

Sunday, September 7, 2003

Editorial: Building our future

It has been a year since AngelouEconomics submitted its Broome County Plan for Sustainable Economic Development. You may be wondering what has happened since. Here are some of the community's responses to the call for action.

* The Greater Binghamton Coalition was formed in direct response to the BC Plan's suggestion that we need a unified voice. Since its inception, the eight-member coalition has focused on marketing the county both externally and internally, says its director, Patrick Doyle.

He counts as first year achievements putting Greater Binghamton on the radar screens of regional and national publications; helping local businesses maintain and grow; building stronger ties with Binghamton University, its students and the community; identifying key sites that are ripe for recovery and redevelopment; and making significant progress in building relationships with our federal representatives.

As part of that strengthened connection, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton helped organize a conference on brownfields redevelopment in April. The coalition also created a new logo for Greater Binghamton and adopted the slogan suggested by AngelouEconomics: "Home to Innovation."

* Binghamton University President Lois B. DeFleur announced in December that she was proposing the creation of an Education and Community Development Center in downtown Binghamton. The facility would include community outreach programs, classrooms and the Master of Public Administration program and could eventually be shared with Broome Community College and Empire State College. BU spokeswoman Katie Ellis said the proposal received much enthusiasm from the community but is in limbo until the SUNY Construction Fund -- that would be in charge of moving the project forward -- is budgeted the necessary funds from the state.

* The Southern Tier Opportunity Coalition was created -- a consortium of business leaders that will pool their development expertise to help fledgling companies grow, achieving sustainable economic growth and technology development for the Southern Tier. The coalition aims to be the premier academic/business alliance in the Tier, sparking innovation that will help the community prosper and inspire the hearts and minds of the next generation. <http://www.stoc-ny.com/>)

* County resident Vickie Maxon proposed The Center for Community Transformation, a team that would take politicians out of the process of defining the goals and processes needed to revitalize Greater Binghamton. Maxon says she has a team of about 25 people with expertise in business transformation, communication, education, legislation and local history. They are currently working on Phase I of the plan, which includes researching other communities that have experienced similar or worse economic downturns than Greater Binghamton.

Maxon says they will be launching a Web site shortly. She says she hopes to begin Phase II -- educating the public on opportunities and responsibilities in January. Phase III will include working with governments and organizations to transform the way they do business.

* The Southern Tier Young Professionals, now about 350 members strong, has been a smashing success. The group sponsors social activities for networking, offers membership discounts at local businesses and provides information on what to do, where to go in the community and volunteering opportunities for the civic-minded. Its strong network has even convinced some members considering a move to stay in the area, said founder and Press & Sun-Bulletin reporter HANNAH MARIA HAYES. As the Web site says to visitors, "Be the change." www.styp.org

* Finally, in response to AngelouEconomics' suggestion that the county rely on its largest city for identity rather than its less easily identified name, The Broome Chamber voted to change its name to Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, Inc. The county's main airport also changed its name, to Greater Binghamton Airport.

These efforts have been somewhat overshadowed this year by news of the war in Iraq and the Endicott spills. They should be lauded, though, especially as formerly disconnected groups have joined forces to achieve the goal of revitalizing Greater Binghamton. It's a process that won't happen quickly, but that will be built steadily on a foundation of progressive steps such as these.