

Parma Mayor Tim DeGeeter's State of the City Address
Delivered February 26, 2018 at Sheet Metal Workers Local Union 33

Good evening.

Thank you for being here.

I want to thank the Sheet Metal Workers Local #33 for hosting the State of the City in their impressive offices and training center. Thank you to Business Manager Mike Coleman. And a special thanks to Business Representative Kevin Tolley for helping make this happen.

What the Sheet Metal Workers do here is vital for Parma and our region.

Built in 2006, this facility houses their apprenticeship training program. About 600 active Sheet Metal members help train around 90 apprentices in state-of-the-art classrooms and labs. They also reached an agreement with the Ohio Board of Regents to help apprentices earn their associate's degree, too.

At a time when construction companies and contractors are clamoring for locally skilled workers, they're having a difficult time filling those jobs within this labor market. Sheet Metal Workers are doing their part to fill this gap with the apprenticeship program and training offered here. And that helps create jobs in our city and across Northeast Ohio.

I'd like to recognize and thank the Sheet Metal Workers for this forward-thinking approach – as well as for all that you do for our community.

Thank you.

There are some elected officials and staff members here I'd like to recognize:

First, Parma's citywide elected officials:

Members of City Council here with us:

Other elected officials here tonight:

And, finally, member of my Cabinet staff:

I also want to thank my wife, Pam, and our children, Jack and Molly, for their love and support.

I'm honored and proud to serve as mayor as well as to speak to you about Parma – not just tonight, but every night.

I'm proud, too, when I think of our city's reputation as one of the safest cities for our size, when I think of our diverse and livable neighborhoods, our quality of life, our businesses, and our great residents.

I'm also proud when I think of what we do here in Parma – everyone working together for the common purpose of making our city an even stronger community.

In difficult times – we've worked together to pull through them.

Until recently, people wrote stories about Parma as yet another symbol, a symbol of the declining Midwestern city that reached its heyday in the post-World War II boom.

A 2015 cleveland.com story painted a bleak picture of a city reeling from the Great Recession. The headline read: *Parma home values plummeted 20 percent since 2007, the most of Ohio's big cities.*

And there were other stories: A bankrupt mall that fell into receivership; a gloomy forecast for the auto industry and General Motors; an uncertain future for our community hospital and local health care; and a city grappling with the loss of millions of dollars each year in state funding, a reality putting critical services at risk.

These images created a narrative of a struggling city and created a sense of pessimism for what the future might hold.

But our city – with everyone working together – persevered. And we have changed the story.

Now don't get me wrong – there are challenges with which we still must contend: the opioid epidemic that knows no city border; the high cost of rebuilding our aging infrastructure – to name just two.

But I believe, and I know, we'll overcome them.

That's because we live in a community where all of us understand – from our elected officials and community partners to our businesses and residents – that we are stronger when we all work together.

It's that underlying foundation that has led our city to receive national recognition as a great place to live, work, and raise a family. In fact, 24/7 Wall St. ranked Parma as the top Ohio city in which to reside.

There is a real sense of optimism

I remember, during the holidays, I was searching for some last-minute presents at The Shoppes at Parma. A woman approached me near the front entrance of Fast Eddie's, where I was picking up gift certificates. Unsolicited, she said, smiling, "Mayor, I'm doing all of my shopping in Parma."

People usually aren't shy about expressing their opinions to me. And I'm hearing more often than not about the pride people have in our city and the progress we're making here

That's why I say to people: if you believe in community, if you believe that our best days are ahead of us not behind us, if you believe in those things I say come to Parma

Perhaps one of the reasons for that optimism is a reflection of our strengthening economy and the continued private-sector investment in our city.

Not far from here, about a 5-minute drive, the Parma Metal Center – the city's largest employer – processes more than 1,000 tons of steel every day.

During the Great Recession, though, some wondered whether the stamping and metal assembly plant would go the way of factories that closed in Ohio or across the country.

However, GM and its workers had other plans for a facility that has been such an influential part of our past and critical for our future. GM has invested tens of millions of dollars into the plant, and I'm proud to say its workforce remains strong.

Another iconic part of Parma's history – Parmatown – has seen a rebirth since headlines declared it another in the long line of dying malls.

