

MAYOR JOHN E. McCORMAC
2013 ~ STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP ~ 2013
“QUALITY-OF-LIFE”
WOODBIDGE METRO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2013

Thank you and Good Afternoon...

This is my seventh “State-of-the-Township” report... and, as in the past, I ask that we open by recognizing and honoring the military men and women from Woodbridge who serve overseas and in harm’s way.... our “Hometown Heroes” as chronicled in the Colonia and Woodbridge Corner newspapers. Our prayers and thoughts are always for their safe return home – to Woodbridge, family, and friends.

I would like to take a moment to recall that it was one year ago that Woodbridge lost two Hometown Heroes...

USMC Corporal Kevin James Reinhard of Colonia was killed in the line-of-duty on January 19, 2012 while serving in Afghanistan. Kevin, a true hometown hero was the first, and I hope the last, Woodbridge soldier to give his life for our country since this awful war started more than a decade ago. Through the efforts of Debbie Meehan and the Colonia Corner, the Blue Star Family Support Group and American Legion Post #471, the newly minted Cpl. Kevin J. Reinhard Marine Corps League, and most importantly, Kevin’s parents – Jim and Kathy - we have honored Kevin’s legacy... his service and sacrifice remain in our hearts and prayers.

Woodbridge lost another “Hometown Hero” earlier that same day when Chief Bruce Turcotte, a 40-year veteran volunteer fireman with Hopelawn Engine Company #1, succumbed to a heart attack while helping fight a fire in the Township. Bruce lived and breathed the fire company and every fireman in town knew and respected him. On January 19, 2013 – little more than a week ago - the firefighters, volunteers, and families of Hopelawn Engine Company #1 memorialized Chief Turcotte on the one-year anniversary of his passing.

Let us offer a moment of silence in honor of our “Hometown Heroes”...

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:

I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce for once again hosting this annual event. For almost 50 years – 2014 will be the Chamber’s Gold Year 50th Anniversary - the Chamber has advocated and supported the Township business community and municipal government.

2012 was a milestone year for the Chamber. There was a changing of the guard with the retirement of longtime President Carol Hila... with Karen Barnes taking up the reins. Carol’s unique relationship with the business community served to work with the Chamber membership and tackle the business concerns of the Township through some very difficult economic times. Carol, thank you for your service – I fully expect that you will not be too far away as we move into the business of the coming year.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank outgoing Chairman John Hogan and incoming Chairperson Donna Rivera for their roles in advancing the business interests and business climate of Woodbridge Township. The Chamber Executive Committee and Board of Directors – a who’s-who of power house businesses and executives, along with WEDCO – the Woodbridge Economic Development Corporation – continue to support our business mission as we work to further the successful business climate that is Woodbridge... Thank you for you service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - ELECTED OFFICIALS:

The Township works tremendously well with all aspects of government impacting Woodbridge. Our brand new Congressman, Frank Pallone, has been everywhere for over a year now... even before he started officially representing us. Our State Legislators and County Freeholders have always kept the interests of our residents in mind while doing their jobs.

I truly appreciate the support of our Woodbridge Township Council. President Charlie Kenny and Vice President Kyle Anderson were recently elected by their colleagues to lead the Council in 2013. Rick Dalina, Michele Charmello, Jim Major, Bob Luban, Jim Carroll, Greg Ficarra and Brenda Velasco all work hard dealing with the issues facing our residents. Unlike many towns around us, we actually all get along and we actually talk to each other regularly, even though we are all getting a little testy because Strawberry’s has still not reopened as our regular hangout after Council meetings.

BOARD OF EDUCATION:

Members of our Board of Education and school district administration are in constant contact with us about ways to work together to continue to save money for our common constituents - the residents of Woodbridge Township. I value the relationship that our Township has with our school district, and as importantly, the personal relationship that I have with the Board of Education, Dr. Robert Zega, and the School District Administration. No town and district in the State have more shared services... no town and district work together better with the business community... no town and district get along better... and no town and district save more money for their taxpayers than right here in Woodbridge.

