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Chenango County's new chairman looks ahead and is not afraid to answer tough questions

BY TYLER MURPHY

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As Chenango County heads into 2021 the pandemic dominates daily life, including the economy and almost all government functions.

Even democratic principles have taken a backseat to New York State's response to the pandemic, with the state being essentially ruled by a single branch of government through executive orders issued by Governor Andrew Cuomo for most of 2020.

Nursing homes in particular have been devastated as New York State has botched the initial vaccine distribution. About a third of the reported deaths in Chenango County at the end of January 2021 were from local nursing homes.

Chenango County and many rural areas have

struggled to get vaccines. Under intense pressure the vaccination process is slowly picking up steam but health officials estimate optimistically it will be late summer or early fall before the vaccine brings enough relief to begin a return to normal life.

The county's top priority for 2021

"The first priority, and it may be for a while, is dealing with COVID-19. COVID will continue to be a focus," said newly appointed Chenango County Board of Supervisor Chairman George Seneck. He is the Town of Guilford supervisor.

"We are not where the state is saying we're at. We're not at 1B. I think you see stuff coming out of the governor's office and it's hard as a small county like this to get the infor-

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Chenango County Board of Supervisors Chairman George Seneck. Seneck is the Town of Guilford supervisor and was recently appointed to lead Chenango County in 2021. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)



While SFCU's headquarters is located in Sidney, the credit union also has locations in Bainbridge, Greene, and Norwich. (Submitted photo)

Sidney Federal Credit Union expands during the pandemic

BY ZACHARY MESECK

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NORWICH – Sidney Federal Credit Union (SFCU) was able to make upgrades for its customers, keep team members safe, and break ground on a new branch in 2020.

According to Sidney Federal Credit Union Vice President of Marketing Keith May, 2020 was a year of progress for SFCU with a new ATM in the Price Chopper Plaza in the

Town of Norwich, and the announcement for a new branch in Amsterdam New York.

As of early 2021, SFCU had 55,844 members, \$607 Million in assets, and nine branches located in Sidney, Bainbridge, Greene, Norwich, Market St. Oneonta, Oneida St. Oneonta, Delhi, Walton, and Hancock with a 10th branch Amsterdam coming in later 2021.

May said while growth was important for SFCU, safety was at the top of

their priority list with the pandemic looming throughout the year.

"In preparing for the pandemic our number one priority was the safety of our staff and members," he said. "Deploying staff to remote positions and being able to provide them the equipment and resources was critical."

"We also needed to ensure as staff were deployed to a remote work environment, we were able protect our members' information, which was

accomplished through multiple levels of required authentication, but also provide the high level of member experience our members are accustomed to."

Nearly a year later, as the number of COVID-19 cases started to rise again, SFCU was able to pivot quickly to a hybrid model for administrative employees. With proper precautions and protocol in place they were able to

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THE EVENING SUN

This paper will be the Friend of the Government, of Morals and Truth – Independent of Politics and Religion

On March 16, 2021 *The Evening Sun* will celebrate its 130th anniversary, serving as Chenango County's Hometown Daily Newspaper since 1891.

"This paper will be the Friend of the Government, of Morals and Truth – Independent of Politics and Religion."

This was the creed of *The Norwich Sun* circa 1913, and though it may have fallen out of use, the basic premise remains the same.

Statistically speaking, a community of this size shouldn't still have a daily newspaper. There just aren't many newspapers of our size still in print.

The Evening Sun is special in that regard, made even more rare by the fact that we are an independently-owned publication.

The history of this newspaper is as rich and deep as the history of Norwich itself. Long before this publication, the newspaper business in Norwich saw its inception on Nov. 14, 1816 when J.F. Hubbard began publishing *The Norwich Journal* for 2 cents per copy. The *Journal* continued to be published successfully for several years, changing hands numerous times.

In 1877, publisher B. Gage Berry changed the name to *The Chenango Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, with an issue coming out every Wednesday and Saturday mornings at a cost of two dollars per year. Eventually, *The Telegraph* merged with *The Norwich Sun* nearly a century later.

The year 1891 marked the beginning of Chenango County's first and only daily newspaper, still going strong today. The paper was first known as *The Morning Sun*, later becoming *The Norwich Sun*, and finally as it is known today, *The Evening Sun*.

The Morning Sun was first published on a daily basis by Reed Campbell on March 16, 1891 in a little building on Mechanic Street, which was razed several decades ago for a YMCA addition. The first daily issue was six pages long, with 17 columns of display advertising.