The Shoppes at Parma's more than \$90 million redevelopment has transformed the property – creating jobs, keeping and adding 35 stores and 12 restaurants, and attracting Vista Springs Greenbriar, a beautiful senior care facility, there.

I want to thank PECO Real Estate Partners and the shopping center's manager, Michelle Devlin, for everything they've done to re-imagine this property.

But it's more than just that.

The tens of millions of dollars spent in this transformation also has spurred development in the area of Ridge Road, Day Drive, and West Ridgewood. And we're seeking to seize upon this opportunity.

We're creating a Town Center Strategic Master Plan – with help from the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission – to harness and incorporate all that is offered in this

vital part of our community – The Shoppes, the hospital, the library, Stearns Farm and Homestead, City Hall, Byers Field, and the golf course.

A recommendation and outgrowth of our Town Center Task Force, the strategic master plan is intended to help galvanize the long-term potential of this area – now called The Crossroads of Parma.

There are other major investments being made in our city. Here are two

PITT Ohio will soon start construction of its state-of-the-art trucking terminal in front of the former GM Powertrain building. It has been a long-time coming, but by working together, the project is moving forward. And when finished, the Pittsburgh-based company expects to employ 180 workers with a payroll of about \$7 million. Eventually, PITT could create a total of as many as 240 jobs here at its 23-acre complex

The Parma Wellness Center plans to construct a facility on a vacant Corporate Drive property to cultivate and grow medical marijuana. The business, which received a provisional cultivator's license from the state, expects to initially employ at least 25 people with a payroll of between one to two million dollars

While our growth potential is attracting business investment to our city, our housing market – yes, our housing market – is encouraging potential homebuyers to come to Parma.

Since 2015, our housing values have rebounded. And the market has shown itself to be strong and stable with quality homes that are affordable and attractive for potential homebuyers.

Apparently, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reported death of our housing market was an exaggeration.

Over the past three years, our housing values have increased by 25 percent. In 2017 alone, those values jumped 6.6 percent.

The median sales price is now nearly \$107,000 – up from a low of \$85,000 in 2015. And if you're a prospective home buyer here – you need to act fast. Many homes are on the market for only 5 days or less.

Part of the reason for our improving housing values is that our city had a strong foundation from which to rebuild. While the home mortgage crisis hit us hard, we still have held a strong 74 percent owner occupation rate. That high percentage of vested homeownership prevented the recession from having an even more devastating impact on our community – and is a testament to our hardworking residents who invested their savings into their homes.

But beyond the strong homeownership rate, the city – from the administration to Council – has put a priority on maintaining our housing stock.

Through a combination of federal and county grant dollars, we continue to demolish blighted and abandoned properties to prevent neighborhoods from deteriorating and the value of nearby homes from dropping. In the last 10 years, we have demolished 90 of the worst properties in Parma. And we will do more this year.

I want to thank Economic Development & Community Services Director Erik Tollerup for managing this important program.

In addition to those efforts, the department last year leveraged \$200,000 in home improvements for seniors and low-income homeowners – not only improving the quality of life for our residents, but also helping bolster housing values. And the city spends another quarter of a million dollars each year in block grant funds to help improve sidewalks and storefronts in commercial and residential areas.

Our building and property inspectors – through what we call our Good Neighborhoods Initiative – also have helped to keep up our housing stock. More than 25,000 building and property maintenance inspections were completed last year. Further, our inspectors are continuing to ticket owners who show neglect for their properties.

All of these efforts are intended to cut down on repeat offenders and encourage them to take better care of their properties.

I want to thank Assistant Building Commissioner Don Graves and our inspectors for all of their hard work in this effort.

It's important, though, to understand the vast majority of our residents invest time, money, and care into their properties. That's why the administration and City Council publicly recognize – through our Neighborhood Pride Awards – homeowners who do a great job of beautifying and caring for their properties. The city also acknowledges that same kind of pride through the Holiday Lights Contest with which we work in close collaboration with the Young Professionals of Parma.

By the way, at this point, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the Young Professionals are holding a post-State of the City discussion at The Wagon Wheel Pub.

Thank you for helping promote and market our community

And I want to take this moment to recognize the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce and Dave Nedrich for what they do and for their partnership – including on our economic forums and on our Small Business Saturday campaign.

