

January 2010

One fine Wednesday afternoon this last month I got to spend some quality time again with Mrs. Collins' second graders at Johnson School. Having been a middle school teacher for several years right out of college, when I get a chance to participate in education again, even if only to help round out a lesson on government, I rarely pass up the invitation. In November, a group of Wheaton North students came by the office one evening for an interview as part of a project for their class in government. What fun! And, what an impressive group of young, active minds, with thoughtful and insightful questions. I'm proud to say that not one of them appeared to doze off during my answers, but of course, they are practiced experts at appearing vitally interested while mentally composing their next Twitter offering.

But back to the second graders, who also manage to come up with some pretty good questions. Inevitably, someone asks: "What do you like best about being Mayor?" This question usually prompts another: "What do you most dislike about being Mayor?" I tell them that, for the most part, I have the same answer for both questions: trying to address difficult issues that have no clear or easy answers. Like many of you, I appreciate being challenged. Likewise, and I know you can identify with me again; challenges frequently give me severe heartburn.

By way of explanation, I tell the second graders to think about a really hard math problem: you may struggle mightily with the process of figuring it out, but when you finally get the right answer, you feel great. Hard work and struggle without guaranteed success is not always our first choice, but that is where some real satisfaction is to be found. In second grade (as teacher or pupil), the Mayor's office, that church committee you volunteered for (what were you thinking?!), deciding to have children (same question), coaching sports with the kids, or taking on added responsibilities at work or in the community. What I don't tell them is, sometimes you don't know whether you found the right answer until long after the decision is made, and it's too late to change course. And, unfortunately, the solution you settle on today may not always comfort you in retrospect. Life just isn't as precise or predictable as mathematics.

Fortunately, I am able to follow up this ambivalence with something which is an unqualified "best part" of being Mayor. It is, of course, the people who I meet, get to work with, become friends with; people who become my mentors and role models, most of whom I never would have met but for my position as Mayor. When people ask why in the world a person would want to be Mayor, the first reason that first comes to mind is always that you have inspired me. Watching how so many of you apply yourselves to projects and causes for the benefit of others, not for your own gain, but just because it is the right thing to do, makes me want to be like you.

This past Christmas, Nancy and Fred Olufs again spearheaded the Christmas Sharing program that they helped start forty years ago, that has grown to serve over 500 families-in-need each year. Pam and Dave Lowe have headed up Holidays for Heroes here in Warrenville for the past nine years, collecting personal items for the vets at Hines Hospital, and this year expanding to include a Saturday morning pancake breakfast fundraiser at VFW Post 8081. Inspirational? I'll say. And I'll wager you know more people in town like them. I may get to be Mayor, but you often show me what leadership is. Thanks, Happy New Year.

February, 2010

Two of the most meaningful and consuming aspects of my life have been my family and my service as an elected official in our town. I think I have remarked in the past about how I often see the parallels between family life and community life, and I continue to maintain that many of the same issues that occupy us in our nuclear family also provide, if we are open to them, “growth experiences” in our extended community family.

Of course, there are some significant differences too, mainly in magnitude of consequences and the very public nature of being an elected official. But if there is one thing that could qualify as a given in family and community life, it would be that what worked yesterday and even today may not work tomorrow, and for sure, don't become too enamored of the status quo because: *things always change*.

Our own children are grown and making their way out in the world now, but I vividly remember their progression through the stages of growth and how each “step” of theirs necessitated a new “dance” by Mom and Dad. It seemed like it was always a scramble to keep up, much less stay a half-a-step ahead. While we made every effort to be consistent in the application of our principles and values, tactics and policies were under constant review, with adjustments more frequent than we would have preferred. And issues could change burners, front to back, back to front, in a heartbeat.

So it is at the City. The State has been talking about widening Route 56 since as far back as 1968, but nothing much has happened until very recently. Suddenly, money has been appropriated and this project is in “fast track” mode. IDOT tells us this project is going to bid in April, with their goal to have all the concrete in and traffic flowing by fall of 2011. Good news, but now we scramble to get items included that mitigate negative impacts and fit in with our redevelopment plans before final engineering is approved and things are changed forever.

A seldom used set of railroad tracks quietly gathers rust for decades on the western border of Warrenville, only to be sold to CN, who has plans to turn this railroad side street into a superhighway. Who would have predicted? The Surface Transportation Board gives us very little leverage, but we negotiate a sound mitigation fund for our most affected citizens and invest considerable time and energy designing, implementing, and fine tuning a program to distribute this money. And our fight to establish a “quiet zone” at the Batavia Road crossing continues.

