

Ladies and gentlemen; distinguished guests; family and friends; welcome to the annual re-organization meeting of the Borough of Raritan. The New Year is upon us and, like the Roman god Janus who had two faces with the ability to look forward and backward, we too are looking back today and forward into the 2014. I am honored to be the Mayor of this fine community and so proud of the fine people who live and work here and so grateful for our many volunteers.

Our engineering department headed by our capable borough engineer, Stan Schrek, had a very active year. Design was completed for the Reconstruction of Orlando Drive, Phase 1, from Route 206 to Busky Lane. This project was substantially funded by two grants from NJDOT. We applied for a NJDOT grant to enable Orlando Drive, Phase 2, which will reconstruct the road from Busky Lane to Thompson Street.

The borough tax collection rate for 2013 was 98.95%. Thank you to our very conscientious citizens who actually try to pay their taxes before they are due.

Stone Bridge at Raritan housing development currently has 231 residential units under construction. Many new Raritan residents are now occupying the finished apartments. The Stone Bridge at Raritan clubhouse is also in use near the entrance on Route 202. Construction of the duplex apartment structures is nearing completion. New businesses now calling Raritan their home include a new attorney, dressmaker and tailor, nail salon, ice cream store, two new restaurants, and the promise of a new Canadian-based coffee shop and another well known ice cream establishment.

Our civic pride was boosted with another incredible Raritan River Fest and Rubber Duck Race. Thanks to all who helped make this one of our

signature events along with the John Basilone Parade which drew one of the largest crowds we have ever had to view the parade. We saw the Memorial Day Bike Races return to Raritan with an officially sanctioned cycling race held on the Saturday before Memorial Day. In July, we witnessed the removal of the Nevius Street Dam which returned the river to the pristine waterway it was in the past. Perhaps our proudest moment was being ranked number 96 among New Jersey Monthly's September issue featuring the Top 100 Towns in the state.

Our police department took steps this year to upgrade our community policing efforts. Extra walking patrols were added to the daily duties of our police officers in the area of Somerset Street and the Nevius Street Bridge as well as increased car patrols in the downtown area. By adding these patrols it increased the visibility to the public and communication with residents. Personnel within our department also changed during 2013. Our officers are a top notch group of professionals and it's always gratifying to know that other departments within the state are looking at them. This was the case this year with Officer Michael Acquaviva who was offered a position with the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. We were saddened to see Officer Acquaviva leave but we know he has a brilliant future ahead as a detective. Chief Mark Ciesla announced his retirement this past August with his terminal day being December 31st. After interviewing all eligible candidates, Lt. Kenneth McCormick, was selected by the Council to be the new Chief of Police. Patrolman Benjamin Griffin, a graduate of the Union County Police Academy, joined the department in December as our newest patrolman.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said, “The most important political office is that of the private citizen.” Participation of our citizenry is vital to our government to keep it effective and efficient. You, as members of our community, need to keep the Mayor and Council focused and accountable. Attend Council meetings, find out the issues concerning our town and your neighborhoods; ask questions and demand excellence from those whom you elected. Volunteer for a board or commission. Our web site had all the information one needs to volunteer. Effective government represents diverse opinion and works toward informed, conscientious compromises. As we move forward let us never lose sight that our ultimate goal is to make Raritan one of the finest communities in Somerset County and New Jersey.

As with every community, we rely on our citizen volunteers to help get the work done. We are thankful for those people who give so freely with their time and talents to make our community run so well. Each year we honor one of those hometown heroes for whom the words “I don’t have time” do not exist in their vocabulary. Theresa Bray was honored as our 2013 Nicholas Esposito Volunteer of the Year. Theresa, thank you for all you do for us and thanks to each and every person who helps the borough in any capacity.

As we move into 2014 we look forward to:

- Continuing a close working relationship with Michael Catania and Duke Farms Foundation
- Continuing the development and redevelopment of the river front

- Evening concerts on the Nevius Street Bridge during the summer months
- Continuing the excellent Halloween Parade and Santa Comes to Raritan extravaganzas held here at the Borough Hall as well as the Easter Egg Hunt held at Frelinghuysen Field. Thanks to the Recreation Committee for doing such an amazing job with those events.
- Completing phase two of the Orlando Drive reconstruction

I would be remiss if I did not welcome back Councilmen Giraldi, Sibilia, Lobell and Tozzi and Councilwomen Gara and Carra. I want to thank you in advance for another productive year working with you all for the good of our community. Let us never forget that we are here to serve the community and not our own personal agenda. In closing may you and your loved ones enjoy good health and happiness this New Year.

Robert Zimmerman also known as Bob Dylan said it best: *“May God bless you and keep you always, May your wishes all come true, May you always do for others, and let others do for you.*