

NEWS

TOWNSHIP OF WOODBRIDGE



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Mayor John E. McCormac 2017 ~ "State-of-the-Township" ~ 2017



I would like to begin the Annual "State-of-the-Township" address by again thanking the Woodbridge Chamber of Commerce for their hospitality this afternoon and for the terrific job that they have done to help us advance the cause for business and commerce in Woodbridge Township this past year and for the last 10 years.

Not a Ribbon-Cutting goes by without Karen Barnes or Nancy Drumm - or sometimes both - attending with their famous giant-sized scissors and an active Chamber of Commerce is a good sign for a company considering locating to a town.

So we went through the first couple of drafts of this year's speech and then John Hagerty suggested going back 10 years to our first "State-of-the-Township" speech on January 18, 2007.

It was 15 pounds and a whole lot of grey hairs ago and we were only in office for 67 days but we laid out a vision for the Township that really became a reality.

We talked about being business friendly and we talked about working with the school district and we talked about "Quality-of-Life" and today those are still our core themes. In fact, there were so many lines, and so many thoughts that are the same now as they were then so we thought we would put together a short video. Let's take a look.

So many of you that are here today, were at that first speech 10 years ago. The people in this room helped make that vision a reality, including the management team of Town Hall and the 1,000+ employees who work for us; members of the Board of Education and the School District Management team; representatives of other levels of government in the County and State; and of course the hundreds of business leaders who call Woodbridge home for eight hours a day every weekday and then some.

Together, we have made Woodbridge the envy of towns around us and we are going to keep up the pace. It will take every one of us to continue this progress on behalf of our 100,000 residents in our 10 distinct sections of town for the next 10 years.

While today's talk is much about the business community in our town, there have been a host of things we have done to improve the "Quality-of-Life" for our residents.

Little things and big things. Fun things and serious things. Easy things and hard things. We introduced a lot of events 10 years ago and last year they were still going strong and celebrating their 10th anniversary.

The Kids Fishing Derby. Mayor's Fluke Tournament. Farmer's Market. Bittings BeerFest. Boy Scout and Girl Scout Camporees. The New Jersey Senior Olympics. Woodbridge Youth Players annual plays. The Woodbridge Artisan Guild. The annual Pizza Run and the Bicycle Tour around the entire town. The Veterans Alliance and Veterans Parade. And many other events, festivals and special programs that are now 10 years old.

"Tooling-Around-the-Township" got stronger and the concerts were expanded. Events typically started slow, but have been built-up as ideas became a reality and a staple in the lives of our citizens. Our Mayor's Advisory Committee makes sure everything goes off without a hitch and there is always something to do in Woodbridge Township.

2016 was a good year to be a Senior in Woodbridge Township and 2017 will be even better. Last year the Sycamore Senior Center celebrated its one year anniversary and it has been a phenomenal resource for our Seniors. We just finished negotiations for the purchase of the Iselin American Legion for use as another Senior Center just like Sycamore and Evergreen and we will lease space back to the Legion for their great Veteran's programs and services.

We have been trying for a long time to purchase the Fords First Aid Squad building and we are getting close which would then give us Senior Centers in the four corners of Woodbridge.

Getting people to our Senior Centers, Township events, and libraries will be easier thanks to our new Senior Transportation system which kicked-off several months ago. We now have four busses and a compliment of drivers and the early reviews are that the Seniors love our help getting around.

New Senior living opportunities are also coming on board in 2017 with Dalina Manor being built by The Ingerman Group - the same company that built the beautiful Reinhard Manor in Colonia. More Senior housing will be built in other areas of the Township so that Seniors can downsize and stay in town to be near their kids and grandkids and all of the great programs and services in Woodbridge.

Within a few months, we should be closing on the purchase of 86 Green Street in Woodbridge - a 20th century Colonial house which will serve as our long-awaited history museum. Former Councilwoman Brenda Velasco has been working patiently with Frank and Audrey LaPenta and Dan D'Arcy of our Historical Association to make this vision finally become a reality.

Dolores Gioffre and the Woodbridge Historic Preservation Commission will join Association representatives on our "History Team" to make Woodbridge's 350th anniversary on June 1, 2019 a special one.