Another reason to come to Parma – beyond our resurgent housing market and the city’s efforts to support it – is our strong neighborhoods and our small businesses within them.

Polish Village, for example, draws people from across Northeast Ohio – whether for its bakeries, restaurants, and small businesses dotting Ridge Road, or the yearly events showcasing the area.

Thousands trek through the neighborhood at the Annual Polish Village Treat & Greet as stores hand out candy, pizza, coupons, and cookies. And the Polish Constitution Day parade and festival is a real spring time destination – attracting 5,000 people last year.

I want to thank Councilwoman Debbie Lime and Director Tollerup for all of the hard work they’ve put in to make the parade and all of these efforts a success.

(SLIGHT PAUSE)

Meanwhile, the West Creek-Quarry District features well-established and emerging small businesses: the popular Parma Tavern; the award-winning Corelone’s; Gentile’s; and The Little Birdie Wine Nest – an example of an up-and-coming gathering place in that part of our city.

Owner Robin Schulze has created a unique experience at a wine shop that is more than the name suggests. It’s where friends and newcomers can socialize, taste wine, and shop for local art and jewelry. And she added a coffee shop to this diverse mix. It’s the kind of place that draws visitors from around the region.

The city is trying to tap into the potential synergy of all the West Creek-Quarry District offers. We’re working with the West Creek Conservancy to seek, and apply for, funding to implement a long-term plan developed with the help of a \$75,000 grant. We want to increase the connectivity of the corridor by incorporating nearby recreation and development with pedestrian and bike-friendly projects.

I want to thank West Creek Executive Director Derek Schafer for all of his work, and Councilwoman Kristin Saban and Councilman Jeff Crossman for their advocacy.

(SLIGHT PAUSE)

Not far away from the West Creek-Quarry District, in another area of our city, people during the late summer gather along both sides of State Road to watch the Ukrainian Independence Day parade in Ukrainian Village.

We truly have a rich cultural heritage of which all of us can be proud. It is a source of strength for us because of the economic and cultural opportunities such diversity affords.

And in this part of our city, it is on full display. We are incredibly proud to be home to the largest Ukrainian population in Ohio. You can see it as the sunlight shimmers off the domes of our Ukrainian churches. You see it in the small businesses along the street. And you can see it when driving by State Road Meats with the giant, inflatable Easter bunny on top of the store's roof.

Our neighborhoods truly are unique.

Just last week, people stood outside the doors of our bakeries in Polish and Ukrainian Villages to grab some of the most inventive paczkis you can find anywhere. We are, after all, the self-proclaimed Paczkis Capital of Ohio.

This time of year, we can certainly feel the sense of community rippling through our neighborhoods at the popular Lenten season fish fries. You can't go more than a few blocks before stumbling upon one of them.

Volunteering with my family at a fish fry at our home parish of St. Francis De Sales, I was struck – as I am every time – by the sheer amount of people who travel here. They're looking for, and indeed finding, a great experience – and awfully good food. It's just a reminder of all the different attractions our neighborhoods offer.

One of our residents – Chelsey Kovar, a past Citizen of the Month – is trying to throw a spotlight on just how diverse those offerings really are. Chelsey, a member of the Young Professionals, started, all at her own cost, a Best of Parma contest featuring 30 different categories, such as Best Restaurant, Best Bakery, and even Best Winter Recreation Activity.

Nominations in those categories ended the last day of January And voting already started February 1st and will end March 1st. So, if you haven't already, visit Chelsey's web site – www.allofherdesign.com – and vote. Winners will be announced Friday, March 9th. I'm sure all of us are looking forward to seeing the winners in this inaugural contest.

Thank you Chelsey for promoting Parma, our businesses, and our neighborhoods.

Beyond supporting efforts such as Chelsey's, the city also is putting in real dollars to strengthen our neighborhoods even more through our streets and infrastructure programs

A major priority of the city, the cost of maintaining our aging infrastructure comes at a high-price tag when considering this: You could take a round-trip drive from Parma to North Carolina in the distance covered by combining the city's roads and sewer lines.

Major resources are required to tackle that sheer scope of work. Couple that with the loss of more than \$27 million in state funding since 2009 – it becomes a real financial challenge to maintain and improve our streets and sewers.

Yet, we're making strides by taking a fiscally-disciplined and systematic approach and by leveraging hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in state and federal dollars through low-interest loans and grants.

