

“The Story”



The Genesis Group

by Sandra Fentiman

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandra Fentiman



Sandra Fentiman has a background in print journalism, having been a staff writer and editor at daily newspapers the Keene (NH) Sentinel, the (Oneonta, NY) Daily Star, and at the (Utica, NY) Observer-Dispatch. Her writing has earned awards from the New York State Associated Press, the National Federation of Press Women, Northeast Affiliate, and the New York State Agricultural Society. She was manager of Marketing and Public Relations at St. Elizabeth Medical Center for 8 years and continues in Community Outreach for Mohawk Valley Health System. In 2016, she started a freelance business, As You Tell It, writing memoirs and eulogies.

ABOUT THE FOUNDER

Joseph R. Carucci



Joseph R. Carucci, a Developer and Real Estate Broker for more than 40 years, passed away on March 15, 2010 at the age of 69. Carucci was a longtime community Leader and was the founder and president of The Genesis Group. He grew a highly respected office, Prudential Carucci Real Estate. He created buildings, he renovated buildings and bought and sold buildings, always striving to improve quality of life for others. He was a Leader in his community that he loved so very much. He was involved with many organizations and community projects. He founded a group called The Genesis Group, because he believed in the importance of regional unity and cooperation.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

The Genesis Group • 100 Seymour Road • Utica • New York 13502 • (P) 315.792.7187 • (F) 315.797.1280

To learn more about The Genesis Group visit: www.TheGenesisGroup.org



YEAR 2000

“Genesis” means origin or mode of formation

. . . and during its 17 years in existence to date, The Genesis Group has articulated a vision for a new beginning in the Mohawk Valley. “Genesis is community,” says Raymond J. Durso, Jr., Executive Director. “It has heart power, as our founder, Joe Carucci, used to say.” Its mission is to unite business and community leaders who are dedicated to advancing the area’s social, economic and cultural interests, and to enhancing unity and cooperation throughout the Mohawk Valley region. The group and its volunteers gather at events throughout the year to support and celebrate each other’s industries and achievements, to plan growth opportunities and to network and assemble those who can engineer change. This happens via programs that celebrate citizens excelling at some of the most difficult and important jobs in our communities: education and healthcare, entrepreneurship, technology and economic development. Add tours to share what local businesses do, career fairs to engage youth, and college networking events, and you get an idea how this non-profit organization functions. Genesis committees of “ordinary” citizens, who care about each other and their neighbors, work throughout each year to communicate good news, attract volunteers and educate the public on areas needing involvement.

Here is the story of Genesis..... In 2000, local real estate broker Christine S. Ossont received a phone call from a previous buyer Ewa and Tom Lawrence, who asked for her help arranging a meeting with Joseph R. Carucci, a community leader and Chairman of the Board of the Mohawk Valley Chamber of Commerce. They wondered if Carucci could influence people to hear Robert Matthews and his message about international security issues at Rome Laboratories and reach out to those who would understand a security program he was planning and help move it forward.

Meetings took place between Robert Mathews, Congressman Sherwood Boehlert and County Executive Ralph Eannace. There seemed to be little interest in the topic at the time. But it was realized that there was a need to create a unified region which would give us a strong population base of 350,000 people. Elected leaders wanted to know what was important to citizens. They needed to learn what would be priority items for the region, and they needed a strong population base to support those priorities and help to move them forward. A neutral, energized, pure of heart group of interested citizens could help community leaders and elected officials to work together to get things done.

Other issues facing the Mohawk Valley came into the discussion and before long, Todd Hutton, President of Utica College; Peter Cayan, President of SUNY Institute of Technology; and Robert Fowler, President of the Mohawk Valley Chamber of Commerce; joined in. Soon others were invited to the meetings and a gathering of about 20 dedicated citizens began meeting every Tuesday and Thursday morning for two hours at Utica College.

