

**2013
State of the City Address
By Mayor Gerald D. Jennings
Presented to the Albany Common Council
January 29, 2013**

Commitment

Each year that I have delivered my State of the City message, I have used it as an occasion to renew the commitment I made to the people of Albany on my first day in office – a commitment to build a better Albany.

And on each of those occasions I have set forth, as I will again tonight, a litany of progress and growth that I believe serves as tangible evidence of our success in fulfilling that commitment.

I have invited you to this magnificent building to share with you this State of the City message for a reason. I believe the future

of this building is symbolic of the exciting future that lies ahead for our great and historic City. As most of you know, this building is in the process of a \$25 million dollar transformation into what will be known as a Smart Cities Center.

With a \$4 million dollar grant from Governor Cuomo and the Empire State Development Corporation, the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, along with our Capitalize Albany Corporation will work to attract technology companies to locate in this iconic structure to repurpose it for new technologies that will hopefully one day benefit not only our own community but indeed, all of humanity.

The concept of Smart Cities Technology is to use new and developing technologies to assist communities in solving challenges in areas such as public health; public safety; transportation and energy efficiency, to name but a few.

This Smart Cities Center will bring together the market linkages already in place between the 300 plus global leaders in the nanoelectronics industry and the world-renowned College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, as well as the City of Albany and the State of New York, to establish a test bed for new technologies and devices that will be deployed in communities around the world, as well as improving efficiencies, opportunities and the quality of life within our own City.

As importantly, this Center will offer hands-on training for our young residents and our at-risk populations, to inspire them to pursue ongoing careers in the field of cutting edge technology.

I have committed to make all of my departments – economic development, law, engineering, and public safety, among others - partners in this effort, and we will also engage our School District, our great medical institutions, and our other world-class institutions of higher knowledge to be part of this exciting partnership.

I want to thank Governor Cuomo and the Regional Economic Development Council for their support of this effort, and I particularly want to thank Dr. Alain Kaloyeros for his vision for this facility and, of course, for his vision at Albany Nano Tech.

So tonight, I commit to you, that from this location, not only will we continue the work of building a better City, but we will begin the work of building a better world.

It is a bold promise, but we have put into place, through the strategic partnerships we have established, the framework to make this new Smart Cities Center the epicenter for technological innovation for our region and beyond.

Last May, during his visit here, President Obama said, “I want what’s happening in Albany to happen all across the Country.”

And what's happening in Albany goes beyond the exciting global interest in the region's technology boom.

Our administration's efforts have resulted in more than \$12 billion dollars of investment in the City. The City's health care and educational institutions are investing and expanding in unprecedented ways. Downtown is undergoing a transformation into a neighborhood of choice with over \$35 million dollars in new residential units, and with the expansion and improvement of premier entertainment destinations and dining locations.

As well, our historic and diverse neighborhoods are being revitalized, and exciting projects are underway, from the Hudson River Waterfront - which has been vitally reconnected to our Downtown - to our globally-rare Pine Bush, which is in the process of a restoration project that will make it a world-class ecological preserve.

The securing of funds for the creation of this Smart Cities Center is only one of several projects within the City that will receive funding as a result of Governor Cuomo's innovative and highly competitive Regional Economic Development Council process.

Our Capitalize Albany Corporation and Department of Development and Planning expertly led our local team efforts to help over 14 important projects secure nearly \$22 million dollars in funding, that will leverage millions of dollars more. Some of the highlights of this strategic effort include:

The Albany Waterfront Performance Place project, which was awarded \$950,000 dollars to continue to develop the Albany Waterfront into a premier destination for waterfront events, performances, and recreation. This \$4 million dollar project will drive tourism and enhance Downtown through convenient access to its amenities.

Albany's neighborhoods will also benefit greatly from this round of funding. The Quail Street Corridor in Albany's education district has received nearly \$1.8 million dollars in funds for a green streets initiative to improve infrastructure and spur business development along this important mixed-use corridor.

Albany Medical Center received \$500,000 dollars for infrastructure improvements, street trees and pedestrian improvements that will complement future Medical Center investment and add to the more than half-a-billion dollars of public, private and Capitalize Albany Corporation investment in the neighborhood since the adoption of our Park South plan.

The Sheridan Hollow Village project will receive \$200,000 dollars to construct commercial spaces in an affordable mixed-use building that is part of a \$13 million dollar project that will dramatically revitalize this historic Downtown neighborhood.

