

2017 State of the County Address

delivered by Nassau County Executive Edward P. Mangano

Good afternoon and welcome!

I would like to begin by thanking Presiding Officer Norma Gonsalves, Minority Leader Kevan Abrahams and all of our County Legislators for hosting this State of the County Address. I appreciate the presence of my colleagues in government -Comptroller George Maragos, Clerk Maureen O'Connell, and members of our learned judiciary. To the FREE Players, thank you for providing entertainment to our audience.

Former County Legislator Fran Becker, thank you for leading us in our National Anthem....and thank you to the Vietnam Veterans of America for serving as honor guard today. Will all our veterans please stand and be recognized. On behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you for your service and dedication to these United States of America.

Before I begin, I ask you to join me in a moment of silence as we remember former Nassau County Presiding Officer Judy Jacobs and County Legislator John Ciotti.

Friends and neighbors, this afternoon I report to you that the State of our County is strong. Our economy has transformed by the day, adding thousands of new jobs and attracting new employers.

In fact, 2017 kicked off with the strongest job growth in more than 3 years and our unemployment rate is consistently among the lowest in the region and jobs have returned.

New housing opportunities continue to open in our downtowns, and the Federal government declared Nassau County has effectively ended veteran homelessness.

Our quality of life continues to advance through park enhancements, infrastructure improvements, and advances at the Coliseum site.

More money is in the pockets of our residents, than that of government, as we froze property taxes 6 out of 7 years and eliminated the County home energy tax on your utility bills.

County finances continue to strengthen, and crime is at the lowest level since records were recorded.

As you know, we live in unprecedented times, with threats of terrorism throughout the globe. While our troops remain overseas combatting ISIS and other radical extremists, here in the Homeland our police are working more diligently than ever before to protect our way of life. The fact remains that America will always be a target as we celebrate democracy, religious freedom and diversity. In the past year, we have witnessed terror attacks in New York City, New Jersey, Minnesota, Florida and Ohio. We have also experienced the deadly targeting of police officers in Louisiana and Texas. While there have been no credible threats to Nassau County, we must

remember our neighbor to the west - New York City - continues to be a high value target for those who wish to do us harm.

Accordingly, we have changed the way in which we police. I thank the Legislature for supporting my public safety initiatives which bolster the police force by hiring 150 additional police officers, 911 operators, Ambulance Medical Technicians and the formation of special units. Special units are becoming ever-demanding. In fact, over the past year, we have sworn in the largest number of police recruit graduates in more than 20 years.

This increase in force provides our police department a greater ability to intensify police patrols throughout local communities...assign officers to special crime prevention units, such as those combatting gangs and drugs...and protect large public assemblies, such as the Presidential Debate, from any threat. Residents should take comfort in these actions, but remain vigilant and remember: If You See Something, Say Something.

Several months ago, the Police Department and I launched a new state-of-the-art school security program to help save countless lives in the event of an active shooter. This program provides school officials with a free, direct link from their cell phones to the Police Communications Bureau and alerts area first responders to a situation. The system provides police with critical intelligence, including floor plans, the ability to control remote door locks and view live footage from closed-circuit security cameras so that responding officers receive real-time intelligence. While we hope that this system is never needed, we are prepared should a tragedy strike here in Nassau County. Each month, more schools are coming online with the police department and the program will be offered to Jewish Community Centers and houses of worship in the months ahead.

Last year, I called upon the public to help us in protecting our homeland by reporting suspicious social media activity to police. I thank the residents who took this initiative seriously and TEXTED-A-TIP through the Crime Stoppers app on their phones and tablets.

Rest assured; federal, state and local law enforcement agencies continue to vigilantly work 24/7 to keep our County and nation safe. Our enhanced Anti-Terror Police Training Exercises and high-powered rifles came into use at Long Island Rail Road Stations in September when bombs exploded in Manhattan and Seaside Park, New Jersey.

In the coming weeks, I will unveil a new Civil Defense initiative. Residents will have an opportunity to attend a two-hour training that includes information on active shooter situations, heroin awareness, crime prevention and homeland security. When complete, graduates of the program will be provided access to a Virtual Neighborhood Watch that includes live crime data, awareness bulletins, a blog within their precinct and the ability to provide direct tips or concerns to our crime analysts. I have long said that the public is our most-important partner.

