

## From the Desk of Mayor Coffey

March/April 2020

We live a pretty wonderful existence here in Oceanport. We live in nice houses, in nice neighborhoods. Our kids go to fantastic schools, where they are taught by wonderful teachers. It only takes five minutes to get from our front doors to a seat on the beach and the Shrewsbury River is practically in all our backyards. We have the most beautiful horse racing facility on the Eastern seaboard, high end restaurants, convenience stores, and we are situated close enough to New York City and Philadelphia that we can visit both in one day. All in all, things are “pretty, pretty good” here in Oceanport. Until they’re not.

It is very easy to forget that life was much the same in Oceanport in late October of 2012. That is, until Hurricane Sandy descended upon Oceanport and the rest of the east coast on October 29<sup>th</sup> of that year. When Sandy hit, things changed. In Oceanport, they changed suddenly, dramatically and under the cover of darkness. When those of us who did not evacuate looked out our windows the next morning, we couldn’t believe what our eyes were seeing. Within the space of about twelve hours, neighborhoods in Oceanport were devastated as people lost their homes, livelihoods, and memories. We all have stories of how we spent the next few days, weeks, and months putting our lives back together again. If you have one of those stories, you’re lucky. Because a lot of people in Oceanport weren’t able to put their lives back together again.

Through it all, Oceanport was ably and courageously served by our non-uniformed municipal employees, police force, volunteer first aid squad and firefighters, school system, and elected officials. Oceanport’s residents also rose to the occasion as neighbors helped neighbors, friends helped friends and, most notably, strangers helped strangers and became friends. Prior to and in the immediate aftermath of Sandy, however, one group of dedicated and unheralded volunteers operated as the backbone of this effort: Oceanport’s Office of Emergency Management.

A municipality’s Office of Emergency Management is like a flare gun on a boat: you hope you never have to use it, but if you do have to use it, well, it better work. And in response to Hurricane Sandy, Oceanport’s Emergency Management Coordinator and the entire Emergency Management team worked and worked and worked. A Municipal Emergency Management Coordinator is responsible for Emergency Management program administration and program development encompassing the four phases of Emergency Management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Oceanport’s OEM excelled in all four of those phases in October and November of 2012.

In October of 2019, Oceanport’s Emergency Management Coordinator, all Deputies and, with one exception, the ENTIRE OEM membership tendered their resignations (effective 12/31/19) due to (1) their collective belief and perception that Oceanport’s Municipal Council was not supportive of the OEM’s efforts and (2) their collective lack of confidence in the Borough’s finance committee and public safety committee to adequately ensure that Oceanport’s OEM would be properly prepared for its next large scale emergency.

Because of the existing and increasing possibility of the occurrence of disasters and emergencies of unprecedented size and destructiveness resulting from man-made or natural causes, and in order to ensure the preparations of this Borough will be adequate to deal with such disasters, and generally to provide for the common defense and to protect the public peace, health and safety, and to preserve the lives and property of the people of Oceanport, members of Oceanport's revamped Public Safety Committee have held numerous meetings with all of our emergency service providers over the past 60 days. As a result of these meetings, and the continuing dialogue that has taken place with and amongst our elected officials and emergency service providers, I am happy, proud, and relieved to announce that, pursuant to law and per the recommendation of the Public Safety Committee, I have re-named Mauro "Buzz" Baldanza as Oceanport's Office of Emergency Management Coordinator, approved his appointments of Chris Baggot, Wes Sherman, and Police Chief Mike Kelly as Deputy Emergency Management Coordinators and look forward to working with all of OEM's membership. Let's hope, however, that we never have to see them in action.

On a personal note, I have used my friend Buddy Brocklebank as a willing foil in each of my Mayor's Messages for the past four years. This Mayor's Message is going to be different. Buddy, the Borough of Oceanport is a much, much better place with you manning the helm during turbulent times. Get off your back and get back on the street protecting us like you have been for so many years. That's an order.