

# 2019 State of the Town

## January 17, 2019

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Good afternoon and welcome. Thank you Kristina Groff, Chairman Michael Hensley and the Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce for hosting the 2019 Cheektowaga State of the Town.

The Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce has built up a community amongst our business owners and has become a strong partner of the Town of Cheektowaga, taking a leading role in making our community the best that it can be.

I want to thank Joe Salvatore and his staff for hosting this year's event. I congratulate them on being a member of the Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce for over 30 years!

This is an incredible time of growth, development and progress in our Town!

It is a special time in Cheektowaga's history and we are in the midst of a transformation that will be felt for generations to come!

As I look around the room I see true leaders, partners and friends and I thank you for your vision and commitment, your cooperation and support. We are all in this together!

And thank you to all my colleagues that are here today:

- Councilmember Jerry Kaminski
  - Councilmember Chris Adamczyk
  - Councilmember Linda Hammer
  - Councilmember Brian Pilarski – our newest member
  - Town Clerk Vickie Dankowski
  - And newly-elected Judge Jim Speyer
- And to my fellow partners in government:
    - Representatives from Senator Tim Kennedy;
    - Assemblywoman Monica Wallace

- Legislator Tim Meyers
- Legislator John Bruso
- And we also have Erie County District Attorney John Flynn here today
- Sloan Mayor Tom Ferrucci
- Depew Mayor Jesse Nikonowicz
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And thank you to all the Town's department heads here today.

And a special thank you to my staff: Kim Burst and Matt Janiszewski! They are the backbone of my office. Without them, we would not be able to accomplish some of the pressing issues we are faced with everyday.

Let's give them all a round of applause.

I promised to put Cheektowaga on a path of prosperity.

My vision is of a Cheektowaga that will reclaim its rightful place among the great towns of Western New York.

We know that the future of Cheektowaga depends on its ability to adapt and grow our economy;

To stimulate development and create jobs;

To build a stronger, smarter, safer Cheektowaga;

To continue to improve quality of life;

To invest in our infrastructure;

And efficiently deliver services;

And to produce the opportunities that would attract worldwide attention back to the treasures that abound our town – the "land of the crabapple";

And the friendliest neighbors in Western New York.

These are the core principles that drive our progress.

In three years we achieved more than what others thought was possible.

I committed to conservative budgeting and implemented dozens of efficiency measures.

The state of our town is strong!

Cheektowaga was ranked 6th for "Best Cities to Live on a \$55k Salary".

Our town's real estate market is souring! Cheektowaga home values have gone up 8%.

Keeping in mind this upward spiral of home values increasing at an astronomical rate, we will continue to stabilize assessments.

I'm all for lower taxes!

For the third year in a row the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee, that I formed in 2016, was able to make smart recommendations on cost-saving measures and spending cuts; and encouraged the board to explore more accountability.

Thank you to Councilmember Chris Adamczyk for implementing your idea of accountability - Time Clocks!

Thanks to this very important Advisory Committee - We have been able to keep expense increases below CPI and tax levy increases below the tax cap.

Since I took office we are slowly replenishing our reserves every year. In 2015, the Town's fund balance was at one of its lowest points. I am happy to report that our forecasted fund balance is up to \$23.3 million.

Investor confidence continues to grow which is reflected in the Town's A-A-2 bond rating by Moody's, which is one of the highest in Western New York.

Investment in the town is higher than it's been in years, and the fruits of these investments have visually impacted every area of our Town!

There is a wide range of projects underway that will create jobs and new life to every neighborhood:

Such as the groundbreaking of Garden Village Business Park;

Garden Gate's new Complex Medical Care Unit;

The expansion of Synergy IT Solutions;

The first Chick-fil-A in Western New York and another one on the way;

Planet Fitness and Citi Trends opened in vacant space at the Thruway Plaza;

Popeyes Restaurant redeveloped a vacant Dunkin' Donuts

Busy Beaver Lawn and Garden Center opened on Broadway at Union;

Calspan unveiled their new Indoor Crash Test Facility;

Rosina Foods invested more than \$2 million in a Customer Focus Center;

The Broadway Development Park expanded; and

Uniland's Airborne Business Park is expanding;

Bison Fleet Specialists unveiled a new showroom;

5 Star Urgent Care is going in at the corner of Walden & Union; and

New resources are being invested at St. Joseph's Hospital on Harlem

The momentum is undeniable!

