Hudson Valley One

An **Ulster Publishing** *publication* | **Vol. 7 No. 42** | **October 21, 2026** | **$2.00** | *hudsonvalleyone.com*

Getting a good bang for your buck



PROVIDED

Ulster County's banking industry reports 2026 results

by Geddy Sveikauskas

As the American banking industry continues its rapid rate of change, community banking continues to play a significant role in Ulster County. Would your financial affairs benefit from a distinct sense of place? Then a relationship with a community bank may make sense for you. If not, then you are more likely to opt for a brick-and-mortar national or regional bank, or perhaps to switch to a higher-yield online bank.

It's a mistake to think of the $20.8 trillion retail banking industry as obsolete. Behind the times or in need of a major update, perhaps. But

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PHOTOS BY ROKOSZ MOST

Beyond the peak

Leaf peepers converge on the Catskills

by Rokosz Most

Over at the Rosendale Trestle, that rust-colored bridge that comes jutting out of the side of Joppenburgh Mountain, it's a surefire spot to catch would-be leaf peeping weekenders. Day trippers. Touristas.

Last Sunday the vast parking lot situated next to the old cement kilns was rammed with parked cars.

On the trail that leads up to the trestle, there was the procession, the pilgrimage, people coming up and down the hill. The night before, the weather had dropped down to freezing for the first time this season, and so everyone was traumatized, wearing beanies and scarves in spite of the full sunlight until it became too much.

Many had brought their dogs or their children to stand with them, 150 ft over the open air and the

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PHOTOS BY LAUREN THOMAS

A performance by Golden Roots rounded out the dedication ceremony for the statue of Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner honored in bronze

A statue dedication at SUNY New Paltz commemorates Truth's legacy

by Terence P Ward



Two-hundred years ago, Sojourner Truth walked to freedom. Those first steps, captured in bronze thanks to sculptor Trina Greene, are now on display before the SUNY New Paltz library which also bears the name of this tireless advocate for the rights of the oppressed. Like the life of the person originally named Isabella Baumfree, it's been a journey.

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Jim Ebersole, painting the vista in watercolors.

Hudson Valley One, a weekly newspaper in Kingston, NY. Subscriptions are $55/year in Ulster County. $65 per year in the continental US. $399 per year over seas. Periodicals postage is paid at Kingston, NY USPS 2515-7000. Postmaster send address change orders to *Hudson Valley One*, PO Box 3329, Kingston, NY 12402; Office at 322 Wall Street, Kingston, NY 12401.

Banking

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banking continues to be the linchpin upon which all finance depends.

The way the bank-regulating Federal Reserve applies its competitive analysis of bank mergers to underserved markets is antiquated and harmful to community banks, the Fed head of bank supervision declared in an Oct. 6 speech in St. Louis. The Fed analysis "systematically understates the competition banks in these markets face, downplaying or ignoring credit unions, nonbank lenders, farm credit institutions, and branchless banks that compete in local markets across the country," Federal Reserve vice chair for supervision Michelle Bowman said.

Locally as well as regionally, the largest national banks and bank holding companies have been gradually gaining market share. But in Ulster County at least, that success has not come at the expense of the community banks. Rather, it seems to have been at the expense of middle-tier regional banking (as measured by deposits).

Being local means having your ear to the ground, possessing the kind of soft information (not directly observable information that influences attitudes and beliefs) that eludes those without your sense of place. But it also means having all your eggs in one geographical market, something that the risk-avoiding distribution of those eggs at varied locations within a single market at extra cost only partially mitigates.

(Credit unions, which have a large following in Ulster County, are not included in the numbers used here. They have a different governmental regulator, and arrange their eggs differently.)

At the present stage of geographic evolution, Ulster County fancies itself as an attractive environment for jobholders whose paychecks come from the nation's largest employer of persons with highly developed skills who enjoy a certain amount of job mobility — i.e., being close to New York City when occasionally necessary. These new potential immigrants are usually young. They combine familiarity with AI technology with special knowledge in the fields of finance, health care or the media — broad subject areas where New York City is the national leader.