Whether it’s advancing updated and effective security measures at all of our schools to better protect students, teachers, and staff in partnership with the Woodbridge Police Department... to the innovative “Principal-for-a-Day” program which involves many of our corporate and business executives under the direction of Bernadette Sohler from Middlesex Water Company... to promoting our Blue Ribbon schools... to making improvements to buildings, athletic fields and playgrounds... together we know the value of quality schools and we will continue to do anything we can to help each other.

ADMINISTRATION:

You've heard me say it at every "State-of-the-Township"... but please indulge me one more time. There is no better talent in local government anywhere in the State of New Jersey than there is in Woodbridge Township.

I would like to take a moment to thank my senior management team who I work with each and every day to make Woodbridge the "Best Town Around." There is no better Business Administrator in the State than Bob Landolfi. Bob handles all of the day-to-day tasks in keeping the trains running on time, so that I can focus on the business of Woodbridge; stop-by the schools and senior clubs,; parades and scout meetings; groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings.

I attend those new business functions because of the tremendous efforts of Caroline Ehrlich, my Chief of Staff, head of the Township Redevelopment Agency, Chamber Board member, and best friend for more than 15 years. Caroline has overseen dozens of great new projects in our town, and is nearing completion on several very, very significant redevelopment initiatives that have the potential to keep our Town in the forefront of economic redevelopment in the State.

How many Mayors can count on a top advisor who is not only an outstanding Municipal Clerk but also a former Councilman, former Administrator, and lifetime Township resident like John Mitch. I am glad he has three young children who will attend college one day and he will never run for my job because he can't afford the pay cut.

I truly appreciate the relationship I have with our "kitchen cabinet" which meets every Monday morning to plan the future of the Township and advises me on every aspect of running our Town.

Our Department and Division Directors maintain the day-to-day operations that truly keep the Township on track – the folks that you work with every day. Will all of the Township Directors please STAND for a well-deserved thank you...

Jim Nolan – Law Director	Manny Fernandez – Chief Financial Officer
Marta Lefsky – Planning & Development	Dennis Henry – Public Works
Dennis Green – Health & Senior Services	Bob Hubner – Director of Police
Joe Nisky – Deputy Police Director	Captain Roy Hoppock, WPD
Pat Kenny – Emergency Management	Lowell Aube – CERT
Vito Cimilucca – Director of the Woodbridge Community Center & Recreation	
Brian Molnar – Recreation Department	Michael Esolda – Information Systems
Scott Thompson – Township Engineer	Robert Sobieski – Building Inspection
Rich Lorentzen – Tax Collector	Rich Duda – Tax Assessor
Marianne Horta – Personnel & Purchasing	Phil DiNicola – Municipal Court Director
Christine Murchio – Library Director	Cynthia Knight – Barron Arts Center
Lee Beckerman – TV 35	Shirley Genty – Municipal Alliance & Youth Services
Larry McCullough – Grants Officer	
Mayor's Office Executive Staff: Kelly Reidy, Erika Aber, Cindy Bence, Gayle Marchetti, Donna Janocko, Gerry Mazurek, Sheila Carrozza	

And, another reason our government works so well is because of the staff in the Mayor's Office who answer phones, greet our citizens, set appointments, and handle the day-to-day matters so that we can concentrate on the overall vision and strategies involved in planning for our Township. Every day, someone thanks me for handling an issue that I, quite frankly, didn't even know was an issue. The credit for our success goes to Kelly, Erika, Cindy, Gayle, Donna, Gerry, and Sheila. Thank you.

WOODBIDGE 2012 – THE YEAR-IN-REVIEW:

Besides that terrible day of January 19, the year 2013 was especially difficult for our Township. The main culprit as in many New Jersey towns, was Super Storm Sandy which presented hurdles that challenge our services, workers, residents, and economy.

But, when it comes to emergencies, the “State-of-our-Township” is the best and strongest around. Unlike many towns, Woodbridge was prepared. Our Public Works crews, led by Dennis Henry (STAND), worked diligently in the days before the storm to clean waterways and culverts and take down threatening trees to minimize damage. Our Office of Emergency Management, led by Patrick Kenny, worked 24/7 before, during, and after the storm to keep our residents safe - we are proud to report that we had no casualties or even serious injuries.

