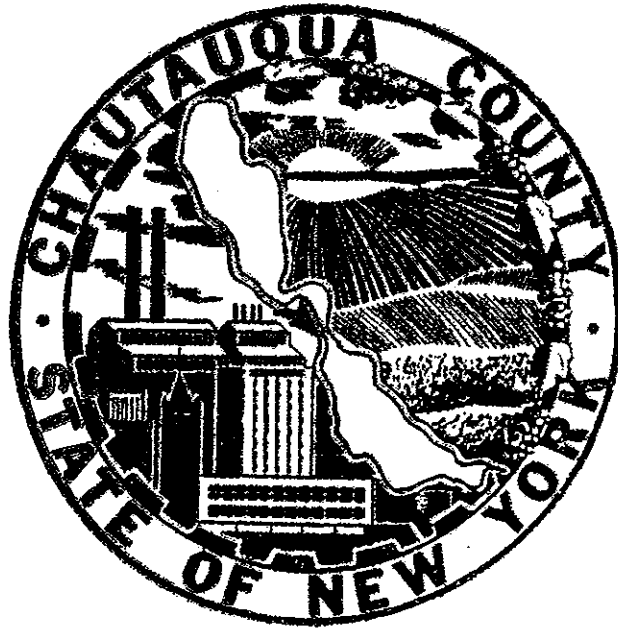


*State of the County*



Gregory J. Edwards  
Chautauque County Executive  
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## 2006 State of the County

Chairman Ahlstrom, Minority leader Croscut, County Legislators, elected leaders, special guests and friends; I am grateful and humbled that you have entrusted me with the honor of being your County Executive. I stand before you tonight to present to you the State of the County of Chautauqua.

I would like to pause at the outset to acknowledge my wife Carrie. When I chose to begin a new chapter in my professional life, one of public service my wife and my family made and continue to make significant sacrifices and they deserve my thanks and a moment of recognition for all that they do... Thank you.

We would all be remiss if we did not also pause for a moment to think of and offer a prayer for all of those who are right now in harms way, serving our Country in locations far from their family and friends..... And to recognize those who have given their all in our defense like Sergeant Mattison whose memorial dedication I attended 2 weeks ago at which I spoke with two men who served with JC who were there honoring their fallen comrade.

As I prepared for this my first Address to those gathered here this evening, I was reminded of how quickly time can pass when we are engaged in meaningful, and serious work. Just over 100 days have passed since I took office on January 1, 2006 yet much has been done and much remains to be accomplished.

Over the last year you had heard me promote three matters of significance to me and to all of the residents of Chautauqua County; caring for our Veterans, improving the financial state of the County Home, and bringing local management

to our Medicaid obligations. I am pleased to report that significant progress has already been made on all three of these fronts.

Our Veterans have already experienced enhanced services through the Veterans Service Agency. The Dunkirk office has been opened and staffed for twice the number of days each week. The numbers of Veteran's who are in contact with our Agency has been increasing steadily, a projected growth of over 30% from last year. Jim Hurley and I have been out visiting with local veteran's groups, working with these organizations to improve communications and opportunities for Chautauqua County to deliver for these service men, women and their families. Jim has already identified over 25 veterans or their dependents who are residents of our County Home that should qualify for significant increases in their benefits each month, and more improvements are on the way.

I have also been working closely with Tim Helwig the Director of the County Home. I have met with Tim and reviewed the operation of the Home in detail. I am pleased to report that due to continued aggressive management and the dedication of the folks that work at the County Home, progress is underway toward improving the financial status of this County asset. A review by the Auditors of the Home identified how we could increase billings and reimbursements through the filling of a vacancy in the financial office. That position has now been filled, and additional staff has been designated through the IT Department. The rebasing of the rates at the Home is proceeding with pressure on those working for us in Albany to finish the job they started. One of the last hurdles to obtain this relief was cleared this month and we are encouraged that the last two will follow shortly. I have also met with all of the leaders from the Counties in NY who still have County owned Nursing Homes and we are working collectively to obtain more help from Albany. The recent budget released by the Governor and amended by the Legislature contains some of the relief we sought.

Much more work needs to be done before this valuable County asset is out of danger, but we press on.

