

# OPINION

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### GUEST VIEW | STEUBEN PREVENTION COALITION

## Communication crucial with kids

As our students head back to school, we'd like to urge parents to develop open lines of communication with their children, particularly with regard to risky behaviors. Young people are much less likely to use drugs, alcohol or tobacco if parents talk to them openly, early and often about the risks involved.

One popular misconception among parents is that their children are not at risk for alcohol or drug use. In 2014, the Steuben Prevention Coalition polled 2,278 students across 9 school districts in Steuben County. The survey showed that by 10th grade, 55.8% of students had used alcohol in their lifetime; 25.9% had used marijuana; and 27.8% had smoked cigarettes. The problem is real and it is here.

A great deal of misinformation has accompanied the recent limited legalization of medical marijuana in certain states.

Many people hold the misconception that marijuana use is harmless, with no lasting effects. The truth is that few young people use any other illegal drugs without first using marijuana (The Parent Handbook, [www.operationparent.org](http://www.operationparent.org)).

Marijuana affects memory, judgment and perception. It leads to physical addiction. Marijuana's impact on memory and learning can last for weeks after ingestion. Reaction time for motor skills (driving, e.g.) is reduced by 41% after smoking one joint and by 63% after two joints. Kids who use marijuana commonly have problems with school work, declining grades, absenteeism, mood changes and withdrawal from activities.

Alcohol, like marijuana, is anything but harmless. And high school sophomores in Steuben County use alcohol in their lifetime at a rate 3% higher than the national average. More kids in our country are killed by alcohol than by all other drugs combined. It affects every organ in the body. If used during adolescence, alcohol can change brain development forever. And children who start drinking before age 15

are 500% more likely to become alcoholics than those who wait until turning 21.

Another important consideration for parents in Steuben County is our Social Host law, which prohibits the consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs by minors on private property. Many parents mistakenly believe that hosting a party at their home provides a safe, controlled environment. In truth, it sends a message that it's okay to drink. Adults who serve minors now face jail time, stiff fines and mandated drug-awareness programs. In Steuben County, it is NEVER legal for any adult to provide alcohol to someone else's child even with the permission of that child's parent.

As shocking as it sounds, our kids are experimenting with drugs and alcohol as early as the 4th grade. With the average time it takes parents to discover a child's drug habit at 2 years, children can easily become addicts before reaching high school. Don't wait. Talk to your kids now about the risks of alcohol and drug use. Here are some tips for building open lines of communication:

- Explain to them that their brain is still developing. Drugs and alcohol can impact that development.
  - Set clear rules about drug, tobacco and alcohol use.
  - Praise them for positive behavior, often and specifically.
  - Ask open-ended questions.
  - Condemn unwanted behavior, not your child.
  - Don't make light of their feelings.
  - Use "I" statements, such as "I worry when..."
  - Make a plan for your child to be able to reach out to you, worry-free, if they ever need you to rescue them from a dangerous or risky situation.
- For more information about the Steuben Prevention Coalition or to join the prevention effort in Steuben County, contact Program Coordinator Norm McCumiskey at 776-6441, Ext. 208, or [nmccumiskey@dor.org](mailto:nmccumiskey@dor.org); or Assistant Program Coordinator Kira Johnson at 776-6441, Ext. 202, or [kjohnson@dor.org](mailto:kjohnson@dor.org).

### POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

## The work of being prepared

September is National Preparedness Month, which offers an especially timely reminder following this past weekend's local, state and national observances of the 14th anniversary of September 11th - the singular tragedy in recent American history which remains the most powerful reminder of the fundamental need for preparedness but, most importantly, the overriding importance of our first responders.

One prominent local observance took place last Friday in Gang Mills in Steuben County with the unveiling of the Tri-County First Responders Honor Park honoring firefighters, police, medical personnel and rescue personnel and teams. The new, long-awaited park's lead sponsor, Don Creath of the Corning Rotary Club, recently wrote of it, "These are the persons who rush into emergency situations to save life, limb and property from harm. While this park will honor and remember fallen heroes, it will mainly honor all those who have ever served, especially those still serving."

