

**Parma Mayor Tim DeGeeter's State of the City Address**  
***Delivered February 25, 2019 at Tri-C Western Campus***

Good evening ....

Thank you for being here ....

I'm honored to serve as your mayor and to talk to you this evening about Parma ....

I'm also honored to serve alongside hardworking public servants .... All of us are committed to moving Parma forward ....

Parma's citywide elected officials ....

Members of City Council with us ....

Other officials here tonight ....

And, finally, members of my Cabinet staff ....

I also want to recognize my wife, Pam, and our two incredible children, Jack and Molly .... Thank you for the sacrifices you make so I can focus on doing my job for the residents of this community ....

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Each year, I pick a different location for the State of the City — a place of significance for Parma and for those who live and work here ....

And that brings me to where we are this evening — the galleria on the Western Campus of Cuyahoga Community College ....

I want to thank President Donna Imhoff and Tri-C for hosting us ....

Tri-C is a real partner with the city ....

The Western Campus is now home to Parma's Rib-N-Rock, and it hosted The Traveling Vietnam Wall this summer — an incredibly moving experience for everyone ....

At the school's Advanced Automotive Technology Center, students receive training in an industry essential to Parma .... At its Public Safety facility, Tri-C offers classes and training for our first responders ....

Now, Tri-C is in the midst of constructing a \$34 million STEM Center that will feature lab and classroom space for science, technology, engineering and math courses ....

The project incorporates the needs of our community by giving students educational and workplace experience in these cutting-edge fields .... This is essential as companies seek workers in an economy ever more dependent on adapting to new technology ....

But at its core, Tri-C's main mission is providing students with the skills they need for today and in the future .... at an affordable cost ....

And there is no shortage of Parma residents who have seized upon the opportunity Tri-C provides ....

Matt Fish .... a hometown kid who started his career at a restaurant here and became the entrepreneur behind Melt ....

Ryan Jasany .... a resident who made a career change with the help of Tri-C and transitioned into IT ....

And Christopher Kafcsak .... who lives in Parma and now owns Nomad Culinary ....

These are just three examples of people from our community who are living their dreams with the help of Tri-C ....

When I think of them, I'm reminded that Parma is full of success stories .... from the people who live and work here .... to the businesses — big and small — who call our city home ....

This evening, I'm going to focus on our success stories .... how we're supporting and creating opportunities in our city .... and how we're confronting challenges to turn those around, too ....

This is — the state of our city ....

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When talking about our success stories, we have to look no further than the transformation of the former Parmatown Mall into The Shoppes at Parma .... a more than \$90 million redevelopment ....

About seven years ago, we saw a mall in receivership with little traffic and more pigeons in the parking lot than cars .... But now, there is foot traffic and shoppers going in-and-out of stores .... like Old Navy, Rally House, and A.C. Moore .... and into eateries such as Naf Naf Grill, Piada, and Panera .... And soon, we will see people shopping at Burlington and Five Below — which I anticipate will be a requested destination by my kids ....

So, instead of a dying mall in northeast Ohio, we have a center almost fully leased up .... I want to thank PECO Real Estate Partners and the Shoppes' manager, Michelle Devlin, for helping give life to a vital destination in our city ....

It also has given life as a centerpiece to our on-going efforts to incorporate all of the nearby community assets into a Town Center ....

To do that, we've been working with the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission to develop a master plan to take advantage of those resources .... such as the Day Drive Corridor, UH Parma Medical Center, Byers Field, City Hall, Anthony Zielinski Park, and the Ridgewood Golf Course ....

Last year, the county planning commission sought public input through meetings and online surveys to help formulate ideas for the area .... This spring, the city should receive a draft of the master plan from the commission .... A document that will help us unlock the potential of this important part of our community even more ....

In addition to the county planning commission, I want to thank the County Executive, the County Councilman, Councilmen Dennis Kish and Al Divis for what they're doing to move forward this Town Center concept forward ....

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Beyond the Shoppes and our emerging Town Center, we have a success story familiar to us, but that people throughout the region are rediscovering – our great neighborhoods and small businesses .... and the pride that exists in these communities ....

