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Opinion for Saturday 11/22/03

Combined services, marriage, Notre Dame

- HIT: Consolidations make budget sense

Two organizations have taken significant steps toward saving money through consolidations. One was definite. The other remains speculative but promising.

The definite move came from the American Red Cross chapters of Chemung-Schuyler in Elmira and the Valley in Waverly. The two organizations will merge into the Sullivan Trail chapter on Jan. 1.

For Chemung-Schuyler, the consolidation will come about 14 years after the chapter was formed from separate operations in Chemung and Schuyler counties. The new Sullivan Trail chapter will have a wider geographic area to serve, but with a central and more cost-effective staff.

Meanwhile, Chemung County is leading the way in talks about consolidating services among towns and the city. Officials are on the verge of hiring Gerald Benjamin at New Paltz State College as a consultant. Benjamin is a respected expert on local and state government, and as an outsider looking in, he can offer a perspective that can turn talk of shared services into action.

- MISS: Gay marriage decision causes chaos

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, by a razor-thin 4-3 margin, recklessly overturned three millennia of history with a ruling that essentially redefines marriage to include homosexuals.

It was a gutless decision, one that failed to uphold the historic meaning of marriage and instead caved to a small but highly vocal segment of society that wants homosexual and heterosexual marriages to be indistinguishable.

Rather than allow civil unions of gays, as in Vermont, or blessings of

union, as some religious denominations now do for gay couples, Massachusetts high court has thrown the matter to lawmakers in that state and told them to write new legislation that would give gay couples the same legal protections as heterosexuals who wed.

The ruling mocks the sanctity of marriage as most societies know it and opens the door for this divisive debate to spread to other states.

There already are legal protections in states, including New York, for gay couples who want the same rights as a married man and woman. The Massachusetts court, in ruling on a suit, should have left well enough alone.

- HIT: Goal accomplished -- a championship

The Notre Dame girls soccer team is a little too young to sip champagne, but it received a well-deserved chance to celebrate its New York State Class C soccer title on ice Thursday.

Team members filed onto the ice at the First Arena between periods of a Jackals game and soaked up a standing ovation from the 2,869 fans present. For Notre Dame, this was a season of determination. After losing in the quarterfinals last year, the team went all the way, defeating Kendall, near Buffalo, in a semifinal game and then Mattituck from Long Island by a 2-0 margin.

For Notre Dame, it was a great season with a great ending that means as much to the community as it does to the school.

Hits & Misses runs every Saturday. Send suggestions to Opinion Page, Star-Gazette, P.O. Box 285, Elmira, NY 14902, by fax to 607/734-5614 or by electronic mail to opinion@stargazette.com

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