

Why some prisons close

The cost of incarceration in New York State has raised legitimate concerns. While I welcome honest criticism of my management of the Department of Correctional Services, the leaders of the correction officers' union are sidestepping the most significant issue and spreading misinformation as they fight the right-sizing of the state prison system.

State correctional facilities hold 2,250 fewer inmates than they did just a year ago. More than 5,400 beds sit empty. We simply do not need the level of staff we have. Since uniformed employees make up more than two thirds of our work force, it is only logical that they see the largest overall decrease.



BRIAN FISCHER

Guest Viewpoint

The leaders of the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association largely ignore this population loss as they fight consolidation. Meanwhile, a "fact sheet" they distributed in Albany recently claims 10,170 offenders are double-bunked in single cells in medium and minimum security prisons. That's impossible; those prisons are made up almost exclusively of dormitory-style housing. Combined, they hold just 21 cells. The union leaders' "fact sheet" also cites double-bunked cells at three of our maximum security prisons without explaining that those cells were built and designed to hold two offenders in the first place, in accordance with all state regulations. And the union's display in the Well of Albany's Legislative Office Building included a photograph of a prison dormitory overcrowded with inmates in orange uniforms. New York bans orange for security reasons; all inmates here wear green.

NYSCOPBA's solutions to reduce Central Office staffing and streamline individual prison management are equally misguided.

Ninety-eight percent of department employees work at correctional facilities across the state. To manage a \$3 billion-plus annual budget, a Central Office team that accounts for just 2 percent of the agency's staff — despite being cut by more than 9 percent in the last three years, which saved nearly \$300 million — is hardly excessive.

To combine individual prison management teams wherever there are two facilities in close proximity would invite trouble. Prisons operate best when staff and offenders alike know who's in charge and see and talk to those leaders as they regularly walk through galleries, dormitories, yards and mess halls. At the core of every serious prison incident nationwide is a lack of firm, knowledgeable leadership and neglect of the needs, moods and problems of the institution. Our prison system has remained free of any major incidents for 13 years, and our rate of violence has stayed at historic lows. Let's keep it that way.

We must control costs, generate savings and — in the face of a projected drop of yet another 1,000 offenders in the coming year — close prisons. No private business would continue operating empty facilities. State taxpayers simply cannot afford to maintain the status quo.

Brian Fischer is the commissioner of the New York State Department of Correctional Services.

OPINION POLL

Do you think the new anti-texting law for drivers in New York is curtailing the practice?

This question has been reposted because of an input error that failed to offer the correct answer options.

Go to the Viewpoints section at ithacajournal.com and cast your vote.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

SHERMAN M. BODNER, President and Publisher
BRUCE ESTES, Managing Editor/General Manager
DAVE BOHRER, Assistant Managing Editor
DAVID KUBISSA, Viewpoints Editor

The editorial policies of The Ithaca Journal, a member of the Gannett Group, are established by the editorial board above.



File Photo

How Tompkins County farmers manage their land has a significant impact on the Cayuga Lake Watershed.

Watershed relies on farmers' care

What preserves scenic open space, bolsters the local economy and protects drinking water and other natural resources? Well-managed farms. Farmers were the first stewards of the land, and they continue that role today. The health and livelihood of farm families depend on clean water, preserving productive soils and good animal care.



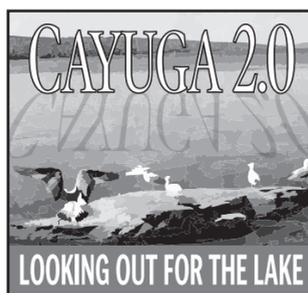
CRAIG SCHUTT

Guest Viewpoint

Meanwhile, farmers in the Cayuga Lake Watershed are also helping to protect the water quality of Cayuga Lake. The Cayuga Lake Watershed is a mixture of land uses, including urban, suburban, forested and agriculture, which has traditionally been the dominant land use in the watershed. Approximately one-third of the land is farmed, with about 57 percent dedicated to raising livestock and 42 percent in field crop production. There is a diverse mix of beef and small livestock operations, horses, vineyards, greenhouses, vegetables and fruit, along with traditional dairy farms and an increasing number of organic operations.