You can smell that pride when walking past our bakeries in Polish and Ukrainian villages .... You can hear it when listening to the bells toll from our church steeples .... You can see it when passing the Lenten season fish fries throughout the city ....

You can taste it, too .... And not just on Paczki Day – although that's a great day to do so ....

Fox 8's New Day Cleveland got a taste of Parma when it took a food tour of our city .... When the segment aired on President's Day, there wasn't an area in Parma that went unnoticed as the show featured .... Chuppa's .... Rudy's Strudel .... Colozza's Bakery .... State Road Meats .... Mission BBQ .... Corleone's .... Pinzone's .... Tarboosh Eatery .... And more ....

The show certainly brought great exposure to our community .... Fast Eddie's at the Shoppes had a two-hour wait for tables shortly after New Day Cleveland's TV story aired ....

It's also important to point out that the diversity that New Day Cleveland found in its tour symbolizes on a micro level the diverse and unique nature of our neighborhoods overall .... That's a source of strength for us as we seek to keep and attract residents to our city .... Beyond our close proximity to Cleveland – our neighborhoods – and what they offer – are reasons why millennials – for example – have discovered Parma as an attractive place to start their lives ....

You can find a celebration of what I'm talking about in the Twitter feed of the Young Professionals of Parma .... But not only do they actively promote it through social media, they also recently highlighted it through their first annual Parma Pizza Bake Off in January at German Central .... I was there with my daughter, and it was a very successful charity event .... I want to thank the Young Professionals for all they do for our community ....

It's also important to recognize City Council President Sean Brennan for his efforts in promoting our city .... He raised money and secured funding for a "script" Parma sign soon to be on display this spring in Anthony Zielinski Park near the splash pad .... It should produce social media buzz and plenty of Instagram pictures ....

I also want to thank Chelsey Kovar — a Tri-C grad — for her hard work in highlighting all that our city offers .... Last year, Chelsey started, at her own cost, the Best of Parma contest, which drew considerable excitement among residents and businesses .... This year, there are now 45 categories, including favorites such as Best Restaurant and Best Bakery as well as new ones, including Best School Spirit and Best Area to Shop ....

Voting on Chelsey's website — [allofherdesign.com](http://allofherdesign.com) — has been going on for nearly a month and will end March 1 .... Winners will be announced Friday, March 8th ....

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As the Best of Parma contest suggests, our neighborhoods offer so many options for our city's residents .... And the best thing about this — they're only growing stronger ....

In the West Creek-Quarry District, there are several cool spots — such as The Little Birdie Wine Nest and Gentile's — that are emerging as popular destinations ....

This dovetails nicely with the city's on-going efforts to reshape the area into an even more livable and walkable district .... a rebrand that encompasses the nearby recreation, transportation, and development opportunities already there ....

I want to thank West Creek and its Executive Director Derek Schafer for their partnership on this .... I also want to thank Councilwoman Kristin Saban and former Councilman, current State Representative Jeff Crossman, and Councilman Roy Jech for their efforts in bolstering the West Creek-Quarry District ....

And while that part of our city realizes renewed interest, our Polish and Ukrainian villages are continuing to see their reputations grow in northeast Ohio and beyond ....

Thousands of visitors continue to attend the Polish Constitution Day Parade and after party .... The village's Treat-and-Greet is thriving .... And the small businesses there are working hard to make this area a destination .... I want to thank Councilwoman Debbie Lime for all of the time she puts into this essential area of her ward ....

Meanwhile, over on State Road, our Ukrainian Village has received overseas attention .... This summer, the mayor of the Ukrainian city of Ternopil visited Ukrainian Village and toured all of Parma .... He soaked up as much as he could from that experience to see if what he learned here could strengthen his city ....

It was a real opportunity to showcase our community .... And there is a natural connection with our two cities .... We're home – as you can see at the Ukrainian Independence Day Parade – to Ohio's largest Ukrainian population, many of whom emigrated from Ternopil .... I'm looking forward to developing this relationship as we try to foster possible economic development opportunities and cultural exchanges with our two communities ....

I also want to mention when talking about Ukrainian Village the work that Councilman Mark Casselberry and Councilwoman Saban are doing for the area .... Thank you ....

