

**Message to the Legislature**

**March 15, 2011**

Good evening, Chairwoman Cornell, members of the Legislature, and those citizens from the public that have joined us here tonight. I am deeply honored to present to you, my partners in government, my 18<sup>th</sup> State of the County Address.

Traditionally, this Message is a time for us to review County government's progress in the previous year, and further its mission for the future. In light of this extraordinary moment in Rockland County and in government, a time unprecedented in my 18-year history here, we must find ways to *rebuild* the structure of government, *renew* our commitment to it, and *reconnect* with the people we are here to serve.

Before looking forward, tonight, I'd like to take a moment to revisit some of the milestones this administration has achieved during my tenure as your County Executive, and talk briefly about how these accomplishments have shaped Rockland, and have indeed laid foundation for this County's future as we rise to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

As only the second County Executive to serve Rockland, following my esteemed predecessor, the late John Grant, I am grateful that the people of this great County have granted me the honor of leading Rockland for the past 18 years, and watching it grow into a community second to none in New York State. Although Rockland may be the smallest county geographically, it has emerged as a giant in our great State, in both stature and accomplishment.

## A Rockland County retrospective

Here are some of the proudest highlights of my career as your County Executive:

- As promised in my first State of the County address, we implemented **Total Quality Management** through Employee Recognition, continuous improvement and multi-disciplinary quality teams
- We **consolidated one-third** of all County Departments and **reduced staffing levels by ten-percent** since 1994
- Reduced the County's welfare roll by **65-percent**
- Completed **Comprehensive Plans** for Rockland's future
- Preserved **1,200 acres of open space**
- Saved **three of Rockland's farms**
- Created **ten new county parks**
- Built **five new county buildings**, including our Courthouse and the "green," LEEDS-certified Technology Building at Rockland Community College
- **Cut Property taxes seven years in row**, thereby reducing the county tax rate by 48-percent – at \$1.37, the **second-lowest property tax rate** in New York State
- Created the **Rockland County Board of Historic Preservation** to review development plans and preserve Rockland's landmarks
- Created **2,389 units of affordable housing**
- Created the region's **first local VA Clinic**, which grew from providing services to 200 vets to more than 6, 000 annually
- Implemented **\$14.5 million in drainage improvements** throughout the County
- **Tobacco cessation programs** achieved record statewide results
- Created **21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools**

- Created **Sheriff Intelligence Unit, Marine Unit, Computer Crime Unit and REACT Anti-Terrorism) Unit**
- Lobbied successfully for **statewide cap on Medicaid** growth for counties
- Created Rockland's **Civil Rights Hall of Fame**
- Provided more than **\$10 million** for the revitalization of **Spring Valley** and **Haverstraw**
- Added approximately **10,800 jobs** to Rockland's business and economic base
- Initiated an award-winning **GIS mapping system**
- Rockland is one of only two Counties in New York State that has fully implemented an **e-Procurement purchasing system**, with 58-percent of all purchases made from our e-Procurement catalogs
- Initiated a state of the art **Alzheimer's floor** at **Summit Park Hospital**

I take great pride in these and in all the accomplishments we have achieved in County government in the past 18 years. We took bold steps. We thought anew. We fulfilled our pledge to the people of Rockland County to walk upon new ground. We are a force to be reckoned with, now and in the future of New York State.

Now let us find new and innovative ways to rebuild, renew and reconnect to government not only as leaders, but also as architects of our own destiny - and of our County's future.

### **Rebuilding County Government's Infrastructure**

A solid foundation for any government cannot be laid without sound fiscal planning. This administration has benefited from stewardship and financial expertise of H. Chris Kopf, who has sat at the helm of our Finance and Budget Departments for the past ten years. His insight, knowledge, and innovative thinking have helped lead Rockland County through unprecedented challenges, including the uncertainty of this current financial

crisis. Chris's foresight and leadership has helped us navigate these turbulent economic waters and not only survive this financial storm, but plan to emerge on solid ground, a better and stronger County fiscally.

While it is true that 2010 left us with an unexpected \$3-5 million operating deficit, we bore up as a government and did not raise property taxes or expect our taxpayers to pick up the slack. Rather, we bore up as a government, using every measure at our disposal to reduce expenses and provide the same level of service to the people of this County without turning to them to foot the bill. I am very proud to once again report to you tonight, members of the Legislature, that in shouldering this difficult task together and, at \$1.37, Rockland's tax rate remains the **SECOND LOWEST of all 62 Counties in New York State**.

Despite current economic conditions, we saw an eight-percent increase in sales tax revenue in the last quarter of 2010 – the largest single sales tax revenue increase Rockland County has seen in three years. And, in spite of numerous headlines to the contrary, our Moody's rating came in at MG1 last month, the day, not coincidentally, on Chris Kopf's last day – the highest rating a County can receive for short-term borrowing. As a result of that rating, we were able to bond more than \$100 million at the lowest interest rates possible this month, saving significant taxpayer money.

These early signs of financial rejuvenation can lead us to one inevitable, yet cautiously optimistic conclusion – due in part to sound fiscal projections and foresight, *Rockland County's economy has turned the corner*.

Even as dysfunctional Albany continues to force the bitter taste of poor financial planning and management down the throats of increasingly vulnerable county governments, I am proud to say that Rockland has weathered this financial storm far better than many other Counties across New York. Yet the mandates increase, with the threat of trickle-down effects of a State property tax cap looming on the horizon. At the top of that growing list of mandates is the state Medicaid program.

While many of the state's Medicaid Redesign Task Force recommendations will be implemented over time by the New York State Department of Health, the financial impact to our county remains elusive. No doubt many of the recommendations will begin to reign in some of the runaway costs of the programs, the overall two-percent cuts in rates and the global spending cap, along with the recommended shift to Managed Care, will likely change our budgetary assumptions this year and next.