We spent the better part of three years gearing up for the redevelopment of our Civic Campus and Old Town area only to have the bottom fall out of the economy, and implementation of these wonderful plans has to be deferred to a time uncertain. How to deal with declining revenues, make do with less, be fair to our loyal and hard working employees, and maintain reasonable service levels now has center stage. Making dependable projections for the future is particularly problematic, as no one seems to have a reliable idea of just when we might expect a “turnaround” and what exactly it will look like.

All things considered, especially in light of the well publicized plight of others, we must count our blessings. Warrenville has no debt, and therefore no debt service. We have a diversified (although diminished) revenue stream and ample reserves. While the City will struggle for this year, and, most probably, the next as well, it is comforting to know that in 2011 we will experience a substantial revenue increase as tax dollars that for 23 years went into our TIF 1 account revert to the City (and our other taxing districts). Not the solution to all our problems, but a welcome change in the right direction.

So, ironically, my earlier lament becomes my uplifting conclusion. When you're “up” it's prudent to remind yourself that “down” will visit you again, sometimes abruptly. But when you're “down”, as a family or as a community, there is comfort in knowing: *things always change*.

You can count on it.

March, 2010

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, Community Development Director Ron Mentzer and I attended a luncheon sponsored by the Valley Industrial Association (VIA) that featured a nationally recognized and highly regarded economist as the guest speaker. Staff and I attend these functions, as we are able, for a number of reasons. One is simply to give Warrentville a presence in as many positive venues as possible. Some 300 business folks from the Naperville/Fox Valley area heard that the City of Warrentville cared enough about their gathering to have two representatives attending. Never know when that might pay off.

Another reason we go to these things is the hope that there will be some worthwhile takeaway: useful information, novel or fresh insights, confirmation that we are doing something right, ideas to improve our process, a connection with a potentially valuable contact, or even some new worry bead to add to our string. The trip to and from is also good as it provides another opportunity for me to have informal face time with Staff, discussing current issues and other good stuff like the latest family and personal highlights.

Of course, there are potential downsides to these luncheons and dinners. There is the very real possibility that they may prove to be a waste of time. It happens. Poor speakers, weak material, no worthwhile takeaways. Sometimes, we walk out wishing we had made another choice for our time, a productive one. The other thing is the food. I used to look forward to the “free” and generally tasty food. Every meal you don’t have to prepare yourself is a good one, right? Well, yes and no. After one year as Mayor, I had ballooned to 205 pounds. This was a “takeaway” I hadn’t bargained for. Fortunately, three years ago I determined to make some changes, lost 40 pounds, and I feel much better.

Which brings me to the cookies? They were pretty hard to miss as I sat down at our table, placed, I am convinced with evil design, not twelve inches from my lunch plate. These were not just cookies. Pull out your Webster’s, look up “irresistible”, and you will find a picture of one of these cookies there. You could almost see the imprint of Mom’s fingers on them, left when she lovingly flattened the oversize dough balls. And there they were, right before me, warm from the oven, and she was calling me to enjoy my favorite, oatmeal-raisin. Darn. Yet another test.

But I digress. I wanted to tell you about the speaker. I’m happy to report that he was above average, articulate, intelligent, well-informed, on top of things and interesting. In other words, he sees things as I do. Technically, as shown by several key indicators, the recession is over and things are getting better -- but slowly, but it seems unlikely that we will return to boom times anytime soon, if at all. He pointed to several cyclical economic trends to show that in each case we have hit a low we have rebounded from it. This was encouraging. At the conclusion of his presentation he provided a summary of his key points, and the very last bullet was just one word, which, in the context of his remarks, remains particularly disquieting. The word was *change*, with its implication of more challenges ahead. Great.

So, back to the challenge that was already on my plate, so to speak. I am happy to report that both Ron and I (it’s always best to have a partner to encourage good choices) were able to resist temptation. Noting that two of the cookies probably represented the calories burned during a five mile run tipped the scales (sorry). No cookies for us. Score one for me.

In the interests of being fair and balanced, I have to fess up about the outcome of another dinner I attended. Cub Scout Pack 68 invited me to their annual Blue and Gold Banquet at St. Irene’s on February 21, to help celebrate 100 years of scouting and honor individual scout achievements. To thank me for attending, they presented me with a nice, big can of Trail’s End Carmel Corn. This is also pretty good stuff, and I could easily picture popping the top off this beauty and inhaling its entire contents in one sitting, as I have done many times in the past. And that’s pretty much how it played out, having been encouraged by Ray Scott as I was leaving, that if I opened the can and let it “breathe” for 30 seconds, all the calories would escape out into the air.

Thanks, Ray. It was worth it. Only a three mile run.

