



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of November 23, 2020 ~ 'Hunting and a tradition of giving'

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 23, 2020

| ISSUE: **HUNTING AND FISHING**



Over the past 20 years, the Coalition has helped put a good meal on many tables across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and throughout New York State.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "Hunting and a tradition of giving"

The opening of this year's regular deer hunting season means it's time for this annual reminder on the Southern Tier-based Venison Donation Coalition.

And with the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) already having reported record-breaking sales of hunting licenses for 2020, it's an especially meaningful reminder during this time of great need throughout so many communities continuing to be hard hit by COVID-19.

Over the past 20 years, the Coalition has helped put a good meal on many tables across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and throughout New York State.

Millions of tables, in fact.

Since 1999 the coalition has coordinated the processing of an average of 38 tons of venison annually and, through its partnership with The Food Bank of the Southern Tier and other regional food banks, provided more than 4 million highly nutritious, low-fat, high-protein servings to individuals, children and families in need.

Talk about making a difference, and talk about timely. Good meals are needed now like never before.

The opening of the regular deer season represents one of the most important economic cycles of the year. Hunting is a mainstay of the regional and statewide recreational economy, by some estimates accounting for \$2 billion of economic activity and nearly 30,000 jobs statewide. Steuben County, for example, remains one of the Northeast's premiere deer hunting destinations.

The Venison Donation Coalition is supported by sportsmen's organizations, of course, but also by local farm bureaus, food banks, civic and religious groups, and so many individual citizens. I am always grateful to call attention to its work and its contributions to the overall quality and strength of our communities.

It was over 25 years ago when a local "Hunters for the Hungry" program was prepared to donate 400 pounds of venison for distribution to the needy and discovered that state law prevented it. As a result, "Hunters for the Hungry" programs operating throughout New York at that time, 1993, were being told they couldn't donate over 10,000 pounds of venison to food banks and other organizations providing meals to the unemployed, shut-ins, senior citizens and other needy citizens. It made no sense. As a result, the Legislature quickly acted to establish a program to authorize the donations. The resulting Venison Donation Coalition got started in 1999 when sportsmen's

federations in Chemung and Steuben counties got behind the effort with funding to pay two processors. Two decades later, the coalition is a broad-based partnership including many area supporters.

It is, simply put, an admirable effort. Never underestimate the spirit of commitment and giving it has encouraged.

According to the Coalition, “We would not even have this program if it weren’t for our amazing processors. They work diligently on getting the deer to the food banks in record time at a reduced rate. Our many thanks to our meat processors for making Venison Donation a success! Meat processors, like farm families, like hunting families, like Food Bank families, have strong family values, strong work ethics and a true desire to help folks. Many meat processing businesses have been family run for generations. It’s the same kind of family values and grassroots efforts that make the Venison Donation Coalition a success.”

As I have often said, we will continue to develop infrastructure, promote tourism, improve schools, protect citizens, and do anything and everything possible to enhance our economic position. Nevertheless, along with these fundamental responsibilities, the ongoing work of groups and organizations like the Venison Donation Coalition is important, inspiring, and meaningful.

As the Coalition notes, “One dollar goes a long way to help curb hunger throughout New York State.” The donation of just \$1 provides four meals. For every dollar donated, the Coalition puts 90 cents towards processing donated venison.

For more information, visit the Venison Donation Coalition online at www.venisondonation.com or call 1-866-862-3337 (DEER).

My very best wishes to you and your families for a safe and meaningful Thanksgiving.