

Good morning...and welcome.

Each year, the men and women of local government work each day to see that our streets are clean, our neighborhoods are safe and that we continue to provide our residents and families every opportunity to enjoy a happy and peaceful life here in West Orange. But as much as local government remains the back bone of this community, our West Orange Schools...and the children of West Orange that bring them to life...remain the pride of our community.

For the first time in our history, simultaneously, we have a West Orange High School Alumni at the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy and the United States Military Academy at West Point...carrying with them the lessons and experiences forged within the hallways of our schools and the neighborhoods of our community. And this fall, one more West Orange High School alumni will join them as Andrei Rosu has been appointed, and after graduation this spring, will be attending the United States Military Academy at West Point. Congratulations and best of luck Andrei...

This past fall...and not for the first time...The West Orange High School Marching Band once again showed that talent, hard work, and a commitment to each other is a winning combination. The Marching Band earned the US Bands Group Five New Jersey State Championship and the National Championship for their 2017 Program, "Defying Gravity". It says a lot about the members of the band when one of the most common complaints we receive from neighbors each year is that the band practices too long...in addition to the more than 100 members, the success of the Marching Band is under the direction of Director Lewis Kelly and Associate Directors Erin Lagatic and Joshua Zimmer with Drum Majors Divya Anand and Jax Apollon...they are each here with us this morning...congratulations to our Mountaineer Marching Band!

Whether at halftime of a fall football game or a winter basketball game, when the band is not entertaining the fans, or the team needs a lift, it is left to the girls of our high school cheerleading squad. It is hard to imagine some sports without cheerleaders but there is a lot more to being a cheerleader today than when most of us ran between the sidelines. And our girls have repeatedly risen to the challenge and the demands of modern cheerleading. Their dedication and hard work paid off again this year as the girls have been recognized with multiple first place finishes in multiple tournaments, in Conference, Regionals and at the UCA JV, Medium Varsity and Varsity State Championships; qualifying them for the Championships in Orlando Florida beginning in a few days and the New Jersey State Championships in March.

The cheerleaders are coached by Olivia DelSpina and Assistant Coach Anna D'Elia. Coach DelSpina and Coach D'Elia as well as some of our Mountaineer Cheerleaders are with us this morning...congratulations girls and best of luck!

We are fortunate each year...to be blessed with excitement on the athletic fields, to be entertained with the talent of our music and drama programs and to marvel at the academic excellence achieved by the students we know as our neighbors, friends and the young boys and girls from town that have now grown into impressive young adults. This morning, as every year, I take the time to welcome a few seniors from our high school, to acknowledge their success and, as a community, to offer them our best wishes.

[Students]

Each of these students has left their mark on our high school by setting a standard of excellence. They are a testament to the strength of their families, the quality of our teachers and to the school system that inspired them. They, in turn, are an inspiration for their fellow students, for younger students and for a community that, each day, offers our pride and our best wishes...join me in congratulating them...our 2017 West Orange High School Mountaineers.

The School System that provides the foundation for the success we have celebrated this morning is the result of a supportive community, hardworking and talented teachers, administrators and a Board of Education that works hard to provide each child of West Orange...a dream they can dream. To our Superintendent, our Board of Education members, our High School Principal and all those here that spend their day as part of the West Orange School System...we thank you.

This past year provided each of us some great days, maybe sad days, days to remember and probably some days we would rather forget. But in between the days that stand out for each of us were mixed the routine days, days that blend together into the normalcy of all our lives. And it is within those days, each and every one of them, without most noticing that the 307 employees of the Township of West Orange work hard serving us, the residents of this community. Showing up each day and night, without fanfare and often without recognition; they protect our streets, our property, our families, clear our storms and insure the routine business of the town, and for each us, is completed quickly and with a smile.

Over thirty two hundred construction permits were issued in 2016, four hundred more than the year before, proving that homeowners are investing in their own properties and new businesses and new residents are making large investments in our community. We were awarded grants providing equipment for our fire fighters, a biking program for children with special needs and recently a grant to provide after school programming through the Community Services Unit of our Police Department. We welcomed seven new police officers and four new fire fighters to our ranks in 2016. Repairs are being completed on the library façade and the “Friends of the Library” introduced themselves to the community advocating for the library and its importance in the Township.