In the editorial column of the very first *Morning Sun*, the following address was delivered by the editor:

"The *Morning Sun* will be issued every day except Sundays. It will be thoroughly independent and especially so as regards to politics and religion.

"It will publish the news from day to day in a truthful and concise manner and in every way try to advocate such needed reforms as will be of lasting benefit to every man, woman and child in the beautiful village of Norwich.

"The office has been equipped with new and modern presses, type, and everything necessary to make a first class newspaper.

"The paper will be under efficient management and editorial writers will devote their entire time to making *The Morning Sun* a bright, interesting

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Sidney Federal Credit Union expands during the pandemic —

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leave branch lobbies open for members to continue to conduct business in person.

“Having the majority of staff working in a remote environment; most of whom have never worked in that kind of environment is probably the most relatable challenge we faced,” May added. “Keeping staff focused and engaged, managers learning how to manage employees they cannot see face to face and keeping morale up during the long months of winter.”

“Our team really rose to the occasion.”

May said SFCU used the Teams application to hold virtual meetings and have engaging events. He said the organization hosted a series of fun contests that employees could participate in and as the days warmed up remote employees made signs at home and visited their local branches to socially show support for SFCU’s invaluable group of frontline workers, our tellers and platform staff.

“We are lucky to have nimble staff; they have become adapted to the changing landscape of our industry as a result of COVID-19,” he said.



In 2020 Sidney Federal Credit Union opened a new ATM in the Town of Norwich so customers as part of its mission to make banking easy and convenient. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

“They have adapted to virtual models with ease.”

“Team members have been flexible in helping other departments in different roles, they have learned new ways of doing daily tasks and are ready to take on what each day brings.”

He added that with a flexible and hardworking the organization was able to push towards

upgrading existing services and adding new ones.

“We were able to make upgrades in our online banking for business members, and these upgrades allowed for a tailored and more personalized business banking experience,” said May. “Also our commercial lending department was able to secure a SBA

authorization to provide much needed PPP loans to our business members.”

“We will officially be rolling out our new Mastercard Rewards program which will be a huge benefit to our members and allow us to remain relevant and competitive within the credit card sector.”

May said SFCU has major plans for its

digital platforms to provide a more concierge and robust experience to our members. He said they will also be actively working towards becoming an SBA 7.a lender to be able to better serve the businesses in their communities.

May added that COVID-19 will continue to be a big driver in a lot of what the economic landscape looks like for 2021 and the years to come.

“We are dedicated to being flexible and ready to make changes where we need to always have the best interest of our members and staff in mind,” said May. “In the next 6 months we will have opened our 10th branch in Amsterdam, NY and will officially have rolled out our Mastercard Rewards program.”

“In 2020, despite the challenging climate we were able to experience record growth in both membership and loan volume both consumer and commercial. We plan to continue on that path into 2021.”

Sidney Federal Credit Union did not have to reduce staff due to the pandemic, and that continues to be the case. While branch lobbies were closed, administrative

staff was sent home to work remotely.

“We shifted our plans on finalizing Mastercard rewards to having our digital operations team support the surging use of online services,” he said. “Business development turned into a team of 20 employees conducting member outreach and calling every member, 55,000 members, at the credit union to let them know we were here for whatever they needed.”

“We have learned we are resilient; We were reminded of what we already know. SFCU is a big family and our members are just as much of that family as we are to each other.”

He added that while we are a ways away from “post-COVID-19” and the road will be long for many businesses.

“Small businesses who are fortunate enough to make it will be rebuilding for years to come, and they will need assistance, counseling, and support,” said May. “Members of the community who lost their jobs will need help for years to come.”

“The emotional impact of COVID-19 and all the friends and family lost will forever be in the back of our minds and in our hearts.”

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The Evening Sun: Friend of the Government, of Morals and Truth –

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and readable newspaper.”

On March 7, 1904, the name of the paper became The Norwich Sun, having changed from a morning to an afternoon publication time.

In 1961, a similar change from afternoon to later evening publication prompted the name change to *The Evening Sun*.

The name of the newspaper remains so today, even though it is off the presses in downtown Norwich by the noon hour; delivery is later in the outer

regions of the county.

