

# Even without top prize, our economic plan is a big winner

It would be easy to be discouraged, even upset. After all, we put a lot of heart and soul—not to mention hours and hours and hours of work—into the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council plan, hoping to secure one of four \$40 million top awards.

There were 10 councils across the state submitting regional plans to Albany, and we were confident that ours was a winner in this process, which was designed by the governor to be demanding and highly competitive.

Last week we found out we were not among the top four winners for best plan. But our region was awarded \$68.8 million—the most among the six runners-up—from the \$200 million plan competition and other state sources. That money will fund 93 economic development projects.

Though our plan was not among the top four, I believe we are winners just for having gone through the process.

That process involved more than three months of intensive meetings, public sessions, writing, editing and rewriting. There were 30 business and community leaders on the actual committee, elected officials who served as advisers, hundreds of other people who participated in 11 industry-sector work groups and more than 350 citizens who attended public sessions or posted comments about the plan on the state's "New York Open for Business" website.

Our plan, of which I and the others on the committee remain very proud, centered on our vision statement and called for building upon the region's many strengths, including a highly trained workforce, a legendary entrepreneurial spirit, thriving cultural institutions and abundant natural resources, to enhance our already high



**ON BUSINESS**  
Sandra Parker

quality and create jobs.

Toward that end, we highlighted a short list of projects that we believed could transform our region's economy. State funding awarded for projects on that list:

- \$2.5 million toward a \$40 million project that would create a Finger Lakes Business Accelerator Cooperative, designed to support entrepreneurship and innovation and drive economic growth across a variety of industry sectors. The project is estimated to create nearly 1,100 jobs.

- \$5 million toward a \$100 million University of Rochester project that would create 400 or more jobs at a Health Sciences Center for Computational Innovation, a partnership with IBM.

- \$3.5 million toward a \$200 million project to create a manufacturing facility for the New York Battery and Energy Storage Technology Consortium, which researches ways to improve storage of energy from wind and solar power projects. The region is already a nationally recognized leader in the field, and this investment will advance that position, while creating more than 200 jobs.

- \$7 million toward \$16 million needed to expand biodiesel production and attract new, related businesses to the Seneca Ag-Bio Green Energy Park, the former Seneca

Army Depot, for a total of 60 jobs.

- \$2.3 million for the \$38 million first phase of creating a Finger Lakes Museum. This first phase would create 37 jobs.

- \$300,000 for a coalition project to improve public health by reducing the incidence of high blood pressure. It would create 20 jobs and save the community \$8 million per year.

There were other projects that did not receive funding, but I'm willing to bet that our region's entrepreneurial, take-care-of-business spirit will triumph and we will find ways to move those projects ahead.

Even more importantly, I believe in what this process taught us and how we will benefit from it in the future. A group of 30 individuals, some of whom had never before worked closely together, evolved into a cohesive team focused on the future of our economically diverse nine-county Finger

Lakes region. To compete, we had to cooperate and collaborate, to act like a region, not a collection of towns and villages and individual employers and officials.

As I've said many times, it was collaboration on a scale I have never witnessed or been a part of in my career here, one I hope will serve as a model for future discussions between the public and private sectors.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has called this council process a new way of enacting economic development in New York. And even before the top four in this competition were announced, he affirmed that funding had been approved for a second round of proposals.

I say bring it on. The Finger Lakes region is ready, willing and able, and that's what makes us winners.

*Sandra Parker is president and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance Inc. and a founder of Unshackle Upstate.*

## Seeking non-profits

The Rochester Business Journal profiles non-profit organizations in human services, the arts and culture, environmental protection and other fields whose work benefits the Rochester area. If you would like to suggest an organization to be featured in the Non-Profit Report, please call Jim Leunk at 546-8303, ext. 116, or email [jleunk@rbj.net](mailto:jleunk@rbj.net).

If you work for a non-profit organization that has never been profiled, or if you believe it has been more than two years since the last report, we also would like to hear from you.

To submit information about a non-profit, include a mission statement or brief

description; a list of programs and services with some explanation of each one; revenue and expense figures by category from the most recently completed fiscal year; a list of board members with their employment affiliations and job titles; the executive director's name; the organization's office address and website; the total number of employees and a scannable or digital copy of the organization's logo.

Information may be submitted by email to [jleunk@rbj.net](mailto:jleunk@rbj.net); by fax to 546-3398; and by mail or in person to Non-Profit Report, Rochester Business Journal, 45 East Ave., Suite 500, Rochester, N.Y. 14604.