

# THE ROCKLAND ROUNDTABLE

Your Voice, Your Future

## FEATURE

### »»» Higher Education's Strategic Impact in Rockland County



*From Left to Right: Dr. Manuel Martinez, President of Dominican University; Ken Daly, President of St. Thomas Aquinas College; Dr. William Mullaney, President of Rockland Community College; Ken Zebrowski, President of Rockland Business Association (RBA) in conversation at the Nyack Seaport in September 2025. Photo credit: Kathy Kahn*

Rockland County is home to three major institutions of higher education: Rockland Community College (RCC), St. Thomas Aquinas College (STAC), and Dominican University New York. That says a lot about this small county that spans just 174 square miles of land area (making it the smallest county in New York State, outside of New York City).

All three institutions are highly engaged with the local community and draw a large percentage of their students from Rockland County, but also, in the case of Dominican and STAC, from across the country and beyond.

“We make sure to instill in students an awareness of the major industries and businesses right here in Rockland,” says **Manuel Juarez, M.S.Ed**, Director of Career Development at **Dominican University New York**. From weekly on-campus employer recruitment events to on-site interviews, the university prioritizes accessibility to local employers. “Students can use Rockland’s small size to their advantage,” says Juarez, citing the “interconnectedness” of the educational institutions with the larger ecosystem of business and nonprofit leaders. Students can utilize internship opportunities at global companies that have a local presence, to start making connections.

## ➤➤➤ Higher Education's Strategic Impact in Rockland County (continued)

For **Michael DiBartolomeo, Ed.D**, Vice President of Enrollment Management at **St. Thomas Aquinas College**, such connections with the Rockland County community are critical. By developing partnerships with companies in the area, STAC provides continuing educational support for students already in the workforce. DiBartolomeo notes that the college offers a 50% tuition discount to volunteer firefighters, an effort that he believes will help the county retain these essential first responders.

“We’re more than an educational institution; we are a community hub,” says DiBartolomeo. “Rockland County is at an inflection point, and this moment opens up so many great opportunities for collaboration,” he says.

Excellent preparation for today’s workforce is not limited to 4-year and beyond degree programs. In addition to offering a wide range of Associate’s degree programs, Rockland Community College (RCC) is constantly identifying opportunities to provide pathways to in-demand fields.

Students already in the workforce can receive “credit for prior learning,” by applying their work experience toward a degree. According to **Rachel Mead, Ed.D.**, Dean of Career and Workforce Innovation at **Rockland Community College**, “Research shows that higher education is still a key determinant of socioeconomic mobility. Our programs are designed to increase access and affordability, while also recognizing and validating valuable workplace experience.”

RCC lists more than 20 microcredential offerings on its website, ranging from Baking Fundamentals to Automotive Technology. Microcredentials allow students to “upskill” and stack credentials toward a chosen degree program. They can also serve as an opportunity for students who may be unsure which direction to take to get a taste of a specific career path, while gaining valuable skills.

Young people can be introduced to various trades and vocations as early as 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, at Rockland BOCES. Students also benefit from easy access to Rockland Works Career Center, which is housed at Rockland BOCES, and is the County’s “one stop operator” for a range of employment services.

Regardless of students’ chosen educational or career path, Rockland County offers a spectrum of options to meet their needs.

**FEATURE**



## County Launches Rockland Roundtable Podcast



In an effort to create another direct line of communication with residents, the County will be launching a new podcast, The Rockland Roundtable. The podcast will be co-hosted by **Jenna Nazario, Director of Economic Development & Tourism**, and **Beth Cefalu, Director of Strategic Communications**, two members of County Executive Ed Day's team whose work relies heavily on community outreach and relationship building.

The podcast aims to bridge the gap between local government and residents.

"Many people are not aware of how local government works, who does what, and how they can get involved locally to impact outcomes," said Jenna Nazario. "This podcast will host a broad spectrum of guests and topics within the County diving into all of it."

Ultimately, the County hopes that a more informed public will lead to meaningful dialogue about solutions to address the most pressing concerns.

"We want residents to feel connected — not just to County government, but to each other," said Beth Cefalu. "The Rockland Roundtable will pull back the curtain on how things get done in Rockland, highlight the people behind the work, and invite residents to be part of the conversation."



The County encourages the public to provide input for future topic ideas. Ideas, questions, or comments can be submitted [HERE](#) or via the QR code.

## MEET THE TEAM



## Workforce Development Board of Rockland County (WDBRC)

Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) are the “backbone of the statewide workforce development system.” Stacked with experts and practitioners representing the communities they serve, the **Workforce Development Board of Rockland County (WDBRC)** sets policy and works strategically to match job seeker skills with the needs of local employers. The WDBRC oversees the operation of the county’s “One Stop Operator,” Rockland Works, and develops partnerships with businesses, community agencies and job seekers to meet the workforce needs of the county.

