

Westchester County, New York

The State of the County

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Andrew J. Spano
Westchester County Executive
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STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
TO THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY
MARCH 22, 2007

GOOD EVENING. VICE CHAIRMAN YOUNG, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF LEGISLATORS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY DiFIORE, COUNTY CLERK IDONI, ELECTED OFFICIALS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MY WIFE BRENDA, AND THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE WATCHING THIS AT HOME.

ON THIS 10TH YEAR OF MY STATE OF COUNTY ADDRESS, IT IS ONLY FITTING TO ASK, "HOW M'I DOIN'?" HOWEVER, SINCE THIS IS A "WE" NOT AN "I" GOVERNMENT, MY ANSWER TONIGHT WILL TELL YOU HOW WELL THE EXECUTIVE, AND THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES, LED BY CHAIRMAN BILL RYAN HAVE WORKED TO SERVE THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER OVER THE YEARS.

WE HAVE BEEN FISCALLY PRUDENT. WE HAVE BEEN SOCIALLY PROGRESSIVE. WE HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE, COMPASSIONATE, EFFICIENT AND PRODUCTIVE. AND THE RESULT: THE STATE OF OUR COUNTY HAS NEVER BEEN STRONGER.

WE HAVE WORKED POSITIVELY WITH OUR VILLAGES, TOWNS AND CITIES — AND WITH THE COURTS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND THE COUNTY CLERK. WE HAVE A STRONG AND PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR STATE DELEGATION IN ALBANY AND OUR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION IN WASHINGTON. AND WITH ELIOT SPITZER AS GOVERNOR, ANDREW CUOMO AS ATTORNEY GENERAL AND TOM DiNAPOLI AS COMPTROLLER, WE HAVE A NEW TEAM FOR CHANGE.

OURS IS A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP AMONG ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT THAT HAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR WESTCHESTER COUNTY RESIDENTS. IT IS THIS PARTNERSHIP THAT HAS HELPED THIS GOVERNMENT GET AWARDS, BECOME A MODEL FOR OTHER COUNTIES NATIONWIDE, AND INITIATE GROUND-BREAKING PROGRAMS TO INSURE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF EVERY PERSON.

WE HAVE CONTINUALLY BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT WHEN IT COMES TO EMERGENCY SERVICES. ENOUGH IS NEVER ENOUGH, COULD BE OUR MOTTO WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING OUR RESIDENTS AND OUR WORKERS. THIS YEAR, WE WILL INAUGURATE THE COUNTY'S FIRST VOLUNTEER TECHNICAL RESCUE TEAM TO RESPOND TO ACCIDENTS AT CONSTRUCTION SITES OR ANY BUILDING COLLAPSE.

WHETHER FROM FIRE OR CONSTRUCTION, WE MUST BE PREPARED COUNTY-WIDE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF STRUCTURAL ACCIDENTS, WHICH UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE HAD RECENTLY. AS NEW HOTELS, APARTMENTS, AND RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS ARE BUILT, THIS POSSIBILITY INCREASES. UP UNTIL NOW, DISPATCHERS HAVE HAD TO BORROW FIREFIGHTERS FROM ONE OF ONLY A FEW COMMUNITIES TO RESCUE THOSE IN DANGER.

WITH THIS NEW COUNTY FORCE, FIREFIGHTERS THROUGHOUT WESTCHESTER WILL BE TRAINED HOW TO USE ROPES AND SUPPORTING BEAMS TO RESCUE VICTIMS IN CONFINED SPACES. THEY WILL AID COMMUNITIES IN THE SAME WAY AS THE COUNTY'S HAZMAT TEAM.

THESE TWO TEAMS WILL HAVE NEW VEHICLES WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPLIES. AND, WITH THE ADDITION OF OUR NEW POLICE HELICOPTER FLYING ABOVE, WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO STREAM LIVE VIDEO OF MAJOR EMERGENCIES TO THE INCIDENT COMMANDERS AT THE SCENE. I WANT TO THANK CHAIR OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE BILL BURTON, AND HIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF OUR FIRST RESPONDERS AND FOR HELPING TO KEEP OUR RESIDENTS SAFE.

OUR AIRPORT HAS BEEN HAILED AS A MODEL FOR THE NATION WHEN IT COMES TO SECURITY; MOST RECENTLY IT WAS THE SUBJECT OF AN NBC NIGHTLY NEWS BROADCAST. CONTINUING TO TAKE THE LEAD, WE ARE THE FIRST COMMERCIAL AIRPORT IN THE NATION TO HAVE A "VIRTUAL" SECURITY SYSTEM. IT USES LEADING-EDGE SURVEILLANCE TO IMMEDIATELY DETECT, IDENTIFY AND STOP UNAUTHORIZED OR UNUSUAL ACTIVITY, BEFORE ANYTHING HAPPENS. THE PORT AUTHORITY IS NOW FOLLOWING OUR LEAD AT LAGUARDIA AND JFK AIRPORTS.

TO HELP PREVENT IDENTITY THEFT, WE WERE THE FIRST COUNTY IN THE NATION TO ADOPT THE WI-FI SECURITY LAW TO MAKE IT HARDER FOR DRIVE-BY HACKERS TO STEAL DATA AND PERSONAL INFORMATION FROM WIRELESS NETWORKS. AND, WE ROLLED OUT OUR NOW FAMOUS SHREDMOBILE TO GIVE RESIDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHRED THEIR PERSONAL DOCUMENTS, ONE OF THE SIMPLEST WAYS TO PREVENT THIEVES FROM OBTAINING PERSONAL DATA. IN ITS FIRST TWO OUTINGS THE TRUCK SHREDDED OVER 12 TONS — THAT’S ALMOST 25,000 POUNDS OF CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS FROM OUR RESIDENTS. THE SHREDDED PAPER IS ULTIMATELY RECYCLED.

WHEN IT COMES TO COUNTY RECORDS, I WILL WORK CLOSELY WITH COUNTY CLERK TIM IDONI TO ENSURE THAT INFORMATION AND DATA FILED BY OUR RESIDENTS ARE PROTECTED AGAINST IDENTITY THEFT.

ACCORDING TO DISTRICT ATTORNEY DIFIORE, WESTCHESTER IS DOING MORE TO PROTECT CHILDREN THAN ANY OTHER COUNTY IN THE STATE. OUR JOINT INITIATIVES AND THOSE UNDERTAKEN BY VARIOUS COUNTY DEPARTMENTS ILLUSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT.

THE CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM AND THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM NEVER WOULD HAVE BEEN A REALITY WITHOUT THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S LEADERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT. OUR FATALITY REVIEW TEAM IS THE ONLY ONE IN THE STATE THAT IS ALLOWED TO WRITE ITS OWN REPORTS, AND WHILE THESE ARE CONFIDENTIAL AND MUST INCLUDE MANDATED INFORMATION, THEY GO ONE STEP FURTHER TO PROVIDE AN EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT. AFTER A CHILD WAS LEFT ABANDONED, D.A. DIFIORE AND I EMBARKED ON A CAMPAIGN TO MAKE YOUNG PEOPLE AWARE THAT THERE ARE SAFE HAVENS TO LEAVE AN UNWANTED NEWBORN. AND WHEN A TODDLER WAS KILLED AS A RESULT OF A BABY WALKER ACCIDENT, WE ADVISED PARENTS THAT THERE ARE SAFER ALTERNATIVES TO KEEP THEIR BABY HAPPY AND ACTIVE. HOPEFULLY, THESE PROGRAMS WILL SAVE YOUNG LIVES.

IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM WILL RECEIVE STATE APPROVAL, SOMETHING I HAVE WANTED FOR A LONG TIME. THIS COORDINATED APPROACH TO CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS BY ALL INVOLVED AGENCIES REDUCES THE TRAUMA FOR THE CHILD. OUR CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER, WHICH TO MY KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT EXIST ANY PLACE ELSE, PROVIDES A VITAL CHILD FRIENDLY SETTING WHERE INTERVIEWS TAKE PLACE. ADDITIONALLY, THE SHARING OF INFORMATION AMONG SOCIAL SERVICES, LOCAL POLICE, THE D.A.'S OFFICE AND THE COUNTY ATTORNEY STRENGTHENS THE PROCEEDINGS IN BOTH CRIMINAL AND FAMILY COURT.

AS A RESULT OF RECENT INCIDENTS CONCERNING UNREPORTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES BY SOME EDUCATORS, REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE OFFICES OF THE COUNTY ATTORNEY, THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES HAVE BEGUN A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL ON THEIR MANDATED REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES. OVER 300 TEACHERS AND GUIDANCE COUNSELORS HAVE PARTICIPATED. I URGE EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS PROGRAM SO THAT NO CHILD SLIPS THROUGH THE CRACKS.

NO ONE HAS BEEN MORE CONCERNED WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING CHILDREN THAN LEGISLATOR JUDY MYERS, CHAIR OF THE FAMILIES COMMITTEE. THANK YOU, JUDY, WE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR KIDS SAFE AND HEALTHY.

GIVEN THE INCREASE OF ON-LINE PEDOPHILES, THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY HAS ACTIVATED A NEW UNIT WORKING IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE TO ADDRESS INTERNET TROLLING. THIS ADDITIONAL RESOURCE IS AN IMPORTANT EFFORT TO KEEP KIDS SAFE, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE IN THEIR OWN HOMES. WE HAVE MADE THREE RECENT ARRESTS — TWO IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FBI.

COORDINATION BETWEEN THE D.A.'S OFFICE AND VARIOUS COUNTY DEPARTMENTS IS BY NO MEANS LIMITED TO PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ADULT ABUSE. MANY TIMES IT IS PROTECTING THEM FROM THEMSELVES. OUR WELL KNOWN EFFORTS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST UNDERAGE DRINKING HAVE YIELDED A ONE MILLION DOLLAR FEDERAL GRANT TO DEVELOP A NEW EDUCATIONAL AND ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM. WE WILL CONDUCT A SURVEY WHICH WILL BE USED TO TRY TO CHANGE PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEEN DRINKING AS WE ALSO FINE TUNE AND COORDINATE LOCAL POLICE EFFORTS THAT CHECK TO SEE IF STORES OR BARS ARE SELLING TO UNDERAGE PATRONS.

IN ADDITION, WORKING WITH THE D.A., YOUR BOARD, AND LOCAL ENFORCEMENT, WE WILL FOCUS ON GOING AFTER THE PEOPLE WHO PRODUCE THE FAKE ID'S THAT ENABLE KIDS TO BUY ALCOHOL IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE OUR DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION FOR BEING THE FIRST OF ITS KIND EVER TO BE HONORED BY THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION. ITS DWI ENFORCEMENT UNIT WAS CITED FOR INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS THAT DETER THOSE CONVICTED OF DWI FROM RE-OFFENDING. SINCE 2000, WHEN GOOD DATA TRACKING BEGAN, OUT OF 1,781 SUPERVISED OFFENDERS, ONLY 4% WERE REARRESTED AND CONVICTED. NO OTHER AGENCY HAS THE SCOPE OF SERVICES THIS DEPARTMENT HAS.

I WANTED YOU TO MEET NICK GIORDANO TONIGHT. AFTER THE MOST TRAGIC EXPERIENCE ONE COULD HAVE, HE IS HELPING US TO PREVENT CHILDREN FROM BECOMING VICTIMS OF DRUNK DRIVERS. EVER SINCE HIS DAUGHTER CARA WAS KILLED BY A DRUNK DRIVER 12 YEARS AGO, HE HAS FOUGHT FOR TOUGHER FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS AND SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS GIVING PRESENTATIONS AT SCHOOLS ALL OVER WESTCHESTER. HE HAS BEEN A VITAL PART OF OUR PROBATION DEPARTMENT'S VICTIM IMPACT PANEL, WHERE HE EXPLAINS TO DWI PROBATIONERS, IN GREAT DETAIL, THE TERRIBLE IMPACT THAT DRUNK DRIVING HAS HAD ON HIS FAMILY.

UNFORTUNATELY NICK COULD NOT BE HERE, BUT HIS NIECE ANDREA IS. ANDREA, PLEASE THANK YOUR UNCLE FOR US.

AFTER OUR WELL-RECEIVED “GANG SUMMIT” LAST YEAR, WE INITIATED ACTION ON SEVERAL FRONTS TO COMBAT YOUTH VIOLENCE. WHITE PLAINS HIGH SCHOOL, PORT CHESTER’S CARVER CENTER AND THE YMCA IN YONKERS BECAME PILOT PROJECTS FOR AN INITIATIVE CALLED THE POWER OF PEACE. A TRIED AND TRUE PROGRAM FROM THE NEW ROCHELLE GUIDANCE CENTER, THIS POWERFUL EXPERIENCE BRINGS TOGETHER AT RISK KIDS, KIDS INVOLVED IN GANGS, AND SO CALLED “GOOD” KIDS TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER HOW TO DIFFUSE CONFLICT BEFORE IT ESCALATES. THESE “PEACE KEEPERS” IN TURN BECOME LEADERS AND REACH OUT TO OTHER KIDS — SHARING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR FRIENDS ON THE BLOCK, KIDS IN SCHOOL, AND THOSE WITH NO ONE ELSE TO TURN TO. THIS YEAR, POWER OF PEACE WILL BE EXPANDED TO PEEKSKILL AND OSSINING.

BUT YOU DON’T GET RID OF GANGS OVERNIGHT OR THROUGH ONE PROGRAM. SO WE HAVE INITIATED AND FUNDED MANY OTHERS ACROSS THE COUNTY: THOSE WHICH PROMOTE YOUTH AND POLICE RELATIONSHIPS, THOSE WHICH FOSTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, AND THOSE THAT CREATE YOUTH LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.

ONE PROGRAM STANDS OUT AND THAT’S BECAUSE IT WASN’T DEVELOPED BY ADULTS — BUT BY THE KIDS THEMSELVES. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT STAJ. FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS, AYANA DAVIS, WHO IS NOW 24, HAS BEEN GIVING AT RISK GIRLS IN PEEKSKILL THE CHANCE TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES. MANY LIVE IN SUBSIDIZED HOUSING. SOME WERE BEING EXPELLED EVEN FROM THEIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. THESE KIDS HAD NOTHING DO, BUT HANG OUT.

BUT WHEN AYANA TAUGHT THEM TO DANCE AND ENTERTAIN, THEY LEARNED SELF-ESTEEM AND DISCIPLINE. HER STAJ HIP-HOP TROUPE GAVE THESE YOUNG GIRLS SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF ... SOMETHING FUN AND POSITIVE TO KEEP THEM OFF THE STREETS AND OUT OF TROUBLE.

THIS YEAR, STAJ, WHO PLAYED 4 TIMES AT THE APOLLO, SAYS IT WILL EMBARK ON A STOP THE VIOLENCE TOUR AT OUR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY CENTERS. PERFORMING ANTI-VIOLENCE SKITS AS WELL AS HIP HOP, THEIR MESSAGE TO KIDS AT RISK, IS VERY PERSONAL: WE CHANGED OUR LIVES, SO CAN YOU.

WHAT STAJ DID FOR THESE PEEKSKILL KIDS, IS WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN OTHER SCHOOLS. THEY ARE ROLE MODELS. PLEASE WATCH THE VIDEO AND YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN.

