

State of the County 2010

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

Before I submit my message I hope you will indulge me for a moment to thank my wife Mary, my daughters Danielle & Lindsay, my son-in-law Marty, my granddaughter Ava 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 while working diligently behind the scenes, Mary, Sheri, Doreen, Donna, Lorrie, Jimmy, Steve, and Richard.

This past week our region was confronted by two of the worst winter storms in recent memory. The storms and their aftermath necessitated the declaration of a state of emergency and a level 4 activation of our Emergency Management Center. I want to thank our County employees, emergency service personnel and the general public for their support and understanding during this difficult time.

Whether you drove a plow, fire truck or ambulance, whether you checked on an elderly neighbor or helped a young mother shovel her driveway or maybe you helped get out critical information to our residents or maybe you just served a hot cup of coffee to an exhausted utility worker, everyone had a part to play and a stake in this disaster and I want to extend the thanks of a grateful County to everyone involved.

I want to also share with you that yesterday I requested that Governor Paterson declare Orange County a disaster area, which we believe is warranted because of the severe financial impact to our community from the storms of last week.

At this time let us pause for moment to remember our servicemen and women who continue to serve in harm's way to keep us safe.

Mr. Chairman, members of this legislative body, today the state of our County remains one of the best in New York State; however, our challenge, our duty is to lead the way as our state and nation struggle back from the worst economic crisis since the great depression.

Last year, we celebrated the 400th Anniversary of Henry Hudson's historic quest for adventure and commercial gain as he explored our Hudson Valley.

Today, we're also on a quest. We're looking for the true source of economic recovery.

That's what I want to talk to you about.

The true source is not more government, more special interests, or even political parties. The true source of hope for our future is the belief by the residents of this County, State and nation that their hard work and perseverance will provide good jobs for our people.

We all want to maintain Orange County's special quality of life. But the term "quality of life," and all that it implies, rings hollow if people don't have jobs.

Today, many people in our nation live with uncertainty and fear because of the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.

Many have been robbed of their dreams by the mistakes or recklessness of others. They're not statistics; they're people dealing with heartbreaking misfortune.

When I see the people of our region, over and over I see decent, hardworking men and women who have asked for nothing more than the chance to do right by their families.

Most of them have never asked for anything from government but to be left alone, to raise their children as they see fit and receive an honest day's pay for an honest day's work.

Today, they are concerned, angry and worried that for the first time the next generation will be worse off than those who have come before.

So, the most important question before us is this: how do we best grow good, private sector jobs here in Orange County, the Hudson Valley and the State of New York ?

I am particularly proud of the steps we have taken here in Orange County to do just that—create jobs and attract investment.

We cannot continue to be the most expensive state in the nation in which to do business.

Nor can Albany continue to make this situation worse by shifting state mandated program costs to local governments and the taxpayers we serve.

If we are ever going to reform this state, now is the time for clear, coherent and consistent leadership.

The call to reform our state's tax structure, funding mechanism for our schools and genuine support for the business community to create jobs and expand the tax base must be the priority of every person in public office.

Here in Orange County we have made tough choices and I believe that our commitment to a clear and steady course has made the difference.

For just a moment let me remind you of what we have accomplished by working together:

Lowest tax rate in the history of the County

Closed Camp LaGuardia

Extensive energy audits of our County buildings

The first new Hospital between Albany and New York City in over 30 years is almost complete.

The Port Authority's takeover of Stewart International Airport and their commitment of over ½ billion dollars is a significant shot in the arm to our local economy.

Our comprehensive master plan which is a model of inter-municipal cooperation and provides our County with sound, sustainable growth that will allow us to control our own destiny.

Our recent investments in our SUNY system, especially the Newburgh branch campus which allows our residents to build for their tomorrows today. I am so proud of the accomplishments of SUNY Orange and know they will continue their outstanding contributions to our workforce.

I am also pleased to share with you that because of the strong leadership of our Orange County IDA the C& S Project in Chester, Montgomery and Newburgh is a reality that will keep and bring 1,300 jobs to Orange County.

The Orange County Business Accelerator is a perfect example of how government can support industry and demonstrates clearly the helpful, not hindering, role government should play.

Just yesterday we signed our fourth company, a high tech life sciences firm, which is moving their Headquarters and Marketing Research Department from California right here to Orange County and will immediately add 7-10 jobs. This company, when it leaves the Business Accelerator, is projecting 100 new jobs for our residents.

