

Good morning...

We are invited to this annual Breakfast by our Chamber of Commerce and grateful for the contributions the Chamber members make in ensuring the success of our business community. We offer our continued support to the Chamber and I thank President, Sally Malech...and wish you continued success in your next year leading this important organization. Thank you Sally.

Special things happen in our schools, and with our students, everyday...some of these successes have become so routine that we come to expect nothing less.

Our heralded Marching Band continue to enjoy the success that follows their hard work. For the third year in a row they finished first in group and first overall at the North Jersey School Music Association Regional Competition as well as winning awards for best music, best marching band, best overall effect, best color guard and best overall percussion.

Band leadership is not with us today as Associate Director Erin Legatic is on maternity leave with her first child and band director Lew Kelly is with his wife, expecting the delivery of their second child any minute. But we are joined by Mr. Lou Quagliato, the Director of Visual and Performing Arts. We offer our continued congratulations to them and to the band members...the hardest working marching band in the state.

Our high school cheerleader's success has become as routine as that of the marching band. Cheerleading is the longest of all sports seasons with cheerleaders practicing, supporting our teams, entertaining the crowds and competing from August to March each year. In addition to supporting the high school sports teams, they placed first in all three competitions this year and will be leaving tomorrow for Florida since once again, they qualified for the UCA National High School Cheerleading Competition.

Joining us this morning is Coach Taylor Calixto and a few of our cheerleaders...we wish you all the best of luck in Florida!

For high school students, for fans or even for a community, there is nothing quite like a Friday night football game. And with the help of the cheerleaders, this season the Mountaineers gave all of us a lot to cheer for. They qualified for the state playoffs and defeated the defending State Champions in the first round in a demanding division...laying the groundwork for greater success in the years to come. This optimism is thanks to Coach Darnell Grant, who joined our community this past year following an already successful career in high school coaching that has earned him placement in the top 100 all-time of New Jersey high school coaching among all sports. We are proud he is here, look forward to his success and to what he will mean to our student athletes on and off the field...Welcome Coach Grant.

Local government may provide important services to our community, but our schools, and our students, bring it to life, and provide the heartbeat...We are blessed to celebrate the success of our students on the athletic fields, to be entertained with their talent in our music and drama programs and to admire the academic excellence achieved by the young men and women we know as our neighbors and friends. As in every year, we take the time now to welcome a few of the seniors from our High School and to honor their hard work.

Student Recognition:

Jackson Edwards  
Emily Baker  
Maya Tobin  
Simone Byun  
Shrey Sanghvi  
Ashlea Hume  
Natalie Nevins  
Elijah Millington  
Gustav Hall  
Brett Zeligson  
Anika Fernandez

Wherever life may lead, these young men and women have already left their mark. Their success speaks to a school system that has challenged them and teachers that have inspired them. They, in turn, inspire us and offer hope for our nation's future, reminding other students of the unlimited possibilities presented to them each day in our schools.

A proud community offers each of you our congratulations and best wishes for all that life has in store...

...Our West Orange High School Mountaineers.

With Elijah Millington's acceptance to the United States Naval Academy, 2020 will be the 7<sup>th</sup> year in a row a West Orange High School student is attending one of the nation's four, elite, Military Academies...including four students from the Class of 2019 that were all accepted at West Point...the first time in the history of West Point that four students from a single high school class were accepted. One of these four, Colin Morgan, followed his older brother Chris to this revered institution.

Tragically, on June 6<sup>th</sup>, Chris CJ Morgan was killed in a training exercise...while living the life he aspired to, as a soldier serving his country and his fellow classmates.

The Morgan family, in short time, turned this tragedy into a living tribute to CJ and to honor the impact he had on all that knew him. The family organized a foundation, a golf outing and created the Christopher CJ Morgan Scholarship as part of the West Orange High School Scholarship Fund. And with over one hundred thousand dollars raised, in barely six months, it is now the largest endowment within the Scholarship Fund...a fund that has existed for nearly 100 years.

