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## Onorato says county business climate—'shovel ready'



DAN ONORATO

by C. Denise Johnson  
Courier Staff Writer

As he assumed his place behind the podium Friday morning at the Rivers Club, Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato was still basking in the afterglow of the just-completed arena deal that keeps Pittsburgh's NHL franchise in town for the next three decades.

It was no surprise that Onorato carried that upbeat optimism with him into the monthly Power Breakfast presented by the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania. With that crowning achievement (with no additional county property tax burden) behind him, the county executive used the occasion to reflect on the other accomplish-

ments during his tenure.

Onorato says the county has become creative in offering incentives while competing with other regions of the country to attract and retain businesses and jobs. He cited the expansion of such business icons as Westinghouse, Verizon and Heinz. Brownfield clean-ups resulted in retentions such as United States Steel's research center on the waterfront.

Westinghouse was contemplating 2,000 new jobs in North Carolina "but we've won that already; its either going to go to Cranberry or Monroeville. Southwestern Pennsylvania got the jobs," said Onorato. "These aren't 2,000 within the next 20 years; we've already 2,000, this will be another 2,000 good-paying hi-tech jobs for the region."

There are more expansions, he continued. "Verizon added 350 jobs up in North Hills in the RIDC Park. Heinz wanted to grow a state-of-the-art research center; they looked around the country and took over the old Marconi Center two years ago and put in a \$13 million renovation (for) food processing."

Another achievement Onorato mentioned was Medrad's expansion and retention that includes a new 250,000 sq. ft. headquarters in Marshall Township, a manufacturing plant in Butler County and their keeping their manufacturing plant in Indiana Township here in Allegheny County.

"These companies are doing national searches

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## BUSINESS

## Onorato: County business climate—'shovel ready'

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and we're competing because the state and the county work to put together packages and programs; and I'm convinced now that we can compete against any region in the country because we now have a track record."

Four years ago the county didn't have any land ready for expansion because of contamination for previous site usage and a lack of pre-existing infrastructure such as sewer lines, water line and roads. Onorato explained.

"Today we have about 800 acres at the airport 'shovel ready,'" shared Onorato. That helped to ice the deal with USAirways to locate its new \$25-million, 60,000-square-foot flight operations control center at Pittsburgh International Airport will be serve as the airlines nerve center and house 600 employees.

Just last month Onorato announced Mitsubishi Electric Power Products Inc. will expand its operations in Warrendale and add 75 new jobs within the next three years. The company will also add approximately 100,000 square feet of additional office, warehouse and production space to its headquarters in Thorn Hill Industrial Park. Onorato also touched on fiscal restruc-

turing and consolidation of services citing a reduction of six law offices by 2008 and scheme to present a ballot issue which would combine law enforcement resources to create one police agency that would be an urban county department and eliminate the duplication of functions by townships and other municipalities within the county in a manner similar to a unified 411 center (which purportedly saves \$3 million per year).

The county executive also cited the consolidation of the city and county courts as another example of fiduciary expediency.

However, Onorato's glee was tempered by the grim reality of the Port Authority debacle as he advocated a right-sizing approach starting with management as well as a renegotiation of the transit union to bring spending under control, citing this year's projected \$80 million deficit.

In fact, he took on an almost indignant tone saying that what took 20 years to screw up must be corrected in six months in the face of impending service cuts as he mentioned health benefits for life for 45-year-old retirees as an example of mismanagement.

"To really bring it home, the county has 6,000 employees, the Port Authority has 3,000

employees—and we both have the same healthcare costs! You can't operate this way."

"My goal is to save the Port Authority, not to cut it," declared Onorato. He also suggested that dedicated funding was necessary to keep regional public transit.

In addition to the success of the arena deal, Onorato advocates a partnership with Hill District residents and stakeholders to design a development that would encompass the entire Hill, not just the lower Hill. While on that topic, he also cited significant MBE participation as a priority with Ruth Byrd-Smith, the county MBE compliance director, charged with monitoring the contract dollars.

Other high points cited during the breakfast briefing included the new collaboration with NEED to provide mentoring opportunities for students with the county and a "fair representation executive order" to increase a more diverse membership of county boards.

Onorato also mentioned an upcoming event, the Greater Pittsburgh Diversity Festival, being developed with PNC Bank and slated for an August debut, to promote the region's inclusion philosophy to employers and business interests that may complete relocation from or to southwest PA.