

**Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato**  
**State of the County Address**  
**January 23, 2007**

Mr. President, members of Council, my fellow County employees and County residents...

Since taking office in January 2004, I have focused my administration on creating jobs and economic growth, reclaiming our old industrial sites, assisting distressed areas of our County, increasing governmental efficiency and effectiveness, expanding recreational opportunities, enhancing health and human services, ensuring public safety, and embracing diversity.

During 2006, Allegheny County made great strides in all of these areas, and this evening, I want to share with you many of our accomplishments.

**Airport Growth & Development**

Pittsburgh International Airport continues to be one of the most important economic generators for Southwestern Pennsylvania. My administration has been a strong proponent of creating shovel-ready land, which refers to property that is cleared, has access to water, sewage and utilities, has all environmental clearances, and is ready to be developed. Creating shovel-ready land is the key to jumpstarting development, stimulating job growth and attracting new and expanding businesses within the airport corridor and the surrounding area.

In January 2006, the County and Airport Authority broke ground on Clinton Commerce Park, a 240-acre site in Findlay Township at the intersection of Route 60 and Clinton Road just north of Pittsburgh International. This event marked a milestone in the development of airport property.

The initial phase of development at Clinton Commerce Park is the preparation of a 100-acre parcel, containing five sites. Together, all five sites will allow for the development of 1.5 million square feet of buildings. When completed, it is estimated that 750 to 1,500 new jobs will be created at Clinton Commerce Park.

Site preparation—including infrastructure and utility connections—were made possible, in part, by a \$7.5-million Pennsylvania Community & Economic Development grant from Governor Ed Rendell. With the Governor and General Assembly's help, we are transforming the area around Pittsburgh International Airport into a major warehouse and distribution center that will create thousands of jobs.

Also in 2006, we assisted in the financing of a \$20-million flex/distribution redevelopment and expansion at the Imperial Business Park. I am pleased to report that the first 100,000-square-foot building is now complete.

As you know, the Findlay Connector opened last October, connecting Pittsburgh International Airport to Route 22 near the Allegheny County/Washington County border. This highway

opening, in conjunction with infrastructure projects currently being finalized in Findlay Township, will facilitate the development of more than 1,500 hundred acres of land near the Airport.

The County also successfully secured a state grant of \$7.0 million to help pay for infrastructure development at the North Field site adjacent to the Airport. This is arguably the most compelling development site in Southwestern Pennsylvania since it is adjacent to one of Pittsburgh International's runways.

In addition to development around the Airport, business and travel are booming at Pittsburgh International itself. Last year, JetBlue joined other low-cost carriers such as Southwest and Midwest at our Airport. JetBlue's arrival into the Pittsburgh market will provide tremendous opportunities for travelers from our region. The new flight service will open up competition for two of our most important business destinations, Boston and New York.

In 2006, Republic Airlines entered into a contract with the Airport Authority to lease Hangar 2, which totals more than 52,000 square feet. The company is also leasing 957 square feet of Airside Terminal space on the Mezzanine level for pilots and flights attendants who will be based here. Republic is already hiring personnel for both its maintenance and flight operations, and it estimated between 60-70 mechanics and 60-70 pilots and flight attendants will be employed at Pittsburgh International.

In addition, the Airport Authority and US Airways announced five-year lease extensions for Hangars 3, 4 and 5, as well as the special services building, cargo building, mail sort facility and ground service equipment maintenance facility. The hangars will be used for line maintenance on US Airways' Boeing and Airbus aircraft and heavy maintenance on its Airbus fleet.

Over the coming years, development in and around Pittsburgh International Airport will continue to drive our region's economy, and we will continue our efforts to promote growth in the airport corridor.

### **Medical, Educational & Research Institutions**

As you know, Allegheny County is home to world-class medical, educational and research institutions. These organizations play a vital role in the economic health of our region, and my administration works hard to ensure that these institutions continue to grow and thrive.

In 2006, Carnegie Mellon University received \$4.0 million in Commonwealth Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program funding for its Commercialization Center for Nano-Enabled Technologies. This research facility will link with industry to develop prototype products and may create as many as 400 direct technology jobs.

