

Mayor's Message

Dec 2024/Jan 2025

2024 has come and gone. They say time flies when you are having fun, but it also flies when you are hard at work. I am proud to say the Borough's Council and its employees were hard at work for the entirety of 2024. The fruits of their labor can be seen in the tremendous improvements to our recreational facilities (most notably at Gatta Park and at Blackberry Bay Park), the vast amount of infrastructure updates, the great number of personnel changes, and the unqualified successes of our community events with our very many annuals like the Summer's End Festival, Easter Egg Hunt, Memorial Day Parade, Veteran's Day Ceremony, and most recently the festive and fun Holiday Extravaganza.

Phase 3 of Maria Gatta Park was completed in September with the addition of state-of-the-art LED lighting. This phase was financed with grants and other third-party funding. It will be instrumental in allowing the park to be used at night safely and efficiently. To date, Maria Gatta Park has generated almost \$500,000.00 in gross revenue during 2024. The annual debt service for the park is about \$240,000.00, which means the Borough realized close to \$260,000.00 in adjusted revenue from the use of the fields while our recreation sports organizations have been able to use the fields for free. Hats off to Council President Deerin, Councilman O'Brien, and Councilman Keeshan for spearheading this transformative project. Please note we are working on Phase 4 improvements to Maria Gatta Park which will include permanent bathrooms and storage facilities.

Sommers Boy Scout Park on Pocano Avenue is still closed to the public to allow for the Two Rivers Sewage Authority to install a new and sorely needed line under the Shrewsbury River. Currently, the directional drilling machine is 1000 feet away from the Monmouth Beach facility and it is heading towards Boy Scout Park. During December and January, you will see the piping material being stored along Port Au Peck Avenue in the parking area in front of Blackberry Bay Park. This project is scheduled to be completed by the first quarter of 2026, and rest assured we will be restoring the park and paving Port Au Peck Avenue as soon as the project is completed.

At Blackberry Bay Park, our top-notch Department of Public Works team has just completed the over-seeding and fertilization of the ballfields. You may have seen the sprinklers running during the period that water use restrictions were mandated by the State of New Jersey and New Jersey American Water. Fortunately for us, Oceanport's sprinkler system is connected to a well directly in the park and our ability to properly care for the fields was not impacted by the restrictions. The demolition of the old Oceanport Lion's Swim Club pool was completed in October of 2024 to allow us to explore options for future use of the space. At present, the Monmouth University women's rowing team, and the Christian Brothers Academy rowing team lease space from the Borough within the old pool site to store their equipment and have a safe passage to the waterways. This spring you will see the playground equipment removed to make way for a brand-new all-inclusive playground facility that was funded by a Jake's law grant. Also, the former bathrooms in the pool area will be converted to new ADA compliant and accessible facilities. Unlike how it was when the pool was functioning, these bathrooms will be available for use by the public during park hours.

Over at Old Wharf Park, the parking lot expansion is underway to allow for easier and safer access to the park and the Old Wharf Building that currently serves as our Senior Center. Moving over to Trinity Park, our Borough Engineer, in conjunction with our Planning and Development Committee, has completed the design phase of the new park facility. This project has gone out for bid, so you can expect to see the renovations at Trinity Park happening next year.

The Governing Body has authorized me to sign four contracts in which the Borough will be acquiring approximately 40 acres of unimproved land in town for the purpose of dedication as "open space" in perpetuity. This will increase our passive parklands and ensure that no development will ever take place on this property. This acquisition will be made in conjunction with a grant from Monmouth County that will reimburse the Borough at least



50% and up to 75% of the purchase price. This is a tremendous win for the Borough, and it will serve to limit overdevelopment within our quaint community.

On November 26th, Netflix received its first round of approvals from the Oceanport Planning and Zoning Board to build its first four sound stages and renovate the McAfee Center right here in Oceanport. The team at Netflix could not be happier with the process and are excited to be a part of the fabric of Oceanport. We can anticipate that Netflix's second phase applications will be submitted to the Eatontown and Oceanport boards for approval of the remainder of the project in the second quarter of 2025. You can expect the demolition of about 88 buildings in the 400 Area along Oceanport Avenue to commence in the first quarter of 2025. The Netflix team and FMERA are anticipating that the closing of the mega parcel (essentially the remaining Oceanport and Eatontown parcels) with Netflix will take place during the fourth quarter of 2025. As always, I will keep the residents up to date through my Mayor's Messages and by social media.

Re-organization day for 2025 will be January 2nd at 7:00 PM in Borough Hall. This is always one of my favorite days of the year as we get to honor our volunteer and paid first responders, recognize our hard-working and dedicated staff, and swear in our public officials. This year we will be swearing in our new Police Chief, Gary Grimes, our newest Sergeant, Dan Petrucelli, and newest Patrolman, Malik Jenkins. Last year, we brought back the Mayor's Lifetime Achievement Award and I have already selected 2025's recipient. Make sure you are in attendance or watching online to see who this year's recipient will be. Last year's recipient, Clarence "Buddy" Brocklebank, passed away this year and a big piece of Oceanport's social, volunteer, and Borough history went with him. Buddy Brocklebank is and was an Oceanport legend. He will be greatly missed.

As noted above, we had two incredible events last fall, one being the Veterans Day ceremony. 2003 West Point graduate and Oceanport resident, Eric Motzenbecker, was our special guest speaker this year, and I can assure you there was not one dry eye in the room after he finished speaking. Oceanport's annual Veterans Day ceremony is always a special day. It provides us an opportunity to honor the brave men and women who have fought and continue to fight for our way of life, and to acknowledge the sacrifices that they and their families have made for our country. Our Veterans Day essay winner this year was 7th grader Makayla Jones-McMahon. We were blessed to find out Makayla's grandfather, Michael McMahon, was in attendance. We were further blessed to have him come to the podium and read her essay, not knowing that his granddaughter honored him specifically at the end of her essay. That was a remarkable moment for all in attendance. Mr. McMahon retired in 1987 as Lieutenant Colonel after 21 years of service in the Army. Retired Lieutenant Colonel McMahon served as an aviator for two tours in Vietnam and has resided in Oceanport since 1982.

The second incredible event took place on November 30th. Oceanport's first Holiday Extravaganza went off spectacularly thanks to the hard work and dedication of our Parks and Recreation Committee, Council President Bill Deerin, all our volunteers and sponsors - most notably Oceanport resident Michael Abboud and his staff members Tricia Rhodes and Christopher Kammerer, Police, Fire, First Aid, OEM, DPW, and all our Borough employees. A very, very, very special thank you goes to our Recreation Coordinator Kelle Burrough. Kelle is an absolute rock star! I had the pleasure of watching her work tirelessly over the last 75 days, making sure that this new event was a successful one. Events like the Holiday Extravaganza and Veterans Day make Oceanport "A Great Place to Live."

It has been an honor to serve the residents of Oceanport as Mayor this year. I wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season, and a blessed New Year.