

The Lakewood Observer

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Mayor Edward FitzGerald's Inaugural Speech

By Mayor Edward FitzGerald

Mayoral Address January 5th-6th, 2008

First I want to thank the students from Lakewood High School who performed "America the Beautiful." That was just wonderful, and I would suggest to Superintendent Estrop, who is in attendance here, that he extend your winter break by one week.

Father Phil, Senator Brown, my fellow citizens of Lakewood and distinguished guests.

The motto of the State of Ohio is "With God, All things are Possible." And I believe that, because how else could you explain an Irish Catholic being inaugurated in a Masonic Temple?

I first heard Senator Brown speak when I was a student at Ohio State in 1990, and I thought he should run for president then, and I still do. But since the Iowa

caucuses have now occurred, I hope you all encourage whomever receives the presidential nomination to make Sherrod Brown the next vice President of the United States.

Senator Brown is not the most important person here today, my mother turned 80 years old on Christmas Day, and she is here with us today. My mom grew up without much money in the middle of the Great Depression, and still raised eight children with my dad. She's a special person, and I'm lucky to have her here today. Some people ask her why she had so many children, but if she had stopped at four, or five, or even six children, I wouldn't be here today, since I arrived at number seven. So I thank her for that as well.

The FitzGerald family has a long history with the City of Lakewood, going back more than 75 years. Working as the Mayor of Lakewood is my opportunity to be of service to the city of my family's past and our future.

It is natural for every mayor to believe that he or she faces the greatest challenges in our history, but all objective evidence now points to the fact this is a particularly crucial turning point for not just our city, but our region.

I'm sure many of you have read recently about how we are facing a fiscal crisis. Even before I took office, I called the state auditor's office in, and we are being forced to consider spending cuts. Not because we want to, or because we asked for this situation, but because the day of reckoning is here, whether we like it or not.

Lakewood is not the only city struggling with a familiar litany of obstacles. All across Ohio, and all across America, hundreds of cities are struggling with stagnant tax revenues, foreclosed properties, rising crime, and aging infrastructure. Some of these communities will fail. Some of these communities will barely keep their heads above water. And some of these



communities will find a way to prevail. In the next four years, it is the duty of everyone in this room, from those on this stage, to those in the back of the hall, to find a way to ensure Lakewood will be one those cities which not only survives, but prevails.

Lakewood is going to prevail because we have some resources which few other communities do. We have an abundance of talent in our community, in every field of endeavor. When we are looking for expertise in business, in technology, in the arts, in education, in government, we have only to look to ourselves.

Part of my job as mayor will be to tap into this tremendous reserve of talent which exists in Lakewood. Since the election, dozens of residents have volunteered their - time and talent to work on solutions to our problems. This process of citizen involvement has already produced results. We have set up working groups regarding all the major issues we are struggling with. And Lakewood residents are studying the problems, researching different strategies, and evaluating the best practices of other communities.

This is hardly the first time we have studied our problems. The difference is, I won't be waiting months or years before we begin to implement reform. In the first 100 days, we will be implementing reforms in every single city hall department, and the phrase: "that's the way it's always been done" will have no place in Lakewood City Hall.

And the reform won't stop at the first 100 days. Throughout the next four years, our working groups will continue to research more effective strategies and evaluate our departments. Because, some of our reforms will succeed, but inevitably some will fail. There are always political risks associated with innovation and change, but those are risks I am willing to take. After all, what in the world is the point of being in political office if you're not willing to take risks to help our city?

In 3 years, Lakewood will celebrate 100 years as an incorporated city. The century mark is an important milestone, at which we can take stock of our strengths and weaknesses. I have a few simple goals which I want Lakewood to have achieved on our 100th birthday.

I'd like to share them with you:

I want our residents to be confident that our community is safe, and I want that confidence to be based on standards of public safety, not public relations.

I want our city finances to be secure and sound.

I want our recreational programs to match the high expectations we have for our children.

I want a local government that is known for high ethical standards, efficiency, and technological innovation.

I want a housing strategy that encourages investment but will not tolerate neglect.

And I want Lakewood to embrace our artistic and cultural assets, and uplift the civic soul of our city.

I don't expect perfection, and I know you don't either. But I do believe that we will put ourselves on the road to being a community which finally taps into the tremendous talent we have, and that we will begin to make steady progress in all of these areas, and many more which I haven't even mentioned.

My campaign succeeded because it came to represent something larger than myself. My administration will succeed if it becomes a vehicle for you- your family, your friends, your neighbors, to participate fully in this 100 year old enterprise we call Lakewood.

We all need to be ambassadors of our city, to tell the story of why Lakewood should be a destination for families.

But not everyone believes we will succeed. We all interact with people who have given up on our city, and who now prefer to live in communities in surrounding counties.

Let me tell you what I tell some of those people. I say, I know your community has some things that we do not. But we have so many things that you can never have.

You don't have our historic homes, you don't have our lakefront, you don't have our riverfront, you don't have our Beck Center, you don't have our library system, you don't have our public schools, you don't have our private schools, you don't have our business community and our workforce, you don't have our churches and faith communities, you don't have our cultural diversity, you don't have our proximity to downtown and the Metroparks.

And you don't have our civic pride, because we're a real community, not some developer's imitation of a real community.

I feel sorry for some of those folks, I really do. Because they're underestimating us. They're underestimating our talent, they're underestimating our resolve, they're underestimating our energy and our character.

They don't know our history, what we've faced before and overcome. They don't know the true story of Lakewood.

The story of Lakewood has been recounted in at least two books in the 20th century, but those histories are incomplete. When I was a kid, I used to read a lot of history. And sometimes when I would read one of my favorite history books, I would hope that somehow, maybe the ending would be different, something more to my liking. And even though I knew it was really impossible, sometimes I just couldn't help hoping for a different ending. But that was just a lost cause, and I couldn't change a thing, because those books had already been written, and those lives had already been led.

But our lives have not been led, and the story of our city has not been completed, and now it is our turn to write our next chapter any way we want, as we would like it to be, and as we would like to pass on to our children.

In the next four years, we're going to add a chapter to the story of Lakewood. I want to invite you to write that chapter with me. And let's make it a chapter worth reading.

Thank you very much.