

## Butler, Seward hold strategy session to fight off closure of Herkimer Home

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Albany, N.Y. — State Senator James Seward and Assemblyman Marc Butler are working to save Herkimer Home from the state budget chopping block.

“With state park use on a steady rise due to the economic crunch, it makes no sense to shutter Herkimer Home,” said Seward, R,C,I - Oneonta. “The cost to operate the site is low, but the return is high — local businesses receive an economic bump and the educational value to visitors is priceless.”

“The closure of Herkimer Home would be a tremendous blow to the region,” said Butler, R,C,I - Newport. “The site means a great deal to Herkimer County’s growing tourism industry and the precious artifacts at the home represent an important link to our past. I fought hard last year to keep the historic landmark open and am gearing up for another battle in 2011.”

Seward and Butler convened a meeting Monday with state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Acting Commissioner Andy Beers, Friends of Herkimer Home President Barbara Mielcarski and secretary Barbara Voelke and Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director John Scarano to discuss future plans for the state historic site just outside the city of Little Falls.

While Beers indicated Herkimer Home is slated for closure due to budgetary constraints, he did indicate a willingness to work with local officials on an agreement that would allow for continued use.

“Other park sites around the state are entering into public-private partnerships to survive, and it is clear there is substantial interest in developing a similar agreement in this case,” said Butler.

“New York state is in dire financial straits and we need to streamline wherever possible. However, I am confident that by aligning with local groups like the Friends of Herkimer Home, the Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce and others, we can develop creative alternatives that will keep the landmark open for generations to come,” said Seward.

Butler and Seward said the site’s active “friends” organization could play a major role in plans to keep the former home of American Revolutionary War hero General Nicholas Herkimer open.

Mielcarski previously said the nonprofit Friends of Herkimer Home would be willing to sponsor and take care of expenses for special events at the site, like the annual Sugaring Off held in April.

“The state has informed our organization they would keep the site secure and maintain it, so it would simply be a case of doing what we normally do anyway,” said Mielcarski.

Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York, said in an e-mail Monday local residents should continue to contact their state representatives about keeping Herkimer Home open.

“The main thing I would say to residents is keep bringing home the message to your local assemblyperson and senator how important Herkimer Home is to the economy of the region. And have the Chamber and the tourism groups contact the legislators too,” said Dropkin.

Herkimer Home is currently closed through at least April 1, due to state budget concerns.

In addition to budget concerns, state officials have said the closure of the site for the entire 2011 season would be due to statewide workforce reductions made by former Gov. David Paterson.

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