

## **STATE OF THE TOWN 2020**

Thank you Cathy! I want to start my talk by thanking everyone for coming out today to support the Chamber and if you haven't joined the Chamber yet, please consider doing so. They do so much for our community! Most of you, if not all of you, have played or will play a vital roll in making our town, your town, the GREAT TOWN that it is, A TOWN THAT IS TRULY AT THE DAWN OF A NEW TOMORROW.

Today I'm very happy to report that our Town is not only fiscally strong, but we are also poised for a much brighter future, a much brighter tomorrow and all that it has to bring!

These certainly are exciting times in the town but to truly appreciate where we are, I think it's important to note where we've been. For over a decade now I have been telling people, if they cared to listen "that our Town's future lies along our River Road corridor and the lands west of Military Road and all that they have to offer". So go ahead and take your family out for a spin this weekend down River Road. Take a good look at what you see. Now, what it will look like in 10-15 years is anybody's guess, but I'll guarantee one thing, it will look totally different form what it looks like today. So lets take a look at what those areas look like today.

It was only four short years ago, when I gave my first SOT address, people were out there saying to me, "YOU'RE DREAMING, THE SKY IS FALLING...THE TOWN IS IN DEEP FINANCIAL TROUBLE" ...and those comments were from my family members!

We were facing what some termed an impossible task, on how to address the loss of over \$2M in tax revenue with the impending shut down of the Huntley Plant in February 2016 without dramatically increasing taxes and driving out businesses and residents. But we didn't look at it that way. Rather, we looked at it as an OPPORTUNITY! 'An opportunity to work with private developers, to take control of our waterfront like the town and developers have never taken control of it before. And here we are, just 4 years later, and we are starting to see just that, we've kept businesses and residents right here by being fiscally responsible and not closing our eyes to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. And by WE, I mean not only the Town Board, but everyone in this room and many others! It goes to show you that if we all work together, there isn't anything we can't accomplish.

Sometime in the near future, hopefully the very near future, the former Huntley site will have a new owner as NRG recently announced they have the site under a purchase and sale agreement with WB Huntley Redevelopment a related company of WarrenBrook Partners. WarrenBrook has extensive experience reviving brownfield properties all across the country. Earlier last month myself and others met with the new ownership group and they assured us that they will be reaching out to the community in the coming months to gather input regarding the redevelopment of the site. They were already well aware our Tonawanda Tomorrow initiative when we met and what the community wants to see along our waterfront. I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to thank NRG for their efforts to find a qualified buyer for the site; one that is not only committed to the clean-up of the site but also in doing a high

quality, redevelopment of the site. As a sign of good faith by both parties (NRG and the Town), I am happy to announce today that the Town and NRG have reached an agreement on the Eminent Domain action the town commenced last year and both parties will be ceasing our actions against the other immediately. The Town's eminent domain action will remove any "cloud" over the property which will allow WarrenBrook to attract new investors to their project, which is certainly good news for the Town. The transfer of this prime, 100 acre waterfront parcel will be transformational for our town and will act as the cornerstone in the redevelopment of our Community and our waterfront. I, like you, am looking forward to working with WarrenBrook and engaging them in public meetings as soon as possible. We certainly welcome them to our community and I can assure you, the Town will continue to do everything possible to facilitate a high quality, responsible, redevelopment of this property.

Along with the Huntley plant about to be transferred, the former Tonawanda Coke site in 2019 was sold to Riverview Innovation and Technology Campus, owned by local businessman Jon Williams. Mr. Williams has successfully remediated other environmentally challenged sites in the area and he's going to do the same thing right here. One of the first steps to be undertaken is an extensive environmental cleanup. Mr. Williams is in our audience today and I want to thank him, along with principals of WarrenBrook for their faith and confidence in the Town of Tonawanda as we enter the DAWN OF A NEW TOMORROW!

