

Grins and groans

Grin

The Elmira-Corning Regional Airport has added a daily round-trip flight direct to JFK in New York City. That's big for business travelers whose work frequently takes them to the city. Also, lot of folks have friends or family there, or like to check out concerts, Broadway shows and other cultural offerings. It could also boost the numbers of tourists coming from the New York City market to the Finger Lakes wine trails. Kudos to county and airport officials for making this happen.

Groan

To the backlash against the National Transportation Safety Board's recommendation that all states ban all use of cell phones for drivers – even hands-free devices.

There have been complaints from businesspeople who travel a lot and rely heavily on their smartphones, as well as from those who think government is overstepping its bounds. But remember, the seat belt and motorcycle helmet laws were resisted, too. Does anybody question the wisdom of those anymore?

It's a common sight to see people checking emails, texting or talking in traffic, and it's pretty scary. We certainly don't want to downplay the risks of drinking and driving here, but distracted driving can be just as dangerous, if not more so.

Although the NTSB's statement will carry weight, it's still up to the states to make the laws. New York has been fairly proactive in combating the issue, but could go further.

Grin

To Corning Community College moving ahead with its plan to add a dormitory for the 2013 school year.

CCC has always offered quality, affordable education, and the hilltop campus is gorgeous. The only drawback for many high school seniors is many don't want to live with their parents another two years, but weren't ready – financially or otherwise – to live entirely on their own.

The dorm will offer the residential college experience, which the majority of junior colleges in the SUNY system already offer. It won't be like a four-year university, because there will only be rooms for 300 students. And college leaders have made it clear it won't be like "Animal House" – they'll keep the dorm pretty well supervised.

But it's a good addition for CCC and it'll be interesting to see if more dorms are added down the road.

Grin

To the Village of Painted Post continuing to explore the possibility of dissolving itself into the Town of Erwin.

Yes, there are some cons. We don't want to see anybody out of a job. There's definitely some nice services the village provides.

But its residents would certainly be pleased with their tax bills.

Not that there isn't something to be said for having a local board that's responsive to residents, but right now there's too many layers of government and it has reached a point in Painted Post where it doesn't make fiscal sense to keep going as its own entity. There's some other local municipalities nearby that should probably look at doing the same thing.

In the end, village residents will have the final say, as it will likely wind up going to a public referendum.

ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Rural futures

The joint, bipartisan Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, on which I serve, periodically issues a publication called "Rural Futures" that's one way to stay up to date on rural affairs locally, statewide, and nationally. It's a publication that's traditionally been a well-received roundup of valuable information on state legislation, exciting and interesting trends in rural communities across New York and the nation, as well as summaries for local leaders and others on grants, publications, useful websites, and upcoming events. More than two-thirds of New York's 62 counties are designated as rural, including all of the counties I represent. The Rural Resources Commission has worked for nearly three decades, since 1982, on a range of issues including agriculture, economic development, universal broadband, education, land use, transportation, local government structure and functions, volunteer recruitment and retention, and health care. How these issues are addressed at the state level has an enormous impact on many local communities.

The latest issue of "Rural Futures" features a look ahead to the commission's agenda for the upcoming 2012 legislative session, which begins in January. I can tell you that commission members intend to step up our focus on the exciting promise today's technology holds for the development of an extensive statewide "telemedicine-telehealth network" – a potentially groundbreaking and landmark achievement for rural health care in New York State. Access to high quality, affordable health care and education remains one of the great challenges continuing to face many rural New Yorkers. As New York keeps expanding broadband capabilities into currently underserved and unserved regions, an accompanying

emphasis should be to develop policies aimed at developing a more integrated, statewide telemedicine system. In fact, the development of modern telemedicine capabilities to expand the quality of rural health care is highlighted by the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development's blueprint for the region's future. In its final report the council noted that telemedicine-based initiatives "will reduce hospitalizations, create Medicare and Medicaid savings, eliminate transportation issues and disintegration of services for elderly and low-income populations" and provide cost-effective alternatives and reduced health care costs for rural residents.

The Rural Resources Commission is planning a statewide telemedicine roundtable for January, and I'll do my best to keep you updated on this important work throughout the year ahead.