The first phase of the demolition and reconstruction of the Bunns Lane Federal Housing project will take place within a few months. Within a couple of years the totally unattractive units there will be replaced by brand new apartments which will greatly improve the "Quality-of-Life" for not only the residents of what will now be called "Jacobs Landing," but also the hundreds of residents in the neighborhood across the street who will no longer have to look at a 1940s housing project.

We are in the final stages of the State buyout program for homes in town that were severely impacted by Super Storm Sandy. Rutgers University has been helping us restore those areas to a natural habitat with plantings and trails and passive recreational uses.

The Redevelopment Agency - headed by Caroline Ehrlich - started our project to identify abandoned properties, contact the owners or lending agencies and get the homes renovated and back into productive use. Results have been outstanding as dozens of homes have been renovated and sold to new owners to improve the character of our residential neighborhoods.

Caroline also spearheaded the effort to make us the New Jersey Sustainable Champion again for the Eighth time in nine years – every year except 2014 when they literally asked us not to compete so someone else could win.

Last year a group of parents of special needs children nearing the age of 21 came to see us. At 21, the local school district is no longer required to pay for educating and caring for what have now become special needs adults and they asked what the Township could possibly do for them. Without continued attention, these citizens tend to regress and forget things they learned and our government agencies cannot always provide the programs and services they have become accustomed to.

Woodbridge has had a special place in our hearts for these citizens for years. Between our support for the Woodbridge Developmental Center and our Buddy Ball Recreation program and the RISE and SOAR programs in our schools, it's no wonder that their parents look for homes in our Township. So after talking to that group of parents we took their request seriously.

The Hess Corporation sold its gas stations, refinery and office building in town and is in the process of selling its 40 acres of land on Main Street and Route 9. In recognition of our help during all of these transactions, Hess donated their former training center at Milos Hall in Port Reading to us with the adjacent parking lot and park space.

We then put former Councilman Jimmy Carroll to work to adapt a portion of that space toward a daily program for these citizens. Jimmy also has a special place in his heart for this population as evidenced by his work with the "One-on-One" program.

Jimmy evaluated many operators who provide the needed services and brought Our House Inc. to us. After touring their operations and meeting their management we are proud to announce that we are now negotiating with them to open their fifth facility at Milos Hall - hopefully starting in September. I am happy to introduce our new partners: Michelle DelCorsano and Nicole Wehr from Our House are here today.

And that's not all!!! A public restaurant will be open in the space from 5-11 AM every morning and in the afternoons and evenings and on weekends the restaurant will turn into a snack stand and will be staffed by our special needs citizens of all ages. In fact, Jernee Alesczyk will be the head of Maintenance in that kitchen and she is here today with her mom Sharon and she cannot wait to get to work. Jernee please stand and say hello.

We hope to be even more diligent in finding employment opportunities for our special needs citizens by working with our school district and we will be reaching out to many of you in this audience to help us out.

The leader of the group that came to see us, Alan Barnett, is here today with his wife Julie, along with Tracey Petersen and Angela Sica, who joined him at that first meeting. To each of you, thank you for advocating for your children and for all the sons and daughters who will have this place to call their own.

Another major new initiative we kicked-off late last year that will advance further this year is our Peer Recovery Coach program for people with substance abuse disorders.

Whether people like to admit it or not, we have a major opioid epidemic throughout our Country, our State, and yes, even our Town. 19 people died in Woodbridge last year from overdoses - our worst year ever. 19 people. High school kids. College kids. Graduates. Our kids. Our neighbors' kids. Our friends' kids. Our kids' friends.

As Governor Christie said in his "State-of-the-State" speech - we need to act and act quickly to help our citizens with the disease of addiction. I am proud to say that our very own State Senator Joe Vitale was the only Legislator the Governor mentioned in his speech due to his dedicated commitment to the issue of addiction. Thank you Senator Vitale.

In 2014, the State of New Jersey started an outstanding program in five Pilot Counties where entities were selected to provide Peer Recovery Coaches every time someone was brought to a hospital after a NARCAN deployment. These coaches are usually in recovery themselves, and bring a unique approach to dealing with those in addiction by having them speak to someone who "walked in their shoes."

