

## A Historic Win for the Finger Lakes

By Joel Seligman

We won! Last month the Finger Lakes region won a \$500 million Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI) award in a nearly yearlong competition established by Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. This is a monumental development for the University and Rochester and our nine-county region.

The URI award represents a five-year commitment to accelerate economic growth and help eradicate poverty—outcomes that will extend opportunity to all of our region's residents. The region's 135-page plan, "United for Success: Finger Lakes Forward," was developed by the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Council, which Danny Wegman, next year's Board of Trustees chair, and I cochaired, in collaboration with the 34 members of the council and 450 regional participants in 20 work groups.

Underlying the plan are three industry pillars most likely to create jobs and economic growth and three enablers to best facilitate the transformation of our region's economy. That transformation is the ultimate aspiration of the Upstate Revitalization competition.

Optics, photonics, and imaging, the first pillar, amplifies the \$115 million in matching fund support that the State of New York will provide to the University of Rochester and RIT for the Rochester region as part of the successful AIM Photonics submission. Our region today has some 26,000 jobs in optics, photonics, and related imaging industries. The anticipated support from winning this competition will extend our historic strengths to new areas such as optics materials surface finishing, imaging systems, and laser technologies.

Agriculture and food production, the second industry pillar, touches all nine counties in the region. The Finger Lakes is the breadbasket of New York. Twenty-one percent of all upstate New York farmland is in our region, along with approximately 19,000 jobs in the agriculture and food production industries. Our region is a leader in dairy, yogurt, apples, organic food, and wine production and is home to such nationally recognized firms as Constellation Brands in wine and spirits; LiDestri Foods in food processing; and Wegmans Food



**CELEBRATION:** Area community, political, and business leaders celebrated a \$500 million economic development award, announced by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (podium).

Markets in food processing and grocery store distribution.

The third industry pillar, next-generation manufacturing, recognizes that our region is in the midst of an economic transformation that will include new industries such as energy storage, photovoltaics, nanoscale manufacturing, new applications of 3-D printing, biomaterials, and software development. During the next five years, much of the region's next-generation manufacturing will be located in three innovation hubs, including Eastman Business Park and a downtown Rochester Innovation Zone.

Pivotal to facilitating the acceleration of our economic growth are three enablers—Pathways to Prosperity, which reflects an unprecedented effort to address poverty in Rochester; entrepreneurship and development to stimulate the establishment and growth of new ventures; and higher education and research, which recognizes the decisive role that the University of Rochester and other universities and colleges play in the increasingly knowledge-based future of our region.

We are proud of what we have achieved to this point. More than \$300 million in state investments to date have also played a critical role in the revitalization of downtown Rochester and in nearby new developments at College Town and CityGate, as well as in Geneva, Canandaigua, Penn Yan, and many other communities across the nine-county Finger Lakes region.

The \$500 million in URI support represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build upon this momentum and create a foundation for sustained economic growth. These new funds will be used to make strategic investments in the core industry clusters and enablers that will drive future job growth. URI funds will also be used to strengthen our region's quality of life and—in collaboration with the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative and the Governor's Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force—undertake a historic effort to lift more families and communities out of poverty.

We are deeply grateful to Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature for their unprecedented commitment to revive the upstate economy and help confront the roots of poverty in our region.

Now the hard part begins. The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council will soon be releasing plans to implement its URI plan, including the process for project sponsors seeking to apply for URI funding. Among other projects that were recommended in the United for Success plan were support for the University's data science initiative, our Laser Lab, the Medical Center's potential program in neurorestoration, and the Eastman School's community music program.

This is a huge win for the Finger Lakes. All of us who participated in the competition have rolled up our sleeves and now are ready to implement the plan. 