

Recruiting and Retention Task Force
Monday, May 16, 2022 - 11:00 AM

Joe Pete Wilson - Chairman

Chairman Wilson called this task force to order at 11:24 am with the following in attendance: Shaun Gilliland, Ken Hughes, Steve McNally, Jim Monty, Ike Tyler, Joe Pete Wilson, Mark Wright, Linda Beers, Jenn Mascarenas, Mike Mascarenas, Terri Morse and Dan Palmer. Stephanie DeZalia, Chelsea Merrihew and Wendy Sayward had been previously excused. Tom Scozzafava, was absent.

Also present: Dina Garvey, Jim Dougan, and Joe Keegan - North Country Community College.

News Media present: Tim Rowland - Sun Community News

WILSON: I'm sorry to be in kind of a rush, we went long and I mistimed the budget meeting in Lake Placid, I thought it was at 2:00 and Shaun informed me it's at 1:00. So, I wanted to make sure I have time to get through the construction in the Cascades and not miss that. So, I'm going to try to be out of here at like 10 of 12:00. So, I apologize for rushing, but I want to keep us moving. So, the agenda I came up with maybe a lot of it will carryover until our next meeting, but this will give us some time to think. You know, I wanted to do a quick update, especially with so many people here, of all the work we've done so far and childcare has been a big one. Committing the ARPA funds to support ACAP's program.

The land bank's got a lot underway with Ken and Jim are doing a lot with the land bank. We've got the market analysis RFP out, too, with the grant money from Lake Champlain Basin Program. So, I think and Mark has been in some conversation with Larry Reagan from, who's doing the development in Lake Placid. So, we've got some stuff working there.

I just want people to not think we're losing track of that, but if there's stuff this Committee can do to support the land bank efforts, to support what Mark's during to explore Ti, you know, please let us know so that we can really throw our weight and energy behind efforts in those areas.

The presentation by Donna Wotton from the Ti Alliance was really impressive, what they're doing. So, maybe a thought for our next meeting is, what can this group do to support the Ti Alliance, but help replicate that in our communities?

MORSE: So, I would like to comment on that. I read the minutes from that meeting and the whole time I was reading it, I was like, this fits clearly into the BRIEF Coalition initiatives.

WILSON: Oh

MORSE: This is something that that entity could definitely connect with her on and, because they have something they call school outreach and they have relationships with every, like school counselor in the County and I think that would be a nice bridge for the BRIEF Coalition. We're already working on transitioning aged youth stuff, so it's a wonderful compliment.

WILSON: That's awesome, so do you have, do you need to facilitate an introduction to Donna or are you already reaching out?

MORSE: I would love to have an introduction; I do not know who she is. I have never met her.

WILSON: Mark, do you want to do it? I'm happy to do it, but I know you work closely with Donna. Do you want to introduce Terri and Donna?

WRIGHT: Yeah

WILSON: That's great, that's wonderful and then how do we, that maybe one pathway using BRIEF to help to look for ways to bring that kind of, look for communities that maybe have an organization who can replicate what Ti Alliance is doing. That's wonderful, great and let me know anything I can do to facilitate that, too. And I know, Joe, you've already connected with Donna, as well, to align in any ways that the college can.

MORSE: And we've been wanting to reach out to you, too, Joe.

KEEGAN: Please do.

WILSON: Great, so, you've got that connection, excellent. So, I think that's a way that this Committee can really work, too, is to make these connections and try and replicate these efforts in other parts of the County, so that's great. Maybe, Ken, I'll slip your update into the status.

HUGHES: Sure

WILSON: If you want to go ahead?

HUGHES: Yeah, very quickly. So, job fair we've decided to punt on holding the job fair this spring, just because of timing. It was too quick and we really want to make a slam dunk out of this, so we're going to look toward the fall. Jim, Holly and Tracy; Holly from DPW, Tracy from DSS, Jim and myself, we're going to be meeting, here, May 18th, 9:30 to begin strategizing and kind of laying the groundwork for fall success. So, if you have ideas and suggestions, we have a lot of information already gathered, we all are just going to sit and eat and talk and begin to prepare things for the fall. So, any questions, comments, concerns, feel free to join or reach out to Jim or myself, that's it.

WILSON: Okay, excellent.

MASCARENAS: Joe Pete, can I just follow up on that a little bit?

WILSON: Certainly, yes.