Capitalize Albany Corporation received \$200,000 in funding for its Blight to Betterment program that combined with Community Development Block Grant funds and Neighborhood Stabilization Bond funds will leverage over \$2 million dollars to rehabilitate abandoned properties in the City.

These exciting projects are just a few examples of the comprehensive community and economic development work taking place in our City every day, bringing about opportunity, hope, and real results.

This work has been accomplished because of the key partnerships we have established with the State of New York, with our businesses and academic communities, and perhaps most importantly, with the residents of our City. Thousands of them have participated in hundreds of forums, neighborhood meetings

and planning groups – giving us their thoughts, their guidance and their wisdom in helping us move this great City forward.

They told us they wanted a safer City, and in response, we adopted new, exciting and innovative ways to implement community policing. As a result, the City’s Police Department has continued to enjoy double-digit reductions in index crimes, particularly in some of our more challenged neighborhoods; and as importantly, the Department has engaged the community as a whole to focus on other factors that contribute to a community’s sense of safety. Our efforts in this regard will not stop until we make Albany the safest community in the Nation.

That is what our community wants and that is our commitment.

Our citizens also told us they wanted a City with the highest possible quality of life. So we intensified our code enforcement

efforts by enacting a new department focused on that very issue. We hired 8 new code enforcement officers, and a new commissioner, and through our Law Department, we instituted an aggressive new code enforcement court, and we put landlords and property owners on notice that we have zero tolerance of their neglect of buildings and their violations of our codes.

Attention to these issues is critical to the vibrancy of our historic neighborhoods, and I believe the results of all of these efforts have been dramatic.

Our community expects no less, and that is our commitment.

That commitment is evident as well in the investment we have made to improve the City's infrastructure. We have spent tens of millions of dollars to reconstruct or repair major roadways and streets throughout the City. Many of these projects like State Street, Lark Street, North and South Pearl Streets, Delaware Avenue,

Madison Avenue, New Scotland Avenue and Central Avenue, have been catalysts for the rebirth and redevelopment of residential and commercial properties along these major corridors.

As well, our Department of General Services has been committed to the beautification of the City's parks and gardens, and our City continues to receive national recognition for these efforts.

The Department, along with my Office of Energy and Sustainability, has been at the forefront of implementing new and progressive programs for recycling, energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion. These programs have also received national recognition, and their success can be directly correlated to the two-way communication we have implemented between neighborhoods and our City administration.

Continually enhancing this two-way communication so that we are as responsive as possible to neighborhood concerns is what our residents want, and it is what we are committed to providing.

Our Fire Department is constantly engaged in community outreach and education, and the Department continues to provide emergency medical response, hazmat response, and fire and rescue response at levels that I believe make it one of the premier departments in the country.

Our Water Department provides water quality that has been ranked one of the best in the Nation.

And our youth programming has won countless national awards and recognition. Literally, throughout the year, our youth programs touch the lives of thousands of Albany's children. I am talking about sports programs in skating, boxing, swimming, karate, lacrosse, basketball, soccer, golf, tennis, and bowling.

I'm talking about educational programs, gang prevention programs, truancy abatement programs, youth build programs, and summer employment programs – all aimed at providing our young people with constructive, meaningful opportunities to learn and to grow, and ultimately, to realize their dreams.

Nothing else that we do is as important as this. It is what our children deserve, and helping our children realize their full potential has been my lifelong passion and commitment.

Moving forward, we must remain focused on all of these commitments, as well as on the exciting plans underway for further redevelopment of Downtown, and on our plans for neighborhood redevelopment – particularly in our Arbor Hill, South End, Park South and Education District communities.

I have spoken recently as well of the need to rethink our concept for convention center facilities and I am grateful that Governor Cuomo's proposed budget keeps in place funding for this project. While I believe it is unrealistic to believe that we can expect New York State to fund a nearly \$300 million dollar facility, I believe it is totally realistic to move forward in collaboration with the State and with Albany County, to improve existing facilities at the Times Union Center and at the Empire State Plaza, and to include the construction of a new ballroom and hotel that would connect into these facilities via the existing walkway.

These disparate components, taken together as a comprehensive plan, can give us convention facilities that will allow us to attract the kind of conventions that I believe would want to come to the State Capital, to the world capital for Nanotechnology, and to one of the leading centers in the Nation for medicine, law and scientific research.

All of these plans and more are within our reach in the months ahead, and I am committed to moving them forward.

