



Otsego Now Regional Workforce Training Center: Fact Sheet

The Problem

Otsego County has a long history of sluggish growth compared with other parts of the state. For example, Otsego County's population fluctuated between 46,000 and 52,000 for 130 years. Even after the population increased after the 1960s, it has hovered for decades between 56,000 and 62,000. By way of comparison, the population of Erie County (the western terminus of the Erie Canal in Buffalo) grew steadily, peaking at 1,113,000 during the 1970s.

The lack of investment in Otsego County that came about as a result of its location well outside of the primary trade routes of 19th century New York has left an unfortunate legacy of lasting economic torpor, population stagnation, low wages, and diminished standards of living. And that lack of investment continues into the present: only 97 building permits have been issued countywide over the past two years.

One result of this economic stagnation has been that good jobs are fewer in Otsego County than elsewhere in the state. Private sector wages here are 12% lower than they are in Erie County (Buffalo), 19% lower than in Onondaga County (Syracuse), and 20% lower than in Monroe County (Rochester). Per capita income in Otsego County remains less than 75% of statewide per-capita income, showing that wages here remain depressed.

The Solution

Clearly, an aggressive, coordinated approach that utilizes all tools for growing the local and regional economy must be implemented. The county is already home to many businesses, a significant public sector, several historic landmarks and many nationally known tourist destinations. It also boasts reputable institutions of higher education in Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta, as well as nearby SUNY Delhi and SUNY Cobleskill. Otsego Now can use these existing assets to begin the work of economic growth, while planning to market the region to new and expanding companies.

Newly implemented economic development strategies now give Otsego County the blueprint for revitalization and overall growth. Increasingly, economic development professionals are

recognizing that there are no incentives or financing packages that can make up to a business for the lack of skilled workers. That is why investment in the development of a workforce pipeline in support for entrepreneurship will be a key element in our region's resurgence. The Otsego Now Regional Workforce Training Center has been established to serve as the umbrella structure for this important initiative.

Otsego Now Regional Workforce Training Center

Boasting state-of-the-art technological capabilities, the Otsego Now Regional Workforce Training Center is located on the fifth floor of 189 Main Street in downtown Oneonta. The Center is an initiative of the County of Otsego IDA, with a mission to make connections with regional employers to assess their staffing needs, develop training programs to meet those needs, and market those programs in the community. Managers will be better able to staff their firms and area residents will be better able to find jobs that help them improve their standards of living.

With the help of grant funding from Empire State Development and a legislative grant secured by NY State Senator James Seward, the Center had been furnished and equipped with advanced educational technology. In addition, a grant secured through the NY State Office of Community Renewal has underwritten the Center's inaugural training programs. Initial training sessions scheduled at the Center will begin with the health care and manufacturing industry sectors, and will add hospitality, transportation and warehousing, and agribusiness in upcoming months.

For entry-level positions, the Center will focus on job readiness training combined with specific needs of employers. For some industries, the Center will offer hands-on training on-site at partner companies in apprentice-like arrangements. For other industries, trainees will spend more time in a traditional classroom setting, with the possibility of some hands-on work in those courses as well.

For the skilled positions, the Center will make use of existing partnerships with local educational institutions such as Otsego-Northern Catskill BOCES, SUNY Delhi, and others, to bring degree programs and non-degree certifications to the Center. One example currently taking shape through the Center is a workforce pipeline in Computer Science that includes programs at the high school career and technical education level, an Applied Associates Degree program, a post-AAS certificate program, and a four-year degree program. The end result will be a multi-tiered structure that can meet the needs of corporate IT departments at every level of expertise.

The Otsego Now Regional Workforce Training Center will play a critical role in the resurgence of the economy of the rural Mohawk Valley region. In launching a training center that is fully equipped with the latest smart technology, the Center will now be able to help employers meet their needs, while also helping workers and families meet their needs.