

**STATE OF CITY
MAYOR DEAN DePIERO
FEBRUARY 21, 2007
“PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS”**

Good morning and welcome. Thank you for attending my third State of the City address.

First, I would like to start by thanking Parmatown Mall and its management for hosting this event for a second year. I appreciate the hard work that has gone into making this day possible. Frank Lanterman and staff... Thank you so much.

A huge thank you also to Mall management for providing coffee for today's event, as well as the newly built Dunkin Donuts on Snow Road for their generous donation to provide a little breakfast for all of you here this morning.

I am grateful to see so many residents, members of the clergy, the business community and representatives from our great city school district here today. Thank you all for being here this morning.

I'd also like to acknowledge members of Parma City Council. Council President Chuck Germana, (fill in other elected officials in attendance)...thank you all for attending today and for your leadership to our community.

I have been indeed fortunate to have such a positive working relationship with these individuals who love and care about the City of Parma as much as I do.

Certainly, I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize members of my cabinet who continue to be loyal and professional in carrying out their duties on behalf of the residents, businesses and institutions that make up this great city, including my executive assistant Meghann McCall and my executive secretary Michelle Blair.

Please stand up and be recognized. Thank you. *(Pause)*

“Time flies when you're working hard.” It seems like only yesterday that I took the oath of office to become Parma's 13th mayor. And as we enter the fourth year of my first term, I am grateful to this community for giving me the opportunity to lead one of the finest and most decent municipalities in this nation.

In the past 3 ½ years, we have accomplished a lot. Together we have worked to regain public confidence in their government. We have reformed areas of our government, and we have made ethics an important part of our administration. We have worked to raise the debate and to make the citizens proud of our work.

We also gave the power to vote on taxes to the citizens of Parma and forged important relationships with churches, schools, community organizations and elected officials around the

state.

We have built new housing, tore down old buildings including the former police station, and redeveloped neighborhood areas. We paved streets, cleaned up parks, and modernized our police cruisers. This, and much more, has been accomplished, but there is much more to be done. That is why I have decided to seek, and look forward to the opportunity to ask for, another term as Mayor.

We live in a great American city with many great things happening. But like many cities similar to Parma, we face many challenges - a changing regional economy with less income for cities like Parma, urban sprawl, an aging infrastructure and aging housing stock are just a few.

We can choose to ignore our problems, or face them head on and work toward solutions. That is why I recently brought government, academia, and the business community together to form the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission. I asked them to make recommendations on how we could make our community better. I want to publicly thank them for their work and for the many recommendations they made. Over the next weeks and months we will be rolling out many of these ideas; working with City Council to debate the pros and cons of each recommendation. I pledge that each will get a full public airing.

One of the recommendations from the Commission was to pursue high-end housing in our community.

Safe neighborhoods attract and keep young families, but new neighborhoods do too. New housing, such as the site of the old police station at W. 54th and Snow and Walter's Grove, have been constructed on the northern end of the City – the first new homes built in decades in that area. I commend Building Commissioner and City Engineer Paul Deichmann for his efforts with all the new construction in Parma, including the 41 new homes built in Parma last year. We are beginning to hear demand for high-end housing in our community. Our residents have made a “home” in Parma, and they want the City's housing stock to grow with their families' needs.

In the southern end of the City, Arlington Place is underway and the Juniper Cove development is completed. Both are “high end” complexes in the \$200,000 - \$300,000 range and up and we will work hard to give additional areas for higher end housing.

You may ask why I am touting new home construction. The reason is simple. Parma, like other inner ring cities in Greater Cleveland, is losing population. Families and empty nesters are setting their sights outside of Cuyahoga County – attracted to new home developments in newer towns.

We must try to stop that from happening here. That's why Parma must compete in the new housing market. That is why, through the leadership of Assistant Building Commissioner Don Graves, we have implemented a fair and ongoing property maintenance sweep of the entire City's housing stock. This exhaustive effort will keep our dwellings attractive and desirable to those seeking to stay here and move here. To continue to show my support for this effort I will authorize doubling the number of housing inspectors for the City in the coming months.

