

## **STATE OF THE COUNTY 2008**

Chairman Lahey, Leader Pillmeier, Leader Decker, legislators, employees and citizens of Orange County ... I would like to take this opportunity to report to you on the State of our County.

First, I want to recognize my wife Mary, daughters Danielle & Lindsay and my entire family for all their support and encouragement.

I also would be remiss if I did not thank my hardworking staff, Mary, Sheri, Doreen, Donna, Lorrie, Jim, Steve, Ann Marie and Richard.

I would like to pause for a moment of silence and remember our servicemen and women who continue to serve in harm's way to keep us safe and our veterans, many of whom have continued to serve our nation long past their date of active duty.

I am proud to stand before you today to present a record of solid achievement that has been built from the common sense and fiscally conservative policies of the past with an eye toward providing for the future of this great County.

Today, Ladies and Gentlemen, you may be assured that the State of our County is on a firm foundation despite the economic difficulties facing our state and nation.

This was not accomplished without your hard work, dedication and cooperation. Working together we have made Orange County Government an efficient, cost effective and responsive government that we can all be proud of.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

As you all know, public safety remains a top priority of my administration and once again I must commend this legislative body for its foresight and diligence in rising to the challenges confronting us.

Let us make no mistake, the elements working against law abiding citizens become bolder and more sophisticated every year. Our efforts must be equally as bold to insure our citizens and communities stay safe from these new types of criminals.

Our Orange County District Attorney's Office continues to do an outstanding job, and I want to commend District Attorney Frank Phillips for his strong commitment to enforcing the law as well as his consistent and compassionate treatment of the victims of crime.

In 2007, District Attorney Phillips prosecuted over 19,000 cases while maintaining a 96% conviction rate.

Technology is at the forefront of keeping the public safe and I am pleased to report that our new Emergency Services Center is on time and on budget.

This facility, when completed this spring, will provide the people of Orange County with the most technologically advanced E 911 Emergency Centers in the state. This facility will also house our Emergency Operations Center and will serve our citizens for many years to come. I would like to thank Commissioner Koury and his entire department for their efforts in seeing this project through to such a successful conclusion.

Our efforts have not just been limited to brick and mortar. We have aggressively pursued grants and programmatic funding from New York State and the Federal government which have allowed us to initiate an Emergent Incident Notification system for first responders.

We also have licensed and installed an EMS transmitter on Schunnemunk Mountain to improve emergency communications and to promote greater inter-operability among agencies and we have received well over \$1.6 million dollars in reimbursements from NYS wireless.

We have also instituted our new email audio communication system which will save precious time and mileage for communications between the Orange County District Attorney's office and our 911 center.

Orange County has received a new state-of-the-art mobile Command and Communications emergency vehicle, fully funded by a homeland security grant and we will be implementing a resource inventory system called DisasterLAN to better integrate County and local municipalities response capabilities.

This past year we have established, with the help of this legislature, our own Orange County Traffic Safety Board and we continue to work with state and local officials to create a traffic management diversion plan for the County.

I also want to commend the Legislature, community groups and the Times Herald Record for the collaboration on the "Not One More" campaign to educate the youth of this County on safe driving practices.

Under the leadership of Fire Coordinator John Horan we have trained 118 new firefighters this year and we also acquired, at no cost, a fire truck from Irvington, New Jersey to assist with our fire training program. Additionally, through a CEDAP grant we have received a First Defender Handheld Identification System to enable our Hazmat responders to identify unknown substances in the field and at a safe distance.

Commissioner Koury and EMS Coordinator Michael Walton and his staff have also designed a course for EMS officers so the County can now teach First Responder Emergency Medical Technician courses as well as refresher courses.

The Police Chiefs' of Orange County Training Academy also graduated a new class of 35 recruits, men and women who are committed to dedicating their professional careers to the protection of our community.

