

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

December 31, 2007

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Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

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Co-Chairs Burmaster and Weinstein:

Attached please find the 2007 year end report of the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition. This was a year of real progress for the organization. Major projects were completed or undertaken, we received much press and recognition in many sectors, attendance was up, participation reached new levels, and a refocusing of the general meetings led to some of our highest quality exchanges ever.

Unfortunately, this is also a year in which we bid farewell to some very good members. Jo Nasoff-Finton of the ECIDA arranged for our new home and helped us reclaim and restart the Regional Economic Development Strategy. Tim Doolittle of Empire State Development was one of the first to step forward to support the group in its sustainability efforts. Mayor Vince Anello gave us a needed city presence, and found the group worthy enough to come himself rather than send a representative. Then, of course, there's long time co-chair Barry Weinstein. There's much that can be said about his importance to the Coalition, but perhaps it is easiest to just say that without Barry the Coalition would not have made it this far.

Ad Hoc:

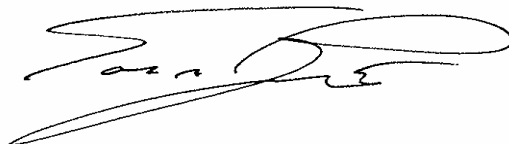
Michael Casale
Matthew Enstice
Melinda Rath Sanderson
Lawrence Witul

Speaking of making it this far, 2008 will mark 10 years of regional cooperation through the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition (formerly ENRP). With new members, new ideas, and a base of dedicated and innovative members we will be able to build on our success in 2007 and find new accomplishments in the coming year. I continue to be proud of this organization and continue to be thankful for the members' support as I too enter into my tenth year with the group.

Executive Director:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Sincerely,



Tod A. Kniazuk
Executive Director

Arts & Economic Prosperity III Economic Impact Analysis

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition was the project manager for local participation in the national Arts and Economic Prosperity project.

Our work in formulating a regional economic development strategy has identified tourism as a growing cluster of importance to our economy, and cultural tourism an important component of that cluster. As would be done for any industry cluster, it is important to determine the economic impact of the arts and culture industry on the regional economy in order to best determine the level of investment prudent to grow the sector. Arts and Economic Prosperity provided that information.

This year-long project was a partnership between the Coalition, the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, AmeriCorps, and the national organization Americans for the Arts.

As a first step, we assembled the database of the organizations, and have perpetuated that database for further use in the region. In total we found close to 200 non-profit cultural organizations in the two counties. Information included director, name, address, phone, e-mail, and website. The database was shared with Niagara University for their work on Advancing Arts & Culture, the two tourism promotion agencies, and was offered to the UB Regional Institute (which did not accept the offer).

We then conducted a survey of those organizations, recruiting them to complete a six page survey on their spending on everything from payroll to supplies. Essentially, this part of the project is a sector analysis of the arts and culture industry in the two counties. Response came in at around 30 percent (including all the traditionally defined "major" cultural organizations). This puts us on par with the response rate for the other communities involved.

The other half of the study involved the Coalition and a team of volunteers conducting the audience surveys. In total close to 500 surveys were completed of audiences at 17 venues, demonstrating the economic impact of arts audiences. Venues were a cross section across counties, disciplines, and size of agencies in order to gain a truly representative sample.

Both surveys were then sent to Americans for the Arts, who employed professional economists to analyze the data. Our region and approximately 150 others across the country were both reported on individually and cumulatively.

Released in June 2007 Americans for the Arts "Arts & Economic Prosperity III" report shows an annual economic impact of \$155.29 million by arts and cultural organizations and their audiences in Erie & Niagara Counties. This spending – \$92.97 million by the organizations and an additional \$62.33 million in event-related spending by their audiences – supports 4,740 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$95.9 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$24.05 million in local and state government revenue.

Reports were sent to every cultural organization in the database, all federal, state, and county government officials, economic development officials as well as a cross section of business leaders, community leaders, and the general public. Findings will also be integrated into our Regional Economic Development Strategy as well as other regional tourism and economic development efforts.

A few items of note about the project:

- It was the most inclusive of any such report, inviting all non-profit cultural organizations to participate rather than just the traditional large organizations.
- As such, it showed a more complete picture as to why more than just large agencies are needed; we found that – just as in any other industry sector – employees get their start at smaller groups then move up to positions in larger organizations. Also, actors and technicians are often employed by more than one agency, including smaller and larger ones. Likewise, it takes a critical mass of agencies to make support businesses like printers successful.
- Economic development officials analyzed and validated the methodology.
- Economic development and government officials were involved in the project from the beginning through the Coalition, and were part of the project's steering committee.
- The message was also well received in the press, receiving radio, tv, and print coverage – including a meeting with the Buffalo News editorial board.

