

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Touched by Random Act of Kindness

Someone has the holiday spirit! As I walked up to the meter at lot 13, there was a baggie with a note attached which said "Random Act of Christmas Kindness Enjoy".

There was a bow on the baggie, and change inside. What a wonderful thoughtful gesture.

It's too bad that the City of Corning doesn't share that spirit during this beautiful season. It would be a nice Christmas gift to the merchants and shoppers on Market St. to offer free parking in the lots, and unlimited parking on the street with signs that direct visitors to the lots.

I so hope that the person responsible for the Christmas "gift" and the smiles it brought, sees this. This is the season of hope, peace, and giving...not necessarily of items, but of oneself. Merry Christmas to this caring person, and to all of Corning!

JoAnne Bernhardt
 Corning

Prattsburgh Post Office thanks its supporters

The Prattsburgh Post office is now open. The Prattsburgh Town Board and the local postal customers appreciate the help from Senator Schumer's

office, Senator Schumer's letter to the Post Master General office combined with the work his staff put forth most notably Mike Iannelli.

The senator's staff in Binghamton office were in constant contact with both the Buffalo Postal authority and the Washington office pushing to re-open the Prattsburgh Post Office.

We would also like to thank Tom Reed's office especially Lee James for their efforts in resolving this issue.

The repair to the building by a local contractor was done quickly and expertly. For the three months our local office was closed our postal employees have gone well beyond their normal duties.

Our rural carriers have put in extra hours, miles and made themselves available to their customers when needed. A special thanks to the Pulteney Post Office staff for their help, it put a real burden on many.

I can't stress enough our federal elected officials are there to help in these situations that are to complicated for local government officials to navigate, they are there by us, for us.

Leonard McConnell
 Town of Prattsburgh Supervisor

SHAWN VARGO | FROM THE EDITOR

Help me re-discover my beloved hometown

I personally believe that the Corning area is a terrific place.

I was born here 50 years ago and except for a couple of years in college and an eight-year stint in Texas - I've set my roots in the Corning - Painted Post region.

My feelings for the area were a big reason for leaving my job in Texas and returning with my family in 2003.

Then, two weeks ago at the Parade of Lights and last week at Sparkle, I got an idea.

There are so many things that make this area great. Everyone who lives here can probably come up with their own list of what makes the Corning area special to them.

And that's when the light bulb came on over my head.

What if folks from this area write down a list of the things about living here that makes them happy? What if they submitted those lists to The Leader and we turned them into local features?

What kinds of things would make your list?

In my teen years, I loved to fish.

The Chemung River was



SHAWN VARGO

accessible to me and my friend Jim Greger - who was probably one of the best fishermen I've known. You could catch bass, walleye and many other gamefish from the Patterson Bridge to the Gibson Bridge and we fished that whole stretch at one point or another growing up.

I've tried to pass my love of fishing to my kids - with some success. But a crazy work schedule and trying to compete with video games and cell phones makes things like that difficult.

Bottom line - some of my best memories of Corning involve throwing Mr. Twisters from atop and below the Bridge Street Bridge. I sometimes wonder if Jim's big bass - the one he wanted to get mounted - is still somewhere in his dad's freezer.

How about Market

Street?

I can recall enjoying shopping at the old Army/Navy store and I remember eating at a small pizza place called Aniello's - back when it was across the street from its current location.

I will admit that I don't get out to eat very often and there are some current restaurants in the area that I haven't tried. If the readers came through with some great recommendations - I'd be more than happy to check them out.

I know that The Leader Publisher Rick Emanuel and I have discussed the possibility of trying out any local eating contests that may be out there. What would be better than to eat good food "AND" show up my boss Joey Chestnut style.

Over the past couple of months, I've found myself over at Corning Museum of Glass - each time, I played the role of photographer. I couldn't help but enjoy myself - especially when a hot glass show was the assignment.

I haven't, however, ever taken the time to try my hand at making anything out of glass. I'd love to try

making my own ornament or anything for that matter.

This is the Crystal City.

The nice part of working at a newspaper is that I can experience things, then write about the experience - whether it be in story form, or in column form. I think one of my New Year's resolutions will be to get out and try some new things. Expand my Corning horizons if you will.

Want to help? Let me know what you think is special about the Corning area.

Email me at svargo@the-leader.com and help me re-discover my hometown.

