Supervisor Mark Lesko gives State of the Town Address, focuses on finances, bipartisanship, creating an innovation economy, and Brookhaven's heroes posted on 1/27/2011 12:58:56 PM

Farmingville, NY - On January 25, 2011, Supervisor Mark Lesko gave his second State of the Town Address, entitled "Brookhaven Government: An Incubator of Ideas". In his speech, the Supervisor focused on the financial challenges and successes of the Town, he recognized Brookhaven's leaders and heroes, and announced a regional effort called "Accelerate Long Island" to commercialize research from Long Island's research assets to create and retain new technology companies and jobs. Click here to read Supervisor Lesko's full speech.

Supervisor Lesko called Brookhaven a leader for municipal government and the state's "incubator for ideas" for measures including passing a debt, spending, and property tax cap this year and introducing the groundbreaking "Blight to Light" initiative to offer incentives to the private sector to redevelop blighted parcels.

He also stressed bi-partisanship, stating that "I want to emphasize, though, that in the past year we've agreed far more often than we've disagreed. Over 95% of our resolutions are passed unanimously."

Supervisor Lesko opened his State of the Town with a moment of silence for the late Councilman Keith Romaine, and announced, "I would note that we recently completed the construction of one of Keith's dreams, a skate park in Mastic, and I'll start today by announcing that, at the request of Keith's father Ed, we will not be charging fees at that skate park in Keith's memory."

Lesko chronicled the Town's fiscal challenges, but highlighted the success of the Town in overcoming those challenges in 2010 through the five point fiscal plan, which saved $20 million, the retirement incentives offered by the Town, and spending cuts which totaled 17% in the General Fund, all without increasing property taxes. He said that "while our work is not done, we are certainly in a better place today than we were a year ago."

Lesko congratulated and thanked the 112 retirees of the Town for their combined 2,000 years of service and viewed the transition as "opportunity", giving special recognition to Dori Scofield, the new Director of the Animal Shelter. Lesko said, "When Charlie McGinley retired, many of us wondered who would be willing to take his place at the animal shelter. And in what can only be described as a gift, Dori Scofield agreed to run the animal shelter. Dori's passion and dedication is second to none. And we all notice her initiatives, whether it's Furry Fridays or Barktoberfest, emails about adoptable pets, or her tireless efforts to adopt pitbulls at the shelter."

In addition to Dori's efforts, Lesko acknowledged the actions of the first responders to the propane gas leak in Shirley who put their lives on the line to avoid what could have been a disaster. He said, "At the worst possible moment we saw the best in people. Chief DJ Blankenship's courage and leadership was awe-inspiring as he ordered the evacuation of a square mile and plugged the leak by the end of the day. About 80 Fire Departments and Ambulance Companies responded to assist that morning. And our Fire Marshals responded almost immediately, making several dangerous attempts to stop the leaking propane gas. They put their lives at risk, using their training and experience to help avert a catastrophe and for that we are all indebted to them."

The major announcement in the Supervisor's speech was the "Accelerate Long Island" initiative, which was formed in partnership with the Brookhaven Industrial Development Agency and their consultant, Collaborative Economics of Silicon Valley, the Rauch Foundation, the Long Island Association, and the heads of Stony Brook University, Hofstra University, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Brookhaven National Laboratory, and North Shore- LIJ Health System. This leadership group met over the course of several months to design Accelerate Long Island.

Supervisor Lesko said, "Many have debated this issue for years and, while there's no clear answer, I would suggest to you that there is no doubt that Long Island must be competitive in the national and global marketplace. How will we be competitive? By leveraging our economic assets to create jobs."

Accelerate Long Island draws upon the best practices of many successful models throughout the United States. Accelerate Long Island will connect entrepreneurs and research innovations at the research institutions by implementing the following plan:

1. An Innovation Ally: This person will create an Innovation Index that collects and publishes data regarding a potential innovation ecosystem,
construct a Tech Portal, which will be an open source searchable inventory of all technology innovations at the major research institutions on Long Island.

2. Change the cultures at Long Island’s major research institutions so that their priority is commercializing their inventions. This includes business plan competitions and creating an Entrepreneurial Clinical Program where law, business and engineering students can help start up companies.

3. A Regional Technology Commercialization Center, which would be a central location to promote mentoring and networking. It would have an Entrepreneur-in-Residence program to assist in the creation of startups, as well as other training and mentoring programs. The Center would also market the region as being entrepreneur friendly, and work to access funding for startups.

4. A Long Island Seed fund, which will to partner with other sources of funding like the Long Island Angel Network and venture capital firms to provide the capital startups desperately need.

Last week, Lesko presented Accelerate Long Island to the Long Island Association, and the LIA Board plans to take action on Accelerate Long Island at its next meeting.

As we worked on Accelerate Long Island, two things became clear. It needs to be a private sector initiative. And it needs a home. And we all agreed that the home should be the Long Island Association. It is anticipated that Accelerate Long Island will follow the business model of the Long Island Housing Partnership, which was also formed under the auspices of the Long Island Association and the leaders of Long Island's major research institutions have agreed to participate in Accelerate Long Island.

Lesko concluded by stating, "Elected officials have been talking about this idea for years. The time for talking is over. The time for action is now. Accelerate Long Island is real, it's necessary, and it is essential for the economic future of Long Island. As I said when I started, this was a year of many storylines. And all of them are positive. We are seeing a glimmer of optimism for the first time in a long time in Brookhaven. We tackled our financial challenges. We see our transitions as full of opportunity. We embrace democracy and work in a bipartisan way. We honor our leaders and celebrate our heroes. And we are a Town that is an Incubator of Ideas. And we are the Town that will lead Long Island towards a bright economic future in the new innovation economy."