The immediate success of this effort speaks to the life lived by this young man, to what he meant to people, to what he stood for and to the strength and dignity of the Morgan Family. CJ's parents are with us this morning and I would like to welcome them and to offer this community's continued support in honoring the memory of their son CJ...please welcome Chris & April Morgan.

With all we have to celebrate about our schools, we are most blessed to have Hayden Moore as our High School Principal. Recently the New Jersey Association of Student Councils acknowledged what we have known for years and honored Principal Moore with the “Administrator of the Year” award. Congratulations Mr. Moore...we are lucky to have you.

Perhaps the most difficult of public positions is that of a Board of Education member. They are tasked with overseeing the education of thousands of students, and the demands of their parents, while navigating the complex bureaucracy of the state’s educational system. West Orange has been blessed over the years, and spoiled, with many talented and committed individuals to serve our schools, and our children. That includes our current Board members...Terry Trigg-Scales, Cheryl Merklinger & Board President Ken Alper and they welcomed two new members this year. Jennifer Tunnicliffe and Gary Rothstein...both bringing years of community service and support for our schools to the Board and to their new positions. We thank each member for their service to our schools and wish our newly elected members the best of luck...We welcome our Board of Education members.

Our school system, and community, recently welcomed a new Superintendent. Dr. Scott Cascone comes to our community with an impressive record along every stop of his career. He has quickly created a sense of respect, of optimism and an expectation of excellence. We are fortunate his career led him here. We officially welcome you to West Orange and look forward to all you will accomplish...Welcome Dr. Scott Cascone.

Another year...they go by fast. And each day, every day, 24 hours a day, the men and women of our local government lend their many talents to serving the nearly 50,000 people that have chosen to call West Orange home. Often unnoticed, Township employees ensure our residents remain safe, protected...they rescue us and save us when we need help. They clean our streets, plow our snow, make sure our garbage is picked up, provide our children recreational opportunities and provide us the parkland to enjoy with our families. They make sure our food establishments are clean, provide transportation and entertainment to our senior citizens; they get our commuters to the trains in the morning and after a long day, they get them home again.

But more than just the routine services we expect from local government, our Township provides the backdrop to the lives each of us enjoy, how we spend much of our free time and much of the time we spend with our families.

Time that helps to define us as friends and neighbors and define what it means to live here.

We welcomed thousands of visitors to the Annual Street Fair hosted by the Downtown West Orange Alliance this past year, and thousands more enjoyed the combined delights of the Annual Food Truck Festival and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks. The Alliance hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual West Orange Idol competition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Barktober costume contest for dogs and continued their efforts in promoting Main Street and our Downtown.

Residents enjoyed a relaxing summer night with “movie night at the pool” as well as the “drive-in movie night” at our High School.

The new West Orange Community Band formed and found success in no time at all, welcoming dozens of local musicians and entertaining us at multiple concerts.

We celebrated Pleasant Valley Productions' inaugural season at OSPAC and welcomed the new West Orange Carnival to the high school.

We honored the very spirit of our community as we continued the tradition of hosting flag raisings ceremonies. We celebrated Gay Pride month with the raising of the Pride Flag, we raised the Italian Flag, the Indian Flag, celebrated independence of the Dominican Republic and raised the 21 flags honoring the 21 Latin American countries.

The annual Mayors 5k Run, entering its 29<sup>th</sup> year, welcomed over a thousand participants and volunteers in raising money to Break the Silence on Ovarian Cancer, adding to the more than one million dollars already raised.

We hosted flu vaccination clinics, Shredding day and several pet adoption days at our Animal Shelter. Our Police Department hosted "Coffee with a Cop" and the Annual, and popular, Juvenile Police Academy while the Fire Department hosted several CPR Training Classes and the annual Fire Department Open House.

