

North Country Symposium Outcomes

(As of February, 2008)

"The mission of the annual Symposium is to convene stakeholders in northern New York to explore and ultimately enhance the region's economic, environmental, and educational vitality." The Annual Symposium is sponsored by the Ellen C. Burt '42 Endowment for North Country Education at St. Lawrence University. The Endowment also supports education in the North Country by providing 5-8 "North Country Prospective Educator" scholarships per year to graduate-level students preparing for teaching and administrative certification.

Since the inaugural Symposium in May of 2003, the North Country Symposium has had a significant positive impact upon the North Country region of New York State.

The Symposium acts as an annual forum event, convening a diverse cross-section of more than 100 community stakeholders to discuss ways to further its mission and create a stronger North Country. The annual event entails a combination of updates on regional initiatives, planning sessions, and a keynote speaker(s) providing advice and assistance. The event also provides opportunities for regional organizations to exhibit their activities and for attendees to engage in diverse networking.

A sustainable development initiative at heart, one of the Symposium's fundamental concepts has been that of "Going Local". In this concept, the region attempts to achieve economic, environmental, and social benefits through local ownership and "import substitution," i.e., producing goods and services locally rather than purchasing them from suppliers outside the region. Doing so promotes self-sufficiency and a stronger sense of community. Relying on locally produced goods and services strengthens the economy by keeping more dollars circulating within the local system, thereby increasing its "economic multiplier effect" while plugging leakages of capital and human resources out of the region.

Past Symposia¹:

The 1st Annual North Country Symposium featured organizational support and keynote address from Michael Shuman, a leading national expert in the Going Local movement.² The theme of this first Symposium was "Going Local: Capitalizing on our Resources in St. Lawrence County."

Important in putting the Symposium into motion, Mr. Shuman first performed an analysis of the North Country economy, identifying the region's economic assets and resources and where dollars are 'leaking' from the local economy.³ Attendees of the first Symposium were provided with this background information and educated on the Going Local concepts. They then organized into ten action/research teams representing the various sectors of the economy (i.e., energy, housing, retail, etc.) The action teams analyzed their sectors and identified initiatives that could be implemented locally to

¹ For more information on past Symposia, see also the Annual Symposium section of this web site:

<http://www.northcountysymposium.org/annualsymposium.shtml>.

² Michael Shuman is the author of the books "Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age" and "The Small-Mart Revolution: How Local Businesses are beating the Global Competition." The North Country Symposium is featured in a chapter of the latter work.

³ The St. Lawrence County Planning Office later performed a SWOT (Strength Weakness Opportunities Threats) analysis for the Symposium endeavor. These analyses and other research reports can be viewed on the Symposium website at

<http://www.northcountysymposium.org/researchreports.shtml>.

build upon the region's assets while plugging leakages from the economy. The teams established plans for executing those initiatives and also identified indicators to track performance.⁴

This approach of collaborative planning has continued through the subsequent years of the Symposium, and has had some exciting results, as described below.

The 2nd Annual Symposium was themed "Our Community, Our Future: Building on Local Assets in St. Lawrence County" and again featured Michael Shuman as a speaker and organizer. Keynote speaker for the event was Stephen Blackmer of the Northern Forest Center, who spoke on program development that links local communities to broader regional partnerships. This Symposium provided opportunities for action teams to meet, plan, and report on progress.

The 3rd Annual Symposium was themed "Strengthening Local Economies through Collaboration among Community and Educational Institutions." Representatives from Colgate University formed an opening panel, explaining how they had partnered with their local community to the mutual benefit of both. Four community leaders presented on initiatives that had grown out of the Symposium. The presidents of St. Lawrence University, Clarkson University, SUNY Canton, and SUNY Potsdam provided a panel presentation on activities of the Associated Colleges of St. Lawrence County. Michael Shuman presented on new collaborative mechanisms for community development. The 3rd Symposium was followed by a special Youth Symposium (discussed below).

The 4th Annual Symposium, themed "Seizing the Initiative in St. Lawrence County" featured a panel of speakers presenting on new initiatives in St. Lawrence County. The panelists were:

- Dr. Daniel Sullivan, President, St. Lawrence University
- Shannon Brown, SLU Coordinator for Community Development
- Karen St. Hilaire, Executive Director, St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Anthony Collins, President, Clarkson University
- Dr. William Vitek, Director, Clarkson Ethics Initiative
- Judy Aldrich, Chair, SLC Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board

This event provided opportunities for community development brainstorming and a question-and-answer session.

