

Chairman Kendall, Members of the Legislature, Guests:

I am pleased to be able to present the *2006 State of the County* address for what I believe is the first time in history from northern Dutchess County. Last year I delivered this address in the historic *Cunneen-Hackett Theater* in the city of Poughkeepsie. *The Center for Performing Arts at Rhinebeck*, as one of our great quality of life assets in this region of Dutchess, is an ideal location to review our work and to identify our emerging challenges.

Such a variety of professional and community performances have graced this stage over the past several years! I am told there were more than 185 events held here in 2005. What a terrific example of community participation and, in particular, the leadership of Lou Trapani and his board led by President Andrew Weintraub. So impressive also is the talented group of individuals of all ages who continue to use the *Center* for self and group expression and enjoyment. I am proud to have assisted in directing \$225,000 since 1995 to your facility capital construction and operational costs, helping to secure your wonderful presence in our county.

And there is breaking news at *The Center for Performing Arts* that I am happy to announce. In September of this year *The Center*, in partnership with *Dutchess County BOCES*, will sponsor Dutchess County's first theatre and performing arts academic program. Our region's high school juniors and seniors will be provided the opportunity to learn valuable theatre and performance skills while earning credit towards a high school diploma. Congratulations to Lou, Andrew and the Board on this exciting new collaboration to benefit our young people and help broaden their horizons!

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Traveling the roads and simply appreciating the beautiful landscape of this area, it's easy to oversimplify and think of Northern Dutchess as our last frontier. Yet Dutchess County is privileged to be home to many spectacular sites like the Hudson Highlands, Stony Kill Farm, the Stone Church property and many other natural and historical resources located across the County. I believe all our communities; north, south, east and west now share a vision of balanced growth. All are committed to Greenway principles, to developing in such a way that even as we grow our landscape is protected.

### ***MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE***

A cardinal rule for carpenters is to ***measure twice, cut once***. We must also take measure and double check as we establish a sound agenda for work to be accomplished in 2006 and beyond. If we are thoughtful and question our strategies, leave nothing important to chance, we will "get it right" in building a prosperous, high quality community and a ***Healthy Dutchess***.

During my 14-year tenure as the elected County Executive, I have made it a point to measure progress; only through measurement can we understand the true value of our investment. And that is critical to our decision-making regarding continued and new investment. And so I measure twice, from two perspectives. First, I examine programs. What is our traditional core mission? How are they running? What are the outcomes? What is missing? What readjustments are necessary? What can be done better?

And then I take stock of our fiscal picture. What's the sales tax outlook? How did our tax base grow in the prior year? What is the economic climate in the nation, the region and in Dutchess?

### ***Strengthening County Finances Through Planning, Preparation and Good Management***

While economic growth has brought many benefits to Dutchess County, major fiscal challenges will always be present. As we have learned over the past few years, it takes only a small handful of factors to strain county finances and negatively impact years of good work. We must be ever cognizant of these potential and real factors that are primarily out of our control but are never completely outside our ability to plan, prepare for and manage.

Medicaid continues to be the largest state-mandated cost to county government. In 2005, approximately \$280 million was spent in Dutchess County for Medicaid through providers and health organizations, funded with a combination of federal, state and county tax dollars. Prior to January 1 of this year, Dutchess County paid approximately 25% for most Medicaid services, as did other New York State counties, a startling number since it is by far the largest local share in the nation. In a typical month there is a Medicaid caseload of more than 14,000 people in Dutchess County – about 5% of our population.

Last year our 30-year fight as county leaders against the state's unfunded Medicaid mandate finally forced state officials to provide some relief to counties beginning in 2006 through a new controlled growth formula of an annual escalator percentage over a county's 2005 base year Medicaid costs. While not a true "cap", this new funding formula slows the growth of Medicaid costs to the counties. However, it also redirects Medicaid revenues that previously flowed to the county. Overall, it still results in an increased cost to Dutchess County taxpayers this year and in future years for the state-mandated Medicaid program.

The Medicaid legislation relieves counties of the liabilities associated with prior year appropriations set aside to cover Medicaid bills, which come in after the end of the year. These prior year Medicaid appropriations represent approximately \$13 million of taxpayer dollars previously raised locally to fund outstanding Medicaid obligations. I feel strongly these dollars should be used for the purpose intended - to fund Medicaid costs. That is why the ***Medicaid Stabilization Plan*** which I proposed and the

Legislature endorsed in the 2006 budget will set aside these appropriations to deal with the state's planned 2006 mid-year Medicaid adjustment, as well as the new Medicaid growth projected over the next three to four years, reducing the future burden on our taxpayers.

We are measuring this a second time, as well since it is uncertain whether a new governor and state legislature in 2007 will change or eliminate this new Medicaid relief. We know from experience New York State has a history of not fulfilling certain funding commitments. For example, NYS Education Law dictates the State shall provide 40% of operating costs for colleges for which a program of "full opportunity" is provided. Dutchess Community College complies with this provision; however, the state has never met the required funding commitment. Moreover, a 1989 NYS statute mandating the provision of services to children three to five years of age with disabilities pledged the state provide 75% of the cost, but it has never reached that level of required contribution.

Through a program I initiated in 1993, Dutchess County has worked aggressively to identify fraud by recipients of Medicaid and other social services benefits, targeting those who hide income and other information. As a result of these efforts, we have successfully saved or avoided the expenditure of millions of taxpayer dollars. In 2005 alone, our *Special Investigation Unit* recovered or diverted over \$11 million in taxpayer fraud. Last fall, I announced Dutchess County's participation with the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) **VerifyNY** Medicaid fraud and abuse detection project. NYSAC, in cooperation with IBM, offered this opportunity to a limited number of counties as a pilot project. This new initiative allows counties for the first time to recapture monies from providers - monies that have been incorrectly or fraudulently billed.

We are finalizing the **VerifyNY** agreement with the state. In a few weeks, our Department of Social Services (DSS) will receive data provided by the **VerifyNY** software program pinpointing discrepancies and potential fraud in billing by medical providers. Analysis of the data will identify areas that may require further investigation.

Rockland County, the first county in the nation to use the **VerifyNY** software, reported earlier this month preliminary analysis revealing \$3.2 million in billing by internists and specialists who serve Medicaid recipients in that county, and nearly \$900,000 could be considered questionable. Of more than 200,000 claims by 420 Medicaid providers, 42% submitted bills exceeding normal levels. An analysis of Rockland County pharmacies revealed even higher numbers. While these numbers are preliminary, they indicate further investigation is warranted.

Abuse of the Medicaid system must be stopped and we must be able to protect our taxpayers from these out of control costs. That is why as part of the **VerifyNY** initiative, we will expand our audit capacity this year to analyze the **VerifyNY** data and work with our *Fraud Investigation Unit* to weed out any fraud, identified waste or abuse of taxpayer dollars. Our staff will soon be attending NYSAC's Medicaid Fraud

Investigation training. We also plan an analysis of our *Medicaid Transportation Program* to ensure the program is operating at maximum efficiency.

According to NYSAC, the state will be announcing a settlement with counties that will credit \$4 million to Dutchess County for overdue reimbursement. This stems from the 1970's when the state began releasing clients from state psychiatric centers, placing an undue fiscal burden on counties. The law assured counties of 100% funding for all medical services provided to eligible clients, but identification of these individuals for reimbursement purposes has been problematic. In recent months NYSAC, in partnership with State agencies, compiled and sent out lists to counties to identify and certify eligible claims. Our staff has worked diligently to research and identify these claims, some going back ten years or more, and I commend them for their work.

While state mandated pension costs to fund our employees' retirement paychecks have spiked dramatically in past years from just \$380,000 in 1999 to \$10.6 million for the bill we paid in December, pension costs have stabilized and will remain flat in 2006.

