

Annual Appreciation Event
February 25, 2011
STATE of the CITY ADDRESS
By
Mayor Allegra Webb Murphy

Vice Mayor Boisvenue, Members of the City Commission, City Manager, City Staff, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for joining us this evening and providing the opportunity for our City Commission and City Staff to express, formally, our heartfelt appreciation to the City Advisory Board members and other volunteers who serve the Oakland Park community. You have given so much to help Oakland Park become an engaged, inspiring and united city.

Serving one's community was eloquently described by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the following speech.

“Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve...you don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace.
A soul generated by love.”

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Another author (unknown) defined service as: “Giving of oneself, extending a helping hand and a listening ear, both of which demonstrate that we are neighbors. In giving selflessly, one feels more connected to life, to God and to others. “

In the years I have lived in and served this community, I have learned we are capable of accomplishing great things, for we have kind hearts and compassionate souls.

This is a very special State of the City Address, for my term of office as Mayor Ends on March 16th 2011, culminating eight years of elected service to this community.

When we look at where we were, how far we have come, and where we are today, our growth is analogous to a mighty Oak tree. We -- the City Commission and City Staff -- along with many residents here this evening -- planted the seeds in year 1999 during the Citizen-Driven Design Charrette. That was the acorn that grew into the towering Oak that is now our city.

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Many of you have seen the television show, “Extreme Home Makeover”. Well, ours is a story of an “Extreme City Makeover”.

In retrospect, Oakland Park was teetering on a perilous financial brink. The situation mandated that difficult decisions be made to prevent bankruptcy.

With a vision and revitalization plans for our future, our leaders and residents committed themselves to achieving short and long term goals.

Our initial challenge was redeveloping the slum areas and blight conditions in Oakland Park. With the input of citizens and businesses, our staff presented a strong consensus for a downtown park and improved recreation centers.

In addition to the Charette, a Master Storm -water plan was introduced, for Oakland Park had become known as “Sand-Bag City” because of its severe drainage problems. This concern was heightened by a series of powerful hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, ending with Hurricane Wilma.

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Executing plans and implementing the Charette was only the first step in what has been a more than 10-year pattern of growth, development, and transformation.

The City's first strategic Plan, which prioritized the numerous issues under the clearly defined Strategic Performance Areas were undertaken.

A detailed business plan-with input from resident surveys helped us accomplish our mission within the framework of a balanced budget. This was possible only by our City's ability to secure the tens of millions of dollars for the drainage projects, park facilities and other improvements.

Mr. Stunson, our City Manager and his staff, along with the City Commission, begged, borrowed, dialed and lobbied for dollars everywhere from Washington, DC, to Tallahassee, to the Broward County Government Center. During this period approximately 40 Million Dollars in grants and funding was received.

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Think about it this way: The City of Oakland Park has generated nearly ONE THOUSAND dollars in funding for every one of our residents. This means we are all investors and stakeholders in Oakland Park. So remember to exercise your right to vote for your “Board of Directors” in the March 8 City Commission Election!

I will never forget how Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Wilma flooded our City during my first term as Mayor in 2005.

But out of the flooded streets, downed trees and resident evacuations sprouted the City’s CERT volunteers or the Community Emergency Response Team which created another opportunity for resident involvement and participation. We had volunteers helping us distribute food, water and ice, as well as serve hot meals to our residents in need.

Nor will I forget Oakland Park’s success in being the recipient of more than \$ 5 Million Dollars in FEMA grants to fund our ambitious drainage projects during following this disaster.

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As a result, drainage problems throughout our community have been solved, including but not limited to: Kimberly Lakes, N.E. 6th Avenue, NW 21st Avenue, the Lakeside/Rock Island area, the Prospect Business District, The Floranada Business District, NE, 6th Terrace, NE. 40th Court, Sleepy River, NW 38th Street and the Lloyd Estate Neighborhood.

With a \$2 Million Dollar Open Space Grant and \$4 Million Dollars in Land Preservation Grants, we were able to acquire and develop the property and structure which are now Jaco Pastorius Park and Jaco Pastorius Park Community Center. We celebrated our Dr. Carter G. Woodson Heritage Festival last Saturday on that site and have hosted other annual events, including Oktoberfest, Pridefest and the Polynesian Festival which attract thousands of people each year.

