



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

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**Strictly Business
Big Impact in a Small Area**

by Andrea Zinser
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It seems Essex County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA) delivers on its promise ... "a healthy place to grow a business, a healthy place to grow a family, a healthy place to be." Nestled in the heart of New York State's beautiful Adirondack Park, Essex is the largest county in the Park and has the advantage of having Interstate 87 running through as well as Amtrak's Manhattan to Montreal "Adirondack Special," and fair access to various airports. The population of approximately 38,850 is spread among 18 communities, 75 percent of them with 2,000 to 3,000 households.

At the helm of the small, but powerful agency, meet Co-Executive Directors Carol A. Calabrese and Jody C. Olcott, who have been operating ECIDA since 1998. They are supported by one secretary and there you have the total staff of the agency. Carol previously worked in business development in private industry before taking time off to raise a family; Jody's experience focused on the administration of grants. Both share dedication and enthusiasm for the growth of their communities and county.



Carol told *SB*, "Although we do have some large businesses like International Paper and NYCO Minerals, small businesses are the backbone of our economic growth." She further explained that the IDA sees a strong need to continue loan funding for start up and expanding businesses. Fortunately, the IDA was granted an additional \$350,000 for 2003. "Between January and June of 2003, IDA leveraged \$1.2 million to businesses, creating 250 new jobs and retaining 20 existing jobs," Carol continued. "The biggest change we have seen over the last few years has been in the cost of benefits, particularly health care benefits." The two have seen an impact of 9-11 which they say has helped to bring companies who want to escape traffic, pollution and sprawl into the area.

Once a company shows interest in relocating to Essex County, they receive a compact information packet including application forms,

which will help them and the IDA identify specific needs. This information packet also assists in predetermining whether a company qualifies for any of the numerous tax credits through Empire Zone incentives. A CD promotes Essex County with a catchy little song and view of the county, then connects the viewer to ECIDA's web site with a list of resources.

Both, Carol and Jody aggressively market the eight existing business parks, which they manage in partnership with the individual communities. The Adirondack Park Agency has zoned the parks for industrial use and has also determined the kind of business which should be located in each particular park to keep companies producing higher noise levels or manufacturing companies together at specific sites.

The two are in constant communication with business leaders, municipalities, and private and government agencies to expound on the ever changing and expanding variety of services ECIDA offers. Carol deals mostly with business start-ups and existing business expansions, while Jody covers land purchases, permits and all aspects of the Empire Zone. Not surprising many of their projects overlap. They point out that communication between them is extremely important and a significant reason for their success.

Another reason for the ECIDA's success comes from recognizing trends, developing new projects and seeking opportunities for funding. The Training Equipment Program serves as a perfect example. The need for a skilled workforce now and in the future is an obvious challenge not only for Essex County, but throughout the North Country.

Business will go where it finds both a skilled workforce and access to training for their employees. With that target in mind, ECIDA used \$50,000 from NYS Empire State Development and \$78,000 from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to purchase lathe, welding, computer and Auto-CAD equipment. They then contracted the equipment, at no cost, to the CV-TEC campus in Mineville for use by high school students and adults. Success so far has come about in more than one way. Local companies such as International Paper and General Composites have taken advantage of the program. Pre-Tech Plastics even expanded its Williston, VT based company to Moriah's Business Park because of the workforce development opportunities. Additional success has come about as high school students who have participated in the program have gone on to pursue a career in college.

Essex County's business parks are thriving in part because of an Empire Zone boundary revision in the Moriah/Port Henry district. Jody explained to SB, "The recent changes in the Empire Zone program allowed Essex County to broaden the parameters of the zone from three non-continuous sub-zones to a county-wide zone". Essex was first in the State to implement a 'land bank', which allowed for setting aside previously dedicated acreage to enable 18 towns throughout the county to offer zone incentives to attract business."

Other successful ways to stimulate the economy were found in two infrastructure development grants ECIDA received from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). In 1998, Ticonderoga Commerce Park received a total of \$1.17 million (\$702,000 EDA grant money, and \$468,000 Town match). Monies were used to supply water, sewer and roads. The opportunity of starting a business within 30 to 45 days because of pre-existing infrastructure is very attractive to potential tenants. The procedure has been so successful that it is now being sold to Ticonderoga.

In 2002, Chesterfield Commerce Park received a total of \$3 million, made up of a \$2.1 million EDA grant and \$900,000 Town match. These monies will supply water, sewer and roads to the park. Additionally the funds will assist with upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant of the Village of Keeseville.

The dynamic duo of Carol and Jody isn't ready to settle for what they have accomplished to date. They have begun a marketing campaign to attract bio-medical companies, using a \$47,240 grant they received from New York's Empire State Development.

Another exciting prospect on the horizon is the installation of a fiber-optic network throughout the tri-county area to benefit schools, libraries, municipalities and business. A \$25,000 feasibility study has just been concluded which determined that about \$15 million in funding will be needed to undertake this ambitious venture. SUNY Plattsburgh, government agencies, Westelcom and others have shown interest in the project. There is no doubt Carol and Jody will find creative ways to fund the IDA's share of the project.

I asked what the two anticipate for future Essex County economic growth. Carol emphasized that business start-ups and expansion remains a vital factor in the area's growth. The \$350,000 grant money received this year attests to the overwhelming need to continue loan funding. She also observed, "There is a growing trend for people who have lived here before to return to the area to start businesses. One example would be General Composites in Westport, which manufactures carbon fiber fishing poles and boat paddles."

With an eye to the future Carol and Jody will remain focused on work force training and integration of programs into the educational curriculum of CV-TEC and other educational institutions. This is especially important since they are seeing companies from Vermont relocate to the area because of access to training and more available workers because of a higher unemployment rate in New York State.

Another issue for the ECIDA to focus on will be cooperation with the area's Housing and Planning offices to determine the needs of residents in conjunction with job growth. Real estate in New York remains cheaper than in Vermont and so the area is seeing an influx of people especially around the Crown Point and Moriah areas.

Carol concluded, "We have been fortunate in the North County. Our economy keeps growing despite the downswing in the rest of the country. I would like to see existing businesses grow and prosper even more with additional resources made available."

"ECIDA has been fortunate in the past to successfully implement federal loan programs," Jody added. "We hope to see this trend continue."

It is certain one will hear more about ECIDA in the future, and the energy and drive of the Co-Executive Directors surely enhances the economic potential of Essex County.