

Mayoral Address – January 6th, 2018

First, I would like to welcome everyone to the 89th reorganization meeting for the Borough of Manville. I will try to keep my remarks brief today due to the brutal cold weather we have been dealing with this week. Hopefully things will warm up soon. But as I tried to recap the year that just passed and looking ahead to this upcoming year, my remarks grew in length. I apologize if I go over 5 minutes.

As one gets older in life we tend to reflect more on the past as time seems to pass by faster and faster with age. One of my all-time favorite movies is from my youth during the early 1980's with the film titled "Back to the Future" starring Michael J. Fox. Time travel was a very intriguing concept to me because I feel it is important to learn from our history, looking back, as we move forward.

So, I would like to "go back to the future" and rewind 2017 starting from December highlighting the accomplishments of the council and the various community events that make our town a special place to live.

This past December was very special. Our community embraced the "**Bright Lights**" contest for the holidays sponsored by the Manville Arts Council where homes were brightly decorated, and homeowners competed for the best decorations. It was exciting to drive around town and vote on your favorite homes. It brought back great memories from my childhood days.

In mid-December the "**Wreaths Across America convoy stop**" put Manville and our local veterans on the map. We were honored to be one of only three stops in the state. Their mission of "*Remember-Honor-Teach*" was well received by our high school students. I hope the students remember that event and realize our freedoms are precious and our veterans today deserve our support and respect. I would like to thank our new school superintendent, Mr. Beers, for hosting and the music teachers and students who participated. It was a beautiful ceremony.

Our "**Community Day**" event held in late September was one of the best ones yet. Live music, hot dogs, hamburgers, a caricaturist, various groups, including the boy scouts and girl scouts, put on activities and demonstrations. Our librarian Nan Peterson provided a Manville history photo booth for everyone's enjoyment remembering Manville's proud past. And our business community generously donated to defray the entire costs of the day! A truly great event for our small town. A big shout out to our Recreation director Ron Cefalone, Jean Weber, Kim Monto and the entire recreation committee. Keep up the good work.

During the summer months we had the **#Manville Rocks** movement in town that even got me out looking for a very special painted rock, a NY Rangers rock. The Facebook group exploded with new members and so many residents were enjoying the artistic aspects along with the thrill of finding a favorite painted rock. You could feel the community spirit as families walked around public schools and parks hiding or hunting

their favorite painted rocks. Cell phones were put down and paint brushes were picked up.

In August, we had our first ever “**National Night Out**” sponsored by our police department which brought our community out to meet our police officers and first responders. It was a night out to simply say “Thank you” to the folks who are so devoted to keeping us safe. Our fire and rescue squad volunteers are top notch along with our police force. Chief Peltack thank you for promoting our first National Night out.

We even had our first ever “**Arbor Day**” celebration at our public library in April. The planting of new trees occurred on library grounds with the help of our middle school students. In addition, Manville’s green team is now active and participating in Sustainable NJ. A rain garden was installed at our library to bring attention to better storm water management practices to help reduce flooding. And we are looking forward to a rain barrel seminar this spring.

Manville Department of Public works assisted in planting of the trees during much warmer weather than we have been experiencing this week. The DPW workers kept our roads clear with this recent storm and do a good job for us during some difficult weather conditions. On behalf of myself and the council, we thank our DPW director Vince LoMedico and workers for their efforts throughout the year.

2017 began in January with much focus on our municipal budget and setting goals and objectives to improve our Borough.

Obviously, property taxes are on everyone’s mind these days as we are confronted with a serious problem concerning school funding. Manville is the 7th most underfunded school district in the state. I testified before Senate President Sweeny’s select committee on school funding and described how Manville deserves so much better. We did receive more aid but not nearly enough.

I wish Governor-elect Murphy all the best in trying to solve this problem to benefit Manville taxpayers during this budget cycle. A solution to the problem is long overdue. But recently much to my dismay, it seems the folks in Trenton are more concerned about legislation to legalize recreational use of marijuana then to fix the school funding formula in the first 100 days of the new administration.

