



SOUTH SENECA CHAT
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FINGER LAKES TIMES

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**Also inside
today ...**



Perfect so far
The Herons soccer team improves to 5-0.
— Page 1B

'Fracking hearing
The oil and gas industry is urging the EPA to keep a narrow focus in its study of how hydrofracking may affect drinking water — while environmental groups want the study to cover everything from road-building to waste disposal. The issues will be aired Monday at an EPA hearing twice postponed last month because of security concerns.
— Page 12A

TIMES

POLL

A recent poll showed people's emotional well-being increases with their income up to \$75,000 and then levels out. How much would you have to make to be happy?

About \$50,000 a year.
17%

About \$75,000 a year.
22%

About \$100,000 a year.
25%

I'm happy with what I'm making now.
12%

I could be happy with any amount — it's not about the money.
23%

Go to www.fltimes.com and scroll down to answer. A new poll runs each week with the answers the following Monday.



Spencer Tulis photos / Finger Lakes Times

With 59.18 percent of its assessed property value tax exempt in 2009, Geneva ranked fifth among the state's cities. Ogdensburg had the highest percentage off the rolls at 64.06.

The trade-off

Behind the tax-exempt numbers is a long-standing policy debate: Should entities that exist to benefit the public receive special treatment to encourage their efforts, or should they pay the same taxes as citizens and for-profit corporations?

By JIM MILLER
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GENEVA — No question about it: When people move here from out of state and learn about the taxes, their jaws hit the floor.

Jennifer Fitzgerald, a broker and owner of Lake to Lake Real Estate, hears it all the time. The double takes stem in part from statewide issues, but Geneva's tax burden is on the high side even by New York's high standards.

"They really do have to bite the bullet," Fitzgerald said of her out-of-state clients. "But the other option is, if they [can] go to Canandaigua or a different municipality with other taxes, they'll opt to do that."

Many factors drive Geneva's tax rate, but the amount of tax-exempt property in the city is among the biggest. That's the trade-off for having the exempt entities here, and it strikes some as a bad deal.

"Why should one person pay taxes and the other not?" said Anita Carlson, owner of the Sideshow Bar on Exchange Street. "I believe things are supposed to be even-handed, and they're not."

Carlson and others like her may or may not see positive points in hosting some of the city's biggest tax-exempt entities — Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Finger Lakes Health and the New York State Agricultural



Darlene DiFederico and Charles Arthur work on a home they are renovating in Geneva. "They've taken a lot of property off the tax roll in the last 10 years," DiFederico says of Hobart and William Smith Colleges. "Have they increased their contribution by that amount?" DiFederico and Arthur own 22 properties between them, most purchased through foreclosure.

Experiment Station — but they definitely see problems.

Property manager Charles Davis, for example, looks at the Colleges' current tuition — about \$40,000 a year — and finds it hard to believe that HWS does not have enough revenue coming in to pay more in taxes. He looks at the health system and wonders why it needs so many properties. And if it does, he

■ See THE TRADE-OFF on Page 6A

OFF THE ROLLS: Part 2

Making sense of Geneva's tax-exempt property puzzle

About this series

Nearly 60 percent of Geneva's assessed value is now exempt from property taxes. Over the next few days, the Times will look at what's off the rolls and whether the benefits the city derives from hosting large tax-exempt entities are worth the uncollected taxes.

► TODAY — The Trade-off. A look at the cost of being home to large tax-exempt entities.

► TUESDAY — The Return. Tax-exempt entities offer services to city residents and have a large impact on the local economy even if they don't pay taxes.

► WEDNESDAY — Going Forward. City leaders plan to talk about the tax-exempt issue later this fall.

► THURSDAY — Our opinion.

A CONVERSATION WITH : Kenneth Millington

"A Conversation ..." is a regular *Times* feature, designed to give our readers a glimpse of various individuals who stop in and share an hour or so of their time, talking with us about today's issues.



Gabrielle Plucknette photos / Finger Lakes Times

Millington, a 1992 graduate of Geneva High School, is nearing completion of his second mural in downtown Geneva.

FLT: Where did your interest in art stem from?

MILLINGTON: I think it mostly just comes from drawing as a little kid. I just used to like to draw dinosaurs, started out with that, and then I graduated to much more — things that I could observe. ... I had the good fortune of being able to travel a lot when I was a kid. ... My father taught for Hobart, so there's study abroad programs there. My

mother, being from Bolivia, we also made a lot of trips back there. So I think seeing a lot of new cultures, a lot of different landscapes, a lot of different architectural histories kind of fostered that interest.

FLT: What was your inspiration for the mural on the west wall of 93 Castle St.?

MILLINGTON: It started when I did the other bicentennial mural. It's by the [Family] Dollar Store [on Exchange Street]. I had been researching a lot of information at the historical society. ... They have great archives down there, so I was kind of going through a lot of

photos and I was reading a lot of books about Geneva, and realized I never knew any of the history of Geneva, by and large.

So I thought it'd be interesting to do something that represented as much as I could put on the wall. It was a source of pride, because I think there's a lot of great history here that nobody really knows about, and it covers all different kinds of things, from geological interests to Native American culture to the agricultural, industrial eras and even the military components that resided here.

■ See MILLINGTON on Page 5A

MURAL ARTIST

Hometown: Geneva
Lives in: Brooklyn
Age: 36
Family: Wife, Anette
Education: Geneva High School, 1992; bachelor's degree in fine arts from the Rhode Island School of Design; and a master of fine arts degree from the School of Visual Arts in New York City.
Professional: Primarily a freelance artist; currently teaching foundation of drawing at Parsons The New School for Design in New York City.
Favorite medium: Large-scale water color.



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WORD OF MOUTH: "If you don't like something you can say so, without worry, because freedom of speech isn't just a bumper sticker slogan ..." — Pete Mitchell. More on Page 8A.

TOMORROW

High: 67
Low: 47