2020 will go down in local history as the year the Town of Tonawanda transitioned from a heavy industrial economy to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century “Blue/Green” economy. There are more than 340 acres between former Huntley and Tonawanda Coke sites currently in transition to light the way for our future growth and redevelopment.

TM Montante’s Riverview Solar Technology Park continues to boom with expansion and opportunity. The latest expansion involves the much talked about Amazon project or “Project Bruno as it had come to be known. This project is moving along at breakneck speed to get their new distribution center up and running in the park. The facility is over 120,000 sq. ft. and will have an fleet of new vehicles ready to deploy in and around WNY when opened. Several hundred jobs are anticipated to be created by the company as they near completion, which is expected to be sometime this summer. In close proximity to the Amazon site, Montante Solar recently announced plans to install a 6-megawatt solar array. The plans call for approximately 15,500 solar panels to go up.

Our own, Town owned North Youngmann Commerce Center is another example of a thriving local business park. The 90-acre business park, first developed just 5 years ago, is anchored by Unifrax and First Source and has only one 11-acre parcel left for development. We’ve all heard of the old real estate adage on what drives real estate values LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION and trust me, there’s no better location than our North Youngmann Business Park. So if anyone out there is interested in locating your business in a business park with great exposure from the I-290, I have one for you, but don’t wait too long before reaching out to me, I’m sure it will be under contract soon!

These are all great for the town, but that's not all! The fact is that all of these areas I just mentioned are located in the newly formed federal Opportunity Zones and State designated Tonawanda Opportunity Areas. These will help enable/ lure investors not only for all of the projects I just mentioned but for many more, creating a bright future for Tonawanda.

While we look forward to working with our "NEW" corporate partners on our River Road corridor, we can't and won't forget our long time corporate partners, including some of who have been part of our part of our "family" for over 8 decades. These industrial giants include GM, Dupont, Sumotomo, 3M and PeroxyChem, all of whom continue to invest and believe in Tonawanda. Most recently we were pleased to hear General Motors Tonawanda Engine Plant Director Mr. Ram Ra-ma-nu-jam announce GM will invest millions of dollars in the plant to upgrade its production systems. This makes over \$800M they have invested in the plant over the past 5 years. These investments will help retain some of the plant's 1,400 employees and setting the plant up for the future by showcasing its competitiveness.

The previously mentioned Huntley and Tonawanda Coke sites provide opportunities for brownfield cleanup and redevelopment, while in another part of our town we turn our attention to finding, so called "brightfield" uses for our town owned landfill ... and innovative uses for the landfill have already begun. Several weeks ago, Solar Liberty finished construction on a 8,200-panel solar array on 10 acres on the eastern side of the former landfill at no cost to the Town and the solar array was just "energized" last week. Known as a "brightfield," the site

is already generating electricity and is expected to produce enough to power to power about 450 homes. Every kilowatt generated will be sold back to the grid, helping to offset the Town's annual electric bills for the next 20+ years. During 2020 alone, we anticipate the Town will save approximately \$80,000 in electricity costs.

In addition to creating the Town's first brightfield, the Town is working on other pioneering efforts to modernize our infrastructure.

The Town worked closely with and secured a grant from the Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition (NITTEC) to identify Brighton Road as a location for smart city technology for video detection at traffic signals. How this works is video is analyzed at the signal and drivers now experience a 10% reduction in travel time along the corridor. This technology establishes the foundation for a future of fully automated traffic signals that adjust timing along a corridor with the actual volume of traffic, no longer using an historic peak traffic count. Tonawanda was the first in the region to use this technology. This project has been, and continues to be, studied by neighboring towns, cities, counties and NYSDOT.

The Town is working with funds from NYSDOT to upgrade high traffic pedestrian crossings and working with funding secured by Assemblyman Schimminger and State Senator Jacobs to replace damaged sidewalks throughout the Town.

