

## **State of the County 2009**

Chairwoman Donnery, Leader Pillmeier, Leader Berkman, Leader Amo, Legislators, employees and citizens of Orange County ...I stand before you today to report on the State of our County.

I would like to take a moment to recognize my wife Mary, my daughters Danielle & Lindsay, my granddaughter Ava, my son-in-law Marty and my entire family for their support, consideration and encouragement these past years.

I would also like to thank my staff who serve the people of this County with dignity working diligently behind the scenes, Mary, Sheri, Doreen, Donna, Lorrie, Jimmy, Steve, Ann Marie and Richard.

At this time let us pause for a moment of silence to remember our servicemen and women who continue to serve in harm's way to keep us safe and our veterans many of whom still linger in VA Hospitals across our land and those who serve our communities in various capacities this day. We thank you and salute you for your sacrifices to make this the greatest nation in the World.

Twelve months ago I stood before you to report on the state of our County. I recognized a severe storm was on the horizon and the time to take action was upon us. Orange County was already deep in the process of cost containment; conducting reviews of our departments and a job freeze to bolster our ability to deal with this economic tsunami.

Every day brings about new reports of the challenges facing our state and nation.

It has become painfully apparent that some of those in positions of authority within the financial community abused their power and have done great harm to our nation's economy.

We too could have put off the tough decisions or overestimated our budget projections just to pass our budgets. In short we could have taken the easy way out. Thankfully we know the easy way is not always the best way. To lead you must be willing to make hard and sometimes unpopular choices.

### **Public Safety**

Historically, during times of economic crisis, crime and substance abuse rise and I have always said people must feel safe or they will not support commerce, industry or the social institutions necessary for a strong, successful and peaceful society.

I again want to thank this body for its strong support of our law enforcement community and, of course, I know we all appreciate the extraordinary work of our District Attorney Frank Phillips. Mr. Phillips enforces the law with great wisdom and a deep understanding of the human condition. This past year a total of 970 felony cases were prosecuted in Orange County Court resulting in a felony conviction rate of 95%.

2008 brought with it the conclusion of a significant capital construction project on time and under budget. This project provided for the construction of a new 88,000 square-foot Emergency Services Center.

The Emergency Services Center provides state-of-the-art workspace for all divisions within the department. Of special note is the enhanced 911 center and its expanded role in the safety of our citizens. In addition, this facility provides for the County departments of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Office of the Medical Examiner. Also included in the facility is classroom and auditorium space for all county-related functions.

Our County was the recipient of a \$1.7 million dollar grant from the New York State Office of Homeland Security to improve radio communications and provide voice and data communications for all emergency service agencies.

Commissioner Koury and his department clearly understand their duties and the serious responsibility to the people of this County and work very hard every day to provide for the safety and security of our County.

Deputy Commissioner Seamus Leary and this department have also created a web-based system for compiling and updating statistics during emergencies thereby allowing for key personnel to have real time updates during times of crisis.

Emergency Services personnel have participated in eighteen (18) drills, including a full-scale, FEMA-evaluated Indian Point drill. The preliminary review of this exercise once again shows high scores for Orange County's emergency preparedness.

In addition we have responded to and/or monitored 53 incidents, including several partial EOC activations for various severe weather events and a federal disaster declaration for a December '08 ice storm.

Our Fire Services under the leadership of John Horan and with the support of this Legislature provided over 3500 hours of course instruction to 2113 students this past year and responded to 68 Hazard Materials Incidents.

Orange County also coordinated and instituted Phase 1 of the Orange County Law Records Management and Data Sharing project, thereby creating a common solution for all county and municipal law enforcement agencies to be able to share law enforcement-related data.

With the support of this Legislature we instituted the Orange County Traffic Safety Program in an effort to join with schools, public works and law enforcement agencies to reduce the number and severity of motor vehicle accidents.

This program will further strengthen the County Executive's Traffic Safety Board, the Orange County STOP-DWI Program and the United Way's efforts to help our young people prepare to be safe and responsible drivers.

