

State of the City
January 19, 2006

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank President Corcoran, Executive Director Noll and the Chamber of Commerce for again sponsoring the annual State of the City. I would also like to recognize and thank Larry Bowersox, Superintendent of Schools, for hosting today's event. Before I begin, I would like to introduce several other people here today.

First, I would like to introduce the members of the 2006-2008 City Council. They are, and please stand as I call your name, President Ron Arndt, President Pro-tem Gail Manning, Councilman At Large, Bernadine Butkowski. 1st Ward Councilman Nancy Beuscher, 2nd Ward Dennis Boose, 3rd Ward Dick Jaenke and 4th Ward Bob Olesen.

I would also like to recognize our school board members that are here today, including Robin Hrabik, Manny Dominguez, Marie Sycz, Ross Mitchell and Bill Harnish.

Next I would like to introduce Safety Service Director Dennis Johnson. Denny is a key, integral part of the City administration and makes my job so much easier. Law Director Andy Crites is also here. His involvement on a day to day basis continues to grow - not because we are in trouble, but because we continue to grow. From trying to continue cleaning up the City by taking the corner gas station by eminent domain, negotiating with First Energy to acquire recreational property, to buying property at intersections so we can widen and/or pave them, we pile more and more on the legal department everyday. In addition, my wife Beverly is here today. Without her support, I'm not sure I could make all the meetings and go all the places I have to go.

I would also like to introduce our Department Heads. The State of the City is always dependent upon them and their crews and they certainly deserve our acknowledgment.

Don Daley, French Creek Waste Water Treatment Plant Superintendent, Gary Teel, Grounds and Maintenance, Chris Rangus, Service Garage, Chief Rick Miller from the Fire Department, Chief Rick Thomas, Police Department, Rita Price from

the Office of Older Adults, Jim Spaulding, Parks & Recreation, Dee Graham, Mayors Court, Chris Costin, who is the part time auditor and Donna Kiraly, Deputy Auditor, Tony Hatmaker, Treasurer who also handles our grants and most human resource responsibilities, Rita Taylor, Information Technology, Laverne Porowski, Income Tax, Jim Whitlock, Utilities, Chuck Norris, part time Clerk of Council and Paula Cope, Assistant Clerk of Council, Guy Fursdon, Building Department and Larry Griffith, Engineer. These are the people that truly keep the City running on a day to day basis.

Can everyone hear me OK? I want to make sure you can, because if I'm not heard correctly, my message might not be understood. That reminds me of a story where a man feared his wife wasn't hearing well and might need a hearing aid. Not quite sure how to approach her, he called the family Doctor to discuss the problem.

The Doctor told him there is a simple test he could perform to give the Doctor a better idea about the hearing loss. "Here's what you do", said the Doctor. "Stand about 40 feet away from her, and in a normal conversational speaking tone see if she hears you. If not, go to 30 feet, then 20 feet, and so on until you get a response."

Early that evening, his wife is in the kitchen cooking dinner. He says to himself, "I'm about 40 feet away, let's see what happens."

In a normal tone he says, "honey, I have a City Council meeting later." No response. So he moves closer to the kitchen and from about 30 feet he repeats, "honey, I have a City Council meeting later." Still no response.

He moves into the dining room where he is about 20 feet away from his wife and says again, "honey, I have a City Council meeting later." Again he gets no response.

So he walks up to the kitchen door, about 10 feet away. "Honey, I have a City Council meeting later." Again there is no response, so he walks right up behind her. "honey, I have a City Council meeting later"

"Dear," she says, "for the FIFTH time, I'll watch it on TV!"

2005 was an interesting year to say the least. It was full of positives and I am starting a nice collection of ground breaking shovels in my office.

To begin with, let me review some of the major events that kept us all busy.

