

2015 State of the County Message

Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.

Before we begin today, let's take a moment to remember all our men and women in uniform in service to our country.

Thank you to Pam Matt and the Board of Directors of the Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event.

I want to start by acknowledging my partners in government. First and foremost, I want to thank the members of the Oneida County Board of Legislators for their service and dialogue, especially the Chairman of the Board of Legislators, Gerald Fiorini. I want to thank my Department Heads who implement the vision we outline through programs and services that meet the needs of our people. I want to thank Sheriff Robert Maciol, District Attorney Scott McNamara, County Clerk Sandy DePerno, and Comptroller Joe Timpano. I want to thank Mayor Palmieri of Utica and Mayor Fusco of Rome for their continued partnerships. Please welcome the Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties, Steve Acquario. As the President of the Association, I have seen firsthand Steve's relentless advocacy on behalf of all the counties in NY State in Albany and Washington.

I want to thank my wife Eleanor, my sisters and nieces who are here with me today, for their constant support and encouragement.

We have a lot to talk about. We have accomplished great things and planted the seeds for many more. We have seen a unique merger in higher education. Nano developments in Marcy continue to expand. Our Airport has become a leader in developing unmanned aerial systems

technology. In addition, we have seen the beginning, at long last, of what a real partnership with the Oneida Indian Nation means for this region.

Let's congratulate Rob Esche, Frank DuRoss and the entire Utica Comets team, as well as the Oneida Indian Nation and Nation Representative Ray Halbritter for an unforgettable weekend at the end of January when the AHL brought the league's All Star Weekend here to Oneida County.

What a spectacular event. The executives from the AHL and the NHL were astounded and delighted by the conversion at the Aud. The Turning Stone Resort and Casino left them speechless and the fans here in Oneida County proved once again they are the best in the AHL. The AHL All-Star skills competition and all-star game were broadcast to hockey fans all over the world and illuminated to everyone all that Oneida County has to offer. The all-star weekend will be near impossible for the next host community to top. So, thank you again Rob Esche, Frank DuRoss and Ray Halbritter for showing this entire community what happens when we all work together.

The AHL All Star Weekend really exemplifies where we are, not only as a community but as a county - especially compared to eight years ago. Eight years ago, county government wouldn't have been able to be the partner necessary to see a weekend like that come to fruition. In order for the AHL to allow a team to come to Utica our historic auditorium needed to be renovated. Through a partnership with New York State, we injected the money necessary to breathe new life into the auditorium. Eight years ago, this government did not have the financial where-with-all to do that. This opportunity would have passed us by.

When the AHL, already impressed with all the Comets had been able to accomplish in a short time, looked toward Utica for their premiere weekend, I was ecstatic to get the call from

Rob Esche to look for a way to make it happen. In a unique and first of its kind partnership with the Oneida Indian Nation, we all enjoyed a premiere event that spanned our county from Utica to Verona. Eight years ago, we were locked in costly, and what seemed to be, never ending litigation with the Oneida Indian Nation. Since then, we have all come to the table, settled our differences and become true partners in the prosperity of our region. No Settlement Agreement, No All Star Game.

We stand here today and look toward a new, world class institution now known as SUNY Polytechnic Institute. SUNY Poly is a merger between SUNY IT in Marcy and the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering in Albany. This new institution is a world leader in Nano science education. Nano's foremost brilliant minds are here to teach our students. It's so much more than a name change.

Just as construction at Quad C neared completion it required a vast expansion. The cleanroom space has increased. The amount of people who will work there has grown from 1500 to 2100. Another building is being constructed that will expand the size and scope of the project

Directly adjacent to SUNY Poly is the Marcy NanoCenter Site. This is an economic development site ready to hold three Nanotechnology chip fabrication plants; it's the major economic development project for not only the county but for the entire Mohawk Valley. It's an investment in our region's future.

