



# State of the County Address

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COUNTY OF SUMMIT  
THE HIGH POINT OF OHIO  
RUSSELL M. PRY, EXECUTIVE



Good afternoon.

Thank you, Ron Syroid, for that wonderful introduction and thank you, Akron Press Club, for hosting my first State of the County Address.

On Friday the 13th, last July, I was sworn in as your County Executive. At that time, I promised the citizens of the County of Summit that job creation and retention would be the top priority of my administration and working together with all the elected officials and their staffs in open communication and cooperation.

At this time, I would like to recognize and publicly thank a few individuals who are here today. Beginning with our county elected officials, Clerk of Courts Danny Horrigan, County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh, County Fiscal Officer John Donofrio, County Engineer Greg Bachman and Sheriff Drew Alexander, the man with the gun! It is an honor to serve with all of you.

I also want to recognize and thank Nick Kostandaras, our County Council President, who stops by my office from time-to-time. He has been a real asset. Thank you, Nick, for your continued support and leadership on County Council. The entire council has been very helpful and cooperative and I believe we now have a team that shares in the vision of job creation, mutual trust and the mission of making the County of Summit the best place to live, work and play.

Council was a big part of the county's involvement with the Goodyear deal and I want to acknowledge this today and publicly thank them. If you would, please stand so that we may acknowledge and thank you.

Keeping the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in the County of Summit is the largest job retention project this area has seen in decades. As a result of many meetings, thinking outside the box and number crunching, 3,000 jobs will remain in the County of Summit. And if that isn't enough good news, the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company will continue to purchase over \$370,000,000 in goods and services each year from over 400 businesses in the County of Summit.

It was an honor to sit at the table with Goodyear, the City of Akron, the Port Authority and Stu Lichter. I remember one day thinking that we were all so fortunate to be working together with such cooperation, respect and the single goal of collaborating to save jobs. I don't believe there is a better place to do business in this part of the country than right here in the County of Summit. I saw at that table, professionals who trusted one another completely and I knew we would work out the pieces needed to keep Goodyear here in Akron. The county was able to help, quite frankly, because of the county's solid financial health; we were able to bring together the financing needed to make this opportunity a reality. And it may be exactly the same role we will play in keeping Bridgestone Firestone jobs here.

My Director of Finance and Budget, Linda Sowa Phelps, and my Director of Community and Economic Development, Patrick D'Andrea, and I are

presently working with Bridgestone Firestone officials and to assist this company with keeping their technical component here in the County of Summit. Team Technology, as the group is called, will continue to talk, meet and hopefully bring about a partnership that successfully keeps these high tech jobs here in our community.

Keeping jobs is important and creating an environment that grows new jobs is also an important priority for my administration.

The newly created Economic Development Task Force is charged with the responsibility of aggressively pursuing economic development opportunities that will bring new job opportunities into the County of Summit communities.

In addition to the task force, an Economic Development Rapid Response Team has been established to immediately respond to local businesses in need of assistance. My administration has designed and implemented a *Sharing Resources to Better Economic Development Forum*. We have held forums in the City of Green and the City of Twinsburg. The forums bring together local, state and federal public officials with members of the local business community to discuss the on-going community and economic development climate. Cooperation and communication is an essential key in knowing what companies are thinking and doing and we, at the county, want to be the first to know if there is the possibility of re-location, a need for retraining personnel, a planned closure or layoff so we can immediately offer resources to assist our area businesses.

There are, even in the short time I've been your executive, many successes to share. Outside of the Goodyear project, our work has helped retain 700 jobs at 14 companies. Additionally, those 14 companies have agreed to create an additional 419 new jobs and invest over \$62,000,000 into our local economy.