On the Medicaid front I traveled to Albany and met with representatives from IBM who are involved in the Verify NY program. After an analysis of this program I met with the County Executives that were participating in or thinking about joining this effort. The consensus was that the program is capable of delivering a valuable analysis of the use of the Medicaid dollars in our Counties, but that additional resources are necessary to identify areas of fraud or abuse. To that end I met with the Executives from Albany, Erie, Orange, Westchester, and Rockland Counties to discuss partnering to negotiate the best deal to make this information capable of clearly addressing our needs. We will continue to progress toward this goal of identifying, prosecuting, and eliminating waste and fraud in the Medicaid systems in our Counties.

However, my belief has always been that local management of our Medicaid services is necessary to truly attack waste and fraud in our County. I have been pursuing a local Medicaid Administrator despite opposition. On February 28, 2006 I met with Brian Wing, the NYS Department of Health Deputy Commissioner to discuss the Medicaid Program and Policies. During this meeting Deputy Commissioner Wing confirmed that my proposed local management through a Medicaid Administrator was appropriate and would be of significant value to the County's efforts. He affirmed that the local Medicaid Administrator would be crucial to local cost control, maximizing the impact of the Cap, and the development and execution of demonstration and waiver programs and all of these could reduce taxes. The best news was that in his opinion this position would not cost the County any local share tax dollars. When I asked the Deputy Commissioner about likely candidates he immediately suggested 3 people he knew that would have the requisite talent for the job. I have developed and presented my

proposed job title and description to some of the Legislators through the Committee process. I look forward to working with the Legislature to move aggressively to capitalize on this opportunity to save our County taxpayers what could be Millions of tax dollars through the hiring and empowering of this Special Assistant.

Those were the three areas of greatest concern to me during the last year and I am pleased that through the hard work of many of the people who are working with me in County Government we are already well on our way to completing these tasks.

However, that was only three areas of concern and we have much more work to be done.

I am absolutely convinced that we here tonight must make some important decisions. We have the opportunity to choose which Chautauqua County we and those we care about live in. That sounds rather dramatic, but I am certain that our answer to this question will determine everything that happens or does not happen for every person who lives, works, plays and prays in Chautauqua County.

We will arrive at the destination that we focus on. Our attitude, our focus and how we as leaders communicate will mean the difference between success and failure.

I learned this very important truth as a boy waiting in our family car waiting for my sister to complete her piano lessons. On these evenings my father, mother, my brother and I would sit in the car, and when my brother and I would complain about going to the playground, my father would tell us to be quiet and listen and we would learn something. At the time I did not know that he was listening to cassette tapes of Earl Nightingale and his classic "Essence of Success". These

early lessons, reaffirmed by my parents would set the stage for how we as a family would approach life's challenges.

Why is my reminiscing of any significance to Chautauqua County? We need to decide right here, right now if we want to live in the Chautauqua County that exists tonight, or the Chautauqua County that can exist tomorrow, if we have the intestinal fortitude to do the hard work and the right attitude and focus.

**These are facts about the present Chautauqua County:**

- 70% of our residents could qualify for Federal Assistance
- Per capita income is an average of \$16,840 from the '00 census
- Median family income of \$33,458 compared to the State average of \$43,393
- 16 % living below the poverty line compared to 8.7% for other upstate Counties
- Our population in decline and getting older
- 47.3% of our housing was built before 1940 versus 15% nationwide
- 23% of our children living below the poverty line
- One of the highest taxed areas in the Nation

**However these are also facts about our County:**

- Our unemployment rates are at or near 5%
- We have over 1,400 vacation homes in our County
- We have increasing opportunities for growth in tourism dollars
- We have the world headquarters of Trucklite Inc., along with Cummins, and Valeo all leaders in the heavy trucking industry here in our County

- We have 3 institutions of higher education, SUNY Fredonia, JCC, and JBC all turning out motivated and talented students
- We have businesses committed to growing the job market, one of whom is returning jobs previously outsourced to Mexico

I am here to tell you that other than a Geographic designation Chautauqua County is not Appalachia but we could be, it all depends on what we elect to do tonight. We can shed that pervasive negativity that hangs across our shoulders like a yoke, to step out aggressively with a positive focus or drop our heads to plod on.