Health Insurance costs for County employees and their families, while not a state mandate, total \$18.6 million in 2006, an increase of \$1.5 million over 2005, and have spiraled up more than \$8.4 million in the last six years reflecting the nationwide trend in the insurance industry. Also last year we began to see an increase in enrollment in our health insurance plans from employees and their families not previously enrolled. This is due in part to reductions in benefits or increased contributions required by other employers, making our county government benefits more attractive. Recommendations developed by the *Health Insurance Task Team* I created are currently being negotiated (as required) with the unions that will directly impact the cost of health insurance. It's important we continue to provide quality health care coverage at a cost as reasonable as possible to taxpayers, as well as to our employees and retirees.

Workers Compensation costs will increase by \$800,000 this year for a total increase of \$2 million in just two years. We are seeing more claims for both deputy sheriffs and correction officers. A court decision broadening the scope to include any injury or illness a deputy sheriff or correction officer receives while working as compensable continues to have a negative impact on our claims experience. Over the last 2 ½ years, expenses relating to claims from the Sheriff's Office employees, who make up only 17% of the total County workforce, have totaled over \$3 million or 48% of the total expended.

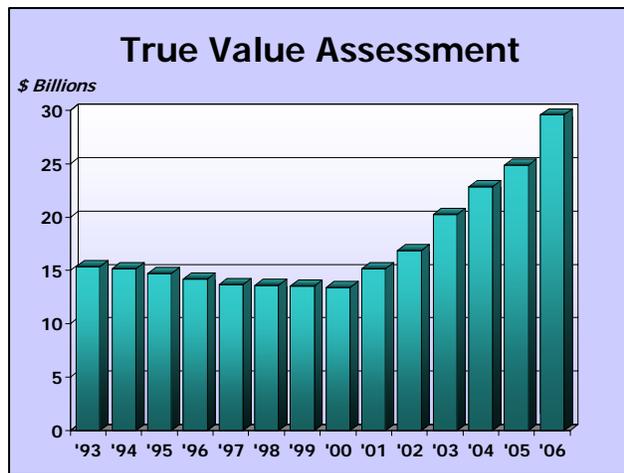
Costs for the state-mandated *Preschool Special Education Program (T&E)* rose sharply last year with a supplemental appropriation of \$1 million required to pay for increased services for the children as well as for multiple retroactive rate adjustments authorized by the state. The cost for this program is projected to increase another \$400,000 this year for a total cost of \$12.5 million.

An additional higher expense is required this year for Dutchess County Resource Recovery Agency (RRA) whose operational costs for garbage disposal are subsidized by the County budget. This is required under a 1984 agreement between the county

and the RRA. The 2006 subsidy or “net service fee” of \$4.1 million is a significant increase over the \$2.25 million appropriated in 2005 as the agency will begin to pay for the installation of \$14.5 million worth of federally mandated environmental improvements to its physical plant. In 2006, we plan to explore funding alternatives so this does not continue to be a direct drain on our operational budget.

I am pleased to say earlier this month we were able to reach agreement with the PBA Sheriff’s Deputies on a new four-year agreement including a wage settlement comparable to other local law enforcement agencies. Our goal was to acknowledge and reward our employees for the outstanding service they provide while recognizing economic realities. A resolution will be before the County Legislature next month to fund this agreement.

Unfortunately, contract negotiations with the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) have stalled over the Union’s unwillingness to agree to an increase in health insurance contributions that would impact future employees only. There was County agreement with the union’s salary plan proposal. Since it appeared no further progress could be made on the health insurance issue, County government has filed a *Declaration of Impasse* with the New York State Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). PERB will assign a mediator to assist the County and the Union in trying to resolve differences. We hope to settle at the earliest opportunity in a way that is both fair to our valued employees and to the taxpayers who fund it.



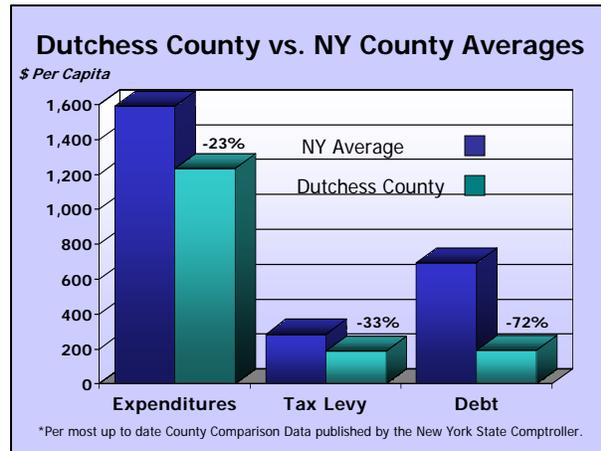
**In spite of the continued growth in Medicaid spending, pension costs, other state-imposed mandates, health insurance, workers’ compensation and employee salary increases, the 2006 spending level of \$367.7 million actually achieves a decrease.** A healthy local economy driven by proactive, multi-dimensional economic development policies, coupled with new construction and a strong housing market yielded \$4.7 billion growth in our true value property assessments reaching \$29.6 billion this year. The sixth year of significant growth

following many years of decline in the early 1990’s represents documented evidence of our successful economic, business and job development efforts.

With the \$4.7 billion growth in our true value assessments, the County property tax rate of \$2.57 per \$1,000 of full market value is a decrease of 28 cents per \$1,000 or 10% compared to 2005. This tax rate will save the “average” owner of a \$250,000 market value home \$70 next year, reduced from approximately \$712 to \$642.

As noted previously, although the County's property tax rate will decrease, the impact on an individual tax bill can vary from town to town based on local assessments and state equalization rates, both factors beyond the County's control. The County's share of the property tax bill accounts for slightly more than 13% of the average annual property tax bill. The remainder is comprised of school taxes, municipal (town, village or city) property taxes and special district taxes (i.e. fire).

However, based on statistical data published by the State Comptroller and reflected in the graph to the right, Dutchess County taxes its residents 33% less per capita and spends 23% less per capita than the statewide county average. Dutchess County indebtedness per capita is an impressive 72% below the statewide county average. Of particular importance to Dutchess County property taxpayers, the county property tax levy totals only 21.9% of the County's constitutional taxing limit.



### Moody's Bond Rating

Dutchess County's rating is still higher than 83% of Moody's rated New York Counties with only 2 counties in a higher rating category.

| Rating | # of Counties |
|--------|---------------|
| Aaa    | 1             |
| Aa1    | 1             |
| Aa2    | 7             |
| A1     | 7             |
| A2     | 12            |
| A3     | 13            |
| Baa1   | 9             |
| Baa2   | 2             |
| Baa3   | 1             |

In December, Moody's Investors Service confirmed Dutchess County's Aa2 rating and removed the county from its "Watchlist for possible downgrade". The confirmation of our Aa2 rating reflects the positive fiscal year 2004 results that significantly exceeded projections, as well as the county's expectation of growth of reserves in fiscal 2005. The Aa2 rating further reflects the county's sizable \$29.6 billion tax base with above average wealth indicators (full value per capita \$105,658) and low debt burden (0.2%). Our removal from the "Watchlist" confirms the County's

enviable standing in the Aa credit category and substantiates our sound and prudent fiscal management. Impressively, only two counties are rated higher.

