

MAYOR JUDY COOK
2004 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
Presented at January 10, 2005 Council Meeting

“As we begin 2005, our city reflects the many events of the past year. Our activities throughout the past year were dominated by major projects already in progress. Both City Council and city staff have focused on completing these projects in a timely, cost efficient manner to benefit the community. At times it has stretched our capacity but with determination and dedication all the necessary steps were accomplished and the tasks completed.

The first six months of 2004 were filled with the work of completing our new comprehensive plan. Final information and thoughts from citizens were gathered throughout the community. Initial drafts were reviewed by staff, Council and citizen groups. After completing the corrections, deletions and additions, the final draft was presented to the Oakwood Planning Commission for review. They recommended the document to City Council for adoption and on June 14, 2004, City Council voted unanimously to adopt the Comprehensive Plan. It immediately became a guide for City Council and staff decisions and actions. It will continue to serve the community in this manner for years to come. Also, the many initiatives proposed by the Plan will be addressed in a priority fashion over time. This will be part of the 2005 agenda for City Council and city staff.

The work of completing the new Safety Department facility on the western portion of the city plaza moved forward with increasing pace in 2004. Along with this facility the necessary renovation of city hall continued. These were difficult days for staff as they worked amidst construction and in the confining temporary trailers. On August 5 the Safety Department began their move into their new quarters. This was symbolized by the ceremonial move of the fire truck from the old bay on the east side to the spacious new bay on the west side. When the department move was completed, we were able to celebrate with a community reception on September 23. At the beginning of that week, City Council held their first formal meeting in the new Council chambers. The final chapter came on December 10 when the administrative staff left the trailers in which they had bravely run the city for well over two years and moved into the renovated city building. With this move the citizens of Oakwood can be assured that the exemplary staff that runs our city is now housed in work space appropriate to their tasks and their expertise. We look forward to the finishing touches of landscaping to enhance the beauty of the new facility. Most of all there will be the pleasure of serving our citizens as they become acquainted with the new building.

Perhaps the most time consuming issue in 2004 concerned Sugar Camp. We regret the expected loss of NCR as a corporate citizen. Our history is closely linked to NCR as a corporate citizen and a neighbor. It has been a rich and beneficial relationship over many, many years and the expected sale of Sugar Camp indicates an end to that relationship. We feel it not only in financial terms but in a sense of historical passing involving benefactors and memorable citizens. The future use of Sugar Camp land is of prime importance to our community. It is the last major tract of land available for a large development so there is great emphasis on it being used in a manner that provides the greatest benefit to the community. Awareness of citizens leaving the community for turn key housing not available in Oakwood, led the city to pursue the possible development of Sugar Camp for this use. A development feasibility study was conducted for this purpose. Many plans were examined as part of the study. They had a variety of appeals but all proved to be financially discouraging in the current market parameters, primarily because of the high acquisition price for the property. Under the current conditions, City Council has decided not to use public dollars in pursuing

the purchase of Sugar Camp. However, Sugar Camp remains a primary focus for City Council and city staff. We will continue to closely monitor and pursue all possibilities that offer substantial benefits to the community at reasonable costs.

We will benefit in 2005 from numerous improvements made to our infrastructure this past year. These are not usually high profile or high interest projects but are essential to keeping the city operating in an efficient and cost effective manner. Our water system benefited from upgrading with the installation of a Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. Our fiber optic network was connected to monitor our water system instead of the more costly leased telephone lines. The city will begin soon to install new remote read water meters in each of our dwellings. No longer will it be necessary to be at home to open the door for the meter reading agent. Also, more accurate reading will be made because the current age of most meters in the city leads to inaccuracies. After overcoming many hurdles, our new well #8 is operational and will help make us almost entirely self sufficient with our water supply. A new phone system was installed for city operations which will significantly reduce expenditures in that category. Streetscape improvements were made along Far Hills. With an eye to improving safety for pedestrians, particularly students, sidewalks were widened and new railing installed along the school walking route on Far Hills. In the Far Hills business district we delayed the costly replacement of the timber wall barrier by repairing and capping the existing wall. With the arrival of better weather, the walls will be stained and once again enhance the appearance of our business district. Advances were made in developing our computer based Geographic Information System (GIS). This spectacular tool has multitudinous possible applications and will be used widely in the future as an aid in accomplishing tasks. Deregulation brought a new responsibility to the City Manager. With a voted endorsement from Oakwood citizens, Norbert Klopsch has diligently pursued a variety of possible contracts for aggregated purchase of utility power. None have yet offered an advantage worthy of public offering. Although this is a time consuming and difficult task, he will continue to examine all possibilities.