One additional, long-standing rural challenge – one made more and more difficult by economic downturns and ever-strained state and local budgets – is the need to ensure an appropriate allocation of state aid to low-wealth, rural districts. The state Board of Regents recently advanced important reform proposals to revisit how New York currently distributes resources to low-wealth schools and, hopefully, reestablish a fairer and more equitable formula that better reflects the needs of many rural and other districts.

It's a great concern that's going to play a central role in this year's state budget negotiations. Another item high on the commission's agenda will be the development of biomass as an alternative fuel source and as an economic engine for rural New York. Biomass – woods, grasses, plants and crops that can be used to generate renewable energy, including biofuels or electricity – has the potential to create thousands of new jobs across

upstate New York, offer new and diversified economic opportunities for many farmers, and generate other spin-off economic benefits.

It's a largely untapped source of economic growth in New York and we believe more can and should be done to encourage it.

In addition to these previews, the latest issue of "Rural Affairs" includes:

- an overview of a new law enacted this year to reduce the regulatory burdens on New York state's farm wineries;

- an update on the importance of the New York State ROPS (Rollover Protection Structure) Rebate Program, a highly successful state initiative in the area of farm safety;

- and a timely review of this year's flood assistance efforts.

And much more, including items on broadband development, farmers' markets, renewable energy, food safety, agricultural assessment, and rural schools.

The Rural Resources Commission has long been noted as a voice of rural New York within the Legislature. I'm excited to take part in its work and to help focus attention on the needs of our rural communities and economies here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions and statewide.

As well, I'm glad to be joined on the commission by two of the region's assembly representatives: Assemblyman Phil Palmesano of Corning and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton of Ithaca.

The latest "Rural Futures" publication can be viewed online through my Senate website: www.omara.nysenate.gov. Or you can always e-mail your request for a copy to omara@nysenate.gov.

■ Tom O'Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.

A move long overdue

A little bit of house-keeping before we get into today's topic.

The Insider is going to take his traditional holiday vacation for the last week of December and the first week of January.

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

This will be the last regular column for the month because Friday will see the reprinting of my traditional

Christmas column.

I'll be back at the Friday-Monday post Monday Jan. 9.

Mean time, Happy Holidays to all.

After years of discussion, it appears that plans for a dormitory at Corning Community College are finally about to turn into a reality.

Construction of a \$12-14 million facility is expected to start in the spring and the residence hall will open in the fall of 2013.

The facility will house 300 students plus a staff of about 20.

The project will not rely on local tax money but rather on bonds to be repaid with rooming fees collected from student occupants.

The cost to students who live there is estimated at \$3,700 per semester.

Such a project has been under discussion off and on for decades and it is a move that is long overdue.

For the majority of CCC students, the trek up Spencer Hill is their first brush with higher education. Yet many feel that living at home makes it feel like grades 13 and 14.

The presence of a dorm for those who are interested and financially able gets rid of that objection.

Three hundred students only represent a start, but it is a start that is much needed.

Congratulations to Katherine Douglass, the new CCC president, for spearheading this project to reality.

Americans apparently are abandoning the habit of saying "I do."

The marriage rate among adult Americans is presently only 51 percent compared to 1960 when 72 percent of adults 18 and older were wed.

The marriage rate is expected to continually decline according to an analysis of US census figures.

The dip is being led by young people. Just one in five adults between 18 and 29 is married compared to 59 percent in 1960.

Those who are marrying are doing it later. Women average 26.5 when they wed while men don't take the plunge until 28.7.

Traditional marriage is being replaced by other forms of lifestyles. Included are single-parent households, single-person households and cohabitation.

Now I know why no one has tossed a bridal bouquet in my direction in years.

Where do you hide an excavator when you steal it? Nowhere, I told my wife when she inquired about a story in the local news recently.

There is no need to camouflage a piece of equipment so common that people pass over them when they appear.

■ Bob Rolfe, a retired Leader reporter/editor, can be reached by writing The Insider, PO Box 1017, Corning, NY 14830.

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The LEADER
The Leader (ISSN #10501983)
The Leader is published daily at
34 West Pulteney Street,
Corning, New York 14830
by Liberty Group Corning Holdings, Inc.
Periodical postage paid
at Corning, New York 14830-0817.
USPS code | 0586-160
Postmaster:
Send address changes to
The Leader, West Pulteney Street,
Corning, New York 14830
Publisher: Dennis Bruen

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Larry Barone

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