The movement of Shortline/Coach USA headquarters to Orange County brings over 250 high quality jobs to our region.

We are fighting to save Kolmar Industries in Port Jervis.

Today, because of the combined efforts of the Office of Business Assistance, The Orange County IDA, The Chamber of Commerce, Orange County Partnership and the Orange County Business Accelerator we have retained over 289 jobs, added 1,119 jobs for the residents of this County and obtained over 100 million dollars in capital investments.

I believe this sends a strong message to the business community that Orange County is open for business because we are serious about economic development.

If there is a silver lining in these economic storm clouds, it is the fact that government leaders and citizens are engaging in serious discussions about reforming how government works in all areas across this great nation.

I have been chairing our Hudson Valley Regional Consolidation Committee and I am encouraged by the real potential for savings with regard to dealing with consolidation of County jails.

Each of these projects has benefited from the support of this body and I thank you for that.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The challenges facing our law enforcement community are fundamentally different than even just 5 years ago.

Crime has become more sophisticated, organized and transnational in nature, but the challenges posed by ongoing advances in technology on crime have been breathtaking.

Long gone are the days when police could focus their efforts on an investigation once a crime has been committed.

Today, we need to think in a broader context and monitor regional events as well as world events to better prepare our law enforcement community for responding to, and ultimately preventing, serious crime.

This legislative body has a long history of strong support of our law enforcement community and, of course, I know we all appreciate the work of our District Attorney Frank Phillips. Mr. Phillips, who is the second longest serving DA in New York State, continues to seek justice for those who have been victimized and, equally as important, applies the law firmly yet fairly. Once again his office has succeeded in maintaining a felony conviction rate of 96%.

As I mentioned earlier our Emergency Management Center was recently put through a very strong test and I am pleased to report they once again passed with flying colors. Commissioner Koury and his team are to be commended.

But it is not only responding to emergencies that shows the capabilities of this department. With our Emergency Services Center in full operation, we were able to accommodate numerous county departments and other public service-related

organizations in utilizing our training facilities. In all, over 600 training and informational sessions were conducted throughout 2009.

Our Emergency Communications division also recorded substantial increases. Last year we handled 250,844 incoming calls for service, an increase of 14.5 % over 2008.

Our Fire Services division, under the able leadership of John Horan, continues working with Orange, Rockland, Sullivan and Ulster County Community Colleges towards the goal of offering college degrees and/or certifications in the areas of police, fire, EMS and emergency management.

This past year they began developing an “Industrial Safety Training Program” in which courses will be offered to private and public agencies that need to meet certain requirements outlined under the Federal OSHA standards. Last year 2,055 students successfully completed firematic courses at the Fire Training Center. Our Hazmat team responded to 61 incidents, and 134 fire investigations were completed by this department.

Deputy Commissioner Cherry is diligently working with representatives from our law enforcement agencies in developing an Automatic Vehicle Locator Dispatching solution from which the closest police car to an emergency can be identified and dispatched from our 911 Center, saving critical time and providing for officer safety.

This department also administered over ½ million dollars in grant funding for Orange County and local law enforcement as well as conducting another successful Gun Buyback Program with the 3 cities acting as collection points. As a result of this Program, 218 firearms were surrendered and taken off the street.

The County also recognizes that good training produces quality officers and we continue to provide \$30,000 in funding to the Police Chiefs Association of Orange County Police Academy.

I am also pleased to note the county’s active involvement in various Traffic Safety Programs. These programs and activities include active participation in the “Not One More Program”, providing driving simulators for all of the county’s school districts, distribution of informational booklets for new drivers at various special county events, and participation in local “Night Out Against Crime” events.

Our Emergency Medical Services division has successfully held EMT courses, thereby training or refreshing 63 EMS students.

We presently have 27 out of 31 police agencies utilizing our Orange County Police Data Sharing system. The sharing of this data just recently led to the arrest of a homicide suspect.

The men and women of the Orange County Sheriff's Office under the leadership of Sheriff Carl Dubois, have a critical role in the safety and overall peace of this County.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate Sheriff Dubois on his recent election as President of the New York State Sheriff's Association. This is a significant achievement. This past year the Sheriff and his command staff have undertaken numerous projects to enhance public safety, including the Sex Offender Watch Program, Impact Records Management System and have processed over 7,000 civil cases.

