

State of the County Speech

James B. McCarthy, Executive

Akron Press Club, February 19, 2003

Thank you Abe for the kind introduction and good afternoon everyone.

One of the biggest fears of a public speaker is to look out into the audience and see empty seats. My staff was concerned that a midterm State of the County speech might not be a big draw in the way of attendance and media coverage; so they started thinking about ways to build a crowd. Now, I have to say my staff comes up with some great ideas ...but I had to draw the line when they suggested I change my name to Lebron James.....McCarthy.

Thank you members of the Press Club for hosting us today at the Martin University Center.

Two years ago I entered the Executive's office with a determination to build on relationships with all county agencies and political subdivisions. To identify problem areas, to assess the needs and then to create working solutions...to chart a course for the future.

Today, at the midpoint of my term, I'm proud to report Summit County is on course.

It's been said that leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. This afternoon I'm going to talk about the real things that we have

accomplished in the last year.

As your County Executive I believe it's simply not enough to participate in a debate over ideas; as a leader you have to bring new ideas into the debate.

As I did on Issue 12. Along with Mayor Dan Croghan of Green, Summit County Superintendent of Schools Pat Corbett, Vicki Soukup of the Hudson School Board, Mayor Don Plusquellic of Akron, Mayor Randy Hart of Barberton, Mayor Amy Addis of Norton, and elected officials of township, cities, and villages; we partnered with hundreds of citizens to provide our children, through a sales tax, with new and safe schools, state of the art technology and up-to-date text books.

As we all know, Issue 12 failed at the polls. However, Issue 12 did not fail in its effort to bring people together for one common purpose. I saw a county rally together, work together, share ideas together.... and yes, even cry together in a way that I have never seen in my 30 years in public service.

I am very proud of this effort. I witnessed community agencies, governments, and labor and business leaders join forces to better the course for our children's future.

I believe in the future many successes will come from the coordinated effort of this issue. Cities, who have never worked with other Summit County cities, schools that have never worked with other schools in the county and citizens who have never even met each other, had a chance to exchange

ideas, to help one another and, most importantly, build a bridge for future partnerships.

A young city like Green can certainly benefit from the wisdom and experience of older cities like Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls, and school systems looking to try new programs can benefit from the wisdom and experience of other systems. Agencies that have experienced successes can help other agencies implement similar programs. This all comes together when you blur geographical boundaries and create communication and trust. This happened during the Issue 12 experience and I pledge to you today, I will continue to nurture this type of cooperation, as long I am the County Executive.

This same spirit of cooperation and trust can be seen in The Ohio-Erie Canal and Greenway Trail project. This ongoing project involving Cuyahoga, Summit, Stark and Tuscarawas counties will re-connect each county with its rich history using the natural environment. Over the next several years, Summit County has pledged to its communities 125-thousand dollars annually to be used in leveraging additional grant monies. This project will improve the quality of life in Summit County by providing recreational opportunities, while at the same time serving as a catalyst for economic development, bringing businesses and jobs into our community.

Also working with our communities is my Department of Community and Economic Development. The department has implemented a new Business Retention and Expansion Project. Throughout the 90's, more than 70-percent

of job growth came from existing firms. This project enables cities to identify ways to help retain their local businesses, as well as grow and expand them. A team of resource partners will address concerns of business communities by utilizing innovative technology tools, such as an Internet-based comprehensive survey. The project began its mission this month and I expect to see successful results within the year.

Another important tool of development is transportation. Last year Summit County government worked with Fred Krum and his staff at the Akron-Canton airport to secure a grant that brought nearly a million federal tax dollars into our community that enabled the airport to offer non-stop flights to New York City for 49-dollars. For those of you who forgot Valentines Day last Friday here's a chance to make it up, book a flight and take that special someone in your life for dinner, show and see the sights of New York City. It's no surprise with this type of value and convenience; our Akron-Canton airport is one of the fastest growing airports in the United States.

Our ability to bring our fair share of federal tax dollars back into our community during these tough economic times is now more important than ever.

The office of Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh has obtained two federal grants bringing more than 390-thousand federal tax dollars to Summit County to hire 3 additional prosecutors in the areas of violence and community prosecution. Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh expanded an educational

program that has proven successful in preventing cases of shaken baby syndrome. This is a valuable program that we hope will reduce the number of these types of cases that appear in our court.

Our Summit County Clerk of Courts, Diana Zaleski, assisted by the grant writing team in my Department of Public Safety received federal grant monies last September to create a countywide computer information resource. This program will include criminal justice information from the Court of Common Pleas, along with the Akron, Cuyahoga Falls and Barberton municipal courts. Today I am proud to announce that Summit County is one of the first counties to be connected to the Ohio Justice Information Network.