In addition, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh also received \$4.0 million in Commonwealth funding to expand the Pittsburgh Technology Center along the Monongahela River.

In 2006, Internet search giant Google opened its Pittsburgh office at Carnegie Mellon University and hired 30 software engineers. The company will continue to hire workers to develop search tools at its CMU location. With the addition of Google, Carnegie Mellon holds the honor of being the only location in the world where Microsoft, Intel and Google are housed under one roof.

As you know, Allegheny County's military facilities were threatened with closure in 2005, but our region rallied together and developed the concept of the Regional Joint Readiness Center to enhance homeland security, national defense and emergency response. During 2006, thanks to our local military, medical, business and emergency services community, we continued to make great strides toward making the RJRC a reality. The Center will coordinate with Western Pennsylvania military bases, local medical facilities and other emergency service providers to respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks or other security issues.

2006 also brought change to the Community College of Allegheny County, including policies to increase fiscal discipline and operational transparency. Today, CCAC is positioned for future growth and success. I am confident the College will continue to serve its students and our community well, while also enhancing its role in the economic recovery of our region. The College and its Board of Trustees have reacted swiftly and decisively to the needs of regional employers by producing highly qualified graduates that contribute to our skilled workforce.

I am especially proud of CCAC's state-of-the-art West Hills Center, which will become the home for workforce training in our region. We will do everything possible to help acquire state funding to support the continued renovation and development of the West Hills Center, as well as the construction of a new science building on the Allegheny Campus.

### **Community & Economic Development**

During 2006, our County authorities approved more than \$223 million in non-recourse funding for 15 projects that will help small manufacturing companies, municipalities, hospitals and institutions of higher education. In addition, another 11 loans and grants totaling nearly \$2.4 million are pending.

Of specific interest, are two projects—the Children's Home of Pittsburgh and Residential Resources, Inc.—which serve the special needs of individuals in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The Children's Home constructed a facility that houses an infant and pediatric transitional care hospital, a pediatric extended care center, and an adoption service facility. Residential Resources provides housing for individuals with mental health/mental retardation challenges by constructing, renovating and equipping rental facilities.

In addition, the Higher Education Building Authority is working with Carnegie Mellon University on a \$160-million project to improve its campus with new construction and renovations, including parking facilities and equipment acquisitions. This loan will be non-recourse funding that does not require guarantees by the County.

County Authorities have also worked with Duquesne University, Robert Morris University, UPMC, Jefferson Regional Medical Center, City of McKeesport and Dormont Borough, just to name a few.

Through our efforts to attract new jobs and new businesses and support new technology, we are revitalizing our towns and cities and making sure our talented workforce stays in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

In 2006, our Municipal Development Division provided \$3.3 million from the County's Community Development Block Program to finance 97 public improvement activities in 74 communities throughout Allegheny County. These projects will address potable water, sanitary sewage, storm water management, bridge and road reconstruction, retaining wall replacement, and ADA improvements.

We have also continued efforts to meet the increasing demand for demolition of vacant and hazardous structures in Allegheny County. Through the Safe Neighborhood Demolition Program, we are in the process of removing approximately 145 residential structures and 10 commercial structures in 32 different municipalities. This effort is made possible by Community Development Block Grants and State Housing Rehabilitation Assistance grants. The total expenditure is expected to be more than \$1.3 million.

Although many of the demolition activities are located at scattered sites, concentrated demolition efforts are underway in the City of Clairton, Borough of Wilkinsburg and Borough of Braddock. Concentrated demolition is preferred since removal of contiguous properties often provides adequately sized parcels of land for future development. This can be seen in the City of Clairton where a major redevelopment effort has been undertaken in the South Side Redevelopment area.

In 2006, our Municipal Recreation Program invested more than \$500,000 in 10 different municipal parks located in low- to moderate-income communities throughout Allegheny County. Activities include the rehabilitation of existing playgrounds and ball fields, construction of new park pavilions, development of walking and fitness trails, and design and construction of skate parks. These projects have a positive impact on our neighborhoods, thus improving quality of life.