We welcomed the holidays with the annual Holiday Open House and Christmas Tree Lighting, we celebrated the lighting of the Menorah and honored the Kwanzaa tradition.

Several new businesses believed in our community, investing their money and their confidence. We welcomed the opening of the Cambria Suites Hotel, Grill 350, Patsy's, Harpers Café, Hook & Reel, Nicholas Anthony's, Ambrosia, La Celeste Bakery, Mits-sa-sumi Sushi Bar and The Yoga Ground.

As a Township, we launched the new website, launched the new Recycling Coach Partnership App, and we opened the new, customer friendly, entrance to the Ginny Dunkel Pool...improving what is already the nicest municipal pool in the state...and just a short time ago, began the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Classic Film Festival.

We are West Orange...collectively...and the men and woman of your local government, from Police and Fire, Public Works and Recreation, the Health Department, the Library, Clerk's Office, Planning, the Tax Offices and all the staff at Town Hall, as well as the countless volunteers of our boards, commissions and committees do all they can, each day, all hours of the day, to provide us the framework to enjoy our families and friends and in creating the opportunities for living our best life.

As in all things we do, governing is a partnership...a collaboration of ideas, opinions and talents. And all things we do in West Orange count on the support and input of our Township Council members. The members of our Council bring a lifetime of experience and years of community service to this process and to serving each of us. It has been my honor to work with them. Council members Joe Krakoviak, Cindy Matute-Brown, Jerry Guarino, Sue McCartney and Council President Michelle Casalino work hard in addressing the many needs and priorities of our community and do so with respect for the process, respect for each other and respect for the community they serve. I thank them and welcome the members of our Township Council.

West Orange's most famous resident, Thomas Edison, when asked about the struggles in perfecting the lightbulb, famously responded: "I didn't fail. I just found a thousand ways not to make a lightbulb." I cannot help but think about that answer when I think about the history of the West Orange Farmers Market.

For years, decades actually, the Township created various versions of a Farmers Market, in multiple locations, different hours, different days; each starting with promise, only to close a short time later unable to overcome the challenges. We set a standard for ways not to run a Farmers Market.

Naturally, I was a bit skeptical when Stacey Reese came to see me and asked for the Township's support and help in organizing a Farmers Market that she and her husband Rob wanted to create. Though our history made me skeptical, there was no doubting Stacey's resolve or the very nonchalant way she promised success.

Stacey and Rob met in 2005 while both participating in the Boy Scouts program called Venture Crew. A program designed to encourage teamwork, among boys and girls, in the planning and organizing of activities and events. Foreshadowing for sure. They moved to West Orange in 2013 and immediately set out to become part of their new community involving themselves in many local initiatives and organizations.

But they wanted their son Finn to grow up in a town with a Farmers Market and were still troubled by the closing of the Township's last Market shortly after they moved here. Rather than complaining about it they set out to do it themselves, organizing a team of volunteers to build something that would bring people together as neighbors and as community.

The Farmers Market they created surpassed all expectations. For 28 straight Saturdays, the West Orange Farmers Market was the most popular place to be each Saturday and before long was attracting visitors from all over Essex County. They created countless attractions for children, raised money for the Boys and Girls Club, for Veterans, supported our Troops overseas and created a dog-friendly market while highlighting the need for animal adoption.

Oh, and they provided food items too! ...along with flowers and crafts and some of the best bread I have ever had...in a lifetime of eating bread! Stacey and Rob organized a variety of options for visitors, coming from all over the region and welcomed as many as 60 different vendors on some Saturdays.

They have set the new, and very high standard, and we all look forward to seeing what they have planned next. We are thankful for their contributions and for their special creation. Today we celebrate them...and the success of the Farmers Market they created. Join me in recognizing our "Citizens of the Year"...Stacey and Rob Reese

All of us know the dangers that await first responders each day. We may take that for granted sometimes, but it is always only a matter of time before, once again, we are reminded. Locally, that reminder came to us this past summer, midmorning, on Tuesday, July 30<sup>th</sup>. The devastating series of events that started with a routine traffic accident on Route 280, left several with minor injuries, including police officers, firefighters and state troopers.