We can also take pride that Dutchess County's outstanding indebtedness represents a mere 6% of the constitutional debt limit. Based on the needs of our growing county, this positions us for several major project priorities included in the 2006 Capital Program some of which the Legislature has already authorized funding. These include: upgrades and expansion of the *Emergency Response Training Center*, including a command, training and control area that will function as the emergency operations center and a learning lab for public safety; the *Eastern Dutchess Government Center*, which will renovate approximately 26,000 square feet at the former Infirmary site in Millbrook

allowing us to provide many needed services throughout central and eastern Dutchess County; a county *Forensics Center*, a facility which will provide the proper support for the work of the Medical Examiner as well as support for specialized needs of victims of violent crimes; the *Central Dutchess Water Pipeline*; and our highway and rail trail infrastructure. We also look forward to the continuing investment in our education efforts as we prepare for the next major upgrade at Dutchess Community College in 2007 with a \$10 million investment at *Taconic Hall*. Additionally, our reduction of debt service through the New York Counties Tobacco Trust (NYCCT V) positions the County to move forward with these important projects.

The County expects to realize the \$126.9 million sales tax estimate budgeted for 2005, which will represent nearly 4% growth. The County's sales tax estimate for 2006 of \$132.5 million reflects a more modest growth projection of 2.5% this year. This estimate reflects some moderating in the growth rate of the economy, as the outlook for the region is increasingly uncertain over the next 18 months given the rise of energy prices and interest rates.

Our undesignated fund balance at the end of 2003 had dwindled to a mere \$7.6 million compared to \$25.6 million just four years earlier, placing us dangerously below the 5% minimum threshold recommended by *Moody's Investors' Services*. Rebuilding our fund balance and maintaining our fiscal stability has been one of my top priorities and is a shared goal of the County Legislature. In 2004, we made significant progress toward achieving the requirement to replenish and stabilize our "*rainy day funds*" by continuing to apply fiscal constraint, aggressively pursue state and federal aid reimbursements and promote economic development. As a result, we were able to rebuild our reserves with an increase of \$15 million in our audited financial statements for 2004 compared to 2003. Not only have we achieved a tax rate decrease for 2006 but we've done so proudly with no appropriation of fund balance. Due to the higher than projected costs for housing out inmates, attorneys and assigned counsel fees, rising utility costs, employee health insurance, workers' compensation, and state-mandated costs for the *Preschool Special Education Program*, however, the County did have to draw down over \$2.8 million from our reserves during 2005.

While our improved fund balance and cash position is encouraging, we must continue our commitment and discipline to maintain our fiscal stability moving forward. As the new year unfolds, Dutchess County government must continue our strong fiscal stewardship and budget management to insure the taxpayers' money is spent in the most responsible and prudent manner.

Unlike other counties, we have successfully managed to avoid employee lay offs. One way we have been able to control costs is through restructuring and realigning our workforce to work smarter. It is important to emphasize Dutchess County Government still employs fewer people today than it did in 1992 when I took office, although our mission is greatly expanded.

However, bearing in mind the fiscal realities facing the County, we must continue our fiscal stewardship to preserve our long-term fiscal strength and stability. With every budgetary decision we make, we must be mindful our current capital plan will add substantial new debt service to our operating budget each of the next five years. Each of these initiatives should support our core mission as a County government and each should be critical to providing for the future economic well being of our government and of our community.

I commend and thank my executive department heads and our elected officials for their energy, dedication and commitment in continuing to develop creative solutions for the delivery of the core services so important to our residents. There are creative programming and best practice solutions that distinguish Dutchess County as a leader in New York State. That's because these professionals do not limit themselves to their "Dutchess County" work surroundings, but are actively engaged in their industry's organizations and associations.

They represent the County's interests on related regional, state and national organizations including, but certainly not limited to: Emergency Response Coordinator DeWitt Sagendorph, currently president of NYS County Fire Coordinator's Association; Social Services Commissioner Robert Allers, past president of the New York Public Welfare Association; Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Caldwell, past president of the National Association of Counties & Cities Health Officials and the NYS Association of County Health Officials; and Don Miller, Michael Murphy, Tim Mahler, Kathy Myers and others enthusiastically work with their respective associations. Our expertise is shared in the various state level committees to address policies and emerging practices such as: Probation and Community Corrections Director Mary Ellen Still who serves on the NYS Task Force on Juvenile Justice Indicators; Director of the Health & Human Services Cabinet Betsy Brockway on the NYS Office of Children & Family Services Advisory Board; and Veterans Director Nelson Rivera on Congresswoman Sue Kelly's Veterans Advisory Committee and VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, Castle Point Veterans Advisory council.

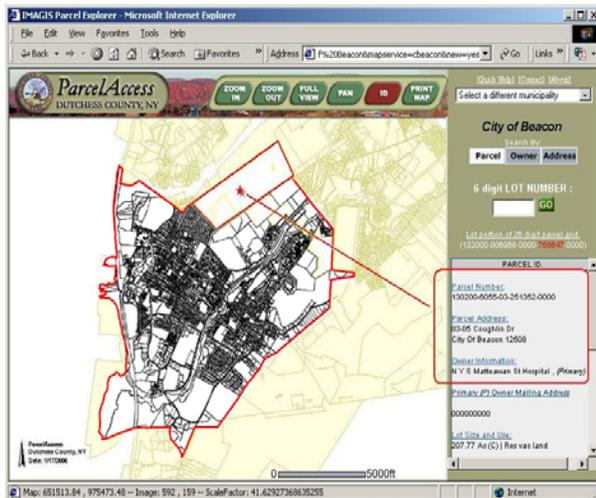
Office for the Aging Director John Beale was recently one of the 1200 delegates from around the country to participate in the 2005 White House Conference on Aging in December. And I will note both the work of the departments of Mental Hygiene and Planning and Development received national awards from the National Association of County Information Officers.

Every successful achievement opens the door to another challenge. The strategies and initiatives we put in place including the creation of key partnerships with the private and not-for-profit sectors, strategic investments in new technologies, and restructuring key service delivery systems continue to place Dutchess County ahead of the curve. It's important we continue to build on our past achievements and move ahead with creative and innovative solutions to enhance our core mission.

## Technology

Dutchess County's commitment to employing technologies to enhance our core services is evidenced by a 2005 award given jointly by the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Center for Digital Government. Notably, Dutchess County government was ranked as #8 in the nation in our population category as one of the most digitally advanced county governments in the country. The only other county in the Northeast recognized was our neighbor to the south, Westchester County. Also, the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation honored the County's Central Services Department with the 2005 *Business Excellence Award* for technology.

We continue to enhance our County Web Site to improve on-line services to the public. As part of this effort, in late December we rolled out a new exciting broad-based *Services Directory*. What sets this apart from other NY County websites is identification of hundreds of services provided by all levels of government and non-government entities. Our *Service Directory* starts with the premise of "what are all the service needs of the public and businesses -- and how do we point them in the direction of the services?" Aside from identifying all the services, this website feature directs the user to the entity responsible for the service (including web site links), FAQs for the service, integration of our GEOACCESS mapping service, and identifies the related eGovernment application for the service.



Another significant On-line Service is our new *ParcelAccess* Web Site application to be implemented early in 2006. *ParcelAccess* will allow the public to search for and view property parcel records as well as display countywide Parcel Maps. This is an example of how we're bringing our services to residents and businesses, rather than requiring them to come to us.

As with private corporations, it is essential we have the proper tools to manage all aspects of our financial activities; at the same time it's important we have computer systems to provide a framework for delivering true eGovernment services. This month, we have implemented the first major phase of our new "integrated" financial management system replacing 30 year old, outdated systems. Additional phases will be rolled out throughout 2006. The system covers a broad scope of applications specific to our day-to-day operations -- improving efficiency, meeting new reporting requirements, reducing needless paperwork, providing planning, analysis and reporting tools, and laying the necessary groundwork to build a bridge to e-Government. Ultimately, it will further improve service levels to our residents and businesses.

