

The Adirondack North Country Association: Perspectives on Sustainable Economic Development

It's the Intersection: Business and the Environment

BY TERRY DEFRANCO MARTINO

Since the Rio Summit in 1992 there has been a commitment on behalf of world leaders and concerned citizens in charting a course on sustainable development. Recommendations and discussions have been generated by the President's Council on Sustainable Development and from a wide range of industry, environmental and development organizations that have advanced the dialogue at international, national and regional levels. Within our region has the discussion focused on the quality of the economy and the environment we will pass on to our children? Are we talking about economic development and livelihood in the Adirondack North Country as a positive contribution to our communities without destroying our environmental resources and quality of life? Does our answer lie in our discussion about how we approach doing business in a manner that can be supported into the future?

The Adirondack North Country Association, a regional non-profit that has been active in New York State's fourteen northern counties since its incorporation in 1954, has long recognized these questions as critical because they focus on issues of importance to ANCA. We believe environmental quality and economic development can and must go together and that our services, programs and business development will benefit by focusing on

"The Intersection" between business and the environment.

At ANCA, we have fostered understanding of the linkages people make to the region. We believe the scenic and environmental qualities, combined with the quality of life and the uniqueness of our villages, towns and cities draw people to the North Country. We recognize that within a region as diverse as the North Country there are communities of people who will define the future. Within this mix is the definition of how we look at both the long term sustainability of the environment and the economy. Within this mix is a quest and a discussion about region wide, sustainable economic development that addresses human needs. Within this mix are solutions which must focus on education and services, employment opportunities, the character of our communities, our cultural and recreational opportunities, and the future of our enterprises.

ANCA's participation in this dialogue forces us to reckon with the very words themselves: sustainable, meaning to last into the future; and development, somehow implying progress. These words are within the context of the relentless technological and social change that characterizes the latter part of the twentieth century. Can we see our region's businesses and communities being able to attract, grow and benefit from companies that are environmental stewards because it makes economic sense? We know that long term sustainability is somehow housed in the recognition that there can be connections between the biological and industrial world. The unique mix of public and pri-

vate landholdings throughout the Adirondack Park, coupled with the intense interest in the region's biodiversity and environmental assets, makes it even more critical that solutions be advanced that are of benefit to the people who live and work in the North Country.

Our answers must address a predominantly rural region where unemployment and underemployment are consistent trends. Unemployment rates are amongst the highest in the state with Hamilton County recorded at 15.8 percent at the close of 1997. Research undertaken by Holmes and Associates in Saranac Lake in the early nineties revealed that the majority of children interviewed did not see their future in the Adirondacks. ANCA's past President, Frank Augsburg, often said that our youth are our greatest export. Our children will leave not because they don't want to live here, but because they do not envision the possibility of long term and challenging employment in this region. To address our potential we must focus on the goal of increasing work opportunities throughout the many communities in our region by creating economic diversity in a wide range of sectors, focusing on enterprise growth, attraction and a systems approach to making the match to companies that work.

Our efforts to develop sustainable businesses and communities must take change into account. To say that we could stop change would be a mistaken and distorted premise that flies in the face of the industrial and community changes we have seen in the Adirondacks—curing for TB in Saranac Lake, when the village had the global market on its ability to sell its

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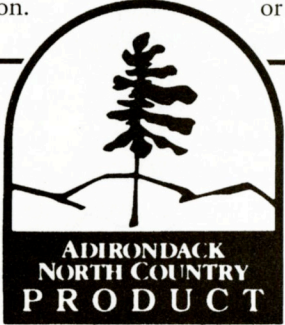
commodity of "air" to a world wrestling with tuberculosis. Or a region that grew a product based on its ability to grow extraordinary ice in the winter, thus advancing ice box technology. Or a region that thrived with different rail corridors connecting communities. Where does our future lie in looking at that which will last, both in our environment and the quality of our communities, particularly in some of our towns where residents remember the addition of each stoplight, or the addition and loss of each enterprise?

Fortunately the dialogue in ANCA has been based on listening to the people who live and work throughout the Adirondack North Country region.

