

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Kathy Konst

Minutes of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Meeting
October 24, 2008

Members:

James Allen
Dr. Ruth Bereson
John Cappellino
Dr. Deborah Curtis
Hon. Paul Dyster
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Robert Gower
Hon. Michele Iannello
David Lacki
Celeste Lawson
Gregory Lewis
Joe McMahon
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Barbara Miller-Williams
Hon. John Mills
Hal Morse
Hon. Jason Murgia
William Murray
Hon. Sean O'Connor
Christina Orsi
John Percy
Hon. Edward Rath III
Hon. William Ross
Salvatore Sciandra
Laura St. Pierre Smith
Hector Titus
Peter Wendel
Arlene White

Present: Burmaster, Konst, Dyster, Ferraro, Iannello, Lacki, Lawson, P. McMahon, Morse, Murray, Orsi (proxy by Marguerite Greco), Percy, Ross, Wendel, White, Rath Sanderson

Excused: Allen, Bereson, Cappellino, Curtis, Ellis, Mills, Rath, Sciandra, St. Pierre Smith, Titus

Absent: Gower, Lewis, Miller-Williams, J. McMahon, Murgia, O'Connor, Casale, Witul

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 a.m. by Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Kathy Konst. Dr. Richard Jurasek and Medaille College were thanked for hosting the meeting. Executive Director Tod Kniazuk was thanked for organizing this special 10 year anniversary gathering.

Former Coalition Co-Chairs Gerald Meal and Barry Weinstein were welcomed back, as was former member John Simon and former graduate assistant Darren Kempner. Also welcomed were guests Brian Sampson (Empire State Development) and Adam Locher (representing New York State Assemblymember Dennis Gabryszak), as well as our panel of keynote presenters (please see the keynote section for details).

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Matthew Enstice
Melinda Rath Sanderson
Lawrence Witul

New members Joe McMahon (representing Erie County Executive Chris Collins), Salvatore Sciandra (Frey Electric Construction Co. Business Development, representing Erie County Executive Chris Collins), and Binational Tourism Alliance Executive Director Arlene White were welcomed to the Coalition.

Executive Director:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Co-Chair Burmaster took the opportunity to reflect on the fact that 10 years ago we were thinking regionally when few others were. Over the last decade we've come to know each other and work together successfully – two counties, two parties, four caucuses, multiple sectors and interests – through the philosophy of

“check your guns at the door and leave your politics outside.” It may have seemed impossible when we started, but it happened.

Burmaster’s comments segued into Kniazuk’s “10 Year Anniversary Celebration” retrospective. (Most of the details were included in a program book that can be found at www.erie.gov/regionalcoalition.) Kniazuk detailed the history of the organization, founded in 1998 as the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership. He shared key moments in the group’s decade of service, recollections of past board members, the organization’s accomplishments, and some anecdotes of some of the fun we’ve had along the way.

In fact, Kniazuk offered the opinion that one of the reasons the organization has been so successful and has continued for as long as it has is that while we do serious work, we don’t take ourselves too seriously. We’re not concerned about grabbing the latest headline or getting anyone re-elected, but rather we just try to do good work for the region. Finding as many talented individuals over the course of 10 years willing to buy in to that concept has made the Coalition what it is today.

On a personal note, Kniazuk thanked the group for making him the organization’s staff member for the entire decade. It has been a fulfilling and rewarding job working for and with such dedicated people.

Former Co-Chair Gerald Meal presented the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Distinguished Service Award to Barry Weinstein, MD – co-founder of ENRP, nine year member, and truly one of the driving forces behind the group’s success. Weinstein thanked the members and noted he was surprised by the award.

Co-Chair Konst and Kniazuk then presented special plaques recognizing the three remaining original members for their 10 years of service – Hon. Clyde Burmaster, Samuel Ferraro, and Peter Wendel. The three thanked the group for this surprise.

Minutes of the May 2008 meeting were approved.

Regional Coalition Executive Director Tod A. Kniazuk presented the sustainability update, which was received and filed.

Kniazuk presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed.

Subcommittee Chair Peter McMahon presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed.

Subcommittee Chair David Lacki presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed.

Kniazuk introduced the meeting's main topic, a keynote roundtable on the impact of higher education on the region. Each speaker was asked to focus on a particular collaboration or impact of their institution. As such the presentations are not in any way complete pictures of these colleges' impact, but rather are illustrative of the diverse and many impacts they have on the region.

Going in alphabetical order, first up was Buffalo State College Professor of Economics and Finance Dr. William Ganley. He noted that as Buff State began its strategic planning process a few years back, community partnerships were made a priority. This led to the establishment of the Office of College and Community Partnerships, which reaches out to the surrounding community to work on collaborative projects.

Daemen College President Dr. Martin Anisman noted that there is a Western New York College Consortium. He listed Daemen's role in several partnerships including the Western New York Service Learning Coalition, the Center for Sustainable Community, and an effort to market the area's colleges to the nation. Anisman stated that the colleges have a much bigger economic impact than the "long sought after" Fortune 500 company we are always trying to get to come to the region.

Next up was D'Youville College School of Business Associate Professor Dr. William Mariani, who sent President Sr. Denise Roche's regards. Mariani spoke of D'Youville's work with community based organizations on the west side of Buffalo; the college assists these groups in many ways. The college has purchased homes in the area and has built new academic buildings. They also have a commitment to the Buffalo Public School system (BPS) and especially schools on the west side. The college places student teachers in these schools, and hosts summer institutes for 7th and 8th grade students. There are also 20 BPS administrators in a doctoral program at D'Youville.

