

## **2016 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 Meghan Frazier 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 acknowledge the unbelievable commitment and dedication of all our county government workers. They carry out our mission with professionalism and skill every single day. They are the best government workforce in the state. 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 Izzo of Rome for their continued partnerships. Also we are joined today by the Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties, Steve Acquario and I thank him for all the work he does advocating for county government in Albany.

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

I stand before you now for the 10<sup>th</sup> time. There is some historic significance to this particular instance. No County Executive has had the pleasure of giving the State of the County

10 times. I have to take a moment and thank all those that have come before me and held this position. Charles Lannigan, Harry Daniels, Bill Bryant, Ralph Eannace and Joe Griff. Including the three gentleman I had the opportunity to work for; Sherwood Boehlert, Jack Plumley and Ray Meier. I also have to take a minute to thank all the voters of Oneida County. For an unprecedented 3<sup>rd</sup> time you have elected me to lead this County. I have done just that.

When I became County Executive, I was determined to re-establish the relevance of this County Government. We were going to make an impact on people's lives. County government would be smart, effective, efficient and financially responsible. We would confront problems and provide solutions. We would be progressive and proactive in our service.

### **Health and Wellness**

Since 2011 we have increased the number of children being tested for lead poisoning by 17%. As a result of our efforts, lead poisoning in children has decreased by 33%. In 2016 the Community Foundation, led by Alicia Dicks, is putting a \$1 million impact investment towards eradicating this problem. We are pleased to partner with them in this endeavor.

While rabies became a crisis for some counties, we proactively attacked the problem, doubling the vaccination rate for domestic animals. We have contracted with the CNYSPCA to respond and investigate animal abuse cases throughout the county.

Today we are faced with an epidemic that is ravaging neighborhoods; urban, suburban and rural across the state and nation. Heroin use must be stopped. This calls for an all-inclusive approach focusing on enforcement, treatment and prevention. Our office of Mental Health is on the front lines of this epidemic.

We created the Oneida County Opiate Task Force.

In 2016, we will educate people about this epidemic by holding three Public Education Forums. One, which has already been held, featured a panel on Families in Recovery which included those who have lost loved ones due to overdose. The second, will detail Heroin/Opiate abuse in our communities. A third forum aims to start the conversation about drug use with your family and your medical providers.

Oneida County has partnered with the Center for Family Life and Recovery to bring educational programs to the most vulnerable of our community, our young people. In collaboration with the County, CFLR, the Opiate Task Force, our schools, and law enforcement, students will be given the information they need to help them make the right choices when confronted with the temptation to use drugs. We have funded this program through my Partners in Prosperity Public Safety Funding.

We are working with the state of New York to create an opiate treatment facility here in Oneida County. This is a piece of the puzzle not previously available for our families dealing with and fighting addiction. Areas with these facilities have a proven track record of reducing the use of Heroin in their communities.

### **Criminal Justice**

Stop DWI has created a mock crash program educating young drivers in 10 local school districts. The STOP DWI Baseball Classic drew nearly 10,000 spectators who were presented with educational materials on the consequences of making destructive decisions. We continue to embrace our diverse community in the programs we offer. In 2015, STOP DWI educational presentations were given in Spanish, Burmese, Karen, Bosnian, and Nepali.

Our Department of Probation has been chosen as 1 of only 3 departments in the state to participate in the Department of Criminal Justice pilot program for Ignition Interlock Device (IID) Installation. This will make our county safer for our residents by keeping repeat and high risk DWI offenders off the road.

We created a countywide arrest diversion plan focused on keeping our youth out of the justice system. Last year a small group, funded by Oneida County, and led by Family Court Judge Randal Caldwell, became Georgetown Fellows where they learned new ways to approach juvenile justice through diversion.

We have created a Mohawk Valley Youth Justice Team that is a 6 county regional effort developing an action plan to improve juvenile services. We are the lead County in this effort.

### **Seniors and Veterans**

Our Office of Aging and Continuing Care continues to be a model for the state of New York. We have elevated our staff training to include information and assistance in; options counseling, dementia screening, program enrollment, health care transition, and managed care navigation. We continue to create innovative programs that help our seniors, including AgeNet, a digital health and wellness network providing outreach and health information to older county residents and senior center members in over twelve locations. We have designed the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program by implementing a national model to educate seniors dealing with chronic disease.

