



State of the City 2009

**Presented by Stephen Cook, President of the Board of Directors St. Catharines –
Thorold Chamber of Commerce**

January 30, 2009

Good Afternoon Mayor Brian McMullan, Mayors from Niagara's Municipalities, Regional and Municipal Councillors, Members of the Chamber Board of Directors, and Guests. It is with great pleasure as President of the Board of Directors of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce that I welcome you to the 2009 St. Catharines State of the City Address. As the President of the Board of Directors for the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce and VP of Operations at Credit Bureau Services Canada I understand the economic challenges ahead for our community. The Chamber prides itself on being the voice of business, and as such, - in this year, - at this time, - renews' our commitment to ensuring that there is a vibrant business and investment environment in Niagara. It is also our responsibility as a member driven organization representing over 1200 businesses and 28,000 employees to seek synergies and opportunities within the government framework that will provide the business community with a competitive edge and make Niagara a viable investment destination.

In Latin they Say “Works are Harder than Words” And in 2009, this will become emphatically apparent. Our words this year must translate into our works, into projects, into stimulus, into a stronger investment environment and a competitive business community. On the Chambers part our Words are

already our Works. We will continue to provide our membership this year the opportunities to grow their business, develop business to business relationships and continue to advocate to ensure that your business is successful. We continue our pledge to work together with those in all orders government to facilitate the kind of growth that Niagara has been eagerly awaiting. Already, the Chamber is working on a breadth of issues in consultation with the City of St. Catharines, be it fairness within the Municipal Property Assessment system for businesses or looking to transform St. Catharines Downtown into a bustling hub of economic activity in Niagara. In working towards achieving this, we look to other orders of government to provide relief during these times in certain areas. We take this opportunity to call upon St. Catharines as we re-dedicate ourselves to work through the Provincial – Municipal Fiscal Framework Review, to resolve the issues of the Capping Claw-Back. The Capping Claw-Back creates significant disparities in the level of taxes paid by businesses in Niagara with a disadvantageous burden placed on St. Catharines. Since 1998 businesses in St. Catharines have paid 25 million in taxes that have left our community for other communities in Niagara. Mayor, Councillors – OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN NO LONGER AFFORD THIS BURDEN. We ask you to join us in lobbying the provincial government to remedy this disparity.

St. Catharines – Thorold and indeed Niagara working together has become an even greater reality through the St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council. Alongside partners in government, business and post-secondary education, the Prosperity Council has produced the Paths to Prosperity Report. The soon to be release Report is an action plan that, focuses on a number of Niagara’s assets, and strategizes ways in which each of the partners and the community will play a role in diversifying and growing Niagara’s economy. To that End - the Chamber plans to continue being a strong partner at the table, be it to get funding for vital economic development infrastructure like the Niagara Health and Bio-Sciences Centre at Brock or Working to bring more partners on board for the Performing Arts Centre that will transform our downtown. The St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council, created by Mayor McMullan has been a catalyst for business, government and academia consulting and working together, and developed a business – government relationship that only stands to benefit our community. Together we will work to re-build the vibrancy of our community.

Though in some areas we may disagree, critique budgets, and speak against over-zealous regulation. We do so with the sole intention of ensuring there is a strong and vibrant business base in Niagara that can support it’s planned

growth. The City of St. Catharines must be commended for working closely with partners including the Chamber, to achieve its objectives. Through the Chamber's participation in the committee process, working closely with City departments and presenting before Council, we have developed a working relationship that provides us with an understanding of the balancing act that the City must perform. Sound Public Sector Finance is a critical means of keeping government expenditure and taxes affordable. The Chamber therefore supports the City of St. Catharines in better managing its Human Resources cost, through the introduction of its new attendance management program. The savings that the City will achieve from this program must be leveraged to create growth opportunities for St. Catharines. Government at this time must make its decisions with an acute sensitivity to the financial difficulties that the business community is experiencing. That is why the Chamber applauds Regional Council for recently voting for a strict adherence to the 3.4% guideline to this year's Regional Operating Budget, - and rejecting any agency or departmental budget that stipulated otherwise. We believe that by managing costs and running public organizations in a business-like fashion that we will see a more streamlined, cost effective public system that is not adversely burdensome to the tax payer.

In closing, the great William Shakespeare once said “Nothing Comes From Nothing” If we do not set the bar high, leverage our assets, work together in areas where we have common interest, - Then we cannot expect positive outcomes, we cannot expect vibrancy in our community and we cannot expect that this will be the community that we all envision for the future. Our Words this Year must be our Works, and our works this year can only be achieved together.

Again, thank you all for joining us this afternoon, please enjoy your lunch and we look forward to the Mayor’s Remarks shortly.

Thank you