In January, we started meeting monthly with Burgess and Niple Engineering to develop the necessary information to submit a grant application for additional funding for widening Center Ridge Road. These meetings have progressed to the point that next week, in fact, we will be having our second public meeting in regards to the project. Current cost estimates for the project range from \$30,000,000 to \$39,000,000 depending on which final option might be chosen. Currently we have commitments of \$12,000,000 from the State and NOACA, so it is imperative that additional funding be pursued aggressively. That comprehensive application will be forwarded to the Transportation Review Advisory Committee in May.

We have also taken significant steps to pursue widening of Lear Nagle Road. This project has been on the NOACA transportation list for a number of years. Not too long ago, they asked us if we wanted it removed from the list, as nothing had ever been done to take the necessary steps to complete the project. We informed them that we did want to pursue this project, and we subsequently contracted with Arcadis Engineering for a preliminary study to determine current costs and configuration. NOACA has it on their schedule for 2009 at an estimated cost of \$3,357,000. The City has to pay 20% of this cost plus right-of-way acquisition projected to be \$540,000 and engineering costs. Updated figures show the constructions costs to be \$4,719,183. We will be approaching NOACA for a revision, but we want to move ahead with this project also. Lear Nagle is a major North South route through the City and must be widened to reduce the congestion on that thoroughfare, as well as to handle any future development on the "Staubach" property.

Speaking of the Staubach property, I can tell you that there are parties interested, offers to purchase have been made but not accepted for one reason or another, some offers are still outstanding, but there isn't anything happening there at the moment. We are having discussions with both the Staubach people and the owners of the Q Panel property in an effort to work towards the improvement of the property for commercial use.

The Community Health Partners project at the corner of Alternate 83 and Chestnut Ridge continues to move along. We met with CHP officials last week, including their new CEO Mark Nosacka, who is committed to building a new facility in North Ridgeville.

It took them awhile, but we finally opened the new Lear Nagle connection. You've heard the question, what if they had a parade and no one showed up? Well, we were so glad to finally get this done, after it took Alltel months to move those poles, we had a grand ribbon cutting. The developer said he would be there, we invited Walgreens and others including all the newspapers. The morning of the cutting it was extremely cold and raining. We had either Steve Lener or Paul Blanchette come to take pictures. Besides the photographer there was Tom Scullen the project manager for Mould Construction, Denny and I, and Denny's daughter. I'm not sure why Denny's daughter was there, but the rest of us had to be. Absolutely no one else showed up.

The Ridgeville Towne Center also continues to move forward. While the developer continues to negotiate major anchor stores, such as a home improvement store and/or a major grocery store chain, they have letters of intent from several sub-anchors. A bank, restaurants, and various other retail stores are definitely interested. Bids are being obtained for the demolition of the buildings that will be removed as well as for the underground work such as sewers and water lines. Negotiations between their financial consultants and our attorneys are continuing.

On a faster track, and believe me, nothing in government seems to happen fast, we are continuing to take the necessary steps to remove the eyesore at the corner of State Route 83 and Center Ridge Road, also known as the old gas station. Last year, we wrote the owner and made him an offer. We told him, that if he donated the property to the City, we would not sue him and force him to fund the costly clean up. He did not accept our offer, and in fact, starts out his response with the statement, "The location at 36001 Center Ridge Road in North Ridgeville is not now and never has been an Abandoned Gas Station." You could have fooled me! He goes on to indicate that his asking price is \$250,000. We have had the property appraised indicating a current market value as of June 1, 2005 to be \$90,000 assuming no underground contamination and that the property is suitable for development. We also know that the cost to remove the waste dirt sitting on the property would be approximately \$30,000. We are currently obtaining an estimate

of what the clean-up costs will be, and then we will file for eminent domain. In our opinion, the net market value will be a negative amount. We can then begin removing this eyesore.

Now, I would like to review some of the accomplishments of some of our City Departments.