Economy and Finances

Today, our state is facing a crisis that compares to the one faced by Governor Hugh Carey when he declared, "Now the times of plenty, the days of wine and roses are over."

The call for fundamental change is real, the time for change is now if our State is ever to begin the process of re-building our economy.

The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance recently reported fourth quarter 2009 and year end (total year) sales tax collections. 52 of the State's 57 counties outside NYC are seeing continued decline in sales tax receipts—13 of them with double digit decreases over the same period last year. For 2009, Orange County sales tax revenue was down nearly 5% as compared to 2008.

And yet we were able to maintain a stable tax rate, preserve essential services and maintain our AA1 Bond Rating.

These accomplishments were not achieved by good fortune but came about because of the willingness of our office and this Legislative body and the people to make hard decisions.

The programs initiated by my Director of Operations and Cost Control, Steve Gross have helped to provide the County with a clear roadmap to achieve efficiencies and cost containment.

Hand in hand with cost containment has been our aggressive pursuit of economic development and I commend Jimmy O'Donnell who has made business retention and expansion one of his top priorities.

Our office of Business Assistance continues to keep Orange County on the forefront of economic development.

Our strategic partners: the Office of Business Assistance, The Orange County IDA, The Orange County Business Accelerator, The Orange County Partnership, the Orange County Chamber of Commerce and our own Employment and Training Administration, have all played a major role in the growing of our local economy.

This past year proved to be a challenging year.

Unemployment was at its highest rate in 20 years. The Unemployment Rate hovered around 8% for most of the year although still lower than some areas. Jobs continued to be hard to come by. Our resources to create and retain jobs were cut by Federal and State agencies at the worst possible time.

However, the Orange County One-Stop Career Centers served over 12,000 people during 2009 at our three locations in Newburgh, Middletown and Port Jervis.

This was an increase of 3,000 people compared to 2008 numbers.

Our Employment and Training Administration assisted in placing over 4,500 Orange County residents in employment even with the current economic conditions in Orange County.

The County sponsored its 10th Annual Orange County Job Fair. Sixty four local employers participated and 1,500 job seekers attended. ETA also sponsored a healthcare job fair in which 27 employers from the healthcare sector participated with approximately 375 job seekers attending. Employers filled over 100 job openings through this event.

ETA through its Welfare Employment Unit closed 144 public assistance cases through employment / job placements in 2009. We estimate a savings of over \$320,000 in taxation through these case closures.

This unit served over 800 applicants and was able to divert 169 cases by finding these individuals employment before a public assistance case was ever opened. This translates into an average monthly savings of over \$127,000.

We placed over 1,100 individuals through our Welfare to Work program.

Green jobs will continue to be a major focus of the workforce. We are working on the \$500,000 Hudson Valley Regional Green Talent Pipeline grant with our partners in the surrounding Counties to create "Green Collar" jobs throughout the Hudson Valley region.

I want to recognize the diligent work of our Budget and Finance Departments under the leadership of Neil Blair and Joel Kleiman. These two professionals, along with their staffs, work tirelessly to administer a budget that reflects the realities of declining revenues while understanding the priorities of my budget.

In plain language we have held to our commitment of keeping the property tax rate the lowest in the history of this County while still funding the priorities of my office and this legislative body.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you should be proud of the work we are doing together for this County and we have met our fiduciary responsibilities to the people of Orange County.

While we work each and every day on cost control and containment, it is also imperative that projects that benefit our communities receive attention and funding.

Our Office of Community Development provided funding of over \$1.7 million dollars this past year to 17 municipalities for 21 new projects which include infrastructure, public facilities and public services. This department also guided development projects exceeding \$8 million dollars. This represents a total of 136 dwelling units. There are also six projects under way totaling \$1.1 million dollars of investment to provide affordable housing for our residents.

Last year we completed sixteen rehabilitation projects for senior homeowners and this year 34 are underway.

We have assisted eight first time home buyers in acquisition, construction and homebuyer counseling.

Orange County Community Development continues our committee of Banking, 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.

These projects represent real hope, whether in rehabilitation, neighborhood stabilization or mortgage counseling. Community Development represents a commitment to helping our communities grow and thrive.

You know, I was an educator for 31 years and I believe no better vehicle exists to improve the fortunes of a people than education. I have seen first hand the liberating and uplifting power of education to change lives. In understanding the benefits of good paying jobs, you must also create an environment that fosters a well rounded and educated workforce.