On the other hand, what is most disturbing is the proposal to cap property taxes at two-percent and the failure of the Mandate Relief Task Force to provide any roadmap as to how counties would be relieved of the nine mandates which, on average, account for 90-percent of Counties' statewide property tax levy. Without true mandate relief, counties across the state will be thrown into utter financial turmoil. As an example, in Rockland County, with 110-percent of our property tax going to Medicaid, the annual increase (capped) of three-percent will immediately place us in a financially untenable position were a two-percent tax cap to be place.

With fiscal control and management as much necessity as a priority for this administration in the coming year, we have and will continue to partner with the members of this Legislature and our representatives in Albany to build bipartisan relationships and create the critical economic relief so important to our taxpayers

Certainly, we are not out of the woods yet. Yes, we must continue to be vigilant and find ways to cut costs. We must continue to fight the wave of mandates that continue to come down from Albany. But we as a County have done more than survived the worst of this economic maelstrom – we have grown, and become the better for it. And we will continue to do so.

We cannot, however, act alone in this endeavor. Our unions, which have served County government and its people with such steadfast loyalty, must do their part to contribute to this effort. Any call to streamline services and make them more cost-effective and

efficient **MUST INCLUDE OUR UNIONS**. They must reinvest in their own communities by sharing in the sacrifices made by government and the public. Tonight, we ask this Legislature to join us in a renewed appeal to our unions to join us in our effort to keep the cost of government from overwhelming our residents. We cannot do this alone. We in service to the people can and must present a unified front and a renewed commitment to reduce the size and expense of government. We need the cooperation of our unions to accomplish this goal. We all have made sacrifices, and must continue to do so. Our unions should not be an exception. Tonight, we ask for their cooperation and commitment to the Rockland County community in which we all live and work.

This administration has already taken several significant steps to fulfill that commitment in 2011. In these still volatile times, a financial reserve is not only prudent, but also necessary. We sent a resolution to this Legislature in January to sweep expenditure accounts by \$2.5 million across all County departments and put that money into the contingency fund. With the cooperation and foresight of this Legislature and as protection against a still tentative economy, we now have a total of \$5.5 million in both contingency and sales tax reserve funds.

Our Capital Projects Budget is under constant review, and has been reduced by 11-percent since last year. And, due to the hard work of Paul Brennan and his Purchasing Department, we have combined the County's contracts for natural gas into a single Request For Proposal (RFP) to be issued this summer, which should result in lower gas prices. Our Purchasing Department has also taken on the role of Lead Agency in two cooperative bids with the Hudson Valley Municipal Purchasing Group in order to implement a bulk buying policy that will save this County and other municipalities even more taxpayer dollars on supplies and services.

Although government has taken these and other measures to decrease spending and streamline services, we must ask our community partners and not-for-profit service providers to join us in this effort. In my address to this Legislature last year, we introduced the Contract Agency Review Task Force (CARTF). Led by Paul Brennan and

including representatives from several of Rockland's business and not-for-profit organizations, this committee was tasked to review current policies and develop a strategy to reduce operating expenses and consolidate services provided by Rockland County's vital not-for-profit agencies, which received more than \$5.4 million in County funding in 2011. The CARTF report, which I have submitted to you, Chairwoman Cornell, contains the following significant and timely recommendations:

- **Establish a pre-determined funding pool** based on a percentage of the County budget, property taxes or other set method
- Develop a **formal evaluation process** for funding applications
- **Review eligibility criteria** and revise accordingly to help **eliminate duplication of services**
- Require, among other measurable accountability standards, **quarterly reports and annual on-site audits** of contract agencies
- Require **set ratio of private fundraising dollars to grant dollars** applied for
- Set aside a portion of annual CA funding pool to provide **fiscal management and fundraising training** for contract agencies funded by the County

While we place a premium on the critical and needed services these organizations provide to our community, we must, in this uncertain economic climate, scrutinize and re-evaluate the methodology by which they are funded. I believe these suggestions create a template for a new, formalized policy for funding our not-for-profit agencies. They provide greater accountability and standards for measuring outcomes that will not only enable government to distribute funding in a more fair and adequate manner, but will also assist our contract agencies in increasing efficiencies, becoming self-sufficient, and collaborating with county government and one another as service partners in our community. I ask of you again tonight, Chairwoman Cornell and members of this Legislature, to consider adopting the policies recommended in this report by the Contract Agency Review Task Force, further refining how County government provides services through its community partners – and increasing the effectiveness with which it manages taxpayer dollars.

### **Public Benefit Corporation – Ensuring a Continuum of Care**

The fulfillment of this administration's pledge to cut costs while maintaining quality service to our constituents hangs in the balance this evening, as this legislative body is faced with the critical decision of whether to adopt the Home Rule request for the Public Benefit Corporation (PBC) included in this year's budget.

Chairwoman Cornell, as you have so effectively emphasized with your "Aging in Place" initiative, Rockland's seniors rely on our vision and planning to help ease their transition into old age. The need for acute, long-term care in Rockland and the region has increased, and the census at the Summit Park Hospital and Care Center bears that out – the beds at the Hospital are full. In fact, due to outreach efforts by Commissioner Richard Maloney and his staff, referrals to Summit Park have increased, and now come in from other medical facilities around the region, including Westchester, Poughkeepsie and Newburgh. Our senior citizens and chronically ill residents need us, and we must be there. By ratifying the PBC, you will have made the commitment to a plan of action that will provide our County's rapidly growing senior population with critically needed care, while reducing the financial burden on our taxpayers.