Friends, I am truly proud of the Nassau County Police Department for their commitment to protecting us. In fact, major crime is down by 27% since I took office, including a 50% decrease in residential burglaries, a 46% reduction in stolen vehicles, and a 37% decrease in robberies. I attribute this success to the brave men and women of the Police Department and our investment

in assets. From intelligence-led policing model to advancements in technology, such as computers in patrol vehicles; license plate readers; and our Shot Spotter system, we have made Nassau a much safer community. Countywide success in reducing crime is also due to community programs, such as our Gun Buy-Back Program which has taken nearly 4,500 illegal firearms off our streets.

Over the past eight years, the Legislature and I have worked in a bipartisan manner to invest significant resources in the Police Department to keep our neighborhoods safe. We have also assisted the Freeport Police Department with license plate readers and the City of Long Beach Police Department with a Shot Spotter system. Together, we invested in new Precinct houses, including the 1st Precinct in Baldwin which opened earlier this year with the support of hundreds of community members. We accomplished this in a cost-effective manner, cancelling prior plans and saving taxpayers \$16 million.

Friends, our brave first responders - both police, emergency medical technicians and volunteer firefighters - take on the battles required to preserve our quality of life. This is also the case when it comes to the War on Drugs – a scary and frightening battle which is tragically destroying families and taking too many lives.

In my hometown of Bethpage, I have personally witnessed the destruction heroin abuse brought to my friends and their families. The faces of those suffering with addiction are probably not what you would expect. No one is immune; no one community is exempt; and sadly, this plague can be found in more homes than you could ever imagine.

In fact, an intern in our own County government, who volunteered his time to help others with drug abuse, tragically relapsed and lost his battle to addiction. His name is Garrett Kassler, and he helped us launch a recovery program that has helped save countless lives. His mother Lisa is here today and we hope they know how appreciative we are for all of Garrett's dedication. We will never forget him and will never stop fighting for families impacted by addiction.

In fact, my wife Linda has dedicated her efforts to supporting and assisting families affected by addiction.

While many have chosen to avoid talking about this subject, my administration has brought the issue of addiction to the forefront - nothing is more important than keeping families whole through effective recovery programs.

Together with the District Attorney, Police Department, Department of Human Services and community partners, my administration is combatting the growing epidemic. I credit our success to a comprehensive strategy of awareness, education, enforcement and treatment. With respect to awareness, the Heroin Prevention Task Force and my administration continue to empower family and loved ones with the tools needed to identify drug use and find help.

Our police department visits students countywide to speak of the dangers of drugs. We hosted a "Schools in the Know" workshop for administrators and nurses – providing them with personal stories of addiction and recovery, early detection techniques, information on current drug trends,

and training to administer the overdose reversal agent known as Narcan. Next month, we'll be hosting a "Colleges in the Know" Workshop to discuss addiction on local campuses.

In total, we have trained nearly 8,000 citizens to administer this life-saving overdose reversal agent. We know of at least 50 residents whose lives were saved because of those training sessions, and that's 50 or more families that remain whole. With respect to enforcement, Nassau and Suffolk counties joined forces for the first time on March 1st last year.

The State Police, FBI and DEA joined our collaborative efforts to combine resources and track down the sources of fatal heroin overdoses. Together, we have arrested more than 200 drug dealers, conducted 12 search warrants, seized over 10 guns, 5,000 glassine of heroin and over 10,000 Xanax pills. We will continue to aggressively hunt down drug thugs and remove them from our streets.

Together, we are overcoming the stigma of drug abuse in families and in society. All should know, you are not alone. The only shame in addiction, is not seeking help when help is available. Help can be found at the County's residential crisis center in Freeport, where professionals are at the ready to assist those who have just been revived from an overdose or are in eminent danger of abusing drugs. Help can also be found at St. Bernard's Church in Levittown, where a Support Group meets weekly. And at Nassau County's Opiate Treatment Program on the grounds of NUMC.

In fact, a resource table is available in the lobby here today. See, treatment is available for those who need it and we continued to promote its availability at a free Drug Treatment Forum and Resource Fair just a few months ago. Our County's, "A Shot at Life," program offers counseling to those with addiction, along with critical monthly injections of Naltrexone – a medication that caps receptors in the brain, cutting drug cravings and blocking their euphoric effects. Together, programs such as these are saving the lives of sons, daughters, husbands and wives. While there is much more work to do, I thank all those who have worked with my administration to combat the heroin epidemic and congratulate them all as we are a model for the nation.

Just as our first responders have fulfilled their commitment each day toward protecting the public, my administration has kept its commitment to support them. Simply put, when we make promises, we keep them! Eight years ago, we began with an ambitious plan to transform our County for your benefit. While there has always been criticism to go around, we can proudly state that we succeeded in our plans and kept our word by fulfilling the pledges we made.