One such company is PPG, a company with long-standing ties in Barberton. PPG was considering creating a new production line and installing it either elsewhere in the United States, or in China where they already have a presence. When my staff and I learned about this, we contacted PPG and began having discussions about how we could help them create this new product and production line in the County of Summit. In our collaborative model, we reached out to the City of Barberton and involved their economic development staff. Together, we determined the best way to help PPG prosper in Barberton was to establish an Enterprise Zone agreement for their new line, an arrangement that was agreeable to PPG, the City of Barberton and the Barberton City School District. The Enterprise Zone agreement calls for PPG to make an investment of \$23,000,000 and to hire at least 10 new employees, with an average annual payroll of over \$450,000, related solely to their new production line. But it also strengthens ties between the company and local community, where it will continue to employ over 150 people.

But tax abatements are not the only way we help companies; in fact, they are but a small portion of the services we offer to the local business community.

In Stow, we linked Noble Metal Processing with state funding to help them retrain their incumbent workforce. Working with our local partners in state government, including the Governor's regional liaison for economic development, the County of Summit identified a program that could help refund Noble up to 50% of its training expenses. In doing so, 43 employees were kept in place while increased efficiencies and product demand necessitated the hiring of 36 new employees.

Expanding our local infrastructure is an essential component to community and economic development. When meeting with companies looking to locate a business in the County of Summit they first look for a diverse local network of highway, rail and air transportation options. To help accentuate our transportation network, my Department of Community and Economic Development is looking into establishing a county-wide transportation improvement district.

The benefits of these structures are two-fold. First, transportation improvement districts are able to lock in prices for construction commodities; thereby, lowering the cost of the construction project. Second, by fronting construction costs, which are later repaid by state and federal monies, projects are often completed faster, sometimes knocking several years off of the project time table.

In addition to studying the possibility of transportation improvement districts, the county's infrastructure is in need of finer tuning. The County of Summit's infrastructure is aging and I believe we must face our

infrastructure challenges head on if we are going to compete for new businesses and local expansions.

Beginning in 2008, I propose to allocate an annual pool of funds from the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to help local communities pay for public infrastructure projects that create and retain jobs. We will continue to look for creative, innovative ways to leverage our resources with the cooperation of local government and the County of Summit Port Authority for job creation in area of high need and great opportunity.

I believe this will jump start our economic development and put us in an enviable position of attracting new jobs for our citizens.

Another ongoing community and economic development project that will have a strong impact on our local economy is establishing an Akron Biomedical Corridor. I am currently working with area leaders, regional hospitals, The University of Akron and NEOUCOM to make a Biomedical Health Corridor in the City of Akron a reality. I strongly believe this initiative has the potential to leverage our existing regional competencies in healthcare research and polymers to become a world-class destination for healthcare research. We can also leverage our strength in advanced manufacturing to become the hub that turns medical research into a marketplace commodity.

As you can see, my Department of Community and Economic Development is open for business and dedicated to working with local municipalities,

businesses and community organizations in an effort to bring jobs, funding, services and additional tax dollars to the community.

In addition to the County of Summit's recent economic development accomplishments, I have also focused my attention on developing community partnerships.

Under my leadership, the County of Summit entered into a partnership with the Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Metro Parks, the County of Summit Ohio State Extension, the City of Tallmadge and the Agricultural Society. This partnership will improve operations of the County of Summit Fairgrounds, conserve green space and promote recreation throughout the community.

The County of Summit also joined forces with the City of Akron to purchase a 9-1-1 emergency phone system that has the technical capability of pinpointing the locations of emergency calls made from cell phones. The purchase of a single system saved the City of Akron and the County of Summit nearly \$150,000. The partnership also reduces maintenance expenses by 40%.

As a result of this successful partnership, the County of Summit agreed to continue its affiliation with the County of Summit-City of Akron Task Force, a group charged with the responsibility of identifying areas in which the two jurisdictions can share services, resources and save valuable tax dollars now and in the future.

I believe strongly that what we do today will determine our future state of the county. Back in 1996, the County of Summit issued over \$2,000,000 in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) bonds to finance a portion of the cost of extending Embassy Parkway and installing water and sanitary sewer lines. In 2000, additional buildings were added to the Embassy Parkway Development; therefore, increasing the value of the properties. Since that time, TIF collections have exceeded the annual debt service on the bonds, allowing the County of Summit to build a reserve for debt retirement.