Recent improvements in the Borough of Braddock illustrate the County's approach to a concentrated neighborhood revitalization effort by improving the basic infrastructure, rehabilitating the housing stock, and building new affordable housing. Most of the activities have occurred in a condensed target area of eight blocks primarily surrounding the Mapleview Terrace housing development.

Community Development Block Grant funding was used to complete the renovation of a building along the 800 block of Braddock Avenue to serve as the new home for the Braddock Employment and Training Center. The restored building reflects part of Braddock's heritage, and more importantly, the facility houses a workforce training provider. In addition, numerous other programs and services are offered to the residents of the greater Braddock area through the Center, and last year, 2,000 clients were served.

New affordable single-family housing construction is also underway on Verona, Maple Way, Holland and 4th streets, and 11 of 20 units have already been completed. Rehabilitation of seven of the proposed nine single-family units has also been completed on Frazier, Verona, Holland and 4th streets.

Our Single Family Bond Program continues to assist families with first-time home ownership. The mortgages we make available through Single Family Bond Funds are 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages, currently at 6.10 percent with no points. During 2006, more than 90 Allegheny County families have realized the dream of homeownership through our program.

My administration is strongly committed to providing citizens with the opportunity to achieve homeownership. I have made a special commitment to this goal by constructing new affordable houses in the Mon Valley, including homes in Homestead, Clairton, Rankin, Braddock, North Braddock and Duquesne. To date, my administration has provided funding for 155 new houses. This is some of the first housing developed in these communities in more than 20 years. Eighty-eight of these houses are now complete, 70 have been sold, and 67 are under construction and in planning phases.

The County has invested more than \$12 million of federal, state and local funds to build these homes, and our investment leveraged an additional \$13 million in funding. These are attractive new houses featuring three bedrooms, yards and porches, and they are affordably priced. In addition, their construction helps to rebuild the tax base in the Mon Valley and the County.

During 2006, I completed my municipal tour program, which provided me with an opportunity to learn about a variety of issues and problems facing our communities. Since taking office in January 2004, I have held more than 20 municipal tours and visited all 130 municipalities in Allegheny County.

Last fall, I undertook an initiative to revisit the communities hardest hit by the Hurricane Ivan flooding in September 2004. I met with local officials, homeowners, and business owners in Millvale, Carnegie, Oakdale, Sharpsburg, Etna, Shaler, Hampton, Bridgeville, Tarentum, and Heidelberg. While we were able to provide millions of dollars in assistance, there is still work to do. By visiting these communities, we got a clear picture of what still needs to be done and how we can help them rebound in the coming year.

Finally, we continue to develop the first-ever countywide Comprehensive Plan, a strategy to guide physical development, conservation and economic initiatives throughout Allegheny County. This plan will help us market our strengths to a broad audience and demonstrate that we are a logical place for people and businesses to locate, prosper and grow.

When completed, the plan will provide tools and guidance to local municipalities which will enable them to plan at a regional level rather than solely at a local level. In addition, the plan will clearly articulate to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania which of our communities are in compliance, and it will assist the Commonwealth in making sound investment decisions.

## **Brownfield Reclamation & Redevelopment**

Brownfield redevelopment is a key component of my strategy to revitalize our region. In 2005, the County acquired the Carrie Furnace site, the last large vacant brownfield site in the Mon Valley. This site will be a catalyst for additional development in surrounding communities like Swissvale, Rankin and Braddock. We have now completed the environmental aspects of the Carrie Furnace project and have begun infrastructure design work.

Redevelopment continues at the City Center of Duquesne and the Industrial Center of McKeesport, two sites that have largely sat idle since the collapse of the steel industry more than 20 years ago. During 2006, site grading and flyover work that will improve vehicular access proceeded in McKeesport, while blast furnace demolition and flyover work continued in Duquesne. To date, more than \$31 million has been committed to the Duquesne and McKeesport projects. This funding will allow us to continue cleaning up two major tracts of land and return them to viable economic use.

