



Olana, Cole House win big

REGIONAL COUNCILS AWARD \$5.4 MILLION TO TWIN COUNTIES

By Greg Hudson
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The Twin Counties have been awarded nearly \$5.4 million in economic development funding, state officials announced Thursday.

An award of \$83.1 million was granted to the Capital Region, an area encompassing Columbia, Greene, Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer, Hamilton and Warren counties, according to the state

Regional Economic Development Councils, a division of Empire State Development.

Columbia and Greene counties are set to receive \$5,390,888, with Columbia County organizations awarded \$2,778,608 and Greene County organizations taking home \$1,694,650. A further \$917,630 was awarded to agencies with ties to both counties, including an \$875,000 award to begin phase two of the Hudson River Skywalk.

The announcement was made Thursday afternoon at the state agency's annual awards presentation in Albany.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the awards, presented to each

of the 10 economic development regions in the state, are part of an ongoing plan to revitalize and grow the economy statewide.

"You're going to see growth in upstate New York as this cycle turns like never before," Cuomo said in a statement.

The event was the sixth annual awards presentation of funding for projects focused on creating or retaining jobs, expanding economic opportunities and promoting tourism.

While presenting the award to Capital Region Economic Development Council members and stakeholders, state

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DARREN MCGEE

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announcing the 2016 Regional Economic Development Council Awards, at the Egg in the Empire State Plaza. Broadcast journalist Maria Bartiromo announced each of the award winners.

Funding

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officials praised the region's investment in the arts and tourism, while highlighting the flourishing microbrewery business community in the region.

Awards to Columbia County included \$596,000 to the city of Hudson and other Hudson organizations, including the Hudson Opera House, the Hudson Development Corporation and Historic Hudson, Inc. Projects in the city will include restoration work on the Dr. Oliver Bronson House on Route 9, continued development of Hudson's Waterfront Revitalization Plan and the restoration of the historic Kitchen Garden at the Olana State Historic Site.

Sean Sawyer, president of the Olana Partnership, a non-profit educational partner of the site, said the \$197,878 grant his organization received will have substantial programming and sustainability implications for the site.

"This specific grant request was for the historic kitchen garden at Olana, which was an integral part of the property during [painter and original property owner Frederic] Church's life," Sawyer said. "The farm was the heart of Olana for Church, and it's been absent from the landscape for more than 100 years now."

Sawyer said the kitchen garden restoration marked the beginning of a concerted effort to restore the entirety of the farm to its former glory, both for historical and educational purposes.

"This is an integral first step in the restoration of the landscape of the farm," Sawyer said. "We're not seeing this as a static historical display. It's going to be an interactive exhibit, sort of a hands-on laboratory."

Sawyer said the garden, which will be the home to a host of plants and vegetables, will also be home to educational programming, and site leaders would work to make the garden one of the stops students make when they visit the site on field trips.

"We're going to work on a curriculum for the garden which will be included in visits," Sawyer said.

But the garden will have appeal to visitors of all ages, Sawyer said.

"Any average visitor can come to Olana and see how life was like in the 19th century at Olana, and this garden will be an important part of depicting that world," he said.

Pedestrians in Claverack will also have a chance to step back in time, thanks to a \$170,000 grant to fund the restoration of the historic Shaw Bridge.

The bridge, a pedestrian walkway, dates from the early 1900s and is built with a rare truss-type construction which makes it a walk worth experiencing, according to Claverack Town Supervisor Clifford Weigelt.

"It's the only bridge still in existence that was built like that," Weigelt said. "We're going to get it fixed up so people can go walking on it."

Weigelt said the grant award was a pleasant surprise.

"This is just fantastic," Weigelt said upon hearing the town had been awarded the grant.

"These grants come along, and you say 'Oh let's do that,' and now we'll actually get to do that [restoration on the bridge]."

Weigelt said an additional \$25,000 grant to perform a study on the waterfront areas of the Claverack Creek will help the town strategize future business and residential development in a safe, environmentally friendly way.

"People are tired of pollution and they want a beautiful creek," he said, "and this study will help us figure out how to keep it that way."

Weigelt remembers a time when the creek was neither clean nor picturesque. While Weigelt was a child, mills in the nearby village of Philmont would dump waste into the creek.

"There was no protection or regulation back then," Weigelt said. "I remember as a kid, riding the bus past the creek and seeing it being all different colors because the mills used to dump all kinds of dye."

The discovery of unexpected colors underneath the paint-

ed walls in the parlors of the Thomas Cole Historic Site in Catskill a few years ago sparked great excitement with site leaders, including site director Betsy Jacks.

Now, a \$417,650 grant will help protect the restoration work done in the parlor rooms.

"Most of that [grant] will go to a fire suppression system, which will protect the whole building from fires," Jacks said. "If a fire were to break out, the system releases a fog which instantly puts out the fire."

Jacks said a second grant, for \$165,000, will be used for marketing purposes to promote the site and the launch of a new interactive exhibit.

"The \$165,000 is for marketing, and this will be used to promote the reopening of the parlors, which will include the restored parlors and the new interactive exhibits," Jacks said.

The Cole House accounts for nearly a third of Greene County's grant totals. Other county organizations receiving grants were the American Dance Institute, which received \$300,000

to rehabilitate its waterfront properties to keep in line with the village's Downtown Waterfront Revitalization Plan; the Prattsville Art Project, Inc., which will hire a new administrative staff member thanks to a \$25,000 award; the village of Tannersville, which was awarded \$500,000 to commence a Gooseberry Creek revitalization project which will include lighting and street improvements on Main Street in the village; and Greene County government, which received \$75,000 to promote mountain biking trails in the county.

Greene County Administrator Shaun Groden hailed the \$75,000 promotional grant as a key support for Greene County's biggest economic driver — tourism.

"Tourism is our industry," Groden said. "From a tourism standpoint this is a very good thing."

The largest grant awarded in the Twin Counties was for the Hudson River Skywalk Phase Two project. Groden said the \$875,000 will be used to con-

nect the Rip Van Winkle Bridge to the Cole House and Olana through the installation of sidewalks and handicapped-access routes.

"This is huge," Groden said, adding the state award is a sign the state supports Greene and Columbia counties' plans to complete the Skywalk with improvements to the pedestrian path on the Rip Van Winkle Bridge.

"It's a big step, and you have to think that if this half gets done, the second half will come later," Groden said. "It makes no sense to move forward with this step of the project and not fund the final step, so this is very encouraging."

At Thursday's award presentation, Cuomo said economic development remains his top priority, and pledged to continue to support upstate economic development with next year's state budget.

"I will never sign a budget that does not help upstate New York with the economic development funds it needs," Cuomo said.