

2014 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. They are not here in body, but are always with us in spirit. I need to thank my wife Eleanor, my sisters and nieces who are here with me today, for their constant support and encouragement.

Thank you to the Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event. Once again I look forward to informing you about our work in County Government.

I also want to acknowledge 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 also want to thank Sheriff Robert Maciol, District Attorney Scott McNamara, County Clerk Sandy DePerno, and Comptroller Joe Timpano. I also want to thank Mayor Palmieri of Utica and Mayor Fusco of Rome.

I want to take a minute to congratulate a special Oneida County native from Remsen. You may have seen her on NBC or ESPN. She's Erin Hamlin - the first American, male or female, to medal in the individual Luge event at the Olympics. We understand Erin is traveling and could not be with us this morning. But, I still want to send her this message: Erin, we praise your hard work, determination and perseverance to do what no American has ever done before. You taught us all a very important lesson here in Oneida County. Nothing is impossible. Nothing is out of our reach.

In her absence, we are joined here this morning by her mother Eileen and her grandfather, Les Porter, longtime Oneida County legislator. Will everyone please join me and give your applause for our 2014 Olympic Bronze Medalist Erin Hamlin!

2013 was a year that mirrored what we saw from Erin in Sochi last month. For years “they” told us the dreams we had for this region were never going to happen. And people believed “them”. People expected disappointment. Whether it was a base closure, mills shutting down or prisons being closed, we became disillusioned. We would look to Albany and see no help. We would look towards Washington and would see no respite from the wave of misfortune. 2013 ushered in a new era, an era full of opportunity and promise.

2013 did not happen in a vacuum. While some take credit for accomplishments, we took action that made it happen. We had to foster an environment that allowed opportunity to present itself in the first place. This is the beginning of my 8th year as your County Executive and I can tell you, the state of Oneida County is strong, but it is much more than that. The very foundation of Oneida County is solid because of years of making essential changes and tough decisions. We had to prepare for a new way to govern, a more efficient way that cost less and did more. We constructed budgets from day one that were honest and kept an eye on the future. We instituted a financial plan that put us on the road to fiscal stability. We stabilized the tax rate. While others in Washington have played the blame game and accomplished little together, we worked with the Oneida County Board of Legislators to make this happen. Those steps have created certainty for our taxpayers and business owners as they plan their future.

Oneida County government interacts on a daily basis with the public. We provide for those who are most in need. We work diligently to repair, develop and maintain our vital infrastructure. We help those without jobs find work that they so desperately need and want.

Oneida County Government and most importantly the people who put on an Oneida County ID badge every day need to be commended, applauded and appreciated. They are the best government workforce in the entire state. Beyond the dedication they show every day, they are partners in our fiscal rejuvenation. When I went to the unions and asked them to consider a “true zero” in their collective bargaining agreement, I was asking for a big sacrifice. We worked together and took action. I want to thank the Union leadership and Commissioner of Personnel John Talerico for their work in making this a reality. That was a key moment in creating our stable financial footing.

In addition to making sure County Government is efficient and responsible to our community, we have consolidated or privatized where appropriate. In the past 7 years, we accomplished widespread consolidation efforts. We can point to Oneida County 911 and the Medical Examiner System as models of efficiency.

What’s the result of these actions? We have reduced our county government to its smallest size since 1970. We improved our credit rating once again. We had a budget surplus for the 6th straight year. We have, in 2014, a 0% property tax levy increase. We cannot overstate why these steps and the sound fiscal certainty of this county are so important to our future.

We’ve always been a hockey town. Utica College has provided this area with exciting college hockey for several years. The college program has demonstrated and proven that people in our area will support hockey. In 2013 we saw professional hockey return to Oneida County. With us today are the people that made that happen. I want to congratulate Rob Esche and Frank Duross for believing in this community and making their dream a reality. This accomplishment is more than just the Comets and Pioneers winning games. It represents a shift in our cultural attitude. The Comets aren’t just here, they’re thriving. A hockey night in Utica is one of the

hottest tickets in town. Hockey at the Aud, whether professional or college, has made downtown Utica a destination this winter. Hockey is a catalyst that has created the opportunity to revitalize downtown Utica.