Over the years, the paper has been headquartered in several locations, from Mechanic Street to Lackawanna Avenue to Hale Street and back to Lackawanna. The newspaper's printing plant on Hale Street was built in 1971; in 2002, it was sold when the newspaper's printing operations moved to the current Sun Printing facility in the Borden Avenue warehouse.

In 1996, the editorial and sales staffs moved their headquarters from Hale Street to Lackawanna Avenue, just a few doors

down from The Sun's former home.

After a succession of both local and out-of-town owners, *The Evening Sun* was purchased by Snyder Communications on May 2, 1994. For the first time in over 15 years, *The Evening Sun* was again owned locally, this time by a growing family of successful companies which employ over 200.

So, here we are today, almost 130 years later, still going strong in an industry which, like so many others, has suffered some devastating blows and challenges.

SUCCESS STORY

Norwich Rehabilitation and Nursing Center

In a year marked by the greatest challenge their facility has ever seen as they strive to protect their residents from COVID-19, Norwich Rehabilitation and Nursing Center has found something to celebrate. Norwich Rehab was one of only five facilities in New York State awarded the American Health Care Association's Silver Achievement in Quality Award. The award is given after exhaustive review of a facility's programs and outcomes finds that their work is outstanding.

“Our project over the last few years has been to continue providing our long-term residents with the quality they both deserve and expect, while developing the area's premiere short-term rehab program,” says facility administrator, Edith Revoir. “We want to be the destination for our community members to recover from surgeries or illnesses; their last step on their journey home. We can get them back to the community and back to their lives.” The outcomes express for themselves. While the national rate of return to the community from a subacute skilled nursing stay is approximately 50%, Norwich Rehab's success rate tops 80%. “One of the reasons I came to work here was the amazing work these therapists did with my grandfather. He was a tough customer, and I was really impressed that the team was able to get him back home. I want to be able to give other families in Chenango County the same gift that Norwich Rehab gave us—the gift of a loved one at home,” says Erika Swayze, Director of Admissions.

Norwich Rehab plans to continue their march towards excellence, developing more specialized rehabilitation programs in stroke and cardiac recovery, as well as launching an outpatient therapy program. They continue to implement restorative therapies to their residents in one-on-one settings, adapting their services to their resident's needs in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. They count the sacrifices and dedication of their staff as key in their successes both in their rehabilitation outcomes and COVID-19 prevention. “We have made it this far through hard work, strong leadership and a lot of luck,” according to Swayze. “We've watched COVID tear through other facilities, and we recognize ‘there but for the Grace...’” Norwich Rehab residents and employees have just completed their second round of vaccinations, and they are holding their collective breath that this is the first step back to a “new normal”. “I've spent a year helping my residents connect with their loved ones via FaceTime and Zoom instead of hugs. It's heart-breaking to watch their pain. I am so excited at the possibility that this vaccine could give them a chance to see their families again,” Allison Miller, Director of Social Services, expresses.

“We're ready for a new year, a new start, and all the new steps we can take with our residents to improve their quality of life, whether it's here with us or out in the community,” Revoir says. “We're here to help. We're excited to be a partner here in Chenango County and to take steps forward together.”

SUCCESS STORY

S&S TV and Appliances Receives Dealer of the Year Award at BrandSource Convention Honored for commitment to excellence in the retail industry

DALLAS – S&S TV and Appliances of Norwich, N.Y., was named the BrandSource Dealer of the Year for the North Atlantic Region at the BrandSource National Convention & Expo at the Gaylord Texan in Dallas. Co-owners Tom and Joan Brauer were honored at the buying group's annual awards ceremony, which was held amid the hoopla of its four-day convention.

With showrooms in Norwich and Hamilton, N.Y., S&S serves the greater Madison and Chenango County communities with a wide selection of home appliances from such premium brands as Amana, Danby, Electrolux, Maytag, Monogram, Samsung and Whirlpool. The company also carries TVs and assorted A/V gear and accessories, and its specially trained, in-house technicians are prepared to service all that S&S sells.

The BrandSource Dealer of the Year awards are presented annually to a member who has shown continued support of BrandSource and its direct suppliers. The Dealer of the Year must support the group by attending regional meetings as well as national events such as the Convention and Summit.

The 14 winners, which were selected by each region's membership, demonstrate a continued commitment to excellence in the retail industry and to their fellow BrandSource dealers.