I for one have decided that my children and the rest of the children in Chautauqua County deserve and are entitled to a County Government that recognizes those negative facts but is focused and committed to offering them a future. I believe that those who work with me as County employees are already beginning to share my optimism.

As a result I am focused and committed to the following:

Economic Development:

Through the appointment of William J. Daly to the position of IDA Director and Department of Development Director, a new era in economic development for Chautauqua County has begun. Bill and I have a simple strategy- take care of our employers so they will retain current jobs and expand. We are systematically visiting local companies to listen to their needs and concerns, and I have already visited over 14 local businesses and Bill has visited even more.

We recently toured Brownfield sites in Dunkirk, Brocton, Jamestown and Falconer. Properties that have been or are in the process of being reclaimed for return to the tax rolls as locations for new or expanded businesses.

Bill is working hard at building cooperation between various workforce development agencies for better and more rapid delivery of resources to save and recruit new jobs.

One of the early success stories is the retention of 99 jobs at Jamestown Metal Products, 68 of those jobs were union metal workers. These jobs and the jobs at the sister company Jamestown Scientific were retained by the aggressive and dogged work of the IDA Board and related agencies. One of the largest investments in our Counties history was recently announced by Purina, 70 million dollars. This would not have occurred without the hard work and dedication of our Department of Development, the IDA, others in our County and our partners. This will mean the expansion of one of our premier employers in Dunkirk with more jobs and serious investments in our County.

I had recently signed an invoice for continued investment in a GIS or Geographic Information System within the County that showed a total of almost 1.5 million dollars invested over the last 3 years. This lead to an initiative to fully coordinate, and just as importantly promote this program. A meeting was held by the Dept. of Development that was attended by over 65 people to learn about this tool and be advised that we were going to go live with the system on July 1, 2006. This will have many uses including public safety, information management, and improved economic development.

We will also continue to strengthen our relationships with Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development, Empire State Jobs Development and the many Boards and Commissions that partner together to improve our economy.

#### County Finances:

I have appointed Darin Schulz as Finance Director, based in part on his many years of trusted advice to the Legislature on the finances of the County. This

appointment will assure continuity with our County finances. At my request, Darin has already impacted on County Government, through the restructuring of the Insurance, Finance, and the Human Resources departments. These changes will decrease costs and increase efficiencies for employees, retirees, and the taxpayers of Chautauqua County.

The contracts for the printing and copier services for our County have been renegotiated, and amended dramatically reducing the costs for these services. This work will save our taxpayers approximately \$12,000.00 per month, an approximate \$150,000.00 per year reduction. The challenge for all of us in the County will be to find more of these opportunities to become increasingly more efficient while we maintain and improve service system wide.

#### Taxes:

Our taxpayers are demanding the same work from all of us, more efficiency, more consolidation, and less taxes. This is especially clear from the recent meetings held in the Towns of North Harmony and Ellery. I attended each of these meetings and the sentiment of the taxpayers was crystal clear, "reduce our property taxes". I believe that we have been too long playing defense, hanging on to memories of the "good old days", wishing and hoping that we won't lose more opportunities, jobs, and our children to other Regions.

We must have the courage to say "no" to programs, and even tax cuts when it is prudent, even if saying "yes" is easier. Saying no and taking the political flack that comes with it because it is the right thing to do will allow us to analyze, prioritize and determine the best long term solutions to our challenges.

That is the reason I formed the Tax Cut Task Force, to analyze who we tax, what we tax and how much we tax, and then where this money is spent before we make decisions.

Then we must communicate these results to our taxpayers. The Town Hall meetings that we have had, with taxpayers, and elected officials have been at good start to this end.

You are all aware that I will not run from difficult decisions or dodge tough issues. I am committed to keeping to the high road, but I will not be deterred from opposing any project, plan or action that is not fair to the people of Chautauqua County. This is not the time to use tactics to influence debate or enflame passions. What our County needs is visionary leadership that will come together to achieve the end results that taxpayers need and deserve.

