



“As County Executive, I feel it is my responsibility to focus on making Rensselaer County a better place to live, work, open a business, and raise a family.”



# Diligent Leadership

**Kathy Jimino**  
Rensselaer County Executive

**Success Magazine: Kathy, what does success mean to you?**

**Kathy Jimino:** Success means making lives better.

**SM:** You came from a large family. How did this help to shape who you are today?

**KJ:** Coming from a large family you learn early how to share, how to work as a team, how to be thrifty, and how to be there for others when they need you.

**SM:** What was your experience at Siena College like? What was your major?

**KJ:** I majored in mathematics at Siena College. I thought I wanted to teach, but after having gone through student teaching and having butterflies in my stomach every morning, I knew this was not the career for me. To this day, I have great admiration for teachers and the vital role they play in our communities.

**SM:** You went on to get your Master's Degree in social policy. Why did you choose to go down this path?

**KJ:** As I advanced in my career in government, I thought it would be helpful to become familiar with the thoughts and ideas of others as to how the needs of society should be addressed by government. So I pursued my Master's Degree in the field of social policy.

**SM:** What was your first job out of school?

**KJ:** My first job out of Siena was with the Rensselaer County Data Processing Department, as a computer programmer analyst. We provided services to employees in both Rensselaer County and the City of Troy. Consequently, I learned a great deal about how city and county government work, as we automated many departments and processes.

**SM:** You were the Budget Director for the City of Troy as well as the City Manager. What accomplishment are you most proud of from that period in your career?

**KJ:** During my term as Budget Director and then City Manager in Troy, the City was struggling with a huge deficit brought on by questionable financial transactions undertaken by the prior administration. Working with our bond holders, our labor unions, our State Legislative delegation, the State Comptroller's Office and our citizens, we were able to craft and implement a plan that brought the City back from the edge of bankruptcy. My work during that time was recognized by the American Society for Public Administration, Empire State Capital Area Chapter with their Frank C. Moore Award.

**SM:** In 1995 you ran for the Mayor of the City of Troy. What prompted this decision?

**KJ:** Having served as City Manager, become familiar with the concerns of the citizens of the City and worked so closely as part of

the team that created the City's financial recovery plan, I thought I was certainly capable of becoming the City's Mayor. When people approached and encouraged me to run, I felt I had both the experience and the desire to continue to serve.

**SM:** What was your experience working for the New York State Senate Finance Committee?

**KJ:** While working for the New York State Senate Finance Committee, I gained tremendous knowledge about how state government and in particular the state legislature works. As a principal analyst and later Deputy Director of the Office of Budget Studies, I oversaw many areas of state government from both a budget and legislative perspective. I also had the opportunity to meet many people both in state government and in the private and not-for-profit sectors whose relationships I still value and draw on for my work in county government.

**SM:** Why did you choose to re-enter into the political ring in 1997, and in what capacity did you do so?

**KJ:** In 1997, a vacancy arose in the County Legislature and I was asked to fill the seat and represent the City of Troy. Knowing that I could draw on my prior work experience in county government and my continued desire to improve my community and the lives of my neighbors, I agreed to be appointed in April of 1997 and to run for the office the following November, when I was officially elected to the office.

**SM:** What are some of the committees that you have been involved in?

**KJ:** While serving on the County Legislature, I chaired the Aging Committee and had the opportunity to work with the County's Aging Department in providing services to our senior citizens. I was also a member of the Contracts and Agreements Committee which reviewed all departmental contracts and significant purchases. During my tenure I also chaired a special committee that was tasked with determining the best way to allocate funding targeted toward the prevention of tobacco use.

**SM:** When were you appointed County Executive?

**KJ:** I was appointed County Executive in May 2001, when the prior County Executive resigned.

**SM:** What were your goals for the position when you were first began?

**KJ:** My first priority as County Executive was, and still is, to ensure that the local services and programs our residents depend upon are available to them and are maintained for future generations. These are programs that I feel improve the quality of life of our residents and include our senior and veterans services, highway maintenance and construction, and the public safety measures taken through the Sheriffs Office and our Bureau of Public Safety. In order to continue these programs while facing the yearly deluge of increased costs brought on by state and federal mandates, I knew those programs had to be operating as effectively and efficiently as possible to ensure that those in need could continue to count on them, and that the taxpayers ultimately footing the bill were only paying what they absolutely had to. Also, we had to grow Rensselaer County's tax base by drawing in more residents and businesses. This economic growth is funding our programs and services and allowing us to keep our tax rate stable and highly competitive with other counties throughout New York State.

**SM:** Your administration is dedicated to the prevention of substance abuse. Why is this issue so important to you?

**KJ:** Many people, especially young people, will not be able to achieve their full potential or reach their goals in life because of their usage of drugs and alcohol. We discovered shortly after my taking office, that our percentage of underage DWI arrests in Rensselaer County was twice that of the New York State average. That indicated to me that our young people were more involved in alcohol usage and subsequently making dangerous decisions that could negatively impact their lives or the lives of others in the community. Because of this, I formed our Underage Drinking Coalition—with participants from all walks of life and all sectors of the community—to address this issue. I don't believe this is a problem strictly for parents or for our schools. Rather, I believe that we are all influenced by what our young people do, and we all have the ability to positively impact their decisions. As a result of the efforts of our coalition, we have seen a reduction in usage rates among our young people and our coalition's work has been recognized by the federal government.

**SM:** What are some of the ways that your administration has streamlined services?

**KJ:** We have combined certain departments in order to share administrative and technical staff. We have engaged in performance planning to ensure that our administrative departments are providing optimal support to our service delivery departments, rather than tying them up with bureaucratic red tape. We have promoted shared services with our municipalities, especially in the areas of purchasing, grant administration, and information services in order to reduce duplicative processes and lessen overall costs to our collective taxpayers. And, as co-chair of the Center for Economic Growth's Local Government Council, I have worked with municipal leaders from the greater Capi-

tal Region to foster greater collaboration throughout the region.

**SM:** What other government responsibilities do you currently have?

**KJ:** As County Executive, I feel it is my responsibility to focus on making Rensselaer County a better place to live, work, open a business, and raise a family. I think that draws me into just about everything and, while as County Executive I may not be able to directly address every issue or problem, I can certainly advocate and press the issue with those on the local, state, or federal levels of government who can.

**SM:** How are you able to find a healthy balance in your life?

**KJ:** I try to keep a healthy balance in my life year round by spending time with my family and doing things for myself such as exercising and reading non-work related books. And, once a year I take a vacation to the ocean with my family, leaving my BlackBerry at home. For that week the motto is "Unless a catastrophe happens, don't call!" The people I work with take care of everything at the office that week, and they do a great job!

**SM:** What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

**KJ:** The most rewarding aspect of my job is being able to listen to people's concerns, work to address them, and improve their lives.

**SM:** What is your secret to overcoming adversity?

**KJ:** I believe the best way to overcome adversity is to dedicate yourself to the challenge, seek the best advice you can get, build a good team, work hard, and be patient.

**SM:** Describe yourself in one word.

**KJ:** Diligent.

