

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

2009

It is once again a pleasure and an honor to deliver the State of the City Address – for the 20th time – and to report to you that during 2008 the State of the City was good! During 2009, similar to other municipalities, state governments and the federal government, as well as private businesses large and small in Northeast Ohio and all across the United States – due to the broad economic downturn in the fourth quarter of last year, our community will be presented with numerous challenges. I am pleased to say we are well positioned to handle these challenges due to the high competence and professional ability of our Richmond Heights elected officials, department heads and city employees.

During 2008, as you know from the regular updates given by Councilman Mark Alexander skillfully acting in his role as Project Manager on this building as well as the Fire Department Renovation, our wonderful new City Hall was completed on time and on budget. City employees relocated from the old building on January 17, 2008 and soon thereafter, the razing of the obsolete sections of the former City Hall commenced. Further construction on the renovation of the remaining space for expansion and conversion of the Fire Department then began. I am further excited to say that the Fire Department renovation was completed on time and on budget November 24, 2008. A reception graciously financed in part by the Marous Brothers, Inc. who was the design build contractor for both the new City Hall and Fire Department – was held to commemorate the new City Hall on May 22, 2008 and attended by close to 300 persons.

These two community capital assets cap the project begun fifteen years ago to responsibly address for decades into the future, the physical plant needed for the City to provide high quality Police, Fire, Service, Recreational, and Administrative services to Richmond Heights residents. Over this time period each department's facilities have been substantially improved. These assets belong to Richmond

Heights residents and have been built and constructed for the sole purpose to help provide, through all city officials and employees in service to our residents, a higher quality of life for residents. As capital assets by their nature these buildings do not adversely impact our operating budget. Instead, they help our operating budget through a multitude of efficiencies from lower utility costs to preservation of Fire Department vehicles and equipment now stored in more appropriately and correctly sized space. Further, Fire Chief Cek whose very approach is always one of streamlining operations and finding greater efficiency has only begun to reap the benefits to residents of this new and improved Fire Station.

Also far up on the excitement scale in 2008 was the great amount of activity at the City's Greenwood Farm. Recall that this historic manor house, near the intersections of White and Richmond Roads, is located on one of the most pristine pieces of property in the region. After many years of careful nurturing of the Phypers' family by Economic Development Director Lee Gase, it was purchased on September 17, 2004. We formed a non-profit corporation this past year to which I appointed the Board consisting of Robert Dresser, Kathryn Gambatese, Cheryl Goggans, Marcia Starkey Morgan, Dave Roche, Lynda Rossiter, Gaye Saks, Marilyn Wilson, and Lee Gase who acts in my place and as my designee on the Board. A Community Lemonade Reception hosted by the Board was held on August 19, 2008. On the occasion, I commented to Lee that in his many years of fruitful public service, his role in helping to assure that this home and property ended up as a community asset with its great potential to serve our residents was the best thing that he had ever accomplished. Perhaps as much as anybody, Ward Two Councilwoman Kathy Gambatese's passion to unlock the potential for Greenwood shined through in her speech that day and in her enthusiasm leading up to and subsequent to the initial gathering. Since then, she and all board members have participated in numerous opportunities for public visitation to Greenwood and have been active in planning Greenwood Farm's future.

Much of Police Chief Gene Rowe's time in 2008 was spent in the successful effort to begin a Juvenile Diversion Program in Richmond Heights. The program is an avenue for first time juvenile offenders to avoid traditional Juvenile Court and instead to have a proceeding in front of a volunteer Magistrate – in our case, Richmond Heights Attorney Janet Kronenberg who has graciously volunteered to help. We had tried setting this up several years back and had several volunteer attorneys who ultimately during our program run-up, had to withdraw for various reasons. One remained and we were ready to get underway when he severely broke his leg. Imagine my thoughts when a few weeks before we were going to have our start up meeting Janet called to say she had hurt her foot – thankfully, it was a minor injury and we avoided deja vu all over again! The program has been a great success and has already handled 33 cases. Besides Gene and Janet, the program is supported by Magistrate Nancy Donnelly, Sgt. Denise DeBiase and Detective Darren Porter.

During the past year, University Hospital Richmond Medical Center renovated an entire floor to accept the relocation of their Department of Psychiatry from their University Circle Campus to Richmond Heights. Because of the unique nature of this occupancy, it had Building Commissioner Bob Rodic intrigued with some aspects of his profession that you don't normally encounter. However, Bob was up to the challenge and worked through various issues to timely accommodate the Hospital's build-out for their dedication this past January 8th. The architects, contractors and University Hospital Medical Center facilities personnel went out of their way that evening to let me know how valuable Bob's recommendations were and how professional he and his office interfaced with them throughout the project – indeed they indicated that his work was amongst the best of the many building departments with whom they have worked. Richmond Heights was proud to be chosen as the new home of this important University Hospital System department.

