

City Council members and other government officials, community leaders and activists, members of the business community, residents, ladies and gentlemen—thank you for coming to hear about where we have been as a City this last year, and where we intend to go in 2013.

Each year, as I've sat down to draft my State of the City address, I've tried to capture something of the mood, not only of the City, but of the nation at a particular point in our common history.

When I came before you in January 2010, I declared emphatically—for the first time in a public statement that I can find record of— “The Culinary Institute will happen.” I know, because I found my notes for that speech, and that line is there, not only in black and white, but underlined and in bold type: “The Culinary Institute will happen.” Well guess what? The Culinary Institute did happen. You know that, because you're sitting in it now. More about downtown redevelopment plans later, but for those of you with that “healthy skepticism” of central authority that President Obama mentioned in his inaugural address, I hope that sitting in the actual bricks and mortar helps restore your faith in democratic institutions.

When I came before you in 2011, the country was still reeling from the senseless shooting that killed six innocents and wounded Arizona Congresswoman Gabby Giffords while out to meet and greet constituents at a local supermarket. We wanted to believe it was a nightmare scenario that would never repeat itself, but that wasn't the case. Since then, our nation has been

forced to endure the heartbreak of a series of gun-related violent episodes up to and including not only the tragic death of 20 children and 6 adults in Newtown, Connecticut, but the murder of two volunteer firefighters and the wounding of two others just 90 miles down Route 104 in West Webster, right in our own back yard. Things like that aren't supposed to happen here, but they did. Don't let them tell you that it can't happen here, because it can happen here...

(Video – Active shooter drill)

Here's some good news. The City Administrator and I just got back from the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, D.C., where the issue of cooperative between municipalities and school districts to deal with potential threats to our children's safety was a hot topic, as you might imagine. I am happy to report that, for once, we're ahead of the national curve in terms of our preparation for nightmare scenarios like the one that unfolded in Newtown. Many of the cities attending had yet to conduct their first realistic police training exercise or student drill addressing the danger of an "active shooter" on the loose in an occupied school building. As you've seen, we've done a considerable amount of homework already; that video was from November of 2011. But we're not going to congratulate ourselves; instead we're going to renew our efforts and stay at the front of the pack.

That's why tonight I am announcing that we will jointly review our contingency planning for school safety in the context of

adopting a new Emergency Management Plan. We'll address all potential threats to the life and limb of our precious children and their teachers and administrators. We will use an all-hazards approach that looks at the "active shooter" scenario, but also disease, severe weather, chemical plant or other industrial accidents, cyber threats, power outages, and yes, the threat posed by bullying; we will make sure we have plans to meet all contingencies. We will make sure plans, whether for evacuation, sheltering in place or locking down, include provisions for students with special needs. We will make sure our plans utilize the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS), so that they can be easily coordinated with plans and systems at other levels and in surrounding jurisdictions. We will reach out, not only to our own public and private school systems, but also coordinate with campus security at Niagara County Community College and Niagara University.

We will leave no stone unturned to adopt the best possible practices, policies and procedures—we think we're in the vanguard, but we will shamelessly steal any good idea we haven't thought of yet, because it might someday save the life of your son or daughter or grandson or granddaughter. We will seek to adopt technological innovations that make possible the transmission of real-time tactical intelligence, from floor plan mapping to surveillance camera images, to devices in the vehicles carrying police officers and firefighters en route to an

incident scene. We will seek to work out arrangements that respect the right to privacy of every individual in our society when it comes to medical issues, including mental health issues, but that also make certain our school resource officers and other key personnel have some knowledge when individuals have exhibited symptoms or have had history of incidents that suggest there is reason for concern. Long story short: we all hope what happened at Newtown won't happen here, but we're going to review every aspect of our preparations in cooperation with our strategic partners just in case it does, because prior preparation prevents poor performance. I think I learned that in the Boy Scouts. Be prepared.

You have probably seen media reports about my support for the initiative undertaken by the bipartisan group Mayors Against Illegal Guns, which has helped shape federal efforts to reduce gun violence and garnered the support of over 800 mayors nationwide. I'm proud to stand by our balanced approach, designed to implement common sense measures to limit gun violence while protecting our Second Amendment rights, which I strongly support. The highlights:

Require every gun buyer to pass a criminal background check;

Get military-style assault rifles and high-capacity magazines off our streets;

Research the impact of repeated exposure to violent video games on our young peoples' attitudes towards and propensity or aversion towards violence;

Make certain that information about individuals who should not be allowed to purchase guns, including those with dangerous mental illness, finds its way into the database used to do background checks when guns are purchased.