According to a recent Federal Reserve demographic analysis, community banks in counties close to large urban areas have experienced stability in their market share, whereas those in rural areas have experienced fewer opportunities for growth.

Don't underestimate the economic impact of this mobile population. According to the tech platform Second Talent's listings, there are presently 93,000 in the New York City area as compared to 123,000 in the San Francisco-Silicon Valley region. New York's numbers may exceed the leader's as soon as next year, Second Talent predicts. (The other significant markets on the seven-location list, each with its own specialties, are Seattle, Washington, D.C., Boston, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Austin.)

What kind of financial services will the portion of this immigrant population considering residing in the Hudson Valley be looking for? The purported regional experts in economic development have so far had very little to say about this significant opportunity.

Ulster County is a three-tier banking world.

The seven community banks collectively had $2.14 billion in deposits in Ulster County as of June 30, 2026, according to BankFind Suite, the annual survey of all insured banks by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in late September. Six regional banks (M&T, Key, Citizens, TD, NBT, and Webster) had combined deposits of $1.31 billion.

Three of the four largest banks in the country — J.P. Morgan Chase with two local offices, Wells Fargo with one and Bank of America with three (Citibank does not have any Ulster County branches) — recorded Ulster County deposits of $1.53 billion.

Largely because of the presence of Wall Street, the state's largest players are the bank subsidiaries of investment banks' holding companies. The three dominant ones are Goldman Sachs, BNY Mellon and Morgan Stanley. Deutsche Bank is also a significant participant.

In 2026, Ulster Savings Bank, 175 years old, with $952 million in county deposits, had easily more than double the total among community banks of the runner-up, Rondout Savings. USB is very much a brick-and-mortar institution, with two offices in Kingston and branches in Gardiner, New Paltz, Stone Ridge, Lake Katrine, Saugerties, Woodstock and Phoenicia. Five additional USB offices in Dutchess County and one in Orange County contribute another $285 million in deposits. The bank also has legendary connections to insurance and legal services.

Both Rondout Savings Bank ($426 million) and Sawyer Savings Bank ($234 million) rank fourth and eighth in terms of deposits. All their offices are in Ulster County. Walden Savings Bank, now with $788 million in deposits outside Ulster County, maintains a single branch office with $52 million in deposits inside the county.

Coming up fast in the Ulster rankings during the past decade has been the Bank of Greene County (two in-county offices with $227 million in deposits and 18 with an eye-popping $2.5 billion outside it). The bank has carved out a unique niche for itself in services provided to governmental accounts.

Wallkill Valley Federal Savings and Loan Association, strong in the southern part of the county with $172 million in deposits, boasts $245 million outside it.

Rhinebeck Bank, now with $1.225 billion across the river, maintains an office on Fair Street in Kingston with $79 million in deposits.

We don't know what kind of financial services the potential immigrant population we've forecasted will be looking for. All we know is that the technological and lifestyle changes of the past decade haven't yet produced a surge of nonlocal banking. As another old saying has it, knowledge of the past is not a good predictor of the future.

City buyers seeking a mortgage on a local property may not spend all their time securing the lowest interest rate, though they're likely to seek alternatives to a long-term fixed-rate mortgage at 7.3 percent. They worry about the availability of a good plumber, what that nest of wasps under the roof might mean, why there's a utility easement so close to the house, or whether it's too late in the year to plant grass. They look for a branch of a bank their uncle highly recommends, or an institution that the real estate agent says knows the property very well. And they worry about whether they might be overpaying for the damned house when there are cheaper comparables in northeast Pennsylvania.

It's fun to make fun of newcomers. When they bring new knowledge that contributes disproportionately positively to the success of our local community, however, we should consider extending to them a little more than just the tolerance that should be the birthright of all human beings. If Ulster County is to become the earthly paradise we want it to be, doing so will provide a good rate of return on the investment.

