

His mother, a lifelong Democrat who voted for her son in spite of it, taught him the value of education, hard work and self-reliance. He still holds those values dear. And he seems to have not forgotten his roots . . .

One of Johnson's October campaign promises was that he would donate his entire \$14,500 annual salary to set up and maintain a GED program at his old Jefferson Terrace neighborhood. Eleven months later, the program has seen two women finish the class and receive their GEDs and a second round of classes in process. Johnson wishes there were greater participation. The first class started with ten and experienced a high dropout rate. Hopefully, as word gets around, the classes will grow. But Johnson knows, "Two is better than one is better than none." Johnson places a huge value on education which he refers to as the "great equalizer." So, for him, even small steps are an accomplishment.

POCKET OF PROSPERITY

As we sit in his office in Town Hall, the day after the Presidential election, although Johnson acknowledges that much of our city's population has indeed been hit by the economic woes plaguing our country and world at this time, he takes pride in the fact that Saratoga Springs itself has suffered less from the impact and feels we will bounce back much more quickly than other areas.

We live in a "pocket of prosperity in Upstate New York," he says – with a vast difference between us and Albany, Schenectady, and other cities even in our own area. "Our history, track, and quality of life are all positive things which affect our housing market positively."

He insists there has been no actual monetary effect on housing values in Saratoga, even in the nationwide housing slump. "It might take longer to sell," he says. And, he admits, there has been a "slowing of appreciation." But, he adds, "Our values have not decreased."

Johnson admits that no one knows how these economic conditions will continue to play out nationally, and he knows we will continue to feel it next year and,



possibly beyond. But he feels strongly that "We're more resilient than most communities, because of our 'destination' or 'resort' classification. He points out that, although some merchants did not have as good a season as last year, it has to be attributed to the national downturn, not a locally-engendered one. "Most of our retail stores are doing fine; and our restaurants seem to be doing quite well," he says.

He knows we can expect some closings due to the economy; but, he says, we always have a few, "especially within the first year or two of a new business." Knowing the cost escalation that has been experienced in the past few years, he feels that rents will have to seek their own natural level, adjusting to the new realities. One can only assume that landlords will realize that some rent is better than none, and there are far fewer businesses waiting in line for space during today's economy.

DOWNTOWN ROOTS AND EVOLUTION

Johnson outlines the differences between where our city currently stands compared to what could be found here in the '70s. With a downtown rife with boarded storefronts, the Saratoga economy was in the midst of a slow death. It was then that Downtown Business Association (DBA) was re-formatted to revitalize the local economy. Originally formed and called the Downtown Merchants Association, to secure the Route 50 arterial through, rather than routed around, Saratoga, they had lessened their activity once that job was accomplished. In the late '70s, they changed to their current name and set up the Special Assessment District

