

Niagara Erie Regional Coalition

10 Year Anniversary Celebration

1998-2008



October 24, 2008

The Organization

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition is a partnership between government, private, and non-profit agencies committed to thinking and acting regionally for the betterment of Erie and Niagara Counties. The Regional Coalition is a non-hierarchical collaborative network.

Mission Statement

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition is a non-traditional regional collaborative forum for linking multiple organizations and initiatives, and also serves as a catalyst to identify and pursue opportunities to grow the region.

Topic Areas

The Coalition concentrates its efforts in the areas of economic development, government affairs, tourism and culture, and transportation.

Within the aforementioned topic areas, we act as a venue for discussing and/or acting on a wide range of projects and policies initiated by member agencies or others, and we also initiate projects and policies ourselves. We play multiple roles as a clearinghouse, advocate, forum, coordinator, incubator, project manager, implementer, catalyst, supporter, and advisor.

Specific Accomplishments & Ongoing Projects

- ✓ Public Transportation-Job Access Pilot & Policy *
- ✓ Small Business Assistance Website *
- ✓ Regional Economic Development Database (REDD)
- ✓ Economic Development Working Group (EDWG)
- ✓ Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) *
- ✓ "The Big Easy in Buffalo" Music Education and Concert Series
- ✓ Regional Cultural Tourism Program
- ✓ Arts and Economic Prosperity III Report
- ✓ Electronic (Smart) Permitting *
- ✓ Site Selection (Shovel Ready) Survey
- ✓ Local Governments Series (Brochures & Presentations) *
- ✓ Resumption of Meetings with CSX
- ✓ Waterfront Trails MOU
- ✓ GBNRTC Long Range Plan & Strategic Priorities
- ✓ Niagara Falls International Airport "Two Way" Presentation
- ✓ Air Travel Study *
- ✓ Produce Quick Cool
- ✓ Nine Mile Island Letter for Amherst/Pendleton
- ✓ Bulk Energy/Utilities Purchase
- ✓ Buffalo-Niagara Tourist Express

** Indicates a current initiative*

Regional Coalition Membership

Co Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster *

Hon. Sean O'Connor *

Hon. Bradley Erck

Hon. William Pauly

Hon. Kathy Konst *

Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Hon. Gerald Meal

Members:

Mr. James Allen *

Hon. Elise Cusack

Mr. Robert Gower *

Ms. Meredith Andreucci

Hon. David Dale

Hon. Samuel Granieri

Hon. Vince Anello

Hon. William Davignon

Hon. John Greenan

Ms. Cyd Bennett Cehulik

Hon. Albert DeBenedetti

Hon. Michele Iannello *

Dr. Ruth Bereson *

Ms. Colleen DiPirro

Mr. Clyde Johnston

Mr. Robert Blanchard

Mr. Tim Doolittle

Hon. Timothy Kennedy

Mr. Daniel Boody

Hon. Paul Dyster *

Mr. Thomas Kucharski

Mr. G. Michael Brown

Mr. Thomas Dziedzic

Mr. David Lacki *

Mr. Steven Brown

Mr. Brian Eldridge

Hon. Dale Larson

Mr. John Cappellino *

Hon. Wright Ellis *

Ms. Celeste Lawson *

Mr. Michael Casale *

Mr. Matthew Enstice *

Ms. Maria Lehman

Mr. Drew Cerza

Mr. Andrew Eszak

Mr. Gregory Lewis *

Mr. David Chambers

Mr. Samuel Ferraro *

Hon. Cynthia Locklear

Mr. Ronald Coan

Hon. Judith Fisher

Mr. Joe McMahon *

Mr. John Connolly

Mr. Charles Frederiksen

Hon. Peter McMahon *

Dr. Deborah Curtis *

Hon. Joel Giambra

Hon. Barbara Miller-Williams *

Mr. Robert Miller

Hon. John Mills *

Mr. Hal Morse *

Hon. Jason Murgia *

Mr. William Murray *

Ms. Jo Nasoff-Finton

Ms. Susan Neubauer

Ms. Christina Orsi *

Hon. Crystal Peoples

Mr. John Percy *

Mr. Philip Perna

Dr. Gary Praetzel

Hon. Edward Rath, III *

Ms. Melinda Rath Sanderson *

Mr. F. Tim Reese

Mr. Luke Rich

Mr. David Roll

Mr. David Rosenwasser

Hon. William Ross

Mr. Laurence Rubin

Ms. Diane Ruzsala

Mr. David Rutecki

Mr. Stan Rydelek

Mr. Christopher Schoepflin

Hon. Mark Schroeder

Mr. Kevin Schuler

Mr. Salvatore Sciandra *

Prof. John Sheffer, II

Mr. John Simon

Hon. Demone Smith

Ms. Laura St. Pierre Smith *

Mr. Hector Titus *

Mr. Richard Tobe

Hon. John Tylec

Hon. Robert Villani

Mr. Timothy Wanamaker

Mr. Charles Webb

Mr. Peter Wendel *

Ms. Arlene White *

Mr. Lawrence Witul *

Mr. Robert Wright

Staff:

Mr. Tod Kniazuk*

Mr. Jeffrey Williams

** Indicates a current member.*

A Brief History of Us:

1997: **A Flying Fruit?** Niagara County and Erie County talk to each other to help Kiwi airlines land at the Niagara Falls International Airport. Despite Kiwi not taking off, ENRP continued to make development of the NFIA a regional priority.

