

MUNROE FALLS PARK BOARD VETERANS MEMORIAL BRICK FUNDRAISER

The Munroe Falls Park Board is proud to announce the 2019 Veterans Memorial Renovation Fundraiser. The memorial, located next to City Hall is celebrating its 30th year. You can honor a veteran you know or love by purchasing a personalized brick today and become part of the legacy.

- Honor your family name
- Highlight service accomplishment
- Dedicate a brick to a loved one
- Celebrate any branch of the military
- Show your community pride
- Share your support

Call City Hall 330-688-7491
Park Board Pres Ross Widenour
744-344-8123



State of the City Address

A message from Mayor James W. Armstrong



It is once again a pleasure to be invited by the Chamber of Commerce to present the Munroe Falls State of the City Address. It is hard to believe that this is my 4th State of the City Address and the Chamber's willingness to host this annual event is greatly appreciated.

Today, I am proud to say the State of the City of Munroe Falls is good and getting better each week. Thanks to the people of Munroe Falls, in the past three years the City's deteriorating financial foundation in both the General and Water Fund has been repaired and this past year we began moving forward on addressing our City's infrastructure projects and addressing staffing issues in both the Police and Fire Departments that, because of previous financial issues, had to be postponed.

In my inaugural State of the City address on February 16, 2016 I was obligated to report about the City's serious financial issues; a report that was verified later that year by the State Auditor who found two critical and four cautionary findings after their 2015 Audit.

I will not forget the meeting I had early in my term with two Council members and seeing their surprise at the amount of capital and other projects and issues that were needed, but never reported to council. After hearing that various department heads were limited in what they were allowed to say to council one of my first directives was implementing an open door policy. In other words: If you can tell me, you may report it to council.

During my 2016 address I stated that a city government has the responsibility to its residents to be honest and transparent in fiscal matters and this is what my administration and our responsible members of council have done.

This past year we became a part of the Ohio Treasurer's online Check Book program, putting the City's expenditures on line, so every citizen can easily review. The City has stopped the past practice of financing regular purchases such as police cars and service vehicles, and budgeted for these expenditures and reducing our interest payments.

The management of our fiscal matters, administered by our Finance Director Karen Reynolds led to the State of Ohio Auditor recently awarding the City of Munroe Falls excellence in financial reporting. In just three years the City has gone from the State Auditor raising concerns about our fiscal health to the Auditor presenting Munroe Falls an award for financial reporting.

To further improve transparency, my administration immediately included members of council in meetings with engineers, EPA, congressional staffers and in other matters. For example the finance chair of council Gary Toth has been included in the budget meetings, and Councilman Alan Mavrides, who has been an engineer for many years, has been very involved in the capital

and water distribution related meetings that we have had with our city engineer GPD Group and with the EPA.

Public Safety Chair Chris Ritzinger works well with Fire Chief Lee Chafin and Police Chief Jerry Hughes, and John Hegnauer's assistance in IT and technology decisions has been very helpful. This past year we upgraded our webpage that includes a method for our residents to sign up for such things as boil alerts and snow bans.

Our Community and Economic Development Director Anne DiCola took the lead in upgrading our website and she has been an asset in coordinating the Veterans Banner program and our relationships with local business, the Chamber of Commerce and other cities. This is a somewhat challenging position in a bedroom community, but we're working hard to enhance our local business environment.

On a related note, the Munroe Falls Park Board will soon begin raising money through a brick purchase program to refurbish our Veterans Memorial. We had a wonderful ceremony this past November on the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that ended World War I as a kick off of this project.

During my 2016 address I also raised concern about the lack of work that had been done on the City's infrastructure. Thanks to passage of the road levy and the money that will be received from the new water rate structure passed in 2018, following the recommendations and planning of our City Engineer GPD Group, the City has a priority list of scheduled road projects, and just recently has implemented a long range maintenance plan to refurbish and maintain the City's water towers to ensure delivery of safe drinking water to our residents.

The City is also making every effort to obtain outside financial assistance for these projects, and have had meetings with various federal and local officials in pursuing any available appropriations. These efforts led to the City being awarded a grant to resurface North River Road, we are currently working with the State to determine when this project can begin.

Knowing the importance of building relationships with other communities and other governmental officials, the City of Munroe Falls became a member of the local Mayor's association. When I took office our City was the only City or Village in Summit County not a member. This organization has improved our relationships with the surrounding cities and other community leaders.

Understanding the benefit of relationships to the City, Councilman Jim Iona and I have attended the Empowering Local Leadership Conference hosted by the Northeastern Ohio Congressional delegation in Washington, during which we interacted with both congressional and executive leaders of our federal government. The networking and subsequent relationships that Mr. Iona and I built led to a meeting in November of 2018 with the top people in the Federal EPA as we pursue grants and other financial opportunities to assist in our needed waterline project under the river.