Commissioner Koury and Deputy Commissioner Craig Cherry are working with State and local agencies to create a traffic management diversion plan. Orange County Government also has a close working relationship with the Orange County Association of Chiefs of Police providing \$30,000 to help the Orange County Police Academy train and certify the next generation of police officers.

The County Executive's Office and this Legislature have joined with the Orange County Department of Consumer Affairs in developing, as we speak, a County "Precious Metals and Gems Local Law" to deter criminal sale and aid law enforcement in recovering stolen jewelry and gems.

I am pleased to report that EMS Coordinator Michael Walton and his team were able to receive sponsorship from the New York State Department of Health to teach EMT and first responder classes. Moreover, they have continued their outstanding work by partnering with the County's Department of Risk Management to train County employees in the use of over 70 defibrillators located throughout various County buildings.

Furthermore, they have developed a Continuing Medical Education program with the Orange County EMS Council. We also initiated the first training class for EMS officers.

The men and women of the Orange County Sheriff's Office under the leadership of Sheriff Carl Dubois play a critical role in the safety and overall peace of this County. The Sheriff and his command staff have undertaken a transformation that has been nothing short of extraordinary. Just last year this Office received another accreditation from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care. Congratulations Sheriff and all the men and women of the Sheriff's Office. Recently, they have initiated and are proceeding with the development of a sex offender website.

As we work to provide our residents safe communities in which to live, work and raise their families, we must combat crime wherever it exists. To that end we will continue to support the work of the Sheriff's Field Intelligence Officers to rid our neighborhoods of gang activity and violence.

We must continue to work with our juvenile release officers who will help our young people make the right choices before they go down a road that is often very hard to come back from.

The surveillance camera program for our three cities is yet another tool we have made available to our law enforcement community.

We want the criminals to know that Orange County will be vigilant in protecting our citizens and that they will be met with the full force of our resources to fight them, oppose them and ultimately defeat them.

## **Economy and Finances**

Orange County Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to economic conservatism and budgetary pragmatism. This commitment is helping Orange County to weather the economic ills facing our Nation and State.

Orange County continues to place a high premium on economic opportunity not just for a day or a year but for generations to come.

This past year challenged our County in ways we could not have imagined. Our departments responded with increased efficiencies while continuing to provide the services our citizens have come to expect.

We all read the grim headlines each day talking of layoffs in government and the private sector. However, Orange County continues to do better than most... a testament to the foresight of many in this room who saw the economic storm approaching. We were proactive in our efforts to tighten our belts so we could keep taxes down.

Let me comment on the Federal Stimulus Package. I have been in consultation with our Federal Delegation and Tim Gilchrist of the Governor's Office to make sure that projects within our County receive the attention they deserve. I don't think they have yet to fully realize the magnitude of projects being submitted, but I can tell you we are in contact with every city, town and village to make sure Orange County projects are not overlooked.

The total cost of this recession is still unknown; however, the pain is being felt by all. While we may debate some of the merits of the Federal Stimulus Package, we all understand the enormous impact this present recession is having across this nation. Lost work time is lost revenue. Every citizen that is unemployed, every machine that is unused, every business that is constricting its activity is a loss to the County, State and Nation

We have at our disposal the human resources and skills to seek out additional economic opportunities. To that end, I have assembled the Orange County Task Force on Business Retention and Expansion. This Task Force is to be co-chaired by Jimmy O'Donnell, my Chief of Staff and Maureen Halahan, President of the Orange County Partnership.

This Committee is comprised of leaders in business, labor, education and government who are charged with not only working to advance our County's interests under the Federal Stimulus Package, but to help businesses with investment, job attraction and retention to ensure the long term viability of the business community in our County. The members include: Lou Heimbach, Roxanne Donnery, Jim Smith, Dr. John D'Ambrosio, James Bodrato, Todd Diorio, Dr. William Richards, Jonah Mandelbaum, Jonathan Drapkin, James Petro, Steve Neuhaus, David Church, Sher Singh and Steve Knob.