* The final report, press release, and PowerPoint are all in the news section of www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition *

Meeting Focus

Some changes were made in the structure and focus of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition meetings, resulting in increased participation and some very productive and informative meetings.

First, the number of meetings was reduced. We went from five to four general meetings, with two subcommittee meetings expected in between each general meeting. So, whereas in past years the total number of meetings a member was asked to attend was 12 or 13, in 2007 it was eight to 10. Some subcommittees – notably Tourism & Culture – did meet more often, but only because they were directing two of our main efforts this year.

As for the general meetings, it was decided that less time would be devoted to discussing the subcommittee reports; members were asked to read the reports in advance, then devote time at the general meeting to approval items or major issues. More time was given to a particular meeting focus. Each subcommittee was asked to develop a program for one of the general meetings. These “Focus on...” topics became a highlight of the Coalition.

Our Focus on Tourism & Culture featured the Niagara University College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (who hosted the meeting), the NU Hospitality Training & Research Center, the new University at Buffalo Arts Management Program, and was keynoted by Professor Eddie Friel, the former head of Glasgow tourism who is currently in residence at NU.

Friel spoke about tourism in the new economy, and our particular strengths and challenges. Friel’s message to us is that we all need to learn how to win for Buffalo-Niagara, regardless of our individual organizations or borders. We need to be one team. The customer does not recognize our organizations or borders, and we all win if we work together after agreeing on a common strategy on how to move forward.

* Details of this meeting can be found in the 2/07 general meeting minutes at www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition *

The Focus on Economic Development featured the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) 2030 long range plan and the GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Program, and also touched on “Explore Buffalo Niagara 2007”, the effort to bring

executives from around the world to the region in an effort to get them to locate business here.

* Details of this meeting can be found in the 5/07 general meeting minutes at www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition *

The Focus on Transportation brought together a panel of experts to speak about cross border issues: shared border management, presented by Ron Reinas of the Peace Bridge Authority; cross border intermodal/freight , presented by Pat Whalen of the World Trade Center of Buffalo Niagara; and the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), as presented by Luke Rich of Rich Results and Tom Garlock of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission.

* Details of this meeting can be found in the 9/07 general meeting minutes at www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition *

The Focus on Government Affairs focused on “The Golden Horseshoe” of Buffalo-Rochester-Toronto, as presented by Calamar President Kenneth Franasiak. Franasiak built on the global trade idea set down in the September intermodal discussion by speaking of global trends and what is needed for our region to be competitive in the future; the key being to link with Toronto and Rochester into one region for trade and resources.

* Details of this meeting can be found soon in the 12/07 general meeting minutes at www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition *

The Big Easy in Buffalo

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition, Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Music Is Art received a grant from the New York State Music Fund to fund a series of eight programs between April 2007 and February 2008. Musicians and bands from New Orleans and Louisiana are being brought in for educational programs at local schools and related institutions during the day, followed by a ticketed concert that evening. Proceeds from the concerts will be used to purchase instruments to be donated to public schools in Buffalo and Niagara Falls. We are connecting artists who have poignant stories of survival and success through music with children in similar situations. Each program features a unique genre of music.

There are four distinct benefits to this project – 1) Music education programs on the days of the events, 2) Donation of instruments to Buffalo and Niagara Falls public schools, 3) Exposure to the unique and significant music and culture of New Orleans, and 4) Employment of New Orleans musicians, many of whom are still experiencing the negative effects of Hurricane Katrina.

The series announcement took place March 19, 2007. Our first event was April 17 themed around the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Programs will follow until February 2008. The final concert in February will be a Mardi Gras jam festival. Instrument purchase and distribution will occur after the conclusion of the programs.

The series so far:

April 17 / Ellis Marsalis Trio feat. Jason Marsalis, Joe Krown / Modern Jazz / Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts, Enterprise Charter School / UB Center for the Arts.

May 10 / Pine Leaf Boys / Cajun / Niagara Falls High School / The Tralf.

June 14 / the subdudes / Roots Rock / Waterfront School / The Tralf.

September 13 / Jon Cleary & The Absolute Monster Gentlemen / Funk / City Honors / The Tralf.

November 16 / Terrance Simien & The Zydeco Experience / Zydeco / South Davis Elementary (Orchard Park) / The Tralf.

December 6 / Preservation Hall Jazz Band "Creole Christmas" / Traditional Jazz / 600 students from 5 schools at UBCFA / UB Center for the Arts.

Still to come:

January 11, 2008 / Eric Lindell / Blues / West Seneca West Middle / The Tralf.