Service Director Don Lazar spent a substantial portion of his time during the fourth quarter of last year helping to assure that Richmond Heights had secured, at a relatively economical rate, road salt for this winter. Due to a salt shortage, the 17 city consortium that we have been part of and were planning to buy salt through, infamously was not able to obtain a single salt bid in response to their invitation to bidders. Upon this, Don went into action as only a 40+ year veteran in his profession is able. Knowing the amount that he needed, he banded together with four other like-minded service directors and approached suppliers with a finite amount of tonnage. He was able to obtain our needed amount and at a price of about one-third to one-half the amount that it might have otherwise been. Hats off to Don for his excellent work under tight time frames to get this accomplished.

It was a year of ups and downs for Recreation Director Teri Drda. On the upside, based on the work of the prior year and the ground work laid at the time, not to mention the programmatic success, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer 3-Day once again made its area campground in Richmond Heights at the airport site. This important regional fund raiser puts Richmond Heights in a positive light which glows throughout the region. On the nonplussed side, after 13 years of holding our Family Day and Parade on the third Sunday of July, the odds finally caught up with us and a severe rain and lightning storm dictated cancellation of the Parade and Family Day festivities. This was the responsible thing to do as a single weather or lightning related injury or electrical fire in our water-logged Community Park, would have been devastating to the victim and their family. On the positive side, let's conclude that it won't rain on the third Sunday of July for another 13 years!

As a necessary result, the Teen and Adult Citizen of the Year Award Ceremony had to be rescheduled. The Teen Ceremony was rescheduled to July 30, 2008 at one of our Concerts in the Park. The Nominees were Stephanie Andrus, Mui Choi, Allison Drda, Gabe Gomes, Megan Keleshian, Allan Kisner, Timothy Lawler, Kyle Misch, Jenna Montali, Anita Nelson, Colleen Nych, Kevin Rozman, and

Ashen Ward. The Police Department and especially Sgt. Denise DeBiase, once again sponsored this excellent program that lifts up the many wonderful young people in Richmond Heights. This year's winner and runner-up were Allison Drda and Jenna Montali respectively. We were finally able to have all of the Citizen of the Year nominees available at the same time at the Council Meeting of November 25th. The nominees were Councilman Mark Alexander, Col. Carl J. Carter, Annette Gomes, Albertine Hoover, and Theresa Simmonds. Once again, Mayors Joseph Cicero, Scott Coleman and Bruce Rinker of Lyndhurst, Highland Heights and Mayfield Village respectively volunteered to serve on the Selection Committee to choose the Citizen of the Year. The Committee was posed with a dilemma by the nomination of Mark for the award. His work on the new City Hall and Fire Department projects unquestionably rose to a level deserving of the award. That said, his position as an employee of Richmond Heights provided him the means to excel in a way that a lay person could never achieve. The mayors astutely pointed out that Richmond Heights did not have a way up until this time, to recognize outstanding work by a Richmond Heights employee above and beyond their job requirements. And so, in response to the mayors' sentiments, I instituted for the first time in 2008, the Richmond Heights Employee of the Year Award given to Mark for his outstanding efforts on the new City Hall and Fire Department projects. Working with the department heads, we will establish a formal process for this new award going forward. Finally, the Citizen of the Year was Colonel Carl J. Carter for his superb service to our country in every military conflict since the Vietnam War up to and including the recent Iraq War, as well as his work downtown with wayward juveniles and in Richmond Heights as Chairman of our Cultural Commission.

During 2008, the Board of Elections notified the City that Marcia Starkey Morgan's decades-long Ward One voting location no longer was appropriate due to insufficient handicapped access. With the assistance of Building Commissioner Rodic and City Engineer Lee Courtney, Marcia developed

some options to keep the Christian Assembly Church as a viable voting facility. Ultimately, myself, Marcia, Bob, and Law Director Todd Hunt ended up meeting with Board of Elections Director Jane Platten, Deputy Director Patrick McDonald and their staff on the matter since the facility's long history as a voting location was something that we all believed was important to preserve. However, the costs to undertake the project required by the Board were simply too expensive so other locations were sought within the Ward. Marcia was able to secure long time Richmond Heights business Borally's Party Center but in the end, the Board of Elections mandated that voting be held at the City's Kiwanis Lodge. Marcia's perseverance and excellent efforts in trying to obtain the best results for her Ward throughout this process are to be highly commended.

Councilman-at-Large John Keyerleber became the first Chair of our City's new Audit Committee. His highly effective programmatic approach to items taken up by the Committee will make a positive difference as the City determines how best to solve the various recommendations made by the State of Ohio Auditors during their biannual reviews of our finance techniques. This hopefully will be of great assistance to Finance Director Lynda Rossiter with having to spend less time tracking all of these items herself. John also volunteered his graphic arts expertise to help design a new Richmond Heights logo this past year. He also became a Dad for the third time on August 29, 2008 when his wife, Natalie, gave birth to their new son, Benjamin.