Recently, with the support of this Legislature, we prepared a promotional video to help us sell the exciting opportunities and rich resources of this County. I invite you to take a copy of

the dvd and help us to spread the word that Orange County is the place to be. Our County has much to offer and I believe that we must continue to build for tomorrow... today.

At my request last May, my Director of Operations and Cost Control, Steve Gross, led a study on efficiency and cost containment. The results of this study led to a countywide job review of every department, travel reductions, countywide energy audit, equipment purchase freeze, accelerated implementation of Voiceover Internet phone system and a Vendor Audit of the County Medicaid program.

We will continue to look for cost savings at every level and we will continue our aggressive pursuit of economic development. We cannot, and we will not, stand by and let our children be the first generation of Americans to be worse off than their parents.

With every passing day the counties across this State continue to show much concern for the proposals coming out of Albany. Two of these areas are the State Budget and the MTA Mobility Tax.

If the Governor's budget were to pass as presented today, I can tell you that Orange County would lose 9 million dollars right off the top.

We are working with our State Legislators to lessen that impact but I can tell you \$9 million dollars will have a tremendous impact on next year's budget and because of these potential reductions Orange County must continue the hard-line fiscal policies of past years.

I want to commend the efforts of the Orange County Chamber of Commerce in opposing the MTA Mobility Tax. This tax is one of the most anti-business, anti-economic development and anti-commonsense proposals to see the light of day. This is without a doubt a job-killing proposal, not a job-creating proposal and the fact that it continues to gain traction is outrageous and unacceptable.

This tax is a death penalty for many of our businesses small and large. Not-for-profits, schools and municipalities will also be taxed "Over 10 million dollars." We will do everything in our power to fight this outrageous proposal. I have spoken with our business community. They have made it clear that for some of them this proposal is a death sentence and that is unacceptable. I urge and support the Orange County Legislature to pass the resolution before them opposing this new tax.

While national unemployment is at its highest rate in fifteen years and resources severely cut by both the Federal and State governments, I do have some positive news to report. Our Orange County Employment and Training Administration Bridge Program was ranked number one in the State of New York for job placement and job retention. Our Federal welfare to work participation was also number one in the State of New York. It's not an accident that our unemployment rate is below the national average and lower than most counties in the State. Orange County's Best Practices continue to be a model for other counties across New York State.

Overall, our Orange County One Stop Career Centers provided placement assistance to over 9000 customers last year. Even with the tough economic climate our job placement numbers for '08 exceeded 2007.

We held our 9<sup>th</sup> annual job fair that attracted 1,600 job seekers and we are now sponsoring industry specific job fairs so that those residents who want to focus on a particular industry such as health care can do just that. Steve Knob and his department not only serve to match employers with qualified employees, they saved over 1 million dollars in taxation by removing individuals from public assistance.

I want to recognize the tremendous work by our Budget and Finance Departments under the leadership of Neil Blair and Joel Kleiman. These gentlemen along with their staffs work tirelessly to administer a budget that reflects the realities of declining revenues while understanding the priorities of my budget. I remain committed to keeping the property tax rate the lowest since World War II while still funding the priorities of my office and this body.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me say that by working together we adopted a budget that we can be proud of. Taxes are lower than ever before and this County continues to have the 2<sup>nd</sup> best bond rating in the State of New York.

We continue to benefit from a government that has the ability to pay cash for projects such as the Fire Training Center, saving millions in interest payments. When we do borrow we enjoy the lowest rates possible. I can tell you that other governments have contacted us to seek our advice and to even borrow money from us to meet their financial obligations. My friends, we have met and will continue to meet our fiduciary responsibilities to the people of Orange County and I am proud of all we have accomplished.