#### Energy:

Our County has been flaring Methane gas from our landfill at a rate estimated at over 1 million dollars of gas per year. Last month when it was clear that progress was not being made to develop this asset and that the process was becoming politicized, I directed the Department of Public Facilities to issue a straight forward request for proposals. This was designed and accomplished in less than two weeks and two weeks later we received 7 responses. Next week requests for additional information will go out to these businesses to move this process forward. It is our goal to have this byproduct under development before the end of the year so that this resource can begin to reduce the amount of money County Government needs from our taxpayers, as soon as possible.

An engineering firm has completed the initial review of the balance of our energy assets. They have been asked how the top three resources can be harnessed to

further reduce the costs of energy for the County and develop new sources of funding.

Further, in the last three months, an audit of the energy that the County uses has also been researched in an effort to determine if there are other decisions that can be made to reduce the use and possible waste of energy by the County.

The County has also been involved in the potential development of an Ethanol production facility in the County and is actively assisting local, regional, and national organizations in promoting the full investigation and if appropriate the recruitment of a developer for this project.

#### Infrastructure:

We have submitted funding requests to Senators Schumer, and Clinton, and Congressman Higgins for the continued development of the Route 60-62 corridor from Gerry to Warren. Bill Daly and I met with the Warren County Commissioners and they have committed to encouraging their Federal officials to join in this development of a critical connection from Buffalo to Pittsburgh.

We are pursuing the completion of the Millennium Parkway, in Dunkirk, and Development in the Ripley region. The County released the Bridge, Road and Drainage construction this past week and is working with the Cities, Towns, and Villages to assure that this construction is done as efficiently and quickly as possible.

The Chautauqua County Airport has a new business partner in Regions Air. This will provide enhanced connections through the Cleveland International Airport. Part of the business visits that are occurring throughout the County includes an analysis of how we can increase the use and development of this crucial part of our infrastructure.

#### Opportunities:

I am committed to considering the following as opportunities, not obstacles, not challenges, just opportunities to make the right decisions for our County's future, and goals for our mutual focus:

1. Grow our economy.
2. Reduce our property tax obligation on our property owners.
3. Develop a more engaged citizenry.
4. Promote an improved CARTS system.
5. Continue to improve Veterans Services
6. Develop a more financially sound County Home
7. Encourage and motivate our County workforce

How will these opportunities be realized - by focusing and setting our sights on the Chautauqua County we can be.

We will do this by recognizing the businesses that are growing and investing in our County like Purina, and Peek 'n Peak who are making multi-million dollar investments in our County. We then must support and promote these businesses and others who will be crucial to the growth of our economy and the reduction of our taxes.

We will do this by recognizing our residents and our youth who are excelling and contributing to our success, like Jody Briggs, from the Dunkirk Boys and Girls Club and Ron Graham and the Infinity Project. We must also communicate clearly and regularly with all of the people in our County on our progress and our challenges inviting their involvement in this process.

We will do this by continued focus on delivery of our services quickly and efficiently through investments in our workforce, CARTS, Veterans and County

Home and a reduction in the waste and fraud in Medicaid through local management.

We will do this by recognizing our employees like Dan (Kwagliana) Quagliana who is a Corrections Officer at the County Jail. A taxpayer contacted me to tell me what a relief it was to meet Officer Quagliana when she went to the jail to visit her brother. As she entered, she broke down, and Dan identified her concerns, and helped her get the answers she needed. This woman went out of her way to tell me how lucky we were to have Officer Quagliana as part of our team. Or Robert Gunnell who I personally witness operate the County's track hoe with an expertise that was astounding, removing materials at the end of Silver Creek to avoid flooding and in Dunkirk to remove materials from the location of the incubator project, both of which were examples of shared services. These are only two examples of the many County workers who go above and beyond the call of duty every day that we need to encourage, and motivate.

We will have the Chautauqua County we envision. The question to all of us is, are we all committed enough to our County to make the tough decisions, to focus on the issues before us and to commit our limited resources to producing the best outcomes?

I am confident that we have the stuff that visionary leaders are made of and that together we can transform Chautauqua County's future into opportunity for our children, and grandchildren. I look forward to working alongside all of you as we join together to accomplish these goals.

May God bless our troops, our families, and Chautauqua County.

Thank You.