AYANA DAVIS AND SOME HER STAJ DANCERS ARE HERE TONIGHT. I WOULD LIKE THEM TO STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

THIS IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF HOW OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE WORKING TO MAKE THIS COUNTY BETTER FOR OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE. IT'S ONE THING FOR GOVERNMENT OR NON-PROFITS OR EVEN DEDICATED ADULTS TO TRY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. IT'S ANOTHER WHEN THE KIDS DO THINGS ON THEIR OWN. BUT I MUST ADMIT I'M NOT SURPRISED. WE HAVE GREAT FAMILIES IN WESTCHESTER IN WHICH COMPASSION, TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING ARE TAUGHT BY ACTIONS AS WELL AS WORDS.

ONE OF MY GRANDFATHER'S FAVORITE EXPRESSIONS WAS "WATCH THE HANDS, DON'T LISTEN TO THE MOUTH." WE SHOULD ALL WATCH THE HANDS AND EMULATE THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITIES WHO CARE.

ONE SUCH PERSON IS ERIC APPEL, WHOSE JOURNEY INTO MANHOOD TOOK A VERY DIFFERENT TURN. AS PART OF HIS BAR MITZVAH PROJECT, HE VOLUNTEERED TO BE BUDDY TO ANNA DI TRAGLIA AND THE OTHER KIDS WHO PLAY IN OUR NEW MIRACLE LEAGUE, A BASEBALL LEAGUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. HE HELPED THEM THROW OR CATCH A BALL OR RACED THEM AROUND THE BASES IF THEY WERE IN WHEELCHAIRS.

"I HAD NEVER SPOKEN TO A PERSON IN A WHEELCHAIR BEFORE," ERIC SAID IN HIS BAR MITZVAH SPEECH. "I WAS UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES." HE SAID HE NOW KNOWS THAT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE THE SAME AS PEOPLE WITHOUT THEM. THE APPEL FAMILY WAS SO MOVED BY ERIC'S EXPERIENCE THAT THEY DONATED MORE THAN \$1600 WORTH OF GLOVES, BATS, AND BALLS TO THE LEAGUE.

THEY WERE NOT ALONE. PLEASE LOOK AT THE VIDEO AND YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN. LAST YEAR OVER 200 ADULTS AND CHILDREN OF ALL AGES AND PROFESSIONS VOLUNTEERED AS BUDDIES FOR THE 125 KIDS WHO PLAYED IN THE LEAGUE. THE BRIARCLIFF MIDDLE SCHOOL, FOR EXAMPLE, RAISED ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY 25 BASEBALL GLOVES FOR THE CHILDREN.

ERIC AND HIS PARENTS ARE HERE TONIGHT, SO ARE ANNA DI TRAGLIA AND HER PARENTS. I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE THEM, AS WELL AS STEVE MADEY, THE DIRECTOR OF THE LEAGUE.

ON MAY 6, UNDER STEVE'S LEADERSHIP, THE MIRACLE LEAGUE, WILL BEGIN ITS SECOND YEAR. OVER 500 CHILDREN ARE EXPECTED TO SIGN UP FOR ONE OF ITS THREE SEASONS. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE ADULT GROUP HOME POPULATION WILL BE PARTICIPATING AS WELL.

FOR MANY OF THESE KIDS, PLAYING BASEBALL IS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES.

WE ARE ALL WELL AWARE OF THE GROWING NATIONAL PROBLEM OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY. WHAT WE DON'T KNOW IS THE ACTUAL EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM IN WESTCHESTER. THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT IS ACTIVELY COMPILING DATA FROM SCHOOL DISTRICTS ON THE AGE, HEIGHT AND WEIGHT OF STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN, SECOND AND FOURTH GRADES. TO DATE, 30% OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE PARTICIPATED. THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT, AND I URGE ALL THE OTHERS TO GET ON BOARD WITH THIS BODY MASS INDEX SURVEY SO WE CAN HAVE THE MOST COMPLETE INFORMATION TO BEST TARGET OUR PROGRAMS.

IN OUR EFFORTS TO CHANGE EATING HABITS, WE HAVE TAKEN SEVERAL ACTIONS. ALL COUNTY SPONSORED EVENTS FOR CHILDREN NOW SERVE ONLY HEALTHY SNACKS, AS DO THE CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS WE FUND. THE VENDING MACHINES IN OUR BUILDINGS NOW OFFER OUR EMPLOYEES MORE HEALTHY CHOICES. AND, IN OUR PARKS, WE HAVE EITHER ELIMINATED OR GREATLY REDUCED REGULAR SODA IN THE MACHINES.

BUT TO REALLY BRING THE MESSAGE HOME TO THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES, PEER TO PEER, WE KNEW WE HAD TO GET THEM INVOLVED. IF YOU LOOK AT THE VIDEO WHILE I TALK, YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN.

SEVENTY KIDS WERE INVOLVED IN A SPECIAL FIT KIDS EDITION OF KIDS X-PRESS MAGAZINE ON NUTRITION AND EXERCISE. THEY SUBMITTED POEMS, STORIES, DRAWINGS AND PUZZLES AND YOU CAN SEE HOW WELL THEY TOOK TO THE TASK. BESIDES WRITING ABOUT HEALTHY CHOICES AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY — AS OPPOSED TO SUGARY SNACKS AND VIDEO GAMES — THEY ALSO SHARED SOME HEART WRENCHING ANECDOTES ON HOW THEY OR THEIR FRIENDS FELT TO BE TEASED BECAUSE THEY WERE FAT; AND HOW HARD IT IS NOT TO EAT THE STUFF ADVERTISED ON TELEVISION.

THANKS TO NIVIA VIERA THE PUBLISHER OF KIDS X-PRESS, 50,000 MAGAZINES WERE DISTRIBUTED TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES THROUGHOUT WESTCHESTER. NIVIA AND SOME OF OUR YOUNG WRITERS ARE HERE TONIGHT, AND I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW HOW MUCH THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO OUR BEFIT PROGRAM.

BUT IT'S NOT ONLY OUR CHILDREN WHO SHOULD BE WATCHING WHAT THEY EAT. TRANSFATS CAN INCREASE A PERSON'S RISK OF HEART DISEASE, NOT ONLY RAISING BAD CHOLESTEROL BUT LOWERING THE GOOD KIND. THANKS TO OUR JOINT INITIATIVE WITH THE WESTCHESTER ROCKLAND RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION, OVER 300 FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED AS BEFIT RESTAURANTS, FOR NOT COOKING WITH OILS CONTAINING TRANSFATS. LOG ONTO OUR WEBSITE AND SEE WHERE YOU CAN GO FOR A HEALTHY MEAL. THIS INITIATIVE HAS CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF THE SEATTLE/KING COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT, ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST, AS WELL AS THE NEW JERSEY STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT — BOTH WANTING TO FOLLOW OUR LEAD.

RESPONDING TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON HEALTH DISPARITIES, THAT I ANNOUNCED LAST FALL, WE HAVE CONTRACTED WITH SIX NON-PROFIT AGENCIES TO START PILOT PROGRAMS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. WITH A GOAL TO LINK MORE MINORITIES TO HEALTH CARE, THESE AGENCIES SERVING PEEKSKILL, MOUNT VERNON, YONKERS, GREENBURGH, WHITE PLAINS, MAMARONECK, AND SLEEPY HOLLOW, HAVE, IN JUST THE LAST TWO MONTHS, REACHED OUT TO HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE. WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED PARTNERS, THEY HAVE PROVIDED EDUCATION AND MEDICAL REFERRALS FOR SPECIFIC DISEASES AND HELPED PATIENTS NAVIGATE THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM.