The Woodbridge Police Department under the direction of Director Bob Hubner, Deputy Director Joe Nisky, and Chief Law Enforcement Officer Roy Hoppock, responded to nearly 2,200 calls for emergency service. Our independent fire companies responded to nine structure fires and 525 calls for service and our first aid squads handled 337 medical emergencies.

The Public Works Department logged 15,000 man-hours while cutting down 500 trees from power lines and from our streets which accounted for 6,200 tons of wood and branches being recycled. Over 360 tons of debris and bulk waste were hauled away from flooded homes. The team amazingly missed only the Tuesday trash collection but made up for it the following Saturday.

Our all-volunteer Community Emergency Response Team, led by Lowell Aube and Skip Landt, kept our shelter open for a week for more than 200 evacuees from throughout the County. Nearly 2,000 residents have filed for FEMA claims for damage reimbursement. The Township itself, after receiving nearly \$1 million in reimbursement from FEMA after Hurricane Irene, has submitted preliminary damage assessment at many times that amount.

The Health Department under the leadership of Director Dennis Green visited more than 300 food establishments in the aftermath of the storm to make certain they were safe to reopen and to serve food. Our Nursing staff was assigned to the Community Center and assisted state and county nurses in providing medical care to evacuees, and the Animal Control officers at the Animal Shelter battled flood waters to save all of the pets.

It is important to note that the work we did before the storm served to control the impact and damage. Significant stream cleaning efforts in the year since Irene helped mitigate some of the damage in Town, but there was little that could stop a 16-foot storm surge. Our crews and equipment are back in the creeks and streams as we speak, because the threat of future storms of this magnitude is real - we will continue to be prepared.

We are working with an independent engineering firm to seek a more permanent solution to the flooding in Woodbridge. I am proud to report that just last week we sent an updated analysis and study to Washington to seek federal flood mitigation funding - the numbers now work in our favor when it comes to comparing damages incurred to the cost of a flood prevention plan. However, we remain cautious about promising this relief because, as we all know, Federal funding has been delayed and is limited - not every municipality that applies for help will be approved. Nonetheless, we feel we have made a strong case because the continued problems along the Woodbridge Creek were exacerbated by new flooding in areas of Sewaren and Port Reading. We would, however, prefer to under commit and over deliver... rather than the other way around.

We have waived permit fees for storm-related repairs and have reduced the building tax assessment by 90 percent for those 34 homes that had significant structural damage which was enough to render them uninhabitable. We are publicizing all grant programs to our residents so they know where to seek individual help. We promise that we will do everything possible to help people get this funding and to get them back into their homes as quickly as possible.

Our Township also had to deal with another devastating and unfortunate event in July when 49 families and more than 100 residents were left homeless with only the clothes they were wearing after a fire that destroyed two fully-occupied apartment buildings in Avenel. Every firehouse and first aid squad in town responded to the fire in some way and squads from throughout our area chipped-in at the scene or covered our firehouses while our teams responded.

I arrived at the fire scene shortly after it started, and I watched first-hand the efforts of the Avenel Fire Company, led by Frank Strain and Cory Spiller. I was completely impressed by the level of cooperation between firefighters who in some cases hardly knew each other. Everyone did what they were trained to do or what they knew they had to do. Volunteers worked with paid crews. Firefighters put themselves at risk searching for residents who were unaccounted for. Some served water and sandwiches to others during breaks in their duties. Egos were checked at the door and once again, there were amazingly no fatalities and no major injuries. I observed a similar effort earlier in the year as Iselin Fire Chief Ed Mullen led dozens of firefighters at a Menlo Park Terrace house fire.

