



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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### **State of the County Address**

Presented by County Executive Jim Kreuser

Good evening Chairman Kubicki, Vice-chairwoman Breunig, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, other elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

It is my honor to tell you the State of Kenosha County is much stronger today than it was yesterday and it will be stronger going forward!

- Unemployment is down
- The General Fund Balance is up.
- Economic development continues to be hot.
- And, people are choosing Kenosha County to be their home and the home of their businesses!

One of the reasons our County is strong is because of the dedicated work of our staff and you – the Kenosha County Board of Supervisors.

Tonight, we bid farewell to some of the key people who have been instrumental in helping Kenosha County achieve its goals – people like the venerable Dean of the County Board, Supervisor Ron Johnson.

Ron tonight concludes a 32 year career on the County Board, one of the longest serving supervisors in the board's history. Ron, who was Chairman of the Board from 1998-2000, served so long and so well because he loves Kenosha County and he wanted to give back to the community that meant so much to him. He has served with great honor and distinction. He led, not with a loud voice, but with a big heart. His word was his bond. He is a friend and will be missed. Thank you, Ron, for serving during this most interesting chapter in County Government history. Your knowledge and insight will be missed.

Doug Noble has served on the County Board for 26 years and served as Chairman from 2000-2002. Doug gave this board an interesting perspective from time to time, which made our public policy process better. We wish you well in your future endeavors. Thank you, Doug.

Both Ron and Doug were on the board in 1988 when Chrysler closed its assembly operations in Kenosha. They were on the County Board when what is now the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, our economic development partner, was created. Those significant community events led to Hwy Q/Hwy 165 being built. We are now the hotspot for economic development in our

entire region. They have been a part of the board when infrastructure improvements were needed. That helped us not only weather the Great Recession but we are now at a lower unemployment rate than before the recession.

Also stepping down tonight are Supervisor Aaron Kohlmeier, who has served six years on the board, and Supervisor Anita Johnson, four years on the board. Both served with distinction and with many contributions and significant opinions that added value. We wish all of you the best in your next adventures and thank you for your service to Kenosha County.

We also welcome new County Board Supervisors and returning supervisors tonight. All of you will play a significant role in leading Kenosha County into the future. I look forward to working with each of you on our collective mission and vision to move our county forward.

Our economic development gains are envied around the state. Good infrastructure leads to economic development, which leads to jobs. One of our top priorities is economic development – jobs – we all want more rooftops and people working under them – construction to employment.

Some key developments over the years, and recently,

- 1988 – Hwy Q/165
- 2008 – 38<sup>th</sup> Street/KABA – Gordon Foods, which led to Amazon, 1000 +jobs
- Bristol/PP/KABA – Uline expansion – 1,300 jobs
- City/Paris/KABA – Uline – 700-800 jobs
- Salem Industrial Park/KABA

Working with KABA and the Town of Salem, the new Salem Business Park is underway. At the request of the Town and Vice Chair Breunig, one of our county 2016 Highway Projects will result in the resurfacing of County Highway C to State Highway 83 to County Highway JF, and will make improvements to the access area for the new business park.

- High Impact Fund with the Kenosha Area Business Alliance– Kenall; Insinkerator; Bradshaw Medical, for example.

Since 2011, the High Impact Fund appropriated approximately \$2.6 million and has helped close six high impact advanced manufacturing projects:

- Bradshaw Medical
- Hanna Cylinders
- Kenall Manufacturing
- InSinkErator

- Niagara Bottling, and
- Gourmet Foods Midwest

Those companies and expansions have contributed to:

- Creation of 1,200 new jobs
- An average annual salary of \$48,000-plus
- \$128 million of new private investment, and
- A total new payroll of \$57 million per year.

For almost a couple of years, there have been meetings with Somers Town/Village/Paris/KABA. It is important that we support the Town of Paris and the Village of Somers with their new Intergovernmental Agreement and work with the City. The end game is the highest and best use development for Kenosha County.

Economic development should not be held back merely because of political boundaries.

Kenosha Mayor-elect Antaramian, who is getting sworn in right about now, and I have met and will continue to meet with Paris and Somers to reach a resolve on the issues. This issue is about economic development and creating jobs for our children and grandchildren. Political lines should not dampen the economic development fire that is burning in Kenosha County.

The good condition of our County Highways is one of the things we hear about when we talk to business people thinking about locating here. We will, as we do each year, be proactive with our paving of county trunk highways. One of the biggest highway projects in 2016 will be the reconstruction and realignment of the intersection of County Highways S and N.

This work is necessary to accommodate future economic development resulting from County Highway N's reconstruction and it sets the stage for the complete reconstruction of CTH S from STH 31 to I-94 over the next number of years. The reconstruction of CTH N has already led to the addition of Gordon Foods, Amazon and another Uline facility to our community's economic base.

The high quality of our county highways, the expert planning that has gone into our major highway projects, the coordination of State Highway road work, snow plowing, bike lanes and maintenance – all of that has been led by Highway Commissioner Gary Sipsma. Gary will celebrate his 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Kenosha County in July! He was hired as an Engineering Technician and has been director of the division of highways since 1996. He has been Highway Commissioner since 2008.

