

Chenango Canal Corridor Project

The Upstate Institute's Chenango Canal Corridor Project aims to revitalize the potential once held by the Chenango Canal by providing support, training and collaborative opportunities to local economic development organizations across the region. The completion of the historic Chenango Canal in May 1837 brought the promise of expanded economic opportunities to the rural corridor that runs from Binghamton to Utica. Its opening was the work of grassroots lobbying efforts to link the isolated Chenango Valley with major commercial centers in the state. Businesses that profited from the canal include the Maydole Hammer Factory in Norwich and Hart Stoneware Pottery in Sherburne. Easy access to major markets also gave way for the development of butter and cheese factories – providing a ready source of profit for local dairy farmers. (Source: Chenango County Historical Society) However, in the post-civil war era, the canal was overshadowed by the ease and cost effectiveness of railroad travel. The state legislature voted to close it in 1878. The canal was sold off piece by piece to local municipalities and private land owners.

Although short-lived, the success of the Chenango Canal demonstrates that an economically viable corridor exists along what is now Route 12 that runs from Binghamton through the Chenango Valley to Old Forge at the southern foothills of the Adirondacks. As a result of the Canal's closure and other geographic and economic limitations, the region's entrepreneurs are historically isolated from larger markets and opportunities that limit not only their growth, but their access to information, education and networks that could enhance their development. Additionally, while locally based economic development organizations do good work in their communities, they are often limited in their resources for training and networking with similar groups in the region. Because of this, a valuable source of collaboration and information sharing is lost to these types of organizations. The goal of the Chenango Canal Corridor Project is to support community based economic development organizations in their pursuit of restoring economic vitality and opportunity to the region.

The Chenango Canal Corridor Project brings together economic development organizations from across the region. Facilitated by the Upstate Institute at Colgate University, the CCCP will provide education, collaborative working opportunities, research interns and transfer of knowledge amongst these groups. Initial involvement in CCCP will include the Morrisville Auxiliary Corporation, The Partnership for Community Development, the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, the Chenango County Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Binghamton Coalition and the Central Adirondack Partnership for the 21st Century. Participant organizations will draw in smaller groups and constituencies from their communities in the project. Each group brings to the CCCP a range of experience and expertise in working with the economic development issues relevant to their local communities.

Who are the participants?

The Upstate Institute is a project of Colgate University. Since 1999, with the creation of the Partnership for Community Development and the Hamilton Initiative, the University has been involved in the economic revitalization of Hamilton and the surrounding area. Creation of the Center for Volunteer Education (COVE) provided a way for students to get involved in the community. A grant from the Mellon Foundation allowed for the expansion of the COVE and creation of the Upstate Institute. The mission of the Institute is to create linkages between Colgate University and the regional community to engage students, faculty, staff and residents in research and a reciprocal transfer of knowledge that will enhance the economic, social and cultural capacity of the area and sustain the environment. These projects provide a model of community collaboration and civic engagement for our students and within higher education. The Institute values scholarly collaboration as a way to support the region.

The Upstate Institute will provide facilitation, organization, education and logistical support to organizations involved in the Chenango Canal Corridor Project. The Upstate Institute sees its role as one of a facilitator to start the conversations and discussions that need to be had in order to make progress in the positive development of the Upstate region. Participant organizations include:

The Partnership for Community Development strives to enhance sustainable economic opportunity and community vitality in the village and town of Hamilton and the surrounding areas. The PCD provides economic and physical revitalization through micro enterprise technical assistance, micro enterprise training classes, historic façade renovations, downtown festivals, and by working with local merchants on a variety of initiatives.

Morrisville Auxiliary Corporation is a not-for-profit company chartered by the State of New York. The corporation's primary function is to provide non-academic services to the SUNY Morrisville campus. These cover a wide range including dining services, the campus store, the SUNY IcePlex, and the Agri-Business Center and Dairy Incubator. MAC also runs Nelson Farms which is a small-scale food processing plant that is an incubator for farmers, restaurateurs and anybody with a family recipe or an idea for a food product they think will sell

The Chenango County Chamber of Commerce serves the business community in Chenango and Southern Madison counties. They offer education and training for businesses, as well as serve as a communication's clearing house. Additionally, they provide benefits for member businesses and act as the business voice for Chenango County. The Economic Development Component of the Chamber provides business start-up assistance, expansion facilitation, technical and financial services and Empire Zone administration.

The Greater Binghamton Coalition started in fall 2001 as a consortium of 6 local organizations to formulate a plan for greater Binghamton and Tioga County. The plan identifies 10 goals that focus on business education, entrepreneurship, business recruitment, improving community vitality, and marketing the area. To date, the

Coalition has received funding and support to market the area of business site selectors, develop an image for the area, work intensively with local businesses on workforce development issues and partnered with Binghamton University on a variety of projects.

The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees provides aid and assistance to refugees and immigrants to the Utica area. They teach refugees practical life skills that enhance their ability to integrate into the community, while building community capacity to support immigrants and refugees in the region. Their services include refugee and family health, referrals, interpretation and translation, immigration and naturalization assistance, cultural competence training, ESL classes, employment assistance and cultural consulting.

Opportunities for Chenango is a Community Action Agency serving low-income residents of Chenango County. OFC, Inc.'s strategic plan includes significant emphasis on community economic development and is currently implementing a grassroots micro entrepreneur support project called Bullthistle Rag Enterprise. Phase I of this project will provide supportive services to existing micro entrepreneurs working in textile craft production. Phase II will expand services with the development of the Bullthistle Rag Textile Studio, a micro enterprise incubator.

The Central Adirondack Partnership for the 21st Century works on economic development activities in the Adirondack region.

The Madison County Industrial Development Agency is charged with expanding the job and tax base of the county. Their first focus is helping businesses in the county prosper and expand. The IDA uses networking to provide help, and has the ability to facilitate bonds and tax abatements to encourage expansions. They also help people start businesses by providing incubator space and 'how to' counseling. Finally the IDA works to attract new businesses to the County with national advertising, trade shows and following up on leads. The Madison County IDA is unique; it doesn't own properties like many other IDAs in the State. Instead they work with communities across the County to encourage them to build, own, and manage a community based industrial/business park.

What are the activities of the Chenango Canal Corridor Project?

Activities of the CCCP will develop an entrepreneurial culture in the region to retain local businesses and create an environment that is ripe for long term reinvestment and new business development. The goal is not only to support economic development organizations, but to give them the tools to help create sustainable economic drivers in their communities. By having the opportunities to learn from others in the same field, economic development organizations will develop the tools to replicate successful projects in their own communities. Over the long term, the Chenango Canal Corridor can attract businesses and people who are looking for a high quality of life with a relatively low cost of living, in a series of vibrant communities that value the entrepreneurial spirit.

The initiatives of the Chenango Canal Corridor Project will begin in fall 2004 and continue on an ongoing basis.

Specifically, the Upstate Institute will:

- Provide training and workshops 6-8 times a year for participant organizations. The goal of these trainings is to provide cutting edge information on economic development issues, along with basic training on crucial non-profit management issues such as grant writing, budget management and human resources. Frequently, non-profit organizations lack the resources and time to access this type of training and information. These trainings will also allow these organizations to connect with one another in a meaningful context.
- Send an Upstate Student Fellow to each organization. Upstate Student Fellows will come from either Colgate University or Morrisville State College. They will work with community groups to create and complete projects that will have a positive social, economic, cultural or environmental impact on the Upstate region. Colgate students will focus on research based projects such as program evaluation. Morrisville students will use their skills on technical projects such as computer assistance, fundraising or event planning. Once a week all fellows will come together to discuss their experiences and learn about a particular issue facing upstate. Through their project experiences, students will develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing Upstate, a stronger appreciation for what the region has to offer and complete independent work on innovative projects that provide a community benefit. Student Fellows will be matched with Colgate faculty to ensure the integrity of their work.
- Provide facilitation among these groups for collaborative project development and grant writing. For example, the Upstate Institute could work with local groups to develop a buying network amongst regional businesses. In Binghamton there might exist a few restaurants that want freshly made organic goat cheese. Through the work of the Chenango Canal Corridor Project, these restaurants can be connected to a farmer in Hamilton that has such a product. The buying network can have multiple applications in agriculture, business and service sectors.
- Develop and provide access to an "Opportunity Fund." The Opportunity Fund will allow non-profits to apply for seed money to help them develop new collaborative projects with other groups. This type of seed money is often the hardest to find for small non-profits and goes a long way in allowing non-profits the opportunity to deliver innovative services in their communities.
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices among these groups. Knowledge exchange can take place in conferences, publications or listservs. This type of sharing is crucial to successful community based economic development efforts. Groups can also exchange information through site visits and access to program information.

Although the geographic region covered by the project is not tremendous, economic development organizations tend to lack information about similar groups and their projects. The simple act of information sharing and exchange can gain untold benefits for these organizations and their communities.

- Offer access to relevant research by Colgate University faculty that will support the work of participant organizations. Additionally, the Upstate Institute will be able to link faculty with regional research interests to non-profit organizations that can provide them with field ready projects.
- Access to a database that contains demographic and other relevant regional information. This information can help organizations with grant writing and project development. Often economic development organizations do not have access to up to date information about the region. This information will be helpful in developing projects that fit the needs of the each community and write grants that accurately reflect that need.

The model developed by the Upstate Institute for Chenango Canal Corridor Project can be replicated in a wide variety of disciplines across the region. For example, the Institute can organize regional arts groups for similar types of training, collaboration and facilitation. Arts groups can also work together to develop collaborative marketing and ticketing that will help them reach a wider audience. Again, these groups can learn from one another and benefit from the support, training and collaborative opportunities offered by the Institute.

Other potential applications include health care, school districts, local governments and environmental groups. The Chenango Canal Corridor Project is the jumping off point for a regional effort that will develop vibrant communities that will attract and retain businesses and people.