Last year, Parma invested more than \$6 million in major improvements to 29 streets, including West 54th Street, Pleasant Lake Boulevard, Grovewood Avenue, and Hoertz Road.

The \$1.7 million resurfacing of Day Drive was the most expensive improvement undertaken by the city last year – and an example of how we try to leverage outside dollars. The city secured more than \$1 million for the project through a grant and a zero-interest loan – saving valuable capital dollars for the city.

In addition, the Parma Service Department spent another \$300,000 to reconstruct and replace catch basins. We paid for that project through our invaluable partnership with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District; we used money from our portion of the district's Storm Water Fund.

This year, it's anticipated at least \$3 million will be spent on neighborhood streets on top of the millions of dollars on major Cuyahoga County Public Works projects on which we partner.

Some of the projects scheduled in 2018 include: the \$650,000 Ridge Road resurfacing project from Pleasant Valley Road to our border with North Royalton and the \$5 million repaving of Pleasant Valley from State Road to Broadview Road. This year, the city also will begin design work on the \$1.5 million resurfacing of major stretches of Broadview Road. Construction work is expected to begin in 2019.

Beyond our city's roads, last year Parma spent more than \$4 million on the maintenance and upkeep of the sewer system through our agreement with the county's Public Works Department.

Along with our partnership with the county, the city has invested in other projects to try and mitigate storm water runoff – a regional problem not just impacting Parma, but all of our neighboring communities.

For example, the city has spent \$1.15 million in the past five years to repair and replace head walls damaged by erosion. And we also used money last year from our portion of the sewer district's Storm Water Fund to pay for major pieces of equipment to help

prevent sewer backups: more than \$280,000 for a broom sweeper and about \$475,000 for a jet vacuum.

Further, our collaboration with the sewer district resulted in its willingness to take over management of a number of the city's storm water basins. Already, the district took over the nearly \$2 million Chevrolet Boulevard Basin – an effort that will be complemented by the \$2.4 million project to improve storm and sanitary sewer lines in that neighborhood.

I want to thank Service Director Brian Higgins, Engineering and Building Commissioner Paul Deichmann, and Assistant City Engineer Hasmukh Patel for all of their hard work and efforts to maintain and improve our aging infrastructure. This is vital in helping keep our city and neighborhoods strong.

While our neighborhoods offer a great reason to come to Parma, the quality of life opportunities in our city is another.

And our local access to health care is a major factor for the quality of life we enjoy in Parma

A few years ago, though, there was uncertainty in our healthcare sector.

Before the merger with University Hospitals, Parma General faced the reality of many independents. Unless something was done to secure the balance sheets, the changing landscape of health care would dramatically alter its ability to provide the quality of care for which the hospital was known.

Meanwhile, in a different part of our city, Kaiser Permanente wound down operations at the Snow Road building, and HealthSpan had moved in. But the future of the urgent care facility was shaky.

What a difference in a few short years.

University Hospitals and The MetroHealth System – which took over the Snow Road facility – are making major investments in our community.

Where other cities have lost access to health care – whether through the closing of a hospital or the elimination of programs – Parma's healthcare options are growing.

What great assets we have here

UH Parma Medical Center is our second largest employer, with 1,351 employees. About 29 percent of the hospital's workers live in our city.

Just last year, University Hospitals invested nearly \$6.5 million in facility improvements to the main building, including the \$2.5 million renovation of patient care floors in the main tower. And the hospital will complete its replacement of one of its three cardiac catheterization labs in April.

These investments have paid off as the facility continues to provide leading-edge care: the hospital, in fact, received a 5-star rating – the highest possible – from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid for its patient experience, efficiency, and safety. It's even more impressive when you realize that about 4,300 institutions were rated. And UH Parma Medical Center was one of only about 350 hospitals to receive this ranking

I want to thank UH, the medical center, and the members of the hospital board for their commitment to the city and its residents.

I also want to thank MetroHealth for its significant contributions in increasing our healthcare options here even more.

Certainly, the system has expanded quickly in Parma.

About two years ago, MetroHealth opened its 24/7 emergency department when it took over the building from HealthSpan.

And, then, the system converted the facility into a micro-hospital with 16 single-occupancy rooms. It just opened in the beginning of the year and represents an investment of at least \$12 million and more than two dozen new jobs.

