

Supervisor says cooperation, not confrontation, responsible for positive 'State of the Town'

by ELLEN M. GALLAGHER
Tonawanda Town Supervisor Carl Calabrese reviewed town government accomplishments of 1994 and discussed plans and problems facing the town in 1995 at the annual "State of the Town" address Friday, March 31.

The supervisor delivered his speech at the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Chamber of Commerce monthly meeting.

The supervisor first praised town government, listing several achievements by various departments, beginning with the 1995 budget.

"If I had to pick one word to describe Town government in 1994, that word would be: balance," Calabrese stated. "In 1994, we controlled spending by balancing the public's desire for services with its ability to pay."

"There is no area where balance is more important than the area of financial management. The 1995 budget was balanced and submitted on time," he said.

The budget, which totaled \$57 million, represented an increase from the 1994 budget of 2.8 percent.

In addition, the supervisor said the amount of debt the town carries dropped to a 2.7 percent of its legal limit.

"There aren't many municipal-

ities that can point to such a small amount of debt," he stated. "In fact, over the past five years, no major town in Western New York has managed to control taxes, spending and debt, better than the Town of Tonawanda."

Reviewing departments, Calabrese began with the Town of Tonawanda Police Department, which responded to 33,490 calls in 1994.

Calabrese claimed the response time of the town police is the best in Erie County, and said all categories of crime are down in the town except DWI and drug arrests, each having a special police unit.

Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) educated more than 800 fifth and sixth graders last year.

The town police force opened a satellite office in the Sheridan Parkside area. The supervisor made reference to a recent incident where information from neighbors led to the arrest of five drug dealers operating in the neighborhood.

"As the suspects were being led away in handcuffs, nearby residents came out of their homes and began applauding the work of our police. This is what community policing was meant to be," he said.

Paramedics responded to 4,586 calls in 1994, "one of them was my father, who is alive today because of the coordinated and quick response of dispatchers, police officers and paramedics," Calabrese said.

Calabrese praised the work of volunteers in Neighborhood Watch Groups, CB Mobile Patrol, and the Crime Resistance Executive Advisory Committee.

In other town departments' accomplishments, Calabrese said:

- The Highway Department paved over 14 miles of new roads and planted 450 new trees.

- The Water and Sewer Department provided in excess of four billion gallons of clean, fresh water and checked and cleaned over a million feet of sewer lines.

- The Parks and Recreation Department's Aquatic Center membership reached over 4,000 and the driving range and batting cages generated \$132,000 in profit.

- The Building Department

performed more than 11,318 inspections and issued \$31 million in building permits.

- The Community Development Office funneled over \$2 million into 38 neighborhoods rehabilitating homes, reconstructing streets, water lines, sewer lines, planting trees and installing sidewalk wheelchair ramps.

Calabrese said the town board has been engaged in a series of innovations, such as the Employee Innovation Program which allows employees to submit ideas for saving money in exchange for 10 percent of the first year's savings.

The first payment was made to an employee in the Wastewater Treatment Plant last November, for his idea which saved the town more than \$2,600 in overtime costs.

"These types of programs have been used successfully for years in the private sector and it's time governments began utilizing them," the supervisor stated.

Other accomplishments Calabrese mentioned included:

- Several departments installed new computer systems, making operations more efficient and increasing productivity.

- The Tax Receiver's Office set up satellite offices during tax collection.

- The Town Clerk's Office expanded its hours.

- The Community Development program rebuilt five homes in the Kanikworth neighborhood.

- The town opened the first municipal CMG refueling station in New York State.

Problems the supervisor sees on the horizon are the ongoing nuclear waste removal project with the United States Department of Energy and the strain of unfunded mandates, specifically the Great Lakes Initiative federal mandate for water treatment standards.

"Despite these problems, 1995 looks to be a very productive and positive year for the Town of Tonawanda," Calabrese said.

Among plans for 1995, Calabrese included:

- A 4,600 square foot addition to the Aquatic and Fitness Center w/ playground equipment at Parkside Village Courts, new furniture at both golf houses, two new backstops at Lincoln



Tonawanda Town Supervisor Carl Calabrese discusses a chart used in his "State of the Town" address at the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Chamber of Commerce meeting on Friday, March 31.
Photo by John Fusac

- Park, and a new observation deck at Mang Pool

- Ground-breaking for a cogeneration plant to convert methane gas from the BFI landfill to electricity to power the Wastewater Treatment Plant

- Opening a second community policing satellite office in Lincoln Park

- Remediation of the Cherry Farm along the waterfront

- Demolition of the old Roblin Steel plant

- Work on agreement to sell "mad flats" to the Allied Group for 1996 development

- Consolidation study of water-related departments

"I want town taxpayers to know that the town board and I are committed to borrowing from the private sector's ideas and techniques that will cut costs, and improve service delivery. People are demanding this type of common sense businesslike approach to government and we intend to deliver it," Calabrese stated.

Calabrese concluded his address with a description of Tonawanda as a neighborly community where people join together for the common good.

He stated that Tonawanda is "a

town where cooperation, not confrontation, governs the way the town deals with problems and our constituents."

"Yes, we prize cooperation, and yes, we are sometimes accused of running a town government that appears boring in comparison to others," the supervisor said. "But as you have heard this afternoon this cooperation has been anything but boring. It has produced a government that works, a government that delivers, a government that is open and innovative, and a government that lives within its means."

Following his address, Calabrese answered listeners' concerns.

First, regarding the Department of Transportation project on Delaware Avenue, he assured businesses that they would be able to opt-out of landscaping, decreasing construction work in the front of their properties.

Another individual asked how long it would be before River Road is relocated to open up the waterfront. Calabrese said this could be several years, as there is still the problem with clear waste from the Manli. Project of World War II.