In 2006, a \$1.5-million hazardous and non-hazardous site cleanup began at the Firth Sterling Brownfield Development in McKeesport. We have also completed site acquisition at the Cochrandale Redevelopment site in Duquesne, and demolition and site grading has begun there. In addition, we are assessing the development potential for more than 2,000 acres of additional brownfields throughout Allegheny County.

In March 2006, I joined Governor Ed Rendell and Leetsdale Borough officials to break ground on a new overpass and access road at an at-grade crossing entering two major brownfield developments off Route 65. The new overpass will provide improved site access, relieve congestion and eliminate safety issues associated with a railroad crossing.

This project will allow us to realize the full potential of the Leetsdale Commerce Center, a 25-building, 1.4-million-square-foot industrial and commercial development, as well as the Leetsdale Industrial Park, a redevelopment featuring 1.5 million square feet of office, industrial and warehouse space.

Thanks to a \$275,000 Growing Greener II grant from the Commonwealth, the former American Electric Facility, a 4.3-acre site that is the largest vacant tract of land in Pittsburgh's Manchester neighborhood, will be reborn into a vibrant residential area.

In what is a true brownfield success story, American Textile Company is building an additional 83,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its headquarters in RIDC Park in Duquesne to expand its pillow manufacturing line, which will create up to 50 new jobs. American Textile is not only helping to return a brownfield to manufacturing use, it is bringing the promise of new jobs and economic viability to the region.

Finally, just last month, our Department of Economic Development submitted an application for a brownfield redevelopment loan to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to assist in our efforts to transform the 35-acre former Edgewater Steel location in Oakmont into a residential

community with townhouses and single-family residences that is seamlessly integrated into the fabric of the borough.

Not long ago, brownfields and abandoned industrial sites blighted our three rivers. But today, thanks to investments such as these, many of those places are now attracting new businesses and jobs, and they are fostering a better quality of life for local residents. These investments will play an important role in defining Allegheny County's future, while also helping to provide good-paying jobs for thousands of residents.

### **Assisting Distressed Areas**

As you know, there are many areas in our County that continue to struggle economically and socially. I have focused a number of initiatives to assist these distressed areas with housing, community and economic development.

Last year, I launched an effort to develop, fund and construct 10 community centers in neighborhoods throughout the County – a total investment of \$18 million. The Allegheny County Housing Authority and our Department of Economic Development are working together to make my vision a reality.

To date, the Myers Ridge Technology Center in McKees Rocks, Rankin Christian Center in Rankin Borough, Walnut Avenue Boys & Girls Club in the City of Duquesne, Pleasant Ridge Community Center in Stowe Township, Groveton Village Community Center in Robinson Township, and North Hills Community Outreach Center in Millvale have opened.

Four additional centers are in the design and planning stages of development. These include: Tarentum Senior Housing Community Center in Tarentum; Park Sheldon Community Center in Natrona Heights; Prospect Terrace Community Center in East Pittsburgh; and South Side Community Center in Clairton.

The development process for each center has been a partnership between the County, community groups, municipalities and school districts. The County has worked closely with each community to determine the types of programming and activities provided at each center. The Housing Authority and Economic Development have provided grants to cover construction costs of the facilities. Various community organizations, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania, have entered into agreements with the County to operate the facilities.

This is truly a win-win initiative. The community determines the needs, the County provides construction funds, and a non-profit operates the facility. For a minimal investment, we are providing these communities with critical recreational, educational and human service programs.

In June of last year, we broke ground for a new Save-A-Lot Grocery store in Wilkinsburg, which will be the borough's first grocery store in decades. Save-A-Lot will not only fill a long time void for residents, but it will also serve as a catalyst for additional economic development.

The 16,000 square-foot grocery store will be constructed at Stoner Alley & Ross Avenue in Wilkinsburg and offer a selection of fresh meat, produce and baked goods, as well as frozen foods and dairy.

Not far from the Save-A-Lot location, the County assisted in the renovation of the Sperling Building along Penn Avenue in Wilkinsburg's rebounding business district. The structure, originally built in 1902, has been renovated to include eight apartments and two commercial store fronts. An adjacent house was also refurbished as part of the project. The story of the Sperling Building is the story of Wilkinsburg itself—both fell on difficult times, but after lots of dedication and hard work, both have a bright future.

