

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

Delivered By
Genesee County Legislature Chair
Mary Pat Hancock

January 26, 2011

7PM

Old Courthouse Legislature Chambers

Thank you for coming this evening to listen to what you may imagine is going to be a doom and gloom evening...little money, no control, and no positives. Well, I won't do that talk...Instead, I am going to emphasize in brief what has been accomplished in Genesee County during 2010...in spite of the challenges that confronted us and still do. I have received excellent information from the department heads, and I am grateful for their contributions. No matter how hard I worked, it all just couldn't be condensed without missing some of the meat. So you can refer to the full department reviews that have been submitted and are available on request.

You see, I would be remiss in my duty if I missed the opportunity to confront the reality of the state's budget crisis, its accompanying ripple effects...and what we can and must do on the local level to survive and thrive. You deserve to know how "the State of the State" impacts the "State of the County".

First, let's appreciate the accomplishments of 2010. In some instances it was business as usual, in unusual circumstances.

The County Manager's office successfully orchestrated hiring the consultant and insuring the completion of the CGR analysis of the Nursing Home. The long anticipated Nursing Home study was completed towards the end of 2010. It was specific and all encompassing, some of the suggestions for improvement have already been implemented and the Legislature is determined to act swiftly, but prudently to prioritize and execute selected options. The fine results of the Department of Health Survey were a prime factor in Genesee County's Nursing Home receipt of a 5 star rating from the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services. This places them as a top 10% facility in quality of services provided. Not taking anything for granted their goals for 2011 include improved technology for medical record keeping and all possible measures to approach sound fiscal health.

The County Manager's office is also the budget office and they worked with all the usual partners and departments to bring the County Legislature what they requested, a timely, balanced and well thought out 2011 budget proposal that maintained a stable tax rate for the fourth consecutive year. It stimulated serious discussions and several options for service delivery and financial solvency that will continue to be examined as the 2012 budget deliberations begin. A real coup, was the "must do" project of energy retrofit and relighting Capital Improvement Plan for almost all of our County buildings. After conducting an energy usage audit and developing a plan to reduce energy costs, this office, together with the Facilities Management Department were successful in securing outside funding to make the capital improvements needed to upgrade our facilities. In 2011 that department will implement the County's first Comprehensive Energy Efficiency Program and utilize almost a half million dollars of NYSERTA funds that will go for upgrades in ten county buildings. These projects, which range from lighting fixture replacements to boiler burner control upgrades, will result in a reduction in energy consumption and annual savings to the County through reduced energy costs.

2010 was a banner year for the Board of Elections, and for all voters in New York State. It was the first year the old lever machines were retired and the new electronic voting devices were rolled out in every polling site. By using a federal grant available to the Board of Elections four individuals were selected to promote an aggressive Voter Outreach Program. The new machines were taken to every Genesee County Town, the City of Batavia, and several public gathering points to introduce the new way of voting to our 35,000 registered voters. The grant was also utilized to train 250 poll workers so they could better assist the voting public. Things went fairly smoothly on Election Day with limited lines, minimum complaints and complete accountability in tallying the

final votes. The Board of Elections will continue to work to improve the process for the November 2011 election.

With the support of the Genesee County Legislature, the College completed repairs and refurbishing of the Anthony T. Zambito Gymnasium as well as the athletic fields to bring them up to safety and energy conservation standards. A new artificial turf field for soccer and lacrosse was constructed, again with the safety of the students in mind. In 2011 we will experience the opening of the brand new 1,700 square-foot art gallery, which will be used for student instruction as well as community exhibits. Note, that the Genesee Community College Foundation and the faculty-student association contributed the entire local share of funds needed for this project. Three years ago, the College began “Genesee Promise Plus,” which offers scholarships for two summer credit courses for every June high school graduate in our region. Last summer 392 area students participated in this unique program. Enrollment is up again. Last fall Genesee enrolled 7,365 students, a new record. And the College is on track for another admission record-setting 2010-2011 year. The College obviously has a well-earned reputation for excellence and for efficiency. Last year the College’s cost per full time equivalent student was \$7,159, one of the lowest costs per student of any SUNY college and 21% lower than the SUNY community college average cost. Despite economic pressures, the Board of Trustees has maintained tuition for full time students at \$1,700 per semester for three years in a row, something no other SUNY community college has been able to do.