By the weekend after the Avenel fire, and a single Reverse 9-1-1 phone call and a few Internet postings, Township residents, businesses and corporations, charitable groups and associations, emergency service organizations, and citizens throughout Middlesex County, the State of New Jersey, and the nation, opened their hearts and pocketbooks contributing thousands of dollars in donations, gift cards, clothing and toiletries, food, school supplies and other necessary items. Atlantic Realty, the apartment owners, did a terrific job finding temporary and permanent housing for all of the displaced families and residents. Once again, Debbie Meehan stepped-up and coordinated the distribution of the aid to the families. Debbie, you have our thanks for a job well-done.

Public Safety is perhaps the single-most important contributing factor to our Township's "Quality-of-Life." In 2012, the WPD Communications Center took responsibility for the dispatch of Emergency 9-1-1 First Aid calls. As a result of the consolidation, our First Aid Squads are responding in record time to emergency calls. Quiet Zones around four railroad crossings make life a little more peaceful for thousands of Woodbridge residents. Renovations at Cooper Towers brought new kitchens and baths to more than 75 Senior residents... similar renovations are coming soon to the Senior residents living in Olsen Towers.

In 2012, the WPD put more uniformed officers on the street... expanded the Community Police Unit which provides "one-on-one" public safety services to residents and businesses and invited Senior residents to participate in the "Senior Police Academy." The WPD is one of only five accredited police departments in the State of New Jersey and has an excellent working relationship with our business community.

WOODBIDGE - YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW:

Woodbridge is the 6th largest municipality in New Jersey with a resident population of just under 100,000. As importantly, our population swells by more than 80,000 people who travel to Woodbridge each day to work and to conduct business... that statistic speaks to the overwhelming success of our local economy, our business climate, our key location at the “Crossroads” of the State of New Jersey, and to our “Quality-Of-Life.”

The “State-of-the-Township’s” economic development efforts were outstanding in 2012... and it promises to be even better in 2013.

Planning Director Marta Lefsky shepherded through nearly 5,000 building permits last year which alone generated more than \$2.1 million in revenue at a time when building has been at a standstill in many other towns. This beat the 2011 record of \$1.9 million despite a still sluggish economy.

The most impressive development was a ten-story office building in MetroPark that was started a few years ago in a very down economy and built on spec with no tenants. We are happy to note that the building is fully rented already... just months after opening.

As a Mayor with the nickname of Big Mac, I was especially proud to appear with Ronald McDonald as McDonalds Corporation became the first tenant in Metro Top. The 19,000 sq. foot office space houses 85 staff that supports the more than 120 franchisees that own and operate 607 McDonald’s restaurants in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. – a truly great addition to our business community... and “We’re Lovin It”.

Future tenants at Metro Top will include a large CPA firm, a large engineering firm, and several information technology companies – the good news is that we’ll be doing a host of new ribbon-cuttings in 2013.

Upper Main Street has had a real revitalization with Northfield Bank and Lighthouse Day Care Center replacing the decrepit High Hill Garage and with Investors Savings Bank replacing the old Quickie Mart. Bally’s is soon to become a kidney dialysis center and the former Brass Bucket (for old timers) and Club Sleep (for new timers) will soon be redeveloped.

Hess continued its expansion of their corporate office as did Proctor & Gamble, United States Gypsum, Prudential, and Pride Solvents.

Red Robin became the latest national restaurant chain to open in Woodbridge and Burlington Coat Factory became the latest national retailer to come to town. Speaking of Burlington, indications are that other vacant stores in that strip mall should soon be rented now that an anchor tenant has moved in.

Boscov’s announced a move into Woodbridge Center and we’re looking to August for their Grand Opening and ribbon-cutting.

Wick Companies rebuilt the corner of Ford Avenue and King Georges Post Road into a 7-11 with office space and apartments. WAWA ventured into Woodbridge with a beautiful new store on Route 9, along with an Aldi’s Supermarket that offers residents an economical food shopping alternative. There’s no doubt that I saved my political career at the elaborate WAWA ribbon-cutting by passing on doing the chicken dance with Wally the WAWA Goose – not in front of TV-35 and several hundred WAWA employees, visitors, and dignitaries.

Paul Sansone and the Lucas brothers have expanded their car dealerships on Route 1.