In the coming year, we will continue to help our most distressed communities return to prosperity.

### **Government Efficiency & Effectiveness**

My administration remains committed to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations and reducing the cost of government. As you know, every year since I took office, I have proposed, and Council has approved, balanced budgets with no tax increases and without using the County's fund balance.

We have also demonstrated that it is possible to increase operational efficiency and reduce government costs through cooperation and consolidation. We collapsed the City of Pittsburgh's fingerprinting operation into the County's, and we merged the Pittsburgh municipal court with the County court system. And in a two-year period, we reduced the number of 9-1-1 call centers from five to one by consolidating them into the Allegheny County 9-1-1 Center.

Last October, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and I announced the creation of the Citizens Advisory Committee on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of City-County Government. The Committee, chaired by University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Mark Nordenberg, is charged with identifying ways to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government in this region by working together.

And just in the last seven days, the Mayor and I have announced a joint telecommunications contract and joint purchasing agreement, which will save taxpayers millions of dollars (I will be forwarding amendments to Council regarding the joint purchasing agreement). Throughout the coming year, I will continue to look for ways to further streamline County operations.

### **Expanding & Enhancing Recreational Opportunities**

Our rivers, parks and exceptional landscape offer endless opportunities for recreational activities. In 2006, Allegheny County took steps to enhance recreational opportunities and improve the quality of life for our citizens and those visiting our region.



As you know, Council passed and I signed into law an ordinance that will lead to a 128-mile long riverfront park along the Allegheny, Monongahela, Ohio and Youghiogheny rivers. The finished park will become the County's tenth regional park, and it will touch more than half of Allegheny County's 130 municipalities. The riverfront park will also hold the distinction as the world's longest urban linear park.

This landmark park takes Allegheny County's commitment to reclaiming, rejuvenating and conserving our riverfronts to the next level. The countywide riverfront park will be an international draw for recreation and tourism, and it will also be a tremendous economic development tool for our region. Businesses want to locate in communities that offer a high quality of life and a wide range of activities, and the new riverfront park will add to both of these in Allegheny County.

The County Parks, Public Works and Economic Development departments have begun the process of mapping and planning the riverfront park. I want to especially commend Councilmen Burn and Fawcett for their vision and dedication to this effort.

Another landmark moment took place last year when I announced a revised lease agreement with the Horticultural Society of Western Pennsylvania, which Council approved, to provide a 452-acre parcel in Settler's Cabin Park for the Botanic Garden of Western Pennsylvania. The agreement will allow the Horticultural Society to develop, construct and operate the Garden on the County-owned land.

The Botanic Garden will transform a brownfield site into a regional attraction and leader in education, conservation and research. It will also be an economic engine for Southwestern Pennsylvania, and I am thrilled that Allegheny County could provide land for this remarkable project.

It is estimated the Botanic Garden will draw more than 300,000 visitors annually, ranking it among the region's most visited attractions. This level of activity is expected to create approximately \$38 million in direct business volume impact within 10 years of the Garden's opening, growing to \$63 million within 15 years. The Botanic Garden will also have a significant multiplier effect on the regional economy, including 500 indirect jobs in garden-related and home improvement industries.

Before construction begins, the site will undergo a complete reclamation involving the excavation of abandoned coal mines and removal of all polluted material, including acidic mine drainage that adversely affects local communities and tributaries of the Ohio River.

The Commonwealth's Department of Community & Economic Development has provided \$5.0 million to help finance the estimated \$30-million cost of Phase One of the project. A demonstration garden is expected to open in summer 2008.

In August, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources awarded 19 Community Conservation Partnership Grants totaling \$2.8 million for recreation and conservation projects in Allegheny County. The grants were awarded to recreation projects that

focus on community planning and infrastructure improvements. Funding for the grants comes from Growing Greener II, a voter-approved \$625-million bond issue, and Keystone '93, a DCNR fund generated from a portion of the realty transfer tax.