Our SUNY Branch Campus in Newburgh is right on schedule, and renovations to the Main Campus in Middletown and planning for a new “Tech Centre” at Middletown are well underway. Both of these projects would not have happened without the strong support of the Orange County Legislature, 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. SUNY Orange is truly an integral part of our County. 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, faculty and staff.

These dedicated public servants understand we are sowing the seeds for future generations to grow and prosper right here in Orange County.

Strengthening our County Infrastructure

The Department of Public Works is responsible for providing various physical services to the general public in a safe, efficient and cost-effective manner. These services have much to do with the safety and quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of Orange County.

In 2009 our County Highway Crews paved or sealed 24 miles of County Roads and performed numerous road and bridge infrastructure improvement projects throughout the County.

The Environmental Division oversaw the completion of the New Hampton Solid Waste Transfer station and brought the project in on-time and under budget. They initiated a cardboard and paper marketing program that generates significant new revenue for the County.

They submitted a permit modification application to the NYSDEC for the relocation and improvement of the residential drop-off area at the Newburgh Transfer Station.

I want to highlight some projects which I believe will be of interest to you in the upcoming year.

1. Complete reconstruction of 2 miles of road from Lazy Hill Road to Lakes Road in Monroe.
2. Design and reconstruct deck surface for Freeland Street Bridge in the Village of Monroe and replace the Bull Mill Road Bridge in the Town of Chester.
3. Provide administration for Stimulus Projects (“Petticoat Lane Bridge Replacement”, “Bridge Painting” and 30 miles of road paving”).
4. Install pump station and sanitary sewer system for DPW complex in Goshen.
5. DPW to complete final grading and paving and to finish construction of a multi-use recreation field at Gonzaga Park in the Southern tier of our County.
6. Develop new County wide solid waste management plan; including a new recycling law and obtain NYSDEC approval for same.
7. Construct an ADA compliant access ramp at the DPW Administration Building.
8. Construct a new roof for the Mental Health building in Goshen.

Quite an impressive list when you consider the budgetary challenges facing all governments. But we understand this because we are building for tomorrow, today!

And when we talk about building for tomorrow, today we must carefully consider and analyze the future of this complex.

Our County Departments are presently configuring the current and future space requirements for our planned submission of the new County Government Center to this legislative body this coming Spring.

Our Department of Real Property, under the guidance of John McCarey, continues to modernize and create greater efficiencies for our residents. Real Property has also assumed all responsibilities for processing and updating tax bills, town budgets and

levies. This department has also worked hard to reduce tax delinquent parcels to less than 150.

Again, an impressive job of taking time to work with our residents by doing everything within our power to assist them in these trying economic times.

Our Director of Purchasing, Mr. Jim Burpoe, and his staff are streamlining our purchasing operation and seeking out efficiencies in every area. Jim and his team are constantly seeking the best deal for County taxpayers as they work to achieve a \$2 million dollar reduction in overall county expenses. To achieve this they are combing through every contract, inspecting every supply cabinet, purchasing in bulk and reducing costs for every service this County receives, including utility costs.

I also want to urge this legislature to review and pass the resolution allowing Orange County to apply for membership in the Hudson Valley Local Government Cooperative Purchasing Project. Not only will this save County tax dollars but will allow our local municipalities to access this purchasing group. This will truly maximize savings!

Quality of Life Issues

I would like to think that each and every member of this government understands that the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

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 614 reviews of individual planning or zoning permits referred by municipalities.

This department will also assist the Census Bureau as we begin the critical process of counting every man, woman and child in Orange County.

The Planning Department, Orange County Planning Board and the Water Authority have diligently worked to complete the first ever Water Master Plan which will address our County water supply and water resource priorities well into the future.

I want to take a moment to speak about some of the factual issues surrounding the water master plan. Some individuals, for their own political agenda or unwillingness to really examine the issue, have taken great liberties in characterizing this plan as a land grab or power grab by the County.

Nothing could be further from the truth. This plan takes into account the many aspects related to current and future needs regarding to water supply and infrastructure.

This water plan will be part of our required five year update to the County Comprehensive Plan which includes other enhancements such as restructuring our

priority growth areas, addressing workforce housing and the economic impact that development has on this County.

This process will require legislative review, oversight and a proper public hearing to address the comments, concerns and suggestions of our residents.

