

Westchester County, New York

The State of the County

Westchester
gov.com

Andrew J. Spano
Westchester County Executive
April 10, 2008

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
TO THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY

APRIL 10, 2008

GOOD EVENING, MR. CHAIRMAN, 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.

FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS I HAVE STOOD BEFORE YOU TO REPORT ON THE STATE OF OUR COUNTY. MY PRIORITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO MAKE SURE OUR RESIDENTS ARE SAFE, SECURE AND HEALTHY. AND MY GOAL HAS BEEN TO ACCOMPLISH THIS IN THE MOST PROFESSIONAL, COST EFFECTIVE, FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE MANNER. WITH THE WORD “CHANGE” OBVIOUSLY THE LEXICON OF THE FUTURE, IT IS WITH MIXED FEELINGS, THEREFORE, THAT I ANNOUNCE THAT OUR FOCUS HAS NOT “CHANGED.”

WE CONTINUE TO BE COMMITTED TO OUR VARIOUS PROGRAMS IN EMERGENCY SERVICES, HEALTH, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND CONSUMER EDUCATION TO ASSIST AND PROTECT EVERY WESTCHESTER RESIDENT. WE CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, THOSE WHO NEED EXTRA SERVICES AND THOSE WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ABUSE. AND WE CONTINUE TO HAVE STRONG MANAGEMENT CONTROLS, MAKING US, ONCE AGAIN, THE ONLY TRIPLE A-RATED COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN NEW YORK STATE.

IN SPITE OF ALL THIS, WE FACE VERY CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES. WHILE WESTCHESTER IS STILL A GROWING AND VIBRANT COUNTY, OUR LATEST UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES ARE UP FROM AN AVERAGE OF 3.6% LAST YEAR TO 4.5%. (THIS IS THE SAME AS ALL OUR SURROUNDING COUNTIES.) WHILE NEW CONSTRUCTION IS STILL HAPPENING ACROSS THE COUNTY, MANY DEVELOPERS ARE WATCHING AND WAITING.

OUR NATION'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE HURTING OUR RESIDENTS. I SEE THE HIGH PRICE OF MILK IN SUPERMARKETS, AND THE INCREASED COSTS OF EATING OUT—EVEN AT PIZZERIAS. RISING UTILITY RATES AND GAS PRICES, MORTGAGE ISSUES AND HOME FORECLOSURES, COLLEGE DEBT, THE TIGHTENING OF CREDIT, AND THE SLOW-DOWN OF THE HOUSING MARKET---ALL THESE THINGS WEIGH HEAVILY ON MY MIND AND ON THE MINDS OF THE PUBLIC.

AND SO DOES THE BURDEN OF HIGH PROPERTY TAXES. I GET EMAILS AND LETTERS FROM PEOPLE ON FIXED INCOMES WHO SAY THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO REMAIN HERE IN WESTCHESTER. I KNOW THAT FAMILIES, WHO NEVER HAD A PROBLEM BEFORE, ARE HAVING TROUBLE PAYING THEIR MONTHLY BILLS. WE CANNOT KEEP GOING IN THIS DIRECTION. SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE.

I TESTIFIED RECENTLY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE COMMISSION ON PROPERTY TAX RELIEF AS DID LEGISLATORS KEN JENKINS AND JOSE ALVARADO. I URGED THE COMMISSION TO MAKE STATE MANDATE REFORM ITS TOP RECOMMENDATION TO THE GOVERNOR. I POINTED OUT THAT DESPITE THE WORSENING OF OUR STATE ECONOMY, STATE MANDATED COSTS CONTINUE TO BE OUT OF CONTROL.

THE ONLY WAY THERE WILL BE REAL PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR OUR RESIDENTS IS IF ALBANY DECLARES A MORATORIUM ON UNFUNDED MANDATES NOT ONLY IMPOSED, ON THE COUNTY, BUT ON OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS WELL. THERE MUST BE NO NEW MANDATES, NO EXPANSION OF CURRENT MANDATES AND NO CUTS IN STATE AID FOR MANDATED PROGRAMS. STATE GOVERNMENT MUST CHANGE THE WAY IT RELATES TO THE COUNTIES, MUNICIPALITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS. DECISIONS MUST BE MADE TO HELP LOCAL PROPERTY TAXPAYERS—NOT HURT THEM--AND ALL OF US MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. I KNOW THAT MAJORITY LEADER MARTY ROGOWSKY WHO HAS BEEN A STRONG ADVOCATE FOR MANDATE REFORM SHARES MY CONCERN.

COUNTIES ARE THE LOCAL ARM OF STATE GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE WHAT IT GIVE US—OR WHAT IT DOESN'T GIVE US. WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE STATE BUDGET. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS BUDGET INCLUDES A 2% CUT IN STATE FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS WE ARE MANDATED TO RUN. THIS TRANSLATES TO A LOSS OF UP TO \$5 MILLION DOLLARS. RATHER THAN TIGHTEN ITS OWN BELT AND REDUCE ITS MANDATES, THE GOVERNOR'S DIVISION OF BUDGET IS KEEPING THE SAME MANDATES, BUT IS CUTTING ITS OWN EXPENSES BY FORCING COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO PAY MORE.

IN 2004, I SAID "THERE MUST BE A COMMITMENT TO SOLVING THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEM OF UNFUNDED MANDATES. LOWERING PROPERTY TAXES BY GIVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES RELIEF MUST BE THE FIRST PRIORITY OF STATE GOVERNMENT." I REPEAT THAT CALL TONIGHT.

AT THE SAME TIME, I WANT TO COMMEND OUR REPRESENTATIVES IN THE STATE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY FOR TURNING BACK WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ADDITIONAL BURDEN ON OUR TAXPAYERS. THANKS TO THEIR ADVOCACY, THE COST SHIFTS THAT WERE ORIGINALLY PROPOSED BY THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED.

EVEN THOUGH COUNTY GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTS FOR LESS THAN 20% OF THE PROPERTY TAX BILL, WE HAVE BEEN ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION'S PROPERTY TAX ALLIANCE, A NETWORK OF SCHOOL, BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO ARE WORKING LOCALLY ON WAYS TO REDUCE PROPERTY TAXES. VICE CHAIR MIKE KAPLOWITZ IS ALSO ON THIS COMMITTEE AND OBVIOUSLY SHARES OUR CONCERN OVER THE BURDEN OF HIGH TAXES.