Tax Increment Financing is an economic development tool used by the County of Summit to finance public improvements. The tool was used to attract additional local companies to the area. Once this debt is paid, the citizens of the County of Summit will reap the rewards of the additional tax dollars the development will bring to the community.

I am extremely proud to announce the County of Summit will soon have enough Tax Increment Financing proceeds **in reserve** to retire the outstanding bonds associated with the Embassy Parkway Development Project. By retiring the debt 10 years **ahead of schedule**, 12 government entities will begin to annually receive the Embassy Parkway tax dollars in 2009. The 12 agencies consist of three social services agencies, three local governments, the Library, the Zoo and Metroparks. Three schools systems will receive the additional tax dollars with Revere Local Schools receiving an additional \$338,000 in tax revenue each and every year beginning in 2009.

Due to the County of Summit's involvement in this project, a total of \$564,000 in annual new tax revenues will be put back into our community **10 years early.**

This is a prime example of the benefits community and economic development programs can bring to our community.

Throughout the past eight months, my administration also moved forward with programming initiatives that were designed to assist our individual citizens who face hardships.

In November, the County of Summit distributed 1,980 box sets of non-perishable food items and personal care products to families in need. The County of Summit received the food and personal care items as a result of a grant through the State of Ohio and partnered with the Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank for distribution.

In December, my administration through Job and Family Services launched a countywide initiative that provided 4,400 Ohio Works First (OWF) clients with a \$150 JC Penney merchandise card to purchase school clothing, coats and shoes for children. According to our preliminary report from JC Penney, a total of over \$516,000 has been redeemed thus far. The cards do not have expiration dates and we expect more of those dollars to be redeemed throughout the year. 97% of all the purchases made with these JC Penney merchandise cards were for clothing and shoes and registered at no more than \$30.00 a piece. We believe this to be a success, and are currently considering plans to offer this program again in the future.

Another Job and Family Services partnership will be the implementation of a drop-in child care service at The Job Center, named the *FUNSTOP*. As many of you know, The Job Center is dedicated to maximizing employment and economic opportunity in the County of Summit by being a resource for every employer and job seeker in the region.

The County of Summit recently signed a lease agreement with Summit Workforce Solutions, the organization charged with managing the programming and operations of The Job Center. Per the agreement, the County of Summit will lease nearly 2,000 square feet of space for the operation of the *FUNSTOP*.

Unemployed citizens will soon have the ability to visit the facility and focus on employment opportunities while their children receive care, **FREE OF CHARGE**. The *FUNSTOP* is expected to be fully operational within the next month.

Today, I have the honor to announce another Job and Family Services partnership. Tonight, my administration will present to County Council for its approval, a new initiative teaming my administration with the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) to address the foreclosure crisis facing many of our citizens. In 2007, there were a total of 4,252 foreclosures in the County of Summit. So far, in 2008, this astounding figure does not show any signs of tapering off.

Therefore, my Department of Job and Family Services, in collaboration with the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, will begin offering a *Foreclosure Prevention and Rescue Program*. The program will offer one-time “mortgage rescue funds” and a full range of housing services. This service will be available to eligible the County of Summit homeowners, who are at risk of losing their home due to predatory lending, financial mismanagement or job loss. AMHA will coordinate the services of local and national housing agencies as well as lenders. Two examples of the coordination efforts will include referrals to the City of Akron for services through the foreclosure initiative recently announced by City of Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic in his State of the City Address and to the County of Summit’s Office of Consumer Affairs. As the funds for this program will come from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF dollars), eligibility will be defined as the County of Summit households that have minor children in the home and whose income is at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level Guideline.

Participants will be eligible for one-time mortgage “rescue funds” up to \$5,000 and will be referred for mandatory financial management education and a case plan for housing sustainability will be developed. A second mortgage lien will be attached to all home mortgages receiving the one-time mortgage rescue funds to ensure that allocated funds are utilized in accordance with program requirements. If you, or a citizen you know, are in need of program assistance please take one of the brochures on your table for contact information.