With this new development here in Cheektowaga and the rebirth across Buffalo and Erie County, sales tax revenue for the Town has increased by over a half a million dollars this year.

Cheektowaga is also home to the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport, who brings visitors from all over the world every day.

In fact, this past July, Cheektowaga was the epicenter for an international summit.

"The 60 Million Polish-American Summit" convened business leaders from across Polonia. This could open the door to our town leading the way for future trade between WNY and Poland, including direct flights from Poland to Buffalo.

With the best police department in the State, why wouldn't residents and businesses be flocking to Cheektowaga!

Our former Assistant Chief Jim Speyer had decided to leave the police force last year and become our newly-elected Cheektowaga Town Justice. Congratulations Judge Speyer and congratulations to our new Assistant Chief Mike Sliwinski.

I also want to thank Dennis Gorski for his decades of public service and his commitment to Cheektowaga and Erie County!

In 2017, tragedy hit the town board. My daughter, Kelly, committed suicide, and two weeks later to the day, Councilmember Adamczyk's son, Danny, died from opioid addiction. They were 27 and 26 years old. They were a product of a growing epidemic affecting our teens and young adults. The Council moved swiftly and collaborated with our Cheektowaga Police to be at the forefront fighting the opioid epidemic and mental health crisis. In fact, this year, the Town Board has allocated \$60,000 to partner with Crisis Services for a full-time "Team Case Manager" - linking families with additional outside services.

The Cheektowaga Police Department has also initiated the "BLUE BRIDGES INITIATIVE", bringing Officers & Kids Closer together, and effectively bridging the gap between law enforcement and youth.

1. At Christmas time, the police officers took children and their families on a shopping spree to Target and afterward went out to lunch! It was a magical day watching so many Christmas dreams come true!
2. Then, on the Sunday before Christmas, they delivered food to each of the families so they could experience the joy of a beautiful family Christmas Meal.

3. Earlier in the year, Police Officers took on Cheektowaga Central middle school teachers in a thrilling volleyball match. They even had a special guest show up for the big day.... Sabretooth was in the house!

Our own Lt. Coons hosted a Civilian Response-To-Active-Shooter Training to our residents. This training is a direct result of the active shooter events we have seen all over the country, including right here in Cheektowaga. Thank you Lt. Coons.

One more important note - the Cheektowaga Police Department's lobby is now a "Safe Trade Station", where people can complete an online sales transaction without the worry of criminal intent.

We are well on our way to my goal of reducing the number of vacant and abandoned homes in our town.

In 2017, the town identified over 500 vacant residential properties. Today, that number has been reduced to less than 300!

This past year, Habitat for Humanity selected the Town of Cheektowaga for their Affordable Home Ownership Program. This was the first time Habitat for Humanity has chosen properties outside the City of Buffalo.

The Town also works with the Land Bank to acquire vacant properties at the Erie County tax foreclosure auction. These properties are then sold to purchasers to rehab the properties and occupy them. The Town also can acquire these homes for our Acquisition / Rehab / and Resale program.

The Community Development Block Grants Loan Program has continued to provide low-interest Housing Rehab Loans to low income homeowners to renovate their homes.

Block Grant Funding was also used for infrastructure improvement projects such as street curbing, road reconstruction and sidewalk replacements saving taxpayers over \$65,000.

A new project, "Angela's House", a partnership opportunity with the Felician Sisters, has chosen Cheektowaga for the redevelopment of the Villa Maria Academy. The plan provides for 60-80 affordable apartments for single mothers, domestic violence victims and veterans returning home.

I am always looking for new money to bring into our town for taxpayer relief. Every year I have been able to announce record breaking grants for the Town and this year is no different. Our aggressive pursuit of grant funding with the help of our Grant Writer, Sue Barnes, as well as Bolton-St. Johns, Senator Kennedy, Assemblywoman Wallace and Legislator John Bruso provided big results and even greater relief for our taxpayers.

In three years we have been awarded more than \$17 million in grants, plus a \$15 million interest-free loan for 30 years, saving us millions of dollars in interest.

This year alone, in addition to another \$5 million grant for our Sanitary Sewers, we were able to secure funding for:

- Partial reimburse for the cost of our recycling totes
- Pedestrian safety improvements
- Cheektowaga's Clean Energy project
- Building repairs at the Julia Boyer Reinstein Library
- Tree planting
- Special initiatives at the police department
- Funding from Assemblywoman Monica Wallace to provide programming for veterans; and Cheektowaga's Winter Celebration and 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration.
- Funding from Legislator John Bruso to purchase equipment for the Dartwood Community Center.