Eight years ago I spoke of an I-90 Tech Corridor. But Marcy needed roads, sewers, water and many other infrastructural improvements to even begin to be a place that would warrant the millions of dollars of State investment we've seen. The County has made those investments. If the County was in the same fiscal shape as 8 years ago, No Quad C. No SUNY Poly. No Nano.

In 2014, our airport had the best year of its post military existence. For the first time, we sold over 1 million gallons of fresh fuel at our airport. I congratulate Freeman Holdings Group for running the best Million Air Fixed Base Operations business in the country here at Griffiss and we are happy to have them as our partner. Griffiss is a regional airport and continues to impress everyone who comes there. This includes our distinguished guests of 2014, Derek Jeter, Deborah Lee James, Secretary of the Air Force and of course, The President of the United States, Barack Obama.

In addition to other upgrades, last week we opened the new Gateway Terminal Building. This building is a multipurpose structure housing our FBO, a U.S. Customs inspection area and our Department of Aviation.

Unmanned aircraft and aerial systems is an industry in its infancy. Over the past two years, we have seen unbelievable gains at our test site. UAS testing commenced in August and culminated with a demonstration operating a full sized Helicopter and a small UAS Quad Copter. This test was attended by over 120 officials from local, Federal and State agencies and leaders of the UAS and Aviation Industry. In 2015, we will go even further to set the test site apart from the other five in the country. We have been awarded 4.4 million dollars for range radar instrumentation. It's the first of its kind. Because of the County and State commitment it is the number one test site in the country.

We continue to commercially develop the airport. We have created a Start-Up NY zone with, President Randy VanWagoner and Mohawk Valley Community College that will incentivize new high tech business to come to Rome. We have created a foreign trade zone - county wide - which will help us further develop international relationships. These actions have been taken to make Griffiss competitive world wide.

Vision 2020 is a collaborative effort to analyze the needs of our community to meet the demands from the growth of the Nano and Airport expansions - it is our “people plan” to meet the needs of a new economy. Vision 2020 has brought together leaders in education, workforce, economic development and non-profits to sustain our high-tech economy into the future. The results have been amazing. Again to all of you, who said yes to take part in this effort, thank you. You have gone above and beyond.

You have seen the video here today so I’m only going to touch on a few points.

The three committees of Vision 2020; Housing, Workforce, Access and Opportunity have not only created proposals for our future, but have executed plans to move this community forward. For example in 2014, The Housing committee worked with the Board of Legislators and the Oneida County IDA to pass a package of tax incentives to encourage the redevelopment of diverse residential options.

The Access and Opportunity committee has done the work necessary for all in Oneida County to meet the needs of a new economy. In 2014 we formalized an alternative high school program that encourages post-educational success among 17-18-year-old refugee and immigrant students. This is known as the Alignment of Pathways and Programs for Learners of English, APPLE. This committee has a full slate of plans to execute for 2015, including creating an ambassador program to bring information and services to the communities that need them most.

Like many of your grandparents, my grandfather came to this country through Ellis Island. He came to America looking for a better life. Like many he struggled and persevered and gave his children a better life than he himself had. Today, new waves of immigrants have headed to Oneida County. They face challenges which are similar to those faced by our forefathers; language and employment barriers. However, they face additional obstacles that our ancestors

didn't; Technology and legal issues, workforce training and more. The good news is we can help. In 2015, work will begin on an Oneida County Welcome Center, not for tourism, but for refugees and immigrants who have come to our region to make a better life, we will break down language barriers, connect them with services and help them achieve the American Dream.

The Workforce and Training committee continues to create a workforce ready to be a part of our region's future. This committee has the important goal of preparing our children for a high tech economy steeped in STEM education so they can learn, work, raise a family and be a part of the next generation of Oneida County residents.

This year I will convene a transportation committee as the next area of Vision 2020. Transportation isn't merely the means to get to and from work it is an essential element of the identity of a community. Transportation infrastructure, like the Erie Canal, shaped this community. The Transportation Committee will be charged with identifying and contemplating how transportation infrastructure can foster our future economic, urban and cultural growth. This committee, through extended transportation options, will connect residents to where they live, learn, work and play. Vision 2020 is a remarkable example of what happens when people stop working at cross purposes and start pulling in the same direction.

