

Purpose before Politics

The State of the County

February 28, 2018

I remember the moment I was elected Tivoli Village Trustee like it was yesterday. My mom and I didn't think I'd win, but on a cold Tuesday in March 1994, with the most votes of four candidates, the small Village of Tivoli elected an 18-year old. It was at that moment, and the following days, that I found my purpose. Over the two years preceding that election, I mowed my neighbor's lawns, managed the village deli and pizza shop, cleaned horse stalls, and interned for a remarkable woman, State Assemblymember Eileen Hickey. She taught me the value of public service and the amazing impact one could make if they set aside party politics and served the people.

One year later, having spent the year learning from Mayor Ed Neese, upon his retirement, I ran for and was elected mayor. Over the 4,273 days that followed, I learned more than I led, listened more than I spoke, and earnestly served a diverse and vibrant village struggling to incorporate great change, hold on to its proud past and do more to support its kids, families, and seniors. It was here I found my purpose: to serve others; where I learned to govern, by molding consensus and engaging others. It was here, where local senior citizens Vince and Daisy Post asked this young kid to help clean up the curb in front of their home. None of us asked about party affiliation or length of residency; our age difference didn't matter; and we respected each other's opinions because they weren't shared to demean or dismiss.

The day – the very moment – each of us finds our purpose in life impacts every moment that follows. Those who have already found theirs are blessed. But, make no mistake: Every life has purpose – whether a child born with a disability, or teen struggling with addiction, the young adult making decisions that will shape his or her future, or a senior who raised their family here and chose to stay. In our community, in Dutchess County, we strive to ensure every person has the opportunity to live a life of meaning and purpose.

I was lucky enough to have found mine: to make a difference. And every day, I see that same spirit on display in this community in so many ways. It's in the parents working two jobs to make ends meet; dedicated teachers buying school supplies for their students; determined small business owners pioneering and innovating in our downtowns and our brave police officers; emergency responders and firefighters placing their lives on the line to keep us safe. I see it in the hospice nurse who cares for the dying and the fast-food worker who shares a smile and a cup of coffee – just as I saw it from Vince and Daisy's front porch as Tivoli and life passed by.

The truth is, every life has purpose if we respect each other and ourselves, if we look to each other, not as adversaries or opponents, but as neighbors and friends. And when some look to divide, to segregate, we must look to each other and unite as one community with a shared sense of purpose – to see all we can be, to rise up, to improve our lives and the life of our community, to build a beautiful tomorrow. That is our purpose, and it is the making of the state of our county.

Three years ago, we began challenging ourselves to ThinkDIFFRENTLY. Our call to action has been embraced throughout Dutchess County, New York State and across the nation. More and more people from all walks of life are choosing to focus on the inherent potential of every individual regardless of ability. Over 70 communities have answered the call, and the impact is far-reaching.

Last year, in collaboration with Dutchess Community College, we began "ThinkAhead," a college experience that focuses on job readiness and skills development for qualified students. This year, we expand this acclaimed program with funding for transportation ensuring connections for students and employers. The mother of one of

“Think Ahead” students noted the program has allowed her son, Andrew, “to realize a lifelong dream: to attend college just as his brother and sister had done.”

Yesterday, we launched our [ThinkDIFFERENTLY website](#), a resource like no other, offering simple navigation through the comprehensive array of services available – connecting families to resources, events, information and each other.

Next month begins the public input part of our new Parks Master Plan. We are already adding accessibility features to Dutchess Stadium, Bowdoin Park and the lake at Wilcox. Next, we will move ahead with a universally accessible addition to one of our parks. As part of the public survey, you will help select the project and the park. As we reimagine what county parks can and should be in the future, our overall priority is making them more accessible while developing ThinkDIFFERENTLY principles to ensure all parks in Dutchess County are open to everyone of every ability.

To assist in making public facilities more accessible, we will begin providing small capital grants to communities through our Municipal Innovation Grant Program to fund ADA improvements. Something as simple as adding a ramp to a building, audio loop for public meetings, or an accessible crosswalk can break down barriers making a world of difference.