1998: **A Three Hour Tour.** Then Legislature Chairs Gerald Meal and Charles Swanick, along with Legislator Barry Weinstein, envisioned a day when the two counties would regularly work together. They gathered both Legislatures and some key private sector folks on the Grand Lady cruise out of Grand Island, NY to pitch the idea on June 29, 1998. Essentially trapped on the boat, those gathered listen to their plan.

1998: **Officially Official.** Both Legislatures approved enabling legislation to create the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership as an ad hoc committee of each house. The first group consisted of 22 members – 10 legislators (five from each county), six business representatives (three from each county), both county Planning Departments and Industrial Development Agencies, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Committee, and the Erie Co. Executive.

1998: **A Bridge to Somewhere.** ENRP Co-Chairs William Pauly and Gerald Meal, along with original staff members Tod Kniazuk and Jeffrey Williams gather on the bridge between Tonawanda and North Tonawanda (and between the two counties) to announce the organization and realize they're going to need a bigger head table.

1998: Dots! In October, 1998 ENRP held its first meeting, a brainstorming session to determine issues and priorities. One of the top vote getters for the young organization – letterhead. Also, concentrating efforts through five subcommittees focused on economic development, government affairs, tourism & culture, transportation, and the short lived community & miscellaneous.

1999: Cooled, quickly. Among ENRP's first efforts were the produce quick cool unit, helping to secure Nine Mile Island for Amherst and Pendleton, a shovel ready survey, resumption of regular meetings with CSX railroad, and bike trail linkages.

1999: REDD. The first major initiative ENRP spearheaded was the Regional Economic Development Database, a way for economic development agencies to quickly respond to site selectors' inquiries about the region. It also began our focus on the economic development delivery structure that continued with the one-stop shop group, Regional Economic Development Strategy, smart permitting, and small business assistance website among others.

2000: Cultured Up. ENRP was instrumental in making a proposed Cultural Tourism Program a bi-county effort. Successor projects included creation of a cultural tourism committee at the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative. We continue to work on tourism related projects such as signage and transportation.

2003: **Moving Day.** The two County Legislatures and the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth agreed to move ENRP and its staff to the Institute. This, along with the addition of member agencies as we expanded our project scope, was a turning point in the group's history as we celebrated our five year anniversary.

2004: **Get to Work!** One of the strengths of the organization is the ability to get agencies from multiple sectors together to address important regional needs. A great example of this was the public transportation-job access pilot and policy. Basically, we connected people who needed jobs in areas of low car ownership to the job corridors they previously couldn't get to. The NFTA, GBNRTC, and IDAs came together to develop this policy and periodic route adjustments continue to be made to this day.

2005: **Red and Green Doesn't Equal Christmas.** The group faced its most serious threat as the bottom dropped out of Erie County's finances. Up to that point ENRP was funded by the two County Legislatures with a contribution from the Regional Institute. With the "red and green budget" in Erie County and a change in leadership at the Institute, ENRP found itself broke and homeless. Our member agencies responded by beginning to contribute financially in the same way they had always given of their time, with the ECIDA agreeing to house the group. Our biggest challenge became the moment when our member agencies stepped up and affirmed ENRP's importance and their desire for it to continue.

2005: ENRP Misses a Meal. To recognize the efforts of our dedicated members, we created the Distinguished Service Award. The inaugural awards were presented to Erie County Legislator Charles Swanick (legislature chairman at the time of ENRP's creation) and to retiring Niagara County Legislature Chairman, ENRP creator, and first ENRP Co-Chair Gerald Meal. Founding Erie County Co-Chair and Erie County Legislator William Pauly and the Regional Institute's former Director John Sheffer, II received the award in subsequent years.

2006: We Have a Plan. In 2005 and early 2006 a subcommittee of ENRP worked on our first ever strategic plan, adopted unanimously by the membership. The plan affirmed our core goals and efforts, refined our mission and vision, and set the agenda for our continued growth.

2007: Just Don't Call It NERC. After eight years of people thinking we're the Buffalo Niagara Partnership instead of the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership, leadership decided to rechristen the organization the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition – a name that effectively communicates who the group is but is just as much of a pain to write out. Staff tries unsuccessfully to get people to refer to the group as the Regional Coalition instead of "Nerc".

2007: The Business of Art. The Regional Coalition teamed with the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County to act as local project manager for the national Americans for the Arts "Arts & Economic Prosperity III" report, which quantified the economic impact of the not for profit cultural sector and gave us a very public project that increased our profile in the community.

2008: **A Musical Interlude.** In 2007 and early 2008 the Regional Coalition teamed with Music is Art and the BNCVB Foundation to produce The Big Easy in Buffalo music education and concert series, bringing New Orleans musicians to the region for school based programs and public concerts through a New York State Music Fund grant. While this was a bit of a tangent for the organization it provided more public exposure than any other single project, and along with the Arts & Economic Prosperity report made for one of the group's most active years.

2008: **A Decade of Success.** The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition celebrates ten years of successful collaborations; one of the longest and most unique examples of regionalism and multi-sector communication in the area. Three founding members – Hon. Clyde Burmaster, Samuel Ferraro, and Peter Wendel – remain with the organization; founding member, nine year member, and six year co-chair Hon. Barry Weinstein is honored following his retirement from the Erie County Legislature and Regional Coalition in 2007; and we prepare for another decade of good work and good friends.