It's always nice to be first in the state.... but it's even better to be first in the country. Summit County has become one of the first counties in the nation to purchase an advanced mixed-mode 800MHz communications system in order to have seamless communications throughout the county. By Memorial Day, three thousand county radios will be programmed with common channels to be used by multi-jurisdictional agencies for emergency response.

When a major emergency occurs people turn to their leaders in government for guidance and assistance. When a tornado carved a destructive path through Twinsburg and Macedonia late last year; training, preparation and partnerships paid off.

On November 10, 2002, an F2 tornado struck northern Summit County, fortunately, there were no serious injuries, however, damage was extensive. About a week later I received a letter from Twinsburg Fire Chief Richard Racine praising the outstanding effort of our Emergency Management Agency during the crisis. Chief Racine told me it was reassuring knowing that the Emergency Operations Center was operational and available to lend assistance. The Chief said the dispatching of a Damage Assessment Team under the direction of EMA personnel was a great help since neither he nor anyone on his staff had ever experienced a disaster of this size. He said the Structural Collapse Group, which is part of the Special Operations Response Team, provided an invaluable service assisting, assessing and stabilizing the many homes damaged by the tornado. In one instance, a husband and wife along with their 2-year old daughter were rescued from the basement of their destroyed home thanks to Twinsburg Firefighters trained as members of the SORT team.

Chief Racine ended his letter offering to speak to anyone at anytime, about the importance of the Special Operations Team concept to the safety and well-being of the citizens of Summit County. In Chief's own words.... "The service that team provided that evening to my community was remarkable and I will be indebted to those members forever." That is a perfect example of preparation, partnerships, and caring about your community.

While providing an invaluable service to the county in times of disaster the Summit County EMA has been instrumental in bringing Department of Justice and FEMA money into the county.

County Engineer Gene Esser secured more than a million dollars in FEMA monies for floodplain mapping and storm water management. This effort avoids costs to our citizens while at the same time providing important safety data to many other county agencies.

Grants are important but intra-governmental partnerships are what make these programs successful.

Our Summit County Sheriff Drew Alexander has expanded the Sex Crimes Unit in order to better track sex offenders. An application was developed using the Summit County Geographical Information System that provides information that is used to notify citizens when a sexual predator has moved into their neighborhood. Parents can provide better safety for their children by monitoring their neighborhoods through a database on our county website.

The Summit County Government web site was redesigned last year to better serve the needs of our community and its citizens. The amount of information about county government now available on-line is greater than ever before. Web site users can read and track county council legislation. Forms and documents citizens need to access county services are a mere mouse-click away. Court cases can also be followed...in fact; recently, there was so much traffic on Clerk of Courts Diana Zaleski's site that a special LeBron James Case Link had to be installed. Educational elements have also been added to the site with the creation of "Kids Web," a kid-

friendly place to learn about our county government. In 2002 the Summit County web site recorded more than 25-million hits; making it one of the most viewed governmental web sites.

One of the most popular hits on our web site is the real estate appraisal information provided by the county Fiscal Office. And for those who do not have a computer at home, John Donofrio's staff went out into the communities and met with over 5-thousand citizens to review and update their new appraisal values.

Last year, both the Fiscal Office and my office won national awards. John Donofrio was awarded a **National Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting**. And my office received 4 national **Awards of Excellence in Achievement** from the National Association of County Information Officers.

One of the projects being submitted for an award this year is Summit ArtSpace. Two years ago, I met with Jessie Raynor, Executive Director of The Akron Area Arts Alliance, an organization that umbrellas 40 cultural organizations in Summit County. We talked about the creation of an Arts Incubator for the visual and performing arts. Jessie put together a business plan, did a needs assessment study and opened the Summit Artspace this year to rave reviews. In addition, the Akron Area Arts Alliance and the Summit County Historical Society have partnered with my administration to create two exhibits in the Ohio Building. One is called "Room with a View" and the other is called "Art Follows Industry" which shows the rich

history of Summit County and fabulous art created using rubber, steel and polymer. Thank you, Jessie, I promised you four years to complete your dream and you did it in two...congratulations.

Summit ArtSpace is a direct result of a group of citizens showing us a need in our cultural community, and we listened.

