

Mayor Runfeldt's State of the Borough Address - 2013

Each year the Mayor is given the duty of preparing and presenting an overview of the previous year. A State of the Borough Address if you will.

I would like to begin by welcoming everyone here tonight for the annual re-organization meeting of the Borough of Lincoln Park. A special thank you to the elected officials from throughout the county and state who have joined us this evening.

Council President Kerwin, I would like to congratulate you on your re-election and to your remaining the leader of this council. I believe that we have fostered a very good working relationship this past year and I look forward to continuing that rapport this year.

Councilmen Wild and Gemian, I would like to applaud your re-elections as well. I am sure that the people of Lincoln Park will continue to be satisfied with your representation.

It has been a pleasure working with Council members Pepe, Thompson and Cardillo, this past year and I expect that we will continue in 2013.

Tonight I am happy to Welcome our newest Councilwoman, Ellen Ross. For those of you who don't know, Ellen was an employee of the Borough for many years prior to her retirement last year. Ellen spent a good part of her career in town as the aide to the Mayor. Ellen should find herself uniquely qualified to navigate the intricacies of elected official, administration and employee relations. Ellen, congratulations on a victory in your first attempt at public office and good luck to you.

Ellen takes over the seat that was previously held by Councilwoman Cari Sweet-Kostoplis. Councilwoman Kostoplis was a tremendous addition to this council as she championed the needs of those in our town who have been the victims of recent floods. In a short time, Cari made a tremendous impact on this Council and her representation of the residents of Ward 2 and all of Lincoln Park.

During the course of 2012 we lost two long time and dedicated Borough employees to retirement, Borough Clerk Penny Smith and Public Works Superintendent Tom Piorkowski. I would like to thank both Tom and Penny for their service to all of us in Lincoln Park. I would also like to mention that Cindi Sloan, our new borough clerk has stepped right into her position and Rick Beyer the new DPW Superintendent has done a fantastic job in his first few months on the job.

2012 began with us finishing up the cleanup and mitigation of Hurricane Irene. While the town has done a tremendous job of getting back to appearing normal, the storm has left a mark that will take a long time to fully overcome. Decreased property values throughout the entire region along with a staggering amount of Federal and State "buy outs" of flood properties have drastically reduced our tax ratables.

In fact, 2012 was the 3rd consecutive year that Lincoln Park's budget had an overall cut in spending. CFO Kerry Geisler deserves much credit for her efforts on preparing our budgets. Unfortunately the cuts were overshadowed by the previously mentioned loss of ratables. Three years ago the Governor mandated a 2% cap on tax increases that each municipality had to adhere to. He offered 33 "tool kit" items that he felt were necessary to help achieve the 2% cap. To this date, the legislature has put only eight of these items into law. Of those eight, 3 deal with arbitration reform and are scheduled to sunset in the coming months. In order to truly provide property tax relief in New Jersey, I implore that those in our state legislature continue to take action to provide us on a municipal level with the tools necessary to make this important change.

2012 was the final year of contracts for each of the unions that cover our employees. I am happy to report that we have reached agreements with both unions would like to thank USW Local 74 and PBA Local 192 for their participation and their commitment to the Borough of Lincoln Park.

Luckily, most of 2012 was fairly dry and uneventful weather wise. That is until the arrival of Hurricane Sandy at the end of October. Mother Nature decided to throw a curve ball at us and rather than heavy rains, we were hit with a blackout that left us in darkness for nearly two weeks. As has become commonplace following events like this in Lincoln Park, we rose above adversity and showed why we are such a close knit and caring community. Our Police, Fire, First Aid, CERT and Emergency Management teams once again showed that they are the cream of the crop in Morris County and throughout the state. Warming and charging centers were set up in town. The Recreation Department under Janet Cassidy was open continuously with programs for our children. Many local organizations such as the PAL and the American Legion helped out tremendously. Local businesses that were forced to close, some for nearly 2 weeks, never stopped generously providing assistance when and where they were able to. And as usual, many regular citizens came out to help each other in so many different ways.

Unlike previous disasters in which we required outside assistance from other towns, this time we were able to help out around the state where our services were needed. Our EMS helped evacuate hospitals in Hoboken and run 911 calls in Jersey City. Our Fire Companies each sent crews down to help keep shore towns safe when they needed it most.

It is important to recognize the efforts of Governor Chris Christie, Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen, State Senator Joe Pennacchio, and our Assembly representatives Jay Webber and Betty Lou DeCroce. These individuals were instrumental in making sure that our voice was being heard in our efforts to have power restored and to make sure our needs were met.

Of course, thanks must be given to the electrical workers from throughout the country who left their homes and families to help where the storm left damage. We here in Lincoln Park are especially grateful to those from Ohio who spent several days bringing light back to our town.

Although the borough received a tremendous amount of appreciation for our efforts to keep you informed during Hurricane Sandy and the blackout, there are still ways that I look to improve our communication. I encourage every resident of town to visit our web site and follow the different links that are there to help you connect with the town. There is now a link for a new notification system that can call your home, your cell phone, send you a text or an email with important emergency information. I also encourage everyone to sign up for at least one of the social media applications that the Borough uses for not only emergency information, but also local events and news.

This year, I will be working with our Emergency Services and Health Department to create a way to be able to safeguard our senior citizens and residents with disabilities by reaching out to them directly with information and checking on their wellbeing during times of emergency.

As I wrap up the events of 2012, I must mention the sad passing of Ernie Gilland who was a long time member of our Fire Department and Joe Ward who was a past Captain of the LP FAS.

I would like to recognize outgoing LPEMS Chief Bob Ward and LPFD Chief Sal Marino for their dedication to their organizations and our town this past year, and wish best of luck to incoming EMS Chief Donna Moeller and Fire Chief Nick Pappas.

Lincoln Park is truly blessed with great employees. Police Chief West, Health Officer John Wozniak, Sal Marino of the Building Department, Rick Beyer from DPW, CFO Kerry Geisler, Janet Cassidy from Parks and Recreation, Patty Fritz in the Court, Borough Clerk Cindi Sloan and in my office Borough Administrator Perry Mayers and my Aide Dina Valente. Each of these people and every employee on their staff give so much of themselves to make Lincoln Park great. They each have my appreciation and they all deserve yours.

In closing I would like to say to every Lincoln Park resident, employee, volunteer, business owner, elected official and member of a civic organization..."Thank You for all you do, and I wish you a Happy, Healthy and Wealthy 2013!"