Obviously, the Law Department has been very involved in addressing several issues. I would like to point out that through the efforts of our Law Department we have been able to successfully and amicably resolve virtually every threat of litigation against the City on substitutive issues, save one, in which we did go to court and the court dismissed on our Motion for Summary Judgement. I would like to thank our Law Department for keeping us out of court, and thereby saving us thousands of dollars in legal fees. Well done and keep up the good work.

Our Utility department continues to make major strides in improving our service to our residents. One of our major advancements this year is the implementation of our online bill presentation, and the ability to now accept credit card payments. Since the first day that the system was up and running, Nov 22, we have already enrolled 173 customers and taken 378 payments totaling over \$24,000. 155 of those residents signed up to receive the utility bill monthly through e-mail, and 11 through our website. We hope to see this grow to 15-20% of our customers in the near future. In 2005 we added 456 new accounts bringing our total water, sewer and refuse accounts to 10,398. Hopefully, technical advances such as this will enable us to handle and process this growing number of accounts with the great staff we currently have. A new feature we will be looking at this year will be the addition of a work order and service-scheduling element that is now being tested which should simplify and streamline the scheduling of customer appointments.

Another significant change we are going through involves replacement of our Automatic Meter Reading System. Seems like we were talking about this during the Armbruster administration, but now it is finally becoming a reality. Our current meters have a battery life of 10 years and many are now starting to require a battery change. It only takes a few minutes, but inside access is required. Our new system will only require a battery change every 20 years, but can be read automatically with a laptop computer by simply driving down the street. A recent test in the Ridgefield Development allowed us to make 220 readings in about 10

minutes simply by driving down the street. And kudos to Jim Whitlock, our utility supervisor who convinced our supplier to provide us with a lap top computer, upgrades, software and 2 days of training at no cost to the City, saving us approximately \$20,000 to make this upgrade possible.

Another service to our residents which is just now coming on line is a new computer kiosk in our lobby. Customers and residents can access the City of North Ridgeville website, which will allow them to enroll, register and pay utility bills at the kiosk. In addition, they will also be able to access City ordinances for quick reference and view additional current city information such as a list of department contacts, council meeting agendas and public meeting notices just to mention a few.

Lastly, for the Utility Department, Jim Whitlock also oversees our recycling program. For the 13th year in a row, we received a grant from the Lorain County Solid Waste Management District. This year's grant was in the amount of \$106,500 our largest 1 year total ever. Among other things this year's grant will help fund our yard waste collection program, funding of educational programs such as the Middle School aluminum can and paper recycling, police SAFE program, Youth Bureau and Safetyville programs. This year we will also be buying 2 waste oil heaters for use at the Service Department. The net result will be to help residents dispose of waste while helping the City save money by using the waste oil to heat a portion of the garage. We have also been able to purchase several new signs, trash receptacles, parking stops and benches as well as several promotional items such as pencils made from recycled denim, rulers made from recycled yellow page phone books and City directories made from recycled cardboard.

Let's talk a little bit now about our safety forces. The Fire Department was very busy, experiencing a 9% increase in run volume responding to nearly 2400 fire and medical emergencies. We reorganized the department adding an Assistant Chief position that serves as our Fire Department Training Officer. This officer formulates and implements our formal in-service Fire and Emergency Medical training for all Fire Department personnel. Previously, this was conducted on an individual basis by the 3 individual shifts and was not standardized. Our firefighters keep busy in many other ways than their normal duties of fighting fires and medical runs. They assist the Police Department at Safetyville, offer free CPR

classes, offer free smoke detectors to residents and will install them or change batteries for senior citizens or for any family that is unable to do so, put on the Independence day fireworks, raise money for MDA, they built a wheel chair ramp for a disabled resident, gave Christmas gifts to the Genesis House Women's Shelter (and they wrapped them themselves, not the prettiest sight!), and they collected more than 12 ½ tons of aluminum cans for the Aluminum Can for Burned Children program, donating more than \$11,000 to Rainbow Children's Burn Unit. Outstanding! We have a fire department we are very proud of that is second to none.