Thank you again to all our State and County Legislators!

We are addressing our deteriorating infrastructure. In 2019, we will put more focus on improving our storm water drainage, while continuing compliance with our DEC Consent order.

In 2018, our Highway Department continued its stellar pace of milling, repairing and repaving approximately 50 roads. Since 2016, they have completed over 49 miles of roads. What an accomplishment!

In addition, they have also completed four full road reconstruction projects which includes curbing, sidewalks, storm and sanitary sewers.

In August a heavy rainstorm caused severe flooding for residents in South Cheektowaga. The Board quickly moved to address these concerns, hiring a company to clean, video and inspect the town-owned storm sewers in this area. This company has helped in putting together a remediation plan, to address some of the flooding and to help educate homeowners in the process.

In 2016, I promised that I was going to take on the challenges of being more open and transparent to our residents. Since then, we have streamlined our Town Council work sessions and regular board meetings.

Previous to 2016, Town Council work sessions were held the week before a regular board meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in a small conference room. It was intimidating for the public to even attend a work session, let alone find the meeting room it was being held in. The Town Board now meets in the Council Chambers, a more welcoming venue.

Since then, the Board holds a work session two hours prior to the regular board meeting. We review and discuss every resolution submitted for the regular meeting that same night. This is also an opportunity for the board to discuss other various topics so that we are all hearing the same thing.

The Town Council is currently working on the implementation of the video recording of all regular meetings of the Town Council thanks to Deputy Supervisor Brian Nowak. Stayed tuned for more on that.

Currently, not all records that the Town Council is voting on, are uploaded on the website with the agenda. In order to disclose full transparency, and in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, it is my goal in 2019, to make sure all related records are available online to the public, along with the agenda, so no one is in the dark as to what the Board is actually voting on!



More than 1 in 4 residents in Cheektowaga are seniors – and a high percentage of those seniors are having trouble making ends meet. Cheektowaga continues to have one of the best Senior Centers in the Western New York area! We are involved with the Resurrection Life Food Pantry and the Cheektowaga HUB to ensure that everyone knows the senior center staff is available to help.

Our Senior Center continues to be a gathering place for over 500 seniors weekly, coming for everything from:

A daily nutritious lunch,  
To crafts and ceramics  
To volunteer opportunities,  
To fitness and dance classes; and  
To plenty of card playing and other social activities.

They are certainly in good hands with Kerry Peek and her staff.

Partnerships with some of our elected officials have led to special programs offered to our seniors:

- Assemblywoman Monica Wallace secured funds to host a Veterans and Seniors Celebration for 300 participants at the Leonard Post.
- Legislator John Brusco organized a Veterans Information Forum that was held at the Senior Center to help Veterans of all ages learn of the services available to them and how to best access those services.

Last year, I formed a Citizens Youth & Recreation Advisory Council with Councilmembers Linda Hammer and Brian Pilarski, to review and make suggestions for our youth and recreation programs and activities.

The outcome of the Youth and Recreation Advisory Council was that forming partnerships and providing low-cost programs for the Town's residents was a priority. These include:

1. a "Learn to Play" Lacrosse program at no cost to the town.

2. Tinkergarten, an outdoor program for young children.
3. The Cheektowaga Youth Foundation, in conjunction with the Depew Boys & Girls Club, to open a satellite Club at the Alexander Center.
4. "Nurtured Heart" parent series provided support to parents and caregivers raising a child who is diagnosed with a mental illness.
5. Swan's Martial Arts Academy to provide a Youth and Family Karate Program - thanks to Councilmember Linda Hammer.
6. Independent Health and the YMCA provided Fitness in the Park at two parks, instead of one this year.

Also, this year, the Town purchased and dedicated the new "Rand-Zoni" in memory of past employee of 30 years – Randy "Rand" Palmisano.

## **CONCLUSION**

I have been so privileged to lead the town that has had such an enormous impact on my life.

In three years I have worked extremely hard to promote job growth and economic development; improve the quality of life of our residents; and stabilize taxes.

It is undeniable that positive things are happening in Cheektowaga. But more work is needed to continue this trend.

Let me take this opportunity to announce my candidacy for re-election as Supervisor of the Town of Cheektowaga.

I will proudly be running on this record of accomplishments and the town's positive direction. I look forward to taking this record directly to the residents and earning their support for a second term.

Now, let's get back to work and continue to make this the best Town in Western New York!

Thank you!

