

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

Delivered By
Genesee County Legislature Chair
Mary Pat Hancock

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6PM
Old Courthouse Legislature Chambers

Good evening friends and family of Genesee County. I especially recognize and welcome our three new legislators...Marianne Clattenberg, Frank Ferrando, and Shelley Stein. Thankfully, they hit the ground running and brought with them the enthusiasm, energy and knowledge that is essential to their new roles. And let me thank all of you...those present and those of you who were not able to attend this evening, for your continued efforts, cooperation, and support during this most challenging time. This year has sped by, our challenges sprang up like dandelions on a spring day, but the good grass also flourished thanks to the good work of our employees, renewed energy of our constituents and the climate of possible change at the state level.

Tonight, let's focus on us. On Genesee County and how we managed during the year 2011 when the State's Property Tax Cap had not yet taken effect, but the mandated service expenses were at an all-time high and continued to whittle away at funds previously available for local and essential programs.

How did we manage? It was a year of enlightenment. Having emerged from a difficult budget process we responded to the lethargic economy by holding the line on taxes and trimming already lean programs. Strong efforts were also made to rethink how services were delivered and which programs might be combined for mutual benefit. We looked within and beyond our county for collaborative opportunities. This was not just one lean year, with relief around the corner. The only thing that we could count on was that things would be tighter in 2012, with the Property Tax Cap, the end of the stimulus fund, and no significant Mandate Relief. It was a new reality for the local governments and for their constituents. And neither of us liked it. Anger is one of the first stages of grief, and we were angry that fine programs, good employees, and needed services were impacted. We were angry that bloated mandated programs continued to expand and feed on our dwindling resources. We were angry that our continued message of Mandate Relief now fell on deaf ears. In order to survive, we had to temporarily put our anger aside and reached for temporary acceptance. We picked up the increasingly heavy burdens and did our best to carry them.

We are a resilient lot. Positive goals were accomplished, new ventures succeeded, and we did not collapse. For this evening, I needed help to look a bit deeper into the accomplishment specifics, yet also respect the fact that good as you are, there is a limit to anyone's tolerance for sitting and listening, so I asked our department chairs to please send a paragraph to me with their selection of the most significant items to cover in their departments during 2011. Were they thrilled? NO. It is nearly impossible to put all your good efforts into a single book, or chapter....a paragraph, impossible. But impossible things are happening every day. I received the necessary information in the abbreviated form and for this I am most grateful. I take full responsibility for cutting department responses to the quick, but the full information is available in the annual reports on file.

Something of enormous import took place this year at our Community College. Dr. Steiner retired after being associated with the college since its inception in the 1960s and its president since 1975. The perfect selection and smooth transition to a new college president was crucial to all of us and was handled with tremendous skill by the College

Board. A thorough nationwide search, and an equally thorough screening process, and final interview process identified the best possible candidate. A local boy, regionally local, with just the right experience and skill sets was hired. We welcomed James Sunser to our midst fall of 2011 and look forward to the formal inauguration ceremonies on May 5th of this year.

Within the Office for the Aging, the fastest growing program is Health Insurance Counseling, which in 2011 served 719 Medicare beneficiaries, resulting in over \$1,000,000 in savings for those using this valuable service. Support services such as home delivered meals, transportation to medical appointments, in-home care, personal emergency response units, home safety checks, and support for caretakers can enable those who want to “Age in Place” to do so. In the past decade the number of our older adults has grown by 16%, causing increased demands on OFA services. Encouraging healthy active aging through programs like the RSVP, Living Healthy courses, exercise classes, falls prevention programs, recreation and social events are ways that OFA promotes this goal. To fill the niche for those qualifying programs not covered by any other funding, which add so much to our seniors’ quality of life, Genesee County is fortunate enough to have the Muriel H. Marshall Fund.

The procurement card program was organized and implemented by the Purchasing Department and the Treasurer’s Office. Procedures and training materials were revised and training was provided. This program replaces a variety of processes, including petty cash and advance checks. Its purpose is to establish an efficient, cost-effective, easily monitored method of purchasing and payment for small dollar transactions. In an additional effort to lower the cost of products and services, Purchasing joined the Western New York Online Bid System. A section of this department, the Mail room processed over 177,000 outgoing pieces of US Mail and by using a pre-sort discount they saved the County approximately \$4, 000 on first class mail.

