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County Executive McCoy: Experience Albany County, “A place for tourism, a place to call home”

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Vista from the hilltowns

Daniel McCoy,
County Executive

Albany County in many respects is one of the most dynamic of the sixty-two counties of New York State. From the Hilltowns of the Helderbergs, to the cities of Albany, Watervliet and Cohoes along the shores of the Hudson, it is a unique blend of urban excitement and rural relaxation. Each town and city has its own unique and rich history, and among the urban, suburban and rural areas, each have their own features to offer and incredible sights to see. For these reasons, among others, I believe Albany County is truly the ideal place to live; and increasingly people are seeing that same thing as our population continues to grow.

If you're here to visit, there's a good chance you are coming in through the Albany International Airport, the second busiest airport in upstate New York, with 1.4 million people walking through the terminals each year. While it has always been a critical part of our infrastructure and the local economy, it's getting a major boost from investments from the County and New York State. The project includes a new, 1,000 unit parking garage, a facelift for the terminal like new escalators,

waiting rooms and restrooms, and a reimagining of Exit 4 on I-87 that will make airport access faster and more efficient.

Lake Summer - Lawson Lake, NY

Once you're here, there is plenty to do. You can visit Washington Park, one of the largest in upstate New York, or you can take a walk down nearby Lark St. and visit our unique local shops, restaurants and bars. At night, we have some amazing and historic venues if you're looking for live music, comedy, sports and other shows, like The Times Union Center, The Palace Performing Arts Center and The Egg. One of the all-america city's most defining characteristics is the beautiful architecture that has been preserved over the years and is part of the reason Livability ranked Albany 29th among the 100 Best Places to Live for 2019.

We also just invested nearly \$20 million in the county-owned Times Union Center, which has been a catalyst for attracting world-class acts and bring in more patrons and fans than ever before. We have sold out seats for the likes of Elton John and Ariana Grande, and continue to welcome the NCAA time and again, including the men's and women's regionals and look forward to hosting the Division I Men's Hockey East Regional in 2020.

For history buffs out there, almost no place in the country offers more, with our rich Dutch and Colonial history. The New York State Museum and the Capitol Building are in close proximity and are even connected by an underground concourse, which is helpful during some of the colder winter months. When the weather is more forgiving, walking through the Empire State Plaza is always a memorable experience with outdoor sculptures by world-class artists, fountains and amazing architecture. Trips through the museum are free, and knowledgeable Capitol staff regularly give guided tours of a truly iconic building.

Take a drive through Albany County and you'll experience the natural beauty of our Hilltown communities. One of the gems of Albany County is Lawson Lake, located in the town of Feura Bush. Since 2012, we have transformed it into a regional attraction for hundreds of families and their children each year. We've added a new pavilion, parking lot, state-of-the-art amphitheater, handicap-accessible fishing docks, playground, basketball court, and more. Not only is the park great for recreational activities throughout the year like hiking, fishing, snowshoeing and cross country skiing, it's also been a place for local organizations like the Boys & Girls Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, and the Pride Center to learn about ecosystems and STEM.

Hudson Shores Park - Watervliet, NY

One of my favorite attractions and one of my proudest accomplishments is the Albany County Helderberg-Hudson Rail Trail, which spans nine miles, and connects the rural regions of the County like of Voorheesville and Slingerlands with the city streets of Albany and the Hudson River.

Having just completed the Rail Trail in October of last year, countless residents and tourists alike can walk, run and bike the paved path with plenty to do along the way. People can stop in at any of our local shops and restaurants along the way and we have placed workout equipment to enhance the health impact of this public space. There's a Little Free Library and donated benches dedicated to loved ones if you're looking to relax.

We've also added a bike repair station, sun block dispensers and picnic areas to picnic, rest, relax and just enjoy nature. If you don't have your own bike, a partnership with the Capital District Transportation Authority and CDPHP ensures a handful of them are available to rent at the trailhead in Albany. The Rail Trail just hosted the inaugural Helderberg to Hudson Half Marathon that had more than 2,500 people sign up to participate from all over the State and even from Canada.

If you do take time to visit Albany County, you may just wind up wanting to stay. Many of the same reasons that make Albany County an ideal place for tourism, also make it an incredible place to work, own a home and raise a family. For the sixth year in a row, our budget has remained under the state tax cap, and we were even able to give local businesses and property owners a tax cut this year, making the county all that more affordable.

Unemployment in Albany County has remained low in the years following the recession compared to other counties. The latest State Department of Labor reports put it at 3.7%, the third lowest rate in the entire state and below the U.S. jobless rate at 3.8%. Over the last year, the Capital Region had the third highest rate of job growth out of any metro area across New York, and it's one of the few bright spots for the upstate economy.

In my State of the County this year, I announced a new partnership with the highly regarded consulting firm Camoin Associates to prepare a new strategic plan for economic development that will utilize and promote Albany County's incredible assets. We are taking a deep-dive into how Albany County can continue to be a catalyst for further growth for the entire region.

Aside from the economy, thanks to our policies over the years, we have also been consistently improving our standing in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation "County Health Rankings and Roadmaps" which show the overall health of counties compared to others throughout New York and the United States. Albany County ranked 7th among New York's 62 counties in terms of general "Health Factors," which include things like individual behaviors and social economic factors, and 5th in the "Clinical Care" category, which includes the rate of uninsured individuals and the availability of physicians.

Additionally, our County Health Department earned national accreditation earlier this year, something few other government health departments have achieved. By establishing rigorous standard of practice, Albany County is now listed among less than 10% of the others and will allow

us to continue building on our progress.

So on behalf of our residents, I encourage you to visit Albany County and see all that we have to offer.

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