

County Executive Joanie Mahoney
State of the County
March 6, 2012

Thank you Linda for that introduction... and thank you Chairman McMahon for your comments. I am enjoying working with you. And, Andrea Moore I appreciate you being here. That was a wonderful rendition of the National Anthem. And thank you all for joining us tonight.

I am pleased to be here with you once again to deliver the annual State of the County Address. Thank you to LeMoyne College President Fred Pestello for hosting us tonight. President Pestello has done an excellent job since becoming LeMoyne's 13th president nearly 4 years ago. In addition to welcoming record breaking freshman classes, he is guiding a major expansion. Not only is the new Science Building applying cutting edge science and technology, it is also being built in a manner which reflects LeMoyne's commitment to the community in which it lives. It is on track to earn a gold level LEED certification. Congratulations President Pestello and the entire LeMoyne community.

Also joining us tonight from LeMoyne is LeMoyne College Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Linda LeMura whom you've already heard from. Dr. LeMura is only the second provost in the history of LeMoyne College. She is highly respected and very active in our community. Linda we are grateful for all that you do.

I would like to welcome my fellow countywide elected officials. Sheriff Kevin Walsh, District Attorney Bill Fitzpatrick, Comptroller Bob Antonacci and County Clerk Ann Ciarpelli. Tonight is a milestone for Ann Ciarpelli. After serving 16 years as our County Clerk, Ann has announced that she will retire at the end of the year. Thank you for your service Ann, you will be missed. I wish you and Tony all the best in your retirement.

Our Comptroller Bob Antonacci is here. Bob, congratulations to you as you begin your second term. It has been a pleasure to work with you on behalf of the taxpayers of Onondaga County. I have at times been very impressed by the level of detail with which Bob can work. With a billion dollars being spent annually in our county no detail is too small to draw Bob's attention. As I stand here tonight, I can assure the taxpayers of Onondaga County that your tax dollars are very carefully watched and are safe in the capable hands of our Comptroller, Bob Antonacci. Nice work Bob.

I appreciate Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner and her team being with us tonight. There is not likely an elected official in our region who has more on her plate than Mayor Miner. When I think my job tough, I need only look down Montgomery Street to put things in perspective. As the Mayor of the hub of the whole region, Stephanie tackles the daunting issues of education, public safety and an antique infrastructure with fewer and fewer resources. Our whole community is lucky to have a bright, brave and capable woman working for us each and every day. Thank you Mayor Miner.

There are also people representing our state legislators, members of the common council, elected officials from towns and villages and superintendents from our school districts here tonight and I would like to thank all of you for joining us.

It is however, to the Onondaga County Legislature that I officially deliver 2012's State of the County. Welcome to the 17 members of our county legislature. As you know, the legislature is smaller this year and there are more new faces than usual.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce the members of the legislature. As I do so, I'd like to ask that they stand up and remain standing as I call their names: Brian May, John Dougherty, Bill Meyer, Judy Tassone, Kathy Rapp, Mike Plochocki, Danny Liedka, Chris Ryan, Kevin Holmquist, Dave Knapp, Derek Shepard, Casey Jordan, Monica Williams and Linda Ervin. In addition, Legislators Pat Kilmartin and Mark Stanczyk have been selected as floor leaders and for the first time ever a new member, Ryan McMahon, has been chosen as Chairman of the Legislature.

Welcome to all the members of the Onondaga County legislature.

As I reflect on my first term, I am proud of what we have ALL accomplished together. When I delivered my first State of the County in 2008, the horizon was very different. No one anticipated the devastating impact of the financial collapse that would occur later that year. The collapse put serious strains on the finances of every layer of government and it seems as if I spent most of my first term managing a crisis. Now with what we hope is the worst behind us we are poised to emerge from this crisis stronger than we entered it.

Onondaga County is a leaner, more efficient and nimble government. Very few municipal governments can say they have a better credit rating in 2012 than they did in 2008. Onondaga County is one of those governments and it is because we all worked together and put smart policies in place when we needed to. We didn't simply put our heads down and hope for better days. We looked forward and made difficult decisions – we cut spending, reduced the size of our government, made Onondaga County government more efficient, elevated transparency and moved our county forward.

Cooperation and compromise between the executive and legislative side, while not always easy, delivered the leadership our residents deserve. The members of the legislature, both current and past have my admiration for the role they played during this difficult time.