Our medical community has likewise embraced the concept of cooperation and consolidation. They have pooled their resources and emerged stronger and more efficient. This year, the Governor has proposed \$300 million for a new hospital campus in our community. We are working with our partners in the medical community and in Albany to situate a state of the art facility on one campus. This is another example of the benefits of cooperation over parochialism. This opportunity does not occur if our medical community is divided.

Day in and day out the public servants of this county are dedicated, talented and caring workers who take their obligation to heart. Every department is innovative in their approach to government service and your County employees do the best job of any county workforce anywhere.

This administration has a common sense, no frills approach to government. I do not believe that government is the answer to every problem. I do believe in solving the problems that government can and, just as importantly, demonstrating initiative with our partners who can solve what government can't. We continue to function with the fewest government workers since the 1970's.

Our county finances continue to be a model for governments throughout the entire state. Comptroller Joe Timpano and I have a simple approach. Live within your means. Borrow responsibly. Invest wisely. Pay back bonding quickly and ahead of schedule. Work with your unions and employees so the government workforce is a partner in controlling spending.

Hold the line on property taxes. For the second year in a row, county government has not raised the property tax levy. I've said before and I say again, keeping property taxes low is the single most important thing we can do to help individuals, families, homeowners, businesses, and farmers. Holding the line on the property tax levy is our number one focus when it comes to taxes. Period.

The State of Oneida County is strong. Stronger than it's ever been. I can tell you this with certainty. As the President of the New York State Association of Counties, I see the challenges facing our fellow New York Communities. We are not alone in the problems we face but we are well positioned to confront those problems and to take advantage of the opportunities available. We are seen as a model and other counties look to us as an example.

I'm not the only one saying it. Three national credit rating agencies have continuously increased our ratings and outlooks. They cite a decreased government workforce and with it reduced government spending. Responsible and wise long term investment in capital projects that move this county forward. Keeping taxes in line. Growth in a new economy steeped in the high tech sector. Money in the bank and revenues from the historic Oneida Nation Settlement Agreement. That's my record as your Chief Executive, that's how your County does business.

Infrastructure is a key component of everything we do and we will continue to fix our sewers, pave our roads and rehabilitate our bridges. We must continue to build our downtown cores and improve our quality of life. This year, we will begin a major capital improvement at the REA Wing of our historic train station, which recently was named one of the top ten most beautiful train station's in America. This is a two million dollar project that will renovate and restore a critical piece of Baggs Square.

With this, I have a proposal that will save a community asset that has been shuttered since May 2014, while simultaneously allowing for the redevelopment of one of the most beautiful buildings in all of Utica. I recommend the center core of the REA Wing be used to host Utica's Children Museum. With new a new home, new purpose and Oneida County as a partner, the Children's Museum can begin a second life. The Museum can be something grand, and it can only happen by putting aside the past and embracing a new future. I ask the Children's Museum's Board of Directors to meet with me and discuss this opportunity for the cultural growth of our children in our community.

This government shares services, consolidates when necessary and increases efficiencies all to benefit the taxpayer. The Department of Public Works, led by Commissioner Dennis Davis, in our on-going effort of expanding inter municipal cooperation, has developed a series of

options with the New York State Department of Transportation that expand the County's snow and ice control responsibilities on State highways. This allows the DOT the ability to reallocate resources during extreme weather events. Thanks to all for keeping our roads safe during this turbulent winter.

In my 2013 State of the County address, I proposed Project ARGO; Action To Realign Government Operations, which was funded with \$500,000 to pay the upfront cost for a shared service or consolidation between local governments. To date, only \$12,000 has been spent. Waterville Central School and the Village of Waterville completed a project to consolidate fueling operations for school and municipal vehicles.