These are common sense actions my fellow mayors from across the country feel strongly need to be part of a balanced, nationwide approach to reducing gun violence. But we are also looking to take action closer to home.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, from noon to 5pm at the Ontario Avenue fire hall, the City of Niagara Falls will conduct its' first-ever gun buyback program. What's the objective, and how does it work? Well, first let me tell you that we don't view this as a silver bullet. It's part of a broader program we call HEAT—Help Eliminate Armed Thugs—and features an educational component, which we think is important. Do we think that a gang member who just illegally bought a brand-new semi-automatic pistol for \$1000 will come in and let us buy it back for \$100? No, we don't. But we have learned from experience that all kinds of guns can kill people if they get into the wrong hands.

I myself have stood looking at table loads of guns seized in raids or recovered at crime scenes, and marveled at just how mundane most of them are. The sawed-off shotgun used in a robbery or drive-by shooting today might be grandpa's old duck or deer gun, left in the closet when grandpa passed on, stolen in a

burglary or snatched by a neighbor kid when no one was looking. Old, unwanted guns or illegal guns that people don't know how to dispose of—those are the guns we are looking to get off the streets. We pay \$10 for non-working guns, \$50 for working shotguns and rifles, \$75 for handguns, and \$100 for assault rifles. If someone unknowingly comes in with a legally-owned antique or otherwise valuable gun, we won't short-change them—we'll take the gun for safekeeping, give them a receipt, and help sell the gun through a gun dealer. And remember that hypothetical gang member with the brand new illegally-purchased semi-automatic pistol? Well, maybe he gets locked up for a while or goes on the lamb out of town, and his mother who loves him and doesn't want to see him gun someone down or get gunned-down himself finds his gun in the closet. Well you know what? Maybe we'll get that gun off the street for \$75 after all. What's the life of a child worth? Worth a try, that's for sure.

Another action we are taking, along with over 60 other cities across the country at last count, is to take stock of our gun and ammo purchases over the last 5 years. That's right, City police departments are big customers for guns and ammo—we spend about \$25,000 annually here in Niagara Falls. What are we going to do with the information? Investigate whether we can use our collective purchasing power to persuade manufacturers of undesirable products—armor-piercing “cop-killer” bullets come immediately to mind—that they will not get our business if they don't pull those products from the market! To me, that's just common sense.

In partnership with our greatly-respected and recently-retired police Chief John Chella, I strove to make community policing the hallmark of our departmental policy. That philosophy, far from being discarded or discontinued, is being reemphasized and renewed under the leadership of our great new Police Chief, Bryan DalPorto. As we seek to minimize costs while maximizing effectiveness and face-to-face contact with the citizens we serve, expect to see the maximum ratio of “tooth-to-tail” that we can achieve with the resources we have to put in to fight. If you own a business on Pine Avenue or Niagara Street, don’t be surprised to see a cop on the beat stick his or her head in the door. When the weather changes, expect to see more cops on the sidewalk, cops in GEM electric vehicles and cops on bicycles—whatever it takes to get closer to the community, and closer to the issues that matter most in the daily lives of the people we serve.

I’ll never forget something that happened my first year as mayor. I was going to my neighborhood Tops grocery store over on Portage, and there had been some troubles in the parking lot in recent days—purse snatchings or car break-ins or some-such. Part of our reaction was to send bike patrol officers through the parking lot to keep an eye on things. As the first two officers began their ride across the parking lot, several elderly ladies... I mean several female senior citizens... were coming out of the market carrying bags of groceries. They took one look at the officers on their bikes, set their grocery bags on

the ground, and broke out into a spontaneous round of applause. True story... Now, to be perfectly honest, I never stopped to ask whether they reacted in such an enthusiastic way because they were big fans of bicycle patrols or because this was the first time in forty years they had been that close to 30-year old men wearing black spandex shorts. But, by golly, I figured out pretty quickly that this was a very popular program and something we should expand on in the future.

