



STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

BY: Luis Alvarez, Chairman of the Sullivan County Legislature

Sullivan County is at the dawn of a new era. Decades of stagnation - of spinning our wheels - of only hope...is finally giving way to real opportunity and prosperity!

It is time we "WALK TOGETHER" to capitalize on these upcoming opportunities and to forge a better quality of life – a better future - for our citizens and the future generations that will call Sullivan County home.

As your Chairman, I am committed to "WALK TOGETHER" with my fellow Legislators, with our County departments, with our Towns and Villages, with our economic development and tourism partners, with our social service agencies and, most importantly, with the public at large of this great County to overcome the difficult issues that face us and to take advantage of the economic opportunities that are finally at our doorstep!

Your county legislature is committed to "WALKING" with you. Sometimes, it will be necessary to walk ahead of you, sometimes it will be necessary to walk beside you and other times it will be necessary to walk behind you. We will walk

ahead of you to provide guidance. As we walk beside you we will provide support and motivation needed to help you achieve your goals. And when we walk behind you, we will keep united and ensure that no one gets left behind.

Let's "WALK TOGETHER" toward the prosperity and health that we deserve...THIS IS OUR TIME! I invite you to WALK WITH ME NOW ...as we review the state of our beloved County.

ECONOMIC ISSUES:

We have and will continue to "WALK TOGETHER" to improve our financial stability.

I am happy to report that the County Government's finances are on the upswing! The following indicators all show great improvement:

- ✓ Sales tax receipts are up by \$5 Million Dollars over the last 4 years.
- ✓ Room tax receipts are up 28% over the last 4 years.
- ✓ Mortgage tax receipts are up 4.2 over 2016.
- ✓ Deed recordings at the County Clerk's office have soared
- ✓ We've refinanced Tobacco Settlement bonds, making 8.1 million dollars available for productive use. The result – savings to the taxpayer this year and for years to come.
- ✓ Our Grants, working with many of the other County Departments, aggressively pursues money from

Federal, State and Private Foundations and has won over \$5.2 Million Dollars in Grants in the last year.

Collectively, all of these achievements have helped fund County programs all the while increasing the County's fund balance, our financial safety cushion (if you will), by 70% since 2015.

County Workers:

We have successfully negotiated several of our labor contracts, which provide certainty for the County with respect to budgeting and security for our employees with respect to their employment and pay.

But frankly, We have to do more for many of our County Employees. This past year studies were presented that revealed that many of our County workers are paid under the poverty guidelines. I am calling on my fellow Legislators and Labor leaders to "WALK TOGETHER" to find the proper balance between cost consciousness to the taxpayer and fair pay and investment in our workforce.

County workers are also working hard to safeguard your tax dollars.

We acknowledge our responsibilities to the needy within our community. Dozens of dedicated staff members work day in and day out at the job of delivering social service benefits to the needy as our society rightfully demands. However, County staff is equally committed to making sure social service benefits are dispensed fairly and only when appropriate. Although we

are presently in a transition period in the County's attitude and approach toward recipients' applicant screening, fraud detection and prevention, I am proud to state that we have recovered 60% more money in 2016 as compared to 2013 numbers.

TOURISM:

Tourism has been and remains an important part of the Sullivan County economy. Recent annual data indicates that tourism accounted for \$388 million dollars in spending in our County. This spending generated valuable tax revenue of \$26 million dollars.

And I can state, without hesitation, that TOURISM is going to be stronger than ever!!

Last year we enlisted the direct, personal support of Governor Cuomo when he created and participated in the First Annual "Catskill's Challenge". He and other State leaders "WALKED TOGETHER" with us and promoted our area's vast tourism riches. They personally rafted our rivers, fished our streams, played our golf courses, biked our roads and dined in our restaurants and enjoyed our healthy and beautiful environment. This demonstrates that we have attracted the support of our State Leaders in helping to bring the Sullivan Catskills back to its prior glory.

I'd like to personally thank Roberta Lockwood and her team at the Visitor's Association for bringing Governor Cuomo to the

Sullivan Catskills and for introducing him to many of the exciting activities we have to offer.

But Sullivan Catskill Hospitality does not stop there. We are on the verge of an entirely new era of tourism with the development of ADELAAR Resort and Veria Lifestyle Wellness Resorts.