MASCARENAS: The Youth Bureau's, also, going to be, I don't have the dates in front of me, and it will probably be small this year, but we're going to do it anyway, even though it is kind of, what Ken said, we maybe should have punted, but we're not going to. What we're going to do is hold a youth job fair over at the fairgrounds, next month to try and connect youth employment with some of our seasonal jobs that are open. We have a few schools that are going to participate, they'll bus kids there. We got vendors from the food industry, the Camp Dudley's of the world that

are looking for employment and it's our first try at kind of doing something like this, so if it's not great, I'm okay with it. I think next year we'll do much better, but we're going to do it either way. So, if you hear about it or have anybody that's interested, let me know.

HUGHES: And that's super smart, because you're trying to fill jobs for this summer.

MASCARENAS: Absolutely.

HUGHES: So, the timing is perfect.

MASCARENAS: So, that's why it has to happen that time of year and hopefully it can turn into an annual event that will help our local businesses that operate seasonally to fill some of those jobs that are struggling to get filled.

TYLER: We have 4 or 5 places in Westport, this year, and I don't know how they're going to open up, you know, I don't know where they're going to get their employees.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, we've reached out to a number of individuals. What we've heard from one private person is, I can't come, I've got to run my place; right? I'm doing all the prep, I'm doing all this, I'm doing all that. So, we've agreed to take anything they would give us, whether it be applications and those types of things and set up booths for them, even if they can't be available the night of the job fair, but connecting these young people with employment and trying to help in any way we can is kind of our goal.

MORSE: Mike, would it be worth reaching out to chambers of commerce?

MASCARENAS: Yeah, we're doing that currently. Yup, Dee Olcott's running it all. I don't know if you know her? She's our newest Youth Bureau employee, she's our only Youth Bureau employee. So, she's worried that it's not going to be that successful, but like I said, I'm okay with that. You've got to start somewhere and that's where we're going to start.

BEERS: Did you invite every school?

MASCARENAS: Yeah, she's included every school and allowing them to visit, some it works, some it doesn't. Transportation, bus drivers are issues schools are having; right? So, there's a lot of barriers to getting people there. So, we'll see and hoping to be able to work on our big issues during the off season for next year.

KEEGAN: So, Mike, your comment jarred an idea in my head. So, we developed or put into place a platform, it's a digital platform to connect students with careers and primarily with employers, but the County is welcome to go in and post. So, Linda; you, Terri; you, Mike.

MASCARENAS: That's really a good idea.

KEEGAN: I'll have our folks that are working on it connect with you and then that way you can, which includes the youth, you know, if you wanted to, even summer jobs, we can look and see if that's an option there, as well.

MASCARENAS: That would be really cool, thank you.

WILSON: Yeah, thanks.

MONTY: I just wanted to pipe in, real quick, as far as, childcare goes. We've opened the enrollment for our summer program, the first 3 days we have over 50 kids signed up. We are opening it up to anybody that, outside communities that want to come in. It's on a first, if anybody's interested, first come, first served, because we got to primarily take the kids from our school district, that's the number one priority, but right now we've got a waiting list of people from other communities. We've got 3 families from Keene, Joe Pete, that want to bring their kids over. So, we do have that program that is available for, basically, if you start kindergarten in September, you're eligible to go and it's 7:30 until 4:30.

MORSE: What's your maximum?

MONTY: Right now, the Department of Health has us at 100, right now and last year we had, actually 104, I believe 4 were on a waiting list and we averaged 86 kids a day. So, make sure, as far as, Department Heads, get that information out, if you know anybody looking for a place to bring their kids.

TYLER: Is it true that Moriah's not running a program?

MASCARENAS: They are running one.

TYLER: They are?

MASCARENAS: They're running it at BOCES. What makes Jim's program so attractive, I am hearing from a lot of my employees in DSS, that maybe live in Moriah or surrounding towns is, hours of operations.

BEERS: Yeah, I'm sure.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, so where they might close at 2:00 in the afternoon and then, how do I get my kid home, you know, who's going to watch them between now and work being over and those types of things. They want to just go across the road and pick them up at Elizabethtown, because he's open until 4:30 and that's really accommodating that need that wasn't there in the past.

TYLER: It's not Elizabethtown school, it's Boquet Valley.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, it's Boquet Valley.

MONTY: And we have a young lady who volunteers to stay, until all kids are picked up. So, if they're not there right at 4:30, but she is compensated for it at the end of the year.

MASCARENAS: It's really a great service that you're doing for County workers, because I don't think you realize how many.