About BrandSource: BrandSource is the leading merchandising organization for independent appliance, home furnishings and consumer tech dealers. Its parent company, AVB, is a \$19.5 billion member-driven co-op that provides merchandising, financing and digital marketing services to nearly 5,000 independent dealers in the U.S. and Canada. BrandSource's sister divisions and affiliates include ProSource (consumer tech and custom integration); TRIB Group (rent-to-own); Mega Group (Canada); and HFA Buying Source, serving home furnishings dealers nationwide.

S&S TV and Appliances also received the New York State Senate Empire Award that was presented by Senator Frederick J. Akshar II of the 52nd senate District. This award is in recognition of outstanding contributions and dedication to the growth, prosperity and betterment of their community in New York State.

S&S would also like to thank the community for making 2020 such a great success!

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mation out.”

Though people who are 65 or older now qualify for the vaccine county health officials are still struggling to get vaccines for area emergency workers and the nursing home residents, who were supposed to be top priority.

Local officials have advised those in need to seek vaccines from pharmacy and hospital sites offering it because the state has been so unreliable in making deliveries to the local health departments.

“As we move beyond the horizon of 2021, the COVID pandemic will continue to test our reserve for rural counties such as ours, the distribution of vaccine to eligible and willing participants is going to be a challenge,” Seneck said.

“The governor’s office, is saying we’re moving to 1B. We’re not there yet. We’re not done with 1A yet, as far as people that qualify to get the vaccine.”

At the end of January, the county was still trying to get enough vaccines for those classified in the top 1A category. “The 1A, you’re looking at hospital employees, nurses, doctors, medical, EMTs.”

Of those in the 1A



The official seal of Chenango County hangs in the board of supervisors meeting room at the Chenango County Office Building. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

group, locally only about 50 percent of emergency medical responders were willing to be vaccinated. The county is still working to vaccinate nursing home residents, those most vulnerable to the pandemic.

“Still to my understanding, we still haven’t managed to provide vaccines to all of our nursing home people. I think that is very important,” said Seneck.

“So, we have that portion of the population and they are very vulnerable. I think they’d be best served, if they so choose to want

the vaccine, to be able to have it. We are months out. I really don’t think that we’re going to be able to service the population in Chenango County, as far as vaccine is concerned, well into April or May.”

Until more vaccines are available officials urged area residents to continue to following health guidelines, wear a mask, stay six feet away from each other, sanitize possible exposures and practice a healthy lifestyle.

How did the county first respond to the pandemic?

In February officials

began to understand the COVID-19 virus was going to have a significant impact, but information was scarce and officials were left guessing on what the reality might be.

County leaders were unsure of how to respond and the Chenango County Health Department run by Public Health Director Marcos Flindt and the County Emergency Management Services, headed by Emergency Services Coordinator Matthew Beckwith, led Chenango County’s official response to the pandemic, and they still do.

The Chenango County board of supervisors never organized a unified response to the pandemic or even had a meeting about how to respond. They released almost no information to the public. Over 2020 health officials did not regularly appear at county board meetings, and the board did not ask for regular updates, apart from a few presented in lower committees or made to individual supervisors.

In a coordinated effort, Beckwith and Flindt began offering information to the public.

The health department had Chenango County Medical Director Dr. Scott Cohen, who also works for the Basset Healthcare

Network, help organize virtual weekly and biweekly meetings. With the help of Basset Healthcare they provided regular information to dozens of community partners. They included local leaders, businesses, charities and others who were seeking information on how to respond.

“I really think the county health department has done a tremendous job. I do think as a county we need to do a better job of getting information out to the public. Which is tough,” said Seneck.

At first the health department predicted the virus would be at least as dangerous as a worst-case flu season, which could kill more than 50,000 people in a peak year.

“But at that point in time, we were scrambling for information - we simply didn’t know. And I think there was a lot of panic mode,” explained Seneck.

“I had panic mode on my part. I had Lysol spray. My shoes got sprayed when I got back in the car. We weren’t going any place. You had gloves on. You had masks.”

“At the town we responded pretty quickly. We ordered personal protective supplies right away and we had some stuff, but I said ‘I don’t know where this is going, but I can tell you what’s going to happen is you won’t be able to get things,’” he said.

In a surprise move Seneck was made Chenango County’s chairman at the start of 2021, after the public, along with a number of other supervisors and local leaders began expressing concern over the board’s response to a number of issues related to the pandemic, including a lack of technology investment and the pending loss of private ambulance services.

“I kind of know the way county politics work is that months prior to January you need to start putting things in motion, and see-

ing whether or not if you have enough supervisors to support you. There was dissatisfaction regarding communication regarding COVID,” said Seneck.

