



MAYOR JAY A. GILLIAN

CITY OF OCEAN CITY

AMERICA'S GREATEST FAMILY RESORT

REMARKS BY MAYOR JAY A. GILLIAN TO OCEAN CITY REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

JUNE 13, 2013

Good afternoon and thank you for having me here today.

It's hard to believe that in a few weeks it will be three years since I was sworn in as Mayor.

It's been an eventful three years to say the least, if for no other reason than the weather: two hurricanes, five or six Nor'Easters, a derecho (whatever that is) and an earthquake.

Most of these were minor inconveniences, but then there was Sandy. I can't speak on the State of the City today without talking about the storm and its aftermath. It's something the city staff is still dealing with on a daily basis. Our team recently supplied FEMA with three boxes of paperwork documenting our debris removal efforts that cost over \$3 million. The staff's doing an outstanding job but the paperwork and bureaucracy is just staggering.

When we met the day after the storm, my direction to my department heads was simple. I wanted to get cleaned up and get back to normal as quickly as possible. I also wanted to help our residents, property owners and businesses do the same thing.

That sense of normalcy is important after such a traumatic event. Some people may have thought it was silly, but that's why I wanted the new holiday decorations up in the downtown just weeks after the storm. There was a great spirit in the air when we lit those lights and saw how many businesses were already back on their feet.

I think one of the greatest success stories in the history of this community is how we worked together to get things back to normal. The business community and the Chamber were right in the middle of this effort and you should all be very proud of that.

As many of you know I'm not shy about asking for help when I need something done. Some of you might say my approach sometimes is not really asking. But when I needed a new heater installed in a senior citizen's home so that they could get back in, it got done. And when the businesses downtown needed help with removing their wet flooring and wallboard, it got done.

When the residents of Pecks Beach Village were sitting in motel rooms for weeks and weeks seeing nothing getting done to repair their homes, they needed help. Several of you were with me that first day over there when we viewed the damaged units. The work began days later and the residents starting returning four weeks after that.

I want to thank the City Council for supporting our arrangement to fund those repairs using COAH funds with the understanding that we would be reimbursed. If we hadn't acted, I have no doubt those folks still wouldn't be in their homes today.

Here in Ocean City we didn't wait for some government program to get up and running. There wasn't time for that. We banded together and helped our own because that's the kind of community this is.

The Chamber was also instrumental in the formation and operation of the OCNJ CARE effort. Two days after the storm we met with leaders of the business community, church community and people who just wanted to help. The results were amazing.

We can't forget that even though we're in great shape for the season, we still have people in Ocean City recovering or uncertain about whether to repair their home or demo it. The uncertainty that FEMA's maps have caused make this even more upsetting for many. I appreciate the fact that our local development community is guiding people through this difficult time with kindness and professionalism.

My Administration is continuing to be very proactive in our approach to these maps. We have a nationally recognized coastal engineering firm dealing with FEMA on our behalf and are doing everything possible to have the next set of maps be more accurate and more realistic. Our consultant has advised us that FEMA has shared information and been cooperative with them which is a positive sign. There is also encouraging news that some towns in New York have had an opportunity to see their new maps and indications are they are more accurate than the advisory maps.

We were determined not to let the repairs the storm made necessary side track our continued emphasis on improving the infrastructure of the City. In partnership with the City Council we've developed the most aggressive capital improvement plan in the City's history. Due to the restructuring of our debt and favorable market conditions we've done this without burdening the taxpayers in the future.

As we speak a contractor is completing the replacement of eight bulkheads at various locations. This is more bulkhead work than was undertaken in the previous four years combined.

Tonight City Council will consider awarding a contract for \$1.1 million to completely reconstruct the boardwalk in the 500 block. We're going to continue to move south with this project in coming years.

Our beaches downtown and in the northend are obviously in great shape for the season thanks to the recent replenishment project. The dune fencing is going up as we speak and grass will be planted in the fall as we work to restore the dunes to what we need to protect public and private property.

In the southend we have trucked in over \$1.1 million dollars worth of sand from 50th to 59th Streets. Those beaches are not in the shape we would prefer, but they are as good as or better

than they were last season at most locations. This picture shows the beach at 50th street looking south considerably wider than it was last summer. Other stretches to the south are somewhat more narrow but still usable and still providing a protective berm that we constructed.

The good news is the Army Corps has confirmed that the southend of Ocean City will have a beach replenishment project as they continue to work to restore the entire Jersey Shore. We are in almost daily contact with our partners at the federal and state levels on this, and we have every reason to be confident that this will occur during the coming off season.

We are aggressively obtaining the remaining easements we need signed from some beachfront owners. The majority understand the importance of these documents and have either provided them or indicated that they will provide them. I want to be very clear that these easements will be obtained one way or another so that these beaches can be replenished and dunes can be constructed.

On the bay side we were able to dredge lagoons from Waterway Road to 17th Street. Work will begin again shortly to complete this project to 15th Street. We are also planning to dredge Snug Harbor into a new disposal facility under the Route 52 Causeway. That site is accessible by truck and could be emptied if we have a viable place to take it.

We'll continue to do everything we can to accomplish more bay and lagoon dredging. A long term sustainable program is going to require the assistance of the state and federal governments, as viable options for additional disposal sites are very limited.

On the operational side we recently consolidated two departments into one with the objective of more efficiently serving the public. The broad goals haven't changed at all – I want to continue to provide the services you've come to expect at a cost that's fair to the taxpayers.

We're going to continue to keep the town clean, safe and with a great quality of life. City Council has adopted a budget that's lean and responsible but maintains services.

I want to thank the City Council for their support and team work during this trying year. We're working together and not wasting time bickering and arguing. That's how things get done.

And that's how we recovered from the storm – by all working together.

I never really had a doubt that we would be ready for the summer season. We are ready, and the Chamber and the Tourism Commission has been doing a great job telling people that. Media coverage has been favorable and things like the Governor's visit have helped. But what's still most important is just good old fashioned word of mouth. Now more than ever it's important to use your e-mail lists, use your social media, do whatever you can to tell your customers we're fine and we're ready for their visit. If you tell them, they will tell others, and so on it goes.

This continues to be a great time for Ocean City. That new bridge with all of the recreational components now being used and the new Welcome Center are spectacular. We'll never see a project like that again.

We have a wide array of special events, concerts and programs for the season as we always do. Plus some new events are planned including a Jeep Invasion this weekend. We're not going to be afraid to tweak some old events as well, like holding the baby parade in the evening. Our friends with the Hero Campaign will play a prominent role in Night in Venice.

I know there's some anxiety about what kind of season this will be and that's understandable. But we need to continue to work together and stay upbeat, stay positive. With a little help from Mother Nature, we're going to have a great season!

If your confidence needs a boost go on the Chamber's Facebook page and read what our guests think about Ocean City. Here's just a sample:

"Been going there for 19 years – great times."

"Been to OC every year since I was born. Best week of the year."

"Of course we'll be back. Can't wait."

It's easy sometimes to get caught up in all the day to day nonsense and lose track for a while of what's so special about Ocean City. Even though you're all busy in the weeks ahead take some time to enjoy everything we have to offer. Take your kids and your grand kids downtown on Market Days. Go to the Farmers Market. Go up on the boardwalk on Family Night. Go to a Pops concert or an Ocean City Theatre Company show. Take a day off and go to the beach with your family. You deserve it; this year more than ever.

Thank you again for having me.