Some of the projects benefiting from the grants include: \$215,000 for renovation of parks in the City of McKeesport; \$150,000 for improvements and accessibility upgrades to McNeilly Road Park in Mount Lebanon; \$200,000 to Sewickley Borough for the construction of a boat launch and other improvements to Sewickley Riverfront Park; and \$40,000 for development of the Riverfront Rail Back Channel Bridge in Millvale.

Last fall, the County helped to break ground on the Tarentum Skate Park, and we opened the new 15,000-square-foot Boyce Skate Park. Not only is Boyce the largest skate park in the region, but it is also the best. We asked for input from young skaters and bikers, and the result is an impressive facility that will draw boarders, bikers and bladers from around the region. Another skate facility is currently out to bid for South Park, and one may be built in North Park as well.

The Boyce Park winter sports facilities are undergoing \$1.0 million in renovations, including construction of a new snowtubing area, installation of two new magic carpet lifts, upgrades to existing chairlifts, and installation of a new sanitary sewer system. These exciting renovations will attract more winter sports enthusiasts to Boyce Park and enhance the overall activities provided by the Allegheny County Parks system. Funding for the project comes from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Regional Asset District, and Allegheny County.

Just a few weeks ago, I announced the addition of 65 acres of land to North Park. The land, a brownfield situated in Hampton Township and contiguous to the park, will initially be used as a collection site for material dredged from North Park Lake. Once the dredging project is completed, the site will be converted to usable park land.

This is another successful example of Allegheny County converting brownfields into greenfields. This former industrial site will not only allow us to perform the critical dredging project to return North Park Lake to its former glory, but it will also add acres of recreational and green space to the park.

During the coming months, I hope to announce a major initiative regarding our County Parks, and my administration will continue to look for ways to expand recreation and conserve our County's natural beauty and resources.

### **Enhancing Health & Human Services**

One of the most important functions of County government is caring for the health and wellbeing of our residents.

Last October, I announced a first-of-its kind action plan that will give Allegheny County residents access to a continuum of care that includes home-based care, adult daily living services,

independent living units, personal care units, dementia units, rehabilitation services and skilled nursing.

The changes we are implementing at the Kane Centers will not only respond to the changing needs of our population, but they will also enable us to erase the Kane Centers' deficit for 2006 and operate the Centers at a break-even level for the foreseeable future.

All four Kane Centers will continue to provide residential skilled-nursing care for up to 1,067 residents needing nursing home care. My plan will transform the Kane Centers in Glen Hazel and Ross Twp. into comprehensive living centers that offer a spectrum of short- and long-term residential and non-residential services. The Kane Centers in McKeesport and Scott Twp. will continue to provide residential skilled-nursing care and rehabilitation services.

Fourteen new independent living units and a 30-person personal care unit will be developed at the Kane Center in Glen Hazel, and the Center will retain capacity for 210 skilled-nursing residents. Glen Hazel will also house a training center for the Kane Centers' workforce.

The Kane Center in Ross Twp. will retain capacity for 240 skilled-nursing residents, while two new personal care units for up to 60 individuals will be created. The County will also develop residential housing units on two acres of land adjacent to the facility, and it will work to create a LIFE Center within the new development. Approximately six acres of land near the facility will be sold.

To assist human service professionals, teachers and counselors, as well as individuals who are seeking services for themselves or family members, the County launched HumanServices.net, a database of 3,000 social service and related agencies that connects users to information on 10,000 programs. HumanServices.net searches for programs by neighborhood, zip code, school district or bus route, and search results are displayed on a map with convenient driving directions or public transportation instructions.

Last August, we unveiled plans for a Family Activity Center, which will transform the lobby of the Allegheny County Jail into a more child-friendly atmosphere. Many of the Jail's visitors are children of inmates, and sometimes their wait can be long. This new center will allow us to make their visit a more comfortable and positive one, while providing their caregivers with important resources.

The Family Activity Center will offer a craft area, video nook and book corner, as well as mock visiting booths to help children prepare for visits. Full-time employees and trained volunteers will offer caregivers information on services and resources important to the wellbeing of children. The center is thought to be the first in the United States where children will be able to engage in activities and caregivers will have access to needed information.

