

What Every Long Islander Should Know: “Building Success”

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Time was when the Long Island economy, led by a high-flying aerospace industry, was the envy of the nation.

Today we lag behind. You can see it in venture capital investment, a good indicator of an innovative economy. Of all such investment in 2006, Long Island received less than 0.2%. Silicon Valley grabbed 27% and Boston 10%. No wonder our job growth is flat.

What would it take to reverse our fortunes?

The advance and decline of regions is not, like the tides, a natural and immutable process. Regions that have prospered in recent decades have built their success by conscious, concerted effort.

And they have built upon certain clearly identifiable cornerstones: (1) High technology; (2) Specialized scientific research; and (3) Collaborative regional leadership.

The first link—between technology and success—seems almost self-evident. Just think of America’s regional powerhouses: Silicon Valley. Route 128. Research Triangle. Their very names bespeak advanced technology.

In this area, Long Island is admirably positioned. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Stony Brook University are world-class research institutions that practically scream to form the core of a network of enterprises concentrated in the life sciences, genetics, and advanced medicine.

Such specialized clusters are the second cornerstone of successful regions. Linking research organizations with business ventures, they turn the latest basic research to commercial advantage. Each innovation spurs others, enabling a region to develop pre-eminence in its field.

Recognizing the enormous potential for regional growth, former Governor Spitzer included funding in his recent budget proposal for planning an alliance among Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Brookhaven, and Stony Brook.

Here is where leadership comes into play, for the successful region does not wait for these things to happen. It makes them happen.

Austin, Texas, set out to become a major player in technology and saw its chance with the formation of America’s first big computer research and development consortium. Determined to bring the organization to Austin, leaders secured major new investment in the University of Texas, including endowing 32 \$1-million chairs in engineering and the sciences. Within a decade, Austin had added more manufacturing jobs than any other metropolitan area. Through the 1990’s, employment climbed more than five percent a year.

San Diego saw its chance to migrate to a high-tech economy with the 1965 founding of U.C. San Diego, which grew into a leading research institution. The University, local business leaders, and the city government then joined forces to create Connect, a network dedicated to building entrepreneurship based on the latest scientific research. From 1990 to 2005, employment in science and high technology grew 25%. Today the region stands fifth *in the world* in attracting venture capital.

Long Island “has the technology.” We’ve got everything other regions have, except, so far, the kind of regional leadership team that turns potential into the actual.

“If we can put a man on the moon,” people say, “we ought to be able to” Long Islanders did put a man on the moon. Now it’s time for us to get our region soaring again.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation and convener of the Long Island Index. The Index provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit www.longislandindex.org.