Oneida County is committed to the Comets, Utica College and to the economic development of this county. That's why when Comets and Utica College Hockey were bringing 3000 plus people a night downtown, a problem began to resurface. Some might say a good problem to have: Parking. We provided \$500,000 to the Auditorium Authority to build a brand new parking lot.

A key piece in sustaining the future of professional hockey was renovating our historic Auditorium. Senator Joe Griffo and Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi worked to secure grant money from the State of New York for key renovations. These restorations were necessary to meet AHL guidelines. As a community, the state funds were essential. However, the Aud Authority had to spend the money and get reimbursed. The dilemma was the Authority lacked the money to spend first, get paid later. Therefore, there would be no improvements unless a municipality stepped up to the plate and advanced the cash. Oneida County took action. We advanced nearly 3 million of county dollars to initiate the actual work. The grant money will come back our way, but without the start up cash, the work couldn't begin. We were in a position to take action because, quite simply, we had money in the bank. That's what a sound fiscal house means. That's what capitalizing an opportunity is about.

Beyond the entertainment value, job creation and infrastructure improvements this activity is generating sales tax revenue. That revenue will be applied to further improve our fiscal circumstances and assist additional economic development throughout the county.

Last year, we looked towards Marcy and saw the beginning of this region's greatest opportunity, the Nanotechnology industry. Under the leadership of Acting President Dr. Robert Geer, it's a very exciting time at SUNY IT and we thank him for being a part of this unbelievable transformation. As recently reported, Dr. Geer is working with CNSE as they move through a game changing merger of these two fine institutions. 2013 saw the construction of the Computer Chip Commercialization Center, better known as Quad C. Quad C is a public private partnership, between the State of New York, higher education, Oneida County and worldwide Nanotechnology companies. It's the first step in making Oneida County an industry leader in this ever expanding field. In addition to Dr. Geer, we thank Governor Andrew Cuomo and Dr. Alain Kaloyeros of CNSE, Alicia Dicks of Ft. Schuyler Management, and Steve Dimeo of Mohawk Valley EDGE, for working with us to make this 200 million dollar investment creating 1500 jobs a reality.

The next logical step is a Chip Fabrication Plant that brings with it up to 5000 employees, countless spinoff businesses and jobs. We recently financed 35 million dollars to increase the capacity of our sewer treatment plant. We are investing 15 million dollars on the North Utica Sewer Interceptor project. These infrastructure investments are necessary steps to bringing this to fruition.

2013 was the year of opportunity and success. In conjunction with NUAIR, a consortium of public and private partnerships, we've been awarded an unbelievable chance to build an industry. When NUAIR decided to pursue the unmanned aircraft testing designation, they needed a public entity that could put the actual application into the FAA. Oneida County Government stepped up to the plate. Griffiss International Airport was designated as one of only 6 FAA unmanned Aircraft testing sites. I want to thank NUAIR President Lawrence Brinker and all

those involved especially Congressman Richard Hanna and United States Senator Charles Schumer in working on this winning designation.

Credit is good when you get it. Announcements are nice when you make them. Ribbons are fun to cut but action is what makes things happen. NUAIR and the FAA testing site designation have so much potential, its staggering unmanned aircraft can be used for mapping, agriculture, package delivery and applications that people haven't even thought of yet. Consider that for a minute. This is an industry in its infancy. I have sent a lease to the Board of Legislators to provide one half of a large nosedock hanger to NUAIR for their needs. An adjacent hanger will be leased to MVCC to house a new training program that will prepare a workforce for this new industry. We are quite literally setting up shop in Oneida County.

Opportunity only turns into success if you are able to capitalize on it. 2013 brought an opportunity that was over 40 years in the making. I have said, my entire time in office, we needed to come to the table and work out our differences with the Oneida Indian Nation. Continuing to pay lawyers to maintain the status quo does not move this community forward. This past year the pieces came together. Myself, Governor Cuomo, Nation Representative Halbritter and Madison County Chairman Becker literally and figuratively came to the table in Albany and hammered out a deal. Nation Representative Ray Halbritter could not be here today but I thank him for all his work on the settlement agreement, and for his partnership in working together to accomplish good things for the county that bears the same name as his native nation.