ONE OF THE OUTCOMES IN THE DISPARITIES REPORT, WAS THE SHORTAGE OF BLACK AND HISPANIC DOCTORS AND OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS. CONSEQUENTLY WE HAVE BEGUN A COUNTY-WIDE MENTORING INITIATIVE, A PROJECT THAT BUILDS ON EXISTING SCHOOL AND COLLEGE-BASED PROGRAMS TO ENCOURAGE MORE MINORITY STUDENTS TO CONSIDER HEALTH RELATED CAREERS. THE MENTORS ARE BLACK HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVE DONATED THEIR TIME TO MEET WITH STUDENTS IN VARIOUS FORMAL AND INFORMAL SETTINGS.

I KNOW THAT LEGISLATORS CLINTON YOUNG, LOIS BRONZ, KEN JENKINS, AND JOSE ALVARADO HAVE ALSO BEEN WORKING WITH US TO MAKE SURE THAT NO RESIDENT IS EXCLUDED FROM ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE. I THANK THEM FOR ALL THE EFFORTS THEY HAVE MADE AND WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE.

AS PART OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S NEW CHRONIC DISEASE UNIT, EVEN MORE FOCUS WILL BE GIVEN TO HEALTH DISPARITIES. PARTICULARLY IN THE AREAS OF DIABETES, HEART DISEASE AND OBESITY-RELATED CONDITIONS, NEW INITIATIVES WILL REACH RESIDENTS WHO MAY NOT BE AWARE OF THEIR CONDITIONS OR WHO DO NOT HAVE THE TOOLS TO MAKE HEALTHIER LIFE CHOICES.

AND, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER, A NEW VIDEO WILL BE PRODUCED: THAT WILL SHOW PATIENTS THE DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN VISITING A DOCTOR'S OFFICE OR HOSPITAL IN ORDER TO GET THE BEST QUALITY CARE.

WHEN IT COMES TO MEDICAL SERVICES, WESTCHESTER COUNTY IS UNIQUE. WHETHER OUR RESIDENTS HAVE ELECTIVE SURGERY OR A LIFE THREATENING DISEASE, ALL THEIR HEALTH NEEDS CAN BE MET RIGHT HERE. THE WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER HAS DEDICATED ITSELF ALMOST COMPLETELY TO HIGH-END, ADVANCED MEDICAL CARE — ITS HEART CENTER, TRAUMA CENTER, BURN CENTER AND CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL ARE VITAL TO PATIENTS THROUGHOUT THE HUDSON VALLEY. WHAT STARTED AS A COUNTY HOSPITAL 30 YEARS AGO HAS EVOLVED INTO A MODEL FOR OUR NATION IN THE DELIVERY OF HEALTHCARE.

OUR EXCELLENT COMMUNITY HOSPITALS NOT ONLY OFFER QUALITY MEDICAL CARE, BUT THEIR LOCAL ROOTS ENABLE THEM TO BEST REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC WITH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. THESE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CARE GIVE OUR RESIDENTS A FIRST-CLASS MEDICAL SYSTEM CLOSE TO HOME, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR HEALTH NEEDS ARE. THAT’S BETTER FOR PATIENTS, FOR FAMILIES AND FOR THE ECONOMY OF THE REGION AS A WHOLE.

I KNOW THAT LEGISLATOR SUE SWANSON HAS A STRONG INTEREST IN HEALTH CARE, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH HER IN OUR EFFORTS TO MAKE SURE WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS GET THE BEST CARE POSSIBLE.

WE’RE ALL GETTING OLDER, SO IT’S A GOOD THING 60 IS THE NEW 40 AND 70 IS THE NEW 50! AT ANY AGE, IT SHOULD BE COMFORTING FOR WESTCHESTER SENIORS TO KNOW THAT WE ARE A MODEL FOR THE NATION WHEN IT COMES TO SETTING THE SENIOR AGENDA. OUR DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES HAS WON FIVE NATIONAL AWARDS JUST IN THE PAST YEAR. WE HELPED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE GET THROUGH THE MEDICARE MAZE. WE OPENED SAFE CENTERS AND HAD 5000 CONTACTS INVOLVING ACTUAL OR SUSPECTED ELDER ABUSE. WE DISTRIBUTED FANS AND THEN POWER PACK GENERATORS TO HOME-BOUND SENIORS TO AVOID UNSAFE EVACUATIONS AND REDUCE STRESS IF THE POWER GOES OUT.

THIS YEAR, WE ARE EMBARKING ON ONE OF OUR BOLDEST VENTURES, AGAIN ACHIEVING NATIONAL RECOGNITION: CREATING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES. WE WANT TO KEEP WESTCHESTER A LIVABLE COUNTY FOR ALL AGES. WHAT DO OUR BABY BOOMERS AND OUR OLDER PERSONS NEED TO SUSTAIN A HAPPY, SAFE AND INDEPENDENT LIFE? WHAT ISSUES DO WE WANT OUR ORGANIZATIONS, HOUSES OF WORSHIP, EMPLOYERS OR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS TO ADDRESS? WE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO MEET WITH CLERGY AND EMPLOYERS ON THIS MULTI-YEAR PROJECT.

AND EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW, THE LEGISLATOR WHO HAS BEEN SPEARHEADING ISSUES FOR SENIORS FOR YEARS, IS NONE OTHER THAN BERNICE SPRECKMAN WHO IS OUR STRONGEST ADVOCATE-PARTNER.

I SPEAK TONIGHT ABOUT THE STATE OF OUR COUNTY, AND THE SERVICES AND PROGRAMS WE INITIATE AND SUPPORT TO MAKE WESTCHESTER THE PLACE WHERE EVERYONE WANTS TO LIVE. TROUBLE IS, THERE IS NOT AN AFFORDABLE HOME FOR EVERY FAMILY WHO NEEDS ONE.

I AM ESPECIALLY CONCERNED THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT WAS CREATED 40 YEARS AGO UNDER STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS ARE NOW REVERTING TO MARKET RATE INCREASES. THIS WILL AFFECT OVER 4,000 MITCHELL-LAMA UNITS IN 11 MUNICIPALITIES. WHILE WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL WORKING WITH LANDLORDS IN OSSINING AND GREENBURGH TO KEEP THIS FROM HAPPENING, I FEAR THAT MANY OF THE OTHER UNITS WILL BE LOST TO MARKET RATES.

EVEN SOME OF THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS BUILT 15 YEARS AGO ARE NOW BECOMING UNAFFORDABLE. ALMOST 300, THAT HAD A 10 YEAR AFFORDABILITY CLAUSE, CAN GO TO MARKET RATE BY THE END OF THIS YEAR. WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, THAT NUMBER COULD CLIMB TO 500. SO EVEN THOUGH WE ARE BUILDING MORE, AT BEST, WE ARE EITHER BUILDING AND STANDING STILL — OR, AT WORST, WE ARE LOSING THE GAINS WE HAVE MADE.

THEREFORE I AM TAKING GROUND BREAKING STEPS TO CREATE THE FIRST EVER HOUSING LAND TRUST IN NEW YORK STATE. WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS FROM THE HOUSING LAND TRUST TASK FORCE, THE HOUSING ACTION COUNCIL AND THE PRO-BONO PARTNERSHIP, WE WILL ENSURE THAT ANY NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDED BY THE COUNTY REMAINS AFFORDABLE FOREVER.