Some say the creation of the PBC will divert from Summit Park Hospital and Nursing Care Center's primary mission to provide quality long-term care to our elderly and indigent; rather, it is evidence of our renewed commitment to fulfill that mission in the best, most efficient and caring way possible. It does not mean that plans to build a new, state of the art health care facility will now be scrapped; the Certificate Of Need (CON) granted by New York State in 2008 could transfer to that new partnership. Indeed, the creation of the PBC will give us the mechanism – and the freedom - to operate within the framework of health care rules and regulations that ensure quality healthcare, without being restricted by the confines of government.

Furthermore, creation of this PBC into law should not be interpreted by anyone, public official, employee or resident alike, as an indication that we have either abandoned or disregarded our dedicated workforce. We have a tremendous loyalty to the employees of this County. The implementation of the PBC could give the workers of Summit Park an opportunity to provide an increased level of service to the patients in their care, and, should they avail themselves of it, the chance to make our hospital and nursing home the standard for quality health care in Rockland County, and throughout New York State. Our most fragile population must have the resources of this County to depend on, and the creation of the PBC ensures that they will have the safety net they so desperately need.

However, we face some difficult choices to make up for an \$18 million revenue shortfall if you do not adopt the Home Rule request for the PBC tonight. In addition to placing the future of the Summit Park Hospital and Nursing Care Facility in jeopardy, we as a government will be faced with a combination of tax increases, layoffs, elimination of services and furloughs that could severely impair this County government's ability to function and meet the needs of our residents.

Possibilities include an increase of one-quarter percent in the County portion of our sales tax; an increase of one-quarter percent in our County mortgage tax; and the creation of a three-percent room tax imposed on Rockland's hotels and motels, which has long been opposed by our struggling business community. We must consider the complete elimination of certain County departments and vital programs, including Homeland Security and law enforcement.

If you do not adopt the Home Rule request for the PBC tonight, we must also consider a 30-day annual furlough for every County employee, starting in June. While this would make up for the revenue shortfall, it would mean six full weeks without salary for every member of a workforce already overburdened by reductions in staff. I believe you would agree that it would become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to bolster the moral of our dedicated employees if they had to take an 11.5-percent cut in pay while many, just like the people we serve, are struggling to make ends meet.

The PBC is not merely a fiscal device; it is as much the fulfillment of an obligation to the quality of life of our sick and elderly, as it is our renewed commitment to a productive and vital County government and to the people that work here.

The PBC is not about numbers; it is, first and foremost, about people – our elderly, our taxpayers and employees alike. I believe we have found a way to alleviate the burden of the cost of government while still fulfilling one of government’s primary missions – to provide quality care for those who can no longer care for themselves. And it gives us a chance not only to keep our valuable workforce intact, but to enhance their contribution to our residents, and to our Rockland County community as a whole. It is my hope that you, too, share that belief and act on it by ratifying the Home Rule request for the PBC tonight.

Good government should always put people first, and that includes the people that work in public service. This administration has relied on the expertise and institutional knowledge of many of its loyal employees, some of whom have dedicated most of their professional careers to County government. With the cooperation of this Legislature and with the goal of achieving reducing staff and saving taxpayer dollars, we instituted three Early Retirement Incentives in the past four years, and saw more than 500 longtime County government employees leave service. Rockland County is fortunate to have one of the most dedicated and hardworking workforces in the state, and many of those who were the backbone of that workforce are no longer part of this administration.

Financially, we reached our goal in achieving salary and benefit reductions in the past three years, with the largest portion of that amount, \$14.5 million, saved through last year’s ERI. I would like to take this time to thank the Department of Personnel, the Departments of Budget and Finance, and the Department of Law for their expertise in seeing us through this difficult transition.

While reducing personnel expenses was critical to avoid layoffs and to the survival of County government in these difficult economic times, what we lost in knowledge and experience cannot be replaced.

But every crisis affords an opportunity to think anew, and in our vulnerabilities, we often discover our greatest strengths. While we acknowledge the loss of many of these valuable employees, we now have a chance to rethink and reorganize County government. Downsizing and consolidating government has long been a goal of this administration, and we must now redesign this government and, with the continued hard work of our public servants, recommit to service so that we can function at our best.

Seventeen years ago, I stood before this body and quoted from an essay on total quality leadership written by my friend and colleague, then-Deputy County Executive, James Hennessy:

*“The quality process is an ethical, serving system which encourages leaders to develop, inspire and empower the right people, individually and in teams, to do the right things right, the first time at the right time.”*

This is the right time, and those who remain to do the people’s work have demonstrated an inherent commitment to total quality leadership. Consider what we said 17 years ago: *through attrition over the course of years and through careful review of all government, we can accomplish our goals of reducing the size of government, and simultaneously make it leaner and more cost-effective.* I can say with confidence that we have accomplished those goals. I can also state that the services we provide every day to the residents of Rockland County have remained consistent, thanks to the steadfast determination of our workers who have stepped up admirably to fill the gaps left by their peers.

Despite a significant loss of personnel, I’d like to highlight just a few of the accomplishments of our County Departments in this past year:

- The Highway Department increased its road resurfacing campaign rating in 2010, with 98-percent of County roads resurfaced or rebuilt, and 95-percent of our roads rated “excellent”– all without going over budget. I must mention that this past winter was the worst we’ve witnessed in Rockland County since 1996, and despite losing key staff, Skip Vezzetti and his team have done a remarkable job keeping our roads safe and clear, despite extreme weather conditions.
- Under the directorship of Marianne McCarney-Haesche, the Youth Bureau Americorps Program provided a total of 19,640 hours of service to non-profit agencies, schools and municipalities in Rockland County.
- Paul Piperato, our County Clerk, Deb Vobroucek and his staff expanded the Return the F.A.V.O.R. veterans countywide discount program, in partnership with my staff and Jerry Donnellan and the County’s Veterans Services Agency. I am very proud to tell you tonight that a total of 275 County businesses now offer 2,000 Rockland vets discounts as a thank you for their service through this highly successful outreach program, and 18 Counties across New York State have emulated our Return the F.A.V.O.R model. We hope it will serve as a model for a national discount program for all our veterans who so loyally serve their country.
- Karen Cassa and the Insurance Department saved more than \$50,000 in liability insurance premiums in 2010, and saved an additional \$86,000 annually in Worker’s Compensation rates.
- The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services recognized Kathy Tower-Bernstein, our new Director of Probation, and the work of her staff as a model for best practices in New York State.
- Director June Molof and the Office for the Aging made 430 home visits to seniors to help them with handyman chores and minor household repairs, and provided