I cannot express to you the level of commitment and amount of extra work required to create this new financial management system and to facilitate its implementation. This has been a two year process and the work is ongoing, but I must give special kudos to OCIS Commissioner Tim Mahler and Budget Director Valerie Sommerville as the lead Project Managers, as well as recently retired Comptroller Richard Noel, retired Commissioner of Finance Rita Brannen and current Finance Commissioner Pamela Barrack, for shepherding this project through to this early stage of implementation even more smoothly than could have been expected. I also thank our many employees involved in this project for "stepping up" and truly making a difference in achieving this milestone.

Our Department of Social Services is a state pilot for two new technology projects; the *Commissioners' Dashboard*, which will allow fingertip statistics and management tools for all local DSS commissioners, and a project to replace printers with copiers for all state forms. This will improve both work and cost efficiencies. In addition, the department will implement a new computer software program called "Kindertrack" in 2006. This program will assist with the review, processing and tracking of payments to childcare providers.

Development is also underway to establish a new multi-agency Criminal Justice and Safety computer system combining the best concepts and historical data from our current applications with new visions and technologies. This initiative is also part of our **Healthy Dutchess** effort and will move our public safety efforts well into the 21st century. Interagency data sharing and integration of modern technologies is the focus of the system. As with our existing system, it is unique in that it incorporates on-line "integration" and system wide data sharing across the organizational boundaries of the user departments. Equally significant is our 911 Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, which will be integrated as well. We anticipate this system will be fully implemented in the first part of 2007.

Throughout the nation there are many efforts to integrate law enforcement agencies; however there has been very little done in the way of integration among all other agencies making up the criminal justice system. This integration is essential not only to share vital information, but also as a means to deliver enterprise wide planning and analysis tools. The bottom line is our new system will make our community safer and help our Deputy Sheriffs, District Attorneys and others do their jobs better.

The Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council has worked diligently over the past several years to integrate databases for learning more about criminal behavior patterns and the effectiveness of alternative programs to better manage and prevent criminal activity in Dutchess County. Our ultimate goal, of course, is to enable troubled residents to take full measure in the economic opportunities offered in Dutchess County.

## **LOCAL ECONOMIC SUCCESS IN AN ERA OF GLOBALIZATION**

I am always struck by the fact we're fortunate to live and work in Dutchess where there is so much talent and know how.

Our dynamic public/private economic development partnership continues to produce envious results. Our comprehensive and diverse agenda has created hundreds of new businesses, thousands of new jobs and tens of millions of dollars of new payroll that compounds and multiplies through our local economy.

The targeted business development strategies we have championed create an economically **Healthy Dutchess** that offers opportunity to anyone in our diverse population who wants to succeed.

Our highly successful *Empire Zone* program continues to distinguish itself as **the most successful in all New York**. We have added 6,000 new jobs, \$4.5 billion of new investment, and 300 businesses have become certified participants in the zone showing the demonstrated success of our policy decision to author the economic zone in 1994.

Another measurable outcome of our successful economic blueprint is the \$6.7 billion growth in our tax base over the past two years. An impressive example of the first class team we have includes our Chambers of Commerce, our Dutchess Industrial Development Agency (IDA), the leadership we get from our County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and of course the visionary perspective from County Planning and Development. Central to the team's success is the support from the County Legislature and senior staff in the Executive office.

These achievements have also impressed others who observe the work being done in Dutchess County. Simply said, others have noticed!!! That is why in the past we have been recognized by the *Milken Institute* as the #1 economic growth county in the state. In 2005, many new honors were added to our county. Dutchess again found its way onto several lists of "bests."

Dutchess was ranked 13th in the nation among mid-size communities as the safest place to live and work. *Forbes* said Dutchess was 16th in the U.S. measured by the favorable cost of doing business, job growth, and for educational attainment. *Inc. magazine* ranked Dutchess # 46 in the nation as a "Big Mover" among "Best Places." And, Hopewell Junction was ranked in the top 50 towns to live and raise a family by *Money* magazine. Wow! All are very distinguished accomplishments, based on the great work done by so many people and organizations that make up "*Team Dutchess*".

We have much more energy in our local economy that will continue to spark an economically **Healthy Dutchess**. That economic energy is visible all across the four regions of our county. In the Harlem Valley, the *Dover Knolls* project stands to drive that region of our county economy for many years. The *Rivers and Estuary Center* in Beacon will be a catalyst for not only that community, but it will help meet one of our

prime objectives to brand our county across the country and around the world. In the Dutchess core area, the plans for the redevelopment of the *Hudson River Psychiatric Center* will provide an enormous economic opportunity for the center of our county.



Further up the road, moving into the northern Dutchess region, the *St. Andrews Village* project on county property across from the *Culinary Institute of America* will be one of the most visionary and impressive projects in the county's history, a huge economic engine for northern Dutchess. Its quality will set a new standard for the County, exemplifying Greenway principles, while adding an estimated 500 jobs to the local

payroll – and also saving hundreds of acres as forever open space.

All these projects will provide dramatic added economic strength to our construction workers, to local supply companies, to our banking industry and to our retail and commercial sectors -- and to the Dutchess tourism sector as well.

Two critically important infrastructure projects are in our future -- one near term and the other thereafter. The *Central Dutchess Pipeline* will come online later this year completing a grueling six-year effort to provide the largest and most significant water infrastructure project in the county's history.

Next on our horizon, I am pleased to announce, is a solution to the long suffering sewer needs of Hyde Park, specifically the hamlet area. After dozens of conversations and meetings held with Commissioner Roger Akeley, the Water and Wastewater Authority staff, Chair Tom LeGrand, and local officials, we are now able to forge a complex public/private arrangement that will provide sewer for the St. Andrews site, the CIA, the property north of St. Andrews Road and up into the Hyde Park "Hamlet."



Just days ago, I again hosted Congressman John Sweeney in Hyde Park for further discussion of the sewer project to help make this effort a success. The residents of Hyde Park should be grateful to Congressman Sweeney for his continued work to put this collaborative effort together and for the funding he has directed to seed its early phases.

All these efforts, and the leadership from so many, will add hundreds of millions of dollars of further expansion to our tax base. The end results are stronger local businesses, even more local jobs, bigger payrolls and better economic security as we continue to harvest the benefits of a **Healthy Dutchess**.

What does it take for Dutchess to continue to succeed in our global economy?

We've known for a long time we need to think globally but act locally. In days past, industries developed because they were close to particular natural or human resources. We are moving into an era where the playing field has been leveled as Tom Friedman has documented in "*The World is Flat*." Manufacturing may be in China, design work in London, marketing in New York and customer service in India. We don't compete just with neighboring communities for new business – our competition is increasingly national and even international. As our world becomes increasingly interdependent, Dutchess is required to carve our own niche, "brand" ourselves, with the idea of distinguishing ourselves. That is why we need to show off our landscape, protect our precious natural resources, recognize and enhance our historic centers, strengthen our ability to access and enjoy our surroundings, and be ever aware of the need for smart growth to occur only in the best, community-oriented layouts.

### **SAVE WHAT MUST BE SAVED, BUILD WHAT MUST BE BUILT**

Residents across Dutchess County want and deserve good land-use planning. That is why LaGrange, with the guidance of the county, has undergone a rezoning to create a zone for a new town center. When built, it will be the first balanced community to be constructed since the development of Millbrook in 1856!

That is why Rhinebeck is in the process of limiting priority development districts to only two areas ("smart" locations) in town, while preserving a vast green belt with very low-density zoning.

That is why to be consistent with the county's Greenway values; its largest zone in Hyde Park's new zoning ordinance is the *Greenbelt Zone*.

That is why Beekman residents with the encouragement of county leadership have passed a bond to help preserve its remaining open space.