We have reengaged with the many, many local governments in our county to come to the table for real shared service and consolidation. Working with Mayor Palmieri, we have made some strides. Consolidation of the City of Utica's mail service has resulted in demonstrable savings to the taxpayer. We are looking to do more. We have begun the process of assuming the printing operations for Utica as well. These projects may not be front page news but they save money while making government more efficient. Taxpayers need relief from all their governments. Let's leave parochial interests behind and save people money.

As I mentioned with regard to the AHL All Star Weekend, our agreement with the Oneida Nation makes great things possible for us as a community. The Settlement Agreement provides revenue to the County for projects that were not possible before and to prioritize those that had languished on the back burner. In the 2015 budget, we have designated a portion of the revenue as Partners in Prosperity funds for infrastructure, education, the arts, housing and public safety.

In addition to the cost savings from consolidation, our municipalities need help with their infrastructure. I have designated \$1 million of the Settlement revenue for infrastructure for our municipalities to be split between Utica and Rome on a per capita basis. Each year this fund will alternate, first with the cities then with the towns.

Agriculture is still our region's number one economic engine and we must ensure its growth and plan for its future. I applaud all of those in our farming community who put in the long days. Since 2007, the number of farms are up 5%. The average farm size has expanded and so has the production on each farm. Eight years ago the market value of products sold was 90 million dollars. Today its 113 million dollars.

In 2015 we will prepare our Farmland Protection Plan for New York State. This is a comprehensive plan with the first purpose to ensure our farmland is protected and remains economically viable going forward.

In addition, I have instructed my Commissioner of Planning, John Kent to begin creating, a master plan for agri-trourism with a specific goal in mind, turn Oneida County into a statewide leader in agri-tourism in the next 5 years. We have a world class brewery, outstanding apple orchards, award winning farmer's markets, including Oneida County's own Public Market, as well as many other agricultural assets- beverage industry, wineries, as well as farm to table programs. We are proud of what we grow and we invite others to enjoy it as well.

We must continue to invest in the future of farming. That is why I'm committing County Government to become a partner in Vernon Verona Sherrill School District's proposed Animal Science Center. It's important that we connect students with the passion to farm to the new technologies in farming. Through Economic Development Funding, I propose Oneida County make this science center a reality. I'd like to thank VVS Superintendent Martha Group for her

vision and partnership. She is here today with the teacher who began the Animal Science Center Project, Keith Scheibel and one of his students Mackenzie Michol.

We are pleased to be joined today by students from our local school districts and I ask them all to stand now, let's give them a round of applause. These young adults and their peers throughout the County are our region's greatest natural resource. We must stop exporting them. We must be an active partner in educating our young people. In 2015, we will continue our focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. A mere generation ago, Nano Tech didn't exist. Our students' education needs to encourage a new way of thinking fostering an agile mind ready to seize on opportunities that we are creating for them. Through our Education Partners in Prosperity Funding, we are working to provide the dollars necessary to prepare our children.

I allocated and the Board of Legislators approved \$500,000 in the 2015 budget. We solicited proposals and received 20 requests totaling 1.3 million dollars. This has brought out the very best from our schools and educators and I appreciate their effort.

We must also look at Arts and Culture as a way to enhance our region's appeal. We budgeted Arts and Culture Partners for Prosperity Funding of \$350,000 for local organizations to impact the cultural offerings of our community. We received requests totaling \$2Million to help fund 42 projects.

We will continue to invest in our NU Downtown Housing Initiative. We have \$800,000 this year that is available to spur downtown investment. The Initiative has received buy-in from our community's local banks and a financial structure has been put in place. A new interest forgiveness loan incentive program, which will inject 8 to 10 million dollars of downtown development, will be ready by June 1st. This initiative will completely reimagine our Utica and Rome Downtowns and, in the years to come, will revitalize the main streets of our towns and

villages. This public-private partnership is the epitome of wise investment that correlates with our long term strategy to encourage economic development by making sure our municipal resources are attractive to new residents and businesses.

