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Michael Relyea, director of the State Office of Science, Technology and Academic Research, talks with Essex County Industrial Development Agency Co-Director Carol Calabrese before they tour General Composites in Westport.

Relyea said he's committed to beefing up the North Country's technology infrastructure.

State technology chief hails from Moriah The state's new techno-czar says Essex County needs a technology infrastructure and a plan for getting there.

By LOHR McKINSTRY
Staff Writer

ELIZABETHTOWN < A Moriah native is the state's new technology czar, and he's encouraging the North Country's to beef up its high-tech backbone.

Michael Relyea, 34, a 1990 graduate of Moriah Central School, is the new executive director of an agency commonly referred to as NYSTAR -- the New York State Office of Science, Technology and Academic Research. On a recent visit to the North Country he toured General Composites in Westport, Lake Placid Biologicals and the State University of New York Technical Assistance Center Broadband Project in Plattsburgh.

Relyea said it's important to get behind emerging technologies early.

³Small companies are developing future lines of products. Universities hold patents, and many universities are a

patent away from putting a small company out of business.² Small businesses in the Adirondacks are especially challenged, he said, because they lack things their big-city rivals take for granted -- broadband Internet access, research and development facilities and high-speed wireless networks.

³We're trying to bring those things here. In rural areas, we pitch the quality of life -- but then you need infrastructure.² Essex County should do a technology needs-assessment survey, he said.

³There has to be a forward-looking commitment by our leaders. What would it take to bring us (the county) up to speed? For every day that goes forward the cost of (technology) upgrades is greater. If you don't start breaking it down it's going to be an astronomical amount of money. There has to be a way to build this into the infrastructure.² He said if local governments and others invest in a technology



infrastructure that includes things like fiber-optics lines and broadband Internet, businesses will grow around it.

³It can get done, but not overnight. What does it take to have cell service from Albany to Plattsburgh in the I-87 corridor? What's the comprehensive strategy for getting there?²

The county needs a 10-year plan for technology infrastructure, he said.

There also isn't a strong research and development structure in northern New York, Relyea said.

He said new technologies typically have a 10 to 15 year research and development pipeline before they're released, and it's about nine years for development of new drugs. He said NYSTAR has awarded \$325 million to academic research institutions and non-profit organizations to continue research and development work.

Relyea received a bachelor's degree in 1994 from Plattsburgh State and a juris doctorate from the Albany Law School of Union University. He lives in Clifton Park now with his wife, Maria, son, Thomas, and daughter, Olivia.

Essex County Industrial Development Agency Co-Director Carol Calabrese said the small businesses of the Adirondacks need help to stay in operation.

³We need retention up here,² Calabrese said. ³If you can leverage federal and state funding you can leverage private money. We're not going after large companies. We don't have the workforce for that.² Two bio-technology research companies recently opened in Lake Placid, mostly because there were people in the area who'd worked for the now-defunct Upstate Biotechnology there.

⊕They knew they could attract a pool of labor.² Such operations are usually done with strong university research and venture capital, Relyea said.

³How do you do high-tech job development up here? They (the Lake Placid firms) defy how it's done, but they're doing it.² The Adirondack Park doesn't have research-hub universities like Cornell and Syracuse, and it does have the land-use controls of the Adirondack Park Agency, he said.

³It complicates things in the Adirondack Park. People (in the rest of the state) are used to doing things when they want to. Up here you can't do that. The APA has its rules.² Clustering services like broadband has been useful in Essex County, Calabrese said.

³One company will attract another. We have to band together.² ³Broadband is crucial,² Relyea said. ³The amount of data that had to be shared (at a company) is enormous.² He said it's no coincidence Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island has so many technology-based firms around it.

³The biggest technology companies are nearest the most powerful computers.

Albany has become a hub for nano-technology research and that could extend to the Adirondacks, Calabrese said.

³It's an industry that is very compatible with the Adirondack Park. It doesn't diminish the quality of life.²

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