

Happy New Year! I hope 2011 is off to a good start for you all.

I really enjoy receiving letters from residents, and I encourage you to keep in touch with me either by letters, telephone calls, or e-mail to give me suggestions, ideas, and to tell me when things are good as well as bad. I take all the suggestions I get seriously, and I try to return calls, reply to e-mails, and get back to you on the issues you raise. The blizzard of December 26<sup>th</sup> dumped over 2 feet of snow on the Northeast and caused many problems, and I thank those of you who notified us of particularly dangerous or troublesome areas around Town. I'm proud of the DPW's excellent job in keeping the primary roads cleared and their tireless efforts to plow the secondary and tertiary streets in the days after the storm. I also want to thank the members of the OEM and Fire departments who manned the Office of Emergency Management and fire houses for 48 hours straight and were prepared and at the ready to help anyone in need. As I write this column, we are preparing for yet another snow storm. You can be sure the members of the DPW, OEM, Police and Fire departments will work hard to maintain all essential services.

I recently received a letter from a resident who is also a Veteran. He informed me about a new model program which helps elderly Veterans who are at risk of nursing home placement to stay in their homes. The program is called the Veterans Directed Home and Community Based Services. It is a partnership between the Administration on Aging and the Veterans Health Administration. Its purpose is to provide benefits for elderly Veterans and their spouses who meet eligibility standards to enable them to stay in their own homes rather than go into an assisted living or nursing home. This partnership combines the expertise of the Administration on Aging's national network of aging service providers with the resources of the Veterans Administration to give Veterans and their caregivers more choices and control over their long-term care services. New Jersey was 1 of 12 states chosen by the federal Administration on Aging to offer this program. The news of this program prompted us to form a Veterans Committee which will be comprised of representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and County and State organizations. I have also asked Deputy Mayor Bueckner, Councilman Clancy and Councilman McKeever to join the committee as they are all Veterans themselves. Deputy Mayor Bueckner served in the Army and in the Reserves, and was called back into active duty during the Berlin Crisis in the early 1960s. Councilman Clancy served in the Army Reserves, and Councilman McKeever served in Viet Nam. The Committee will help elderly Veterans and their spouses apply for benefits, and will assist Veterans currently returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the coming months, we will be planning for a 5K Run to benefit local Veterans who were injured in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflict. The run is sponsored by Hartz Mountain in conjunction with an organization called Hope for the Warriors which provides advocacy and support for wounded service members and their families.

The Memorial Day Parade will be held on Saturday, May 21, 2011. This year's Grand Marshall is Luke Smentkowski, a Marine Corps recipient of the Purple Heart who served two tours of duty in Iraq. Luke began his military service on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Upon completion of initial training, predeployment and Special Operations exercises, his unit was deployed to Kuwait in February 2003 in support of

Operation Enduring Freedom. Their first major engagement was The Battle of Nasiriya in Iraq where they participated in the rescue of lost marines and captured soldiers, among them Jessica Lynch. Luke returned to the States for training exercises and was redeployed to Iraq in July 2004. On October 29, 2004, while on a routine vehicle patrol in Iskandariyah, Luke and two of his team were wounded when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) exploded. Luke's injuries were severe. Shrapnel hit him in jaw, fracturing the bone, barely missing his trachea, and becoming embedded in his neck between the carotid artery and several nerves. He was medevac'd to Baghdad, where his condition was stabilized. He was later flown to Landstuhl, Germany, where he underwent surgery, and was subsequently transported to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland where he underwent surgery to reconstruct his jaw. While in Bethesda, Luke received his Purple Heart from Commandant of the United States Marine Corps General Michael W. Hagee. His recovery is progressing well. He was released from active duty with an Honorable Discharge on December 25, 2005. We are very proud that Luke will be the Grand Marshall of this year's Memorial Day Parade. He truly is our hometown hero. He embodies bravery and patriotism and represents the dedication of every serviceman, woman and Veteran whose sacrifice protects and defends our freedom.

Also, please keep in mind that an annual property tax credit in the amount of \$250. is available for veterans who served during wartime or received an expeditionary medal. If you have any questions about your eligibility for this tax credit, call the Tax Collector's office at 201 330-2021.