Kniazuk noted that Erie Community College was scheduled to join us, but had a last minute conflict. They send their regrets, and their congratulations to the Coalition on our anniversary.

Medaille College President Dr. Richard Jurasek explained that higher education institutions file economic impact statements and educational impact statements, and suggested that they also be required to complete community impact statements. He recommended that the Coalition collect all the colleges' economic impact statements to get a real feel for their overall importance. He then introduced Mary Ellen Mulvey, who is in charge of community outreach for Medaille.

Mulvey spoke about their "Community 101" project. The freshman class gets tours of Buffalo, then they "read the city," using it as a focus for their general education work. Two-thirds of Medaille students stay in the region following graduation. Medaille is also partnering with the BPS and with the Arts Council to produce a student-edited arts journal. A new project is the Academy for Creativity and Entrepreneurship which will be created at the new Riverside school. It will be an integrated curriculum project with students in grades 9-12.

Niagara County Community College (NCCC) President Dr. James Klyczek began by speaking about perceptions – people still think community colleges are for kids who barely got out of high school and couldn't get in to a four year college. While that is still partially true, they are also a place for workforce development training, and an entry point for the fields of hospitality & tourism and allied health careers. While there may be an "open door in" to the college, there is certainly not an "open door out" – students have to earn their degrees. Klyczek then listed some of their collaborations including a surgical technology program with Erie Community College and a jointly registered teacher education program with Buff State that allows all credit hours earned at NCCC to be applied to Buff State (this is also being developed with Niagara University). NCCC is also working with ECC and NU – along with the Crown Plaza Hotel in Niagara Falls – to create an environment to get more out of town students into their hospitality and tourism programs.

Niagara University President Fr. Joseph Levesque stressed his students' community involvement; 3,000 of the 4,200 enrolled students are engaged in community service including mentoring

younger students and work with public housing residents. In all, students contributed 54,000 hours of community service this past year alone. NU is also engaged in collaborations such as the Community Outreach Partnership Center, an entrepreneurship program in Niagara Falls. Eddie Friel (a past Coalition keynote speaker) was brought in to be a resource for the region's tourism and government folks, and he is in residence at the Hospitality Training & Research Center.

Last up was University at Buffalo Associate Vice President for Government and Community Relations Ryan McPherson. The University is currently pursuing their "UB 2020" plan, which has four pillars: a growth plan, including adding 10,000 more students; a physical plan to accommodate the growth; an academic plan; and enhancing their institutional strategic strength. One of the goals is to create a knowledge based economy. When that is achieved it will lead to 10,000 new jobs, growth on all three campuses (Amherst, Main St., and especially downtown Buffalo), and will have \$2.6 billion in economic impact. UB is also engaged in collaborations with their surrounding neighborhoods, pre-k through high school education, and health care, among others.

Kniazuk then transitioned the group into the second phase of the roundtable, an open discussion and q&a. He noted that former Co-Chair Weinstein had advocated for education to be added as a cluster in the Regional Economic Development Strategy, and that there certainly seemed to be some merit to that position based on today's presentations.

Coalition member Celeste Lawson noted the many partnerships the colleges have with cultural institutions. She added that many who stay in the area need to be "lifted up" and wondered what role the universities can play in this.

Ferraro explained that Niagara County is being very proactive in working with their higher education institutions. They've done outreach to college advisors to apprise them on the county's economic development efforts and the clusters we're focusing on and marketing, and that they need to extend this effort to high school advisors as well.

McPherson responded that UB works closely with the BPS. He added that there needs to be a true pipeline created to put more local students into the higher education system so that our high

school kids can truly see themselves receiving a quality higher education. He noted that there is a \$1 million difference over the course of a lifetime for someone without a college degree. McPherson concluded by quoting UB President Simpson, "Access without excellence is discrimination."

Former Coalition (actually, ENRP) member John Simon expressed his pleasure in hearing about the consortium for hospitality and tourism. For example, Disney comes here every year to employ our colleges' hospitality graduates. He asked what the entry point is for information about the consortium, but that is still being developed.

After hearing about the kinds of projects the Coalition looks for, Ganley suggested that we look at the collaborations with schools and small businesses to find both duplications that can be streamlined and holes that need to be filled.

Coalition member Arlene White brought up several areas for potential improvement including binational collaborations, better transportation for internships outside of urban centers, and remote learning for cultural organizations who don't have time to come to a classroom setting for training.

Co-Chair Konst noted that a lot of what we're talking about relates back to the REDS and its focus on a knowledge based economy. She asked (on behalf of Coalition member Ed Rath who had to leave) how the higher education institutions can get their information to the Coalition's committees so we can be kept apprised of and assist with their agendas. Dr. Anisman replied that Sr. Roche is chair of a consortium of higher education presidents, and that perhaps the chair of the consortium could hold a seat on the Coalition. The membership approved this unanimously.

Wendel suggested a way for the colleges and universities to help us with our agenda as well – as they do their work, they can help their students, faculty and partners broaden their horizons and think of us as a region.

The Co-Chairs thanked everyone on behalf of the Coalition for the presentation. Burmaster stressed that academia seems to "get it" in terms of working together and understanding the issues facing the region. A key question is always how do we do better, faster; getting academia involved in the Coalition's efforts is a step forward.

Anisman asserted that half the problem is the mindset that we can't fix the problem, to which Konst responded that we are the problem-fixing group.

Under new business, Kniazuk announced that he wanted to do something special for the Coalition's anniversary. Over the past few months he's been working with a class at the Rochester Institute of Technology on branding for the group. The results will be presented at the December general meeting.

The next general meeting date will be December 12 at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (thanks to Samuel Ferraro). The Co-Chairs thanked the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:25 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
December 8, 2008