Cyber event in Saugerties

On Aug. 3 of this year Sawyer Savings Bank abruptly closed its branches after what board president and CEO James P. Whitaker called "a technical disruption." There had been, it was believed, a data security incident at the Saugerties-headquartered community bank that was the result of a vendor vulnerability. Online and mobile banking for deposits, withdrawals and balances could still be accessed.

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Later in the week, Whitaker announced that Sawyer Savings' branches would reopen on Aug. 10. Relevant updates would be provided "as this process progresses."

That was two months ago. No relevant updates have yet been provided. The bank's legal advisers want to wait until the bank's investigation is complete before releasing further information, senior operating officer Jenn Gutheil-Denier said.

"Developments in the digital economy, such as the rise of e-commerce and digital payment methods, may be convenient for businesses and consumers alike, but these developments have also resulted in cybersecurity becoming a serious concern for community bankers," Tansim Ahmad wrote a year ago in an issue of Community Banking Connection. "In a 2024 survey conducted by the Conference of State Bank Supervisors (CSBS), cybersecurity risk was cited as the top internal risk, with nearly 96 percent of community bankers viewing cybersecurity risk as either extremely important or very important."

The largest American banks have sophisticated cybersecurity systems for round-the-clock defense against cybercriminals, but the nation's 4,000-plus community banks don't. Cyberattacks against community banks are becoming more numerous and more troublesome. Because banks are among the biggest targets for cybercriminals, the market for information technology security in banking has grown.

Cybersecurity is among the top risks for community banks and how community banks can mitigate cyberthreats. The largest American banks have sophisticated cybersecurity systems for round-the-clock defense against cybercriminals, but the nation's 4,000-plus community banks don't.

Neither of Whitaker's updates, the sole information released on the data breach, has used the term "cyberattack."

The article in Community Banking Connection provides an appropriate conclusion. "Community banks need to stay informed about the many evolving forms of cyberthreats and develop an appropriate cybersecurity framework that maximizes available resources to reduce the risk and subsequent costs of cyberattacks," it says.

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New neighbors incoming

Numerous big development projects set to reshape Kingston

by Geddy Sveikauskas

Michael Berg, veteran executive director of Family, spoke briefly on a chilly November day last year at the christening of the 164-unit affordable Golden Hill Apartments in Kingston. Among the festivities, Berg struck a somber note. "This has to be the first, not the end," he said.

Almost a year later, the direction of the home-building situation in Kingston has become clearer. Golden Hill was the first, but it hasn't been the end. More than 1,450 new units, at least half of which are classified as "affordable," are in various stages of planning, design and construction as we approach the year's end.

As 2026 comes to a close, several additional major projects have been or will be proposed. Minor projects, some of which are unlikely to come to fruition, will add to this robust pipeline.

Here we present a map of what's happening at 10 significant development sites:

1. The largest project in terms of possible housing units is the Kingston Business Park off Delaware Avenue, which is slated to accommodate up to 600 new mixed-income housing units. Of the projects on the list, however, the 107-acre business park is at some distance from having shovels in the ground. Though it's gifted with city infrastructure, its awkward location makes its description as "problematic" accurate. The city has chosen Douglaston Development, a large firm active in New York City with a portfolio of affordable and senior housing, to work on it. RUPCO will also be a partner.

2. The least consequential in terms of housing is The Metro, the $55 million community and educational center off Greenkill Avenue that Novo of Kingston has been creating. Novo is sparing little expense on a project intended to have a profound effect on the future of the midtown neighborhood.

3. The recently opened 100-unit Barrel Factory on Cornell Street has added 20 units to the city's inventory of affordable housing. "The Barrel Factory development is a great model for mixed-income, mixed-use housing," said state Sen. Michelle Hinchey at its opening. "I'm proud to have fought for state budget funding for the project and of the work of our local and state partners who brought non-profits, developers, and government together to make this happen."

4. Unless there's an unexpected glitch, a revised plan for uptown's The Kingstonian — now city-approved, but with its deadline for building 143 units plus a small hotel, some retail and considerable parking set to expire at the end of this year — will soon see the light of day, according to Brad Jordan, a local member of the project's ownership team. This strategically located project between North Front Street and Schwenk Drive has been in a suspended state for some time. Expect an application with some changes.