3,426 rides using taxi vouchers to medical appointments for seniors throughout Rockland. The OFA also provided 35,322 hours of homecare to help Rockland's older adults remain safely in their homes and out of nursing homes, through its Expanded In-Home Service for the Elderly program.

- Sue Sherwood and the Department of Social Services served 13,274 eligible families with Food Stamps last year, an increase of 19.2 –percent over 2009. The workers at DSS, which are operating at diminished staffing levels, also helped 22 displaced families find permanent housing, and placed 117 single adults in permanent homes. DSS's Medicaid caseload also increased in 2010, with staff serving 27,385 cases and 57,845 individuals with Medicaid benefits.
- Thanks to the hard work of the staff at the County's Planning Department, the Rockland County GIS Portal was honored with the prestigious GeoSpatial Leadership Award for Public Enterprise from *GeoWorld Magazine* at 2010's annual GeoTec Conference in Ontario.
- Dr. Joan Facelle and the staff at the Department of Health successfully worked with schools in Rockland County's school districts and convinced five of them to participate in the County's smoke-free car law initiative.
- Joe Abate's staff at the Rockland County Office of Community Development continued to assist the Villages of Haverstraw and Spring Valley with their downtown revitalization efforts, investing \$3.5 million and \$3.8 million of federal Housing and Urban Development funds in each project respectively.

The accomplishments I've singled out are just a few examples of the significant work County government does every day. Despite the challenge of staff reductions and reorganization in every department, our hardworking employees have taken on more than their share of the workload and continued to provide seamless, quality service to the people of Rockland County. Tonight, I ask you to join me in acknowledging that hard

work and thanking them publicly for all they do on behalf of our residents. As leaders, we must work together and reaffirm our pledge to our employees and to the people we serve, so that County government continues to function at its best and most efficient.

### **Renewing our Commitment to Service**

This current economic downturn provides us with another unique opportunity – the chance to look at the way we do business and restructure the methodology in which we achieve our goals.

Due in part to our economic development programs, Rockland County's unemployment rate continues to hold at one of the lowest in New York State. In January, Rockland's jobless rate was 7.4-percent, the third lowest in the state. In contrast, the national unemployment rate reached nine-percent in January of 2011, while the State unemployment rate rose to 8.3-percent.

Despite nearly a double-digit unemployment rate nationwide, Rockland-based business received more than 5,000 government contracts valued at more than \$137 million dollars.

Working with Ron Hicks and the staff of the Rockland Economic Development Corp., we established the Rockland Economic Assistance Corporation to provide a financing mechanism to support further growth and investment in our non-profit community. A sister agency to the IDA, the REAC has begun its first project, the Mental Health Association of Rockland's relocation to and renovation of their new location in Valley Cottage.

But the task to bring new businesses to Rockland and maintain our existing economic base was made more difficult by the elimination of significant business incentives. 2010 saw the departure of the highly successful Empire Zone Program (EZP), which provided benefits and tax incentives to attract new jobs and businesses across New York State. The inherent value of the Empire Zone Program to Rockland County's economic

development cannot be understated. Since Rockland's designation as an Empire Zone in 2006, the EZP certified 40 businesses, 24 of which were new to our community. Collectively, these businesses were projected to create over 1,600 new jobs, with investments of over \$190 million. In fact, in the first six months of 2010 alone, ten additional businesses were certified for EZP tax incentive benefits in Rockland. These ten new companies, six of which are manufacturers, are projected to create 473 new jobs in Rockland and invest over \$33 million in new construction and other capital and equipment purchases. Fortunately, these EPZ certified businesses are still eligible for the program's grandfathered benefits, increasing our chances of keeping them here in Rockland County.

With the State's phase-out of the EZP in June of 2010, we once again had to find a way to create opportunity where there was potential crisis. We saw the re-emergence of our local Industrial Development Agency (IDA), which once again became a significant tool in our efforts to foster economic development in Rockland.

The revitalization of the IDA in Rockland County also rejuvenated our economic development. In one of its largest projects in 2010, the IDA approved tax incentives for a new 131,000-square-foot FedEx Ground Transportation Center in Blauvelt. This \$43 million project is expected to create 62 new jobs here in Rockland County.

Other projects under the auspices of the Rockland County IDA in 2010 included:

- The renovation of the former Holiday Inn in Suffern to the new \$8 million Crowne Plaza Hotel, scheduled to open later this month, bringing with it 30 new jobs and retaining 70 existing jobs
- ADH Health Products, a Congers-based pharmaceutical manufacturer, is using \$5 million in tax exempt bond financing to significantly expand its manufacturing plant, retaining 60 jobs and creating 10 new jobs

- Wood-flooring manufacturer DER Specialty Products will locate in West Nyack, creating 18 new jobs.

Separate from the IDA, PAR Pharmaceuticals also expanded their operations in Chestnut Ridge, bringing 40 new jobs to Rockland from their operation in New Jersey.

To help stimulate continued job growth in Rockland, the County Office of Community Development will establish a Small Business Loan Assistance Program in 2011 to help fund the cost of applications for the creation and retention of low-income jobs. Grants of up to \$5,000 will be available to assist with application fees for Rockland County businesses. This new resource for creating and retaining lower-income employment will enhance and expand Rockland County's economic base, from the ground up.

