



## Our Future is Now

by Colin Read, Ph.D

**T**he demographics are inescapable. By some estimates, 76 million people will retire in the next decade, and only 46 million new entrants to the job market will replace them.

*The Economist* magazine recently related that Fortune 500 companies will lose half their top people by 2011. And you don't have to go to too many public meetings, business meetings, or gatherings of professionals to notice that the vast majority of the people in the room are in their 50s or 60s.

This system of reliance on the senior generation has worked amazingly well until now. The generation born out of World War II and raised on the values of the Depression, the work ethic of the Eisenhower Era, and the realm of the possible from the Kennedy Camelot legend and the Space Race created a work force with the right combination of pragmatism, stewardship, and competitiveness that instilled in us the confidence that tomorrow will always be as bright as today. As a consequence, we did not have to spend much time ponder-

ing the future or wondering what we will need to do when the generation ahead of us began retiring from the job market.

Meanwhile, the generation that follows baby boomers has been brought up within a flood of technology, a rapid expansion of everything, and no evidence the world has not always been that way. This class of future professionals is multitasking, dynamic, progressive, more globally oriented, and perhaps less economically secure, but without a compelling concern about economic insecurity. They are more

likely to take risks and far more likely to change careers often.

What does this mean for the North Country and the larger business community? We must recognize that it may not be business as usual in the future. Change has come to be expected rather than feared. And maintaining the status quo is likely a recipe for business failure rather than success.

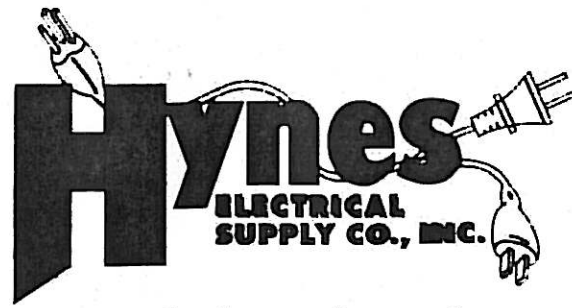
Our emerging professionals want to enjoy their work. They want to keep things interesting, and they want their surroundings to be interesting, too. If you look around at the growing communities in the country, you will see that they cater to such values by providing amenities that are more eclectic and more closely associated with the outdoor activities the next generation can more easily afford, and by creating a range of opportunities that can keep things interesting.

The North Country has some of these values in abundance. There are few places in this entire country that have the amazing combination of mountains, lakes and streams, state parks, and an interesting history that we find (and perhaps even take for granted) right here. We have world class amenities in Montreal, and even in Burlington, and now at least an appreciation for why it is important to also have them right here in Plattsburgh.

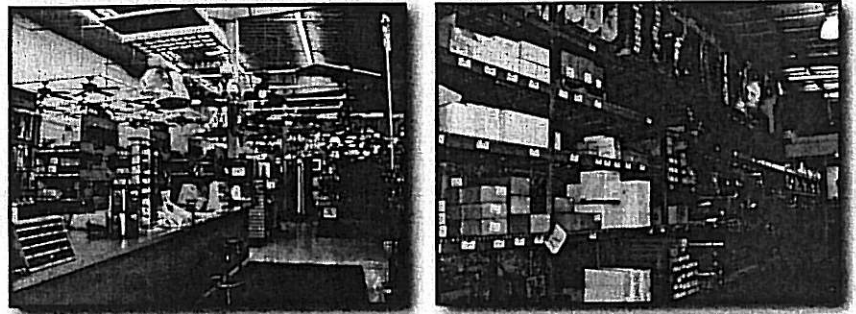
We do, of course, need to be sure we also have created opportunities for our youth right here in Plattsburgh, too. This is a bit of a chicken-and-egg challenge. There is certainly a wide range of small businesses here. There is also a group of business owners that hope to pass those businesses on to their children. And there is certainly going to be a demand for these businesses and others, should we continue to grow our economy. The desire to provide for a future is certainly in place.

There is plenty to celebrate in this community. A revitalized Strand Theater, a downtown pedestrian-oriented ambience like Church Street across the Lake, and a riverwalk would all contribute to creating a city core that is attractive, cohesive, and interesting for young professionals.

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transformed economy. This is evidenced by new programs in Supply Chain Management, Aviation Maintenance, Management Information Systems, and a broad array of certificate and evening programs offered by SUNY Plattsburgh, Clinton Community College, and Champlain Valley Educational Services. And there is a growing awareness about the necessity of lifelong education as young professionals strive to keep up with an ever accelerating pace of change in the workforce.

So the questions remain. How do we make our community attractive and vibrant enough to keep our children here and induce others to come? How do we ensure the younger generation has the skills and dreams they'll need to bring our community to the next level they will come to expect? How do we identify and cultivate this different generation of leaders so they have the foundations necessary to thrive? And how do we offer them the mentorship that will allow this transition, if many of us will be retired in a few short years?

We must work harder to cultivate and mentor our young professionals. That may mean placing a greater level of responsibility, authority, investment, and divestment to those that will follow us. We cannot underestimate the challenge and trust this will require.

Today's professionals must hand off all that they have created to a group of young professionals that do not necessarily share all the same values and may not be satisfied with outcomes that have been perfectly satisfactory up to now. It seems unlikely, though, that the values of stimulation, amenities, lifelong education, and changes in opportunities are going to somehow go away. It is ultimately going to be a challenge for today's business leaders to embrace these changes, create these opportunities, and mentor those willing to follow.

Are you up to the task? I am! ■



Colin Read, Ph.D.  
Dean, School of Business  
and Economics  
State University of New York  
College at Plattsburgh  
Contributing Writer