The ADELAAR project alone, which includes the Montreign Casino, a five star hotel, a second hotel, a world class water park, a championship golf course and shopping amenities will add up to an astounding ONE BILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT in our COUNTY. The economic influence that this 4 Season Mountain Getaway will have cannot be overstated. It is expected to generate 100 million in tax revenue and a 500 million increase in annual economic activity in the region.

Overall, the project expects to employ 4,000 construction workers and will lead to 3,000 permanent jobs in our region.

Our casino project is already having significant positive impacts on our economy. There are a number of mid-level hotels getting approvals at this time representing 300 new rooms with more to come soon. Interest from within and outside of Sullivan County is increasing daily. Unemployment is down, sales tax is up and we are just at the beginning of our economic comeback.

On top of ADELAAR and Montreign is the Veria Lifestyle Wellness Resort, which is being built as we speak at the former Kutsher's property site. Focusing on spa amenities and

wellness, Veria will attract a different sector of the hospitality market.

Along with our extraordinary signature projects, the Partnership for Economic Development is focused on new manufacturing projects soon to begin operations in Sullivan County. The first, Metalized Carbon will be producing specialty critical components for the commercial aircraft industry through its new Aerospace Materials Division right here in Sullivan County. The second Sullivan Fabrication will be manufacturing metal racking systems previously purchased outside of the country. These projects underscore the importance to continue to diversify our economy. The Partnership too is focused on making Sullivan County more competitive in the region and beyond by continuing to prioritize shovel ready sites and is currently piecing the necessary funding together to begin a shovel corridor analysis along old route 17 next to the highway. We are currently competing for a fulfillment center looking to build its northeast headquarters potentially in that very corridor. The growth of various industry sectors will ensure that the current momentum is sustainable long term and will provide job opportunities for years to come. This work will continue and be enhanced this year.

To anyone that is paying attention, what we are witnessing is a real renaissance in the County. The tired and neglected facilities of the Borscht Belt era are now giving way to the modern accommodations that today's tourists expect.

These flagship projects will complement the already successful amenities that our County is known for, such as Bethel Woods Center for the Arts at the site of the original Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, and the Monticello Motor Club to name only a few.

County Leaders and its tourism partner at the SULLIVAN COUNTY VISITORS ASSOCIATION are working to leverage the activity and traffic that these high-profile projects will generate by greeting tourists and other visitors at a brand new SULLIVAN CATSKILLS VISITORS CENTER at Exit 106 on Route 17/86.

This new strategically placed Visitor Center will create an opportunity for Visitor's Association and other stakeholders to introduce tourists and other visitors that may have been first attracted here by these exciting major projects, to the vast number of other attractions, restaurants, breweries, distilleries, wineries, music venues, campgrounds, lodging options and outdoor destinations that the Sullivan Catskills have to offer.

It is these small businesses that have been the backbone of the Sullivan County economy for decades. Now, with the draw of our new flagship destinations, we will "WALK TOGETHER" with our small businesses by directing customers to them and help them too benefit and capitalize from the increased economic activity that is upon us.

There is no question that economic activity is in the upswing in Sullivan County, and it's about time!

HEALTH ISSUES:

While our economic future appears to be bright, Sullivan County still struggles on many fronts. Not the least of these struggles is the Health of our citizens. It is no secret that our County was ranked second from last in the State for health outcomes by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

This revelation was simply unacceptable to your County Legislature.

Since the time this report was issued, your Legislature has begun to “WALK TOGETHER” with the County Manager, Public Health, the Planning Department, the Gerry Foundation, Sullivan Renaissance, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Sullivan County Visitors Association, Catskill Regional Medical Center, Sullivan 180 and other important partners to turn around this dire statistic.

We have formed a coalition of interested stakeholders known as the Healthy Sullivan Initiative. The primary goal of this coalition is to improve the health and well-being of Sullivan County residents, with results that can be documented and tracked by self-defined benchmarks.

Other groups such as Sullivan 180 have been formed with a united purpose of offering our residents the opportunities for improving their health and prosperity.

I am proud to report that your County Legislature is hard at work on Health issues.

We have recently considered legislation that will prohibit the sale of Tobacco products to anyone less than 21 years of age.

This legislation has made it through committee and is hoped to become law very soon. It is viewed as an important piece of the health puzzle as Sullivan County has the highest smoking rate in the State of New York.

We are also leading by example. The Legislature has convened a Workplace Wellness Committee that will promote health among the County's 2000 employees. When a breakfast, lunch or snack is made available at any County meeting – the options will be exclusively healthy ones.

The County and other Health leaders are working hard to reverse the unhealthy trend in other ways too, such as:

- ✓ Good Food from our Local Farms
- ✓ Community Health Improvement Plans
- ✓ The Health Means Business Campaign
- ✓ Breastfeeding Education
- ✓ Farm to School initiatives
- ✓ The Eat Healthy, Eat Local campaign
- ✓ Promoting Immunizations
- ✓ Free Dental Screenings in 100% of our schools thanks to the PRASAD project
- ✓ Planning initiatives such as walking and hiking trails and making our communities more walkable in general.

And we haven't forgotten our furry citizens, as we continue to provide free rabies vaccinations throughout the county and we continue to allocate resources to combat animal cruelty and abuse as is evidenced by numerous arrests in recent years.

Our region has a history of providing a healing environment and being a health care destination. Nearly a century ago, New York City residents took to our mountain air to overcome tuberculosis and other ailments. Today, we are home to many fine health care institutions such as Catskill Regional Medical Center, Crystal Run Healthcare and The Center For Discovery - which is renowned for its care of the developmentally disabled. The Center has spearheaded tens of millions of dollars of investment beyond direct health care. In particular, they are helping transform the entire hamlet of Hurleyville into a creative, vibrant and inclusive community.

Health care has been and will continue to be a significant sector of our local economy. And in light of such a legacy, it is only appropriate that we improve the health of our citizens.

We can and will “WALK TOGETHER” to improve our collective health and move up in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundations rankings.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

Part and parcel to our County’s Health outcomes is our Public Safety.

We have and will continue to “WALK TOGETHER” with our law enforcement agencies and the District Attorney’s Office to ensure that our citizens feel safe in their homes and in their communities.

After decades of debate, the Legislature has embarked on the construction of a new, state of the art, jail complex. While

reasonable persons can disagree on the necessity and costs of constructing such a facility -- long term the County will benefit both fiscally and functionally.

This new facility, which is expected to open in Fall 2018, will increase functionality making the jail safer for employees and inmates alike. Unsafe and unhealthy conditions, such as those that exist in our current jail, which is the state's oldest, lead to incidents, injuries, overtime and costly claims and litigation.

I am proud to report that through the process of give and take at the drawing table, through careful consideration of "wants" versus "needs" through compromise and negotiation – in essence by "WALKING TOGETHER" through the process, we anticipate saving the County Taxpayers \$231,000,000 within the next 20 years.

I want to personally commend Sheriff Mike Schiff and Undersheriff Eric Chaboty for their leadership in this major project. As a retired member of the Sheriff's Office, I can state, without hesitation, that the Sheriff's Office is in good hands.

I also want to commend our District Attorney, Jim Farrell, and his staff for their tireless commitment to ensuring public safety through aggressive prosecution of serious crime in Sullivan County. Over the last two years the DA's office has achieved a substantial increase in felony convictions of those who inflict harm upon our society.

The Legislature also recognizes that Sullivan County has not been spared from the Opiod epidemic that plagues

communities nationwide. The widespread abuse of drugs in our county is a threat to PUBLIC SAFETY and PUBLIC HEALTH at the same time. As such, it is incumbent upon County Leaders to “WAIK TOGETHER” to combat drug abuse through:

- ✓ Treatment Initiatives
- ✓ Drug Court Diversion Programs
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Drug ‘Take-Back’ receptacles throughout the county.

And many other initiatives.

The County also takes its responsibilities under Federal and New York State firearm’s regulations seriously. Pistol permit applications are up 700% but, thanks to the good work of County Clerk Daniel Briggs and his staff, in conjunction with the efforts of the Sheriff’s Department and our County Court Judges, all applicants are properly vetted in an efficient manner despite very complicated state guidelines.

INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUE:

Without increased investment into infrastructure, we will limit the potential that all this renewed private investment and new interest in our County can bring. It is incumbent upon government leaders to invest in the county’s roads, bridges and to promote wise stewardship of our county’s building stock to take advantage of the opportunities that are at our doorstep and to safeguard these investments for the future.

“WALKING TOGETHER” with Federal, State and Local Governments, we are making great strides in improving the infrastructure of Sullivan County.