5. A six-story, 135-unit building has been proposed this month at the long-vacant 1.8-acre Romeo Kia auto dealership site at 111 Schwenk Drive. The New York City planning and construction firm Milestone Development will partner with RUPCO and others. The proportion of affordable housing at the site is yet to be determined, but it may be high.

6. Garraghan Drive in the Rondout neighborhood is the boundary of a canvas ready to be painted. Mired in an eminent-domain process, Kingston doesn't expect to publish a request for proposals on the intended 5.3-acre site projected for 200 housing units plus commercial and recreational space for some time.

7. A significant portion of the 60 to 70 new units at the city-owned 0.85-acre site at 25 Field Court, contiguous to Kingston's linear park in midtown, "will be designated as deeply affordable," says the nonprofit development consortium about the former brownfield site. Proposed is a single five-story building with commercial uses on the ground floor and frontage on both Field Court and O'Neil Street.

8. Baxterbuild of Poughkeepsie recently put the old Kings Inn property fronting at 615 Broadway to its final resting place, replacing it with a three-story structure with commercial space on the ground floor on the Broadway side and a larger structure on the Cedar Street side. Baxter will own and manage the property, which will dedicate a small plaza to the memory of music theorist Pauline Oliveros. The 0.78-acre project will have 21 affordable units among its 70 residences.

9a, b & c. The Kingston Housing Authority (KHA) is embarking with Mountco on a total overhaul of 98 apartments at Colonial Gardens on Flatbush Avenue and 60 apartments at Wiltwyck Gardens on Albany Avenue. As part of the second phase of the $112 million program funded by state and federal sources, the KHA is also replacing 32 units at the Penn Court complex with 80 units of senior housing, of which 30 units will be reserved for the homeless.

10. RUPCO has announced the opening in December of the redeveloped Willow Landing, which will provide 82 supportive apartments exclusively to homeless families and individuals at the former Quality Inn in the town of Ulster. Instead of formerly homeless people needing to seek support services elsewhere, Willow Landing will bring most services to the location as well as providing some on-site resources. Case management staff will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide support. The concept is light-years away from today's isolated homeless and hopeless being stored for long periods of time in expensive motels.

WRITE-IN MEGHANN REIMONDO WOODSTOCK TOWN SUPERVISOR LEADING WITH HEART

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Leaf peepers

Continued from Page A1

Rondout Creek meandering by, shallow this time of year, below. A very wholesome excursion.

The sunlight had that lemon-yellow tint from the almost white star of the sun shining down onto the dirt trail and all the leaves of all the trees along the path had turned yellow and let as much sunlight through as Chinese rice paper. All the plants close to the ground, there's quite a bit of green, but up in the trees, almost none.

I wasn't looking forward to crashing other people's experience like some kind of pushy news pervert—where you from? are you here to see the leaves? — but I needn't have worried. Everyone seemed grateful for the exchange and they took the most banal-sounding questioning seriously.

Geoff and Sarah for instance, he tall, she friendly, though they had come down from Albany, the leaves were far from their minds.

"Just kind of went for a walk to be honest," explained Geoff. "But the foliage is nice. Just a lot of nice mix between mature and juvenile trees."

Two women in headscarves and a man bareheaded with a gentle mustache and downy sideburns had also driven down from Albany, where the leaves had already passed peak, the gentleman ventured to say.

"I think up in the Adirondacks it's already happened," he said.

One of the women took her hand quickly from the railing as if she had been stung.

"Oh my god," she laughed, "this bridge just shocked me!"

And then there was Raul Gordillo, a satisfied-looking man, head shaved to the skin, who seemed to be living his best life, straddling work in The City and maintaining a house in High Falls. He was entertaining visitors from España who spoke Spanish with delightful lisps.

"They're here visiting New York City," said Gordillo, "so I brought them up. This is the spot."

Nor were they too shy to be photographed.