So how does this patchwork of land uses affect the Cayuga Lake Watershed? When rain falls, it flows across the land, into groundwater and streams, and eventually into rivers and lakes. In the process, it can wash contaminants from land activities such as road salt, fertilizer and pesticide applications, timber harvesting, manure spreading and construction into the water. While there are no perfect land uses, well-managed farms can actually protect water quality as they contribute less-polluted runoff to water bodies than most land uses. The conservation efforts of farmers in the watershed have demonstrated that where agricultural runoff concerns do occur they can be remedied by implementing Agricultural Environmental Management, AEM, practices.

As economic pressure continues to drive the growth of dairy farms, the land base needed to support that growth also increases.



ABOUT THIS SERIES

Cayuga 2.0 is a series of monthly guest viewpoints about the health of the Cayuga Lake watershed and the challenges and opportunities related to it. The viewpoints are provided by the Tompkins County Water Resources Council.

► Next month's installment: Stream buffers and flood hazards in Tompkins County.

In order to protect land and water resources, New York was one of the first states in the nation to take regulatory action. Larger-sized livestock and poultry farms are regulated under permits with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. This regulatory program is considered a national model, as many states are just beginning to implement a regulated process. New York is one of only a few states that require Certified Planners and the only state with a quality assurance and quality control process in place to assure regulators and the public of quality planning.

Nearly all of New York's regulated dairy farms are family-run businesses that have had their roots in farming for generations. Regulated farms are categorized by the number of animals on the farm by the DEC. A medium-sized regulated dairy farm houses more than 200 mature cows, and a large regulated farm houses more than 700. New York's regulated farms are required to have a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan developed by a Certified AEM Planner. To meet stringent runoff controls for nutrients and other pollutants as prescribed in their plan, farmers install and maintain conservation practices according to standards from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Many of these practices can cost the farmer in the tens, to sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars. Fertility testing of all crop fields every three years is required. From that, nutrient management, including fertilizer and manure applications, are calculated to crop needs. DEC routinely inspects these farms to ensure permit compliance, including required record keeping. As in any industry operating under a natural system, sometimes Mother Nature throws a curve into even the best-intended plans. When this occurs, the farm's required emergency actions plan lays out the state's established protocol.

Farm planning and natural resource protection in New York begins at the local level with County Soil and Water Conservation District AEM programs. AEM is a statewide approach that evaluates potential environmental risks on individual farms, and identifies the good stewardship practices currently being followed. Once concerns are identified, alternatives are recommended and a farm plan is developed to meet environmental needs and the farm's business goals. In order to be eligible for state or federal cost-share funding to install conservation practices, farms must participate in AEM. This approach is applicable to all sizes and types of farms. AEM is an important step for smaller, unregulated farms to voluntarily assess and address potential risks, and helps regulated farms meet and exceed their plan requirements.

When you see those scenic vistas of cows grazing on green meadows, corn stalks swaying in the wind, and clear water flowing in the stream near you, remember, it is local farmers who provide this to the benefit of everyone. So if you see a farmer, say thank you for all they provide.

To learn more about AEM and how farmers are protecting the Cayuga Lake Watershed, and other programs provided by the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, stop by our office or visit our Web site at www.tcsxcd.org.