This town has something to offer everyone from our shopping districts to our quality public education system; from our numerous religious institutions and parochial schools, to many fine eateries - independently owned and chains.

In the heart of Parma is the West Creek Preserve – the newest member of the Metroparks Emerald Necklace – a project that this Administration embraces wholeheartedly to insure green space within our city for decades to come. This year residents are already seeing the investment of \$14 million in trails and park infrastructure.

As you may recall, the City has also partnered with the Busch family to secure acres of property behind their Ridge Road funeral home as permanent greenspace to be enjoyed for generations to come.

With all this and more to offer, it is why my Administration seeks to attract new residents and retain existing residents to this wonderful place we call home. It is why new housing starts are critical to the future of Parma.

And speaking of the future.... This spring the City will unveil two new fire stations to better serve residents. Last year, we broke ground. This year, our firefighters will move into two new fire houses -- one on Snow Road and the other on Pearl Road. To Fire Chief John French and Assistant Chief Dennis Ryan, we look forward to the “open houses” and thank you and your staff for shepherding this project to its completion. These fire stations will feature state-of-the-art training facilities and will increase our ability to quickly respond to our citizens’ needs.

As you may recall, last year I created the position of City grantwriter. I am proud to say that in this capacity Shelley Cullins has brought in about a quarter of a million dollars in new money to the City. This money has benefited the city’s service department, police department, as well as the auxiliary police. I am hopeful that as Parma continues to apply for more grants, we will become more and more competitive, and we will be able to benefit even more of our departments.

The City’s Human Resources and Purchasing Department, headed by Director Elayne Siegfried, implemented BWC related programs that have saved the City nearly \$1 million in premium costs in 2006. Additionally, the execution of the Transitional Work Policy has brought individuals back on the job after a workplace injury sooner than previously allowed; resulting in 150 less days off work from 2005. The Department has also further utilized the City’s website with adding current job postings, and we will begin accepting competitive bids through the site as well.

Under the leadership of Law Director and Chief Prosecutor Tim Dobeck, the law department has instituted a successful youth diversion program and community mediation program. Not only do these programs provide a community service, they are a cost savings to our residents. Please also check the City’s website to find suggestions and warnings compiled by Director Dobeck on how to avoid identity theft.

Our Service Department repaved, resurfaced or resealed over 25 streets in 2006 and has worked to keep our streets clean during difficult winter months.

Public Housing Director, Lev Kulchytsky, has turned a department once overwhelmed by mismanagement into one of the best public housing departments in the area.

Our Department of Parks and Recreation, which will have a ribbon cutting ceremony immediately after this address and our Senior Center, have programs for the young and the young at heart. Every year we work hard to update our ball fields and equipment so that we are offering the “best” to Parma residents.

Our Senior Center, under the direction of Director JoAnn Mason saw exponential growth in the number of partnerships with the Senior Center in 2006. The Parma Area Fine Arts Council, PAFAC, now calls the Senior Center Home. In addition, the Center is now visited regularly by County representatives from Adult Protective Services, and houses the City’s HEAP offices. JoAnn is also working tirelessly to expand the Human Services Department at the Center. JoAnn’s work truly highlights what creating partnerships can do for our residents.

We continued a working relationship with the Parma City Schools and its invaluable Superintendent, Dr. Sarah Zatik. One project that we’re particularly proud of was improving an abandoned construction site on Biscayne Avenue. The city provided the structure and Parma’s high school vocational students are giving it a brand new look while learning valuable trade skills. This is an example of what I like to call “Progress through Partnerships” – a phrase for the City, I believe, coined by the late Mayor Mike Ries.

“Progress through Partnerships” was never more evident when the independent Blue Ribbon Commission, which was established to review city finances and operations to help guide the City, presented its findings last month to City Council and provided 15 recommendations to help enhance this city, its residents and businesses.

