



State of the County Address **April 21, 2009**

To the Honorable County Board of Supervisors and to the People of Kenosha County

Good evening Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, and guests. It is a pleasure and an honor to be elected Kenosha County Executive and to deliver to you the State of the County Address.

Over the past year, our employees, and many of the department and division heads who are here tonight, kept county government working through an awkward series of events. They were up to the task of maintaining quality services, and, after June 18th of last year, worked with the County Board and a new County Executive to get a number of initiatives started and several projects completed. I'd like the County Employees, Department and Division Heads here to stand and be recognized.

I'm happy to report that great things are happening in Kenosha County every day.

I want to tell you about the kind of people who work and live in Kenosha County. Many county employees strive to make Kenosha County an even better to work, live and raise a family beyond their work day.

I'm talking about people like Kelly Birschbach, an assistant district attorney, who, along with the Kenosha Catholic Schools Council, made up of Catholic Schools and parishes, put together a city-wide effort called "Catholic Kids Care."

More than 70 children made fleece blankets. They put those blankets and small gifts in more than 140 duffle bags and delivered them on April 3 to the Kenosha County Division of Children and Family Services.

These will be given to Kenosha County Foster Children.

I would like some of those volunteers to stand -- J. Michael McTernan, Bob Strifling, Marie Lindquist, and her son, Lewis, one of the school children who helped. Please applaud this tremendous and heart-warming effort.

Also here tonight are the young men and women who will be serving on County Board committees as part of the Youth in Governance effort, approved by the County Board in 2007.

There were 122 high school students from all county schools who were nominated to serve. The UW Extension Committee interviewed 27 youth and 18 were recommended for appointment to 9 County Board Committees.

Please stand and be recognized. We are looking forward to seeing all of you as community leaders in the future.

Let's take a look at the past 10 months.

Working together, we in County Government have:

- Included ethics language in our contracts, RFPs and contracted services.
- By April 30th, signs will be placed in all buildings where we exchange money or provide permits to remind people that our employees adhere to an Ethics policy.
- I will be formally providing to the board by April 30th proposed Ethics Ordinance changes, which is in its 17th revision, and that we have worked on for nearly a year.

It's fairly comprehensive. I have already self-imposed stricter rules on myself than those I lived by in Madison for 15 years.

I urge the board to carefully review and adopt these provisions for elected officials and other employees.

It is important that these more stringent ethics standards be put into place to regain the public trust and confidence in county government.

- Together, we tackled the long-standing issue of the Medical Examiner's Office. Rather than spending millions of dollars to build an office, we partnered with United Hospital System at the Kenosha Hospital Campus and used their under-utilized morgue for autopsies.

It's been a win-win for the county, the hospital and, most of all, the taxpayers.

- Together, we reviewed our Information Systems department and took swift action when we learned the county was at a high risk of losing or compromising records and data due to insufficient security protocols, aging systems and insufficient or non-existent data backup.

We are now ready to interview for a new IT director and we have assembled a team to advance an organization of our size and maximize our departments' productivity.

- Our golf operations have been completely re-organized under the new Golf General Manager Dan Drier.

The number of leagues booked at both Petrifying Springs and Brighton Dale golf courses are higher than last year.

We hired Dave Hassel, who most recently worked at Strawberry Creek Golf Course, as supervisor of course conditions.

There is on-going training of staff on everything from greeting customers, to a dress code and increasing the pace of play.

People will be able to see and feel the differences at our county golf courses.

- KD Park – We have worked together with you and the surrounding communities to develop a solid plan to make KD Park a reality, understanding our budget constraints.
- The 8th Branch of Circuit Court is moving along on time and on budget and will be ready for Judge-elect Chad Kerkman by July 29 or he will court-order us to get it done.

We're working with the Clerk of Courts Becky Matoska-Mentink and the judges to get it done and get it done right.

- Our discussion and planning is continuing to implement video-conferencing in our courts. The first two phases should be implemented by fall.

This will save money by reducing the movement of inmates and will improve efficiencies.

I thank the County Board, the judges and the Clerk of Courts for moving forward on this.

- I proposed a concept to the County Board last fall to address the 911/Dispatch Center concerns.

The 911/Dispatch Center was identified as a public health and safety issue for at least a decade and a study verified that in 2004.

We are hoping to break ground in the next few months on the Public Safety Building addition that the County Board approved.

It is critical that when someone dials 911 that someone will hear them and will help them.

Your serious attention to this issue, your deliberations and the adoption of the concept in the budget has allowed our county to move forward with its own shovel-ready stimulus package.

- One of the greatest threats to public health and safety is gangs. The problem cannot be taken lightly.

One needs only to look at communities to the north and south of Kenosha to see the very real impact.

And, if anyone thinks that gang concerns are only related to urbanized areas of Kenosha County they need only to talk to school administrators in the villages and towns in the western part of our county.

We are tackling this issue county-wide by hiring Donna Rhodes as our Gang Intervention Supervisor, and she has begun outreach to various neighborhoods in the community to ask citizens what they believe is needed to stop gang problems in their neighborhoods, and meeting with county school leaders.

The ideas and solutions will be presented to a group comprised of law enforcement, government leaders, community service providers and community leaders who will prioritize and act on strategies to reduce gangs in Kenosha County.

- Sheriff David Beth has been a leader in the Frank Neighborhood Project, inspiring children here in our own neighborhood to stay involved in school and in positive activities.

Many of us are also working with the Boys & Girls Club to provide resources so that all young people of Greater Kenosha County can realize their full potential as productive, responsible, caring citizens.

