

MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



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JANUARY 3, 2013

This has been one heck of a year! There were some challenges and a lot of progress made. We have the opportunity to strengthen the foundation of Summit and continue to build on the strong sense of community that exists here.

To start, we are going to stay focused on making sure Summit remains a very desirable place to live and also a very attractive place to do business. Underscoring the latter point is Merck's decision to relocate its global headquarters in Summit. Along with Celgene, we are now the home of two Fortune 500 companies and two of the leaders in the pharmaceutical industry, a major source of employment in New Jersey. There were other positive signs of Summit's vitality and they include the opening of many new stores and restaurants in our Central Business District. The old Summit Medical Group building reconstruction was completed and reopened as One Deforest at 100% occupancy with companies like McKinsey and Bank of America – Merrill Lynch. And nearby, many new housing units are in various stages of completion.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we faced as a community last year was Hurricane Sandy. It was a harsh test. Much of Summit lost power for the third time in about 18 months. For many it was more than just an inconvenience and a source of stress, as it caused destruction and for some - physical hardship. Despite all the problems Hurricane Sandy caused, the vast majority of people put their troubles aside and thought about other people first. When they could they provided shelter, food, money, or a helping hand. The effort came from many citizens and also our local charities, religious institutions and many of the people working for the City of Summit. Regardless of the organization, that helping hand was provided by many citizens who just wanted to help. The strong sense of community we enjoys in Summit was especially strong during Hurricane Sandy. It is important to remember how so many helped and to celebrate their efforts, to reinforce the strong sense of community support that Summit enjoys, and in so doing provide a reminder that we are each other's keeper. I thank all citizens for their efforts and patience throughout that ordeal.

The reason Summit lost power for so long is reflected in this quote from former Gov. of NY George Pataki from a WSJ article " Superstorm Sandy exposed perhaps the greatest flaw underpinning the American way of life: insecure and unreliable electric

infrastructure. Under the stress of a major storm these systems have proven inadequate in responding and recovering.”

In a recovery mode, single-family homes in a heavily treed suburb will take a back seat to restoration in larger cities, critical care facilities, public safety, water and sewage treatment, etc. For this reason I have been in contact with JCP&L about a plan to harden our electric grid. Tom Ferguson a long time resident and former head of our cable TV committee has volunteered with Chris Cotter to draw up a plan to bury wire from Springfield Ave. outward to the Post office, YMCA, Library Connection, Firehouse, LCJSMS, First Aid Squad. I assume we will have to pay for most of the cost of a project like this but it may be cheaper and more dependable than generators. Since Deforest Avenue is scheduled for re-engineering and repaving, a second loop could encompass this area. This plan does not protect homeowners but it does protect critical parts of our infrastructure. Much as we are installing Belgian block curbing in a ten to twenty year timeframe burying the wires is a long-term solution.

Financially, Summit is rated AAA. You should know the combined budget for schools and city services increased less than 1% in 2012. The pressure on the budget came from our Union County tax bill. We now pay \$33 million a year to the County and rising. That is over 25% of our property taxes. Our increase last year was 11% with a double-digit increase expected this year as well. Obviously the 2% spending cap does not work with the County. This is frustrating since the value provided by these taxes is not apparent and they give us much less financial flexibility and make it much harder to afford new programs. I ran for Freeholder and while many of us have attended the Union County Freeholder meetings we know our voices seemed to have been ignored. In an era when the needs of our citizens are hard enough to meet and real median incomes are much lower than five years ago, we have a county government that builds \$10 million golf club houses, approved the construction of a multimillion dollar ice skating rink, and runs a hospital that is losing millions of dollars a year. County government at the very minimum needs to become more accountable, responsive to all of its constituents, transparent and affordable. Perhaps, it should be eliminated. That step was taken in Massachusetts and Connecticut and those states are more affordable.

Over the past year, many people helped me and I want thank all those who helped make it successful.

I am going to start with a goodbye. I am sorry to see Nuris Portuondo go. She has been a vital and effective leader and has accomplished so much during her tenure as councilwoman. Good luck to you, Nuris. Congratulations to Councilmen Rob Rubino, Greg Drummond and Pat Hurley for completing their first year on council. They really hit the ground running.