From its formation in 1954 on a wintry day in Tupper Lake, ANCA has been about people coming together to talk about their future and how collectively they could affect public policy and have a positive impact on the communities in which they live and work. ANCA's resurgence in the mid eighties grew from New York State's financial investment which enabled ANCA to administer a regional grant cycle which resulted in the organization focusing on core programs: Services and Culture, Enterprise Development, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Tourism. ANCA's investment in these programs resulted in more than 300 contractual arrangements with organizations, businesses and individuals from 1986 on.

From our headquarters in Saranac Lake, ANCA was able to provide funding support to many initiatives throughout the North Country that are still ongoing: snowmaking at Mt. Pisgah in Saranac Lake; trail development and grooming at the Jack Rabbit Ski Trail; curriculum for a ropes course with the Adirondack Experience; the Adirondack North Country Crafts Center; expanded seating capacity at Pendragon Theater (because we knew the arts meant business); planning for reuse of the Adirondack Railroad as a cornerstone of an integrated, regional devel-

opment model, to name a few. Other projects have been as diverse as providing financial support to the start-up of a Hospice in the Tri-Lakes and the pilot of a microloan financing program with the Adirondack Economic Development Corporation—two examples of project work in the eighties that have flourished into outstanding services for our residents. The long term sustainability of each of these projects points to the fact that they were right for the region and that they represent a mix of public and private interests, of partnerships that have been forged for the benefit of people who live and work in the region or who recreate here.



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Each of these projects have been on target in ANCA's goal to maintain a healthy environment which supports livelihood for our residents while maintaining the region as an attractive destination for the travelling public.

In addition to the sustainability of projects in which ANCA has participated, there has been increased interest in new models that have emerged that will be of benefit in helping us to achieve recognition for what ANCA has termed The Intersection: Business and the Environment—a recognition that business and environmental concerns can be compatible. Past work ANCA has done in providing technical assistance to companies interested in their bottom line by addressing recycling, waste minimization and waste reuse, pointed to a framework that focused on environmental issues and how they relate to doing business. ANCA's release of the *Wood Pallet Concentra-*

tion Yard: A Business Opportunity, identified the potential of a pallet collection yard. The goal of waste minimization while simultaneously developing a new venture for business addressed the potential for sustainable development while demonstrating that environmental needs and business objectives are mutually supportive. In recent years we have seen companies in our region go forward with public statements about the cost savings they have generated by paying attention to their waste stream. Retail businesses, hotels and motels, restaurants, offices and small manufacturers have all benefited economically in their bottom line costs.

Through ANCA's work in providing recycling technical assistance, it became increasingly obvious that the Intersection must include direct participation of the business community, in a manner in which economic benefits to their costs of operation are clear. We learned this focus was so important because it ultimately is the responsibility of managers to define the message: economic savings, positive public image and customer benefits, when services and

programs directly impact the environment and the way of doing business. For The Intersection to be sustained, there must be clear evidence of both economic and environmental gains.

A truly exciting and regional model that has emerged involves the fostering of eco industrial parks throughout the nation. The ANCA region was extremely fortunate to see how world wide interest in sustainable development is being developed in the Plattsburgh Airbase Redevelopment Corporation's work to reuse the former Air Force Base in Plattsburgh, New York. At a recent public meeting with PARC officials, representatives clarified that the long term sustainability and use of resources is linked to industrial models in which linkages are established between businesses with an integrated management of natural, technical, fiscal and human resources (i.e. waste from one company can be come another's raw

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material). Within this scenario long term environmental performance goals can proactively address global standards. The integration of environmental and economic development standards, with local businesses working to address ISO 14000 and Total Quality Management concerns, while simultaneously striving to ensure that there will be region-wide, national and international recognition for the work taking place in the North Country, is to be applauded.