Another invaluable partnership that we are proud of is our relationship with the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of Board President Frank Lanterman and Executive Director Pat Pell. The Chamber continues to be an advocate for commerce in the tri-city area and their ongoing efforts are greatly appreciated.

There is synergy and partnership in a joint study being conducted by neighboring community fire departments to explore regionalization of these services in an effort to save tax dollars.

Our growing partnership with Parmatown Mall cannot be overlooked. We are proud and excited to announce the City’s Department of Parks and Recreation have moved their offices and is now located in the mall. (*gesture to the new location*)

Another partnership I continue to form is with Parma’s religious community. I want to take this moment to off a special “thank you” to Reverend Todd Biermann of the Calvary Lutheran Church who generously agreed to chair the Blue Ribbon Commission. He will also be presenting the Commission’s findings at my next quarterly breakfast meeting with area

ministers, scheduled for Wednesday, February 28th.

There's also the collaboration between the Parma Fire Department and the Community Emergency Response Team or CERT. CERT is made up of volunteer Parma residents trained to handle emergency situations. CERT has been called out on three emergencies to aid our fine Fire Department. They continue to train for future emergencies, when and where needed. Just this past weekend, CERT worked to safely unbury 70 fire hydrants from under heavy snow, and while members were walking our City's streets, two CERT members came upon a resident in distress. Using their training, the resident was kept calm and warm until an emergency squad could arrive.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Parma Auxiliary Police for their continued volunteerism throughout 2006. Last year, these fine individuals donated nearly 11,000 volunteer hours staffing various functions and events. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

I am proud of our community's volunteer safety forces. They provide an invaluable service to our residents and provide needed assistance to our full-time safety employees. I am proud to call them the best in the area.

I knew when I was elected that if Parma was to move forward, faith had to be restored in its police department and to put in place measures to ensure that personnel abuses would not happen again.

Police Chief Dan Hoffman, his police command staff, and Safety Director Greg Baeppler have systematically put in place effective and efficient "safeguards" designed to protect tax dollars from the sloppy departmental management practices of the past.

I can honestly say that Safety Director Baeppler, Chief Hoffman and the Parma Police department's new senior command staff wasted no time in tightening up lax internal accounting practices. And in the wake of sweeping and meaningful police department reforms, a "new culture" runs through the ranks of Parma's men in blue.

Since taking office, new crime fighting technology, such as in-car computers and video cameras have been added to the department's inventory. These purchases were made utilizing competitive grants, drug money seizures and property seizures instead of tax dollars.

In the aftermath of Plain Dealer and other media scrutiny about overtime and sick abuse within the department in 2003, Parma voters lost faith in the police and they showed their anger at the polls. Those rejections at the polls – in **2003 and 2004** --have now placed this City a point of critical mass. The City has lost nearly \$5.4 million in police operating funds because police levies placed on the ballot after the news coverage have been defeated.

The hard reality is that the Parma police department is understaffed. We have gone from a department of 106 to 87 – a significant reduction in force for the seventh largest city in the State of Ohio and one whose borders are becoming more porous.

According to nationwide statistics, Parma was ranked the 32nd safest cities in America in 2006, but the question we must ask ourselves is: “For how long?”

A strong and vibrant police department is needed to protect this city, its residents and its businesses. It cannot be done without the necessary staffing levels, and we can’t achieve the necessary staffing levels without added finances.

There has been enough talk about the former mismanagement of the police department. I assure you that we have a police department you can be proud of - but to move Parma into the future the City needs restored revenue.

As you know, Parma City Council, at my request, has authorized that a police operating levy be placed on the May ballot to replace the money that was lost. I made this request because it is the right thing to do and at the right time to do it.

The owner of a home valued at \$100,000 will pay less than \$6 a month in additional property taxes. For less than the cost of lunch from a fast food restaurant, we can work together to keep this great city safe. We must not only ask what the cost to is to a resident if the levy passes, we must ask what the cost is if it fails. The consequences are declining safety, declining property values, and less safety services.

There will be town hall meetings and forums held throughout the city to inform the residents about this important issue and how the reforms have been implemented and how your tax dollar being protected.

