

REORGANIZATION MEETING SPEECH
MAYOR ROBERT J. SEADER
1 JANUARY 2012

"The Year in Review and a Look to the Future"

I thank you all for joining us today, this first day of a new year, and, I predict, the first day in what will prove to be a great year for the Borough of Dunellen.

2011 was an eventful, earth-shattering year for Dunellen and I am sure that 2012 will be even more momentous, though I sincerely hope in more productive and less climactic ways.

I congratulate Kenneth Bayer on his re-election to the Council and Mark Bieniek, who was elected to his own first full term. I think your father would be proud of the job you are doing on the Council. I look forward to working with you and all the members of the Dunellen Municipal Council.

I want to speak bluntly to you in our audience: We face enormous challenges in the coming months and years. The nation's economy has not yet turned around and governments, large and small, are looked upon as the enemy. We hear the constant cry from talking heads and so-called leaders in Washington and Trenton: downsize, share, less is better, make do with what you already have.

To this I respond, and I think I speak for the entire governing body when I say, “The Borough of Dunellen does not shy away from our obligations, nor do we shirk from our responsibilities to our residents.

“Over the past three years, the borough has reduced its work force by six full-time employees; our operating budget has shrunk by 20%; and we have instituted new shared or contracted services for dispatch, fire prevention, and animal control. This adds up to an annual savings of \$200,000 each and every year.

Our guiding principles are fair and open government and our primary concern is the welfare of the people who have elected us.”

Looking back over the past twelve months, we have all experienced some low points of tragedy and bereavement. Many of us have lost family members, loved ones and friends, taken from us all too soon. Such personal losses take a terrible toll, and the fact that death is inevitable does not make its coming any easier to bear when it does.

Also, the ravages of nature in 2011 affected all of us in town. The list is amazing to recite: floods, hurricanes, freak snowstorms, and even an earthquake. We had downed trees, loss of power for days on end, basements inundated by water, streets closed, property and homes destroyed.

Yet I believe that all these occurrences that have conspired to challenge our very existence have not daunted our spirit to survive and to flourish. Quite the contrary! Even in the midst of disaster, the people of Dunellen came together to show they are united in their compassion and determined in their courage to overcome whatever difficulties lay in our paths. Let me provide just one example that I believe embodies that which makes Dunellen great: during Hurricane Irene, when the power went out and the waters from our brooks and streams flooded the streets and basements, the brave men and women of our community, both professional and volunteer, both ordinary citizen and next door neighbor, joined to help one another. Our Office of Emergency Management remained on duty for five full days and nights directing our fire and rescue teams to the aid of the hurricane's victims, bringing them food and clothing and taking them to shelters; neighbors lent neighbors generators to combat the rising waters and took in their friends who suddenly found themselves homeless. I am very grateful to all of you.

We have much to be proud of as we begin a new year, and I'd like to share a few of our other highlights with you.

The new light poles on North Avenue have really made a difference in our downtown. And aren't the holiday banners and wreathes great to look at? The stadium lights in Columbia Park have transformed our football season. What a

wonderful sight it was to watch our home-town team again prove that we may be just a small town, but our guts and determination make us giants. Go Destroyers!

Here are a few other infrastructure accomplishments: Front Street and Fairview Avenue were paved and improved, brooks and sewer lines were cleaned out, and manhole covers were replaced. Maybe the project I am most pleased with is the paving of Jefferson Avenue. This was accomplished only after literally years of negotiations with the City of Plainfield and Middlesex County. If there is a lesson to be learned from this, it is that persistence really can pay off.

Another wonderful example of continual application and quiet hard work is the borough's purchase of the property at 500 Mountainview Terrace. This was done in part with help from a Middlesex County Open Space grant. We have plans to preserve this land for recreation and education, including bike and walking paths, and a possible site for a Dunellen Historical Museum or borough offices.

In 2011, downtown businesses grew in some really interesting ways. Right across the street is the Lily Yip Table Tennis Academy, a world-class training facility for a growing sport, led by two-time Olympic champion Lily Yip. A new medical complex is being built on the site of the old Taylor Rental business. And Roxy and Dukes, a new restaurant and theatre experience, entertains people from across the region with highly professional shows, concerts, and performances.