Our Service Department is doing a tremendous job, as evident by the fact that no community had better conditioned roads after our huge snow storm last month. We received numerous compliments about our road crew after the storm. Service Director Jim Bowery works a tremendous amount of hours and is very dedicated to the City in which he was raised.

Once again Fire and EMS calls have significantly increased. Although our Fire Department's response time is excellent, it has become obvious that we need 24 hour staffing at the station to maintain the level of service that our citizens deserve. Our Fire Chief Lee Chafin has implemented a plan to achieve this staffing within his existing budget. The days when cities like Munroe Falls could rely on a volunteer staff have long passed, and it is necessary to take the next step toward around-the-clock staffing of our Fire Department. In the next few years our goal is to further improve service and stability by investing in more full time staffing in the Department.

We have done an excellent job of addressing our expenses in other areas. An example of this is our Law Director Tom Kostoff's managing of the City's legal issues. We had a number of unexpected legal expenses in 2018 resulting unfortunately from questionably motivated lawsuits, but despite this fact we

still spent \$60,000 less in 2018 than the City spent in 2015, which was the year before I took office.

Our City Prosecutor Tom DiCaudo has also done a great job these past three years and he is well respected by the police officers and the Court. Before Tom became City Prosecutor a number of criminal cases were dismissed and the City's relationship with the Court was less than ideal. Needless to say Tom DiCaudo has never missed a hearing, I have heard only praise from the Court about how our cases are handled, and his many years of experience has been an asset to the City.

When I took office we only had five full-time police officers, and pursuant to the existing union contract, no full timers worked weekends. I am pleased to announce that we now have at least one full time officer working every shift.

In the past years the training and the atmosphere that Chief Jerry Hughes instilled was clearly apparent this past year with a much more cohesive, better trained, and active police force. In 2018 our police department made more criminal and DUI arrests than previously, and accidents in the City went down. This was not an easy task for Chief Hughes since the department was not in a good position when Chief Hughes joined our City, but where possible he has successfully worked with the police union to provide the full-time, around-the-clock coverage and resolve other issues that every department periodically faces. He has earned the respect of his officers by creating a positive work environment that a number of officers informed me did not exist before his arrival in 2016. Also, last month Chief Hughes was elected by his peers President of the Summit County Chiefs of Police Association.

Solidifying the City's fiscal condition, implementing a long term plan to correct problems with the water distribution system and the other infrastructure issues that had been neglected for many years were known problems when I took office, but last year we also addressed problems in the work environment that came to my attention in January of 2018.

Worldwide 2018 was a year that brought needed awareness of how common workplace harassment is in many workplaces throughout the country. In light of this, it was very important to me that the employees of Munroe Falls had a safe and healthy environment in which to work.

Last year we engaged an outside consultant to revisit our personnel policies and procedures, review our personnel records and assist in creating a policy that would protect our employees from inappropriate behavior. To

further this protection, the City partnered with the Summit County Executive to give employees an independent avenue to go in case a problem should ever arise in the future. Councilwoman Jenny Markovich was instrumental in assisting in this matter and special appreciation goes to County Executive Ilene Shapiro and her entire staff who met with us to craft the independent mechanism to report problems.

Improving the City of Munroe Falls work environment and adding further protection for our employees is my proudest accomplishment. No one should ever be afraid to come to work and whether I am giving this speech next year or not, it comforts me that I know our employees have this additional protection. It is also an example of the importance of being engaged in the community and why this fall I was pleased to accept a position on the Summit County Charter Review Commission, where I serve as Vice Chairman.

As I finish my first term as Mayor, I am very proud of what the City has accomplished in just three years. We have brought transparency and direction to the City of Munroe Falls with long range planning. This has included being honest with people about the finances, the needed projects, or other decisions or events. We have a solid and experienced staff with unquestionable integrity that are dedicated to providing the necessary services to our residents.

Although we have come a long way in relatively short time, there is still much more work to be done, but the City of Munroe Falls is heading in the right direction.

I want to thank my wife Lisa for her love and support, and my entire family, friends, and professional associates for their encouragement.

It is an honor to represent the City of Munroe Falls, and I am proud to say that the City is in a much better place in every area than it was just a few years ago. I thank the Chamber of Commerce for the invitation to speak today. The ability to bring community leaders together for the Chamber's common purpose is a testament to this great organization and Doris Stewart and her staff's commitment to Munroe Falls and Stow.

As presented at Stow-Munroe Falls Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting