

Monday, February 22, 2010

Essex economic development

By: Jennifer Meschinelli
Special Publications Editor

Essex County has the distinction of being one of only two counties situated entirely within the Adirondack Park – which also makes for some unique economic development hurdles.

“The difference between the rest of the nation and here is that we never really come out of recession – we stay pretty steady, without the dramatic highs and lows,” said Carol Calabrese, co-executive director of the Essex County Industrial Development Agency. “There is still a real need here for more economic development in the North Country.”

Adirondack Park Agency restrictions make it quite a challenge for attracting large employers. As a result, 90 percent of the businesses in Essex County have 5 to 10, or fewer, employees, according to Calabrese.

“The majority (of Essex County businesses) are small businesses that are weathering the economic storm, like so many small businesses in America,” Calabrese said.

And it is through these hard times that the IDA continues to work on its core mission and that is to cultivate economic development in the County.

“We’re committed to working with the community on their economic development plans,” Calabrese said. “And if you have a strong community with strong resources, it will help sustain and attract businesses.”

Attracting businesses to the region involves a significant amount of community development, according to Calabrese. In the past five years the IDA has worked with municipalities to apply for grants to assist them in upgrading their infrastructure. At least three different communities have worked with the IDA on infrastructure projects.

“We partnered with Schroon Lake to replace their antiquated sewer system,” Calabrese said. “You need infrastructure for economic development.”

Unfortunately, these types of projects have had to temporarily take a back seat to two major issues that have come to the forefront that may threaten the county’s economic development: the closure of the Crown Point Bridge and the slated closure of the Moriah Shock facility.

“Right now our focus is working with state agencies to help keep the bridge corridor businesses operating and support them,” Calabrese said. “We also need to see how that closure will effect the tourism season if it will affect the interior businesses.”

In addition to making contacts for the state to help local businesses, Calabrese said the IDA is also gathering resources to help those impacted, both the businesses and the thousands of people who commute to work everyday.

“We are hoping that the ferry starting up will help those businesses – the economic impact has been very significant,” Calabrese said. “It affects everyone from the large industrial to the small businesses.”

Here are the top industries in Essex County:

Government Jobs (30% of all employment)
Resource Extraction: mining, quarrying and logging
Tourism
Wood product industries:
 paper, furniture, pallets, etc.
Light manufacturing

“We also make products for the biotechnology industry, as well as aerospace and computer industries,” Calabrese said. “These are the kind of businesses we can attract and retain.”