Any discussion of Rockland County's economic development or resurgence must include mention of the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, with its sprawling campus and vital tax base in the heart of Orangetown. Although many local jobs were lost due to the manufacture's plans to relocate its consumer health division internationally, I am pleased to report to you tonight that Pfizer has continued to add new high-tech jobs to its employment roster. The company is also delayed its plans to relocate its biotech manufacturing operation, pushing the date of the move out until as late as 2018. This is good news on several levels – not only does it delay the closing of part of the company's Pearl River campus, but it may give us a chance to continue our discussions with Pfizer officials and convince them to remain here in Rockland, where they have thrived and been a community partner. In the words of Pfizer representatives themselves, "As one of the company's primary research sites and a central hub for vaccine and oncology research, the Pfizer Pearl River site remains well positioned in the Northeast corridor and will continue to play an important role in the science driving Pfizer's global R&D strategy."

To foster growth in the technological industry in Rockland, REDC co-founded BioHud Valley NY, an initiative designed to retain, expand and attract new biotech companies to the Lower Hudson Valley. Currently, there are 63 biotech firms in the Lower Hudson

Valley region, and we believe with the combined efforts of the REDC, Westchester County and the Hudson Valley Economic Development Corp., we can bring in even more. As one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, Pfizer could well serve as anchor to help draw other biotech companies to Rockland.

And to ensure that our businesses continue to operate in the event of a large-scale emergency, we partnered with Al Samuels of the Rockland Business Association (RBA) and the Business Network of Emergency Resources (BNET) to develop a new Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS). Rockland is the first County in the Hudson Valley to adopt the BNET credentialing system, which will allow rapid authorized access to affected worksites, minimizing downtime and economic loss to County businesses.

Once again, in spite of continued financial pessimism nationwide, we must view these advances as healthy signs of a rejuvenated economy, thanks in part to the partnership and collaboration of government and the private sector to ensure that our economic base not only survives, but thrives here in Rockland County.

As it did 17 years ago, the thread of public private partnerships and consolidation of services with the public sector is woven through the daily work of my administration and this County government. In order to ensure that our destiny and future is indeed of our own making here in Rockland County, we tasked our Department heads to enhance our service to the people, while increasing our outreach to the private business community.

Tonight, I am proud to detail some of the ways in which your County government collaborated with Rockland's businesses and community leaders to meet the challenges of an uncertain economy:

In 1994, I made a commitment to use Community Development funds to build affordable housing in Rockland, especially in Villages like Haverstraw and Spring Valley. Tonight, I am proud of the fact that my administration has participated in the construction of a total of 2,389 units of affordable housing throughout Rockland since I first took office. Last year alone, our Office of Community Development helped finance the construction

of 53 affordable family units of housing in Spring Valley. In 2011, 80 new units of affordable senior housing will be built as the third phase of construction at the Esther Gitlow Towers in Suffern. And in perhaps Rockland County's hallmark revitalization project for 2011, we have partnered with longtime community activist and businessman Howard Hellman, the Rockland Housing Action Coalition (RHAC) and the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC) to build 80 units of affordable senior housing for the redevelopment of the former Hyenga Lake housing project in the Village of Spring Valley. All these projects will enable our elderly population to continue to make their home here in Rockland County.

Additionally, our County Purchasing Department bought a total of 42-percent of its total \$105 million purchases in 2010 from Rockland County-based companies with its new "Buy Local" economic stimulus program, an increase of 10-percent over 2009.

And I am proud to announce tonight that the long-awaited Countywide Radio Project, which will allow our medical and fire first responders, police and municipalities to communicate more effectively during emergencies, will move forward in 2011. Thanks to the cooperation of our Sheriff, Jim Kralik, Gordon Wren and the staff at of the Fire and Emergency Services Department, RFPs will go out this month, with construction of a new Communications Center at the Fire Training Center in Pomona set to begin this Summer. Thanks are due to the members of this Legislature; to the County's Finance Department and Chris Kopf for his negotiating skills, and to the representatives of Motorola, Inc., who will build the infrastructure for this \$30 million project. With their cooperation, there will be no outlay of taxpayer dollars for the Radio Project until the year 2014. Because of this unique public/private partnership, we will be able to provide for the increased safety of our County and its residents in emergencies, while not placing the burden of the cost of this project's infrastructure on the backs of our taxpayers.

In yet another example of cooperation between governmental and private sectors, our Department of Mental Health, led by Commissioner Maryann Walsh-Tozer, will continue

to partner with officials and staff at the New York State Office of Mental Health, and the state's Department of Health to move both emergency and psychiatric inpatient mental health services from their present location at Summit Park Hospital to their new home at Nyack Hospital. The goal of this groundbreaking move, which is scheduled to take place early in 2012, is to optimize patient care and improve the cost-effectiveness of mental health services. Nyack Hospital was awarded an \$8 million HEAL grant from the state last October to renovate its facilities and construct an in-patient psychiatric unit, all designed to maximize "best practice," integrated mental health care and decrease in-patient admissions. We believe this partnership will do much to consolidate services and provide cost-effective, state of the art mental health care to our community.

On the environmental front, we continue to work with the appropriate New York State agencies, as well as with our public water suppliers, to solve the many questions surrounding our most precious natural asset, our County's water resources. Under the New York Public Service Commission's 2006 rate case, in which Rockland County participated actively as an intervener, UWNY was ordered to develop additional water capacity for our growing County. As the members of this Legislature are well aware, the subsequent PSC Order and Joint Proposal outlined the formal basis for not only how much the utility could charge for water, but also what steps it must take to ensure a safe and adequate water supply for our County and its residents. Determining what will comprise that additional supply is the source of much debate among governmental officials, environmental groups, and our citizenry.