And Congratulations and welcome to our newest Councilman Al Dill. I look forward to working with you over the next 3 years! And of course, congratulations to Councilman Rich Madden who was re-elected for a second term and again as Council President.

Thank you to David, Rosie and Michelle for helping me through my first year as Mayor, It has been quite a learning experience! 35 weddings this year! Thank you to Nuris Portuondo for standing in for me when I could not be there.

Police Department

Congratulations to our new Police Chief Robert Weck, who has done a fine job during his first year, along with his two Captains Steve Zagorski and Andy Bartolotti. The police department revived community policing in the downtown, which has been a great success and has been extremely well received. Earlier this year, the police department had their first Open House, which was well received and there are plans to continue it.

Chief Joe Houck leads the Fire Department, and Eric Evers was named Deputy Chief last year. Parts of the Fire House are 100 years old and reaching the end of their useful life. Schematics are currently being developed for a new firehouse. This may involve reconfiguring that part of Broad Street and may offer other opportunities like combining it with a parking garage.

Combined dispatch with New Providence should be up and running in 12 months.

Department of Community Services

Our Division of Public Works had an extremely busy year. “Sandy” took up quite a bit of its time, most of which was tree-related. Thank you to all our public works crews for your perseverance and all those extra hours on the job. We could not have done it without you.

Our Engineering Division completed another successful year upgrading and maintaining the City’s infrastructure, which was tested by the three major weather events endured over the last 20 months. In addition to improvements projects on the City’s roads, sewers and drainage, the Division played a key part in several new programs and projects. The effort, which was spearheaded by Rick Matias, required significant coordination between multiple towns and government agencies. A significant portion of the trail along the Passaic River should be completed this year. Additionally, the Engineering Division obtained an environmental grant to implement a basin wide cleanup project to the Martin’s Brook watershed. It also completed a road rating system and a full evaluation of the City’s sidewalk and handicap ramps, which will be vital in budgeting for improvements to the City’s infrastructure, and completing projects where they are most needed.

Department of Community Programs

Led by Director Judith Leblein Josephs, the Department of Community Programs took over the Senior Connections Bus and saw an increased ridership this year. Judith and her team continue to explore funding for this vital service to our seniors through grant opportunities.

Two Walnut Street was sold at auction this year. As a result, the Summit Community Center has been hosting youth programs, with approximately 15 and 35 students coming to the Center on a daily basis.

Our golf course and family aquatic center continue to be self-sustaining. Concerts and movie nights on the Green were paid for by local businesses.

Our very successful TRYCAN program, which runs programs for special needs youth, has brought approximately 100 youth volunteers. We are very fortunate to have such a rich

resource of community-minded citizens and it is re-assuring to see our youth learn by example to give of themselves so generously.

Public Library

I am pleased to announce that we have a new Library Director. Susan Permahos will be joining us in early March. She comes to us after serving the Township of Springfield for 15 years. I am confident that she will meet the challenges of our library and will bring new ideas to the table. She certainly has big shoes to fill from our former Director, Glenn Devitt, who recently retired after 25 years of service to our community. Thank you, Glenn, for your outstanding service.

A reception is being planned to welcome Susan, and I hope many will join me in welcoming her as our new Library Director.

Reminder – The City does not control the Library’s budget. It is listed as a millage on the tax bill.

Our City is in an outstanding place to work and live in. In many ways, Summit is what many cities want in a headquarter city. We have great restaurants, great places to shop and do your day-to-day business, and easy access to transportation.

We want Summit be a community that is always striving to be at the forefront of technology. Within the last year we have developed a new Technology Advisory Committee, which has been exploring the use of technology in City services and throughout our community. We have connectivity, accessibility and convenience. In 2012 the City’s Department of Community Services and Summit Downtown, Inc. developed its first Ap – an Historic Tour of Summit, NJ. This is a free Ap, and is an interactive tour experience, showcasing Summit’s beautiful historic business district as well as famous landmarks, residences, shops and restaurants. I will be reaching out to other groups, such as our Arts Committee and our houses of worships to develop their own tours, so stay tuned.

Our Parking Services Agency has an Ap for on-line payment of various parking fees. Please watch for the roll out of our new parking system in the shopper lots.