But for Fire Captain William Holder and Firefighter Matthew Keenan, it is a day they will never forget.

Captain William Holder was raised between New Jersey and California and graduated from Orange High School in 1993. He attended Monmouth University and was part of Monmouth's inaugural Varsity football team. His talents would lead to his signing with the Oakland Raiders and eventually playing 7 years in the Arena Football League.

After retiring from football, Will joined the West Orange Fire Department in 2013, graduating from the Fire Academy as the Commanding Officer of his class. Since joining the Department, he has become certified in Hazmat Awareness & Operations, Confined Space Awareness and is Captain of the Fire Department's Special Olympics fund-raising football team.

Firefighter Matthew Keenan graduated from Livingston High School in 1998 and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in January 2001. After his initial deployment in Japan, he was deployed to Iraq where he completed a full tour of duty. He would eventually end up back in the United States and was honorably discharged as an E-6 Staff Sergeant completing eight years of service to the Marines.

Matt was hired by the Fire Department in 2012. He is certified as an Emergency Medical Technician and in Hazmat Awareness & Operations and Confined Space Awareness.

The response that Tuesday morning was not unlike the response to any accident on the highway the hundreds of times prior. But while Will and Matt were treating a patient from the original accident in the rear of the ambulance, it was struck by a truck that lost control approaching the accident, tossing the ambulance into a fire truck, tossing several responders to the ground and leaving Will and Matt with multiple serious injuries. Will spent nearly a month in the ICU. He is continuing in his recovery with the support of his wife Meriel (Merril), and their four children, LJ, LeDawn, Aiyanna (I on-a), and Will Junior.

Matt is recovering with the support of his wife Tiffany and their two daughters, Ashley and Bianca.

They are continuing their respective recoveries through physical therapy treatments and scheduled surgeries including a surgery Matt has scheduled for tomorrow. They both have long roads ahead of them. We are grateful for their service and blessed that they are with us this morning. Today, we recognize Fire Captain William Holder and Firefighter Matthew Keenan as our “Employees of the Year”.

The 69<sup>th</sup> Annual West Orange St. Patrick’s Day Parade will take the annual march down Main Street in a little over a month. Each year the Parade Committee provides the Township a colorful and musical introduction to the Irish Culture. Bagpipe bands from all over the East coast, organizations from all over the state and groups from all over town come together to celebrate the patron saint of Ireland and to celebrate community.

And once again, a member of the Township family will be among the honorees. Police Lieutenant John DeMars will be honored as Deputy Grand Marshal for the 2020 St. Patrick’s Day Parade, recognized for his years of service to our Township. Congratulations Lieutenant...we look forward to honoring you and celebrating another successful parade.

Golf, anyone? ...When 2019 began, the idea that the Township would purchase a golf course would have seemed farfetched...and it certainly was. But with the support of a majority of the Township Council, and overwhelming public support, the Township purchased this beautiful one hundred and thirty-eight acres and, in April, re-opened the once private golf club, originally opened in 1925. Even with a later start to the season and the initial struggles of spring rains, in the first golf season as a municipally owned public course, the “Rock Spring Golf Club at West Orange” welcomed over twenty-two thousand rounds of golf. More than three times the number of rounds in previous years and proved that the golfing community would embrace this new public course.

There are still many decisions to be made about the golf course and the future of the property but the success of this first year puts us on the right path.

The second golfing season will begin shortly, and the second of the two-year commitment we made to the current operator. We will spend this coming year working to develop a long-term plan for the property and golf’s role in that and begin preparations for a Green Acres funding application to ensure whatever plan we decide on as a community, includes permanent preservation of a majority of the property.