And we anticipate sponsoring many more events.

We have watched with awe the extensive makeover of downtown NE 12th Avenue/Oakland Park Main Street. The beautiful fountains, the striking street lights, the green benches and the bicycle racks have transformed the entire area.

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The annexations, which welcomed the residents of North Andrews Gardens, Twin Lakes South, Mira Largo and Montage-by-the Lake, also contributed to our growth and expansion.

Take a walking tour of our community to see the tangible evidence of the results of resident's requests for improved parks and leisure facilities. In addition to those previously mentioned, we now can enjoy a beautiful Lakeside Sand Pines Nature Preserve and our very own dog park -- Oakland Bark Park.

Is it any wonder that our City Parks and Leisure Services Department earned the prestigious National Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies in 2010? **Oakland Park is on an exclusive list of fewer than 100 municipalities to receive this honor.**

The landscaped gateways, including the I-95 Oakland Park Boulevard interchange, the long-awaited wall along Commercial Boulevard and the new entry signs have helped to promote a more positive image of Oakland Park.

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We worked diligently to make City Hall and City facilities more “resident friendly.”

We streamlined the permitting process, including our “One-Stop Shop” for permitting, licensing, code enforcement and other services at our new Municipal Building, which also provides a more accessible location for public-meeting space.

We have made available to residents and businesses on-line, via the City’s website-24 hours a day, seven days a week: Agenda Review, City Commission Webcasts, Code Enforcement, Occupational Licenses and Permit Access, Registrations for Parks Programs, Utility Billing and Public Records Requests.

Our City is safer today, thanks to men and women of Oakland Park Fire Rescue and the BSO/ Oakland Park District. Our experienced Emergency Management Team was put to the test during Hurricane Wilma. Consequently, we were one of the first cities in South Florida to have our own AM Radio Station and we implemented Code Red and other emergency communications to alert residents before, during and after disasters, such as hurricanes and last year’s tornados.

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While Commissioner Arnst and I are delighted to stand tall before you tonight as we reflect upon our past eight years in office, and the rest of the Commission feel pride in the accomplishments made during their tenure, we remember foremost that we stand tall only because we stand on the shoulders of many others who have given of themselves to our City. We pay homage and extend gratitude to all City Commissioners, dating back to the 1999 Charette, and residents who served on City Advisory Boards and have been actively involved in their Homeowner or Neighborhood Associations.

Along the way, many of you have questioned our judgment, offered your advice and challenged us to make the best possible decisions for the residents and the City. For your commitment to excellence, we are grateful.

An outcome of your persistence is reflected in the nearly 200 participants in the City's Annual Local Government Academy, which began in 2005. Many of the graduates have gone on to serve on City Advisory Boards and several have been elected to the City Commission or are candidates for office in next month's Municipal election.

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Our efforts to re-landscape properties along the Arterial Roadways have made a visible difference as we continue to enhance our City's image and make our neighborhoods and business districts more attractive and appealing. Volunteers have been instrumental in our beautification plans-including the Adopt-A-Street Program and regular clean-up activities by citizens' groups, and members of several community organizations mentioned earlier.

This past year the City developed and organized the Community Volunteer Corps to promote more citizen participation.

We are favorably impressed by the Community Volunteer Corps members and other volunteer organizations-such as the Oakland Park Historical Society, the Friends of the Oakland Park Library and Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs.

Several weeks ago, we had an amazing turnout of approximately 60 volunteers who spent their Saturday morning cleaning up and helping to maintain the Lakeside Sand Pine Nature Preserve. This followed an earlier clean-up and refurbishing Campaign at Royal Palm Park.

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Volunteers have been vital to the success of our hometown Oakland Library. We have 9 adult volunteers who provide 30 hour per week.

All you have done, not only impacts where we are as a City today; it will also ultimately determine our continued success, 5, 10, and 20 years from now. At that future date some of you in this room will be leading our City and helping to recruit and train future generations of leaders.

