

## Mayor's Message

June/July 2022

One of the benefits of living in a small town like Oceanport is that it is easy to get to know your neighbors and get involved in the community. But even in small towns, it is easy to take for granted what should be treasured. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, I had the distinct honor and privilege of speaking at a memorial service for Steven Widmaier at the Oceanport Hook and Ladder Company. Norman Rockwell could not have painted a more moving picture of small-town America than that service. For those of you who didn't know him, Steve was a volunteer firefighter here in Oceanport. For those of you who did know him, he was much, much more than just a volunteer firefighter. Steve was everything good that Oceanport has to offer. Need a buddy? Steve. Need a ride? Steve. Need someone to talk to? Steve. Need somebody to sit quietly with? Steve. Need help moving? Steve. Need somebody to fight a fire? Steve. Need somebody you can count on? Steve. Need somebody to tell you what you really need to hear? Steve. Need somebody to just say nothing? Steve.

The funny part is that I really didn't know Steve. But I didn't need to know him, because I looked around and realized that Steve is actually all the people who came to mourn, honor, and celebrate him that day. Steve is the volunteer firemen, the policemen, the first aiders, the teachers, the softball players, the executives, the custodians, the moms, the dads, and everybody else who said goodbye to their friend that day. They were saying goodbye to someone who was just like them. A big piece of Oceanport was taken away from us when Steve died, but the little pieces of Steve living in the hearts, souls, and memories of all the people whose lives he touched add up to something much greater. Oceanport is filled with people like Steve Widmaier and we should not take that for granted. If, like the song says, "sometimes you want go where everybody knows your name and their always glad you came," then we don't have to go anywhere because Oceanport is that place. And we shouldn't take that for granted, either.

Oceanport's footprint got just a little bigger in May. The Allison Hall property (where the big, geodesic structures used to be on Oceanport Avenue) on the east end of Fort Monmouth finally closed and is now on the tax rolls of the Borough of Oceanport! FMERA sold the property to Fort Monmouth Business Center, LLC, which is owned by two Oceanport residents who are investing in their own community. The Allison Hall site is comprised of about 12 acres between the East Gate and the Little Silver bridge on Oceanport Avenue. Its redevelopment will include the re-use of the historic 36,000 square foot Allison Hall building as well as construction of new retail, office/research and development space and some open space/recreational use space. It is expected that a minimum of \$14,000,000 will be invested in the property and that, upon completion of the development, close to 150 full and part-time permanent jobs will be created.

The conveyance of the Allison Hall property leaves only the Nurse's Quarters (on Main Street), the MacAfee Center (large building near the Eatontown border by the old bowling alley), and the 400 Area (on the right side of Oceanport Avenue as you head into Little Silver) to be developed in the Oceanport section of Fort Monmouth. The 400 Area and the McAfee Center are expected to come off the market on June 6<sup>th</sup> when FMERA accepts proposals for its long awaited "Mega-RFOTP" (Request For Offers To Purchase). The Mega-RFOTP covers close to 300 acres of property in Eatontown and Oceanport



designated by the State to function as a regional hub for high-wage, high growth sectors including, but not limited to, arts and cultural centers, film production studios, research and design facilities and high-tech facilities featuring incubator spaces. Submissions for the Mega-RFOTP are due on June 6, 2022 and, given the fact that, if successful, this type of redevelopment would be the most transformative economic driver in the region, there will be no shortage of news articles about the bidders and their designs for the property. Much more to follow on this matter in the coming months.

In what is either a sign of good governance or a sign of the apocalypse, the long-awaited repairs to Gooseneck Point Road and Shore Road have begun! Inasmuch as it seems that Buddy Brocklebank was in diapers the last time these roads were addressed, this is quite an auspicious moment for the residents of these two streets and we hope that in a month or two we can finally hold the “Gooseneck Point Rollerblade Rally” that has been delayed for far too long.

Monmouth Park Racetrack is open and the restriction on coolers in the picnic area (known to locals as the “Anti-Galvin Edict”) has been rescinded for 2022! Once again, patrons, even those named Galvin, are permitted to bring coolers no larger than 15” by 25” into the first-come, first served, or group picnic areas. In fact, on June 11<sup>th</sup> the first 5,000 paying fans will receive a FREE Monmouth Park cooler. See, Tommy Galvin, dreams can come true, especially in Oceanport!

Finally, it wouldn’t be a Mayor’s Message if I didn’t say “SLOW DOWN WHEN YOU ARE DRIVING IN OCEANPORT!” Tell your friends. See you all in August.