



# A Thriving COUNTY in a Winning LOCATION

*Cayuga County (population 79,000) is a beautiful and scenic area located in New York State. It is made up of thirty small communities, the biggest of which is the City of Auburn (population less than 30,000). Cayuga County's entrepreneurial spirit shines in this mainly rural area filled with farmland, nature and the most miles of freshwater shoreline found in New York State.*



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Written by Charline Cormier-Pellerin

Cayuga County has a winning combination of beautiful lakes, rich history, and an ideal location, making it rich in tourism and recreational opportunities. "From a tourism standpoint, we are centrally located," explains Cayuga Economic Development Agency (CEDA) Executive Director Tracy Verrier. "We are right smack in between Rochester, Syracuse, and Ithaca."

Cayuga County encompasses and borders eight lakes which include Lake Ontario and several of the Finger Lakes. "Water is one of the things that sets Cayuga County apart," says Verrier. "And from an industry standpoint, it's definitely one of our competitive advantages. Between the lakes, consistent precipitation and snow melt, we have a lot of fresh and clean water."

With countless cultural museums and historical societies, history is another of Cayuga County's strengths. "There are many notable historical characters with ties to Cayuga County such as Harriet Tubman, renowned for her work with the Underground Railroad; William H. Seward, Secretary of State under Abraham Lincoln, who negotiated the purchase of Alaska; and Theodore Case who invented the process of putting sound on film. All of which had homes in Cayuga County," says Verrier. Today, those homes and many others have been turned into museums and historic sites. "We even have a new museum focused on the Erie Canal that has access directly off of the New York State thruway," adds Verrier. "This is something brand new and completely different, and is a big benefit for us." ➤



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► There are a large number of bus tours that visit the museums and different cultural sights of Cayuga County. “We also have the Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival, which is known as ‘Broadway in the Finger Lakes’. They do very high-quality productions and draw a lot of people from out of town to see their shows.”

Visitors, businesses, and residents have great access to transportation. “We have an active freight rail system, nearby access to two international airports (Syracuse and Rochester), and the New York State Route 90 Thruway runs right through Cayuga County. This is certainly a big advantage for us from a business perspective.”

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The county also has a strong entrepreneurial background. “Myriad patents and numerous big businesses have come out of Cayuga County,” says Verrier. “For many years, the economy here was primarily industrial- and agriculturally-based.” Now, Cayuga County’s economy is more diverse. “We now see more small- and medium-size companies in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, hospitality, and professional and business services. Throughout our community’s history there’s been a strong entrepreneurial spirit here, and what has changed is the way it has manifested over time.”

In addition to employers in the healthcare, corrections, education, and private sectors, Cayuga County also has wineries. But, until three years ago, it had no breweries; today, there are four. “It was strange how, when you looked at a beer trail of New York State, Cayuga County was a big hole in the map,” says Verrier. “Now, our breweries are doing great work here, and we’re so happy to be able to participate in that growing industry.”

“Our Prison City Pub & Brewery has been winning awards for its various beers, and huge amounts of people from outside of Cayuga County visit to have a drink of Prison City beer,” adds

Verrier. “The Good Shepherds Brewing Co., Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing Co., and Aurora Ale & Lager Co. are Cayuga County’s other breweries, and they’re all doing great work also.”

As a result of constant efforts to rejuvenate its downtowns, the county now boasts a vibrant nightlife. “This is all part of the renaissance,” explains Verrier. “There’s definitely been an increase in the number of people coming downtown on the weekends. There are a lot of downtown events and festivals, bars, and eating establishments, and over the summer there’s plenty of live music. People are definitely getting more engaged in the downtown.”

The county aims to continue attracting, growing, and expanding its business community. “Right now, some of our focus is in manufacturing and technology, as well as in value-added agriculture,” says Verrier. For food processing industries, the county has a huge supply of agriculture products: grains, corn, soybeans, and milk from its large dairy industry. Most of those things currently leave the county before being processed.

“We’ve had a milk processing plant, Cayuga Milk Ingredients, start up,” adds Verrier. “It is a cooperative of a number of farmers in the region. They are now processing milk into milk powders and different products that are being sold on the global market. But we still have a lot of grains and soybeans that are leaving the county before they’re being touched. So, that’s a big area of opportunity for us. With our water resources and that supply, we think that value-added agriculture is our next big target.”

It’s all about creating connections. “We want to make sure our workforce is appropriately skilled for the businesses that we have. We are looking to create a pipeline of workers by better connecting our workforce and education sector with our businesses,” says Verrier.

One exciting project is the Grober Nutrition plant that is presently being built and connected to the Cayuga Milk Ingredients pro-

cessing facility. In sharing that location, Grober Nutrition is conveniently taking a waste product (milk ingredient) from the milk processing plant and turning it into a viable, marketable product. “This helps because the milk processing facility doesn’t have to dispose of that by-product,” explains Verrier. “It’s also creating an investment in our community by providing a new product for the dairy industry – which is very active here.”

“At the Cayuga Economic Development Agency (CEDA), we’re very proactive in terms of business assistance, and we have a good system for making sure that companies who are here or who are looking to locate here are getting to resources they need,” adds Verrier. “That’s partially because we now see CEDA as a one-stop. Anytime a business needs something, they can call us and we will either provide them with what they need or point them in the right direction. They don’t have to make a series of phone calls to get what they need. We know exactly where to send them, and if we can’t provide what they need, we’ll do the legwork to find out where they need to go.”

“Another initiative that we’ll be working on over the next couple years is figuring out better ways to incorporate non-profits into our economic system,” says Verrier. “Cayuga Centers, a non-profit that provides educational opportunities and assistance for troubled youth and their families, is presently among our top employers. We’re starting to think about non-profits as economic drivers as opposed to just human services.

“By diversifying our industry and focusing on creating jobs that people want, and by offering ways for businesses and people to engage in the community and really feel that this is their own, it will have an impact on Cayuga County as a whole,” explains Verrier. “We’re aiming for a vibrant and connected community both with businesses and individuals.”

“A more vibrant business community will help to attract more young professionals and keep them,” adds Verrier. “It’s really hard to come here and not fall in love. I’m sure this is true of many upstate New York counties. But you can appreciate what we have to offer in terms of quality of life, water and business resources. And all of those things come together to create a very unique system for businesses.”

With its variety of employment opportunities and an energetic environment, Cayuga County aims to continue working towards an even more active business community and increasingly engaged resident community. “Just because we’re a small community, doesn’t mean we don’t have a lot to offer,” says Verrier. “There’s excellent quality of life in Cayuga County.” ■





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