

2008
STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS
BY: SUPERVISOR MARY F. HOLTZ

Good afternoon. It is a privilege to continue this long standing Cheektowaga tradition here today.... accepting the Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce invitation to present my first State of the Town Address.

I'm tempted to let out a "jeepers creepers" a favorite phrase of my father, who also served as Town Supervisor and Town Clerk, and one that I have found myself saying quite a bit lately, especially the last few months. It's one of those phrases that can be used at times of great joy and great frustration. I've sat in the audience and listened to the State of the Town Address many times over the last 37 years...it never occurred to me that one day I would be giving the speech myself.

Excuse me if I speak rather quickly at times...anyone who has been present when I read Town Board resolutions, as Town Clerk, can attest to that.

It really is a pleasure to be here with you today and I would like to acknowledge Chairman of the Board Jim Corigliano, of Rosina Foods and also thank the Officers and the Board of Directors of the Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce for continuing to provide this opportunity for the business community and our residents to hear what is happening in our Town.

Chamber President and CEO Debbie Liegl and I have worked cooperatively together for many years and we have already met and talked a few times this year. I also want to acknowledge today's lunch sponsor, the Cheektowaga Times, which was founded by the late Willard and Eve Allis in 1946. I knew them both, from my earliest days at Town Hall. They would be proud of the role their paper continues to play in our town's history. I also would like to thank Time Warner Cable for taping here today so that our residents can be better informed about their town government.

Today, on my 17th day as Cheektowaga Town Supervisor I can tell you that I am energized, excited and proud to be serving my community in this new role.

I am honored to succeed Jim Jankowiak who very capably served the last year of Dennis Gabryszak's term when Dennis took on the new challenge of representing us in the NYS Assembly. I worked closely with Dennis as Town Clerk. And Jim's generosity in bringing me to the table on all issues during the transition, and even earlier, when it became apparent that I would be uncontested in both the primary and general election, was of immeasurable benefit to me in being able to hit the ground running on January 1. I look forward to the months and years ahead with the hope that I, too, can build a legacy of good work for our Town during my service as Supervisor.

Anyone following coverage of the presidential primaries and caucuses knows that the candidates are debating whether change or experience is the quality voters are most interested in. The Cheektowaga electorate decided to go with both qualities in last fall's election. We began this year with changes in several elected town offices. Charlie Markel is our newest elected member of the

Town Board and Stan Kaznowski has been appointed to fill Alice Magierski's seat this year. Although new to elective Town office, both are well know for being community-minded and committed to neighborhood preservation. Re-elected to the Town Board was three-term Councilmember Jeff Swiatek, an attorney, whose expertise is municipal operation. I have asked Jeff to serve as my Deputy Supervisor. Also elected was Councilmember Rick Zydel, following his successful one-year appointment to the Board last year. Councilmembers Pat Jaworowicz and Jim Rogowski, who are in the middle of their current terms, complete this year's Board. Alice Magierski was elected our new Town Clerk and Mark Wegner is the newly elected Highway Superintendent. Town Justice Tom Kolbert returns for another term and serves with Town Justice Jim Vallone.

I would like to acknowledge in the audience today---

- Councilmember and Deputy Supervisor Jeff Swiatek
- Councilmember Rick Zydel
- Councilmember Stan Kaznowski
- Town Clerk Alice Magierski

and

- Highway Superintendent Mark Wegner

Former Supervisor Jim Jankowiak and former Councilmember Tom Johnson chose not to seek re-election. Our Town is better for the years of service both of these men gave.

Today, I hope to give you a brief review of key 2007 accomplishments and to tell you about our goals for 2008. Much of what was realized is the result of the hard work of our Department Heads and our Town Employees.

In municipal government it is always appropriate to begin with the state of our town finances. I am proud to report that we are in an excellent financial position. The Town's AA3 bond rating remains the highest bond rating of any municipality in Western New York. Our Director of **Finance and Administration**, Brian Krause, has been doing an outstanding job for our Town and I am pleased to have him on my staff.

I pledge to ensure that the Town of Cheektowaga will remain fiscally strong while also providing the level of services we have all come to expect.