As the end of my term approaches, I am particularly gratified that the City has remained financially sound. This has been evidenced by Oakland Park repeatedly being the recipient of the respected award for its annual budget and financial reporting.

Our Nation's economic woes have impacted us all. Despite the reduced revenue, the City Commission was able to maintain service levels for your Core Services without increasing your property tax rate in 2011 or your Fire Assessment fee since 2005.

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In 2010, our Commission reduced the cost of residential Solid Waste Services by more than 25 percent in a further effort to ensure that City Services were affordable, while still delivering the highest quality of services to the residents.

Let us now focus on some of major improvements we have made beginning with the Western region of Oakland Park:

The shoreline rehabilitation and the enhancement of Veterans Park along Norwest 21st Avenue were made possible by more than one million dollars in FEMA funding.

The long-awaited installation of sanitary sewers, drainage, landscaping and roadway upgrading in the Rock Island and Lakeside neighborhoods with a total of \$1.1 million dollars funded by FEMA.

Heading east, the NE 5th Avenue Project in 2010, which resulted in drainage, water main, roadway, landscaping and lighting improvements for the corridor serving the Harlem McBride neighborhood, was funded by \$1 and one-half million dollars.

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During this past year, we completed the Lloyd Estates Drainage project and the Sleepy River North Dredging Project.

Continuing on to our eastern gateways, NE 38th Street/North Dixie Highway Intersection Improvement Project is well underway, with more than \$1 Million Dollars in funding. We anticipate its completion by the summer of 2011.

We are in the final stages in the Floranada Business District Drainage project which was funded by more than \$600,000 in grants.

The Prospect Road Beautification project, financed by the Tree Trust Fund, will beautify the landscape on Prospect Road from NW 10th Avenue to NW 21st Avenue to Veterans Park. This marks the 17th consecutive year that Oakland Park has been honored as a “Tree City, USA”

Overall, we completed more than \$44 Million dollars in Capital Improvements projects between 2007 and 2010, more than 40 percent of which were funded by grants.

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Our staff took advantage of the lower cost of construction to begin several of these projects, thus making Oakland Park even more favorable for future redevelopment and more attractive to new businesses.

Our City's "Neighborhood Planning" program helped us prepare the Powerline Road Planning Assessment and the Commercial Boulevard Corridor Study.

To address the negative impact of Pain Clinics in our Community, we adopted and implemented a Pain Management Clinic Ordinance, which has led to our approval of several new Community Appearance Ordinances.

Our staff continues to support the South Florida East Coast Railroad Passenger Station location efforts for potential passenger rail stops along our City's North Dixie Highway Corridor.

I recognize many residents here this evening who participated in the Census 2010 Complete Count Committee Activities that were responsible for a total participation rate that surpassed the 2000 Census rate. This could equate an additional \$6.5 Million Dollars of Federal and State funding to be given to Oakland Park in the future.

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We have witnessed, firsthand, the social and economic benefits of Partnerships between the City and community organizations. At Harris Chapel Life Enrichment Center, our City now offers Satellite library services and a free open gym for residents in supervised athletic activities.

We recently formed a Youth Advisory Council to seek input from local youth on their recreational needs, to discuss their most important issues and to work together with the city to facilitate the highest quality of athletic, social and recreational programming.

Oakland Park continues to focus on improving its image in 2011. Code Compliance is involved in removing graffiti and in improving the aesthetics in neighborhoods and on Arterial Roadways.

The City Organized the Abandoned Property Registration program that has been beneficial in helping to maintain the numerous homes in foreclosure.

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As Mayor, I am thrilled to report that we have a distinguished history and an August future. This realization humbles and inspires me as I deliver this State of the City Address.

I close with these timely words by Maya Angelou:

“I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s Mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.”

I do not claim to be an expert on baseball, but I do know that to be successful, the Florida Marlins need a lot more “pitchers” than “catchers.”

Oakland Park has become a successful city because we have more “**givers**” than “takers” and more people who do **something** than people who do nothing.

On behalf of our entire City Commission and our City Staff, I convey to you, this message of our deepest appreciation, respect and love.

Good night and God bless you.