Send me your lists of "must-sees", "must-dos", and "have to try" ideas. Please put "Discover Corning", "Discover Painted Post", "Discover Addison" (you get the idea) in the subject line. Open my eyes to the great things about this area.

It may turn into an upcoming story in The Leader.

— Shawn Vargo is the Executive Editor and can be reached at svargo@the-leader.com. Follow on Twitter @TheLeaderVargo.

MATTHEW T. MANGINO

Convictions elusive

In 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson. This incident was described by St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar as a "physical confrontation" that started inside a police car and spilled onto the street.

Attorney Benjamin Crump, who represented the family of Michael Brown at the time, told the USA Today, "Those who shoot and kill suspects often escape prosecution because the criminal justice system places a high value on an officer's word and often accepts their narrative of events."

Crump's words were prescient. Charges were never filed against Wilson and as we've learned during the course of the last month, even when charges are filed against a police officer conviction is difficult.

In the last 30 days, juries in South Carolina, Oklahoma and Ohio have failed to reach verdicts in cases involving police officers charged with murder.

The trial of a South Carolina police officer accused of murdering an unarmed black motorist was declared a mistrial this week. A video showed Officer Michael Slager, who is white, shooting 50-year-old Walter Scott, who is black, multiple times in the back as he ran away from the officer.

The jury deliberated for more than 22 hours over the course of four days, when Judge Clifton Newman announced that the jury was hopelessly deadlocked.

Contrary to original reports, the jury was not hung 11-1 in favor of guilty. Jury foreman Dorsey Montgomery II, told the "Today Show" that the jury had agreed that murder was not the appropriate charge and they considered a lesser charge of manslaughter, but five jurors could not vote for guilty, despite the fact that

shooting a fleeing suspect in the back has long been outlawed.

In 1974, the United States Supreme Court in *Garner v. Tennessee* held that, under the Fourth Amendment, when a law enforcement officer is pursuing a fleeing suspect, the officer may not use deadly force to prevent escape unless the officer believes that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others.

Justice Byron White wrote, "It is not better that all felony suspects die than that they escape." He continued, "The fact that the police arrive a little late or are a little slower afoot does not always justify killing the suspect."

Last month, a judge declared a mistrial in the murder trial of now retired Tulsa police officer Shannon Kepler. The officer was off duty when he confronted his daughter's boyfriend and shot him in the chest and neck killing him and endangering others.

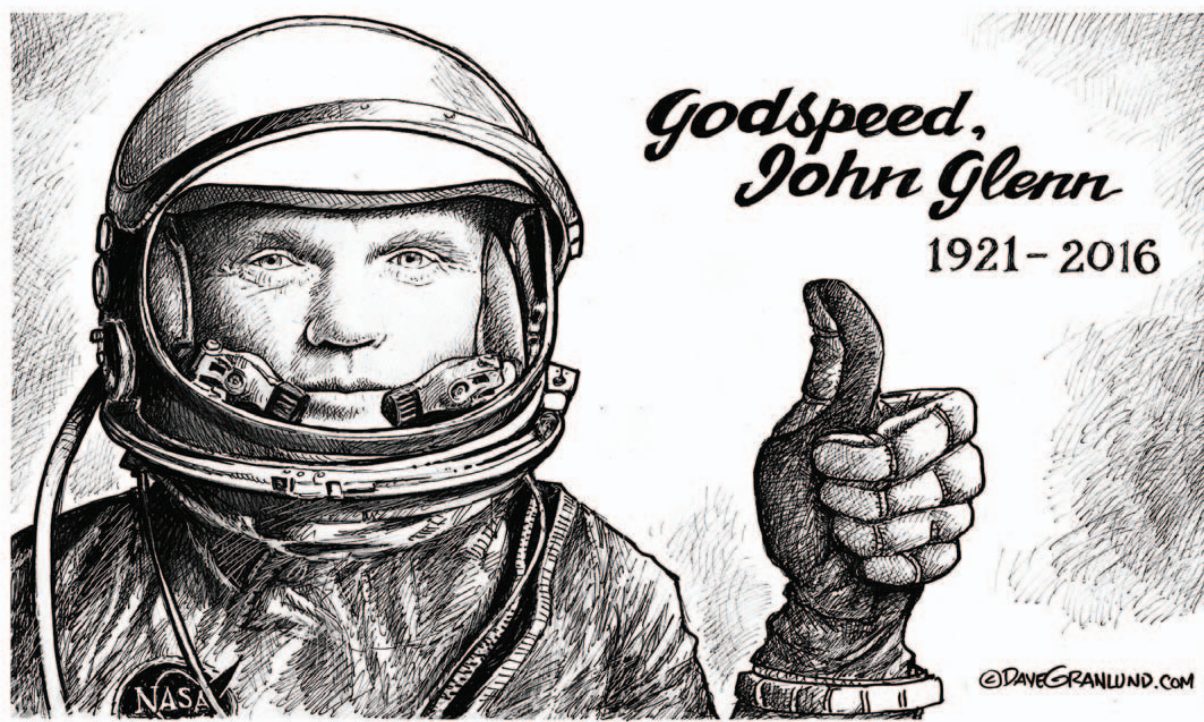
The jurors said they were stuck at 11-1 in favor of guilty. Kepler, who was off duty, claims that he was looking for his 18-year-old daughter. When he found Lisa Kepler she was with her boyfriend. Kepler then fired at the boyfriend with a .357-caliber revolver - killing him.