And in late-breaking news, County Council has recommended a \$50,000 grant to Ukrainian Village and Polish Village to supplement on-going streetscape projects .... You can see this effort already when driving past St. Josaphat and its golden domes .... Thank you to County Executive Armond Budish and County Councilman Scott Tuma for their help in securing much-needed dollars to the city's neighborhood beautification programs ....

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To keep neighborhoods like Ukrainian Village and others across the city strong, the city administration and Council have put a major emphasis on maintaining our existing housing stock ....

More than 25,000 building and property maintenance inspections were completed last year .... We invested \$365,000 in block grant funds to improve sidewalks, streetscapes, and storefronts .... We leveraged \$100,000 in home improvements for seniors and low-income homeowners .... And we continued to demolish vacant and neglected homes to make sure our neighborhoods remain stable .... Since 2008, we've demolished 100 homes ....

These policies are effective ....

I want to thank Economic Development & Community Services Director Erik Tollerup and Assistant Building Commissioner Don Graves – and all of our inspectors – for the work they do to maintain our housing stock ....

But as they can tell you, we don't do this alone .... We have so many homeowners across Parma who invest money, time, and sweat equity in their houses ....

You can see that in the level of participation in our Holiday Lights Contest run by the Young Professionals ....

And you certainly see that neighborhood pride in the example of David Rusnik ....

For decades, he has plowed his neighbor's driveway on Sary Drive, sometimes several times a day, at no cost .... And he does it for other senior neighbors, too .... We named him Citizen of the Month, but he declined to attend a Council meeting when we honored him .... David said he was just being a good neighbor and "not doing anything out of the ordinary" .... He even suggested others were more deserving .... But, eventually, David got the award when I delivered it to him at the home of the neighbor who nominated him ....

"Not doing anything out of the ordinary" .... Those are the good and selfless people who live in our neighborhoods ....

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When taken together – our neighborhoods, the city's efforts to maintain them, and the good people who live in them – it leads to another Parma success story: our rising home values ....

While our owner occupation rate – which remains at a strong 74 percent – helped us mitigate some of the effects of the Great Recession, our housing values plummeted in the aftermath .... At our lowest point, in 2015, the median sales price was \$85,000 ....

But our housing values have rebounded .... And there is a high demand for Parma homes ....

Even since 2017, the median sales price is up 11.6 percent to about \$120,400 .... Meanwhile, the median list price now is nearly \$122,000 .... The \$1,600 difference between the two reveals that those selling their homes essentially are getting their asking price ....

But that's not all .... Parma is carrying only 1.6 months of housing inventory, down 20 percent from 2016 – a figure that shows real stability in our neighborhoods ....

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Some of the success stories I've shared – the revitalized housing market, the redevelopment at The Shoppes – came after the city confronted challenges ....

Another challenge we're facing – and trying to turn into a success – is fixing and rebuilding our streets and aging infrastructure ....

This is no easy task ....

The city's responsible for maintaining and improving 583 lane miles of roads .... Equivalent to a one-way road trip to North Carolina ....

This major priority has been made even more difficult when realizing Parma has lost about \$31.5 million in state funds since 2009 – a reality that has put a great strain on all of our funds, including those used for repairing our streets ....

Nevertheless, we are committed to fixing and rebuilding our roads in a fiscally responsible way .... We've done that by seeking and receiving millions of dollars each year in county, state, and federal grants and zero-interest loans .... We also do this by working with our partners, including Cuyahoga County Public Works, the Ohio Department of Transportation, and the Army Corps of Engineers, among others ....

Last year, Parma invested about \$3.8 million to reconstruct and repair streets throughout Parma .... For instance, working with the county and North Royalton, crews put down an asphalt overlay on Sprague Road between York and West 130th Street .... The city also undertook the Ridge Road resurfacing project from Pleasant Valley Road to our border with North Royalton ....

On another road improvement that you're probably familiar with, we worked with the county to expedite the resurfacing of Pleasant Valley Road from State and Broadview roads to ensure work was completed by the end of the year .... And this year begins the highly anticipated \$1.5 million resurfacing of Broadview Road ....

I want to thank City Council and all of our elected officials – such as Auditor Brian Day and Treasurer Tom Mastroianni – for their strong support – and advocacy – in improving our roads ....