I promise you that we will continue our tradition of community-based policing, strengthening our partnership with citizen organizations. For years, the Block Clubs have been our eyes and ears on the streets and in the neighborhoods. Roger Spurback, Norma Higgs and company: we couldn't do it without you and your Neighborhood Crime Watch. SNUG is simply "guns" spelled backwards; the program, which originated in Chicago, uses individuals from the community who had troubles early in life but got their lives turned around to serve as credible role models for youth at risk. **MAD DADS**, which stands for **Men Against Destruction Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder**, was founded in 1989 by a group of concerned African-American men in Omaha, Nebraska who were fed up with gang violence and the unmolested flow of illegal drugs in their community. **MAD DADS** activities, now coming to our town, are designed to promote and demonstrate positive images of fathers engaging in community development and protecting youth and families. And with help from Senator Chuck

Schumer, Niagara Falls will be one of only eight cities, nationwide, to be partnered with the new U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Diagnostic Center. The center brings the most advanced crime fighting techniques and expertise to the participating cities. "The aim is to curb crime and spur development," Senator Schumer said while making the announcement, "and it doesn't cost the city of Niagara Falls or county of Niagara a dime."

The center will bring federal experts into the city to partner with Falls police to implement an evidence-based, data-driven approach to criminal justice, juvenile justice and victim services issues, building on the high-tech COMPSTAT approach we already use. Speaking of high-tech in the Police Department, did you know that we have not one but two Facebook pages? One page for the Department itself, and one called "Niagara Falls Police Retail Crimes Intel," specialized for the Business District Initiative. I don't care how big a ham you are, you do not want your picture to turn up on these pages because you didn't know there was a surveillance camera at the convenience store you were robbing, or you forgot to wear your hoody or whatever. Go on these sites and see if you recognize any of your friends; if you do, drop us a line...

I've spent a lot of time talking about law enforcement issues in this speech. I did that because I think a "State-of-Anything" speech has to reflect what is on people's minds, and from Sandy Hook to Webster to the gun control debate, these issues are

certainly weighing heavily on the public psyche. But I don't want you to think the reason for all this attention is that our City is somehow lawless, unsafe or out of control. Far from it.

One homicide is too many. We had three in Niagara Falls last year, though we were lucky a two-year old survived being shot in the head outside a convenience store, or the poor little girl might have been number four. But a couple of the homicides we did have were unthinkably horrible. That leaves a disproportionate negative impression of the state of law and order in the community. Here are the actual statistics. Tough times usually result in more "economic" crimes, but robberies are down 1%, while arrests for robbery are up 88%. Similarly, burglaries are down 15%, but arrests for burglary are up 22%. Larcenies are up, we think due to increased reporting of incidents like car break-ins through our Business District Initiative, but here too arrests are up 21%. Stolen vehicles are down 25%.

Strength, resilience and fundamental goodness of the people: those are our secret weapons in the war against crime, and with the continued support of the people of the City of Niagara Falls, we're going to come out on top. So what else is going on in Niagara Falls?

Our Community Development department sent two clear messages in 2012: quality housing is a game changer; and partnerships breed success. If we want more people to stay, move, or do business here, we need to provide access to safe,

well-maintained, and yes “cool” neighborhoods. Good housing is the backbone of a successful local economy.

Here are some highlights of our plan:

Community Development rolled out the LiveNF initiative, and a new needs-based housing assistance program based on student loan debt. You may have seen that we received a little media attention for that. Well, a lot of media attention, actually. All the national media—the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, everyone—covered it. But that is not why we did it. We started this program because facts are facts. We have lost 50 percent of our population over 50 years—the largest population loss of any city in New York State. Far too many of those who leave have been our best and brightest—in other words, our children. And as our own kids have left, we have not been successful in drawing in young people from other cities. If we want to survive as a city we need to find ways to keep talented young people here, and get them to come here from other places.

LiveNF started a conversation and that is a good thing. Since its’ inception last June, the project has been funded entirely with non-general fund dollars. A management plan was drafted, an application process and housing standards were created and executed, a community meeting was hosted, and the public was given 30 days to comment on the program. Right now, first round selections are being made by our independent panel. At the same time, every major media outlet in the country has told

our story, and people around the nation are talking about, and considering, Niagara Falls as a living and working destination.

From the beginning, we talked about LiveNF, especially to those who were skeptical, as being a spark program that would leverage other funding. Just a few months into this program, that promise became reality. We were awarded a \$450,000 Empire State Development Grant for our Downtown Stabilization Project. This grant will help fund demolitions, storefront improvements and property acquisition in the downtown core, the same target area as LiveNF. The goal is to make downtown Niagara Falls a more attractive place to live and do business. Governor Cuomo asked for projects that maximize financial return, build upon strengths, and are orientated to young people –and that’s just what we gave him. In less than a year, LiveNF has paid for itself twice over with this grant and has cost less than \$1,000 to administer.