We created the Intergenerational Spring and Fall Clean Up which brings together younger volunteers and older Residents. This removes a common barrier for many to remain

living independently in their own homes. Since the program's inception 6,293 young volunteers have cleaned the yards of 1,334 older residents.

At my swearing in ceremony this past January, Congressman Richard Hanna presented me and my family with the medals my father earned during his time in WWII. We lose 10,000 WWII Veterans a day. They are the greatest generation and their loss is immeasurable. As much as we revere that generation, this government is committed to all of our Veterans – every generation. Every day new Veterans return from their service. Our Department of Veteran Services has done an outstanding job of assuring they receive the benefits the United States government offers. We continue to link thousands of veterans to benefits every single year. Last year we created, with the Veteran's Outreach Center and Syracuse University, a legal clinic that is assisting veterans in Oneida County.

This year, I will create a Veterans Advisory Council. This council will advise us on how to best assist veterans in our community. I charge this newly created council with conducting an exhaustive comprehensive needs assessment that will look at housing, employment and health for our veterans. We will identify where the gaps exist and we will create a plan to fill them. Veterans are the backbone of a free society. Their commitment must be honored.

## **Infrastructure**

Our Department of Public Works, in addition to maintenance and upkeep of our roads bridges and facilities, which is no minor task, manages all of our ongoing capital projects, including, the \$33 million MVCC Rome Campus Plumley Complex, continued renovations to the REA wing at Union Station, parking projects around the County office Building, the Rome Family Court Facility and the Rome Social Services Building.

We continue to be the national leader for UAS testing at our airport. Since its inception, as the only UAS Test Site in the north east, we have seen over 100 tests done. We have installed a \$4 million range instrumentation system, the first of its kind in the United States. We have become a contracted partner with NASA, sharing test data to ensure safety for everyone in our national airspace. In addition, through Start-Up NY and MVCC we have seen a new company begin UAS operations in Rome. All this has happened while air traffic has increased by 15% and airport redevelopment has continued, including; taxiway reconstruction, Nose dock rehabilitation as well as upgrades to the main buildings at the Airport.

Regarding future development at the airport, the question of whether or not commercial air traffic is feasible will be answered, once and for all, in 2016.

### **Anti-Poverty**

In 2015, Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi and I, along with the United Way and the Community Foundation announced the Mohawk Valley Anti-Poverty Initiative. Just two weeks ago we hosted a Poverty Simulation with over 120 participants. Many, including the Assemblyman and I, spent a simulated week in poverty. The scenarios are grim. The paths towards economic freedom were few and far between. We both left with a better understanding of what people in poverty go through but we also left knowing that this initiative has to succeed. This initiative is creating a new way for our community to address poverty. We've created a steering committee to coordinate, highlight and support existing efforts and create new endeavors throughout the Mohawk Valley Region to combat poverty.

## **Outside Recognition**

This County Government does a fantastic job and these were just some of the work we do every day.

We are leaders statewide as well. I just concluded my tenure as the President of the New York State Association of Counties and the President of the County Executive Association. I now serve as the President of the NY State Entertainment Facilities Association and a Trustee of the New York State Power Authority. John Talerico, Commissioner of Personnel is the President of the New York State Public Employer Labor Relations Association. Anthony Carvelli, Commissioner of Finance, is the President of the New York State County Treasurers and Finance Officers Association. Mike Romano, Director of the Office for Aging and Continuing Care is the President of the Board of Directors of the Association of Aging in New York. Our Director of Workforce Development, Dave Mathis literally sits on every single Board in Oneida County. I'd name them all, Dave, but we don't have that kind of time. I'm proud of all of those who have stepped up to serve in these vital statewide leadership roles.

The work of your County Government is recognized throughout the State and Nation. In 2015, through our Central Services Department, led by Anne Hartman, Oneida County was recognized as one of the Top Digital Counties in the United States. The American Association of Airport Executives presented Griffiss International Airport with an excellence in Airport Training Award. Our Intergenerational Clean-Up Program was named a best practice for replication in New York State by the Albany Guardian Society's Innovations in Aging Awards. The Oneida County Public Market at Union Station, which I created, was rated one of the top 100 farmer's markets in the entire country for the third year in a row. The National Weather Service recognized our County as Storm Ready, a national community preparedness designation.