Sadly, five months ago, our community college president, Dr. Stuart Steiner, announced that he would retire at the end of the current academic year. Since the first students arrived in 1967, Dr Steiner has made Genesee Community College his focus. He has also made an immense contribution to the entire SUNY System, to

the Genesee County Community at large, as well as to the College. We thank him for all of this and wish him well.

The efficiency of the Treasurer's office is a given. The accuracy and speed which is required would be instantly noticed if absent. The new financial system that went live in November of 2010 was an important focus for the entire department all year. Getting trained and prepared for the conversion took time, but the smooth transition made it well worth the effort. The merged department...Treasurer's office and Real Property is now in full swing...and staff is being cross-trained to meet the needs of both departments. These folks have been living outside the box for over a year...it was worth it and we thank them.

For the Public Health Department, one of their major accomplishments was the successful handling of the 2009-2010 H1N1 Pandemic Flu season. Collaborative efforts helped to immunize approximately 8,500 County residents for the seasonal and H1N1 influenza strains. The department conducted flu clinics at 100% of the County School Districts. Another accomplishment was the transition of the Certified Home Health Care Agency and the Licensed Home Health Care Program from Genesee County to Home Health Care of Rochester and being issued a Licensed Home Care Services Agency license by the New York State Department of Health to allow the Public Health Nurses to continue to provide necessary public health care to County residents within the individual's home. During 2011 the Public Health Department will adjust their 2011 budget to insure the continuation of the mandated service areas.

At the request of the County Manager's office, the Public Health Department, Mental Health Department, and the Nursing Home worked to put in place a Corporate Compliance strategy that would meet the New York State Office of Medical Inspector General's guidelines. In addition, the Mental Health Department has been in

a two-year transformation process to re-align the professional staff to meet the state required credentialing. They have upgraded their billing and tracking software, re-coded all diagnostic treatments and increased their psychiatric services for children to reduce wait times and address crisis children's services. These changes have not only increased the quality of services, but they have made those services more cost effective.

We asked each department to mention their proudest moments of 2010. The proudest moments of the Highway Department were the accomplishment of normal highway maintenance and improvement this year. They remind us that if it doesn't seem significant...then factor in the two months late state budget, delayed receipt of CHIPS funding and the many state reductions to their budget, as well as the retirements the department has witnessed in the past two years. It really was a big deal. It was accomplished because the employees put their heads down, worked hard and cooperated with the town highway departments at a level never seen before in the County. So, though they started two months late with five less employees, they finished on time and on budget. Congratulations are in order!

Given the poor economy, it was no surprise that DSS accepted an average of 16 new applications each and every business day for some type of financial assistance in the 2010 year. Over and over the department was called upon to provide short-term aid to our county residents. The food stamp caseload grew by 10% and the Medicaid caseload increased by nearly 5%. Yet the department had great success in also helping our residents to find jobs...work rather than welfare...and reduced the long-term public assistance caseload by almost 6%. Genesee County has been the only county in the state to have this success that stretches back to September of 2008. In addition the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program filed over 100 income tax returns for low-income individuals at no charge, and that success will enable the program to expand this tax

season. Volunteers from GCC staff collaborated with DSS on this program. Also 11 foster children found permanent homes through adoption. And a former 30 year employee of the Department of Social Services established a trust fund through his estate to address the unmet needs in the foster children's program. Thanks to Gary Grow...what a wonderful example of the profound impact a Genesee County employee can have on our community.

Hal Kreter is the Veteran's Department for our County. An extended illness has caused his assistant to be on leave and the Social Services department staff has undertaken to help with the necessary paperwork on a part time basis. It is not perfect, but Hal has made it work. His activities for the year reflect the increased number of veterans in our community who qualify for services under the recently approved laws regarding compensation for medical conditions associated with Agent Orange. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a new benefit providing educational assistance to individuals who have served on active duty on or after 9/11. Many of our returning Genesee County Veterans are pursuing college immediately after discharge as a result of this Bill. Hal finds time to be on the Board of Directors of the Genesee Veterans Support Network, and has worked to implement a Veteran's Court here in Genesee County.