As important as cost control and fiscal restraint are to any budget it is also imperative that projects that benefit and are vital to our communities continue to receive attention and funding. Our Office of Community Development provided funding of over \$1.2 million dollars this past year to 15 municipalities for 19 new projects which include infrastructure, public facilities and public services. This department also guided seven development projects exceeding \$25 million dollars. This represents a total of 255 dwelling units of which 52 units are designated HOME Assisted dwelling units and provided lead abatement for 171 other units. There are also six projects in the works totaling \$1.8 million dollars of investment to provide affordable housing for our residents.

Last year we completed seven rehabilitation projects for senior homeowners and this year 17 more are underway. In total these efforts have helped 32 single family homes, have assisted eight first-time homebuyers and expect 10 more properties completed during 2009. Community Development has assisted six farms under our agriculture program which continues to be our number one industry. While some counties have slashed their support, we believe in the future of agriculture in this County.

The Office of Community Development established a committee of bank, real estate and mortgage professionals and held our “Catch the Dream” homeownership seminar that served over 300 constituents and provided a venue for 60 public and private agencies to assist first-time homeowners.

Tom Lane and his team have done great work this past year and as impressive as these statistics are, look past the numbers and see the people who have been impacted by these projects. Community Development helps individuals who may have been forced from their homes because of unsafe conditions, seniors who may have had to move out of the County because of their inability to maintain their homes or those first-time homebuyers who are taking back neighborhoods one house, one block at a time.

Reflect for a moment if you will on the good paying jobs associated with this economic activity. We are proud of this department and the services we are rendering to the people of this County.

In understanding the benefits of good paying jobs we must also create an environment that fosters a well-rounded and educated workforce.

Our SUNY Branch Campus in Newburgh, renovations to the Main Campus in Middletown and planning for a new Science and Tech Centre at Middletown are well under way. These projects would not have happened without the strong support of Senators William Larkin and John Bonacic. I also want to express the gratitude of this County to Mr. William Kaplan and the Kaplan Foundation for their support of the Newburgh project. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the critical role played by Dr. Richards, his cabinet and the SUNY Orange Board of Trustees. These dedicated public servants continue to provide this institution with the vision from which future generations will benefit for decades to come.

In a time when so many institutions across our nation are closing their doors, we should all be full of pride that Orange County is opening new doors for those who wish for a higher education.

### **Strengthening our County Infrastructure**

Once again our Department of Public Works under the leadership of Commissioner Ed Fares, Deputy Commissioners Lee, Scrittore and Hammond have proven that with creative thinking, cost monitoring and providing strict attention to detail you can achieve monumental success.

In 2008 our Road and Bridge Division paved or sealed over 30 miles of highway, reconstructed a major County highway, and improved sight distance on numerous properties. DPW designed and reconstructed the Mechanicstown Bridge and did extensive culvert work on two County highways and the Heritage Trail.

Our Buildings and Grounds Division completed another 20,000 square feet of renovations to the Community Campus Building for Cornell Cooperative Extension, a new roof for the

Surrogate's Court, on time and under budget and installed an interconnected fire alarm system between the Government Center and the Courts Building. By using our personnel we have saved this County millions of dollars and we have shown that our DPW employees can compete anytime, anywhere and produce a quality product.

Our Environmental Facilities Division has begun work on our new solid waste transfer station for New Hampton and designs will begin for Newburgh shortly. We have also completed the first phase of a methane recovery project at the Orange County Landfill which will result in carbon credits for Orange County.

Our work on the Indigo and Dwaarkill reservoir sites continues and there is great potential that these sites will provide the additional water we need to further enhance our water systems. The best and the only way to achieve the goals of our Master Plan is to develop regional water and wastewater solutions.

We know we have the resources. Now it is incumbent upon us to ensure that they will be available for our children and our grandchildren.

Our Department of Real Property under the guidance of John McCarey continues to modernize and create greater efficiencies for our residents. This past year alone Real Property saved over \$300,000.00 in operating expenses. Real Property has also assumed all responsibilities for processing and updating tax bills, town budgets and levies. This office has also expanded accessibility to the Real Property website, adding GIS, assessment information and tax bills.