The Reeves-Reed Arboretum is currently undergoing some major renovations and will re-open in the spring. Arboretum Director Frank Juliano, who started in May of 2012, has been doing a great job and is working well with our various city departments.

Education

There have been some changes on the Board of Education, saying goodbye to Michelle Stevenson, who stepped down earlier this year. I want to thank Michelle and retiring Board Member Tom O'Rourke for their many years of service. A more recent appointment, Elizabeth Anne Burton, had to resign her position since she and her family are moving to Colorado. We wish her well.

David Dietze, a new member of the Board of Education, has been a strong contributor. I look forward to his continued good work on this board. And the most recent appointment, Richard Hanley, will join the Board effective January 16. Rich, we wish you good luck.

Schools

Summit schools continue to perform extremely well moving up in the NJ Monthly rankings to #11. Congratulations to Summit Hilltoppers Football on its stellar 12-0 season and winning the State Group 3 Championship! Go Hilltoppers!

The Council and I were recently invited to the Lawton C. Johnson Summit Middle School to read reports prepared by the 8th Grade social studies students on how to improve the City of Summit. The project called *Public Policy Convention* was an idea of Assistant Principal, Eric Parks, and was led by Social Studies teachers Dan Miller, Laurie McCormick, Eric Kostibos, Jamie Kochis.

I was very impressed with the students' projects and it warms my heart that students are learning civics again. The reports gave ideas and suggestions on how to change and improve on City government and services. I was especially surprised to see how many students feel there is not enough parking in our town!

Going forward, we will have challenges with our school infrastructure. Some schools need repairs. Superintendent Nathan Parker has been diligent about investing in our infrastructure. But many of our schools are old and need updating. While Union

County's population is down by 2% our student population in Summit is up by 1,000 students, up 2% from last year, which continues to put pressure on our school budget.

Twelve years ago when the high school was renovated, the City was told that there would be no more than 330 students per class. The newest class coming from the middle school to the high school has about 370 students.

Communication

The amount of new technology available to municipalities to communicate with residents can sometimes be overwhelming. It seems like things change every three months.

Although social media can sometimes help in getting the word out, cities like Summit cannot base their communications plans on third party services which may or may not be around in a few months.

While the City's use of the internet during Hurricane Sandy was a notable improvement over the prior year, I think there is more to do. I would like to see a material leap forward this coming year in the way we use the internet to communicate with residents both in times of calm and in times of emergency, and the focus of that leap needs to be on the City's website, where we can guarantee its availability, and can quickly publish important information.

We also need to look at ways we can receive immediate feedback from residents through the site. I want to explore with all of you how we can make the site more friendly to you, how we can improve it to make it easy to receive information from you, and how we can use it to push information out to you when there is a need to do that.

Given all we have been through this past year, a final thought from a New Years greeting I received from friend – She said when she was a kid, her Mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then.

One night she made breakfast after a long hard day at work. She placed a plate of eggs, sausage and extremely burned biscuits in front of her dad and she waited to see if anyone noticed - her dad did just reached for his biscuit, smiled at her Mom and ask her

about her day at school. I don't remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that ugly burned biscuit. He ate every bite of that thing...never made a face nor uttered a word about it!

When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my Mom apologize to my dad for burning the biscuits. And I will never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits every now and then." Later that night, I went to kiss Daddy good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He wrapped me in his arms and said, "Your Momma put in a hard day at work today and she's real tired. And besides - a little burned biscuit never hurt anyone!"

As I have grown older, I've thought about that many times. Life is full of imperfect things and imperfect people. I am not the best at hardly anything and I forget birthdays and anniversaries just like everyone else. But what I have learned over the years is that learning to accept each other's faults and choosing to celebrate each other's differences is one of the most important keys to creating healthy, growing, and lasting relationships.

That is my prayer and hope for all...that we will learn to take the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of our life and lay them at the feet of God. Because in the end, He's the only One who will be able to give you a relationship where a burnt biscuit is not a deal-breaker!

We could extend this to any relationship. In fact, understanding is the base of any relationship, be it a husband-wife or parent-child or friendship! Do not put the key to your happiness in someone else's pocket - keep it in your own. So, please pass me a biscuit, and yes, the burned one will do just fine. **Be kinder than necessary because everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle.**

Happy New Year!

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