“I talked to people and they want more updates on what’s going on with COVID. The health department has done an outstanding job, but people look to the supervisors in the town as if we know what’s going on,” he said.

In early 2020 before he was appointed chairman Seneck took other actions in the Town of Guilford.

“We were scrambling and looking for the best information possible. This was something new and there were a lot of adjustments that had to be made. At that time I was making - it was more a town response.

He began searching for answers to questions that could soon impact Guilford.

“Can we open our parks? Can we operate our summer youth program? We researched the CDC data and so forth and we determined we just cannot meet the CDC requirements. I think that happened across the county in a lot of different places. It was the first time that I can ever recall we didn’t have an arts and crafts program at the town. We didn’t have the summer swim program. We’ve looked at some options of doing it virtually, and then the people who would have been working in the program didn’t think it would work. I said, ‘Well, we have a Zoom account at the town. I certainly can set this up for you. You know we can put together arts and crafts packets and so forth.’”

The town took immediate steps to cuts costs, hoping to get ahead of the pending economic crunch and was successful in avoiding layoffs of town employees.

“There was some discussion about are we going

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to have to lay workers off and stuff and what's the bottom dollar line, as far as services and what we can save for costs. As a public service provider, if workers are laid off, you're going to have personnel costs with unemployment and so forth, and other issues with not getting the public what it needs. It might even cost more in the long run."

Chenango County blindsided by rise of technology

"One of the things that I think has to happen in Chenango County and I guess it's going to become my number two priority, after COVID, is we have to improve the technology on which the county operates."

When COVID arrived and Cuomo ordered a lockdown, the county was not prepared for remote operation, with only about 15 to 20 people able to access work systems from home, out of more than a hundred workers.

"When we tried putting more people on the system, the system froze up or collapsed," confirmed Senneck.

The figure improved overtime and today there are a number of employees able to work remotely but when asked how many Senneck responded, "I know it was increased at that time, I think the plan was to double it and to be honest I really am looking for some updated information."

Unable to work remotely many local government employees were paid to stay home and not work.

Pressed about the issue Senneck admitted, "Yeah, basically people were getting paid to stay home."

The situation caused by the pandemic, a lack of understanding by state officials issuing mandates and a lack of technology, made for hard choices for rural public officials.

Senneck said, "I think there was a lack of clarity on the part of the governor's office, and I think the same thing impacted the county."

"I know there was a move here to have people work remotely, but in order to work remotely you have to have, I'm going to say 'The ability to have employees do that.'"

He said Guilford had the same issue, facing unemployment payments and then the challenge of trying to bring back staff or hire new employees if things change. That presented additional cost and challenges. So officials opted to just keep people home.

"At the town what we did was cut our workforce 50 percent. We continue to pay people. Our highway crew we cut it in half and people were on a rotating schedule for several



"I ask you, 'What can you do as a member of the county board of supervisors for the residents and businesses of Chenango County? I would ask you be as informed as possible, that you read your committee minutes before coming to the board sessions. That you continue to ask questions and invest some of your time in understanding where technology is taking us in 2021.'" - County Board Chairman George Senneck

weeks," explained Senneck. "We finally got back to the point where we had everybody in."

The county attempted to get tablets for employees through a grant, with Senneck saying, "You know you're not going to take your desktop with you."

Senneck said he was still trying to understand the issues saying, "If you're going to work remotely, certainly you can. If you're connected via the Internet and have a computer and so forth. I have no idea where the county is with that, as far as what laptops we have, what tablets we have."

Apart from employees the need to invest in the county's technological infrastructure has also impacted the public.

There is a lack of basic cell phone service and internet for those living outside the Route 12 corridor and main population centers. In today's reality of remote work demands and health uncertainties, this has cost some people their livelihoods or increased their chance of being exposed to COVID.

"Internet is huge concern; we have people in Chenango County that don't even have internet in areas. A lot of school kids are remote and unless you have internet, how can you work remotely? It places a portion of our population; especially young people at a severe disadvantage," said Senneck.

County leaders have been aware of the issues for years, and in the past, some even questioned the need to update the infrastructure, while others admitted to hardly even using a computer or a smart phone themselves.

Asked if there are still members of the Chenango County Board who don't use computers at home Senneck admitted, "Sure we have board members who don't use computers."

