

MAYOR JUDY COOK
2008 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
Presented at February 11, 2008 Council Meeting

2007 was marked by many challenging projects and issues which engendered enthusiastic citizen participation. The review by citizens of these projects and the ensuing comments and discourse surrounding the decision making process is a great strength of our community. A government is only as good as citizens require it to be. In Oakwood, our citizens stand ready to participate and are insistent on having their voices heard. It is important that this continue and it is the responsibility of City Council and City Staff to see that it does.

When the year began we were well into completing the process of approving plans for the development of the former NCR Sugar Camp property. The long, step by step, process required to develop the plan was finished in April when Council voted to approve the master development plan. The complexity of this project continues to demand attention of staff and often Council as well. Ground breaking took place in October with focus on the infrastructure needs of the project and the commercial areas. The residential portion of the development will begin soon with the exciting prospect of retirement housing becoming available in our city. As financial benefits from Sugar Camp occur, they will be immediately realized by all Oakwood citizens in the form of lowered property taxes. This crucial aspect of the project has from the beginning been a key requirement of our citizens. When the commercial office buildings are fully occupied, we expect to receive as much as \$250,000 in new income tax revenue. This money will help us to continue providing the finest city services and to avoid a tax increase for at least a couple more years.

The proposal for regional centralized dispatch garnered our attention for much of the year. The prospect of saving millions of dollars in the region while providing commendable dispatch service led City Council to enter into a study plan to consider joining the unified service. Oakwood stood to save \$100,000 a year by participating in the centralized dispatch service. However, it was difficult for our community to understand the limits of this proposed change because our Oakwood dispatch personnel provide so many additional services beyond dispatch. With this lack of understanding and the expressed demand that we maintain the personal touch provided by our own dispatchers, City Council accepted the recommendation of city staff that we not join centralized dispatch. However, City Council did direct staff to begin using the county-wide dispatch center as our primary backup. Council also appropriated \$200,000 to pay for major upgrades to our dispatch center. We will continue to monitor this new service and examine future cost saving possibilities.

In August 2006, NCR deeded Hawthorn Hill to the Wright Family Foundation. The years of living with Hawthorn Hill as a private guest house were over. The Wright Family Foundation, responding to both their long standing convictions regarding the house and to regional encouragement from the Aviation Heritage Foundation, announced

their decision to transfer ownership of the house to the National Park Service and made application to open the house for public tours. Immediate neighbors protested both these plans, particularly ownership of Hawthorn Hill by the federal government. Lengthy meetings and public hearings ensued regarding this decision. Community support for opening the home to public tours was evident as was the continuing determination by the Wright Foundation, owners of Hawthorn Hill, to transfer that ownership to the National Park Service. Members of the Wright Family Foundation demonstrated support for neighbors concerns and endorsed detailed conditions to protect the neighborhood. In the several months the home has been open for tours on a limited schedule, there has been no disruption to the neighborhood. The legislation required to transfer ownership of Hawthorn Hill to the National Park Service has been introduced but with many requirements remaining for completion. This legislative process has the full attention of City Council and city staff.

As the result of a front page article in the *Oakwood Register*, much of the summer months were spent on the topic of subsidized housing as it relates to Oakwood. Along with Oakwood city staff, the staff and Board of Directors from Dayton Metropolitan Housing Authority, along with representative from Miami Valley Fair Housing provided the necessary information for the discussion. They gave generously of their time to be of assistance. Subsidized housing is not new to our community. For some time several types of subsidized housing have existed successfully in our city. They are few in number and blend comfortably with our housing stock. The power of our property maintenance code and its enforcements, along with stringent city law enforcement, creates a level playing field for citizens living in Oakwood, no matter how their housing is categorized. We can count on these standards to assure proper property maintenance in the future while welcoming anyone dedicated to keeping these standards as a resident.

Changes to the stretch of Oakwood Avenue between Far Hills Avenue and the north city limits are another part of our 2007 legacy. The street was in need of resurfacing so safety issues along the roadway were also addressed. The street is not wide enough to be a four lane thoroughway and yet vehicles often drove as if it was. Speed and unsafe driving practices were concerns calling for correction. Initial reaction to proposed changes from home owners bordering this roadway was not favorable. After a series of meetings through which citizen concerns were addressed, an agreeable plan was finalized. The city had the choice of making minimal changes to correct safety issues or embracing the opportunity to enhance the streetscape. This neighborhood of gracious homes called for a streetscape to match and thus the beautification additions were made. Oakwood Avenue resident Harvey Lehrner deserves special recognition for investing an enormous amount of time and energy in representing his neighbors and working with the city to arrive at a final roadway design that best serves our community.

Our business districts received attention this past year. A streetscape plan for the Neighborhood Business District on Park Ave. was developed. The city parking lot between Park Ave. and Dixon Ave. will be reconfigured and resurfaced this year and some new signs will identify the district. The remaining portion of the plan is still under consideration due to cost implications. For our Far Hills Business District, parking

improvements are planned on the east side. Property has been acquired as part of a coordinated plan for additional parking to support the considerable private investment recently devoted to that district. The results will encourage future success for the district. Final details of the plan await citizen review.

The issue of deer encroachment into Oakwood remains a problem although the number of deer incidents is down. Citizen reports clearly indicate on-going property damage and evidence of deer moving into new areas of the city. We continue to seek a solution.

