

# OURVIEW

Editorials

## Erie takes step toward new economy

**I**n a once-thriving economy built on high-paying manufacturing jobs, the Erie region could sit comfortably and wait for new companies to roll into town to build new factories. That isn't happening anymore here or anywhere in this country.

So you adapt. And while this region may have a long way to go for real economic diversification, adapt it has.

Erie County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for June was 4.4 percent, representing a 17-year low for the month of June.

### OUR POINT

1,400 more jobs in Erie County in a year is a positive step toward creating a more diversified economy.

There is no mystery in what happened. Tourism and education — two key anchors in a new Erie economy — led to this remarkable statistic: Erie County has 1,400 more jobs than the county had in June 2006.

There are 1,400 more jobs, despite painful manufacturing job losses at Steris Corp. and other companies.

Our optimism isn't meant to gloss over these job losses in Erie's important manufacturing sector. They hurt deeply. Many lives were turned upside down.

But look at what is happening. Presque Isle Downs & Casino opened and now employs about 750 workers — and that number will increase significantly when live horse racing starts in September. In addition, the Bayfront Convention Center is opening Thursday, which launches the region's official entry into the competitive convention industry.

Many residents still pine for the days when high-paying, blue-collar manufacturing jobs stirred Erie's economy. And, no, most Presque Isle Downs employees don't make \$20 an hour.

But what this casino does is drive the Erie regional economy, along with other key segments in the region's expanding tourism industry. The convention center's opening represents the next step in this economic evolution built on tourism, education and health care. Economic development — job creation — is happening.

And there is another important point. Erie's manufacturing industry is far from dead. But the sector is smaller, sharper, quicker to adapt to new technologies — and it is certainly not the job-creating engine it once was. But its role remains crucial to the region's economy.

Economic diversity is the Erie region's future. As the new numbers show, the region gained 700 leisure and hospitality jobs, along with 600 education and health-services jobs in the past year.

It's not reason to bust out the bubbly, perhaps. But it is a reason to be more optimistic about the Erie region's future.