Our Probation Department, under the direction of Vicky Casey, has conducted numerous compliance sweeps in cooperation with local police and the Sheriff's Office to ensure that probationers are meeting the terms of their probation. These aggressive community enforcement programs are just one more step the County is taking to protect the safety of our residents.

The Orange County Probation Department has established a full time field intelligence probation officer and we have also hired a full time Juvenile Release Officer to begin the first program to intervene and supervise juveniles in the Impact area. We have begun a school based truant /Probation Officer program to assist at Middletown High School. Our Probation Department has also received a license plate reader to monitor offender compliance.

Furthermore, grants to municipalities for public safety improvements such as cameras in the three cities will continue as will the highly successful Gun Buy Back program which last year removed 198 illegal guns from the streets of our County.

Many of these new programs were achieved by utilizing grants from outside sources enabling us to enhance our public safety programs while not burdening our County taxpayers.

I am happy to say that our Medical Examiner, Dr. Catanese, has already become a part of Team Orange. His office has successfully completed the transition from the coroner system to a modern and efficient operation that will serve our County for generations to come.

I would like to thank Orange County Sheriff Carl DuBois and the men and women of the Sheriff's Office for the outstanding work they do for the people of this County every day. Under the leadership of Sheriff DuBois, the Sheriff's Office initiated a very progressive Inmate re-entry program that, coupled with mental health services, social services and other community resources, prepares inmates for re-entry into society.

Moreover, the Sheriff's Office has instituted a Crisis Intervention Unit and an Internal Controls Unit that will enhance the excellent services already provided by this office.

Sheriff DuBois, we appreciate your work in providing safety for the people of Orange County and salute your ongoing efforts.

## **ECONOMY & FINANCES**

The strength of our economy and sound government finances are critical to providing the services and programs the people of Orange County have come to expect from their government.

This past year was one of the most challenging I have witnessed during my 25 years in public service. A slumping housing market, lagging sales tax revenue and an overall softening of our state and national economy made for challenges and choices that were extremely difficult.

However, continuing our commitment to streamlining the delivery of services, aggressive cost containment policies and working in partnership with this legislature to control spending, we are staying within the parameters of our budget while still enhancing our physical infrastructure for the future.

I believe it is a testament to the strength and soundness of our government that led to over 40 companies applying to the IDA. These high quality firms have the ability to go anywhere in the country and yet they chose Orange County because of the strength of our economy, commitment to service, great labor pool and the serious nature with which we approach business development, retention and job creation.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Bill Trimble of our Orange County Office of Business Assistance, Maureen Halahan of the Orange County Partnership, Chairman Jim Petro of the Orange County IDA and Dr. John D'Ambrosio of the Orange County Chamber of Commerce.

These dynamic individuals, along with the outstanding organizations they lead, make Orange County one of the premier places to live, work and do business in the State of New York.

I would like to highlight the efforts of our Orange County Employment and Training Administration under the leadership of Steve Knob. In 2007 our one stop center served over 7,000 customers, both employers and job seekers. We assisted over 4,600 job seekers and maintained one of the highest success rates in New York State. Our Employment and Training Administration also placed 495 Welfare recipients in new jobs and 692 potential Welfare recipients into jobs prior to their entering the system.

The work of Steve Knob and this department is nothing less than extraordinary, saving almost \$300,000 in County taxation but more importantly changing lives before they enter a cycle of dependency that is often hard to escape. Well done, Steve.

Orange County continues its collaboration with SUNY Orange to insure that our Managers and Supervisors receive the best training to more effectively manage their departments. To better serve the people of this County we will continue these management training programs in the coming year.

Our grants and project coordinator, Angie Kays-Burden, has once again helped to identify and assist in obtaining \$6.2 million dollars in new grant funding to augment critical services and relieve the burdens on local taxation.

I am also pleased to note that our Risk Management Department under the direction of Mike Morris has begun the process of allowing our local municipalities to opt out of the Orange County Workers Compensation Fund. To date only three of our municipalities remain, as most have realized the savings they can achieve by leaving the program. The removal of the locals from this system, in conjunction with our own improved insurance programs, will result in significant savings to our budget this year and in the future.