Many of our roads were constructed when the Town was being built up in the 1940's & 1950's. After six or seven decades of use and harsh weather, we, like our neighboring towns, are seeing several of our roadways in need of major reconstruction. Using funding from a number of

federal, State and Town sources, we continue efforts to reconstruct roadways, improving traffic flow and driver safety.

The Town continues to work closely with the NYSDOT and Town of Amherst to improve pedestrian and vehicular traffic along Niagara Falls Blvd. I want to thank and acknowledge Amherst Supervisor Brian Kulpa who is with us today for his efforts as our two towns work collaboratively to improve the situation along this corridor. The first step will be to install new streetlights along a portion of Niagara Falls Blvd. north of the Youngmann. Townwide, we are purchasing existing streetlights from National Grid so they can be converted to LED lights, saving tax dollars while at the same time providing better service. The Town will be able to identify deficiencies with equipment remotely to reduce the time it takes to make a repair. LED streetlights will increase efficiency, reduce power consumption and reduce the Town's carbon footprint. The Town foresees this step as an effective way to enhance services to residents while reducing the demand on tax dollars. Investments into smart city technology through our streetlights can translate to benefits to all departments as well. In the future, Emergency Response personnel may have an enhanced ability to respond to calls and traffic data can be collected and used to design safer streets.

The Town is also working behind the scenes to bolster redevelopment efforts as we transition to a Blue/Green economy. The Town is in the process of re-writing our 1940's era Zoning Law, replacing it with model legislation that will help launch a new era of cleaner, greener development. The new law will be more user-friendly for architects, designers, and developers,

allow for better enforcement, and emphasize walkability, diverse transportation options, mixed-use development, and other design principles attractive to young people and families.

I'm going to switch gears now. Each and everyday, we depend on the Town of Tonawanda Police Department to ensure the safety of our residents, businesses and visitors. 2020 marks a very important year in our PD history as 2020 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Town Police Department. The Police Department was formed on January 2, 1920 with the appointment of three police officers. At that time the population was 5,505. At present, the current complement of sworn officers is 101 strong, serving a population of over 73,000 in an 19.5 square mile area. In addition to the sworn officers, the Police Department consists of a full-time civilian Public Safety Dispatch Unit, a full-time Paramedic Unit, and a full-time Animal Control Officer. 2019 brought a changing of the guard at top with the appointment of Chief James Stauffiger who was sworn in as the 10th Chief of Police. (Chief would you please stand to be recognized). Faced with an unprecedented number of retirements in the past couple of years, the TTPD has been working diligently promoting qualified candidates from within, as well as hiring new officers to fill the vacancies. 100 years strong in 2020 and in 2020 we are TTPD proud!

Of course, no State of the Town address would be complete without discussing the state of the Town's finances. The Town has once again maintained its high bond rating of Aa2. Another confirmation, I may add, to Wall Streets confidence in our fiscal management policies since the shutdown of the Huntley plant.

The Town will continue our efforts to find cost saving measures and increase non-tax revenues to offset this loss of revenue. We are optimistic that the recent sale of the Huntley site will potentially result in future revenues once redevelopment plans are implemented.

Borrowings will continue to increase in 2020 as the Town continues to deal with updates to aging buildings and infrastructure and to comply with continuing costly mandates from New York State and the Federal Government relating to water and sewer flows.

I would negligent if I failed to mention some of the other people who continue to help propel our Town forward.

Of course, thank you to my fellow Town Board members – Deputy Supervisor and Councilman John Bargnesi, and Councilmember Bill Conrad, and our newest Councilmembers, Shannon Patch and Carl Szarek. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the many contributions of former Councilman Dan Crangle, who stepped aside at the end of 2019 after serving our community 17 years on the Town Board.

I want to extend a special thank you to our other town elected officials as well, Town Clerk Marguerite Greco, Highway Superintendent Tom Jones, Judges Mark Gruber and Dan Cavarello. As well as all of our Town Department Heads, and all of our Town employees who do such a tremendous job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help make our Town the great community it

is! At this time I would like all of the Town elected officials and Department Heads please stand and be recognized? (Applause).

