

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

2010

It is once again a privilege and an honor to deliver the Richmond Heights State of the City Address for the 21st time. The state of the City is stable and improved over 2009.

Of course, the major issue of the past year was the adverse impact of the world-wide recession on businesses, the federal government, state governments, and local governments everywhere, and here in the City of Richmond Heights. In my 21 years of mayorship, last year's economy was by far the most challenging and it is gratifying to have made it through the year on budget. The fiscal responsibility shown by Department Heads and City Council these past twelve months was highly admirable. Further, difficult steps were taken to align the size of our workforce to match the funding available. I would also like to thank the Department Heads and City employees for continuing to provide quality services to residents despite having to accomplish our work with fewer employees, fewer workweek hours, less remuneration, and less equipment. Indeed, regarding equipment, the City was not able to have a Capital budget to speak of in 2009, but we will have one in 2010.

Police Chief Gene Rowe did an excellent job providing the best possible police coverage with fewer officers and jail staff. Gene adroitly devised and implemented a 12-hour police shift to maximize personnel on the road during these challenging times. The professional response by Gene and the officers to this economy could only have been managed by a person of his high skill level and experience.

In the meantime, Gene also fully participated with myself and Colonel Carter, Chairman of the Richmond Heights Cultural Commission, in establishing our new neighborhood mediation program. He helped Colonel Carter and me interview the 14 volunteer mediators in establishing the group who would receive 20 hours of training given by the Bellaire-Puritas Development Corporation. From there,

training progressed and a celebration at its completion at the Council meeting of June 9, 2009 officially kicked off the program which is now serving residents.

Interestingly, one thing that we didn't think of originally was potential language barriers of mediation parties. One of the first participants spoke Chinese. A solution for this was actually found right here in Richmond Heights when I contacted the Pastor of the Cleveland Chinese Christian Church, Reverend Wong, who graciously agreed to provide an interpreter. The good work of Gene, Colonel Carter and all who have made the program possible have helped establish a valuable no cost option for residents who have a neighborhood dispute. I believe that this program is unique amongst Hillcrest Communities.

Service Director Don Lazar's department also had to cope with reduced staffing. Again the City was well served by Don's wisdom and experience on how best to maintain public facilities, keep the roads clear in winter and support the community's recreational activities. Not only is he a good leader of men but Don is also a superb mechanic. Persons who have heard some of my past State of the City addresses know his exploits in acquiring used equipment at great discounts and obtaining many more years of useful life through refurbishment and repair. This is particularly valuable to Richmond Heights residents during this difficult economy. Further, if something needs to get done from plowing to trash removal and manpower is otherwise not available, Don rolls up his sleeves and simply does it himself at all hours of the day and night.

Percentage wise, Recreation Director Teri Drda's department incurred the largest retrograde. The Charter of Richmond Heights which establishes all of our departments states that there shall be a Recreation Department. So, having taken a solemn oath to uphold our Charter, Council and I continue to budget for Recreation's activities for residents albeit at a substantially reduced level. Accordingly, the department's largest and most costly event, the Family Day Parade, has been discontinued to save

funding. Throughout, Teri and the Recreation Board have made the best of the situation to become as self-sufficient as possible. Those who attended events this past year such as Breakfast with Santa know that curtailed activity does not mean curtailed quality, as Teri and the Recreation Board's community spirit is greater than ever and is, for many residents, the community's heart and soul.

To help manage the lower economy better, Finance Director Lynda Rossiter has moved up earlier in time and greatly enhanced the City's budget process. For those who follow such things it is plainly evident that Lynda has made great strides each year of her tenure in improving our budget process. So, this past year, our 2010 budget meeting began in the Fall instead of January. This allows a much more detailed and in depth analysis by myself and Council, which is particularly important in challenging economic times. Also, materials that Lynda has created for us to work with have grown from a glorified monthly report under past directors to an inch-thick binder with continual updates and replacement pages as the budget evolves. Additionally, Lynda has also continually sought savings to residents especially in the area of utility costs. As we sit here, due to Lynda's hard work the City has a balanced budget to submit to the County; as far as I know at an earlier point in time than ever in the City's history, and we continue to make it even better before submitting it downtown.