Our Department of Social Services was chosen as a statewide pilot county for ChildRight: The NYS initiative to combat child trafficking. Our Public Defender's office was chosen as the Regional Immigration Assistance Center for a 17 County Region.

I'm proud of these recognitions and I hope all of you are as well. It shows we are leading the way.

### **Investment**

As a County, we will continue to invest in our future. We have expanded our unprecedented community effort of Vision 2020 to address transportation issues and I continue to thank the over 70 community leaders involved in this evolving blueprint for our county. In 2015, we made a \$5 million commitment to arts and culture, STEM education, public safety, economic development and infrastructure. It was called the Partners in Prosperity Program and it was funded with revenue from our settlement with the Oneida Indian Nation. This was the right investment in our community. The Board of Legislators cut that program in our 2016 budget. They did what they believed to be the best thing for this county. I respectfully disagreed then and I respectfully disagree now.

This Program invested in 27 STEM Education and Arts and Culture projects throughout our County. Let me tell you about two.

Munson Williams Proctor Art Institute was able to complete a film series digital conversion with this money. Since completion their attendance is up 75%. Their Director, Bob Mortis, is calling it a great success and everything he hoped for. This is just one example of a quality of life investment. These are important. These are offerings that attract businesses and young people to our area. It's a key component of a thriving community.

The Rome City School District used Partners in Prosperity funding to create the Integrated Approach to Technology Education Program. Children in Rome City Schools are receiving the STEM education they must have to succeed in a new economy. New equipment was purchased to use in ten different courses at RFA within the technology program. In addition, supplies and equipment were purchased for a VEX robotics competition team, affording more practical, hands on experience with robotics technology. RFA was able to host a robotics tournament with several hundred visitors from across the state in attendance. Additionally, they also created regional STEM learning opportunities for students with alternative and special needs with BOCES with this funding.

We invested half a million dollars in public safety. Air packs and training for firefighters. A virtual fire arms training system for police. Bullet proof vests for emergency response teams. GIS next generation technology and probation tracking equipment. For the first time, we were able to fund a helicopter emergency medical response team located in Oneida County.

Partners in Prosperity was a great success. Look, every area in the nation has an economic development site. They all have roads and sewers. They all have PILOT programs and incentive packages. As do we. It is Partners in Prosperity and Vision 2020 that sets us apart. These areas of progress are a recognized component for site selection considered by national and international companies when deciding where to come. As Vision 2020 continues, I will bring some version of Partners in Prosperity back next year. I believe in my heart that if we do not invest in our students, our communities and their protection then we are failing in our obligation to give the next generation better opportunities than we ourselves had.

### **Agriculture**

Our focus on agriculture will be sharpened in 2016.

In 2015, we announced a 5 year Agri-tourism plan with the goal to be the best in the state. Along with a committed team of community partners, we have been working on a final product. Preliminary recommendations include a signature event that will tie in every sector of agriculture from produce to craft beverages. Linking agricultural tourist activities, for example, a purchase of cider at a local orchard will generate a discount at a local winery or brewery. We will create an agricultural trail of breweries, wineries, orchards, farm stands and farmers' markets. Also, in the coming year, we will create an agri-business/tourism incubator that will work to increase our agricultural offerings from breweries, cideries and wineries to assist local farmers to add a tourism component to their business. This is the start of a plan that will put us on the cutting edge of this booming industry in New York State.

Blue Apron, an internet-based "meal-kit" company delivers five million meals a month in major metropolitan centers including New York City and San Francisco. Blue Apron, while working with Cornell Cooperative Extension, has entered into multimillion dollar supply contracts with Oneida County businesses including Delft Blue USA, a local meat processor, and Upstate NY Growers and Packers Cooperative, in Clinton. This will lead to more investment, farming expansion and more agricultural jobs in our community.

### **Economic Development**

Last August, we announced, with Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, the single largest economic development project in a generation. AMS, an Austrian based company, is building the United States' next chip fabrication plant here in Oneida County. The work has begun. 300,000 tons of dirt is being moved right now. Truckers, construction workers, electricians, contractors and many others are needed just to build the facility. Once the fab is completed, over a thousand people will go to work there every day. Between AMS and General Electric, SUNY POLY's

Quad C building will employ another 500 and with that a Nano Technology economic ecosystem will be underway. This will bring more growth, more people, and more opportunity to all in Oneida County. AMS and General Electric are coming to Oneida County because when they were looking for opportunity, we were ready for them.