Our ThinkDIFFERENTLY calendar expands each year with great new events like the Disability, Dream and Do baseball weekend at Dutchess Stadium with the Hudson Valley Renegades, our popular “Red Carpet” movie days and our Special Needs Picnic. We are proud to support so many others who are thinking differently like East Fishkill’s Beach Day at Red Wing Park, Adaptive Easter Egg Hunt at Tymor Park in Union Vale, and the introduction of the Wingman Mentoring Program, a program founded by the father of a victim of the tragedy in Sandy Hook, at Gold’s Gym Summer Camps.

We are inspired when we see the real impact of ThinkDIFFERENTLY. We hear it in the voices of those too often overlooked. And we see it in the growing number of people willing to open their hearts and minds to neighbors of all abilities. The indelible image of this success was seen recently when a mother, who saw the ThinkDIFFERENTLY logo on the back of a County bus, summoned the courage to stand before her school board, and advocate for her child by challenging them to ThinkDIFFERENTLY.

As we learn of the stories of people fighting for change, we know we are achieving our purpose. Yet there is more to be done to break down barriers, and I challenge you to ThinkDIFFERENTLY, to have the courage to create new opportunities. I ask you to do something as inspiring as supporting our efforts to host the Special Olympics New York Summer Games. Perhaps, you might contribute to or volunteer with one of our great service providers or help out at this year’s ThinkDIFFERENTLY Dash. To the employers here tonight, I challenge you to “Think Jobs” and work with us to create employment opportunities in your business for someone with a different ability. Will you do that? Will each of you find a way to ThinkDIFFERENTLY?

When we don’t listen to each other, the space between us grows more vast, making room for misperceptions, misunderstandings, and unearned labels. The remedy to this all too common problem is bringing people together to talk to each other and learn from one another – to listen. The more you understand an individual or group, the less likely you are to see them as “others,” unjustly judging them, or cynically dismissing their claims of injustice. Through our Commission on Human Rights, we are fostering a dialogue that breaks down barriers and builds the bonds of community through mutual respect and understanding. We’ve increased its staff and resources, and the Commission continues holding listening sessions, 100 Cups of Coffee transformative dialogues, and facilitated conversations throughout the County.

We are too often tragically reminded of the isolation and despair felt by so many. When violence and drugs become the only option for those lonely, broken, and in need of help. We must not only demand more from society – we must do more ourselves. The costs of standing by are too high, the results of inaction too painful and the consequences can be far too many.

Right now, across the nation and here in Dutchess County, the opioid epidemic continues taking a horrifying human toll, leaving in its wake destroyed families mourning sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers lost too soon. We join them in mourning their loss. As individuals, we grieve the unprecedented loss of human potential; and as a community, we must search our souls and ask ourselves what we are willing to do to preserve life and stop this horrific disease.

This epidemic will touch more people in this room, county, state, and nation than we are willing to admit. It is scary. And if it doesn't frighten you, it should. Children's Television host Mr. Rogers once offered when the news scared him, his mother would say, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." Across this County, there are compassionate and courageous people combatting this epidemic – nurses, doctors, mental health professionals, counselors, police officers, EMTs and those suffering themselves – who give us hope and inspire us to do more.

We cannot passively sit by and allow this crisis to unfold. We must break through it all and be the helpers. We can each make a difference by uniting as a community to push back against the forces that have left us as a society disconnected and too many feeling alone and without purpose. We must talk openly about the realities of this disease – that it is not in someone else's town or neighborhood or avoid it by isolating those who are suffering. We have to fight the stigma so no one ever feels ashamed or afraid to admit they or someone they love is suffering and in need of help. Each of us can act by helping someone you know find treatment; reaching out to a family who lost a loved one to provide support; getting trained on how to use Narcan; or inspiring and teaching others with the story of your own recovery. We must embrace solutions that work and combat the notion that mental illness and addiction are choices. They are not.

Yes, this is a challenge to everyone in our community. It is also a challenge to myself and County government to think critically about our current efforts and act purposefully with radical new solutions.