Rest assured, our Department of Health, under the direction of Dr. Joan Facelle and led by Dr. Dan Miller, the Bureau Head of our Water Supply, and myself, continue to play an active role in determining the future of Rockland County's water. At present, the State Environmental Quality Review ACT (SEQRA) evaluation of United Water New York's (UWNY) proposed desalination plant in Haverstraw is underway, with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation serving as lead agency. The DEC clearly takes its role very seriously, and is examining the proposal in order to determine if it represents the best solution with the least environmental impact. To date, the plant's

Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has not yet been accepted by the DEC. The SEQRA process is designed to be impartial and thorough, and we have faith that it will take its due and proper course.

What we do believe is this: while water conservation and education are admirable goals that have been and will continue to be fully supported by my administration, conservation measures alone will not solve the problem of our increasingly fragile water supply. This idea is not new; in fact, extensive analysis of available data, including the recently completed United States Geological Survey (USGS) Water Study, coupled with the professional judgment of state, county, town and utility officials, concludes that conservation alone is not a feasible alternative. The facts bear this out: a new water supply is needed for Rockland County.

One possible alternative outlined in the recent USGS Study includes the enhanced treatment and indirect re-use of wastewater as a source of additional water supply for our County. In order for this alternative to be considered as viable, releases to New Jersey from our reservoir at Lake DeForest would have to be substantially reduced, with required downstream river flows being replaced by highly treated wastewater. My administration has led the fight to have the DEC reopen and revise the outmoded 1980 permit it issued to UNWY over 30 years ago. This alternative represents another potential option that we encourage the DEC to investigate thoroughly. As always, this option would require thorough review by our Health Department, the DEC, the PSC and the utility for safety, environmental concerns and cost-effectiveness, but it IS a possibility that can and should be evaluated as we consider options for increasing our water supply capacity. We cannot rule out any possible alternative when it comes to making one of the single most important decisions facing our County.

As your County Executive, I can assure this Legislature, our State officials and our residents alike that we will continue to be active and vigilant in our regulatory role to preserve and ensure a safe, reliable water supply for our residents - now, and for the future.

Preserving Rockland County's natural environment and resources is of paramount importance, and has long been a hallmark of my administration, I am pleased to report to you tonight that our 2006 joint acquisition of the Cropsey Farm will "bear fruit" this year. Well, organic vegetables, actually, but five of the 24-acre farmland will be used as active farmland for the first time since we preserved it under our Open Space Program nearly five years ago.

With the cooperation and partnership of Supervisor Alex Gromack and Allan Beers, the head of the County's Division of Environmental Resources, the Town of Clarkstown and the Rockland Farm Alliance (RFA) will implement a plan to return a portion of this community treasure, one of the last remaining farms in Rockland County, to active farmland. Under the direction of John McDowell, the RFA, a coalition of farmers, community groups and residents, received permission from Jim and Pat Cropsey to farm the land, bringing a "ground breaking" new agricultural model not only to the County, but possibly statewide. The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative will require that members buy shares priced at \$500 annually, and, in return, receive vegetables and other produce grown organically on the Cropsey Farm. I'm proud to report that of the 180 shares available, 100 have already been sold in anticipation of an initial spring 2011 planting.

This initiative becomes even more significant in light of the first reported decline in active farmland in New York State in four years, which many believe could not only hurt our economy, but also our environment. Figures collected by the New York Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture show there were 36,300 farms on 7 million acres in New York State last year, a drop from 36,600 farms on 7.1 million acres in 2009.\*

If this pilot program is successful, and we believe it will be, Allan and his staff hope to expand this farming initiative to the 28-acre, County-owned Erickson County Farm in Monsey next year. It's a wonderful tribute to our County's history, and a demonstration

of our commitment to the preserve Rockland's beautiful natural resources that, through this unique CSA program, we have returned to our farming "roots."

*\*Messenger Post Now online.com*

### **Reconnect with the people we serve**

As we revisit our past in order to protect and preserve our great County for the future, we can take particular pride in the passage earlier this month by this Legislature of our new Comprehensive Plan, *Rockland Tomorrow*. This achievement is directly attributed to the partnership of Chairwoman Cornell and the members of this body who spent the last 18 months working on this new plan, a "bi-partisan blueprint for Rockland County's future," which my administration took on as one of its original initiatives nearly 17 years ago this very day.

In my first Message to the Legislature, we set a goal to update the County's 1973 Comprehensive Plan, which we knew needed to adapt to Rockland County's rapidly expanding population and infrastructure. We knew then that a plan for Rockland's future must include careful and well-thought-out strategies for sustainable and environmentally sensitive land use and development, the preservation of historic sites and natural resources, and future transportation corridors and infrastructure. We knew then that Rockland was changing, and we had to find a way to support those changes while preserving the many wonderful aspects and characteristics that make our County unique. Tonight, I thank you, Chairwoman Cornell, the members of this Legislature, and the staff at the Planning Department for helping me accomplish this goal. I thank you tonight for supporting this and helping to develop Comprehensive Plan and for joining me in this significant achievement – the creation of a vision for Rockland County that will help nurture and preserve it, for our children, and for the generations that will follow.

But our vision for this great County must not end with the adoption of the new Comprehensive Plan. Together, we must continue, with foresight and discernment, to move forward in these times of change and continued economic uncertainty.

