



# **Mohawk Valley Matters**

- Phase 1: Regional Action Plan
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- Phase 4: Regional Initiatives &  
Implementation

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**The Genesis Group** was founded in December 2000 by a group of community leaders who believed it was time to transform the Mohawk Valley into a vital region where positive economic, social and quality of life changes are possible. Today, The Genesis Group is a vibrant association working to advance regional economic, social and cultural interests and to foster regional unity and cooperation.

## **Mission**

The Genesis Group unites individuals and organizations to grow, promote and celebrate the Mohawk Valley

## **Vision**

The Genesis Group is a catalyst organization that fosters new attitudes, forges new partnerships, and creates positive impacts - challenging the region to move forward. Genesis is the Mohawk Valley's "call to action."

## **Committees**

- 1    **Education Committee** – Education Hall of Distinction, Career Exploration Program, College Town Project, Regional Education Task Force, Education Celebration
- 2    **Technology Committee** – Genesis Website, Digital Mohawk Valley, Trade Careers Initiative
- 3    **Community Connections** – Ambassador Program, Discovery Tours, "Did You Know?" Campaign, Hospitality Training, Newcomers Program
- 4    **Economic & Workforce Development** – Community Pride Events, MV Edge Board, Leadership Interviews, Regional Forums
- 5    **GYP** – Genesis Young Professionals

## **Regional Action Plan**

In 2005, Genesis began researching, reviewing and comparing a number of master plans, “visioning” documents and studies from local cities, towns and villages to compile an ongoing list of development priorities for the region – a “regional” action plan.

## **Regional Community Forums**

With the action plan in mind, Genesis and its sponsors have hosted a number of regional forums to promote timely discussion in an effort to develop coordinated action items to be implemented by Genesis committees, community organizations and local governments.

On January 24, 2008, two hundred fifty-five business and community leaders listened as eighteen elected officials voiced their opinions and pledged their support to help develop a cohesive vision and a unified voice for the Mohawk Valley. Joining moderator WKTV Anchorman Bill Worden were: US Congressman Michael Arcuri, NYS Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito, NYS Assemblyman Marc Butler, NYS Assemblyman David Townsend, NYS Senator Joseph Griffo, Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, Herkimer County Administrator James Wallace, Rome Mayor James Brown, Utica Mayor David Roefaro, New Hartford Mayor Donald Ryan, New Hartford Town Supervisor Earle Reed, Dolgeville Mayor Bruce Lyons, Marcy Town Supervisor Brian Scala and others. Both technical and financial needs were identified and partnerships solidified.

During a follow-up forum held on February 28, community members provided additional public comment and completed written surveys ranking the region’s priorities.

## **Regional Workshops**

Based on information gathered from plans, studies, forums and the community surveys, Genesis proposes to work with State and local leaders to organize five three-day regional community and economic development workshops over the next 12 months. The goal is to bring elected officials, state agencies, business leaders and community representatives to the table (literally and electronically) in an effort to identify available funding and technical assistance necessary to

develop specific implementation plans relating to the following five priority areas:

1. Downtown Development
2. Microenterprise & Entrepreneur Development
3. Bridging the Education – Technology Divide
4. Mohawk Valley Image Enhancement
5. Embracing Green Technology

Genesis will help organize workshop locations, topics, speakers, and technical advisors to focus on innovative ideas and solutions for regional development, including joint planning efforts, incentive programs, grant-funded opportunities, and other coordinated and consolidated initiatives. **Day One** will focus on regional priorities relating to the workshop topic; **Day Two** on best practices and available resources; and **Day Three** on action plan and implementation steps. Following is a framework for each workshop identifying potential topics, avenues for assistance and results.

## **Workshop 1 - *Downtown Mohawk Valley***

### **THE MATTER . . .**

Innovative and coordinated downtown development efforts are crucial to the successful redevelopment of the cities, towns and villages that have been challenged by the economic and physical decline of their urban cores. To thrive and prosper, we want and need downtowns that are inviting, attractive and walkable – places where we want to come home to, residents want to live, corporations want to bring their workers to, and entrepreneurs want to grow. This workshop will concentrate on focused, intensive, and on-site technical assistance necessary to reestablish community self-reliance, local empowerment, and grassroots efforts to rebuild traditional commercial districts that focus on unique assets.