LiveNF, like our new dedication to strategic neighborhood investment works because of partnerships. Partners like the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, the County Legislature, the City Council, the Niagara Falls Block Club Council, the Downtown and Main Street Business Associations, and many more, have been out there talking about why a downtown focus just makes sense. Now, I am happy to say that one of those key supporters is moving into the neighborhood. In my time as Mayor, Niagara University has been a trusted partner and community stakeholder. That relationship has only gained

strength in the last year. As a true Vincentian institution, guided by the wisdom and compassion of Father Joseph Levesque, NU has dedicated itself to serving the Niagara Falls community and helping, in any way possible, to make our residents' lives better. In recent days, we have greeted with mixed emotions the news that our friend and mentor Father Levesque will soon be stepping down as President of the University, though thankfully not leaving the university. Father, you have left an indelible mark on the University, the City and the people you love, and as long as any of us survive, you will never be forgotten.

Just today, NU announced that its flagship community program, ReNU Niagara, will now be located on Park Place, right in the middle of the target area we are trying to improve. Professionals and students downtown... That is what it means to put your money where your mouth is. I want to thank Father Levesque, Dr. Bonnie Rose, Tim Downs, Mary Borgognoni and Dr. David Taylor, head of the Institute for Civic Engagement, Jill Shuey and Tom Lowe of ReNU Niagara. Every day, we count on your energy, skills, and commitment to Niagara Falls to get things done. Thanks also to Jan van Harssel and Chairman Tom Chambers for your work on the Niagara Heritage Area Commission. And no narrative of the partnerships between the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara University would be complete without a mention of Eddie Friel, whose sage advice on tourism has helped shape not just the City's but the region's future plans. If Eddie's vision of Niagara Falls' future becomes a reality—

and it just might—the existing partnerships between the City and University are just a taste of what’s to come.

As new people move in, we need to make neighborhood investments. There is no silver bullet. The public made clear demolitions were a high priority. So we presented a 2013 budget plan that increased demolition funding by over 300% from 2012. We found grant funding, worked with our partners at Center City and Neighborhood Housing Services to repurpose funding, and came up with a strategic plan. In 2013, we are going to take down as many derelict buildings as possible, because we made sure we have the funding to do it.

We also knew we needed to find ways to rehabilitate existing homes as cost-effectively as possible. We can’t waste money retreading urban homesteading programs of old. They sound good, but do not deliver enough concrete results.

Last year I quoted from FDR, who said, “It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But by all means, try something.” The country, he said, demanded “bold, persistent experimentation.” That’s what we did with the housing incentive based on student loan debt. And that’s what we’re going to do with the issue of housing renovation.

So, on to a new partnership that CD Director Seth Piccirillo calls his favorite: The Isaiah 61 Project. We are working hand-in-hand with the Board and Program Coordinator Jim Haid,

Orleans-Niagara BOCES, and MIKELLY Construction to convert city-owned vacant houses into job training sites for the unemployed, and a new opportunity for first time homebuyers. The City is selling vacant homes to the Isaiah 61 Project below market value, and Isaiah 61 is partnering with Orleans-Niagara BOCES to start a semester-long class to teach unemployed residents trade skills, all under the supervision of licensed contractors from MIKELLY Construction. The results: renovated homes, homeownership, and people learning job skills to help them afford homeownership. We are not waiting for foreclosure auctions or the wrecking ball. We are being proactive because that is how you make an impact.

The region has taken notice, and just this month the John R. Oishei Foundation awarded a three-year, \$200,000 grant to this project. I want to thank CD, the Legal Department, the Department of Code Enforcement, and the Planning Board for all working together to make this happen. This project started as a walking tour through vacant buildings. Jim Haig, your commitment moved it forward. We have been with you from the beginning, and that will not change in 2013.

It does not stop there. CD is working with the Niagara Falls Block Club Council, the Landlords Association of Greater Niagara, and local elected officials at all levels to find ways to improve our housing strategies in every way possible. Regardless of your organization or political party, we need to

work together. That will be CD's driving purpose in 2013 and beyond.

Our City has become a world-wide destination for commercial speculators. Residents and visitors often ask: How can properties so close to the beauty of the cataract look like time has forgotten them? Beyond the stark reality that we have lost one half of our population over the last 50 years, there is no simple answer.

Starting next week, Dennis Virtuoso and his team will begin a new crack down on vacant, blighted buildings. These blatant violations of building and Clean Neighborhood codes are unacceptable, they create potential threats to public health and safety, and they kill economic development before it can start. The message to the owners of these nuisance buildings is simple and clear: maintain your properties, and show some respect to your neighbors, or get out. Enough is enough.