The next department is impossible to ignore. When we come to work we turn on the computer, pick up the phone for messages, make a call, or turn to a printout of a report. All of these tasks are supported by the Information Technology Department. During 2010 they also were instrumental in supporting the New World Systems Finance and Human Resources application upgrade from the AS400 to .Net Technology. They were there to help the Board of Elections with the implementation of the new machines and their accompanying applications, and implemented virtualization for core business servers and storage that helps reduce hardware costs and positions the County so they can develop a Disaster

Recovery strategy for critical business systems. And they launched a new intranet site based on Microsoft Sharepoint technology. During 2011 they plan to work with other departments to use technology to ‘work smarter’, control costs in any way possible, and complete the upgrades to the County infrastructure to ensure departments have a reliable voice and data connection to effectively and efficiently serve the public.

Public Safety is one of the most important responsibilities of County Government. It encompasses many departments who work together to provide this key service. From the sheriff’s office, the district attorney’s office, public defender’s office, and probation department and including all of the many aspects of the system that they oversee, their hours are not nine to five...but twenty four/seven and they do a fine job with limited resources. This past year, the Sheriff points with pride to the break-up of a major meth. distribution ring operating within Genesee County in addition to the countless less high profile engagements. The major investigation included assistance from the FBI, DEA, and US Attorney’s Office that resulted in the arrest of five individuals. Keeping the jail population at a manageable level depended in large part to the appropriate use of alternatives to incarceration. There was a retirement in the District Attorney’s Office, after 30 years of exceptional service; David E. Gann retired in March of 2010. He has returned to work on a part-time basis to continue to use his experience and unique expertise to the benefit of the DA’s Office. A new full-time assistant DA, Melissa L Cianfrini, the first new attorney in this office since 1990, was hired and these adjustments to the staffing did not result in any additional expense. The department prosecuted several most serious cases during the past year to successful conclusions. The Genesee County Probation Department provides services which remain the most cost effective form of an alternative to incarceration for the 700 adults and juveniles served in this county. As a mandated function with strong NYS oversight, funding remains critical. However, the

Probation department will continue to move forward by using risk and needs assessments to focus resources where needed. Our Public Defender's office continues to seek justice for all, regardless of circumstances. In an effort to provide appropriate services in these financially difficult times, their office has entered into a partnership with the Monroe County Public Defenders Office which will permit our attorneys to attend at no cost their continuing legal education programs and thereby receive some of the required hours. They also partner with Wyoming and Monroe County to apply for Attorney Fellowships on a regional basis. The additional hope of these departments is that it becomes possible to fund the Genesee Justice Program with funding from establishing a foundation.

The Planning Department has a presence in many areas of County Government. This year their attention was focused on the revisions to the Smart Growth Plan and its adoption. Many public hearings and conversations formal and informal went into the draft and changes to the document. The approved Plan maintains a rational and sustainable approach to development while fully respecting local control. 2010 was the year of the census. Genesee County's participation rate was high due to the efforts of local municipal and county officials to get the word out...and the assistance received through the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council. But certainly this is one area where the Planning Department staff can take great pride...our thanks to their enthusiastic and sustained efforts for making the "year of the census" such a success. The County's Comprehensive Plan continues to move forward through the efforts of the ten Focus Groups and their members. This year the Livable Community Theme is weaving through all of their work, enhancing collaborative efforts and giving everyone a new perspective. The Department looks forward to an Ag district review and the time when the final results of the 2010 Census will be available to study. Whatever the next year brings, careful planning of our resources is essential.