THE NONPROFIT HOUSING LAND TRUST WOULD TAKE OWNERSHIP OF ANY LAND THAT THE COUNTY PURCHASES ON WHICH THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING WOULD BE BUILT, AND WOULD THEN LEASE IT TO DEVELOPERS FOR CONTINUOUS AND RENEWABLE TERMS. IN THIS WAY, THE HOMES WOULD BE AFFORDABLE PERMANENTLY. BUT TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE, WE NEED LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES TO JOIN THIS EFFORT. TO MY ELECTED COLLEAGUES: PLEASE, TAKE A LOOK AT THE LAND YOU OWN THAT MIGHT BE SUITABLE FOR HOUSING AND CONSIDER DONATING IT TO THE LAND TRUST. IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN ACHIEVE AFFORDABILITY IN PERPETUITY.

AS THE WAR DRAGS ON AND ON, ONCE AGAIN IT IS MY SAD DUTY TO EXTEND OUR CONDOLENCES TO A WESTCHESTER FAMILY. ARMY STAFF SERGEANT KYU H. CHAY FROM CHAPPAQUA WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN. HE LEAVES A WIFE AND TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AND PARENTS, WHO OWN A DRY CLEANERS IN CHAPPAQUA. I KNOW THE FAMILY, SO PERSONALLY, AS WELL AS ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER, I OFFER MR. CHAY, WHO IS HERE TONIGHT, OUR PRAYERS AND COMFORT. AND I HOPE I DO NOT HAVE TO DO THIS NEXT YEAR. (NOTE TO ANDY: HIS FIRST NAME IS SAM)

OUR RETURNING WESTCHESTER VETERANS, WHO HAVE PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE AND MADE PERSONAL SACRIFICES FOR ALL OF US, SHOULD GET IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE IN WHATEVER THEY NEED. OUR OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STANDS READY TO HELP THEM IN ANY WAY WE CAN: FOR EMPLOYMENT, MILITARY BENEFITS, HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES, OR SIMPLY RECOGNIZING THEM AND WELCOMING THEM HOME. UNFORTUNATELY, WE CANNOT REACH OUT TO THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN, BECAUSE THE MILITARY IS NOT GIVING US THEIR NAMES. I DON'T KNOW WHY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL NOT RELEASE THIS INFORMATION TO US. I THINK IT'S A TRAVESTY.

SO NOW I TURN TO OUR SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN IN WASHINGTON WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR US: HELP US HELP OUR RETURNING HEROES. THE MILITARY NEEDS TO FREE UP THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. I KNOW I CAN COUNT ON THE ASSISTANCE OF LEGISLATION CHAIR VITO PINTO AND LEGISLATOR JIM MAISANO, BOTH OF WHOM ARE VETERANS, AND WHO HAVE WORKED HARD TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR OUR SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN.

2007 PROMISES TO BE BOTH AN EXCITING AND CHALLENGING YEAR FOR US.

NEXT MONTH WESTCHESTER GOES METROCARD. BY THIS TIME, BUS RIDERS AND EVERYONE ELSE PROBABLY KNOW THAT BEE LINE PASSENGERS WILL HAVE MORE DISCOUNTS, MORE SAVINGS AND MORE CONVENIENCE. FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS — AND IT WILL CONTINUE — WE HAVE CONDUCTED AN EXTENSIVE EDUCATIONAL AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN IN BOTH ENGLISH AND SPANISH TO MAKE SURE THAT THE TRANSITION IS SMOOTH. WITH METROCARD YOU CAN TRANSFER FREE TO NYC SUBWAYS AND BUSES. REMEMBER: NO MORE DOLLAR BILLS — ONLY COINS OR METROCARD.

IN JULY WE PROUDLY HOST FOR THE FIRST TIME IN WESTCHESTER, THE PRESTIGIOUS EMPIRE STATE GAMES. OPENING CELEBRATION WILL BE JULY 25 AT KENSICO DAM PLAZA WITH FIREWORKS, TORCH AND THE PARADE OF 6000 ATHLETES FROM ALL OVER NEW YORK. WE ARE PROUD TO HOST THIS MAJOR AMATEUR ATHLETIC EVENT, SECOND IN SIZE ONLY TO THE OLYMPICS, WHICH WILL BRING 20,000 TOURISTS TO OUR COUNTY.

THE EMPIRE STATE GAMES WILL ADD TO WHAT HAS BEEN A RECENT TOURISM BOOM. OUR HOTELS ARE FULL, AND MORE ARE BEING BUILT — THE NEWLY OPENED SHERATON IN GREENBURGH, THE RITZ CARLTON THAT WILL OPEN EARLY NEXT YEAR IN WHITE PLAINS, AND MORE TO COME IN YONKERS, TARRYTOWN AND CORTLANDT MANOR — A GRAND TOTAL OF 1000 NEW ROOMS ADDED TO OUR BASE.

OUR OFFICE OF TOURISM HAS MADE WESTCHESTER A TOURISM DESTINATION WITH OVER 2 MILLION VISITORS LAST YEAR, MAKING A 1 BILLION DOLLAR IMPACT IN OUR COUNTY'S ECONOMY. THEY VISITED US FOR LEISURE PURPOSES — PLAYED GOLF, ENJOYED OUR PARKS, AND OUR CULTURAL DESTINATIONS.

WHETHER A TOURIST OR A RESIDENT, OUR 18,000 ACRES OF COUNTY PARKLAND CONTINUE TO BE OUR MAIN ATTRACTION FOR RECREATION, FUN AND ADVENTURE, WITH OVER 3 MILLION VISITS A YEAR. I CONGRATULATE COMMISSIONER JOE STOUT AND HIS STAFF FOR ENABLING US TO BECOME THE FIRST COUNTY IN NEW YORK TO BE ACCREDITED BY THE NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION.

OUR DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION IS ALSO APPLYING FOR NATIONAL ACCREDITATION, ONE OF ONLY TWO CORRECTION DEPARTMENTS IN THE STATE TO DO SO. TO HELP KEEP CRIME DOWN, THE DEPARTMENT HAS INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS TO HELP INMATES REENTER SOCIETY IN A POSITIVE WAY. LAST YEAR, 279 INMATES SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAM OPERATED BY ST. JOHN'S RIVERSIDE HOSPITAL. 699 DISCHARGE PLANS WERE DRAWN UP TO CONNECT THOSE RELEASED TO HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT AND TREATMENT PROGRAMS. 44 YOUNG OFFENDERS EARNED THEIR HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALANCY DIPLOMA MAKING THEM ELIGIBLE FOR JOBS THAT REQUIRE A SECONDARY EDUCATION. NEW LAST YEAR, AND TO BE EXPANDED THIS YEAR, IS OUR ONE-ACRE PRISON FARM. NEARLY 1,700 POUNDS OF VEGETABLES WERE HARVESTED AND TURNED OVER TO FOOD PATCH TO FEED THE HUNGRY.

WE ARE EVER MINDFUL THAT COUNTY RESIDENTS PAY HIGH PROPERTY TAXES. WHILE COUNTY TAXES COMPRISE LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF A HOMEOWNER'S BILL, WE ALWAYS LOOK FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE, ENHANCE EFFICIENCIES AND CUT COSTS. THAT IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY WE CONTINUE TO BE THE ONLY TRIPLE A RATED COUNTY IN NEW YORK STATE.

MY GOAL IS TO MAKE SURE OUR GOVERNMENT FOCUSES ON OUR TAXPAYERS AS WELL AS THE PEOPLE WE SERVE IN OUR PROGRAMS. I AM VERY SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT WE MUST BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR EVERY TAX DOLLAR WE SPEND. THAT IS WHY I WILL CONTINUE TO RELY ON AND WORK WITH MIKE KAPLOWITZ, CHAIR OF THE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE. MIKE HAS DONE A TREMENDOUS JOB IN SCRUTINIZING COUNTY SPENDING, AND HE HAS BEEN A GREAT PARTNER IN HELPING TO ENSURE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.

