

LEHIGH VALLEY – “THE PLACE TO BE”

County of Northampton

2008

“STATE OF THE COUNTY FINANCIAL ADDRESS”

The Lehigh Valley is the place to be – especially Northampton County; we have been discovered! Whether you are establishing a business, pursuing employment, raising a family, enrolling in a college, or looking for help with a serious medical issue, you can find your answer here. With a rich history dating back to the 1700’s, the Lehigh Valley, 60 miles north of Philadelphia and 90 miles west of New York City, is now among the fastest growing regions in both population and commerce in Pennsylvania. With a lower cost of living than many other surrounding areas, the Lehigh Valley continues to offer both urban and country charm.

Primarily because of our location, richness of universities, economic initiatives, and a strong workforce, Northampton County is fast becoming a leader in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical health related industries. The presence of a significant number of corporate/industrial parks presents great opportunity for diverse business development. One of the largest “brown fields” in the country is presently being developed at a record pace – an indication of the trust and confidence of being in “the place to be.”

While the area has been discovered, County government has not. It remains a mystery to many. Though County government plays an increasingly important role in our lives, most citizens are unaware of the many services we provide. What I hope to do this morning is to present some of the initiatives this Administration accomplished in fiscal year 2007 and hopes to address in fiscal year 2008.

Initially, let me state that I am pleased to submit a no tax increase budget for 2008, despite the fact that real estate property tax revenue is projected to increase by only 2%, a mere \$1,860,000 over last year. The tax millage remains at 10.8. Next

year's budget is projected at \$341,000,000 with a workforce of 1,854 full-time and 273 part-time employees. Of the 72 new full-time and 6 part-time positions that were requested; 39 full-time and 4 part-time positions are proposed in this budget.

During 2007, the following projects were completed:

- **The Prison expansion is now complete.**
- **Courthouse renovations will be completed in 2007.**
- **The cupola is restored and painted.**
- **A property at 654-670 Wolf Avenue has been acquired and now houses Voter Registration.**
- **The Controller's Office was moved to 684 Washington Street.**
- **256 additional parking spaces were added to the Courthouse campus.**
- **Eight collective bargaining agreements were settled; 3 remain in arbitration.**
- **A consultant was selected for a pay and classification study. The first since 1993.**
- **A new County training center was created for employee professional development.**
- **The Personnel Policies are being reviewed and updated.**

- **The employee wellness program was reinstated.**
- **A voluntary flexible spending plan was implemented to provide employees with pre-tax savings for out-of-pocket medical and childcare expenses.**
- **A new third party administrator for health care was selected which resulted in reducing health care expenses by \$6,953,000.**
- **The central processing center was opened in the Prison (first in the Lehigh Valley).**
- **Negotiated a new information technology contract that saved an additional \$1,700,000 over four years.**
- **A telephone system billing review was conducted with potential savings of \$200,000.**
- **A countywide gambling impact study committee was established.**
- **A fleet management initiative focusing on vehicle replacement, maintenance programs, fleet sharing, and fuel use was started. Two hybrid vehicles and E-85 flex-fuel capable vehicles were purchased. Savings of \$106,330 over requested vehicle replacements for 2007 were realized.**
- **Applied for and awaiting final approval from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development designation as an “Urban County”, resulting in \$1,200,000 additional grant opportunities.**

As a result of the 1/2 mill tax increase last year dedicated to “Open Space”...

- **Six farms (totaling 520 acres) were acquired. Total farmland preserved to date is 9,044 acres.**
- **Contracts were initiated to begin the Weaversville County Park build out.**
- **Eight properties of environmentally sensitive land totaling 532 acres were preserved at a cost of \$1,066,980.**
- **Over 2 million dollars is anticipated for five different park projects.**
 - Wilson: \$74,000**
 - Easton: \$560,000**
 - The City of Bethlehem: \$1,100,000**
 - Tatamy: \$35,000**
 - Upper Mount Bethel Township: \$140,637**
- **A Domestic Relations “Top 20 Most Wanted” website was developed.**
- **The Dialogic “reverse 911” system for emergency notifications to the citizens was launched.**
- **A credit card process for online payment of County real estate taxes was designed and implemented.**
- **In early 2007 began inspecting the metering of both home heating oil delivery trucks and facilities.**

- **National County Government Week was celebrated by inviting Easton High School students to a structured half-day program at the Courthouse.**

There were many other successes too numerous to mention.

WE WERE BUSY.

What is in store for 2008?

