

## Local economy has rich history

**Colin Read: Everybody's Business**

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— This year marks a milestone in the history of our region. It has been four hundred years since the French explorer Samuel de Champlain first set foot on the shores of the lake that would become his namesake. Our region and our economy have not been the same since that fateful year of 1609.

Our predecessors pursued their individual missions for their own reasons. In doing so, though, they created a region that depends crucially on, and contributes dramatically to, the transportation networks that created a global trade powerhouse. The world, too, has not been the same since.

Our illustrious trade history did not begin with Champlain, even though he helped our trade go global. The Iroquois had for centuries developed trade routes that relied on the waterways of what we now know as the Saint Lawrence River, the Richelieu River, the Hudson River and Lake Champlain.

The original name, Lake Ondakina, meant the lake in between. The early explorers and traders could not have imagined the dual meaning of the Native American name for our lake. To the arriving European explorers and traders, the lake was a symbol of trade between an old world in Europe and a new world in the Americas. The early Native American trade routes were expanded to provide a thriving Renaissance Europe and the new American colonies with novel goods and luxuries previously unimaginable.

Those who cannot appreciate and celebrate the past will have a difficult time creating a vision of the future. Fortunately, hundreds of local residents have come together to remind us of our heritage over the past four 400 years.

Under the leadership of Celine Paquette, this region is marking the arrival of Samuel de Champlain in a spectacular fashion. We have been celebrating his arrival every 50 years, but this 400th anniversary is special. And the events planned to date are unprecedented.

For instance, SUNY Plattsburgh recently organized two major conferences. One was a meeting to discuss the history of Lake Champlain and its namesake. Another was the first annual Global Supply Chain Management Conference, which attracted supply-chain experts from across the U.S. and Canada. This very successful conference is helping to create the foundation for future trade prosperity.

And next week, Clinton Community College is hosting a number of special events. From July 8 to 10, the college will honor all the various groups that were affected by the arrival of Samuel de Champlain. For instance, on July 8, they will have presentations on Native American history, heritage and culture. These include lectures, storytelling and dance. This is followed the next day with presentations that explore the influence of French Canadian culture on our region.

The celebrations hosted by Clinton Community College close on July 10 with re-enactments, music and discussions that reflect the legacy of Samuel de Champlain on our economic and social history.

Later in the month, on July 25, Fort Ticonderoga celebrates its history and the legacy of Samuel de Champlain. Such events occur over the entire summer, ranging from celebrations of history to culture, food, drink, and dance, music, fife and drum, sailings and more. The events are chronicled at <http://www.discoverlakechamplain400.org/calendar.htm>.

Our local PBS station is also contributing to the documentation of history. Their new production, *Dead Reckoning*, is a novel and compelling documentary that I am sure will garner accolades and awards. It will appear this fall on Mountain Lake PBS and possibly throughout the PBS network, and in Canada and Europe. Through the use of realistic, almost lifelike, animation, it documents the ways Champlain learned how to survive from his American Indian allies, and describes the legacy he left in our region.

Champlain is but one of the many characters and pioneers that defined the names, places, and people of our region. By acting as the first interface between a North Country world thousands of years old and a New France, he set in motion events that still reverberate today.

Why are these collective events so significant for our economic future? Without an awareness of the hard work and the pioneer spirit of our predecessors, we can easily fool ourselves into believing our world does not change. This notion of a static world is comforting because it lulls us into believing we need not change either.

Our economic history tells us otherwise. This region is constantly evolving, even if such evolution is difficult to observe in a given decade.

Our future too depends on our ability to evolve. It would be hard to attract newcomers, the lifeblood of our future, with a motto "Come to the North Country, Where Nothing Happens." Those new to our community thirst for knowledge of our heritage and a fascinating past. Such a realization lets them know they are part of something exciting and dynamic, with as strong a sense of our collective future as we have of our illustrious past.

These pioneers who came before us remind us that economic growth is hard won, as is anything worthwhile. The sacrifices and courage of our predecessors gives us an equal measure of courage to continue their tradition of vision.

The Native American trade pioneers, the explorer Samuel de Champlain, Moss. K. Platt's early railroad to Canada and the pioneers who built automobile plants, bus plants, passenger train plants, and perhaps airplane repair plants someday, emphasize for us that this region is all about discovery, transportation and trade.

This is a terrific year for us all to discover the layers of our region's trade past, from the routes forged by Native Americans to the Supply Chain Region this area has become. I hope you can partake in all the events this summer that celebrate our history and educate our residents. If we can better understand those who made this region what it is today, perhaps we can sit on the shoulders of these giants and better see our rich economic future. Check out [www.discoverlakechamplain400.org](http://www.discoverlakechamplain400.org) for more information about Samuel de Champlain's Quadricentennial.

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