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Albany logic: It's not CNY, it's the Finger Lakes!

By Sean Kirst / The Post-Standard

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Dennis Nett / The Post-Standard

Philip Domenico owner of the property on Gates Rd in Jamesville that coordinates as the center of New York State. In the background he has view of Oneida Lake (not visible because of haze).

If you had to choose an exact spot for the geographic center of New York state, you couldn't do much better than the home of Philip and Jane Domenico in the town of Pompey.

Since 1966, the couple has lived in a 19th century farmhouse at **Sweet and Gates roads**. The Domenicos moved there from New York City, after Philip took a job as an actuary in downtown Syracuse.

Stand in their yard, near a classic barn, and you look down upon miles of fields and woodlands that roll toward Oneida Lake. The vista is even more beautiful

in autumn, Philip said.

If you go strictly by **the coordinates that pop up in several Internet collections** of information about the 50 states, the Domenicos live about as close to the middle of New York as anyone can get.

After using those numbers to check on a location, U.S. Geological Survey officials and **John Olson**, librarian for geographic information systems at Syracuse University, arrived at roughly the same spot for the exact center of the state:

The Jamesville-Pompey area, near the Domenicos' home.

Already, we can anticipate the shouts of protest from Madison County, whose loyalists have long considered **Pratts Hollow** or thereabouts to be the geographic center. Don't worry. You may well be right. Olson and the geological survey officials don't know the source of the common Internet coordinates, and thus take them with a grain of salt.

Still, the point of revisiting the question is to savor another mind-blowing decision in Albany.

The budget is a mess. The state Legislature and the governor seem trapped in political molasses. But if you thought that looking-glass world could get no wackier, pause to appreciate this recent revelation:

Empire State Development, a state agency, decided against including Onondaga County in the region officially known as "Central New York." Eight counties are listed in that area, but not us. For state purposes, Onondaga is now part of the **Finger Lakes region**, which some civic leaders say could be a boost for tourism.

Maybe. But the casualty - as happens all too often - is common sense. Sure, if you want to twist logic like so much taffy, you can argue that Onondaga Lake is a kind of geological half-sibling to the Finger Lakes. In truth, we all know that greater Syracuse has strongly identified itself with Central New York since the time when people in this region drew up early maps.

Dennis Connors, curator of history for the Onondaga Historical Association, noted that our community made a serious bid to be the state capital in the 1840s, based on the whole notion of being in the middle. Even the traditional seal of Syracuse includes the words "Central City."

Today, if you ask residents to collectively identify themselves, almost everyone will say:
We're Central New Yorkers.

That brings us back to the official center point. Olson is quick to note that he isn't sure where the common Internet coordinates originated. The Geological Survey provides only a **mileage standard for the center**, Olson said, and that puts it 12 miles south of Oneida and 26 miles southwest of Utica. If those numbers are correct, the center would indeed fall in Madison County. Scott Ingmire, Madison County director of planning, said he's done a detailed computer study that reinforced the point.

Asked how different computations could point to both Pompey or Pratts Hollow as the center of the state, Cheryl O'Brien of the Geological Survey said a multitude of data goes into making such a determination. Survey guidelines, she said, emphasize that any final results "should be considered as approximations."

In other words, Madison and Onondaga counties could both have a basis for the claim.

So here's a suggestion: State officials who tried to move Syracuse out of Central New York ought to call some of the Sudanese "lost boys" who settled here. Many of those refugees embraced this region with a passion. When they speak of their new home, they don't talk about the Finger Lakes.

They live, they will tell you, "in the CNY."

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