“Joseph R. Carucci became the founder and President of the Genesis Group. This core group became its first governing board,” says Durso. “Peter Cayan kindly offered neutral office space at SUNY IT.” The group discussed regional thinking and how important it would be to unite communities. “It is very important for us to have a connection to the North, South, East and West of the city of Utica and to truly be a regional organization,” Durso says. “The core group began by increasing communication and working relationships.”

In its first year, the group asked many questions. Among them: How can we support community and government leaders and inspire them to collaborate? How can the region's people overcome a history of negativity to appreciate and focus on the positive aspects of our area? How can the Mohawk Valley's citizens come together to create common goals? How could this group bond the talent in the region to advance its economy? How could our community's varied elements work together to focus on important strategies? How can our people make life better for all of us?



“In the first year, we held focus groups,” says Ossont, now Genesis Assistant Vice President. “They asked: What is needed to progress? Where are we going, in this region? From those discussions came five main areas of interest: economic development, healthcare, education, tourism and technology.”

Several elected officials told the committee that they needed more input from citizens on what direction to take for positive change. The core group knew that these government and community leaders worked hard and yet there were many organizations that operated in “silos”, not working together with others who could make them more effective. “With a regional population of more than 350,000, we knew that this citizen’s group could share information about the good and important things that organizations are accomplishing,” Ossont says. Genesis could “connect the dots.”

As a result, The Genesis Group was developed to facilitate and lead positive change in the Mohawk Valley Region – economic, social and quality-of-life change.

“We knew Genesis needed to be neutral and pure of heart,” Ossont says. “As discussion continued, committee members agreed we should create an apolitical, grass-roots organization that would draw people interested in helping community leaders, non-profit organizations and elected officials. The point would be to help all of us.”

Vital in all of this was Joe Carucci. As the first Genesis leader, he instilled his most closely-held beliefs as the group started working steadily to keep its leaders focused. “Joe always said, ‘Take your time. Establish your credibility, especially in the beginning,’” Durso remembers.

After about a year of the core group meeting, Durso was hired as the Genesis Executive Director. “Ray has been the perfect leader for Genesis,” Ossont says. “He’s gracious, he’s friendly, and he’s welcoming to everyone. He makes everyone feel important and they have trust and confidence in him.” He is organized, dedicated and has excellent business skills.

However, Durso gives credit to the founders, and the members of the Board who followed. Joseph R. Carucci was the President and Chairman of the Board.

“The leadership, through its Board of Trustees, has been amazing,” Durso says. “We have been blessed with so many great people who have served on this Board. Our Board has been strengthened by many who’ve offered their time, talent and experiences: Gene Quadraro, Gordon Garrett, Dr. Gerard Capraro, Alice Savino, Roger Skinner, Patrick Becher and Frank Przybycien, just to name a few.

“Vincent Coyne, has been here since the beginning and he just keeps contributing after 17 years,” Durso continues. “He is sharp as a penny and is so valuable to us. Keith Fenstermacher has also been with us for 17 years; he took a leave of absence when he became president of Faxton St. Luke’s Healthcare. He was still involved, just not as much. He turned in his resignation and we didn’t accept it – we said, ‘You’re not going anywhere.’”



Since inception, committee meetings have been held at the Prudential building at 600 French Road in New Hartford. After two years of gathering to discuss ideas and consider options, the next step was to bring groups of people together from throughout the region to examine priority needs. The Genesis Group held a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) by collecting data from more than 100 community leaders.

Additional context was added from numerous master plans that had been written for the area through the years. Genesis members compiled information from approximately 26 previous studies that had been performed at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Assembling the information, the committee developed an updated plan of action utilizing the many items that had been included in previous studies.

By then it was 2003, three years since the first core group began meeting. Genesis leaders and members knew it was still important to bring people together and build trust where there had been little before. For decades, area citizens had been promised new jobs and economic growth that didn’t materialize. Understandably, people became skeptical. Now, citizens from this area were coming together to strengthen this region’s position, create opportunities for progress, and celebrate accomplishments.