I also want to thank all the volunteers on all of our boards, committees and the members of our numerous service clubs and garden clubs for their efforts. There are too many of you to mention. We are so fortunate to be the beneficiaries of your time, expertise, and dedication to our community

With us today are two member of our Village government; Mayor Pat Mang and Deputy Mayor/Trustee Paul Catalano. Thank you for joining us today Mayor and I look forward to our continuing good working relationship in the years ahead.

We have such good working relationships with all of our local, state and federal officials from U.S. Senators, Schumer and Gillibrand and Congressman Brian Higgins to Governor Andrew Cuomo, State Senator Chris Jacobs, County Executive Mark Poloncarz, and County Legislators Kevin Hardwick and Lisa Chimera and of course our State Assemblyman Robin Schimminger who has decided to retire at the end of this year. I also want to acknowledge and publically thank Robin's long time aides Ken Berlinski and Terry Wegler who have always been only a phone call away and always willing to provide us with the benefit of their vast knowledge of State government.

Finally, and most importantly, I offer my thanks, my gratitude and my love to my family who are all with me today. My amazing wife Colleen, and our three children and daughter-in-law, Joe, Chris, Mary and Rachel, Two members of my family not here today are my granddaughters Isabel and Agatha. Those two right now are probably doing what some of you are doing... taking a nap!. I could not serve as your Supervisor without their love, support and the many sacrifices they make for the Town. And, as those of you who follow me on Facebook know, my granddaughters have developed quite a following of their own based on their weekly Bills game predictions. They are already counting down the days to the next Bills home game!

Finally, as I have said, 2020 is a year of transition and new beginnings for our community. These are times that quite honestly, we have not seen in our town for over 100 years. These new beginnings have inspired me to launch a new tradition as part of the State of the Town address. In any given year, state of the Town is due to the collective efforts of many individuals joining forces for the advancement of the greater good. That said, there are certain people without whom these advances would not be possible. Exemplary contributions of time, ideas, and financial resources all help the Town to make changes that improve our quality of life and advance our community.

This year, it is my honor to introduce a new award that will be presented annually in recognition of significant contributions to the state of the Town and advancement of the Town for the good of all. I am hereby naming this award the Robin Schimminger Commemorative Economic Development Award, in honor of the man who has represented our community with

dedication and honor for more than four decades and whose legislative representation in Albany and financial support have greatly benefited our residents and businesses.

I would like to ask Robin, if he would please join me and assist me in presenting this award?

For those who don't know, Assemblyman Schimminger served two terms as an Erie County Legislator before being elected to the NYS Assembly in 1976. He has served as chairman of the Assembly Standing Committee on Small Business and later, chairman of the Assembly Standing Committee on Economic Development, Job Creation, Commerce and Industry. He has sponsored and played key roles in enacting numerous measures strengthening the state's economic development policies, improving its tax and regulatory climate, modernizing workforce training programs, enhancing coordination of the state's economic development efforts, and encouraging the development of new businesses and the creation of new jobs. In all, Robin has nearly 400 laws to his credit, including the "smart growth" law which encourages the reuse of existing facilities and sites for business relocations and expansions. We can see the results of this legislation firsthand as our Town continues its transformation.

Equally important, are the vast financial resources Assemblyman Schimminger has secured to benefit our Town. Monies for technology upgrades, new sanitation trucks, snow plows, street reconstruction and sidewalk replacement, park enhancements, new 911 dispatch consoles, the police body camera system and other projects too numerous to mention! So having said all that,

I can think of no one more deserving to receive the Inaugural Robin Schimminger Economic Development Award than our GREAT Assemblyman himself, Robin Schimminger! (Applause).

Invite Robin to say a few words.

With that, I thank all of you for attending today and look forward to seeing you around the Town during the coming year! God Bless all of you and your families.