BEERS: It is.

MONTY: I see it when they sign up.

MCNALLY: Is this a free program, Jim?

MONTY: Nope, it's not free. We raised it to \$75.00 for 6 weeks, per kid.

MCNALLY: So, it's pretty much free.

MONTY: But, for out of district kids it's \$150.00, but you get a discount for the 2nd kid and 3rd kid's free.

MCNALLY: Jim, what is your operating budget?

MONTY: To be honest with you, right off the top of my head...

MASCARENAS: It's not that high, really.

TYLER: He tells me \$30,000.00, so I don't know what he's telling everybody else.

MASCARENAS: I think that's probably there; right? The food is separate.

MONTY: Right, right, we serve breakfast and lunch.

MASCARENAS: Breakfast and lunch at that program, which is great.

BEERS: When you say, out of district, you mean out of Boquet Valley District?

MONTY: Out of Boquet Valley District.

BEERS: Thank you, I just wanted to be clear.

WILSON: So, that's great and some of what you're bringing up Terri and Joe and Mike, brings up to me, what I think the next step I'm looking at for this Committee is, we need to have a plan, an overall plan, because how, like we were talking in the beginning, how do we reinforce what the Ti Alliance is doing and draw in, like the other, like BRIEF? How do we replicate things in other parts of the County? What you're doing Jim, is amazing. How do we help you do that and then help that happen in other towns?

TYLER: It's not Jim, Westport's helping out.

WILSON: Okay

MONTY: For Boquet Valley.

WILSON: Yeah, but how do we replicate that effort? You know, you guys are doing something that hasn't been done here before. It's been town by town, everybody does their own little piece. How do we take a more regional approach and draw in other resources, so that, you know, these things are sustainable? They reach, you know, they let parents work all over the county. I mean, I know that employment piece, you know, hotels in Lake Placid are not staffed. We're struggling to staff our youth commission program and it may not run. How do we draw on, you know, make our efforts more sustainable and more easy to replicate in other parts of the county? So, what I was thinking in this second part of this agenda, is we've been kicking out good ideas about referral bonus for current employees, the job listing catalogue and career pathways at Essex County. You know, Donna Wotton, sort of talked about how they were doing that. How do we do stuff like that? Having Department Heads do recruiting, you know how are we going to do this stuff if we don't have a plan, the resources to back it up? You know, if Department Heads are going to do recruiting, we got to train them to do that, and we've got to pay them to do that, we've got to make sure they have the time to do that. If Jen is going to take on more of the outreach, the marketing, how, where is she going to focus her effort? What skills is she going need from her employees and how are we going to pay for it? I think if we go away from this short, rush meeting with one thing, it's thinking about that last point, you know, what's our strategy going to be? What are the things that we want to focus on? How are we going to conduct our marketing, our training of Department Heads? Like what is that we're going to ask people to do to start changing, you know, to get more result from our recruitment, to get people here? Because we know the follow on effect is there, it's good for school enrollment, it's good for, you know, our fire departments to have potential volunteers, but how are we going to start here, interiorly, to help start to develop a strategy and then a plan to carry that strategy, because I don't think it's fair to just dump it all on Jen and say, okay do this. Or if we are going to do that, we at least got to give her the tools to do it. So, if this Committee says, yeah, we're going to dump it all on Jen, let's give her the tools to do it and the same, if we're going to put more on Department Heads, we got to give them some tools. So, if we want to refine that idea, a little bit, but then come back and really talk about it, I think that's the next step for this group to really revise what we're doing with a plan and then give the resources to do, so that Department Heads can still run their department and not be, you know, expected to just take one more task. Here's just one more giant task. So, if anybody has any thoughts about that, any starting points or concerns, I would love to get them out there, so at our next meeting can really dig into this.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, I can tell you for me, personally and I think I can probably speak for most Department Heads, I'm not doing that, Department Heads are very reactionary to what's in front of them at any given time; right? I mean Linda wasn't dealing with the pandemic, until she was and it consumed her for the next two and half years, it continues to consume her, today. For me, on this job issue, it's become part of my life. It's become something that we have to do, if we're going to succeed and it comes at the expense of not doing other things; right? So, when you're dealing with a pandemic, you're losing the opportunity to do some of the, you know, public health things that you had focused on in years past, that's just what happens, you have to shift focus. For me, I've had to shift focus to be able to get workers into my office and it just comes at the expense of other things. I think that's just kind of what we do, but understanding that we all have to be active participants in doing that, I'm starting to benefit from that now, but it's been a year and a half worth of outreach, personal, just going to job fairs, recruiting people, word of mouth in the community, changing a little on social media how we approach things, but it's been a lot of different efforts, but I can tell you, our Departments Heads are excellent, they're resilient, they are

