



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

On the Way to Revitalization

Finger Lakes region wins \$500 million award to spur economic development.

By Scott Hauser

A \$500 million award from the state represents a historic opportunity for Rochester and the Finger Lakes region, but the important work is just beginning, says President and CEO Joel Seligman and other political and community leaders.

“We have to roll up our sleeves. We have to go to work,” Seligman told a standing-room-only audience at a December reception to celebrate New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s selection of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council’s submission in a statewide economic development competition.

“Five years from now, this city will be well on its way to revitalization.”

In November, Cuomo selected the council’s plan, drawn up by area business, community, academic, and political leaders, as

CELEBRATION: Governor Andrew Cuomo; New York Senator Joseph Robach; Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren; Wegmans CEO Danny Wegman; University President and CEO Joel Seligman; and State Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle celebrate the awarding of \$500 million in funding from the governor’s Upstate Revitalization Initiative.

one of three proposals to each receive a five-year, \$500 million state award.

Led by Seligman and Board of Trustees Chair-elect and Wegmans Food Markets CEO Danny Wegman, the council identified several public-private initiatives to spur job growth, increase regional wealth, attract private investment, and reduce poverty across the region. Among the initiatives are efforts to expand manufacturing around optics, photonics, and imaging; support new endeavors in agriculture and food production; and create better programs to help move people out of poverty.

Joining the Finger Lakes in winning the competition were proposals from the Southern Tier and central New York. The Upstate Revitalization Initiative competition was based on the success of the Buffalo Billion, a 10-year, \$1 billion award announced in 2012.

Cuomo said Rochester has a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity to take advantage of the skills and expertise of the region to help transform the economy of New York.

Noting that the area’s neighbors—Buffalo, the Southern Tier, and central New York—will also be building on their success, he said Rochester’s historic strengths as an inventive and entrepreneurial city will help

lead an economic synergy throughout upstate and western New York. “Some of the greatest minds and some of the greatest inventions come from Rochester,” Cuomo said. “And don’t you forget it.”

“It’s time to rebuild Rochester to a level that it’s never been before. That’s your mission.”

In addition to Seligman and Wegman, Cuomo was greeted by Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren, State Senator Joseph Robach, and Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle. Each of them thanked Cuomo for his commitment to spurring economic development in the Rochester region and in other areas of the state outside New York City.

Warren and other speakers highlighted aspects of the plan that are particularly designed to address poverty. “When we had challenges with poverty, Governor Cuomo stepped up for Rochester, New York,” Warren said.

Robach, who admitted that he had been a critic of Albany’s “neglect” of western and upstate New York, said that the historic award represented an important, positive shift in the state’s approach to economic development. “This really is a great day for Rochester,” said Robach. 