Maintaining all of these commitments has not been without its challenges. I have said before, there is always a temptation to cut back in the face of rising costs and limited revenues. While we have made painful fiscal cuts, we have not compromised on the delivery of services. Instead, we have chosen to find newer, smarter ways to do more to enhance the vibrancy of our City without placing more of a financial burden on our citizens.

Toward that end, as you know, I have lobbied continuously for more aid for our City. And over the years, those efforts have been extremely successful. We've secured tens of millions of dollars in State and Federal grants for infrastructure, public safety, and for economic development. We've also secured millions more in direct State aid – particularly with our PILOT on the Empire State Plaza,

which over 30 years will result in over half a billion dollars in critical revenue to our City.

I am most grateful to Governor Cuomo for his ongoing commitment to our Capital City, and in particular, for his assistance in advancing 19-a PILOT payments. He understands the challenges facing municipal governments and has been a remarkable ally in our efforts to lessen the financial burden on our real property taxpayers. I am grateful for his leadership and on a personal level, for his great friendship.

In the days and weeks ahead, I will continue to press the case to our State leaders, that Albany receives far less in per capita financial assistance than its peer cities in the State, and that Albany should receive additional State aid as well as equitable compensation for State-owned tax-exempt property within the City.

If we received State aid commensurate with our peer cities, it is estimated we would receive an additional \$40 million plus dollars annually. Imagine the additional programs and economic development we could then achieve.

Even so, I am proud of what we have accomplished. Proud of the budgetary and management practices we have put into place, and that because of those practices, we continue to have one of the highest bond ratings in the State. Proud of the strategic partnerships we have developed with New York State, with our County, with our School District, with private industry, and with our many important not-for-profit institutions, particularly with our great arts and cultural institutions, and our great colleges and universities.

I am grateful to have with us tonight, SUNY Albany's new President, Dr. Robert Jones; St. Rose's new President, Dr. David Szczerbacki; and Albany Law School's new Dean, Penny Andrews –

we welcome you to our community and I look forward to working closely with each of you. I also welcome tonight, my good friends, SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher; Dr. Alain Kaloyeros, President of the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering; Dr. Vincent Verdile, Dean of Albany Medical College; Dr. Lea Johnson, President of Maria College; Dr. Susan Scrimshaw, President of Sage Colleges; and Dr. Andrew Matonak, President of Hudson Valley Community College.

Our strategic partnerships with these institutions have not only enhanced important City programs, but they have also enabled us to leverage so much more than we could have achieved acting alone.

Many of these partnerships have resulted in award-winning approaches to complex problems – our Truancy Abatement Program, for example, which works in collaboration with the City School District, the County of Albany, and the District Attorney’s

Office, has become a national model. In this area and in so many others, we continue to lead the way.

So, yes, I'm proud that over the years we have been named one of America's Most Innovative Cities, and one of the Best Places for College Graduates; proud that we have been named one of America's Best Job Markets, and one of America's Best Cities for Job Growth. Proud that we have been named one of America's Best Places to Raise a Family, and one of America's Greenest Cities; and proud of our being named Tree City USA for 10 years running, and proud that we've been called one of America's Most Bike-Friendly Cities.

I am particularly proud of winning the U.S. Conference of Mayor's premier recognition, the City Livability Award, and of course, so proud of being named an All-America City by the prestigious National Civic League.

But most of all, I am proud of the people of Albany – they are the reason why we continue to be a great place to live, work and raise a family, and any success we have achieved is directly a result of their commitment to our City.

In years past, I've given you reports on such things as the number of permits issued; miles of roads paved; inspections completed; affordable housing units renovated – all of these statistics are important. They of course help tell the story of our accomplishments. And these statistics can be found in the departmental reports filed on our City's website.

But tonight, rather than recite that information, I want to share with you some very special stories – the stories behind the statistics - the stories of the lives affected by what we do as an administration, and why we are committed to this effort. These are the stories of Albany, and I am proud to share them with you.

- **Let me tell you about Angelo Maddox. Angelo grew up in Brooklyn, where at a young age, he fell into the wrong crowd, got into trouble and was incarcerated as a Youthful Offender. When he was released, he moved to Albany to live with his aunt and uncle, and in Albany, Angelo turned his life around, graduating from SUNY Albany in 2005, ready, as he says, to take on the business world.**

In 2006, he opened Young, Fresh & Fly at the Coliseum, a recently renovated Downtown retail incubator, and he quickly built his business into the area's premier urban clothing store. In 2010, based on that success, he opened a second store called Fancy, specializing in women's fashions.