Our Police Department was also doing exceptional work.

I have a little story I would like to tell involving one of our best officers, Lt. Todd Hilty. And although the story is a little humorous, I know it is in no way indicative of how professional these officers are. I just thought it was a great true story.

Lt. Hilty saw a young man with what he was sure was a stolen bike so he stopped him to investigate. Just picking a name, he said, "Dan, come here a minute". The gentleman answered, "Uh, my name's not Dan." "What is it?" Todd asked. "Uh, Mike" was the response. "What's your last name?" "Uh, I don't remember, I just got up." "Surely, you remember your own name!" "Uh, Smith." "Mike Smith, huh. How old are you?" "Uh, 16" he responded. "What's your birthday?" "Uh, (counting) 1989" (which at the time did not calculate.) At that point, Lt. Hilty was fairly sure, he was lying.

We also had officers that upon investigating a break-in, noticed footsteps in the snow, and followed those footsteps through some very tough areas resulting in arrests, and another officer off duty in a local store recognized a pickpocket/shoplifter and made an arrest before the person whose purse the crook had removed a credit card from even knew there had been a crime. And, after 9 years, the case of the disappearance of North Ridgeville resident Stacie Balas was solved. This was a direct result of the dedication and perseverance of our department and particularly Lt. Barry Accordi. Thanks to all our officers for their fine work.

Traffic crashes were down 15.3% and alcohol related crashes were down an incredible 53.8%. How can we explain this? I would attribute a large part of the

decrease to the fact that our arrests for drunken driving were up a significant 32.4% from 2004, getting those drivers off the road before they hurt themselves or someone else. A continuing problem, however, that wastes a lot of our officers time is false alarms. In 2005 we responded to 737 alarms. All but 3 of these were false, and each requires the response of at least 2 officers. We are researching legislation intended to help reduce this number, or possibly require the alarm owner to pay for calls after the 3rd false alarm, for example.

The detective bureau increased the number of burglaries and felony arrests they solved by 103.8% even though Lt. Marty Garrow was away attending the prestigious FBI National Academy, our 4th officer to do so.

Our jail passed the state inspection with 100% compliance, something I do not believe was ever accomplished before. Costs savings realized by housing prisoners here versus the county jail was a savings of \$113,850.

2005 marked the 40th anniversary of the North Ridgeville Police Department, and you should be very proud of this extremely professional department.

Our Building Department continues to be swamped. In 2005 they issued 539 New Dwelling Permits and 20 new Condo permits. These 3 gentlemen completed 12,165 residential and commercial inspections and our zoning inspector was busy with 2,368 complaints that he dealt with.

The Engineering Department was also extremely busy with their inspections, plan reviews and other duties such as Water Backflow Prevention, Storm Water Management and work with State and other officials as we work towards obtaining funds for street projects, sanitary sewers, EPA compliance and traffic flow. They managed or oversaw over \$16,000,000 in construction projects .

Our French Creek Waste Water Treatment Plant started up their new \$500,000 centrifuge unit which is the initial step in a 5 year plan to develop a sophisticated biosolids division. In the future, this will help keep waste out of the landfills, and result in additional revenue for the plant.

Our Office of Older Adults remains busy preparing approximately 17,000 meals, up from 15,000 the year before. A kitchen renovation project took 6 weeks to

complete and they never missed a beat, relocating to St. Julie's during the interruption. We also increased our transportation schedule so the van now runs Monday - Friday, providing additional service to our senior population.

At our service garage our men and women were kept busy by adding 19 new lane miles to be plowed and maintained. We paved on Bagley, Bender, Tree Moss, Race, Dorchester, Harris, Fortune, Line Drive and South Central Park. With developers money, we paved Bender and Bagley.

We were able to clean and grade over 5 miles of ditches. In 2006, we anticipate assigning an employee full-time to surface drainage concerns.