As I have indicated before, this has been a difficult financial year for Orange County as well as the state and nation; however, I think it is important to remember that with the help of this legislative body we were able to once again provide a modest reduction to the county tax rate this year. Our tax rate continues to be the lowest since World War II and I have to commend Finance Commissioner Joel Kleiman and Budget Director Neil Blair for their prudent and conservative policies.

Our Bond rating continues to be outstanding, second only to Westchester County. As a result of our high credit worthiness we have saved approximately \$1.7 million dollars over counties with only A ratings in future interest cost for 2007 borrowings.

Despite these impressive savings and reductions in the tax rate and conservative spending practices, the County still remains concerned with the fiscal projections for the coming years, and in our '08 budget my administration was forced to cut departmental budget requests by \$9.8 million dollars.

To our partners in State government, we understand your task is difficult and we know that each member of the State legislature is working diligently to produce a sound budget. Our concern as counties is the lack of control we have over the many programs that Albany places on local governments without sufficient funds to support these many programs. When 75 % of our budget is mandated by the state of New York, even small percentages can make an enormous impact on the County's bottom line.

This year's proposed state budget will see Orange County lose 3 million dollars. That is a tremendous amount of money given the fact that we have already adopted our budget for this year.

To that end and with the Governor's most recent State budget in mind, I have created the Orange County Commission on Efficiency and Cost Containment. This Commission under the direction of Steve Gross, Director of Operations and Cost Control, will review and advise my office on any and all cost saving measures we can implement. To assist this Commission, my office has requested all department heads to begin identifying ways to achieve reductions in spending and operational costs in their current 2008 budget.

As County Executive and a lifelong citizen of this County, I do not enjoy taking these hardline policies but I would be negligent in my fiduciary responsibilities if I did not prepare this County for our children and now, as a soon-to-be grandfather, our grandchildren. They deserve our commitment now to secure their future.

We can't always make the easy and popular choices. We make choices out of concern for the financial integrity of this County now and for the future.

I want to address our ongoing negotiations with our unionized County workforce. I, as well as the members of this legislative body, are proud of the service rendered by our County employees, and I want to thank them for their continued dedication to the people of this County.

I believe that the individual members want to settle these contracts and when you get past the posturing and rhetoric, we will achieve contracts which are fair and preserve the fiscal integrity of the County.

We have made significant offers to the leadership of our largest union and my only request is that they take our offer to the membership. Again, look past the stickers, slogans and personalities. The offer the County has on the table is reasonable, prudent and allows us to meet the needs of our employees and the taxpayers. I urge the leadership of the union to take the offer we have presented to the membership and let them have an opportunity to see it first hand.

While these are challenging economic times, I would like to report on the encouraging signs for our local economy coming from Stewart Airport. The changes brought about since the takeover by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey have been nothing less than extraordinary.

The completion of the Drury Lane Project, the arrival of Jet Blue, Air Tran and Skybus confirm what many of us have said for years about Stewart Airport.

Now, under the leadership of the Port Authority, we finally have an entity with both the skill and resources to develop Stewart in a manner that will benefit not only Orange County but the entire Hudson Valley region.

Hand in hand with the progress at Stewart has been the transformation of our own Orange County Airport in Montgomery under the able leadership of Airport Director Lenny Llerena.

The overall improvements, coupled with the commitment of a first class fixed based operator for our Airport, will greatly improve the service at this facility.

Orange County Airport is poised to truly take off and benefit from increased corporate air travel while maintaining its long tradition of servicing the local flying enthusiast.

Another institution that is a rich part of our history and holds the promise to strengthen our future is SUNY Orange. Since its inception as the first County sponsored Community College in the State, SUNY Orange has been a leader in providing for the educational needs of our citizens. It is one of the great resources of our community.

