

**VILLAGE OF MARIEMONT  
STATE OF THE VILLAGE ADDRESS FOR 2009**

**INTRO & FINANCE**

The words “Thank You” aren’t expressed often enough these days. Thanks to you our wonderful citizens, our dedicated employees, the hard-working volunteers, and last year’s Council, we had another successful year in 2009. Thank you to one and all who made this happen!

I am pleased to report, in this extremely difficult economic climate, for the ninth straight year, the General Fund finished with a balance of over one million dollars (\$1,009,877.42)

Clearly, this result shows how hard last year’s Council worked to save our precious tax dollars, when the cost of running the Village is higher than ever and our income tax revenue is down about 4%. There is no doubt 2010 will be a very challenging year, but Council has planned well and we are still in good financial shape for about the next 2 years and as I have stated in the past, “This administration will not wait for a financial crisis to happen and then try to fix it. We will continue to work hard and stay proactive until we can see a better financial future.”

Also, I want to make it clear a new General Fund tax levy is something I have not and will not support. It is just an unacceptable solution with utilities costs on the rise and our federal, state and county governments looking to raise our taxes in the near future. Plus, in May, our very important school district needs new tax dollars to operate and rebuild our schools. If by the will and vote of the people our taxes are to be raised, I would rather see the revenue go to our award-winning schools, because they are one of the main reasons our property values remain among the highest in Hamilton County.

We, the new Council, need to continue working to identify opportunities to streamline our Village government, but not cut important services. Last year’s Council did just that and started this proactive path to a balanced annual budget for this year. So far, we have made staff reductions of one person each from the Maintenance, Police and Fire Departments. This hard decision, by last year’s Council may appear to be service cuts, but are not because:

- 1) In the **Maintenance Department** it became clear to Maintenance Superintendent John Scherpenberg that we only need 4 employees, not 5. This is because of our wonderful volunteers and Park Advisory Board members who take care of our Square and Parks. To prove the point, our 4 maintenance men did a great job this year with the snow removal in our one square mile. This move will save the Village about \$28,000 the first year.
- 2) The **Police Department** now has 9 full-time officers to fill the 3 shifts, for an average of 3 men per shift. When Lt. Feldmann retired, Council never hired a

10<sup>th</sup> officer to replace him, because of the sour economy. But we need that 10<sup>th</sup> man to cover for the officers who get sick, injured, or go on vacation. To correct this problem and save tax dollars, I am working with the Safety Committee of Council and Police Chief Hines to put together a list of 2 or 3 part-time Police Officers who are semi-retired, layed off or looking for a job after graduating from the Police Academy. Using a part-time officer instead of a full-time officer to fill in when needed will save the Village about \$40,000.

- 3) Even the **Tax Department** has found a way to save money and not cut service! After years of waiting for a smaller, two-room office to become available at the Mariemont Executive Building, it happened! This month, our Tax Office has moved from Room 206 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor to room 315 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. This move will save the Village more than \$5000 a year and we will still have a 2<sup>nd</sup> room for private tax conferences.
- 4) Our **Fire Department** has 4 firemen on duty per shift which is on 24 hours and off 48 hours. Last year, the Council laid off one full-time fireman and brought him back as a part-timer to save the tax payers approximately \$19,000 for the first year and then an additional \$8000 for the following year.

For the last 9 years we have employed a fire chief and 4 full-time firemen, plus we have a list of about 30 well-trained firefighters from different fire departments who we refer to as “part-timers” to fill in on all our 24-hour shifts. As one can see, there will be no cuts in service. We will still have 4 trained firefighters to cover each shift.

Now that Chief Phifer has retired, we have the opportunity to save the Village \$95,000 plus eliminate the cost of a Chief’s vehicle here in our one-square-mile Village.

We can do this by restructuring our Police and Fire Departments similar to Amberley Village, where one person with excellent management and leadership skills is both the Police and Fire Chief.

The new chief (like most other chiefs) won’t fight fires or run police patrols, but will manage and oversee both departments. The Assistant Fire Chief and Assistant Police Chief will handle the day-to-day duties of their department, without comprising safety.

I personally met with the Amberley Village City Manager, Amberley Councilwoman, Fran Cohen, and their Fire and Police Chief, Jack Monohan. I was told the key to this program working, like any program, is having good, hard-working personnel and good mutual-aid neighbors. I feel we have both. I was told this program has worked very well for Amberley Village for many years and has saved the taxpayers a great deal of money, without compromising safety.

As I stated at the January 11, 2010, Council meeting, I feel our Police Chief, Rick Hines, is the best person for the job. Chief Hines has proven to be a high caliber leader

and has been dedicated to this Village and its residents for over 20 years. Chief Hines has always gone beyond the call of duty. Last week, he finished his fire certification class with a 94% grade on his exam. The code states the Mayor appoints the fire chief with the advice and consent of Council. As soon as Chief Hines takes his state exam and passes, I will appoint him as the Fire Chief. He will remain as Police Chief, as well. Then Council will vote on putting Rick in this position on a six-month probation period. After the six-month probation, Council will vote whether to make this appointment permanent.

If Council votes this appointment down, I will do a search for a new Fire Chief.