Strategically, we will start in the center city core because we know that area has far too many of these buildings. We are starting with a priority on commercial buildings in a targeted area because that is how you get demonstrable results with limited resources. This is about implementation and not just announcement. But the crackdown is just the first step. We intend to become advocates at the state and national level for reforms that will seek to standardize property registration programs across participating jurisdictions, and that accelerate the process by which vacant and abandoned buildings go

through foreclosure and get into the hands of people who will protect them from further deterioration and set them on the road to renovation. This is an interest that all the responsible parties, from banks to property management companies to cities to the neighbors themselves, all share. Right now, it can take between two and three years for a property to go through foreclosure. By then there's usually nothing left to save. When the property is vacant and there is no one in danger of losing their home, how about we try, by legislation if necessary, to shorten that process to something more like 90 days? Do you think that would make a difference in this and many other similarly-impacted cities? I do.

My administration is developing a plan that will financially target any building owners that continue to leave their buildings unoccupied or blighted over the long term, making them a target for criminal activity and a drain on the surrounding area. Working with partners in other cities that have undertaken innovative programs, with the National Community Stabilization Trust, and with the Vacant and Abandoned Properties Task Force of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, we intend to challenge the base economics that underlies this vexing problem: one way or another, we are going to make it impossible for land speculators to hold down development in Niagara Falls by hanging on to multiple key development parcels year after year, decade after decade, with no regard for how this impedes the overall development of the city. My goal

is to bring the age of the speculator in Niagara Falls to an end. I know that ending land speculation and blight is a high priority of the City Council, and I have pledged to try to find ways we can work together. We will continue to work together to develop the right strategy, and together we will get the job done.

Every department of City government is doing something to move the City forward. Talk about issues related to property ownership: 1355 Real Property transfers were recorded and processed by the assessor's office in 2012. Without that hard work, we wouldn't even know who owned what. The Online Assessment Roll (OARS) website, where you go to see who owns a piece of property, is being updated to make it more user-friendly. Our customer service-oriented Clerk's was in the national spotlight during the Wallenda Walk, and by working with the City Council to amend the Vendors Ordinance, our Office was able to issue permits to more than 50 Vendors for the Special Event. We even created a specialized ID badge for the vendors to commemorate the event. The sale of these permits created revenue to the City. Niagara Falls continues to be a popular wedding destination; our friendly staff bends over backwards to try to accommodate the needs of couples who want to come here to wed.

Our Department of Code Enforcement was also busy this year. Revenue for the department for 2012 was \$942,925.20, a \$219,203.76 increase. 141 new court cases were written for

Housing Court in 2012. Our inspectors made 306 court appearances.

Last year there were 45 demolitions performed within the City at a cost of 1.3 million. During 2013 we plan to demolish approximately 50 structures, and we're looking for ways to do more.

The Department of Code Enforcement was assigned the task of implementing a Landlord Licensing program. This program has 4632 property owners registered. The revenue received from this program for 2012 was \$100,789.00. The City Council recently adopted and I signed into law an ordinance that will license demolition contractors. This will bring in additional revenues to the City and also ensure that the Contractors are properly insured and regulated.

Last year, my speech highlighted the valiant rescue operation that had recently taken place on a frozen Hyde Park Lake. Luckily, we haven't had to do anything like that yet this year. But Chief Tom Colangelo took on another sort of rescue operation, making sure we would not lose the benefit of a great fire training grant announced by Congressman Brian Higgins because of problems making our match due to lack of casino money. I am happy to announce that, by inviting members of surrounding department and companies to participate in the program and share the cost, the Chief has made it possible for us to go forward with the grant for this great "Train the Trainer" Program in Fire Ground Survival in 2013. Another similar

accomplishment: our Fire Department worked with Niagara County to secure 30 portables radios valued at \$45,000.00 at no cost to the City to replace aging portables that all personnel have while they are stationed on an apparatus. We will get these early this year. These are just a couple of examples of meeting the challenge to do more with less in the NFFD. Being short on resources doesn't mean we can't be innovators. How about the new "Wag n o2" program where, by donations, we were able to purchase special masks in all different sizes to be used on pets that are pulled out of house fires? Personnel in the department also received special training on how to treat pets in these emergencies. And of course the Firefighters toy fund raised \$60,000 for toys, clothes and food for families in need. Work will continue this year, as I noted earlier, on continuously updating the City's Emergency Management Plan, including in the area of continuity of operations.