I can't thank Dr. Richards and the Board of Trustees enough for their vision and leadership in making SUNY Orange a first class educational opportunity for the residents and students of this County.

I am also pleased to announce that the Newburgh Campus of SUNY Orange will be the first certified LEED facility in Orange County Government and I want to thank my Administrative Officer James O'Donnell for his hard work on this project.

With the cooperation of this body we are again positioning SUNY Orange for growth and stability well into the future. The Newburgh Branch Campus, the Gilman Institute and significant improvements to the Middletown Campus will continue to help SUNY Orange be the college of choice for generations of Orange County residents.

I would also like to recognize the efforts of our Orange County Office of Community Development. Under the direction of Thomas Lane, this Department has made great strides in improving services to County residents.

Community Development completed 8 HOME projects this past year with a total development cost of \$42 million dollars, of which \$1.8 million was funded by the HOME Program. These projects resulted in a total of 340 units of affordable housing of which 59 are dedicated HOME units. We sponsored the first ever "Catch a Dream" symposium which brought together first-time home buyers with federal, state, local and private resources to fulfill the dream of homeownership.

Tom revised our residential Rehabilitation Program to place new emphasis on major system repairs and weatherization of homes occupied by elderly residents. Community Development also funded two new senior centers in Montgomery and Maybrook and assisted with improvements to Goshen, Greenwood Lake and the Town of Mt. Hope.

Additionally, Community Development funding has also enhanced public accessibility and safety with new sidewalks in Otisville, Walden and Warwick.

I would like to thank our County Attorney David Darwin and his staff for the hard work they do in protecting County assets and reclaiming funds for the people of Orange County. Last year alone the County Attorney's Office reclaimed well over \$3 million dollars in settlements for the people of this County.

## **IMPROVING OUR COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE**

Our efforts to strengthen and improve our County resources have continued this past year with our DPW. Under the strong leadership of Commissioner Ed Fares, Deputy Commissioners Pete Hammond, Charles Lee and Gary Scrittore, along with their DPW crews, have shown that by keeping an “open mind” and a “can do” attitude, County government is reshaping the way we do business.

The Middletown Community Campus renovation is now complete, bringing over 120 County jobs to the City of Middletown. Our Buildings and Grounds Division just completed the last phase of the renovation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Middletown Community Campus to house Cornell Cooperative Extension. We have also completed the renovations to our Consumer Affairs Department and made it ADA accessible on the main floor with significant cost savings to County taxpayers.

The Orange County Environmental Facilities and Services Division continues to lead the way in new and innovative measures to handle our County’s solid waste disposal. We have obtained a permit from the New York State DEC to construct and operate a 675 ton per day solid waste transfer station at New Hampton. This modern facility will be more efficient and serve this County for many, many years.

We have obtained approval from the United States Environmental Protection Agency for the implementation of an Industrial Pretreatment Program for Orange County Sewer District Number 1.

A clean, safe and adequate supply of water is critical to our health and economic future. We are in the process of our first water exploration project to assess our water reserves to meet the growing needs of Orange County residents well into the future.

The potential for water at the County owned Indigo and Dwaarkill sites, as well as the Mid-County Study and our proposal for regional water systems are a direct response to aging infrastructure and an increased demand for water within our municipalities. We look forward to expanding this program to the eastern portion of the County as we recognize that a responsible approach is a regional approach.

We believe these important projects will allow the County to help direct growth in those areas defined by the master plan to ensure we control and effectively manage our County’s growth for decades to come.

Through our Highway Division we continue to improve and maintain our roads and bridges, ensuring safe and efficient travel for our residents and visitors.

John McCarey and our Division of Real Property continue to modernize this Department to better serve the residents of our County. John has improved residential access to Real Property via the web for general information, assessment data, tax bills, tax maps and pictometry.

In these difficult economic times, Real Property has worked to reduce tax delinquent parcels to less than 100 out of a total 135,000 properties.