In addition, this department applied for and received grant funding to study centralized tax assessment and tax collection to improve the current system as well as developing efficiencies of scale to reduce overall costs.

Our County's Information Technology Department continues to thrive.

Commissioner John McCaffery and this department continue to provide the keystone of our overall communications network. Among their accomplishments are expanded GIS, assisting in our Law Records Management Sharing Program and the integration of administration functions for Parks and Recreation. The County continues to move ahead with the Oracle project and we all know that the successful implementation of this project will move our County forward for the next decade. The Information Services Department continues to keep the County on the cutting edge of technology ensuring that all of our departments can respond to the needs of our citizens.

This department continues to save County taxation by implementing faster and more efficient programs such as Smart Card Technology, electronic imaging, new access control for Corrections and a Voiceover Internet phone system, which is saving our departments over \$4,000.00 a month in phone services.

One of our more critical departments is Personnel. Commissioner Cathy Stagmier leads this department that provides for our most important resource, our employees.

I want to thank Commissioner Stagmier for her help in negotiating multi-year collective bargaining agreements with CSEA, Orange County Community College Faculty Association and the Orange County Community College Staff and Chairmen's Association.

As we said from the beginning, we must, and did negotiate fair and equitable contracts for our unionized workforce. I can say without a shadow of a doubt if anyone thinks these were bad deals for our employees just look at other counties that are now cutting positions and laying off employees.

I know the job freeze has made us do more with less. Our policies remain firm, however; in the end we must all answer to the taxpayers of this County who have made it perfectly clear they cannot afford any increases to the tax rate. The tough choices we made almost two years ago have proven to be correct and they have saved taxpayers millions of dollars and saved County jobs.

If you are a County employee anywhere in this government, you can hold your head high when people ask where you work or what you do for a living because truly you do the people's business every day.

To Team Orange, all of us, working for the people of this County, I salute you and thank you for your service. I stand before you again this year resolute in my belief that Orange County still is a great place to live, work and raise a family. The significant contribution to the fabric of our community by Team Orange helps to make our County the jewel of the Hudson Valley.

### **Quality of Life Issues**

The Orange County Planning Department and Commissioner David Church continue to provide the framework for development that respects our overall Master Plan, environmental assessments and provides consistent application of land use regulations. Last year the Department of Planning completed 850 reviews of individual planning or zoning permits referred by municipalities. These reviews rarely took place prior to my administration and I am pleased with the progress we have made.

This department continues to advance open space projects that have already preserved over 9,000 acres helping to protect our great quality of life. Last year the Planning Department rolled out our brand new Transit Guide describing all transit services available in or around Orange County. While the grants unit secured almost \$13.6 million dollars in competitive grant awards in 2008, it also provides for centralized tracking of discretionary grants received from the Federal and State Governments.

The Planning Department is also working closely with my office to ensure that our Stimulus Projects are in order and that Orange County is prepared to take advantage of whatever funds become available.

I have always said we are a service business. Providing high quality, efficient and friendly service to the people of Orange County has been the goal of County Clerk Donna Benson from the first day she took office. The Office of County Clerk provides the most consistent and daily interaction with the people of this County. Donna Benson and her staff are continually looking for new and innovative ways to bring even more services to the people of this County. Last year alone her department generated \$4.7 million dollars in revenue to the County and every year more and more records, maps and services are available in digitized formats for even greater accessibility by our constituents.

I am sure each of us is well aware no matter who we are or what we do for a living, the truth is that time marches on. Seniors in Orange County are fortunate to have a progressive and caring Office of the Aging that provides a “One Stop” service entry point that links seniors to all available services in the County. Whether you are looking for home delivered or congregate meals, in-home personal care, certain legal services, respite care, HEAP or even tax preparation, this is truly a full service department.