That is why North East and Amenia are both exploring new ways to keep their towns rural, encouraging development only in "smart" locations, near existing settlements and within suitable building envelopes.



That is why Union Vale joined the County as a funding partner in purchasing the development rights to the *Abel Farm*.

That is why Dover is carefully reviewing a proposal for the Wingdale area to insure it conforms to the highest developmental standards of the county's Greenway Plan and to take full advantage of the Metro North station as a transportation alternative.

That is why Milan and Red Hook are advancing plans to protect their rural landscapes.

That is why Millbrook became the 28<sup>th</sup> community in Dutchess to join our Dutchess County *Greenway Compact*.

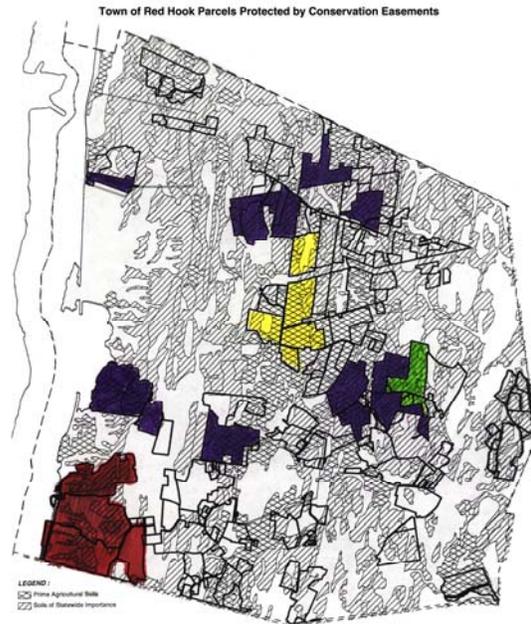
That is why Pine Plains is busily working on its first ever zoning ordinance.

That is why we hear the word "moratorium" so frequently.

That is also why most towns, villages and our cities are becoming accustomed to and confident in issues of design. Fewer developers are getting away with uninspired subdivisions and site plans. They should all be held to these high standards. Local review boards feel newly empowered to represent the public interest with increasing insistence that we protect our natural heritage and develop not only big expensive houses, but also attractive groupings of houses.

But I strongly caution we not be rigidly anti-growth. Rather, we should insist upon *balanced* smart growth. Growth in our businesses, our population, and our tax base actually sustains our efforts and programs to save the landscape and viewsheds. Since 1999, the county open space initiative I originated has added 2,000 acres of permanently protected farmland and open space to a growing inventory. Funding availability to accomplish this, of course, depends on a healthy, growing economy. Our motto must continue to be, "*save what must be saved, build what must be built.*" Balanced growth and high quality of life go hand-in-hand.

I have challenged our towns, villages and cities to join the County in saving the land that should be saved. Who is in a better position to know the special open space or agricultural resources than local residents, community leaders and their elected officials? **A third** of our localities have already responded to that challenge with local purchases of development rights and conservancy easements, and with dedicated bond allocations. I won't be satisfied until permanent open space implementation is an adopted policy of every local government agenda. Trail and open space plans are an essential component of our local land use planning process.



In 2001, I set a goal of 10,000 acres to be permanently protected in the decade. We have made progress by working together – we're a fifth of the way there. But more local governments must pitch in to make the 2001 goal a reality. It's both possible and necessary. I know our residents want carefully selected easement purchases, along with effective non-sprawl planning. So my hope is a number of local communities will come forward in 2006 with these visionary open space preservation programs.

Our residents want to see the wise purchase of development rights, trails for walkers, hikers and bicycles and the chance for close-to-home peacefulness in a work-a-day world of traffic and noise. So I again challenge local communities to make preserving open space a top priority and come to the County with both intention and funding commitments so our *Partnership for Manageable Growth* can be part of our legacy to future generations.

When we work on the complicated process of maintaining our rural character and high quality of life, we again must *measure twice, cut once*. We must take care that certain well-intentioned actions do not limit our residents in other, unintended ways. Most important is to remain socially inclusive. It is not right to become an "exclusive" County only for people with incomes high enough to afford the very expensive homes being built. We don't want to be the housing option for people making Westchester salaries, while we fail our own local families and fall short of providing for our own workers and for our young adults from the families who have long called Dutchess home.

We talk about allowing our teachers, police and firemen to be able to live within the communities they serve. But equally important are the shopkeepers we rely on at the local florist, grocery store or pharmacy, the service workers who provide your lunch or dinner at a fine local restaurant, the first-time homebuyers and our elderly residents who need to downsize into an affordable dwelling. Many of us remember the day when

people of average means could have reasonable expectations of a comfortable home, good schools and a safe community.

The home is central to the American dream, the American fabric and must always be the centerpiece of our quality of life measurement. That is why we established a *Housing Consortium* in 2004. Working in conjunction with the *Economic Development Corporation*, the County's Department of Planning and Development, and the *Dyson Foundation*, this group has initiated activity in employer-assisted housing, and provided assistance to local communities as they implement workforce housing initiatives.

A December 2001 county task force report challenged the community and local towns stating:

***“Local municipalities should review and change master plans and zoning ordinances to provide land for such housing.”***

We're delighted some communities have accepted the challenge set by the County. As master plans and zoning are rewritten, we will advance a higher set of values and ideals to meet the challenge of housing affordability for a diverse workforce. And we will correspondingly help our local economy.

Some communities have listened to the county's vision. East Fishkill, Pawling and Fishkill are moving toward inclusiveness by requiring developers to build a mix of housing inventory where people with family incomes of \$40,000 to \$70,000 have a chance to purchase a new home. Dover is currently finishing a draft of new inclusionary housing provisions. And this is with no compromise in appearance or increase in sprawl. Certainly, a mix of housing is superior to development stratified solely by income and wealth.

Increasing our mixed-income housing inventory is a complicated process if it is to be effective and fair. Therefore, the demand on our time for assistance has increased dramatically. That is why I've asked Commissioner Akeley to be ready to increase our capacity to assist localities when they've done the right thing by amending their zoning with inclusionary rather than exclusionary housing provisions. It is my expectation and hope several more communities will follow the county lead in 2006 and will make zoning changes for balanced housing. Nothing is more fundamental toward maintaining a diverse, well functioning local economy.

### **VALUE-ADDED CHANGE**

To maintain a high quality of life, Dutchess County and its individual communities must have a "value added" mentality. Mostly, our county budget goes to pay current bills for daily county services and programs needed by our residents. But when we as partners collectively invest to use our resources to save land, build rail trails, new parks or implement wise environmental protection measures, when we care for our

surroundings, we increase the value of our home front because it becomes a more beautiful and healthy place to live. And this visionary work becomes part of our heritage. Surely, we must be stewards of the budget, but all of us must just as importantly be stewards of the land.

Over this past year, many county agencies including the County Legislature, have worked with partner entities such as the *Soil and Water Conservation District* and the *Environmental Management Council* to investigate our water resources in more detail so we have a basis to determine what governmental action might be needed to adequately protect our groundwater. This work is ongoing. Again, we must *measure twice, cut once* before we decide how to do business in the future.

I am looking to improve our governmental capacity to manage the environment. In 2005, Legislative Chairman Kendall and I worked with the *Cornell Cooperative Extension Service* to add an environmental program area. The Extension agreed to manage activity that previously had been shepherded by the *Environmental Management Council*. This new arrangement should help to stabilize the EMC and be more responsive to the environmental contract work desired by the County.