We welcomed over seven hundred new homeowners to West Orange in 2016. People that chose our community to raise their family, to retire or simply to begin a new chapter in their lives.

And even for those that may live elsewhere, they chose West Orange to begin their lives together as over four hundred weddings were performed in our community at the various houses of worship, country clubs, catering halls or hotels, just like this one, making us a permanent part of their new lives together.

We celebrated the return of astronauts Scott and Mark Kelly, sons of West Orange that have traveled to space and returned home to join in the renaming of the elementary school they attended in their honor. Thousands of people attended the Annual Street Fair and thousands more enjoyed "Slide the City", as we became the first New Jersey community to welcome this new attraction.

The Life Christian Church celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in our community and we implemented the second round of the Energy Aggregation program which will save our residents on their electric costs, collectively, two million dollars during the fifteen month contract.

Each and every year, among us and around us, great things are happening in West Orange...and once in a while, we should take the time to notice them.

Like all successful endeavors...government works best when we govern in partnership...a partnership with the residents and taxpayers as well as a partnership with our Township Council. It has been my pleasure to work with these hard working and committed members of our community.

Council President Joe Krakoviak and Council members Susan McCartney, Victor Cirilo, Jerry Guarino and Michelle Casalino work hard each day to improve the lives of our residents and to see that West Orange remains a strong and prosperous community. I look forward to continuing to work with each of you...I offer my thanks to each of the members of our Township Council.

Our former Mayor, and current Assemblyman, John McKeon, years ago said that in all his travels around the state, he had never met a man, more respected throughout the State, than Monsignor Michael Kelly. And in all the years since, I have never seen any reason to disagree.

Monsignor Kelly was born in Newark and raised in South Orange but has been an integral part of life in West Orange for decades since moving here, along with his beloved Seton Hall Preparatory School, in 1985.

In addition to his commitment to the priesthood, Monsignor Kelly has had a lifetime commitment to education. He himself is a graduate of The Prep, class of 1957 and received his Bachelor's and Master's Degree from Seton Hall University shortly after and eventually, ordained into the priesthood in 1966. He has been part of Catholic Education ever since, becoming Seton Hall Prep's Headmaster in 1980.

He is a West Orange Rotarian, a member of the Knights of Columbus and part of countless other organizations and charities. His career...his life...has touched thousands and thousands of young minds and young spirits. And he has received nearly as many awards and honors. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Metro YMCA of the Oranges and has been honored by our West Orange Unico with the Ben L. Spinelli Community Service Award.

A life-long sports fan, he is a proud member of the Seton Hall University Athletic Hall of Fame, has been honored by the Essex County Chapter of the National Football Foundation, is a Past President of the NJ Interscholastic Athletic Association and, under then Governor Richard Codey, served as Chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Steroid Use and Prevention.

Monsignor Kelly has been the longtime Chaplain of our West Orange St. Patrick's Day Parade, presiding over the annual Parade Day mass and providing spiritual guidance. And, as a Chaplain Captain of the New Jersey Army Reserve National Guard, he has been a faithful participant in the Township's Annual Memorial Day and Veteran's Day Ceremonies.

In 2016, he celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> year of Ordination in the Priesthood, much of that time as a part of our Township. He is well known everywhere, but humble, he is respected, but well liked as well, he is a man of the people, but more than anything, he is a man of God...and has lived his life in the service of God...and of others. Seton Hall Prep has become a valued part of our community, and it is impossible to think of Seton Hall without thinking of Monsignor Kelly.

Today we offer our congratulations on his celebrated service and our thanks for his years of guidance and friendship. Join me this morning, in welcoming our Citizen of the Year...Monsignor Michael Kelly

West Orange has a long and proud tradition of having some of the finest sons...and daughters...of this community join the ranks of our Police or Fire Departments. That proud tradition of our Fire Department began over 120 years ago. It would have been hard to imagine all those years ago but in 2016, these men and women responded to 7,377 emergencies, 264 fire incidents and 4,736 EMS Rescue calls. Like all well run organizations, the success of our Fire Department has counted on strong leadership throughout the decades and many former Fire Chiefs remain well-known names among the ranks and respected members of the community. Since 2005 that honor has belonged to life-long resident, Fire Chief Pete Smeraldo.