- I also want to thank the Sheriff's Department for working with the Kenosha Police Department to patrol some of our more challenging neighborhoods.

That's another example of how it's not city or county – it's “we” – it's our community.

The Sheriff has also been cooperative in continuing the Jail Work Crew Program to have those in a negative situation doing something positive with their time.

- Another area we are working on together is truancy.

Recently, KUSD held a meeting with 60 people – a cross section of the community, including representatives of the Sheriff's Department, Human Services, the Police Department, the Mayor and the County Executive where we agreed to work together and share information to help children stay on track and in school.

County government needs to be working with all levels of government to come up with creative and collaborative solutions to address this issue.

- There is no better gang diversion activity than a summer job.

The Workforce Investment Act is adding a Summer Youth Program through Federal Stimulus money for low income youth for subsidized work experiences. Kenosha County will receive more than \$300,000.

Add to that the money that I proposed and the County Board approved and that will mean that more than 225 low income youth will have jobs this summer.

That's up from about only 15 jobs in a similar program last summer.

- Another federal stimulus grant we've received is \$875,000 for the HUD Health Homes Demonstration Grant. This three-year program aims to reduce household hazards for at least 1,000 children and adults who live in distressed housing units.
- For the county transportation system, we were awarded \$248,000 dollars in Federal stimulus money to purchase two handicapped accessible vehicles, bus shelters and routing and dispatching software.
- That means Kenosha County has already received well in excess of \$1 million in Federal Stimulus money to date.
- We can't forget the biggest stimulus project announced to date for Kenosha County and that is the start of the I-94 North-South Freeway Project. Governor Doyle has authorized \$1.9 billion in improvements that will modernize and expand the corridor to eight lanes, and will create more than 2,300 jobs.
- The I-94 project partners with our commitment to our local infrastructure. Good infrastructure leads to economic development which leads to jobs.
- There are many positive things happening in Kenosha County. But, we cannot ignore the international economic downturn. I know it is a storm we will weather.
- We will have to make adjustments and live within the state-imposed guidelines for our own budget.

- Communication has been – and is – the key to success.

I will continue to work with Chairman Joe Clark and Vice-chairwoman Anita Faraone, Mayor Keith Bosman and the town and village leaders and the school districts.

Working with municipal leaders, I am continuing to hold listening sessions in all of the municipalities to hear what county residents have to say.

- This past Saturday, we had a Council of Governments meeting attended by about 50 people and we had a great deal of positive dialogue.

Elected leaders meeting with each other – some new, some not so new. Many of them said “thank you” for bringing them all together.

- One of the main themes from that meeting is that the State budget is a concern to all.
- As a result of the anticipated state budget cuts, I have signed an Executive Order today issuing a hiring freeze for all county vacant positions.

The freeze will remain in place until further notice. We will have a Management Review Committee take a look at any critical positions that need to be filled for health or safety reasons.

- Brookside Care Center ended 2008 with a \$400,000 cash deficit. That could double with the loss of Medicaid reimbursement and a potential cut to the Intergovernmental Transfer money.

The new Administrator Fran Petrick knew her job wasn't going to be easy. I do thank Fran for her leadership.

Whether it's a bridge to home, hospital or assisted living, our nursing home is a jewel and we want to keep it that way. We need the Legislature to act on this very serious issue.

- Tax delinquencies are up from \$3.2 million dollars to \$6 million dollars over four years. We're carrying the paper for municipalities and that number is significant.
- There are some immediate challenges in Human Services, too.

We are anticipating a \$680,000 increase in cost in mental health placements and another loss of \$800,000 in other human services this year from state budget cuts.

We can handle some of these cuts but we need to uphold our commitment to the most vulnerable in our community.

- Although the County spends a considerable amount of effort to provide the needed social services to its residents, what Kenosha residents really need – and what we have continually tried to get them – is jobs.
- Job growth and job retention remains a high priority.

I want to recognize our strategic partnership with the Kenosha Area Business Alliance and its executive director Todd Battle. Todd, please stand.

Together, we have had some significant success by attracting Gordon Foods, Affiliated Foods and ULine to Kenosha County.

But, it is not enough to sit on our laurels.

In about 30-days, KABA will have the results of a strategic and comprehensive plan for Kenosha County that will help direct our outreach to new companies and strengthen our position to retain companies already here.

The glass and brass buildings will move here. We need to prepare ourselves so when the time is right, those companies will see Kenosha County is the right place to be and the right place to remain.

Because we have worked together -- and through this board's past fiscal responsibility –

We will move forward and continue to offer top notch services in the most cost-efficient way possible.

There is a silver lining and the sun will shine again.

A bond rating agency in November upgraded our management rating, which is quite an achievement in these difficult economic times.

Our bond rating is Aa2.

We were also told by those financial experts that Kenosha County is among the last in to the recession and will be among the first to come out.

These are uncertain times we live in. And, this is why we are in public service. People look to us to make tough decisions and choices and we are up to that challenge.

Because times are tough there will be a greater demand for County services.

We will – because we must – invest in our people, our youth, our families.

We will – because we must – encourage and manage growth.

We will – because we must – do the necessary infrastructure improvements to keep our county safe, healthy and strong.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Board, we will – because we must – maintain our vision of Kenosha County by learning from our past, maintaining our present and work toward strengthening our future.

Together, we will – because we must -- work to make certain Kenosha County is still the best and the biggest small town in Wisconsin.

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