April, 2010

There are probably any number of better ways to start your day than boarding a bus that will take you to Springfield, especially if you have to go there on business. Nevertheless, this is how City Administrator John Coakley, I, and a couple of dozen DuPage mayors and managers began one of our days the middle of last month. In another example of the frequent triumph of hope over experience, we were off to the state capitol to try to make a difference. The hope was that we could influence our legislators to embrace some desperately needed, substantive change, as well as prevent them from passing some, from our perspective, bad laws. The experience was, predictably, somewhat shy of our high hopes.

Every spring DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference holds its Springfield Drive Down, an organized effort to influence legislation that affects municipalities. DMMC is one of several councils of governments (COGs) around the state. It is comprised of 33 member communities (including Warrenville) in DuPage County, representing about 1.2 million people.

One of the principal purposes of COGs is to promote and protect municipal interests based on the realization that communities, no matter what their size, have common interests and face similar challenges, as well as the concept of strength in numbers. The Mayor of Warrenville taking a stand on an issue is not as likely to produce a desired result as the Mayors and Managers of almost all the communities in DuPage County taking the same stand, and then following up with the collective resources available to the organization. In addition, keeping on top of regional and state issues that might affect our individual communities, a daunting task, becomes more manageable by active participation in our COGs, whose staff members are dedicated to helping us maximize our efforts at good local government.

The specific goal for these drive downs is to promote our Legislative action Program (LAP), as put together by our Legislative Committee and approved by our membership, consisting of three parts: LEGISLATIVE PRICIPLES -- protect municipal revenues; reject unfunded state mandates; respect home rule authority; preserve the right of municipalities to manage employees and determine wages and benefits; preserve local authority. LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES -- public safety pension reforms; amend the public safety employee benefits act; protect authority for red light camera enforcement; address commercial requests in new FOIA law. POSITION STATEMENTS -- expressions of support or opposition on a myriad of issues that affect municipalities.

While in Springfield this time around, we met as a group with the minority leadership of both the House and Senate, a representative of the Governor's office, a couple of influential legislators, and John and I talked with all of Warrenville's legislators. We were received in each case with courtesy and, for the most part, no one disagreed with our message. But if I had to sum up our effort in one word, that word would be "frustrating". You know that feeling you get when you are vigorously promoting your point of view on an issue to someone, and they are nodding their head in agreement with you, but you know it is unlikely that they will follow up in the way you would like because their agenda is simply not the same as yours? Well, welcome to Springfield.

While I believe most of those who represent us in Springfield have good intentions, good intentions are not enough. The present system is far too political, neither party willing to cede any advantage to the other with elections imminent, short term triage fixes for structural problems have been and continue to be the order of the day, while debt accrues at an accelerating and ever-more-alarming rate, and the leadership necessary to make meaningful change appears to be lacking.

Not a pretty, particularly rosy or encouraging picture from the Capitol. There certainly is the hope that the recent heightened awareness of citizens about the state's dire fiscal problems will translate into enough pressure to force state leaders to, um, lead. There are solutions, but they won't be popular, easy to implement, or reverse our downward spiral in one year. Unfortunately, balanced against this hope is our experience of state government in Illinois.

But I do know a little town in DuPage County whose example could provide our state leaders with some guiding principles that, while they don't guarantee success, might help: establish diversified revenue streams; aggressively pare waste and pursue efficiency; avoid debt by paying cash for your purchases; establish and maintain a rainy day fund; treat your employees fairly and generously, but don't promise them things that you can't afford. It can be done. Hope and experience don't have to be strangers. In fact, here in Warrenville, they meet for a cup-o-joe on a regular basis.

May, 2010

A particularly active day in the community last month really highlighted for me how much we depend on the pro bono efforts of our citizens, and the good things that happen when people are willing to offer: "Here, let me help with that." It was a Saturday that began at 8:00 am with Kathy Kimber's Adopt-a-Block folks walking their street to tidy up, as they do for an hour once a month. At 9:00 o'clock, I joined another group moving down the Prairie Path through town and picking up litter there. As we passed Sesqui Park, I happened upon Matt Mulcahy and his fellow Scouts, who were busy pulling up all the garlic mustard that had invaded our parks as Matt's Eagle Scout project. Go Matt! On my way over to Summerlakes Park for our Arbor Day celebration, put on by Environmental Advisory Commission, with help from America in Bloom volunteers and others, I passed a large group of Adopt-a-Highway folks from St. Irene's Knights of Columbus working their way west on Butterfield Road while filling large orange bags with the trash that accumulated over the winter. I eventually ended up at Summerlakes clubhouse, where the Chamber of Commerce and the Summerlakes HOA were hosting a Contractor Expo to help people eligible for CN sound mitigation funds make good choices. All of this had me feeling pretty good about our town, as well as prompted me to reflect on how and why I got involved thirteen years ago. In 1976, I built our home on Forest Lane and we lived in quiet isolation in unincorporated Warrenville until 1995, when the ten acres immediately to the north of us sold to a developer and dreaded *change* came to our neighborhood. I sought out Plan Commission member Tim Cosgrove, the only City official I knew, who sent me to Community Development Director Ron Mentzer, and, long story short, we managed to work out a plan, over a period of some months and multiple meetings, to preserve the charm of our neighborhood, accommodate the change, and annex the new development and most of the existing homes on Forest Lane into the City. A good outcome. And now, for me, I thought, back to life as usual.