Any long-term plan will include food...creating public spaces has been the commitment since the conversations originally began and that includes public dining. In addition to determining the future for the course and the clubhouse, the Township is currently reviewing options for leasing the operations of the dining facilities to a professional restaurant operator. Food...banquet facilities...golf...public recreation...small development...all important considerations for the property and we will spend 2020, as a community, in developing a plan for the future of this important property.

As a community...as residents...we may not have a lot of impact on the factors that lead to a strong regional real estate market, but we certainly do enjoy it and the benefits that come from it as property values have continued to climb. In 2019, residents and business alike continued their commitment to our community and, with confidence, continued to invest in their properties. Over 2,800 permits were issued from our Construction Code Department, that is more than ten each workday for more than \$65 million dollars in new construction and renovation projects to existing properties.

Redevelopment...now taking many forms but each speaks to significant private investment in our community and are important steps toward our future...and our contributions to the future of our town.

The Edison Lofts, Main Street redevelopment, is still the largest non-waterfront redevelopment project in the entire state. It now has over 220 of the 323 apartments in Phase I occupied and continues to fill more apartments each month. This often-maligned project has converted an original Thomas Edison factory building into a luxury apartment complex with the best of amenities and building materials and is filling apartments quicker than originally forecasted with monthly rents higher than projected.

With Phase I moving toward completion, Phase II, fully approved, will begin construction in the coming months adding more new housing.

The Central Avenue Redevelopment project, a joint Orange/West Orange project, continues its maddening pace toward completion. Replacing an entire block of contaminated properties that had been abandoned for more than forty years. The first completed apartment building was quickly, fully occupied and the second building is nearing completion, barely a year after they originally broke ground. In the coming year, we will take the next step in the rebuilding of this neighborhood and finalize plans for the parcels of this project the Township owns, adding additional housing and community parking to serve Luna Stage, the Arts Council and local businesses.

In 2020, the old hotel on Northfield Avenue across from the Arena, and the vacant restaurant space, vacant for more than a decade, will make way for the recently approved apartment building with 59 luxury units and 11 affordable housing units, providing walking access to local businesses and, more importantly, walking access to commuting options just across the street.

Essex Green Shopping Center, the geographic center of town, and one of the largest properties in town, will soon begin construction on the approved renovations, remodeling most of the existing buildings, improving access to the site, improving parking and adding forty thousand square feet of new retail spaces.

Adjacent to Essex Green, the Executive Drive property has been fully approved for redevelopment. This roughly 30 acres of land currently contains four nearly vacant office buildings. The approved project will maintain one building as office space, will demolish two others to make way for 361 market rate units and 64 affordable housing units. The fourth of these buildings, 10 Rooney Circle, will be deeded to the Township at no cost. With the assistance and support of the Library Board, this building will become the new home to our Library, providing larger spaces for public use as well as outdoor spaces and more parking.

The Executive Drive redevelopment project will also provide two acres of land, the construction of a dog park and public parking for visitors to the park, also at no cost to the Township.

The existing Library site, an approved redevelopment project, will be rebuilt to accommodate 61 affordable Senior Citizen housing units as well as seventy-five hundred square feet of community space to be used as a library annex and a community center. This project will provide one million dollars to be used in the relocation and build-out of the new library space. This one-million dollars, along with one point five million dollars in funding from the Executive Drive redevelopment project will provide two point five million dollars in funding for the new library space, along with the building and land.

All in, these redevelopment projects total more than three hundred million dollars in private investment in our community, increase annual revenues, provide housing options and provide a variety of amenities. The Executive Drive and Library redevelopment projects provide a 75,000 square foot office building to house the new library, will provide the new library, a dog park, much needed Senior Citizen affordable housing units and seventy-five hundred square feet of community space while increasing the annual revenue these properties generate for the community...all at no cost the West Orange taxpayers.

