

The following Majority Freeholder Report was read by Freeholder Laury along with a power point presentation:

I would like to extend a warm Salem County welcome to Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno. It is truly an honor to have New Jersey's first Lt. Governor administer the oath of office to the first female freeholder director of Salem County.

I would also like to recognize the 3rd district legislators in attendance and would like to congratulate them on their recent reelections.

State President Steve Sweeney
Assemblyman John Burzachelli and
Assemblywoman Celeste Riley

For ALL those in the audience who have served or who are serving in elected positions would you stand and be recognized. Thank you.

Would the past freeholders please continue to stand? We are honored by the legacy you have passed on to this board and the great County of Salem that you have dedicated part of your lives. God Bless you all.

I would like to continue by thanking David Lindenmuth for his six years of service to this board and the County of Sale.

In addition, as the son of a B24 World War II Pilot, I would like those that are serving or have served in our armed forces to please stand and receive our recognition and our gratitude that you rightly deserve. Thank you.

I have saved my best for last, my wife 33 years, Kathy, my daughter Brittany (who is working this evening and unable to attend), my son TJ, my son-in-law Stan, and my mother Harriet. Without your support and understanding I certainly would not be here tonight. You are the proverbial "wind beneath my wings". Thank you.

Lee, Coach as we pass the baseball on to the next pitcher, we thank you for your many years of service as freeholder director. How many years, six? When I was elected to the freeholder board two years ago, Lee, in a bipartisan fashion, mentored me through the first days on the freeholder board. I can truthfully say, you did your best to be honest and to be fair to everyone. May God continue to bless you and your family.

Julie, we are honored to have you as the next freeholder director. You have definitely earned the position. No one will out work you nor will anyone match transparency you intend for this board. God bless you and may God bless your team of freeholders.

Dale congratulations to you on your re-election for a second term. It has been a pleasure working side by side with you over the past 2 years.

Bob, Welcome on board. I would like to thank you for being the new rookie, relieving me of that title, and the dubious honors that goes along with it.

Just a few Salem County 2011 highlights

From the "100 year" storm and Hurricane Irene we saw over 11 million dollars in damages to roads and bridges. We are well on our way to completing the repairs and if there is a silver lining it is that if Salem County receives the anticipated reimbursement, the total cost of repairs will not be 11 million dollars but less than 3 million dollars.

We also saw the best in Salem County during Hurricane Irene. Our CERT volunteers manned our evacuation centers and provided countless hours attending to those in need. We saw our emergency responders keep us all safe by handling the numerous emergency calls not only throughout the day but throughout the long night as well.

2011 saw the sale of the Salem County Nursing Home by the Salem County Improvement Authority, ending several consecutive years of annual losses of almost 3 million dollars. The net assets from the sale of the nursing home were divided between the Salem County Improvement Authority and the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders. We only consider this a highlight because we are no longer saddled with the ongoing losses.

After many agonizing months, we celebrated the announcement that the maternity ward at the Salem Memorial Hospital will remain open and available to our expectant mothers.

Salem County continues to be New Jersey's leader in farmland preservation with more than 27,000 acres preserved. Because of Salem County's leadership role in farmland and open space preservation, future generations will experience the same quality of living we now enjoy.

We have issued numerous low interest loans to Salem County businesses through our revolving loan fund. This continues to help to maintain our vital small businesses and the jobs they represent.

We have balanced our 2011 budget without layoffs or furlough days. This was done solely with the help and cooperation of our staff and all of our collective bargaining units.

On a more difficult note, Salem County's debt is approaching 60 million dollars. However, the freeholders have ensured through resolution, that some of these bonds will be reduced when our disaster reimbursement funds are received.

And now we look forward to 2012

WE WILL BE DOING MORE FOR LESS

As with all our local municipalities, we will need to find ways to maximize the use of our tax dollars. The county and local budgets will be difficult – probably the most difficult to date. Governments must ensure that every possible tax savings is realized and passed along to their constituents. Layoffs and furloughs are the last resort to balancing a budget. This being said, we are proud that our past efforts have allowed us to be the only county in the state not to resort to layoffs or furloughs.

Our first look at the 2012 budget shows about a \$10 million dollar deficit. Balancing the budget will not be easy but we promise to meet that challenge “head on” and produce a balanced budget. We will overcome this deficit and we will make the difficult decisions to meet this goal.

We will be reducing the size of government. We will accomplish this goal by eliminating positions we cannot afford, not staffing unnecessary positions, and by doing a thorough analysis of the salaries associated with necessary positions.

We will be doing strategic planning. We will establish plans to better manage our current and future resources. We will trim down the “management by crisis” mentality.

We will increase our commitment to shared services, not only with other counties but with our own municipalities.

WE WILL WORK ON MAKING SALEM COUNTY A SAFER AND BETTER PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND RAISE A FAMILY

We anticipate the completion of a county wide emergency communication system, a system that will finally provide quality coverage to the entire county. This is one of our highest priorities, for the increased safety of our law enforcement and our emergency responders.

We will continue exploring the possibility of a county wide EMS department to provide needed support to our current EMS squads. The goal is to ensure quicker response times and provide better access to emergency services.

We will complete the 5th street project. When completed, the new county facility will provide the needed administrative space for our county services. This project will return Salem County workers to the County seat and eliminate costly lease payments.

We will finalize the four and a half million dollar Tiger III grant to upgrade a portion of the vital county railroad system which supports Salem County industry. We also are in discussions that could see federal and state funding for the completion of the rail line upgrade.

We will be finalizing a significant "Home Fund" grant application. This program will provide funding to enable residents to remain in their homes instead of nursing homes. These grant funds will provide such items as wheel chair ramps and functional changes in home for the disabled and the elderly.

We will hold our county authorities more accountable for their actions by vetoing their minutes when they are out of line with Salem County objectives. Salem County taxpayers have seen years of independent authorities squandering their budgets on questionable lease payments, programs, and Projects. This must stop.

WE WILL BECOME MORE TRANSPARENT AND ACCESSIBLE

This year, we will be taking our freeholder meetings to three remote locations
Pennsville on March 21st
Pittsgrove on July 18th
Woodstown on October 17th

We will have work sessions open to the public at 5:30 prior to each 7:30 freeholder meeting. If there is a need for a closed administrative meeting it will be attended by a representative of ALL parties.

The 2012 budget will be scrutinized for every possible way to establish a fair and cost effective Salem County Government. We truly look forward to the additional financial expertise that Bob Vanderslice brings to the freeholder board. I will tell you, he started working the budget process within days of his election.

Salem County will evolve. Our county administrator will be stepping down on January 18th. We will be welcoming Evren Ford as the new administrator. Evren hails from our own Salem County and has extensive experience in both the public and the private sectors. Evren brings with him many years of experience with the DuPont Company in human resources and currently has his own consulting firm. We look forward to utilizing his skills and ideas.

We are a great freeholder team and I would like to remind all of our team that "Good is the Enemy of Great". We need to keep working at being great, NOT stopping at good.

Thank you all for coming out tonight and supporting Salem County.

And if I may borrow my final words from Red Skelton (those over 50 remember him).

*I wish you love and happiness,
In everything you do.
The time has come to say goodnight,
I hope I've made a friend....
And so well say, "May God bless you,
Until we meet again."*