Riparian Setback legislation is another example of how our county government listens to its citizens and then responds to that need. Summit County citizens recognized the need to preserve the integrity of our waterways, and with this legislation we have done that. Summit County is the first and only county in the state to adopt a comprehensive, countywide setback ordinance. We have set the precedent in the State of Ohio for legislation that protects and benefits our citizens and the environment. Recently Bath and Copley Townships helped Summit County lead the way by adopting similar regulations.

Townships have always played an important role in shaping county policy. Recently 10 townships and 23 public and private interest groups partnered with us to craft improved subdivision regulations.

Numerous changes were made to these old regulations. Among the improvements...all-major subdivisions now require a "concept plan review" meeting. Open space, landscaping and buffering requirements are now included. Private street construction standards and access management have been addressed, and we have upgraded Cul De Sac standards to provide

improved access for fire and emergency vehicles that will increase safety for our citizens.

Builders and the public can review these subdivision regulations, riparian setbacks, and other information gathered from our Natural Resource Study detailed on our county maps online...and while there, they can check the progress of our capital improvement projects.

Improvements to the Summit County Juvenile Justice Center include an additional 78-thousand square feet, making accommodations for 30 new beds for offenders and facility upgrades for the staff and Judges. Construction is underway and if you're driving on Route 8 look towards Dan Street and you will see the new construction. The facility is scheduled to be completed in 2004.

The 21-million dollar expansion of the county courthouse annex will bring an additional 70-thousand square feet to accommodate the growth and needs of the Domestic Relations Court and the Clerk of Courts. The new design, boasting a common courthouse lobby, will provide easier access for the public with higher security. The new addition will accent the current architecture while maintaining the historical integrity of the existing structure.

The Summit County parking deck expansion will be completed August of this year. The expansion adds 350 new parking spaces and incorporates a skywalk to the plaza of the courthouse complex and city-county safety

building. These new parking spaces will add much needed parking for daytime workers and provide safe parking for evening visitors of downtown venues such as Canal Park and the newly renovated Civic Theatre.

You can't mention the Civic Theater without also talking about the Summit County Port Authority. The theatre is a centerpiece in the redevelopment of a key block of downtown Akron. The Port Authority owns the facility and manages it through an operating lease with the Civic Theater Foundation.

The Port Authority is also involved in a project that will enable Summa Health System to add 160-thousand square feet of high tech medical space to its City Hospital Campus. The Port Authority issued 27-point-5 million dollars in bonds for the project that will result in approximately 250 construction-related jobs and a payroll of an estimated 6-million dollars.

The Port Authority has shown it is a true vehicle of development and of creating new opportunities.

Opportunities are abundant with the Brown-Graves property. This 34-acre industrial landscape is prime for redevelopment and regional investment. It will be the new home to the Summit County Sheriff's administrative offices that will consolidate law enforcement and corrections for swift and efficient operation. The City of Akron is building a waste transfer station at the site to separate regional trash, making it more manageable. As potential partnerships blossom, the Brown-Graves property will attract new

businesses and more jobs.

One of the strangest partnerships happened one morning when I was told that the alternative music group Blink 182 wanted to shoot a music video at our Brown-Graves site where months earlier one of the buildings had been destroyed by fire. A film crew from Hollywood came in the next day with band members and shot a video in the charred remains. I have yet to see the video....but of course in my house MTV means McCarthy's T-V.

Certainly the Blink 182 visit along with the City of Akron's purchase of land for the transfer station proves once again that one man's trash is another man's treasure.

At the January 27th Summit County Council meeting I introduced legislation that would blend Edwin Shaw Hospital for Rehabilitation Services with Akron General Medical Center. The mission of providing rehabilitative services has been protected in the merger of AGMC and Edwin Shaw Hospital. This partnership also saves jobs and protects the interests of Summit County taxpayers.

I am proud to announce today, that after 2 years of very hard, very complicated work, coupled with the creative thinking of many individuals, I look forward to signing this legislation next month.

I want to thank Alan Bleyer President and CEO of AGMC, my Director of Law Karen Doty, Linda Faa, former CEO of Edwin Shaw hospital and all who assisted with this project.

I want thank Kim Zurz, former President of Summit County Council and the entire Summit County Council for their work on this project. And I want to take just a moment here to let everyone know that when Council members and I get together at the table, everyone checks their egos at the door. We work hard and stay focused on the issues and we agree to do what is best for the citizens of Summit County.

The Edwin Shaw - Akron General merger is something I am very proud of...saving jobs, saving money and saving a hospital is no small feat.

As important as it is to work on a big job like Edwin Shaw and bringing it to a successful conclusion, I believe the most important job of the County Executive is to keep the county fiscally healthy.