We upgraded 50% of our lift stations to new cellular monitors that allow for quicker automatic notification on alarms and monitoring of pumps. We also purchased a new sewer camera and have already logged 180 hours of sanitary sewer review. So when they tell me they are watching dirty movies, it's OK!

We also contracted with URS Engineering to assist us in analyzing our sanitary system, helping us to identify and prioritize where we need to emphasize our rehabilitation efforts. This administration remains committed to doing everything we can to eliminate or reduce flooding.

Our Parks and Recreation and Grounds and Maintenance Department were also very busy during 2005.

We again hosted 2 State Softball Tournaments with approximately 60 teams each time. I routinely receive compliments about the job that Gary Teel and his crew do in maintaining our parks.

We were able to pave the road back to the Community Cabin at South Central Park and install handicapped parking areas at Shady Drive last year. Also at South Central, the steps leading to what is now the fishing dock were removed and a ramp was installed making the dock wheel chair accessible. A protective fence was installed on the dock, so fishing from a wheelchair is possible. This year, the restroom facilities will be upgraded to meet ADA standards. And the depth of the fishing lake was raised 18" to ensure a healthy habitat for the fish.

I want to recognize the Baseball/Softball Boosters who spent over \$12,000 helping to improve the ball fields.

At the soccer complex we added 1 new regulation size field that will be useable this spring.

We have finalized the purchase of 67 acres of land off of Cook Road from Ohio Edison at a cost of \$25,000. This year, with the help of some of our residents, we will lay out a master plan for the development of this property.

The Parks and Recreation Department received a grant for \$36,500 plus \$2500 of materials to implement the Healthy Ohioan Youth Pilot Project. Only 8 cities in the state were awarded these grants. The objective of this after school program is to actually document that regular physical fitness, nutrition and tobacco prevention impact children in a positive manner.

As you can tell, even though I didn't hit every department, I think an awful lot of our employees and supervisors and the jobs they do.

Last year my office performed 44 weddings. These run the gamut from just the 2 persons getting married, to a full blown wedding at the gazebo with the bride arriving in her wedding dress in a limo, Dad walking the Bride up and giving her away, a singer, unity candle lighting, flower girl and ring bearer. These are great, I just wish the wedding party would tell me in advance when they design their own wedding with different vows. It does make for an interesting afternoon. And two of the weddings I conducted were extra special.

On January 14th, I conducted a wedding for one of my own daughters. Very special and very tough.

In addition, Joy Jenkins, one of our Office of Older Adults employees asked me to perform her ceremony which I was elated to do. However, Joy had entered a wedding contest and won! Her wedding was held upstairs in the public area at the Southpark mall in Strongsville. I'm sure that will be the largest wedding I ever perform as there were several hundred, if not thousands, of onlookers.

Financially, 2005 was a good year for North Ridgeville. Beginning with the

changes we made in the insurance program, we realized a savings of \$139,569 on our medical and prescription costs. Because of the changes we made the balance in our self insurance fund, which was in the red at the end of last year, now stands at slightly over \$600,000 at the end of November.

Our municipal income tax revenues were up 11% at slightly over \$7,000,000.

As a result of the insurance program changes, increases that we made in our building and inspection fees, and the increase in tax revenues, I believe we have turned the corner at least, and we are heading in the right direction. When we arrived here at the end of 2003, our first budget report showed a deficit in our general fund spending of approximately \$781,000. Last year, we had reduced that deficit to \$450,000. This year, for the first time in many years, our revenues actually exceeded our expenses by approximately \$150,000. That's not very much in the larger scheme of things, but the trend is definitely in the right direction. In the last 2 years our carryover from year to year was \$612,855 and \$657,931 respectively. Keep in mind that carryover includes approximately \$600,000 we moved from capital expenditures to the general fund, to insure that positive carryover for bonding purposes. This year, our carryover is \$1,046,975. Hopefully, in 2006 we will be able to restore our capital expenditure fund to it's full funding level, while at the same time maintaining our finances where we can obtain the highest rating possible. The City is intending to issue bonds in late summer this year to pay off various short-term notes relative to the Westerly sanitary sewer project and other smaller projects. The City hopes to obtain a general bond rating of A2, which is consistent with its last rating obtained in 2003.

