

More shopping signifies growth

■ Expansion plans in Big Flats reflect well on the area.

The Southern Tier has seen an unprecedented wave of new retail development in recent years, ranging from freestanding stores such as Talbot's women's fashions and the expanded Raymour & Flanigan home furnishings to the growth of shopping centers such as Consumer Square. And with the looming prospect of a new major shopping

GUEST VIEW



ALISON M. WOLFE

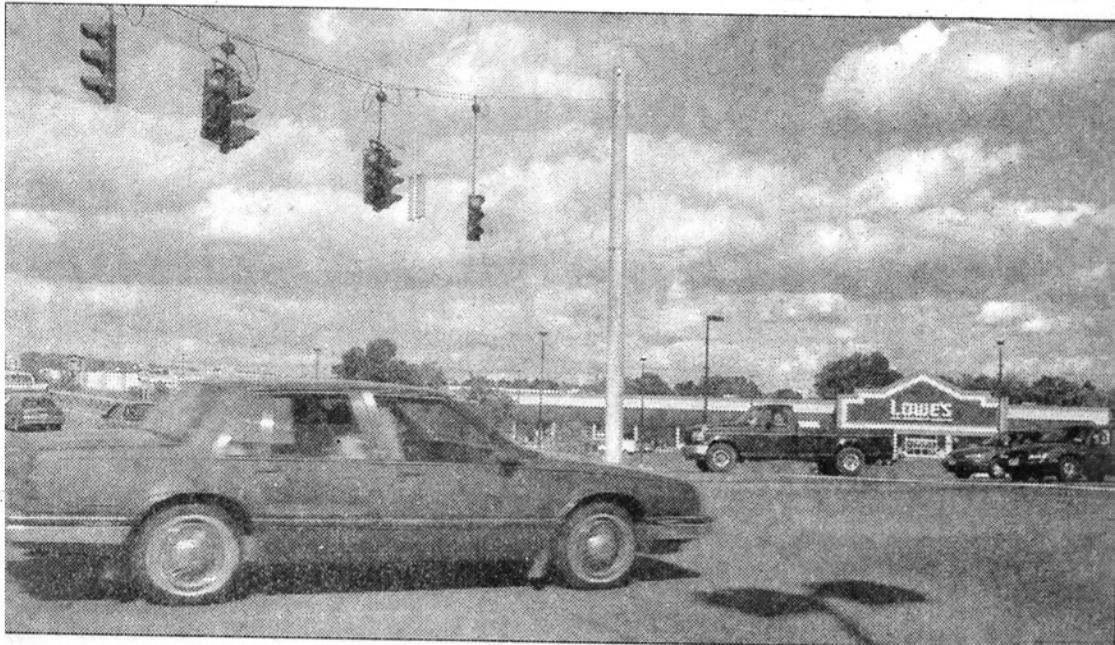
center anchored by a 150,000-square-foot Wal-Mart Supercenter and another new shopping area next to Consumer Square, we may be just getting warmed up.

I am a member of the Elmira College Marketing faculty, and one would certainly expect me to be in

favor of more retail growth. But there are reasons that you should be too. Here are just a few of them:

■ **Jobs.** How many people worked at home centers here in the Southern Tier a generation ago? Or department stores? Or hotels? The answer is many fewer people than today. The growth of retail in this area has brought with it a substantial, permanent increase in the number of employment opportunities, and further retail choices have the potential to add more jobs as this area grows as a destination for retail shoppers.

■ **Choices.** The growth that we've seen over the last decade has not only fueled more stores, but more choices. Today in Big Flats, we have Lowe's and Chase-Pitkin, a Country Inn & Suites and a Hilton Garden Inn, an Applebee's and an Outback



Star-Gazette file photo

Traffic along Chemung County Route 64 is a concern that Big Flats planning officials are studying in connection with a planned shopping area east of Consumer Square.

Steakhouse. The fact that all of these are still thriving means that consumers are reacting to greater choices in a positive way.

■ **Growth.** The retail growth we have already experienced has improved the Southern Tier's reputation as a place to live and do business, and these new plans are a sign of that continued and future growth potential. As Chemung County Chamber of Commerce president Kevin Keeley puts it: "In our experience, retail responds to a strong economy, a strong market. It goes where the shoppers are shopping."

■ **Quality of life.** How many of you currently drive to Binghamton to find stores that aren't in places such as Arnot Mall or Consumer Square? And when you go there, do you do other shopping as well?

More retail choices and greater competition funnel more dollars back into the local economy, and lower prices improve our cost of living. Corning Chamber of Commerce Chairman of the Board/Acting President John Fowler agrees, noting that "adding new offerings only helps create a better experience for consumers and a stronger business environment."

There is no question that growth brings challenges in its wake: "The global trend toward sharper price competition and more big-box retail means that businesses of all sizes need to critically examine how they attract and keep their customers, ranging from costs and service quality to their basic mission and vision.

A booming retail environment increases pressure on employers to retain their best people with living wages and legitimate career oppor-

tunities. And individual communities will always face the challenge of balancing growth with the pressures of traffic congestion, infrastructure and suburban sprawl.

Personally, I remain an optimist. I feel that responsible growth benefits everyone and that the good companies in our midst will always find a way to grow, survive and flourish, even with larger competitors in the neighborhood. In the meantime, the Southern Tier may soon be on the verge of a renaissance in retail economic growth, and shopping convenience. We should welcome it with open arms.

Alison M. Wolfe is an assistant professor of marketing in the Department of Business and Economics at Elmira College. Guest View offers an opportunity to comment in-depth about an interest or to address specific issues that have public impact.