

2010 Mayor's Annual Message

As a 34 year resident of New Providence, I have come to know our Borough and its people well. New Providence is a close knit community - some might say an extended family - that may have its internal disagreements and challenges, but in the end we are a gallant community of neighbors helping neighbors. We are there for each other through the good times and the bad. As we all know, 2009 was a difficult year for many of us. Some have lost jobs, some have experienced dramatic changes in their lifestyles, while others have seen sons and daughters called to active military service. The nightly news is often filled with stories of callousness, brutality and dishonesty. I am proud to represent a community that exemplifies civility, integrity and benevolence.

Our police, despite attrition and one officer deployed in Iraq, continue to diligently perform their jobs with the highest degree of professionalism. Despite predictions to the contrary, our crime rate in 2009 was the lowest in nine years. Our volunteers in the rescue squad and fire department are always there to lend a hand and continue to save lives and protect our property. Our Department of Public Works, despite a reduced workforce, continued to provide uninterrupted services and respond to all infrastructure emergencies. To our police, fire and rescue volunteers, and our Borough employees, your service to our community is greatly appreciated.

I am also proud of the accomplishments we have made in this extraordinarily difficult economic climate. It is no secret that my Borough Council colleagues and I had to make very tough decisions this past year. We could have easily retained all personnel and services, by either enacting substantial tax increases or using up our surplus, with dire future consequences. But sometimes leadership requires making unpopular decisions today to ensure a thriving community tomorrow. In 2010 many New Jersey towns are facing substantial tax hikes due to declining revenues, declining state aid, and increased costs. In New Providence we are in a better position to deal with these issues as a result of the decisions we made last year. We all concur in the desire to ensure that our Borough remains economically robust and an affordable place to raise a family. As your Mayor that is my goal. As a CPA and local business owner, I know what it means and what needs to be done to be fiscally responsible. Fiscal irresponsibility not only results in higher taxes, but declining property values and a lowered quality of life.

In order to retain and improve many of our programs, we have been vigilant about finding grant and shared services opportunities. In 2009 we applied for and received about \$100,000 in grants for our community activities programs. I am especially proud of the grants we have received to provide special needs classes and the development of a tri-town model to support and expand special needs programs. We are also developing a plan to enter into a inter-local service agreement with Summit that will result in increased participation in seniors programs whose viability is currently threatened due to declining enrollment. On the other hand, our community activities children programs have seen an increase in enrollment in 2009 and registrations for our adult classes have grown by an astounding 32%. We have also added a number of new programs including Yoga for

Kids, Acting for grades 3 and 4, introduction to Martial Arts, Music for Special Needs Kids, Pathways Mentor Training, an expanded Volleyball Clinic and the revamping of the Mommy and Me program.

We applied for and received grants of over \$650,000 for Borough improvements, including Safe Routes to School to develop sidewalks, Safe Routes to Transit for Division Avenue and Livingston Avenue improvements, the Downtown Streetscape, Greening Union County for the Borough Tree inventory and energy efficient lighting upgrades.

There is good news for New Providence on the economic front as well. We have seen a surge in new businesses, business expansion and business relocations within the Borough in 2009 with, to name a few, the Summit Medical Group, Boro Gardens, Svelte Medical, Pioneer Pizza, Bellariva Pizza, Home Again Designs, NJ Sharing Network, Graver Water, Indigo Gymnastics, Braunschweiger's Jewelers, The Performing Arts Academy, Alpha Graphics and McGrath's Paint and Hardware. In addition, seven new homes were built in the Borough. During 2009, these homes and businesses translated into an aggregate \$10 million investment in our Borough. I am also pleased to announce that the new A&P will be opening its doors in the renovated Village Shopping Center in August of 2010. I encourage our residents to continue to "buy local" to support these new businesses as well as our existing businesses, which fund numerous Borough activities and our community organizations.

As the result of extensive market research, Lutheran Social Ministries is willing to make an investment in excess of \$100 million in developing a retirement community in New Providence. This will offer our seniors an opportunity to remain in New Providence to enjoy their retirement years near their friends and families, while providing employment opportunities for our residents and new customers for our local businesses.

The Borough Council and I continue to seek out opportunities for improving upon our delivery of services for our residents. Tonight I would like to announce we are negotiating with the City of Summit and the Township of Berkeley Heights to consolidate our respective emergency response dispatch operations and open a shared dispatch center in New Providence. While such a consolidation will result in significant savings for our three towns, more importantly, through technology improvements, we expect to maintain our continuing high quality of service for our residents.

All of what was accomplished this year required a team effort. I want to take a moment and thank my Borough Council colleagues for the vast amount of time and effort they have spent this year on challenging initiatives and working so hard to ensure that New Providence remains a thriving community. None of us could have accomplished our goals without the commitment and dedication of our Borough employees and volunteers. As always, I want to specifically express our gratitude for the time, talent and energy of our citizen volunteers who serve on Borough Boards and Committees.

We know that 2010 will present its' own set of challenges, but we hope that it will also be a year of opportunities. Opportunities to come together to work hard, commit to fiscal responsibility, continue providing better programs and recognizing that our Borough family – with its talents, creativity, energy, integrity, diversity and dedication – will continue to work together to achieve a vibrant and prosperous community.

On behalf of our Borough Council, I wish you all a healthy and safe New Year.

Sincerely,

John A. Thoms