There will always be some misinformation about this agreement. Let me tell you in no uncertain terms what this agreement does. It makes Oneida County, Madison County, the State of New York and the Oneida Indian Nation true partners in the future of our region. The Nation is the largest employer in this county. They have built a world class entertainment venue that is

the envy of the rest of the state. This agreement sets up an exclusivity zone for the Oneida Indian Nation to be the only casino in our region. It also provides recurring revenue to the county estimated to begin at 12.5 million dollars a year forever and provides an additional 2.5 million dollars a year in payments for 19 and ¼ years. It's a resolution and we all move forward in unison.

I negotiated in good faith. I signed the document as the chief elected representative of this County. I'm as proud of this accomplishment as anything else I've done in my 7 years as Oneida County Executive. Today and for the rest of time we are all partners in prosperity. Opportunity presented itself in an unprecedented way and we secured it.

In the coming weeks you will see more of this partnership beyond what the agreement holds. And you will see how this revenue will move this entire county forward. I have stated before at this address that for those who refused to settle there is nothing I or anyone can say to satisfy you. But please, for the betterment of this community and for the sake of truth, stop scaring people. No one is going to have their property taken. No one is going to be arrested without reason. There is enough fear mongering in the world, we do not need it in Oneida County.

We are charged in County Government with dealing with populations who have very high needs: The poor, the elderly, veterans, children, the developmentally disabled, substance addicted, mentally challenged and more. Oneida County's government is a service provider by law and we do the best job of any government anywhere.

This year I want to point first to our Department of Social Services and Commissioner Lucille Soldato for all of the hard work she and her staff do. The people of Oneida County that have come to our Department of Social Services are most often in desperate situations. There are

acronyms for every program and department, TANF, SNAP, WIC, HEAP, CPS, APS the list goes on. The bottom line is the people who come to our offices need help. They need the basics: food, housing, heat, or more. They are elderly and they are children. They need the essentials and they need help to get on the path of self-sufficiency. Oneida County takes action to make this a reality. In 2013, the Department of Social Services Employment Division assisted 1,000 applicants and recipients of temporary assistance in obtaining employment. This is the second consecutive year that we have achieved 1,000 job entries. That's 2,000 people moving off of the assistance rolls and onto a payroll.

The Health Department, under the leadership of Phyllis Ellis, is working every day to lay the foundation for a healthier Oneida County. A total of 628 total clients were screened in 2013 in the Cancer Services Program. These are 628 individuals who would not have been properly screened if not for this program. The Health Department advocates for a healthy community through our primary and secondary lead prevention programs, our flu vaccine awareness program and many other community outreach initiatives. The Health Department administered 160 TDAP vaccines to victims of flooding. In 2013 alone, the Health Department took part in over 50 community health events.

The County Health Department, hospitals, and representatives from community organizations released in 2013 the Community Health Assessment. It showed that nearly a quarter of Oneida county adults smoke compared to 16.8% Statewide. It identified obesity and chronic disease as issues in our community. In short, it came to the conclusion that our community is not as healthy as it should be.

In 2014, I'm proposing the Oneida County Total Health Initiative. I have asked our very own Olympic Bronze Medalist, Erin Hamlin to serve as the Honorary Chair of the Oneida County Total Health Initiative, and she has graciously accepted.

The Oneida County Total Health Initiative will start right in County Government. We have an opportunity to lead by example and we will, by making our workforce the healthiest it can be. I'm directing the Health Department to institute a Wellness Program for Oneida County employees. This program, the first in the Total Health Initiative, will begin by offering smoking cessation programs for interested employees and provide a lunch and learn educational series related to health and chronic disease management. Meanwhile the Wellness Program will be further developed with input from the employees of Oneida County.

Later, this initiative will incorporate the Community Health Improvement Plan that specifically looks at infant nutrition as well as expands smoking cessation to the community at large. In the weeks and months to come we will begin to incorporate new ideas from community stakeholders as we embark on this undertaking together, to bring a total health approach to our community.

Our Department of Emergency Services is always faced with unpredictable challenges that Kevin Revere and his team meet on a regular basis. Emergency Services is a touchstone of consolidation services including the Oneida County 911 system. In 2013, the 911 Center was officially recognized by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for completing the steps in their Missing Kids Readiness Project, one of only four centers in the State to receive this recognition.

