

## North Country has secret to economic success

By Colin Read, Everybody's Business

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— Psst. I'll let you in on a secret. But don't tell anybody.

Things continue to happen in the North Country.

Look no further than the big contract Akrimax just received. It will allow this drug company to begin manufacturing in more of the Wyeth Pharmaceuticals plant it purchased in Rouses Point.

Add to that the continuing preparation for buses to be manufactured here at the new Nova bus factory, and we see that this community is not getting caught up in the drama that besets the rest of the country.

And according to the Zindex, a home-price-index service, Plattsburgh's home prices are not showing the tremendous drops seen across the country. Actually, while national single-family median housing prices fell by 11 percent over the last year, Plattsburgh prices actually remained flat or rose slightly in the same period. Even with a housing market that is holding its own, homes remain amazingly affordable here. On a square-foot basis, houses are about a third the cost found elsewhere.

Why do we continue to be successful while others languish? The North Country is not an area prone to excesses. It does not shoot high in the booms and does not sink low in the busts. Perhaps it is in the DNA or the water to be careful and thoughtful when things are on the upswing and to be resilient and cooperative on the downswing.

Throughout the economic cycle, the North Country is the Energizer Bunny of communities. We have not seen the huge increase in unemployment that other communities are seeing. And the jobs growth as Nova ramps up seems to be taking care of some of the job losses from the Comfort Inn fire and minor retrenchments across the county.

Perhaps we have been lucky so far. I don't think so, though. Instead, I think we have been well positioned for success. Our county, city and towns watch economic development closely and offer any encouragement employers need. The Development Corporation and Adore Kurtz have the facilities to permit new companies to move right in. And Garry Douglas of the Plattsburgh North Country Chamber of Commerce works alongside OneWorksource and TDC to ensure that we take the steps to be an attractive and appropriately trained community, even before potential employers come knocking.

We also anticipate needs that may even exist now. The SUNY business school developed a program in global supply chain management before any other SUNY school in the state. And it worked closely with the chamber to brand this area as a supply chain region. This is in line with our regional expertise in moving goods and manufacturing transportation equipment.

The community was also quick to recognize the importance of sustainability. It is a very important issue in

Canada, and we are determined to work with our Quebec friends to ensure the transportation route from Quebec to New York City becomes a green corridor. This region understands the need to live in balance with our surroundings, so an appreciation of sustainability is not a new concept for us. It is completely consistent with our philosophy to live modestly, within our means, and with little impact on our neighbor.

No matter what happens with the national economy, goods will still have to move. And as the world retrenches, we rely more on our closest and longest trading partners. The unique relationship the North Country has with Canada, unlike perhaps any other region in the country, allows us to build on relationships while others have relationships threatened.

Finally, when times get tough, the North Country is able to get back to the land. People are heating with wood again and growing their own food. We have an active farmers market during the growing seasons, which offers a steady source of income for some local farmers. And everybody needs an apple a day! This spending creates income in the community and keeps the income circulating at home.

Maybe it is ultimately our remoteness that is our providence. We trade with each other because we don't have too many large box stores or large chain restaurants sending the wealth away. And our media outlets take their responsibilities seriously, investing in local reporting rather than pulling stories off the wire or from the national offices.

The national and global economies are not out of the woods yet. That is fine. It must be the case that we are beginning to look up, though, even if there remain some shoes to drop. The die has been cast, and we are still playing out some national layoffs and their secondary effects. It is not that the North Country lags the rest of the world and will merely fall later. Rather, I think it is more that the North Country is more moderate, more resilient, less high flying, but also not so low to go.

Even in these troubling times, the North Country continues to look for opportunities and refuses to be put down. We will continue to prepare for a bright future, to educate our children for the jobs we can create here, and to go about our business and our lives in one of the most beautiful areas you could find anywhere.

This community has become one that is attractive to others, self contained and essential for trade. Yet it remains one that is affordable to live in, affordable to run a business in and a great place to raise a family. What more can we ask?

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