Monthly general Genesis meetings, open to the public, were held at Hotel Utica where committee chairs reported on their progress. Often, meetings had specific themes or topics with a guest speaker or panel. Durso made time at the end of each meeting for individual members to make announcements of upcoming events or to report progress and good news. No dues were required to be a member – which is still the case today.

With input from many, an official Mission statement was developed: “The Genesis Group is a leader, facilitator and catalyst for positive economic, social and quality of life change in the Mohawk Valley.”

Members determined that Genesis would: • *Cultivate a regional vision* • *Identify and prioritize opportunities and initiatives* • *Develop broad strategies for success with decisive action* • *Involve business, political and community leaders and associated groups* • *Challenge our fellow citizens to turn vision into reality.*

In a video commemorating the Genesis five-year anniversary, Carucci said there are other regions that have a group of people that serve as a conduit to bring diverse parties together.

“All of these organizations work very hard and there is a need for an organization to be the communicator between them,” he said in 2005. “Genesis helps them communicate with each other and we organize meetings for them and with them. It’s bringing the community together.”

Diane Shoemaker of Rome put it this way in the video: “The real thing about Genesis is that we can save time, we can save money, and we can really expand our human resources by working together. Genesis provides the forum to share ideas, to share funds, to share services for people who work in the region.”

Dr. Mathew Hawes of Herkimer agreed. He said, “Some of the same issues that Oneida County has, that Utica has, apply to Herkimer County... I think it’s that symbiotic relationship, getting people to work together, that is the key to really promoting this area and getting some stronger economic development.”

By that time, Genesis was offering a Newcomers program and Community Connections initiative, to engage those who have moved to Upstate New York as well as long-term residence, in activities and events across the region.

As time progressed, the need for action became apparent and The Genesis Group created new projects and events that would generate positive impact. While the number of people wanting to get involved was growing, the group focused on regional thinking and realized that we are stronger as a region when we display unity and cooperation.

Early in its existence, Genesis had started a Young Professionals subgroup for the under-40 crowd to gather and discuss their careers, interests and hobbies. It grew fast, from its inception in 2001 from about 50 people to 245 strong within a year. From there, the Mohawk Valley’s first young professionals’ summit, STRIVE, was created, along with Striving for Success – an annual program that recognizes young leaders for their dedication and community support.

By its ten-year anniversary in 2010, the Mission statement had been updated to: The Genesis Group is a civic organization that unites Business and Community Leaders working to advance regional economic, social and cultural interests, and to foster unity and cooperation in the Mohawk Valley region.

Eve Van de Wal, Regional President for Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, has observed Genesis activities and says:

“When I think about the question ‘what has the Genesis Group done for our Mohawk Valley region?’ I can’t help but think ‘What hasn’t it done?’ Whether it is recognizing outstanding people and organizations in the health care and education industries, supporting young professionals and entrepreneurs, or hosting community forums with elected officials and business leaders, Genesis is at the forefront.

“The Genesis Group has been called upon to facilitate community forums on region-wide projects, its members convene community Discovery Tours throughout the Mohawk Valley to enhance the community's awareness of issues and opportunities, host ‘Taste of the Mohawk Valley’ at the F.X. Matt Brewing Company to showcase local restaurants; and the area's 9/11 breakfast and 4th of July parade are as successful as they are because of Genesis' involvement,” she says. “The list goes on and on! I believe that the Mohawk Valley would not be what it is without the Genesis Group working day-in and day-out for a better community and a brighter future for all of us.”

In 2010, Genesis created the Joseph R. Carucci Legacy Award in honor of its co-founder. This award is given to area individuals who exemplify the same dedication that Joe had towards our community. The awards are a great way to thank these people for all that they do and to keep Joe's legacy alive.

