



ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE
DAN ONORATO
SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS
JANUARY 2, 2008

Bishop Zubick, Justice-elect Todd, Rev. Curtis, Rabbi Miller, Mr. Hussaini, Father Bruney, distinguished guests, family, friends and neighbors:

I am pleased and honored to assume the duties of Allegheny County Chief Executive for another four years.

As I begin my second term, I want to thank my family for their love and support. Thank you, Kate, Emily and Danny. You and the tens of thousands of young people like you in Southwestern Pennsylvania are the driving force behind my efforts to make our region successful and prosperous. And thank you, Shelly. Thank you for your steadfast support and for all of the sacrifices that you have made.

I also want to thank the voters of Allegheny County for their strong support.

Four years ago today, I stood on this very stage and said to the people of Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania that it was time to take action and time to move forward. I spoke of the need to work together and direct our collective energy and resources on the promise of a better, brighter future.

It was a future where Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania would have land and resources readily available for prospective and expanding businesses; a future where residents could once again buy a home in Allegheny County without fear of wildly escalating property assessments or backdoor property tax increases; and a future where government would become more efficient, effective and accountable.

My fellow citizens, that future is upon us. And the proof is all around us.

Over the past four years, we have seen unprecedented economic growth and investment in Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania. Today, there is approximately \$4 billion in housing, commercial and recreational developments taking place in and around the core of our region, including Three PNC Plaza, Piatt Place, the Majestic Star Casino, and a new multi-purpose arena.

The airport corridor also is booming with industrial parks, warehouse and distribution centers, and other private developments, and we have seen origination and destination traffic at Pittsburgh International Airport increase from 6.2 million passengers annually to 8.2 million passengers in just the last two years. And finally, after decades of struggle, we are beginning to witness the economic resurgence of the Mon Valley.

Working together with the Commonwealth, as well as neighboring communities and counties, we have succeeded in creating a business climate that can compete with any region in the United States. There are more jobs in our region today than at any time in our history, including the height of the steel industry. And more and more of our young people are staying here, and still others are coming to Southwestern Pennsylvania to take advantage of our high quality of life, low cost of living, and myriad of opportunities.

Companies such as Lanxess, Verizon Wireless, Medrad, Mitsubishi Electric, Google, Dick's Sporting Goods, Heinz and American Eagle have all chosen to locate or expand right here in our region. And without a doubt, two of the largest economic victories in decades came with the news that Westinghouse Electric and U.S. Steel were going to invest significant capital here in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

I want to recognize U.S. Steel Chairman & CEO John Surma, who is with us today, for his continued confidence in Allegheny County as a viable place to do business. Not only did U.S. Steel choose to locate its new research and development center in Munhall, but as you all know, the company is also investing \$1 billion in its Clairton Works in the heart of the Mon Valley. John, on behalf of the 1.2 million residents of Allegheny County, thank you for your investment and faith.

And, as a result of our efforts to clean and reclaim brownfields and old industrial areas, as well as our efforts to create shovel-ready land around Pittsburgh International Airport, we now have thousands of acres of land ready for development. Allegheny County no longer has to watch as investment bypasses us for other parts of the country, because we now have the land and resources available to react quickly and compete successfully.

However, we can do more – and must do more – to promote growth and investment in Allegheny County and Southwestern Pennsylvania. And so today, I proudly and firmly re-commit the energy, resources and cooperation of my administration to a continued, aggressive agenda of economic renewal for our entire region – and for businesses both large and small.

In September of last year, I launched “Allegheny Together,” a small-business revitalization program that will encourage well-planned, well-designed and geographically-focused investment in established urban commercial districts.

The goal of Allegheny Together is to assist and encourage property owners and businesses to reinvest in the County's 43 traditional business districts by providing matching grants and low-cost financing. Eligible activities include: corrections of code deficiencies; modifications to provide disabled accessibility; improvements to provide energy efficiency; façade improvements; streetscaping; business signage; awnings; and lighting.

Swissvale, Stowe Township, Elizabeth Borough and Tarentum were selected for the initial phase of the Allegheny Together program, and over the next four years, we will expand the program to additional business districts. This is an exciting opportunity to help the traditional, pedestrian-based business districts that built Allegheny County and made it a great place to live, work and play.

Competing nationally and globally for investment and workers requires more than just a good business environment – it also requires robust educational, medical, cultural and recreational assets. We are fortunate here in Southwestern Pennsylvania to have some of the finest colleges, universities, medical centers, museums and performing arts groups in the entire world. Our region also boasts world-class sport and recreational offerings, including skiing, biking, hiking, boating and so much more.

Last September, I unveiled a County Parks Action Plan to address 20 years of deferred maintenance and to transform and enhance recreational opportunities at Allegheny County's nine regional parks, which encompass more than 12,000 acres. The first component of my plan is the creation of the Allegheny County Parks Foundation to raise private funds for the County's nine regional parks and the proposed riverfront greenway.

I have named the foundation's board of directors and pledged \$1 million from the County's capital budget to help establish the new organization. In addition, I have set aside \$10 million in capital funding to match the foundation's fundraising efforts dollar-for-dollar with County capital funds. By matching private giving, we will double the amount of funds for deferred maintenance, recreational improvements and facility enhancements.