2009 was also a year of transition. Building Commissioner Bob Rodic after 17 ½ years with us resigned from full-time work. Bob continues to support and consult the competent and capable Dan Spada as he moves into the leadership role in the department. Bob also supports Richmond Heights with his C.B.O. license which is rigorous to obtain both from an experience and longevity perspective, yet key to municipalities for regulating businesses. Although Dan was not actually in attendance at most of our council and committee meetings during the start of his tenure as Department Head, he had good reason. Ambitious by nature, Dan is working part-time on his Associates Degree in Civil Engineering

and had Tuesday evening classes until the end of 2009. As the classes have shifted away from Tuesday's going forward, it is a pleasure to have him with us.

I have appointed as Acting Chief, Lt. Bob Armstrong - a 22-year veteran Richmond Heights Firefighter and our Paramedic Coordinator - to succeed Chief Mike Cek on his transition to retirement. From his significant firefighting and paramedic experience, we look forward to hearing Bob's suggestions on how to improve the already excellent department services.

Highlights of Mike's career include the expansion of our Fire Department by upgrading service to residents from basic EMS to Paramedic in 1991. In the wake of this expansion, Mike successfully worked with the Insurance Service Organization (I.S.O.) to improve the Richmond Heights Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating from a classification of "5" to a "4." This reduced the insurance rates and corresponding premiums paid by Richmond Heights businesses and homeowners saving them year after year literally thousands of dollars.

Further, Mike led the incident command and coordination of over 20 departments responding to the Hilltop Plaza fire in 1991 which was the largest structural fire in Richmond Heights history, and spearheaded the development of the regional Mutual Aid Automatic Box Alarm System (M.A.B.A.S.). He also provided key testimony to the State of Delaware Bankruptcy Court on the critical need to keep the Richmond Heights Hospital Emergency Room open when the Mount Sinai Hospital System went bankrupt in 2000. This key testimony helped to persuade the Bankruptcy Court to a favorable decision which paved the way for the University Hospital System to bid on the facility, eventually leading to the superb University Hospital Richmond Medical Center in Richmond Heights serving our residents and the region.

Along the way, as a Firefighter and Chief, Mike directly and indirectly saved numerous lives and helped countless Richmond Heights and regional residents in their time of peril and great need.

John Keyerleber, after almost 3 years as Council-at-Large, yielded to veteran Council-at-Large Don O'Toole and newly elected Miesha Wilson Headen in the Council-at-Large races last Fall. John's business experience and analytic capabilities will be missed. However, Miesha will serve the City nicely as well going forward, with her excellent financial background and indeed will chair our Audit Committee. Also, she has a good understanding of Richmond Heights government having served as Chair of this past year's Charter Review Commission.

Speaking of the Charter Commission, it is little known of the hard work that our Law Director, Todd Hunt, did to support the Commission through attendance at their meetings and subsequently responding to their questions. Year in and year out, Todd does many things that nobody ever learns about to keep our community legally viable and prosperous. Todd's valuable work as always is greatly appreciated.

Earlier in the year the Federal Government announced a stimulus plan for "shovel ready" projects. Lee and Chris Courtney, City Engineers, swung into action with incredible panache and finesse to put together a list of potential projects for Richmond Heights. Having been our City Engineer for 38 years, it is unlikely that any other engineer would have been able to assemble such a comprehensive list with all of the information needed in such a short period of time. As with so many other grant possibilities, our projects were not awarded the stimulus money in part because of our community's affluence. However, in the spirit of trying to capitalize on such opportunities for residents, the Courtney's hit a home run.