The grants unit within this Department continues to leave no stone unturned to find funds to reduce County taxation while funding important County Programs. This year alone working with almost every County Department we have successfully obtained \$14.4 million dollars in new or renewed grants, \$44 million dollars in pending grants and another \$54 million pending under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

Once again, County Clerk Donna Benson continues to provide high quality, efficient and friendly service to the people of Orange County.

Donna has stood up for the people of Orange County in opposing outrageous new fees sent down from Albany and making sure that our residents receive their fair share of service.

Donna was instrumental in arranging our highly successful Veterans Discount Card along with Tony Zippo of the Orange County Veterans Service Agency.

Seniors in Orange County are fortunate to have a progressive and caring Office for 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 entitlements and benefits, home delivered or congregate meals, in-home personal care, certain legal services, caregiver, respite care, HEAP, insurance or even tax preparation, this is truly a full service department.

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. I would encourage anyone who has the time to consider volunteering for this important program.

Our seniors have given us a solid foundation and our youth represent our strength for tomorrow. 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.

The Orange County Youth Bureau was one of four New York State Youth Bureaus selected to participate in the Ready by 21 Quality Counts Initiative. Partnering with United Way of Orange County and other not for profits ,a community goal was developed to provide young people with the support and opportunities needed to be ready for work, college and life by age 21.

The Department of Mental Health continues its positive life changing work even as changes in traditional delivery systems, budgetary realities, multiple program shifts, and rising census have all served to tax the resources of this department and its staff.

The clear sense of mission and the service to those who may not have an advocate is a heavy burden, but, Commissioner Ashman and his Department, working with our contract agencies, change lives one person at a time.

So while individually you may not directly benefit from the services of this department, more than likely you know someone who has.

The Department of Social Services ,led by Commissioner David Jolly, provides and manages a wide range of social welfare programs.

As you would expect during this economic crisis, individuals and families turn to DSS and the numbers are compelling: families and individuals receiving temporary assistance increased by over 15% . Food Stamp benefits are up over 20% , and Medicaid recipients increased over 12%.

The authorized Social Services budget totaled \$206 million dollars in 2009, of which \$ 101 million was funded through local taxation.

The numbers are staggering and yet Commissioner Jolly and his staff treat their clients with dignity and compassion.

I must also report that Orange County can no longer wait for the State of New York to take a firm stand on comprehensive Medicaid Reform.

In the Governor's proposed budget for 2010-11 Medicaid will cost NY State Taxpayers 51 Billion Dollars.

While health insurance reform needs to remain a priority for all elected officials, we have to understand that Medicaid has been crowding out other essential services for far too long. The cost of Medicaid in New York decreases State funding for schools while increasing local property tax dollars.

Here in Orange County, innovation is a priority. In 2009 we launched the Newburgh Bus Loop. For decades we relied on taxi's to provide non-emergency medical transportation through the State's Medicaid Program.

The New Bus Loop is a series of fixed non emergency medical transportation routes that cross the city of Newburgh and the Towns of Newburgh and New Windsor on a continuous loop.

This project has reduced the uses of one by one taxi trips by 19,000 trips per year, resulting in savings of \$850,000 per year for the New York State Medicaid Program. The three year costs savings on this project alone will reach 2.5 Million by January of 2012.

We are also spearheading a six county regional transportation initiative that brings six Hudson Valley Counties together to regionalize non emergency medical transportation from Albany to Rockland County.

This project, spearheaded by Orange County, will save the New York State Medicaid Program 1.4 Million Dollars per year for the first two years and 2.8 Million Dollars per year in years three, four and five.

If we can do this in Orange County, we can do this in New York State and maybe even the nation.

Not only will we produce significant costs savings, we will also decrease administrative costs and increase quality and responsiveness, by sharing resources with other governments.

These projects, spearheaded by Counties are just the beginning to solving the State Medicaid crisis, but we need to start the process of challenging the State to think creatively to use their resources with greater efficiency.

The Orange County Department of Consumer Affairs under the leadership of Chuck Mitchell continues to promote an atmosphere of trust for consumers in the marketplace and in which honest Orange County businesses can thrive. It is our goal to provide the best, proactive support to the people and businesses of Orange County.

The Orange County Department of Veterans Service Agency continues its mission of serving those who defended our freedom and made this the greatest Nation in the world. Director Tony Zippo, his staff and the members of the Orange County Veterans Advisory Board understand the special needs not only of our veteran's population but those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Orange County is currently home to nearly 26,388 veterans.