going to do whatever's necessary to get the job done, but know that it's at the expense of not doing something else. Whether it's some kind of service provision or something like that, but without a workforce your service provision is going to fall through, anyhow. So, to me that's at the top of your list, is getting people through the door, you know, some people will try to put bandaids by taking on more work. That's only going to hold up for so long before you need to have a workforce that can accommodate what you're trying to accomplish. So, I think Dan and I are starting to talk about it more at Department Head Meetings, in the importance of getting people involved in our workforce that actually do the work, because they really are our best advocates in getting people.

BEERS: I would equally add that, even, so I have a bunch of new employees and the idea of lifting them up to be trained employees is also massive and so, I would, I don't know, maybe something this Committee could do is do some universal training of all new, so, Mountain Lake Services, they have an intake, once a month, everybody goes through the same OSHA training and whatnot, because that is universal to all employees, maybe even a 3-day training that new hires go through that as one less thing or burden off of us that we would have to do and everybody would have this core training. I don't know, performed by somebody other than us.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, I have a staff development person, I'm fortunate and Ken, knows her and Jim, knows her, so every new employee she deals with.

BEERS: I have the same thing, but she also has another job; right? And so, each one of my departments are really different, if you're a nurse, you're doing a lot different than Health Educator and whatnot, but there's still core stuff that we make everybody do, the OSHA, the handbook, the da, da, da, I usually send them to Jen and hope they get this overarching training, too, there. But, it might be an easier lift. Right now, I have like, everybody I hired in the last few years come in and did Covid, that's all they did and that's all they know, but that's not their job anymore. So, we're doing work plans on 7 employees, all at the same time. That's a huge lift bringing people in the door and training them.

MONTY: Two quick things, I couldn't agree more, Mike, with what you said and then the trickle-down effect, it trickle down, because now Dan's got different responsibilities and now Tracy's got different responsibilities and each time you trickle it down, everyone's obligations to what they have to do kind of take up a different level and stuff and it's very tough, but I do agree with your statement, 100%.

The other thing is, have we ever thought at the County of hiring, within Personnel, specifically, a training specialist? That would specifically be there to train new employees, granted, now Jim's employees is going to be different than Mike's, which is going to be different than Linda's, which are going to be different from Terri's, everybody department's a little different, but they would be responsible for that training, giving them the ability to see, number one, that maybe that there's promotion opportunities, if you do this and you know, whatever the training might be that's universal to all employees, they would be the one's giving it and just a thought.

WILSON: But, I think again, that's part of the bigger strategy, because if we are going to do that, what are the components of that orientation going to be? Part of it might be the career pathways, you start here as a shovel operator, where do you go from there? You know, so it's showing the doorway into being a lifelong employee here, even if your role might change 2 or 3 times. But, I

think that fits into the big strategy and again, tying it to how do we sustain it, who's responsible for it, but I think that orientation, that's a key time, when you've got them fresh and their eyes are open, just who's doing it, so we standardize that, great, who's going to do it? You know, those are the kinds of things we need to decide on our strategy and then fit those things in and the resources for it.

I want to check in with you, Jen, is this, are we covering stuff that seems reasonable and like this discussion's heading in a way that's reasonable to you?

MASCARENAS, JEN: Sure, yeah

GILLILLAND: I just have a couple of ideas; from the discussions here, in particular with Jim's program and stuff and the idea of, if we put together a guide, basically for our new employees or we hand it out at our recruiting events and things. I just call it, Working, Living, Loving Essex County and so it provides all these pieces of information, schools, summer camps, daycare, you know, I'm from Pittsburgh, how do I get my water turned on? You know, these kinds of things, all in one document, that we can give to new employees of how to live and have a good time and you know enjoy Essex County or how to deal with things here within the County structure. Or we could, also, have that online, as well.

