

# Life well-lived includes service to country

Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, now a resident at Oak Hill Manor on Ithaca's South Hill, celebrated her 100th birthday on October 11. She was born in the Philippines, the daughter of a Filipino mother and an American father who had come to the Philippines with the United States Army during the Spanish-American War and settled there.

After high school, Florence went to work for Major E. Carl Engelhart at the U.S. Army Intelligence Headquarters in Manila. While employed there, she met Charles Edward Smith, USN, and married him on August 19, 1941. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Charles reported to his P.T. boat for duty and was killed in action on February 8, 1942.

During the time that Florence was employed by the Japanese-controlled Philippine Liquid Fuel Distributing Union, she worked closely with the Philippine Underground, diverting fuel supplies to the resistance as well as assisting in arranging acts of sabotage against the Japanese occupation forces. Meanwhile, her immediate boss, E.C. Engelhart, had been captured, and Florence heard through the grapevine how badly he and other prisoners of the Japanese were being treated by their captors.

She and others began to assist the prisoners as best they could, smuggling food and medicine to them, but Florence was caught and arrested in October, 1944. She was imprisoned and tortured before being sent to Bilibid Prison. After a sham-trial, she was sentenced to three years of hard labor, and sent to the Women's Correctional Institution in Mandaluong on the out-

skirts of Manila.

Florence was liberated by American forces on February 10, 1945. She then decided to move to New York to be with her father's sister and arrived in May of that year. Not having any luck at finding work, Florence enlisted in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, to, as she says, "Avenge the death of my husband."

While she was stationed in Buffalo Harbor, her activities in the Philippines became known to her superiors, and Florence was awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon, the first woman to be so decorated. In November, 1947, Florence was awarded the Medal of Freedom, in no small part due to the testimony of her former boss, E.C. Engelhart, after he had also been liberated.

Florence later married an Army veteran, Robert Thornton Finch, and they became parents to Betty Finch Murphy, of Ithaca, and Bob Finch, currently living in Denver. Robert died in 1968. Florence has six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Of her wartime activities, Florence says, "I feel very humble because my activities in the war effort were trivial compared with those of the people who gave their lives for their country." In 1955 the Coast Guard honored Florence's service when it named an administration building on a base on Sand Island, Hawaii, after her.

When I asked Florence to please tell me her most memorable experience during her military service, she told me it would be when she and 4,000 others boarded the USS Eberle to come to the United States to start new lives.

A good deal of the information

shared here with you was provided from a public service article written by the United States Coast Guard. The entire article can be seen at <http://www.uscg.mil/history/people/florence-finchbio.asp>.

I would like to mention how honored I felt to meet Florence, for she is a truly lovely, and very quietly dignified, hero.

## Harvest festival

The Caroline Center Church will be holding its Harvest Festival from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Oct. 24 at 719 Buffalo Road in Brooktondale. There will be food, music, an auction, crafters and more. Proceeds from the fair will be used to help with the church's winter heating bills.

## Book sale

The Newfield Public Library, located on Main Street, will be holding a book "bag sale" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Oct. 24. You pick out your books and pay \$1 for as many as you can fit in a plastic shopping bag!

## Lean into love

I received the following information from Liz Scott, who recently took over the position of Administrative Assistant for Bereavement Services at Hospicare. There will be a program held for anyone 18 years of age or older called "Leaning into Love, Ritual and Music in Times of Grief" from 10:00 a.m. to noon on Oct. 24, in the Nina K. Miller Hospicare Center at 172 East King Road. This event acknowledges those we miss and the changes loss has made in our lives, and will be led by bereavement writer and hospice volunteer Elaine Mansfield



PROVIDED PHOTO

Florence Ebersole Smith Finch was a member of the U.S. Coast Guard, and was a Japanese prisoner of war during World War II.

and Hospicare music specialist Jayne Demakos. Register by calling 272-0212.