But it's not just our streets on which we are focused .... Parma is committed to maintaining what's beneath .... In our agreement with the county's Public Works Department, we invested more than \$4 million on the upkeep of our sewer system ....

The city also is working closely with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District to confront a regional problem that is acutely felt locally .... Storm water runoff ....

Last year, as part of our plan to attack this, the administration and City Council used \$400,000 from our share of the district's Storm Water Fund to repair and replace 117 catch basins throughout the city's main streets .... This year, we'll invest another \$650,000 on 135 catch basins within residential neighborhoods ....

In addition to those efforts, the city also is working to improve the capacity of our larger basins to tackle potential flooding ....

The Bonnie Banks project near Stormes Drive and Gross Drive – just west of York Road – is a perfect example ....

In 2014, we met with neighbors who lived near the detention basin after serious flooding occurred there .... It's an area with a history of flooding ....

All of us from the city – including Service Director Brian Higgins, Councilman Brian Brochetti, and myself – told residents we understood their frustration and would systematically tackle the problem ....

And we did ....

Service crews soon dredged the basin after clearing it ....

The mitigation effort worked .... There were no reports of flooding afterwards ....

However, we wanted to make sure there was a permanent solution ....

We turned to our partners at the sewer district and – because of our close collaboration – it took control of the basin .... This past fall, a \$634,000 excavation project began at the site to improve the detention basin even further ....

By systematically attacking infrastructure problems such as this – or the \$2 million Chevrolet Detention Basin project – we are confronting long-term challenges and turning them into successes ....

I want to thank Service Director Higgins, Engineering and Building Commissioner Paul Deichmann, and Assistant Engineer Hasmukh Patel for helping spearhead these efforts ....

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Another Parma success – in addition to tackling our aging infrastructure – is the strength of our business community ....

It's vital for our city .... That's because we need to continue to expand the number of jobs here – not only to grow our economy, but to give people the ability to work where they live ....

And as we look at our economy, more often than not, we turn toward GM's Parma Metal Center – our city's biggest employer ....

When GM announced its restructuring plan late last year, people wondered what that meant for our stamping plant .... I know that .... because I got the calls ....

But in short, our stamping plant is going strong and is well positioned in the future ....

As a result of smart business decisions, the plant, a few years ago, began focusing on support for trucks, SUVs, and crossovers .... That's exactly where the market is today and one of the main reasons why the plant continues to thrive ....

Beyond GM, our health-care sector also is strong ....

University Hospital's Parma Medical Center – our city's second largest employer – is an example of that ....

In the fall, the hospital announced a \$27.5 million renovation and expansion of its surgery department, a move that will benefit the quality of health care for our residents .... This two-year project is the largest undertaking at the facility in more than 33 years ....

UH also is making other upgrades, including a \$3 million linear acceleration system and a \$2 million MRI machine ....

Another healthcare provider in our community – MetroHealth – also is planning a major investment in its medical center to upgrade and rebrand the facility's façade .... That comes after MetroHealth turned the center into a micro-hospital with 16 single-occupancy rooms – a \$12 million conversion that created more than two dozen jobs ....

We also have newer companies in Parma that are investing here, too ....

In June, PITT Ohio expects to complete construction of its 100,000 square-foot trucking terminal complex and will employ more than 200 people .... It's our largest job-creation project in more than a decade ....

The facility will feature innovative sustainability systems, including wind and solar, in an attempt to power the complex without being on the electrical grid ....

This is an innovative project ....

Another company we're excited to have in Parma is GES-AGM, a graphite fabrication facility that makes parts for the oil and gas and airline industries .... The company in the fall of 2017 purchased a building on the former GrafTech campus and is now headquartered there ....

The company has added machinists and a second shift and recently announced plans to expand .... Eventually, they want to put a warehouse at the location as well ....

GES-AGM has 47 employees at the facility and expects to add at least another 20 with the expansion .... And it is investing heavily in new products and technology to grow even more ....

I believe we have representatives from the company here this evening .... Thank you for your investment in our community .... You are certainly a company to watch and a good story for Parma ....

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Another enduring community success is in the outstanding work of our safety forces and first responders ....

