

County Executive Jimino, with her recent remarks to the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce shed light on the current fiscal crisis. The following are excerpts of these remarks:

*“I look at this annual meeting with the Chamber as both an appropriate and timely way to start the New Year. I say appropriate, as this represents an opportunity to exchange views between the business community and your county government. And I say timely because the beginning of the year is when the County and the Chamber reaffirm their commitment to work together over the next twelve months in our co-effort to assure a sound local economy.*

*One such collaborative effort that the Chamber and county government have partnered on as Linda mentioned is our business breakfast series designed to gather the ideas, concerns and suggestions of our businesses on how the chamber and / or the county can help improve the climate for existing businesses to succeed, and therefore be better able to attract new businesses as well. Our first breakfast series, held nearly three years ago, resulted in the introduction of new programs and informational pieces that directly responded to the ideas shared with us by our businesses. This past year we held our second round of breakfast meetings and are now beginning the process of reviewing the needs you brought to our attention and compiling a plan as to how the Chamber and the County can provide assistance to continue to move the game ball forward for businesses and the County as a whole. I want to thank Linda Hillman and her staff for continuing the wonderful working relationship we’ve enjoyed since I have been County Executive. It is obvious that the Chamber is a tremendous source of support and advocacy for the businesses in the County and our partnership brings an important perspective to the day to day considerations of county government.*

*This morning we are gathered to discuss positive actions to benefit our County that are occurring. As well, we must note possible pitfalls along the way that can potentially stifle our efforts. I feel that this economic weather report is vital, since, when all is said and done, we are two entities whose success is irrevocably tied to each other.*

*However, without the interest, participation and support of the community, all of our hard work and great ideas will go to waste. For example our residents must patronize your businesses for you to be successful, and our effectiveness on the county level is measured in one way by the collection of sales tax dollars generated, sales tax dollars that along with taking the pressure off our property taxpaying owners, like yourselves, help provide necessary services for our residents, services that our people have long depended upon and have helped make Rensselaer County the place to be, yes, and kept them here to form a viable consumer base. In short, we need one another. “We are partners in progress” as the saying goes, and the people who live here and come here to patronize our businesses are our investors and are the mortgage holders of our future.*

*And what does our future look like?*

*On the positive side of the ledger, I am pleased to report that as most know, HVCC is building a facility at Luther Forest Tech Park to train those who are applying to fill new jobs at the Global Foundries facility. This chip fab development also sets the stage for spinoff business opportunities for all our communities. And it goes without saying that this endeavor will provide a ripple that will affect jobs and housing in our County as well as Saratoga. And we are anticipating one of the first communities to feel that effect will be Schaghticoke, right across the river from Saratoga County.*

*And there are other significant happenings that have occurred over last year and in the new the year that clearly show that the wheels of progress are turning in our County pressing onward toward assuring our economic stability, such as GE's new digital mammography manufacturing facility at the RPI tech park, that is on track to create 150 new jobs, after \$165 million investment by GE. And Fedex has recently taken control of property in East Greenbush thereby initiating their plans to invest \$30 million to develop their new facility. Through our Job Development Program we have been able to provide loans to support Old World Provisions, Pacamor / Kubar Bearings and the Troy Community Food Co-op. And I would be remiss if I didn't also mention that the County has secured grant funding to reinforce our commitment to our economic foundation in Rensselaer County, agriculture, through the funding for farmers' markets and the protection of development rights to ensure a safe local food supply that consumers throughout the region will benefit from. These are certainly healthy local economic signs, as is a new Hilton Hotel opening in Troy, with additional redevelopment of the Hoosick St. corridor expected to be coming right around the corner.*

*And in the southern part of the County, the county's Water and Sewer Authority worked with East Greenbush and Rensselaer last year to provide better water quality and quantity for existing residents and businesses, as well as providing a positive incentive for increased residential and business growth.*

*I am pleased that we have in place a county philosophy that says that during bad times we do everything we can to ready ourselves for the good times, and nothing shows this more than the 50,000 dollar investment into the Workforce Development Institute at HVCC made some four or five years ago. This has resulted in creating jobs for 40 plus people, and has leveraged multi-millions of dollars in grants to train workers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When it comes to keeping pace with progress, we are working hard.*

*And I must say that a good portion of our progress is occurring courtesy of the federal government's stimulus funding program. In this regard, I have been working with our federal delegation to assure that we get the most use out of these dollars, by attempting to shore up some of the projects and programs that need a financial push.*

*Our mutual efforts can be seen with the county's paving of Oakwood Avenue on the northeast side of Troy, which reportedly has a traffic count of 13,000 cars daily, and is a major thoroughfare connecting the northern towns to Troy and beyond. This combines with the State using stimulus dollars to pave Route four between Routes 43 and 151 which has numerous commercial retail outlets and serves as a major connector between*