We faced a similar situation when I first took office. I noted then that we were on the verge of coming out of a recession; and as we remain optimistic now, we know that many of our friends and neighbors are struggling to make ends meet, and provide for their families. Even though unemployment numbers in Rockland County remain relatively low in comparison to the national jobless rate, we know many Rocklanders find themselves out of work, some possibly for the first time in their careers. Consider these statistics: the monthly number of families served by DSS's Employment Unit increased over last year by 23-percent, with the total number of Temporary Assistance cases increasing by four-percent, and active Family Assistance cases increasing by more than eight-percent. These facts tell us one thing: our fellow residents are in trouble, and we in County government must find ways to extend a helping hand while they struggle through these difficult times.

### **Rockland Jobs Database**

In order to help our Rockland residents in their search for employment, I am proud to announce that our Management Information Services (MIS) Department, under the leadership of Commissioner Gerry Walsh, will launch the Rockland Jobs Database on the Rockland County website, [www.rocklandgov.com](http://www.rocklandgov.com), later this year. The Jobs Database will provide an opportunity for Rockland's local employers to post job openings on the County website, so that local residents will have a "one-stop-shop" when looking for work. This is a unique pilot program that the staff in my office has worked closely with Rich Caunitz and the MIS staff to develop, and we're looking forward to partnering with the RBA, the REDC and our local business leaders in this timely initiative that will help Rockland's unemployed citizens find work.

### **Commission on Human Rights bridges differences in the Rockland community**

Another way my administration has sought to increase outreach and improve ties with our Rockland community also had its roots at the beginning of my tenure. As I said then, while we celebrate Rockland County's diversity, it brings with it challenges we must continue to be prepared to meet. In addition to investigating the complaints of discrimination in housing, employment and places of public accommodation, our Human Rights Commission also conducts various pro-active educational and outreach programs. At my urging, the commission also initiated the *Montage Program*, which helped bring diverse community groups together to help dispel mistrust and improve dialog.

The Commission on Human Rights has helped bring different groups together to facilitate discussion and resolve issues that could divide our community is the ongoing situation in the East Ramapo School District. Contention has caused a great divide between the school district and members of the public, and Commissioner Nagubandi and his staff have sought to bring them together to try to resolve their differences. The Human Rights Commission played a role in bringing the various groups together and met with them to talk about and strive to resolve some of their differences. Several school policy issues were discussed and, as a result of the mediation, East Ramapo School District officials agreed to share policies and open discussion about the concerns of the citizens. While the two groups are still divided in their approach to improve the student education at the school, they have agreed to continue discussions. While this situation is by no means resolved, progress has indeed been made. A forum for open dialog has been created, and the Commission on Human Rights has helped facilitate that.

### **Expansion of Human Care**

The Summit Park Hospital and Nursing Care Facility will expand its services to the community in 2011, increasing the number of patients who receive treatment in our new Dialysis Center from six to nine. Summit Park's Adult Day Health Program was authorized by the New York State Department of Health earlier this month to increase its

Adult Day Care by 21 new slots to a total of 66, providing additional opportunities for families and adults needing acute care to avail themselves of state-of-the-art medical and daycare. And, in a unique partnership just formed with United Hospice of Rockland, UHR and Summit Park staff will provide short-term respite care to Rockland County residents with a seriously ill loved one or family member. In this way, families can get the respite they need, while knowing that their loved one is being cared for in a professional and compassionate environment.

Our Department of Health will begin Phase II of the renovation of our Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) program in Spring Valley this year, and will become a NYS DOH. approved permanent site by the end of 2011. The WIC program, which first opened its doors at the Spring Valley location in 2008, now serves more than 2,300 enrollees per month. In fact, WIC enrollment has grown significantly in the past five years, with more than 11,000 women, infants and children per month receiving nutritional counseling, medical care and other services at the five off-site WIC locations across Rockland County last year.

And in addition to helping to establish Rockland's "Return the F.A.V.O.R." discount program for vets as a national model, Director Jerry Donnellan and the staff at our Veterans Service Agency are working with several local attorneys to provide pro bono legal assistance to our service people who don't otherwise have the means to pay for an attorney. The County VA is participating in a statewide effort, Pro Bono New York, which partners with Legal Aid to offer free legal services including civil matters such as estate law, divorce, bankruptcy and foreclosure. It's yet another way our County can assist those who have put their lives on the line in service to their country, and ease their transition into life back at home.

### **Department of the Year: Finance and Budget**

As I began my State of the County address this year looking back on the accomplishments of this administration, we cannot fail to recognize the invaluable

contribution of the Departments of Finance and Budget – the 2010 recipients of the Department of the Year Award.

Not only have these two outstanding Departments helped this administration face – and conquer – many of the financial challenges of the past year, they have worked hard to retain our favorable bond rating, worked closely with my office to keep property taxes stable and hold Rockland County’s property tax rate as one of the lowest in New York State. In 2010, the Departments of Budget and Finance have received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting every year since I have been in office, and facilitated, along with the County Departments of Law, Personnel and Insurance, the third ERI in as many years, resulting in the retirement of 197 employees. In addition, they assisted delinquent taxpayers in redeeming their properties, resulting in a foreclosure auction in which no delinquent properties were sold, helping residents on to their homes.

As worthy of the staff of the Budget and Finance Departments are of this honor - the second such distinction in four years - none of these achievements could have been accomplished without the expertise and leadership of former Commissioner H. Chris Kopf.

Chris first came to work for Rockland County in August of 1982 in the Department of Budget as he likes to recall, a “budget examiner trainee.” He wasn’t a trainee for long.

When asked what his single greatest accomplishment was during his tenure with County government, Chris will proudly tell you that it was the automation in 1983 of the old-fashioned, ledger-based accounting system the County used to keep track of its finances.

After heading up the Department of Hospitals Budget division for ten years, Chris’s ascent to Acting Commissioner in 2001 and then to Commissioner of the Budget and Finance Departments in 2006 didn’t come easily. His path brought with it a lot of fiscal and personal challenges – like the Mirant bankruptcy and two recessions. Chris

encouraged his staff to become leaders as well, to think innovatively to solve the financial hurdles and challenges that often faced this County and its Departments during the nearly three decades of his career in public service.