### **THE METHOD . . .**

Workshop 1 will examine potentials for abandoned and vacant downtown industrial sites, increased housing opportunities in the urban core, viable and affordable streetscape improvements including urban greening and the development of community-driven programs. The objective is to establish a “designation” program for local communities, enabling them to receive a wide range of technical assistance services. Development professionals, including the *National Main Street Center*™ will be consulted to assist with design of the workshop, and a resulting assistance program based on their proven Four-Point Approach™ - Design, Promotion, Economic Restructuring, and Organization – along with other avenues that focus on distinctive architecture, pedestrian-friendly environments, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of

community.

## **THE MESSAGE . . .**

A Mohawk Valley *Main Street* Alliance Program (MVMSA) will work with the State to deliver local and focused technical assistance and to continue the revitalization of downtown areas as urban business and living centers. A Mohawk Valley *Main Street* Advisory Board comprised of local government officials, small business and corporate representatives, and other individuals with revitalization expertise will be assembled to assist in promoting, funding and advocating for the downtown centers of the Mohawk Valley. The Advisory Board will help determine how services can be tailored, delivered and replicated – including procedures, equipment, software, data fields and distribution methods.

Other workshop topics might include urban design planning, signage, design guidelines, commercial façade programs, streetscape improvements, building inventories, cleaning up and using downtown brownfields, urban greening, waterfront and neighborhood connections, and image development. Best practices from around the country; potential funding sources; and project collaboration will be highlighted.

## **Workshop 2 - *Mastering the MicroEnterprise***

### **THE MATTER . . .**

Successful small businesses have become the primary engines of economic development, income growth and poverty reduction in many small cities and towns. However, poor infrastructure, weak and disconnected public services, and lack of access to markets and formal financing remain as major impediments to small business growth in the region. Workshop 2 will focus on our need to provide coordinated, smart incentives and marketing assistance to cultivate microenterprise and entrepreneurial development in the Valley.

### **THE METHOD . . .**

Combined with downtown, tourism and cultural development, this workshop will focus on growing retail, arts and specialty businesses that can help fill long-time vacant buildings and abandoned sites along downtown, waterfront and commercial corridors. Retail, information and green technology “incubator” opportunities will also be identified. Linking and refining the services of Mohawk Valley Edge, local and State industrial and economic development agencies and services, the Small Business Administration, SCORE, local colleges and universities and others will be a goal of the workshop. User-friendly and viable venues for developing,

coordinating and delivering local and regional incentives and technical assistance will be explored.

## **THE MESSAGE . . .**

Rome's REACH Microenterprise Center might be used to help develop a model that can be replicated in other municipalities throughout the Mohawk Valley. Partnership opportunities and "how-to" details - protocol and incentives - to enable municipalities to use vacant buildings in downtown centers as wireless facilities that can provide "incubator type" services for start-up or expanding microenterprises will be investigated. A task force will be established to coordinate local efforts and assist to populate potential buildings and sites. The goal is to arm the region's cities, towns and villages with a framework of coordinated technical assistance services that are currently available, along with feasible avenues to provide additional business development services and opportunities.

Economic restructuring practices, including commercial inventories, market research, incubator spaces, venture and community banking opportunities, business service packaging, retail co-ops, and entrepreneurial educational opportunities and incentives might be included as workshop topics.

## **Workshop 3 – *HIRE Education***

### **THE MATTER . . .**

Education is the single-most important investment we can make in our local economy. The Mohawk Valley, including Oneida, Herkimer and eastern Madison Counties, boasts over 25,000 college students in eleven outstanding higher education institutions including Colgate University; Empire State College; Hamilton College; Herkimer County Community College; Mohawk Valley Community College; Pratt MWP; St. Elizabeth College of Nursing; SUNYIT; SUNY Morrisville; Utica College; and Utica School of Commerce - The Business College. Together, these schools bring great distinction, excellent educational and vocational opportunities, and have significant impact on the economies of our local communities.

Increased and focused investment in education can produce substantial gains in personal income, economic potential and marketability of our community. Products of these investments – without fail - include increased public & private revenues, a more diversified workforce and improved quality of life. Workshop III will focus on applying education as an economic development tool for the Mohawk Valley through innovative and institutional change and cooperation.

### **THE METHOD . . .**

The Genesis College Town Project will be used as a framework and vehicle for this workshop. Eight of the eleven local schools are already part of a "Mohawk Valley Compact" providing for free cross-registration for students, and all eleven schools are very active in the community. With the assistance of the Syracuse-based Project ION (Internship Opportunities Now) the Mohawk Valley Project ION is focusing on advancing year-round internship opportunities for students who have remained in the area as well as college students returning to the area on summer break from college. "The Genesis College Town Project" is spanning the divide between campus and host community with out-of-the-box ideas and the identification of a spectrum of collaboration opportunities.

