



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

New York Library Association honors O'Mara with 2016 'Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award': State's largest library advocacy organization highlights O'Mara's longtime commitment and support

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 4, 2016

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Elmira, N.Y., November 4—At its 123rd Annual Conference and Trade Show tonight in Saratoga Springs, the **New York Library Association (NYLA)** honored State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C,I-Big Flats) with the association's 2016 "Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award."

The NYLA is recognized as the voice of the library community in New York State. The oldest state library association in America, the NYLA represents school, college, special and public libraries, library staff, trustees, and students statewide. It is the only statewide organization dedicated to advocating on behalf of all libraries and library staff.

At its Annual Conference, the NYLA presents a series of awards including the Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award, Outstanding Services to Libraries Award, Mary Bobinski Innovative Public Library Director Award, and the SirsiDynix Intellectual Freedom Award.

According to NYLA, the Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award being presented to O'Mara "recognizes and honors an individual who, or a group that, has made a far reaching, sustained contribution to the promotion and/or support of library and information services to the people of New York State or residents within a designated service area within the State."

NYLA Executive Director Jeremy Johannesen said, "Our 2016 recipient, Senator Thomas O'Mara, understands the importance of libraries and how library systems are at the core of New York's educational infrastructure. His advocacy has led to a multi-million dollar investment in broadband infrastructure to provide high speed connectivity to rural communities. He appreciates and understands the vital role that libraries must continue to play in education and within the 21st century economy. Senator O'Mara has consistently delivered for the libraries he represents across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes, and library patrons statewide. We look forward to being able to work with Senator O'Mara for years to come on

the challenges and needs that libraries will face.”

O’Mara said, “I am honored and proud to receive this recognition of my commitment to our libraries. Support for libraries has always been a top priority. Fighting for our libraries is an investment in education, economic growth and civic quality for parents and families, seniors and the community at large. Our libraries play a fundamental role in local workforce development, career training and job placement. They are cherished public institutions, and we are fortunate throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions to benefit from an outstanding network of public libraries providing access to books and so many other activities, learning materials, and civic, cultural and economic opportunities. I deeply appreciate this advocacy award and I look forward to continue supporting the ongoing strengthen and success of New York State’s libraries.”

O’Mara noted that public libraries across New York State serve over 19 million patrons annually.

Throughout his tenure in the Legislature, O’Mara has been a strong supporter of Southern Tier and Finger Lakes public libraries, recognizing their central importance to the civic, cultural and educational fabric of area communities. He has fought for increased state support for the Library Construction Grant Program. The 2016-17 state budget increased funding for the program by \$5 million to \$19 million, as well including \$95.6 million in state aid to public libraries, a \$4-million increase. It’s important progress representing the highest aid level since 2008, according to the New York Library Association.

O’Mara will also join the NYLA to pay tribute to State Senator Hugh Farley of the Schenectady area for a lifetime of achievement for libraries. For decades in the State Legislature, Farley has been known as the Legislature’s top library advocate and has sponsored virtually every piece of major library legislation since 1978. Farley is retiring at the

end of this year after a 40-year career in government and O'Mara said that he hopes to carry on Farley's legacy as an effective advocate for libraries within the Legislature.

In September, O'Mara was also one of only seven members of the Senate to receive the 2016 "Library Champion Award" from New Yorkers for Better Libraries, a prominent library advocacy organization.

In 2015, O'Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), who also received the "Library Champion Award" this year, sponsored a new law (Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2015) to, for the first time, include "installation and infrastructure of broadband services" as a specific project category eligible to receive funding through the Library Construction Grant Program. Prior to the law's enactment, libraries were unable to access funding through the popular grant program specifically for broadband purposes including cable, wiring and modems, and network terminals and access points.

Visit the website of the Southern Tier Library System, www.stls.org, for links to member libraries in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates. The members of the Finger Lakes Library System, including Tompkins County, can be found online at www.flls.org.