First, we are taking a more proactive approach, actively seeking out those in need to listen to and learn from, helping connect them with appropriate services and support. To help facilitate, we will increase the availability of Recovery Coaches, individuals who have turned their struggles of addiction into the purpose of personal growth and societal change by helping others walk the long road to recovery.

We will ask these brave individuals to seek out those in need, harness the power of social media, provide support, maintain accountability, and lead group sessions in non-traditional settings. This past year, a Recovery Coach was integrated into the Department of Behavioral & Community Health's programs in the County Jail and Stabilization Center, and in 2018 we will expand our efforts into communities and neighborhoods across the County.

We will also find new ways to utilize the power of data to identify people and communities most in need; target resources; track events and substances that present an immediate threat to public health; direct law enforcement efforts to crack down on suppliers; and evaluate our efforts to address this public health crisis. We will make a concerted effort to collect more data on the use of Narcan, to better understand its effectiveness and connect with those treated. As part of this effort, we are asking community members, police officers, firefighters, and

emergency medical personnel to report all Narcan use and connect those helped to the Stabilization Center or a hospital for support and treatment.

Let me confront the thought that Narcan is just another way for opioid users to avoid the consequences of their decisions. Narcan and those trained to administer it save lives, and protecting life is our most sacred responsibility.

We are expanding our efforts to help those suffering manage their addiction by increasing Medication Assisted Treatment. Currently, the County's largest opioid addiction program serves nearly 400 individuals and has produced tremendous results. Medication Assisted Treatment combines counseling and therapy with approved medications that relieve withdrawal symptoms, control cravings, and block the effects of opioids. We will provide more treatment options at the Stabilization Center and expand treatment by working with primary care providers throughout the County. We need your help as we confront the stigma unfairly associated with these sites. Make no mistake: Those in treatment are our friends and neighbors; they live productive lives and have renewed purpose.

To ensure a seamless and robust delivery of services I am asking the County Legislature to approve funding to expand and improve our campus at 230 North Road. With larger clinic space, group meeting rooms and integrated offices, more people can receive the help they need, lives will be improved and families better supported. Our Behavioral Health Campus should stand as a testament to the importance of the services provided and the unquestioned value of the individuals served.

We will also strengthen our partnership with law enforcement by building on the BEAT model – currently a joint effort of the City of Poughkeepsie Police Department, the County's Mobile Intervention Team and Mental Health America – pairing police officers trained in crisis intervention with mental health professionals to proactively engage those in need of support and divert them from the criminal justice system. We will expand this model into other jurisdictions.

And, the County's Drug Task Force will continue constricting the supply of illicit drugs by identifying and cutting off supply chains and distributors.

The opioid crisis is one consequence of the isolation and despair endemic in our modern society, to find another you need only look to the news or your Twitter feed. Two weeks ago, we saw the latest tragic example of another lost son so hurt, so angry, so alone that he extinguished the lives of the innocent. These tragic events rightfully stir deep, powerful emotions in us all. Too often, though, our anger, passion, and ideological differences overshadow our purpose: to protect our children.

We must rise up and find ways to help prevent yet another tragedy. Along with the Sheriff's Office School Resource Officers, our Department of Behavioral & Community Health will continue partnering with local school districts to incorporate Second Step, a social-emotional learning program that focuses on empathy and communication skills, bullying prevention, problem-solving and substance abuse prevention. We will continue providing school district personnel with Youth Mental Health First Aid, teaching how to identify someone showing signs of an emerging mental illness, intervene in a mental health crisis, and refer someone to treatment, if needed; personnel from Hyde Park, Pine Plains, Dover, Poughkeepsie, and Beacon school districts have already taken advantage of this program, but we need all to participate. We will keep reminding all our schools that both the Stabilization Center and our Mobile Intervention Team are available 24/7 to connect students or anyone in need of assistance. Our Medical Reserve Corps will continue to provide training related to emergency and life-threatening situations. Most importantly, we must stay vigilant, ensuring that no call for help goes unheeded, no threat goes unchecked, and no lingering concern goes unaddressed.

