

Happy New Year everyone. I would like to begin 2014 by thanking Peter Corvelli for his years of service on Council and to welcome Barbara Macesko. Welcome back to Brian Joho, as well. I look forward to working with Barbara, Brian and my entire council in the coming years.

The past few years have been difficult ones for the Borough financially. Council has responded by keeping a tight rein on Borough spending. For the past two years, there has been almost no increase in spending and we owe a debt of thanks to our employees for working with us and holding the line on cost increases.

As everyone knows, Merck filed a tax appeal in 2011 contesting the assessment of their facility. Our tax assessor, Paul Parsons, successfully negotiated a favorable settlement with Merck which resulted in the withdrawal of the tax appeal for the year 2011 and allowed the Borough to phase in the reduction in the assessed value of their facility over 2012 and 2013. In 2014, there will be no further downward adjustment in the assessed value of the Merck facility. This stabilization will allow the Borough a bit of breathing room in the current year.

Of course, the best news we received in 2013 is that Merck will be relocating its world headquarters to Kenilworth beginning this year. This is an enormous benefit to the Borough, its residents and our merchants. It is my hope that our future relationship with Merck will begin to mirror that which we had with Schering. I very much look forward to working with the Merck leadership and to establishing such a relationship. In fact, I will be attending a meeting in the next week with the Merck construction representatives to discuss their plans for renovating and reopening their headquarters building and related offices and how the Borough can make that process go more smoothly. While it will certainly be different than when Schering called Kenilworth home; Merck's relocation can only mean good things for Kenilworth's future.

2014 will be a year of change for the Borough. Hedy Lipke, our Borough Clerk for the last 15 years has retired and a new Clerk will take the helm in the near future. Hedy's absence will certainly be felt; she was a fixture at Borough Hall and a font of institutional knowledge. There will certainly be some growing pains during the transition period but I am confident that we will weather the storm which will be felt as a result of Hedy's retirement. I look forward to toasting her future at her retirement party.

I would like to thank Kathi Moschitta who is stepping into the void until the new Clerk comes on board. Both she and Pat Howarth will render invaluable aid in the coming months.

There are so many people to thank for their help over the past year. I would like to begin with Chief Zimmerman for his leadership of the stellar police department that we are fortunate to have. All of the members of our Police Department, including the civilian employees, have demonstrated time and again their dedication to this community and their extraordinary commitment to protecting and serving the Borough.

The commitment to service by Chief Lew Giordino and the members of the Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad is unmatched. 2013 marked the 100th anniversary of the Fire Department and Rescue Squad and this Borough has been lucky to have such a great group of volunteers who selflessly spend untold hours to keep us all safe.

Superintendent Dan Ryan and the members of the Kenilworth DPW have done a fantastic job this past year as well. I have received many complements from both residents and out of towners saying how nice the town always looks.

Our CFO, Rob Ordway has once again done amazing things to help keep the Borough financially strong. Our Welfare Director and Senior Citizen Program Director, Paulette Drogan, works tirelessly to help those who need help the most. I want to thank all of our employees in Borough Hall who keep the Clerk's office, the Construction Department, Municipal Court, and the Health Department running smoothly.

The many volunteers who help the Borough with their service are most deserving of our thanks. The Beautification Committee has once again done a wonderful job of keeping the planter's along the Boulevard attractive during all seasons. The members of the Planning Board, Board of Health, Welfare Board and Library Board, are all volunteers who devote countless hours to assist the Borough and its residents. The volunteers on our Recreation Committee and Pat Boyle, as Recreation Director, have over seen many events and sports programs for the Borough's children.

We are blessed to have so many people who are willing to serve and volunteer their time and efforts. On behalf of all of the residents of the Borough, I thank you all.

I would also like to thank each of the members of council for the many, many hours they devote to the Borough. I don't think people really realize how difficult it can be sometimes to do this job. But each of you do it well and on behalf of the residents of the Borough, I'd like to thank each of you. Knowing that you have done good is often its own reward, but you should be thanked from time to time.

For the first time in a long time I am looking forward to the new year. I am as always very hopeful for the future of the town that I have called home all my life and thankful for having been given the opportunity of giving back to the community that has given so much to me.

In conclusion, I hope everyone has a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. May God bless America, the Borough of Kenilworth, each of you and all those serving in the armed forces.