

# OPINION

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**SHAWN VARGO | FROM THE EDITOR**

## Help me Re-Discover Corning

Consider the last week to be a good one, mainly due to the number of times I have been stopped or approached because of my Cap'n Morgan's chicken wings story.



SHAWN VARGO

For those of you offering up belated birthday wishes - I respond with a hearty thank you.

For those of you offering good wishes for another piece in my Re-Discover Corning series - I not only thank you, but also add that I can use some help with it.

Re-Discover Corning is a series of feature stories that show off some of the things that make Corning such a unique place.

From my glass-blowing adventure at the Corning Museum of Glass in January, movie night at The Palace Theater on Market Street, to my failed efforts to out-eat the gastronomical legend that is Leader President and Publisher Rick Emanuel - the stories and photos put a spotlight on the Corning area.

As I did about six months ago, I'm asking for some help from readers of The Leader by asking, "What else can I feature in the area?"

I will admit that I'm working on a couple of pieces currently - but am always seeking out cool things to do.

So what I'm asking (again), is what makes the Corning area such a great place to live or visit?

If you have family or friends visiting from out of state - where do you go? What do you do?

Where are your go-to eateries? When there, what are your go-to menu items?

What do you do for fun? Where do you go to do it?

Email me at [svargo@the-leader.com](mailto:svargo@the-leader.com) and put "Re-Discover Corning" in the subject line.

Tell me a little bit about your favorites and I'll see if I can't get out of the office and take part in as many things that the Corning area has to offer - and get a feature and some photos into the paper.

I strongly feel that being a part of a community newspaper is being a part of the community. I love getting out and taking part in things - even if my schedule keeps me anchored to an office chair a good chunk of the day.

So shoot me some ideas and I will see what I can do. It's a labor of love - trust me.

I look forward to your ideas.

*Shawn Vargo is the executive editor and can be emailed at [svargo@the-leader.com](mailto:svargo@the-leader.com).*

## ANOTHER VIEW



**TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT**

## Volunteer firefighters deserve this action

One critical piece of legislation approved by both houses of the Legislature in 2017 was legislation to extend critical health care benefits to volunteer firefighters. Specifically, it would ensure expanded levels of protection for firefighters stricken with cancer attributable to their service as volunteers.

Now Governor Andrew Cuomo gets to make the final decision.

The legislation (S.1411/A.711) would expand the Volunteer Firefighters' Benefit Law to provide presumptive cancer coverage to New York's more than 100,000 volunteer firefighters. The number of firefighters diagnosed with cancer has steadily increased over the past decade. Recent medical studies have concluded that firefighters are at a significantly higher risk for many types of cancers than the general population because of their exposure to higher levels of carcinogens and other toxins in the burning buildings and other hazardous environments they routinely encounter.

Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) President Ken Pienkowski has said, "Presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer firefighters is unquestionably FASNY's number-one priority for the 2017 legislative session. Thirty-five other states in the nation,



TOM O'MARA

most recently Ohio, have passed presumptive cancer legislation. Fully 89 percent of New York's municipalities are protected by volunteer firefighters, who save the state approximately \$3 to \$4 billion each year, which is what it would cost to maintain an all-paid fire service."

To help deliver a widespread message of support, FASNY has established an online "Take Action Now" page making it convenient for volunteer firefighters and all supporters to email the governor urging him to sign the legislation into law. Visit FASNY's website, <http://www.fasny.com/>, if you would like to participate.

I wholeheartedly agree on the fundamental importance of our volunteer firefighters. With the summer festival and parade season in full swing - many sponsored and organized by fire departments - it's clear they play a central role in so many communities across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions.

Not long ago I joined the members of the North Hornell Volunteer

Fire Department for an important announcement. It was another reminder of how heavily communities rely on volunteer fire departments. Of the state's nearly 1,800 municipal fire departments, 89% are volunteer.

According to FASNY, "Volunteer firefighters are most prevalent in smaller, suburban and rural communities that have a lesser tax base than larger towns and cities."

FASNY released an important economic impact study in late 2015. Among numerous findings, this one was particularly alarming (and not new): it would cost local communities and local property taxpayers statewide more than \$3 billion to replace volunteer fire departments with all-paid fire services.

In other words, the continued diminishment of volunteer firefighter ranks (and volunteer ambulance personnel) will be devastating to already overburdened local property taxpayers.

I'll zero in on just one of the findings from the FASNY study, "Tax Savings and Economic Value of Volunteer Firefighters in New York." Replacing volunteer departments with all-paid squads would result in county property tax increases averaging 26.5% statewide. For regional counties, the increases would be much higher than the statewide

average; Chemung (33.8%), Schuyler (36.1%), Steuben (40.3%), Tioga (48%), Tompkins (45.4%) and Yates (33.8%). You can read the full FASNY report online at <http://www.fasny.com/EconomicStudy/>

New York government faces stubborn economic and fiscal obstacles, as well as challenges in our schools, in maintaining local roads and bridges, water infrastructure, and many more. Nevertheless, our long-term focus must include the recruitment and retention of volunteer emergency services personnel. It's true that there are factors outside of government's influence that contribute to declining ranks. There are also actions that government can and should take to help reverse it.

The legislation expanding health care coverage for volunteer firefighters represents a critical action, and I was proud to cosponsor it and help secure its approval by the Legislature. I'm equally proud to urge Governor Cuomo to sign it into law once it reaches his desk.

Volunteer firefighters make great sacrifices to protect the health, safety, and well-being of lives and property throughout our communities. They deserve and they have earned the health care coverage this legislation would provide. It's the least we can do for our volunteer firefighters and their families.

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Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Don't be afraid to ask, "Are you Okay?"

To the Editor, "Are you okay?" It's a simple question that can help save a person's life if you take the time to listen and refer them to help if it's needed. Suicide happens when stressful life events overload the coping abilities of someone suffering a mental illness. The most common mental illness that leads to suicide is depression.

For the many people that suffer with depression, the chronic illness can be treated with

medications and having the courage to talk with others that can help. There is a stigma with people that deal with mental illness that often makes them feel alone.

Talking about mental illness and talking about suicide can help shatter the darkness that surrounds those that are going through this part of their life. It's necessary to talk about mental illness because one person every 5 hours dies by suicide in NY State. Men in the US die by suicide 3.5 times more often than women. Also in the US, white males

accounted for 7 out of 10 suicides in 2015.

True strength is showing your weakness and having the courage to stand with others against the things that harm us. Encouraging the ones we love to embark on getting biological and psychological treatments can help address the underlying health issues that put people at risk for suicide and ultimately decrease deaths by suicide.

One organization that has taken on the mission to decrease the suicide rate in Schuyler County is S.A.F.E., which stands for Suicide Awareness

For Everyone. They have been working on connecting people to prevention, intervention and recovery by providing education, support and advocacy. SAFE is an advocate for the more positive solutions to dealing with life's struggles.

For more about SAFE contact: Chris Tennant, LCSW and Liz Sommers, LCSW S.A.F.E Coalition Co-chairpersons, 106 South Perry St, Watkins Glen NY 14891, 607-535-8282.

**Elizabeth Watson**  
S.A.F.E Member