Ann Marie Maglione of my staff has been Acting Director of this office since the retirement of Nick Gerten and she has overseen numerous improvements to the already outstanding services of this agency. Last year the Office of the Aging established a single point of entry for Long Term Care known as Orange County NY Connects. This unit provides 24 hour messaging and online resources to assist our residents seeking long term care service. This new unit processed over 5000 calls last year and had almost 4000 visitors to the Website. The need for these types of services will continue to grow as our senior population has become the fastest growing population in our Nation.

The Office for the Aging also served over 200,000 meals through home delivery or congregate meals. The majority of these meals are delivered by volunteers who I submit to you today are heroes in every sense of the word.

Furthermore, this agency celebrated 25 years of the Orange County Senior Games. These games encourage not only physical activity but social and cultural interaction across this County and saw over 500 of our residents participate last year.

As important as our seniors are, so too is the future of our youth. The Orange County Youth Bureau under the direction of Carol Chichester once again set the standard for excellence in this state in serving the needs of our young people, our future leaders.

As I am sure you are all aware, Albany is considering serious reductions in funding for Youth Bureaus across this state. Not only do these proposed reductions add further burdens to County Government, they are coming at precisely the wrong time for the youth of this State.

Last year our Orange County Youth Bureau in cooperation with our local municipalities served over 40,000 young people with various programs and activities.

The cornerstone of our democracy continues to be free and fair elections and I want to take a moment to thank our Commissioners of Elections David Green and Sue Bahren for their service as New York State has struggled to comply with the Help America Vote Act. This has been a time consuming and sometimes frustrating process but I know that I and the members of this Legislature appreciate their service.

The Orange County Department of Mental Health and Commissioner Chris Ashman continue to change lives one person at a time. The lives changed and transformed by the programs and initiatives of this department are staggering in light of the challenges of the past year. Changes in traditional delivery systems, budgetary realities and multiple programmatic shifts and the rising census have all served to tax the resources of this department and its staff.

However, the sense of mission and the service to the greater good are clearly evident in the population served.

Mental Health provides client outreach, family support services, including respite care, sheltered workshops, alcohol crisis services, and domestic violence intervention just to name a few. So while individually you may not directly benefit from the services of this department more than likely you know someone who has.

Another major player in the social safety net of our County is the Department of Social Services led by Commissioner David Jolly. The mission of this department sounds relatively simple - to help individuals and families lead safe, healthy and independent lives.

In reality what Dave Jolly and his team does is quite complex and deserves our praise. The Department of Social Services is the direct link to the social contract that we as government have with our citizens.

During this economic crisis individuals and families turn to DSS and the numbers are compelling: families and individuals receiving temporary assistance increased by over 25% in 2008, Food Stamp benefits up over 18% and Medicaid recipients increased over 8%. The authorized Social Services budget totaled \$186 million dollars in 2008 of which \$101 million was funded through local taxation.

The workload is incredible and yet Commissioner Jolly and his team continue to treat their clients with dignity and compassion. They ensure that only those who deserve services receive them.

Our Child Protective Services has consistently registered improvements year after year. Orange County successfully completed the conversion from a Voluntary Managed Care County to a Mandatory Managed Care County. Once again this was an opportunity to save County tax dollars while improving services to those in need.

The Orange County Office of Consumer Affairs continues to reach out to consumers in need across this County. Under the able direction of Commissioner Charles Mitchell we have seen a tremendous increase in outreach and the number of consumers helped by this department. They also ensure the accuracy of the gas and fuel supply, giving Orange County residents the confidence that they are receiving what they pay for.

The Orange County Department of Veterans Service Agency continues its mission of serving those who defend our freedoms and made this the greatest Nation in the world. Director Tony Zippo, his team and the members of the Orange County Veterans Advisory Board continue to provide vital services to veterans including our newest heroes, those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. To care for those who have borne the burden of battle is a sacred trust. I am very grateful that at my urging the United States Department of Veterans Affairs located their new Vet Center in the Town of Wallkill so our vets won't have to travel for the much needed services they deserve.

To that end, I continue to believe and will advocate for the soon-to-be vacated Arden Hill Hospital to be a veterans rehabilitation center to serve current and returning veterans right here at home.