WE ALL PAY SCHOOL TAXES, TOWN, VILLAGE OR CITY TAXES, SOME PAY SPECIAL DISTRICT TAXES FOR FIRE PROTECTION, AND OF COURSE THERE ARE COUNTY TAXES. WHEN YOU PUT IT ALL TOGETHER, IT'S ONE BIG TAX BILL. AND ALL OF US NEED TO WORK IN UNISON TO REDUCE IT. THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE SHARED SERVICES AND LESS TURF ISSUES.

AT MY DIRECTION, OUR FINANCE DEPARTMENT HEADED BY COMMISSIONER KATHY THORSBERG HAS COME UP WITH NEW IDEAS FOR SHARED SERVICES. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHOSE COSTS ARE LOWERED---SCHOOLS OR COUNTY OR MUNICIPALITY—BECAUSE A SAVINGS FOR ONE, IS A SAVINGS ON THAT ONE BIG TAX BILL.

WE INTEND TO CREATE A NEW SHARED PROCUREMENT SERVICE, WHICH WILL SAVE TOWNS, CITIES, SCHOOL AND FIRE DISTRICTS TIME, ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS, AND ADVERTISING FEES ASSOCIATED WITH PREPARING BID DOCUMENTS. THERE WILL ALSO BE A COST SAVINGS ON ACTUAL PURCHASES DUE TO ECONOMIES OF SCALE. WE ARE WORKING ON A NEW WEBSITE TO PUBLISH CURRENT WESTCHESTER COUNTY CONTRACTS SO THAT ALL THE OTHER ENTITIES CAN ACCESS THEM. AND WE WILL HAVE A “CUSTOMER SERVICE” PERSON WHO WILL ASSIST OUR SCHOOLS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN RESEARCHING AND COMPILING COOPERATIVE CONTRACTS.

ANOTHER NEW INITIATIVE IS THE CREATION OF A LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT POOL THAT COULD CONSOLIDATE THE INVESTMENTS OF THESE DIFFERENT TAXING JURISDICTIONS TO GENERATE ADDITIONAL REVENUE FOR ALL BY AGGREGATING FUNDS TO GET A BETTER RATE OF RETURN.

OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS IN COORDINATION WITH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND PURCHASING IS PROMOTING ADDITIONAL SHARED SERVICES. COUNTY DATA WILL BE ON THE WEB TO HELP SCHOOL AND MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS SELECT FROM OUR ALREADY VETTED LISTS OF PROFESSIONALS LIKE ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS. THERE WILL ALSO BE INFORMATION TO HELP THEM PURCHASE VARIOUS ITEMS FROM GREEN CLEANING MATERIALS TO HYBRID CARS. THE COUNTY WILL PROVIDE AT NO COST, OR AT OUR COST, TRAFFIC ENGINEERING STUDIES, HIGHWAY SIGNAGE, AND THE SHARED USE OF VARIOUS FACILITIES.

AT THE SAME TIME, WE CONTINUE TO INSTITUTE NEW COST SAVING MEASURES IN ALL OUR DEPARTMENTS, REGARDLESS HOW SMALL. IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, TO SAVE STAFF TIME AND INMATE TRANSPORTATION COSTS, WE HAVE TELEMEDICINE WITH WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER, AND WE WILL SOON BEGIN VIDEO COURT CONFERENCING WITH THE MOUNT PLEASANT TOWN COURT. WE HOPE TO EXPAND THIS INITIATIVE TO OTHER MUNICIPALITIES FOR ADDITIONAL SAVINGS.

IN FINANCE, WE USE ELECTRONIC BIDDING, PAPERLESS CHECKS, AND VENDOR DIRECT WHICH TRANSFERS FUNDS ELECTRONICALLY SO THAT UP TO 10,000 VENDOR CHECKS, STAMPS, AND ENVELOPES A YEAR CAN BE ELIMINATED, ALSO REDUCING LABOR COSTS AND LOWERING BANK PROCESSING COSTS.

BY THE END OF THIS YEAR OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS WILL HAVE CONVERTED AT LEAST 14 VEHICLES TO RUN ON VEGETABLE OIL, WHICH IS NOT ONLY GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT ALSO WILL SAVE ABOUT \$25,000 ANNUALLY IN FUEL COSTS.

AT PLAYLAND, BY PURCHASING EIGHT LEASED OR REVENUE SHARED RIDES AND REDUCING EXPENSES, WE HAVE CUT THE TAX LEVY ALMOST BY HALF IN TWO YEARS.

COUNTY CLERK TIM IDONI HAS INSTITUTED A VARIETY OF COST SAVING MEASURES, SUCH AS THE ELECTRONIC FILING OF LEGAL PAPERS WHICH WHEN FULLY IMPLEMENTED WILL SAVE OVER A HALF MILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY.

LAST YEAR, I TOLD YOU ABOUT A LARGE-SCALE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE THAT THE COUNTY WAS POISED TO UNDERTAKE. SINCE THAT TIME, 17 COUNTY DEPARTMENTS HAVE GONE THROUGH THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A SYSTEM TO MEASURE THEIR OWN EFFECTIVENESS IN PROVIDING THE SERVICES WHICH MATTER MOST TO THE PUBLIC. AFTER THE REST OF THE DEPARTMENTS FINISH THE INITIAL PROCESS THIS YEAR, WE WILL BE ABLE TO REVIEW ELECTRONICALLY, ON AN ON-GOING BASIS, HOW THEY ALL MEASURE UP. THEIR PERFORMANCE WILL BE A VITAL FACTOR IN FUTURE BUDGETING DECISIONS.

I WANT TO BE ABLE TO STAND HERE EACH YEAR AND ASSURE YOU THAT YOU ARE GETTING THE BEST VALUE FOR YOUR TAX DOLLAR.

I HAVE SPOKEN TO SENIORS WHO HAVE BEEN TARGETED IN FINANCIAL SCAMS. I HAVE SPOKEN TO COLLEGE KIDS, EVEN TEENAGERS, WHO ARE DEEP IN CREDIT CARD DEBT AND CAN'T GET OUT. I KNOW THAT HOMEOWNERS, HAVING BEEN ENTICED BY EXOTIC LENDING SCHEMES, ARE NOW LOOKING AT THE HORROR OF FORECLOSURE. AND, I AM AWARE THAT MANY LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS FIND OPENING BANK ACCOUNTS INTIMIDATING. PERSONAL FINANCIAL EDUCATION IS

A NECESSITY IN TODAY'S WORLD, AND THE ABSENCE OF COORDINATED EFFORTS TO PROVIDE IT IS GLARING.