*East and North Greenbush. Hopefully, this will not only make it easier to travel, but increase the travel in stores as well.*

*At the suggestion of business owners in our outlying areas, as voiced at the previously mentioned Chamber and County co-sponsored breakfast meetings with business owners around the County, we have applied for stimulus dollars to expand broadband network access into unserved and underserved areas of our County. You've told us that it is difficult at best to maintain a business without computer access in the times we live in. We listened, we agreed, and we applied for stimulus funding to put this into effect.*

*And as we talk broadband access, hopefully, through stimulus funding and in conjunction with other counties we will be able to broaden our public safety alertness and preparedness through broader access thus providing greater security and safety throughout the capital region.*

*And on the tourism side I am excited to report that our new tourism website will be launched within the next six weeks providing additional information to potential visitors far and wide about the many great spots to visit and enjoy here in Rensselaer County. As well next month we will be undertaking a strategic planning effort to identify the best way to promote our tourist attractions and amenities. If you'd like to be part of a focus group working on that effort, please let me know!*

*As far as the negative side of our business ledger there unfortunately is lots to report.*

*If there is ever a time that we have to work hard to keep our heads above water, this is the time. I do not intend to pull any punches, as most know by reading the paper, we are in trouble right across the state as the economic fall out of the recession we are now experiencing is exacerbated by our state government spending more than they take in, by not engaging in meaningful cuts in both programs and spending.*

*Their refusal to realize that revenue shortage is a problem that cannot be solved by over estimating revenues, or forcing more taxes and more fees on the counties to force the taxpaying public to fund increasingly costly mandated programs is irresponsible at best. True, stimulus funding has somewhat plugged the hole by serving as an infusion for immediate needs, but ultimately is a band aid approach to a tourniquet matter, and has only delayed the reality of the need for the state to economize.*

*As the State reports an estimated budget gap of nine billion dollars this year with the following year estimated to be a deficit of between 18 and 20 billion dollars, it is easy and at the same time sad to draw a picture of a state that loves to drink fine wine but can really only afford beer, but never the less refuses to sacrifice its acquired taste. Our residents are economizing, budgeting and prioritizing by substituting hamburger for steak. Why can't they?*

*Locally, we are facing a fourteen million dollar budget gap for the county's fiscal year beginning January 1, 2011, which would require a 25 percent property tax increase,*

*which I am sure we all realize cannot be allowed to happen. To put the reason for this dramatic increase in perspective, along with the ever increasing mandated programs and the shifting of funding responsibility from the State to the County for their programs, we must look at the over \$21.2 million in personal benefits costs for county employees for 2011. This represents 41 percent of the county payroll and compares to \$9.9 million, or 26 percent of the payroll that we paid in 2004. This rise is in good part due to health insurance increases which I'm sure you can all relate to, however more dramatically due to retirement cost increases, as our costs rise because of state investment losses on Wall Street. And of course the cost associated with our retirement contributions and others cannot be legally altered. Therefore, these costs grow rapidly despite the negative economic climate we live in. Thus, you have the reality that unless something is done to lessen the local burden, as the stock market goes down, local taxes will go up, a teeter totter that is certainly a bad signal for business as well as the taxpayer.*

*For the county's part to cut back on spending, I will increase my efforts to push my department heads to find ways to stretch more services for less money, and have already begun the formal part of this process that usually is not started until July. I do this while keeping a watchful eye on Albany to see what they might attempt to put on our backs in the form of funding additional programs as they clean their back yards at our expense and ultimately the expense of our taxpayers. I hasten to say that local cuts will not be easy due to the fact that during my eight years of service as County Executive, I have cut over \$35 million of departmental spending requests through cooperation and consolidation within the structure of county government, without compromising the delivery of services. However, I will push for even more, and will fight to not compromise our local services, so necessary for not only the face but the guts of the County. We cannot compromise our message that we care about our residents and businesses.*

*I would hope that the State would follow this example as well, but frankly to do so would be an abrupt change from how they have conducted themselves to date. We can only hope that our representatives get the message that our backs are bending over with the weight.*

*In essence, the public can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines and watch the game. They have to become players. To this end, some have noted that for the past few years, I have authored a message on the back of the local and county tax bills that attempts to alert and inform the public of just how their tax dollars are being allotted, namely, most recently 90 cents of every tax dollar collected to fund state mandated programs. My hope is that an informed public will become a concerned public as they better understand our serious situation and realize that there are reasons that their taxes are what they are.*

*At the suggestion of the Chamber I have made copies of the most recent of these messages for your information and you should have them on your tables.*

*Are there any questions or comments?"*