The 5th Annual Symposium, in April of 2007, focused on "*Collaborative Planning for Sustainable Development in the North Country.*" Ed Murphy, Director of the New York State Workforce Development Institute provided a keynote. In the morning, a panel of community leaders presented on a number of initiatives in the planning or implementation stages within the region. These included:

- A "North Country 1st! Card" concept aimed at promoting shopping at local businesses first.
- The "Keep our Energy Dollars at Home" initiative, aimed at using locally-produced biomass to meet our energy needs.
- Business development programs at Clarkson University.
- Programs promoting local entrepreneurship with our school-aged youth.
- Efforts to promote sustainable air service in the North Country.
- Investigations into the possibility of combining athletic and lodging facilities in St. Lawrence County to host large athletic events, thereby increasing tourism income.

⁴ See the action teams section of our website at <http://www.northcountrysymposium.org/actionteams.shtml>.

- Sustainable population recruitment efforts by the St. Lawrence County Office of Economic Development and St. Lawrence University, known as “Come Farm With Us” and “Coming Home.”

The afternoon then provided time for the action/research teams to meet and establish plans to support the initiatives presented in the morning or other new initiatives as the action teams saw fit. Exciting programs are underway pursuant to those sessions. These include the Education team’s plans for a career exploration and pre-tech/prep pilot program in the county’s K-12 education system, and the Energy action team’s plans to “Keep our Energy Dollars at Home.”

The upcoming 6th Annual Symposium in April will illustrate the connection between the Going Local approach and sustainability, using initiatives growing out of the Symposium as a lens to viewing this connection. Again the event will provide time for action teams to meet for planning on emerging initiatives in the North Country. Providing the keynote address will be Charles Fluharty, former Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute.

Successful Initiatives:

A number of initiatives that were created or supported by these action/research teams have been successful and have had an important impact on the North Country. Examples of these successful initiatives include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

- Growing out of the work of the Education team, the Learner Centered Resource Collaborative⁵ hosted a Youth Symposium in 2005. This initiative was aimed at joining local youth, educators, businesses, organizations and entrepreneurs to promote stronger integration of schools within communities and enhance youth’s appreciation of career opportunities in the region. Teams designed standards-based activities with assessments based on local businesses.
- A Farm-to-School program was established to connect local food growers/producers with local institutional consumers. This has since developed into the North Country Grown Collaborative, Inc.
- The St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce helped to establish the Northern Adirondack Trading Cooperative. NATC's purpose is to improve the marketing performance of local cottage businesses through the use of technology and e-commerce. To improve marketing performance, the project teaches entrepreneurs, artisans, and producers how to begin or to improve their online business. The project uses the combination of business development training, micro loan funding, and the internet to assist vendors in reaching a worldwide market.⁶
- The energy action team has continually worked to “Keep our Energy Dollars at Home.” A current focus of this effort is in promoting local growth and production of biomass (particularly wood and grass pellets) to meet local energy needs. The action team is currently defining the county’s “fiber basket” and hosts an annual pelleting seminar. Recently, the St. Lawrence County Planning Office has engaged a St. Lawrence University intern to map local land areas for potential use in growing switchgrass.

⁵ The Learner Centered Resource Collaborative consists of St. Lawrence University, the Institute for Learning Centered Education, the St. Lawrence Valley Teachers’ Learning Center, the Jefferson-Lewis BOCES, and Niagara University.

⁶ <http://www.natconline.org/>

- A major annual carp fishing tournament was established, building upon the world-class carp resource of the St. Lawrence River and drawing competitors from across the country and around the globe.
- Plans were created for an Education Leadership Academy of Northern New York (ELANNY). This collaborative academy, joining the expertise of Clarkson University's Business School with St. Lawrence University's Graduate Program in Educational Administration, would undertake research and provide professional development programs, both for prospective educational leaders and for practicing school administrators.

A Model to Follow:

The North Country Symposium has also been a model for other communities, as its approaches to community development and the Going Local concepts have been broadcast at venues across the country. A few examples are the following:

- At a recent "Greening of the Campus" conference at Ball State University, Michael Shuman and Ben Dixon provided a workshop with the North Country Symposium as an example of how universities and communities can collaborate on community development.
- Michael Shuman featured the North Country Symposium in his recent book entitled "The Small-Mart Revolution: How Local Businesses Are Beating the Global Competition."
- An article featuring the North Country Symposium recently ran in the Yellow Springs (Ohio) News. The article was written by a reporter seeking information about new ways to support local economic development in rural Ohio

And the Symposium continues! To be part of the action, please [contact us](#).