



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Text of Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser's 2021 State of the County address:

Good evening, Chairman John O'Day, Vice Chair Monica Yuhas, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

Before I begin my next-to-last State of the County message to the County Board and our community, I want to remember our late friends: Twin Lakes County Board Supervisor Lon Wienke who, unfortunately, passed away earlier this year; the former chairman of the County Board Gene Bilotti, who passed late last year after courageously battling various health challenges; and three former supervisors who also passed away in the past year; Robert Schneider, John Ruffolo and Judy Rossow.

Gene Bilotti was a role model for the citizens and elected officials with whom he interacted. Even in disagreement, Gene was a gentleman—respecting differing points of view and using cogent reasoning and calm demeanor to state his position on an issue or item.

Then, after a contentious meeting, Gene would enthusiastically go out for a cup of coffee or a beverage with the people he had just disagreed with on the board floor because he understood the importance of building relationships and disagreeing without being disagreeable on what's in the best interest of Kenosha County for the short and long term.

Gene Bilotti was Chairman of the County Board during one of Kenosha County's most challenging times in history, the 1988 Chrysler Assembly Plant shut down. His intellect and wit were a true gift during that tumultuous time. His efforts complimented our community's transformation to a diversified workplace with a future for our young people.

Lon Wienke, although only serving briefly on the County Board, had been serving our western Kenosha County communities for many decades. From being a realtor, where he was a terrific promoter for Kenosha County, to the decades of involvement with the Kenosha County Fair, Lon loved and cared about his community and was pivotal to the progress made on one of our most recent endeavors, Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park.

Bob Schneider, best known in recent years for his leadership of the Kenosha Community Foundation, and as a former banker, served with distinction on the County Board in the early 1970s. He died this past fall.

Judy Rossow served on the County Board for four years, was an iconic businesswoman in Kenosha, worked with Meals on Wheels for 14 years, and was a great friend of the arts with her involvement in the Pollard Gallery and the Rhode Center for the Arts. Downtown Kenosha already misses her.

John Ruffolo served on the Kenosha Common Council and on the County Board with, as Supervisor Rose described it, passion and honesty. Both Judy and John died this year.

All of these selfless people gave more in positive value to our community and to all of our citizens than their jobs required.

Let's pause in their memory.

Ladies and gentleman of the County Board, even after a year-plus of COVID, every day great things happen in Kenosha County.

If you haven't noticed I'm kind of a cheerleader for Kenosha County — and it's easy when you have such a terrific team of employees who perform every day at a high level with professionalism and efficiency.

This has not just occurred in this past year, it happens every day. Our quality employees from every division of Kenosha County make a big difference. They have all pulled together to help accomplish what is our No. 1 top priority countywide — getting vaccine shots in arms efficiently, safely, and with great dispatch.

In a topsy-turvy year, our teams of employees have:

Planned for rapid change and improvement in services —

- The Economic Support Program experienced a year of unprecedented caseload growth and many changes in eligibility policies for programs due to the pandemic. The economic support employees applied all of these new policies quickly and successfully, while also achieving the highest Call Center metrics on record!
- Child Support Services collected \$36.5 million in child support for families — the most ever collected in Kenosha County. Collections to reimburse out of home placements were also the highest ever, collecting over \$500,000!

Our employees have **organized**, in a new way and many with outside partners —

- Staff at the Division of Aging, Disability and Behavioral Health Services stepped up and filled in as Meals on Wheels delivery drivers and with onsite distribution so that people in need received their nutrition services; and, ADRC staff partnered with the Kenosha

Achievement Center to provide grocery shopping and delivery to those who were limited in their ability to be out in public due to the pandemic.

- For 2021, ADRC is partnering with Emergency Medical Service providers across the county to focus on, and reduce, the number of falls in Kenosha County

Our employees have *modeled* the definition of “nimble,” tackling issues head on and quickly changing and adapting as needed —

- IT started 2020 with cybersecurity challenges, followed quickly by the challenges of the pandemic. It required changing everything they did to help all of us in the county do our work to meet the needs of county residents. They quickly helped many departments deploy a remote workforce, with each division offering unique situations and objectives.
- IT was a critical resource during the civil unrest, able to quickly assess and meet the needs for the Emergency Operations Center, the Sheriff’s Department, the Kenosha Police Department, the National Guard and other state and federal agencies.
- IT continues to be a critical partner for the Health Division. They developed a robust COVID-19 website; they worked together to guide COVID testing processes, and now vaccination clinics. The application developed for vaccination appointments, and their vital assistance in the smooth transition from the Job Center to the former Shopko building has been phenomenal. They did all of that quickly, efficiently and with a can-do and positive attitude.
- Across county government, employees quickly pivoted, changing their methods of communicating with each other and with clients, reducing reliance on paper while increasing speed and efficiency.
- Many customers had a higher participation rate because they didn’t have to arrange for childcare, take time off work, or find transportation to physically be at our buildings. Instead, many more easily attended a virtual type of appointment or court hearing.

Our employees *LEAD*, setting new benchmarks and priorities with timeframes to various stakeholders —

- The Division of Children and Family Services continues to lead the state, and the southeastern region in its work in the Child Protective Services Unit. They continued to promptly see children in the community and investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect throughout 2020, even with the challenges of the pandemic. They achieved a rate of 97% in completing initial assessments within 60 days and made timely initial face-to-face contacts on these cases at a rate of 93%. The overall state rates were 68% and 80%, comparatively.
- Project Permanency, a partnership with the District Attorney’s Office and Circuit Court, to move children to forever homes was slowed during the pandemic, although 54 children

went from foster homes to permanent homes in 2020. As of March 31 this year, parental rights were terminated for 20 children in foster care, freeing them to be adopted into safe forever families and another 35 children in foster care have cases pending in court with the projected plan of being adopted by their loving foster parents.