The MetroHealth Medical Center – in addition to the patient rooms as well as the emergency department and labs – also features operating rooms and pharmacy and radiological services as well as offers primary and pediatric care.

How fortunate is Parma to have the healthcare access we do through MetroHealth and University Hospitals?

In addition to our health care sector, Parma's recreational opportunities and activities also enhance our quality of life.

Our Recreation Department – among the best in Northeast Ohio – provides a great deal of those opportunities. Thousands of people – adults and children alike – enjoy our programs, parks, and facilities – from our youth and tot activities to our pickleball courts, ice rink, and golf course.

One of our biggest attractions last year – and one of our newest – was the splash pad – which opened last Memorial Day in Anthony Zielinski Park. Not a sunny day went by when it wasn't packed with kids splashing in and around the water features. And, again,

this whole project was kicked off with a major \$225,000 donation from the Sylvasy family in memory of Frank and Marge Sylvasy. It simply was an incredible gesture to our community and to our kids.

And in addition to the splash pad, the Recreation Department also completed construction on other destinations: the two outdoor street roller hockey courts at Ries and the final phase of the All-Kids Playground.

But perhaps the activity that meant the most to the Recreation staff – and to all of us – was hosting the Northeast Ohio Challenger Baseball Tournament in July at Veteran’s Memorial Park.

Challenger Baseball – if you don’t know – gives children and young adults with special needs the opportunity to experience our nation’s greatest pastime. They learn about teamwork, and they can enjoy what it means to be part of a team.

Kids with special needs don’t often have these kinds of opportunities. Words fail to do justice in describing what it meant for our city to be a part of that experience and bringing joy to those kids.

I want thank Recreation Director Mickey Vittardi not only for all of his work, but in particular for his leadership in making that weekend a success for everyone.

And Mickey and his staff aren’t done looking for new recreation opportunities for our residents.

The city is seeking money in the Ohio Legislature’s capital budget for two major upgrades at our parks – just like we sought and received for our tennis courts in the last capital bill.

One would be the installation of playground equipment at Ries Park. And the other improvement – a potential new splash pad at our pool at James Day Park.

State Senator Mike Skindell and State Representative Nick Celebrezze both submitted those projects in their capital bill requests and are advocating for them. We also reached out to other legislators on both sides of the aisle to seek their support.

Along with the activities and programs offered by the Recreation Department, Parma also is home to the Cleveland Metroparks’ West Creek Reservation

A real jewel for the city, the reservation – which celebrated its 20th year in 2017 – provides a distinct and unique recreation experience for a city the size of Parma.

Last year, more than a 100,000 people again visited the Watershed Stewardship Center as interactive exhibits inside and outside the facility taught thousands of kids about being good caretakers of our environment.

The Conservancy also expanded the park by more than 45 acres last year and awarded over \$500,000 toward future greenway trail construction as well as protected an additional 145 acres throughout the city.

West Creek – in partnership with Parma – also is continuing to undertake the redevelopment of Parmadale – a project that will repurpose 80 acres by integrating natural resource preservation, habitat restoration, and recreation activities.

This project has the potential to be truly transformative

In addition to the recreation experiences offered here in Parma, the city also tries to add to the quality of life for our seniors through the programs and activities at the Senior Center.

Benefit Checkups assist older adults in obtaining discounts for medication, utilities, and food stamps, among other things Our partnership with the YMCA on our Silver Sneakers program, Optium, and our wellness exercise room is popular and growing. And our regional, cooperative effort with Seven Hills to transport their seniors – who cannot drive or reach a bus line – is a real success.

The city also is launching a program to give residents access to bus transportation for their doctor appointments, therapy, and minor surgical procedures. We're still fleshing out details of this program, but expect to roll it out this spring.

I want to thank the UH for making this a reality by donating the bus. And I also want to take a moment to thank Director JoAnn Mason and her staff for their dedication in helping improve the lives of our seniors.

Our city – and our quality of life – is also enhanced by the great educational opportunities available to people in our community: the Parma City School District, the Tri-C West Campus, and Cuyahoga County Public Library. All are critical to Parma's success

That's why it's essential to pass the Parma City Schools' levy on the ballot this spring.

Our public schools are a real asset.