At the same time we were making government more lean, we were also keeping an eye on our friends and neighbors who were struggling and we ensured that we met our obligations to those in our community who were in need. Cutting programs was not an easy thing to do but by drawing parameters around food, safety and shelter, we ensured that our dwindling resources would be available to those who were in the most critical need. By making those decisions and by trying always to do things in a better and smarter way we were able to be there for many more of our neighbors without spending any more money. In some cases we saw double digit increases in the number of people using our programs and we met that need without expanding the size of county government. Wise decisions, strong leadership and creative solutions were found all

across county government. Our county employees continue to impress me day after day and I thank them for all they have done.

As our recovery continues, it is also important to recognize a big reason that our county continues to thrive. For 20 years, County Executive Nick Pirro led our community with a steady hand and a careful eye on the taxpayer's wallet. His administration created the base our financial recovery was built upon. It is important for us always to be mindful of and grateful for the service provided by those who came before us. Thank you Nick.

As I mentioned, our bond rating is strong. For many years we have delayed necessary capital projects and this year we plan to do a lot to catch up. The low bond rating means we can borrow the money to make the necessary improvements and pay low interest rates.

Both county employees and outside contractors will be put to work this year undertaking \$8 million in projects in Parks, \$20 million in facilities and more than \$100 million to continue the revitalization of Onondaga Lake. We are also working to reduce our operating costs by decreasing the amount of office space leased by the county and addressing long overdue improvements to aging trails and roadways in our county parks system. I'd like to thank the members of the Legislature for approving these projects. There has never been a smarter time to borrow money to undertake these necessary projects and at the same time we're putting people in our community back to work.

With the improvements in our parks system comes great news that the County Legislature voted last month to approve a new lease between the county and the Syracuse Chiefs. Deputy County Executive Bill Fisher and County Attorney Gordon Cuffy negotiated a much improved lease which will reduce the county's subsidy for the stadium, provide incentives to maximize the stadium's use and – most importantly – assure that professional baseball will be played in Onondaga County for years to come. Thank you to the Simone Family, Bob Scalione and the entire Chiefs organization for the work you've done to make this possible.

And staying on the topic of parks, some of you may have heard that Syracuse JazzFest has been evaluating new locations to host its festival. I am honored and privileged to announce to you tonight that Syracuse Jazzfest has selected our very own Jamesville Beach to be the host site for the 2012 festival. This is excellent news. Thank you to festival founder Frank Malfitano and Commissioner Bill Lansley for the work you have done in a very short time to make this a reality. I for one, cannot wait.

We have the good fortune of hosting JazzFest this year in part because of the combination of the incredible crowds drawn by JazzFest and the high demand for the use of the SRC arena at OCC. There is a lot going on at OCC. OCC has been ranked in the "Top Ten percent of Community Colleges" by the Aspen Institute. OCC's enrollment has grown by 65% over the past decade and fall 2011 enrollment reached an all time high of more than 12,700 students. OCC is now the second largest undergraduate institution of higher education in Central New York. Congratulations to Dr. Debbie Sydow and the OCC community as you celebrate 50 years of service to the citizens of Onondaga County and the State of New York.

And this was just an incredible year for Save the Rain under Deputy County Executive Matt Millea's leadership. It's hard to believe, but if we had hadn't changed course we would just now be finishing up the construction of a fourth sewage treatment plant in the city of Syracuse. Instead we took the road less traveled and the results have been nothing less than phenomenal. We committed to and exceeded advancing 50 green infrastructure projects last year and by the end of 2012 we will already be halfway to our goal of capturing 250 million gallons of water per year by 2018 – well ahead of schedule. We are continuing with an ambitious schedule for this year and I encourage you to check the Save the Rain website during the year to watch the great projects. When we made the decision to move toward a more environmentally friendly solution to our stormwater problems, we did so for one simple reason: it was the right thing to do for our community.

While the projects themselves have been exciting, the unintended consequences have been incredible. Onondaga County is now a national leader in the use of green infrastructure. Stories have been written in *Governing Magazine*, *Public Works Magazine*, and *Water Environment and Technology Magazine* among others. We were recently featured on a nationally broadcast PBS series called *Designing Healthy Communities* and our story has been told in the widely circulated video series from the National Resources Defense Council called *Rooftops to Rivers*. Most importantly, the United States Environmental Protection Agency named us as one of its "10 Green Infrastructure" partners in the United States. Without exaggeration, I can tell you that Onondaga County is playing a vital role in changing for the better the way things are done all across our country. It's just one example of the creativity our county employees show every day.

In our Emergency Communications Department, Commissioner Bill Bleyle is working with his counterparts from Oswego, Madison, Cortland and Cayuga counties to study the opportunities for consolidation of 9 1 1 services. Onondaga County has invested in state of the art technology which can serve populations beyond our county borders. So it makes sense to see if there may be partnerships we can form in the interest of efficiency and the five counties are doing just that. The smooth transition we had when we consolidated the Town of Skaneateles' 9 1 1 operation with ours has given us valuable perspective about how to move forward. I'd like to take a moment to recognize one of our Public Safety Dispatchers.

Todd Hall is the recipient of a 2011 American Red Cross Real Hero Award which was presented in December. He was recognized for successfully guiding a caller in assisting her daughter through the delivery of a child. Congratulations Todd and thank you to you and all the talented staff at 911 for the great work you do every day.

In our Department of Social Services, under the excellent leadership of Commissioner David Sutkowy, we are charged with doing some of the most important work county government does, we help those who need help. And again, our employees do what they do very well. Our office of Temporary Assistance was recognized this past October as a Food Stamp Hunger Champion by the United States Department of Agriculture. They were recognized for the outreach and collaboration with community partners that allows Onondaga County to be a national leader in reaching low income families who are eligible for food stamps.

And staying with our Department of Social Services, we are working hard to ensure children are growing up in a safe and healthy environment. We have made a number of investments in the Child Welfare system such as our new OnCare system of care. Our efforts have resulted in a forty five percent decrease in foster care placement since 2005 and a forty three percent decrease in foster children living in highly intensive, high cost institutional care since 2006. These decreases are far exceeding state averages.

And these programs dovetail smoothly with our commitment to Say Yes to Education. Say Yes is an all encompassing effort that puts the necessary support pieces in place to assist children in successfully completing school. Keeping our children with permanent, supportive families improves academic outcomes.

We've partnered with Huntington Family Center and together we are accomplishing this in dramatic fashion. For reasons such as academics, attendance, family, or medical, school children are referred to Huntington's Family Support Program. In 2011 alone, 342 families, which included 1,038 children, were referred to and served by the Family Support Program. We've seen great results. 96% of those served reported progress, 99% reported that the services helped connect them to needed supports and since the program's inception four years ago only three children have been directed to out of home placement. Helping create an environment where families can stay together is critical to helping children achieve academic success and reach their full potential.

In the area of juvenile justice, we have saved \$2.2 million dollars over the last four years implementing a new policy which shifts from a focus on detaining youth who pose no public safety risk to one with enhanced community based services that provide better outcomes. Onondaga County's approach caught the attention of Gov Cuomo who proposed similar reform for the whole New York State Juvenile Justice system. Our leadership role has resulted in additional funding from the state to provide supervision, keep our community safe and offer the services children need. Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for this year takes statewide reform even further and we look forward to continuing our work in this area.

Also under the leadership of Deputy County Executive Ann Rooney, a team of county employees has made significant progress in our discussions with Upstate Medical University regarding Van Duyn Home and Hospital. We are very lucky in our community to have a visionary leader like Upstate President and CEO Dr. David Smith. David is someone who sees the possibilities of what a teaching hospital can be and who has succeeded in bringing his vision to reality. Not surprisingly, a transaction of this magnitude involves complex negotiations among many entities. We are approaching the end of the negotiations with Upstate and I am optimistic that we will have good news to announce in the near future.

In 2011, Onondaga County continued fulfilling its commitment to the men and women who have served our country. When veterans come home to Onondaga County, retired Marine Lt. Colonel Bob McLean and our Veteran's Services Agency are there to provide support. This past year we assisted in a cooperative effort among Syracuse Habitat for Humanity, National Grid and the VA Medical Center on a new partnership that is helping veterans in need. These organizations worked with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on an agreement that will

create opportunities for homeless and low income veterans to purchase homes. Syracuse Habitat for Humanity is close to completing the first 2 specially adapted, affordable houses on Syracuse's West Side for veterans. This is the first Habitat project of this kind in New York State and one of only a few in the entire country. It is the right thing to do, and will allow people who fought for America to achieve the American dream of homeownership.

I am happy to report to you that the city/county purchasing consolidation is complete and is paying dividends. In addition to adding interested towns and villages Purchasing Director Sean Carroll is exploring the possibility of including additional school districts as well as fire departments. Looking back on the decades long debate surrounding a combined purchasing operation; and now witnessing its smooth transition and resulting benefits should encourage all of us to continue to find ways to work together. Thank you Sean for the hard work you have done to move us forward.

And the list goes on. The citizens of Onondaga County should be proud of the high level of service provided by county employees day in and day out. I thank them all for the good work they do.

Despite all the great work being done locally, we are still tremendously affected by what happens in State Government. As you have heard me say many times before, state mandates take every single dollar we collect in county property taxes. There is reason though this year to be cautiously optimistic.

Long derided as the most dysfunctional legislature in the country, the change in Albany in the last year has been dramatic. Governor Andrew Cuomo came into office and got results in his first year. The members of the Assembly and Senate heeded his call to put politics aside and get this State moving again. They worked across the aisle and delivered an on time budget that actually spent less money than the year before. It was truly impressive and much appreciated by all of us charged with managing municipalities in New York.

This year, the governor is continuing to help. He has once again proposed a budget that closes the deficit and is balanced. But more importantly, he kept his word about state mandates. The Governor promised that last years property tax cap was only the first step and that mandate relief would come next. We took the Governor at his word and have been very relieved to see real, concrete mandate relief in his budget. The Governor proposed a three year phased state takeover of Medicaid growth – a change which would save Onondaga County nearly \$500 thousand dollars in the first year alone. Over five years the savings would exceed \$23 million dollars. That is real relief for property taxpayers and a great start to the mandate relief we so desperately need.

Governor Cuomo is also proposing a new tier to the state pension system. It is very important to note that the proposed tier six would have no affect on current public employees whatsoever. But, it will reduce the cost to county government for new employees. In 2008 our pension bill was just over \$15 million dollars. In 2012, our pension bill will be more than 39 million dollars, which equates to a 156% increase in the past five years alone. Our taxpayers cannot keep up with the cost of pensions and changes have to be made.

To understand the magnitude of the expense, consider that over 37 billion dollars was paid into the NYS Pension fund last year. To be clear, that's \$37 Billion for just one year. If we were to send a bill to every man, woman and child in New York State for their share, you would each receive a bill for \$1,944 to pay for public pensions in 2012. I encourage our state representatives to please support the governor as he tries to bring relief to our property taxpayers

During a time where gridlock in Washington is at an all time high, seeing the change in Albany has been encouraging. There's a tendency with politics for people to focus on the negative, so it is important to acknowledge how quickly our state government is changing how it works. Last year's session was the most successful in modern history and this year's session can continue that momentum.

Locally, our 2012 budget sets the property tax levy at \$148 million and with the costs for state mandates at \$175 million we are becoming even more reliant on sales tax revenues. Last year was a better year for sales tax receipts. The infusion of tax dollars from our visitors on the bowling tour, combined with a gradually improving economy is moving us in the right direction. While we might find some relief in the improving sales tax receipts, it's important to keep in perspective the severity of the economic downturn we've endured. The 2011 sales tax receipts are encouraging but they are just now surpassing the 2008 levels. As you can see on the screens, the trajectory of our sales tax revenues has been significantly altered by the downturn, and tens of millions of dollars in sales tax revenues are forever lost. These lost revenues are why we've had some of the most difficult budgets in the history of Onondaga County.

While our department heads and our budget department have done a very good job finding ways to make us more efficient, there are still difficult budgets ahead. Our early projections put the county's 2013 budget gap at \$20 million dollars. As a result, I would like to announce the creation of an interdisciplinary task force to help close our future structural budget gaps. Our employees have the best working knowledge of county government and are best positioned to help us find additional innovative approaches to lower our costs. I am pleased that County Legislators Danny Liedka and Mike Plochocki will join this task force and I will expect their recommendations in July as we compile the 2013 budget proposal. As I begin my second term I will continue to support the framework we have built around working together to make things better.

