

Everyone wants change for the better

The Otsego County Chamber is not a traditional Chamber. We push beyond the normal envelope and are proud of our commitment to change. We will color outside the lines.

We are very active in Albany, Cooperstown and Washington on issues that impact local businesses' ability to make a profit and to create jobs.

Elected officials have taken many affirmative actions — but more must be done on many fronts.

Now they must reduce government spending in a down economy so businesses can create opportunities.

Albert Einstein once said, "You can't solve a problem with the same type of thinking that caused the problem in the first place." In these economic times, Einstein's statement is a rallying cry.

Our mission is to improve the overall business climate in the region, and to strive for an atmosphere that attracts investment.

■ We believe a positive business community requires and contributes to a broad range of employment opportunities including education, government, health care, manufacturing, retail, service and tourism. To accomplish our mission, our region must be financially healthy across all these sectors.

■ We understand that we alone can't accomplish this mission, but that we must work in partnership. On a consistent basis, the Chamber cultivates a collaborative exchange to identify and address opportunities for improving our region.

■ The future economic quality of life of our region will be determined by how well our mission is accomplished. Community discussions are an important part of laying out the framework for our future.

The realities of operating a business requires that the Chamber be active and vocal on issues to create the economic security and types of opportunities our children and grandchildren are looking to fill.

Additionally, because government writes the rules on how a business operates, what kind of revenue businesses

must pass along to finance the system, and how you do your job, The Otsego County Chamber continues to be outspoken.

We will speak to actions being considered by our elected officials — whether beneficial or detrimental — that impact our obligation to strengthen the region and to build the character of our communities.

We are not partisans — we are just aggressively pro-business.

Now at times we tend to be a little negative about running a business in New York. Peter Drucker in his book

"Management Challenges for the 21st Century" wrote: "Everybody has accepted by now that change is unavoidable. But that still implies that

change is like death and taxes — it should be postponed as long as possible and no change would be vastly preferable. But in a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is the norm."

He is right — the landscape has drastically changed. But will these changes alone really mean a new, better environment to allow businesses to create opportunities that allow our region to rebound?

Upstate New York is struggling — no net new private sector jobs in more than a decade, ever-increasing cost of doing

business (that outpaces our out-of-state competition) and most disturbing — a net loss of more than 250,000 upstate residents between the ages of 18 and 34 (aka — our future).

However, Otsego County, over the past 15 years, has gone against the grain. We have actually had job growth that has kept pace with the national job growth stats! Due to the growth in opportunities in education, health care and tourism, we are doing above average upstate. Yet the region's tax base continues to

be pushed to fund the heavy cost of government and education at all levels and we must continue to fund health insurance increases that exceed the rate of

inflation.

Economic progress is our major objective. We must institute an atmosphere for the creation of jobs if we are ever going to be successful. The Chamber has set our targets on a few issues to address if our dream of creating an environment that will allow our grandkids to pursue their dreams in this area will be realized.

■ Housing: If we recruited a new business that would need 50 new workers with families, where would they live? If redevelopment put 100 new feet of the street, where would they

rest? We must address our needs for housing across our existing market and the future — housing turnover, summer rentals, young-professional starter housing, and the regulations and local ordinances that slow down and deter development. We must move forward with ideas to prepare for our future.

■ Education: Our school districts are losing population. What impact does fewer students have on the cost-per-student? Can we in the current tax climate continue to fund the current system of education? What about the increased cost to schools to deal with for our social issues — the fastest growing costs?

■ The Economic Value of Tourism: We talk about the pluses and minuses of tourism in the abstract. We need to quantify it and to understand it. Who are our tourists? And what do they leave behind when they move on? How has our tourism marketplace changed since the baseball camps arrived? How can we expand the season beyond the existing three-month season?

■ Countywide Wireless Service: This is the single-most-critical issue for the potential of economic growth in today's global marketplace. The Chamber is working with county, state and federal leaders to develop a plan for complete coverage countywide.

The Otsego County Chamber will direct our resources to develop consensus and push movement on the key issues addressed above here.

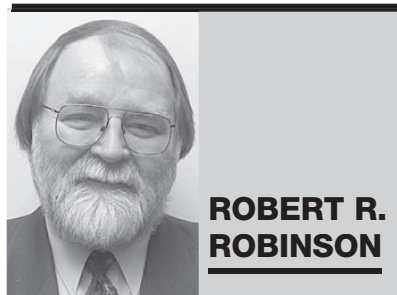
Thomas Jefferson was quoted as saying, "Every generation needs a new revolution." Will these economic times be ours? The next 18 months promise to be an exciting opportunity to make some real philosophic and meaningful changes in upstate New York. We, like the majority of states facing economic downturn, reduce government spending to allow the citizens and businesses stabilize and regroup?

The Otsego County Chamber's challenge is to assist business growth and economic development.

With the money saved from government's efforts to reduce spending, we must be ready to face the sacrifice of implementing and funding an expanded economic development effort. One clearly based on the retention and expansion of all our existing businesses as well as seeking growth from those who do business with Otsego County companies.

Let us, as the stewards of our future, push the envelope beyond its current dimensions so we may better serve. Let us, as the architects of our grandchildren's future, vow to try new ideas with renewed determination — even if we fail at some — to ensure we give them a reason to stay. As Georgia O'Keefe said: "To create one's own world takes courage."

Robert R. Robinson is president and chief executive officer of the Otsego County Chamber.



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