THEREFORE, I AM PROPOSING TO ADD A FINANCIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AS PART OF OUR OFFICE OF CONSUMER PROTECTION. BY PARTNERING WITH STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS, I HOPE WE CAN MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE FINANCIAL LIVES OF OUR RESIDENTS.

IN THIS VEIN, ON MONDAY, APRIL 14 AT THE COUNTY CENTER, I WILL CO-SPONSOR A PROGRAM WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL ANDREW CUOMO TO GIVE VALUABLE INFORMATION TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS ON WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW BEFORE TAKING OUT A COLLEGE LOAN. OVER 300 FAMILIES HAVE ALREADY SIGNED UP. WE EXPECT TO HIT 400.

IT IS A FACT THAT WHEN THE ECONOMY IS STRUGGLING, MORE PEOPLE RELY ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT. BOTH RESIDENTS AND EVEN BUSINESSES TEND TO COUNT MORE ON THE SERVICES AND INFORMATION WE PROVIDE—MANY WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING THAT IT'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT THAT'S PROVIDING THEM.

I AM NOT TALKING ABOUT PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS WHICH WE ALL KNOW PROVIDE A SAFETY NET FOR THOSE IN NEED. I AM TALKING ABOUT ALL THE OTHER THINGS WE DO THAT AFFECT THE LIVES OF OUR RESIDENTS—IN GOOD TIMES AND IN BAD.

TAKE CONSUMERS, FOR EXAMPLE. THESE ARE DANGEROUS TIMES FOR CONSUMERS AND THEY DEMAND AN AGGRESSIVE, FAST-ACTING CONSUMER PROTECTION AGENCY, ONE THAT IS OUT IN FRONT OF THE ISSUES. MOST CONSUMERS DON'T REALIZE THAT THEIR STRONGEST ADVOCATE IS OUR OFFICE OF CONSUMER PROTECTION, HEADED BY DIRECTOR GARY BROWN.

WHEN RECALLED TOYS WERE COMING RAPID-FIRE, I WANTED TO KNOW IF ANY WERE STILL ON SHELVES IN WESTCHESTER'S STORES. TIRELESS INSPECTORS FROM CONSUMER PROTECTION FANNED OUT ACROSS THE COUNTY TO TOY STORES, DEPARTMENT STORES, SUPERMARKETS, DOLLAR STORES, AND OTHER

RETAILERS. RECALLED ITEMS WERE FOUND IN 10% OF THE STORES CHECKED. THEY WERE THEN PULLED FROM THE SHELVES.

THEN CAME LEAD IN CHILDREN'S JEWELRY. KNOWING HOW HARMFUL LEAD IS AND EVEN THOUGH THERE WAS NO NATIONAL RECALL, I SENT OUR INSPECTORS, UNDERCOVER, TO DOLLAR STORES TO BUY SAMPLES. 70% OF THE ITEMS TESTED AT COUNTY LABS AND RESEARCH CONTAINED EXCESSIVE LEAD. THANKS TO OUR EFFORTS, THOSE STORES SUBSEQUENTLY REMOVED THE ITEMS, AND WE WARNED PARENTS NOT TO PURCHASE TOY JEWELRY FOR THEIR KIDS.

IN TROUBLED TIMES, WE HAVE TO BE ESPECIALLY VIGILANT WHEN IT COMES TO UNSCRUPULOUS CONTRACTORS—THOSE WHO PROMISE GOOD WORK FOR CHEAP PRICES THEN DO SHODDY WORK OR NONE AT ALL. IN FACT, COMPLAINTS AGAINST CONTRACTORS TOP THE CONSUMER DEPARTMENT'S LIST. TO PREVENT HOMEOWNERS FROM BECOMING VICTIMS, WE HAVE CRACKED DOWN ON UNLICENSED CONTRACTORS, CONDUCTING COUNTY-WIDE SWEEPS AT WORK SITES, AND EVEN GOING SO FAR AS TO ARREST 17 WHO SHOWED UP AT A UNDERCOVER "STING" HOUSE PREPARED TO MAKE MAJOR REPAIRS. EVEN LICENSED CONTRACTORS ARE CHECKED OUT---ENABLING CONSUMERS TO CALL THE DEPARTMENT TO FIND OUT IF THERE ARE ANY COMPLAINTS AGAINST THEM.

TAKING THE INITIATIVE ONCE AGAIN, THE DEPARTMENT LAUNCHED A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND INVESTIGATION OF OUTDATED FOOD ITEMS BEING SOLD IN SUPERMARKETS. SIXTY AREA MARKETS WERE CHECKED WITH DISTURBING RESULTS: AN AVERAGE OF 88 OUTDATED DAIRY ITEMS WERE FOUND PER STORE—ONE HAD 433. OTHERS HAD ALMOST AS MUCH. ONLY SIX HAD NONE AT ALL.

WE ADVERTISED THE FINDINGS, URGED CUSTOMERS TO ALWAYS CHECK THE "SELL-BY" DATE, AND WARNED FOOD STORES THAT THEY COULD BE FINED \$1,000 PER VIOLATION.

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION OFFICE COST TAXPAYERS JUST \$59,000 IN 2007, AND BROUGHT IN \$975,000 IN RESTITUTION FOR OUR RESIDENTS. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY THAT YOU CAN COUNT ON COUNTY

GOVERNMENT. AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH LEGISLATORS PETER HARCKHAM AND JOHN NONNA TO KEEP PROVING THAT POINT.

WE LIVE IN A COUNTY OF ALMOST ONE MILLION PEOPLE. EACH OF OUR 43 MUNICIPALITIES HAS A POLICE DEPARTMENT AND A FEW HAVE MORE THAN ONE FIRE DEPARTMENT. I DOUBT VERY MUCH IF THE PUBLIC KNOWS WHO TRAINS THESE PROFESSIONALS WHO KEEP THEM SAFE.

LAST YEAR, OUR DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES PROVIDED 111,000 HOURS OF TRAINING TO CAREER AND VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS IN 52 DEPARTMENTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY. THEY GOT SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION IN RESCUING PEOPLE FROM A BUILDING COLLAPSE, A TRENCH COLLAPSE, OR A PASSENGER TRAIN EMERGENCY. COURSES ALSO INCLUDED AIRCRAFT RESCUE AND FIREFIGHTING, MOTOR VEHICLE EXTRICATION, HAZARDOUS MATERIAL AND TERRORISM RESPONSE. IN ADDITION, OUR ACADEMY GRADUATED 34 NEW CAREER FIREFIGHTERS WHILE ALSO HOSTING THE YONKERS FIRE DEPARTMENT ACADEMY THAT GRADUATED ANOTHER 34.

