

Debora Boening of Oak Beverages Welcomed as 2017 RBA Chair of the Board

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Business organization celebrates 50 years

BY KATHY KAHN

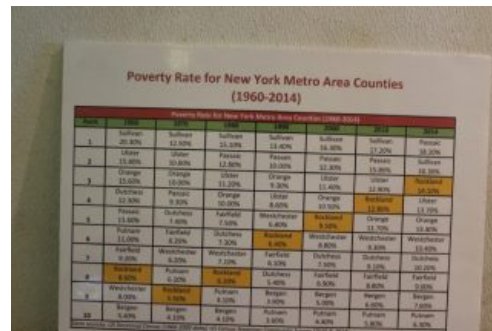


Chart shows how Rockland's income levels continue to decline



Back in 1967, a handful of business owners hatched an idea to form a business association where they could share ideas and help build up the community. This year marks the 50th birthday of the Rockland Business Association.

Al Samuels, President/CEO of the 900-plus member organization for the past 16 years, helped usher in the

RBA's milestone on January 19 to a sold-out house at Nyack Seaport.

"We are committed to help local business expand and attracting new businesses," said Samuels. "Unfortunately, we are currently dealing with a Legislature that does not want to co-exist with our County Executive. Government needs to work together.

"We see what's happening on the national level— locally, we can do better," he added, urging members to reach out to their Legislators and implore them to work with the County Executive's office for the overall good of the people of Rockland.

“Many perceive economic development as an evil encroachment,” said Samuels. “We are desperately in need of ‘shovel-ready’ sites, where all permits are in place; without that, developers will go where they don’t have to wait months—in some cases, years—to get a site approval. We are just 18 miles from New York City, a prime location.”

Along with the rest of the Empire State, Rockland has a growing out-migration that continues to climb, along with its poverty levels. “Today, we have a 14.7 percent overall level of poverty. In the Town of Ramapo that number jumps to 24.9 percent” said Samuels.

“From Census 2010 statistics, we do know that these poverty pockets are centered in New Square, Monsey, Spring Valley and the Village of Haverstraw. None of the programs we have in place now are helping to turn that around.” He produced a chart highlighting the loss of the middle class wage-earners and the growth of poverty.

One of the RBA’s focus points is building tourism. Noting New York State generates millions of dollars every year from visitors. County Executive Ed Day hired an economic and tourism director, Lucy Redzeposki, tasked with encouraging visitors and businesses to stop in Rockland and encourage people to stop and enjoy the county on their way to points north.

He pointed to what Michael Bruno, owner of Tuxedo Hudson Company, has been doing in the town of Ramapo. Tuxedo Hudson has bought several properties in along old Route 17 in Sloatsburg and into Tuxedo. Plans include creating a “walkable” community with bike paths, a new hotel, restaurants, as well as refurbishing the former IGA supermarket.

Tuxedo Hudson received a \$750,000 grant from the Mid-Hudson Region Economic Development Corporation in December, 2016 to help with the revitalization efforts along the Sloatsburg-Tuxedo corridor, which once boomed with travelers before the New York State Thruway took local business away.

Samuels introduced incoming chair of the RBA Board of Directors, Debra Boening, president of Oak Beverages. Oak Beverages is a family-owned company that’s been a Rockland staple for more than a century.” She’s going to help lead us in a great direction,” said Samuels. “Debra’s a smart business woman with strong ties to the community and truly cares about seeing it well and prosper.”