I also must mention the great work of Oneida County Sheriff Rob Maciol and his Office. In 2013, the Sheriff's Office handled 508 reported incidents and 241 warrants issued, in the City

of Utica alone. That's not all; they provide security and traffic details at local events such as the Heart Run and Walk and Boilermaker while receiving no extra compensation. The Sheriff continues to find ways to handle more and more while being fiscally responsible to the taxpayer.

In 2014, Sheriff Maciol will propose taking approximately 8 acres of open land surrounding the jail and place a solar array on the grounds to produce electricity. This proposal will save nearly \$40,000 annually and 1.5 million over 25 years. This will be the first time a correctional facility in the State of New York has produced solar power.

Our District Attorney, Scott McNamara, continues to redefine the role of the County's head prosecutor. In 2014 the District Attorney's office is applying for a Gun Involved Violence Elimination Grant (GIVE) through NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services. The focus of the GIVE Initiative is to use all tools available to communities to deter shootings and homicides effectively. I applaud him for continuing to be proactive in seeking out ways to prevent crime in our communities.

We've talked about some of what County government does on a day to day basis and I believe it's important to reiterate that laying the financial foundation is a key to seizing opportunities. We ask county government to do more with less and they do. In 2013, opportunities presented themselves everywhere and through our long-term financial approach we were able to take advantage of them.

Sometimes opportunities are presented in the form of serious challenges. This was never more apparent than in the summer of 2013 when devastating floods swept through parts of Oneida County. Our first responders and emergency personnel did an outstanding job. I can't say enough about the first responders and emergency personnel in this county. They are courageous

and tireless. We owe them more praise than we could ever give and our thanks could never be as much as they deserve.

In the aftermath of the flooding, the Governor stepped in to help families with financial support when the federal government did not. Our community, including local governments, businesses, community organizations, charities and others came together to help those in need. Meanwhile, county government was also able to think long term. We provided \$500,000 for flood mitigation efforts to be administered through The Oneida County Soil and Water Conservation District. We provided this money so that communities affected by the flooding could fund projects aimed at flood mitigation. This is why a sound financial house is so important. We have the means to plan for the future.

Vision 2020 is the next piece. Vision 2020 was charged with examining three separate areas, education and training, access and opportunity and housing. For the past 8 months, community leaders from all walks of life and expertise have come together to devise a plan to address the concerns of our burgeoning industries. I'm pleased to announce the first step of the process is complete. I want to thank the Co-Chairs of Vision 2020, President of Mohawk Valley Community College Randy VanWagoner and head of Oneida County Workforce Development Dave Mathis for their leadership. I also want to thank the chairs of the subcommittees, BOCES Superintendent Howard Mettelman, Ferris Betrus and Tony Colon. We have a plan to develop the workforce of the future and accommodate those that are heading our way. In the coming weeks my administration will hold a community forum and lay out the report in its entirety. Today we look at a few specific action items included in the full report.

Our education and training committee looked at providing the experience necessary to our young people to take advantage of the opportunities coming to Oneida County. Internships

are a cornerstone in educational and professional development. In 2014 Oneida County will work with school districts, universities, colleges, business leaders and the Office of Workforce Development to increase the amount of available internships in the County of Oneida. We will start by doubling the internships in our summer program through Workforce Development. In addition, I have secured the support and commitment of the Presidents of MVCC, SUNY-IT, and Utica College to increase the number internships at those institutions by 10%.

Next, the Education and Training committee identified a need to further streamline the process of connecting job opportunities with job candidates. Oneida County Workforce Development will work closely with the Department of Labor, the Workforce Investment Board, MV EDGE, our local colleges, and other partners to help employers more easily access trained and well-prepared workers. We will develop a Workforce Matrix that identifies the number of positions that will need to be filled by year, the type of job, the earning potential, and education and training required. We are fortunate to have an abundance of resources in our workforce system. This year we connect the dots between the needs of the employer and the skills of the employee.

Our workforce system is only as strong as the educational pipeline that supports it. Our educational partners greatly enhance the quality of life in Oneida County. Through Vision 2020, I'm calling on school districts to develop five new articulation and dual credit offerings to expand opportunities for students. In addition, Vision 2020 recommends degree program transfer agreements be updated in high-demand programs like cybersecurity, engineering, healthcare, and business to optimize opportunities for students.