Today, I deliver this State of the County Address from the New Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum – presented by New York Community Bank. As you well know, I pledged to jumpstart the previous efforts to improve the Coliseum and build a new economy on the property. We succeeded! In just two days, the New Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum will officially host its first performance - Long Island's own Billy Joel. Billy will be followed by hundreds of world-class performances and events. Acts like Marc Anthony, Bruno Mars, Barry Manilow and Stevie Nicks; rock bands Def Leppard, Metallica and Tony Award-winning icon Idina Menzel – as well as sporting events and family shows are booked to perform at the New Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. No taxpayer dollars were used for transformation of the arena, and in fact,

\$165 million in private investment was invested. This public-private partnership was a huge win for our community, as we now have a world-class arena and have shed millions in expenses formerly paid by taxpayers, including utilities, parking lot repairs and capital improvements. Moreover, Nassau County is guaranteed \$4.4 million a year in revenue, which will help us keep taxes down and provide opportunities for employment. April 5th's grand opening of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum will be a celebration for all of Long Island.

While the New Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum transformed our County, we now have an opportunity to showcase a new arena to the New York Islanders. I have met with officials from the Barclays Center and the Islanders; and I strongly believe there is a path for the Islanders return to their home, where the best sight lines in NHL remain. Together with modern amenities for fans and athletes, and room to add seats to accommodate the Islanders, I believe Nassau County has positioned itself for serious consideration by the team. When you factor in the support of Long Island fans, I believe we are now an attractive option for the Islanders.

On the Coliseum property, much work continues beyond the opening of the arena. New housing opportunities are being discussed for the surrounding Plaza, along with restaurants, retail, and family entertainment options. I look forward to unveiling those details in the near future. Our vision for the Coliseum property is much more than a sports-entertainment destination.

Joining the arena and plaza is a new state-of-the-art, \$140-million cancer care facility. Memorial Sloan Kettering recently broke ground for this new first-class cancer treatment and clinical research center. This outpatient treatment facility will offer critical care to those fighting cancer without the wear and tear of traveling to Manhattan, while employing 250 people with an average salary of \$150 thousand. This is great news for residents fighting cancer and for those seeking employment in the health care industry.

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center is only the beginning of our vision to establish the Hub as an Innovation Center. Together with new lab space at Winthrop University Hospital, a new Primary Medical Care Center at NUMC and the new Hofstra-Northwell School of Medicine, Nassau's healthcare industry will continue to grow and my administration seeks to make the Nassau Hub a Center for Innovation in the healthcare and homeland defense industries. To support our goal, Governor Cuomo and our State Senate delegation announced plans to invest \$88 million in the Hub. These funds will be used to create the foundation needed for a Innovation Center by freeing up land through structured parking.

Additionally, State funds will be used to help connect the Coliseum site with surrounding property through the use of pedestrian bridges. I thank Long Island Association President Kevin Law for his support of this vision and commitment to growing our economy. Together, we can attract billions in private investment and create thousands of new, permanent jobs to complement existing educational institutions, financial companies, research and development and the Coliseum. Nassau's Hub should, and can, provide daily economic activity, improve our quality of life and create a job-generating economic engine for millennials and generations to come.

When the private sector succeeds, our economy succeeds! And to save taxpayer dollars, I have formed cost-cutting partnerships with the private sector that are saving you hundreds of millions

of dollars while improving the services our County delivers. Successes include more than \$233 million in savings through a public-private partnership with Suez for the operation and maintenance of wastewater facilities. We are saving \$30 million a year through a public-private partnership for Nassau County's bus system. Millions in utility and capital improvement savings were achieved through a public-private partnership to transform the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Old Bethpage Village Restoration was enhanced through a public-private partnership to build the Museum of American Armor on the property. The Museum offers a permanent living classroom for a new generation of Americans to appreciate the battlefield sacrifices made by our veterans on their behalf. New athletic fields at Mitchel Athletic Complex - constructed in public-private partnership with Molloy College without taxpayer dollars - are open for use by our residents. The NY Cosmo's Practice Field – a new soccer field at Mitchel Athletic Complex – was also constructed without taxpayer dollars and open for use by our residents.

The use of PRIVATE SECTOR dollars has resulted in public improvements while saving you money. Nassau County leads the nation in public-private partnerships. Over the past seven and a half years, my administration has kept its pledge.

We remained mindful of the economic times in which we live.

County government on average made up 19% of your total tax bill in 2009. It only makes up 16% of your total tax bill in 2017, a real decline despite increasing costs related to employee health insurance and pensions.

Let me tell you how that's we accomplished that!