We must also challenge ourselves to be the helpers – to summon the courage, overcome the fear and be the change. If you notice someone alone, distressed, using drugs, acting in a violent manner, or harming themselves, get involved. Offer your help to those clearly in need or contact law enforcement, a schoolteacher, or a mental health professional. And, to the students, school officials, and parents across Dutchess – no child in any school anywhere should “eat alone.” If you see a child in school eating alone, pull up a chair or slide your tray over; give that person your attention, a shoulder to cry on, or an opportunity to be heard. Do not turn your back on those being mistreated, bullied, or tormented. Step up, step in, change the course of someone’s day. Be their hero. Change their life.

The awkwardness of acting pales in comparison to the consequences of inaction and the joy of making a difference. Be kind, be brave, be a helper – break through.

It has never seemed more important to help young people find their place in the world. Our greatest chance to effect long-lasting, positive change is to help every child make choices they’ll benefit from and place them on a path to a promising future.

With a nationally renowned consulting group, we will identify and assess youth services throughout Dutchess County – both public and private – and create an innovative action plan to help our children fulfill their promise and find their purpose. We are engaging stakeholders, young people, and families to develop a dynamic plan, molded by the input we receive from the very children and families we’re working to impact. We will host a youth summit to help develop the plan, ensuring we bridge existing gaps and connect every child to community services and programs they need to be successful. We will provide those embarking on a “Path to Promise” with the tools to mentor the next generation.

We will also continue safeguarding our children’s future through our holistic approach to responding to child abuse, which strikes the necessary balance between supporting families and protecting our children.

None of us – child nor adult – can ever reach our fullest potential without the fundamental ability to read. So, let me ask you: What are you reading? That’s a question you’re going to hear a lot throughout our community in the coming year, as we embark on “Dutchess Reads,” an initiative focusing on early reading, literacy for those seeking jobs, and English as a Second Language.

In partnership with local libraries and literacy advocates, County government will promote reading programs and existing resources, and identify deficiencies or barriers to literacy. “Dutchess Reads” aims to bring literacy programs proven successful in various parts of the County to other, underserved communities and support programs offered countywide.

Through our Behavioral & Community Health Department, “Born to Read” will provide new mothers with bilingual board books to read with their newborns, encouraging early literacy. We will establish book swaps on County buses, in the Department of Motor Vehicles and in other public spaces.

With organizations like Literacy Connections, we will encourage participation in “Book Buddies,” a program that pairs volunteers with children who need help reading, expanding it into Eastern Dutchess. And, we will support a new “buddies program,” where kids needing help improving their skills and gaining confidence will read to dogs and cats at the Dutchess County SPCA and other area animal shelters.

With Dutchess Community College, the Northeast Community Center, and others, we will expand support for English as a Second Language programs. Not speaking English creates barriers for so many in our community. In many cases, children of parents speaking another language become their interpreter and teacher.

I am grateful to County Clerk Brad Kendall and Legislature Chair Gregg Pulver for agreeing to help make “Dutchess Reads” a success. We will also look to others to ensure a positive impact.

Our senior citizens have given so much to our community, and we will continue helping them live fulfilling lives by promoting independence, dignity and an improved quality of life.

Between 2010 and 2020, our senior population is expected to grow more than 20 percent. The current Office for the Aging facilities in the City of Poughkeepsie are inadequate to meet the needs of our seniors. They are outdated, inefficient, and inaccessible; the OFA offices are disjointed and costly to maintain.

With help from Senator Sue Serino, we moved forward with plans for a new Office for the Aging Senior Center. A public competitive bid process led us to a location in the City of Poughkeepsie near Route 9. With a lease for a new senior center to house OFA offices, the senior meal kitchen, classroom and meeting space, we will integrate and expand programs and service delivery. We plan to move into this brand new facility by early next year, and we are grateful to Senator Serino for her assistance.