To address the funding uncertainties of the past two years, Cornell Cooperative Extension has intentionally focused on developing and implementing regional operations. In collaboration, the Boards of Directors from nine western New York counties are the first in New York State to implement a regional business center providing more efficient financial oversight. They moved in this direction hoping to maintain adequate federal, state, and local funding so that the programming can continue with improved outcomes. They are targeting the number one economic driver in Genesee County-the agricultural industry. Their purpose is clear...through regional ag/vegetable teams, 4-H youth development, Leadership Genesee, and nutritional education...and all other strategies to support this industry.

The report from the Genesee County Youth Bureau also demonstrates the ability to provide services in various ways with limited resources. Through the year 2010, forty-five AmeriCorps members provided over 26,000 hours of service that enhanced the programming of 25 agencies. Their services ranged from mentoring youth during non-school hours, to enhanced children's' services at area libraries. The program's outstanding performance has been rewarded by grant funding for another three years! Presently shared services between Genesee and Orleans County for the operation of the Youth Bureau is solidly in place for another year. A similar success is anticipated through the intermunicipal agreement with the City of Batavia that provides for the oversight of the City Youth Bureau and Youth Center.

It is often said that without the knowledge of history, we are doomed to repeat mistakes. The wise folks in the History Department are working hard to make sure that we do not. This year they worked to develop the Federation of Historical Agencies for Genesee County. This insures, or at least makes easier, the collaboration of all the many historical societies,

museums, and historians within this county. It is a county which has a rich history and a story well worth telling. Just this year the index for the World War II collection was completed. It took four years to complete and includes 35 notebooks! Thanks also to the AmeriCorps members who helped make this possible.

County Clerk, Don Read, sends us reassurance that the Auto Bureau and County Clerk's office continues to be self sustaining through the efforts, creativity, and dedication of his staff.

Don Luxon, reports that the Weights and Measures Department had another very good year in the Motor Fuel Quality program with no failures in 60 samples taken. Although he can't do much about the escalating cost of gas, at least he can assure that the consumer is getting a quality product for their money.

The Job Development Bureau has had a banner year, serving 636 Workforce Investment Act participants. That is 41% of the total served by all four WIA offices. \$217,000 went to retrain job seekers for new careers. This office is anticipating conserving resources in the coming year with contracts that will save an estimated 45% in rent and operations, the savings will be passed on in additional retraining services for their Genesee County customers.

Especially in fiscally demanding time, the purchase of any item from cleaning supplies, to big-ticket items like highway salt, vehicles and area renovations, and including the hiring of consulting firms is a serious matter. The purchasing department plays a critical part in the continuous team effort to maintain services within budget appropriations and maintain legal compliance within local and state codes. Looking ahead there is promise of increased savings as we increase our use of procurement cards and cooperative contracts.

The Human Resources office reports the staff from the Treasurer's Office, Information Technology, and Human Resources worked hard throughout 2010 to accomplish the transition from an antiquated payroll/accounts payable system to a system that utilizes state of the art technology. All employees involved deserve kudos for a tough job, well done. Project manager, Matt Landers, is especially deserving of congratulations. The Health Benefits Review Committee worked with the County's Health Plan consultant to review proposals and make a recommendation to the County Legislature for the County's Health Plan and Pharmacy Benefit Administrator. Their work ensures continued excellent administration of the County's Health Plan for employees and continual cost monitoring

As well our Genesee County Self-Insurance Plan had a successful year in 2010. Working as a team, the County and First Niagara Risk Management provided intensive case management to assist injured workers to obtain the necessary treatment that will allow them to return to work either in a full or limited capacity. The new excess insurance, which was purchased in August, has provided a report which benchmarks the County Plan and compares it to similar plans to assist in risk management endeavors. This information and accompanying educational seminars will be shared with the towns, villages, school districts and fire departments.

We can certainly take pride in what has been accomplished by our departments. They were able to provide most of the same services in spite of a reduced work force and increased work loads and they did it with a smile. However, it would be naïve of us to expect this trend to continue forever. There is a point, if reimbursements continue to shrink, arrive late, and be withdrawn entirely; and county responsibilities continue to expand to include more and more state pass downs that will require us to take different strategies and re examine our priorities. I suggest that unless there

is a real change at the state level regarding how they intend to balance their budget, that time may be in 2011.