Recently, I asked my departments of Job and Family Services and Communications to initiate a program designed for our senior citizens. This program will have a designated “Senior Liaison” who will communicate with senior groups throughout the county. Many of you know Bob Otterman, who joined my staff several months ago, you also know that he is one of the county’s most visible and well respected senior citizens and certainly, one of their strongest advocates. Our communities have no shortage on senior programs, senior organizations and senior activities, and for that we are very lucky. Bob will identify and gather information on all of these resources and then communicate with seniors across the county by hosting community meetings, creating publications and coordinating workshops. Bob, my staff and I are committed to doing every thing possible to keep our senior citizens happy, healthy and in their own homes for as long as possible. The program is called *Senior Service* and Bob has already begun meeting with organizations to create a circle of cooperation and communication. Bob is ready to assist the senior population of the County of Summit and his contact information is also listed on your table brochures.

As a community leader, I feel it is my responsibility to be an active leader in our social service community. And I am honored to assist local non-profits with their fundraising efforts.

In August, I created a new program called *Change for Change*. *Change for Change* is a monthly networking program that is held at Rockne’s Pub on Merriman Road in Akron. All of the tips (change) generated at the event are donated to a local organization, charity or cause.

To date, this networking program has raised funds for the following community organizations: the Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank, the United Way of Summit County, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the East Akron Community House, The Salvation Army and The Sierra Club.

A total of \$7,264 has been raised.

This program provides the County of Summit government employees, county officials and private citizens with an opportunity to mix, mingle and raise funds for organizations dedicated to making CHANGE in the community. I want to personally thank Rockne's owner, Chris Hamad, and his serving staff for sponsoring these monthly events and working without tips these nights.

And by the way, tomorrow night we sponsor the Akron Urban League so please join us at Rockne's on Merriman from 4:30 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. and **bring change.**

Once again, I am proud to report that the County of Summit Social Service Advisory Board has made significant strides towards accomplishing the goals of the Summit 2010: Quality of Life Project.

For those of you who don't know, Summit 2010 is a comprehensive health and social service plan that focuses on strengthening collaboration among

the major public systems in the County of Summit and increasing the effectiveness of the services they finance and deliver.

Part of Summit 2010 is The Healthy Connections Network. This Network has empowered the County of Summit to expand primary medical care and reduce health disparities to citizens in need. To date, Healthy Connections has enrolled and served nearly 1,600 individuals for primary care, providing nearly \$10,000,000 in donated medical care and an additional \$21,000,000 in pharmaceuticals.

Through Summit 2010, we have designed a directory of available social services for the County of Summit court personnel. The directory is updated periodically and was created in an effort to increase coordination and communications between the courts and the public social service system.

The Social Service Advisory Board is responsible for creating a case management data system that will provide the opportunity of sharing and updating client information between community agencies. The pilot system being implemented will be used to share case management data between the following organizations: County of Summit Job and Family Services, County of Summit Juvenile Court and the County of Summit Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

As you can see, a significant amount of progress has been achieved through the Summit 2010: Quality of Life Project. The Social Service Advisory Board is presently working on generating continued program success and I

would like to thank our board for their hard work, vision and dedication to our *Summit 2010, a Quality of Life Program*. Thank you all.

In January, I presented the 2008-2013 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to Summit County Council. My 44 page document contains detailed plans for financing the construction of a new Veterans Service Commission building, a new County of Summit Animal Control facility and a new County of Summit Sheriff's Administration Building. It provides funding for renovations to the County of Summit Jail and the County of Summit Courthouse to provide space for two new judgeships and for the expansion of the County of Summit sewer system in southern Summit County. The CIP also includes continued funding to the Ohio & Erie Canal Coalition through a Canal Corridor and Greenway Grant.

In addition to the proposed construction projects, land purchases and renovations, the Capital Improvement Program also details the financial role the County of Summit will play in financing the public improvements needed to keep the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company's World Headquarters and North American Headquarters in the County of Summit.