Parma is a safe city .... In fact, we are one of the safest cities for our size .... In large measure, that's because of the job our firefighters and police officers do in our community ....

I want to thank the women and men in uniform who put their lives on the line every day to protect us .... I also want to thank Police Chief Joe Bobak and Fire Chief Mike Lasky as well as Safety Director Tom Weinreich for their leadership ....

One of the reasons both our police and fire departments are so effective and efficient is that they are regional leaders in the use of technology to deliver great services .... and save lives ....

Our fire department is on the cutting-edge of para-medicine .... Partnering with University Hospitals, our paramedics use iPads to give doctors and nurses real-time patient assessments – *before* arriving at the emergency room .... This significantly improves the care patients receive in our ambulances, and it allows physicians to quickly determine the best course of treatment .... This leading-edge care saves time so our first responders can save lives ....

Our police department, too, is deploying technology in a way that is creating efficiencies and savings .... When our officers write traffic tickets .... they are no longer writing them .... Instead, our department uses e-citations .... This paperless system has saved clerks at least 30 hours of work each week .... And has significantly cut down on the use of paper, saving the city money ....

This year, the department also is expected to unveil body-worn cameras, another new technology initiative paid for through a \$135,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice .... This is an initiative our police officers and Economic Development Officer and Grants Writer Shelley Cullins have been working diligently on .... and something Councilman Vito Dipierro has supported since his first days on council ....

Perhaps the most challenging problem our safety forces must confront is in their almost-daily fight against the opioid crisis ....

They are the ones on the front lines .... They are the ones who carry Narcan with them and use it to save the lives .... I want to thank University Hospitals for providing this antidote free of charge to our first responders .... It truly has meant the difference between life and death ....

Last year, we sent a message about this scourge when the city sued the opioid manufacturers and distributors .... And I appreciate Law Director Tim Dobeck, State Representative Jeff Crossman, and all of council for their advocacy on this ....

Our suit is among hundreds of others filed by cities across the country – all of which are now before a federal judge in Cleveland ....

Beyond the lawsuit, we felt the need for an even more pro-active approach .... We wanted to connect people to the treatment they need ....

That's why we sought – and received – an \$87,500 grant from the state to do exactly that .... We used those funds to create a Quick Response Team consisting of a police officer, paramedic, and a MetroHealth-provided social worker .... The team screens individuals who overdose and, then, visits those determined to be potential candidates for treatment ....

This program, I'm proud to say, has achieved some real successes .... Since starting in April of last year, the team has made visits to 85 individuals or their families, providing counseling as well as Narcan kits .... In one case, we learned that a week after a team visit, a family used the kit supplied to them to save the life of their loved one ....

Dozens of overdose victims have sought guidance on where they could find treatment .... These are people who are trying to free themselves of their addictions ....

Thank you to the police officers and paramedics involved in this innovative program as well as Shelley Cullins.... I also want to give a big thanks to MetroHealth for partnering with us ....

Now, when you think about Parma's success story as a safe city – we wouldn't have that without the support of our residents who report possible crimes, check on their neighbors, and help our police officers and firefighters ....

I can't think of a better example of this than our youngest EVER Citizen of the Month – Four-year-old Lucas ....

At the Parma Treat & Greet this fall, Lucas met police K-9 Dexter .... Afterwards, Lucas told his mother he wanted to give Christmas presents to our police dogs ....

At first, he thought he could raise money by doing chores around the house .... That wasn't enough, though ....

Then, he thought about a lemonade stand .... But, you know, it's winter ....

Eventually, his mom, Becky, took to Facebook to explain what her son had in mind .... They raised \$300 to spend on the dogs for balls and biscuits – and even received donated Mission BBQ gift cards ....

I believe Lucas is in the audience this evening .... Lucas, why don't you stand up so we can thank you for what you're doing to make a Parma success story ....

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While our reputation as a safe city is a community success, so too is the quality of life we enjoy here ....

One of the reasons for that rests in our educational institutions ....

Tri-C – as I mentioned in my opening – is a major part of that ....

The Cuyahoga County Public Library and its two state-of-the-art library branches also provide essential education and training programs to our residents .... I want to thank Executive Director Sari Feldman and her administration for being such a valuable partner to us ....

