

Mayor's Address - January 1, 2023

Happy New Year and I am honored to welcome you all to Middletown's Annual Reorganization Meeting.

For the fifth time, I stand before you filled with excitement, full of gratitude, and inspired by the patriotism and love in this room for our town and our Nation.

I cannot tell you how humbling it has been to serve the people of this amazing town and year after year, as we approach this reorganization meeting, I ask myself how can we top the accomplishments of the past year, how can we best address the needs of our community and exceed the expectations of our residents?

Well...It begins with the team here behind me. Without the dedication, support and commitment of the Township Committee, we would be unable to celebrate all the successes.

I want to congratulate, my friends Rick Hibell and Kevin Settembrino on their victories this past November. Middletown is incredibly fortunate to have the continued leadership of these two public servants and I am personally lucky to have their continued friendship and support on this governing body.

I also want to congratulate and thank Rick for his willingness to continue serve as our Deputy Mayor. All of us are grateful for your unwavering dedication and the leadership that he brings to the job each day.

Last year, we welcomed many of you to this new Town Hall, as I laid out the priorities and agenda for 2022. I am very happy to report that this governing body has fulfilled the promises made here exactly 365 days ago.

To support our veterans, Middletown continued to work toward constructing our Veteran's Housing Project on Leonardville Road. As we ended 2022, the Township is completing the environmental cleanup on the property and we voted to officially turn the property over to the Middletown Housing Authority with approved plans to construct this amazing new facility. I want to thank our Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman and its members for their assistance and support for this project.

Last year, I stressed the desperate need for Middletown and governments at every level to accept and address the often overlooked and underreported effect the pandemic had on our students. While this issue impacted young people across our Nation - I stated that we could not afford to wait for a national solution. That the answer could come from right here in Middletown.

The Township immediately formed the Next Generation Support Program, which utilized the American Rescue Plan funding to ensure that our students received the necessary tutoring and support they lost when schools were closed or using virtual learning.

The shocking and upsetting reality was soon understood.

Of the more than 250 Middletown students, who were signed up for our program, not 50%, not 75% but 99% - 99% of them were measured to have significant learning loss as a result of the pandemic. 99%

That's the next generation of business owners, of tradespeople, of athletes, that's a generation of Americans - who have all been impacted. There are millions of students now trying to catch up for time lost and we will not sit by.

While our program in 2022 topped more than \$75,000, to implement this program. We are not stopping there!

I am very proud to announce today, that Middletown is preparing to match and if we must exceed last year's allocation to ensure that every child is taken care of, to make sure that every parent feels their child will succeed, and to create a generation of Americans ready to shape the future.

Now, while on the subject of our students, I want to point to another victory for Middletown that was accomplished. After years of opposition by previous Boards of Education, together the Township and Board were able to quickly come together in the aftermath of the tragedy in Uvalde, Texas to place a Class III Police Officer in every Middletown Public School.

This unprecedented effort was completed in less than three months and without the leadership and partnership of Board President Frank Capone and our Police Chief Craig Weber - this accomplishment would not have been possible. And every day since the beginning of the school year, a Middletown Police officer has stood guard at every school but more

importantly they have become a part of the fabric of the district, they have become part of the community and while we pray they are never needed to act, we are grateful to have them in place should they be needed.

Our students need to learn, our teachers need to teach and our parents need to have piece of mind.

In a time when police activity is so heavily scrutitized from a microscopic instances, it is beneficial for our young people to have this daily interaction with the men and women of our law enforcement.

On the subject of public safety, Middletown has been at the forefront of curbing the auto theft wave in partnership with our Police Department and Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden that has struck our town, county and state. Unfortunately, New Jersey's bail reform policies have created this lack of law and order. As a result, we have had to increase patrols in targeted areas and have a police officer assigned full-time to the State Police Autho Theft Task Force.

Unfortunately, our judicial system has has been hamstrung by policies and policymakers that result in no consequences for illegal behavior. What message are we sending...are we a nation of laws or a nation of chaos.

The time for empty talk, promises or pointless legislation is over - Trenton created this disaster and Trenton should fix this before tragedy strikes. This week, Middletown Police will continue its enhanced presence in neighborhoods frequently targeted by these criminals.