This year we expanded home-delivered meals to five days a week, supporting the good health and welfare of our seniors. Building on this success, we will expand our City of Poughkeepsie, Beacon, and East Fishkill Senior Friendship Centers to a full week of service, Monday through Friday. Earlier this week, doors opened at our new Northern Dutchess Senior Friendship Center at the Red Hook Community Center; this new site will also soon be open five days a week. We will continue to evaluate all of our Friendship Center site locations, hours and programming to ensure they are vibrant, engaging environments meeting the needs of our seniors.

Our summer picnics are popular nutritional and socialization opportunities enjoyed by thousands every year. This year we will host 12 picnics around the County at more accessible locations. Of course, I’ve been rehearsing a new Sinatra song; you won’t want to miss it.

In 2012, as I delivered my first State of the County address, the financial and economic challenges facing Dutchess County were immense: a \$40 million budget gap, virtually no fund balance, 8 percent unemployment, and in the four years leading up to 2012, a 20 percent decrease in our assessed valuation. These challenges threatened programming for our youth, seniors, and veterans; mental health services; 911 dispatch; road repair; snow removal; County planning; and many other critical programs. Through consolidation, shared services, and the hard work of our elected officials and employees, we came together, shared in sacrifice and weathered the storm.

Six years later, we stand on a firm economic foundation: three years of assessed valuation growth, unemployment down to 4 percent, two quarters of high job growth, and a healthy fund balance, all earning us the second-highest bond rating among counties in New York – a foundation that has enabled us to decrease the property tax levy four years in a row and cut the tax rate three consecutive years. But we cannot forget the harsh realities we faced nor overlook the uncertainty of the future. Changes in federal policies, new state-imposed mandates, our obligation to our employees, New York’s high cost of living, skyrocketing construction costs, and unforeseen emergencies all impact and have the potential to undermine our success.

The lessons of the past reinforce the importance of prudent financial management and demand we protect our reserves to guard ourselves against the uncertainties of the future. Being careful stewards of taxpayer funds

demands we manage costs and the size of government. We can achieve some of this by sharing services. Our Municipal Innovation Grant program has supported municipal projects aimed at reducing the size and total cost of government by partnering with our towns, villages, and cities.

In New York, though, managing government costs is especially difficult with 70 percent of every property tax dollar going to pay for state-mandated services. We are controlling those mandated costs with up-front Medicaid fraud audits, saving over \$3 million annually, and back-end audits, saving almost \$3 million to date. We initiated our Community Schooling and Better for Families programs to prevent costly institutional placements and strengthen our families. Our Stabilization Center provides a more effective and less costly alternative to the criminal justice system and emergency rooms. In the past 11 months the Center and our other diversion services provided effective and less costly alternatives to emergency departments and the Criminal Justice system over 2,000 times. And our response to New York's unnecessarily complex, but appropriate change in the law to "Raise the Age" will employ a balanced approach sensitive to young people and taxpayers.

Passing more of its costs down onto local taxpayers than any state in America, New York so often takes without giving, demands without helping. Albany mandates counties have a jail, yet so many are crowded because of the State's own inaction or willful contribution. New York's dismantling of mental health services and failure to implement its own policies have left those with severe mental illness or parole violations languishing in county jails like ours. This keeps too many from the help they need, complicates the work of corrections officers and increases local jail population. So we welcomed the Governor's office's recent affirmation of the problem in jails across New York; after all, we are solving ours. The Justice and Transition Center will provide a safer environment, allow for more restorative, mental health and educational programming, require less staffing and help individuals transition back into the community. The project is progressing on time and on budget, and the Sheriff's Office is working to improve delivery of services and take corrective actions at our current facility. While pointing out the problem, the Governor might also provide meaningful assistance to help reduce the burden on local taxpayers, improve conditions, and help individuals.