Pete joined the ranks of the department in 1987, becoming a Captain in 1996 and Deputy Chief in 2002. His career has been marked with too many successes to mention but some have had an unmistakable and immeasurable impact on the department and within our township.

It was under his leadership that third party billing was introduced not long after state legislation made it possible. Today it raises over \$1.3 million dollars in revenue for the Township and has become the norm in municipal governments around the state.

He assisted with years of planning to create a Basic Firefighter Training Program at the Essex County Public Safety Academy; established a Confined Spaces Program, helped secure a nearly \$2 million dollar SAFER Grant that enabled the Township to hire 10 new firefighters and in 2015 welcomed the opportunity for the department to take over full EMS services and coordinated the opening and operations of Fire House Five.

I am not sure I have ever met a man prouder to be a fireman...except maybe when he steps into his role as the Office of Emergency Management Coordinator. At these times, his enthusiasm and adrenaline is hard to ignore. Whether a major storm, power outage or heat wave, Pete has coordinated all facets of our response from OEM headquarters to insure that each and every resident remains safe and ready to go about their own lives...and I can tell you, we have been in great hands.

On top of all his other responsibilities, he is pursuing a Bachelor's degree at Fairleigh Dickinson University and will be graduating this June.

But now, our Chief has decided it is time to move onto the next stage in life, to spend more time with his wife Kim, and sons Connor and Peter and will retire from the department this June. His legacy is sealed. He has squeezed a lifetime of accomplishments into his 30 year career and many of his initiatives as Chief will influence the department and the community for decades to come.

Today we offer our thanks. We wish him a long and happy retirement and acknowledge this important career as we recognize Chief Pete Smeraldo as our Employee of the Year.

We have all watched television or movies and seen any number of different versions of people performing CPR in their attempts of reviving a dying individual. In real life, it can be much more harrowing but no less frequent. The members of our Fire Department are often called upon to perform CPR as they respond to our emergencies. In 2016, four residents were saved thanks to CPR and the response of our Fire Department. On one particular day, last June, West Orange Firefighter Phil Johnson was confronted with just such a life or death decision.

But Firefighter Johnson was not servings our Department on that day and he did not have the backup or equipment he would normally count on for support; he was off-duty and working out at the Life Time Fitness gym...but when he saw another patron collapse with a heart attack, he took charge, performed CPR for more than twenty minutes and revived him right there on the floor of that gym. Thankfully, that gentleman has made a full recovery. Firefighter Phil Johnson is with us this morning...great job and thank you Phil!

There was a time when the very mention of the word Redevelopment could make my eye twitch. Even now, almost instinctively, it brings me pause; but not for the same reasons. As a community we have endured a long and bumpy road to bring the Edison Lofts Redevelopment project to where we find it today...a full construction project, with a new façade, parking deck and the beginning stages of a new retail and residential building. New windows will follow soon and this first phase of a more than \$200 million dollar redevelopment project in our Downtown will have the first apartments available for rent before the end of this year. Though often ridiculed, and maybe justly so, the commitment of our local government, the financial patience of Prism Partners, the additional capital of Dune Real Estate Partners and the ongoing support from much of this community has brought this project to our Main Street.

The first conversations of redevelopment of the Battery Building date back to the ninety's, last century. The process did not always go as smooth as we would have liked, but many forces came together, to overcome the many obstacles this projected faced to break ground on one of the state's largest redevelopment projects. We are not a waterfront community, and as we know, we do not have a train station but people had faith in this project, faith to acquire the properties, to patiently wait, faith to invest tens and tens of millions of dollars because they believed in our downtown, they believed in West Orange. It seems to me, despite our challenges...that we should too.

Our Main Street Redevelopment project is not the only approved redevelopment project in West Orange. Joe Alpert of The Alpert Group has been ready to build an approved residential project in the Central Avenue Section of the Valley for many years. This project has overcome many of the same obstacles as the Edison Lofts and is now ready to begin. The approved project plans for 100 residential units on the West Orange side with over 200 residential units on the Orange side of the property. This project will officially break ground in the next few weeks when construction starts on the Orange units with the West Orange side soon to follow.

