



# St. Lawrence Progress Report, 1984

The county moved ahead in 1983; the expansion project at the Ogdensburg Correctional Facility (left) was just one example of the progress that continues in 1984.  
(LaComb Photo)

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## 'We're Definitely On The Upswing'

BY JIM REAGEN

Last year, when St. Lawrence Pulp and Paper Company shut its doors and closed the mill, county economic development officials were privately worried whether they could ever reopen the plant.

Years of work had suddenly gone down the drain with the third shutdown of the Ogdensburg plant.

"It was grim," recalls St. Lawrence County Economic Development Director Edmund Russell.

But the county agency and an Ogdensburg Task Force went to work trying to stir up interest among firms across the county to reopen the mill.

By the time they were done, 18 different firms came to Ogdensburg to tour the facility. Today, Ponderosa Fibres is negotiating a purchase agreement for the plant.

The possible reopening of the Ogdensburg plant is only one of several recent developments that have shown area officials that St. Lawrence County currently has a bright economic outlook.

Other include:  
— In Heuvelton, McAdam Cheese is planning a \$1.3 million 60,000-foot expansion of their packaging plant that will put eight to 10 more people to work.

— In Canton, the Best Western University Inn plans a major expansion of their hotel.

— In Norfolk, the Norfolk Lumber mill is expanding.

— In Massena, Walsh Trucking is planning a new terminal.

— In Ogdensburg, Filtran and COMPAS are expanding operations in the city.

— In Massena, Alcoa, Reynolds and G.M. are moving back to full production. Most of the employees who were laid off a year ago are back to work.

"On The Upswing"  
"I think we're definitely on the upswing," says Ernest LaBaff, the chairman of the county Industrial Development Authority and chairman of the St. Lawrence County Legislature's Economic Development Committee.

"We've still got a lot to do," he says. "But we on the county-level are ready to help communities, provide coordination, technical assistance."

"We want to put people to work," he says. "People forget what that does. It gives someone a job. It helps their family. It helps the tax base. It's good for a community."

"I think things are improving," says Economic Development Director Russell. "We've benefited from a turn around in the economy. It shows in the employment statistics. Plus we're seeing a lot of firms that want to expand."

"We're getting more of a response to our mailers," he says. "People are looking at expanding their operations. In 1980, when St. Lawrence Pulp and paper closed down the first time, no one came to see the plant. This time, out of the 100 firms we contacted, 18 came to visit the plant. That showed that even though the pulp market wasn't good, they expected it to turn around."

Part of the reason for the expansion by some firms, Russell says, is the county has spent a major effort at helping local businesses as well as recruiting new businesses.

"There's a lot of competition to get firms," LaBaff says. "It's a rough business. A community has to make a real effort to compete."

One of the ways the county has attempted to meet the competition has been to set up its own Office of Economic Development to assist localities, market the county, and provide assistance to companies.

"We've been very fortunate,"

LaBaff says. "We've also been fortunate to have the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority. You never hear me complaining about Ogdensburg getting new businesses or assistance. I'd rather see someone drive 30 miles to Ogdensburg to go to work than see them drive 20 miles to Massena and pick up an unemployment check."

The county's effort to attract industry and business has also been aimed at existing companies, LaBaff says. "These commissions can help create awareness," LaBaff says.

Lessening Conflicts  
But they also breed competition between communities because there are not too many opportunities to convince firms to locate within their borders.

"One of the things the IDA and the county's Economic Development Committee will be doing is lessening any conflicts that might arise," he says. "We want to provide coordination."

"It's crucial," he says. Communities across the county are at-

tempting to lure businesses. They provide tax abatements, some offer to build build buildings, they provide cheap land, low interest loans, technical assistance, help in marketing, funds for new employees to lower start-up costs.

"It's very competitive," LaBaff says.

That's why the IDA and his legislative committee hope to be able to work with the boards to coordinate their efforts before rivalries develop.

"It doesn't make any sense," LaBaff says. "We have to make sure everybody works together. The competition from other areas is too intense."

"St. Lawrence County has to find ways to go a step further," he says. "We have to find out what the other areas are doing and if they're giving tax abatements, we might have to give larger ones."

Industrial Parks  
One strategy communities have used is to create industrial parks. Today Ogdensburg's Commerce Park with more than 500 people employed in several high tech businesses is the model for upstate New York.

In Potsdam, the county IDA has an industrial shell building where several firms operate.

In Massena, the village, town and county built a shell building in the industrial park. Parker Paint moved in last year. MARCO is located in the park. But Massena officials are hoping to fill the park.

In Gouverneur, the community owns the property for a park, and plans to install water, sewer and roads onto the site.

Two other communities, Star Lake and Waddington also have sites. Both sites are now being marketed heavily by the county to spur economic development.