

DIOCESAN NEWS

State Catholic conference opposes casino plan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

The New York State Catholic Conference, which represents the eight bishops of New York state, has appealed to the state Legislature to reject an agreement between the Seneca Nation and Governor George Pataki allowing for the opening of gambling casinos in Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

The conference noted its disapproval in a press release issued one day after announcement of the Pataki-Seneca agreement June 20.

The governor spoke about the proposed casinos in glowing terms.

"These casinos will provide a major boost to the economy of western New York by allowing us to compete with our Canadian neighbors, bringing thousands of new jobs to the region while encouraging private-sector investment from around the world," Pataki said in a press release announcing the agreement.

The Catholic conference, on the other hand, believes casinos are the wrong way to develop the state and the Seneca Nation economically, according to John M. Kerry, director.

"While gambling may bring certain economic benefits, it comes with a high cost, including an increase in crime, a disproportionate negative impact on the poor and the state-sanctioned promotion of the addictive disease of compulsive gambling, which destroys individuals and shatters families," Kerry said in a press statement. "The state cannot ignore these serious social and economic implications."

The Seneca Nation has slated a referendum on the issue for Aug. 7. If approved by both the Seneca Nation and the state Legislature, a Seneca-operated casino would open by April 2002, in the Niagara Falls



Karen M. Franz/Catholic Courier

Gov. George Pataki has proposed casinos for Buffalo and Niagara Falls, N.Y., in hopes they will foster the kind of economic development Casino Niagara, shown here, has brought to Niagara Falls, Canada.

Convention Center. A similarly operated casino would open in a Buffalo location to be determined by the Senecas by the end of 2002.

Under the terms of the 14-year agreement, which permits a seven-year renewal, New York would receive a portion of the proceeds from such electronic gaming devices as slot machines. That portion would increase in three multi-year increments from an initial 18 percent to a maximum of 25 percent over the agreement term.

The agreement essentially allows the casinos to use gaming devices already authorized in agreements with the Mohawk and Oneida nations, both of which currently operate casinos in New York.

The governor must also receive approval from the U.S. Department of Interior to enter into the agreement. The department's

secretary must approve the Senecas taking into trust the land on which the casinos would be located, thus making them Indian lands.

The agreement would also allow the Seneca Nation to open a third casino on reservation land in the future, subject to certain conditions.

In a phone interview from his Albany office, Kerry noted that the Catholic conference did not consider it inconsistent to oppose casinos when many Catholic parishes and schools use bingo games and casino nights as fundraisers.

"There is really no valid comparison between recreational bingo and casino gambling," he said, adding that comparing bingo to casinos was comparing "sandlot baseball" to "major league baseball."

"Casino gambling is an ongoing and very

addictive activity for many people," Kerry said.

In his press statement, Kerry cited statistics showing that 5 to 8 percent of people who play games of chance become compulsive gamblers, with another 15 to 20 percent gambling beyond a normal degree. He also noted statistics showing that more than half of compulsive gamblers rely on illegal means to support their habits.

Kerry also pointed to the steep rise in major crime following the opening of casinos in Atlantic City, N.J. Rapes and robberies rose 33 percent in the first year of casino operations, and murders rose 40 percent, he said.

He added that gambling is "regressive," in that poorer people are more likely to spend money on gambling.

"Casino gambling offers false hope of economic and social salvation for those caught in the throes of poverty," Kerry said.

The *Catholic Courier* contacted the Oneida-operated Turning Stone Casino Resort in Verona, Oneida County, for comment on the proposed Pataki-Seneca agreement. Mark Emery, Turning Stone's media director, declined to comment directly on the agreement, other than to say: "The Oneida Nation supports the Seneca Nation in their efforts to become economically self-sufficient."

Oneida County Undersheriff Peter Paravati said in a phone interview that a substantial increase in vehicular traffic into the county caused by the casino's opening had resulted in more traffic violations and vehicular offenses.

However, Oneida County is a "relatively safe place to live," he said.

"As far as crime that we can directly attribute to the casino ... we have not been able to note any real difference in crimes associated with it," he said.

Sister Steinwachs cooking a book as she leaves schools' post

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — After 50 years in Catholic education, Sister of St. Joseph Virginia Steinwachs is retiring July 15 from her position as assistant superintendent for human resources for the Diocese of Rochester's Department of Catholic Schools.

Sister Steinwachs, who held the position for the last eight years, will be replaced by Sister Elaine Englert, SSJ, currently assistant superintendent for WIN Programs. No replacement has been named yet for Sister Englert's current position.