Then one day, Mary comes out to the shop and says that Mayor Lund called and wants to talk to me. Whoa! What in the world could THE MAYOR want with the likes of me? We had never met, so I figured it wasn't a social call. Well, when I finally mustered the courage to return her call, Vivian explained that there was an opening on the Plan Commission for Ward 3, and now that I was in the corporate limits of the City, I could take this position and she thought I should do it.

I kicked the idea around for a few days and then accepted, reasoning, first, that it was an opportunity that I would ultimately regret passing up. Second, I was impressed with Ron, and figured if he was representative of the people at the City, well then, that was a group I wanted to hang with. But lastly, there was this little voice whispering in the back of my mind: "You are about to change your life forever." This intrigued me. *Little did I know.*

Am I saying that you should get involved in the community in some volunteer capacity and someday you will be Mayor? Well, that might happen. My story is not the only evidence that it does. What I am really saying is, if you sign on to do something for the benefit of others, along with the good things that will come out of that work, thirteen years down the road, you may find your own life enriched beyond anything you could have imagined.

So, next time this kind of opportunity presents itself to you, whether it's city, school, church, sports team, cleanup event, whatever, would you take a chance, push past your comfort zone, extend yourself, and sign on? Please. Do it. Don't make me call you.

June, 2010

I like to collect cartoons that I find particularly insightful or that make a wry observation on our lot as humans. Some people turn to Plato, Camus, or Nietzsche in search of wisdom, but I prefer the likes of Watterson, MacNelly, and Trudeau. The truths revealed are just as pithy, and as a bonus, they are packaged in a contemporary format with a generous side order of humor. Plus, I don't have to know Greek, French, or German to pick up on the nuances. Hence, my office, home, and shop walls are chock-a-block with the works of cartoonist philosophers.

One of my favorites, posted in my shop and retitled by me "A Day at Rymar Kitchens" is a *Shoe* gem by the late Jeff MacNelly that shows Fishawk sitting and staring at his overloaded desk in the first two panels, and in the third panel, still confronted with huge piles of undone projects, he remarks: "Wow, procrastination takes up most of my day."

Another, framed and hung in my mud room at home, is a classic *Calvin and Hobbes* by Sam Watterson. Calvin wants to make a new path down a hill on his sled and Hobbes is a little hesitant. Calvin explains: "Change is invigorating! If you don't accept new challenges, you become complacent and lazy! Your life atrophies!" Approaching a precipice at increasing speed, he continues: "New experiences lead to new questions and new solutions! Change forces us to experiment and adapt! That's how we learn and grow!" They end up sailing through the air and landing head first in the snow, with Hobbes remarking: "The problem with new experiences is that they're so rarely the ones you choose." And Calvin: "I feel smarter already."

I guess I continue to enjoy these because they remind me that I am not unique in investing more effort to avoid doing something than it would take just to do it, and my frequent reluctance to try new things is probably almost universal. Plus, if you stand back and look at yourself sometimes, you just have to laugh.

Case in point: Staff at the City has been after me for years to put aside my Daily Planner in favor of Microsoft Outlook. I have steadfastly resisted, resulting in the necessity to compare my appointments on the City computer with those I scribbled in my planner, which sometimes didn't get done and sometimes resulted in two commitments for the same time slot or a frantic call from Ana to remind me I was supposed to be somewhere ten minutes ago and where was I? Also, while I have had a cell phone for many years, the idea of a Blackberry gave me cold sweats. No thanks. Just not interested. I barely use 10% of the potential of the cell phone, so I would just feel that much worse using only 1% of what a smart phone could do. To be able to benefit from one of these infernal devices, I would have to learn so much new stuff! And my thumbs are too big anyhow. Arrgh! As the immortal Yogi Berra once said: "Include me out."

Well, I converted to Outlook for e-mail, appointments, and contacts right after the first of the year. I started using my new Blackberry three weeks ago. And you know what? I should have done these things a long time ago! All that foot dragging. All that resistance to change. All that intransigence. All that drama. All to put off or avoid a couple of things that, as it turns out, I couldn't be happier with, and that have made things more efficient and less complicated for me.