TRAINING HAS BEEN ENHANCED BY THE NEW “LIVE BURN” ROOM IN THE TRAINING TOWER WHICH CAN WITHSTAND TEMPERATURES BETWEEN 800 AND 2,000 DEGREES. FIREFIGHTERS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, CAN EXTINGUISH REAL FIRES IN A TOWER SETTING, PREPARING THEM TO FIGHT FIRES IN HIGH RISE BUILDINGS NOW IN MANY OF OUR CITIES. WE ALSO HAVE A NEW “MASK CONFIDENCE BUILDING” TO TEACH RECRUITS WEARING HEAVY GEAR AND AIR MASKS HOW TO GAIN CONFIDENCE WHEN CRAWLING AND SEARCHING FOR VICTIMS IN TIGHT SPACES.

EVEN BEFORE 9-11, WE RECOGNIZED THAT TO SAVE LIVES WE NEEDED AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM THAT WOULD ENABLE ALL POLICE, FIRE, EMS AGENCIES AND HOSPITALS TO TALK TO EACH OTHER. NOTHING OF THIS MAGNITUDE HAD EVER BEEN UNDERTAKEN FOR FIRST RESPONDERS IN THIS COUNTY—IT WAS A BOLD PROJECT WITH A GREAT MANY CHALLENGES. LAST SEPTEMBER IT WENT LIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME. EVERY FIRE TRUCK, CHIEF’S CAR, AMBULANCE, POLICE HEADQUARTERS, HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM AND EVERY BEE LINE BUS CAN NOW COMMUNICATE. I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT WESTCHESTER HAS LED THE WAY IN COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY--- IT WILL NOT ONLY SAVE LIVES—IT WILL BETTER PROTECT OUR FIRST RESPONDERS IN AN EMERGENCY. MY CONGRATULATIONS TO THE

DEPARTMENTS OF EMERGENCY SERVICES, TRANSPORTATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR MAKING THIS HAPPEN.

THE COURSES OFFERED AT THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY POLICE ACADEMY CONTINUE TO ADD TO THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF POLICE OFFICERS IN ALL OUR MUNICIPALITIES. IN THIS WAY, IT PLAYS A KEY ROLE, BUT NOT A VISIBLE ONE, IN KEEPING THE RESIDENTS OF EVERY WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY SAFE AND SECURE.

LAST YEAR, THE ACADEMY GRADUATED 141 NEW RECRUITS WHO WERE HIRED BY WESTCHESTER'S CITY, TOWN AND VILLAGE POLICE DEPARTMENTS. THE 20-WEEK BASIC RECRUIT SCHOOL, WHICH IS PHYSICALLY DEMANDING AND ACADEMICALLY RIGOROUS, ENSURES THAT POLICE RECRUITS LEAVE THE ACADEMY FULLY PREPARED TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC.

THE POLICE ACADEMY ALSO OFFERS A WIDE ARRAY OF ONGOING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPERIENCED LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS. IN 2007, 189 COURSES INCLUDING COUNTER-TERRORISM, HOSTAGE NEGOTIATION, FORENSICS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILD ABUSE, ELDER ABUSE AND FIREARMS WERE GIVEN TO OVER 4,700 PROFESSIONALS. SPECIALIZED COURSES ARE ALSO OFFERED TO NEWLY PROMOTED FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS AND DETECTIVES TO GIVE THEM THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED IN THEIR NEW ROLES.

IN ADDITION TO THESE EFFORTS, WE CONTINUE TO LOOK AT HOW POLICE TRAINING CAN BE FURTHER ENHANCED. IN LIGHT OF THE TRAGEDY SURROUNDING THE DEATH OF DETECTIVE CHRISTOPHER RIDLEY, WE HAVE FORMED A PANEL OF ACADEMICS, LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALS AND A COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE TO REVIEW THE "USE OF FORCE" TRAINING OFFERED IN THE ACADEMY. THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE DUE IN LESS THAN 45 DAYS. ONCE AGAIN, ON BEHALF OF OUR COUNTY RESIDENTS, I OFFER MY PROFOUND CONDOLENCES TO THE RIDLEY FAMILY AS WELL AS TO THE MOUNT VERNON POLICE DEPARTMENT. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE ASSISTANCE OF LEGISLATOR LYNDON WILLIAMS WHO REPRESENTS MOUNT VERNON, BECAUSE NO ONE WANTS DETECTIVE RIDLEY'S DEATH TO BE IN VAIN.

EVERY DAY, OVER 400,000 CARS TRAVEL ON THE FOUR PARKWAYS THE COUNTY PATROLS. LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, I OFTEN SEE DRIVERS SPEEDING AND WONDER “WHERE ARE THE COPS”? THE ANSWER IS “ON THE JOB.” WHILE YOU MAY NOT REALIZE IT, OUR PARKWAY POLICE ARE DOING MORE THAN EVER BEFORE TO GET DISTRACTED, DRUNK, DRUGGED, AND ROAD-RAGED DRIVERS OFF THE ROADS. THE CRASH REDUCTION UNIT BEGAN LAST SEPTEMBER AND HAS REDUCED ACCIDENTS IN THE FOUR CRASH CONTROL ZONES BY 57%. DWI ARRESTS FOR 2007 TOTALED 543, A NEW RECORD, AND OVER 21,000 SUMMONSES WERE ISSUED MOSTLY FOR MOVING VIOLATIONS---THAT’S ALMOST 2,000 A MONTH. OUR COPS ARE OUT THERE 24/7 BUT IF YOU SEE SOMEONE DRIVING RECKLESSLY, CALL 911 AND ASK TO BE CONNECTED TO THE COUNTY POLICE—THEY’LL HANDLE IT. (BY THE WAY, NONE OF THE REVENUE FROM THESE TICKETS GOES TO THE COUNTY—IT GOES TO THE CITIES, TOWNS AND THE STATE.)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT HELPS SOLVE CRIMES. THAT’S WHY WE INSTITUTED THE \$1,000 REWARD PROGRAM FOR ILLEGAL GUNS. THAT’S WHY WE HAVE WARRANT WATCH ON OUR WEBSITE AND DEADBEAT DAD ADS IN THE NEWSPAPER. NOW WE HAVE SOMETHING ELSE: A NEW NON-EMERGENCY TEXT MESSAGE TIP LINE. THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY IS ACCEPTING TEXT, PHOTOGRAPHS AND SHORT VIDEO CLIPS FROM PEOPLE WITH INFORMATION OR IMAGES OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY. YOU WILL BE HEARING MORE ABOUT THIS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

THOSE WHO THINK ABOUT THE COUNTY’S DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY WOULD PROBABLY SAY THAT OUR POLICE FIND THE BAD GUYS, MAKE ARRESTS AND FIGHT CRIME. SOME MAY EVEN BE AWARE THAT WE HAVE A BOMB SQUAD THAT’S SENT TO SCHOOLS EVERY TIME THERE IS A SUPPOSED THREAT AND AN INTERNET CRIMES UNIT THAT TRACKS DOWN PEDOPHILES WHO PRAY ON OUR CHILDREN.