Education is the only realistic avenue for the integration of Business, Urban Infill Development, Image Transformation, and Green Technology. This workshop might focus on specific and innovative implementation strategies including the establishment of Urban Business & Education Cooperatives and Specialized/Advanced Degree Programs:

### ***Urban Business & Education Cooperatives***

In order for education to be recognized as the binding (or limiting) element of regional success, a primary objective might be to construct working urban cooperatives. The idea is to work toward establishing satellite educational facilities as economic development laboratories (ie –space in the local microenterprise center). The facilities will incorporate instructional space with a working student-run microenterprise. In the space of one year, students will undergo total immersion in downtown and entrepreneurial business development. The result is a viable student-operated business – financially and environmentally sustainable - in each major urban center.

The curriculum will hybridize classroom instruction, independent study, and a work-study program. Students and instructors will build a team that incorporates market research, marketing & image development, construction & contract administration, financial planning, grant administration, information technology and business administration. The collegiate business will expand, migrate and evolve according to the skill sets and ingenuity employed by the cohort and cadre. Students will reap the benefit of invaluable real world experience; colleges will boast greater exposure, outreach and diversity; and municipalities will intrinsically benefit from the stimulus to the local economy, opportunity for infill development, and infusion of the student demographic.

### ***College Town Technology Transfer Initiative***

Another workshop topic might include the development of specialized advanced degree programs, particularly in engineering and other advanced high-tech fields, including a more "agile" curriculum review program in Albany to enable the region to quickly respond to employer

needs. A perfect example is the industry-specific MVCC Aviation Maintenance Curriculum in cooperation with Empire Aero Center – where students are graduating directly into an emerging field with unlimited potential for both students and industry. The workshop will identify partnership opportunities with firms like Andro Computational Solutions - one of the most specialized and impressive electromagnetic and RF spectrum technology development and consulting firms in the nation whose client base spans the globe from military to commercial applications. Currently, Andro is aggressively seeking technology transfer funding to bridge the educational gap in the Mohawk Valley.

The Marcy Nanocenter project offers the same opportunity for education, employment and complete transformation of the Valley. High tech, high-demand workers can and must be cultivated right here in the Valley so we can stop sending our graduates out of state. Varying levels of instruction can incrementally prepare young adults for corresponding levels of technical and professional careers. With that in mind, the ultimate goal is to provide the optimal environment for education in science and engineering.

## **THE MESSAGE . . .**

Workshop 3 task force participants will develop the framework and protocol for curriculum, college partnerships and host communities for projects like the College Town Technology Transfer Initiative and the Urban Business and Education Cooperatives. Workshop topics might include the potential of establishing special secondary education schools (within existing facilities) for Applied Science and other industry-based fields (biofuel research, etc.,) and the technology transfer to B.S. and M.S. programs in nanotech and green technology systems.

## **Workshop 4 - *Mohawk Valley MANTRA***

### **THE MATTER . . .**

Workshop 4 will focus on the development of an energizing and marketable brand image for the Mohawk Valley – putting unified and coordinated public relations and marketing plans in place that are relevant and compelling – shaping positive perceptions. Local leaders recognize that a consistent message is necessary to provide a solid springboard and heightened awareness of the region’s attributes – one designed to capture the attention of residents, officials, business and community leaders and outsiders alike. We need to compete as a region for funds, talent and fame in the race for economic prosperity.

## THE METHOD . . .

The goal is to take the Mohawk Valley through a “branding” process, hitting on all major demographics and stakeholders that will be affected, developing a timeline, and using creative solutions dependent upon a desired outcome. The “brand” of the region needs to be an emotional connection that it makes with its audience - something that resounds in the very culture, history and the vision of the place. The development of a strong brand will help the region shift negative perceptions and shed unfavorable stereotypes - to create a common vision and a consistent message within and outside of the region.

The workshop will use in-depth interviews, surveys, focus groups and other methodologies that have been gathered - information and common denominators that can be used to define a brand for the Mohawk Valley and adopted for joint marketing and advertising efforts. Defining clear objectives; determining and understanding the target audience; identifying the current image; and, setting aspirations will be the focus.