- **A Comprehensive 20-year Plan will be undertaken which will explore future planning as the County continues to grow in population and demand for services.**
- **A Correctional System Master Plan is underway to outline current and future requirements for our criminal justice system with special focus on the Prison.**
- **Additional funding in the amount of \$7,800,000 will be committed to the open space program in 2008.**
- **We anticipate celebrating the milestone achievement of preserving 10,000 acres of farmland.**
- **The CCAP Project at Gracedale is scheduled for completion in 2008.**
- **Windows that have been leaking at Gracedale since 1973 will begin to be replaced at a cost of 2.7 million dollars.**

The Capital Improvement Plan includes the following:

- **The painting of the ceiling of historical Courtroom No. 1 ceiling - \$150,000**
- **Exterior Elevator – Annex - \$750,000**
- **Exterior Painting and repairs – Old Courthouse - \$500,000**
- **Gracedale Fire System Code Upgrades - \$278,200**
- **Gracedale Cooling Tower replacement - \$100,000**
- **Parks Maintenance Building - \$500,000**
- **County Bridge 102 - \$1,100,000**
- **Kitchen Upgrades - \$943,900 (Prison)**
- **Repair retaining wall (inmate yard) - \$200,000 (Prison)**
- **Weaversville Park development - \$2,702,000**
- **Louise Moore Park tennis courts - \$120,000**

Areas of Concern and Significance:

- **Of concern is the \$500,000 reduction in wireless 911 fees resulting from reduced allocations from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and an increasing trend away from traditional landline phones.**

- **Children, Youth and Families caseworkers, for the first time ever, will be located in schools in the Bangor, Easton and Northampton Area School Districts.**
- **The establishment of a bi-county health department.**
- **Of special significance is the proposal of a substantial increase of \$500,000 to the Area Agency on Aging. This increase is necessary to compensate for the lack of adequate funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Were we not to do this, there would be substantial waiting lists for services for our most vulnerable citizens.**

In addition, the County Administration endorses a new \$20,000,000 bond from which the following projects will be addressed:

- **\$5,000,000 for a Juvenile Justice Center expansion.**
- **\$10,000,000 for a Community Education and Residential Center (and recidivism reduction programs). A prison alternative to address high recidivism.**
- **\$3,000,000 for an Archives building.**
- **\$2,000,000 to replace windows in the old Courthouse.**
- **The \$521,100 debt service expense for the bond is included in the 2008 budget.**

Sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? It is. And it would never have been accomplished without the fine team that has assisted me during the past two years:

John Conklin, my Director of Administration, who continues to get better and better every day at what he does.

Vic Mazziotti, Director of Fiscal Affairs, who has saved us millions and who brings a fiscal expertise seldom matched in a county system.

Ross Marcus, Director of Human Services, probably the hardest job in the County with the least amount of recognition, and he does it so well.

Steve DeSalva, Director of Public Works, who inherited a massive list of things to do and is getting them done effectively and economically through dedication, hard work and long hours.

Bill Hillanbrand, Director of Court Services, who is developing into a capable administrator and an increasingly valuable employee. He has a terrific future.

Connie Sutton-Falk, Director of Human Resources, a true professional who knows her field and is rewriting our personnel policies and who daily manages a very difficult process – modern day human resources.

Karl Longenbach, County Solicitor, our Henry Kissinger, an experienced solicitor who understands and knows county government like few others do.

To Todd Buskirk, Director of Corrections, to Sheriff Jeffrey Hawbecker and to Zac Lysec, County Coroner, I extend my thanks and appreciation.

To our office staff, Annette Yatco and Caroline Coughlin, my assistant who keeps me out of trouble and tells me where to go.

To Northampton County employees who work so hard, and see such little recognition for what they do.

And to District Attorney John Morganelli, President Judge Robert Freedberg and the Courts who continue to cooperate fully with likeminded initiatives and finally, to County Council. We don't always agree, but that's the way democracy works. I appreciate their support and look forward to working with them in 2008.

I still strongly believe that government is "of the people, by the people, for the people." This is what our Administration and I strive for on a daily basis. It is the public whom we serve. We try to make the right decisions.



Finally, I want to thank Governor Cunningham and his staff for being here today, frankly, I see more of him than I do of my wife, but Don, I still prefer her over you. Some people criticize me for engaging in bicounty projects, but I believe strongly that it is the way to go. I will continue to work in a regional way, especially in the establishment of a bicounty health department. Thanks for coming this morning. Let's all continue to work together to make the Lehigh Valley the place to be.