

GOOD AFTERNOON.

MY NAME IS CARMELLA HOFFMAN. I AM THE OWNER OF A 100-YEAR OLD DAIRY FARM IN SCHUYLER COUNTY AS WELL AS SUNSET VIEW CREAMERY. I AM THE INCOMING CHAIRPERSON FOR THE SCHUYLER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

I AM HERE TODAY TO FOLLOW-UP ON A LETTER WE SENT TO THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE IN LATE OCTOBER REQUESTING \$2.7 MILLION FOR A NEW SCHUYLER COUNTY VISITOR CENTER.

OUR COUNTY ESTIMATES THAT IT WELCOMES 1.5 MILLION VISITORS YEARLY, WITH NEARLY 15 THOUSAND WALKING THROUGH OUR FRONT DOORS. THESE VISITORS COME TO SEE THE NATURAL WONDERS OF THE WATKINS GLEN STATE PARK, TO BE ENTERTAINED AT WATKINS GLEN INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY, TO TOUR AND SAMPLE OUR WINES AND TO TAKE IN THE AWE INSPIRING BEAUTY OF OUR AREA. SCHUYLER COUNTY, IN THE HEART OF THE FINGER LAKES, HAS IT ALL FOR THE VISITOR.

THERE IS ONE EXCEPTION, HOWEVER, AND THAT IS THE LACK OF AN ATTRACTIVE, FUNCTIONAL, MODERN VISITOR CENTER.

OUR CURRENT BUILDING WAS BUILT AROUND THE LATE 1950'S AND WAS ACTUALLY ONCE A GARAGE THAT HAS BEEN CONVERTED INTO A LESS THAN DESIRABLE VISITOR CENTER. WE HAVE ISSUES WITH SPACE, CURB APPEAL, HEATING / VENTILATION / AIR CONDITIONING, DRAFTY WINDOWS, POOR LIGHTING, UNEVEN CONCRETE FLOORS, COLD CINDER BLOCK WALLS, INADEQUATE ELECTRICAL OUTLETS, PLUMBING (NO PUBLIC RESTROOM FACILITIES), STORAGE, CONFERENCE SPACE, PARKING AND MAINTENANCE COSTS ON A BUILDING OF THIS AGE.

IN NEIGHBORING TOMPKINS COUNTY, A NEW VISITOR CENTER WAS BUILT LAST YEAR, YATES COUNTY COMPLETED THEIR NEW BUILDING ABOUT 8 YEARS AGO, AND STEUBEN COUNTY HAS A LOVELY VISITOR CENTER IN THE BARON STEUBEN BUILDING. WITH SCHUYLER COUNTY HOUSING ALL THE DESIRED TOURISM ATTRACTIONS, SHOULDN'T WE ALSO BOAST A WARM AND WELCOMING VISITOR CENTER?

THESE CONCERNS HAVE NOT GONE UNNOTICED BY OUR COMMUNITY. IN 2005 WE RECEIVED A GRANT FROM THE APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION TO ASSIST IN PART WITH THE COST OF A FEASIBILITY STUDY, WITH THE REMAINING EXPENSES COVERED THROUGH COMMUNITY DONATIONS. PHASE I OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY WAS INTENDED TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR A NEW VISITOR CENTER. THE STUDY CAN BE QUOTED TO SAY "THE

CHAMBER'S VISITOR CENTER PUTS A POOR QUALITY SPIN ON WHAT IS OBVIOUSLY A GOOD TOURISM PRODUCT."

IT GOES ON TO SAY THAT "VISITORS USING THE CENTER ARE LIKELY COMING AWAY WITH A NEGATIVE COMMUNITY IMPRESSION." AS A CONCLUSION, THE STUDY STATES "CLEARLY THERE IS A NEED FOR A NEW FACILITY."