His entrepreneurship, vision and enthusiasm caught the eye of the Downtown Albany Business Improvement District, and Angelo was asked to serve on their newly created Retail Committee.

Working with the BID to attract new retailers to Downtown, he began identifying possible new locations to expand his own business, and last September, Angelo and I cut the ribbon on Fresh & Fly, at 13 South Pearl Street.

He reports that in the first four months alone, sales at his new location have increased by 25%. He says he is proof that Downtown Albany is the place to be, and he cites Downtown businesses like Yono's, Lodge's, and Jack's, as further evidence that businesses here can thrive for the long-term, and he says he intends to be around for the long-term, just as Fresh, and just as Fly.

I have no doubt he will continue to succeed and I am thrilled that Angelo is with us tonight, and pleased to tell you that Angelo's story is the Story of Albany.

- When Amar Lall accepted a position at a leading technology**

company in Coxsackie, New York, he and his wife Nada began to look around the Capital Region to find a new home. Friends and family suggested various suburban communities, but Amar and Nada wanted to live in an urban, downtown neighborhood.

While researching the area, Nada learned about the \$9 million dollar project underway by the Rosenblum Companies to convert 17 Chapel Street into high-end Downtown condominiums.

As soon as she visited 17 Chapel, Nada knew that she had found her home. Amar and Nada fell in love not only with their new building, but with all of the architecture, arts and culture they discovered in our Downtown.

Amar and Nada tell us that it is the charm of the City that continues to remind them they made the right decision in purchasing their condo, and they enthusiastically encourage others to become part of their new neighborhood.

We are thrilled to have Amar and Nada as ambassadors for Downtown living and grateful they are here with us tonight (by the way, they pointed out to me earlier that for them it was a short walk getting here). I am happy to say that their story is the Story of Albany.

- **Our stories are not only about great people, but great companies as well. Like the story of Sark Wire USA and their dynamic U.S. manager, Tolga Kaan Isik.**

Tasked with finding a prime location in the United States for his company to begin production for its North American market, Tolga came to Albany from his native Turkey in 2008 and was, he says, immediately attracted by Albany's accessibility and our business- friendly environment.

Working with Capitalize Albany Corporation, he opened Sark's first U.S. processing facility, a \$10 million dollar investment that brought a vacant 50,000 square foot building back to life and created more than 50 local manufacturing jobs.

Tolga tells us that business is booming at the Albany site and that, in fact, Sark is planning a \$2 million dollar building expansion project that when complete will create a significant number of new quality jobs.

We are delighted that Tolga is with us tonight. Tolga, please tell your Chairman and Board in Turkey how pleased we are that your company is doing so well here, and that your story is now part of the Story of Albany.

- **On a cold December morning in 2004, firefighters were awakened to an alarm of fire at 356 Leedale Street. Firefighters from the Delaware Avenue Station, Engine #9, Rescue #9 and**

Ladder #4, arrived to find heavy fire coming from the front windows of a small home in the quiet neighborhood.

They also found that there were two young children trapped on the first floor. Under heavy smoke and fire conditions, firefighters entered the building and quickly located two unconscious children, eleven year old Zachary Middleton and his twin sister Zora. Heat from the fire was rapidly becoming unbearable, as firefighters quickly passed the lifeless bodies of the 2 children through a bedroom window to waiting firefighter paramedics, who then promptly initiated advanced life support. As a direct result of those heroic efforts, both children were rescued without serious injury.

Years later, inspired by the heroism that saved his life and his sister's, Zachary would become one of the first members of the City of Albany's Fire Department Explorer Post Program. Zachary is now a college student with aspirations of becoming an Albany

firefighter after graduation. Zachary tells us that he can think of no finer way to give back to the community and to the Department to whom he owes so much. Zachary, we look forward to your realizing your dream, and we are so grateful that you are here with us tonight and that your story and Zora's, are part of the Story of Albany.

- Omar Trimino was raised on Clinton Avenue and was involved in the City's Gang Prevention Program since its inception in 1999. Like many of the young people in his neighborhood, he faced gang pressures every day while growing up, but he wanted a positive alternative from the streets. He says he found that alternative in the City's Program, which focused on teaching him positive life skills and as importantly, surrounded him with other youth who were similarly goal oriented.**

After high school, Omar attended Caldwell College and graduated in May 2006. He is currently working as a Senior Accountant/Financial Analyst at Tata Global Beverages, and is the

owner of his own bookkeeping business called Brighter Future Financials. And, he is also currently pursuing his CPA.