Now about mandates.

No gloom and doom here. Just some information, strategies, and a call to action. Let's have a bit of background. Our county mission, over time has been very different than it is today. Fifty years ago, we had a County Clerk's Office and a Sheriff's Office; and we were building, maintaining, and patrolling roads; operating a nursing home; and maintaining parks...that was about the norm, here and around New York State. Gradually, as State mandates came down from Albany, this all changed.

Medicaid was the first and remains the biggest state/federal imposed mandate. In 1966, the local share across the state was \$115 million, by 1980, less than 15 years later; it had multiplied by over 10 times to \$1.2 billion. Then, within ten years, 1990, this amount doubled to \$2.4 billion. Again within ten years, in 2000, it doubled to over \$5 billion. Because of State Legislation that finally capped the amount of Medicaid annual increase charged to the counties, the amount did not double in growth by 2010, but it did grow by a third to \$7 billion.

The total Medicaid funds spent in New York State in 2010-Federal, State, and county combined was \$53 billion. That's more than \$1 billion a week and it is certainly a good part of the reason the state's budget is broken. The opportunity to make some systemic changes in the program at the state level was not taken...only a band aid approach on the funding stream. This cannot be allowed to happen again. Neither can this type of growth be sustained. Slowing and capping the growth of property taxes only insures that New York State retains its position as the state with the highest property taxes in the country; they are 80% higher than the national average. And that does not mean that the services are the best, or the outcomes of those service programs are

the best, just the most costly by far. We offer all 30 of the federally approved program options...no other state does that, except California, and their fiscal crisis exceeds our own.

Certainly a look at the possible methods to reduce the overall cost of this program is warranted. Governor Cuomo has appointed a task force to look into this very issue. Our support and encouragement goes to those members of the committee, including a NYSAC representative, as they look for answers to this most important issue. Counties are not self-serving when they insist on programmatic changes, they are aware of the reality...there is no solution to the state and local budget crisis without significant changes to this program. This is the time to act, there are federal programs already enacted which would reduce the New York State cost of Medicaid significantly, if changes are made now. 2011 could well be the year that New York State turned from its path of a bleak future, to a path leading to fiscal solvency and hope restored.

While Medicaid certainly is the 800 lb. gorilla in the living room, the other 8 mandates, which make up the "9 for 90" mantra of our NYS Counties are significant contributors to the unsustainable property tax burden on our citizens. They are:

The Public Assistance/Safety Net program

Child Welfare protection/prevention

Special Education Pre-K

Indigent Defense

Probation

Early Intervention

Youth Detention

NYS Pension System

Each of these basically good programs could be improved and become more efficient and cost effective by making some obvious changes; refocusing upon the initial intent of the program,

redesigning the delivery of services, following the recommendations of state wide task forces who have studied the concerns, and eliminating the trend to simply pass on excessive costs of state programs to the counties instead of reforming those programs. Some of these programs have no local control built into the procedures at all...these specific state programs should be funded by the level of government making the decisions.

It is a fact that these 9 state mandates consume 90% of the statewide county property tax levy. In some individual counties, the percentage of the tax levy is much greater than that. I remember only too well a citizen decrying the fact that 82% of Genesee County's property tax levy is consumed by mandated programs...she demanded a redistribution of the way her taxes were spent....saying, "how long before 100% of our property taxes will be spent on mandates and there will be nothing left for local initiatives and needs?" Well, for some counties, the time has already come and for all counties it is not far off. No amount of public outcry can impact a local budget that is already "spent by Albany." Action and change must come before they spend all of your money. That would be now!

I quote an article in the November 20th Daily News, "county legislators can't do this alone. If there is ever hope of change taxpayers have to do more than complain to county officials. They need to write, call or collar state representatives. The state has been pushing its expensive programs on county taxpayers; it's time for county taxpayers to push back." Together...working at all levels to reinvent the way we deliver and fund programs and services to those who need them...in such a partnership we can fundamentally transform the way in which government at all levels meets the taxpayers needs. That is the challenge of 2011 and beyond. Let us embrace it.