

# OPINION

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## The LEADER

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### GUEST VIEW | PAULINE EMERY

## Library funding request is fair

Several inaccurate statements have been made by critics of the Southeast Steuben County Library's funding proposition, and I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight. We want the public to understand this is a levy that benefits all residents and offers an immediate return on investment. If you do not use library services currently, we welcome you to visit and take advantage of all the valuable life-long learning resources.

1. The library is not asking for a substantial increase in funding. We are asking voters to approve a new funding structure that would release all municipalities from their contractual obligation to fund the library after 2014. Instead, residents within the boundaries of the Corning-Painted Post Area School District would fund the library directly. If the referendum is approved on December 17, the library would be subject to two very strict controls on spending increases besides those already in place: The library would be subject to the statewide 2% tax cap, and any future spending increases would require voter approval. The tax cap does not currently apply. The Board of Trustees has fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the library secures funds so that it remains open the required 55 hours a week, and meets the needs of the diverse community.

2. Funds from six of the seven municipalities in the Library's designated service area now cover less than half of the library's current operating expenses. The current contract with municipalities reduced library funding by 10 percent through 2013, and the library has had to draw down its modest reserves to continue to provide the many services and programs on which community members rely. The reserve funds are nearly depleted.

3. Trying to operate on just municipal funds is not realistic. Current contributions from the municipalities are designated only for personnel and related costs. These funds no longer cover those costs. Because the municipal funds no longer cover what they were designated to cover, the library needs to find sources of income to bridge that gap as well as the entire rest of the budget. Because of the size of our service area, we are required to be open 55 hours a week. We offer extensive programming and have an impressive collection available to the public. We see about 700 patrons coming into the library a day,

every day we are open. It is also unrealistic to think that municipal funding to the library will increase in the future.

4. Private donations, contributions from the Friends of The Library (from book sales), grants, earnings from our endowment, careful spending policies and the hard work of more than 80 volunteers help to keep our costs lower than most libraries serving similar sized populations in New York. We are very fortunate that many in our community value a public library, help support it, and volunteer thousands of hours for the betterment of their community.

5. The amount requested, \$960,000, is required to ensure stable secure funding. Anything less would compromise library services and would jeopardize the financial health of the library. That works out to about 50 cents per \$1,000 assessed value. That is about \$50 a year or \$4 a month, and less than 14 cents a day. The amount we are asking for is close to the amount received from municipalities plus what we need to draw down from our reserves in 2013. Since the \$960,000 will be used for the 2015 budget and beyond, this amount will make the library sustainable for the long term.

6. The by-laws of the library require that we have a public annual meeting and publish our annual report. This will not change; the public will still be invited to our annual meeting as they have been for the last 13 years. In addition, any request for an increase must be brought to a public vote. Residents will have a direct say in the future of the library and its contribution to the community.

Across the nation, libraries that are funded by local governments have seen their budgets slashed, their hours cut and their services sharply curtailed. Voter-funded libraries in New York – like 33 of the 48 libraries in the Southern Tier Library System – fare better, and that is because library users know the importance of continued access to library collections, services and innovative programs.

Voter approval of the referendum on December 17 will ensure that our community has a financially solvent, vibrant, community-minded library going forward. Libraries, after all, are at the heart of democracy. Please vote on December 17.

### Pauline Emery

Library Director  
Southeast Steuben County Library

### GUEST VIEW | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

## For holidays, please shop small

You hear it all the time, especially in government where we debate constantly about how best to create jobs and strengthen local economies: small businesses are the backbone of the economy.

That's as true as it's ever been and so is the fact that Albany and Washington can take steps to help improve the economic climate for our small businesses. That's especially true right here in New York State, where businesses large and small continue to face one of the worst (the most hostile by some standards) business tax climates in the nation. Nobody explains it more succinctly than Governor Andrew Cuomo himself, who has repeatedly said, "New York State has no future as the tax capital of the nation."

But we need to do more than just say that we're Open for Business. That's why just this past legislative session in New York, for example, the state Senate put forth a "Blueprint for Jobs" plan I co-sponsored that included a series of tax breaks and credits aimed at small business development. In fact, we'll be taking up another version of that blueprint when the new session begins in January. There are strong signs of a growing consensus to act on it. Let's hope so.

But government's not

the only place to make a difference. We all can, and there's never a better time than now with the holiday shopping season kicking into high gear this week.

So much of our annual holiday shopping increasingly takes place online (I'll have more to say about this phenomenon in next week's column), we know that, but the further we get into the holiday shopping season the more consumers start turning to "brick-and-mortar retail." And that, of course, is only great news for local businesses. Fortunately for many of us, there's still a store right down the street or a shop right around the corner from home that turns out to be the best destination of all to find that perfect (and meaningful) gift.

So here's hoping that we'll do our best to support these small businesses on Main Street, Market Street, Water Street, the Commons or wherever they happen to be found in your own community. One strategy that really keeps making a difference takes place again this year through a nationwide event on Saturday, November 30th called "Small Business Saturday."

It's all about consumer choice. Here's how the head of the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) defined the idea of "shopping small" as a guide worth remembering

throughout the holiday shopping season: "Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the fabric of our communities. By shopping small...we can support the men and women who are building these amazing small businesses. It's a chance to say thank you to the small business owners who do so much for our communities."

Small Business Saturday takes place across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions on November 30th, including one special event that's been brought directly to my attention. The Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce recently announced that nearly 40 businesses in and around Schuyler County will participate in "Shop Small BINGO" on Small Business Saturday. It sure sounds like a fun way for consumers to stop by participating businesses, pick up that shop's distinctive BINGO-related marker and potentially earn a chance to win an amazing grand prize gift basket. There'll be live entertainment, wine tastings, storytelling and much more. In other words, it sounds like a great day to be out and about around Schuyler County. You can find out more about it on the chamber's website, <http://watkinsglenchamber.com/Events.aspx>.