Well said, and timely. As a nation over the past 14 years — and forever moving forward — we will never forget the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. This ongoing process of never forgetting was renewed this past weekend at many local observances, like the one in Gang Mills, and at ceremonies across the state and nation. Whether quietly



TOM O'MARA

walking a "Healing Field," visiting a remembrance exhibit or museum, or in many other places and ways, we remember that American decency, American generosity, and American fortitude cannot be overcome.

But above all we recall the response from volunteers, work crews, and emergency personnel who prove, time after time, that when disaster strikes so many stand ready and willing to help. National Guard units. Local Red Cross volunteers and DOT workers. Local firefighters. The Bath Volunteer Fire Department's Swift Water Rescue team. The list goes on and on.

To this very day, while 9/11 evokes such a range of emotions, one of the most powerful of all remains this one: we are Americans and in the toughest of times, we will stand together in aid, in comfort, and in resolve.

So National Preparedness Month serves to remind us that disasters and emergencies can strike in many different ways, and at any moment.

In fact, that's the driving force behind the state-sponsored effort, at locations across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions and statewide, known as the

"Citizen Preparedness Corps Training Program." The state launched the initiative early last year with the goal of training 100,000 New Yorkers "to be first responders in their own homes and in their communities."

From flash flooding and other natural disasters, to everyday emergencies and accidents, the importance of citizen preparedness is critical. Our entire region has been hard hit over the past several years following Hurricane Irene and other severe storms, floods and emergencies. As a result, this emergency preparedness and response initiative has been welcomed and worthwhile in many places.

Likewise with other ongoing state efforts, such as the recent announcement that Steuben County is among 17 counties statewide recently selected to share \$50 million in state funding to help enhance and support local emergency communications systems. Localities are being awarded up to \$3.5 million (Steuben's slated to receive nearly \$3 million) to undertake infrastructure, equipment and technology upgrades through the Statewide Interoperable Communications Grant program, a competitive grant program supporting regional communications partnerships throughout New York.

This timely and important public safety and emergency response grant should make a great difference to the regional emergency response team. Emergency

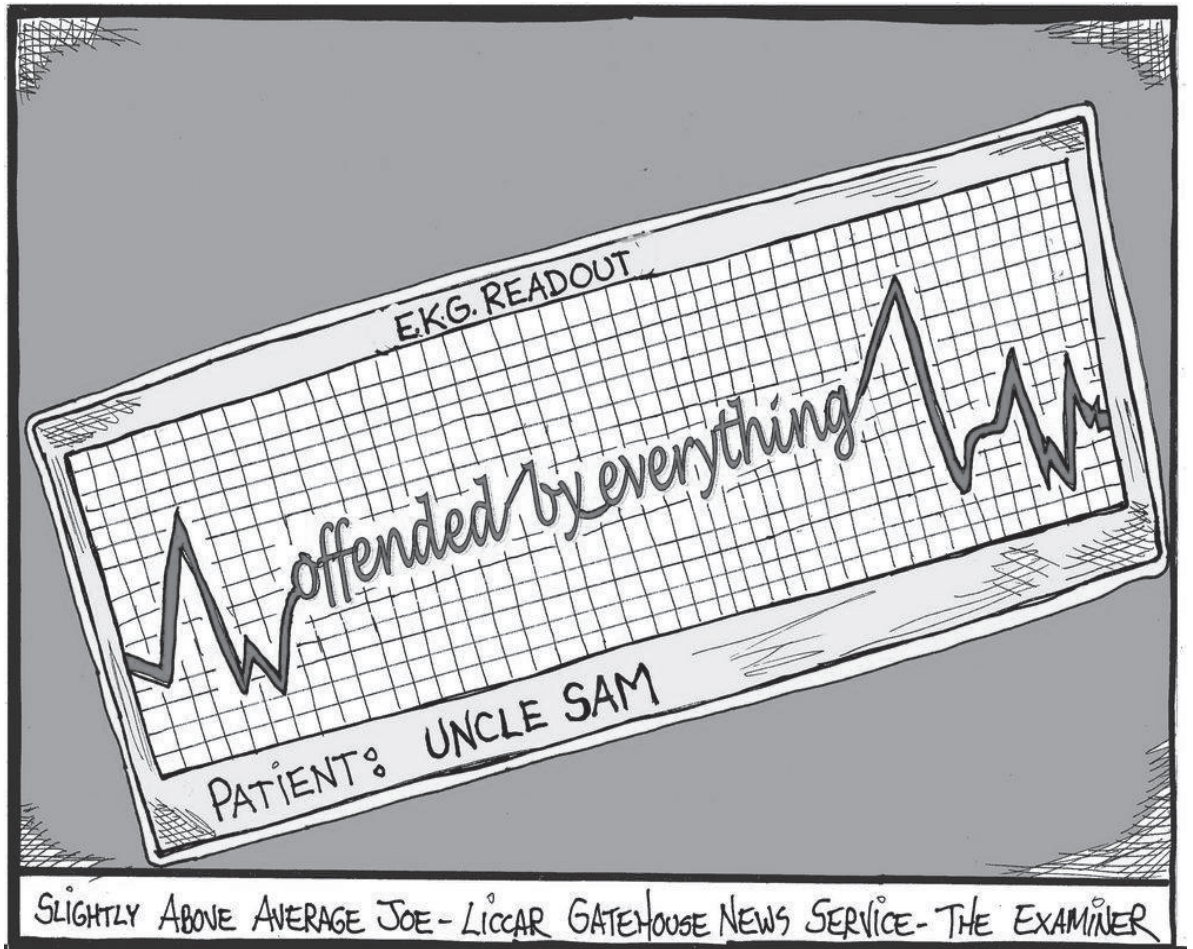
preparedness, response and recovery are fundamental government responsibilities. Steuben County Office of Emergency Services Director Tim Marshall said, "We are very excited to be able to partner with New York State and our partners in Chemung and Schuyler to develop a more robust communications system for our fire, police and emergency medical responders. This grant will bring the enhancements that have been talked about within the fire service for nearly 30 years."

