

A special supplement to

The Malone Telegram

WHO'S WHO IN BUSINESS



Malone and N.Y. campgrounds have record year



Manuela Ocampo and Joe Thaler, Corning, walk around the Southwick Beach State Park campground in September. Julie Abbass/Watertown Daily Times

After initially bracing for economic catastrophe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of New York's private campground and RV resort operators have had their best year ever as families have embraced camping and the great outdoors in record numbers.

Business has been exceptionally strong in Upstate New York, including for campgrounds in the great-

er Malone area, such as Pine Ridge Park Campsite in Conestable.

Year-to-date business levels at some New York campgrounds are up by as much as 25 to 40% over 2019 figures, according to Campground Owners of New York (CONY), which hosts CampNewYork.com, the travel planning website.

"Most of our members have had an incredible year,

despite opening four to six weeks late and despite the continued closure of the Canadian border, with record numbers of first-time campers keeping them busy throughout late spring, summer and fall," said Donald G. Bennett, Jr., CONY's president and CEO.

Bennett himself owns and operates Conesus Lake Campground in the Finger Lakes Region.



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Sales tax revenues up over 2019

TREASURER'S REPORT: Despite pandemic, county has received \$950K more in 2020 compared to last year

By EJ CONZOLA II

econzola@mttelegram.com

MALONE — Despite dire predictions about sales tax revenues from state Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Franklin County has so far seen an increase in the monies it receives from the tax, County Treasurer Fran Perry told the county Legislature on Thursday.

The county took in more than \$7.7 million in sales tax in the third quarter of the year, an increase of roughly \$600,000 from the prior year, Perry said. For the year to date, the county has received roughly \$19.6 million, about \$950,000 more than last year at this time, Perry said.

The growth in sales tax receipts was bolstered by a roughly \$600,000 windfall

that came in as a result of a state audit of sales tax distributions that found Franklin County had received less than it was due, Perry noted. But even subtracting the windfall, the county is doing better than it did last year, she said.

The state Department of Taxation and Finance administers the state and local sales taxes, according to a publication from the state Comptroller's Office. The state tax commissioner certifies the amounts that should be distributed to lo-

cal governments, and those amounts are then paid to the local governments by the comptroller.

Sales tax receipts had been lagging behind last year early in the year, but rebounded significantly even as

the state imposed restrictions — including closing many businesses — in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. All non-essential businesses were closed March 20 when Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo issued his New York on Pause order. A phased reopening began

in mid May, but some businesses have still not been given the go-ahead to reopen.

Several legislators had theories as to why the sales tax receipts had risen.

Legislator Paul Maroun, R-Tupper Lake, said he has seen a sizeable increase in the number of delivery trucks since the shutdown orders were issued, an indication that many people were continuing to shop

— just online. And Legislature Chairman Don Dabiew, D-Bombay, said he believed many people in the area began shopping locally, rather than traveling to visit stores in other communities where they might be more likely to catch the virus.

While Franklin County's sales tax revenues grew despite the pandemic, occupancy tax receipts have

See REVENUES 6



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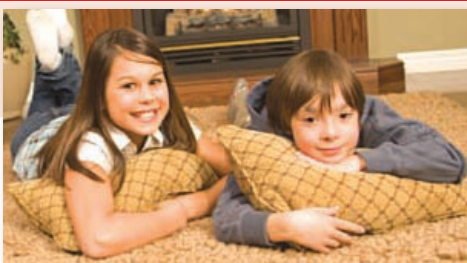
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Paul Barton, president and general manager of Westelcom. PHOTO PROVIDED BY WESTELCOM

Westelcom expanding reach despite pandemic

Local telecommunications company Westelcom has expanded its operations nationwide over recent months, as the COVID pandemic has made telecom services more important than ever before.

On July 15, Westelcom announced their purchase of Teo, a telecommunications service and manufacturing company based out of Washington state.

Paul Barton, president and general manager of the Westelcom Family of Companies, said that in purchasing Teo, the company has acquired a national sales team, manufacturing capacity, a line of commercial and military-grade phones, and a communications service platform that can bring together multiple forms of communication into one suite of services.

"It made sense from a technical standpoint to acquire

that technology," Mr. Barton said. "The other thing that made a lot of sense is that Teo had been working through a series of partners throughout

the country. They'd developed what we refer to as channel sales organizations."