Another example of Council persons making a difference in 2008 was Council President Dave Roche and his efforts to maintain our beloved bus for Seniors and the Disabled. The Senior Transportation Connection (STC) sent Richmond Heights a letter indicating that because of low ridership, the status of our bus was in jeopardy and facing imminent withdrawal. Dave swung into action and along with Recreation Director Teri Drda, worked with STC to forge an arrangement by which service could be maintained along with a certain amount of Richmond Heights autonomy over the

vehicle. With this success, our bus will continue to serve the community for the foreseeable future. Further, David's light has also been shining brightly throughout the year in his work on our City's website, which I believe is one of the top in the area, as Chair of the Greenwood Farm Board and through his participation regarding our City Hall and Fire Department building projects.

Ward Three Councilwoman Eloise Henry during the past year saw an opportunity to strengthen the Richmond Heights community through our Cultural Commission sponsored Neighborhood Coffees. These occasions permit an exchange of ideas on topics from A to Z amongst residents in a comfortable setting. Having already held multiple Coffees with more I am sure to come, Eloise can truly be thought of as the "Coffee Queen!" The input she receives is of great value in helping all of us better understand resident concerns.

Sometimes, what goes largely unnoticed are major achievements for some of our residents. Such a scenario was handled very deftly by Don O'Toole's Service and Recreation Committee working in conjunction with Recreation Director Teri Drda to transition from Fall/Winter Senior Dances to the new "Dancing Like the Stars" format. Don had learned from various feedback that attendance was down in recent years at the Senior Dances. However, it was clear that some Seniors still greatly valued the occasions but acknowledged through dialogue with the City that a different format might be more fitting. Thus, a well-orchestrated transition was accomplished for our Senior community but in a smartly evolved new format that only a veteran public official such as Don could handle smoothly.

The City continued to receive top-notch support from Clerk of Council Betsy Traben and excellent legal advice from Law Director Todd Hunt and his colleagues during 2008. In a joyful moment on May 1, 2008, Betsy gave birth to a new baby boy, Elliot.

Finishing out 2008 in good economic standing I am sure will be a lasting memory for Finance Director Lynda Rossiter. As gasoline prices soared during the past summer and dramatically higher road

salt prices were broadcast in the fall, these unexpected cash outlays would have been enough to contend with from a cash on hand basis moving toward the close of the year. However, the wrap up to our bargaining units negotiations sent Lynda scrambling to meet the City's obligations under the Arbitrator's decision. Not having the necessary cash on hand at year end, the sale of a note became a crucial need. Enter the nationwide economic downturn which by the end of the year had banks not wanting to loan money, even to entities such as Richmond Heights with excellent borrowing records, and the picture is complete. Lucky for Richmond Heights, Lynda is a woman with a lot of pluck - and she persevered and moved beyond the banks and finally sold the note recently to a firm in Southern Ohio.

But, as we move into 2009, these challenging economic times will keep Lynda, Richmond Heights department heads and we as elected officials thinking about how we will keep our budget balanced when revenue sources such as R.I.T.A. broadcast substantial declines in revenues due to the broader economy, whilst our costs rise by double digits in many areas.

City Engineer Lee Courtney will be busy presiding once again over our road program in 2009. A major responsibility of city officials under our charter is to keep the City thoroughfares open for motorists. As I travel across the county on a daily basis and see firsthand the condition of traffic artery pavements in the region, I know from experience that Lee over his long tenure as our City Engineer has helped our community roads to stay in a condition that is second to none.

Another little known fact is that during 2008, Richmond Heights ranked fifth out of 59 communities in the county in new home starts. This of course keeps Bob Rodic and his department busy shepherding all of this new construction and if the developers' projections in Richmond Heights are correct, and they usually are, Richmond Heights will again be amongst the top cities in the area for new homes. This is great for Richmond Heights as it tends to lower the average age of our housing stock

which is an important indicator of a community's good health. But even more importantly, it is a tangible sign that developers and new home owners continue to believe that Richmond Heights is an excellent community in which to invest their capital and hard earned money.

Also coming up in 2009 will be the Neighborhood Mediation Program that we have been working on throughout the past year in the Cultural Commission. Volunteer mediators who have come forward to participate and whose formal training will be taking place shortly are: Nelson Barmen, Tobi Barmen, Gwendolyn Biddlecom, Aaron Burko, Noella Burrows, Valeria A. Harper, Louise Kane, Rhonda Long, Rev. Michael Marino, Marybeth Muehle, Sheari Rice, Barry Speirs, Nick Tibaldi, and Greg Walker. This program will allow neighbors with minor differences of opinion over items of which the City has jurisdiction, to settle their differences well below the level of active Police Department participation or the Lyndhurst Municipal Court.

Also this coming year emerging from the Cultural Commission will be the "City Beautiful" Program which will provide recognition for home owners in Richmond Heights who maintain their properties in an attractive way befitting an award. Further details will follow on this new program as well.

Confirming my announcement at a Council meeting of a few months back, in continuation of my service to residents, I plan to run again for reelection to the Office of Mayor this coming fall. Further, I would like to thank all Council Members, Department Heads and City Employees for another great year of service to Richmond Heights residents. In working together with all of our God-given talents and skills in high community spirit we will successfully overcome the challenges of the year ahead!

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Daniel J. Ursu
January 27, 2009