And we work closely with another critical institution in our city – the Parma City School District ....

For example, the district, the city, and the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce are partnering on a pilot program at Parma Senior High School .... Called the Parma Youth Leadership Academy, the project will teach emerging student leaders essential leadership skills for future careers and personal development ....

Through a grant from AT&T, the program is managed by the Effective Leadership Academy, a non-profit out of Warrensville Heights that provides similar programming in other schools and cities near us ....

This project is an evolution of the Parma Youth Commission ....

I want to thank AT&T and ELA Founder Flo Brett for putting this together .... I want to thank Dave Nedrich and the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce for working on this pilot .... Dave and the chamber truly are part of our community's connective tissue on programs like this and our Small Business Saturday campaign ....

I also want to thank the district and Superintendent Charlie Smialek for supporting this innovative project ....

Charlie and the school board are working to move our schools in the right direction .... The district has a school levy renewal on the ballot this May, and it's essential we pass it .... Our city depends on the strong educational foundation the schools provide our youths ....

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Our partnerships with Parma's educational institutions – such as the school district – is just one way the city is trying to improve the quality of life for our residents .... Another is through our senior services and Recreation Department ....

At our Senior Center, Director JoAnn Mason and her staff are always trying to enhance what we do there .... The partnerships with Seven Hills and with the YMCA on our Silver Sneakers program .... Bus transportation for seniors to their doctor appointments .... Benefit Checkups and Meals-on-Wheels ....

And now, JoAnn is working on an agreement with Cleveland State's nursing program to make the center a clinical site for training — which will only improve the care seniors receive there ....

Thank you JoAnn ....

I also want to thank Director Mickey Vittardi and his staff for setting a gold standard when it comes to our Recreation Department and what we offer residents ....

And what we offer are plenty of recreation opportunities — from our youth and tot activities to our splash pad, baseball diamonds, ice rink, and golf course, as well as tennis and pickle ball courts ....

This past year, we put in our second disc golf course in the city at James Day Park .... We also installed new playground equipment and landscaping at Reis Park — some of the costs of which are expected to be offset by dollars in the state capital budget ....

This year, we hope to start work on a splash pad at the James Day pool — with some of the cost reimbursed by state capital dollars, too ....

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Our recreation opportunities certainly enhance our quality of life here .... And the Cleveland Metroparks' West Creek Reservation is a large part of that success as well ....

The Watershed Stewardship Center .... The work that the West Creek Conservancy does to protect our greenspace, streams, and flood plains ....

We are fortunate to have West Creek and Executive Director Derek Schafer as partners in providing such a unique experience in an urban setting ....

The biggest project the Conservancy is working on in our city — the repurposing of Parmadale — holds real promise ....

West Creek is planning to preserve nearly 90 acres of property there and clear it for greenspace, public park development, and watershed conservation .... This would connect the Reservation to tens of thousands of people ....

The effort received a major boost in the summer when the county awarded the Conservancy about \$1.3 million to demolish 13 former dormitories on the site .... a move that helped gain real momentum for the project ....

Once the dorms are taken down this year, West Creek will seek additional funding to demolish the remaining structures ....

Now, I want to put in a plug of my own – I think, when complete, this is a great home for a dog park ....

I want to thank both Derek Schafer for coming up with the idea to use the demolition funds for this phase of the redevelopment and Councilman Larry Napoli for his strong support of the project and for all things West Creek ....

County Executive Budish and County Councilman Tuma also deserve thanks for their support in pushing forward funding for a plan to help enhance the quality of life for our residents ....

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Making our quality of life even better .... Keeping our city safe .... Growing our economy .... Improving our infrastructure .... Strengthening our neighborhoods .... These are all of the ways we're working to make success stories in Parma ....

And we're receiving national recognition for it, too ....

Last year, 24/7 Wall St. ranked Parma as a top Ohio city in which to live ....

Forbes listed our community as one of the "Best Places to Retire" ....

And the Military Times considered Parma one of the best cities for veterans to live ....

We ought to be proud of our city .... of the people who reside here .... and how we work together to make Parma a great place to live and work ....

Every day, we're trying to build one success story after another in Ohio's seventh-largest city ....

Good night, have a great evening, and God Bless Parma!