

FOCUS ON FINANCES

Since taking office in January, our administration has been hard at work stabilizing the municipal budget. Although we inherited serious financial problems, we are making significant progress. First, the Tax Office investigation is complete. The sum of \$777,725, which was missing, is now accounted for and will be covered by our insurance.

We are taking a threefold approach to regain control of the Town's finances – cutting costs, making changes, and raising revenues.

One way we've cut costs is by doing more things in-house. For example, Councilman Bueckner has taken on the responsibility of programming the upcoming Summer Concert Series, saving 60% of the cost of last year's concerts. For St. Patrick's Day, we hired a local caterer and held the Senior Citizens' Luncheon in the High School cafeteria rather than at an outside banquet hall. Those simple changes resulted in savings of \$27,000 compared to last year. Also, as Fire Chief, I decided not to hold the biennial Fire Chief's Dinner – saving over \$30,000.

We are also working on ways to make our municipal government more efficient. We switched the company that handles the Town's payroll from ADP to Paychex, and are getting more service for less money. In a short time, computerized hand scanners will be installed in all Town locations to monitor employees' attendance, resulting in savings and efficiencies compared to the old paper time-sheets method. In addition, we reorganized the Department of Public Works to eliminate duplication of job responsibilities, making a more streamlined and cost effective DPW.

In the past, professional service fees, such as lobbyists and attorneys were very costly. In accordance with the ordinance banning "Pay-to-Play" as well as Governor Christie's directives, we are totally doing away with lobbyists' fees and will be utilizing our legislative officials who represent us to lobby on our behalf in Trenton. As for attorneys, we capped the hourly fee rate at \$175, which is \$35 per hour less than the previous rate. Another measure we are taking is to appoint an Associate Town Attorney at the hourly rate of \$125. The Associate Attorney will handle routine legal tasks while working closely with myself and Town Administrator David Drumeler. Implementing these changes will save more than \$300,000.

Because we are a municipality in Hudson County, Secaucus residents have long been entitled to receive services from the North Hudson Community Action Program at little or no cost. Recently, we started to take advantage of what Community Action has to offer, including comprehensive health care and preventive health screenings, counseling for alcohol or substance abuse, and assistance for the elderly. Many of these services had previously been provided by Meadowlands Hospital. By changing to Community Action, Secaucus residents will receive more services while saving approximately \$60,000.

Unfortunately, the entire budget problem cannot be solved by cost cutting. We have also been working on ways to raise revenue. For example, notices have been sent out to collect more than \$720,000 in late or uncollected fire and burglar alarm fees owed to the Town. We have increased the fees in our construction department to keep pace with changing times. This should result in revenues of \$200,000. Additionally, this year's revenue from the parking tax at the train station should be approximately \$450,000. Lastly, we have extended the opportunity to non-residents who work in Secaucus to join the Recreation Center and will rent a part of the Center out for children's' birthday parties.

Our commitment to you was to stabilize the Town's finances, restore trust and integrity, and maintain civic and community pride. We are working to keep that commitment.

Sincerely,

Mayor Gonnelli