Omar credits our Gang Prevention Program and Cook Barrett, its Director, for much of his success. To quote Omar, “The Gang Prevention Program and Saturday Night Teen Program were my saving grace. Those programs provided me with a safe outlet where I could be a teenager for a few hours every weekend without worry. As I moved on and went away to college, I always looked forward to coming home to the Saturday Night Teen Program. I was proud that this program was still around saving lives, as I believed it saved my life.”

Omar is with us tonight, and Omar, we are so proud of you, and proud that your story is the Story of Albany.

- Steve Ellis and Mike Holtzman founded their Albany-based**

startup company, WhoSay, in 2010, as an innovative media platform for famous artists, athletes and other personalities to manage their interactions with fans in a direct way while maintaining ownership of the content. Starting with just 3 employees, the company has grown in leaps and bounds and now has 35 employees, as well as more than a thousand active celebrity clients with over one billion social media fan connections.

With offices now also in New York City and Los Angeles, WhoSay chose Albany for their corporate headquarters because of Albany's availability of venture capital for innovative entrepreneurs; our proximity to high caliber educational institutions, and our high quality of life.

WhoSay's high-tech innovation and entrepreneurship, along with what is happening at Albany Nano Tech and at Global Foundries, is putting the Capital Region on the national and international stage as the place to be for technological innovation.

We are grateful Steve and Mike are with us tonight, and that their story of success is the Story of Albany.

- **As I have said since the day I took office, our children should be our first priority, and one of the programs I have most strongly supported is our Police Athletic League's Explorer Post Program.**

Like the Explorer Program offered by our Fire Department, it is a career education program for high school aged youth who are interested in the field of law enforcement. Working directly with members of the Police Department, explorers discover career opportunities, leadership experience, life skills, and character education. The mission of the Program is to help instill core values in young people, to prepare them to make ethical choices throughout their lives so they can achieve their full potential, and also to hopefully cultivate their interests in becoming a police officer.

One young explorer joined the Program during her junior year of high school, primarily because of her interest, even at that young age, in community service and law enforcement.

It was there that she met Detective Rick Romand and Sergeant Amy Morgan, and she immediately became determined to become a member of the Albany Police Department.

Continuing her quest to meet her full potential, she graduated from high school and continued on to earn her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from SUNY Potsdam. After college, she returned to Albany to fulfill her dreams, and on January 12, 2012, she officially became OFFICER Nicole Volpi of the Albany Police Department.

Officer Volpi now spends every working day serving to protect the lives of the people of this City. Officer Volpi, along with

Detective Romand and Sergeant Morgan, are with us tonight. We are so grateful to each of them for their service to our City, and grateful that Nicole's story is the Story of Albany.

Individually and collectively, these residents, these business owners, these young people, these heroes - they and thousands more like them are the reason we do what we do; they are the reason why our City's story is unique and why it's a story of success.

But, I know, as well as anyone, that there are countless other stories in our City as well, stories of hardship, of despair, and of need, and those too are a part of the Story of Albany, and why the work of building a better City never ends. So long as any child still lives in poverty, so long as any part of our community still struggles, so long as any individual still suffers, the effort must go on.

I recently read an article in the New York Times about a city in South Carolina, called Little Mountain, that can't find anyone

who wants to run for Mayor. Imagine that. A councilmember quoted by the Times, said the reason why is because “being Mayor isn’t easy.” The population of Little Mountain, 292. The population of Albany, nearly 100,000. Yes, being Mayor isn’t easy, but the effort to touch and improve the lives of our incredible citizens is what makes this job not a hardship, but a joy.

So for me, the commitment endures – a commitment that I have literally dedicated my life to – as a teacher, as a school administrator, and for nearly 20 years as the Mayor of this great City.

It is a commitment born out my love for Albany and for its people, and it is a commitment that is as strong and as passionate today as it was on that first day in office – a commitment not only to build a better Albany, but to build the best Albany, and with your help, and God’s grace, we will continue to move that commitment forward.

In closing, I want to thank my wonderful wife and family for their constant love and support. I also want to thank all of my department heads, deputies, and our entire City workforce, as well each one of you, for your hard work and dedication to our City.

But most of all, I want to again thank the people of Albany for their commitment to our City. They are the reason why I can say once again and with great confidence, that the state of our City is strong and our future is bright. May God bless you all and may He continue to bless this great City.