

**2009 State of Wayne County
Wayne County Executive Robert A. Ficano Feb. 12, 2009**

Good evening and welcome.

Thank you for joining us in Canton Township at this magnificent Village Theater at Cherry Hill.

This will be my seventh state of the county address.

I am humbled by the opportunity to serve you.

I would like to thank our gracious hosts, Supervisor Phil LaJoy and the people of Canton Township. This is truly a community of achievements. Last year, Canton Leisure Services won a gold medal as one of the top recreation service providers in the nation. We salute you!

Tonight we are being broadcast live on WJR-760 AM and taped on WWJ-TV - Channel 62. We invite viewers to watch "Prescription for Michigan" hosted by Carol Cain at noon Saturday on WWJ-TV. This show includes a look at the healthcare industry in Wayne County.

Tonight we also are appearing live on the soon-to-be redesigned Wayne County Web site, waynecounty.com.

I would like to welcome newly elected chairman of the Wayne County Commission, Ed Boike, the members of the Wayne County Commission and other elected officials who have joined us. Please stand.

Let's take a moment of silence to recognize our veterans and troops at war and the sacrifices of their families.

In many ways, 2008 was a bleak and worrisome year. We're in the midst of the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression.

Unprecedented cuts in the auto industry and a struggling economy have ravaged this region. Many of you have lost your jobs. Some of you have lost your homes. All of you, in some way, have been affected by the pain.

What we will never lose is hope. Tonight, I want to assure you that Wayne County and Southeast Michigan will help lead a comeback to prosperity. We will turn adversity into opportunity. Our children and grandchildren deserve no less.

But first we must change the way we do business. We must be bold in our approach to today's challenges.

In Wayne County government, my administration has already started a transformation that will make us stronger in the long run.

Since taking office in 2003, I have downsized the executive branch through layoffs, buyouts and attrition. I am operating with nearly 1,500 fewer positions than my predecessor. As an example, in our Children and Family Services Department alone, we've eliminated a \$13-million deficit and created a surplus.

We've learned to work smarter, increase efficiencies and basically do more with less, just like all families. Another thing we've done is to institute a system of accountability used in private industry -- Managing for Results.

To further demonstrate our commitment to savings, we will move this year into the Guardian Building. The county spent more than \$100 million during the past 20 years to rent the Wayne County Building.

We've purchased the Guardian Building with five times more space for \$14 million - the equivalent of about three years worth of rent. That kind of good business judgment is critical as we move forward with limited resources.

As county executive, I have direct control over 11 departments that comprise about 45 percent of the county budget. When the going got tough, we led by example. I would not expect others to make cuts unless my executive departments made cuts.

These were not easy decisions. But these are the same kind of decisions facing many families who live within a budget and expect their government to do the same.

I'm proud to say we have balanced the county's annual budget for the sixth consecutive year without a tax increase.

And, our credit rating remains strong despite the loss of tax revenue.

Employees in the executive departments have sacrificed and are to be commended. I'd also like to thank the executive department heads and those elected officials who have cooperated in helping to balance the budget.

Regrettably, we have been forced into litigation with the sheriff to maintain a balanced budget. The sheriff knows how to make cuts without jeopardizing public safety. I encourage the sheriff and other officials to join us in keeping the budget balanced.

In fact, it's not going to be any easier this year as we face a projected deficit that could be as high as \$100 million dollars. ALL elected officials will have to make the tough decisions they were elected to make! The County Commission must continue to join us in making job creation our first priority in spending.

Living within its means, Wayne County government has still been able to reach out to those struggling in today's economy.

The county's Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program has attracted national attention for its effectiveness in helping Wayne County residents stay in their homes.

Dateline NBC recently aired a report featuring how our staff directly intervenes to help people facing foreclosure.

This program has now become a national model. Other areas across the nation are seeking to license our software. Las Vegas, Houston, Miami, and the states of Michigan and Ohio are looking to Wayne County for solutions.

In only a few short months, we have helped or are in the process of helping more than 600 people resolve their mortgage problems.

These are not cold statistics, these are Wayne County families facing the loss of their homes. One of these families is with us tonight.