Our Human Resources department completed digitizing of employee medical records, a big first step toward getting our records-keeping out of the stone age. HR and EEO were consolidated and streamlined. Phase 1 of a performance appraisal system was completed, and a new EEO Policy Booklet for all employees was issued. MIS updated our e-mail systems and improved our internet security. The Law Department worked out arrangements for a new operator at the Hyde Park Ice Pavilion, advanced the development agreement for the new mixed-use development at 310 Rainbow Boulevard, and

continued working with the NFPD on implementation of the Consent Decree entered into by and between the City and the New York State Office of the Attorney General. Last but not least, they coordinated with the Engineering Department to ensure the removal of the initial contractor on the Lewiston Road reconstruction project and replacement of that contractor with a new contractor. The day the new contractor, Accadia Construction, started work, they were greeted by neighbors in the street who offered the workers sandwiches and cups of coffee. I stopped by to check it out, and asked one of the senior citizens who was there whether he had ever seen anything like it. “Yes,” he said, “when I was with General Patton and the Third Armored Division during the liberation of France in World War II!”

If our battle plan stays on track, and we are determined that it will, 2013 will be the year when not one but two of the road projects no one ever thought would get done are going to get done in Niagara Falls: Lewiston Road, and the long industrial portion of Buffalo Avenue. We will break ground on Phase III of our new International Train Station and Intermodal Center—the most impressive and impactful phase, where the large new station building gets constructed, creating over 137,000 manhours of prevailing wage work for local tradesmen—that’s over 3,000 fulltime, 40-hour paychecks for working families in our region—all under a pre-agreed Project Labor Agreement. We will finally replace the roof on the Stone Building at Hyde

Park Ice Pavilion and continue other much-needed capital improvements to that well-used but much-improved facility, to improve the experience of the thousands of families that use it every year. In 2012, we opened LaSalle Waterfront Park and built a playground at Griffon Park. In 2013, we'll put new lighting and other amenities in at LaSalle and a canoe and kayak launch and other improvements in at Griffon. We're committed to continuing our multi-year commitment to improving parks in every neighborhood of the City

Over the last several years, we have used casino revenues to pursue an aggressive program of in-house paving that has—thankfully—help us shed the unwanted title of “Pothole Capital of the World.” As we start 2013, we don't have casino revenues on hand to add to the pot for this year's program. But we do have about \$1.5 million in CHIPS money, including about a third of a million dollars that we are rolling over from last year, to do road paving, sidewalks and catch basin replacement this year. I have asked the engineering and DPW departments to put forward a plan that includes doing the set-up work for streets that could be done if casino revenues arrive before the end of the paving season. We're going to start in LaSalle in May (we started in the North End last year), and if all goes well with the casino issue the funds will arrive to add streets in Deveaux just about the time Lewiston Road finishes up and we can match up our mill and overlay paving with the aprons from the new

construction for the smoothest and longest-lasting result. We have to pull the trigger about the end of July. Stay tuned.

Finally, but in the final analysis most importantly—because this is the thing on which everything else depends in the long run—we have economic development. As most of you probably know, we have for several years been following an innovative, diversified strategy that includes emphases on both an improved and expanded tourism industry and attracting or growing locally new sustainable “green” industries that will provide good-paying jobs throughout the next several decades of the new century.

The largest project in the latter category, the \$450 million Greenpac project, is slated to have product coming off the line this October. You know about the story of JBI—the company that turns waste plastic into oil and gas over on Iroquois Avenue. Well, we’re looking for the next JBIs out there—innovative, growing companies that can help ensure our City’s environmental and economic sustainability for years to come. Some things to look out for? Yet another innovative, high-tech start-up that turns a waste product into fuel; continued clean-up of brownfield properties like Tracts I and II and their return to exciting new productive uses; working with cutting-edge scientifically-sophisticated new companies whose digital products could revolutionize the maintenance and upkeep of high-tech machinery around the world; renewable energy projects that could capture global attention... You’ll just have

to wait and see... Just as we expect new companies to reinvent themselves to adapt to a changing world and changing circumstances, so too we are going to look at the way we organize ourselves to do the work of community and economic development, always on the lookout for ways to create jobs and lure investment more cost-effectively. More on that in coming months.

Meanwhile, on the tourism/downtown development side of the equation, there is both much to celebrate and much to look forward to in 2013.

In June of 2012, downtown hosted the “Side Show” Event on Old Falls Street—before and after Nik Wallenda’s unforgettable walk across the Niagara Gorge—featuring a day of festivities including mini-tightrope walks, aerial performers, improvisational and cultural dance, juggling, stilt walking and more. Families also enjoyed a petting zoo, live music, and carnival food/beverages, as well as more than 25 local merchandise vendors. Devised as a way of overcoming the geographic limitations on viewing the walk from the American side, this creative solution was awarded the 2012 “People’s Choice Award” from the Buffalo Niagara Event Professionals Association. June 2012 also saw the City Parking Ramp re-opened to patrons after a 6-month, \$9 million rehab that included a new elevator for easy access to Old Falls Street.

