



## **State of the Region Address 2009**

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

**April 2, 2009**

**Good Afternoon Regional Chair Peter Partington, Mayors from various Niagara Municipalities, Regional and Municipal Councillors, Business Members, 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 State of the Region address.**

**It all starts with business, it all starts with a successful private sector business earning a profit, making a payroll, employing our citizens. Only private sector business generates the revenue necessary to finance our public health care, our public education, our public services and public safety net. When the Chamber advocates for business, we do so on behalf of our members, but there is a greater overall good. What is good for business is good for the entire community.**

**So we come together today faced with an enormous challenge, the challenge to sustain, expand and diversify our local economy in the midst of a Global Economic Recession.**

**With an economy rooted in traditional industry, fighting to survive....must survive. As plans and work must be done today to expand and diversify into advanced manufacturing and green technology tomorrow.**

**An economy in Niagara that now sees the majority of its wealthiest citizens employed in the public, must expand its private sector as we move to a more economically sustainable model. We must expand our private sector as we transition and capture emerging sectors in the knowledge based economy.**

**So how are we going to collectively accomplish such a goal?**

**Of course answers are complex, similarly in business, the right formula may be found in the accumulation of doing “all the little things well.” Our future success ultimately is dependent on several factors, such as strategic investment and smart public policy creating a business friendly environment and a culture of progress with the courage to change.**

**As business leaders, as political leaders, we must never stop asking ourselves the question – Are we being part of the solution? Are we on the right side of issues, are we taking positions that contribute to the macro-economic health**

**and welfare of Niagara, or are we falling victim to the same old stereotypes and parochial tendencies that has too often defined Niagara.**

**The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce understands that part of the solution is business, academia and government coming together, working in sync for a common purpose.**

**The St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council is just that, a collection of business and academic leaders in Niagara, created by local government and facilitated by the Chamber. Leaders volunteering their time to create an Economic Action Plan with defined responsibilities and metrics.**

**The Paths to Prosperity Report identifies existing businesses in emerging sectors, along with geographical advantages, and incorporates it into a strategic plan designed to incubate, commercialize and expand these niches in thriving economic generators. Yet such a plan needs all partners on board, which includes Regional Government, active involvement to be implemented.**

**Soon, the St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council Path's to Prosperity will be presented to Regional Council and we look forward to their support,**

**but what else can Regional Government do for business? What else can Regional Government do to be a part of the overall solution?**

**Business, in the Paths to Prosperity report, firmly believes that a prosperous economic future is dependent on retaining and expanding business and sectors in Niagara.**

**Yet, according to the Niagara Economic Development Corporation, they have mandate to take a hands off approach to retaining and expanding existing business. Respectfully, this does not make sense to business, and we ask the Region to re-examine that role.**

**What else can Regional government do for business to be part of the solution?**

**Does business support moving the Niagara Regional Police Headquarters from a downtown location to a Greenfield site? Does business believe in spending \$150 million dollars of taxpayer money on another public building? Could this be a part of the solution? ABSOLUTELY NOT!**

**The business community expects value for money, and expects all institutions to adhere to the Provincial Places to Grow Act in keeping with the principles of Smart Growth.**

**What else can Regional government do for business, what else can Regional politicians do to be part of the solution?**

**The business community would like to see Regional government lower the industrial tax ratio. Our industrial tax ratio is still above the provincial average. Industry has told us, that in recent years they have expanded to Niagara when we started to bring down the Industrial Tax Ratio, it is time once again to bring it down, bring it below the provincial average. Lets get industry coming to Niagara.**

**Currently the Province's Capping and Claw-Back legislation is still putting an unfair burden on Commercial Property Taxpayers with lower assessed values. Business owners in Niagara who have not seen an increase in their property value are unfairly subsidizing Business owners with increased assessments. We respectfully ask the Niagara Region to work towards and explore a Regional solution.**

**What else can the Regional Government do for business, how else can Regional politicians be a part of the solution?**

**Currently, Regional Council is considering increasing Development Charges, from 19% to 50%. In light of Provincial money coming downwards to the Region and the Provincial responsibilities going upwards, the business community must ask, is there a better way?**

**Now is not the time to deter development. Find another way. Niagara's future can be bright....very bright! We look forward to hearing from Chair Partington about some of the new and exciting things that are happening in Niagara.**

**The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce will do its part to advocate for workable solutions and work with government to reach our potential. Now is the time for political leaders to lead, now is the time for political leaders to do what is right even if it is unpopular. Because in this economy, it won't be the strongest that survive, it will be the most adaptable to change.**

**Thank you and enjoy your lunch**