So, from now on, no more procrastinating for me. No more avoiding changes because I'm afraid it's going to be too hard. Yes sir, I have seen the light. Things are going to be different from now on. Right.

July, 2010

I sold my big red pickup truck toward the end of June. Mary and Sara drove it in my first 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, with me following as your newly-minted Mayor, dispensing candy to the kids along the route. I ran out of candy at the corner of Curtis and Townline, and when I upended my bucket to show it was empty, was booed soundly. Memorable moments in public life. But that's another column.

That truck was part of my identity for the more than seven years that I owned it, and because it was so big and red and easy to identify, many of you saw me coming and shared a smile and a wave over the years. I liked that. I state with confidence that I was the only Mayor in DuPage County who, as a tradesman, had a legitimate right to drive a pickup truck. I liked that too. Another cool and fitting and unique thing about Warrenville -- its Mayor also works with his hands. I know what it is like to have to hustle in the heat and mud to bail out footings with a 5-gallon bucket after a heavy rain the night before because the concrete is coming at 8:00 am. I know what it is like to walk to top plate of wall 20-some feet in the air of a house under construction while carrying a heavy, 13-foot tall roof truss -- while it's snowing. (Carrying the truss out to set it was the easy part. Walking back empty handed on that wet and slippery three-and-one-half-inch wide wall, with nothing to help you keep your balance, was the scary part. Actually, the day I did this was my last day as a rough carpenter, as I determined that cabinetmaking, in a nice warm and dry shop with my feet firmly planted on the floor, was more in line with my talents.)

I have also taught middle school and faced the daily challenge of motivating a roomful of kids raised on TV (no computers or video games when I taught) who felt that they had done their work by showing up, and the rest was up to me. And, as Mayor, I have run countless public meetings, spoken often as your representative in front of groups sometimes numbering the hundreds, negotiated settlements with billion-dollar corporations, and honed my diplomacy skills when a fine line needed to be walked. Good stuff of another sort, and I like to think that this mix of diverse skill sets is a nice fit for Warrenville, given our blue collar roots and the realities of the changing landscape and suburban life.

So, there it is: change. That's where I was going with this. For the past 38 years I have never been without a pickup truck. Big Red was my fifth, the last four were four-wheel-drive, real trucks, you know? Now I have a van, and it just isn't the same. It's nice, and sort of red, but it just doesn't do justice to the big part of me that is now more in my past than in my future, and I have to say, it's hard to let go. More than ever I can relate to some of our long-term residents who say: "I like Warrenville the way it is. Change it when I'm gone."

So, hope to see you at this year's parade. Mary and I will be walking, embracing this year's "green" theme. It'll be great. It always is. But I figure there will be a few times when there is the inevitable lull, and I'll be standing there, fondly remember seeing that red tailgate down with the empty candy bucket sitting on it, a little sad, but ready to move forward, knowing the parade must go on.

August, 2010

You may recall happenings at a City of Elmhurst Finance Committee meeting that made it into the national media last month. A resident, reportedly a regular and demonstrative attendee at City meetings, was ejected from the meeting for yawning, sighing out loud and rolling her eyes when she found that the comments she had hoped to present to the committee were not going to be allowed. The chairman of the meeting later apologized to the community for the delaying of City business his action caused when enough Councilmen walked out of the meeting to eliminate the quorum necessary for business to be conducted, and suggested, in hindsight, that a warning might have been more appropriate. In his defense, he noted that it was within his duties as Chair to maintain decorum that the resident, in his opinion, was being disruptive, that her "comments" were not made in a time designated for public comment, and facing a more-than-full agenda and a long night ahead, his concern was to keep the meeting moving smoothly. The back-story, which I gathered from news accounts, also

indicates a history of this citizen being a frequent and vocal attendee of City meetings and opinionated contributor to the proceedings.

The classic confrontation: protecting First Amendment rights v. the desire for decorum and the need to curb disruptive and possible threatening behavior. This struggle, in varying intensity, plays out almost continually across the nation, and certainly, from time to time, here in Warrenville. I can tell you, it is a sticky wicket. On the one hand, each of us should be able to express our views, no matter how contrary to the majority, and be treated with respect and free from recrimination. This is our constitutional right. On the other hand, I must confide that facing a relentless, frequent, and vocal critic with whom you share virtually no common ground, or angry citizens whose anger may or may not be justified or rationally directed, and who may be informed, uninformed, misinformed, or listening to those whom you believe to be deliberately disingenuous or misleading in order to gain some advantage or circumvent some community standard for personal gain, while maintaining a respectful and neutral demeanor, is no mean task. Many times it takes a significant act of will and considerable forbearance. On the third hand, if I may stretch the expression, I believe you have a right to expect that your local public officials, while acting in your name in a public forum, err on the side of providing a safe and respectful forum at which any citizen has the ability to, as John O. Davis would encourage applicants at Plan Commission meetings: "Tell us your story."