As we cut costs and found ways to make government smaller, smarter, and more effective, we also made strategic investments in our economy, increasing funding for tourism and arts promotion in 2018 to \$1.5 million. Employing over 10,000 individuals and attracting nearly 5 million visitors who spend nearly \$570 million in our stores, restaurants, and hotels, tourism remains an economic powerhouse. The FDR Home and Library, CIA and Dia, our theatres, farms, and galleries attract millions; and our own Dutchess Stadium draws thousands of visitors from around the region every year, generating an estimated \$1 million in visitor spending annually. With a \$1.5 million state grant, the County will propose improvements to our 25-year-old asset. In collaboration with the Hudson Valley Renegades, we will repair this aging facility and enhance the fan and attendee experience.

By attracting major motion pictures like Paramount's "A Quiet Place" and other film, television, and commercial projects, we've welcomed new jobs and seen new spending in local communities and businesses. "A Quiet Place," filmed extensively in Dover and Pawling, spent \$18 million in the region. To capitalize on this growing industry, our Economic Development Advisory Council's Education and Workforce Committee will partner with Stockade Works in Kingston to train and educate our workforce to meet production and post-production needs, while Dutchess Tourism will promote venues and locations around the County. In June, Dutchess County will host a Hudson Valley Film Conference right here at the Culinary Institute of America.

To meet the workforce needs of emerging and traditional industries, we are focused on reducing the skills gap and creating a true pipeline to jobs. Dutchess Community College and IBM will host a Design Thinking Workshop on March 22nd and conduct a skills gap study to align educational outcomes with employment needs.

Th!nk Dutchess is adapting its marketing efforts by matching advanced technologies with traditional marketing to more effectively promote Dutchess County around the globe. They will expand social media analytics and geofencing, in addition to releasing a second magazine this summer – all highlighting our assets and community.

Dutchess County is fostering innovation to drive new jobs and investment with the kickoff of Th!nk Dutchess' second Innovation Challenge and the creation of an "Innovation Quad," pillared by Marist College's Fulton Technology Crossroad Project, Dutchess Community College's Materials Science Lab, Vassar College's Bridge for Laboratory Sciences, and of course, IBM. With this Innovation Quad, Dutchess County brings these powerhouses together to cultivate a Start-Up Ecosystem, where companies can leverage existing science and technology resources, as well as expertise. An example currently underway is Marist College's partnership with healthcare start-up TeliStat, headed by Dr. Anthony Bacchi, which has the potential to transform healthcare delivery by decreasing length of hospital stays and reducing nursing home readmissions.

At the heart of this start-up ecosystem is the City of Poughkeepsie, where the energy and excitement of the Vassar Brothers Medical Centers expansion, the waterfront redevelopment, new housing units, and MASS Design's Hudson Valley Design Lab are attracting new interest, people and investment. Rhinebeck Bank has committed to a \$3 million loan fund, investing in this downtown innovation, dovetailing with the Hudson Valley Startup Fund and Community Capital New York to help support and cultivate this ecosystem.

Innovation is happening throughout Dutchess County as Th!nk Dutchess works to grow the Center for Harvesting Materials and Systems lab in the Town of Poughkeepsie and bring an advanced textiles lab to the City of Beacon. Also in Beacon, we welcome Café Spice, a family-owned and operated food manufacturer expected to create up to 250 jobs.

The only thing more difficult than converting the single employer economy of the pre-1990s is reusing that single employer's facilities. But, National Resources is doing just that as we welcome More Good and Sloop Brewing to iPark in East Fishkill, as well as the expansion of eMagin, a leading manufacturer of microdisplays.

We are putting as much effort into new businesses as we are supporting our existing ones. Small business owners are the backbone of our economy, employing our neighbors, providing opportunities for residents, and supporting our communities. Th!nk Dutchess will expand its small business programming by adding a Procurement Technical Assistance Center to its one-stop-shop. Over the last five years, PTAC in the Lower Hudson Valley helped businesses obtain more than \$450 million in local, state and federal contracts. The Economic Development Advisory Council's Local Government Committee will expand opportunities for municipalities to attract investment by partnering with school districts and towns to implement preapproved strategies. These efforts will complement a new Downtown Building Catalyst Program and our Pace Land Use Law Center commercial centers program.