In addition, I have asked Commissioner Akeley to examine his agency to take more responsibility in coordinating our efforts to protect the environment and to make sure every local master plan, every new development, and each initiative for economic growth has an environmental component. I am looking to our Departments of Health, Public Works, Planning and the County Attorney's office, to form a more united and focused approach to environmental protection. We must go beyond standard permit and review activities to identify regional and local challenges; we must set new goals and standards; and we must monitor our work at achieving environmental goals. Of course, we can only accomplish such a task by incorporating the talents and energies of local governments and non-profit agencies. Later in the year, we will expect to have identified institutional changes to improve the function of our environmental protection structures and call for measures that will factor "sustainability" in the decision-making of County government.

With assistance of local foundations and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, several communities are completing biodiversity studies. Hudsonia, located in Red Hook, has been contracted to perform much of the technical work. Their results will help us "save what should be saved," challenging each community to be more precise in defining what areas should be developed. If we are going to be "sprawl busters," we must be better planners. We know the reasons why it is important to have and to save -- wildlife habitat protection, agricultural land preservation, water storage, noise buffers, etc. -- and we must take the measures necessary.

We are equally compelled to **allow high-quality development** with requisite amenities – utilities, sidewalks, mixed uses, good design, public amenities, more compact site plans. Sprawl busting doesn't just happen by accident and it isn't accomplished by pulling up the drawbridge at our borders. It means changing our practices and having

the will, courage and foresight to improve local land use ordinances. I commend the communities that are working in this direction but again caution: sprawl-busting cannot happen with a business-as-usual attitude.

Value-added improvements are being made once again through application of community development funding. For 2006, I have announced a new round of projects: water district improvements in North East, parking lot improvements in Millerton, strategic street improvements in Red Hook, infrastructure improvements in Stanford and Red Hook and an infrastructure upgrade at Hackett Hill Park in Hyde Park.

And as I again remind you that priority-growth area designation is smart growth, the necessary complement to saving ourselves from becoming a sea of look-alike subdivisions, I am reminded of the words of William Arthur Ward:

***“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts his sails.”***

As we continue our Dutchess County journey together, I am very thankful for the realists. We continually look to improve and refine the quality of services and programs we provide, and continue to *measure twice, cut once* in our evaluation of what works, what doesn't, and what we may need to “adjust” to continue to craft and maintain a ***Healthy Dutchess***.

### ***A HEALTHY DUTCHESS: In Body, Mind, and Play***

Just as we took a coordinating and convening leadership role in 1993 to help create a healthier economic climate, I believe county government can and does play an important role in creating healthier lives. As we envision a healthy community, there are many quality of life factors to be considered. There's a need for human services health and public health, as well as mental, emotional and spiritual health. Public safety is at the core of a healthy community, and healthy living must be encouraged and allowed through recreational and environmental opportunities.

Dutchess County government's mission includes providing the services and programs necessary to fulfill the opportunities for a ***Healthy Dutchess***, and every day we continue to help make Dutchess healthier. But I believe we can do more and we can do better.

That is why in addition to the many highly effective existing programs and services we already provide, I have launched efforts to create an even more comprehensive and cohesive, yet diverse, set of new ***Healthy Dutchess*** initiatives for 2006, including stronger efforts to inform and educate our community as to what's available, when and where it's available, and how to access it. And I am especially thankful the County Legislature gave their enthusiastic support for these initiatives during the adoption of the 2006 county budget.

In 2005, in order to ensure an even more comprehensive and integrated approach to what we do in county government, we implemented the *Health and Human Services Cabinet*. The *Cabinet* is composed of the Commissioners of the Departments of Health, Mental Hygiene and Social Services, and the Directors of the Office for Aging, Probation and Community Corrections, Veterans Affairs, and Youth Bureau with representatives from the Budget and County Executive's Office. It serves as a high level executive management team to conduct cross systems planning, address issues affecting multiple departments, share information on departmental best practices and develop strategies to maximize the County's resources. We have already experienced increased communication and understanding about the involved departments/programs and a willingness to collaborate at a greater degree than before; however, the Cabinet's work is just beginning.

Two work groups have been established so far to promote a healthier community agenda. The *Performance Evaluation Work Group* will implement performance outcome measures and common basic monitoring/reporting requirements for human services county-run programs and contracts – to make sure the services are providing the results we want and need. The *Integrated Public Awareness Work Group* will create cooperative interdepartmental purchasing agreements for media, share expertise and create a common branding of the County's message. This will better educate our residents and assist them in readily identifying information on county government programs and services. Last fall at my direction, the *Cabinet* also convened an ad-hoc Community Leaders committee to respond to Katrina evacuees' local needs as requested by the local American Red Cross Chapter.

The *Cabinet* members will monitor and measure our new human service 2006 initiatives, provide training and technical assistance for human service programs, develop a process to report program outcomes using our framework of "Preparation, Prevention, Protection and Participation," and implement the Multi-Solutions Collaboration Workgroup to improve the coordination of services for families and individuals involved in multiple departments.

### **Healthier Children and Families**

Examples of new and enhanced programs and services for healthier children include an *Early Childhood Coordinated Children's Services Initiative* to create a comprehensive system of care in Dutchess County for our early childhood population. This has been recommended by DSS Commissioner Allers, Legislator Marcus Molinaro and the *Dutchess County Zero to Three Partnership*. Under the leadership of Dr. James McGuirk, Executive Director of Astor Home for Children, the *Early Childhood Coordinated Children's Services Initiative* will provide necessary service coordination for infants and children, birth through four years old, who are at risk for foster care placement or abuse and maltreatment. The goals for the multi-agency project will be increased access for families to community based preventive services; improved, effective coordination of services with the families' active participation; decreased

referrals to our social services system; and identification of gaps or barriers in the current child development system.

With new resources in 2006, we will put in place a *Healthy Baby Initiative/Safe Baby Awareness* campaign that I believe can spread life saving information for new parents and caregivers on quality childcare guidelines and how to avoid physical harm to babies through inappropriate handling by caregivers. The campaign will include a media component to raise awareness on the harm of *shaken baby syndrome* for any adults involved with young children: grandparents, neighbors, friends, babysitters as well as parents. Brochures printed in English and Spanish will reach over 10,000 families and caregivers with information on critical health related issues for our youngest most vulnerable residents.

For our older youth at risk for participation in gang activities, I have set aside \$115,000 for our DC Youth Gang Prevention Initiative. The recent City of Poughkeepsie's Juvenile Violent Crime Needs Assessment identifies "collaboration and unity" as a priority in addressing youth violent crime. Our Youth Bureau and DC Workforce Investment Board resources and proven collaborative experience have joined together to implement this initiative. The focus will be on working with youth and various sectors to build a community approach to reducing local youth gang involvement and youth violence. This initiative will support youth programming that provides an alternative, safe culture and incorporates the nationally identified effective youth gang prevention strategies of mentoring with caring adults, linkages to support services, work readiness skills development, internships and career exploration. We have already started this program early in 2006, and today I am pleased to report the DC WIB Youth Council will subcontract with three community organizations to serve young people at risk in Hyde Park, Beacon, and Poughkeepsie. This initiative may not only make a healthier life for the youth it serves, but it could save a life!

As part of my commitment to the health of young people, I am expanding the very successful, comprehensive *Tobacco Use Prevention* and *Childhood Obesity* programs for young people with an allocation of \$525,000. This is part of our *Child Health Initiative (CHI)* created in 1999, and brings our multi-year funding commitment with the *Children's Services Council* to an impressive total of nearly \$3 million! *CHI* funded services discourage our youth from smoking and work to increase their healthy eating/exercise behaviors. Using researched-based, effective prevention strategies and survey data to measure impact, *CHI* has already achieved success with our middle school students and teens.