The coaches make contact with the person, usually in the emergency room, and develop a relationship over several more visits where they help the person find the right kind of treatment for their addiction and become someone they can just talk to about their life. Although it is somewhat premature to fully evaluate the program, early signs are very promising and there have been some individual successes in getting people the help they need.

Unfortunately, Middlesex County was not one of the original five Counties selected, so we in Woodbridge decided to start our own program. We hired Dr. Bonnie Nolan, who has a Ph.D in Neuroscience, as the head of our newly formed Division of Addiction Services in the Health Department. We then hired Elizabeth Cowan, who has a Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling, to be Bonnie's Assistant.

We signed agreements with John F. Kennedy, Robert Wood Johnson Rahway and Raritan Bay Meridian Hospitals to allow us access to any Woodbridge resident admitted to those hospitals with an overdose or any other addiction issue, not just heroin. Bonnie and Liz met dozens of times with nurses and people on the front lines to be sure they knew how to get their patients help from the Woodbridge Department of Health's new Peer Recovery Program.

We reached an agreement with SOBA Recovery Services in New Brunswick to provide the coaches. I am proud to say that Joel Pomales of SOBA is here with us today. We have known Joel since he participated in a roundtable discussion of the Heroin epidemic over two years ago which you can watch through our Township web site. Joel, thank you very much for being here and for helping us to start this great program.

Bonnie and Liz have attended many seminars to learn more about the opioid abuse issue and just this month we held four forums in different parts of town for parents and guardians and young people themselves to come and learn the signs to look for to help those in need. And, we started a Recovery Group that meets weekly in one of our Township facilities where we provide recreational opportunities and just a chance for people to get together.

Because of all the triggers in everyday life, people in recovery often say they just need a place to go and hang out and be free of the temptations to drink or take drugs and we have provided that forum and we will hopefully be expanding into more opportunities.

The Barnabas organization, which already had three counties where they provided the services, was chosen to run the Middlesex effort last year when the State added six more Counties, but their efforts will be limited to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital in New Brunswick which is not usually where Woodbridge people go, especially for emergencies. And since many of our municipal neighbors also do not regularly see their residents travel to New Brunswick either, we decided to offer our program to these towns.

We are about to sign an Interlocal Agreement with the Township of Old Bridge and we will sign a contract with Meridian Old Bridge to provide Recovery Coaches to their residents. Their Mayor, Owen Henry, has been a leader among Mayors in the State of New Jersey in addressing the opioid epidemic and he is here today. Thank you Mayor Henry for being the first town to work with us.

We will partner with our four hospital connections to work together with the rest of the eastern part of Middlesex County. We have had preliminary discussions with Edison, South Amboy and Metuchen and we hope to also talk to Carteret, Perth Amboy and Sayreville and together with Barnabas we hope to cover the entirety of Middlesex County.

I cannot thank Dennis Green, our Health Director, and Bonnie and Liz, enough for starting this program in town. The State understandably cannot cover every resident in New Jersey due to their own financial constraints so it is incumbent upon us to pick up the slack and get our residents the help they need.

Our Police Department was once again reviewed by the National Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) and we expect to receive national accreditation for the seventh time in March.

One evaluator said ours was his 49th review from all over the country over many years and that we were the best Department he has ever seen. Director Bob Hubner, Deputy Director Joe Nisky and Chief Law Enforcement Officer Roy Hoppock, have run this fantastic police force and have increased the number of police officers on our streets and provided them the equipment they need to ensure our safety, which of course is our primary job.

This year will be a great year to be a kid in Woodbridge. Milos Hall has added to the Township's amazing array of recreational opportunities and it will be a permanent home for cheerleading and wrestling - two sports that typically draw the short straw when gymnasium space is allocated.

On the outside, we plan to add four tennis courts; two sand volleyball courts; two hard surface volleyball courts; four pickle ball courts; a level playing field for soccer and baseball for special needs kids including those in wheelchairs; a new basketball court; improved soccer fields; a new youth soccer field; and a spray park.