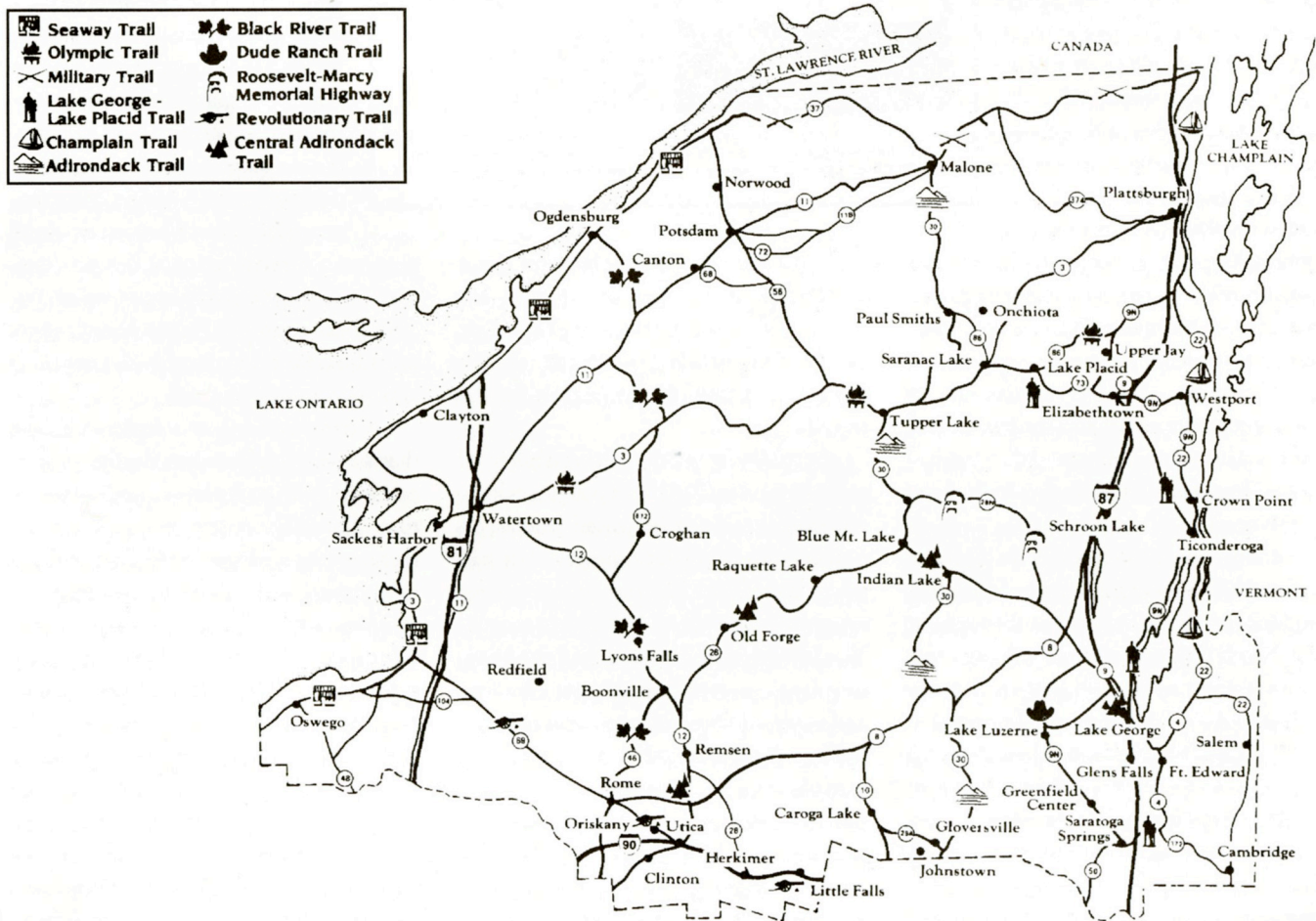
For the message to grow, we believe there must be a foundation of location, place and image. A major portion of ANCA's efforts have been to address regional identity building and name recognition for the Adirondack North Country. ANCA's regional map put a face on the North Country and our production and distribution of thousands of these maps has helped people to view the enormous

size of the region. We've used the map to promote the network of roadways that were recognized by our State legislature and more recently acknowledged by the Federal Highway Administration as "Scenic Byways." In themselves the routes have pushed our region to the forefront of highway and tourism planning that has moved well beyond a focus on infrastructure to now include a message that recognizes scenic vistas, archeology, historic sites, recreational opportunities, natural habitats and cultural attractions as part of the discussion.