## Fundraiser for Charlie

The Danby Volunteer Fire Department will be holding a spaghetti dinner and bake sale fundraiser for one its own, Charlie Robinson, of Danby, who has been battling health issues and is still recovering from recent surgery. A spaghetti dinner will be served at the fire station on Danby Road from 4 to 7 p.m. on Oct. 24. The cost is \$8. If you would like to contribute baked items please deliver them to the fire station after 3 p.m.

*Southern Tompkins Town Talk appears weekly in the Ithaca Journal. Contact Gay Huddle at 273-6530 or at [gayhuddle@hotmail.com](mailto:gayhuddle@hotmail.com) with stories from the Danby, West Danby, Newfield, South Hill and Brooktondale neighborhoods.*

## Displays

Continued from Page 1A

sculptures that sit in the Smithsonian. In December 2016, the traveling version of the "Human Origins" exhibit is coming to the Tompkins County Public Library and PRI will sponsor programming.

Among the newest haul of material is one of the Smithsonian's most famous statues, a papier-mache stegosaurus nicknamed Steggy, its acquisition spurring changes to renovations the Ithaca museum staff were already in the process of planning.

The 110-year-old, life-sized stegosaurus model wasn't originally in those plans — and the model would not fit through the museum doors — so Director of Exhibits Beth Stricker had to find ways to create the a space. They had to; it's likely the most famed dinosaur model in American history.

"I've flirted with the idea of calculating how many people have seen this statue over that 110 years, but it's clearly in the tens and tens of millions of people," Allmon said. "It's been renovated and spiffed up at least three times in that span. It was made in 1904 for the St. Louis World's Fair, and at the time it represented state-of-the-art thinking of what a dinosaur looked like."

Steggy's not the only famous display now sitting in the Museum of the Earth. A number of dioramas, five of them, are on display in the museum's temporary



SIMON WHEELER / STAFF PHOTO

The Museum of the Earth at the Paleontological Research Institution.

exhibits section. Though some of the finest examples of paleo art ever created, to many, these displays will hardly be offering any new sights.

"If you ever saw an earth science textbook or a geology textbook or surfed the web for any of these particular types of fossils, you've probably seen these dioramas," Allmon said. "They're among the most famous images in the genre. We have slide shows of textbooks that have included pictures of these dating back to the 1960s."

For the next nine or so months, the dioramas will offer an articulate look at a

world that existed millions of years ago, from complex reefs to a view of the muddy banks of Herkimer County, circa 400,000,000 B.C., even accented with models of trees that today exist as coal; products of the coal swamps of Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Though the dioramas are impressive both in historical significance and appearance, there is a problem. Three tractor-trailers full of material does take up three tractor-trailer's worth of space — something the museum has found itself out of.

Many items have had to remain in

**"It's an opportunity to see stuff you'd normally only see in Washington, here, permanently."**

**WARREN ALLMON**, DIRECTOR OF PALEONTOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTION

storage and, without permanent space to put them, the dioramas may soon be found there as well. But with the right marketing and some generosity, Director of Marketing and Development Stephanie Meyer said there could be a solution — growing the museum.

"This will be pretty long-term as far as our exhibits go," Meyer said. "It'll give us an opportunity to have them on display so we can fund raise for the expansion while showing them off."

With \$50,000 committed, the museum is about a quarter of a way to its goal of \$200,000. If they don't make it, they have a slowly developing, cheaper plan to reorganize the space but unfortunately, some of the dioramas would have to go back in their crates under that scenario. If they do raise the money, plans will move quickly.

"If someone gave us the money today, we could have it open in 2017," Allmon said. "It's an opportunity to see stuff you'd normally only see in Washington, here, permanently. This isn't a traveling exhibit and it won't go away if we can raise the money to install it."

## Tax

Continued from Page 1A

The windfall meant \$583,000 from county's planned \$37 million property tax levy was no longer needed to cover pension costs.

"We applied the \$583,000 the first night of the voting meeting, and that literally sent the 1.3 (percent tax levy increase) to almost back to flat," Dennis said. "In other words, had we just left the \$583,000 in the budget, it would have been a flat (property tax levy)."