While many neighboring municipalities increased property taxes by double-digits since 2010, we froze property taxes for 6 out of 7 years. This unprecedented record of holding property taxes down hasn't been easy, but we got it done. Combined with the elimination of the County Home Energy Tax and a 20% reduction in the size of government, more money is in our residents' wallets than in the pocket of government.

In cooperation with the Legislature and NIFA, we have improved finances by addressing two decades of non-structural fiscal policies with systematic reforms rather than burdening homeowners with enormous tax increases to address problems of the past. My administration reduced the size of government by 1,700 positions - which reduces costs by \$154 million for this generation and future generations. In doing so, we also consolidated 10 departments into 4 - saving taxpayers \$4 million annually; From reducing copy machines to our automotive fleet and overall energy costs, we have cut waste and saved millions.

In collaboration with NIFA, we entered into new labor agreements that save hundreds of millions of dollars by implementing a new salary structure and by requiring new employee contributions to healthcare and pension costs while reforming work rules. We now pay employee termination costs from operating funds, no longer relying on Nassau's historic route of borrowing for these

costs. We also established a Litigation Fund to cover costs of judgments and settlements from operating surpluses generated each year while limiting bonding to extraordinary litigation only.

By tightening our belt, we produced budgetary surpluses which has increased our Reserve Fund from 60 million to 160 million - thus exceeding the 4% or \$120 million goal set forth by the Counties Fund Balance Reserve policy.

Together with NIFA, we have strengthened our County finances and eliminated the annual borrowing associated with our assessment system. While you may read of problems plaguing Nassau's finances for the past 30 years, the number one cause is our assessment system which has saddled taxpayers with over one billion dollars in debt.

Let me tell you about this billion-dollar albatross! For decades, the County borrowed on average, \$100 million a year and simply threw borrowed cash at the problem. We changed all that!

Together with the County Legislature, my administration implemented reforms which successfully slowed this debt accumulation. In 2017, the County will no longer borrow money for this purpose. This is a major success, as it saves 32 million in interest alone. That said, the courts have ruled that I do not have the jurisdiction to make the necessary legislative reforms needed to truly reform this system. Archaic laws must be updated by the New York State Legislature. It's time for Albany lawmakers to address this issue. State laws must be amended if we are to fix Nassau County's finances once and for all.

Let me remind you that assessment does not raise a dime more in taxes than a municipality requests. The system simply divides the amount a municipality collects among property owners based on the value of their homes and businesses. That said, Nassau is treated differently than other counties in the state when it comes to assessment. Nassau collects property taxes on behalf of all schools and local governments and apportions that money accordingly.

HOWEVER, when a property owner grieves their assessment and a refund is due, the County refunds dollars on every municipality's behalf. So, the County receive 16 cents of every dollar you pay in taxes, with the remainder gong to schools, towns, villages and special districts.

HOWEVER, when a refund is due, the County pays back the entire dollar. Could any household or business stay afloat if they refunded 600% more money than they received in the first place? The answer is NO! This is what has cost County taxpayers \$100 million annually – of which we borrowed - and it accounts for half of the County's entire debt load – over a billion dollars.

To address these costs, we implemented a successful Residential Assessment Settlement Program to curtail 20 to 30 million dollars in annual waste and eliminate the accumulation of future debt. We also established a Commercial Disputed Assessment Fund, which beginning this year will drastically reduce commercial assessment debt and save tens of millions of dollars annually. This is important as Nassau's \$100 million problem is mainly caused by commercial property grievances.

In fact, it has created substantial inequities in neighborhoods without a commercial tax base. With approximately 80% of the \$100 million in refunds going to commercial property owners, homeowners in neighborhoods that don't have significant commercial properties do not enjoy the income generated but share in paying commercial refunds.

My reforms reduce these inequities and better protect neighborhoods with little commercial property. But again, to truly fix the system, New York State must change the laws governing Nassau's assessment system.

Ask any resident what their number one gripe is....and they will tell you it is their tax bill. Taxes are just too high!

That's why the Republican-led Legislature and I froze County property taxes 6 out of the last 7 years. Unfortunately, schools and other municipalities haven't done the same.

The number two gripe I used to receive was that homeowners would successfully grieve their property's assessment, yet have to fight again the following year to keep it at the same value in which they just won. The Legislature and I changed that practice by freezing assessments for four years. So, if you reduced your assessment value, it wouldn't be Ground Hogs day all over again and your assessment rose back up to the value it was before your reduction.

This reform ended much frustration, and saved taxpayer's money by reducing employee costs and systematic errors. Our intended plan was to maintain the assessment freeze for four years and then revalue properties. Unfortunately, Hurricane Sandy put a kink in that plan.

