

Oneonta Mayor – Hometown Oneonta Column – 06-24

Howdy, Pardner.

You will be hearing that a lot in these next 3-plus years that I'm Mayor of Oneonta.

Lots of folks know me, but for those who don't, here's a quick introduction.

I've been a lifelong mover from one creative pursuit to another, one challenge to the next. An illustrator, a radio host, a writer and publisher, a media creative, an enabler of vocational success, a manager, and a community organizer.

And always a salesman and cheerleader.

Typically, I've been a group leader. And in that role, it's been my policy to engage multiple voices in respectful dialogue and creative problem solving.

I'm proud that there's a popular perception that I enjoy working shoulder-to-shoulder to get things done. That reputation makes it easier to recruit new people to take on big projects.

And success breeds success.

Nothing compares to the spark of new ideas and the crackle of the group's excitement at what can be accomplished. (I'll sign up for that every day.)

I know that is the way. Working together, creating partnerships, and strategically addressing challenges and opportunities.

In this critical moment, this is the mindset that will help us "survive and thrive" – to borrow a phrase.

We have many issues, but we have just as many potential strengths. Most are flip sides of the same coin. And it's the coin of the realm.

Oneonta is my city. But Otsego County has been my sweet home for years. So, one of my first acts in office was to reach out to Cooperstown Mayor Tillapaugh and Milford Mayor Pokorny.

We share the same problem - as does most of New York State - a dwindling population. Together we are determined to address this trend-line and turn it to our advantage.

And we can.

Think about your last vacation. Remember how enamored you were with the landscape, the quaint towns, the friendly people? Did you ever for a moment think, “What a nice place to live...”?

(And what better place to live than here?)

Our area’s unique strength is our vital and expanding baseball tourism industry and all the many families from across the country and the world that they attract. The potential of those visitors to become new residents, with connective employment or entrepreneurial ambitions, has gone untapped.

But the “3 Mayors,” together with the Otsego County Chamber, OtsegoNow and Destination Marketing are on this.

We’ve created a brochure and website, and we’re distributing it widely. Social media and video will follow. So will the addition of more partners.

This is the first step of many to solve our population challenge and create an oasis in upstate for young families and nimble businesses.

To be clear, this is not our only challenge, and success in one area will need to be matched by successes in many more.

New residents will energize our economy. They will ensure a continuation of the many events and services that so enhance our quality of life. They will reduce our individual slices of the tax burden.

But they will require housing and infrastructure. Both are concurrent concerns, and they will require many heads and hands to solve.

Our collective future is at stake.

I know that it will take an unprecedented commitment to collaboration and the entertainment of new strategies to forge the necessary path forward.

It will take new partners, and a reconnection to old allies.

It’ll require the respectful entertainment of diverse opinions. It will be messy, and there will be compromise. But it will be glorious. And we will achieve great things.

I’m happy and honored to play my part.

Mark Drnek
Mayor of the City of Oneonta

[Facebook.com/MayorMarkD](https://www.facebook.com/MayorMarkD)