

# OPINION

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Find pool solution before too late

TO THE EDITOR | I would like to address Painted Post Mayor Roswell Crozier and all of those who made the decision to keep Craig Park Pool closed for yet another summer. Are you aware that it's people like you who make ignorant decisions that drive people out of this great community? The mayor has claimed that the residents of the Town of Erwin use the pool more than anyone else. Can he back that up with statistics? I have used the pool nearly my entire life and I have never once been asked where I live. Craig Park Pool is for community ... the entire community.

Why haven't the representatives of the town reached out to the community for a solution, or fund-raising ideas, or even an increase of admission price to cover the costs needed to keep the pool operational?

This problem is not going to go away. Eventually, the pool will be beyond repair and will need to be demolished. Why can't we find a solution before it's too late?

**Sara McKay,**  
Riverside

### Tuesday, thank library workers

TO THE EDITOR | On Tuesday, during National Library Week, schools, campuses and communities across the country will celebrate the valuable contribution of our librarians and library support staff on the second annual National Library Workers Day. Libraries are part of the American dream – places for opportunity, education and lifelong learning – but that dream could not become a reality if not for the people staffing our libraries.

The staff at the

Southeast Steuben County Library works hard and is passionate about library service. Libraries today help people transform their lives, whether it is finding a job, doing online schooling, learning a new software program, or helping a child experience the joy of books. Our staff is crucial in that transformation.

On behalf of the Library Trustees of the Southeast Steuben County Library, we would like to thank and recognize our dedicated staff. They are a fabulous group of people who love making the library a welcoming, educational, and friendly space.

I encourage everyone to take a moment this Tuesday to thank our library workers for the services they provide and to remind our public officials that libraries provide vital services, programs, and access to numerous collections each and every day.

**Sarah Collins,**

President, Southeast Steuben County Library Board of Trustees,  
Painted Post resident

### Bridge barriers block view of traffic

TO THE EDITOR | Why did the NYDOT construct the Meads Creek Bridge on Route 26 with cement barriers on the sides of the bridge?

Merging into traffic from exit 42 is a dangerous hazard as it is impossible to determine whether any traffic is coming over the bridge due to these cement barriers. Why didn't the engineers consider steel side rails that would allow motorists to see oncoming traffic? An alternative solution now to this construction would be to raise the approaches to the bridge so that oncoming traffic would be seen.

Hopefully, the DOT will address this problem.

**Martha Sanford**  
Painted Post

## First Amendment

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 people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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## COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

# Taking part, and pitching in

Americans are known for volunteering. In fact we're coming off a week when the nation observed National Volunteer Week in tribute to all of the many millions of citizens throughout our communities, of every age and from all walks of life, who make such a difference with their willingness to devote time, energy and sacrifice to the lives and needs of others.

It's a recognition, however, that shouldn't – and fortunately doesn't – end after just one week.

The nation's 41st President, George H.W. Bush, recognized its importance. He's widely credited with having launched the modern volunteer service movement. In 1990, he signed into law the first piece of federal service legislation in two decades, the National and Community Service Act of 1990. He made public and community service a cornerstone of his presidency when he said in his 1989 "thousand points of light" inaugural address that one cornerstone of his presidency would be devoted to inspiring "duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in."

But we know that fewer and fewer Americans, for a variety of reasons, are taking part and pitching in today. A recent report from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, for



SEN. TOM O'MARA

example, revealed that volunteerism nationwide is at a 10-year low. Make no mistake, there's still a heck of a lot of volunteering going on across the country – at least 63 million Americans volunteered at least once between September 2012 and September 2013 – but the decline has become evident.

Here in New York State that's particularly true in one sector of volunteerism: emergency services. According to the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), the number of volunteer firefighters statewide has declined from 140,000 in the early 1990s to fewer than 90,000 today. Volunteer emergency medical technicians (EMTs) experienced a decline from more than 50,000 to 35,000 during the same period, with some rural counties experiencing as much as a 50-percent depletion of their EMT ranks.

It's why I'm continuing to work with area Assemblymen Phil Palmesano and Chris Friend on legislation we've sponsored for several years aimed at helping localities recruit and retain volunteer firefighters and

other emergency services personnel. The legislation is known as the "Omnibus Emergency Services Volunteer Incentive Act." We view it as a complement to the ongoing state-level efforts by FASNY and other groups that keep drawing attention to what many believe is not only a threat to the safety and security of our cities, towns and villages, but also looms as the next property tax crisis in waiting for many rural, upstate communities. FASNY, for example, has estimated that it would cost local taxpayers more than \$7 billion annually to replace volunteers with paid fire and ambulance services.

So the reality is straightforward: the alarm has been sounded on the challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters and other emergency services personnel. We have to keep seeking solutions. This legislation helps us keep the challenge in front of the Legislature.

Incentives, while not the be-all and end-all solution, can be an effective piece of a more broad-based response. The volunteer fire department has anchored so many rural, upstate communities for so long that we can't turn our backs on the crisis.

Our legislation would:  
 ■ provide a \$400 state income tax credit for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers who have been active for four or more consecutive years;  
 ■ exempt motor vehicles

owned and used in the performance of duty by an emergency services volunteer from motor vehicle registration fees and vehicle use taxes;

■ authorize local volunteer fire and ambulance companies to use state-administered funds, collected annually through a two-percent fire insurance premium tax on out-of-state insurers, to help offset the cost of health insurance for their members; and

■ direct the state Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) to create a volunteer recruitment service college loan forgiveness program.

It also offers an opportunity to issue a reminder that in a few weeks, at local volunteer fire departments regionally and statewide, one of the year's most important volunteer recruitment efforts takes place. It's an annual event sponsored by FASNY called "RecruitNY." Over the weekend of April 26-27 volunteer fire departments open their doors to the public in an effort to "boost our ranks."

You can find out more about RecruitNY, including a comprehensive list of participating departments, at [www.recruitny.org](http://www.recruitny.org).

*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.*

## ANOTHER VIEW



## GUEST VIEW | ASSEMBLYMAN PHIL PALMESANO

# Volunteers protect us, save money

In 1974, National Volunteer Week was established as a time to celebrate people who selflessly serve their communities.

Over the last four decades, National Volunteer week has grown, drawing ever-more support and recognition, from the President of the United States to local non-profits and community organizations around the country. This week, the tradition continues. Legislators, community activists and media professionals shined a national spotlight on the monumental impact and power of service.



PHIL PALMESANO

While much of the week is focused on recognizing the creative and innovative ways people have improved their local communities, it is also an opportune time to promote the benefits of volunteerism and encourage others to take part.

In light of the struggles brought on by our nation's economic downturn,

volunteer efforts are more important than ever before.

While all forms of volunteerism play a vital role in our communities, I would like to highlight the crucial contributions of one group of volunteers: emergency workers. Volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) provide a much more valuable service than most of us realize, particularly in upstate New York.

I have said it over and over again – volunteer emergency service providers are the backbone of our rural communities. They should feel great

pride in the contributions they make to the lives of our families, friends and neighbors. They train for countless hours. They work to educate themselves, ensuring that their departments are on the vanguard of emergency response techniques.

We owe volunteer firefighters and EMTs a great debt of gratitude for the sacrifices and hard work they provide to the residents of our communities. In upstate New York, it is estimated that 95 percent of all firefighters participate on a volunteer basis. In addition, there are over

SEE PALMESANO, A5

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