Cornell Cooperative Extension continued its tradition of putting the latest scientific knowledge to practical use. In this county agriculture is our economic engine, and attending to that business is the Extension’s business. Last year there was a new course at GCC...Western New York Agriculture, its success suggests that it is the first course in a targeted curriculum. An Extension outreach brought a new business to this area...goat cheese production, with its many special requirements and the provider was guided to a happy landing as a successful Ag business by Extension staff. Another venture in the works is the development of a Broccoli Industry in the East, which includes our area. Staff members: James Kingston, Jan Beglinger, and Christie Hoepting are to be especially congratulated. A collaborative effort by the Rotary Club, YMCA, UMMC, and CCE and Dr. Jain, initiated a GET FIT program for families in this area to begin to address the national concern of Childhood Obesity. The health of our young people cannot be overemphasized and this program shows great promise.

We had plenty of elections in 2011. In addition to 4 primary contests in September, and the General Election in November, an unanticipated county wide Special Election was held in April. Our frugal Board of Elections was able to absorb the additional costs by

cost saving adjustments in other areas. They presently have well founded concerns that 2012 will force three to four primary dates...with the resulting extra expenses. The State Legislature must iron out their disagreements and coordinate their primary dates to avoid this wasteful extra expense...

The Office of Emergency Management Services insures that the County develops and maintains multiple emergency plans. They see that the County has the equipment, manpower and resources to respond to disasters or emergency situations. The 2011 State Homeland Security Grant Program (\$101,948) will alone provide Fire Investigator Protective Clothing, Law Enforcement Equipment (ERT); provide Critical Infrastructure and security enhancements to the County emergency operations center and the County Highway Departments. It will also provide upgrades to the interoperable communications equipment and provide the funding for the Fire and EMS Reporting Management Systems. This year a County-Wide Recruitment and Retention program for volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel was made possible through the Federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant of \$388,000.

Under the Highway Department's banner, please include the actual Highway crews who maintain our roads and bridges and are concerned about the effects of deferred maintenance as a result of flat funding and escalating material prices. The Parks Department, under this banner, continues to find new grants and outside funding opportunities to keep the Parks open for residents during difficult financial times. Several improvements were made to the DeWitt Recreation Area in 2011 expanding opportunities to explore this urban park. Airport fuel sales increased nearly 8% this year and the GC Airport again turned a profit...as it has done for the past 9 years. We continue to explore options to replace its aging terminal facility...to meet federal safety requirements without a financial burden on our residents. Our Highway Superintendent/Water Project Director continues to investigate the future financing of the Countywide Water Project as well...so that Phase II may be implemented as planned within the next five years.

The History Department and Records Management completed two long term projects this year. The first was the digitizing of the department's photograph collection which includes 10,570 photographs. The second was the Archival Cataloging Project which included 742 cubic feet with a total of 1,672 items cataloged. In addition, they provided assistance to thousands of people interested in local history...generating income for the County. They were assisted by volunteers who helped them accomplish numerous additional projects. They all still had the time and strength to help us commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War....beginning with the bell ring observance of April 12th; we were helped to realize the impact of this war on Genesee County by an original display board and power point presentation.

In 2011 Human Resources partnered with the County's Employee Assistance Plan to provide the required county wide workplace violence training for employees. Kudus are given to all County employees covered by the County's Self-Funded Health Plan for

their cooperation in providing the necessary documentation for the Health Plan Eligibility Audit that was conducted in 2011.

During 2011 Information Technology focused on updating an aging infrastructure to ensure the reliability and availability of systems that support all county departments. They also introduced a new County Website, put IPADs to use by the Public Defenders and District Attorney's Offices and addressed several compliance issues.