In the meantime, Economic Development Director Lee Gase submitted Greenwood Farm as a potential Historical site. As with the State of Ohio border signs at both ends of Highland Road that Lee was instrumental in obtaining, if ultimately successful in gaining the designation, it will be an enduring

legacy for future generations of Richmond Heights residents. We have made the “first cut” in the Historical designation process.

Looking ahead into 2010, the City will continue to search for ways to economize and to best maximize our revenue stream. Along these lines, our ever-vigilant Council President Dave Roche, while reviewing some aspects of our current waste handling contract, noticed an apparent inconsistency with our understanding of the number of homes that should be receiving trash service and the number shown by our waste hauler on the billings. We have since begun a deliberate effort to learn whether there are some monies that can be recouped from our trash hauler as a result. In the final analysis it might make no difference. However, it is this kind of effort that although tedious in nature, illustrates the steps that Richmond Heights is taking to help ensure that value to our taxpayers is maximized. Indeed, myself, Council and all Department Heads are doing our best to be good fiscal stewards of taxpayer money.

Also during 2010, some City Council Committees will have new Chairpersons. So, we look forward to Eloise Henry chairing the Safety Committee. She will bring to her Chairmanship her pleasant style and her knowledge of Safety Forces from her involvement in helping to establish the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Councilwomen Kathy Gambatese and Eloise provided the main effort to organize CERT, which will be a volunteer-based group to assist residents in the time of calamity due to for instance, severe weather, prolonged power outages, or colossal water main breaks. Kathy Gambatese will not currently chair a committee and will use this well-earned break to focus more on her important involvement at the County level as a member of the Mental Health Board.

Marcia Starkey Morgan, after her long and valuable tenure as Planning & Zoning Chair will move to Chair Service & Recreation. As the Dean of Council it would be an interesting project for some college Political Science major to research how many Council Committee meetings she has chaired

during her many years of excellent dedicated service – I would expect that it exceeds any other currently serving Council person in the County.

Councilman-at-Large Don O’Toole, after almost 14 years as Chair of the Service & Recreation Committee will matriculate to the Chair of Planning & Zoning. Don’s many accomplishments during his tenure as Service & Recreation Chair include a tree program which resulted in 1,919 trees being planted on treelawns and at City parks and buildings, a complete overhaul of the alignment and drainage of the City Park ball diamonds, new drainage at DeSan Park and the SprayGround at our City Pool. What a wonderful legacy as Chair of that committee!

Councilman Mark Alexander will continue as Finance Chair. It occurs to me that the excellent work that Mark has done as Chair of the Finance Committee during the most challenging economy of any of our lifetimes; ought to be distilled in a time capsule. Such capsule to be buried for retrieval by some future generation as a recipe for success should they – Heaven forbid – be confronted by a similar economy. Mark has deftly kept the City legislature on budget during 2009.

As we move forward into 2010, coping with the impact of the world-wide recession on our budget will again be the main focus. However, after successfully dealing with even a more difficult 2009 economy, the experience gained by Richmond Heights administration, Department Heads and employees position us for continued success in the face of this adversity. Although it sounds mundane compared to forecasts of the year ahead in some of my past State of the City addresses, a major focus going forward will be how to plan for legacy costs as a wave of retirements of well-seasoned and mature Richmond Heights employees comes to pass over the next half-dozen years or so. Accordingly, in the year ahead Richmond Heights will set up funds in our budget to help mitigate the economic shock that Richmond Heights would otherwise experience due to the legacy costs of good and valuable employees

leaving us after many years of dedicated service to our residents. This is hard to do in our current economy, but fiscal responsibility dictates this choice.

I would like to again thank Richmond Heights City Council, Department Heads and Employees for all of their efforts to serve our residents during the past year. It is working as a team that we succeeded in the face of unprecedented challenges during 2009. Such teamwork, God willing, will continue us along a path of better prosperity during 2010 in Richmond Heights, Hillcrest, Cuyahoga County, the State of Ohio, and the entire United States.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Daniel J. Ursu
January 26, 2010