NOW THERE’S ANOTHER NEW WAY OUR RESIDENTS CAN COUNT ON THE COUNTY POLICE.

THERE ARE OVER 18,000 ALZHEIMER’S PATIENTS IN WESTCHESTER. A CAREGIVER’S GREATEST NIGHTMARE IS FINDING THAT A RELATIVE HAS WANDERED OFF, NOT KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE ALL HEARD HEART-BREAKING STORIES ABOUT A FAMILY MEMBER WHO

DISAPPEARED. THE HAPPY ENDING ONLY COMES WHEN THE PERSON IS FOUND, SOME DAYS LATER IN FAR OFF PLACES---BUT THAT IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE.

WHEN I HEARD ABOUT PROJECT LIFESAVER, A PROGRAM THAT COULD ELECTRONICALLY TRACK SENIORS WITH DEMENTIA, I KNEW IT WOULD BRING PEACE OF MIND TO A GROWING NUMBER OF CAREGIVERS. THIS FREE PILOT PROGRAM, A PARTNERSHIP WITH COUNTY POLICE, THE DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND THE HEBREW HOME FOR THE AGED, WILL BE OFFERED TO 100 SENIORS WHO LIVE WITH CAREGIVERS. EACH SENIOR WILL BE GIVEN A WRISTBAND THAT EMITS AN AUTOMATIC TRACKING SIGNAL EVERY SECOND. IF HE OR SHE SHOULD WANDER OFF, THE CAREGIVER WILL CONTACT PUBLIC SAFETY'S SPECIALIZED SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM WHO WILL USE THE LOCATOR TRACKING SYSTEM TO SWIFTLY FIND THE MISSING SENIOR. TRAINING IS BEGINNING NOW AND WE EXPECT TO OFFER THE PROGRAM IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. I AM SURE THAT LEGISLATOR BERNICE SPRECKMAN WILL BE RIGHT THERE TO ASSIST WITH THIS INITIATIVE.

WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS, WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE AWARE OF IT, INTERACT WITH COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER EVERY DAY. A SUDDEN REALIZATION FOR MANY CAME THIS YEAR WHEN THE PUBLIC LEARNED WE HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THEIR GARBAGE.

IN JANUARY WE CREATED THE FAMOUS OOPS STICKER. WE HAD BEEN STUCK FOR YEARS WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF RECYCLING---ABOUT 47%--HIGHER THAN THE STATE AVERAGE BUT NOT HIGH ENOUGH FOR US. SO WE EMBARKED ON A MASSIVE CAMPAIGN TO EDUCATE OUR RESIDENTS, PRIVATE HAULERS, MUNICIPALITIES, SCHOOLS AND BUSINESSES THAT RECYCLABLES HAD TO BE SEPARATED OUT FROM THE GARBAGE, OR THE GARBAGE WOULD NOT GET PICKED UP. WELL, 15 HUNDRED PHONE CALLS LATER, THE INITIAL SHOCK HAS WORN OFF, AND I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT FOR THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THIS YEAR, OUR RECYCLING HAS INCREASED BY 23% OVER THE SAME PERIOD IN 2007 AND GARBAGE COLLECTION HAS DECREASED BY 13%.

THIS EFFORT IS JUST ONE PART OF OUR STRATEGY TO IMPROVE OUR ENVIRONMENT. IN 2007, OUR MOBILE SHREDDER TRAVELED THE COUNTY ENABLING 6000 RESIDENTS TO SHRED THEIR PERSONAL DOCUMENTS WHICH HELPED PREVENT IDENTITY THEFT AND, AT THE SAME TIME, RECYCLED 140

TONS OF PAPER. THIS YEAR, WE WILL INTRODUCE A LARGER SHEDDER TO MANAGE THE UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND FOR THIS SERVICE.

AND, OVER 2500 RESIDENTS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS YEAR'S FIRST TWO HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING WEEKENDS, BRINGING PLASTIC BAGS AND EXPIRED OR UNUSED MEDICATIONS---ADDED ITEMS THAT WE ARE NOW RECYCLING. I WANT TO THANK LEGISLATOR BILL BURTON FOR HIS EFFORTS IN PASSING LEGISLATION I SUBMITTED TO REQUIRE LARGE RETAIL STORES TO TAKE BACK AND RECYCLE PLASTIC BAGS. AND, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE WESTCHESTER-ROCKLAND SOCIETY OF PHARMACISTS, OUR PARTNERS, ON THIS INITIATIVE TO PROPERLY DISPOSE OF MEDICATIONS.

SOME MAY THINK THAT THESE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS ARE UNIMPORTANT. TO ME, THEY SYMBOLIZE A VITAL CALL TO ACTION. GLOBAL WARMING IS NOT TRIVIAL, AND EVERYONE IN THIS COUNTY HAS A PART TO PLAY.

THIS PAST FEBRUARY, AT A FULL DAY'S CONFERENCE, I UNVEILED THE COUNTY'S GLOBAL WARMING ACTION PLAN, THE RESULT OF ONE YEAR OF EXHAUSTIVE WORK BY A TASK FORCE OF 34 REPRESENTATIVES FROM GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, EDUCATION AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY. THEY WERE ASSISTED BY 70 OTHER VOLUNTEERS. SOME ARE HERE THIS EVENING AND I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEM AND THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE TASK FORCE: SUPERVISOR REESE BERMAN OF NORTH CASTLE AND OUR OWN ROBERT FUNICELLO. THE PLAN, WHICH IS ON OUR WEBSITE, CALLS FOR EVERY RESIDENT, BUSINESS, SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE ITS CARBON FOOTPRINT BY 20% BY 2015. AND THE PLAN TELLS YOU HOW TO DO IT.