See WESTELCOM 5

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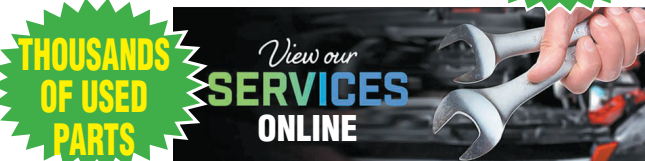
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Westelcom

From 4

Mr. Barton said that these national relationships allow the company to sell both the TEO products and Westelcom services across the country, massively expanding the company's reach.

Teo offers a suite of products targeted towards businesses that require teams of employees to collaborate and work together while not necessarily together in a shared office space, but the company also has a long pedigree in manufacturing.

Since 1972, Teo has manufactured phones and phone systems for the United States military, and currently manufactures three tiers of VoIP desk phones with military-grade security features and the latest in business communication features.

Mr. Barton said that the process of merging the companies together has taken months, and is far from over. The spread of COVID-19 slowed the process, as office spaces across the country closed for fear of viral spread. Jill Van Hoesen, director of business development for Westelcom, said that the company was easily able to adapt to a world out of the office.

"When COVID came in March, Westelcom didn't even skip a beat," she said. "I mean, we were literally able to pick up our laptops, our desk phones, and bring them home. Already we were provided with all of the tools, and quite honestly I'm probably more productive at home than I am at work."

Acquiring a company in the unified communications space couldn't come at a better time. With more and more people working from home, and with many companies considering keeping employees out of the office long-term, employers are looking for ways to keep their workers connected. Unified communications services integrate business communications including email, instant messaging, calling and video chat into one suite of products that

interact with one another. Many services, including the TEO platform of services, include services that enable workers to access business communications, like phone calls to their work extensions, on their cell phones.

"[The platform] allows us to provide mobility," Mr. Barton said. "Now that a lot of our business, locally, regionally and nationally, working from home, with the unified communications platform that we can now offer, they can unplug their phone and take it home, or they can download an app on their cell phone or on the computer and work from home. They have that mobility, that presence."

Westelcom has been ex-

panding its services in its hometown of Watertown. Over the past few months, Westelcom's linemen have been upgrading the local fiber optic network, which connect businesses in Watertown downtown region to super high-speed internet. Mrs. Van Hoesen said that the expansion was largely done to accommodate the growth in telehealth services.

"We expanded our fiber capacity up here because we needed to meet the telehealth needs of the northern New York community," she said.

Westelcom offers what is referred to as "mission critical" services, meaning that its products and platforms are integral to the operations of

the companies they serve. Because of how much local businesses and health systems rely on the Westelcom networks, Mr. Barton said that the company often builds in layers of redundancy and backups when working on their network.

In the coming months, Mrs. Van Hoesen said that Westelcom will be expanding its network in Carthage, to service Carthage Area Hospital.

"That will be another expansion of our network into that area," she said.

Mr. Barton said that the growing process has been methodically conducted, and that while the acquisition of Teo and expansion of the companies networks in upstate New York have been "significant commitments," financially, all have been financed from the company's regular cash flow.

"We made a significant commitment in terms of acquiring the company," Mr. Barton said. "The company is doing well, it's nice and stable right now."

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Revenues

From 3

dropped — although not as significantly as county officials had feared.

The county took in about \$253,000 in occupancy tax — a 5% levy on short-term rental charges also known as a bed tax — in the third quarter of the year — a little more than 1%, or about \$3,000 less than last year, Perry said. For the year to date, bed tax receipts have totalled \$374,000, about \$70,000 less than last year, she said.

"That's pretty good for having been shut down," said Legislator Lindy Ellis, D-Saranac Lake.

Perry noted that the number of property owners who have registered to pay the tax has increased by more than 50 this year, with at least five more set to register in the near future. However, five

properties that have registered to collect the tax have not filed any receipts this year, and the county will begin pursuing enforcement action against them, she said.

Perry did not identify the properties, saying she is prevented by confidentiality provisions in the county law authorizing the tax, but she did say "I believe they could be quite substantial."

The money collected through the bed tax is dedicated to tourism promotion. That figure was initially projected to be at least \$473,000, but at the beginning of the pandemic locally, county officials suspended the promotions contract with the Local Development Corp. because of fears the virus would make it impossible to reach that total. An amended agreement, with a smaller minimum payment, was reinstated last month.

Perry also delivered one

other piece of good financial news to legislators on Thursday.