We are also training municipal staff on the preparation and printing of tax rolls and bills. John's office has dealings with all our local municipalities, school districts and 344 taxing districts.

Now that the state has enacted some technical corrections to the Cold War veterans' tax exemption, I am proud to support this proposal and I urge the Legislature to pass this important measure today.

Mark Coleman and the staff at the Division of Purchasing have completed our copier consolidation program, saving the County at least 1 million dollars over the next five years. We have enrolled the County in an electricity and natural gas co-op with other counties to save up to 20% on electric and natural gas costs. We have also implemented the sale of surplus property on E-Bay which has realized over \$13,000 in new revenue for the County.

The Orange County Office of Information Technology has begun replacing outdated software and systems across the County with our new Oracle E Business System. This system will provide state of the art financial management, purchasing, payroll, Human Resources, general ledgers and project management while insuring our compliance with applicable state and federal regulations. In negotiating this contract, my concern was that we have a system that would provide reliable service well into the future. I am also pleased to report that through tough negotiations my office was able to save three million dollars from the original purchase price.

John McCaffrey and his staff have also created the Geographic Information Systems Division that generated \$35,000 in new revenue. John has also expanded our Voice Over Internet Protocol phone system working with other telecommunication enhancements for a total savings of \$26,000 a year.

Brett Simmons and the staff at the Orange County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department have truly transformed our County Park system. We have begun renovations to the Graham M. Skea Parks and Recreation Center and opened our first County Dog Park. We are committed to expanding and improving our County recreational activities and Gonzaga and Glenmere are on the horizon.

While golfing nationwide has experienced serious declines, in Orange County we have increased our revenues significantly by implementing a new On-Line Tee Time reservation system allowing us to increase the number of rounds, while opening up Stony Ford and Hickory Hill to more players. The Parks Department has also started on the second phase of updating playground equipment for our entire parks system and we are continuing to expand the Heritage Trail.

We recognize the important role recreation plays in the health and socialization of our residents and we will continue to explore additional recreational opportunities across the County in the coming years.

I also want to remind our municipalities of the great opportunity they have to once again enhance their own park systems with our local parks grant program funded by the Legislature. This ½ million dollar program will go a long way to provide for enhanced recreation in our local communities.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES**

As you all know, one of the most significant projects this government undertook was the purchase and closure of Camp LaGuardia. For too long the people of Central Orange were burdened with the problems of a New York City homeless shelter. I want to thank the Legislature for recognizing and acting on this historic opportunity.

Already, we have seen property values rise and petty crimes fall. Now we look forward to bringing this parcel back on the tax rolls, and to develop it for the benefit of local residents and the entire County. I urge this body to review objectively the offers before it and understand that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity that will change our County for years to come.

The Orange County Office for the Aging under the steady hand of Nick Gerten continues to work hard to improve the lives of seniors in new and innovative ways. Working together with our Department of Social Services, they established Orange County NY Connects, to allow for a single point of entry for Long Term Care. The Senior Dining program has 1,161 consumers receiving over 190,000 meals through home delivery and congregate dining. Our Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program has helped over 2,800 Orange County residents navigate the complex world of Medicare.

I am happy to report the tremendous progress being made at our Department of Consumer Affairs under the leadership of Commissioner Charles Mitchell. This Department is taking an increasingly active role in helping consumers across our County.

Our Electrical Licensing Board is in place and testing should begin this spring with the first licenses being issued sometime this summer.

Orange County Clerk Donna Benson continues to make the Orange County Clerk's Office one of the most efficient and user friendly offices in the state.

Donna is a great asset to the people of this County and the Clerk's Office remains one of the most accessible and pleasurable departments to deal with in County Government.

Commissioner Chris Ashman and our Orange County Department of Mental Health continue their fine tradition of service to the residents of our County.

The work of this department is critical to protecting some of our most vulnerable citizens and we salute their many accomplishments.