Another individual who has done a yeoman's job this year is Kevin Schenk, our **Town Attorney**. I can't impress upon you enough how beneficial it has been to have a full-time Town Attorney this past year. Kevin's long stint with us as a Deputy Town Attorney-- with his knowledge of the Town and municipal law-- made him the best choice to take on this role.

Another person who has worked to benefit this Town for a number of years now is Sue Ann Barnes, of **Grantmakers Advantage**. In 2007, Sue recently reported, the Town was awarded a total of over \$295,000 in grant monies. This represents an 869% return on the Town's investment in her services.

The **Employee Relations/Personnel Department** is headed up by Employee Relations Coordinator Anthony Romano. Two union contracts will expire at the end of 2008—the Supervisory Unit and the Public Safety Dispatchers. Tony anticipates that collective bargaining with the respective units will begin during the second half of this year.

This past year employee healthcare and insurance premium reduction were areas of focus—

- ★ In cooperation with the Town's collective bargaining units a Wellness Program was instituted and 133 of 466 full time employees were active participants in 2007 with the expectation that the number will increase in 2008. Since our health insurance plan is experience rated it is imperative that we encourage our employees to make a significant effort to improve their medical fitness.
- ★ The Town provides quality healthcare to its employees and retirees. In recognition of this, the Town receives a subsidy from the federal government under the Medicare Part D Program. The subsidy received in 2007 was \$141,000 and a similar amount will be rewarded in 2008.
- ★ In another effort to reduce the Town's health insurance premium expenses, the Town has offered qualified retirees and dependants the opportunity to participate in the Medicare Advantage Plan. A total of 22 have optioned to participate, reducing our annual premium by approximately \$48,000 this year alone. We plan to encourage others to enroll in this plan to further reduce our annual insurance premium expenses.

Our **Assessor**, Brian Hess, and his staff, produced a 2007 final assessment roll and maintained equity with an estimated **65 million additional taxable assessment**. They met with taxpayer groups and held informational classes for approximately 700 taxpayers.

For 2008, Brian will continue to expand means to share information with taxpayers through enhancement of the assessment Web page, informal hearings for assessment grievances and a continuation of classes and workshops for individuals and community groups.

A local law, amending the **Sanitation** code, took effect in 2007 and requires residents to keep their refuse in garbage cans. This action seeks to help control the Town's rodent population. Two part-time code enforcement workers were hired to help insure compliance. The Town Board, at the end of last year, re-established the Sanitation Department as a stand-alone department, answerable to the Town Board, in order to have better accountability for its operation and appointed Frank Max its General Crew Chief. I recently met with Frank and the Sanitation employees to share some of the problems residents have expressed and we all agree that it is reasonable for the public to have the expectation of a high level of service from all Town employees.

The **Building Inspection Department**, under the leadership of Tom Adamczak, issued 2,008 building permits, with a construction value of slightly more than \$74 million. Both figures set new records. These numbers benefited from the continued remodeling of the Walden Galleria and from a surprise project, the remodeling of the Kensington Village Apartments into a college student housing development. In addition, more types of work are required to be inspected by the building code, prompting the filing of additional permits.

The largest commercial project is the long awaited renovation and expansion of the Walden Galleria. Work in 2007 accounted for \$14 million in value.

Other commercial projects included a---

- \$1.2m Niagara National Insurance office on Genesee St.
- \$1.3m store building on Transit Rd.
- \$500,000 for the McDonald's on Union & George Urban
- a \$700,000 store on Walden,
- \$2.4m medical office building at the Maxim Medical Park on Harlem (the old Buffalo Drive-in site)
- \$800,000 remodeling of the Comfort Inn on Dingens St.
- a \$2.3m community center for the college housing project
- \$4.5m in additions to Target on Walden

and

- a \$5.8m class A office building on Airborne Parkway

The largest residential remodeling project is the conversion of the Kensington Village Apartments into college student housing... a project with a \$20 million price tag.

The construction picture for 2008 includes a number of hotels proposed for the Genesee Street/Airport corridor. I want to assure the homeowners residing in neighborhoods bordering this area that your concerns are being heard.