Revaluing damaged homes would have caused a major shift in expenses to non-damaged homes to the point where certain school districts would not have been able to sustain their budgets. Instead, values were frozen again and Federal and State reimbursements helped protect residents with damaged homes and leaving homeowners an option to grieve annually if they disagree with the assessor.

Nevertheless, not updating every four years leads to variations in values between assessed values and market place values. Accordingly, updates to property value will begin in 2018. This is a circumstance we sought to avoid but again, Hurricane Sandy prevented the revalue.

While revaluation will help with updating market values, history indicates grievances will continue regardless - just as they do in all taxing jurisdictions throughout the State. In other words, the circle of tax grievances and either settlements or refunds will continue absent a change in State law authorizing Nassau to be treated like other large assessing jurisdictions.

The Department of Assessment and I continue to promote fairness and equity by making homeowners aware of their right to challenge their assessment. Nassau is the only County in the state to offer you an opportunity to grieve your assessment on the Internet and we have posted a step-by-step video to help you do so if you believe your home is unfairly assessed.

The County's assessment system is also one of the most transparent in the State. Detailed property and tax information is posted on our website and tentative assessment disclosure notices are provided to all homeowners annually. While challenges remain, they will not serve as obstacles to maintaining our quality of life which has been enhanced by policies of my administration.

Overall, economic indicators are on the rise.

After losing private sector jobs for more than 10 years, good middle-class jobs have returned and our population is expanding while neighboring counties have decreased. Home values have increased countywide and we consistently lead the region with the lowest unemployment rate – half of what it was in 2010.

To build upon this success and protect middle-class families, we've held the line on property taxes for 6 out of 7 years.

Our low crime rate, combined with quality of life and economic policies, contribute to our success in attracting and retaining local employers. Together with my economic development team, we have created more than 25,000 new jobs and employment opportunities.

In partnership with the Nassau Council of Chambers of Commerce and the Association for a Better Long Island, we have focused on job creation by aggressively soliciting companies to establish their headquarters here.

Recent success stories include: Vengo Labs – a father-son started business–relocated to Bethpage after operating in New York City. This innovative company, featured on Shark Tank – creates high-tech vending machines; Bagels by Bell, an iconic Brooklyn bagel and bialy producer who moved to Oceanside along with 72 new jobs; Amazon, who opened a customer fulfillment center in Bethpage, creating hundreds of jobs; An underperforming office building in Westbury was transformed into a telecommunications hub with 89 new good-paying jobs.

Over the past several years, we have attracted a number of headquarters from New York City. Employers who moved to Nassau, with new jobs and brick and mortar investments, include: Display Technologies, New York Vanity, Supreme Screw, K&B Trading, Hain Celestial, R-Best Produce, Jesco Lighting and Aqua Enerviva.

My economic development team has also focused on retaining quality employers. We helped employers stay in Nassau, expanding their employment opportunities and overall operations. We have retained thousands of jobs at NY Community Bank, Publishers Clearing House, Dealertrack Technologies, Long Island Firedoor, the Slant Fin Corporation, Nassau Candy, Designatronics, P&L Development and WAC Lighting Co. All of these companies had been courted to leave the state. We kept them here!

Our team connects businesses with additional Federal, State and utility-based incentive programs, creating global incentive packages that make Nassau County an attractive place to do business. To help these companies and others find qualified candidates for their workforce, my administration has hosted both job preparation workshops and job fairs, and actively connects

employers with a pool of unemployed residents through an innovative collaboration between the Department of Social Services and Industrial Development Agency.

My administration also created NassauWorks, a free application for your smart phone or tablet. It is a great avenue for job seekers.

An area of enormous growth is our County's Film and Television industry, which has benefitted our local economy to the tune of a BILLION dollars over the past four years. Most recently, Nassau served as backdrops for movies, including "The Comedian" starring Robert DeNiro, Harvey Keitel, Edie Falco, Danny DeVito, and Billy Crystal. Also filmed in Nassau was "Rock That Body" starring Scarlett Johansson and Demi Moore; as well as "Gypsy" starring Susan Sarandon.

Showtime's "Homeland" filmed here this season as well as ABC's "Quantico." We also serve as home to NBC's live performance of The Wiz, the Sound of Music and Peter Pan. Most recently, Kevin James made Nassau County home to a live-studio audience sitcom known as "Kevin Can Wait."

Local businesses are benefitting from this ever-growing industry and we will continue to devote the resources necessary to sustain and expand it here in Nassau.

