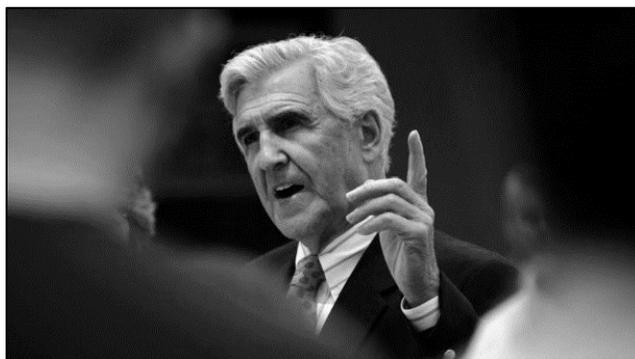


This Week in Saratoga County History

Bruno, Others Did Hard Work for Nanotech

Submitted by Steven Williams June 15, 2022

Steven Williams is a retired Schenectady Daily Gazette journalist. He spent most of his career covering Saratoga County communities and regional issues. Steve authored the Off the Northway column on Saratoga County which has been compiled into a book to be released by the Saratoga County History Center on June 28 7 PM at Brookside Museum in Ballston Spa with a presentation and book signing. This article from the book was first published on May 12, 2012.



Joseph L. Bruno 1929-2020

Credit: The Daily Gazette

Joe Bruno never fell from favor with many Capital Region residents, and the vast sums of state money he brought to the region were mostly good investments. But by the time President Obama visited the semiconductor research center at the University at Albany on May 8th, 2012, he had long been driven from power.

President Barack Obama's nanotechnology visit to Albany was announced the same day that former Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno was in a federal courtroom in Albany, reindicted on corruption charges, but as well-tailored as ever.

Here's the irony: Bruno, despite his arrogance, had a passion for using his power to beneficially reshape the Capital Region economy – and GlobalFoundries wouldn't be in Saratoga County without him. When he deposed fellow Republican and then-majority leader Ralph Marino in 1994, Bruno said Marino had become too smug in his power, too quick to steer state taxpayer money to things like high school swimming pools in his Long Island district.

But Bruno was soon doing the same thing, dropping hundreds of millions of dollars collected from residents of Endicott and Batavia and Huntington Station on projects in Troy and Albany and Saratoga. A minor league baseball stadium may bear his name, but here's betting the Luther Forest Technology Campus will cast a longer shadow.

Bruno sank \$100 million of state money into developing the enormous industrial park in Malta and Stillwater, the kind of money it takes to turn the middle of nowhere into somewhere. Like Bruno, many if not most of the people who did the heavy lifting that led to the region landing GlobalFoundries have exited public life, voluntarily or not.

Luther Forest was really the second choice for where to build a Capital Region chip plant, after the North Greenbush Town Board rejected Bruno's dream of a semiconductor manufacturer located there, among the fields overlooking the Albany skyline.

The Rensselaer County town simply said no. In Malta it took some convincing. At the time, people were treating the 1,400 acres of pine plantation as their private woods, so turning it into an enormous industrial park was divisive, believe it or not. Public hearings on the tech park could be as tense as an air traffic control room. The Town Board held dozens of meetings on trails, traffic and environmental safeguards, meetings that lasted until past an owl's bedtime.

David Meager, who was Malta town supervisor at the time, said some of the recent glowing national reports about GlobalFoundries transforming the upstate economy "didn't really give any indication of the hard work and heavy lifting that went in early on."

Meager said more credit should go to Ken Green and Jack Kelley, the top leadership at the Saratoga Economic Development Corp. when the technology campus was first proposed, in secretive discussions between 1998 and 2002. Neither is with SEDC any longer.

Green brilliantly and tactfully coaxed the complex project through town zoning approvals in Malta and Stillwater until final approval in 2004, and he was at the edge of the stage when Gov. George Pataki announced a tentative deal for a chip plant in 2006, the deal that coaxed what was then AMD with an unprecedented \$1.4 billion in state cash and future tax breaks. (Bruno, of course, was instrumental in that package, too.) But Green would pick up two too many DWIs, spend a few months in jail, and move to Florida. Kelley left SEDC for a private real estate job.

Since his resignation in 2008 and first indictment in 2009, Bruno's name has also disappeared from the credit lines. (Bruno's two 2009 convictions were overturned by an appeals court last November, but he now faces charges all over again in a fresh federal indictment.) Nevertheless, the \$100 million in state money that went into developing the technology campus was almost all Bruno's doing.

"There were endless studies that had to be done up front. The site had to be analyzed, and Joe made sure the money was there," Meager said.

Then there's water. Chip plants need lots of it, and Luther Forest was a dozen miles from the nearest river. Saratoga County supervisors argue that their financing of the county water system in 2008 was a courageous step, integral to attracting a chip plant. They took the step before there was a final deal for the plant, basically diving based on a promise the pool would be filled. Without the chip plant, the water system wasn't going to support itself, even with the \$30 million Bruno promised it.

Bruno and Pataki were both out of office by the time the county needed that money, and the state bureaucracy repeatedly put the county through some high hoops, even as contractors were demanding to be paid.

Meanwhile, off-stage events provided fuel for the skeptics. The semiconductor industry went through a downturn, AMD hemorrhaged red ink, and the company wasn't making any promises to anyone. It finally sold its manufacturing plants to the government of oil-rich Abu Dhabi in 2008. Abu Dhabi also snapped up an established semiconductor company in Singapore, and merged the companies to form GlobalFoundries. "I'm just hopeful people will remember there was a lot of hard work," said Meager, who retired in 2005 after 34 years as town supervisor. "I'd be a wealthy man if I had a nickel for every time someone said, 'They're not going to come.'"