Throughout the years, so many families moved to Parma – or stayed here – because of the quality education provided by our school system.

But recently, the schools have come upon some real challenges. The district faces a projected \$3.6 million deficit next year and another \$9 million for 2020. Already, the district has cut \$15 million over the past two years.

They have tried to minimize the impact of those cuts as much as possible. And I appreciate the work the current school board and the superintendent are doing to manage this difficult financial situation. But they only can do so much with the current resources they have.

Forcing the district to make millions of dollars of cuts on top of those already made will truly hinder the ability of our schools to deliver the kind of education our kids need to compete in what has become a global labor market.

As mayor, I'm not only concerned about whether our students receive the resources they need, but I worry about what it means for our city. We're only as strong as our schools. And we will face significant hurdles in keeping and attracting families to Parma if our district doesn't have adequate resources for educating our kids for the 21st Century.

This levy is critical for the future of our schools and our city. Let's continue to provide our kids with the education they deserve.

I want to thank Superintendent Carl Hilling for his years of dedication to Parma Schools. He's retiring this year, and he deserves our thanks for his commitment to education.

I also want to thank the school board for including me along with the mayors of Parma Heights and Seven Hills in their search process for Carl's successor. I was honored to give my thoughts on the qualifications and experiences our next superintendent needs as Parma Schools goes through this challenging time.

Another critical educational partner – Cuyahoga Community College's West Campus – is providing students with the skills needed for today and tomorrow at an affordable cost.

With the passage of Tri-C's levy this past November, the community college will construct a \$28 million STEM addition on the Western campus and will feature math classrooms, team-working spaces, and new science labs with state-of-the-art equipment.

Campus President Donna Imhoff views these major upgrades as way to attract local high school students by giving them a continuum of education in these fields of study – areas increasingly important as employers seek skilled workers in an economy ever more dependent on adapting to new technology.

I truly appreciate President Imhoff and Tri-C's overall vision incorporating the educational needs of our community and its residents.

The Cuyahoga County Public Library – yet another critical educational institution – shares a similar vision

The library's commitment to our city – with its two impressive library branches and administrative offices – makes a difference in people's lives – whether helping establish a great educational foundation for our children, or featuring programs for adults seeking to better themselves, or providing gathering places for cultural events.

Indeed, the library's description of itself as the "People's University" couldn't be more apt. I thank Executive Director Sari Feldman and all of those who work at the branches for their efforts to encourage learning.

Beyond our housing, neighborhoods, and quality of life opportunities, another strong reason to come to Parma is the priority we place on the safety of our residents

And Parma is a safe city.

But don't just take my word for it

One of the reasons 24/7 Wall St. listed Parma as a top Ohio city in which to live was our record on safety. And security companies also have taken notice [SafeHome.org](#) ranked Parma the second safest city in our state And [alarms.org](#) listed us among the Top 50 safest municipalities in the nation.

Not only are these rankings a testament to the hard work of our police officers, but they also speak to our residents who do their part by reporting crimes and suspicious activities to help protect their neighborhoods.

The city's record on safety rests in large part with the commitment our officers have shown to community policing and building a strong relationship with the residents they serve.

The department's Meet on the Beat program and Bike Patrol Unit are both designed to connect with local business owners as well as foster relationships within our neighborhoods.

Our officers truly care about our city.

Whether through the Shop with the Cop program, or collecting 2,290 pounds of food and \$2,000 for the Parma Hunger Center during their annual Thanksgiving drive, our police department works hard to build a bond and lend a helping hand to the people whom they serve and protect.

And the department's latest initiative – outfitting our officers with body-worn cameras – will only increase that trust within our community as well as protect our police force Officers will begin wearing the cameras this year.

The cost of the body-worn cameras and the support equipment will be offset through a \$135,000 grant the department received from U.S. Department of Justice.

I would like to thank Chief Joe Bobak for his leadership on this and in so many other areas. I also want to thank Lt. Rob Tarro for his work on the project as well as our Economic Development Officer and Grants Writer Shelley Cullins for helping to secure this funding. And I also would like to thank Councilman Vito Dipierro for his advocacy of body-worn cameras from the beginning.

Our police officers – in addition to these initiatives – are working with the fire department in a pro-active approach to combat the opioid crisis impacting our city and communities across Ohio and the country.