The Housing & Neighborhood Preservation and the Fire Inspection components of this department are located at the Alexander Community Center. The clean-up and securing of structures and properties, rodent control and fire inspections has continued. Many properties must be visited by inspectors more than once. More emphasis has also been placed on interior inspections resulting in an increase in the number of violations being issued. The staff expects that this trend will continue as will the number of vacant properties which is now over 600.

The **Engineering Department** headed up by Town Engineer Bill Pugh was involved in a variety of projects. The Engineering Department staff plays a key role in our Capital Improvements Projects and also provides technical assistance to various Town departments.

In the area of *Capital Projects and Facilities Improvements*, the Engineering Department--

- ★ Coordinated the technical aspects associated with the removal and replacement of all the gas and solar street lighting in the Town.
- ★ After 10 years of design, development, land acquisition and permitting, a contract for construction of the Rails to Trails Project was awarded
- ★ Assisted with improvements at various parks, facilities and roads
- ★ Coordinated preparation of the Town Buildings Master Facility Study

and

- ★ Assisted with coordination activities for numerous NYSDOT and Erie County Water Authority projects

In the area of *Storm Drainage Improvement Projects*, the Engineering Department--

- ★ Was involved in the aftermath of the October 2006 storm, including: major clearing and cleaning operations of drainage tributaries and creeks; the removal of downed trees and debris; and the re-grading of stream beds. All of these activities were documented in order to seek FEMA reimbursement.

They also

- ★ Performed field survey, design and installation of numerous storm sewer improvements projects and submitted a grant application seeking funding assistance.
- and
- ★ Worked with the Western New York Storm Water Coalition to implement Storm Water Management Local Laws requiring implementation in 2008

In the area of *Sanitary Sewer Improvements*, the Engineering Department---

- ★ Works in close cooperation with both the Main Pump Station and the Sewer Maintenance Department on issues involving the Town's sanitary sewer system.

And regarding a project that will be of pre-eminent concern in the future, the Engineering Department has begun negotiations with the NYSDEC relative to a long term Sanitary Sewer Overflow-Abatement Program. Our Sewer Maintenance and Main Pump Station personnel have and will continue to play key roles here as well.

Our **Main Pump Station** operates under the direction of Superintendent Jon Nichy. This department maintains and operates the Plant #5 and Plant #3 facilities which provide the main collection points for the Town of Cheektowaga's Sanitary Sewer Systems... and... the final metering chamber located on the Villa Maria Campus. The staff must constantly monitor operations for public safety and health and to meet contractual obligations. For these reasons, the facility is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We have an urgent need to upgrade and replace some critical components at the Main Pump Station. This vital equipment is almost 30 years old and rapidly approaching the end of its duty cycle. This equipment has been impeccably maintained and repaired over the years... but, Jon has recently been informed that there are components within these systems that are in limited supply or not available at all. This past March, during routine testing, the emergency power generator failed to operate during a test procedure. The resources expended to repair this unit were vast.

A loss of electrical power during a severe weather event, due to the failure of the emergency backup generator, would have catastrophic consequences upon the sewer district and the environment.

Interrupting the ability to convey waste-water through this facility is not an option.

With the knowledge that the service-life for this equipment is diminishing, the Town Board must consider a capital improvement project, in the range of \$800,000, to fund this need.

Our **Sewer Maintenance Department** is headed up by General Crew Chief Robert Latshaw. In 2007, the Sewer Maintenance Department set a departmental record by root cutting over 740,000 feet of sewer and did TV work on over 123,000 feet of main sewer.

Working together with the Engineering Department, 96 separate sewer rehabilitation projects at locations throughout the Town's sewer district were completed.

One of the department's goals is to continue to work cooperatively with our plumbing inspectors to identify residents who are having problems with back-ups or flooding and inform them of their possible need to update the plumbing in their homes.