The investments contained in this plan reflect those priorities that I believe to be crucial to the success and well being of the citizens of the County of Summit. I look forward to working with County Council, county officeholders, local community leaders and businesses to implement this six year program.

For too many years, our County of Summit Veterans Service Commission has not had a proper home. The Park Street facility is an old converted residential house, with little parking, no easy access and quite frankly, not an appropriate place for the men and women who gave so much for our freedom.

I hope Jack Ryan and George Baker are here today because these two men deserve a big round of applause. George and Jack, please stand and let us recognize you both for your service to our country and your commitment to this new facility....thank you both.

I sat down with George and Jack right after I was sworn in and we made happen in two months what had not happened in ten years. We have purchased land on Waterloo Road for the new facility, we have hired an architect to do the design and we will break ground on this great new home of the County of Summit Veterans Service Commission in late 2008.

I attended my first deployment ceremony recently, it was the largest deployment of area soldiers since World War II and I was moved beyond words. What struck me was how brave the families were of these soldiers going off to war. I wanted to do more and because of that, I asked my staff to find out what we could do to help our area soldiers and their families. As a result, the office of the County of Summit Executive has created a partnership with the USO and the County of Summit Veterans Commission.

Our 3,800 County of Summit employees will be given the opportunity to participate in monthly service giving programs from sending out birthday

wishes and letters to platoons to collecting items to ship overseas. Activities and notification of events, news and ceremonies will be sent to the Executive's office by both the VSC and USO. We will email blast this information to our staff and participating agencies. The program, *Serving our Soldiers*, or *SOS*, will also communicate information about deployment and welcoming ceremonies, events, programs and giving opportunities that are sponsored by various home front groups and organizations.

My office will also establish a direct telephone number for use by military families and a brochure listing programs that may be needed by our soldiers and their families. This brochure will be distributed by the USO and the County of Summit Veterans Service Commission to local military organization so that our local soldiers and their families will know who to call when they need county program information.

I believe this program will help many soldiers, not only here in the County of Summit, but throughout our country. I am proud to lead this effort and I am proud to work with so many individuals wanting to give more for our soldiers and their families. If you, or your organization, want to be a part of the County of Summit's *SOS* effort please contact my office and you will be included in our monthly communication listing opportunity to support our soldiers.

Please also visit the web site of our Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner and participate in her new program called, *Vote in Honor of a Veteran*. You can list the name or names of veterans you want to honor by voting in this election. This year, I will be voting in honor of the men and women of the

County of Summit who are serving overseas. It is a wonderful program and I commend Secretary Brunner and encourage your participation.

In closing, I would like to share one moment of surprise I experienced when I first became county Executive. Last summer, I asked the Directors of all the levy agencies to lunch with me. Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Children Services, the Akron-Summit County Public Library, the Akron Zoo, Metro Transportation and Metro Parks, serving Summit County were all represented. I was amazed when one of the Directors said that they had never met before as a group. I couldn't believe that. It was at that moment, I discovered that we all need to talk more, to share more and to work together more. During lunch, we talked about cross marketing, helping each other with cost cutting programs and the possibility of partnering on variety of issues. I asked my staff to gathered information on all the agencies and created a resource booklet for all to use. We agreed to meet quarterly and commit to a level of cooperation never before seen in our county. I strongly believe this advancement in communication and cooperation will serve all of the citizens of the County of Summit.

There is a new working climate in our county government of communication, cooperation, partnership and fellowship. Many people want to do what is right and what is good for our community. Their knowledge, expertise and dedication are overwhelming and I am most grateful to all of those people who everyday help me make the right decisions.

We have proven to those outside this great county that we have the financial resources, the creative thinking, the proven experience in collaboration and

the mutual trust needed to get things done, to keep jobs and to create jobs and to work together for the citizens of our county. I pledge to continue to bring people together, to work out any problem that may stop us from moving forward and creating opportunities for our future. I hope you will agree, my administration has shown it is ready, willing and very able to do the job.

Thank you and I will be happy to take questions.



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