The city received an \$87,500 grant from the Ohio Attorney General's office to create a drug intervention team to help supplement on-going local efforts. Parma is using those dollars to create what is called a Quick Response Team – made up of a police officer, a paramedic, and a social worker. They will screen individuals who overdosed on heroin and visit potential candidates for treatment.

Far too often, our police officers and firefighters are going to the same homes. This program is an attempt to curb repeat overdoses, keep people out of jail, and help individuals with little hope onto the path of recovery.

Already, before this effort, Parma has been leader in fighting against this epidemic

To increase efforts on the statewide level to combat the opioid crisis, I've worked closely as a board member of the Ohio Mayors Alliance to recommend ways Governor John Kasich can strengthen local and state responses. And that included meeting with the governor and his Cabinet Opioid Action Team

The city also sued opioid manufacturers and distributors – not only to send a message, but to seek reimbursement for the costs borne by our city in contending with this crisis. I want to thank Safety Director Tom Weinreich for his leadership. I want to thank Law Director Tim Dobeck and Councilman Crossman for advocating this course of action.

Our firefighters and paramedics too often are on the front lines of the opioid battle, too. But more than that, they're also a major reason why our city is safe.

You only have to ask patients whose lives have been saved – or their health improved – because of the fire department's first-in-the-state stroke treatment program.

Parma Fire partnered on this project with UH, which invested \$20,000 to pay for medical equipment to make this program a reality.

And it's working

Paramedics use iPads while in the ambulance to give real-time patient assessments to hospital doctors who use that information to determine the best course of treatment even before the patient reaches the emergency room. This saves time and lives.

The fire department also is on the leading-edge in other areas, including PulsePoint Respond, a smartphone app that notifies residents who subscribe to it when someone nearby is in cardiac arrest and need their help.

While saving lives and treating victims is in their job descriptions, that's not all our firefighters do for our community

Our firefighters teamed up with UH ER Medical Director Sheldon Rose to help deliver Christmas presents this past year to a little girl whom they treated for severe brain damage six months earlier.

The firefighters paid for the gifts using money from a local grassroots foundation for the families of first responders who had fallen on hard times. They said they knew of no families who needed those funds But our firefighters did know of one little girl to whom they could bring joy

I want to thank Chief Lasky and our fire department for all they do on the job and off.

While people come to Parma for our safety, our quality of life, our neighborhoods, and our strengthening economy, perhaps the biggest attraction rests in the people who live here.

Here are two of them

Maybe you don't know Ken Ehlert. Chances are, if you met him, you wouldn't forget him.

Ken – who attends most City Council meetings – was on a mission about two years ago.

He urged the city to recognize Parma's World War II veterans. One last chance to publicly express our gratitude for a generation of heroes who risked their lives for our country and our freedom.

His advocacy spurred the city – led by Treasurer Tom Mastroianni and my Communications Director Jeannie Roberts – to recognize those veterans as Citizens of the Month at a City Council meeting I'll never forget.

But that's not the end of the story. He advocated for the recognition of those who fought in the Korean and Vietnam Wars – veterans who – far too often – are forgotten.

Well, last year, three communities – Parma, Parma Heights, and Seven Hills recognized our Korean War vets.

And this summer, The Traveling Vietnam Wall – sponsored by the Parma American Legion Post 703 with support from the city and Tri-C – is now headed to the Western Campus And our local Vietnam War veterans will get their due

I would like to thank Ken for his dogged advocacy for those who served and sacrificed for us. Please stand up Ken so you can be recognized.

Now, if you want to learn about true resiliency maybe you should meet Parma resident Christine Vodicka.

Christine doesn't know if the next day will be her last.

After surviving breast cancer in 2013, she learned two years later the cancer had spread, and she is now fighting meta-static breast cancer.

Despite the diagnosis, she didn't give up her dream of opening a learning center – which she did.

Now, she provides the kind of tutoring and mentorship she received in 1995 when she was a then-struggling freshman at Kent State University.

Christine says she's trying to help others fulfill their dreams. That's because – she's living hers. After all, she says, life's too short not to live that way ...

Christine – please stand up so we can recognize you and your powerful message

Christine and Ken are just two of our many residents who make us want to say – come to Parma

Thank you for coming this evening. Good night and God Bless Parma!