

## 2021 State of the Village of Bratenahl

By Mayor John M. Licastro

I am pleased to submit the 2021 State of the Village of Bratenahl Report.

We begin 2021 as we ended 2020, with the specter of Covid-19 lingering over us and violent and deadly civil unrest, not seen since the Civil War, both as evidenced January 6<sup>th</sup> and threatened over the next week. Covid has affected all aspects of governance in Bratenahl and continues to do so. Whether the disturbing violence continues is unknown as I write this on January 14<sup>th</sup>. We prioritize keeping residents, staff, and employees both as healthy and safe as possible. Our efforts in these tasks will not diminish.

I will offer insight as to the State of the Village by Department. Every Village Department has been affected by Covid-19. I won't go through the details on how each department navigated this path, but infection, quarantine, contact tracing, etc. have been an ongoing occurrence.

**Police Department** – With leadership from Chief Rich Dolbow, Lt. Chuck LoBello and Sergeants Durand, Soric and Flanagan, the men and women of our department have functioned well in these difficult times. There is a nationwide shortage of qualified police candidates, driven by the actions of some and the heightened level of scrutiny that follows. We continue to suffer attrition in our ranks as other departments poach our highly trained and competent officers. The effort to locate and recruit replacements gets more difficult. Police Academies are graduating fewer and fewer individuals. Every department is on the lookout for candidates. Even though the search is frustrating, we will not lower our standards just to be expedient. We have been able to maintain the staff needed to patrol and keep us safe. As always, most of our resources, both in compensation and equipment, is dedicated to this department.

**Service Department** – Joe Zalar, our Service Director and Dave Maund, our Foreman along with the other five members of the Department continue to do what they do best: keep our streets and sidewalks plowed, our tree lawns neat and clean and our public spaces something of which we can be proud. Their efforts might be under the radar, given they are often out there working while we sleep peacefully in our beds. Don't forget to give them a wave as you pass them on the street.

**Mayor's Court and Legal Department** – Julie Kreiner, our Clerk of Courts and Deputy Clerk Angela Takacs have had a herculean task in keeping Mayor's Court open and operating in the time of Covid. Our magistrates Chuck Bauernschmidt, John Murphy and John Palumbo have also had to walk the fine line between personal safety and duty. They have all performed admirably. Our Law Department with Law Director Dave Matty and Mark Marong have navigated well the legal mandates we have as a Statutory community, made more complicated with the CARES Act and other Covid-19 challenges.

**Building Department** - Mary Ranney, our Building Department Administrator, along with Scott Packard, our Building Inspector, have had a challenging year. Bratenahl has had an ongoing housing boom, not only with new construction, but with existing homes selling at a rapid pace. That entails review of plans, visual inspections, permits, and review by the Architectural Review Board and Planning Commission. Both Scott and particularly Mary do an exceptional job.

**Fiscal Department** – Diana Cooks is our Chief Fiscal Officer. She is also our Public Records Officer and de facto in-house Human Resources Manager. The Fiscal Department had a full time and a part time component for years. Diana is full time and now the only member of this department. She oversees all aspects that pertain to finance, including tracking the income the Village receives to managing the manner in which monies are spent, with oversight from the Mayor's office and Village Council. Her daily duties change given the priorities of the moment. She has the task of managing the Unified Accounting Network (UAN) that tracks every dollar and detail. Under her leadership, this department is operating efficiently and accurately.

We are blessed to have so many individuals that are volunteers, beginning with **Village Council**. Jim Puffenberger, Joyce Burke Jones, Gina Huffman, Rod Taylor, Tom McDonald and Keith Benjamin give freely of their time. They have many duties that are mandated by the Ohio Revised code, particularly fiscal oversight. They are the legislative body (like Congress) that has final approval of many, if not all,

actions taken by our government. We are thankful for their dedication and hard work.

The **Planning Commission**, chaired by Vikki Broer, the **Recreation Commission**, chaired by Dave Kosinski and the **Shade Tree Commission**, chaired by Jean Lyons all contribute to keeping Bratenahl the wonderful community we know and love. All of the members of these Commissions are volunteers.

A special mention must be made for Sue Capello, our **Program Director** for the Recreation Commission and the individual that oversees the operation of the Bratenahl Community Center (BCC). The manner in which she manages the many activities at the BCC and the condition in which the building is kept are largely the result of her efforts.

We have a difficult path ahead in 2021. There is much uncertainty on how Covid will affect revenue. Many projects need completion, including the installation of the Bratenahl Road Fence, tuck pointing at Village Hall, ADA compliance at the BCC, a facilities study which will include the use of the newly acquired Bratenahl Center being but a few.

I'll say in closing that my involvement in Village Government began in the early 1980s, continued through the 1990s as a member of Village Council, up to the present, as I begin my 20<sup>th</sup> year as your Mayor. I have never experienced a year as challenging as what I experienced in 2020. Those challenges will continue in 2021 and beyond.

Village government has, in my memory, always functioned bottom up, not top down. As elected officials, we look for residents' input and guidance to help make the correct decisions for our Village. That in turn allows Bratenahl to be on the proper path. We look forward to your feedback.

I wish all of us a healthy, safe and prosperous 2021.

We hope to see you at our meetings. I close, as always, with the refrain from Bratenahl's School Song:

*"...she is the best, the very best, all Hail to Bratenahl!"*