With that, I ask for your support in passing the desperately needed police operating levy which will be on the May ballot.

I am also proud to announce that the Police Department will be launching their website in the coming months as well as the Auxiliary Police Department. Residents will be able to learn the number of services each of our officers provides to the community.

The City’s website continues to evolve, and I believe it has become one of the best community websites in the area, and the proof is in the thousands of hits we receive each month. I am proud that the City’s website has become a resource for all city operations for our residents.

Another service I have been proud to provide the community is the semi-annual newsletter. I hope that our residents have found this to be a resource for news and updates regarding what are going on in their City. We know that not all of our residents have access to the Internet, so I hope residents are taking advantage of this service to our community.

For the first time employees are now making a contribution to their health coverage which is saving money for the tax payers. This partnership has come as a result of working through negotiations with the City’s nine unions and is nearing completion for all.

Partnerships and collaboration were made evident by the Department of Community

Development, under the leadership of Director Erik Tollerup. Such initiatives include our Storefront Renovation program, the revolving loan program, and working with developers to help revitalize Parma's tax base. The City hopes to strengthen its partnership with P.A.R.C., the Parma Area Redevelopment Corporation, to gain their assistance in our streetscape initiative and other north-end projects.

We also provide a successful first-time homebuyer program and home improvement program for interior and exterior renovations for more established homeowners through the Community Development Department.

The list of partnerships is endless and is in part making Parma the "best that it can be."

But there is another "partnership" that must be nurtured and enhanced. And that partnership is between City Hall and our residents.

For years this town has prided itself on its financial responsibility and prudence.

That goes for City Hall and residents alike. It is why despite shrinking tax dollars, we have not had to layoff any workers and why we have managed to balance three budgets despite tightening revenues. Thanks to Treasurer Anthony Zielinski and Auditor Dennis Kish for helping to ensure that this was possible.

But the time is now upon us that "doing more with less" may not be an option.

Income tax revenue that we've counted on in the past is dwindling. With the GM plant offering employee buyouts and local TOPS Supermarket shutting its doors, the city has lost a substantial amount of tax dollars. Also, a small distribution company located here recently went out of business as a result of the TOPS closing. Add to the fact that Parma residents haven't approved a police operating levy since 2004 and we're facing some hard financial decisions in the future.

Already, Parma residents pay some of the lowest property taxes in Cuyahoga County and we work hard to live within our means.

But the time has come that we must look at where Parma is heading financially and how it is being supported financially.

That's why partnerships with residents are so important. We believe that if people are told the truth and recognize the truth about the City's finances, then we can move ahead making prudent decisions about this city's future.

And we have great plans for the City's future.

In the coming weeks legislation will be introduced in Parma City Council creating the Citizen's Police Academy and my administration will be studying how best to create a Citizen's Review Board for our Police Department – both recommendations offered by the Blue Ribbon Commission. I believe these new citizen's groups will offer volunteers a first hand opportunity

to see how our police force operates, and will help us to continue to make the Parma Police Department the premier department in the area.

I am working with the Veterans Administration to bring a state-of-the-art Veterans Administration outpatient facility to Parma.

There are plans to work with General Motors to use its vacant property for economic development uses.

I want to expand the Department of Community Developments' "Storefront Renovation program" in partnership with the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce to re-invigorate our small businesses and, in turn, our community

Parma's health care base must continue to work with Parma Community General Hospital and assisted living facilities such as Manor Care, which will open their expanded facility in April. The Manor Care will create 150 new health care jobs.

A thorough examination of the City's aging water and sewer infrastructure will be a priority.

Tackling unfunded government mandates is another challenge, finding additional ways to regionalize and thus save tax dollars must be reckoned with.

Parma's future is bright. Throughout my Administration, I have been dedicated to keeping Ohio's seventh largest city a superb municipality to live, work, and play.

Through continued partnerships we can do anything we wish to accomplish. I am reminded of a famous quote from President John F. Kennedy. "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

Thank you for attending today.
May God Bless America and the Great City of Parma.