Senneck said he was encouraging officials to learn more about technology. Since becoming chairmen he has met with a number of department heads and gets updates

from the county's technology department. He told the department to develop a technology action plan for the county in 2021.

Why wasn't the county investing in technology?

"That's going to be a difficult question for me to answer," said Senneck.

"I think probably the best thing I can say is Chenango County is very fiscally conservative, which has served the county well and I think at times there's been a reluctance to invest in our own future. And if we don't take a look at some of that investment, we're not going to go anywhere," he said.

"I don't know whether it was a lack of direction, a lack of knowledge. You know I'm not a real super techie person myself. But I really have felt that we need to use technology."

Senneck recalled a conversation and a remark from a fellow supervisor made years ago as the board debated spending more to develop better internet service in the county.

"We were talking about investment in broadband and there was a big debate whether the county should be investing in broadband and so forth and he said, 'You know when the next best thing comes along, you may not want to be the first person who gets on the bus, but if it proves pretty good, you better make sure you get on the bus before it takes off.'"

"And my feeling is the bus left a long time ago and we're going to have to run to catch up with the bus, and to catch up with where technology is going to take us," said Senneck.

Senneck said he hopes to improve the county website.

"Is that something that really should be updated? Yes, if you want to promote business in the county, I think that the county website works fairly well. You know you can go in and you can find information there and so forth, but really in today's world it's a piece of media that's out there and it needs to be inviting."

tack crippled the county's services and infrastructure. It took emails and databases offline. County election officials blamed the attack for complications that caused 55 votes to be forgotten and not counted as they should have been.

By the end of January 2021 some systems, especially older ones, like the current mapping software used by the county tax department, was still offline. That system is from 2012.

"Personally, I think the hack was worse than what was initially thought," said Senneck. He said so far, no private information about residents was compromised. "I tend to think a lot of archival information was lost."

In December the county board authorized at least \$200,000 on repairs, with servers and half the county's computers, about 200 machines, being encrypted by malware and rendered unusable. The figures do not count the time lost by employees having to use more laborious paper systems and other workarounds until repairs were completed.

The New York State Board of Elections repair specialists, along with federal Homeland Security investigators, secured the county's voting systems in the days before the election.

The October cyberat-

The county is trying to repair the rest, but the task is a serious challenge.

"It's been kind of the county's position is that this is something we can take care of ourselves and I think this is bigger than what our IT department can handle. We may need to be looking for outside help for this," said Senneck.

Another issue raised was how the county shared information about the October cyberattack. Officials initially downplayed the attack but when it became clear that votes cast in the 2020 elections were being impacted, local election officials were forced to reveal the extent it had impacted their department, and the county as a whole.

The former leadership even kept other board supervisors and those working in the county government in the dark.

Senneck said he found out about the hack indirectly and only drips of information were released about it.

"I made calls, and I continued to call. I was pretty frustrated that over a week had passed and I was getting limited information from the department heads I was going through, and they had limited information."

"My recollection is there was about a 45-min-

Continued on Page 64

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Chenango County's new chairman looks ahead and is not afraid to answer tough questions —

Continued from Page 63

ute discussion by the supervisors that were there, which I found difficult to swallow," he said.

"Because there was a lack of understanding of software and licensing and how if you expanded your ability, you also have to expand your licensing for your firewalls and stuff, and I find that sometimes frustrating."

Over time the extent of the attack became clear.

"On our end we have to look at it as a learning curve. I don't want to say too much, I was not in charge at the time. I think at least the people involved needed to share more information. I'll talk about the board of supervisors: We really, first of all, we didn't even know it happened," he said.

Like the health department, the county's technology director did not give the board regular updates during 2020, or even during the cyberattack itself. The board released no information to the public directly.

Asked if the technology department was ever asked to brief the board Seneck replied, "Not to my knowledge."

"I think we need to work

on the technology at the county and I don't know that we have a handle on what we have here as far as: How many computers exactly do we have? How old are they? I don't know that there's an adequate inventory. I don't know exactly what all the software is that we're using, and some of the software is what you're going to call 'proprietary software' that performs certain functions."

Moving the county forward

The appointment of Seneck has been seen by many as a significant turning point in how the county will move forward.

He is promoting reform, education and transparency.

The county is now collecting information and conducting an inventory of its technology. Seneck has met with the IT department several times.

"I told them they win the award that I know the names of everybody in the department already and I do have to rely on them for some service to get my computer working," he said.