Our Woodbridge Community Center (WCC) continues to be the best facility of its kind in the State and we have more improvements in store there, including an expansion of our weight and exercise rooms.

School 9 in Port Reading will get five new 10-and-under soccer fields that can also be used as 10 fields for the 8-and-under kids.

Our lease of St. Cecelia's School in Iselin, which we will talk about shortly, gives us a beautiful new basketball court, more wrestling space, and another cheerleading venue for the younger girls.

More and more kids in Woodbridge take advantage of our dozens of sports leagues and our school facilities projects have made more fields and courts and gyms available to them than ever before.

Three new senior centers could mean three new after-school youth centers like in Evergreen if we can work things out with the school district.

We keep adding work and responsibilities to Recreation Director Vito Cimilluca and Deputy Director Brian Molnar and they keep getting the job done so our kids have more to do.

The State selected Woodbridge as the most recent home for a "Family Success Center" and just two weeks ago we welcomed the Greenway Center - an absolutely fabulous facility to help kids and families throughout Woodbridge navigate various governmental and social service agencies and access various programs and services on-site at their new location in Fords.

Our Library system is under new leadership with Monica Eppinger and she is leading a Strategic Planning Committee to be sure we keep up with all the technological changes in how library services are delivered.

The Planning Department under Marta Lefsky set records again for building permits – last year, they issued 2,700 permits and collected nearly \$3 million in permit fees. We have become known in the construction industry as a town where it is easy to navigate the system to fix up your home.

Marta's knowledge of Township statutes and State laws means a contractor or resident can make one stop to a meeting with her team and walk away knowing exactly what he or she has to do to get something done in Woodbridge. Her stewardship of the Woodbridge Economic Development Corporation (WEDCO) provides another entity that assists in bringing new development and jobs to town.

I would like to introduce Michael Gelin of Colonia - our new Township Engineer who came to us from the City of Newark where he was a Deputy Director of Public Works in charge of Engineering. Michael's knowledge of roads and sewers and his familiarity with our Township will be invaluable to us in replacing Scott Thompson who is retiring after 15 years of dedicated service to Woodbridge.

Our Public Works Department under the leadership of Dennis Henry and George Brew continues to be the absolute best around. Though I always hope for no snow at all, it does give me great pleasure to ride around town after a snowfall and see blacktop everywhere and then see our border towns with ice and snow still all over their roads.

Ten years ago, we offered a special program to our residents using funding from the snow removal budget after a particularly light year for snow. We gave residents a one-time opportunity for a free bulk waste pick-up scheduled over two months in different parts of town. The program was a huge hit and we continued it for eight more years.

This year, however, we are still offering the same service but in a different manner. Instead of being told when to put your bulk waste out, you can call DPW for one FREE pick-up in 2017 at your convenience. And, our Sanitation Division will still collect up to three items for free at any time with a call to DPW. The beauty of the revised Bulk Waste Collection program is that now you can clean out your garage or basement or attic when you want to and the pick-ups will not be hampered by the weather and they will no longer interfere with typical April and May events when you just might not be able to get it done. And yes, residents can still have their one permit-free garage sale and they can coordinate them with neighbors – all of this is designed to be more convenient for our resident homeowners.

Our government runs great thanks to our Business Administrator and Chief Operating Officer, Bob Landolfi, who oversees the day-to-day operations of Woodbridge Township and keeps our trains not only on track and running on time but accelerating in the fast lane.

John Hagerty keeps the Township informed of everything happening in town and people literally look forward to the quarterly Woodbridge News in their mailbox.

Though not in the Executive Branch of our government, Township Clerk John Mitch provides a steady and balanced approach in advising us based on his 28 years in Woodbridge government.

Chief of Staff Caroline Ehrlich, who is literally by my side for virtually everything that happens in the town, has made economic development happen and continues to keep new corporations, business and other entities interested in coming to and expanding in Woodbridge.

Those four make up our senior management team and if there are four people better running any town in the State then I have not come across them in my 37 years around local government.

Our Mayor's office staff is second to none and I get constant compliments about people's experiences communicating with Cindy, Gerry, Erika, Loretta, Gayle and Sheila to handle their problems before they even come to me or one of the managers. Casey, Jeff and Tom have proven to be an awesome support staff for myself and our senior staff.