I see one of our jobs as public officials is to provide for you the opportunity to experience all the "stories" as they are presented, no matter how we personally feel about them or their presenters, as long as there are no safety issues. One of your most vital jobs as citizens is to be informed or become informed on an issue before drawing conclusions and jumping on a bandwagon that later, having additional information, you may wish to quietly disembark. We agree to take the heat if you are willing to do your homework. Given the current state of affairs, we both have our work cut out for us.

September, 2010

As I write this, with the final days of August, 2010, appearing on the debit side of the ledger, I can't help but note that it has been such a joy to be on the receiving end of so much sunshine for the past couple of weeks. June, for the Chicago area, was the second wettest month since records have been kept. July was the third wettest. July also served up another near "hundred year" rain event within the past two years (!), causing widespread regional flooding, including more than a dozen Warrenville homes and businesses along the river that sustained damage. Five properties took advantage of the City's offer of a free pickup of flood damaged goods.

Growing up on the east side, I recall frequent flooding in the Lorraine/Wilber/Melcher neighborhood that closed intersections, inundated basements and yards, and occasionally even washed out Lorraine at its low spot. The Ray/Manning neighborhood downtown was pretty much guaranteed to be inundated by even moderate rainfall. Over the years, the community has, with considerable effort and expense, addressed these internal flooding issues to the point which neighborhood flooding, independent of the West Branch, and is the exception rather than the rule. We continue learn from every event and make such improvements as we are able. Utility Superintendent Mike Smith has identified several opportunities to reduce flooding in the past two years, and the Council has given him the resources to make improvements that have had positive results. We keep plugging away.

The West Branch of the DuPage, however, remains a formidable foe, especially when we and our neighbors to the north receive 5-10 inches of rain in a matter of hours. Many of the folks who live along the river observe that the river behaves differently than it did 50, 40 and even 30 years ago. I think this is an accurate assessment. The river channel is only able to convey a certain amount of water and remain in its banks. The loss of floodplain due to development over the decades, the increased volume of storm water runoff generated by the

ongoing urbanization of DuPage County, and the evolving weather patterns that have been bringing us more frequent heavy rain events, seemed to have combined to exacerbate flooding all along the river corridor. I think it is fair to say that we will not see any significant improvement on the river flooding situation until DuPage County, the entity charged with storm water management for all the communities along the West Branch, identifies cost effective flood mitigation projects and allocates funding for their implementation.

Recently, DuPage County Board Chairman Schillerstrom has proposed a bond issue that included \$8.9 million for storm water and flood mitigation improvements. At the urging of Warrenville (City Council resolution and letter from the Mayor), Carol Stream, DuPage County Stormwater Committee Chairman Jim Zay and others, this figure has been tentatively increased to \$15 million. Needless to say, this kind of investment is long overdue and could have significant positive results.

Warrenville staff and elected officials have also been urging the County for quite some time to undertake updating the West Branch Watershed Plan-so that there is current and accurate information on which to base any mitigation efforts. The County agreed to do this and the results of the new study are scheduled to be presented at the 7:30 a.m. September 7 DuPage County Stormwater Committee meeting. With all the conflicting information that has been run up the flagpole recently, as well as perceptions and conclusions based on outdated, inaccurate and occasionally misleading information, this technical study should provide clear direction on both the causes and potential solutions to flooding in Warrenville.

The perception continues to linger that Fawell Dam, by protecting Naperville, causes Warrenville to flood. I suspect that this issue will never be put to rest for some, but new modeling based on accurate and current information made possible by the ongoing watershed study will hopefully highlight any opportunities to alter the operation and maintenance of the dam if deficiencies are identified.

If you believe, as I do, that if the County is going to borrow \$70 million at least \$15 million should go towards storm water and flood mitigation improvements on the West Branch, please attend the September 7 County Board meeting, 7 pm at the County Complex in Wheaton to thank the County for their past and ongoing efforts to investigate and address flooding issues in Warrenville and respectfully voice your support for funding the implementation of cost effective flood mitigation projects on the West Branch of the DuPage River.