This hero population is growing everyday. For the past six months we have been trying to convince Washington that Arden Hill hospital is a perfect opportunity to further care for our heroes, our veterans and their families.

Another outstanding service provided by this department is the van service, which provides veterans and their dependents transportation to VA medical facilities. This service is free and highly utilized by over 2,124 veterans.

The Orange County Department of Health, under the expert direction of Health Commissioner Dr. Jean Hudson, had one of the most challenging years in recent memory. The H1N1 flu outbreak tested the ability of this department in promoting the health of our County residents, preventing the outbreak of diseases, educating our populace and assuring healthy environmental conditions for our residents.

However, once again they rose to the challenge and showed that a staff committed to a strong and vibrant public health system can respond with great efficiency during times of crisis.

As we continue to face the impacts of the weak economy, we understand that Orange County residents need and deserve quality, low cost recreational opportunities. Once again the Orange County Department of Parks served over 800,000 County residents.

Now is not the time to close or reduce parks and recreation opportunities; now is the time to enhance these facilities for all our residents.

In fact, Commissioner Rose and his department have begun the work of updating the Orange County Parks Master Plan to ensure that we are not only meeting the current recreational needs of our citizens but that the future needs are addressed as well.

The County is also committed to protecting the rights of our individual citizens, and last year the Orange County Human Rights Commission recorded 972 inquiries from county residents. This agency, with its volunteer Board of Commissioners, works very hard to foster understanding and secure those basic human rights to which we are all entitled and I thank them for their quiet and steady work over the years.

This was a very busy and productive year for the Orange County Attorney's Office. County Attorney Dave Darwin and his staff scored major victories on behalf of county residents, in particular the successful three year legal battle against New York Regional Interconnect (NYRI) and its proposed high voltage electric transmission line. This truly is a case where the public interest prevailed over corporate interests.

The County Attorney's office continues to move forward towards implementation of the County's plan to consolidate Orange Sewer District 1 into a single, unified entity.

Consolidation will eliminate a myriad of financial, operational and technical issues existing under the current inter-municipal agreements. It will result in a far more efficient, cost effective and reliable structure for providing much needed sewer service for those municipalities within the service area for years to come.

In closing, let me thank you, this legislative body, for your support. These are challenging times and I commend each one of you for your desire to serve the residents of this County. Together we have made Orange County a vibrant and progressive County that serves the people with purpose and conviction.

And as we are progressive, let me finish with training. During the past five years we have brought in different consultants to train and keep our upper level management sharp and efficient. Last year we participated with Orange County Community College, who hired a consultant whose expertise is Lean Six Sigma.

Lean Six Sigma is a continuous process improvement tool that will lead to a structured approach to improvements and cost savings. Three of our departments are now engaged in five projects that will save hundreds of thousands of dollars. We will continue to lead, and we will continue to be innovative.

Today, I can report to you, the people of Orange County that the state of our County is among the strongest in the State of New York.

However, it is time for all of us to consider a different path as I believe that the issues confronting us cross geographic lines and political party lines.

The stark reality is that while Orange County remains on a firm foundation, the overall health of the State of New York and the economic crisis facing our nation today is impeding our ability to move forward in the direction that we all want to go.

In 1784, five years before George Washington was inaugurated in New York City as the first president, he envisioned New York as the "seat of empire," thus giving rise to its nickname--the Empire State.

I believe that in order for our State to return to greatness it must once again recall the courage of a different- time- when men and women of principle chose the honorable vocation of public service and strove with all their might to make this State the seat of empire.

My friends, in the not too distant future our children, and yes, our grandchildren, will be living and working here in this state, or they will say, "My family used to be from New York but they left for greener pasture , because they could not afford to live in New York or worst of all, they lost hope."

I remain confident that the people of New York will reject the failed policies and leadership that dominate this State. They will embrace genuine change, and I believe that progressive and visionary counties like Orange County will lead the way.

The challenge is ours, the time is now, we must change the course of this State or live with the consequences of continued decline and decay.

By your presence here today, I know you are ready for the battle, and for that I am grateful.

A final thought. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and

again because there is no effort without error and shortcomings, who knows the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows in the end the high achievement of triumph and at worst, if he fails while daring greatly, knows that his place shall never be with those timid and cold souls who know neither victory or defeat.”

This quote sits on my desk and I read and live it-everyday.

May God bless our County, State and Nation.



EDWARD A. DIANA
County Executive
March 4, 2010