



Niagara County  
Public Information Office  
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CONTACT: CHRISTIAN W. PECK  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
TEL: (716) 439-7241  
FAX: (716) 439-7058

**SANDONATO URGES NCCC TO SITE CULINARY INSTITUTE IN  
LASALLE  
SAYS FORMER WENDT'S FACILITY OPTIMAL LOCATION**

LASALLE—Freshman Niagara County Legislator Vincent Sandonato, R-LaSalle, urged Niagara County Community College trustees to site a proposed Culinary Arts Institute at a site in LaSalle, noting that a number of largely-vacant properties in downtown Niagara Falls all possess fatal flaws that jeopardize the success of the proposed cooking school.

Sandonato was also openly critical of several downtown buildings proffered since the failure of city officials to gain an acceptable deal to utilize the much-touted Rainbow Centre Mall—as well as the refusal of the administration of Mayor Paul A. Dyster, D-Niagara Falls, to consider other locations in the sprawling city, including the LaSalle neighborhood that Sandonato represents.

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“The Dyster Administration’s insistence that this Culinary Arts Institute be placed in downtown Niagara Falls, at the detriment of other parts of this county, and even worse, at the detriment of other parts of this city, is troublesome,” Sandonato said in a press briefing held on Buffalo Avenue in LaSalle. “While Mayor Dyster insists the taxpayers fund a massive project in a dying downtown, neighborhoods like LaSalle, that offer viable sites, are being ignored.”

Sandonato said he would like trustees to consider acquiring the former Wendt’s Dairy building, located at 8450 Buffalo Ave. in LaSalle, following the apparent collapse of negotiations by the city to utilize space in the Rainbow Centre Mall—a structure they technically own but are unable to utilize due to a byzantine lease agreement with developer David Cordish.

“As it has become clear to many of us this past week that Mr. Cordish’s Rainbow Centre Mall is no longer a viable option, I believe it is time to reveal a plan I have been working on since arriving in the Legislature in January,” Sandonato said from a podium erected in front of the Wendt’s facility. “It is time for our community college, our county legislature, and other involved parties to look beyond the same tired collection of vacant buildings in downtown Niagara Falls and consider other sites.”

Sandonato noted that, in addition to much lower costs for acquiring the facility, it is ideally constructed for the purpose of housing a culinary school.

"[The Wendt's] site meets the needs of the college, in both square footage—the building totals slightly more than 73,000 square feet, including 4,000 square feet of office space—and in amenities," Sandonato said of the former dairy production facility, which shut down nearly two years ago. "Parking at the site is exceptional, with approximately 150 parking spaces, which should meet faculty and student needs better than the decrepit garage at the Rainbow Centre. The facility is also optimal for food service, with several truck bays and adjacent outdoor fenced storage."

Sandonato also pointed to geographic benefits of the proposed LaSalle site.

"The Wendt's site also enjoys close proximity to the Niagara Falls International Airport, Interstate 190, Buffalo Avenue, and Niagara Falls Boulevard—as well as the Factory Outlet mall and, not insignificantly, a convenient, straight drive to the State Park and Falls attractions," Sandonato said. "It is surrounded by the community with the highest tax base in the city, low crime, and a middle- and upper-middle-class population that would be amenable to serving as a customer base—as would residents of the nearby towns of Niagara and Wheatfield, which are substantially closer to LaSalle than to downtown."

Additionally, Sandonato argued that existing venues in downtown Niagara Falls would both compete with—and potentially be harmed by—the taxpayer-subsidized culinary arts school.

"The Wendt's site would augment the existing small restaurants and bars without facing the significant competition of the Seneca Niagara Casino and the Crowne Plaza, both of which imperil the ability of any downtown site to draw customers," he said.

Of greater concern to Sandonato, however, is the insistence by some that the culinary school be located in downtown regardless of its impact on that area and other parts of Niagara County.

"The Niagara Falls downtown has no greater claim on this resource for our county's taxpayers than any other area in Niagara County, or the City of Niagara Falls," Sandonato said. "I have always supported the presence of the Culinary Arts Institute in Niagara Falls because I believe it will benefit the people of Niagara Falls—not because of the arrogant assumption of some that our city is entitled to it."

Sandonato vowed to work to bring the Culinary Arts Institute to Niagara Falls in a manner that was inclusive of other communities, rather than the current exclusionary tone being pursued by some.

"Ultimately, siting the Culinary Arts Institute requires vision and a commitment to the betterment of our entire community," he said. "The Wendt's Dairy location presents an enhanced opportunity for our community. The Wendt's Dairy venue is economical, flexible, and offers a supporting community that will welcome and help this institution."

Sandonato said he would immediately forward a detailed proposal for utilizing the Wendt's site to college trustees, and urged them to consider the benefits of his proposal.

"I want LaSalle to gain this asset based on our community's merits, and the strength of this proposed facility," Sandonato said.