As many of you know, Orange County has the largest number of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan in the Hudson Valley. Our Orange County Veterans Service Agency led by Director Tony Zippo has made meeting the needs of these brave men and women a high priority. Orange County will always respond to the needs of our nation's veterans and I want to thank Tony and his department for their hard work and dedication.

Commissioner of Health Dr. Jean Hudson continues her mission to protect and promote the Health of Orange County residents. Her commissioner columns, clinics, wellness screenings and educational sessions continue to grow and flourish across this County.

Dr. Hudson's dedication and vision truly reflect a growing recognition that public health is just as important as your own personal health and well being.

I would be remiss if I did not note the enormous commitments made by our local hospitals to improving health care for our residents. Orange Regional Medical Center will break ground this year on the first hospital built in 35 years between Albany and New York City.

The enhancements by Orange Regional Medical Center, Bon Secours and St Luke's Cornwall Hospital continue the proud tradition of providing high quality care right here in Orange County.

Our Orange County Department of Social Services under the skillful leadership of Commissioner David Jolly continues to break new ground in offering programs to assist our residents while maximizing grants and streamlining services to save County tax dollars.

Dave Jolly truly is concerned with each person who faces adversity in this County. He understands the importance of rooting out fraud and abuse which leaves less funding for those who are truly in need. I applaud his efforts on reviewing Medicaid expenditures and providing for a safe efficient transfer from a fee for service Medicaid program to a managed care program.

In working with the Orange County Youth Bureau, DSS has established the first Orange County Youth Employment Project. This program directly targeted at risk teenagers in partnership with private businesses in Highland Falls. This project proved highly successful and is worthy of replication across the County as a way to reach out to the County's youth by providing employment, as well as hope and guidance from positive adult leaders in a community.

DSS has also launched a countywide Energy Campaign in conjunction with the Orange County Energy Task Force. This year over 1,800 Energy Saving Toolkits were distributed across Orange County and almost 300 county residents attended our energy saving workshops. This past year, we committed \$100,000 to weatherization service projects.

As a result of our commitment, Orange County will be highlighted with a statewide “Best Practice” in community partnerships to save energy. The Department also continues to target areas within our three cities with outreach programs and active partnerships with our Not for Profits. They truly make a difference for the people of this County each and every day.

The Orange County Youth Bureau continues to provide strong guidance and first rate programs to our young people. Carol Chichester and her staff have actively worked on the issues of violence in our schools and have developed a number of Safe School Ambassadors programs to help deal with escalating safety issues in our schools. Last Summer’s Youth Academy was such a success in Port Jervis, we will now be expanding to Middletown and Newburgh.

The Youth Bureau also continues to educate police depts., schools and community leaders with countywide programs and symposiums to ensure that our community has the most accurate and current information on the difficult issues confronting our youth today.

As we continue to focus on our future, the Orange County Planning Department, led by David Church, has helped this County to adopt policies that are economically viable while respecting and retaining the unique quality of life that we all enjoy.

The Orange County Planning Department has been in the forefront of integrating our new Transit Orange program and helped with the introduction of free parking at all the County’s Park n Rides. Transportation and land use programs are critical if we are to maintain our competitive edge while exploring new and innovative shared municipal services.

The Planning Department continues to oversee numerous studies that will help my office and this Legislature chart our course for years to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for 325 years this County has stood through recessions, depressions, world wars, cold wars and through it all we have been a people assembled from every corner of the globe with one purpose. We are seeking a better way of life for our children and our children's children.

I believe there is something special about this land, its people and the fierce passion with which we live, love and raise our families.

We are truly a blessed land nestled between two rivers, cradled by ancient mountains and fed by green valleys. This County ... our County is a special place worthy of our admiration and worthy of our labors to make this a great place to live, work and raise our families.

Together, we will continue to work with a steady purpose and one thought in mind... to leave this County better than when we started and continue to make our mark in history.

Thank you for listening and may God Bless the United States of America, our Great State of New York and our own County of Orange.



---

EDWARD A. DIANA  
County Executive  
March 6, 2008