I think you will be pleased to hear about the progress we've made on some of the policies we've been working on. This summer we will unveil a final draft of a new sustainable development plan for Onondaga County. We have had a thorough and thoughtful public process to develop a plan for our community. We can no longer accept sprawl without population growth and we must focus on reinvestment and rehabilitation. Don Jordan, Megan Costa and our whole planning team have worked very hard and are putting an excellent plan together which will ensure that we make smarter growth decisions. Good land use planning helps to preserve natural areas, improve air and water quality, create walkable communities, support transit, reduce energy usage and improve livability for our residents. Our land use patterns and infrastructure investments play a big part in how sustainable we can be as a region. We know we are stronger when we work together as a region on tough issues like sprawl and we must have the policies in place to

encourage cooperation. With flat population, growth in one town will cause vacant properties in another town. Policies that pit us against each other don't always serve us well as a region.

It is with that in mind that I would like to propose a new program designed to support sustainable development: our new "Sustainability Pays" initiative will recognize the fact that we are one region and we will rise and fall together. We must be thoughtful about how we go forward as a community and as a region if we are going to be competitive and succeed. Onondaga County will do its part and continue to expand the cooperation and vision for Central New York. I'll look forward to sharing more details as we put our budget together.

Part of our effort to support sustainability includes recognizing the tremendous asset we have in our local farm community. Agriculture in Onondaga County is a \$137 million dollar per year industry. It makes good business sense to create an environment where farmland protection, local food production and preservation of our rural landscape are key elements of our planning effort.

I am creating the Onondaga County Agriculture Council to ensure that county government works to promote and preserve Onondaga County's strong farming tradition. The council will work to strengthen and enhance connections between our urban and suburban core to rural, agricultural areas and it will work with government to review, improve and develop pro agriculture/farming friendly policies to make it easier and more likely for local farmers to stay in business. I am pleased that Legislator Dave Knapp has agreed to co chair the new council.

And all of this will be supported by the new local law passed by this Legislature which creates the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation. After the Common Council votes on this we will then ask New York State to approve our application to form the land bank corporation. The tools made available by forming a land bank corporation will allow Onondaga County to work with the private sector to redevelop abandoned and vacant properties to return them to the tax rolls. And due to the cooperation between the mayor, common council, county legislature and my office, We expect Onondaga County's to be the first land bank corporation established in New York State.

It is these types of policies which will result in real growth and economic opportunities for all of us. When we cut the cost of government and support smart land use we set the stage for our local businesses to succeed.

Central New York has been lauded statewide as an example of cooperation. Our governments are working together and our governments are supporting our employers. That cooperation is paying dividends. One of the best examples we have of what happens when we work together is the success of the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council. Led by Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor and Centerstate CEO President Rob Simpson, people from Onondaga, Cayuga, Cortland, Madison and Oswego counties came together and worked at an incredibly challenging pace to create a great proposal for the statewide competition. It was impressive to see the way everyone focused on the success of the region and not simply their own turf. Everyone came together to do their part to create the best plan. And it worked.

When the results were announced, Central New York was awarded \$103.7 million dollars, the highest of any regional council, to fund more than 74 projects. It is a welcome investment from the Governor and one that will truly make a difference.

You can see the signs of success because there are more and more everyday. Things are improving. In fact, according to CenterState CEO's website, our region ranks #1 as the most affordable place to live, #4 among the best places to raise a family, one of the top 10 healthiest cities, one of America's top 25 green cities, and the list goes on. We have much to be proud of and look forward to.

In closing, it is worth noting that we are emerging from a national economic crisis of almost unprecedented proportions. It is perhaps well to ask where we are as a region and where we are headed.

During my first campaign in 2007, I would ask people where they thought our region was headed and what we could do better. It was surprising how many people talked about cranes and the fact that they didn't see any in Syracuse.

Cranes.

When people were given an opportunity to evaluate our progress as a community, they counted the cranes to do so. Cranes don't just pop up because government wants them too. Cranes are used when government creates policies that provide opportunities for others to succeed. The cranes are a result of responsible actions by government. But they are also a symbol of progress, economic growth and prosperity. Today, the landscape in Onondaga County is dotted with cranes in the sky. Thank you to everyone who has helped make that possible.

Most importantly...Go SU!

Good luck and thanks for a great season and thank all of you for coming.

Have a safe drive home and a pleasant evening.

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