October, 2010

At our September 20, 2010 City Council meeting, we appear to have finally made some real progress in our long drawn-out quest to establish a quiet zone along the Canadian National (formerly the EJ&E) railroad tracks. While seeing (or hearing) little progress outside your door (or inside your family room, for some of you), it's easy to assume that the City has abandoned this initiative. The truth is, however, City staff, legal counsel, consultants and elected officials have been working on this project for the past five years. One of the most frustrating aspects of local government for me has been the patience and tenacity necessary to accomplish things that, on their face, seem not only sensible, but relatively straightforward. I'd like to give you a little background on the hurdles we've encountered just to give an idea of how the regulatory process sometimes makes me feel like I'm being forced to watch the progress of a glacier as it inches across a continent:

1. In February 2004, staff attended a workshop on the newly drafted federal rule for train horns.
2. Over the course of 2004, comments were accepted for review until the final rule was issued.
3. In July 2005, staff attended a meeting hosted by the DuPage Mayor and Managers Conference (DMMC), who presented a guide for creating new quiet zones.
4. The DMMC agreed to facilitate a coordinated effort by Warrenville, Aurora, Naperville and West Chicago to establish a quiet zone.

5. In June 2006, the City sent out a Notice of Intent to create a quiet zone to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).
6. In the fall of 2006, Warrenville coordinated the necessary diagnostic evaluation of *every* at-grade crossing along the tracks from West Chicago to Aurora. This meant finding one day in which representatives from the police department, engineering and fire departments of each municipality along with representatives from the FRA, EJ&E, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), DuPage County, and FermiLab could all meet to go to each crossing. Daunting, for sure, but it was done on Halloween in 2006.
7. Also in fall of 2006, new traffic counts were performed at each crossing, as required, and forwarded to IDOT for updating the crossing inventory sheet.
8. As a result of these evaluations, it was determined that Aurora had to make expensive upgrades to two of their crossings. This took two years.
9. In the fall of 2008, the City sent a Notice of Quiet Zone Established to the FRA. All impacted entities had 30 days to respond. During these 30 days, the City was required to post signage and did so.
10. On the 29<sup>th</sup> day, the EJ&E filed an objection to the quiet zone, specifically; that Batavia Road was a private crossing not regulated by the federal rule and should not be included in the quiet zone. The FRA agreed. Naperville and Aurora got their quiet zone and we didn't, even though Warrenville's Assistant City Administrator, Jenn McMahon, did most of the work.
11. In the winter of 2008, the Canadian National (CN) purchased the EJ&E.
12. In June of 2009, CN agreed to support Warrenville's efforts to establish a quiet zone, which meant that Batavia Road needed to be converted from a private crossing to a public crossing.
13. In August of 2009, at an ICC hearing to convert the crossing, CN indicated that they would not sign the required easement agreement without Warrenville insuring their crossing.
14. Staff spent the next year trying to find an insurer who would provide such insurance, but to no avail.
15. In August of 2010, the City contacted Congresswoman Biggert's office and the federal Surface Transportation Board and CN unexpectedly dropped their requirement.

This brings us to the September 20th City Council meeting, when we approved the documents we need to go before the ICC for a second time. A hearing will be scheduled in October and I'm actually optimistic that they will declare the Batavia Road crossing public and we can proceed with steps five through nine all over again - this time with a successful outcome.

It's easy to get frustrated and believe that the City has forgotten about your issue. But hopefully, from the synopsis above (provided by Jenn, for whom the pursuit of this quiet zone has become, and she freely admits this, somewhat of an obsession) you can see that things aren't as easy as they appear from the outside. None of us had any idea of how many hurdles there would be in this process. However, we all remain committed to getting this quiet zone established. I must add that I am quite impressed with the patience the impacted residents have shown during this time. You have been a class act. If you have any questions about the quiet zone or just want a status update, contact Assistant City Administrator Jennifer McMahon at (630) 393-9427 or [jmcmahon@warrenville.il.us](mailto:jmcmahon@warrenville.il.us). This will be a sweet accomplishment when we finally succeed. And although Jenn may still wake up sometimes at 3 am to worry over City stuff, at least train horns will no longer be part of the mix.

November, 2010

Let me confirm right up front that I am no fonder of change, for the most part, than many of you. I tend to get things the way I like them when I am able, and then stick with that going forward. Looking at pictures from the time our kids were little, I am frequently struck with how many things caught in those sometimes decades-old photos still grace our home in pretty much the same place they have occupied since they were first positioned. Many things, of necessity, are replaced or gone, but there is no question I favor the familiar and stability, and I

am not one to shake things up just for the sake of shaking things up. Things that I like, I tend to want to stay around forever. An older, long-time resident once said to me: "I like Warrenville the way it is. Change it when I'm gone." On some level, at least, I can relate.