Our main focus of 2017 will once again be economic development. Many Mayors have to worry about the day-to-day delivery of programs and services in their towns, but I certainly don't and that allows us to really focus on establishing our vision for Woodbridge Township.

Warehouse projects have continued to boost our economy with hundreds of new jobs and cleaned-up sites. Pantheon will renovate an old warehouse on the corner of Rahway Avenue and Randolph Avenue and build a new one. Sitex will do the same in Port Reading on Blair Road. Arizona Iced Tea will also finally break ground on their nearly one million square foot warehouse and manufacturing facility in Fords - and I think they have beaten Amy Bellisano and Woodbridge Center which only took five years to get Olive Garden built.

And speaking of Woodbridge Center, I am pleased to announce that it will be the site of the very first Dave & Buster's to open in New Jersey – Amy advises that Dave & Buster's will occupy the upper Sears wing. Amy is involved with the Chamber and with WEDCO and she has her finger on the pulse of Woodbridge and that truly helped her land D&B. The General Manager of Dave & Buster's – Rocco Casciato – is with us today to confirm the announcement.

Pennrose Properties has been named the redeveloper for the Prison Warden site where they will build 100 apartments with 25% being specifically for the Developmentally Disabled population. We anticipate that the rest will be marketed to families with special needs children – the same families that will use the Our House facility and our Buddy Ball programs.

Right across the street is the Developmental Center and its 50 acres which we still hope to be turned into a facility with a health care theme. We have been working with the State to put together a proposal to send to interested developers and we hope to have more senior housing, medical offices, assisted living, a nursing home and perhaps a continuum of care facility where people can move in after 55 and age-in-place with people they lived around for the last few decades.

The 100 acres of vacant property in Sewaren off Pennval Road finally is seeing some action as a redeveloper has reached an agreement to buy one of the larger of eight parcels there which we hope will be the impetus for other owners to sell.

Route One continues to see plenty of action with the start of construction of the strip mall next to the Avenel Firehouse. The Quick Chek on Route One and Avenel Street will soon move across the street and remove several unattractive vacant buildings and land used only for equipment storage.

Wendy's is in the final stage of planning and is expected to open a new location between Route One North and South in Iselin.

The Bud's Hut site may have lost Mc Donald's as a tenant but another is certain to follow.

The Holiday Express has interest from tenants for land on either side of the hotel and the Star/City Motel site will soon be a La Quinta Hotel. The owners of two motels on the northbound side of Route One in Avenel are actively working on a redevelopment project that will remove additional eyesores from our landscape.

We have been working the hardest, however, on our Transit Village redevelopment projects. We are fortunate to have three train stations in Woodbridge - many towns wish they had just one.

The last thing I thought I would be doing as Mayor when I was elected 10 years ago was pushing apartment projects in town. But the fact is that if we do not bring people with incomes to our transit villages - the walking wallets - then the Transit Village concept will fall short. All of the towns around us are doing it and if we sit still they will bring residents and restaurants and shops to their towns instead of ours.

The old General Dynamics site is being developed and quite rapidly. Atlantic Realty expects to open its rental office within a few months for the 500 luxury apartments there which already look better than an abandoned chemical plant.

The Avenel Arts Village is no longer a dream but a reality. Caroline Ehrlich had this vision 10 years ago when we met the prior owners of the site and within two years a Performing Arts Center with 200 seats and a restaurant and all of the amenities will open thanks to her hard work and the commitment by Alan Schall and Atlantic Realty to that vision.

We have hired a three time Emmy winner - Anthony Wilkinson - who will team with the Music Man of Woodbridge, Bill Brandenburg, to bring plays and concerts and art exhibits and dance recitals and poetry readings to a facility that should have the lights on nearly every day of the year. Avenel will be one of the hottest places in central Jersey in a few short years.

Downtown Woodbridge, like downtown Avenel, has also been the focus of much of our attention over the past year and will continue to be front and center this year. We have divided the downtown area into 12 districts and have named a redeveloper for each district after a competitive process to match the right developer with the right project.

