

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
“Attitude Adjustment”**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

I never thought I would say that Long Islanders don't have enough of an attitude.

But I do think that we may be lacking something that is holding our region back. Let me explain.

The latest *Long Island Index* has just come out, and our region continues to trend downward. Our economy is plagued by a dearth of venture capital, job growth mainly in low-paying sectors, increases in food stamp recipients and free lunch participants. It's not just the recession: in relation to the rest of the country, Long Island incomes have been losing ground for years.

At the same time, we're not building the kind of housing we need, nor preserving open space at the levels that will maintain our quality of life. Overall, in the six years that the *Index* has provided metrics, we have seen little or no improvement.

Most disturbing of all is that we're doing so little to reverse these trends.

Other regions take action to correct their problems. When Silicon Valley identified a shortage of affordable housing, they instituted new incentive programs and permitting procedures. The result: in seven years the average density of new development more than tripled.

When San Diego saw its economy devastated by post-cold war defense cuts, they developed a plan to connect university researchers with entrepreneurs to incubate new businesses in emerging, high-tech industries. The result: San Diego is now the world's 36th largest economy: between Portugal and Venezuela! The region ranks fifth in the world in attracting venture capital.

The vehicles of successful change like this are regional alliances: coalitions of leaders

from business, academia, community organizations, and government, who work together to achieve regional goals. We desperately need this kind of alliance here.

That will require leadership, which Long Island has, and also collaboration, which we can learn. But perhaps it starts with that attitude I was speaking about. We need an outlook that sees a problem and says, "This is unacceptable. We have to fix it."

The *Index's* new study of education on Long Island, for example, reveals a system that spends enormous amounts of money and still fails to provide thousands of our kids the learning they need to succeed. We need an attitude that says, "That has to change."

We know all too well that our lack of housing options is driving young people away, splitting families, and shackling our economy. It's time we agreed, "Enough talk. Let's get this solved."

Long Island's 100-plus downtowns and village centers offer enormous potential to provide new housing options, ease the brain drain, maximize existing infrastructure, relieve pressure on roads and open space, and spur business development.

Patchogue has shown what can be done. Long Island should be making four or five Patchogues happen every year. Working together we can do that. We can transform our region: why not, if other regions have?

"A new era" is a state of mind. A conviction. It's partly "Yes, we can"; but it's also, "Yes, we must."

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation. The "Long Island Index" provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit our Website: www.longislandindex.org