In addition to redeveloping properties that have been abandoned for decades, it will introduce much needed affordable housing, and, perhaps, most importantly, will be the stimulus for state investment in the Highland Train Station; providing our commuters another option for safe travel back and forth to work. Adding to this approved project, the Township has taken title to the longtime abandoned Selecto Flash property which is adjacent to this approved project. We are currently exploring options to demolish this old building and develop the property. This property, of an acre and a half in size, is part of an additional redevelopment zone recently approved by a majority of the Council. It is our intention to expand on the already approved project and to add parking to that neighborhood...to support the Valley Arts District and the growing business community that is finding success in our Valley Neighborhood.

These exciting new projects are not the only successes to celebrate in our Downtown. The Downtown West Orange Alliance and the volunteers that work hard to promote our downtown businesses continue to bring progress to that historic district. Fourteen new businesses were opened in our downtown during 2016 and many opened in the last few years continue to thrive. There was more investment in our Downtown properties, outside of redevelopment, this past year than in the last three years combined. And that includes one of the oldest organizations in town. The West Orange Community House, providing recreation and childcare to this community for one hundred years will put the final touches on the new recreation center in the heart of our downtown during this coming year.

The property has served as a movie house and a warehouse but will become the center for recreation for hundreds of children each week as well as be available for all the Township's youth sports programs.

There is a lot to see and do in our Downtown and if it's been a while...I invite you all to pay them a visit.

Celebrating our nation's birthday each year is one of the oldest and most popular traditions in town. The Fourth of July fireworks has been celebrated in West Orange for decades and decades and is always highly anticipated. This year, the celebration will extend beyond the traditional fireworks. For several days leading up to the Fourth of July West Orange will host the Vietnam Memorial Moving Wall. This traveling replica of the War Memorial in Washington, DC is three-fifths scale and is over three hundred feet long. It will be placed at Suriano Field at our high school for several days leading up to the fourth.

In addition to providing the opportunity for our community to pay respects to those that were lost in that conflict, we will take the time to honor the many West Orange residents that are veterans of the Vietnam War. West Orange has always taken great pride in honoring our military veterans and in being known as “New Jersey’s Most Decorated Community” and this provides a special and unique way to celebrate that distinction.

Joining us this morning our three of West Orange’s proud Vietnam Veterans...today we welcome Joe Brennan, Kim Ameli and Al Hughes.

But there will still be more to the celebration. On Sunday July 2<sup>nd</sup>, we will add to this community event by hosting our first Food Truck Festival at the High School in conjunction with the War Memorial. In what we hope will become a new tradition in West Orange, this community event will provide an appetizing backdrop to the Vietnam Memorial, a fun filled welcome to the summer with friends and food and an exciting new way for us to kick off our traditional Fourth of July celebration.

It can be said of every generation, but I do not think it has ever been more true than today, for this generation...that policing a community, small or large, has never been harder. Whether facing the challenges of a modern world, human indifference, senseless violence, or the relentless scrutiny of a society, a police department is counted on to keep us safe while at the same time, providing us hope. And the West Orange Police Department has continually lived up to those expectations.

The men and women of the West Orange Police Department, under the direction of Police Chief James Abbott has continually worked to maintain law and order while balancing the need to be a welcome part of the community. Whether the charitable work performed through the Timothy C. Groves substation, the important role they play with our Human Relations Commission, the popular Juvenile Police Academy hosted each Spring or the relationship they have built with our diverse religious community through the Police Clergy Alliance, our Department works each day to insure they are seen as friends and partners in all our daily challenges. This year, in addition to all their important responsibilities, they will reintroduce the Citizens Police Academy for adults in our community to get a small glimpse into the daily life of law enforcement.

Of all the tools we can provide our police officers, with all the training available to them, there is perhaps no greater or more important tool they carry with them each day, than compassion. Regardless of the complexity of the drug problem in America, it is left to local law enforcement to deal with. Police Chief James Abbott, recognizing the futility of continually imprisoning small drug offenders, more often than not, battling their own addictions, looked to a successful program already in place in Maine and Massachusetts and turned to Captain Tom Montesion, Lieutenant Rich McDonald and Deputy Chief Matthew Feula to put together the pieces. Once our Welfare and Social Services Director Patty Duffy, Township Attorney Richard Trenk and his associate Jessica Maier joined the effort, “Operation Hope” was born.