We can attribute some of the increase in revenues to new businesses that have come to the City, along with all the new residents. Last year, 19 new businesses came to North Ridgeville. Since this is a Chamber meeting representing our business community, let me briefly list these new businesses. Carlisle Nurtury, Climate-Tech, Curves, Delphi Insurance, D'Nora's Art Studio, General Printwear & Advertising, Grateful Dog Bakery, Homes Roofing, North Ridgeville Family Dentistry, Pets Please, Red Desert Enterprises, Techrep Marketing, Ten Point O Gymnastics Fitness, University Accessories, Walgreens, Get Go, Stefanec's Barber Shop, ABC Rental and JBC Technology. I don't have an exact count, but conservatively, these new businesses represent approximately 150 new jobs.

And, of course as always, all of our funds ended the year in the black.

Finally, let's take a look at what is planned for 2006. I think we will see a number of forward movements and accomplishments that have long been just a dream to many.

First, it is my hope that the old gas station will be cleaned up and the building razed. We, as a City, have had to look at that eyesore since 1997 and it is time for it to go. We are close to filing our eminent domain action, which is the first step in making that happen. To be politically correct, I would point out that the reason we are seeking the property is to make it a park to beautify the main intersection in town. This is a high priority of this administration for 2006.

Hopefully, most of the buildings at the old shopping center will also be demolished. This is not under our control, but we will work diligently with the developer to do what we can to make it happen.

An application will be submitted to the TRAC committee for funding for Center Ridge Road. This is a major step forward in addressing the congestion on this road. I think we are starting to make believers out of people, that we are serious about widening Center Ridge. I am constantly asked, "Are we really going to widen this road?" And they want it, they just didn't believe it could be done. And a reminder, be sure to come to the meeting next week on the 25th, from 4-8 at the Library, and be a part of this tremendous improvement to our City.

This year you will also see major progress towards rehabilitating and widening Lear Nagle Road. It is scheduled to be completed in 2009, and this is the year that the City has to either put up or shut up. We plan to "put up" and will pursue funding options for the major engineering and land acquisition that will need to be done.

I intend to appoint a Charter Review Committee this year. Our Charter requires a Committee at least every 6 years, and the last one was held in 2001.

You will see a continuation and formalization of our Flood Reduction and Avoidance Initiative. We are currently awaiting the results of our Engineering

studies which will help us to prioritize efforts within the City. We will be monitoring zones in the City to help pinpoint some of the problems and we will complete an information pamphlet for our residents to answer many of their questions. Those of us that have lived here many years, know the lingo and know how to be better prepared. Many of our newer residents, however, don't know what a sump pump even is, and often ask why one would bring water inside the house to then pump it back out. I believe we can provide some good advice on how to help prevent flooding, as well as alleviate some of their concerns.

We will be starting the engineering and planning to provide sanitary sewers to Dyke Avenue. Long a major concern in the City and to those residents affected, we are going to address that situation. We have had discussions with the EPA and are under orders to resolve these concerns, so we really don't have a choice in the matter, even if we wanted to, which we don't.

It is our intention to bring forth legislation this year that will allow us to bill insurance and medicare for ambulance service. We can do this without charging our residents, which we are committed not to do. Several cities in Ohio now have the ability to recoup the costs of ambulance runs including equipment and supplies that are used, which helps to support the operation of their fire departments. As costs continue to rise, it is incumbent upon us to look for new revenue streams that make sense, and implement them where they benefit our residents. Of our 2400 runs last year, most were medical runs. We need a new fire truck. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to pay for it with insurance company dollars. And keep in mind, if you have insurance, you are already paying for this coverage. If you don't, we won't charge you.