He also wants the board to get more information from the technology department and learn

more about the county's systems.

"We need more of a basic understanding. I think we need to do some education pieces for the board related to technology," Seneck said.

"Certainly, you may not be using this technology but you need to have an understanding of what we're doing and why we're doing it. You're here to make an educated decision on how we move forward, so that education piece is going to be important for the board members."

"I know we have some supervisors who really don't like using computers who aren't too computer savvy, but you need to understand how those pieces fit in with county government," he said.

The county and towns hope to release more information regarding COVID. The county is working with the health department and others to promote technology literacy and assistance, especially to elderly generations who have a hard time using a computer.

"What else can we possibly do? It's going to be a challenge. We have an aging population in this County. One of the things that was talked about when we had the depart-

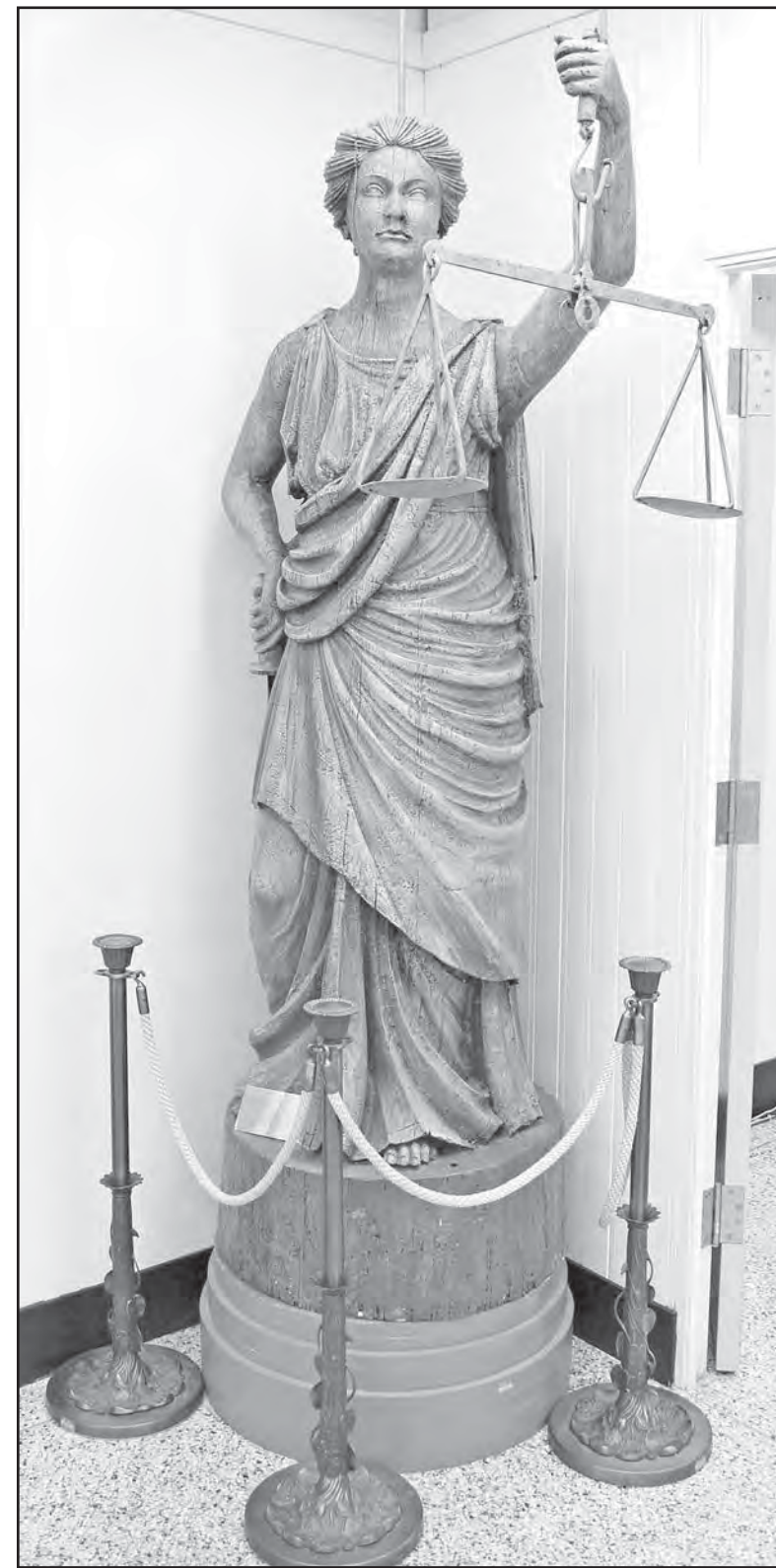
ment meeting is that after people get their first vaccine, they're going to have to be on a state registry to make sure they get their second vaccine. We have a lot of senior citizens who do not do anything with computers. There may be a service we need to provide," he said.