### **COUNCIL and ADMINISTRATION**

At the end of 2009, we had 4 Council representatives retire. It has been my privilege to work with these outstanding Council representatives, Rex Bevis (12 years), Bill Ebelhar (10 years), Charlie Thomas (9 years) and Melissa Schmidt (4 years). These leaders were of high moral character and enthusiastic for their work and goals. A very special "Thank You" goes to these individuals for their leadership and dedication to our Village. During my 9+ years as Mayor, this elite group made some very tough decisions and helped bring about and complete many wonderful, important projects and honors for the Village, including:

- 1) The new maintenance building
- 2) Finding a way to save the Historic Resthaven Barn
- 3) The Square improvements with a drop-off area and the beautiful flower gardens
- 4) Dogwood Park Bathrooms
- 5) Dogwood Park's Clarence Erickson shelter
- 6) Saving Kellogg-Keebler from leaving the Village and adding about 150 more jobs
- 7) Bringing Haney PRC Company to our industrial park plus the 50 to 60 jobs
- 8) Making Wooster Pike sewer project happen and getting the sewers out of our Dogwood Park
- 9) The building of a shade shelter and all new electric at the pool
- 10) The building of a salt dome
- 11) Finally getting a rain run-off retention tank put in below Mercy St. Theresa to stop the flooding of basements in the area
- 12) Receiving Tree City honors every year
- 13) Dale Park Statuary repair at and the clean up there
- 14) Fountain at the Square project with a beautiful stone wall
- 15) Jordan Park condominium development
- 16) Kirkwood Legislation
- 17) Trolley Turn-Around Park
- 18) Murray Avenue Connector improvements

And when they retired, \$1,000,000 was still in the General Fund.

I welcome and congratulate our 4 new Councilmen who were sworn in on January 1, 2010. They are:

- Dist. 2 – **Joe Miller**, Planning & Zoning Committee Chairman
- District 3 – **Andy Black**, Finance Committee Chairman
- District 4 – **Cortney Scheeser**, Rules & Law Committee Chairman
- District 6 – **Jeff Andrews**, Health & Recreation Committee Chairman

Our two veteran Council members are Vice Mayor Dennis Wolter and District 5 Councilwoman Kim Sullivan, who is the Chair of the Public Works Committee.

### **PERSONNEL**

- On May 1, 2009, Police Lt. John Feldmann retired after 32 years of service. Thank you, John, for keeping us safe.
- Patrolman Brian Siefke finally retired after a long history of back problems and on December 6, 2009, Officer Phil Mitchell was hired to take Brian's place. Phil is a good fit for our Village because he graduated from Mariemont High School about 10 years ago and knows the Village well.
- Also, last month, Fire Chief Jack Phifer retired. Jack was our Assistant Fire Chief for 4 years and Fire Chief for 9 years. We thank Jack for his 13 years of full-time service and wish him the best in retirement. His commitment to our Village was greatly appreciated.

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

- Again, I am very proud to state that, for the 18<sup>th</sup> year, our village received the Tree City USA designation.
- Peggy Keyes was named the Outstanding Citizen of the Year at the Memorial Day Parade. This was an overdue honor for one of the hardest working volunteers in our Village.
- Mariemont residents recycled 472 tons of material in 2009, which was 30 tons more than in 2008. This is something all of us can be proud of, because it saves trees and power and reduces greenhouse gas pollution.
- I am very proud of Police Chief Rick Hines and our Police Department for winning the Gold Award only one year after beginning their participation in the AAA Community Traffic Safety National program, which is based on traffic enforcement, reduced auto accidents and public education on traffic safety.

### **LAWSUIT**

John M. Altman, on behalf of himself and others, has filed a Complaint for Preliminary and Permanent Injunction, Declaratory Judgment, a Writ of Mandamus and Civil Forfeiture in the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas against the Village of Mariemont and its current and former council members in their official capacity. Essentially, the allegations contained in the Complaint are that the Village of Mariemont

went into Executive Session on three separate occasions to discuss certain personnel issues, The allegations are that the Village did not comply with the exact statutory language for going into executive session to discuss personnel issues. The council members who moved to go into Executive Session did not specifically state the exact words that are required under Section 121.22(0) of the Ohio Revised Code even though the purpose was clear to all. The Village has filed an Answer, denying that it has in any way violated Ohio law.

The Complaint of Mr. Altman also alleges that Council for the Village of Mariemont did not maintain meeting minutes for Committee of the Whole meetings. Again, the Village denies these allegations. The chairman of the Committee of the Whole meetings, who is the Vice Mayor, takes notes of everything discussed at those meetings and has them on file.

The Village is committed to defending these allegations and the matter is currently pending in the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas before Judge Ethna Cooper. If it is ultimately determined that the Village has not been specific enough in the language used to go into Executive Session, corrective action will most certainly be taken.

The hard-working citizens who take these Council jobs are Little League dads and soccer moms. They work 40 hours a week at their regular jobs and, often times put in an additional 10 to 15 hours that same week working for the Village at just \$85 a month. These good people are not sophisticated lawyers or professional politicians. They are just ordinary people who want to do the best they can for their community. When presented with a problem, they work hard to resolve it. When told of a mistake they have made, they immediately go about the business of correcting that mistake. For someone to sue them without first talking to them about a problem and allowing them to work out a solution is just not the Mariemont way!

## **CONCLUSION**

In closing, I ask God to bless and protect the brave men and women who are fighting for our freedom and to continue to watch over the Village of Mariemont.