Speaking to the health of our veterans naturally leads to the overall health of our County residents and this was an extremely busy year for the Orange County Department of Health. Under the expert direction of Health Commissioner Dr. Jean Hudson the Orange County Health Department fulfills a vital role in promoting the health of our County residents, preventing the outbreak of diseases, educating our populace and assuring healthy environmental conditions for our residents.

I want to take a moment to recognize Dr. Hudson and her team for the successful and seamless transition from a Coroner system to a Medical Examiner system. To date our Medical Examiner, Dr. Charles Catanese, has accepted 748 cases and performed 327 autopsies providing efficient and accurate information to our County.

Dr. Hudson is a true public health advocate and she understands very well the significant role she plays as our Commissioner. Her sense of purpose is sure and her commitment to the well-being of every resident of this County is outstanding. She is truly the people's doctor and a wonderful representative of our government and our belief in a vibrant and strong public health system.

Another department of which I am equally proud is our Orange County Parks Department. Last year this department served over 800,000 County residents, their families and friends. What a wonderful compliment by the citizens of this County to utilize our facilities and know that the investments we have made are appreciated.

Our new Commissioner Richard Rose comes to us with a wealth of knowledge and experience. Commissioner Rose is already making strides to improve efficiencies and serve even more County residents while keeping costs down.

Let me add if you have not had an opportunity to visit the new Graham Skea Building at Thomas Bull Park, I would encourage you to do so.

This building represents not only our commitment to Parks and Recreation but also is a shining example of the financial strength of this County. This project, which will benefit our residents for years to come, was completed on time, under budget and paid for with cash. It is a testament to the fact that with careful budgeting, cost monitoring and working together, government can be innovative, efficient and produce a product that its constituents can be proud of.

In closing, let me thank you this legislative body for your support, input and yes sometimes even your criticism. Together we have continued the proud tradition of this County, moving forward with purpose and conviction.

Seven and half years ago when the people of this County entrusted me to be their County Executive, I laid out a plan that would build on the cornerstones of government. We have kept taxes under control, public safety efforts have been strengthened, our County finances are sound, our infrastructure has been enhanced and our quality of life continues to be among the best in the nation. We are the envy of every county in New York State and I intend to make sure we continue down this proven road of planned progress.

Today, I can report to you that the state of our County is the strongest in the State of New York. However, severe challenges lie ahead. Our years of careful planning, conservative budgeting and just plain old-fashioned, roll-up-your-sleeves hard work will continue.

The forces of this national recession are weighing heavy on our families, friends and neighbors. Every person in this room, knows someone who has lost a job or is having a hard time paying their bills.

How can we help? We will provide the services that our residents have come to rely on, we will research new programs to make sure that people who are in trouble know what they are entitled to. Even more importantly, we will make sure that we hold the line on spending and taxes to make sure that while life comes with burdens, we do not add to them. I urge everyone to continue to support our charitable institutions, not-for-profits, churches, synagogues, mosques and community groups.

We will also continue to pursue economic development, job creation and business retention and expansion. This will not come easy and we no longer compete with other areas of the State and Nation but we now compete in a global arena. This will require us to be even faster and more aggressive, with a willingness to fight for every investment dollar.

We will do all these things, but I also believe the best we have to offer is to remember that we have been given a trust by the people of this County to be good stewards of their resources and to look beyond the doors of this chamber to the hopes and future of our residents.

The problems facing us today are not insurmountable. We have faced them before in different times and different places. And when the going got real tough, we have always managed to put our differences aside and work steadfastly to an American solution to the problems at hand. Today and tomorrow will be no different as we face this economic crisis and come back stronger and more competitive than ever before.

Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for your service to the people of this great Nation, State and County. As we leave here today, let us renew our oaths of office and commit ourselves to be true and noble public servants.

Thank you and may God Bless our County, State and Nation.

EDWARD A. DIANA  
County Executive  
March 5, 2009