

LI losing good jobs that'd keep youth here

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Photo credit: Handout | Martin Cantor, director of the Long Island Center for Socio-Economic Policy

The numbers aren't cheery, as Marty Cantor charts the departure of Long Island's solid-paycheck jobs. Thirty-four thousand in manufacturing, 31,000 in construction, 54,000 in finance and real estate -- poof! - gone, gone, gone the past 12 years. It's not that overall employment has fallen so sharply. It's that the well-paid jobs are being replaced by low-paying ones.

"The jobs we've been losing are the ones that might keep a talented young person here," Cantor says.

A CPA-economist who has worked in government, business and academia, Cantor spouts off these days from the independence of his one-man think tank, the Long Island Center for Socio-Economic Policy. He's pretty good with numbers, always has been.

For every defense-engineering position replaced by a fast-food gig, he says, another young Long Islander bolts for Boston or Brooklyn, Charlotte or Chicago. And then there's the other LI quandary: Where are our young workers supposed to live if they stay? Most bright 25-year-olds don't see themselves in a split-level ranch.

The other night, Cantor and his numbers turned up for a community meeting at the Residence Inn in Plainview with real estate developer Don Monti, who has big plans for youth-friendly complexes in

Hempstead Village and Huntington Station. Plans like these have been getting the cold shoulder from Long Island politicians for years.

"We gotta keep young people here," Cantor said. "They have the talent and the technical skills for changing work requirements. If they're not here, the jobs won't be. And they won't stay if they have nowhere to live." When it comes to America's founding suburb, the choice may actually be: Change or die?

"We led the country in creating the suburbs," Cantor said. "Now the country is leading us into a redefinition of what suburbia should be, and we are sitting around just watching. Actually, we're not even watching. If we were watching, we might be learning some things along the way."