And the other idea that I had is going on the training specialist here, might be, is also, as an additional duty or as a primary duty, you know for onboarding our new employees, also, but also having the role as a community ombudsman for our employees. So, that somebody, an employee who's here, a young person, somebody starts to run into problems out in the community or has an issue with housing or things like that, then there's a certain point that they can do within the County, you know, government structure, I've got a problem, I need help with us. Because, if we can help these people before it becomes a crisis, you know, as a training specialist, ombudsman, that they can reach out to the town or they can reach out to the school, they can help these employees with that, just an idea.

HUGHES: I just wanted to say, when I was a new employee, something that was very helpful to me, was the Q&A you put together for new supervisors. That was awesome, I mean direct question, direct answer, maybe there could be a similar document for new department heads, maybe there could be a similar document for new employees, something like that? I just learned so much from that document, and it's always modified, based on new questions that come up, that was hugely helpful.

MONTY: I just wanted to chime in on what Shaun was saying, I agree 100%, but with that being said, we do have a program in place for that, it's the Employee Assistance Program. Unfortunately, it's underutilized. It's underutilized just because of the stigmatism of, I've got problems, I can't go to EAP, somebody sees me going to EAP then, you know, and I faced that when I worked for the State. You know, people didn't want to go and share their problems, because they were afraid they were going to be seen by somebody and it could be just as simple as finding daycare, finding housing and stuff, but the stigma of people using EAP.

GILLILLAND: You know, sometimes you just change the billboard, it's not EAP.

MONTY: Yeah, absolutely, I agree, Shaun.

WILSON: But, again, these are excellent ideas to discuss implementing. What I would ask and I do want to wrap up and I apologize, again, for rushing, I want to make sure that I don't get stuck in the Cascade Lakes, all day and I know you've got to make that drive and other people are going up there. But, what I would ask is, bring these ideas to the next meeting, but think about the big piece. How do we fit this in? Where are we going to need people to oversee stuff? What kind of resources and tools are we going to have to develop? You know and we should really clearly define our goals, too. Is it just recruiting? Is it more than that? You know, what is it that we're after and then we can really start coming up with how we get to the point of implementing some of these ideas.

MASCARENAS: We do have one action item that we need to get accomplished by next meeting. It doesn't have to get accomplished, now, people have to think about it. When we were doing recruitment and retention, last year or the year before, I can't remember, we looked at the life insurance that we offer every employee in Essex County, \$50,000.00 life insurance policy for full-time employee, \$25,000.00 life insurance policy for part-time employee, that runs out in July. So, this Committee's got to decide whether they're going to recommend to Full Board whether that policy is renewed. The cost is \$34,000.00 for our total membership to get that renewed. That was something that we did 2 years ago, now. So, that's something, you don't have to make a decision now, everybody's got to get going, but we have, we definitely have an action item that we got to talk about in June, as that policy runs out in July.

WILSON: I'll put it on the agenda for our next and if you want to send a little, like blurb with information out to the group, that would be great.

MASCARENAS: Yup

WILSON: That would be great.

MCNALLY: I think we're missing out on the opportunity on the referral program. It's something that could get started, today. I mean, even if we hire 60 employees and we gave \$500.00, it's \$30,000.00, probably payable through ARPA and this is something we could start.

BEERS: What are we talking about?

MCNALLY: The referral program.

BEERS: Oh, I'm sorry. Mountain Lakes Services does that.

MCNALLY: Everybody's doing it.

BEERS: It's valuable.

HUGHES: Do we have to have something written up?

MCNALLY: It would be very quick to do and we keep kicking the can down the road, if we don't get something acted on. It works everywhere and it gives the employees a sense of being part of

the team, there's no downside, except the money cost. So, I think we should really act on this, as soon as we can.

WILSON: So, I'll put on the next, for our next meeting.

HUGHES: Can we have something written up for the next meeting to look at?

WILSON: Yeah, yeah

HUGHES: That would be huge.

MCNALLY: You know, even if do a \$1,000.00 and they get \$500.00 after 6 months and \$500.00 after a year.

BEERS: I can get Mountain Lakes Services.

WILSON: If you have a sample, yeah, because I thinking about that.

BEERS: And I sit on a board and we did one. I'll give you two samples.

WILSON: Yeah, if you could send me a sample.

MCNALLY: I do have a friend that does the same job, you know, works in Ti doing the same job for the health center down there and you basically, that's where you get your best employees.

WILSON: Any other? Thank you, everybody, sorry for the rush.

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS RETENTION AND RECRUITING TASK FORCE, IT WAS ADJOURNED AT 11:52 AM.

Respectively Submitted,

Dina L. Garvey, Deputy
Clerk of the Board