Cyber security is an issue of national concern. Our County is poised to become a leader in this emerging field as our workforce has the skilled defense industry talent and high-tech knowledge to support cyber security technology. In May, New York Institute for Technology was designated a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security. This designation, along with the County's recent purchase of the Morrelly Homeland Security Center, are important steps forward in plans to create a Cyber Defense Accelerator in Bethpage.

Together with captains of industry, we are fostering a supportive environment for technology companies. Over the past year, in collaboration with LaunchPad, Digital Ballpark and our own Inventors Club, we have supported their growth, assisted in their recruitment efforts and showcased their products.

As we all know, housing is at a premium on Long Island, and a larger housing stock is needed for our expanding workforce. That is why my administration has incentivized the private sector to increase housing opportunities by more than 3,500 new apartments. In fact, we helped transform vacant and under-utilized real estate into 1,974 residential units near transit-centers, including 353 affordable apartments, for our young workforce, seniors and veterans.

Success can be viewed in Great Neck, Great Neck Plaza, Farmingdale, Hempstead, Manhasset, Mineola, New Cassel, Roslyn and Westbury. Nassau County is proud to assist these Villages with redevelopment initiatives.

To further help our communities, my administration launched a land bank that will help tackle zombie houses, by acquiring, rehabilitating and getting them back into the housing market. I

thank Attorney General Eric Schneiderman for his recent commitment of \$1.2 million for Nassau's land bank. Together, our initiatives are assisting young families in staying on Long Island while supporting the workforce of new industries.

Housing has also been a struggle for our nation's veterans. Accordingly, I pledged in 2009 to create veteran housing. It's a promise I kept.

In 2011, we established 60 homes at Mitchel Field to provide affordable housing for veterans, active duty military and their families. We also partnered with Beacon House to rehabilitate five two-bedroom townhouses in Hempstead for homeless veterans and their families; and worked with a not-for-profit organization to build a home for a returning Iraq-war veteran in Hicksville.

In July, the White House and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development declared that we effectively ended the homeless veteran crisis in Nassau County. What that means is, if you know of a homeless veteran, call us and we – along with our not-for-profit partners - have a solution. This commitment is the least we can do for our veterans, who we salute for their commitment to our homeland and way of life. Together, we have honored the brave men and women who wore and wear our nation's uniform.

At Eisenhower Park's Wall of Honor, we solemnly remember those who are no longer with us. We also remember our veterans annually at our Veterans Day Service, Gold Star Families Remembrance Ceremony, and POW/MIA Candlelight Recognition Ceremony,

We proudly honor those still with us and remember those who made the supreme sacrifice for our nation. This year, we officially welcomed home a generation who was dishonored by the American public upon their arrival home from Vietnam. I was proud to host Long Island's largest Welcome Home Ceremony and demonstrate our never ending respect and appreciation for the service of our Vietnam veterans.

My administration has also made it a priority to enhance services for our hometown heroes. From creating veteran housing and ending the veteran homelessness crisis, to securing record benefits for our vets, Ralph Esposito and the Veterans Service Agency are leading the way. Our record includes opening a new office for the Nassau Veterans Service Agency in East Meadow at Nassau University Medical Center and joining in the opening of a new Veterans Affairs Health Clinic at this same location.

I'm proud to report that volunteers help support their fellow veterans through our program to provide free transportation to the Northport VA. I also thank Westbury's American Legion Post 101 for their continued donation of handicap-accessible vans for this service, as well as Crowne Ford of Lynbrook for their donation of a handicap-accessible van.

Our County also helps vets-in-need by partnering with local veterans to provide food and clothing at Stand Downs, and free toiletries and meals at our Vet-Mart. To assist those injured while serving our nation, we enhanced opportunities for Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses to further participate in government contracts. We also host events in our park system to support America's Vetdogs and Paws of War – two not-for-profit organizations that raise money to

provide specially-trained guide and service dogs to disabled veterans or those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In fact, our parks system serves as home to many events in which we honor our veterans.

When I took office I made a commitment to improving our parks system....for veterans...but also for families and seniors. After many years of poor upkeep and outright neglect, my administration is proud to have kept our promise by transforming our park system into vibrant destinations for our children and families.

In Nassau's backyard, Eisenhower Park, we joined with the League of YES in opening two new athletic fields with turf designed for walkers, wheelchairs and individuals with prosthetics. New playgrounds were also constructed in Eisenhower, along with a second playground designed specifically for differently-abled children.

Through a public-private partnership, indoor twin ice skating rinks and an outdoor rink known as Northwell Health Ice Center opened in Eisenhower Park. Built at no cost to taxpayers, the facility hosts official NY Islander practices, youth hockey leagues and share their profits with taxpayers.