"Vamos a salir en el periódico," he explained to his guests, giving them the chance to avoid the photograph. But his warning elicits happy exclamations.

A last couple, a friendly blonde red-head, and a black-haired woman in the third trimester of her pregnancy, were just taking the air.

"When I think of leaf peeping, I think of farther north," the woman confided.

All in all, it seemed that the clear sky and suggestion of fading warmth may have had more to do with the desire to wander out onto a bridge at 1 p.m. in the day than the leaves. But once out, all appreciated them.

***

Cold colors comfort us, and warm, in an otherwise blind universe. Apparently, color doesn't actually exist outside of our minds. It's the cones set in the back of our eyes, say the scientists, that translate the wavelengths of leaf-bounced electromagnetic radiation spit out by the Sun that tell our brains what colors we see.



ROKOSZ MOST

Raul Gordillo and visitors.

But a tree is an autotroph, and what sunlight it doesn't reflect back at us it gobbles up by trapping it in its leaves. Holes in the leaves also allow the tree to suck up carbon dioxide in the air. Trees breathe. Sure.

In the leaves, those solar panels of the sunlight eaters, the nutrient factories of the barky and hardened trees, when the chlorophyll begins to taper off, responding to the change in weather and the angle of sunlight, that creates the effect we're looking for.

For leaves not yet fallen in a Hudson Valley October, xanthophyll yellow replaces the fading chlorophyll green. Then carotene orange follows after, and if we're lucky, anthocyanin red.

One costume-change after another and in the end after all the leaves have dropped it's the annual valley-wide strip tease. I'm not sure the writer and naturalist pre-eminent John Burroughs would have said it quite like that.

Let Burroughs speak for himself.

"Then, when the maples have burst out into color, showing like great bonfires along the hills," Burroughs wrote in his essay, Autumn Tides, "there is indeed a feast for the eye. A maple before your windows in October, when the sun shines upon it, will make up for a good deal of the light it has excluded; it fills the room with a soft goldenglow."

There is a Maple outside my bedroom window actually, across the street, and on this morning, when the day could no longer be avoided, and the bedroom curtain flung open bitchily, there it stood, its leaves had gone a bracing lemon-tart color, and the sunlight did bounce into the room. Burroughs, that canny naturalist was right.

But newspaper headlines can often be counted on to provide a more provocative framing. Here last week from the Hudson Valley Post: "Hudson Valley Fall Foliage Weekend turns into a crowd nightmare."

No, a tour bus hadn't overturned. No one had run amuck in the woods with a butcher knife. It was just one reporter's experience of a mountain trail just above the city of Beacon choked with leaf-peepers.

Under the leafy exhibitionist canopy, if any of them were piping music through their cell-phone speakers or amplifying some jabbering podcaster, that could indeed rise to the level of a nightmare. But anyone familiar with forest-bathing knows it can grow boring and repetitive after about 10 minutes hiking the trail so who can blame them?

The secret is that a hike is just the cover for a trance state if you know how to get there. To reach a place of interior quietude where the meekest little dopamine blast has a chance of being noticed. It's not the crazy, see-saw, rocket launcher dopamine blasts that social media algorithms deliver. It's not swimming in the main noisy current of existence, hustling with elbows out and catching sparks among the multitudes of The City.

There, off the path, sitting cross-legged in the grass, eyes closed and making peace with the ants crawling up your back, finally beginning to make out the words in the wind, when it all starts to make sense, if you hear the dumb shuffling of feet— a herd of tourists approaching, and yes, there, music interrupted with commercials, sure, for being pulled off the path to enlightenment. Hell really is other people.

But only in a narrow and limited, spiritual sense. From an economic viewpoint, other people are dynamite. Especially their pocketbooks.

While there is not a New York State Division of Spirituality, Self-Realization and Gratitude for existence, there most certainly is a State Division of Tourism.

