



**ESSEX COUNTY IN THE PARK
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

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Free Trader Today

By: Kim Smith Dedam

LAKE PLACID – Area business professionals have set out on a course to hone their leadership skills. And they will benefit from the experience and guidance of about 40 regional leaders through the next nine months.

The North Country Leadership Series (NCLS) began in late August, and includes the tutelage of mentors like Daniel Fitts, executive director of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA); Ted Blazer, CEO of the Olympic Regional Development Authority; Dan Stewart, Mayor of Plattsburgh; and Dan Senkowski, Superintendent of Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora.

Experience is designed to be the primary teacher in the series, according to course facilitator Ricki Marin.

"Local leaders will provide role models as we review different aspects of community. We are encouraging the participants to find their niche," she said.

The series also set new horizons this year.

"We took from previous ideas and expanded them," said Marin.

The move was designed to observe and combine regional strengths, lifting from what was originally a leadership series for Clinton County.

"The Chamber of Commerce created the curriculum several years ago," explained Marin, "and Clinton Community College continued with it."

An eight member steering committee from the Workforce Investment Board adopted and enhanced the course and deepened its outreach into the professional community.

Key to the NCLS standards are hands-on project requirements. Participants are encouraged to attend community events like city or town council meetings and job shadow local leaders. Sharing their experience.

The second of 14 sessions was held in Lake Placid last week. The topic considered challenges and choices faced by the regions hospitality and tourism industry.

Bob Shinko, a member of the Plattsburgh city board of education, opened the panel discussion by defining leadership as a choice.

"You can choose to be a boss or a leader," said Shinko. "Your job as a leader is to understand human nature, find out what people are made of. A leader relies on cooperation and shows how to achieve it," he added.

For Shinko, participating in the series was a way to return much of what he's learned to the community.

"This is my offering to the group," he said, "I believe community is the reason why everyone is here."

Ted Blazer, Chief executive officer of ORDA; Steve Piatt, communications specialist at the Lake Placid / Essex County Visitor's Bureau and Carol Calabrese, co-executive director of the Essex County IDA, shared professional and personal insights about their leadership roles in the industry.

Calabrese described how vital communication is to the work she does.

"I spend part of every day listening to businesses and responding appropriately," she said. "I learned how to negotiate by being a good listener."

"I believe I'm always in a learning pattern," said Calabrese, "many problems are solved by listening. Solutions are usually right in front of you."

Blazer outlined several of the recent trends noted by ORDA in travel and tourism numbers, but brought it right back to basics.

"How we do is based on how we provide for customers," he said.

Blazer described that APA guidelines were part of ORDA's success.

"Three of ORDA's venues are in the Forest Preserve," he said. "For us, it's the way to do business. If we look over the long haul, we have to do the right thing in this Park. Others will follow us for centuries," he added. "Is Development online with the regulations in Essex County? If it wasn't, we would not be ranked as high as we are by the industry."

Piatt credited role models as tantamount to solid leadership skills.

"I have been fortunate to have great role models," he said of his experience with publishers in the newspaper business.

"I've found my leadership style has developed like writing skills," he said. "I find it important to lead by example."

Jerry Forcier, who is the business development director of Westelcom, looks forward to the entire course.

"I saw this series as a good way to learn about other businesses in our communities," said Forcier. "I want to learn about and lead by example. As to how I'll do it, I'm not quite sure yet. I'd like to step up and do my part."

The leadership course will include future discussions focused on government, environmental issues, education, health and human services, arts and culture, and education.

The series is presented annually by the Workforce Investment Board.