

# VALLEY NEWS

THE NEWS SOURCE OF THE UPPER VALLEY

Published 8/14/05

VALLEY NEWS HOME

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

CONTACT US

WEB EXTRAS

VALLEY CALENDAR

CLASSIFIED ADS

EMPLOYMENT ADS

ABOUT  
THE UPPER VALLEY

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

AP WIRE

## Open Door To Regional Cooperation

By Sarwar A. Kashmeri

For the Valley News

The governors of Vermont and New Hampshire joined forces a few days ago to personally promote the Upper Valley's tourist attractions, and to add gubernatorial muscle to their tourism offices' efforts at getting National Scenic Byway designation for the New Hampshire communities of Cornish, Claremont and Charlestown and the Vermont communities of Windsor, Springfield and Bellows Falls.

Part of the plan is to design and publish tourist marketing materials with money provided by both states -- an unusual level of cooperation in that taxpayer funds from both states will be aggregated to serve a regional good.

Gov. John Lynch of New Hampshire pointed out that joint marketing will boost local economies by attracting more tourists, and allow both Vermont and New Hampshire to spend their marketing dollars more effectively. And Gov. Jim Douglas of Vermont was equally effusive of the bistate initiative, saying that "the Connecticut river isn't a line that divides us, but a bond that unites us."

I am sure I was not the only one intrigued by this positive tone set by the governors, and their imaginative proposal that taxpayer dollars from both states be pooled for the purpose of benefiting the region, as opposed to each state doing its own thing.

Let's face it, even though it may make good business sense, politics being what it is, one does not often see tax dollars from one state joined in an effort to also benefit citizens from another state, and it is a real tribute to both Lynch and Douglas that they have opened the door to regional cooperation.

If the two states can join their tourism marketing efforts, might they be able to find other areas where bistate cooperation can help local tax dollars go further? Purchasing commodities such as heating oil, for instance? So I put the question to the executives who run two neighboring Upper Valley towns to get their reaction.

"It is not a bad idea and I wouldn't mind trying it," Robert Forguites, town manager of Springfield, Vt., told me. But he was realistic enough to point out the impediments that lie buried in state legislation. "We have different regulations that govern public procurement in each state, and they would have to be looked at to see if this was permissible," he said.

That sounded halfway promising, I thought, and called Guy Santagate, city manager of Claremont, Springfield's neighbor across the river. "Absolutely. It ought to be tried," Santagate said.

Claremont already works with its New Hampshire neighbors to pool purchases. "We began asking for joint oil bids with Lebanon and Hanover in 2002, and in the first year Claremont saved around \$50,000," he said. There is no reason, according to Santagate, why Upper Valley towns on either side of the river ought not to try bistate strategies to make their local tax revenues more efficient.

Wouldn't the issue of separate regulations pose a serious problem? "It would pose a problem," Santagate said, "but once local agreement is reached, there is no reason why new legislation cannot be introduced to change existing regulations when it benefits the taxpayers."

Santagate said he believes that the economies of Springfield, Windsor, Claremont, Lebanon and Hanover are all interlinked. "How can we be shining cities on the hill if the valley is in shambles?" he asked.

Machinist training might be another regional issue worth discussing.

In an earlier column on manufacturing, I pointed out that the Machine Technology Program, housed at Claremont's Sugar River Valley Regional Technical Center, is the largest such facility in the region with an annual output of between 40 and 45 machinists and could easily accommodate twice as many. On the Vermont side, the Machine Tool Program at the River Valley Technical Center/Howard Dean Education Center in Springfield will graduate only four to eight students this year, and maybe fewer.

Might it be more cost effective to set up Claremont as the region's machinist training hub, and use the resulting budget savings to charge the Dean Center with developing a regional marketing program to help recruit more young adults from both sides of the river for scores of well-paying manufacturing job that the area's companies have been unable to fill for months?

At a recent visit to the Dean Center, its hard working executive director, Julie Ladieu-Walton, told me that the center already serves Cheshire and Sullivan counties of New Hampshire: Fall Mountain Schools in New Hampshire, for instance, use the Dean Center. So there appears already to be a powerful precedent.

Vermont and New Hampshire are different states, as Douglas pointed out in the visit, "but regardless, we all understand our responsibilities to work together for the good ... of both our states," he said.

Wouldn't it be nice if a town or city manager from the area could leverage the regional tone set by the governors and invite his or her comrades-in-arms to discuss one money-saving idea that they could work on. The journey of a thousand miles, as a wise man once observed, begins with a single step.

Is there a regional leader who'd like to step forward?

\*\*\*

***Sarwar A. Kashmeri of Reading, Vt., advises corporations on communications and marketing strategy and is a fellow of the Foreign Policy Association. This***

***twice-monthly column explores the Upper Valley's "business climate," focusing on the issues and conditions affecting the region's economic health. Kashmeri can be reached at [skashmeri@aol.com](mailto:skashmeri@aol.com).***

[Back to the story index](#)

---

[Valley News Home](#) [Subscribe](#) [Advertise](#) [Contact Us](#) [Web Extras](#) [Valley Calendar](#)

[Classified Ads](#) [Employment Ads](#) [The Upper Valley](#) [Associated Press](#)