MAKE NO MISTAKE. GLOBAL WARMING WILL NOT BE SOLVED IF WE SIT BACK AND WAIT FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT TO DO SOMETHING. IT WILL BE SOLVED IF WE MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS, IF WE CHANGE OUR HABITS, IF WE CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRODUCTS. WE MUST ALL UNDERSTAND THAT THE ROAD WE PAVE TODAY MEANS A PLANET SAVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANYONE SAY--- WHAT CAN I ALONE ACCOMPLISH? THE ANSWER IS SIMPLY, YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH, AND IF YOU ARE A PARENT OF AN AUTISTIC CHILD, YOU KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO FIND THE RIGHT RESOURCES. THE NATIONAL STATISTIC OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM IS A STAGGERING 1 IN 150. BASED ON THIS, WE ESTIMATE THAT UP TO 6000 INDIVIDUALS IN WESTCHESTER HAVE AN AUTISTIC DIAGNOSIS. IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, THERE ARE 828 CHILDREN DIAGNOSED.

PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN SPEND A LIFETIME OF ENERGY AND EFFORT, NOT COUNTING THE HUGE EMOTIONAL AND FINANCIAL TOLL, TRYING TO FIND THE RIGHT PROGRAMS, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT TO HELP THEIR YOUNGSTER TO BE EDUCATED AND THEIR OLDER CHILD TO BE INDEPENDENT. AUTISM AFFECTS NOT ONLY FAMILIES, BUT THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. THERE MUST BE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE. NO ONE KNOWS THIS BETTER THAN LEGISLATOR TOM ABINANTI WHO IS SUCH A STRONG ADVOCATE.

I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT OUR DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH HAS INITIATED A NEW APPROACH THAT WOULD EXPAND AND ENHANCE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM. BECAUSE THE NEED DOES NOT LESSEN AS CHILDREN GET OLDER, WE MUST MAKE SURE THERE ARE PROGRAMS TO HELP CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, YOUNG ADULTS AND ADULTS.

WE ARE ABOUT TO CONVENE THE COUNTY'S FIRST AUTISM ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMPRISED OF PARENTS, PROFESSIONALS AND EDUCATORS KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE FIELD. NOT ONLY WOULD THIS 14 MEMBER COMMITTEE ASSIST THE DEPARTMENT IN IDENTIFYING RESOURCES AND FUNDING MECHANISMS THAT WOULD EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES, IT WOULD ALSO POINT OUT WHERE THERE ARE LARGE GAPS IN SERVICES. A CLEARINGHOUSE OF WESTCHESTER PROGRAMS WILL BE PUT ON OUR WEBSITE AS A RESEARCH GUIDE FOR THOSE SEEKING SERVICES. AND SINCE WANDERING OFF IS ONE OF THE GREAT FEARS OF PARENTS WITH AUTISTIC CHILDREN, WE ARE RESEARCHING TO SEE IF IT'S FEASIBLE TO PROVIDE A BRACELET TRACKING SYSTEM SIMILAR TO OUR NEW ALZHEIMER'S INITIATIVE. MEMBERS OF THIS NEW COMMITTEE ARE HERE TONIGHT, AND I THANK THEM FOR SPEARHEADING THIS EFFORT.

WHILE SOME PEOPLE MAY NEVER TRAVEL ON THEM, MORE THAN 50,000 WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS COUNT ON OUR BEE LINE BUSES TO GO TO SCHOOL,

COLLEGE, OR WORK, AND TO GET TO OUR PARKS AND ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS. OUR BUSINESSES COUNT ON THE BEE LINE FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES AND OUR SHOPS COUNT ON OUR BUSES FOR CUSTOMERS. WITH THE ADDITION OF METROCARD LAST YEAR, OVER 31 MILLION PASSENGERS, A 6.3% INCREASE OVER 2006, RODE THE BEE LINE. ANOTHER 5,600 PEOPLE TAKE PARATRANSIT FOR DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE.

WHILE OUR BUSES CURRENTLY USE THE MOST ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND FUEL, ALL FUTURE PURCHASES WILL USE THE MORE ADVANCED HYBRID DIESEL ELECTRIC TECHNOLOGY TO FURTHER REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT. AND TO IMPROVE ON-TIME PERFORMANCE, A NEW AUTOMATED LOCATER SYSTEM IS UNDERWAY WHICH WILL ALSO PROVIDE NEXT STOP ANNOUNCEMENTS BOTH INSIDE AND ON THE EXTERIOR OF THE BUSES.

A TRIP TO THE DOCTOR IS NOT SOMETHING MOST OF US LOOK FORWARD TO. EVEN IF IT'S JUST A ROUTINE CHECK-UP, WE OFTEN FEEL NERVOUS SO WE DON'T ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. AND, IF A VISIT IS FOR A MEDICAL PROBLEM, VERY OFTEN WE DO NOT FULLY PROCESS WHAT THE DOCTOR SAYS. WE HAVE THE BEST HEALTH CARE AVAILABLE RIGHT HERE IN WESTCHESTER, AND I WANT TO BE SURE EVERY RESIDENT TAKES ADVANTAGE OF IT.

PARTNERING WITH THE WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER AND INCLUDING OVER 60 PHYSICIANS, HOSPITAL AND HEALTHCARE EXECUTIVES, WE LAUNCHED "IT'S MY HEALTHCARE," A MULTI-MEDIA EDUCATION CAMPAIGN THAT WILL REACH OVER 10,000 RESIDENTS THIS YEAR. OUR BROCHURES AND 12-MINUTE VIDEO, WHICH ARE ON OUR WEBSITE AND IN DOCTORS' OFFICES AND HOSPITALS THROUGHOUT WESTCHESTER, ARE MEDICAL PRIMERS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR AND HOW TO SIFT THROUGH COMPLEX INFORMATION. WHAT SEEMS SO SIMPLE, OFTEN, IS NOT.

LAST YEAR I ANNOUNCED THE RESULTS OF THE HEALTH DISPARITIES TASK FORCE SAYING WE WOULD PUT TOGETHER PROGRAMS THAT WOULD HELP REDUCE THESE DISPARITIES AMONG BLACKS AND LATINOS. THESE DISPARITIES START BEFORE BIRTH, LAST A LIFETIME AND LEAD TO A SHORTER LIFESPAN.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS WHO ARE HERE TONIGHT: UNION BAPTIST CHURCH IN GREENBURGH, MOUNT VERNON NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH

CENTER, HUDSON RIVER HEALTH CARE, HISPANIC RESOURCE CENTER, CENTRO HISPANO AND EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY OF THE TARRYTOWNS, MORE THAN A THOUSAND RESIDENTS HAD FIRST-TIME HEALTH SCREENINGS. MORE ADULTS LEARNED THEY HAD DIABETES AND OTHER CHRONIC DISEASES AND ARE NOW GETTING THE TREATMENT THEY NEED.