Long has there been one. In 1935, first called the Bureau of State Publicity, absorbed later into the Division of Commerce, consolidated after into the Department of Economic Development now contained under the heading Empire State Development. It's an umbrella organization that speaks with many voices but listens with one ear to offer a menu of financial development incentives to anyone who can learn to sing songs from the psalm book of prosperity.

'Oh, lord, let me entice the tourists to salt the land with their sugar,' is one such song. "O'er the turnpike may they come to pick apples' is another.

Led by the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs), they who collaborate with the Empire State Development on high, to distribute the resources collected from the New York State taxpayer.

$463 million in 2025 alone, shared out among New York State's 10 REDCs— Capital, Central, Finger Lakes, Long Island, Mid Hudson, Mohawk Valley, North Country and Southern Tier to provide for the tourism aims of '11 vacation regions'— Adirondacks, Capital-Saratoga, Catskills, Chautauqua-Allegheny, Central New York, Finger lakes, Greater Niagara, Hudson Valley, Long Island, New York City, Thousand Islands Seaway.

For just the Mid-Hudson Valley that year, more than $53.1 Million was passed down.

But tourism was not where the bulk was spent. Quoted from the

"As one of the sitting judges in Woodstock since 2017, I have made it my mission to serve the people of our town with fairness, honesty, respect and compassion. I humbly ask for your vote on November 3rd, so that I may continue my service as Woodstock Town Justice."



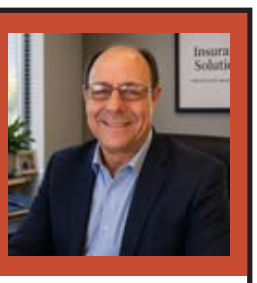
Judge Jason Lesko

Practicing law since 1995,
Brooklyn Law Graduate 1995 Solo practitioner with private practice in Woodstock since 2002

Dedicated to public service and the community, he has been a family law attorney representing children and adults who are unable to afford counsel since 2001. Handling criminal defense and vehicle & traffic cases in nearly all of Ulster County's town and village courts since 2001.

Judge Jason Lesko is proud to announce his candidacy for incumbent justice of the Woodstock town court. Please vote for Jason Lesko for Town Judge.

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six goals of the Ulster Regional Economic Development Council:

"Preserve and create outdoor spaces that make the Mid-Hudson region an attractive place to live and visit, recognize the imperative need to protect our natural resources from degradation, while also leveraging them for tourism, agriculture, and the development of sustainable businesses."

Tourism is relegated to an 'also', the use of the word 'leveraging' here is noteworthy as it implies consent and transparency while forestalling comparison with 'exploitation'.

Envisioned as a maple tree, the sturdy branches of the Mid Hudson REDC pump the resources up and out to where the flowers bloom and the fruit ripens, (and to where the leaves are changing color.)— to the counties in its prescribed territory.

Flowered and fruited Ulster County, Director of Tourism, Lisa Berger receives a salary of $99,681 a year to do the work of capturing lightning in a bottle, phrase-wise, to gather, shape and disseminate the joyful propaganda meant to draw tourists to the county to spill their sugar.

And this is as it should be. If you won't sell yourself, sooner or later, someone else will.

Visitation and visitor spending are the all-important metrics by which to measure if an economic impact has been created by any given efforts to court tourism.

As measured by spending for lodging, recreation, food and beverage, retail goods and services, local transportation and vacation property, the New York State Tourism Association claims $1.242 Billion was spent in Ulster County by tourists and tourism-adjacent consumption in 2025 alone.

And to hear the governor tell it in the New York State executive budget, tourism is New York's third largest employment sector.

A report put out by Tourism Economics in 2025 is less ecstatic, claiming the Hudson Valley impact of tourism accounts for roughly 6% of employment supported by tourism across the Hudson Valley.

Taken altogether then, the third largest employment sector supports only six percent of the jobs in the Hudson Valley but still rakes in over $1 billion… the copy written by governors and tourism associations should perhaps be taken with a dose of salt.

Regardless, tourism-minded communicators do churn out frequently untethered ecstasies of copy around this time of year and they must have at reality-distorting psychic effect.