The one major work accomplishment for 2017 that really stands out is the adopted municipal budget which did not ask for 1 more tax dollar than the 2016 budget. Every year our expenses like pension payments and health insurance premiums rise significantly. Our cost savings initiatives with shared service agreements with Hillsborough and Montgomery made a stable budget a reality. I would like to thank the leadership of both townships for helping us out.

A detailed line item budget was introduced which focused on the true needs of each department. Our Fire department, fire safety and OEM budgets were increased significantly while still achieving a balance budget.

For the last 4 years, municipal taxes have been stabilized. Most of the effort to keep Manville affordable has unfortunately been overshadowed by the school funding problem. The municipal tax levy for 2014 was \$8,908,000. In 2016, the tax levy was \$8,909,000. With the same tax levy for all of 2017. A one thousand dollar increase in 4 years.

In 2017, we focused on fixing decade old problems like digitizing of our outdated paper tax maps and the electronic codification of our Borough ordinances. This work effort was started in 2006 and never completed. Both will be completed in 2018.

Another major improvement for our Borough is the implementation of an annual reassessment of 20% of our town for a rolling 5-year period. We are now the 16th town out of the 21 towns in Somerset County undertaking this approach to keep all real estate values in line with current market conditions which significantly reduce the number of successful tax appeals. The implementation of this approach was long overdue given the major floods this Borough has encountered and will produce significant cost savings in the years ahead.

A new financial system was implemented last year that provides better accuracy and enhanced reporting features to help monitor the budget. In the last 3 years we have paid down previous incurred debts and increased budget surpluses as we focused on getting our financial house in order. 4-year labor contracts were signed last year. The Police PBA and the DPW Teamsters contracts were negotiated and accepted. The labor unions and management were able to arrive at agreements that were very cost effective.

We also have begun work on new redevelopment plans for the Rustic Mall area. Adjacent Borough owned lots will be put up for sale and hopefully the residential redevelopment may help spark interest in the entire 12-acre site.

We will also be wrapping up our flood plain planning grant that will catalog and prioritize the existing homes for future buyout considerations. I am happy to announce today we recently received a FEMA grant for 4 additional buyouts to help move homeowners out of harm's way. The amount of the grant is \$1,188,900.00. Flood insurance rates are projected to increase 25% every year and the financial burden is quickly becoming unsustainable for many homeowners who are required to carry expensive flood insurance policies.

Our administrator, Andrea Bierwirth, is now a certified flood plain manager (CFM) to help residents with flood insurance questions. And this past August we watched as the Weston Mill Dam was removed from the Millstone River lowering water levels in that section of river by 2 feet.

With climate change on everyone's mind these days, we are currently working with Somerset County Office of Emergency Management to update our hazard mitigation plan to help make Manville more storm resilient. Projects will be identified, and FEMA grants will be sought to help reduce our risk. We will also be planning a 2018 capital program to address old equipment that needs replacement.

Our main street will begin the redesign phase soon to help make our pedestrian crossings safer with reconstruction scheduled to begin in 2019. It is a 3-million-dollar grant acquired by the NJ Transportation Planning Authority. Our main street is a County owned roadway and Freeholder Peter Palmer was instrumental in acquiring the funds to improve public safety and make our main street much safer.

A full "**Street-Smart**" campaign will be launched this spring bringing further awareness to pedestrian safety. Additional signage has already been installed to bring awareness to speed limits, the use of cross walks, and to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. In addition, the Royce Brook main street bridge reconstruction is on schedule to be completed later this summer.

Our Borough website is due for an upgrade and redesign to improve navigation and content. **Manville's News** was published every month during 2017 and have been posted on-line. The newspaper has been very well received to help keep everyone informed of our work efforts and town activities.

In closing, putting partisan politics aside, I am of the opinion we had a very good 2017 in this Borough. It was a year of major changes, accomplishments and memorable events. We will continue the progress in 2018 to make Manville a community that others will become jealous of.

Starting with our community spirit, it is something we can all be proud of. It was on full display when we lined the streets to welcome the Wreath's Across America convoy to town on a very cold morning. And during 2018, let's not lose sight of the theme of last year's convoy as we move forward together to solve our problems within our community. The theme was "**I'm an American. Yes I am!**". I'm optimistic 2018 will be another very good year for our Borough. Thank you for coming out today. I would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year!

Mayor Richard M. Onderko