Our small businessmen

and women – in many instances, our small business families – play such a fundamental role in local job creation and preservation, to say nothing of economic opportunity and hope here at home and, collectively, across the nation. The SBA notes that over the past 20 years small businesses have been responsible for creating two out of every three net new jobs nationally. More than one-half of all of America's working men and women, according to federal statistics, own or are employed by a small business.

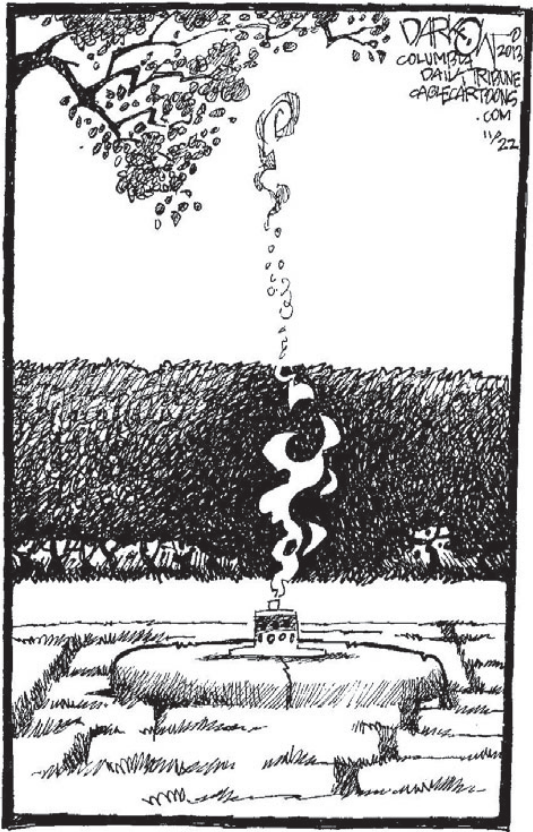
It's also worth recalling these words from Mike Durant, the director of New York's leading small business association, the National Federation of Independent Business/NY, "It's about the entrepreneurs and families who have put everything into stores that offer what the chains and e-commerce companies don't – something different, something special, from handcrafted gifts to genuinely friendly service...When you shop at a small business, you're supporting your hometown, your neighborhood and your neighbors.."

You'd be hard-pressed to say it any better.

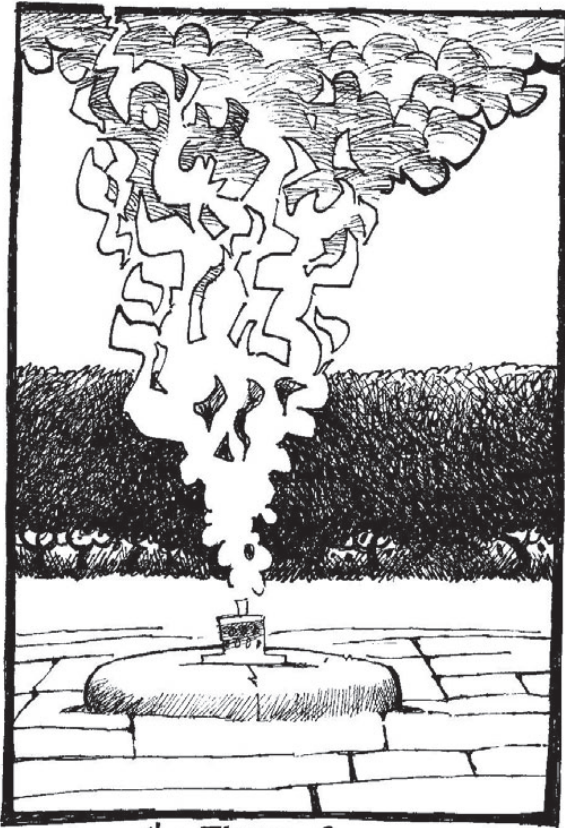
The job you help save by shopping local and buying "Made in the U.S.A." may ultimately be your own.

I'll look forward to seeing some of you out there.

### ANOTHER VIEW



JFK Eternal Flame



the Flame of eternal conspiracy theories

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Library asking for too much

TO THE EDITOR | Let me begin by saying that my husband and I are both ardent supporters and volunteers of the Corning library. We believe that the many services it provides are vital to our community and should be maintained.

That being said, we are highly concerned about the new funding proposal to raise \$960,000, which is an enormous 66% increase in the library budget.

We also oppose the idea of attaching this new tax

to the school bill. The reasoning the Library Board gives for the increase is that "funding through contracts with local municipalities has not been stable or secure."

That is true as some towns (especially the smaller, outlying towns) have elected not to participate in the 10-year contracts at \$5,000-\$6,000 per year because they felt that it created extra financial burdens on their citizens during these troubling times. The town of Lindley is just recovering from a loss of taxable income resulting from the building of the new I-99 and also the loss

of our town's maintenance building and all of the equipment through a devastating fire last year. I'm sure that many other towns have similar woes.

It seems ironic that since we can't see our way clear, at this point, to agree to a contract, our citizens would actually pay more since our town is being assessed \$43,000. That makes little sense.

The 2012 school tax bill had devastating consequences for many of our residents; some were forced to lower their home owner's insurance, sell property or borrow just to pay that bill. And

all communities are not equal in terms of access or usage of the library or socio-economic standards. So, this tax would not be equitable and would again create duress among our senior citizens and others who are struggling to make ends meet.

It pains me to write this letter and to say that I am voting no on the proposal. I am aware of the struggles that the library is going through but I am more concerned about the struggles of my friends and neighbors.

### Fran Tempel

Lindley



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