Nothing better represents the dynamic economy budding in Dutchess County than one of our oldest, most traditional economic engines: agriculture, which is responsible for nearly \$50 million in sales annually. We have supported this reinvigorated sector by working with Cornell Cooperative Extension to fund an Agricultural Navigator to help those in the industry open new markets and traverse government regulations. We continue to preserve farming by protecting over 3300 acres of active farmland and dedicating another \$1 million through our Partnership for Manageable Growth. Due to our many efforts and industrious farmers all across Dutchess County, the industry is thriving – traditional farms, distilleries, wineries, and farm-to-table restaurants. Asahi Shuzo International's planned investment of over \$28 million in Hyde Park to turn a long-vacant building into a sake brewery will create 32 new jobs. Asahi Shuzo will also partner with the Culinary Institute of America for research

and development at their facility. This is a great example of a sector full of opportunity and the success of our recruitment efforts.

Together, we have worked and sacrificed to build a strong fiscal foundation to support our many worthy endeavors. Because purpose without a pragmatic, realistic approach leads to empty promises and empty coffers.

Years from now, though, while people may not remember we controlled spending or that our bond rating was upgraded, they will remember what our fiscal prudence has enabled. Individuals with special needs and their families will remember how we created an inclusive and compassionate community by calling on us all to ThinkDIFFERENTLY. Those seeking treatment for addiction will remember how we committed to “Breaking Through” the stigma and barriers between help and those who seek it. A young person heading to their first college class or new job will remember we provided a path to fulfill their promise. In the midst of a turbulent and adversarial political climate, they may recall we provided honest and respectful leadership. And, when anger and hate too often filled the speech and discourse of the day, we gave rise to a spirit of acceptance, respect, and hope.

We can only leave such a mark because we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us: the legacy of our founding fathers and all of those who fought to ensure our right to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This foundation has been preserved through the service and sacrifice of so many, but none have sacrificed more in service to our nation and its founding principles than the American veteran.

In recognition of the immense sacrifice of the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces, and in honor of the 100th anniversary of the end of fighting in World War I, we proclaim 2018 the “Year of the Veteran.” We will celebrate this important year by recognizing Gold Star families who lost children in service to our country, holding a parade honoring our veterans and their families, and proudly commemorating the service of all County veterans throughout our 300-year history – from those who battled the tyranny of our Colonial rulers to the men and women who fought and continue to fight for security and stability around the globe.

Beyond celebrating and honoring our veterans, we continue finding new ways to support them. Whether it’s Dutchess Community College’s Veterans Resource Center providing support to veteran-students or peer counseling in partnership with Mental Health America or funding for Hudson River Housing to address veteran housing - we stand with these brave men and women. And, for the past 18 years, one man and his amazing wife, Christina, has led our team and stood shoulder to shoulder with our County’s veterans. Nelson Eddy Rivera has earned our admiration and thanks. While he cannot be with us tonight, we wish him well in his well-deserved retirement. He will be truly missed, and his service and commitment will not soon be forgotten.

November 11, 1918, marked the end of the “Great War,” a war that saw nearly 5 million United States service members mobilized worldwide and resulted in the loss of over 116,000 Americans. Now nearly 100 years later, we look back in awe of these brave men and women who left their homes and families for the purpose of reshaping the world by making it safe for democracy. Let us follow their example of not just living in the world given to them, but demanding and fighting for more.

Let us honor them by making and remaking the State of our County.

So, the State of Dutchess County is not the last 50 minutes I have spent speaking with you; it isn’t the actions of an executive or votes of a legislature. The state of our county is you; it’s us. It’s our dreams and labors, the steps we take, decisions we make, problems we solve, and challenges we overcome, together. It is the courage and faith, troubles and toils, unyielding promise and reasoned purpose of our people.

We are the heirs to this county's rich history; stewards of its land and resources; caretakers of its monuments and achievements. We are its hope for a prosperous future, and we are the State of our County. May we find purpose in its making.

Thank you. May God bless us, and may He bless Dutchess County and the United States of America.