Our **Facilities Department** is composed of the Parks Division and the Building and Grounds Division and is headed up by General Crew Chief John Jaroszewski. A few of their key accomplishments in 2007 included--

- ★ Playground renovations to Kelly, Nob Hill, Raymond and Dingens Parks were completed and a new liner was installed at Maryvale Pool
- ★ New soccer fields were added to Rehm Road and Dingens parks.
- ★ Many new trees were planted in Town Park (at the Cleveland Hill Memorial) and at Stiglmeier Park.
- ★ A project especially dear to my heart is the conversion of the former Maryvale Branch Library into the Town's new Records Center.

Among our anticipated goals for 2008 is completion of the Dingens Park project and John also wants to start updating all the basketball and tennis courts throughout the Town.

Our **Senior Services Department** presents an outstanding array of programs with a dedicated staff, under the leadership of Director Kerry Switalski, and with the efforts of outstanding senior group leaders.

Kerry reported many 2007 highlights. These are a few—

- ★ We secured corporate sponsorship (\$2,850) for all five of the summer gazebo concerts and a couple additional special events. We will be looking to do even more of this in the future and already have numerous businesses offering to sponsor for 2008. We are always looking for more.
- ★ In partnership with the Cheektowaga Central School District's Community Task Force, we were awarded the Hodgson Russ Erie County Association of School Board's "*Excellence in Education Award*" for our collaborative projects with students and seniors.

- ★ We had over 200 seniors attend a pre-celebration for our center's 25th Anniversary...at Mickey Rats. Many seniors commented that they remembered the "good old days" when they used to go there as "young folks".
- ★ We held our 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Senior Center in early October... two black tie affairs with over 400 senior guests. The evenings finished with a slide show picturing seniors--- from yesterday and today--- who have participated in center programs and special events.
- ★ We added an additional route for Meals on Wheels at our Bell Tower Site to eliminate the waiting list we had in the south end of town. In addition, we recruited some local businesses to send employees each day to volunteer to deliver meals for this program. We are hoping more businesses consider this in the future.
- ★ Expanded membership of Cheektowaga Senior Citizen Foundation, Inc. to 11 voting members – including two senior members and a cross-section of community business members. The Foundation was incorporated in 2001 to raise funds and help maintain and support the programs at the Cheektowaga Senior Center.

The Department has already achieved one of its 2008 goals---with the recent start of a "Staying Fit Senior Dining Site" right at the Center, in conjunction with the Erie County Department of Senior Services. The program provides a nutritionally balanced, hot meal at a reasonable cost to our current members who use our Center on a regular basis.

Among the other 2008 goals are--

- ★ The Cheektowaga Senior Citizens Foundation will seek to partner with local businesses for programs and activities at the Senior Center and conduct a community-wide fundraiser.
- ★ A maintenance wish at the Center includes improving the landscaping. We may be looking for corporate sponsors to help us fund this in conjunction with our Foundation.

The staff of the **Youth Services & Recreation Department** conducts an excellent year round program for youth, adults and families. The department is headed up by Executive Director Ken Kopacz. Along with the benefits realized by the participants, some programs have a spin-off effect in that they generate a positive economic advantage to the Town and its businesses as well. Cheektowaga Recreation Center Rink Programs which have an economic affect on the Town include hockey tournaments which bring teams from outside of our area in for stays of 1 to 3 days.

In late spring, after the ice is removed, we rent our sport court for Junior Level Inline Hockey. The program attracts competition from Canadian teams who come to town and play at our facility on 6 separate occasions, many of whom spend a night in local hotels.

In 2007, the Youth Council held its 2nd Bowling Lock-In to raise money for re-planting trees lost through the October 2006 storm. This year the Youth Council planners have decided to donate the proceeds as part of the Team Cure for Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

Also this year, the Cheektowaga Alliance for Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth will be looking to work with local businesses to institute Program Sticker Shock to help curb underage drinking in the Town of Cheektowaga. It will be interesting to hear how that works out. Also, middle and high school students affiliated with the Alliance have begun planning a town-wide student art auction, which will be hosted by the Senior Center, with proceeds to benefit Renaissance House.