According to **Rachel Adler**, the Commissioner’s Regional Representative for the Mid-Hudson Valley, **New York State Department of Labor**, some of the key strengths of the WDBRC are their strong spirit of collaboration and commitment to innovation. “They aren’t scared to try different programs and different ways to succeed,” says Adler.

Meet some of the folks who compose the intricate network of workforce development support here in Rockland County:



*From Left to Right: Jiwanda V. Gale-Rogers, Apprenticeship Training Representative, NYSDOL; Deborah Studnitzer, Business Liaison, WDBRC (front); Claudia Murphy, Executive Director Career Services & Adult Education, Rockland BOCES (back); Shannon Hargrove, Director, Rockland Works; Jamiyla Cody, Business Service Representative, NYSDOL; Rich Gore, Business and Employer Services, Rockland Works; Rachel A. Adler, Commissioner’s Regional Representative, Mid-Hudson, NYSDOL; Debra J. Thomas, Executive Director, WDBRC; Lynne C. Allan, Chair, WDBRC. Photo courtesy of WDBRC*



## Meet the Team: WDBRC (continued)

### How does your work impact the quality of life for Rockland residents?

*"As the Chair of the Workforce Development Board of Rockland County, I'm proud to help bridge the gap between the needs of our local businesses and the potential of our residents. By focusing on sector-driven strategies and targeted training, we're not just filling jobs, we're building sustainable career pathways that fuel economic growth and strengthen the foundation of our community"* - **Lynne C. Allan, Chair**

*"Together with Rockland County business leaders, the Workforce Development Board directs Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to invest in Rockland's talent pipeline, strengthens our regional workforce with career pathways and industry credentials, and helps build a thriving local economy."* - **Debra J. Thomas PhD, Executive Director**

*"At Rockland Works, we connect job seekers with meaningful opportunities such as training, new jobs and career changes. We also equip businesses with the talent they need to grow and thrive. We're proud to be part of a community that shows up for each other, and we love seeing the impact of our work throughout Rockland County every day."* - **Shannon Hargrove, Director, Rockland Works Career Center**

### What inspires you?

*"My biggest inspiration is the collaboration among our board members, educators, and business leaders. Seeing so many dedicated people come together with a unified goal—to make Rockland County the best place to live and work—shows me the true power of community leadership."* - **Howard Hellman, Vice Chair**

For more information about the Workforce Development Board of Rockland County:  
<https://rocklandworks.org/>



**PARTNER  
HIGHLIGHT****“Service Above Self” Drives  
Rockland Rotarians**

A characteristic of a place with a strong sense of community is that, when called upon, its members will rally when one of their own is in need. In Rockland County, one of the shining examples of this can be found in the membership of more than ten Rotary Clubs in Rockland, a 350-plus person network that is ready to serve and quick to act.

**Rotary International** was founded in 1905 by a Chicago attorney named Paul Harris as a way for professionals from a variety of industries to network and exchange ideas. Very quickly, however, members looked beyond their business interests and began to harness their collective influence to address challenges in their own communities and around the world.

According to the [Rotary International website](#), Rotarians, as they are known, are driven by this vision statement: “Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change – across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.” They are a group of people who take the commitment of service very seriously, utilizing a series of four questions to guide their actions:

1. *Is it the truth?*
2. *Is it fair to all concerned?*
3. *Will it build good will and better friendships?*
4. *Will it be beneficial to all concerned?*

Locally, the mark of Rotarians can be found everywhere, through volunteerism and fundraising for organizations such as Meals on Wheels, Homes for Heroes, and Keep Rockland Beautiful (to name just a few). While every Rotary Club has the same mission and vision, clubs operate independently. Each club’s membership determines a slate of causes and activities they will support, while allowing for the flexibility to also respond to unforeseen needs that arise.



*Rotarians at the Montefiore Nyack Rides & Strides event to support breast cancer research. Photo courtesy of Nanuet-West Nyack Rotary.*

**PARTNER  
HIGHLIGHT**

**“Service Above Self” Drives  
Rockland Rotarians (Continued)**

“Rotary has the reputation of being the best kept secret,” according to **Matthew Konecni**, who is a member of the **Nanuet-West Nyack Rotary Club** and serves as the Assistant Governor of Rotary District 7210 (which includes Rockland and other parts of the Hudson Valley). He says this in reference to the immediacy with which its members respond to real needs in the community; Rotarians serve because there is a need, and they do so without fanfare.