Chris says it's not his accomplishment that matters most. Rather, he singles out the work of Rockland County Department heads, saying that their buckling down during tough financial times and running their operations "more like a business, with an eye on keeping expenses down and revenues up," was the proudest achievement of his time here.

Tonight, we wish Chris well in his new endeavors. We are very grateful that he chose to work in County government and give us the benefit from his vast knowledge and financial expertise. I know the members of this Legislature join me in acknowledging Chris's service – and in telling him how very much he will be missed.

### **DeFlumere Medal of Valor**

The DeFlumere Medal of Valor is awarded to an individual emergency service first responder who, "in recognition of extreme bravery and heroism under life-threatening conditions," goes above and beyond in the call of duty to keep the Rockland County community and its residents safe. It is bestowed in memory of Al "Foxy" DeFlumere, a member of the Blauvelt Volunteer Fire Company who died trying to save his six-year old son from a fire in the family's home in 1996. This year, in the proud tradition of bravery and extraordinary courage Foxy exemplified, the 2010 DeFlumere Medal of Valor is awarded to **Andrew Kolesar** of the West Haverstraw Volunteer Fire Department.

Late on the night of January 14, 2010, Rockland County's Deputy Fire Coordinator, John Kryger, was on his way home from a firefighter's meeting when he spotted smoke rolling out of a home off Route 202, near the Haverstraw/West Haverstraw Village border. He quickly notified the County fire dispatch, and within minutes, Fire Chief George Zayas and the West Haverstraw Fire Department were on the scene, with the Haverstraw Fire Department answering the call for backup.

Firefighters were told someone could be trapped on the third floor of the burning, two-and-a-half story home, and Captain Kenny Patterson of Volunteer Hose No. 2 was among the first in the building to locate the victim. His search soon revealed several locked doors and boarded-up windows, indicating that the house had been converted into an illegal multi-family dwelling – conditions very like the Bronx fire five years earlier that took the life of Pearl River fireman John Bellew, and severely injured Jeff Cool of the West Haverstraw FD.

Patterson’s air pack alarm went off, signaling that he was about to run out of air. Smoke billowed around him as he searched for a way out, and he couldn’t see more than a few inches from his face. He knew conditions had worsened and his tank was nearly empty. Captain Patterson ripped off his facemask and sent up the one call every firefighter dreads: “MAYDAY, MAYDAY” – firefighter down.

Ex-Chief Andrew Kolesar knew that time was running out for the captain. Responding to the call, he scanned the smoke-filled space with his thermal camera and saw Patterson’s body light up the screen in the corner of the second-floor room. Kolesar grabbed Patterson’s limp form, pulling him backwards by the straps of his breathing apparatus and dragged him out of the room, tumbling down the stairs with his fallen comrade. Two firefighters met Kolesar in the doorway and carried their captain into the cold night air – and to safety.

Captain Patterson was treated for smoke inhalation at Nyack Hospital and Westchester Medical Center and recovered fully from the blaze. The fire took no victims that cold January night, but if it were not for the quick, instinctive and courageous response of ex-Chief Andrew Kolesar, Rockland would be missing one more of its heroes tonight. Instead, we are privileged to honor one of Rockland’s bravest, a man who thought little about his own safety when he charged into a burning building to save a brother in arms.

Let us also remember tonight, while we honor Andrew Kolesar with the 2010 DeFlumere Medal of Honor, that these brave men and women voluntarily risk their lives to keep us safe. Let us never forget that every time a fire whistle sounds in the middle of the night, these heroes answer that call, not knowing whether they will return home to their families. Let us keep in mind that every illegally converted dwelling in this County, every home that does not comply with proper fire safety and building codes, and every municipality that does not make it their business to vigilantly enforce them, puts the lives of these heroes at even greater risk - at the same peril as the owner of the illegal home in Haverstraw last January, and in the Bronx five years ago. Let us commit to the mission of the County's Code Violation Task Force, along with Gordon Wren Jr., the staff at our Office of Fire and Emergency Services, and every firefighter in Rockland County. Let's join together, public officials and residents alike, to make sure that these brave men and women never face even greater danger than they already do, every day, in their pledge to keep our community safe.

I would like to close tonight in remembrance of several of Rockland County's citizens who have left their own indelible mark on our community and indeed, changed the face of Rockland County forever.

Senator Thomas P. Morahan, who defined the phrase "public servant," is dearly missed. Rockland's first County Executive, John T. Grant, set the standard in County government. Dr. Martha "Bobby" MacGuffie, whose life of self-sacrifice and humanitarian work helped change the face of the AIDS virus, in this County, and across the globe. S. Hazard Gillespie, whose passion for the law and the environment helped shape the future of the Tappan Zee Bridge, and that of the County he so loved. Beloved philanthropist and community activist Joseph Raso, whose heart was as big as the fortune he so readily shared. County Legislator William Darden, who served as a mentor to many people. Our own Ed Devine, who helped reorganize the Rockland County Drainage Agency after Hurricane Floyd with enthusiasm, dedication and an unwavering sense of responsibility. And Heather Duke, whose kind heart, energy and creativity infused everything she did for this administration. Irwin Cohen in our Public Transportation

Department, who was always there to help. Their lives and work should serve as an example to us all of devotion, caring and a deep sense of commitment to our County. Their contributions are incalculable, as is our loss. We are richer and better as a community for having known them.

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Rockland County Legislature, members of the public, and our loyal Rockland County employees for your kind attention this evening. May God bless our great nation and our troops around the world, particularly those in harm's way. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Japan as they struggle to recover from the effects of last week's devastating earthquake and tsunami.

Thank you, and goodnight.