February 1, 2008 / Mardi Gras Jam feat. Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Papa Grows Funk, Joe Krown Organ Combo, Cyril Neville, Papa Mali, Big Chief Monk Boudreaux Mardi Gras Indian, Buffalo's Great Train

Robbery, and student battle of the bands winner / 4 schools tba / Town Ballroom.

To date approximately 1000 students have participated in performances, workshops, and master classes with the artists, and around 2000 concertgoers have heard music otherwise unavailable to them. These artists have also visited throughout the community – everywhere from the Colored Musicians Club to Gigi's to the Guitar Center. Further, they (and we) have been interviewed in the Buffalo News, Artvoice, PM Buffalo, WBFO, and Buffalo Spree.

Clearly, three of the deliverables of the grant will be rousing successes. The instrument donation, however, will need a concerted effort to reach its goals. We need to raise sponsors and matching donations in order to fulfill the grant. Please send any ideas to tkniazuk@ecidany.com

Launch of the Regional Coalition

Following the strategic planning effort in 2006, it was decided to retire the name Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership. After eight years, Niagara was put first. "Regional" was easy to retain, as it remains our focus. The group liked "Coalition" as it was more active and involved, and as we have grown we have become a collective of many organizations and individuals, whereas at its launch ENRP was primarily a partnership between the two county legislatures. The hyphen was simply dropped because nobody remembered to use it.

So, in February 2007 the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition was launched. Our website www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition was redesigned, and more of an effort to reach out to area leaders and the community at large was made. Invitations to our general meetings are sent to approximately 200, and over the course of the year we have had numerous elected officials, business leaders, and interested parties come to a meeting or request more information.

Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS)

In 2002 the then-ENRP convened a working group toward the goal of creating a one-stop shop for economic development. That group concluded that a regional economic development strategy was first needed. The Buffalo Niagara Partnership and Erie County Industrial

Development Agency offered to fund such a strategy, and the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth (ILGRG) was commissioned to write the REDS. This was to be a two year effort, with a final document in 2004. Two complimentary components were to be completed; a contextual piece on the new economy and our place in it, and a cluster analysis of emerging industry sectors on which we should be focusing.

In 2003 a draft of the contextual piece was written, and the clusters were identified. However, the ECIDA decided not to fund year two of the project and instead commission its own cluster analysis. The ILGRG, through Director John Sheffer and project manager James Allen, nonetheless continued the work and produced a fully formed contextual piece as well as a framework for the clusters. ENRP remained involved throughout as an advisor and participant.

This document has for the most part sat idle since the end of 2004, waiting for it to be determined how to complete the clusters, weave the two pieces together, release it, and implement the strategy. The ILGRG considered the ECIDA to be the "owner" of the work as they signed the original contract. In late summer of 2006 the ECIDA agreed to transfer stewardship of the REDS to ENRP, giving new life to a still much needed effort.

In 2007 the Coalition continued to push for completion and release of the document. One school of thought was to complete the clusters, integrate them into the completed contextual piece, and release it in total. The other school of thought was to release the context piece for comment, with the cluster work released as completed. The Buffalo Niagara Partnership engaged interns to work on the clusters, but it was not until the very end of the year that this work was shared with the Coalition. As such, co-chair Weinstein released the context piece to the media and to the Erie County Legislature in December 2007. Work will continue in 2008, as the Coalition remains committed to the need for the REDS.

Economic Development Infrastructure

In addition to the Regional Economic Development Strategy, the Coalition remains committed to other efforts to improve the way economic development is provided in the region through the further refinement of the infrastructure for delivery. Specifically, we continue to look for ways to implement the following:

- Small Business Assistance Website
- Electronic Permitting
- Framework for Regional Growth

In the case of the small business assistance website, the issue is simply money. It will take approximately \$26,800 to build, launch, advertise, and maintain the site for two years. We have applied for grants and sponsorships but have not yet been successful. Nevertheless, the need for the site remains. The site can be launched within four months of receipt of funding.

As for electronic permitting, the project for six municipalities is completed. The switch was ready to be flipped by the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth. Erie County, however, decided to put the program on their server (as they paid for development of the project). Due to the budget crisis it was never activated, as the county claimed it did not have the personnel to maintain it. We hope to work with the incoming county executive to make this project a reality.

The Framework for Regional Growth is a needed plan to coordinate development in the two counties. Niagara County is well on its way in terms of implementing of the principles of the Framework, including having a county planning board and integrating the Framework's principles into their county comprehensive plan. The Erie County Legislature has invited the Coalition to the table to be part of discussions as to how they should best implement the Framework, and we stand ready to continue this work in 2008.

Other Significant Efforts

In addition to the aforementioned, the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition continues its work on several other efforts, including:

- Cross border identification impact
- GBNRTC Freight study
- Niagara Falls International Airport
- Dedicated cultural funding
- Traffic signal coordination