The second component of my Parks Action Plan is the establishment of public-private partnerships to operate some of the parks' major amenities and attractions. The County is issuing requests for proposals for the adaptive reuse of the North Park Boathouse, Hartwood Stables, South Park Fairgrounds, and Boyce Park Four Seasons Activity Center, including the skiing and tubing area.

We are also seeking private operators for our tennis courts in Boyce Park, North Park, Settler's Cabin Park and South Park. Finally, we are engaging the services of the National Golf Foundation in Jupiter, Florida, to enhance the County's golf course operations in North Park and South Park with a public/private partnership.

Over the next several months, I will be hosting community meetings in or near all nine regional parks to engage the public in this effort and to gather input on additional programming, recreational and facility needs.

My goal is to transform Allegheny County's nine regional parks into one of the finest park systems in the country.

And working with the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and local trail groups, we will finish the final seven miles of the Great Allegheny Passage here in Allegheny County. When it is completed, the Great Allegheny Passage trail will stretch for 335 miles from Point State Park to Washington, D.C., and on to Mt. Vernon, Virginia. The Great Allegheny Passage is one of the most scenic, user-friendly and accessible trails in the world, and it will be a great asset to our region for tourism and economic development.

The development of trails and parks and the cleaning of thousands of acres of brownfields are bringing new life and development back to our riverfronts. For decades, our rivers were the “backdoors” of our region, but increasingly, our great rivers are becoming the front doors to economic and recreational renewal.

Over the past several years, our region has also become a leader in green technology and environmental stewardship. In fact, Southwestern Pennsylvania is one of the “greenest” regions in the country. We are a national leader in LEED-certified buildings, whether you measure by the number of LEED-certified buildings or the overall square footage of LEED-certified space. And as a result, we are also becoming a leader in the area of green building materials and design.

Last year, Allegheny County established an integrated pest management policy, and our public works employees are using environmentally positive techniques in monitoring, suppressing, and managing weeds, insects, and diseases in the nine County parks and along Allegheny County rights of way. The County is also increasing our use of hybrid vehicles, and we were an initial local sponsor of Flexcar.

In order to sustain this momentum, I am going to establish the Allegheny Green Action Team, which will advise my administration on policies and procedures that will support our burgeoning green industries, as well as promote environmental consciousness and action. Allegheny County has taken the lead in brownfield reclamation and cleanup, and we will be a leader in the green movement and environmental stewardship as well.

Four years ago, I pledged to make County government more efficient and responsive, to consolidate our row offices, and to eliminate duplicated functions. Since then, we have made historic strides in streamlining government and maximizing our resources.

As of this week, we will have successfully reduced the number of row offices from 10 to four, which will save taxpayers at least \$1 million annually. My administration has also embraced opportunities to merge government functions and eliminate duplicated services to improve efficiency and save taxpayers money.

We reduced the number of 9-1-1 call centers in Allegheny County from five to one, including four suburban centers and the City of Pittsburgh’s center, which saves \$3 million annually. The City of Pittsburgh’s fingerprinting operation was collapsed into the County’s, and the Pittsburgh Municipal Court was merged with the County court system. The County and City signed a joint telecommunications agreement that will result in \$4.5 million in savings over the next three years. The County also provides bulk purchasing services for the City and other agencies, which is improving the efficiency of purchasing operations and resulting in significant savings for taxpayers.

The County and City have also formed an energy purchasing consortium that is open to our region’s hospitals, school districts, colleges, universities, municipal authorities, non-profit organizations and private businesses. This consortium has the potential to be the largest cost-saving public/private partnership in the history of Western Pennsylvania.

Working with the private sector and the Commonwealth, my administration took action and successfully restructured the Kane Regional Centers and eliminated their \$10-million operating deficit. At the same time, we are transforming the Kane system into a continuum of care that will give Allegheny County residents access to home-based care, adult daily living services, independent living units, personal care units, dementia units, rehabilitation services and skilled nursing.

But the consolidations and savings have not been limited to just the County and City. We have seen the success and efficiencies of the Northern Region Police, which serves four townships in the North Hills, as well as the Ohio Township Police Department, which provides service to six boroughs and townships in the Ohio Valley.

We have proven that consolidating functions and merging services saves taxpayers money, and today, I am recommitting my administration to the goal of streamlining government and reducing costs by eliminating duplicated functions.

During the past four years, my administration has been successful in building partnerships with our surrounding counties based on mutual goals and opportunities, and we will continue to work together for the betterment of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Given the success of our regional partnerships, I have been reaching out to others areas in the Commonwealth that not only share many of our same goals, but also face many of our same challenges. And in the coming months, I will continue working with other county and local elected leaders to develop a common agenda for Harrisburg and Washington, D.C.

Working together as a community, as a County and as a region, we have accomplished great change over the past four years. Together, we have become more efficient. Together, we have become more competitive. And together, we have become more successful.

Everyday, we are reminded of the strength and power that lies in coming together. The Allegheny and Monongahela become the great Ohio. One hundred thirty municipalities become a great county. And 14 counties become a great region. We are indeed one, and we are indeed great.

As I enter a new term, I pledge to continue working together as a community, as a County and as a region to achieve even greater results.

Thank you.