An amnesty on delinquent property taxes that waived interest on the overdue bills

brought in a little more than \$3 million from 645 properties, Perry said. The program not only brought in more money than county officials had predicted, it allowed tax-

payors to catch up on their outstanding bills and avoid the possibility of foreclosure on their properties — keeping them on the county tax rolls, she said.

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Arts group has big plans for more outreach

FOOTHILLS ARTSOCIETY: New president aims to renew its influence in community

By **EJ CONZOLA II**
econzola@mtelegram.com

MALONE — The Foothills ARTSociety, which had gone quiescent after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted so much of life, has reorganized around a new president and ambitious plans to expand its efforts in the community.

Jenny Gessler, who has worked with several nonprofit organizations in both northern New York and Florida, has taken the reins of the 20-year-old arts group with plans to renew the society — which had dwindled to a handful of active members — and the arts scene in Malone.

"We needed a little revitalization," Gessler said.

In just the past two months, the society has rebounded to more than 35 active members and begun planning a significant expansion of its mission: "Advancing artistic awareness and creativity in our community." Those plans include the hiring of an executive director to provide professional management of the group and its planned facilities, which include the acquisition of a space that can be used as a community

arts center that could support both the visual and performing arts, she said.

The society also plans to

promote public art projects, including sculptures that would be placed throughout the community, and collabora-

tion with existing arts projects such as the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored summer concert series in Arsenal

Green and the creation of a mural on the side of the build-

See **OUTREACH 8**



Jenny Gessler has been appointed president of the Foothills ARTSociety, which is planning to resume its activities after going largely dormant because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gessler outlined an ambitious plan for growing the organization and its activities and giving the broader community the opportunity to help guide its way forward. EJ Conzola/The Telegram

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Outreach

From 7

ing on East Main Street in which the Downtown Artist Cellar is located.

That project, which is actually the brainchild of the Downtown Artist Cellar's Jen Bilow, has received a \$10,000 grant from the Adirondack Foundation and taken in an additional \$4,000 through donations, said Foothills board member Nancy Child.

The society plans to "partner and collaborate with everyone," Gessler said.

It will also seek input on its future projects from a variety of sources, Gessler said. The group wants its projects to appeal to a wide range of interests — "art for all tastes," she said.

Child said she wants the community to know Foothills is "not an elitist group" and is open to offering a variety of programs and activities. The group wants to know, "What do you want for programming?" she said.

Gessler said she realizes the hiring of an executive director and the group's ambitious expansion plans will

require money, but noted she has significant experience in finding sources of financial support thanks to her background with other nonprofit organizations. She noted that, as executive director of the Women's Center in Brevard County, Florida, she grew the center from "a small storefront with a budget of \$75,000 annually to a facility owning three office buildings, two shelters and two apartment complexes with an annual budget of over \$3 million."

The center had endowed funds of over \$1 million and assets of over \$3.5 million when she retired.

But Foothills knows it will have to start small. An open house membership drive "Autumn Tea" is planned for Tuesday from 1 to 4 p.m. at The Cabin on County Route 25. The timing and the location — coupled with the normal restrictions imposed by the pandemic — will serve to keep the gathering small, such an event will make it easier to ensure all in attendance can receive personal attention from society board members.

"This is our first," Gessler said. "It won't be our last."

Shopping locally is now more crucial than ever

Metro

The importance of shopping locally has been emphasized with increasing urgency in recent years. Events like Small Business Saturday and Plaid Friday have brought some much-needed attention to the importance of shopping local, which is even more crucial now as so many small businesses try to survive the pandemic.

A poll from the trade group the National Federation of Independent Business reported that about half of all the businesses in the survey reported a 25 percent drop in sales since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, and roughly one in five businesses have seen sales decline by more than 50 percent. If the economic climate does not radically improve, 20 percent of small businesses won't survive.

According to NBC News, small businesses employ 60 million people in the United States, almost half of the nation's private-sector employees. In addition, small businesses generate tax revenues that help communities by

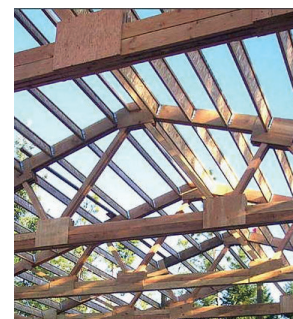
funding schools, maintaining parks and contributing to public safety programs. However,

based on research from the Federal Reserve Bank of New

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Alice Hyde expands drive-thru testing hours



LPN Malorie Bell helps patient Linda Bouissey launch her telehealth video visit in April at Alice Hyde's primary care offices at 183 Park St. in Malone. The UVM Health Network expanded the drive-thru hours for Alice Hyde Medical Center's COVID-19 testing site on Park Street.