Prism Development is nearly ready to start building luxury apartments on the Rlffy's/Quick Chek site. At least three other projects are on the drawing board and in a few years the entire landscape of our downtown will be enormously enhanced. The HESS property, though not actually downtown, will be developed and with future connectivity, it will be a great asset to all of Main Street.

To help with the additional traffic that will ultimately flow from more development, we have petitioned for approval from the State of New Jersey to take the heavy trucks off of Main Street and Green Street. This will make traffic move quicker and more efficiently and will allow for better ambience for our downtown shopping and dining. We are also working with the County, the State, and Russo Development to rework the intersection of Main Street and Route 9 by the bowling alley and move the light further up Main Street to alleviate the bottleneck in that area.

To help with parking issues, we have hired a consultant to advise us as to where to locate and how to size one or more parking decks near the train station for commuters, residents, shoppers and visitors.

Look at it this way – if a downtown has plenty of places to park and not too many cars on the streets then it clearly does not have enough shoppers and not enough people going out to eat and not enough people at plays and concerts and parades and then the businesses will close and we would have a ghost town. That is not the kind of town that we all want to be living in.

Our terrific school system will really help us differentiate our downtowns from those of our competitor towns. Despite the fact that Transit Villages produce less school children than normal, we will still see more children from our plans and we welcome them.

Ross Street School, just two blocks from Town Hall, provides a terrific education but in an environment that one would expect from a 100 year old facility. It is unattractive both outside and inside and in no way would it entice people to rent an apartment or buy a house near our downtown if they have or expect to have school aged children.

The school district will invest \$30+ Million in a brand new Ross Street School on the site of the playground next door and then when open, the existing building will be demolished and a new gym and playground will be built on that site. Capacity will be increased to handle any new students from the new development.

The district will then invest a similar amount in Woodbridge Middle School a few blocks away – a physically attractive old building that is extremely dysfunctional due to its 100 year old age and due to five different haphazard expansions over the years. Those additions will be demolished and a new wing with a gym, science labs, media center and classrooms will be built and the older space renovated to provide a nearly brand new school.

With these two projects, potential tenants and homebuyers will have a reason to select Woodbridge over all of our competing municipalities knowing that for nine years their children will be educated in fantastic new buildings with “State-of-the-Art” technology and an excellent educational staff of teachers, aides and administrators. Then for four years they can experience the newness of Woodbridge High School and the multi-million dollar investment there.

The Township will pay for all of these improvements at no tax impact to the residents of Woodbridge Township the same way we paid for \$26 million in community facilities on school grounds over the last three years.

As you all know, under the leadership of Project Manager Chris Kosty, the Township built new turf football, soccer, baseball and softball fields, tennis courts, cricket fields, tracks, a stadium, gymnasium floors and bleachers, auditorium air conditioning and seating and playgrounds at every elementary school. We did this using the tax revenue from just a handful of economic development projects like the CPV power plant and warehouses for Prologis, Amazon and Preferred Freezer.

Without these incentives, those projects would have gone to towns around us and not Woodbridge. But now we get the jobs, we get the cleaned-up sites and we get the tax revenue that we share with the school district even though there is no requirement that we do so. It is simply the right thing to do.

In a similar way, we expect to share the revenue from the downtown development projects and new warehouse projects with the school district and pay for the Ross Street and Woodbridge Middle School projects so that our taxpayers will never see a tax increase to pay for this work. And, by the way, we will also cover the incremental variable cost of any school children to come from these developments so there truly will be no impact at all on the school budget.

In order to get the State to provide over \$10 million in funding for these projects, we will put a referendum to the voters of Woodbridge Township on March 14. We are confident that this referendum will pass because of the zero tax impact and because the last two times the district went to the voters they were successful. Our citizens support our educational system.

The fact is however, that unless someone lives in the area of the two schools, they have little or no motivation to take the time to learn about the plan and vote for it on March 14. But there are several other aspects of the referendum which will impact each and every person in our Township.

The one major amenity that we lack in Woodbridge is full-day kindergarten – a program that many of our surrounding towns already have. This is a key factor for young families in deciding where to live. The referendum will include funding to lease and renovate St. Cecelia's School in Iselin to accommodate the move of Kennedy Park School 24 - hopefully in within the next one year - and then School 24 will be used for full day kindergarten.