Jacqueline Madden, a single mother from Redford Township, was on the brink of foreclosure after she lost her job with Ford Motor Company. One of our licensed foreclosure counselors negotiated a deal that reduced her payment from about \$1,200 per month to interest-only payments of \$200 per month for four months. Her interest rate will be renegotiated. Ms. Madden and her teenage son are in their home without fear of being evicted. Ms. Madden, please stand. Thank you for your courage.

We in Wayne County are helping people in many other ways.

Here are a few examples:

With a three-million-dollar federal grant, we have started a lead abatement project in Highland Park and Hamtramck. This project will abate the lead in about 200 homes at no cost to the homeowners and protect children.

The Community Mental Health Agency served more than 58,000 residents last year. In a major innovation, the Agency has moved on-line to provide training in recipient rights to all those who work in our system. And Wayne County has been awarded a state grant to pilot a mental health court with the Third Circuit Court that will help ensure treatment for those with mental illness who are nonviolent.

Also, hundreds of blighted properties were renovated or demolished thanks to the persistent efforts of the Nuisance Abatement Program.

NAP representatives attended more than 30 community group meetings last year to educate residents on how they could clean up their neighborhoods, one property at a time. NAP also reaches out to children as its mascot Scrappy the Safety Dog teaches youngsters the importance of being safe around vacant houses and open blighted buildings.

Our Second Chance Thru Expungement Program, known as STEP, is helping one-time nonviolent offenders turn their lives around. In less than a year, we have 100 pending cases for individuals eligible for expungements. With the assistance of Lonnie Peak and Wayne County Community College, STEP recently celebrated the first graduating class of our life skills and college preparatory training course.

Despite budget cuts, our successes are creating jobs and economic opportunities throughout the region.

When I announced the launch of our Land Bank/TURBO program, I promised significant results and I'm proud to say it already has generated more than \$400 million in new investment and 2,500 new jobs. TURBO stands for Transforming Underdeveloped Residential and Business Opportunities and that's what it's done in turning vacant fields and dilapidated buildings into productive businesses from Highland Park and Detroit to right here in Canton.

Canton Township realized the value of TURBO when the program was used to help Sysco Food Services expand here, retaining more than 600 jobs and adding more than 100 new jobs. To their credit, Canton officials utilized TURBO as a resource to prevent a company from possibly relocating out of the area.

Our Land Bank has been innovative in other ways. It has an alternative work force to help dozens of churches and community groups in their cleanup efforts throughout the City of Detroit.

Our churches are doing a great job in stabilizing our neighborhoods.

The Reverend Oscar King III, pastor of Northwest Unity Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, is overseeing the building of new low-income homes. The church's vision is to help uplift neighborhoods with new homes.

We look forward to working with the Rev. King and other church leaders in the future. (Rev. King, please stand). Thank you.

In another achievement, the Department of Public Services, working with local communities, reduced a backlog of more than 100 permits while continuing to process all current permit applications within 60 days.

In regional cooperation, the Department of Environment joined with Oakland and Macomb Counties and the City of Detroit to resolve a longstanding dispute that will greatly improve the Detroit Water and Sewage Department.

And, in a major victory for regionalism, Wayne County joined Macomb and Oakland Counties and the City

of Detroit in approving the first regional mass transit plan in 50 years. We expect to see a shovel in the ground this year for construction of a light rail line along Woodward. A line that would stretch from Ann Arbor to Detroit should be next.

These mass transit projects are prime candidates for President Barack Obama's stimulus package and we will lobby aggressively for funding.

Many of the recent successes of Wayne County government simply involve doing an ordinary job extraordinarily well.

- The Department of Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs delivered nearly one million meals to homebound seniors and provided emergency assistance to 0 veterans.
- County engineers designed and supervised improvements to the Grosse Ile Public Bridge.
- Road crews paved more than 17 miles of gravel roads in partnership with Redford Township.
- The Department of Health and Human Services produced a Childcare resource guide for parents and caregivers, entitled "Wayne Babies, Live, Learn and Play." Children are very important to us.

This user-friendly guide contains information for the care of children and a directory of county services.

- In December, we opened Sheldon Road to traffic on schedule following completion of the underpass project. Numerous obstacles were overcome to finish the project on time. We thank the City of Plymouth and Plymouth Township for partnering with us.