Today, residents struggling with addiction can voluntarily turn in their drugs, free from criminal charges, and with the partnership of Integrity House, can be guaranteed a bed in a treatment facility, rather than a jail cell. With the help of the 35 residents that have been trained and voluntarily signed on as “Angels” to assist those participating, we have already helped six people in need, placed them in a facility and removed the drugs from our neighborhoods.

But their effort did not stop there; two thirds of drug related deaths in New Jersey are related to the misuse of prescription drugs. This past month, with the help of Captain Tim Brennan, Lieutenant Michael Cali and Deputy Chief John Buoye, and a grant from the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Team, they implemented the Medicine Drop Box program. Residents can anonymously deposit old or unused prescriptions in the box securely installed in our Police Department for eventual destruction.

We are way past the days where walking a beat was the best we could hope for in community policing. We are blessed with caring and compassionate law enforcement and legal professionals and we should have complete confidence in each of them to lead us through this changing world...they themselves, with their decades of excellence, have earned that.

We have all lamented the absence of a train station in town, but for fifteen years, we have operated our successful commuter jitney program providing transportation from our neighborhoods to the doors of local train stations for hundreds of residents each day. In 2013 we added a fifth Jitney route and this year, in 2017, we will add a sixth Jitney route. This new route will serve the Pleasant Valley Way and Eagle Rock Avenue area, providing jitney service to the side of town that has not yet been served by this program. The official route will be announced soon and service will be available by summer, providing a safe and reliable way for more of our residents to access local transportation.

The daily routine of government may not be exciting, but it is no less important to the services the Township provides. In 2017 we will stagger office hours in our Construction and Zoning Departments to accommodate the schedules of our residents and the contractors that rely on that department to improve and renovate our homes. We have implemented a new automated time management system for better efficiency and we will continue to make software upgrades and invest in our infrastructure and street resurfacing program.

We are working on grants for improving recreation programs, our parks and street and traffic safety. We will add additional cameras to the existing Surveillance Cameras placed on our busiest streets, providing our Police Department additional resources for monitoring and patrolling our neighborhoods.

As a community, we are currently enjoying our 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Classic Film Festival, will soon welcome the Annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade, we will welcome the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Relay for Life this May and, this year, B’nai Shalom will celebrate their 85<sup>th</sup> year as a part of the West Orange community.

The best that government can provide, may not be fancy, may not be thrilling and under the best of circumstances, will go unnoticed. The best that government can provide each and every day, is a safe and peaceful community, where our residents enjoy the spoils of our modern world, the convenience of our location and the benefits of our suburban community, free to pursue their own inspirations and comforted to know that all of us, and all we represent...are always welcome.

May you each discover that in this new year.

We are West Orange...

We are a collection of people, complex in our make-up and diverse in our backgrounds...but connected by the streets and neighborhoods we all call home...and more importantly, connected, as neighbors and family, in our individual and united pursuit of life's happiness. We celebrate together our individual success, the success of our business community, we marvel at the achievements of our children and we mourn together, when even one of us suffers.

We long to protect our homes and families or the town that each of our children will forever remember as the town they grew up in. But that takes more than words and there is a time when we each must step out from behind the keyboard...for each of us to decide what it is that will define us and what we can do today, as people, that the future may thank us for. The future will not judge us by the level of our cries or the creativity of our social media but by how we contribute, in real life, to the people and community we proclaim as ours.

Technology can ease the conveniences of life but can never replace the spirit, the character or our humanity.

We should not wait for the Township to pick up litter on our streets...

We should not wait for the Township to help a neighbor or Senior Citizens in need... We should not wait for the Township to encourage us to volunteer; to serve the various boards, commissions or community organizations or to gather as neighbors, to create your own, as you chase the single devotion that may inspire you...to give meaning to your words or simply to spoil someone with kindness.

Regardless of what is said, at any level, we should never count on or allow government to define who we are as people.

We are West Orange...and it is up to each one of us, individually and collectively...with purpose and with resolve...to keep it that way.

Thank you for listening.