We must guarantee access and opportunity for all our citizens. This committee had possibly the toughest charge in all of Vision 2020 and I thank them again for their work. What they found was enlightening.

We've heard the stories of refugees and immigrants who come to our community with talent and ambition, often with advanced degrees, who simply need to learn English in order to connect with a job opportunity. Our current ESL program providers have been working hard to keep pace with demand, and we need to do more. In 2014 we'll be working with our workforce and community partners, along with all educational providers of English as a Second Language, to expand and streamline access to these programs.

In the coming months, we will create a team of Opportunity Mentors who will go into communities throughout the county. Their goal will be to increase awareness of emerging opportunities on all fronts whether its employment, education, or ESL programs, and help our residents connect with what is available to them.

Lastly, to put our best foot forward to the global companies that are considering relocating to our area, we will showcase our cultural resources. We will work with local partners to inventory our social, ethnic, cultural, youth, and faith-based groups, organizations, and businesses to capture and market the abundance of cultural resources our area has to offer.

The Housing Committee has done fantastic work. Through their recommendations we have identified the need and a path forward to meeting it. We must completely change our approach to housing development. I propose a two phase approach to housing.

Phase one starts today to meet the needs of a new type of resident. One we long coveted, young professionals who embrace urban living. Today I propose the creation of 300 housing

units in the metro areas of Utica and Rome over the next 5 years. This is a multifaceted approach that we are calling the Nu Downtown Living Initiative. In the months ahead we will present the initiative in great detail, including incentive packages for development. In order to help facilitate this endeavor, we will find ways to get to a uniform permitting process while working with the County IDA and the Utica IDA to put in place a series of exemptions that encourage development. In addition I will send to the Oneida County Board of Legislators a local law to enact section 485-a of Real Property Tax Law which will give a tax exemption to those creating the multi-use housing we need in our cities.

We must continue to act. Action is how we keep moving forward. Last year in this address I proposed a project called ARGO – Action to Realign Government Operations. This project has \$500,000 in funding and is there to be utilized by municipalities that are ready to make a fundamental step in realigning their operations. Some have come to us - more need to.

I challenge all municipalities to make the tough decisions. There are obvious areas of duplication. Purchasing, civil service, print shops, mail service, information technology, the list goes on and on. It's time to change for the sake of the taxpayer. Call my office. Reach out and we will get it done.

As we talk about consolidation and new approach to opportunity, I believe that no area should be considered off limits if it can lead to a better way. Oneida and Herkimer counties have long worked together on various issues of governmental cooperation. Solid waste management and planning are two great examples.

As Herkimer County Community College looks for new leadership, I propose they consider a new model. The changing landscape of community colleges coupled with the change and growth in our region calls for bold action to address our needs. As we both look to

strengthening our economy, through education, our community colleges are but 15 miles apart. 15 miles apart in distance but nearly on the same page in course offering. The investment made by each county to the other can better be served by enhancing our reach. 11 out of 16 of the highly paid jobs at QUAD C require associates degrees. 11 out of 16. As Herkimer looks to a training center for Remington, MVCC's machine technology shop is prime for growth. Our interests intersect, shouldn't our approach?

A merger of MVCC and HCCC would show not only our boldness of thought but our disregard to the notion of the impossible. At the very least we owe it to our respective constituents and students to see if it can work.

2013 was a year of milestones and big headlines. It was great to hear people put the negativity of the past behind them and look towards the amazing opportunities presented to us. We are ready as a community to seize upon those opportunities. The tough decisions County government has made for years righting the financial ship have shown tangible dividends. We have put past regional tensions behind us and moved on as partners.

As you leave here today, think about where we are. The stories are changing. Oneida County is being talked about, not just around the state, but the country and the world. The next semi-conductor plant comes not from around the corner but from around the globe. I stated here years ago that we needed to think bigger than we were. That opportunity would not just come, we needed to go and get it. We are not just looking for change, change is happening. It is real and we need to embrace it. We need to continue to be bold. To continue to prepare for development and growth with an eye on a future that is opportunistic and filled with a kind of potential this county has never seen before.

Nothing is impossible, nothing is beyond our reach. Join me as we make 2014 even better than last year. Thank you. God bless you, God bless Oneida County and may God Bless the United State of America.