Wayne County's achievements are the product of vision and hard work. TURBO, Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention and the STEP program were all created by my staff. I am very fortunate to have a deputy who knows how to get things done with limited resources.

I'd like to thank Deputy County Executive, Azzam Elder for his creativity and loyalty. We have a strong management team in Wayne County including department heads and appointed staff. I am especially grateful for the efforts of my chief of staff, Nancy Mouradian, who is retiring after more than 20 years with Wayne County. My team is the best and I thank them for their dedication and hard work.

It has been said that the best way to predict the future is to invent it.

As we focus on the future in 2009, we encourage everyone to quit looking in the rearview mirror and keep your eyes on the road ahead. Concentrating on what we need to do today will get us to where we need to be tomorrow.

In Wayne County, we're already reinventing the future. As I've said, job creation and job retention has been and will remain our top priority. A transformation of our economy in Wayne County is based on new technology, new industries and a new way of doing business.

Seeds of our new economy are sprouting up countywide.

In Plymouth Township, we have partnered with Washtenaw County, the state, Ann Arbor SPARK and others to develop a Life Science Innovation Center in what was formerly a Pfizer facility.

The life sciences industry primarily focuses on pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics and biotech research. Wayne County is positioning itself to grow with the life sciences by attracting new companies and employees.

The catalyst for the Innovation Center is Dr. Roger Newton, the co-founder of the drug Lipitor and perhaps the region's most renowned entrepreneur and scientist. When Pfizer decided to downsize and

leave the area, Dr. Newton decided to stay.

Dr. Newton said: "This is the most exciting place you agree.

Dr. Newton's company is a pioneer in creating a life science business environment unique in Southeast Michigan. Dr. Newton is here tonight. Dr. Newton, please stand. We thank you for your inspiration and determination and look forward to your future accomplishments.

Another seed of the new economy is growing on the campus of Wayne State University at TechTown, one of the area's best kept secrets. More than 40 start-up companies are tenants of TechTown.

This is home to life science research being carried out by the U.S. government, the state of Michigan, Henry Ford Health System and various companies.

Wayne County was instrumental in convincing the ministry of Mexico to sign a lease with TechTown to bring as many as 50 automotive tech companies to the region over the next 10 years.

Tonight, I am proud to announce that Wayne County is partnering with TechTown to create a Wayne County Stem Cell Commercialization Center. Embryonic stem cells provide a valuable means to eventually create treatments for many diseases that cannot be treated today. The recent passage of state legislation has paved the way for this research. Our Stem Cell Center will be the first of its kind in Michigan. We are creating a new biotechnology industry that will attract new companies, new jobs and alliances with researchers around the world.

Another emerging sector in the region is the film industry. We are currently working with two new film studios that would bring thousands of new jobs.

As Clint Eastwood said while filming "Gran Torino" in Wayne County... "Michigan will be the next film Capitol of the world."

That would... "make our day!" There are plenty of other exciting signs of a bright economic future, particularly in the Aerotropolis region.

For example, in Huron Township, the Michigan Institute of Aeronautics is expanding to focus on alternative energy. It will train hundreds of students to become technicians and dispatchers while creating more than 100 new jobs.

In addition, I recently attended a ribbon cutting for the state-of-the-art Great Lakes Recycling facility, which will serve communities and businesses throughout Michigan, parts of Ohio and Canada.

This new green operation features the latest in recycling technology and a recycling education center.

These are just a few of the projects developing in southern and western Wayne County as the Aerotropolis continues to soar.

This year we will work with our state lawmakers to reintroduce new legislation to provide Aerotropolis incentives for businesses linked to air commerce.

The recent opening of the North Terminal further enhances our world-class Metro Airport. And the opening of the Pinnacle Race Course revived an important industry, provided hundreds of new jobs and showed what can happen when government and private investors work together. After a successful first season, we look for Pinnacle to be a catalyst for future development.

The potential of an Aerotropolis as an economic stimulus is well known. Recently, the mayor of Cleveland cited the need to create an Aerotropolis around their local airport. In Wayne County, we are far past the talking stage. In partnership with Detroit Renaissance, we need to maintain our momentum and proceed

aggressively.

Technology is a critical part of all our development projects.

Technology is going to drive the future and our Department of Technology is well-positioned to make Wayne County business ready.