Here in all caps from the I Love Fall New York foliage project: "VIBRANT PEAK FOLIAGE CONTINUING COLORFUL TREK ACROSS NEW YORK STATE"

Helpfully a color-coded map is shared with which to track peak fall foliage around New York State along with a weekly foliage report and leaf peeping updates across regions.

Or this from the Hudson Valley Inc., 'Make it Yours' campaign:

"If all you want is to stroll along a back lane and view the fall colors we have rural vistas, which, well, will just knock you out with its beauty."

Well, shucks. Leaving grammar and violent hyperbole aside, just what in the cosmopolitan imagination is a back lane? Is it the analogue of a back alley in Two Bridges near Dimes Square? Or do they mean back lane in the medieval sense, narrow paths running behind the main plots which separate fields from homes? Perhaps a cow path?

Like Virginia is for Lovers, or Kansas is as big as you think, if it is anything, advertising copy is meant to conjure an emotion, not withstand scrutiny. Milton Glaser's 1977 'I Heart New York' state-branding logo is just a feel-good placeholder and seal of approval for whatever the marketing campaign of the moment is pushing. If New York passes a medically assisted suicide law, you can bet they'll slap the I heart New York sticker on the suicide pod.

"New York, I'm dying to meet you!"

According to gubernatorial hopeful Bruce Blakeman, New York has high inflation, soaring grocery and utility bills and high state taxes which are causing residents to flee the state.

This is not the kind of publicity the tourism industry appreciates, but while the dour outlook of would-be governors can't be said to help the brand it's not clear it can hurt it. Does anyone believe advertising copy? Most studies show people believe what they want to believe and only ask questions later. That is, advertising copy exists to encourage the already willing.

Would you choose the leaf show in New York over a tropical island vacation with warm, lapis lazuli waves to frolic in, if the price of the air fare was the same?

Would you pay $8,820 for a fall foliage cruise that motors one way up the Hudson River from New York City to Albany? In that case American Cruise lines has got you covered.

"Revel in the beauty of Hudson River fall foliage on this captivating cruise," sayeth the advertising copy. "Between ports, enjoy panoramic foliage views from your stateroom or private balcony, and unwind in the evenings over cocktails and regionally inspired cuisine on this unforgettable Hudson River fall foliage cruise."

Taking shelter from the rain under a corrugated roof one night outside the Maritime Museum and Boatbuilding School, I saw one of American Cruises vessels approach the dock out to tie off one evening. Like a floating apartment complex of the damned, it drifted out of the mist four stories tall, white and ghostly, and you could see through glass windows into the dining area on the bottom deck and imagine the sound of the forks and knives scraping against the plates. All white hair. The curtains to the rooms on the above decks were all drawn. The balconies were empty. Nobody disembarked.

So writing advertising copy is putting lipstick on the lips of whatever animal is presented and making the best of it. Which is not to say it must be a disingenuous profession, just a rabidly optimistic one.

But besides being conflated in the imagination with Haunted hayrides, picking apples from the orchard and whatever a back lane is— we all must know what the true import is of the color-changing leaves. What comes after.

The swelling nostalgia for the warm months left behind and the mental toll of counting ahead through the days of cold, has not yet started in earnest. The leaves have not yet all turned brown and been forgotten, have not yet been raked and bagged and disposed of into the county compost operation. The forest paths are already covered in dropped leaves though, dry and rustling.

There are months of dead silence waiting ahead, made loud in the hole left that insect songs used to fill. if they haven't died then what insects are left will hunker down to wait out the cold, and dream of waving antenna, of haustellate and of chelicerae, as the glycerol rises in what passes for their blood. To prevent it from freezing.

When most of the birds will have left and the skunks will have entered torpor and the groundhogs and bears will be hibernating, we will still have to stay in the game, like the rabbits and the deer, the foxes and the coyotes, the fishers and the owls, the river otters and the beavers. We're all in it together. It's autumn and the price paid for fall is knowing what's coming. Enjoy it while it lasts.