He recalls the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a couple of weeks, the Rotary Clubs in Rockland collaborated to ensure that the community had access to PPE (personal protective equipment), which was scarce at the time. More recently, members from the Clarkstown, New City, and Nanuet-West Nyack clubs refurbished a van for a local family impacted by ALS. The project which cost more than \$8,000 would have been out of reach for the family without support from the Rotarians, specifically **Noah George** of **Global Collision** and **Anyiro Garcia** from **9W AB Towing**, both of whom offered their services in-kind, staying true to the Rotary motto, “Service Above Self.”

Konecni says he was initially invited by a colleague to check out a local Rotary and ultimately joined because he liked the community-oriented lens through which many Rotarians approached business. His passion for the values of Rotary is palpable and infectious. He is also well-versed in the details of governance of the organization, given his position as Assistant Governor for the district. However, when asked what he wants people to know about Rotary, he says simply, “When there is a call to act, we answer that call.” He encourages anyone for whom this message resonates to learn more at the [Rockland County Rotary website](#) and to consider getting involved.

**Rotarians in action. Photos courtesy of Nanuet-West Nyack Rotary.**


*Lining the streets of  
Main Street in  
Nanuet to honor  
those we lost on  
September 11.*



*Supporting a local  
veteran with a car  
donation.*

## SUCCESS STORY



### Chris Drag's Secret to Success? Helping Others Find It

Upon meeting **Chris Drag**, it's easy to see why he has built a solid customer base at **Low Tor Quick Lube** in Haverstraw over the past 30 or so years. His demeanor is soft-spoken, genuine, and down-to-earth. He takes pride in providing a service that is convenient, efficient, and simple. "I'm not trying to sell something to people that they don't need," he says. Instead, his goal is to make sure people have the information they need so they can make their own decisions.

What keeps generations of customers coming back is the rapport Drag has built with them. He knows their names and asks about their kids' soccer games. He talks about the "mutual trust" he has developed with both his customers and staff. He will humbly say when asked about the success of his business, "it's not because of me, but because everyone works as a team."

At the shop, the staff is a close-knit team that feels more like a family. In fact, family is a running theme in the business. Drag credits his sister Tina for being the backbone of the entire operation. While he is the face of the business, he says she does everything else. "Tina is the one who truly keeps it all together," he says. His nephew also works with them at the shop. Drag has employed multiple members of other local families, including current staff members who are father and son, and previous interns who are sisters.

This ability to make personal connections and invest time in people is likely what the staff at Rockland Works recognized in Drag when they approached him about offering internships. He's had more than a dozen interns come through his doors (some of whom he ended up hiring when the internship ended). Because they don't always know what they want when they arrive, Drag takes the time to get to know them so he can customize their experience based on their interests and strengths.



*Chris Drag at the shop with Tezia, one of his interns. Photo courtesy of Rockland Works*



## ➤➤➤ Chris Drag (continued)

His deep commitment to the community ultimately led him to be appointed to the Workforce Development Board of Rockland County (WDBRC) this year. "Chris leads with purpose and a genuine desire to create lasting, positive impact on our Rockland County community – qualities that make him a tremendous asset to the Board and to all those we serve," says **Howard Hellman**, Vice Chair of the **Workforce Development Board of Rockland County**.

After three decades in this business, Drag has built a well-oiled machine and has the luxury of taking more leisure time away from the shop. But he still chooses to spend his days onsite, talking to customers and training interns. When asked what the secret is to the longevity of his business, he says simply, "I enjoy it."



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*This is an excerpt of a previously written article. To read the full story, visit <https://www.rocklandforwardny.com/>*

## COMMUNITY CORNER



**We Want to Hear from YOU!**  
**Join the Conversation!**

***"Are there areas in Rockland County that could benefit from more revitalization? If so, where? And what would you like to see there?"***



Let us know your thoughts on this question by clicking [HERE](#) or by using the QR code! You can also share ideas or topics you'd like to hear about in the Rockland Roundtable newsletter and podcast!

# COMING UP

Below are a few highlighted upcoming events. To learn more about events and things to do in Rockland County, please visit [ExploreRocklandNY.com](https://www.explorerocklandny.com)



**Through December 19, 2025**

**Africa 24/7: The Legacy of Black Visual Culture -**

Finkelstein Memorial Library, Spring Valley

Click [HERE](#) for more information



**Sunday, December 21, 2025**

**All Together Now Winter Solstice Chorus Concert**

The Angel Nyack, Nyack

Click [HERE](#) for more information



**Sunday, December 21, 2025**

**Festival of Lights Hannukah Celebration**

Nanuet Town Centre, Nanuet

Click [HERE](#) for more information



**Through Sunday, December 28, 2025**

**Gingerbread House Display**

Bear Mountain Inn, Tomkins Cove

Click [HERE](#) for more information