Our **Police Department**, under the leadership of Chief Christine Ziemba, is second to none and I would like to share with you a few of the accomplishments of the Patrol Division and the Crime Resistance Unit--

- ★ The Patrol Division conducted a field training exercise with the Cleveland, Pittsburg and Buffalo FBI Field Offices at Walden Galleria Mall involving a terrorist incident -- Patrol officers simulated a first response with a hand off to the Tactical Unit.
- ★ Detective Jedd, with the assistance of Administrative Division and Crime Resistance, completed training and implementation of a license plate identification system into patrol operations.
- ★ A joint training exercise was conducted with the NFTA, Crash Fire and Rescue and TSA regarding a possible plane crash at the airport.
- ★ The department applied for and obtained the Project Impact Tools Grant and Secure our Schools Grant 2007.
- ★ Uniformed patrol in Town Park and the Town Park Pool was increased with utilization of the Justice Assistance Grant.
- ★ During the summer months of July and August foot patrols were incorporated.

The Crime Resistance Unit also had a number of accomplishments in 2007—a few key ones are:

- ★ Over 500 gunlocks were given away as part of *Project ChildSafe*
- ★ The Unit participated in several community related ventures which further cemented the outstanding working relationship between the Cheektowaga Police Department and the F.A.T.H.E.R.S. Group—the most notable being their presence at the Unity Weekend at the Delevan/Grider Community Center.
- ★ In a continued collaboration with the Cheektowaga Youth & Recreation Department, the Crime Resistance Unit interacted with Town youth at six *Wednesday in the Park* events during the summer. This program provides opportunities for the youth of Cheektowaga to associate with police officers in both recreational and educational endeavors.
- ★ This year marked the 21st year of participation for the Cheektowaga Police Department in *National Night Out*. Each year has seen increased support from the citizens, businesses, and outside law enforcement agencies. There were 6 satellite venues which hosted specific

events in conjunction with this event and 13 neighborhoods participated in the Flash Light Walks.

- ★ A new *Neighborhood Watch* group in the Randolph area was formed. We now have a total of 26 Neighborhood Watch groups active in Town
- ★ I would be remiss if I did not at least mention the *Watch Your Car Program, DARE, Do The Right Thing* and the *Explorer* group.

Earl Loder, our **Emergency Services** Coordinator, says he had a somewhat quiet year compared to 2006 (with the surprise October storm) but still responded to over 90 separate incidents. Earl, and his assistant, Mike Mazurowski know they will be very busy this year reviewing and up-dating all of the Town emergency plans.

Mark Wegner, our newly elected Superintendent of **Highways**, is energetic and eager to implement a plan that will divide the Town into four quarters for the most efficient use of manpower and equipment for repairing receivers, doing pipe work, street paving and brush clean-up. His goal is also to plant over 200 trees at various locations in Town and relieve flooding problems in the northwest section of Town and the Dingens area his first year in office.

Last year, Highway ground down and topsoiled-over more than 600 tree stumpsa result of the October storm. While Town streets were cleared of debris in good time, residents on County roads had a longer wait. Former Supervisor Jim Jankowiak and former Highway Superintendent Chris Kowal had numerous meetings and phone calls with County officials before the situation was finally rectified.

When the clean-up was complete, Highway was able to resume its scheduled work including... paving, planting new trees, and repairing receivers.

As you can tell from several of the Town Departments' lists of accomplishments, the surprise October 2006 storm consumed a lot of time and effort last year. It also provided the basis for some departments to make sure they are prepared for similar occurrences in the future. Our **Central Garage**, which is responsible for maintaining all Town vehicles and equipment and headed up by Bob Ciesielski, was without power for several days and used portable generators with temporary hookups. It now has a permanent emergency generator installed which will also power the Sanitation Department and our fuel facility.

As you can see from the items I listed, we have accomplished much. All of us know there is much still to do. Cheektowaga remains an attractive, stable and affordable place to live and work but we are also part of an ever-changing society as a first ring suburb of the City of Buffalo.

As your Supervisor and as someone who grew up and still lives in the Pine Ridge section of Town, I am committed to doing all that I can to keep this and all of our other border neighborhoods safe and stable.

I know my fellow Town Board members have made the same commitment to stabilize our neighborhoods and maintain our property values. We will continue to work with neighborhood and citizen groups to address community needs and concerns.