MALONE – The UVM Health Network–Alice Hyde Medical Center is expanding hours for its drive-thru COVID-19 testing site on Park Street after recent increases in the demand for COVID-19 tests.

The site, which is located behind Alice Hyde Occupational Health and Wellness at 130 Park St., will offer COVID-19 testing with a provider's order from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 9 to 11 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

The site also offers state-sponsored COVID-19

testing to asymptomatic individuals who meet specific criteria every Tuesday, from 1 to 3 p.m. A complete list of eligibility criteria and more information on state-sponsored testing offered at the site is available on the Alice Hyde website.

The hospital is expanding hours at the site in order to meet increased demands for COVID-19 tests in our communities, and to ensure parents, families and students who might not be able to reach the test site earlier in the day have appropriate access to testing services.

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Locally

From 8

York, even before COVID-19 spread across the world, only 20 percent of healthy small businesses had sufficient cash reserves to continue to operate if they experienced a revenue loss for two months. Some have been shuttered for much longer.

Individuals looking for everything from clothing to home improvement services to office supplies can look to small businesses to fill those needs.

■ Look for small businesses for any and all of your shopping needs. Chances are items sold by big box retailers also are sold by small businesses. When the options are the same or similar, purchase from a small business instead of its big box competitor.

■ Readily provide recommendations of small businesses with which you have done business. Too often people are quick to complain about places that have failed them, but those same people don't think to say kind words about companies that went above and beyond. Share great experiences on social media or through word of mouth.

■ Talk to small businesses owners first if you have an issue. It's tempting to go direct-

ly to social media to complain about something, but such complaints can have a dire impact. Always take issues to the manager or business owner first to see if a resolution can be reached. A manager may not be aware of an issue at all. Give small businesses a chance to make it right before taking things public.

■ If you own a small business, rely on other small businesses to fulfill your needs. Order supplies from fellow small business owners, seek the help of local financial advisors and tax professionals and use local suppliers and delivery personnel.

Small businesses have experienced unprecedented setbacks due to COVID-19. By supporting small businesses, communities can help them regain stable footing.

Unique ways to support small businesses during the pandemic

Small businesses have faced unprecedented challenges in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic wore on throughout the year, small businesses continued to confront the economic fallout wrought by the virus.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the number of active business owners in the United States plummeted by 22 percent in the early stages of the pandemic. Though many businesses managed to hang on as the pandemic continued through spring, summer and fall, such businesses need their communities to contin-

ue to help them stay afloat.

Consumers have not been immune to the economic fall-

out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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ic. Unemployment figures skyrocketed across the globe, and in April retail sales dropped by 14.3 percent from the previous month according to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and Deloitte Insights. But consumer spending gradually increased in various industries over the summer of 2020. As consumers loosen their purse strings and begin spending more, they can embrace some unique ways to help small

businesses in their community.

■ Support struggling industries. Consumers may not typically give much thought to whether an industry is struggling before spending their money, but doing so can help small businesses that have had an especially difficult time during the pandemic. Data from the USCB and Deloitte Services indicates that retail sales in certain industries continued to lag even as other industries recovered over the summer months. Sales in the clothing and accessory and food services and drink-

ing places industries were still down nearly 20 percent in July 2020. Supporting locally owned businesses in these industries can infuse some much-needed cash into their operations.

■ Think twice before buying from big box online retailers. Amazon has become such a go-to consumer resource that many shoppers forget they can comparison shop right on Amazon.com. And some consumers may be unaware that they can support small business when shopping via Amazon. Data from the Association of American Publishers

indicates that print revenues have grown by more than 1 percent in 2020 as many people in quarantine are choosing to spend that time with a good book. When shopping for books via a site like Amazon, purchase books from independent sellers, who are often small book stores in local communities across the country.

■ Purchase gift cards. Pandemic-related restrictions have been lifted in many places, but that doesn't nec-

essarily mean consumers are confident enough to visit their favorite stores and restaurants in person. Gift cards can be a great way to support local businesses even if you're still hesitant to patronize them in person.

Small businesses continue to face an uphill battle as they confront the economic fallout of the pandemic. Consumers can show their support for locally owned businesses in their communities in various ways.

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