Although she said she has made no specific retirement plans, Sister Steinwachs is working on one project: a cookbook consisting of recipes from Sisters of St. Joseph throughout the world, associates of the local congregation and sisters' relatives.

"I'm excited about it, but the key is to get other people excited about it," she said.

She already has collected 50 recipes, including recipes for Polish, Italian, German, French and American South dishes. She said she may call the book *Wholly Delicious: Recipes from the Convent*, and added that its pages will be peppered with such SSJ maxims as: "Always interpret everything in the most favorable light." She also plans on including passages on her order's history.

Sister Steinwachs hopes to use the book as a fundraiser for her order, and is optimistic that it could do well. "If you've ever gone into Barnes & Noble (Booksellers), there's a whole section on cookbooks, so the interest is there," she said.

As for her most recent day job as assistant superintendent for human resources, Sister Steinwachs oversaw the recruitment and placement of Catholic schoolteachers throughout the diocese. It's a task she said has gotten more and more difficult in recent years as a teacher shortage has hit not only Catholic schools, but public schools



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

as well. The shortage's effects are compounded by the fact that public schools can offer higher salaries than their Catholic counterparts, she said.

"Times have changed dramatically," Sister Steinwachs said in an interview in her office in the Diocesan Pastoral Center.

Fire

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reached out to former St. Lucy's parishioners.

"They're great people. We've formed a relationship with a number of the people," Rev. Everett commented about the St. Lucy's community.

Rev. Everett said July 10 that his congregation, while "emotionally trying to get things together," has been touched by the outpouring of community support.

For Vito, the fire was more painful than St. Lucy's 1975 closing. "When it closed, we could still go back to the church," she

"Many of the young (teachers) can't afford us, which is sad."

Until a few years ago, Sister Steinwachs said, many Catholic schoolteachers were the wives of business executives and could afford to teach in Catholic schools because their salaries were not their families' primary incomes. However, that crop of teachers has been retiring from the system in the past decade, and the pool of younger teachers includes many saddled with thousands of dollars in college loans. Such teachers have almost no choice but to take higher-paying public school jobs, she said.

"I can't blame them," she said of the younger teachers. "I wouldn't want a debt like that hanging over my head forever."

To illustrate how much her talent pool has shrunk, she said that when a school needed a teacher just a few years ago, she could type the school's zip code into a computer database she created, and a few names would pop up of teachers looking to work in that area. Today, however, the computer database is all but empty.

"There aren't any people waiting for jobs anymore," she said.

Her office also has made efforts to re-

explained.

"You knew the building was there, you felt your roots were there. When I heard about the fire, it just gave me a sinking feeling," added Jeannie Raisbeck, secretary in the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, who also grew up in St. Lucy's.

McBride said he was struck by community reaction to the fire. He recalled seeing many Lily of the Valley members burst into hymns while the fire was still burning.

"It was an impromptu prayer service, right on the street," McBride said.

McBride observed that many former St. Lucy's parishioners showed up to pay

tain and recruit teachers, she said, including the creation over the last year of a mentoring program that pairs veteran teachers with new instructors. The mentoring program is designed to keep young teachers from getting discouraged in their first few years by offering them regular feedback on how they're doing in the classroom.

However, nothing short of an increase in funding for Catholic schools can alleviate the teacher shortage in the long run, she said.

The nun has taught English at or served as a principal of a number of Catholic schools in both the dioceses of Rochester and Buffalo. She also served as an assistant superintendent for the Rochester diocese in the 1980s, working as a school visitor.

"I've been very fortunate that I've enjoyed whatever I do," she added, reflecting on her career. "I guess I've always thought of myself as a teacher in all of the jobs."

EDITORS' NOTE: Sisters of St. Joseph, their relatives, and SSJ associates may submit recipes for Sister Steinwachs' book to: Sisters of St. Joseph, 184 Little Creek Drive, Rochester, N.Y. 14616.

homage as well. "I went back for about three days afterward for the investigation, and met dozens of people from the old neighborhood who were there to tell their stories and get a brick," McBride said.

Former St. Lucy's parishioners have maintained strong bonds in recent years, Vito said, noting that more than 600 people attended a 1995 reunion Mass at Lily of the Valley, 20 years after the parish was discontinued. The late Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey celebrated the liturgy.

Vito is chairperson of the St. Lucy's Women's Auxiliary, which organizes several social events each year. She added that the auxiliary's male counterpart, the 11th Ward Originals, is still active as well.