Allstate opened an office in Colonia; FedEx expanded in Keasbey; Hess invested millions in solar panels on Main Street; a Residence Inn opened on Route 9; Wegman's opened a Wine & Spirits Shoppe; and over a dozen small businesses opened up on Main Street, New Brunswick Avenue in Fords and Inman Avenue in Colonia.

And while on the topic of Inman Avenue, I would like to congratulate the Colonia Business Community for their advocacy for development along Inman Avenue and other parts of Colonia. Their civic involvement is also impressive with their contributions to our veterans groups and food pantries... The "Taste of Colonia" is only three days away with tickets still available by contacting Debbie Meehan or President Peter Scocca of Colonia Travel.

We expect bigger and better in 2013 when it comes to the economy, development, redevelopment, and jobs with some major projects on the horizon.

But first, I must report some unfortunate news that we just learned about yesterday. Hess announced that it is closing part of its Port Reading operations in coming months. The decision will result in a reduction of the Hess workforce by some 170 jobs in the Township... Hess remains committed to Woodbridge with their Route 9 corporate office and 800+ jobs, terminal operation in Port Reading, and their retail stores. The silver lining after the Hess announcement is that two new projects are in the pipeline (pun intended) that have the potential to replace the lost Hess jobs five-times over.

An existing vacant warehouse in Avenel is expected to bring 500 new jobs not only to Woodbridge, but also to the State of New Jersey. Vacant land in Fords is expected to become a manufacturing facility and warehouse complex which could produce another 500 jobs... and we all know that new manufacturing operations have practically disappeared from our landscape. We hope that both commitments will be made within months and both are nationally-known.

Prologis is breaking ground on two additional warehouses in Port Reading to compliment the recently expanded Bed, Bath and Beyond warehouse of 750,000 square feet – the Prologis expansion – planned to start later this year and will bring hundreds of new jobs with it in ensuing years.

I kidded Amy Bellisano for years about Olive Garden coming to Woodbridge Center but it happened and I now feel like the long promised WAWA on Route One North in Avenel has become the new Olive Garden. I'm assured that construction will begin this year, and we'll see the end of the last and ugliest eyesores in town – Mom's Diner, the Gem Motel and an old gas station that has been closed for over 20 years. It will be a challenge, but I'm sure that with proper police protection I can avoid Wally the Goose for one more hour at the next ribbon-cutting.

The Hampshire Group is looking at significant new construction in Metro Park off Wood Avenue. New Jersey Transit is considering additional expansion in Metro Park and is also looking at the area surrounding our downtown train station. The General Dynamics site in Avenel is at the finish line for a contract between the owners and a developer and that will help all businesses along Avenel Street and Rahway Avenue. In fact, local businessman Frank Zappia is already redeveloping that corner in anticipation of the new housing units soon to arrive.

Competitive Power Ventures continues to make progress in the planned construction of a nearly one billion dollar power plant on the Keasbey waterfront – when completed, CPV will be the Township’s biggest revenue producer. The cleanup along the Keasbey waterfront is well underway, and when finished, will provide public access and passive recreation to the Raritan River for residents and visitors.

Frank and Valerie Montecalvo continue to seek new tenants for their property and should be making announcements in 2013 about new projects. And one cannot mention the Montecalvo’s and Bayshore without thinking of their commitment to the environment... and one cannot think of the environment without knowing that Woodbridge is the best town in the State with our fourth straight Sustainable New Jersey championship in 2012. This effort has really branded our Township and has helped tremendously in our business development initiatives. We owe a debt of gratitude to Caroline Ehrlich for her stewardship of this program.

Speaking of new business and “State-of-the-Township”... I’d like to announce that we’re expanding our own business - the new Woodbridge Community Center or WCC... Home to the Skyline Mini Golf Course... the Arena’s Roller & Ice Skating Center... the Arena’s Café and Skyline Pavilion... the WCC Sport Center... and the YMCA at WCC. We had a very successful – and profitable – last year and have embarked on a major marketing campaign to make the WCC even better. If you’re looking for unmatched value in entertainment, sports and community connection, then look no further than the WCC. There are so many opportunities for family fun and entertainment, recreation, health & fitness, cultural activities, and more. WCC Director Vito Cimilucca and members of the WCC staff greeted you as you entered and are here to book your spring & summer corporate event and outing... Don’t hesitate... we’re booking fast...