I WILL CONTINUE TO SETTLE FOR NOTHING LESS THAN A HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATION. AS TAXPAYERS, OUR RESIDENTS SHOULD KNOW THAT THEIR MONEY IS BEING SPENT WISELY AND THAT OUR PROGRAMS ARE WORKING AND WORKING EFFICIENTLY. THE SAME IS TRUE FOR OUR "CUSTOMERS" — ARE THEY GETTING WHAT THEY NEED? ARE THEY BENEFITING?

BUILDING ON THE PROGRESS MADE OVER THE LAST NINE YEARS, WE HAVE BEGUN A LARGE-SCALE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE THAT WILL SPAN EVERY ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT AND INCLUDE HUNDREDS OF COUNTY MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES AS WELL AS THE COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS WE CONTRACT WITH. THIS TWO-YEAR INITIATIVE WILL INJECT A DYNAMIC NEW LEVEL OF ACCOUNTABILITY. BY MEASURING AND MAKING CHANGES BASED ON PERFORMANCE, OUTCOMES AND COSTS, WE WILL ENSURE THE MOST APPROPRIATE ALLOCATION OF TAX DOLLARS AT ALL LEVELS OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

IN SHORT, I WANT OUR TAXPAYERS AND THOSE WHO USE OUR SERVICES TO FEEL COMFORTABLE THAT THEY ARE GETTING THE BEST DEAL.

THANKS TO THE HARD WORK OF OUR DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WE CONTINUE TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY TO REDUCE COSTS, BECOME MORE EFFICIENT AND INITIATE NEW PROGRAMS TO KEEP PEOPLE SAFE.

TO REDUCE PAPER, WE ARE ISSUING BID DOCUMENTS AND SUBMITTING ENGINEERING DRAWINGS ELECTRONICALLY, CHANGING TO A PAYROLL DEBIT CARD SYSTEM INSTEAD OF PAPER CHECKS, AND AUTOMATING THE CONTRACT PROCESS THROUGH AN ON-LINE SYSTEM.

OUR DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS ONE OF THREE DISTRICTS STATE-WIDE TO PARTICIPATE IN A PILOT PROJECT USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SERVICES TO FAMILIES AND CHILDREN BY REDUCING CASELOAD PAPERWORK.

WE CREATED AN "INTERNET PHONE" SYSTEM THAT LINKS OUR DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES TO 11 COUNTY HOSPITALS IF THE PHONE LINES GO DOWN IN AN EMERGENCY. WE ARE NOW WORKING TO CREATE THE SAME SYSTEM WITH OUR MUNICIPALITIES.

THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION IS ABOUT TO BEGIN USING TELE-MEDICINE TECHNOLOGY THAT WILL LINK THE JAIL'S INFIRMARY TO WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER WHICH WILL ELIMINATE NEEDLESS INMATE TRIPS TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM FOR A SIMPLE DIAGNOSIS. BOTH TELEHEALTH AND THE DEPARTMENT'S NEW PROGRAM TO HAVE PRISONER ARRAIGNMENT BY VIDEO CONFERENCE WILL REDUCE BOTH TRANSPORTATION COSTS AND OVERTIME FOR CORRECTION OFFICERS.

THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY IS IMPLEMENTING A NEW GPS PROJECT THAT ALLOWS FOR THE AUTOMATIC LOCATION OF POLICE VEHICLES. THIS NOT ONLY IMPACTS OFFICER SAFETY, BUT ALSO ALLOWS US TO IDENTIFY AND DISPATCH THOSE POLICE VEHICLES WHICH HAPPEN TO BE THE CLOSEST TO THE SCENE. OUR POLICE HAVE ALSO JUST COMPLETED AN IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF VEHICLE ACCIDENTS ON OUR PARKWAYS AND WILL USE THE INFORMATION TO TARGET ENFORCEMENT AT THE MOST ACCIDENT PRONE LOCATIONS.

FOR THOSE WHO WOULD BREAK THE LAW, THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE TO KEEP IN MIND: OUR POLICE HAVE JUST ACQUIRED A DIGITAL LICENSE PLATE READER WHICH SCANS AND THEN IDENTIFIES IN A MATTER OF SECONDS EXPIRED, REVOKED OR SUSPENDED VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS AS WELL AS STOLEN CARS. IN JUST THREE MONTHS, IT SCANNED 20,000 PLATES, WHICH RESULTED IN 200 TRAFFIC TICKETS, 30 VEHICLES IMPOUNDED AND THREE ARRESTS.

IN A CONTINUING STEP TO HELP LOCAL FIRMS INCREASE THEIR SHARE OF GLOBAL TRADE, WE HELPED CREATE A NEW WEBSITE: USCHANNELS.COM. AS A RESULT, WE HAVE ESTABLISHED NEW CONTACTS WITH TRADE GROUPS IN THE GOLD COAST OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND IN ADDITION TO IRELAND, CHINA AND ITALY — COUNTRIES WE HAVE ALREADY VISITED TO FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

SPEAKING OF NEW WEBSITES, WESTCHESTERGOV.COM WILL HAVE A NEW FACE THIS SPRING. USING EYE-OPENING NEW GRAPHICS AND A SUBJECT RATHER THAN DEPARTMENT-BASED DESIGN, THE WEBSITE WILL GIVE RESIDENTS THE INFORMATION THEY WANT IN A MORE USER-FRIENDLY WAY. I ALSO WANT TO ENCOURAGE OUR RESIDENTS WHO HAVE IO CABLE TO TUNE TO CHANNEL 504 FOR INTERESTING AND ENTERTAINING COUNTY PROGRAMS THAT CHANGE ON A REGULAR BASIS. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU CAN GET A VIRTUAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TOUR, LEARN ABOUT PROTECTING KIDS FROM THE INTERNET, AND GET TIPS ON HOW TO JOIN A HEALTH CLUB. AFTER THAT YOU CAN WATCH A SHORT DOCUMENTARY ON PLAYLAND AND SEE SELECTIONS FROM OUR RECENT WESTCHESTER FILM FESTIVAL.

WHILE WE CONTINUE TO KEEP OUR OWN HOUSE IN ORDER, WE FACE CHALLENGES THAT ARE NOT OF OUR OWN MAKING — BUT THAT WE HAVE A HUGE STAKE IN RESOLVING.

ONE PROBLEM HAS JUST BEEN TAKEN OFF THE TABLE. I WANT TO THANK THE STATE LEGISLATURE FOR PASSING AND THE GOVERNOR FOR SIGNING THE CIVIL CONFINEMENT LAW. ON OUR OWN, WE HAVE DONE JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING A COUNTY CAN DO TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEX OFFENDERS. OUR PROGRAMS ARE FAR REACHING AND HAVE RECEIVED NATIONWIDE ACCLAIM. BUT THIS CIVIL CONFINEMENT LAW, WITH ALL ITS PROTECTIONS, IS A MAJOR WEAPON IN KEEPING DANGEROUS SEX OFFENDERS OFF THE STREETS. I SUPPORTED CIVIL CONFINEMENT, I WORKED FOR CIVIL CONFINEMENT, AND I AM VERY PLEASED THAT IT ALSO INCLUDES PROVISIONS FOR MORE JAIL TIME.

WELL, THAT JUST LEAVES US THE TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE, INDIAN POINT, CON EDISON'S POWER OUTAGES, THE HOMELESS, AND, OF COURSE, GLOBAL WARMING.