EXPERTS FEEL THAT ONE MAJOR WAY TO REDUCE DISPARITIES IN MINORITY HEALTHCARE IS TO HAVE MORE MINORITY PHYSICIANS. SO WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO GO INTO THE MEDICAL PROFESSION. THEREFORE, THIS FALL WE WILL SPONSOR WESTCHESTER'S FIRST MINORITY HEALTH CAREER CONFERENCE, DRAWING HUNDREDS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS. AMONG OTHER THINGS, STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT DIFFERENT HEALTH CAREERS FROM MINORITY PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS AS WELL AS HOW TO BE A COMPETITIVE APPLICANT AND GET FINANCIAL AID FROM COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICERS. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH LEGISLATOR LOIS BRONZ ON THIS INITIATIVE.

OUR QUALITY OF LIFE IS WHAT MAKES WESTCHESTER SO DESIRABLE, AND NOTHING ADDS MORE TO IT THAN OUR PARKS DEPARTMENT. OVER HALF OUR RESIDENTS HAVE WALKED, HIKE OR BIKE OUR 200 MILES OF TRAILS AND ABOUT 300,000 WENT TO OUR POOLS AND BEACHES LAST SUMMER. IN FACT, ALMOST THREE-QUARTERS OF ALL WESTCHESTER HOUSEHOLDS HAVE USED ONE OR MORE OF OUR PARKS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, INCLUDING 37,000 PEOPLE WHO BIKE ON BICYCLE SUNDAYS. THIS YEAR, BY THE WAY, WE ARE EXPANDING THE PROGRAM TO ALLOW BABY STROLLERS AND THOSE WHO JUST WANT TO WALK OR JOG.

EACH YEAR, IT HAS BEEN MY SAD DUTY TO REMIND OUR RESIDENTS THAT THE WAR IN IRAQ CONTINUES TO TOUCH FAMILIES HERE AT HOME, IN THE MOST GRIEVOUS AND PERSONAL WAY. STAFF SERGEANT COURTNEY HOLLINSWORTH OF YONKERS WAS KILLED LAST SEPTEMBER WHEN INSURGENTS ATTACKED HIS UNIT. I OFFER THIS COUNTY'S HEARTFELT SYMPATHY TO COURTNEY'S PARENTS MR. AND MRS. COAXUM, HIS GRANDMOTHER MRS. HOLLINSWORTH AND HIS AUNT AND UNCLE MR. AND MRS. CORPAS—ALL OF WHOM ARE HERE THIS EVENING.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT, AS A NATION, WE DO NOT DO ENOUGH FOR OUR VETERANS. THAT'S WHY I HAVE BEEN LOBBYING THE VETERANS

ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A VETERANS VILLAGE AT MONTROSE. A MODEL FOR SERVICES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THE VILLAGE WOULD INCLUDE AFFORDABLE AND MARKET RATE HOUSING, RECREATION, SHOPS, BUSES—PLUS MEDICAL AND NURSING HOME CARE ALL DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR OUR VETERANS—OF ANY AGE. I WANT TO THANK CHAIRMAN BILL RYAN FOR BEING MY PARTNER IN LEADING THIS VERY IMPORTANT AND CHALLENGING PROJECT.

APPROXIMATELY 20,000 COMBAT VETERANS CURRENTLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR PROGRAMS TO REDUCE THEIR PROPERTY TAXES. THANKS TO YOUR BOARD, APPROXIMATELY 20,000 MORE WHO SERVED IN THE COLD WAR WILL NOW BE GIVEN THE SAME OPPORTUNITY. I COMMEND YOUR ACTIONS AND THE HARD WORK OF LEGISLATORS VITO PINTO AND JIM MAISANO WHO PROMOTED AND SUPPORTED THIS EFFORT.

WHEN IT COMES TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS SHOULD KNOW THEY CAN COUNT ON THE COUNTY'S EFFORTS TO REDUCE UNDERAGE DRINKING WITH VARIED PROGRAMS THAT REACH OVER 100,000 SCHOOL KIDS EACH YEAR. TWO YEARS AGO WE BEGAN A MULTI-FACETED PROGRAM TO REDUCE GANG VIOLENCE—A PROGRAM THAT HAS REACHED OVER 60,000 YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS. WE CURRENTLY PROVIDE SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE TO OVER 3,000 CHILDREN, AND OVER 13,000 PARENTS ARE NOW PAYING CHILD SUPPORT THANKS TO THE AWARD-WINNING EFFORTS OF OUR DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

THE INFORMATION DISSEMINATED BY OUR CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM ON THE DANGERS OF BABY WALKERS, CO-SLEEPING WITH INFANTS, AND UNSAFE INFANT PILLOWS HAS DONE MUCH TO EDUCATE PARENTS TO REDUCE CHILD TRAGEDIES. BOTH DISTRICT ATTORNEY JANET DiFIORE AND I AGREE THAT AS A RESULT OF THE UNIQUE PUBLIC ACTIONS OF THIS TEAM, WESTCHESTER IS WAY AHEAD OF THE REST OF THE COUNTRY WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN.

THIS ADMINISTRATION BELIEVES IN SECOND CHANCES. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE DEVELOPED A NEW PROGRAM TO GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE BAD CHOICES A REASON TO CHANGE. USING A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT AND A HEALTHY DOSE OF FEAR, THE COUNTY'S PROBATION, PUBLIC SAFETY AND LABS AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENTS HAVE CREATED A REALITY EXPERIENCE

AT THE MORGUE. WE CALL IT “SECOND CHANCES.” IT’S AN HONEST AND BRUTAL LOOK AT DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURY THAT RESULT WHEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF DRINKING AND DRIVING GO FAR BEYOND WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPECT. THE PROGRAM IS EXPECTED TO START THIS SUMMER WITH YOUNG OFFENDERS 16-19 CURRENTLY ON PROBATION. ULTIMATELY, WE PLAN TO OFFER THE EXPERIENCE TO ALL HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS BEFORE AN UNFORESEEN TRAGEDY RUINS THEIR LIVES...OR SOMEONE ELSE’S.