Finally, the County began construction on a new public health lab, which includes a Biosafety Level 3 facility. The new health lab will be equipped to handle exotic and deadly viruses and bacteria, such as anthrax and avian flu. This new facility will also enable the County Health Department to upgrade its routine day-to-day testing for many naturally occurring infectious diseases, including ordinary seasonal influenza.

## **Ensuring Public Safety**

My administration is committed to ensuring the safety of our citizens, and in 2006, we made good on that promise. We increased the size of our County Police force with the addition of 42 new police officers, which will enable us to provide critical public safety services throughout the County.

We also completed the consolidation of the County's 9-1-1 regional call centers, expanding upon the consolidation of the City of Pittsburgh's call center in 2005. Together, these consolidations have created a more efficient system to handle emergencies across Allegheny County.

The motivation for consolidation was to improve public safety, because placing all 9-1-1 dispatchers under one roof maximizes the coordination of our resources during an emergency.

I am proud of the County's 9-1-1 call center, and I am confident that we are well equipped to handle emergencies. I am also proud that we accomplished these consolidations while maintaining excellent services to our municipalities.

## **Embracing Diversity**

Allegheny County has a wealth of talented, energetic and diverse people who should be involved at every level of decision making. I believe our County will be best served when boards, authorities, commissions and other bodies fairly represent the diversity of County residents, including gender, race, age, geography, disability status and other factors.

In December, I signed an executive order that directs the County to develop and maintain a database of all boards, authorities, commissions and other entities over which the Chief Executive has appointment power, including information on the purpose, duties, composition and terms for each body. In addition, information regarding the age, sex, race, disability status and home municipality of each appointee currently serving will be gathered. The database will be available on the County's web site, as will a list of all current vacancies and positions that are scheduled to become vacant within 90 days.

This fair and open appointment process will ensure that the composition, outlook and diversity of County residents are reflected on our boards, authorities and commissions. These positions will provide an entry point for future leaders to engage in civic activities and the political process, and appointees will serve as role models for various social, economic and cultural segments of our County.

Finally, last fall, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and I announced the formation of the Allegheny County-City of Pittsburgh Women's Commission. The Commission will identify and advance the diverse needs and interests of women within Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh, while also informing, educating and advocating for women.

## **The Year Ahead**

The year ahead will continue to pose challenges and opportunities for all of us in Allegheny County.

We will continue to negotiate a deal with the Penguins to keep the team here in Pittsburgh where it belongs, and I am confident that we will succeed.

Allegheny County will also continue to pursue new and expanding business opportunities, such as Westinghouse Electric, to maintain the economic momentum we have built over the past few years.

During 2007, we will form a presidential committee at CCAC, and a blue ribbon panel of higher education and business leaders will benchmark CCAC against some of the nation's best community colleges. The panel's work will provide a more complete understanding of the challenges facing community colleges throughout the country, and this will help guide the search for CCAC's next president.

Finally, as you know, the Port Authority of Allegheny County is facing two decades of legacy costs and questionable management decisions, which have led to a projected deficit of approximately \$80 million for Fiscal Year 2008 if no action is taken. These costs must be addressed this year if we hope to preserve public transportation in our County. The Port Authority has proposed reductions in routes, vehicles and workforce to address its operating deficit, and the agency is in the process of holding eight public hearings to gather public input and comments on its proposals.

Let me emphasize that the Port Authority will continue to provide public transportation throughout Allegheny County, and it will maintain night and weekend service. ACCESS, which provides transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities, will remain unchanged, and, in fact, ACCESS ridership is expected to expand as more people take advantage of the service.

This restructuring must be done before we lobby Harrisburg for a dedicated funding source for mass transit. At the end of the day, this will not be the same Port Authority we are used to, but it will be a more fiscally responsible and efficient Port Authority.

During the next six months, I will work with Port Authority staff and board members to craft a plan that preserves mass transit service across our County and returns the Port Authority to solvency.

The accomplishments that I have discussed this evening are a testament to the hard work and dedication of my departmental directors and our County employees. I am confident they will again rise to the challenges that face us in 2007.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with Council in the coming year.