The proximate cause for this reflection is the death of a beautiful mature oak tree, close to the walk and right behind the house and garage, that I have enjoyed sharing space with for the past thirty four years. It has grown to at least 24 inches in diameter and perhaps 175 feet in height. I have loved walking close to this tree several times daily for over the past three-plus decades. I loved viewing it from the deck, and appreciating how it somehow balanced my picture of the yard, between the buildings, the fence and the rest of the woods, in the just right way. I loved how the yard light illuminated its massive trunk at night. And now it must go, as it has the potential to come down and take the garage or half the house with it. Soon there will be an empty spot where there once was a really cool tree. Things just won't be the same.

I have heard similar sentiments reflected back in conversations with many of you, as you are confronted with shake ups, often not of your own choosing, in your lives or neighborhoods. Walking down the center of the dry river bed next to the massive pipes that contained the river (!) to inspect the progress of the river cleanup for Reach 7, it was really clear to me how this effort was going to change a lot of people's back yards, and it's not a huge leap to assume that many liked the river and their back yards just as they were.

Since Canadian National purchased the rail line on our western border, those living in proximity to the tracks have been subjected to a steadily increasing number of trains and their horns. It's not hard to imagine that most affected would much prefer the old rusty tracks that were seldom used. Change just keeps coming. Trees die and have to be dealt with. River beds have to be cleaned up. Train traffic and noise increases.

Fortunately, balanced against the changes that are thrust upon us (and, truthfully, some of which we eventually come to accept and even embrace) are those changes we welcome. On October 25 at City Hall, DuPage County shared plans to spend up to \$18 million to help mitigate flooding in Warrenville. The 9<sup>th</sup> Proton Therapy Cancer Treatment Center in the nation, operated by Central DuPage Hospital and ProCure, just opened in Warrenville, with the prospect of improving and extending thousands of lives going forward. Also, it appears that our long sought after quiet zone will soon be a reality. As my Dad was fond of offering whenever I would go on about something in life that really had me upset or especially enthused and excited: "That's all part of it."

Wisdom I hadn't the maturity to understand at the time, but I'm beginning to finally appreciate. Thanks, Dad.

December, 2010

One of the things about being a small town mayor is that people feel free to "go right to the top" when they have an issue. In general, I'd have to say I find this to be a good thing. The fact that local officials are accessible to their constituents, and in fact encounter many of them daily, encourages accountability. When those who make the rules and policies are insulated from the effects of their decisions, as at the state and federal levels, much of the heat generated by an unpopular decision is dissipated by the time it filters through "staff" to finally get to the elected official. The knowledge that you will have to stand toe-to-toe and eye-to-eye with folks, who must live with the consequences that follow public policy decisions, while it may not guarantee quality outcomes, at least heightens the awareness that there are always consequences, and almost always, someone on the downside of those consequences.

So, I get a lot of calls, e-mails, and letters. For the most part, a positive outcome ensues, as I can turn to an excellent and responsive staff that either gets things fixed, or at the very least, follows up with a personal

connection to explain what the City can and cannot do in a given situation. Some correspondences, however, aren't seeking resolution. Sometimes people are just so mad that they could spit, and they want you to know it.

Case in point: A lady left me a message at the office two weeks ago. Seems she had just gotten a red light violation notice in the mail along with the requirement that she send the City of Warrenville \$100. This did not sit well with her. I can appreciate that. Nobody likes to get unexpected bills in the mail.

Recently, Mary and I traveled to Canada for our son's wedding. They apparently have toll roads in Ontario without toll booths, etc. You have to open an account with 407ETR (Express Toll Route), I guess similar to our transponder arrangement here in Illinois. If you don't have an account, they apparently take your picture, get your information, and send you a bill. My bill, which arrived just the other day, was for \$37.12 (Canadian). I had no idea I was even on a tollway. Of this, \$16.62 was actual tolls. \$18.00 was a "video toll charge" and \$2.50 was an "account fee". So they nicked me for an additional \$20.50 because they had to take my picture and because I didn't have an account that I didn't know I needed!

So I did appreciate this lady's rant. She went on forcefully at some length, proposing that she, her large family, and her extensive group of friends would never shop in Warrenville again. She did not give me her name or ask for a return call (caller ID showed an 847 area code). She just wanted me to know how upset she was and that \$100 she had to pay, if she had anything to say, would cost Warrenville much more going forward. Her concluding (and most emphatic) remark was that she was LIVID!

Hopefully, after unloading on Warrenville's Mayor, she has since calmed down and found perspective. Having some ambivalence myself about this photo enforcement thing in general (see paragraph four above!), I appreciate her being upset. Given her agitation, I wonder how the call would have gone if I had been in the office to receive it. I have to remind myself often that my role frequently is to only listen -- sometimes with the receiver well away from my ear. After all, we all like to be heard.

Let's see, it says here: 407ETR Customer Service: 1-888-407-0407. Please excuse me now. I have a call to make.