Speaking of taxes...the sound of that may make us cringe. And it should. No taxpayers feel the burden of taxes, like local municipal taxpayers. But no form of government provides us greater services, on a daily basis, like local government. 2019 presented the biggest budgetary challenges we have faced since 2011. Despite significant reductions in staff over the last ten years, and related personnel costs, routine operational costs continue to rise, as they do for each of us in our own lives, and many of those fixed expenses peaked in 2019. But even with last year's challenges, since 2010, West Orange has the second lowest municipal budget increase of all twenty-two Essex County towns, averaging just 1.6% per year over the last decade.

But regardless of the struggles with property taxes...struggles that have characterized every generation...we have an obligation to provide the services that keep us moving forward. Regardless of the challenges, we have to plow snow, we have to pick up garbage and re-pave roads. And their remains the additional obligation of ensuring we continue to find, and fund, ways that will make sure our residents will find value in living here as well as the need to encourage new residents to want to move here. In all we do, every goal must be premised with the notion that our objective is to build a community where people and their families want to live.

In 2020, we will make upgrades in the delivery and operations of the commuter Jitney program; a program that has expanded in recent years to cover the entire town and requires improvements to ensure we are meeting the needs of our commuting population.

With the cooperation of Bethany Church, we will provide overnight parking options to a neighborhood that struggles to find parking. Parking problems remain one of the most frequent complaints among residents in many neighborhoods and though the Township cannot simply print more land, we will continue to look for ways to improve options for residents. A recent relaxing of alternate side parking restrictions assisted many neighborhoods in finding adequate parking and Bethany Church will provide new options for that neighborhood.

For more than twenty years, as a community, and in partnership with our Board of Education, we have made significant investments in our athletic fields and facilities...and many are the envy of neighboring communities. We plan to continue these efforts with Degnan Park. One of our largest parks and the one most visited as it sits next to our high school complex. We will present a plan to the Council in the coming months, that includes partial grant funding...for a new kiddie-park, modernizing the athletic field with artificial surface and improving other public spaces within the park. In addition to the many youth baseball programs that count on Degnan, our Mountaineer girls' softball team also depends on this field and we look to create a space that measures up to the quality of our other athletic fields.

Thanks to a recent grant, we are enhancing our already robust Senior Citizen programs by adding Senior Livability programs. And with the first sign of nice weather, the Special Needs Playground approved by voters in our first Participatory Budgeting referendum, will be constructed at O'Connor Park.

Each year may present different challenges, but it also provides opportunities; for improving our community, improving how we deliver services and improving the lives of all those that live here.

It could be said that with every expectation, every aspiration or in every decision we make in the fulfillment of life's promise...each day, in our own way...we make history.

Maybe not in the way some may first think...maybe not in the way some may dream of as children. But in a real way...In the real world. In the only way that really matters.

The history made when young children grow into impressive young adults. The history of everyday people, turning their dreams into successful businesses.

Or concerned citizens, seizing the opportunity to contribute their talents or time...to right a wrong...or to simply show others the value hidden in each of us...or the history made when we raise our hand, step forward and declare that we are here, we accept responsibility for us...and for tomorrow.

A responsibility that does not come with glory, nor praise or profit. But knowing that success for each other and for us, follows hard work, commitment, understanding ...sometimes criticism and setbacks...and the collective knowledge that though we are different...in goals, in background or beliefs / in how we look, live or how we pray...that is always overshadowed by what connects us.

We are connected in our hopes for the opportunity found in good schools, for safe streets to get us to work, with nice parks and programs for play...we are connected with the warmth and comfort found in the joy of family and friends.

This connection...more than just geography...is purpose. Where in this mixture of life's memories, milestones, and all of the adventures found between the ups and downs of everyday...we have built our home.

No one can say for sure what forces brought us together, but at this moment, in what time has provided, we are bound as neighbors and partners in the town of West Orange...just one town in a country of many towns...where we share this time, this journey, and the history we make...in telling the story of our lives.

Thank you for listening.