There were changes in 2007 to note. An appeal from an Oakwood citizen drew the attention of staff and Council to sidewalks on corner lots. After due consideration, our ordinances were changed so that corner lot property owners will now be responsible for sidewalk repair cost only along the front of their property. The side lot walk ways will be maintained at city expense. Only the second increase in sewer rates since 1992 became effective early in the year. The 25% increase was necessitated by falling balances in this fund due to increased costs over the years without additional revenue. Wifi access came to our city in 2007. Without cost to us, citizens are able to access the internet in outside areas in the Far Hills Business District, the Park Ave. Business District, the Oakwood Community Center property, and Fairridge Park. Along Ridgeway Road, the battered metal roadside barriers were replaced with more environmentally appropriate and attractive wooden rails. The Oakwood Historical Society embarked on major restoration projects at the Long-Romspert House. Made possible only because of skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated volunteer effort, the transformation is inspiring. Along with authentic period decor, the restoration will also create a teaching history of kitchens. The Society is seeking private funding to complete the restoration.

Many traditional community celebrations were welcomed throughout the year. The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast at the beginning of the year marked the fourth year of this joint Kettering/Oakwood event. A sellout crowd enjoyed Reverend Vanessa Ward as a speaker and the displays of student talent in art and writing. Our business appreciation breakfast in early spring was well attended and offered us an opportunity to thank the business community for all that they contribute to our city. The new resident breakfast followed soon after in April. It was our pleasure to welcome new families to Oakwood and provide information about our city. Entertainment for the children allowed them to enjoy the occasion as well. In the month of May the annual CARE Walk celebrated its fifth birthday. Thousands of dollars have been raised by this volunteer organization, founded by Leigh Ann Fulford, in support of local efforts to support breast cancer victims. The annual "That Day in May" sponsored by Oakwood Rotary Club enjoyed good weather and large citizen turn out. The full day of breakfast, run, parade and games was enjoyed by all while dollars were raised for Rotary's charitable projects. The first Oakwood Relay for Life took place in July. Citizen support for this American Cancer Society fund-raiser brought success in numbers and dollar. The next Relay for Life in Oakwood is already being planned. During the summer months Smith Gardens was the site of three blanket concerts. They benefited from wonderful weather throughout so families could enjoy the beauty of the gardens along with the entertainment. The dedicated volunteers of *Giving Strings* presented their 8th annual concert in early August.

The audience filled the street on Lonsdale to listen to talented musicians play in a performance that raised money for Children's Medical Center. The Ice Cream Social in August marked the end of summer and beginning of the school year. This last vacation fling was well celebrated at Shafor Park. Summer months also included the designation of City Beautiful Awards. The artistic landscaping created by property owners enhances the neighborhoods in which they reside and inspire all of us to dedicate this effort on our own property. As Halloween drew near it was time for Scarecrow Row to be assembled. The contestants grew both in numbers and quality of entries. Selecting winners was difficult and the judges wished all the entries could receive awards. The whole community benefited from the creative displays. Along with Scarecrow Row we again enjoyed the Fall Family Festival at Shafor Park with its Halloween theme. Once again the Leisure Services Department created a fun filled afternoon for the many citizens in attendance. New this year was a gathering of active military families living in Oakwood. Breakfast at the Oakwood Community Center provided an opportunity to thank our military citizens for their service to our country and to welcome them as residents of Oakwood. The year ended with our winter celebration of Lighting Oakwood. The weather did not cooperate but our indoor version was complete with Santa Claus and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Along with the festival was the Holiday Decorating Awards competition. The Environmental Committee carefully toured the city and selected outstanding winners in each category. The holiday decorations brought additional beauty to our neighborhoods.

On a sad note, our health commissioner, Dr. Mary Pryor, passed away on June 20, 2007. Dr. Pryor had been our health commissioner since 1992 and had served as a member of Oakwood City Council for the 14 year period from 1977 to 1991 culminating as our Vice Mayor. Mary served our city with distinction and extreme dedication.

Many organizations beyond our city were served by Oakwood Council participation. Councilman Stanley Castleman served on the Montgomery County ED/GE Committee. Vice Mayor McGinnis continued his long standing membership on the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and Councilman Roger Blumensheid served not only as our representative on the Miami Valley Communications Council but also as its Vice Chairman. I continued as President of the Greater Dayton Mayors and Managers organization and as our representative and member of the Executive Committee of the Dayton Area First Suburbs Consortium. Our representative on the South Suburbs Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Task Force was Councilman William Duncan. The City of Oakwood joined the Dayton Development Coalition as a government member. Our belief in this organization's benefits to our region led us to seek a supportive relationship. Also, we both participated and gave financial assistance to the second annual Greater Dayton Conference on Youth held in October. Furthermore, we continued our tradition of meeting regularly with the leadership of both the Oakwood Schools and Wright Memorial Library. All of us gain from the communications and discussions these meetings promote.

The past year required many difficult decisions and extensive information gathering for both City council and city staff. The greatest burden fell on city staff. Their response

rates the highest praise. City Manager Norbert Klopsch, assisted by Deputy City Manager Jay Weiskircher, directed a staff team that met all the many demands of the 2007 agenda. In many instances, these demands went far beyond normal expectations. City Council accepted their leadership responsibility and devoted the hours required to reach resolution. The ability of City Council to effectively work together makes this possible. I thank them all for their successful efforts. At year's end we bid farewell to Councilman Roger Blumensheid. Mr. Blumensheid served the city of Oakwood with skill and devotion for six years and we applaud his contributions. As we begin the new year, our centennial year, we look forward to having Steve Byington as a member of Council. The 2008 centennial year, with its planned celebrations, generates great expectations. Together the community will celebrate all the good news that is Oakwood.