This past year we had two new opportunities to move this region forward in ways that were not imaginable 10 years ago. First, the Upstate Revitalization Initiative. Second, the creation of a new hospital to be located in downtown Utica.

Our plan for the URI didn't win. Nevertheless community leaders like Alicia Dicks, Laura Casamento, Nick Matt, Ray Halbritter, Assemblyman Brindisi, Montgomery County Executive Matt Ossenfort, and Herkimer County Chairman Jim Bono came together with young educators and entrepreneurs to envision our region's future. Our future is advanced technologies, agriculture and tourism. We will continue to collaborate and cooperate with these leaders and anyone else committed to move this Region forward.

However, the process of MV500 was slow to develop. There were some who didn't see the regional possibilities. For nearly 2 months after the URI was announced too many clung to provincial interests. Eventually, they began to believe in the MV500. We broke down barriers and we were no longer 6 counties but one region. I will be blunt, the delay was detrimental to our success in this endeavor.

There is a lesson here. We need to think differently. We must think regionally. Not county versus county. Not urban versus suburban. Not Utica versus Rome. Not rural versus metropolitan. Not Utica versus Utica. Those mindsets must be consigned to the scrap heap of the past.

The downtown hospital is at a pivotal moment. This is, at the very least, \$600 million worth of development. We spent a year arguing with ourselves. There is no time for pessimism and I have no tolerance for those who stand in the way of progress. All that will accomplish is to guarantee our money will go to Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo or even New York City, leaving the rest of us to lament another lost opportunity.

Whether the URI or the Hospital, we have to recognize opportunity as exactly that. Our future is right in-front of us. The only thing in our way is us. We can fix this, but we have to embrace possibilities and work to seize them.

### **Government Operations**

As we review the past 9 years and prepare for the next 4, it is important to reiterate that without a government that is financially strong our ability to help ourselves is compromised. That is why I have worked so hard to make your government fiscally wise and proficient. We have raised our credit ratings 4 times. We have kept property taxes under the cap every year of its existence including 2 budgets with no property tax increases and a proposed 3rd. This government runs efficiently and effectively. Despite all that, we, and many local governments, continue on a path which is unsustainable. This past year county sales tax revenue is down \$3.8 million and we are left to deal with that fiscal reality.

Here is the plain fact of the matter; governments in this County cannot continue to be structured as they are. We need to downsize. Currently, we have 1 county, 3 cities, 26 towns, 17 villages, 30 school districts, 26 fire districts, 90 lighting districts, 36 sewer districts and 116 other special taxing districts. This structure is financially and operationally irresponsible and unsustainable.

If it were snowing would you pay 5 different people to plow your driveway at the same time? Picture it, the first plow comes in and clears out your driveway. You pay him \$40. He leaves. As he pulls away the next plow guy is pulling into your driveway and plowing it again. You pay him \$50 and he leaves. And you do that three more times at \$30 apiece. \$180 for a \$30 job. Doesn't make a lot of sense right?

If you go to New Hartford and stand on the Route 8 Bridge over Genesee St and look at the road below you will see exactly that. The state plow comes and clears the snow. Then right behind him the County plow comes followed by the City of Utica. Next the Town plow, then the Village plow. You're paying for all five plows. You then pay to fix the road because 5 plows have been driving over it all winter, instead of only the one you need. You can see this repeated all over our county.

I wish that was as bad as it gets. But it isn't. Recently, there was a house fire. 7 fire departments were called to the scene. Departments came from as far as 7 miles away. Imagine you're standing outside watching your house burn to the ground. The closest fire department was mere blocks away and wasn't called to the fire for nearly a half hour. Why? Parochialism? Volunteer vs. paid? Village vs. City? Allegiances to institutions this community can no longer afford? A family lost their home. Residents and firefighters were put in unnecessary danger. When do we stop this? When someone dies? When a municipality goes bankrupt because of inefficiency? The reality is we must have fewer layers of government.