In Hicksville, we joined with local sports teams in celebrating improvements made at Cantiague Park on its 50th Anniversary. The park now showcases new athletic fields, a new playground, new batting cages, an improved mini-golf course, a refurbished driving range, improvements to the pool and restrooms, and a renovated NHL-sized ice rink that now accommodates more youth hockey teams and figure skating.

Wantagh Park is presently undergoing a major renovation. In November, we broke ground for new athletic fields, a new community center, new fishing and picnic pavilions and an improved dog run. Earlier in the year, we also joined with local residents and children from our successful summer recreation program in opening a new 18-hole mini-golf course at Wantagh Park.

At neighboring Cedar Creek Park in Seaford, my administration installed two state-of-the-art turf fields for football, soccer and lacrosse. In East Rockaway, a brand new Bay Park is now open to the public with athletic fields, basketball courts and a first-class playground and picnic pavilion. This park serves as home to the East Rockaway Raiders Youth Football League and Cheerleaders. In Hewlett, transformations were made at Grant Park which now showcases a new athletic field and a new ice rink. On the barrier island, new cabanas arrived last summer at Nickerson Beach and a new Pitch and Putt on the beach was built by CSEA employees.

Let's give a round of applause to our County employees who work hard to deliver important services to our residents.

Dog Runs were also opened for our furry friends at Bay Park, Cedar Creek Park, Nickerson Beach, Wantagh Park, Eisenhower Park, Christopher Morley Park, and Old Bethpage Village Restoration. In partnership with Valley Stream, new playground equipment with handicapped accessibility was added to Arlington Park.

At Milburn Creek Park, a kayak launch and boardwalk were constructed, and a new South Shore Blueway Trail is now open. The Trail – made up of 22 launches and landings - offers residents and visitors a new exciting and recreational opportunity to explore the western bays of the South Shore Estuary Reserve and experience its beauty.

Friends, we have truly taken back our parks for family recreation. In doing so, we also reinstituted Nassau's largest and most affordable Summer Recreation Program for children. This program not only helps families with working parents, but also provides an amazing summer opportunity for our children.

While there is so much to be proud of in our parks system, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the Nassau County Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged. Back in 2011, New York State eliminated all funds for the Games. My administration, with the help of private sector sponsors, stepped up to raise the funds necessary to keep the Games for the Physically Challenged alive. In doing so, we kept alive the opportunity for these wonderful children to compete with their friends from across the State, share their stories and build friendships that will last a lifetime. Let me tell you....as they cross the finish line, you see the smiles on their faces and tears of joy in their eyes. I am most grateful to our sponsors.

Beyond improving our parks and programs, we have also invested in our overall environment. The largest project has taken place at the South Shore Water Reclamation Facility in Bay Park, where we are investing the necessary dollars to protect our waterways and surrounding communities from nitrogen. While work began to improve the plant before Hurricane Sandy struck our shores, much has changed since that time.

Progress includes new odor controls, rehabilitation of generators, restoration and elevation of the electrical distribution system, and new berms and walls surrounding the Plant to protect it against tidal surge. This work was possible thanks to the support of our leaders in Congress and Albany; as well as the residents that joined me in Washington, D.C. to fight for these funds.

To strengthen our shoreline, protect our marine life and improve our environment for decades to come, it's critically important to connect Bay Park to an ocean outfall pipe. An ocean outfall pipe will ensure that treated sewage no longer gets dumped in our western bays - resulting in excessive nitrogen in our waterways.

While Federal and State funds have not materialized for this **\$650** million project, environmental activists and I have advanced a new path. A feasibility study is currently underway to determine if an existing, non-utilized underground pipeline can be used to connect the Bay Park facility to Cedar Creek's ocean outfall pipe. If possible, this path would achieve the success needed for our environment at a fraction of the cost.

We achieved similar success in 2012, when we kept our commitment to cleanup Zach's Bay near Jones Beach by connecting a State-owned wastewater treatment facility to Cedar Creek. While the project is being studied, I have advanced two projects, which are currently underway, to reduce the nitrogen entering our bays by 50%.

From these efforts, to the preservation of land, installation of solar energy and the conversion of traffic lights to LED, our environmental record is one of our many continued successes. It's my hope that Nassau County will continue along our path of success in transforming the way in which we protect our environment.

Government and corporate leaders of the past decades never imagined the environmental impact they would leave behind. Parts of our great Island served as a dumping ground for significant contamination. We continue to read about the mess left behind by the defense industry, which impacts our drinking water.

