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Sussex County

DELAWARE
sussexcountyde.gov

(302) 855-7743 T
(302) 855-7749 F

Guest Editorial

August 6, 2012

By Michael H. Vincent
Sussex County Council President

In just a few weeks, another summer season here in Sussex County will fade away into the history books. Our resort businesses will put the wraps on what has hopefully been another successful season. Local farmers will take to the fields to harvest their corn and soybeans. And children will head back to the classroom for another year of learning in our local schools.

Summer is winding down. But we're just getting warmed up here in Sussex County.

This summer, and the year so far, has been a busy and productive time for Sussex County Council, from recording a multi-million dollar surplus that resulted in taxpayers receiving a one-time credit to securing federal funds for two very important projects that will help add jobs to the economy.

As Council president, I thought I would take a few moments to review some of the many things that we have been working on.

Since this time last year, the County Council has appointed a new county administrator, Todd Lawson, who has brought energy, enthusiasm and a new perspective to County government. Todd is extremely focused on finding new ways to streamline operations and make us more efficient, all with the goal of making County government responsive to the people it serves.

Some of the other major highlights in the last 12 months include:

- Renewing the County's commitment to improving healthier living among our residents, especially young people, by supporting trails initiatives and participating in the first-ever Sussex Outdoors summit, which was aimed at drawing attention to the nation's obesity crisis;
- Approving a program that will offer economic incentives to new or existing businesses. The cornerstone of the program will be an abatement of County property taxes over a 10-year period, up to \$800, for each job created. To qualify, businesses would have to create at least 10 new positions based here in Sussex County;
- Earning another bond upgrade, to AA+, reflecting the County's strong financial health and continued commitment to carefully managing the public's dollars;

- Recording the most significant surplus in five years, approximately \$3.5 million. Cost-saving measures, including limiting new hires, delaying purchases, and consolidating operations, over the past few years have helped the County operate within its current revenue;
- Working with federal officials, including Delaware's Congressional delegation, to secure \$1.8 million in federal funding to pay for dredging the Nanticoke River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project will deepen the main channel to 12 feet;
- Refinancing more than \$60 million in sewer construction debt to capitalize on low-interest loans, netting an overall savings of approximately \$8 million that will be passed on to County sewer customers in the years ahead;
- Securing a \$3.7 million pledge in State funding for the Sussex County Airport runway extension project. The grant will go toward the final phase to extend the runway to a full 6,000 feet. A separate grant approval, for \$3.1 million, announced in July 2012 by the FAA, will allow the initial phase of construction – the first 500-foot extension – to begin later this month;
- Successfully petitioning the Delaware General Assembly to change State code to allow the County government to set its annual capitation tax. With that change, the County was able to drop to zero the customary \$3-per-person charge;
- Adopting a \$121 million budget earlier this summer, one that keeps taxes unchanged for the 23rd year in a row. The budget includes a one-time tax credit for taxpayers thanks to an earlier surplus that returns more than \$1 million to the taxpayers;
- Implementing a new, lowered \$1 flat fee for credit card payments for customers who want to pay their tax bills online.

We're proud of the many accomplishments the County has achieved on behalf of the taxpayers, but we are not resting on our laurels.

In the months ahead, the County will take on other proactive projects, including implementing a state-of-the-art computer software upgrade to integrate County departments; redesigning the County website to freshen the look and improve functionality; and adding more training for County staff to ensure employees are providing the best service possible.

It is my pledge to our constituents that Sussex County Council will continue to find ways to always keep improving so that we remain the best local government in Delaware.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Vincent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael H. Vincent