

## Vision 2020 -- North Country resolution

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— I have a New Year's challenge for us all. On the cusp of 2008, we find ourselves but a dozen years away from what could well be a new destiny. While so much has changed in our lifetime, there will be young people entering the workforce in 2020 who have no memory of the century or millennium past. Theirs is a world of converging media, computers and the Internet, communities often forged online, and, for the first time in history, the ability to live where they want with the skills and technology to work in a virtual environment. More often than not, these young people will make decisions based not on necessity, but from their belief in an intrinsic right to realize happiness, not just to pursue happiness.

While Plattsburgh and the North Country chose many of us, the next generation will choose Plattsburgh, or one of many other vibrant communities around the country. Such communities have seen their own destiny, and have seized upon their own future. Towns like Sedona, Ariz., Boulder, Colo., or perhaps even Burlington, Vt., believe they are pursuing a special and unique vision, and this pervasive attitude affects all the perspectives of their citizens and visitors alike. A person steeped in a more stoic heritage might dismiss such attitudes as boastful or overly confident. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating -- these communities seem able to create a palpable excitement in their own future, and this excitement cultivates energy and attracts new residents that buy into and share in the communities' dream.

A few weeks ago, another writer on this page discussed viewing our town from the eyes of a tourist. Perhaps we are so familiar with Burlington that we would not be able to view it from that perspective. However, there are places you and I have visited that magically transform seemingly ordinary historical events into compelling historical experiences.

This "magic" gives their visitors an experience that is most encompassing. It creates ambiance, nostalgia, wonder and maybe even a little awe and raises the awareness of the importance of local history, events, and people that would most likely otherwise go unnoticed. And it is this ambiance that people now want from their communities, for the very same reasons they want an interesting ambiance at the restaurants they most enjoy.

As many of us recognize, there is a rich history around every corner in the North Country. Once called Albany County and extending from here to Maine, this region was an important trade region from well before the American Revolution, through the Industrial Revolution, and up to our more recent past.

Our region grew out of a heritage as the center of economic activity bisecting Upper and Lower Canada and New York/New England. Many of us grew up with this history, and perhaps took it for granted, as it was our forebears' past and a normal part of our work-a-day lives.

It remains our choice and our choice alone -- to define Plattsburgh as we always have, or take the view of the tourist and see what "magic" there is to be had here. We have the history and the devotion to this region. And newcomers can bring forward new energy and create the roots for their children's children. But nobody will think this region is special unless we first acknowledge its heritage and imagine its potential.

Let us vision forward a dozen years together, and let us call this Vision 2020. If we can, let's for a moment put our current issues aside and dream a bit about what we can make of our town.

Of course, we cannot gloss over our current realities. We must get local and school taxes in line with other communities that do not want to hobble their future. We must figure out how to cooperate to prevent duplication of services, and we must reduce the plethora of jurisdictions and layers of government.

But there is one thing we all share -- we love the North Country. If we can vision together, we may be able to create a renewed energy and excitement, and it is precisely this excitement that tourists and newcomers alike will find contagious.

And, once we Vision 2020, let us take that pride and blueprint and work backward -- by putting the institutions in place and documenting the histories and eccentricities that make our city so remarkable. As we do so, I think we will find that we have more in common than a fascinating past and a bright future. We may discover that we all want the same thing.

Who knows? Maybe our New Year's resolution can be to work together in the present to create a common vision of the future!

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