In September, the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute welcomed its inaugural class of 350 Culinary & Tourism students on Old Falls

Street. Congratulations, Dr. Klyczek and staff! The 90,000-square-foot facility will eventually grow its enrollment to 1,000 students. Neither the City nor our partners at USA Niagara were content to rest on our laurels; instead we're looking to accelerate efforts to help create critical mass and a "window of opportunity" effect for potential investors. So we rolled new ideas for moving forward with the balance of the former Rainbow Centre Mall the same day we cut ribbon on the Culinary; a prestigious team from the Urban Land Institute undertook a week-long design exercise to identify key suggestions and recommendations for new reuses of the building. A remarkable array of design recommendations and possible uses were developed, which will feed into solicitations for new development at the building.

Through October and November of last year, the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute opened its program of retail components along its Old Falls Street frontage, including Savor, an 80-seat full-service restaurant, the Old Falls Street Deli, LaPatisserie (a pastry shop), and a culinary-oriented Barnes & Noble College Bookstore. The year was capped off with a fantastic holiday light display, and Old Falls Street USA reporting another banner year of successful management and programming of Old Falls Street. Over 350 activities and events were held on the street in 2012; major event attendance top 62,000 people to the street.

So what's ahead? Now that the way is clear after construction of the Culinary Institute, we'll start to look for a developer for

all or a major part of the 200,000 SF in raw space left in the former Rainbow Center Mall. And construction is anticipated to begin late in 2013 on a major new mixed-use development at 310 Rainbow Blvd at the corner of Old Falls Street; the former site of the balloon ride. Anchored by a 100-room upscale hotel, the 119,000-SF project will also host ballroom facilities, street-level restaurants, and 24 market rate apartments.

Major construction is anticipated to begin on the Days Inn at the Falls as part of \$11 million project to fully upgrade the exterior and interior of the building. Work continues at the Hotel Niagara. Groundbreaking is expected by July on expanded retail and restaurant facilities at the Holiday Inn on Rainbow, where recent action by the City’s Planning Board is helping pave the way for construction of another new hotel by an experienced local hotel operator.

With our partners at State Parks and USA Niagara Development Corporation, we hope to move forward the South phase of Robert Moses Parkway reconfiguration—from Daly Blvd to Old Falls Street--into final design in order to break ground in 2015. Largely inspired by the “Riverway” – the undulating, low-speed park road that Olmsted designed as part of his plans for the Niagara Reservation, the project will restore visual and physical access to the adjoining Buffalo Avenue Heritage District and expand our network of bikeways and hiking paths along the Upper River. Next, we hope and believe, comes accelerated work on Phase I of Robert Moses Parkway North—from Main

Street near the Rainbow Bridge to Whirlpool and Deveaux Woods Parks—removing the remaining lanes of the RMP and replacing them and Whirlpool Street with a single, scenic boulevard that allows easy lateral access to the Gorge and connects downtown with the North End and new train station and Underground Railroad Interpretive Center.

Also with our State partners, the initial steps and work items evolving out of the planning process for Governor Cuomo’s \$1 Billion Initiative to Revitalize Buffalo will begin to take shape. Niagara Falls plays a critical role in the tourism components of this effort; initiatives in joint regional marketing, solicitations to expand activities available in State Parks along the Niagara River—including a host of new ways to be immersed and experience our areas great natural resources in the Gorge—will all begin in 2013. When we were kids growing up along the Gorge, we used to say that State Parks only had one rule for using the Park: “No Having Fun.” Consistent with keep people safe and preserving the fantastic natural ecology of the Gorge, we’re going to repeal that rule, and look an innovative new ways to enhance ecotourism, active outdoor adventure and other anything else that enhances people’s experience of our great natural resource. Finally, in the Downtown Niagara Falls Challenge, we’re going to look for a globally-prestigious design, developer and operator team to do a transformational tourism-oriented project within walking distance of the Park downtown. We all know we need more things for families to do downtown;

we all know we could do a better job telling the many wonderful stories our region has to tell, and we all know about the great things happening down the road in Buffalo that we want our visitors to be aware of. For a long time we local people have had ideas for making that happen; now the Governor, through the tourism part of the Billion Dollar initiative, looks like he's going to help us make it happen.

