

Albany needs to start listening

Last week, I had the honor to deliver the annual State of the County address to the Niagara County Legislature. As part of my remarks, I discussed how policies being driven by New York state are fundamentally changing the relationship between state and local governments, and not in a good way. This column is an abbreviated version of my remarks.

There is a famous quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson that says, "The government closest to the people serves the people best." In these few words, Jefferson made a strong commentary on the importance of allowing local communities to govern themselves free from the overreach and intrusion of big, centralized government.

Indeed, I believe Niagara County government truly represents what our community wants. For, while we are a very diverse community comprised of three distinct urban centers, farmland as far as the eye can see, bustling suburban communities filled with

families and, of course, home to a great Wonder of the World, we share very common interests.

We are united in a sense of purpose, of wanting to see a prosperous Niagara County that provides services people need, that is fiscally prudent and that respects people's freedom AND the idea that we are all intertwined for the common good. Yet, when I talk so proudly about our great county, I also feel tremendous unease about our future, namely because it seems like control of that future is being taken away from us, bit by bit, by policies emanating from the State of New York.

It seems every day, there is a new example of how the state has enacted some policy or made some decision that completely tramples on home rule. There is

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

a complete disregard for the fact that certain areas of governance are supposed to be left to localities to decide.

Consider how we have been battling solar projects that completely run over all historical precedent that zoning is a power that is held by local governments. Whole communities have built a way of life, a culture, a local vibe if you will, that the state now says doesn't matter.

We say, put these solar projects on brownfields, landfills, industrial sites. We say the state constitution says you must preserve farmland. We say residents don't want this. We say some faceless state agency should not be empowered to simply wave their magic wand and determine all local rules and ordinances are too burdensome and brush them away. And Albany says too bad.

We say the Second Amendment rights of our residents need to be respected. We say the state legislation that severely limits where a legal pistol permit holder can carry their gun is blatantly

unconstitutional. We say we have no issue with responsible gun owners carrying their firearms in public places. And Albany says too bad.

We say that agriculture is important to us, and the policies you are pursuing are going to further erode farms that already are up against it. We say it's outrageous that a board charged with determining overtime rules and pay for farmworkers has a majority that have no understanding of farm economics. And Albany says too bad.

We say your climate plan ignores the realities of Western New York winters. We say the electric grid can't handle the demand. We say the December blizzard just proved it, and that even the state's own Climate Plan recognizes the need for multiple energy sources. And once again, Albany is saying too bad.

There used to be a time when unfunded state mandates were the bane of our existence. And trust me, they are still bad. The governor's proposed budget

could create an immediate \$6 million hole in Niagara County's budget. This is unconscionable but, Albany, again, does not want to listen.

All of this together is not a recipe for building a unified future for the Empire State. We must acknowledge that different regions of the state have different needs, different wants and different priorities, and those differences should be embraced. It is time for upstate counties to speak with a single voice and demand that our concerns be addressed, that our voices be heard, and that balance be restored between state and local government.

Let me end by saying that I believe we can restore that balance. But that means all the dialogue on these issues cannot be in one direction, with Albany speaking at us, not with us. I believe that if we can hit reset on some of these issues, and local governments can be included in the debate and decision-making, we can achieve much better outcomes for all New York residents.

Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce: Your one-stop-shop for event planning

It's the first week of March, but the Chamber is busy planning out the festival and event season, which runs weekly from June through the end of the year! We are lucky to have a full summer of events and things to do. Not only does our Chamber keep track of the major festivals and events in our area, but we also have an online community calendar that features everything from Historical Association meetings to live music at area restaurants.

The community calendar of events found at www.NiagaraRiverRegion.com includes meetings, programs, events and festivals from businesses and organizations all over Niagara County. We print an extensive listing of major events and festivals that happen in our region called "Come and Play in our Backyard." The printed edition (25,000 copies)

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Jennifer Pauly
President

will be available at the end of April.

If you have a program or event that you would like listed, send over the information to Chamber@NiagaraRiverRegion.com, or give the office a call at 716-754-9500.

The calendar information has helped our businesses plan their staffing, promotions and hours of operation. Knowing when the larger festivals happen has also helped in the planning of smaller events and programs. Our staff has the general knowledge of what is happening in our community and can help you find dates that do not conflict. Some of the major events in our region have had a shelf life of over 50 years! They have become traditions!

We are grateful to the organizers that bring events to the region. It's not an easy task and

requires months if not a year of planning. They help bring visitors and traffic to generate revenue for the businesses, as well as sales tax revenue for the county, towns and villages.

There are several festivals and events that close down street access, resulting in detours, have limited parking, or cause traffic delays.

2023 Schedule

- √ Artpark events – visit www.artpark.net for schedule
- √ May 29 – Memorial Day parade
- √ June 17-18 - Lewiston GardenFest
- √ June 22 – YBPA Here Comes Summer Street Dance & Car Cruise
- √ July 4 – Fireworks
- √ July 12-15 – Porter Cup Golf Tournament
- √ Aug. 12-13 – Lewiston Art-Fest
- √ Aug. 25-26 – Northwest Jazz Festival
- √ Sept. 7-10 – Lewiston Ki-

wanis/Niagara County Peach Festival

√ Sept. 23-24 – Lewiston Harvest & Hops Festival

√ Dec. 1-3 – Christmas Walk & Parade

For a full listing, visit www.NiagaraRiverRegion.com and click the News/Events tab. From there, you can find information on major events and also a link to the community calendar.

Lew-Port High School to host first career expo

Volunteers sought to participate in program

Lewiston-Porter High School has put out the call for participants to be a part of its first career expo for students. The event will be held from 1:15-2:40 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, on the school's Creek Road campus.

Nicole Alonzo, business teacher at Lewiston-Porter High School, said an important objective for the business education department is to provide students with real-world exposure to college and career opportunities available following graduation. The high school offers career and financial management, which Alonzo calls "a valuable first step in introducing students to the world of work."

Through this event, students from ninth through 12th grade will have an opportunity to speak one-on-one with individuals in a

variety of occupations and career pathways in the hopes of sparking an interest or answering questions regarding a budding career choice."

Lewiston-Porter is looking for volunteers to participate in the following areas:

- √ Individuals from any career background, currently working or retired, who are interested in talking to students about their work experiences;
- √ Trade workers or organizations to discuss the benefits of skills-based training and occupations;
- √ Military personnel who can talk with students about the process of joining the U.S. armed services; and
- √ College representatives who would like to present their institu-

tions' academic offerings to students.

Participants will man stations in the high school gymnasium with other professionals in a similar career area. Students will move from station to station to ask questions, listen to career stories, and learn from current and former professionals in the field.

Interested individuals who would like to participate should visit the career expo page on the Lewiston-Porter website (<https://www.lew-port.com/page/13217>). Click on the "Register Now" button to sign up. Registrants will receive additional information via email closer to the event.

For more information, contact Alonzo at nalonzo@lew-port.com.

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NiagaraCounty Tribune/ Sentinel February 17 - March 31