The *Childhood Obesity program* was new in 2005. It began with a prevalence study this past summer, and the results of the study are striking: overall, Dutchess County children are more overweight and obese than the rest of the nation's youth! To help address this issue, I have committed \$100,000 in 2006 to ensure Dutchess County residents, in particular children, their parents and care givers:

- will be aware of the negative impact of obesity, including co-morbidities associated with obesity on their health;

- will be knowledgeable of the ways to prevent obesity, including good nutrition, healthy eating habits and physical activity; and
- children who are overweight or obese will have access to intervention programs including physician interaction that will help them reach and maintain the proper weight.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in New York State as well as the nation. An estimated 86,000 people will be diagnosed with cancer in New York in 2006 - nearly 235 people each day of the year. An estimated 36,000 New Yorkers will die from cancer - about 100 individuals each day. In Dutchess County, the cancer burden is similar to the nation and state. While annual cancer mortality rates have decreased, the annual incidence rate (number of new cases) has increased. Additionally, cancer still remains the second leading cause of death in Dutchess County, second to cardiovascular diseases.

Therefore, in keeping with my efforts to create a more comprehensive and coordinated effort for a **Healthy Dutchess**, I have asked Dr. Michael Caldwell, Commissioner of Health, to convene a *Cancer Council* to facilitate dialogue on the issue and to help develop a comprehensive cancer control plan for the county. Funding will enable Dr. Caldwell to bring the partners together and to create and implement a local *Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan*. The Council will be modeled after *C-Change*, which is comprised of the nation's key cancer leaders from government, business, and non-profit sectors. These leaders share the vision of a future where cancer is prevented, detected early, cured or is managed successfully as a chronic illness. Our ultimate goal is to reduce the burden of cancer in Dutchess County.

Another public health issue of great interest to the community and the County Legislature is Lyme Disease. Last year we funded an international Lyme Disease conference that was held in Dutchess County. This year we earmarked resources to fund basic research and to educate the community about risks and preventions of tick-borne disease. Our Health Department also continues to offer free educational programs and identification services as well as a 24-hour Lyme disease information hotline.

I am very pleased with the results of the discount prescription drug card program I launched in 2005 with support from the County Legislature to help consumers cope with the high price of prescription drugs. The free prescription drug discount cards were made available under a program sponsored by the National Association of Counties (NACo).

The cards may be used by all county residents, regardless of age, income, or existing health coverage, and are accepted at 58 pharmacies throughout the county. A national network of more than 54,000 participating retail pharmacies also honor the NACo prescription discount card. Cardholders and their family members may use the card any time their prescriptions are not covered by insurance.

As of December 2005, a total of 3,530 residents had used the prescription discount card to fill over 8,000 prescriptions, and they saved \$110,000. That's an average of 23% savings per prescription, and is real evidence of our ability with little to no additional cost to truly make a healthier difference in the lives of our residents!

In most areas of public health, government shares certain responsibilities with private citizens. I have allocated an additional \$85,000 this year to the Department of Health for an enhanced *Safe Drinking Water* education program. The program is designed to wage a comprehensive, multi-faceted public education and public awareness outreach campaign to provide accurate information to our residents. The goal is to assist them in decision-making regarding their drinking water supply and to make them aware of ways to reduce the risk of contaminated water. As indicated in the many and varied public health initiatives already mentioned, as well as the many other public health services we provide which are not mentioned here, we take our role to promote better health seriously.

### **Public Safety for a Healthy Dutchess**

Today, we live in a world where we all must expect the unexpected. I believe it is a primary goal of County Government to protect our residents. One of the best ways county government can help is to give our residents the knowledge and expertise to effectively deal with emergency situations. Therefore, I plan several initiatives for 2006 that are focused on strengthening emergency preparedness and public safety for county residents.

The final report of the "*Changing Times in the Fire Service*" committee, an offshoot of the *COMEVOL* forum we sponsored maintains what we have known for some time – communities nationwide have a recruitment and retention challenge within the ranks of the volunteer fire and EMS departments. We must do more to shore up our volunteer numbers and avoid taxpayers having to foot the bill for an increasing number of paid firefighters. To address this issue, we will sponsor a *Comevol Follow-up Forum* to be held in 2006.

In 2006, I have committed funding for three new part-time staff to offer added training for volunteer firefighters at the Training Center. As part of the overall *Preparedness Planning* we practice, we are committed to leadership management training programs to reinforce effective and qualified direction of emergency support personnel, which will result in improved retention of first responder volunteers from our local communities. As part of these efforts, county personnel will also work with local emergency service organizations. I know many of our local volunteer companies have struggled with volunteer retention and recruitment and that is why I want to help them in this comprehensive, countywide effort.

Another area of public safety focus for 2006 is the *Medical Reserve Corps* (MRC). The MRC existed only as a concept in 2002, with no local, state or federal model to follow. A new MRC Coordinator position will have the responsibility to strengthen the recruitment, training and organization of the civilian volunteers to support our efforts in

the event of a large-scale natural disaster or bio-terrorism event. Today there are over 250 trained local Dutchess volunteers with a goal to expand to over 1,000. The coordinator's role is vital to sustaining and growing the necessary capabilities of the MRC, and coordinating training and planning with numerous county organizations, educational and medical institutions.

Dutchess County's MRC has consistently been featured as a best practice by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, Federal Emergency Management Agency, New York State Emergency Management Office and the New York State Department of Health for its collaborative and integrated approach to recruiting and training citizens to serve in various support roles for disaster planning.

I have also made available resources to support a comprehensive public education and outreach of the "ICE" cell phone plan to encourage public use and ensure awareness by police, hospitals, fire and emergency responders. The acronym "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) means next of kin notification can be entered into cell phones under "ICE" so first responders know whom to notify in the event of accident or injury. I know this initiative is important to the County Legislature, particularly Legislator Rob Rolison, and I am confident it will prove to be an effective tool for our community.

### **Human and Social Services Health Across the Ages**

There exist pockets of our population that require certain supportive services to maintain a degree of healthy independence. We provide numerous programs and services through various departments for job success such as mentoring, Wheels-to-Work transportation needs, training, job clubs, apprenticeship programs, childcare as well as basic social service and mental health services.

An exciting new initiative for job success in 2006 is our "*Tools of the Trade Apprenticeship Program.*" This is a partnership enterprise between local area manufacturers, the Poughkeepsie Area Chamber of Commerce and our Department of Social Services. In collaboration with Dutchess Community College, local manufacturers, PACC, and DSS, participants will learn soft skills, earn GED's and work as apprentices in the afternoons. They will receive supportive services such as the mentoring, childcare, and transportation subsidies already mentioned while learning job skills and earning wages. Employers will receive tax credits and trainees will become full time when they have been trained to the company's technical standard.

Also on board for 2006 is *Pathways to Employment* – a program Dutchess County was asked to participate in by our oversight agency, the New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives. The project is funded by the National Institute of Corrections to promote employment for individuals involved with the criminal justice system. Our agency, as part of this project, agreed to serve as the regional "hub" for training. This is a comprehensive approach for giving practical skills to probationers to target unemployment and under employment, a known risk factor in recidivism. We work closely with *Dutchess Works* to provide skill-building services.

There will also be an added focus in 2006 on supports to keep our seniors in their homes longer, additional outreach to our veteran population, additional support for our homeless population, and continued emphasis on housing for seniors and for low-income populations. We have considered it a key objective that the Office for the Aging continues to be successful in meeting the challenges of our senior citizen population to lead productive, independent lives and remain in our community close to their families and friends. With the growth in our aging population, we will continue our core programs for seniors, including the nutrition and exercise programs we launched in 1997 that are so popular. The program was expanded in 1999 and I am proud to say today it is by far the largest program in the state with over 1400 participants and 55



locations. Dutchess won a national award for this program, which again demonstrates our emphasis on a **Healthy Dutchess**. A new exercise class is starting in Pine Plains Presbyterian Church this year.