The linkages among infrastructure, tourism and economic development are what have fostered ANCA's work in bike-way planning and promotions enabling our region to capitalize on the 100 million bicyclists in the nation, many of whom are interested in bicycle travel. Recently we established computerized infor-

mational kiosks at strategic gateway locations: Crown Point, the Saratoga Battlefield Historical Park, Alexandria Bay, Ogdensburg and Remsen. Funding support from the Niagara Mohawk Foundation will enable us to place a kiosk in the Depot Station in Saranac Lake, enhancing its role as a multi modal travel center focusing on rail, bicycling, pedestrian, snowmobile, vehicular and cyber travel. Information and name recognition are key to showing that the Adirondack North Country region and the Adirondack Park are special places.

ANCA has long been attuned to the Intersection of the visual landscape and the natural resource base that impact production and product development. In an effort to keep agricultural land active, we have worked to diversify our agricultural base through product development, marketing, and alternative uses, such as grass-



This map showing North Country Auto Trails is from the Directory of Arts and Cultural Resources in the Adirondack North Country Region.

lands production models. In the past we were directly involved in livestock marketing and more recently have developed programs which address the marketing needs of producers interested in increasing beef production in the North Country. We worked on a St. Lawrence Valley Beef Marketing Day in October of 1997. In the past, we've supported development of a cheese filter strip at Plumbrook Farms, addressed the potential for fallow deer production, initiated seminars on agri-tourism and supported the start up of the Adirondack Farmer's Market. We believe that sustainable agriculture is a component of the discussion about sustainable development.

In ANCA's Natural Resources program our overall goal has been to increase value-added processing—the addition of economic value that takes place when harvested wood is cut, sawn, dried and made into products—within our region, thus establishing linkages between harvesters, mills and secondary processors. Too often we hear that our logs—our primary resource—are leaving the North Country without additional value-added processing taking place. We believe the long term sustainability of our northern forests is linked to the social, economic and environmental health of our northern communities. We directly provide industry support because we know that information is key to the companies interested in siting here, or in diversifying their product line. Training dollars, tax incentives, and the availability of investment capital from traditional and nontraditional sources are all important ingredients.

We also know that key ingredients, such as increased kiln capacity and a lumber concentration yard, are targeted enterprise goals that will assist in the long term sustainability of the industry. This example forces us to consider what such a complex would mean with an expanded lot for yarding operations, the noise of debarkers, noise of outside equipment being moved, which all become locational factors. This example highlights how important it is to ensure that businesses are lo-

cated in the right places. In this regard sustainability is linked to location and careful siting. It means working with businesses with a good potential for success.

The approach can be coordinated to create regional business activity. For more than a decade, ANCA's Crafts Industry Development Program has maintained contact with more than 500 craft businesses. In 1986 we established a retail market in Lake Placid—The Adirondack North Country Craft Center—for 41 producers. By the time ANCA privatized the operation in 1994, there were over 300 active businesses marketing through the store. ANCA's other efforts, in providing start-up assistance in 1993 to Adirondack Made, a regional marketing effort that provided centralized marketing and order processing, representing regional businesses in national gift shows in Atlanta, Dallas, New York, Chicago and San Francisco, were focused on addressing the wide range of giftware production in the region. Adirondack Made's transfer of ownership, to a producer driven, not for profit organization named Mountain Lakes, was an important step in achieving the long term ownership and sustainability of the program. ANCA's other craft related program—Buyer's Day, a regional wholesale show, has existed for more than a decade. Other regional events, such as Craftfest, have been long standing and of value to those producers interested in marketing through a juried, retail show.

We've known that the Craft Development Program doesn't have the lure of tremendous job creation in one site, but we also know that there are many individuals throughout the Adirondacks who are involved in small business operations. Marketing, financing options and technical business support are all important in-

redients of sustainable development. Sustainability is about *fit* and having the people, resources, location and markets to make it happen. We take particular pleasure when a company that has marketed through our Buyer's Day can't join us in a particular year because they just received a large account with L.L. Bean.