I had the opportunity to attend the inauguration of our 44<sup>th</sup> president a few weeks ago, and there were a lot of high points to the experience. You know that I'm a big supporter of the President. But I've got to say—hopefully there's no one from the White House listening—that I thought in some ways our own Senator Chuck Schumer stole the show. We all know he used his role as chairman of the inaugural committee to get Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to loan Danish artist Ferdinand Richardt's famous painting of Niagara Falls so it could hang prominently behind the President's table at the inaugural lunch. Then he gave a couple plugs about the natural wonder during his remarks, just to be sure everyone noticed.

But I thought the high point of Senator Schumer's day, and maybe of mine, came during his remarks in front of the assembled throng on the Mall at the beginning of the inaugural ceremony itself. It's hard to describe the emotions I was feeling at that moment. As the Senator—look, every time I see him he tells me to call him “Chuck,” but Senator, I just can't do it... I went to Catholic school, and if I were to address someone I

respect and admire as much as I do you in such an informal way, I have this deep-seated fear that a ruler is going to come swinging down out of the clouds and rap me across the knuckles or something... so anyway... As Senator Schumer was making his eloquent and profound remarks about the very meaning of the inauguration itself--“no matter how many times one either witnesses or attends this event... its simplicity, its innate majesty, and most of all its underlying meaning – that sacred yet stingy entrusting of power from we the people to our chosen leader – never fails to make one’s heart beat faster and one’s hair stand on end”—well you know what, my heart was literally beating faster and my hair was literally standing on end.

He went on to say that the theme of this year’s inauguration was Faith in America’s Future, and told the story of what he called “a perfect embodiment of unshakable confidence in the ongoing success of our collective journey... the improbable completion of the Capitol Dome, which occurred 150 years ago in December of 1863.” When Abe Lincoln took office in 1861, the dome was a tattered half-finished eyesore, and the wags around Washington were saying that – given the travails and financial needs of the times – the country might as well leave it that way until the war was over. But Lincoln didn’t see things that way. To him, the half-finished dome symbolized the half-divided nation, and he ordered the work to continue. The Senator quoted Lincoln as saying, "If people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign we intend the Union shall go on.” You know the rest

of the story. The dome was finished on December 2, 1863, and Phillip Reid, a former slave and now free American, cast and erected the Statue of Freedom, a woman, which still stands atop the dome today.

“Our present times are not as perilous or despairing as they were in 1861,” said the Senator, “but here in 2013 far too many doubt the future of this great nation, and our ability tackle our era’s half-domes. These new problems we face are intractable, they say. The times and challenges are so complex, and the differences in the country and the world so deep, we will never overcome them. When thoughts like these produce anxiety, fear and even despair we do well to remember that the American people have always been – and still are – a practical, optimistic, problem-solving people. And that, as our history shows, no matter how steep the climb, how intractable the problems seem at the moment, how half-finished the task, America always rises to the occasion; America prevails and prospers.” He concluded, “Those who bet against this country have inevitably been on the wrong side of history.”

Now look folks, I know Senator Schumer was addressing his remarks to the 800,000 or more folks out there on the Capitol Mall, and to the millions more watching the event on TV, not to me personally or even specifically to the 51,000 citizens of the City of Niagara Falls. But to my way of thinking, he could not have captured more precisely or eloquently my own feelings as I have the honor to conclude this, my fifth State of the City

address as your mayor. There are many—including perhaps many here in this room—who doubt our ability to tackle our City’s “half-finished domes.” They view our problems as intractable and complex, and doubt we will ever overcome them. They spread the word that nothing good can possibly happen here because—take your pick—the casino issue has not been resolved, or the national economy is still having or trouble, or the local politics are bad. They in turn create anxiety, fear and even despair among the people around them. Well I say, “rubbish.” We, the good people of the City of Niagara Falls, like Americans as a whole, are a practical, optimistic and pragmatic people; no matter how difficult our problems seem in the present moment, we will always find a way rise to the occasion, to prosper and prevail. You can count on it.

That is my message to you this evening, City of Niagara Falls. Our work may be half-finished, but have faith that through your efforts we will prosper and prevail. Never give up. That way, when our children and grandchildren look back on these admittedly challenging times in our City’s history from a point twenty or fifty or a hundred years into the future, they will conclude, paralleling the Senator’s thundering conclusion about our great nation as a whole, that those who bet against this City have inevitably been on the wrong side of history.

God bless you, God bless the United States of America, and God bless and keep the great City of Niagara Falls, New York.