For 2006, Office for the Aging will have a new Community Services Worker to respond to the growing number of senior citizens and their families who need additional insurance counseling for Medicare Part D, social security, long-term health care, home and adult day care services or personal emergency response systems. And importantly, a new Case Manager in CASA will help handle an increased number of caseloads to keep the elderly at home rather than being forced into nursing homes.

In order to better serve our veterans and their families, including our returning service men and women from the Gulf war area, we are adding a part-time staff position to our Veterans Services Agency. This will also provide for better outreach to the Beacon and Pine Plains satellite offices. The department's budget includes a new *Veterans' Services Public Awareness* campaign to provide information for local veterans on the County's increased property tax exemption for Veterans and update on services for veterans and their spouses. This mailing should go out very shortly. By educating our veterans on how to obtain their full federal provided benefits, we reduce the potential burden on County funded services and help them receive the well-deserved recognition for sacrifices they made for all of us.

The Legislature also supported my request for \$97,500 to fund emergency housing for the homeless as requested by the DC Housing Coalition, under the leadership of Departments of Mental Hygiene and Planning, to meet the short term needs of families and individuals who are unable to find permanent housing in our tight rental market. This Executive initiative will fulfill the year round unmet emergency housing needs for those ineligible for TANF or Safety Net support.

The County has also funded 12 senior citizen property rehabilitations in 2005. We



assisted Hudson Valley Housing Development Fund Company, which is constructing Meadow Ridge II, a senior project in Beacon. More funding has been directed toward the Millbrook Church Alliance for additional senior citizen units. Hamilton Gardens, 54 attractive units on the 400 Block of Main Street in Poughkeepsie should be open any day now. The County is involved with eight

ownership opportunities in cooperation with Hudson River Housing. Most exciting is the brownfield cleanup of the Perx property off Route 9 in Red Hook. The property is on schedule to be converted from industrial blight to construction of a senior living complex. Additionally the County is working closely with East Fishkill as it works to implement its inclusionary zoning regulations.

### **Healthy Living Physical Amenities**

A healthy community must have outlets and opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and family enjoyment. Along with the many outstanding cultural and historic sites throughout Dutchess County, we have a growing inventory of county parks that are valuable assets in contributing to the quality of life we offer our residents.

Just last October, I announced the opening of the County's new *Quiet Cove Park*, a cooperative effort between Dutchess County and New York State. *Quiet Cove*, located in the northern part of the Town of Poughkeepsie, is 27 acres of land that was formerly part of the Hudson River Psychiatric Center property and sits on the Hudson River waterfront. We have begun in earnest a three-year phase of planning and development that will ultimately invest \$1,000,000 of county dollars into *Quiet Cove*. Residents will appreciate its quiet beauty and spectacular view of the river. Beginning April 1 this year, the park will be open to the public seven days a week.

We will also undertake several enhancements and initiatives to expand and preserve the County's existing park and recreation facilities. Building upon our existing relationships with the local arts & cultural community, our recently completed band shell facility at *Bowdoin Park* hopes to host three county sponsored concerts in 2006, along with providing the facility for interested school groups and community organizations. The inaugural event of the band shell in September brought 10,000 people to *Bowdoin Park*. With a re-grading project of the concert hill to commence this spring, the site will be completely ready to host fabulous spectator views of both the shows on stage as well as the scenic Hudson River, all from one seat!

In addition, we will be creating an in-line skating facility for roller hockey leagues to have another venue. The popularity of the sport has grown dramatically in recent years and the Town of Poughkeepsie's donation of the Dasher Boards has enabled us to

collaboratively provide this recreational opportunity. In addition, the building of a basketball court adjacent to the rink will provide additional recreational opportunities for our county residents.

*Wilcox Park* in northern Dutchess will see the construction of a new pavilion this spring, with construction of this fourth pavilion for *Wilcox* scheduled for completion by Memorial Day weekend. Once built, the new 40' x 76' structure will be the largest of any pavilion within our county parks, and will be complete with attached restrooms and a full kitchen facility. The construction of the pavilion will coincide with a new initiative to expand the weekend operational hours for *Wilcox Park*. The park will now be available for public use seven days a week from April 1 to October 31.

Although not commonly thought of as a county park, that's just what *Dutchess Stadium* is. Over the past year, we have been involved in fruitful negotiations with the *Hudson Valley Renegades* to continue our relationship at *Dutchess Stadium* for the next ten years. Since 1994, the *Renegades* have offered quality, family friendly entertainment for hundreds of thousands residents and guests, and we look forward to many more years of baseball enjoyment at *Dutchess Stadium*.

We continue to develop our growing network of trails, which are becoming increasingly popular with our residents and tourists alike. In eastern Dutchess, the *Harlem Valley Rail Trail* is set for another extension. This trail opened in 1996 with a 4.5-mile stretch from Amenia to Northeast, and its use and enjoyment has surpassed all expectations. Phase 4 will extend the trail another seven miles to the Columbia County border, completing 18.5 miles of trail in Dutchess County. This sets the stage for the eventual completion of the trail to the Copake Falls area of the Taconic State Park in Columbia County.

We have many incredible settings throughout the county to see, beckoning us to actively participate in the natural beauty of Dutchess County. Beginning in the fall of 2006 and continuing into 2007 we will be building an awesome *Dutchess Rail Trail*, an 11-mile linear county park running through the middle of the County, which could very well become the most widely used portion of our parks system. We will be working with our engineering consultants for this project to conduct town meetings in February in the four towns (LaGrange, East Fishkill, Poughkeepsie, and Wappinger) that will contain the trail, and this input will be essential in our finalizing the full scope of the project. Amenities along the trail such as rest areas, flower gardens, play areas and exercise stations will provide the opportunity for individuals and groups to support this magnificent community collaboration that is sure to become one of the regions major tourist attractions. A web site is being created for input and updates as the project progresses.

Although not part of the county parks inventory, the *Community Rowing Center Boathouse* on the Poughkeepsie waterfront is a fabulous addition to our waterfront assets. Working with the Board of the *Hudson River Rowing Association* we have helped secure the \$3,000,000 funding necessary to complete the project. Local high

school rowing clubs as well as adult members of the association will use it. Today, the exterior of the boathouse is largely completed. Current construction activity is focusing on inside work. The boathouse consists of two substantial structures. One is an unheated, 5-bay storage facility that will house about 70 shells. The other is an exercise and training facility. We are expecting to complete the building in time for an April dedication then used for the spring high school rowing season. This collaborative effort is an unparalleled example of a very successful public-private partnership and another excellent use of our lengthy and enticing riverfront.

The *Community Rowing Center Boathouse* helps create a renewed “Boathouse Row” that includes Vassar College property, Marist’s boathouses and Longview Park, and *Quiet Cove Park* to the North – further enhancing Dutchess County’s enviable location as the “front porch” to the Hudson River.

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A good friend recently sent me an article that quoted Ed Zore, the president and chief executive officer of Northwestern Mutual. I found it to be so descriptive of how I view our 14, now into 15 years together. Zore said,

***“When we work together, we grow together, when we grow together, we grow stronger, and when we grow stronger, we make a tremendous difference...”***

The differences we have made, and look to make in 2006 are emblematic not only of the mission and vision of our county government, but also of the spirit of our citizens.

So as we begin another year in the life of Dutchess County, we have taken this opportunity to measure our progress. We will check it again as the year goes along. And we’ll do our jobs knowing that our prudent approach will help us “get it right.”

May God Bless our troops, their families, and Dutchess County.

Thank you.

William R. Steinhaus  
Dutchess County Executive  
January 18, 2006