Foremost among the current projects, and very exciting to report, is Governor Cuomo’s commitment to reconstruct Interstate Highway 86 (formerly Route 17) by ensuring a full three lanes from Harriman all the way to Monticello both east and west bound.

This huge infrastructure investment is critical to our County as it will ensure that visitors from the New York City Metropolitan area and New Jersey can get to the Sullivan Catskills as quick as possible and without being stuck in traffic.

Instead of wasting time jammed in traffic, these visitors will soon have the time to jam vacation dollars into the registers of our local businesses.

Included in infrastructure, is the need to facilitate proper stewardship of the County’s stock of existing privately owned buildings. Too often, privately owned buildings here in the County have been left to ruins – creating deterioration within our community and stifling economic activity within our Towns and Villages. In response, I am pleased to announce the formation of the SULLIVAN COUNTY LAND BANK CORPORATION.

This new entity will strategically acquire tax delinquent, foreclosed, vacant and abandoned properties, eliminate barriers to their redevelopment and sell the rehabilitated

properties to new, responsible owners. This program will initially focus on the Villages of Liberty and Monticello, which have so much potential and yet have so desperately lacked the attention of progressive developers.

Another exciting infrastructure initiative involves the O&W rail trail. As history buffs among us know, Sullivan County's last major revival was largely attributed to the New York Ontario and Western Rail Road, which transported a vast number of summer visitors to our area at the Turn of the Century. You have all heard of "To The Mountains By Rail".

It is appropriate then that this rail trail be developed as an outdoor amenity for our local citizens and a new generation of health conscious visitors to use and enjoy as a recreational trail.

County staffers have been working with our Towns and Villages and other interested groups to link together existing segments of the trail with soon to be developed new segments.

When the trail is completed, we will literally be able to "WALK TOGETHER" from Wurtsboro to Livingston Manor and visit with our friends and neighbors in 9 Hamlets and 2 Villages along the way.

Other Infrastructure initiatives include:

- ✓ A Bike Trail that will connect the Community College to Hurleyville
- ✓ Construction of a New Hanger at the Airport
- ✓ Numerous upgrades to Roads and Bridges throughout the County

COMMUNITY ISSUES:

I would be remiss if I didn't comment on Sullivan County's most valuable natural resource – OUR PEOPLE.

Sullivan County is a culturally diverse community. And yet, our differences make our communities more interesting and stronger. This fact, in and of itself, yields an inherent asset that the County can hold out to the rest of the State and the Country as a successful model of peaceful and integrated co-existence.

As the first ever Hispanic American County Legislative Chairman in the State, I am living proof of the equal opportunity Sullivan County has to offer.

The County Legislature joins me in seeking to “WALK TOGETHER” with our White neighbors, Black neighbors, Latino neighbors, Asian neighbors, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Straight, Gay and all other diversities of neighbors to continue to create a prosperous, caring community, which is based upon tolerance and mutual respect.

Our County takes pride in caring for our Community members in a variety of ways, such as:

- ✓ Our Child Care Council will soon provide on-site infant care after receiving a QUARTER MILLION dollar grant.
- ✓ Our Fire and EMS personnel - respond 24/7 to help complete strangers – all on Volunteer Power

- ✓ To serve our Vets better, Our Veterans Service Agency will soon move to larger, more efficient quarters.
- ✓ The non-profit BATS organization will be opening their doors to Homeless Veterans at their recently renovated home in Liberty.
- ✓ The Legislature and other County Offices will open their doors to Student Interns to expose them to the workings of government and inspire them to work in public service and politics – to shape the future of their County.

CLOSING:

In one year this body of Legislators and our County Manager has accomplished SO MUCH! There is still much more to achieve. Let us “WALK TOGETHER”! The TRAIL OF LIFE in Sullivan County is our legacy and one that will be an inspiration to our youth and an example of how government should “WALK TOGETHER” to achieve their goals. We will reach our destination in Sullivan County if we WALK TOGETHER.

There are ONLY 9 Legislators! We must have your voices, your ideas and your support. With you WALKING with us, we can find solutions to our challenges. As your elected Legislators, WE will hear your voices and with YOU – our Sullivan County Residents, our Friends and Family, our Brothers and Sisters – We Will Prosper! LET’S WALK TOGETHER!

GOD BLESS AMERICA – GOD BLESS YOU ALL! GOOD NIGHT!