WE KNOW WE CAN'T STOP GREENHOUSE GASES ON OUR OWN. BUT IF EVERYONE TAKES ONE GREEN GIANT STEP WE CAN HAVE AN IMPACT. THAT'S WHY I ESTABLISHED THE GLOBAL WARMING TASK FORCE, HEADED BY NORTH CASTLE SUPERVISOR, REESE BERMAN, AND BOB FUNICELLO, THE COUNTY'S ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT DIRECTOR. IT IS COMPRISED OF HIGH LEVEL EXECUTIVES AND OFFICIALS REPRESENTING OUR CORPORATIONS AND BUSINESSES, COLLEGES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND, OF COURSE THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY. I WANT TO THANK MAJORITY LEADER MARTY ROGOWSKY FOR SERVING ON THE TASK FORCE AND FOR GIVING US THE BENEFIT OF HIS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE ON ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.

WHEN I CREATED THE TASK FORCE, THE RESPONSE WAS OVERWHELMING. IT WAS HARD TO SELECT THE 34 MEMBERS. SO, WE CREATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR OVER 100 OTHER VOLUNTEERS TO GET INVOLVED. SENATORS SCHUMER AND CLINTON HAVE ASKED TO BE KEPT ABREAST OF THE OUTCOMES. SO HAVE CONGRESSWOMAN LOWEY AND CONGRESSMEN HALL AND ENGEL.

WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, THIS HIGHLY MOTIVATED, GREATLY COMMITTED GROUP OF PEOPLE WILL PRODUCE A COUNTY-WIDE ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. IN THIS WAR, EVERYONE IS A SOLDIER. IT IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY OR GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION. I WANT EVERY PERSON IN THIS COUNTY TO THINK ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING WHETHER THEY ARE BUYING A LIGHT BULB, OR A NEW CAR. I AM PROUD THAT SO MANY OF OUR RESIDENTS ARE ALREADY TURNING GREEN.

AND NOW I AM MAKING AN OFFER, WHICH NO HOUSEHOLD SHOULD REFUSE. TO CELEBRATE EARTH DAY WEEKEND, WE WILL GIVE ONE COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHT BULB, FREE, TO EVERY FAMILY WHO ATTENDS KIDS FAIR ON APRIL 21 AT THE COUNTY CENTER AND THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN EARTH DAY AT TIBBETTS BROOK PARK ON APRIL 22. I WANT TO ESPECIALLY THANK THE NEW YORK POWER AUTHORITY FOR A GRANT THAT IS ASSISTING US IN THIS PROGRAM.

HERE'S WHY REPLACING LIGHT BULBS IS SO IMPORTANT. SOME STATISTICS: BACK IN 1999 — WHEN WE LAST DID A STUDY, THAT IS NOW BEING UPDATED — WESTCHESTER HOMES PRODUCED 3.6 MILLION TONS OF CARBON DIOXIDE. IF ALL OF OUR HOUSEHOLDS REPLACED JUST 4 BULBS, WE WOULD REDUCE THIS EMISSION BY ONE MILLION TONS OR 28%. THAT IS A REALLY BIG STEP. BESIDES THESE BULBS LAST LONGER, USE LESS ENERGY AND IN THE LONG RUN, WILL SAVE MONEY.

RIGHT NOW, NEW YORK STATE COMES IN 45TH OUT OF 50 STATES WHEN IT COMES TO PURCHASING COMPACT FLUORESCENT BULBS. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE OUR EFFORTS MOVE NEW YORK OUT OF BASEMENT.

AT THE SAME TIME, I AM URGING YOUR BOARD TO PASS MY LEAF-BLOWER LEGISLATION, CURRENTLY BEFORE YOU. THIS LEGISLATION, PHASED IN OVER TWO YEARS SO AS NOT TO CREATE A HARDSHIP FOR LANDSCAPERS, COULD KEEP MORE THAN 10 TONS OF HARMFUL EMISSIONS FROM BEING RELEASED INTO OUR AIR EACH YEAR. I WANT TO PARTICULARLY THANK LEGISLATOR TOM ABINANTI FOR HIS STRONG SUPPORT ON THIS ISSUE.

NOISE ISSUES ASIDE, NUMEROUS STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT OLD LEAF BLOWERS, STILL COMMONLY USED, ARE TERRIBLE POLLUTERS. FOR EXAMPLE, A SINGLE BLOWER OPERATING FOR 30 MINUTES PUTS MORE EMISSIONS INTO THE AIR THAN A VEHICLE TRAVELING 2000 MILES. NEW MODELS ARE MUCH CLEANER AND ARE NOW BEING USED BY THE COUNTY PARKS AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENTS.

I WANT TO COMPLIMENT OUR CORPORATIONS WHO ARE GOING GREEN, ESPECIALLY SWISS RE WHO HAS SET A GOAL, TO BECOME “GREENHOUSE NEUTRAL.” BY 2013, THE COMPANY WILL REDUCE OR OFFSET THE NET CARBON EMISSIONS OF ITS EMPLOYEES TO ZERO, AND WILL REDUCE ITS OWN EMISSIONS BY 15%. THEY HAVE ALSO ANNOUNCED A FIRST-IN-THE-INDUSTRY INCENTIVE PROGRAM THAT REIMBURSES THEIR EMPLOYEES UP TO \$3,300 DOLLARS FOR PURCHASING A HYBRID CAR, SOLAR PANELS FOR THEIR HOMES OR OTHER SIMILAR MEASURES TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES. I URGE OTHER BUSINESSES IN THE COUNTY TO DO THE SAME.

AND I URGE OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO FOLLOW THE COUNTY'S LEAD.

- ALL OUR CONTRACTS CALL FOR ENERGY STAR AND HIGH EFFICIENCY EQUIPMENT.
- WE ARE SWITCHING TO GREEN CLEANING PRODUCTS IN ALL FACILITIES.
- TRAFFIC SIGNALS ARE BEING COMPUTER-UPGRADED TO REDUCE VEHICLE IDLING TIME AND RESULTANT EMISSIONS, AND THE STANDARD LIGHT BULBS WERE REPLACED WITH LED TECHNOLOGY.
- ANY NEW COUNTY VEHICLES ARE BEING REPLACED WITH HYBRIDS, WHICH NOW MAKE UP 28% OF OUR FLEET. BY JUNE THE PERCENTAGE WILL BE 33%.
- WE ARE RECYCLING MORE MATERIAL THAN EVER BEFORE — NOT ONLY AT OUR HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL CLEAN UP DAYS, BUT ALSO IN OUR PARKS, WHICH RECYCLED OVER 201 TONS OF MATERIAL — A 31 % INCREASE OVER LAST YEAR.
- OUR IDA NOW REQUIRES ITS PROJECTS TO LIST ITS ENERGY SAVING EQUIPMENT, FIXTURES AND CONSTRUCTION METHODS TO FOSTER GREEN BUILDINGS.

FOR THE NAYSAYERS WHO SAY OLD HABITS DIE HARD, AND INITIATIVES TO COUNTERACT GLOBAL WARMING ARE JUST NOT GOING TO MAKE IT WITH THE MASSES, I POINT OUT, THAT IT WASN'T TOO LONG AGO THAT NO ONE RECYCLED PAPER, GLASS, OR ALUMINUM — MUCH LESS CELL PHONES, COMPUTERS, OR TIRES. TODAY, THIS IS SECOND NATURE TO MOST OF US.

THERE HAS BEEN MUCH PUBLICITY LATELY IN A COUPLE OF COMMUNITIES ABOUT WHERE TO HOUSE HOMELESS STREET PEOPLE AT NIGHT. LET ME SAY THIS: EVEN THOUGH THE COUNTY HAS NO LEGAL OBLIGATION, I WILL NOT ALLOW ANY HOMELESS PERSON TO FREEZE ON WESTCHESTER STREETS. AND, I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT ANY ELECTED OFFICIAL — OR FOR THAT MATTER, ANY WESTCHESTER RESIDENT — FEELS DIFFERENTLY.