- Brookside Care Center and Willowbrook Assisted Living have had to do — and continue to do — a tremendous job of orchestrating the management and delivery of services during this pandemic. They had to juggle federal, state and local requirements. We appreciate their love and grace — from both staff and residents — through these challenges.

Our employees have *coordinated* complex logistical plans —

- Our Facilities staff were tested at every juncture. And, with every new challenge, they rose to the occasion. They had to plan for constant cleaning and sanitizing of public areas, quickly adjusting schedules and hours. Additionally, they were among the frontline response teams during the civil unrest to secure and clean our campuses. They worked hand in glove with law enforcement and the highway workers to get the fence up, and to board buildings and to repair buildings, which is still ongoing.
- Our Human Resources team was key at every level, as we transitioned employees to work from home, and while we worked to retain some normalcy for the many employees who could not work from home. They have worked to get our vaccination clinics staffed with employees and volunteers, along with coordinating the training involved.
- The Emergency Operations Center, headed by Lt. Horace Staples, has juggled countywide responses to both COVID-19, which is ongoing, and civil unrest. Many individuals, organizations and other branches of government were coordinated through the EOC.
- The Division of Health has excelled on every level during these months of constant strain and a high volume of work that hasn't seemed to slow. They have had to plan, implement and constantly re-evaluate policies and procedures as the situation required. They continue to work with multiple partners at federal, state and local levels, businesses and leaders across our county. I am so very proud of their work.

I would be remiss in not acknowledging the personal and professional toll often experienced these past 13 months by all of our county employees and their families. Our workforce has continued to perform with the same high quality and with the same strong commitment to the people of Kenosha County despite the sometimes overwhelming physical and emotional challenges. I sincerely thank them and applaud their efforts.

And, as you see in the 2020 closeout report, they did all of this while keeping our financial reserves intact.

Ladies and gentlemen of the board, we kept Kenosha County government working for our community and made sure our vital, mandated services were delivered when many Kenosha County residents were in need.

This past month, employees have been redirected to our number one priority in Kenosha County government: Get as many Kenosha County residents vaccinated as fast and safely as we can.

And our numbers show we are getting the job done: To date, our county clinics have administered nearly 45,000 doses. But the mission is not over, and it is my sincere hope that I will see you all this fall, back in the County Board chambers, to deliver to you the 2022 Kenosha County budget.

Our numerous infrastructure projects including the County Trunk Highway S expansion and Country Trunk Highway H improvements in Pleasant Prairie are moving forward on schedule, and soon final wrap up will be completed on Country Trunk Highway F.

Our infrastructure improvements have been critical to many economic development WINS all over Kenosha County:

- Nosco, a packaging manufacturer, relocating its headquarters and flagship production operations from Gurnee to Pleasant Prairie
- Geneva Supply, distribution, warehousing, marketing and fulfillment center bringing 100 jobs to the Town of Randall in the former American Girl Doll or also known as the old Gander Mountain site.
- The Kroger customer fulfillment center being built in Pleasant Prairie, bringing up to 700 jobs in 3-5 years.
- Stabio North America, cold processing formed parts, expanding from its Bristol location to the Salem Business Park, and growing from 50 to 85 jobs with room for expansion.

The financial state of Kenosha County is very strong. We are AA+ and doing all the right things to attain a AAA rating. Furthermore, the overall long-term obligation is \$24 million dollars less than when I took office in 2008.

S&P, in its latest review of our finances noted our:

- Strong economy
- Strong management with good financial practices.
- Very strong budgetary flexibility, with maintenance of reserves of approximately 30% of expenditures the past three years.
- Very strong liquidity, with strong access to external liquidity.
- Rapid amortization of debt with 85.9% of debt scheduled to be retired in 10 years.

- Think about that. *Rapid amortization of debt with 85.9% of debt scheduled to be retired in 10 years.*

Fitch said:

- Kenosha County's economy has become more diversified over the past decade.
- Our operating performance is "AAA":
 - “Kenosha County's ample financial resilience is derived from its broad revenue-raising flexibility, solid control over costs and substantial fund balances.”
- And, “The county's independent revenue-raising ability is high.”

2020 presented many fiscal challenges, but Finance Director Patricia Merrill and her team and the Finance Committee of the County Board have done an outstanding job staying ahead of the curve.

They managed a constantly changing fiscal landscape, from ICE pulling its inmates from County Detention Center in March, leaving a potential \$4 million financial hole, to making sure they were monitoring and tracking all COVID-19 costs.

Through it all, Kenosha County has maintained a fund balance of almost 30%, even through a pandemic.

I also want to thank the citizens of Kenosha County for how they have navigated this year, which brought them challenges, frustrations, fear, and, too often, losses.

Let's also recognize and thank the businesses, non-profits and various organizations, from churches to restaurants to hair salons to food pantries. This has been a year like no other. I pledge that Kenosha County government will continue to work with you and for you.

I pledge, too, that Kenosha County will continue its commitment to diversity and equity for a better society for all of our citizens.

We will finish strong in dealing with this pandemic and I am confident in Kenosha County's future and this is all possible because of our employees of Kenosha County.

We still have a lot of work to do in 2021 and I look forward to working with each of you as we work through this stage of the pandemic keeping the goal in mind of making Kenosha County an even better place to live, work, play and raise a family.

Thank You and May God Bless Kenosha County.

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