We anticipate Community Health Partners breaking ground on their new medical campus. We are completing a grant application that will help us to bring our sewer line down to Chestnut to enable this to occur.

Route 83 will be paved, as Center Ridge Road was this year, from City Line to City Line. In addition, we will pave Taylor Woods Industrial Parkway and Mills Industrial Parkway. Too long have these business areas been ignored. If good businesses are going to be convinced to move into these areas, they must have decent streets for their employees and customers.

This year the intersection at Lorain and Root Road will be totally rebuilt. We ask our resident's patience and cooperation. We are currently reviewing how we are going to handle traffic flow during this interruption. Do we institute a detour which might be more inconvenient for residents but allows us to complete the project quicker, or do we try and maintain some semblance of traffic flow locally, but extend the project time line another 30-45 days? Keep in mind, this is a total rebuild with improved turn lanes, curbs and smoother approaches. The end result will be worth the wait and inconvenience, so please bear with us.

And, of course, the railroad overpass will be opened this year making the southern and western portion of our City safer for our residents and businesses.

Speaking of our businesses, I received notice just Tuesday that our application for a Foreign Free Trade Zone has been approved. This will certainly help Invacare, Beckett Industries and others compete globally in today's economy, thereby helping to keep and retain these businesses locally. And even to grow. While Lorain County is losing manufacturing jobs at a very high rate for the last few years, going from 37% of our employment to about 20%, this can only help us get some of those jobs back. We look forward to working with these companies to grow and provide good jobs for North Ridgeville and Lorain County residents.

These are only a few of the improvements we anticipate next year.

It continues to be my vision that over the next few years, we continue in the direction we are going to solidify the City's finances so we do not have to continually ask for increases. I think we are getting nearer to that point. I would still like to look at an income tax some time in the future that would replace some of our property levies. This, in turn, would stabilize our residents taxes so they are tied to their income rather than to property values.

We need to update the Master Plan and look where we want to be in 5, 10 and 15 years. Widening Center Ridge Road, for example, may not even be finished while I am in office. We need to have a plan that can follow from administration to administration.

And finally, we need to continue working towards bringing all kinds of new businesses to North Ridgeville. This is the key to keeping our individual taxes

low, and helping to improve our quality of life in this great City.

Even though not every day at City Hall is perfect, they are all fun or at least very interesting. Kind of like last year when my friend Rev. Mike Gibson and I went fishing. We went up to Sandusky Bay to try out his brand new bass boat. For some reason, the snakes were out, and the banks were just covered with thousands and thousands of snakes. Sure enough, one of my casts towards the shore went a little long, and I hooked a snake. It jumped 5' straight up in the air. I couldn't cut my line fast enough. Continuing to fish, Mike caught 2 huge carp. Not to be gross, but he hooked the first one right in the eye (we released him unharmed) and the second one he hooked right through the tail. Have you ever tried to reel in a big fish backwards? It isn't easy. Finally, on another one of my casts, a sea gull swooped down, and, sure enough, I hooked him in the wing in mid flight. Successful day? I guess not, but we sure had a lot of fun. Kind of like your average day at City Hall.

And as much fun as the last 2 years have been, I am really looking forward to 2006. I feel that this can be the year that many of the projects that have been presented to the City will finally take hold. Financially, I believe we have positioned ourselves to be able to start rebuilding our surplus towards a more responsible level, while meeting our commitments to our employees and residents.

We will continue to strive to bring good businesses and light industry to our community. Working with the Chamber of Commerce, we want to be responsive to prospective businesses.

I look forward to working with our new Council and continuing to move North Ridgeville forward. It's a great place to live and do business, as all of you know. Last year 896 new residents and 19 businesses also decided it would be a great place to live and work, realizing what all of us already knew.

Thanks to all of you for listening and to the Chamber for once again giving me the opportunity to speak to you. Remember, our door is always open, and feel free to stop in and say hello.