If a student would be a normal walker to school, then full-day kindergarten will be provided on site. If students would normally be bussed to school, then for the first year they will go to School 24 before going back to their home school for first grade.

Everyone should care about having full day kindergarten because of the positive impact on property values that will come from it. More people interested in purchasing your home means higher asking prices and there is no better way to get more interest than having a top-notch educational system in town with top-notch facilities both inside and outside the buildings.

Two other aspects of the referendum will also impact every student in the district. A major commitment to taking advantage of the latest in technological advancements will make sure that our children have the best resources available to them. A major commitment to improving the security of our school facilities will ensure that our kids are as safe as possible when they walk in the front door every morning.

So a YES vote on the referendum means one brand new grammar school; one newly renovated grammar school; a fully renovated like-new middle school; full-day kindergarten; advanced technology and improved security, all at no cost to our taxpayers.

I want to thank Dr. Bob Zega and his administration and the Board of Education for working with us on this aggressive plan. Our Township Council has joined with all of us and we have been fanning out all over town talking to PTOs, senior clubs, rec leagues, and many other civic and church groups, about the plan for the referendum. Thus far, the reaction has been very, very positive and we are encouraged that we will succeed.

It's now time to recognize our great Township Council and their importance to the team effort. No Mayor can govern alone. Just about everything we as an Administration do needs input and approval from our nine Council members. Nine dedicated men and women who are diverse in age; background; and in their race and culture.

We have some Council members with grey hair and some with 10 year olds. A Council President in his 24th year and a Councilman in his 24th week. A former fireman and a former policeman. Several who work or worked for Boards of Education, or in sales, or in their own business. But all who care. All who find their sweet spot and use their knowledge and dedication and passion to make Woodbridge a better place, especially when it comes to helping a child or family in need with a spaghetti dinner or pancake breakfast.

Council President Rick Dalina. Vice-President Debbie Meehan. Councilpersons Greg Ficarra, Kyle Anderson, Nancy Drumm, Lizbeth DeJesus, Cory Spillar, Brian Small and Viru Patel – I cannot thank you enough for what you have meant to our Administration.

I have to admit that I truly love reading the paper and seeing towns where the Mayor and Council don't get along or don't even talk. I love seeing Council people in other towns at odds with each other, and I love seeing Boards of Education in other towns that don't work with the town. And, I really love to see the dysfunctionality of many of our neighbors because it reminds me - and all of us - as to just how good this town is.

Someone asked me years ago what one word was the most important in our line of business and I said RELATIONSHIPS. Without them we fail. With them, we succeed. We have great relationships here and that is primarily because our Township Council shares our vision and helps us implement it throughout Woodbridge. Ladies and gentlemen on the Township Council – THANK YOU.

So as good as the last 10 years have been - 2017 promises to be the best year ever!!!

It will be a year of major investment in our schools.

A year of major investment in our Seniors.

A year of major investment in our youth.

A year of major investment by our businesses.

Everybody will participate in the progress for 2017. Every Township and school district worker. Every elected official. Every business owner and their employees. Every member of our Planning Board, Zoning Board, Library Board or Housing Authority. Every volunteer in our youth leagues, senior clubs, church groups and civic organizations. Everyone involved with our fire companies and first aid squads.

Every one of our 100,000 residents, and every one of the additional 80,000 visitors who come here to work, dine, shop, visit and recreate.

We are the “Best Town Around” because we have the best people on the “Best Team Around.”

A team that gets along in all aspects of our operation. A team where everyone forgets their egos and works together for the common good. A team where all ideas are considered and where everyone has input. A team that deals with the public in the nicest way possible. A team that rallies around people who need help and who cannot always help themselves.

A team that makes the “Quality-of-Life” in Woodbridge Township the best it can possibly be.

A team that remembers that we all work for the same constituency regardless of who signs our paychecks.

I am thankful to be the captain of this team and I am thankful for all of our teammates.

I am proud to report that the “State-of-our-Township” is GREAT.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for helping us to make Woodbridge the “BEST TOWN AROUND.”

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