

If Rochester is losing, these guys will take more of it

Joel Seligman calls it the Rochester miracle.

The University of Rochester president says it's nothing short of miraculous that the region could lose all the jobs it did as Eastman Kodak and other large companies drastically downsized over the past 30 years — and yet show an increase in employment.

"We've transformed ourselves," he told a Rochester Downtown Development Corp. luncheon Thursday.

While Rochester always has had an economy based on innovation, that attribute has been joined by another: resilience. We get knocked down, we get up again.

A knowledge-based economy — high-tech health care, advanced manufacturing, energy breakthroughs, telecommunications — has grown up to replace an economy that revolved around little yellow boxes of camera film.

Seligman and Danny Wegman, CEO of his family's supermarket **business**, are co-chairs of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council. At Thursday's event, they defended the council against criticism that its economic

growth plan didn't win one of the four top awards last month in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's competition among regions for state dollars.

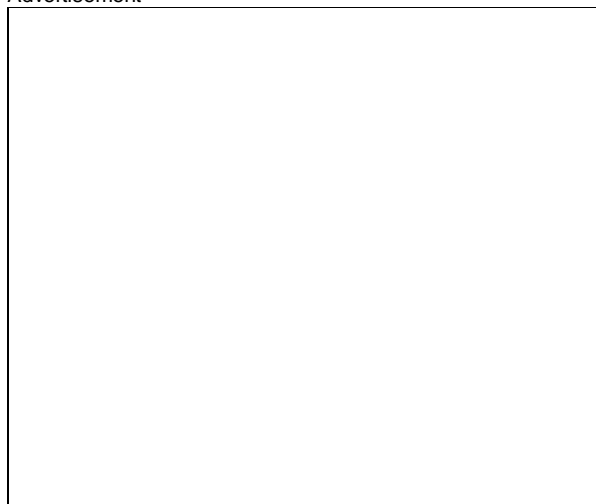
What this region did get — \$68.8 million for more than 90 projects — "isn't pocket change," Seligman said, insisting that things will even out during subsequent rounds of **funding** and that Rochester and the Finger Lakes will catch up to Buffalo and Syracuse, winners of slightly more than \$100 million each in the first round.

"Were we losers? Absolutely not," the UR president said.

Wegman suggested that if this region is losing, he'll take a second helping of it. Noting that Rochester accounts for more than half of all the private-sector jobs being created upstate, he said, "I call that winning."

A key part of the Finger Lakes growth plan is to take advantage of the space Kodak no longer needs at Eastman Business Park.

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The park, thanks to the infrastructure Kodak developed and maintained, can easily absorb new and expanding **businesses**. The regional plan calls for it to become a hub of energy research and development.

Seligman described the regional plan as a "post-Kodak" plan. He sits on the company's board of directors, but acknowledged he has no idea how its Chapter 11 bankruptcy will play out. He guessed it will be a smaller company if it successfully emerges from bankruptcy in 18 to 24 months.

On Friday, I listened to Kent Gardner of the Center for Governmental Research present an economic review and outlook to hundreds of Nothnagle Realtors employees. "There's concern that we'll see (Kodak) people leave the community," he said.

If so, Rochester will be tested again, perhaps even knocked down. You know what follows.

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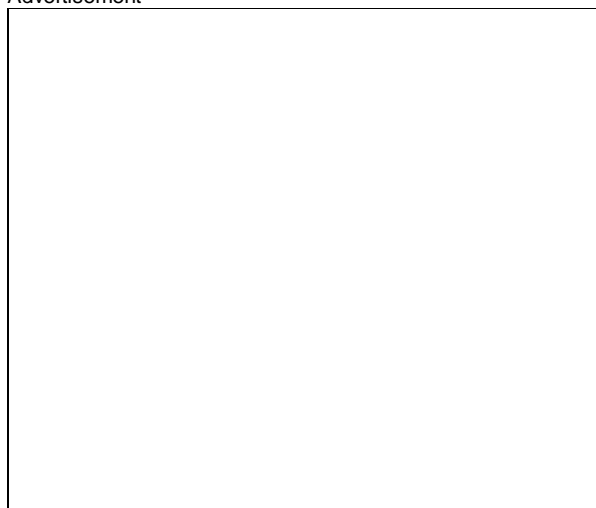
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