But the Middletown taxpayer should not be required to pay the tab for the continued reckless policymaking by Trenton. This week, Middletown will file a complaint against the State of New Jersey with the Council of Unfunded Mandates to pay for their mess, to pay for this insanity. This governing body will not be quiet, we will not sit by, the safety and security of our residents should be the top priority of every elected official.

Middletown has long enjoyed its placement as one of the safest towns not just in New Jersey but in America and we will restore peace and security to our town with or without Trenton's help.

After the successful implementation of the voter approved open space referendum in 2021, the Township has prioritized the preservation of our open space and enhancements of our recreational facilities. We are currently working in good faith with Saint Mary's Church to preserve and utilize the existing fields at Mater Dei for recreational sports leagues all the while preventing any possible development of the area.

The repair of the Conover Beacon in Leonardo is currently being finished by our public works team and before the summer, the beacon will once again shine with new paint and a new light. Restoring the historic importance of this navigational tool and Bayshore symbol.

The dog park at Tindall Park in place of the old mini golf course will be ready for use this year and as soon as the weather breaks for spring the

final phase of that project will quickly start and the facility will be a destination for dog owners across the town.

Our new skate park at Kunkel will be quickly assembled and ready for new life at this beautiful park.

I could certainly go on and on but we achieved so much to be proud of: our new Health Shared Service agreement with Monmouth County that not only saves taxpayer dollars but increases services and programming.

The enhancement of our incredible new recycling center at Kaness Lane.

The installation of the only clone of the World Trade Center Survivor Tree here at our memorial.

We rightfully distinguished the location of the Cedar View Cemetery in Lincroft as a part of Middletown's rich heritage.

We opened our community gardens at Stevenson Park, which has generated hundreds of pounds of food for those most in need.

Finally, as always, fiscal discipline will remain the top priority of this Township Committee, and not only will we continue to renew that commitment but we will take an active approach, in finding new ways outside of the traditional property taxes to lessen the burden on our residents.

Now nothing I say here is possible without the team that jumps at all the projects and initiatives that come from the Township Committee. Our administration is made up of incredibly dedicated professionals that I am honored to work alongside. From our Township Administrator Tony Mercantante, our attorney Brian Nelson, our clerk Heidi Brunt, our CFO Colleen Lapp, our public works director Ted Maloney and so many others who work tirelessly. A very special shout-out to two individuals that I rely on the most, Laura Mattes and Amy Rose Napolitano who I could not effectively do this job, without. Finally, our communications team, Tara Berson and Raven Rentas who continue to demonstrate how government should, can and will continue to inform residents of all that is happening in Middletown.

Our police department have risen to the challenge, especially given the absolute failure of our state government but I am honored to work alongside them each and every day. I am incredibly grateful for the leadership of our Police Chief Craig Weber and Deputy Chiefs Kaiser, and Bailey.

I want to thank our all-volunteer Fire Department and our Fire Chiefs, all of whom I have had the great fortune of working with so closely these past few years. I must extend a sincere thank you to the department's 2022 Chief, Bernie Chenoweth. Chief Chenoweth's – leadership and dedication is much appreciated. I want to congratulate our 2023 Chief John Waltz and I look forward to the continued collaboration with you and the entire department.

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To all of our Emergency Services Personnel - thank you for your service, we know that your efforts these past two years are unlike any before and we are so grateful.

I must take a minute to thank my family – I am able to do this job and do it the way I believe it should be done because of my amazing and incredible family. I do this job for my kids, I do it to ensure that Reagan and Grant have an amazing place to call home. And while today, they do not understand, today they are unsure why I do this...but one day, I want them to have the same values my parents instilled in myself. I do not only want to provide them with the most comfortable life we can, I want them to understand what it means to be a citizen that leaves their home, their neighborhood and town better than we found it.

That is why I do this job.

I am so fortunate to have such an understanding wife in Alannah. Who affords me the time, guidance and support needed.

As I mentioned, this is the fifth time I have had the honor of giving this address and each year has been very different but my commitment - my commitment to this position and this community remains the same.

Today is day one of 365 and we are already moving at full speed for 2023. We will and we must be the leader - not just here in Monmouth County but statewide.

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So let us continue to create a legacy, one that we will be proud of, one that will keep Middletown a top place to live, a legacy worthy of passing on - I am honored to once again serve as your Mayor.

Thank you