We need to continue to make Oneida County a healthy and safe region for all who live, visit and do business here.

Our Juvenile justice system is most effective when working together and proactively. We must divert our youth from dangerous, counterproductive paths. In January, along with our community partners and the Oneida County Youth Council, we began preparation for the first ever comprehensive countywide arrest diversion program. Throughout this county, there are many worthwhile diversion programs but, there are gaps that some of our at risk youth are falling through. The Countywide Arrest Diversion Program has one major goal; pull all these programs together so collectively we can impact as many youths as possible. It's time for one comprehensive program. I have instructed my Director of Probation, David Tomidy to work with the Oneida County Youth Council and Family Court Judge Randy Caldwell, who I want to thank for spearheading this effort, as well as Sheriff Maciol and District Attorney McNamara who are active partners, as we deliver a Countywide Comprehensive Arrest Diversion Program by the end of the year.

In Oneida County our emergency response teams do an amazing job. They exhibit incredible courage every time they put on a uniform or answer a call. They deserve equipment and resources to match their bravery and commitment. That's why this year through our Public Safety Partners in Prosperity Funding we have set aside \$500,000 to do just that.

We are purchasing for all Emergency Response Teams in the County tactical bullet proof vests. We are retrofitting two Air Vans that will be available to fire departments at fires scenes.

In addition, Oneida County will be paying for training that volunteer fire departments would like to do but are unable to afford.

In 2014, we set out to address our overall public health with the announcement of the Oneida County Total Health Initiative. The Oneida County Health Department has spearheaded inventive ideas that have set Oneida County on a healthier path. Being a healthy community makes for a better workforce, better place to live and certainly a better place to raise children.

We are expanding the wellness options for our county workforce as well. We have created walking maps that have laid out clear routes at every county campus, allowing for walks on lunch hours and break times. Through our Healthy Neighborhoods Program we will continue to survey homes for lead and a variety of respiratory issues through a 5 year, multimillion dollar State grant. We have expanded our HEPA Vac Loan program through a grant from the Community Foundation as we continue to have the most aggressive primary and secondary lead prevention programs in the entire state. In 2015, the Teen Assessment Project Survey will be conducted in our schools by a coalition of county government departments and local educators to determine healthy habits. Additionally, our Health Department has been awarded a cancer screening grant which will provide funding for screenings for uninsured and underinsured county residents to get the proper testing they need.

On August 5th, the Youth Bureau and the Oneida County Health Department are partners in the Fun and Fitness Walk For Children. This will be an educational and promotional event for children's health for the entire county.

In Oneida County Government we help the members of our community that need it the most. The major way we do that is through the Oneida County Health Clinic, whose main offices are located right here in downtown Utica. This year, the clinic will undergo a complete

renovation. The State of New York has provided a two million dollar grant for a new state of the art health clinic which will be open by fall 2016. I thank the Governor for his commitment to our urban centers and public health.

We are committed to our veterans, especially those veterans who are in the need of the most help. The national statistics are horrific. Nearly 600,000 veteran disability claims are backlogged. 1% of Americans have served in the military yet veterans represent 20% of suicides, on average, 22 a day. A congressional report found unaddressed legal issues as a leading cause of homelessness and suicide among veterans. In Oneida County we lead, we don't wait for the federal government to find a solution. This is why we have begun a partnership with the Syracuse University Law School to fund a legal clinic for our veterans. Located at the Veteran's Outreach Center in Utica, this clinic will provide them with free legal services.

In the past eight years we have done more to foster growth than any previous administration. As 2014 turned to 2015, Governor Cuomo made an announcement about the future of upstate NY. New York State is going to invest 1.5 billion dollars to revitalize upstate. Many have spent their time bickering about the process. I will leave the bickering to others and, as always I will act.