So as our thoughts remain focused on current struggles, and on one of the darkest chapters in American history, we also put at the forefront this month the labor of being prepared for anything that comes our way locally and across the state. We're grateful to the volunteers, the workers, and the community leaders who keep carrying out this mission of preparedness day in and day out.

Read more on National Preparedness Month from the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (<http://www.dhse.ny.gov/aware-prepare/>), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency at <http://www.ready.gov/september>.

—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



## The LEADER

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Clerk jailed while others go free

**TO THE EDITOR |** President Obama won't allow federal agents to enforce U.S. Immigration Law and innocent American citizens are murdered.

Former Attorney General Rahm Emanuel allows illegal guns into the hands of the Mexican drug cartel and Mexican citizens and U.S. law enforcement officers are murdered.

Health care is withheld from our veterans and many die as a result. Nobody in the V.A. Administration is held accountable. The I.R.S. spies on American citizens and those responsible are promoted.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton refuses to protect an American ambassador and he is murdered along with three of his body guards. She allows top secret information to flow into the hands of our enemies and she runs for president.

A county clerk refuses to issue a marriage license to homosexuals and she is jailed. Interesting.  
**Thomas P. Greven,**  
 Corning

#### Curb number of tobacco retailers

**TO THE EDITOR |** A total of 90 percent of smokers start before the age of 18, and each year 22,500 youth become new daily smokers.

This can be largely attributed to the exposure youth have to tobacco products. Youth who visit convenience stores more than twice per week are 64 percent more likely to begin smoking within the next 12 months than their peers who visit less frequently. Youth are also twice as likely as adults to recall tobacco advertising. There is approximately one licensed tobacco retailer for every 194 children in NYS, and tobacco advertising and regular displays in stores creates an impression that tobacco is easily accessible and acceptable.

One way to help curb this problem is to decrease the number of retailers. A few ways others

states have done this is by removing tobacco from pharmacies. It doesn't make sense for a trusted health care partner to sell the number one cause of preventable death and disease. In NYS, municipalities have worked within zoning codes as well as imposed local licensing requirements to restrict the location and number of tobacco retailers. Examples of these are the Cities of Rochester and Binghamton. Learn more at [STTAC.org](http://STTAC.org), [TobaccoFreeNYS.org](http://TobaccoFreeNYS.org), [smokefreemonroe.com](http://smokefreemonroe.com), or [tobaccofreebt.org](http://tobaccofreebt.org).  
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