

Niagara County provides support for businesses that are local, and those that are Amazon

I have always been a firm believer that, while government does not create jobs, it can play an important role in creating an environment to attract businesses and new investment. In Niagara County, we have always worked hard to promote ourselves as open and welcoming to businesses.



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

That begins with the great work done by our team at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development. The NCCED is comprised of both our county Department of Economic Development, led by Commissioner Mike Casale, and our Industrial Development Agency, led by Executive Director Sue Langdon.

The NCCED has been at the center of our efforts to attract the Amazon distribution warehouse to the Town of Niagara, and those efforts actually began more than a decade ago. Back then, the NCCED and its local partners, including the Town

of Niagara, submitted a shovel-ready application to Empire State Development for the now-future home of Amazon on Lockport Road. The application was thoroughly vetted by numerous agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; and the New York state

departments of Environmental Conservation, Agriculture and Markets, and Transportation. Following that rigorous process, which included public hearings, the site was designated a Build-Now NY Shovel Ready Certified Site in August of 2012.

This designation is important because it allows communities to do a lot of the legwork upfront on a potential development site, working through the necessary regulatory process, and, when complete, sends a message to the development community that the site is ready to go. That was a major part of the pitch to the

developer working for Amazon.

The Amazon project represents a \$500 million investment in Niagara County, with 300 construction jobs and 1,000 permanent jobs with Amazon. Right now, the vacant piece of land yields about \$24,000 in taxes. That means, over 15 years, that property would yield \$360,000. Over the next 15 years, the Amazon project will yield \$49 million in payments to local governments. Clearly, this will have a major positive impact on our community.

Projects like Amazon lead many people to think the NCCED is there to only help large businesses, but that is not accurate. For example, earlier this year, the Niagara County Center for Economic Development launched the new Niagara County Façade Program (NCFP). The goal was to provide matching grants up to \$50,000 for eligible small businesses to rejuvenate the exteriors of their properties while helping bring vibrancy to business districts in communities across the county.

The legislature initially allocated \$3 million for the program through the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The thinking behind the program was that, in each community across the county, there are many small, local businesses that serve as the commercial hub. These were often the small businesses that were hit particularly hard by the pandemic, which had to close when "big box" retailers stayed open and had to use any resources available just to stay afloat. This left them with little money for capital upgrades. We believed the NCFP could help fill that gap.

Well, the response was beyond expectations. More than 200 businesses across the county applied for funding. There were so many great projects that the legislature allocated another

\$2.2 million, bringing our total commitment to \$5.2 million, so we could fund as many as possible. Many of these projects got underway this summer, and most should be completed by the end of the year.

The NCFP is just one example of the great work done by our team at the NCCED. The best place to start learning about what they have to offer is their website, niagaracountybusiness.com. This is a repository of a tremendous amount of information about incentive programs, events, latest news and so on. I also encourage any business or budding entrepreneur to reach out to the NCCED staff at 716-278-8750, as they are always available to answer your questions, discuss your plans and offer their advice and guidance.

Despite challenges, agriculture among most resilient state industries in pandemic

SUBMITTED BY THE OFFICE OF NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER THOMAS DINAPOLI

Agriculture in New York state paid close to \$1 billion in wages and produced roughly \$3.3 billion in gross domestic product in 2021, according to a report by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. The sector has proved to be among the most resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic, losing just 1% of jobs in 2020 compared to the statewide annual employment loss of 8.7%. Both employment and wages in the farming sector grew in 2021 to reach new highs of 23,868 employees and \$970.2 million in wages.

"Agriculture supports jobs and communities throughout New York," DiNapoli said. "In addition to the growth in employment and wages in the sector, local farms contributed to the food security in their communities during the COVID pandemic, as disrupted supply chains left shelves empty in many places. Agriculture, particularly the family farm, is vital to New York's health and economy. Many of our farms face significant chal-

lenges to their bottom line, making it important for the state to ensure that this sector continues to thrive."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, milk is the state's largest agricultural commodity, ranking fifth nationally in sales. New York is also among the top producers of many other products, including other dairy products, apples, maple syrup, wine and grapes, and roughly 9% of the state's agricultural receipts come from crops grown for animal feed. According to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, there are over 33,000 farms in New York, with nearly 23% of the total land area in agricultural use.

DiNapoli's report noted much of the income earned on farms recirculates back into the farmer's community. In addition to local taxes and the wages paid for farm workers, this includes supporting a variety of local businesses and services, making farming an engine of their local economies.

Back to school focus this year is on overcoming learning gaps due to pandemic

SUBMITTED BY THE NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

As school districts in New York begin the new school year, more than three-quarters (77%) plan on spending COVID-19 recovery funding they received from the federal government to address the impact of the pandemic on students, particularly learning gaps due to interrupted instruction, according to an analysis by the New York State School Boards Association.

"School districts are still finding their footing after two-and-a-half years of the pandemic," NYSSBA Executive Director Robert Schneider said. "The federal funding that schools have received from the American Rescue Plan and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Plan, along with state foundation aid funding, will go a long way toward addressing many of the un-

intended consequences brought on by school closures and remote learning."

Much of the focus of federal ARP-ESSER funding will be on low-income students, children with disabilities, English language learners and homeless students. A little more than 72% of districts plan on offering summer, afterschool and other extended learning and enrichment programs, while 72% plan to implement strategies to meet students' social, emotional, mental health and academic needs.

The 2022-23 school year is the second of three years in which school districts may spend their federal funding. ARP allowed them to spread their use of federal funding over three school years, beginning in 2021-22 and ending in the 2023-24 school year. School districts in New York must spend their funding on non-recurring expenses in any of nine

broad areas outlined by state lawmakers. NYSSBA analyzed plans submitted to the State Education Department by 668 school districts across the state.

Smaller percentages of school districts also plan on using at least part of their federal funding in 2022-23 on safely returning students to in-person instruction (45%), purchasing education technology (43%) and maximizing in-person instructional time (32%). About one in six districts (16%) are using their additional funding to support early childhood education.

The New York State School Boards Association represents more than 670 school boards and more than 5,200 school board members in New York. NYSSBA provides advocacy, training and information to school boards in support of their mission to govern the state's public schools.

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