A new fire truck was delivered to the Safety Department in late fall. It was welcomed into ample housing space. Much work was done by safety officers in developing the specifications for this vehicle and searching out the best sources for building the components. The effort spanned several years from inception to delivery. It is a relief to know that this engine was selected to best suit community needs and not because it would fit into the available housing. Also, the Safety Department will begin this year to bill insurance companies for medic transportation to hospitals. No citizen will bear this as a personal expense. Insurance companies set aside money for this service as required by law. Receiving second party payment for this service will help keep the city budget in balance and will help us continue deferring a tax increase.

Many events from 2004 are recorded in our memories. A great loss was suffered by the city in the unexpected death of J. David Foell in September. We remember his 30 years of excellent management of our city. He guided the community to completion and then firmly set in place the standards and traditions that remain our hallmark to this day. His legacy will always be with us.

Our traditional community celebrations continued in 2004. "That Day in May" was again rainy but populated with determined Oakwood Rotarians and stalwart citizens. The August Ice Cream Social enjoyed a beautiful day and throngs of merry makers. At Halloween time, the second Scarecrow Contest took place on Shafor Blvd. As expected, it increased in popularity with more entries making prize giving even more difficult. Our traditional holiday lighting celebration again offered horse drawn carriage rides through neighborhoods aglow

with luminaries. Chabad celebrated their second lighting of the Chanukah menorah and invited the community to related festivities. Throughout the summer, properties were selected for City Beautiful Awards and then presented in an artistic film at the award ceremony. Holiday decorating contest was again held with the Environmental Committee selecting the winners. In the fall we joined with other communities for "Make a Difference Day" projects at Hills and Dales Park.

Added to these was a New Resident Breakfast in May where families gathered to be welcomed and gain familiarity with each other and the city. Also in May, the CARE Walk to benefit breast cancer awareness took place culminating months of preparation by Leigh Ann Fulford and her citizen coworkers. Later in August the Judge sisters again organized the "Giving Strings" concert which turns the second block of Lonsdale into symphony hall and supports community charities. Joining with Kettering citizens, a combined committee presented the first Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. The highlight of this enjoyable team effort was the participation of many school children in the art, poetry and essay contests which were part of the event. The featured speaker was inspiring and all attending found the event a rewarding experience. The breakfast is scheduled again this year.

2004 brought several unique celebrations. It was a special occasion when we recognized ten young men who as a group attained the rank of Eagle Scout. These Oakwood high school students are the largest number of scouts to receive the rank in one ceremony in Troop 101 history. A concert by the Oakwood High School Band was presented at the home of John Gray where he generously welcomed the community. The Oakwood Historical Society received several awards relating to the Celebration 2003 Tour of Homes. The Tour of Homes Booklet, supported with our historical education fund, won a State Outreach Award and the film associated with the tour, produced by John and Barbara Moraites with the help of Harry Ebeling, won two Phil T. Farnsworth awards. Next year the DPVA Designers' Show House and Gardens returns to Oakwood. In fitting recognition, it will be held at the former residence of Ben and Marion Schuster.

As the 2005 budget for the City was prepared, it became increasingly evident that the cost of services expected by our citizens is rising beyond our ability to cover those expenses with anticipated revenues. With the help of our citizen Budget Review Committee and efforts by staff, balances for 2005 are at acceptable levels to maintain the high level of community standards we enjoy. This will become more difficult in the future. If a threatened reduction, or elimination, of state support from Local Government Funds occurs, the problem will increase.

As always, the strength of our community lies with the quality of its citizens. Present is a rare combination of people who express their views and seek to persuade but join together and support when discussion ends. The expertise and talents of our citizens are given freely to assist in meaningful decision making and resulting action plans. They respond to difficulties and inconveniences with reason, understanding and appreciation. In addition the city is served by a well informed, responsive City Council and an outstanding staff management team and work force. With these assets the city of Oakwood can look to the year ahead with confidence and optimism."