This past year the Genesee County Career Center assisted 4,514 job seekers, a 30% increase from 2010 with a 77% placement rate. They also served 267 area businesses by posting employer job openings and hosting businesses for on-site recruitments, as well as screening and assessing the skills of all of their job applicants. Workshops (147) were conducted on high demand topics.

The County's Comprehensive Planning Process continued with the Steering Committee, representing the Ten Focus Groups, making its Annual Monitoring Report to the County Legislature in September. The Planning Department continues to support other County agencies and local municipalities as they strive to create a more livable community for our residents. Agriculture remains a cornerstone of our County's economy. The County Legislature remains committed to continued support of the Agricultural District Program and the long term protection of the County's agricultural base including the preservation of prime farmland. The Household Hazardous Waste Collection and an ongoing program supporting recycling are going strong and continue to attract strong participation throughout the GLOW region.

Probation supervision remains as the most cost effective form of an alternative to incarceration for the nearly 700 adults and juveniles in Genesee County. As a mandated function with strong NYS oversight, funding remains critical at the state and local level to support this vital function of the criminal and juvenile justice system. Presently the NYS reimbursement to Probation Departments continues at 12-13%, which is far short of the 48.5% required by statute.

Quiet times are the fruit of a successful Public Health Program, 2011 was such a year. Mandates and deliverables were accomplished on time and on budget overall. Program reviews and NYS Audits proved favorable. On the flip side, it was retirement time for key personnel in the department and their departure represented a loss of valuable experience. The demands of an increasingly tight budget are being felt at every level.

The Genesee County Sheriff's Office continues to provide excellent public safety and correctional services to the residents of Genesee County. The Sheriff's Office took a zero tolerance position with regard to underage drinking and the deputies made over 500 unlawful possessions of alcohol arrests at Darien Lake. In addition deputies took 175 drunk drivers off the roads. The jail saw an increase in population of male inmates during 2011, averaging 71 per day and Genesee Justice monitored almost 1,600 offenders. The Sheriff's Office partnered with GCC offering the facilities at the Animal Shelter for Vet Tech Students. Emergency Dispatch center handled over 175,000 phone

calls, including over 28,000 911calls, leading to over 50,000 calls for service. The Sheriff's Office was fortunate to receive over \$149,000 in grant funding.

In difficult economic times, more of our citizens turn to the Department of Social Services for assistance. Caseloads in public assistance, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and HEAP continue to grow. Families are stressed and also require more help with their children.. Our DSS has been doing the best possible job to deliver services while controlling costs.

During 2011 the Veterans Service Agency moved and became co located with the Department of Social Services. The move allowed for increased administrative support for processing all of our veterans' claims for compensation, pensions, education, etc. at a cost saving. With the end of the Iraq War and the reduction in the military, there are more veterans returning. Presently, there is a huge backlog of claims at the federal level and this trickles down to the local level and is causing an increased number of claims pending. When the backlog is combined with the high rate of unemployment for our veterans it produces a less than ideal homecoming for the individuals who earned and deserve the best.

The Weights and Measures Department had a good and productive year in spite of budget constraints. Scales and liquid measuring devices were checked, devices were inspected, milk tanks were calibrated, store packages were checked and price comparisons were performed. Consumers are paying higher prices for nearly everything, the least we can do is to insure they are receiving their money's worth.

A long awaited partnership with the City of Batavia was formalized in 2011. The youth bureaus entered into contract for the County to provide administrative oversight assigning 20% of the Executive Directors time for the City Youth Bureau. This collaboration reduces expenses and is mutually beneficial to both agencies. Sadly, 2011 was also the year when Debbie Kerr Rosenbach retired. She had been the Director of the County Youth Bureau for many years and initiated many innovative programs which directly impacted the young people in this region in a most positive way. All this was accomplished during a time of shrinking resources.

The District Attorney's Office prosecuted a charge of predatory sexual assault against a child. It was the first time the office prosecuted such a charge. It was remarkable because of the degree of interagency cooperation which came together for the trial of this offense. The trial resulted in a guilty verdict, with a sentence of fifteen years to life. A former member of the District Attorney's office received a high honor at the NYS District Attorney's Winter Conference. The prestigious Robert M. Morgenthau Award recognizes those whose professional accomplishments, honesty, integrity and commitment to justice exemplify an extra ordinary high standard...congratulations to David Gann!