Craig Schutt is district manager for the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, March 27, 2010. On this date:

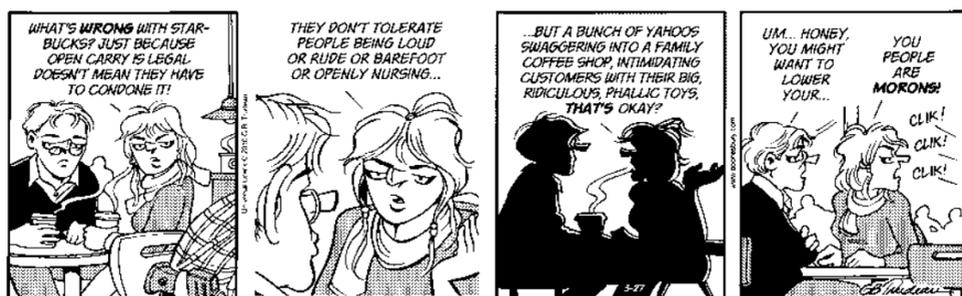
► In 1836, the first Mormon temple was dedicated, in Kirtland, Ohio.
► In 1884, the first telephone

line between Boston and New York was inaugurated.

► In 1964, Alaska was hit by a powerful earthquake and tsunamis that killed about 130 people.

► In 1977, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on the Canary Island of Tenerife.

DOONESBURY



DARTS & LAURELS

Care, compassion for injured daughter

Laurel: From Sheila McCue of Ithaca. On Jan. 11, my daughter was in a horrific car-truck accident on Route 81 South. An 18-wheeler truck hit her as she spun out of control on the snowy highway. Miraculously, she lived. As she lay tangled in her vehicle screaming for help, a priest approached the car. He held my daughter's hand through the broken window, assuring her that she would be OK and that help was on the way. Help arrived 14 minutes later. As the rescue team went to work, the priest faded into the background. No one got his name.

This laurel has two purposes. First, heartfelt thanks to the team that saved my daughter's life. Their extraordinary skill and compassion allowed her to safely make it to SUNY Upstate Medical Center and receive life-saving surgery. Second, we want to thank this mystery priest and need to find him. If anyone knows anything about who this person might be, please call us at (607) 319-4221.

Women's center event

Laurel: From Ronnie Zieba, on behalf of the board and staff of the Women's Opportunity Center. Thank you to everyone who attended our second annual Wine Tasting event held at Six Mile Creek Vineyards on March 5. Thank you to the following Cayuga Lake wineries for participating: Six Mile Creek Vineyard, King Ferry Winery-Treleaven Wines, Long Point Winery, Sheldrake Point Vineyard, and Bellwether Hard Cider. We extend a special thank you to Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions for donating the wonderful wine for our raffle and also to Taughannock Farms Inn for contributing refreshments. This was a very enjoyable event for all, and we look forward to seeing you next year. Thank you for supporting the Women's Opportunity Center.

St. Baldrick's a success

Laurel: From Kim Cotton, Kelly Starkweather, Diane Craig and Jill Parillo, on behalf of the St. Baldrick's event: WOW! That three letter word is the only word we can come up with to express our thanks to everyone involved with the March 14 event held at the Candor American Legion. We would like to thank everyone who helped make this event a huge success, raising over \$28,000 for pediatric cancer research (donations are still being accepted). Our thanks to: Our honored cancer families, Candor American Legion family, Candor Emergency Squad, all the people and businesses who helped with music, food donations and preparation, donations of raffled items, making hats, Lucky Charms and for all who helped make the event a success. To our barbers: Salon Escape, The Haircolor Café, Becky's Beauty Shop, The Trendsetter, Short's Barber Shop & Connie Kulze. And the biggest thank you goes to everyone who donated funds and to our 59 shavees — to brave the clippers to become a "Shavee Hero," to proudly go bald to help raise money for pediatric cancer research, in hopes that one day no parent will ever hear the words, "your child has cancer."

Keep kids off memorials

Dart: From Holly Hollingsworth on behalf of the DeWitt Park Restoration Committee to the parents who allow their children to climb on the memorials and smear mud on them. This shows disrespect for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedom. It shows disrespect for the property of others. What we teach our children now will make for good citizens in the future.