

# The Columbia Paper

## Fish farming resurfaces in county

April 2, 2015 by PARRY TEASDALE

W. GHENT—John Ng says industrial scale fish farming is a lot like his family's primary business, metal recycling. Adding weight to that claim is the \$11 million his company, Fortune Group, has invested so far in its Hudson Valley Fish Farms in Greenport.

Mr. Ng was a featured speaker at the annual meeting of the Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) at Kozel's restaurant Tuesday morning, March 31. In introducing Mr. Ng, CEDC Executive Director Ken Flood acknowledged that this was not the first fish farm to have occupied the site on Route 9 south of Hudson. A start-up called Local Ocean opened several years ago to much fanfare and then abruptly closed in 2013, abandoning both the facility and the fish inside, with the county seizing the property for unpaid taxes. The new project is unrelated to the earlier one, and Mr. Flood said all that the new owners kept of the old farm were the walls of the building. Mr. Ng said his company will produce 1,000 metric tons of steelhead trout for regional markets. The company will also launch much smaller scale "pilot projects" to produce yellowtail amberjack, called "hiramasa" in sushi restaurants, and Pacific white shrimp.

A company brochure available at the meeting says that future plans also call for large greenhouses for "aquaponic vegetable production" next year. By the time the fish and vegetable operations are functioning, the brochure says the company will have invested over \$15 million and will employ 75 people.

Mr. Ng said the Fortune Group, which is run by Mr. Ng and his father and has recycling operations in Brooklyn, New Jersey, Rhode Island and California, has "internally funded" Hudson Valley Fish Farms so far.

What's the recycling connection? Mr. Ng said that fish waste and the water from the fish tanks is a product that can be used as fertilizer.

"Eighteen months ago I knew nothing about fish farming," he said. But now he expects the operation will bring in its first fish eggs in two months. The brochure says the fish will meet organic standards.

He thanked Greenport Supervisor John Porreca, saying, "We never had a town or municipality work so closely with us."

Also speaking was Bill Van Slyke, vice president of Marketing and External Affairs at Columbia Memorial Health, who outlined the rebranding of Columbia Memorial Hospital and all its related healthcare facilities in the region as Columbia Memorial Health (CMH). It is the largest private employer in both Columbia and Greene counties, and has invested over \$60 million recently in improvements to its facilities, among them an upgrade to the 6th floor patient rooms at the hospital.

Mr. Van Slyke said that 70% of the CMH revenue is generated by its outpatient facilities, in particular its primary care centers.

He said independent comparisons show the hospital equals or exceeds the quality of care provided at larger hospitals and that Columbia Memorial Hospital is the lowest cost provider in the region. Meantime, after intensive work with a consultant, data indicate the hospital has “dramatically improved” patient safety, and has currently gone well over two years with no incidents that could have harmed or did harm a patient.

He also discussed the pending agreement between Columbia Memorial and Albany Medical Center, which is still in the due diligence phase. He emphasized the deal is neither a merger nor an acquisition, and that the areas of cooperation between the two institutions have yet to be worked out in detail. But he said the willingness of the two institutions to cooperate, a factor that led to the agreement in the first place, has already proved helpful by reducing CMH costs for anesthesiologists and improving access to care in that specialty.

The first of the speakers Tuesday was John Gilstrap, executive vice president for expansion and attraction of business with Empire State Development, a state agency.

He explained the various forms of assistance his office provides to improve the business climate in New York State and to help individual businesses and institutions. Among the local firms that have received state funding are Hudson Opera House, the Berkshire Mountain project at Catamount, Premier Personal Products, a cooperative project involving Olana and the Thomas Cole House in Catskill and Etsy.

As Mr. Gilstrap listed the types of assistance available—like business mentors, job development loans, funding for emerging farmers, beer and wine making and manufacturing assistance—he paused on the topic of improving access to broadband Internet connections. He said that Columbia County was one of the “weakest areas” for service in the region. “We’re really going to address that this year,” he said.

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