Our new Waynecounty.com website is being built in stages to become a gateway for information and online taxpayer services. The live streaming of tonight's speech is only a start.

Wayne County is implementing fiber optic infrastructure to connect key business hubs throughout the region, including the Aerotropolis. In support of our vision, AT&T has invested millions of dollars to implement a network with the capacity to drive high-speed applications for our business community. It will put the Aerotropolis at the apex of the high-tech spectrum.

It was Wayne County's ability to provide technology infrastructure that helped keep Stardock in Plymouth. This emerging leader in the PC gaming industry had been prepared to leave Michigan because of its advancing technology needs. With a global telecommunications leader like AT&T on our side, we convinced Stardock to grow its business here.

Wayne County also has partnered with Plymouth Township and Secure-24, a provider of data services, to create a new data center in Plymouth Township that will host all county technology services.

This unique Technology Resource Center will be able to support the IT needs of private sector clients in addition to serving the needs of all 43 communities in Wayne County.

That's technology at work for all of us.

As you know, I remain committed to making China our jobs partner.

During our fourth trade mission to China last year, Atwell-Hicks signed an agreement to work with a company in Chongqing to improve environmental quality in China. These missions started a dialogue between local companies and their Chinese counterparts that will continue to create jobs.

One example is here in Canton Township. After one trade mission, the Tempo Group set up an automotive research and development center here with about 500,000 square feet of space.

As you can see, we're well on the way to diversifying the economy in Wayne County.

But our trademark will continue to be the automobile industry. We're not about to give up our trademark no matter what is said in the media. Many of the high-tech jobs of the future will be auto related.

A recent report by the Kansas City-based Kauffman Foundation benchmarked all 50 states in specific areas to rate their ability to compete in the new global economy.

Michigan was rated 17th in the nation, up from number 34 just nine years ago. Only one other state has risen faster.

In the critical area of research and development, Michigan is second in the nation. That is largely due to the research done in the auto industry, much of it in Wayne County. We will continue to encourage that research with incentives and a business friendly environment.

Despite those who said it couldn't be done, this year we plan to break ground on an expansion of Cobo Hall. For more than three years we have worked for approval of an expansion to keep the North American International Auto Show in Detroit and attract other convention business.

It has been a very grueling process. My creative and aggressive staff refused to take “no” for an answer.

More than 16,000 jobs and nearly \$600 million a year in economic impact are directly tied to Cobo. A renovated, expanded Cobo Hall will be good for the auto industry and the region.

As we head further into 2009, it is apparent this will be another tough year economically. But let’s keep things in perspective.

When rumors of his death began circulating, Mark Twain once told a newspaper correspondent: “The report of my death is an exaggeration.”

Well, the demise of the Detroit auto industry and the entire region has been exaggerated by many people, including a few southern Republican senators.

With the support of the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, we tried to dispel many of the myths about our auto industry. We launched a radio advertising campaign to reach some of the most ardent opponents of a loan to preserve auto jobs. I spent thousands of dollars of my campaign funds... and it was money well spent.

We launched a web site Americanautoindustryrocks.com as the entire region showed its support for our Detroit automakers.

One in every 10 jobs in the United States is related to the auto industry. We will not stand by idly and watch those jobs disappear.

Those who predict failure have terribly underestimated the resolve of our people. History is filled with stories of people and communities who have overcome odds to achieve greatness. Wayne County and its people will do the same.

I am proud to be your Wayne County executive. It is a trust I take very seriously.

My vision is still the same for Wayne County. I see a place where our children and grandchildren will work, attend schools and raise their families in peace and prosperity.

I am determined to lead this county through tough times. Our assets far outweigh our challenges. We have a diverse county that looks like the rest of the world. We have a skilled workforce, first-class universities, an international border, a world-class airport and a resolve to succeed.

President Obama has excited this nation with his strong message of hope. We in Wayne County wholeheartedly share his optimism for the future.

But words won’t create a better Wayne County.

We must act with a sense of urgency.

We must be bold.

We must relearn the art of compromise and sacrifice.

And, we must be willing to courageously take chances.

Together, let’s make each day “Simply The Best” in Wayne County.

Let’s dare to dream and build those dreams together.

May God bless you and Wayne County. Good night!