Up across the border in Catskill, Jim Ebersole was not worried about the skulking approach of winter. He had set up his easel and was painting the inland vista of treetops and the distant angles of the Catskill mountains in watercolor.

Up in Greene County the trees still held a great deal of green but this didn't dismay him either.

"I paint all the time," Ebersole confessed. "I've done a lot of paintings here but this is a special time. It doesn't last very long."

"This spot here," he gestures with his arm to the ghosts of a row of trees just beyond the fresh poured and shaped, concrete sidewalk and curb on which he stands.

"This view didn't exist a couple of months ago," he said. "There was a small gap in the trees the city took down. I did a lot of paintings of the mountains through there."

When the city fixed up the walkway, it took down the trees. Ebersole said, regardless of the season, he remains at his easel, steadfast. He will probably paint out here, he allows, even in the dead of winter.

"It's still an amazing view," Ebersole said. "And there can be a surprising amount of color. But I drove back from Syracuse the other day, and over there it was farther along. The colors in the Mohawk Valley and whatnot were very vibrant, so I guess it's still going to get brighter here."

A single mature maple tree is estimated to grow up to 200,000 leaves, every one of them, holding in them the fire of the sun.

"More intense colors still on the way," the painter promises.

Sojourner Truth

Continued from Page A1

The dedication of this statue was initially going to be timed to the 50th anniversary of that library, which was opened in 1970. It was thanks to the efforts of a group of forward-thinking activists, including faculty member Carlton Mabee who would go on to write a biography about Truth, worked to get the building named for this local icon. At least one of those individuals attended the statue dedication this week. A certain pandemic scuttled those plans for the statue, which had initially been pitched to place on Walkway over the Hudson, and when the campus event was rescheduled it became clear that seemingly the last people consulted were members of the black studies department. Whether that was a terrible oversight or an intentional slight remains a source of pain and none of the current department members were in attendance.

On the other hand, attendance at the dedication was perhaps a hundred despite any past controversy or the intense downpour that immediately preceded the gathering. Black Ulster County residents are slightly less than six percent of the population, but a visual scan of the crowd suggested that they made up a quarter to a third of those present. These included members of two student groups, the choral Voices of Unity and the dance troupe Golden that performed between speakers that included the county's first poet laureate Kate Hymes, who both poured libations to the ancestors and read three original poems drawn from Truth's life.

The county's historian, Edward Moran, highlighted the remarkable way that Sojourner Truth resisted the historical erasure that has swallowed up most mention of anyone else who was once owned as property in New York -- despite never learning to read and write, no less. Indeed, the first mention of Truth in print was in an *Atlantic* article by Harriet Beecher Stowe, in which Stowe incorrectly described Truth as Libyan and also as deceased, according to information in the Mabee biography. Moran celebrated Truth's fame -- all of which occurred that exaggerated death -- for highlighting the fact that slavery in northern states was still brutal and dehumanizing. Sojourner Truth walked out on an owner who broke a promise of early emancipation and then took a white man to court for illegally selling Truth's son Peter to a southern plantation owner. That was the first interracial court case in which the white party lost.

The university's president, Darrell Wheeler, came to campus when this statue was under a cloud and stored out of sight of the world. Wheeler first sent it to be displayed in Kingston and Newburgh, before eventually speaking at a long-delayed dedication under low-hanging clouds that obscured the horizon. However, Wheeler chose to frame the weather as another libation, one that will "nourish us and guide us," as Sojourner Truth did centuries ago and continues to now. The president acknowledged the past "controversy and turmoil," and later said when asked that while some on campus have not yet healed from that, "no one voice can capture" what Sojourner Truth and this statue in particular mean. In a 2024 interview Wheeler expressed the intention to have a QR code placed on the statue's base, which would link to a web page describing its complex history. That code has not yet been installed.

Stories linked to Sojourner Truth, be they true or not, continue to inspire anyone exposed to them to do more with the tools they are given. Doubtless this spirit will touch some of the many who will now regard this statue and learn about the prophetic fire that drove forward a long and remarkable life.