The county is also keeping a close eye on expenses and delaying some projects to save money.

"Maintaining the fiscal integrity of Chenango County amidst a pandemic is going to be an ongoing challenge, that I am sure we will be able to meet."

"I am reaching out to the residents of Chenango County to ask themselves what they can do to build a better 2021 for us."

"I ask you, 'What can you do as a member of the county board of supervisors for the residents and businesses of Chenango County? I would ask you be as informed as possible, that you read your committee minutes before coming to the board sessions. That you continue to ask questions and invest some of your time in understanding where technology is taking us in 2021.'"



Once on top of the Chenango County Courthouse this statue of Lady Justice is not blindfolded. She is now on display inside the Chenango County board of supervisors' meeting room where she keeps her eyes on local politicians. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

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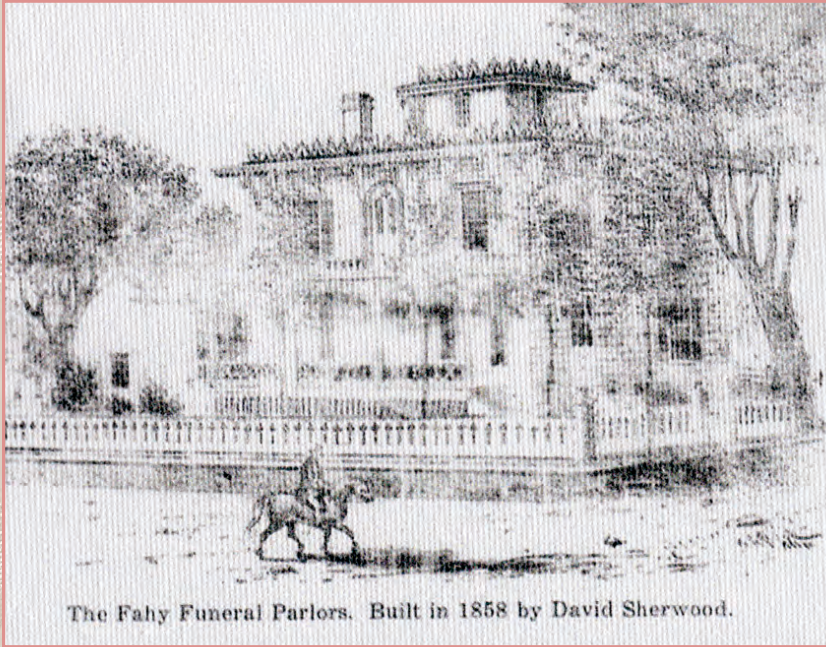
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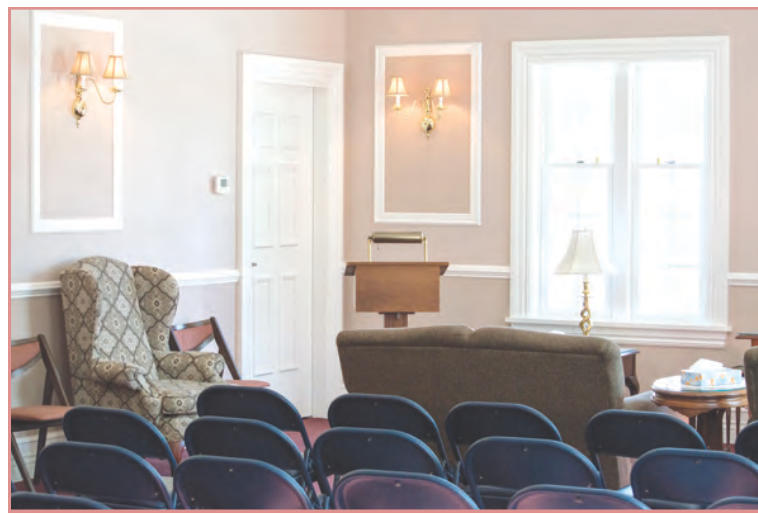


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