IN A REPORT RECENTLY UNVEILED BY THE FINGER LAKES TOURISM ALLIANCE, WHEN VISITORS WERE ASKED WHICH ATTRACTIONS IN THE 14 COUNTY AREA THEY LIKED BEST, SCHUYLER COUNTY HAD TWO OF THE TOP SIX ATTRACTIONS, WATKINS GLEN STATE PARKS AND DOWNTOWN WATKINS GLEN. THE WATKINS GLEN STATE PARK WAS NUMBER ONE. LISTED THIRD ON THE LIST WERE WINERY TOURS, AND WITH SCHUYLER COUNTY BEING HOME TO AN ESTIMATED NINETEEN WINERIES, WE COULD ALSO CLAIM THIRD PLACE.

ACCORDING TO THE STUDY, TOURISM ACCOUNTS FOR \$2.2 MILLION IN EXPENDITURES IN THE FINGER LAKES REGION. WITH THIS TYPE OF ECONOMIC IMPACT, TOURISM IS A DRIVER THAT SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED, AND WE IN SCHUYLER COUNTY WANT TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE POISED AND READY TO WELCOME THE VISITOR AND THEIR DOLLARS.

IN ADDITION TO OUR CURRENT TOURISM GEMS, WE ARE IN A GROWTH MODE FOR TOURISM. WE ANTICIPATE A HIGH END,

LUXURY HOTEL WITH FULL CONFERENCE FACILITIES TO BE COMPLETED AND OPEN IN SPRING OF 2008, LOCATED AT THE SENECA HARBOR LAKE FRONT IN WATKINS GLEN.

THE CATHARINE VALLEY TRAIL BISECTS OUR COUNTY, AND PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES SAY THAT THE COMPLETION OF THIS TRAIL, ESTIMATED FOR 2009, WILL YIELD A POTENTIAL ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF \$3 MILLION.

ALSO ON THE HORIZON FOR OUR FUTURE ARE AN AGRI-TOURISM TRAIL, FIBER ARTS TRIAL, MICRO BREW TRAIL AND AN ARTS TRIAL, OFFERING EVEN MORE OPTIONS FOR OUR VISITORS. A NEW VISITOR CENTER WILL ENSURE THAT THE SCHUYLER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IS POISED AND READY FOR THE INCREASED VISITATION.

WE HAVE LONG BEEN IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SENECA LAKE WINE TRAIL, WATKINS GLEN STATE PARK – THROUGH NYS PARKS – AND THE FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST – THROUGH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT – TO ENSURE THAT THIS STRUCTURE WOULD NOT BE A SINGLE CAPITAL PROJECT. RATHER, WE ARE ENVISIONING THAT THIS FACILITY WOULD REPRESENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COUNTY, REGION AND THE U.S., OFFERING NOT ONLY VISITOR SERVICES FOR THESE AREAS, BUT ALSO SHARED SERVICES, CROSS-PROMOTIONS, AND MINI-MUSEUMS TO SHARE EXPERIENCES LIKE HIKING THE WATKINS GLEN GORGE OFF-SEASON OR WITH ELDERLY

OR HANDICAPPED INDIVIDUALS, OR RACING AT WATKINS GLEN RACETRACK. WE ALSO ENVISION THE FACILITY OFFERING EDUCATIONAL DISPLAYS – SUCH AS HOW SALT IS PRODUCED IN OUR TWO LOCAL SALT COMPANIES, OR HOW WINE IS MADE IN THE 50+ WINERIES AROUND SENECA LAKE.

WHILE WE UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE GOVERNOR SHOWING HIS SUPPORT FOR TOURISM PROMOTION BY INCREASING MONIES ALLOCATED TO THE I LOVE NY MATCHING FUNDS PROGRAM, AND BY MAINTAINING THE EXPLORE NY PROGRAM FOR 2007-08, WE SIMPLY DO NOT HAVE THE ADEQUATE FACILITIES TO WELCOME THE ADDITIONAL VISITORS ANTICIPATED TO OUR REGIONAL, STATE AND FEDERAL ATTRCTIONS THROUGH INCREASED PROMOTIONS AND VISIBILITY IN OUR CURRENT LOCATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERTION.

Rev. 11/26/07

mlb