Contamination has spread south from the middle of our County through a series of plumes in our aquifer. With assistance from local water districts, as well as the Towns of Oyster Bay and Hempstead, we continue to apply pressure on the State and Federal governments to ensure the safety of our residents and drinking water.

Recently, Governor Cuomo directed the State Department of Environmental Conservation to undertake an immediate investigation to assess expedited cleanup options. I commend the Governor for his attention to this critical issue as protecting our drinking water is a top priority.

On a separate front, we are also working with the Department of Environmental Conservation and Army Corps of Engineers to strengthen our seven-mile barrier island. From new dunes to new berms and jetties, this infrastructure will protect our shoreline and the communities of Point Lookout, Lido Beach, Long Beach, Atlantic Beach and East Atlantic Beach.

Government infrastructure on Long Island, and throughout our State, is reaching its end of life as many structures exceed 60 years of age. When entering office in 2010, I made a pledge to enhance our aging infrastructure.

While the largest project take place here at the Coliseum and in Bay Park, other work is underway at the former Social Services Building in Garden City which is being converted into a new Family Court.

Reinvestments have been made in County roadways and streetscaping projects have stretched throughout our County - from North to South and East to West.

With the assistance of Vision Long Island, Complete Street initiatives are being used to ensure pedestrian and bicycle safety on our roadways.

A new Crime Lab is under construction in Westbury and construction will begin later this year for a new Police Training Academy at Nassau Community College.

The new First Precinct building is now open, the Fourth Precinct and Eighth Community Police Center are under construction.

The Bayville Bridge continues to undergo repairs and the final phase of West Shore Road reconstruction is ongoing.

We have and continue to build better, smarter and stronger than ever before while enhancing the quality of life throughout our communities.

Friends, our vision for Nassau County eight years ago has quickly become a reality.

We have transformed the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum, and laid a path for the Islanders return.

We have transformed our economy by attracting 25,000 new jobs and new employers - consistently achieving the lowest unemployment rate in the region.

A new world-class healthcare center is being built to treat resident in their battle with cancer, and our healthcare industry is on the rise as we establish an Innovation Center at the Hub.

New industries have emerged in cyber security and television and film production.

To support these emerging industries and new employers, we have transformed vacant commercial real estate into 3,500 new housing opportunities for young families.

Nassau is the place to be as our quality of life is second to none.

We kept our commitment to transform our parks, and the improvements we made have resulted in some of America's finest parks and recreational facilities.

As you know, our quality of life would not be possible, if not for dedicated police officers, volunteer firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians. We have fulfilled our commitment to them through recruitment and retention programs, bolstering training initiatives and by providing them with the latest equipment to aide in their response to emergencies. These brave men and women have transformed our neighborhoods, and we have achieved the lowest crime rate since statistics were first recorded. Major crime is down 27% since I took office in 2010.

Together, we have renewed our war on drugs by transforming the way in which we combat addiction. Through awareness, education, enforcement and treatment, we have put the programs in place to keep families whole.

With families and seniors always on our minds, we kept our commitment to hold the line on property taxes by freezing them 6 out of 7 years.

We pledged to repeal the home energy tax placed on electricity, natural gas, home heating oil and propane. We kept our promise and eliminated the tax.

We committed to reducing the size of government, and we succeeded by eliminating hundreds of millions of dollars in waste.

We formed public-private partnerships to save you millions more, and succeeded in private sector investments in our parks, museums and entertainment venues.

We saved millions more through labor concessions and have strengthened the County's finances more than any prior administration.

While the assessment system will continue to plague County finances, just as it has for three decades, we reduced that burden through local reforms and have put Albany on notice that they must act to end Nassau's fiscal challenges once and for all.

With your support, we have upgraded our wastewater facilities and strengthened shorelines while protecting marine life.

We have transformed County infrastructure through investments in roadways, downtowns and police precincts.

And, we kept our commitment to our veterans by honoring their sacrifice and serving them better than ever before.

There is so much to be proud of, and Nassau residents have much to look forward to!

Our collective efforts have been locally and nationally recognized.

We have earned awards for government performance and efficiencies, public-private partnerships, safer roadways, transit-oriented housing, environmental improvements, excellence in public health, and for our work in combatting the heroin epidemic.

Friends, my administration has succeeded in making Nassau County a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Together, we have tackled the status quo and defied the critics, who – in the name of politics - seek to hold back our County from progress.

I thank our entire County workforce for the good work they perform day in, and day out.

And, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your County Executive!

May God Bless you, Nassau County, the State of New York and these United States of America.

###