I WILL BE MEETING VERY SOON WITH THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION. WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER ON THIS ISSUE. WHILE WE HAVE REDUCED THE HOMELESS POPULATION IN OUR SHELTERS BY OVER 50% SINCE 1998, WE STILL HAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE NOT TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OUR SHELTER SYSTEM. NO ONE WANTS TO SEE THEM WANDERING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS OR SLEEPING IN CARDBOARD BOXES IN FRONT OF RESTAURANTS, THEATERS, OR PARKING STRUCTURES. LET'S GET SOME IDEAS ON THE TABLE SO WE CAN GIVE THE STREET PEOPLE A BED AT NIGHT AND AT THE SAME TIME GIVE OUR RESIDENTS AND MERCHANTS A FEELING OF SAFETY.

ENTERGY HAS FILED FOR A RENEWAL OF ITS LICENSE, AND MY POSITION ON INDIAN POINT IS CLEAR. I BELIEVE, AND STUDIES HAVE SHOWN, THAT GIVEN ENOUGH OF A HEAD START, ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CAN BE PROVIDED TO REPLACE THE 2000 MEGAWATTS THAT THE PLANTS PROVIDE. THAT'S JUST ONE REASON I AM AGAINST THEIR RE-LICENSING. THE OTHER IS SAFETY; I CANNOT GUARANTEE THAT EVERYONE CAN BE EVACUATED QUICKLY ENOUGH IF A FAST-BREAKING SCENARIO OCCURS, GIVEN OUR ROADS, TRAFFIC, POPULATION DENSITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SEVERE WEATHER.

SO, WORKING WITH OUR FEDERAL DELEGATION, I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR AN INDEPENDENT SAFETY ASSESSMENT OF INDIAN POINT. I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR NEW RE-LICENSING CRITERIA. AND I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR LICENSE DENIAL. IF THE PROCESS TO LOCATE INDIAN POINT WERE BEGINNING TODAY, INDIAN POINT WOULD NEVER GET APPROVAL.

AND, WHILE WE ARE ON THE SUBJECT OF ENERGY, I WANT TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE POWER OUTAGES OUR RESIDENTS FACED LAST SUMMER. 90,000 FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES SUFFERED WITHOUT POWER FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME DUE TO THE WILD WEATHER. SOME HOMEOWNERS EVEN HAD TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES; OTHERS SUFFERED INDIVIDUAL LOSSES TOTALLING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS. CON EDISON'S COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSE SIMPLY FAILED. LAST SEPTEMBER, I WROTE TO THE GOVERNOR CALLING FOR AN INDEPENDENT AUDITOR TO CONDUCT AN OBJECTIVE PERFORMANCE OF CON ED'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO THE MAJOR STORMS THAT HIT US. I AM PLEASED TO SEE THAT THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION HAS FINALLY HIRED THAT CONSULTANT. IN ADDITION, THEY CONDUCTED THEIR OWN ASSESSMENT WHICH POINTED UP SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THE UTILITY.

I WANT TO SEE THE SYSTEM FIXED. I WANT THE CON ED CULTURE TO CHANGE. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED THE UTILITY HAS A LOT OF WORK TO DO TO INSTITUTE BEST PRACTICES WHEN IT COMES TO COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC, PREVENTING WIDESPREAD OUTAGES, AND RESTORING POWER PROMPTLY. MY STAFF WILL CONTINUE TO MEET WITH CON ED OFFICIALS AND THESE AUDITORS TO MONITOR THEIR PROGRESS. IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEMS IS NOT ENOUGH. SOLUTIONS MUST BE MANDATED BY THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION AND IMPLEMENTED IMMEDIATELY.

THE TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE IS THE BIGGEST, MOST IMPORTANT, AND UNDOUBTEDLY THE MOST EXPENSIVE STATE TRANSPORTATION PROJECT WESTCHESTER COUNTY HAS SEEN IN VERY LONG TIME. AS THE INCOMING CO-CHAIR OF THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL, I AM WELL AWARE THAT WHATEVER ALTERNATIVE IS ULTIMATELY DECIDED, IT WILL HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE, THE ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT, NOT ONLY OF WESTCHESTER AND ROCKLAND COUNTIES, BUT THE WHOLE METROPOLITAN AREA AND THE NORTHEAST.

THAT IS WHY ROCKLAND COUNTY EXECUTIVE SCOTT VANDERHOEF AND I CREATED A HIGH LEVEL TASK FORCE TO WORK WITH STATE DOT, METRO NORTH AND THE THRUWAY AUTHORITY WHO CONSTITUTE THE PROJECT TEAM. OUR TASK FORCE REPORTS THAT THE PROCESS HAS BEEN SLOW, LACKS VISION AND THAT THE PUBLIC WILL NOT BE ABLE TO WADE THROUGH THE TONS OF INFORMATION IN ORDER TO GET A TRUE PICTURE OF THE CHOICES. THAT IS WHY BOTH OF US HAVE ASKED FOR THE GOVERNOR'S DIRECT INVOLVEMENT TO BE SURE THE PROCESS IS CARRIED OUT IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE REGION. I WANT TO THANK GOVERNOR SPITZER FOR RESPONDING POSITIVELY.

FORTY YEARS AGO, THE COUNTY SET OUT ON A BOLD VISION THAT SAW BEYOND MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES TO CALL FOR A SYSTEM OF CONNECTED OPEN SPACE, WATERFRONT ACCESS, DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANDED TRANSIT SERVICE. TWENTY YEARS LATER, THAT VISION WAS REFINED TO INCLUDE STRONGER EMPHASIS ON THE ENVIRONMENT. TEN YEARS AFTER THAT, IN 1996, "PATTERNS FOR WESTCHESTER" WAS RELEASED — TO PRODUCE EVEN MORE DETAILED REGIONAL PLANS AND POLICIES.

LAST YEAR, I ASKED THAT "PATTERNS," BE UPDATED. THE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD HAS RESPONDED WITH "WESTCHESTER 2025". THIS WILL BECOME AN INTERACTIVE, LAND USE ROADMAP ON WHERE WE ARE HEADED AND WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION. I ASK OUR MUNICIPAL PARTNERS TO JOIN WITH US TO MAKE A SHARED REGIONAL VISION, A REALITY.

THIS IS A GREAT COUNTY. AS I LOOK BACK ON THE PAST 10 YEARS, I SOMETIMES WONDER HOW WE ACCOMPLISHED WHAT WE DID. THE ANSWER IS WE DIDN'T DO IT ALONE.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1683—A LONG AND PROUD HISTORY. YES, WE ARE BLESSED WITH RESOURCES THAT OTHER COUNTIES ENVY – OUR PRESERVED OPEN SPACE, THRIVING CITIES, INVOLVED CITIZENRY, AND ENLIGHTENED BUSINESSES. BUT IT’S BECAUSE OF THE PARTNERSHIPS WE’VE FORGED — WITH YOU, OUR LEGISLATORS, FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT, AND LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES — THAT WE’VE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE SUCH GREAT STRIDES.

IT’S BECAUSE OF THE REMARKABLE PEOPLE AMONG US WHO WORK ON BEHALF OF ALL OF US, AND THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS WHO PULL TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD, THAT WE CAN SPEAK SO PROUDLY ABOUT WHERE WE ARE TODAY.

OUR COUNTY SHOWS WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN PEOPLE LOOK PAST THEIR DIFFERENCES AND FOCUS ON THE INTERESTS THEY SHARE. WE’VE BROKEN GROUND WITH DECISIONS THAT HAVE BEEN HEARD NATIONWIDE. WORKING TOGETHER, I’M CONFIDENT THAT WE WILL STAY ON THAT TRACK AS WE TACKLE THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD, AND CONTINUE TO CHART A PATH OTHERS WILL WANT TO FOLLOW.

THANK YOU AND GOOD NIGHT.