We are still having a difficult time even approaching a break even financial status, or manageable fiscal support with the Nursing Home. We have made and continue to make

positive changes based on recommendations to increase efficiency and lower costs. But for every step forward, we seem to be forced back two steps. There are additional requirements to meet new standards, frozen reimbursement levels, a changing system of payment, and increasing costs for care...all combining to add to increasing the financial burden on the County. Presently we contribute over two and one half million dollars every year to just meet expenses. And this amount grows each year. How long can we afford this? With the tax cap and our already high tax rate, not long. The Legislature continues to take a proactive approach as we deal with this crucial issue.

Genesee County should be very proud of the achievements of our GCEDC. The recent ground breaking by Alpina in our newly opened Agricultural Park, and even more recently the announcement of the Wave Project in the same Park promises an investment of \$206 million dollars in the economic health of our area and a resulting 186 jobs. The GCEDC was able to participate in 30 project "wins" and enabled \$51.3 million of investment over the 2011 fiscal year. There were additional achievements, new cooperative work force training programs, businesses expanding, jobs retained....do not think that all this would have happened without the inspired and dedicated work of the GCEDC and their team. Their success is our success. Great work!

The County Clerk's Office has been busy with the implementation of several new programs made possible by contract enhancements with their computer company. They are now able to issue plastic permits for pistols, as well as image, index, and merge 210 years of mapping into the system, issue veteran's ID cards for the popular "Return the Favor" discount program for veterans, to be announced soon. This new technology has allowed for the scanning of criminal and civil court records to allow for direct access and paper free transmission to the Court system of these records. And, in spite of economic fluctuations and a recession in the motor vehicle industry, the Motor Vehicle Office was able to maintain sufficient revenue to operate their office with a net profit of over \$600,000. Many out of county clientele use our MVO for registration, license renewals, and an increasing number of dealers who use the Genesee County MVO for all their transactions. Much of the credit for this goes to a staff that emphasizes friendly thorough service.

In January of 2011, we sent prescription discount cards out to all of our citizens. These were at no cost to the county. The program was introduced by the New York State Association of Counties, and during the course of this year has saved the 4,874 participants 52% on their prescription costs. As you might suspect, the program continues to grow.

I hope you can tell from this brief synopsis that our county is working hard to maintain a positive direction. And we are succeeding. The legislators are working hard to reach out to their constituents with information, petitions, meetings, and resolutions about the need for immediate mandate reform. There is legislation ready to pass...but it hasn't happened yet. Legislator Lawrence has headed up the (Mandate) Medicaid Reform outreach and through her efforts, the other eight legislators, and the cooperation of our constituents we are turning in over 1500 signatures from NYS citizens demanding Medicaid Reform.

Yes, we are keeping our heads above the water, but we can't tread water forever. I remain hopeful that 2012 is the year for State leaders to step up and work with their partners in County government to enact real reforms that will enable us to maintain and enhance the local safety and quality of life programs that will attract and keep families and businesses here in New York. You can help. This is not a political issue...it is a survival issue. In every case, when there has been a real change at the state level...it was because the people back home insisted. Let your voices be heard.

The pressures evidenced in the New York State Association of Counties state wide "9 for 90" mandate relief initiative coupled with the new state imposed property tax cap have given county governments across New York State a focused rallying cry and platform to demand change and real long term mandate relief. These reforms and solutions must originate in Albany. The state Legislature and Executive in the past have made passing reference and lukewarm commitment to such relief. Now is the time for them, with our help, to pass real reform measures, provide real property tax relief by changing and decreasing the 9 mandates...most especially Medicaid, presently consuming 40% of our tax dollars each and every year.

In 2004-2005 our message was "Don't Come Home without it (the Medicaid Growth Cap)". In 2012, the message to our elected State delegation and Governor Cuomo has to be "Don't Adopt a Budget without Medicaid Reform and Local Medicaid Share Relief." Now that's a plan we could live with. Right?