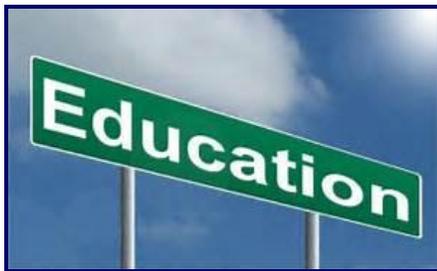
Durso gives a good deal of credit to Ossont for the organization’s success. “Chris and I speak almost daily. We put a lot of thought into our decisions and work as a team,” he says. “It's a pleasure to call her my friend and I value our conversations.”

As the group celebrates 17 years of working together, its members are more excited than ever about the future of the regional community as it grows and transforms, continuing to power an economic and educational resurgence in Upstate New York.

“For those who are new to Genesis, please know that everyone is invited to become involved in shaping our future and continuing to make more good things happen,” Ossont says. “We need as many people as possible to join us in the work of service to our region. The pride of knowing you are playing a part in moving the Mohawk Valley forward to be the best we can be is a huge reward. We need everyone’s vision and ideas.”

Durso agrees, noting that as people look to the future of The Genesis Group, they will stay focused on the needs of our community.

“Everything we set out to do must have, as its goal, the desire to make a positive impact on the Mohawk Valley region and its diverse people,” he says. “All communities have their challenges and their opportunities. We are growing personally and collectively, and want to continue that growth and share it with newcomers and natives alike.”



Among the many projects that Genesis presents to the region are:

Career Days with Herkimer and Oneida County school districts - uniting students in middle school and early high school with professionals in numerous occupations to illuminate career opportunities.

Celebration of Education, held during American Education Week each November, honors educators and programs that make a positive impact on students from the pre-kindergarten level through college. The **Education Hall of Distinction** inducts individuals who have made a life-long impact on Mohawk Valley citizens through education.

College Community Network, begun by former Oneida County Executive Ralph Eannace, brings together students from the area’s colleges and shows them the region’s numerous benefits. Many businesses offer discounts to the more than 25,000 college students in this area and Genesis volunteers are glad to share the stories when students decide to continue their lives here post-graduation.

Community Connections include the Ambassador and Newcomers programs, as well as a “Did You Know” campaign, support of the Chamber Alliance of the Mohawk Valley, area Chambers of Commerce and partnering organizations, plus speaking engagements at civic group meetings such as Rotary clubs.

Discovery Tours are offered throughout the year at various business, government and organizational sites to raise awareness of opportunities and showcase behind-the-scenes activities. Board member Claudia Hartz has been, and continues to be, an integral part of the tours and their success.

An **Elected Leaders and Community Forum** involves local, county state and federal officials who speak and answer questions at an open forum.

The **Healthcare Recognition** grew from a partnership between the Medical Societies of Oneida, Herkimer, Madison, Chenango, Oswego and Cayuga Counties and Genesis, celebrating its 12th year in 2017. It honors people from across the health care industry that are recognized by their peers and the community for their work. The **Mohawk Valley Healthcare Hall of Distinction** inducts individuals who have made an impact throughout their lives in that field.

Technology and Economic Development programs include support of the Mohawk Valley Engineers Council and facilitating several initiatives: the Mohawk Valley Matters, a regional blueprint and action plan; a regional Main Street program and a region-wide Sustainability Project.

Striving For Success, a program that highlights young leaders in the community and offers opportunities for them to grow and develop in their careers.

The list goes on and on, including **Gems of Distinction**, **9/11 Community Prayer Breakfast** and a newsletter titled **Generate** that highlights activities and results. The Genesis Group “East Room” ~ located at Gems Along the Mohawk in Herkimer, is named after the group as a way to have more exposure in Herkimer County. The idea and naming rights were donated to the group by Genesis Trustee Dr. Renee Scialdo Shevat.

In conclusion.....The Genesis Group and its Board of Trustees appreciate the continued support of so many dedicated volunteers and supporters. Their focus will remain on the “community’s agenda.” Genesis volunteers will continue to “take action, achieve results and make a positive difference.” The Mohawk Valley region “is” a better place today, because The Genesis Group has and will continue to remain a force for positive change and growth. **Their founder Joe Carucci would be so proud!**