ANCA has been convinced we need a

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comprehensive marketing strategy which promotes the agricultural, wood products, services, giftware and manufactured items which carry our quality message of being an "Adirondack North Country Product." Presently we're linking ANCA's logo to our website at adirondack.org with a long standing goal to identify the best of the products and services from the region. We're rapidly transitioning into a world where our product

marketing and communications can be done through our telecommunication tools, making it possible for geography to no longer be a limiting factor to our residents and businesses.

Technology is a tool that will help to wrap so much of our regional message together. It's important to note that when we talk about sustainable development that many of the companies in the Adirondacks are here because of quality of life features and are operated by owners who chose to be here for the environment. Our challenge is to recognize there are companies that are in the Adirondack Park right now that are non-consumptive, that have long term markets and that are fitting in terms of their environmental impact. Their presence portrays a region that is more than a service economy and more than the processing of our natural resources. There are non-resource-based very good companies that are entirely fitting in the region's economic future. Our challenge is take a systems approach and determine where the other fits will be and

how advances in our use of technology and infrastructure will support our competitiveness.

The future of sustainable development demands that there be industrial sitings in the park which are located to accommodate structural development and economic activities. There must be the capacity for land-use planning and economic development that supports the Intersection for the benefit of companies and the preservation of open space. We must be able to work together to establish support for development efforts and provide specific strategies and locations for growth. We must be able to look at specific targets: environmental technologies, tourism, pharmaceuticals, agricultural, paper, wood-based processing, biotechnology, research, telecommunications, plastic, and find the appropriate economic development connections that can be integrated with our communities, markets and labor force.

There is a strong need for cooperation in the future to ensure there are appropriate locations for business development outside hamlet areas and to ensure that economic developers work with local governments and through planning to find the right locations. There must be an openness in state government that is receptive to the needs of residents, municipalities and the long standing commitment and work of the many regional organizations, like ANCA, that have fostered the dialogue. Sustainability encompasses both the long term potential and operation of the individual business and larger community. ANCA has always viewed the Adirondack Park as a whole unit and recognizes that sustainability

means we need the financial and personal commitment to move beyond the present patchwork into which the State of New York carves up the Park for economic development, environmental, transportation and tourism programs, so we can focus on the entire Park region.

Without this support and focus, we know that nobody gains from a business locating in the area, developing a new structure, hiring a work force, operating for a short period of time, and going out of business, especially if this is preventable. Everyone knows there are no gains in environmental degradation. People's lives are interrupted and our goal of sustainability is short-lived.

Without moving forward, we will fall prey to a number of disorienting perceptions: that the mix of public and private land in the Adirondack Park is incompatible and destructive to our ability to grow a sustainable economy; that we have no economy; and that our collective inability to address these issues will result in a "half full" glass view, with our greatest export, our youth, concluding their future lies elsewhere.

ANCA believes in local capacity. We need to build the local capacity of people, organizations and communities to engage in economic development. We need to view and market the Adirondack Park in its entirety. We need to encourage cooperative efforts, utilize advances in technology for our benefit and liberation. We need to continue to foster flexible, decentralized financing and come up with methods to help communities deal with continually emerging infrastructure concerns. We must also continue our emphasis on small business development while

maintaining the current industrial profile. Among our challenges to achieving the Intersection is addressing the needs of a county like Hamilton, which has the smallest population in the state—5,000 residents—to the counties which have the dual nature of being inside/outside the Adirondack Park.

For more than a hundred years the Adirondack Park has been an experiment in land conservation and the man made environment. Our attempts at sustainable development will be both anchored and challenged by the unique public/private mixture of land and the enormity of our land mass. ANCA will continue this dialogue about the Intersection between the natural and man made environment. We are driven by the hope of making tomorrow better than today and by working toward the goal of increased private investment opportunities that are sustainable.

William Carlos Williams, the great poet of the twentieth century, said there "are no ideas but in things" and we'd like to take that a step further to conclude by saying there are no ideas but in places—the places where we live, the organizations and communities where we interact, the Adirondack Park that is the core of so much of this discussion and the core of ANCA's fourteen county service area. Much of the discussion is about location linked to development and quality of life that works for the future and is based on the commitment to build compatible and responsible businesses which create new and good jobs with improvements to quality of life. The solution is inherent in the quest at the international, national, regional and local levels for quality in the economy and environment we will pass on to future generations.

