

Editorial on Niagara Orleans Regional Alliance

Citing common interests with sports fishing, agriculture and the Lake Ontario shoreline, on February 8, 2012 county officials from Niagara and Orleans formed an alliance between the two counties, where county leaders looked for ways to share services and pool other resources. Although Niagara is much larger in population than Orleans, 216,469 people compared to 42,883 for Orleans, the two counties have similar demographics

Niagara County Chairman William Ross sums up the synergy between the counties saying; "Orleans and Niagara counties are sister counties, they are cut out of the same cloth, and share many of the same challenges and opportunities." Orleans County Chairman David Callard echoes his support citing a great working relationship with common goals, and a stronger, unified voice in battling State and Federal mandates.

Niagara County Legislator David Godfrey and Orleans County Legislator Lynne Johnson, who Co-Chair the Niagara Orleans Regional Alliance (N.O.R.A.), pushed to create the alliance after discussing their emergency radio system upgrades mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, and how both counties could save taxpayers money by working together. The two counties initially looked at sharing radio towers along their common county border. The fire departments along the edges of both counties have long been involved in answering mutual aide calls, and it was time the county legislatures looked at the concept of shared assets.

As the partnership matured, NORA began looking at joint tourism promotion, economic development, lakeshore protection, purchasing, natural gas lines expansion, and rural broadband service to every home and business in their towns. In fact, the alliance has traveled to Albany to meet with the Governor's staff on the need for rural broadband and the importance of "reaching the last child". NORA has also testified at a local Public Service Commission hearing for the proposed Time Warner/Comcast merger, speaking on behalf of their citizens, calling for a seat on the Board of Directors of the giant service providers.

NORA's most recent fight is against the International Joint Commission's Plan 2014, which would drastically change Lake Ontario's high and low water levels, resulting in an economic disaster along the entire south shore of the lake. Traveling to Washington, DC, Legislators Johnson and Godfrey met with a number of elected federal officials and the Department of State to express their opposition to Plan 2014.

In subsequent letters and articles, the Niagara-Orleans Regional Alliance has taken the position and hence quoted "The approval by the IJC (International Joint Commission) of Plan 2014 is government at its worst. The IJC did not listen to the voice of people." says Legislator Johnson. Speaking to IJC's own predictions, Legislator Godfrey added, "This plan is going to be economically devastating for our entire area. There appears to be no interest from the IJC to assist with what will be the equivalent of a manmade disaster to our communities."

The Niagara-Orleans Regional Alliance, a taxpayer-focused partnership, has become an unprecedented, influential, and dedicated force. Their unified voice continues to search for achievable solutions for the good of the people. Internet, natural gas, shared services, and mandate relief is only the tip of the iceberg.