



## **State of the Region**

### **Remarks by the Chair of the Board for the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce**

March 25, 2011

**Good afternoon, and welcome to the State of the Region Luncheon. On behalf of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce, I would like to welcome our partners in this event:**

- The Greater Fort Erie Chamber of Commerce**
- The Grimsby & District Chamber of Commerce**
- The Lincoln Chamber of Commerce,**
- The Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce**
- The Niagara on the Lake Chamber of Commerce**
- The Port Colborne-Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce**
- The Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce**
- And the West Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.**

**I would also like to acknowledge one of the founders of Niagara’s newest Chamber, Steve Megannety of the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce – which aims to provide a regional voice for Niagara’s business community.**

**A stronger Niagara includes a diverse, modern, and robust private sector – and it’s our collective goal to be the voice of business in Niagara. Together, we represent more than 3500 businesses – businesses that pay property taxes, employ people, and contribute to our community. Without a strong and vibrant private sector, there can be no sustainable economic recovery, and certainly no return to prosperity or growth.**

**Through collaboration on events like today’s State of the Region, the Chambers are ensuring that the interests of business are being clearly heard. Given the interests of our members extend their municipal boundaries, it is critical that the Chamber**

**organizations in Niagara continue to evolve and work together to remain relevant to their members.**

**The Chambers have come together on a number of advocacy initiatives this year, one of which was the Chamber's report on *Supporting Prosperity through Effective Government in Niagara*. This report was done through the Niagara Chambers member network. This broad based business report identified a number of ways in which the interaction between business and government can be improved and I'd like to highlight two of these areas in my remarks today.**

**Niagara must think, act and market itself as a Region. We must put the days of having five economic development offices at the lower tier level behind us. We can no longer present ourselves to the Ontario, Canada, and the World as a collection of municipalities that are in conflict and competition. If Niagara is going to compete on a global scale to attract and retain businesses, it cannot continue to have the fragmented economic development framework that it currently does. There must be a single economic development agency that represents the interests of Niagara – including its 12 municipalities. This would provide for a more strategic and focused approach to providing services for existing businesses and for attracting new investments. A single economic agency can provide regionally coordinated service for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). As small and medium sized enterprises are the economic foundation in communities across Niagara, this coordinated service would provide the support that is required for businesses from Wainfleet to Fort Erie to Grimsby and all points in between.**

**When it comes to investment and business attraction strategies, a single agency will be able to leverage all of Niagara's assets. Economic Development Services are one of the most critical services that businesses interact with municipal government,**

**establishing a new, innovative economic development framework will be important for Niagara sustainability.**

**As a committed partner in Niagara's growth, we believe that sound public finances are the cornerstone of a sustainable community. We would like to take this opportunity to again recommend the establishment of the Office of the Auditor General at the Region. An independent Auditor General would conduct audits that focus on efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money of municipal operations and program delivery. It would have legislated powers, privileges and immunities that provide the necessary tools to conduct thorough audits with little or no external impediments. The business community believes that this role would greatly strengthen the relationship between business and government in Niagara and help establish more efficient regional and municipal operations. In no way does this recommendation diminish the great work of past of and present councils and staff, in fact it goes to enhance it.**

**Supporting prosperity involves everyone in this room today. Already there has been strong leadership provided by the Regional Chair and this Council on these important matters. We are looking forward to working with the Chair, Mayors, Councilors and Staff to reach the full potential of our collective community.**

**Niagara's resiliency in facing the challenges of today is remarkable. Governments in Niagara have an important role and can send a powerful signal to the private sector that this region is ready for investment by working with them to address their needs and concerns.**

**Thank you**