Our Regional Economic Development Council has built a strong foundation for this competition. They have worked in unison throughout the past 4 years to help this region grow and I commend them for their effort. In addition to their work on the council, they are job creators, business owners, philanthropists and pillars of our community. In short, we couldn't have asked for a better REDC and we all need them to continue their work for the next CFA round. As a leader of this region and the Oneida County Executive I cannot, in good conscience,

ask them to do more than they already are. In light of that, I propose a structure to present our plan to win the Upstate Revitalization Fund.

This structure will mobilize the region, build upon the REDC effort and put the resources necessary in place to be successful. We will create, for the sole purpose of winning the 500 million dollars, MV500. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to alter our trajectory as an entire region. We will capture our innovative spirit through a collective constructive impatience.

I have engaged regional cooperation like never before. In partnership with Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi we are assembling this community's best and brightest to see this to the finish line. To represent Oneida County on this team we need to turn to those that believe as we do that as good as things have been, the very best is yet to come. Alicia Dicks, Community Foundation Executive Director, Rob Esche, Mohawk Valley Garden CEO, Ray Halbritter Oneida Nation CEO, Steve DiMeo, MVEDGE President, and Nick Matt, Chairman and CEO of Matt Brewing Company will lead a contingent of regional business, cultural, tourism, economic development and agricultural partners to put together the best plan that Upstate will see. The Government sector will include myself, Assemblyman Brindisi, Montgomery County Executive Matt Ossenfort, Herkimer County Chairman Jim Bono and others.

MV500 will have three specific goals. Create a vision for the upstate revitalization funds, identify projects that will facilitate the realization of that vision, and create the action steps to bring those projects to fruition. This is no easy task. It will take time, teamwork and dollars to complete. We must come together and create a 500 million dollar winning presentation that articulates our future.

This structure will include three working groups focused separately on Vision, Strategy and Action.

The Vision Team will create a vibrant and connective vision for the entire Mohawk Valley while highlighting our cohesion as a region. This group will provide key input, serve as advocates for the region and every county will be represented.

The Strategy Team will create, manage and deliver on The Vision Team's framework. This group will work to triangulate this region so the tourism in Cooperstown benefits and relates to the nano-technology in Utica. They will need to connect Cyber Security initiatives in Rome to livable city transformations in Utica and Johnstown. This group must show how agri-business in Herkimer helps every county in the region.

The Action Team, will develop a multi-dimensional, informative and meaningful final report that will be complimented by creative, distinctive presentation materials. This group will make the presentation of our vision into a spectacular display of what this investment will look like in the years to come.

MV500 will be mobilized from the Community Foundation's office space and funded with start-up capital from Oneida County Government. The first step will be an extensive interview process of over 300 people throughout the region. Data will be compiled, analyzed and assembled for review by Mid-April. This is labor intensive and Oneida County staff is at their disposal to assist with this process.

I want to be clear, this isn't money for governments. This competition will invest 500 million dollars of the people's money in an economic ecosystem that will not only bring jobs but will foster new industries, transform cities, and revitalize main streets in every village in our region. This is a competition that needs this region to come together and work as a team like never before. I'm committed to this process and I will put the full force and weight of my office and the resources of this government behind it and together we are going to win this competition.

I have stood before you now for the ninth time and we have gone through tough times and challenges, some like other counties and some only unique to ourselves. But in all of those times and through all of these years I have kept my word that my administration would continue to focus on moving this county forward no matter the challenge. We have done that and we are better today than we were nine years ago.

As long as you allow me the honor to lead this county I will continue to do my very best to keep us moving forward. I will continue to bring people together that make this community the best it can be. I will continue, as I have, to put politics aside to make things happen. Anyone who has a plan or an idea or the ability to invest in this county so that your children and your grandchildren will not have to tell their children why they didn't stay here will find an open door, an open mind and a partner.

Abraham Lincoln said, "The best way to predict your future is to create it"

Let's continue to create the best future Oneida County has ever seen.

Thank you all for being here. God Bless you. God Bless Oneida County and God Bless the United States of America.