

Feeling Crunch, Local Officials, Superintendents Listen To What State May Offer

By TERESA WINCHESTER

ONEONTA

What can economic development councils and state government do to help Otsego County's communities achieve vibrant futures? To find the answer, more than 80 people – municipal officials, school superintendents and business leaders – gathered at the Foothills Performing Arts Center Tuesday, May 5.

The first session featured Dede Scozzafava, New York deputy secretary of state for local government.

In the second, Carolyn Lewis, SUNY Oneonta economic-development coordinator, and Amsterdam Mayor Ann Thane talked about the Mohawk Valley Regional Economic De-



Scozzafava

velopment Commission. Both are members.

According to DOS' Mark Pattison, director of local government services and former Troy mayor, local governments are challenged to maintain local identity while still delivering services. Ways of doing this may include consolidation or dissolution of municipalities or of school, fire or library districts. Shared services is another possible route.

DOS grants are available to study these options, he said, and cited four received by Otsego County governments so far:

- Otsego County government has received two



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Milford School Superintendent Peter Livshin, left, questions the value of DOS aid received so far. Listening at right are, from left, Jamie Reynolds, NBT Bank regional executive and Oneonta school board chair; ARC Sales Manager Kevin Scott; Atty. Andrew Stammel, an Oneonta Town Board member, and Lamont Engineerings' Jody Serowski (Lamont Engineering). Back right is Springfield Town Supervisor Bill Elsey.

grants –\$36,000 for a highway asset management program and another to design an emergency services telecommunications system. The first grant should savings \$12,600; the second, \$347,000.

- The Milford and Laurens central school districts received a grant to expand the Career Opportunities in Rural Education Initiative (CORE) to create a consolidated Biomedical Science Curriculum. The \$36,299

saved \$97,000.

- The Village of Cherry Valley received a \$22,770 grant to identify issues, costs and benefits of village government dissolution and consolidation with the town.

Despite the many opportunities presented by the DOS, a degree of frustration with obtaining grants was expressed by some in attendance.

"The DOS is more of an impediment than a help," stated Milford Central School District Superintendent Peter Livshin.

He elaborated. "There is a mental block to small rural counties not on the I-90 corridor. We don't meet a lot of the criteria for grants even though we need them. There is a population outside the urban areas of the state."

County Treasurer Dan Crowell had a more positive take on the DOS presentation: "Good things are emerging – creative solutions balanced by insights into the challenges of implementation," he said.

County Board Chair Kathy Clark, R-Otego, floated ideas of her own, seeing possible benefits of merger in the Office of the Aging: "Why do we need a dietitian for every county?" The hard

part is changing mindsets, she said.

At the sessions' end, DOS community coordinator Lynne Mahoney was identified as the contact. She may be reached at Lynne-Mahoney@dos.exec.gov.

The event was sponsored by the Bank of Cooperstown and organize by the pro-business groups GO-EDC and Citizen Voices.



County Rep. Ed Lentz, D-Garrettsville, foreground, and county Treasurer Dan Crowell ponder what they're hearing.



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