The Housing and Neighborhood Preservation Office, under the Building Inspection Department, is charged with following up on complaints and conducting inspections to make certain that our housing remains up to code. I would like us, in the very near future, to begin to utilize technology that will help insure that our housing inspectors can work more efficiently... so we can see positive results more quickly.

Another resource is our Office of Community Development headed up by Director Jerry Gabryszak. Jerry will pursue a designation of the Walden and Pine Hill neighborhoods as a "Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area" from the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development. Such a designation is intended to forge a partnership among the Town, HUD, the private sector, community organizations and residents to facilitate neighborhood revitalization efforts and encourage reinvestment in the area. The primary goal is to bring about comprehensive improvements in housing, economic and commercial activity and the overall quality of life of area residents. One of the features of this designation is greater flexibility in the use of federal resources. For instance, the Town can formulate a loan program to help some homeowners make needed repairs to their property who otherwise would not qualify for federal assistance. We will also focus on development of the Walden Commerce Exchange and job creation for area residents. We will also work to find ways to revitalize the Walden Avenue and Genesee Street commercial corridors between the Buffalo City Line and Harlem Road. Safe and long-term viability of these neighborhoods with stable property values is what we hope to achieve through this program.

The Town Board realizes the importance of maintaining our neighborhoods and our Town government's role in this regard, but I can't emphasize enough the important role our residents and businesses play in keeping their own neighborhoods safe and clean.

Earlier, I mentioned the Town Buildings Master Facility Report which was prepared last year. It confirmed what we have already known for several years now...that our Town Campus needs improvement and, especially, that our **Justice Court** is in desperate need of additional space for a more efficient and safe operation. The study provides us a first concrete step in moving forward this year to remedy the situation.

The Town Board took steps with-- I must admit-- a severe nudge by me as **Town Clerk**, to keep and convert the former North Branch Library, on Maryvale Drive, into the Town's Records Center, thereby, saving over \$60,000 in annual lease costs. It was decided that the South Branch Library, on William Street, would be sold as recommended in the Town Facilities Report. It is on the market now and hopefully will soon be purchased and placed on the tax roll. And, speaking of taxes, the efficient collection and prompt investment of taxes collected in 2007, resulted in a \$700,000 return to the Town. Further computerization has also made more information that the Town Clerk's office provides more readily available to the public and the Town departments.

The Deputies and Staff of the Town Clerk and Tax offices are among the finest employees of in the Town. They are customer service oriented and work as a team. I will miss the day to day contact I had with my Town Clerk Family. Alice, I wish you all the best as you take over as Town Clerk.

The Town Board took another definitive step.... the updating our Master Plan... when it contracted with Wendel Duscherer last fall. It was last done over a decade ago. The process will take about 18 months to complete and will provide ample opportunity for citizen input. The finished document will guide land use, development and green space for the next decade and beyond.

Our elected officials at all levels of government...Federal, State & County...have assisted us in the past in obtaining resources to achieve our goals... and we thank them for all that they have done... and all that we hope they can do in the future.

Congressman Brian Higgins, State Senator Bill Stachowski and Assemblyman Dennis Gabryszak were all very positive in conversations at our Inaugural ceremonies.

I look forward to working with our village mayors—Mayor Len Szymanski, of Sloan and Mayor Barbara Alberti, of Depew—as well as the village trustees, school and fire districts, community groups and activists and all who dedicate themselves to making our town a better place.

I look forward to working with the Town Board and our Town Clerk and Superintendent of Highways as well as the rest of our town personnel. Our workforce is made up of hard-working and dedicated individuals—both full-time and part-timers--who help to make Cheektowaga a great place to live and work.

I look forward to working with the leaders of our employee bargaining units to resolve issues in a way that will allow both labor and management to declare victory.

I look forward to working with you, the Chamber during my first term as Cheektowaga Town Supervisor.

So 2008 brings “change” to the Town--- along with the “experience” needed to make even more change possible--- for the Town.

I've said a lot of words here this afternoon. And I can tell you in words what we would like to accomplish...but let's all work together and let our actions speak in a voice that will be heard by all. Thank you.