IT WAS JUST ONE YEAR AGO, WHEN I TOURED MANY OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS THAT WERE DEALT A CATASTROPHIC BLOW FROM FLOODING. I SAW HOMES AND BUSINESSES THAT WERE DEVASTATED; FAMILIES DAZED WITH WORRY ABOUT WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO DO. THE FLOOD SUMMIT I CONVENED WAS A WAKE-UP CALL TO OUR COMMUNITIES THAT WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO LESSEN THE PROBLEMS.

I AM GRATEFUL TO LEGISLATOR JUDY MYERS FOR HER LEADERSHIP ON THIS ISSUE AND TO YOUR ENTIRE BOARD WHO SUPPORTED MY REQUEST FOR \$50 MILLION DOLLARS OVER FIVE YEARS IN CAPITAL FUNDING SO WE CAN WORK WITH OUR HARD HIT MUNICIPALITIES. SEVERAL HAVE ALREADY SUBMITTED APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING, AND OUR FLOOD MITIGATION TASK FORCE IS WORKING WITH EACH ONE TO DETERMINE HOW BEST TO MOVE FORWARD. I WANT TO THANK THE MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE AND CHAIRMAN PETER ESCHWEILER FOR DEVOTING SO MUCH TIME AND EFFORT TO THIS INITIATIVE.

WHILE WE ARE OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH WESTCHESTER TODAY, WE MUST HAVE A VISION FOR THE FUTURE. HOW WILL OUR COMMUNITIES GROW AND CHANGE? USING THE LATEST WEBSITE TECHNOLOGY, WESTCHESTER 2025 WAS DEVELOPED, AN EXCITING PLANNING TOOL THAT OPENS A NEW VISTA FOR COUNTY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS. THIS INVOLVES MAKING COMMUNITIES LIVABLE FOR SENIORS, ENACTING GLOBAL WARMING, SMART GROWTH, AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES, REVIEWING LAND USE AND FLOOD CONTROL MEASURES,—ALL WHILE MAINTAINING AN INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY’S CHARACTER. I WANT TO THANK THE PLANNING BOARD CHAIR CHERYL LEWY AND THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD AND STAFF FOR THEIR ENERGY AND IDEAS.

TWO MONTHS AGO, WE WERE NAMED ONE OF THE WORLD’S “TOP SEVEN” INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES OF THE YEAR BY THE INTELLIGENT COMMUNITY

FORUM, AN INTERNATIONAL THINK TANK. THIS PUTS WESTCHESTER IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER PROGRESSIVE FINALISTS IN SCOTLAND, CANADA, SOUTH KOREA, ESTONIA AND TWO OTHER PLACES IN THE UNITED STATES. THE WINNER WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEXT MONTH, BUT OUR REPUTATION AS A LEADER IS ALREADY WIDESPREAD AND RESPECTED.

THIS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT RECOGNIZES ALL WE HAVE DONE: THE CREATION OF THE TELECOM NETWORK TO FOSTER ECONOMIC GROWTH, OUR SUSTAINABILITY AND VARIOUS “GREEN” INITIATIVES TO HELP FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE, AND OUR FAR-REACHING USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO KEEP OUR RESIDENTS SAFE AND PROTECTED. OUR INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN MEASURED IN AN INTERNATIONAL ARENA. NOT ONLY WERE WE JUDGED ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS BUT ALSO ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY OUR PARTNERS—INCLUDING OUR COLLEGES, SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND PRIVATE SECTOR FIRMS. WORKING TOGETHER, WE HAVE MADE OUR COUNTY A MODEL—BOTH NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY.

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR PRESENTATION TO THE INTELLIGENT COMMUNITY FORUM WAS OUR NEWLY REDESIGNED WEBSITE.... WESTCHESTERGOV.COM WAS DRAMATICALLY REVAMPED LAST MAY TO MAKE IT MORE ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE TO OUR RESIDENTS. OUR SITE RECEIVES MORE THAN 300,000 VISITS A MONTH OR ABOUT 11,000 A DAY AND IS THE PLACE TO GO FOR ALL COUNTY INFORMATION.

ON A DAILY BASIS, PEOPLE GO TO WESTCHESTERGOV.COM TO FIND A LICENSED HOME IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTOR, TO LOOK FOR A JOB, TO FIND A BUS ROUTE, OR GET DIRECTIONS TO OUR PARKS. THEY USE THE WEBSITE TO SIGN UP FOR EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION OR TO GET THE LATEST QUICK NEWS ON A PARTICULAR INITIATIVE. WE HAVE SO MUCH—AND WE CONTINUE TO ADD MORE.

BESIDES THE INTERNET, WE ALL KNOW THAT FILM IS A MOST POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM. SO IN OUR EFFORTS TO REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC, WE PRODUCED A FILM TO SHOW THAT COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS, FRANKLY, MORE THAN A YEARLY TAX BILL; IT IS AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE THAT CAN NURTURE, INSPIRE, SUPPORT, AND PROVIDE SERVICES FOR EVERYONE.

HERE IS A BRIEF “COMING ATTRACTION” OF CHESTER WEST: A HOME-GROWN PRODUCTION—WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND EDITED BY OUR COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE AND STARRING OUR COUNTY EMPLOYEES—ALL OF WHOM DONATED THEIR TALENT. IT WILL ENTERTAIN YOU, BUT OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS A MORE SERIOUS PURPOSE BEHIND IT.

(FILM SHOWS)

HOPEFULLY YOU GOT THE MESSAGE. WHILE THE FILM IS A SPOOF, IT REALLY FOCUSES ON OUR VAST ARRAY OF COUNTY PROGRAMS—THAT EVERYONE IN WESTCHESTER CAN COUNT ON. WE ARE HERE TO KEEP YOU SAFE. WE ARE HERE TO KEEP YOU HEALTHY. WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT. AND, WE ARE HERE TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR CHILDREN HAVE A FUTURE THEY CAN BE PROUD OF.

I AM PROUD OF WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED AND WHAT WE WILL ACCOMPLISH IN THE YEARS AHEAD. WE HAVE A GOVERNMENT THAT’S HONEST, FORWARD-THINKING AND COST-EFFECTIVE. BUT WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL IS THAT WE ARE A GOVERNMENT OF PARTNERS—YOUR BOARD, THE BUSINESS, EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITIES, THE NON-PROFIT AGENCIES, AND OUR VOLUNTEERS.

WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN THE PAST 11 YEARS, AND WE KNOW THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AHEAD. BUT BY CONTINUING TO WORK TOGETHER, THE PATH TO EVEN GREATER PROGRESS IS BEFORE US.

THANK YOU AND GOOD NIGHT.