## THE MESSAGE . . .

A **BRAND MANTRA** will be exposed after the completion of the workshop and a **VISUAL IMAGE** will be explored and assigned to the Mohawk Valley. Executing the brand strategy and measurements of success will be identified. Workshop IV topics might include identifying ways to make the region unique, valued and attractive; roles of stakeholders; visual imagery; aspirational identity; and, the identification of community leaders, organizations and steps to bring a regional brand to life. Leveraging assets, systematically addressing and mitigating liabilities, and packaging incentives in an understandable – yet captivating format is the goal. The “walkaway” is a quintessential, multi-media marketing *pro forma* that integrates all the concepts addressed for use on the road, in publications, online, and in the boardroom. We need a consistent “message” that any community leader can be armed with in the office and on vacation, at golf outings, business trips, political meetings, and industry conventions

## Workshop 5 – *Engineering the Green Revolution*

## THE MATTER . . .

Workshop 5 involves exploring, cultivating and establishing the Mohawk Valley as the Green Technology Farm of Upstate New York. Of the first-world countries, the United States ranks among the very last in graduates in science, math and engineering disciplines. Statistics show there are not enough students in engineering and computer science to replace the baby boomer technologists now retiring. This shortage comes as the complexity of technology overwhelms business organizations and municipal operations. Simultaneously, the most limiting factor to the emergence and growth of innovative, green and revolutionary technologies is the availability of local talent. Dovetailing our technology goals with our aforementioned educational programs, we can usher in the renaissance.

By nature, high-tech is green technology by virtue of eliminating the necessity for travel, paper consumption, or outsourcing. The Mohawk Valley has progressive local leaders, a supportive business community and a reputation for technological innovation. We are armed with countless incentives that level the playing field in a global scenario; the key is to exploit them on a global scale. We need to talk about and work with existing firms like . . .

### **Mascoma Corporation**

Mascoma, a leader in advanced low-carbon biofuels, recently had a groundbreaking ceremony for the company's \$30 million cellulosic ethanol demonstration facility at Griffass Business and Technology Park in Rome, New York. They received a \$14.8 million award from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to build and operate a biomass-to-ethanol demonstration plant. The plant will focus on demonstrating "cellulose to ethanol" technology and industrial processes. The facility is expected to operate using a number of New York State agricultural and forest products as biomass feedstock, including wood chips, switchgrass, corn stover and paper sludge.

### **New England Wood Pellet**

In 2007, NEWP in Schuylers, NY retrofitted a defunct pulp mill and converted it into the leading wood pellet production facility in the Northeast. Using a combination of traditional and high-tech solutions, they produce a renewable, high-efficiency fuel for both heating and cogeneration systems. Converting waste wood to fuel, their product can heat a home or business for half that of the leading fossil fuels. What's more, they are the conduit for emerging production facilities and retailers of alternative fuel furnaces and cogeneration plants.

## **THE METHOD . . .**

A two-pronged method approach is necessary. The first method is through the support and cultivation of Green technology. Everything we do from this point forward is inherently going to involve some aspect of green technology (or what we like to call "Common Sense"). It is critical to our survival that regionally we embrace this emerging sector as our guiding principle.

Comprising a diverse range of products, services, and processes that reduce energy consumption while mitigating our impact on the environment; the basic idea is to harness the potential of renewable resources, improve the efficiency of new products and retrofit existing facilities with low-entropy solutions. Not only is it environmentally sustainable, but it is the most cost effective option for housing, business, transportation and recreation.

Innovative and expanding technologies such as solar photovoltaics (PV), wind power, electric vehicles, biofuels, building envelope systems, and advanced water filtration can attract new jobs and businesses to the region. Furthermore, it can enhance the ability of established businesses and workers to operate at lower costs and greater efficiency.

## **THE MESSAGE . . .**

Workshop 5 might develop a green catalyst project that demonstrates the quintessential nature of going green.

A. Workshop participants will develop a conceptual plan, narrative, and budget for a catalyst project or catalyst technology distribution network. The future is Green for the Mohawk Valley – commercial or residential cogeneration furnaces, rooftop wind harvesters, electric snowblower production facilities, etc.

B. A committee will nominate candidate(s) and develop protocol for selective recruitment of catalyst businesses to make 5-A a reality. The candidate(s) will be authorized to promote state, local, and regional incentives to companies and investors at no less than five (5) trade shows, national conferences, or industry conventions during 2009. The identification of support, incentives and qualified employees for start-up research and development companies in the Mohawk Valley as well as increasing their accessibility to obtain contracts will be included as topics.

**To get involved with “Mohawk Valley Matters,” contact Genesis Executive Director Raymond J. Durso, Jr., by calling (315) 792-7187 or by email, [info@thegenesisgroup.org](mailto:info@thegenesisgroup.org)**