“QUALITY-OF-LIFE”:

At this time, I’d like to take a break and present a video produced by our very own TV-35... The video serves as a recognition to all of you... the Chamber and members, WEDCO, the Township corporations, businesses, and businesspersons, Municipal workforce, and community associations, groups, institutions, and residents that together contribute to our “Quality-of-Life”... without doubt, the best “Quality-of-Life” in any town, in any county, in the State of New Jersey.

As you saw in the video... residents of Woodbridge have various different interests and our local government and business community have worked hard to channel these interests for the good of our community.

For those who love the arts, we have Northfield Bank's Woodbridge Community Youth Players which will perform Pippin this summer... the Woodbridge Artisan Guild on Main Street unveils its first exhibit of 2013 this Friday... the New Horizons Band and its new partner, the Woodbridge Community Choir, are always seeking and auditioning for new participants... the free Monday night summer concert series sponsored by Sansone, Woodbridge Center, and Shop Rite returns to the stage in July... the free Woodbridge Wednesday concerts at Parker Press Park and the spring and fall "Music on Main" series will be back with headliner performances.

The Barron Arts Center with its aggressive schedule of concerts, exhibits and poetry readings anchors our arts initiative. Provident Bank's Family Series brings arts and entertainment directly to young people through a variety of events.

For those interested in history, we will complete our walking tour of Woodbridge this year and we hope to continue to make progress toward having our own History Museum.

Looking for fitness and wellness events... The Mayor's Wellness Campaign sponsors and promotes runs and races, walks, a bike tour, and many programs targeting fitness.

Most of these programs and services are coordinated by Kelly Reidy and the Mayor's Office.

And we haven't forgotten our Seniors... We have five senior clubs and a dedicated outreach to those seniors who are homebound and unable to attend events. The New Jersey Senior Olympics return in September – last year, more than 1,000 Senior Olympians from across the state travelled to Woodbridge to participate in the three-day competition. May is Senior Month, and we will be announcing a host of programs, events and services targeted directly to our Senior's.

For children we have our Youth Recreation Council led by John Galvin which covers almost 50 leagues and nearly 10,000 children. And, for our challenged youngsters, we have Buddy Ball and Special Hockey programs. April is Youth Month – the biggest and best "Big Wheels" show in the state is on April 1 at Woodbridge Center Mall.

And, most importantly, for our taxpayers, we have the lowest municipal tax burden of any town which borders us.

CONCLUSION:

Like a family, our community is connected in countless ways. As we move toward the future, this Administration is committed to programs that promote a strong and vibrant economic climate and which, in turn, offer residents the best “Quality-of-Life” in the region... initiatives and programs that strengthen our bond of community and help us take advantage of new opportunities that lie on the horizon.

We in Town Hall will continue to embrace our private sector and we will continue to solicit and encourage your assistance for civic projects.

In fact, we are right in the middle of the annual “Have-A-Heart” food drive – sponsored by Wegman’s, ShopRite, Northfield Bank, and the Colonia Corner and Colonia Business Group. Once again, we have challenged every business to donate 214 pounds of food or \$214 to keep our food pantries stocked so they can offer food and supplies to our less fortunate neighbors... it is through the generosity of Woodbridge businesses that we’ll continue to do just that. And, we will continue to do more with less, because right now people need more and can only afford less...

So, where are we today and what is the “State of the Township.”

I am proud to report that the “State of Woodbridge Township” is the strongest around and getting stronger.

We are attracting new businesses and creating jobs for today and tomorrow. Existing businesses are expanding operations. We are working to connect Woodbridge residents to those jobs which will make us even stronger. The best municipal work force in the State keeps getting better.

In fact, 2013 may prove to be our best year for bringing new businesses to Woodbridge. Our programs and service offerings to residents are unmatched anywhere in the State.

Thank you to all of our residents and businesses who make Woodbridge “THE BEST TOWN AROUND”.

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