrators and school board members dedicated to improving and expanding educational opportunities and protecting the needs of students in district.