

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

# All hands on deck to fight heroin scourge

“I never thought in my 23 years I would be standing in front of our community talking about heroin. But it's here in the community ... It is on the rise, cheap, addictive and deadly. You don't really have to say more than that.”



TOM O'MARA

That was the warning from Yates County Sheriff Ron Spike at a “Community Leadership Forum on Heroin Prevention” in Penn Yan on the last day of September. More than 100 residents turned out to hear from law enforcement officials, former addicts and others.

The Yates County event was one of several recent efforts locally to highlight the drug issue, including an anti-heroin discussion on September 24 in Corning sponsored by Alfred State College.

In mid-September, there was a Town Hall on the illegal drug problem in Hornell. The Steuben County Prevention Coalition conducted an anti-meth workshop last

week (and, as I've stressed time after time in this column, we can't forget that meth has been and remains a serious threat. Further evidence of that comes from the latest State Police warning to regional highway departments, first responders and the public at large that the remnants of illegal meth labs are being discarded along area roadsides and other open spaces).

And we've recently seen the impact of other initiatives to heighten public awareness of drug-related activity in our neighborhoods and townships, such as the Steuben County Drug Tip Line (1-844-DRUG-TIP [1-844-378-4847], or go to [www.844drugtip.com](http://www.844drugtip.com)) that has led to multiple arrests.

It's this constant, steady drumbeat of public awareness, education and participation that's going to make all the difference in this ongoing battle against illegal drugs and drug trafficking, and addiction. That's the driving force, as well, behind the state's recently started “Combat Heroin” campaign to help better educate and inform the public.

This new, statewide anti-heroin campaign was called for as part of a series of heroin- and opioid-related laws approved by the Legislature and the governor earlier this year in response to the growing heroin crisis across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide. The new initiatives, 11 in all, were signed into law in late June and culminated a bipartisan legislative effort started in early April by the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, on which I serve as a member. We're hopeful that heightened public information will

help keep more and more young people away from these devastating and deadly drugs – and we're going to keep working together on this comprehensive effort to save lives, keep communities safer and prevent more heroin- and opioid-related tragedies regionally, as well as across the state.

In fact – signaling the great and growing concern surrounding heroin – the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New Jersey have just announced that they'll be working together to stop heroin trafficking across state lines. Other Northeastern and mid-Atlantic states are expected to soon join this coalition.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane said, “The drug dealers don't stop at the state border, and with this partnership, neither will law enforcement.”

Our new “Combat Heroin” campaign includes a website (<http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov>) providing valuable information, including the

warning signs of addiction, prevention tips, and information on how to get help. The website, which you can also access through a link on my Senate website, <http://www.omara.nysenate.gov>, is complemented by a media campaign, including public service announcements delivering the message that “addiction can happen to anyone, any family, at any time.”

Or as Sheriff Spike recently put it, “[Heroin addiction] cuts across the whole spectrum of society. If it doesn't go checked, it will turn into an epidemic.”

Putting a stop to this epidemic remains the goal of the Senate Task Force on Heroin, which held nearly 20 public forums this year, including one I sponsored at Elmira College. We solicited more than 50 hours of testimony about the range of complex challenges posed by heroin including addiction prevention and treatment options, drug-related crimes, and other community and public safety impacts. The

point is that heroin is being met head on, collectively, by an ever-growing and powerful coalition of law enforcement, media, educators, government leaders, social services and health professionals and other experts – together with the parents and friends of victims, and recovering addicts themselves.

At the recent anti-heroin meeting in Yates County, Penn Yan Academy graduate and former NFL running back Tony Collins delivered a strong message. “We have to get our kids thinking the right things and saying the right things, because then they are going to start doing the right things. We are going to make this happen. We are going to stop this. I truly believe it, but it's going to take everybody to do it.”

He's right.  
*State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.*

## EBOLA

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to the United States, and nearly 95 percent of them land first at one of the five airports.

Passengers arriving at Kennedy said the process of taking people aside for screening was orderly.

“They asked us a few questions, if we had been

sick in the past few days,” said 14-year-old Johnson Nellon, who flew from Liberia with his 17-year-old brother.

One man said his temperature was taken even though his country, Niger, does not have an Ebola outbreak. “They checked everything and everything was fine,” Moussa Halidou said.

## SENATE

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before the election. “Campaigns matter. They educate voters. They move voters,” he said.

It's a simple math, requiring 32 out of 63 senators. But the formula is complicated by the odd shapes of senate districts, shifting loyalties, personal ambitions

and money for persuasive campaign ads. The backdrop includes nearly 5.9 million registered Democratic voters, mainly concentrated downstate, and 2.8 million Republicans.

On one side is the Democrats' minimum wage push, abortion rights, public financing of political campaigns and college tuition assistance for students in the U.S. illegally.

## RECOVERY

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a news conference that the IMF has made \$130 million available to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and that the IMF and other international agencies stood ready to do more.

“If more is needed, it will be there,” Lagarde said.

The IMF and World Bank meetings were preceded by talks among finance ministers and central bank presidents of the Group of 20 nations, which comprise 85 percent of the global economy. Those discussions focused on the recent growth slowdown and troubling signs that some countries in Europe could be close to another recession.

## HUNTERS

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started by drawing about 2,000 people and has grown steadily each year.

“We draw people from the entire Finger Lakes area and northern Pennsylvania,” Dawejko said.

The Southern Tier Outdoor Show offers vendors, exhibits, demonstrations, wildlife shows, seminars and children's activities. The entry fee is just \$5 per car each day, which includes parking, shows, seminars and a program listing the weekend's lineup of events and vendor information.

Today's highlights include the Bwana Jim Wildlife Show, a presentation on bald eagle restoration by John Adamski of the Finger Lakes Museum, who will



Aaron and Steve Gould entertained the crowd with shooting tricks at the Southern Tier Outdoor Show. ERIC WENSEL/THE LEADER

have the museum's two rehabilitation eagles, and Gould Brothers Exhibition Shooting, featuring shooting demos by brothers Steve and Aaron Gould.

“This show is everything you look for at an outdoor show,” said Ben

Bleden, who along with his brother Luke give an ice fishing demonstration. The Minnesota brothers are members of the USA Ice Team. “I love coming to these shows, because different areas have different ways of fishing.”

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