But through the budgeting process and approving a series of over-target requests, Tompkins County lawmakers voted to bolster the budget to a proposed 1.12 percent tax-levy increase. The rate of inflation for the 12-month period ending in September is 0 percent.

The proposed budget sets the tax rate at \$6.73 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, meaning a \$1,144 county property tax bill for a median-valued \$170,000 Tompkins County home. The budget would represent a 10th consecutive increase in the Tompkins County tax levy.

Tompkins has scheduled a public hearing on the proposed budget 7 p.m. Nov. 10 at the Gov. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court St. in Ithaca.

The hearing will provide an opportunity for Tompkins County residents to voice their opinions on the budget to Tompkins County lawmakers.

The 2016 tax increase conflicts with a common talking point among Tompkins County officials, which asserts that local property taxes would drop overnight if

New York state lifted its mandates.

## Spending debated

Tompkins County lawmaker Dan Klein, D-Danby, pointed out that the tax levy increase means a \$13.62 increase over last year's tax bill for the owner of a median-valued \$170,000 Tompkins County home.

"If we returned the pension money ... that would come out to about \$5 per person, per household," Klein said. "Is that significant? Is that going to make or break someone?"

Klein added that not spending the money would have meant not providing services that lawmakers feel are important.

"We had decided ahead of time that we were going to try for a 1.3 percent increase ... and that's what we ended up doing," Klein said.

Dennis offered a different take. "Here was an opportunity for us to save a little, and I'm not certain that we did as good a job as we could have," Dennis said. He added that increasing the levy by less than 1 percent after the pension windfall was his goal.

"I think that we did some good things, but we did some other things that we didn't need to do," Dennis said

## Where the money went

Lawmakers allocated the majority of the \$583,000 pension savings after they heard a series of over-target spending requests from the Tompkins County department.

A majority of the money went to the Highway Division, a re-entry program

from parolees, rural youth services, the Health Department and TCAT.

The Highway Division got \$100,000 in funding through over-target requests.

Klein said he consistently hears from constituents that county roads are in poor condition.

"I think really highly of our highway department, but the fact is that there are limited resources," he said. He said that money would translate to road repairs.

Dennis had sought \$250,000 for the highway department, but his proposal was defeated by other lawmakers. Martha Robertson, D-Dryden, said spending more than \$100,000 on the highway department would mean, essentially, spending as much or more than the mandate relief the county got, according to a county news release.

A program aiming to help inmates reintegrate to society after release from Tompkins County Jail got \$100,000.

Robertson initially proposed \$200,000 for the program. She said the money would demonstrate the county's commitment to the program, and it would provide time and flexibility to develop and agree upon program details, according to the news release.

It isn't certain if the program will actually materialize, Dennis added.

"Since the jail renovation project, we have been talking about the need to do more alternatives to incarceration — this is something that we've heard loud and clear from the public," Klein said. "It feels like not only a good social investment but a good financial investment."

Lawmakers restored \$94,469 to support an additional community health nurse for the county Health Department's Early Intervention Program.

"We're having difficulty filling the vacancies in positions that we've had for quite a while (at the Health Department)," Dennis said. "It made no sense to me that we would add a position to a department that's already having trouble filling the positions that they have."

Lawmakers also recommended \$75,000 in for Municipal Youth Services System. The money intends to minimize programming reductions made after the 2008 recession, the county news release stated.

"I hear consistently from constituents that they value youth programs," Klein said. In Klein's district, these are the only youth programs available, he added.

"I feel good about providing more money for youth programs," Klein said.

The lawmakers also recommended \$50,000 in additional operating support for TCAT, contingent upon matching support by the transit system's two other funding partners, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University.

TCAT has a shortage of buses, drivers and money, Klein said.

"We know that this is not sustainable, and if more money doesn't go into the system something is going to have to give," Klein said. The most likely thing to get eliminated would be bus routes, he added.

Amendments to the Recommended Budget, as well as other information regarding the 2015 budget process, are available online at [tompkinscounty.ny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget](http://tompkinscounty.ny.gov/ctyadmin/2016budget)

Follow Andrew Casler on Twitter @AndrewCasler.