

Hamilton County Industrial Development Authority **2012 Operations and Accomplishments**

After a request for proposals for the purchase of Oak Mountain Ski Area, with or without the communications tower at its summit, the IDA induced a project that will result in capital improvements to its Oak Mountain Ski Area, continued winter operation/employment, summer and fall events, and its ultimate sale. The IDA negotiated an installment sale agreement with Elizabeth and Kevin O'Brien, Oak Mountain LLC. Oak Mountain is the county's largest winter employer with 40 full-time and part-time seasonal jobs, helping to counter-balance the large number of summer seasonal positions in a county wholly contained within the Adirondack Park.

The O'Briens intend to operate the ski area as a three-season recreation area and began work on mountain bike trails, as well as holding a bridal fair and booking several weddings. Expanding the season will help support the ski operation through challenging winters and lead to year-round employment opportunities.

After a separate RFP, the communication tower at the summit of Oak Mountain was sold in November to Tarpon Towers/Florida Tower Partners LLC for \$715,000, and the \$211,677 balance of an NBT loan that helped finance the operation of the ski area, post foreclosure by the IDA, was immediately paid with the proceeds.

Brant Brothers, Inc., doing business as Charlie Johns Store in Speculator, received approval for a \$250,000 IDA loan at 1 percent for a term of 10 years. This financing, along with a \$500,000 NBT Bank loan, was for energy efficient food freezers and refrigeration units, as well an energy efficient compressor and heating plant, and partial enclosure of a porch. The store is among the top 10 private employers in Hamilton County and the only year-round grocery store in the 1,700 square mile county.

As a result of the sale of the cell tower, the board began discussions about the best way to move economic development forward, possibly with a business incubator plan. These discussions will continue in the new year.

The IDA helped finance a fiber optic link between Wells and Speculator with a loan for \$50,000 to Hamilton County Cable Television. The cable will be used to provide better cable television services, but can also be leased to upgrade internet

speeds in the southern part of the county that has no broadband coverage under the FCC definition. Work on the line was completed last fall.

The IDA made only two loans in 2011. Frisky Otter Kayak Tours received a \$20,000 loan to expand into canoe and kayak retail sales.

The IDA also helped small businesses develop business plans and complete loan applications. Several of these businesses, after completing the business plan process, realized that their conception of the business was not realistic. Several other businesses could not meet the burden of job creation that most of the IDA small business loans carry as a result of original funding through the Community Block Grant program. It is important to sustain existing businesses and jobs, but the tools from five years ago are not effective in today's economy, and particularly, not in an area as rural as Hamilton

Much of the IDA's energies were devoted to selling Oak Mountain, and a request for proposals was prepared and publicized last summer. There were no offers, so an RFP offering different terms will be offered in 2012.