All borough departments continued their high level of public service.

In addition to their regular duties, the Department of Public Works re-coated the tennis courts in Columbia Park themselves, saving the borough over \$20,000. And the DPW did an outstanding job preparing for the rain and snowstorms, and then cleaning up afterward.

Our Fire Department and Rescue Squads are manned with well-trained and enthusiastic volunteers who devote hundreds of hours each year to ensure the safety of our residents. Both organizations have the Council's full support. Once again, in October, the Fire Department hosted an Open House that was attended by hundreds of excited children. And, the Department and the Squad co-sponsored the Annual Dunellen Street Fair in September. By all accounts, it was a great Street Fair and we all look forward to it next year.

The Dunellen Public Library under the direction of Joan Henry continues to be an invaluable resource to our community. It circulated over 39,000 items in 2011 and as a cooperative member of the Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium loans thousands of items to out of towners, as well as enabling Dunellen residents to borrow from over 30 regional libraries. The library sponsored or hosted 408 programs for adults and children in 2011, and the public computers were used more than 22,000 times. Much thanks go to the Friends of the Library whose fund raising supplements the book and program budgets.

The Recreation Department had another outstanding year. Director Chris Tarver supervised a score of sports and fitness programs, ran another successful year of "Summer Camp Find Nothing to Do," sponsored a terrific Summer Olympics program in Columbia Park and gave his full support to the Senior Citizen Club.

Your municipal government serves the residents of our borough with enthusiasm and professional competence. On this re-organization day, I would like to acknowledge the men and women of the Tax Office, Tax Assessor's Office, Municipal Court, Construction Office, Registrar's Office, Code Enforcement, Finance Office, Clerk's and administrative offices, Police Department, Fire Department, Rescue Squad, the Planning Board, Recreation Commission, Shade Tree Commission, Parking Authority, school crossing guards, and all our professional experts including our borough attorney, bond counsel, engineers and planners, and sewer operator. Like a gigantic mosaic that is made up of hundreds of separate yet coordinated pieces, when you put them all together they make a wonderful picture of a dedicated and progressive government that calls itself the Borough of Dunellen.

I would also like to thank the many service organizations who enhance the quality of life for all our residents: the Dunellen-Green Brook Rotary Club sponsored its month-long Pasta Festival at the Dunellen Hotel in April and a

Classic Car Show in the Skinner Plaza parking lot in June. The Dunellen Education Foundation held another great 5-K run. Community Involved continued its clean ups of North Avenue and the Rail Road Embankments. The Memorial Day Parade brought out hundreds of marchers and Veteran's Day was appropriately recognized at a solemn ceremony in Washington Park. I am grateful to the American Legion, Veteran's of Foreign Wars, Knights of Columbus, the Lion's Club, and the Boys and Girl Scouts for all they do to enhance the quality of life for all the people in our community.

Dunellen is truly a volunteer community and we could not exist without all these people.

I would like to conclude this portion of my annual address with some words about Gerard Cappella. Yesterday, Gerry retired as Dunellen's Chief of Police. He came here in 1986 as a patrolman, and worked himself up the ladder of responsibility to sergeant, then lieutenant, then as our chief in 2006. All this time, he has been a pillar supporting his department and the residents of Dunellen. Gerry is experienced, compassionate, generous, and the model for what I will always consider to be the ultimate police officer. But even more important to me is that Gerry is my friend. When he walks through those doors at the end of this re-organization day, nothing will be the same again. Gerry, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you and say, "You will be missed."

Finally, I must thank Karen, Bobby and Kelly Seader—my family. Without their support and understanding, I could not be speaking to you here today.

In conclusion, I predict that the year 2012 will be one of the most important in the history of Dunellen. As I walk about town, I feel an excitement in the air. Residents feel safer. The business climate is heating up. Community spirit is on the rise. Wonderful things are coming. I am pleased, grateful, and privileged to share Dunellen's great future with all of you. Thank you and Happy New Year!