A few years ago I introduced ARGO, a plan to incentivize local governments to consolidate, and we saw some moderate success. I want to thank those municipalities who took the opportunity to save the taxpayers money. But, for the most part, we were nibbling at the edges. Don't get me wrong, we still saved the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Two villages did dissolve - Prospect and Bridgewater. Amazingly the sky didn't fall. The water still comes out of their faucets. The roads still get paved and plowed and their people are protected by police and fire service. The only difference is those things happen more efficiently and cost less. Their identity stayed intact, both are hamlets, Bridgewater is still Bridgewater and Prospect is still Prospect.

Today is the day we make governments in Oneida County confront the economic realities that each of us contends with. Today is the day we stop enabling governments. To accomplish this, we will change the way we distribute sales tax in this county. No longer will we, nor can we, subsidize layers of government we cannot afford. This plan will impact municipalities and we will be there to assist them to adapt to a new reality.

Our current formula does not properly reflect the functions and roles governments play in this county. The current structure doles out dollars to all levels with no regard to true economic impact. A new formula must reflect the needs and contributions of the larger governments.

County government cannot continue to take the lead in public safety and economic development, as well as serve those in need when sales tax loss is greater than the amount we can raise in property taxes. The cities of Utica and Rome will be unable to attract development and residents as long as property taxes climb. The Towns of New Hartford and Whitestown cannot sustain the strain of retail and industrial growth without harming their tax base. A scenario in which village governments no longer exist can propel us to the right size of government to fit our population. We are 235,000 people and we have 345 taxing jurisdictions within 47 general governmental units.

You have all heard of Charlotte North Carolina. Charlotte is located in Mecklenburg County, population 1,012,539. Do you know how many governments are in Mecklenburg? 9.

Yes, the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, Charlotte Mecklenburg School District and 6 towns.

Now, I'm not proposing that we go to 9. But, for a population of 235,000 are we really serving our people in the best way? More importantly can we sustain this?

During my administration we have undertaken two monumental consolidation and dissolution efforts and the County is better off because of it.

Oneida County 911 is a model for consolidation throughout the state. We brought together 4 separate 911 offices and created one integrated system. Through an economy of scale we saved the taxpayers millions while creating a state of the art 911 center. We have been able to invest in that 911 Center. We have unified police and fire records management system and upgraded their computer systems. Right now we are embarking on a \$7.5 million radio system advancement that revolutionizes our law enforcement communications.

We looked to our neighbor in Onondaga and eliminated an outdated and inefficient coroner system and partnered with their Medical Examiner. Leaders in law enforcement all believe we are safer today than before and once again we created an economy of scale that will benefit the taxpayer.

Today we take another step. This idea was born through the outstanding work by Rob Esche and his team at the Mohawk Valley Garden and with the Auditorium Authority and I thank him for his continued commitment to seeing our area grow.

I propose to unite our cultural, athletic and entertainment facilities under one umbrella to maximize our assets and streamline our costs. I will ask the Board of Legislators for a home rule message to be delivered to the State Legislature amending the authorizing legislation for the

Upper Mohawk Valley Memorial Auditorium Authority to expand their powers and duties to include additional facilities and broader responsibilities. I intend to merge the Oneida County Sports Authority into this as well, to bring the Tourism Bureau under its auspices and to begin discussions with the Boards of the Stanley Theater and the Capitol Theater to unite under one entity. This will lower costs and increase efficiencies that will stabilize these local treasures insuring their existence for future generations. The Oneida County Arts, Culture and Entertainment Authority, OCACE, will extend the vibrant enthusiasm that the Memorial Auditorium has seen across this County.

None of this will be easy. I know as soon as I end here there will be many questions and many will be against any proposal that alters or takes away power. But the power is not mine nor does it belong to any elected official. The power belongs to the people. And unless we are willing to drastically reduce the services we provide over the next five years, we must do something better. Over the next few months I will take these discussions to City Halls, Town Halls and Village halls.

It's time to be bold. It is time to grow like never before. The seeds we planted are growing. New businesses; new areas of entertainment; new people. Time to shed old policies and look to the future. We often say what we do is for the next generation. Is it? Or are we taking the same approach from years past and leaving the tough decisions for them?

Abe Lincoln said "you cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

I will not evade my responsibility. It is why I wanted to stay in this job. There is much more to do. You elected me to lead for another four years. Let's lead together.

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