Jury nullification has long been accepted where a jury decides that the evidence supports conviction but renders a "not guilty" verdict because it feels that a conviction would be unjust.

Are these decisions by individual jurors the product of conscientious deliberation or "juror nullification?"

Some jurors may find it simply unconscionable to convict a police officer and by holding out - juror nullification - they can take a stand on what they perceive as the unjust treatment of the police.

ANOTHER VIEW



THOMAS O'MARA | STATE SENATOR

Start the New Year with mandate relief

Very soon, the New York State Senate will deliver to Governor Andrew Cuomo a piece of critically important mandate relief legislation. The governor will have the choice to sign the legislation into law, or to veto it.

This legislation, which I co-sponsored, has broad bipartisan support and it would mark a badly needed mandate relief action to start the new year. Specifically, it would begin to get county governments and local property taxpayers out from under the burden of the state-mandated cost of public legal defense for the poor, commonly known as "indigent criminal defense."

But in light of the governor's recent barrage of more than 70 veto messages for measures that many of us thought he would sign into law this year - including legislation I co-sponsored known as the "Farm to Food Bank" bill and sponsored to create an "Upstate Transit Advisory Board" - your guess is as good as mine about what's going to

happen here.

Since the beginning of 2016, the New York State Association of Counties has identified the move to relieve counties locally and statewide of this unfunded state mandate as a top priority. It would save counties and local property taxpayers statewide nearly \$155 million a year. In Steuben County alone, it would save taxpayers \$1 million a year when fully effective.

Single out Steuben County because I'm fully on board with a Steuben County legislative resolution adopted earlier this year which states, in part, that "the New York State Senate and Assembly have passed historic legislation entitled the Public Defense Mandate Relief Act (S.8114/A.10706) which will require New York State to reimburse counties for expenditures made fulfilling the State's obligation to provide representation for those financially unable to afford counsel...Requiring counties subject to a State-imposed tax cap to finance

the State's obligation to provide public defense services imposes a significant, uncontrollable financial burden on counties dependent on real property taxes to fund needed services."

The New York Conservative Party recently weighed in with its support by stating, "Beleaguered counties need the relief that this bill offers."

The legislation, in fact, gets bipartisan support across the political spectrum, from the above-noted Conservative Party to the Brennan Center for Justice. In June, it was given unanimous approval.

Relieving counties of the burden of unfunded state mandates is, after all, the only way to ensure a future for local property taxpayers defined by property tax cuts, not just a slower rate of property tax growth.

To be clear, the local property tax cap the state enacted in 2011 has largely been successful. It's provided local taxpayers with a combined, four-year savings of \$15.3 billion. I

strongly support making the cap permanent. Add to this the fact that the state's self-imposed, two-percent spending cap - which should also be made a permanent fixture of New York State's fiscal practices - has produced an additional \$31 billion in taxpayer savings. Combine these two and we're making progress.

But I've been more than outspoken about the fact that New York has not lived up to Governor Cuomo's original promise in 2011 to lift the existing burden of unfunded state mandates on local governments and local property taxpayers.

Here's an opportunity for the governor to begin changing course. The legislation about to be placed on the governor's desk for final action would mark a significant mandate relief.

Simply said, it's the kind of action we need to take if we're ever going to truly transform the state-local partnership and lead the way to a future of property tax cuts for our local taxpayers.