Budgets can be really boring stuff to some people... but I find them very interesting. Interesting, not from a numbers perspective, although getting budgets to balance is challenging, but from a real-life, what-do-we-get for our money perspective. So I thought I would give you a sense of our budget.

The County's operating budget for 2003 is roughly 460 million dollars. This budget grew only by one-percent. We did this by negotiating affordable labor contracts and freezing most discretionary spending. I want to thank our

labor union leaders and their members for their cooperation. I believe Pete Alati, president of AFSCME 1229 is here, Thank you, Pete.

There is a big difference between what you can afford for one year and what you can afford to sustain over the long run. The state may get away with draining their Rainy Day Fund, but I have no intention of foolishly spending ours.

It's not always easy to live within our means. It requires making hard decisions. It's easy to talk about being tough on crime and suggesting we need to lock up every offender, it's another thing to deal with the significant financial impact such a policy entails.

Last year we hired a national consulting firm, Huskey and Associates, to assess and evaluate our adult community corrections programs. The basic findings showed that while the Summit County Jail operates at 100-percent or above its capacity, Summit County's alternative sentencing facilities, that reached high levels of success, operate below their capacity. The report gave us high marks for using these alternative programs, but was critical of the fact that many of them are under-utilized.

It is clear, we need to make more efficient use of the resources we have, before we consider additional jail beds, and here's why.

It costs over 100 dollars a day to keep someone in our Jail, that's 36-thousand dollars a year per bed. So when I hear talk of a 500-bed addition to

the jail I know it would cost 32-point-5 million in tax dollars to build and another 18-million in tax dollars a year to operate. Summit County does not have those additional tax dollars.

The Kalmanoff report of 2000 criticized the county for failing to manage and control its criminal justice system. Shortly after taking office in 2001, I created the Criminal Justice Advisory Board. This board is made up of common pleas, juvenile and municipal court judges, law enforcement officials, prosecutors and defenders, social services providers, representatives of victims and elected office holders...these are **the** decision makers of our criminal justice system. This board meets regularly to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the system. We discuss needs, solutions, programming and concerns. So if anyone repeats the statement that Summit County does not control its criminal justice system they are either misinformed or not telling you the truth.

More than half of the County's budget, about 254 million dollars, is spent by our social service agencies, including Children's Services, Mental Retardation Developmental Disability, Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board and the Department of Family Services. This is a substantial amount of money by any accounting, and it is the prime reason we initiated a Quality of Life Study, in partnership with these agencies, to identify how our services affect the lives of our citizens. We need to make sure our financial resources are coordinated to address our most pressing issues and voids left by state cuts.

If any of you are wondering why I give my State of the County after the President's State of the Union and the Governor's State of the State, it's because their policies directly affect us.

The State's failure to deal with its budget problems responsibly hits us right here at home. The state has frozen and threatened to eliminate the Local Government Revenue sharing program, which is shared with the County, our townships, villages and cities. It is your share of state tax dollars that are suppose to be used for the operation of your local government. The state has cut its support of indigent defense from 50-percent to only 30-percent of the cost of the program, which is more than 3-point-2 million dollars per year and rising. Most disturbingly, the State is abandoning its traditional share of the cost of caring for our young, not only by failing to adequately fund education programs, but now by drastically cutting or eliminating support for children in the Juvenile Justice system.

Maintaining a budget that meets the needs of Summit County citizens, while at the same time being aware of the economic realities of the day is a big challenge. We met that challenge last year and were rewarded with a county government that today is fiscally sound.

Thinking about the many successes our county has had over the year, I always think of one project. My staff saw a need to do something on September 11th, 2002 where everyone could participate in their own personal way. It had to be dignified and meaningful.

On the first anniversary of September 11th, 555 county employees and citizens using their thumbprints and acrylic paints of red, white and blue created a 3 foot by 5 foot flag on stretch canvas.

The county's tribute to 9-11 is called "Thumbs up, America!" The painting is dedicated to the men and women in government and to our safety forces for their commitment and dedication. This beautiful painting proudly hangs in our Ohio Building.

Every time I see this painting I think about people caring about other people...caring about the firefighters and law enforcement personnel that protect us on a daily basis. I see the goodness in the people who created this for others. Beneath all this is the process used to identify a need, to develop partnerships and create a positive solution. "Thumbs up, America!" is what we do everyday in county government.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." We've done many things over the past year. These successes are due to a dedicated staff, committed officeholders and many of you here today.

I am proud to report The State of Summit County is strong, on course, and is prepared to meet the future.

I want to thank the citizens of Summit County for the honor and opportunity to be your County Executive.

Thank you and have a good afternoon.