Gary has been highly competent, dedicated, conscientious, caring and committed to his work here for Kenosha County. There are few people you will meet who are more honest, hard-

working and caring. I have leaned hard on him during my time as Kenosha County Executive and he has never let our community down. Gary will retire before the next state of the county address. When he does retire, he will be missed. Gary Sipsma's work has definitely left a positive mark on Kenosha County. Thank you so much, Gary Sipsma!

When business executives look at locating in a community, they also look closely at the quality of life and the quality of place. What is there to do? Is this an attractive and active place that will enable the business to recruit and retain talent – offering a great place to live and raise a family?

Our Kenosha County Parks are a key feature of our quality of place in Kenosha County. In the past nearly eight years, just some of the parks improvements include:

- The West End KD Park, going from a shuttered former gravel pit to an active park. By the way, that will have a paved road and parking lots this year and next year;
- Three dog parks were developed without taxpayer dollars;
- An Award Winning Petrifying Springs restoration;
- The Kemper Center campus has improved dramatically;
- 45 holes of Disc Golf courses were created;
- 8+ miles of mountain bike trail, built by volunteers, are now at Silver Lake Park.
- The Ice House Trail (and other trails), were created;
- We host a successful Oktoberfest, Ice Fishing Derbies (when we have a real winter) and other new activities have been added at our parks.

County Parks Director Jonathan Rudie has been with Kenosha County for 41 years. Those of you who know Jon know that he has more energy than most teenagers. His creative ideas are only thwarted by the fact that the rest of us have trouble keeping pace. Jon will retire this summer.

I can say, without hesitation or reservation, that all the changes we have seen the last eight years wouldn't have happened without you, Jon. You and your team have made their mark on the Kenosha County system that will stand the test of time: Brighton Dale, Bristol Woods, Fox River, KD, Kemper Center/Anderson Arts Center, Old Settlers Park, Petrifying Springs and Silver Lake parks. Thank you, Jon Rudie.

Speaking of quality of place, of the total 609 golf courses in the State of Wisconsin - the White Birch course at Brighton Dale Links was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> best in the State by Golf Advisor, one of the industry's most recognized rating agencies. Wow!

Congratulations to Golf General Manager Dan Drier and the entire team, from maintenance to the club house. Great job! The Golf Courses also continue to operate in the black as the result of good management and marketing and this board's support.

We're continuing to make improvements on our Downtown Civic Center Campus, which helps with our current and future space needs, but is also a benefit to the City of Kenosha and Downtown Kenosha by keeping our employees and those who use County services in this area.

A number of you attended the Brookside Care Center ground breaking last week. This is a necessary investment in the future of the county's top-rated nursing home. Thank you to Chairman Ed Kubicki and most of you on this County Board for your forward thinking and supporting a plan that will ensure a strong future for our nursing home.

I want to thank Fran Petrick and her staff for their loving care of residents, their attention to business details and for staying ahead of the game when it comes to long-range planning and knowledge of long-term care needs.

Fiscally, Kenosha County is very strong. In August, Fitch assigned a "AA rating" to Kenosha County for the Brookside Care Center project, noting "solid financial performance and reserves," and "strong management practices," as well as growth in the tax base.

A recent year-end report to the Finance and Administration Committee showed that, at the end of the year, our general fund balance is at the same level that a Triple A-rated government would be. It has grown to \$18.25 million in 2015, and reserves at 29.3% of the general fund.

Thank you to the Finance Committee, Dave Geertsens and the entire finance team, and all of the county employees who work so hard to ensure good services and fiscal responsibility.

For those of you new to County Government, we are an arm of the state and provide mandated services, many of which are aimed at assisting the most vulnerable. As this board is aware, we are making strides in treatment for people suffering with Mental Illness in our county. But there is much work to be done. A lack of psychiatrists and limited space available at a Racine psychiatric hospital are a few of the concerns we need to review as we proceed proactively.

A community meeting will be held at 6 p.m. on April 27<sup>th</sup> at the Job Center to review a recently completed study of the mental health issues in our county and to outline short term and long term recommendations to tackle the issue. I urge you to attend that meeting as we work together to make better and cost efficient options available to our residents so that they are getting the help they need.

Kenosha County Division of Health, in collaboration with Human Services, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), Professional Services Group (PSG) and Kenosha County Detention Center (KCDC) are working closely together on the Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) Vivitrol program. The Pilot Program started on January 1, 2016. There are just under 20 people participating in it. Vivitrol has been shown to be effective in treating alcohol dependence and preventing relapse to opioid dependence after opioid detox. Opioid addiction is a growing problem nationwide and we need to continue our support of law enforcement's efforts, while treating those who need assistance. The County Board supported this pilot program and we will keep you apprised of its progress.

In other human services areas, our county works very hard to find work for the unemployed, and to find workers for our growing list of employers. We also assist with Child Support collections, and Food Shares administration. Adelene Greene oversees these county services. She has worked for Kenosha County since January 1990, first as an income maintenance supervisor, then in Personnel as the Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator.

Adelene has been providing leadership and guidance as the director of Workforce Development since 2000. One of her recent major projects was coordinating the merger of our economic support program with Racine, known as WKRP. WKRP has been recognized for its high performance and Child Support has been noted for its great work.

Not only do her oversight areas win accolades, so does she. We're so proud of all she has accomplished:

- She was selected as the recipient of the Wisconsin Women in Government Graduate Seminar scholarship in 2005, and
- She received the Susan B. Anthony award in 2006.

She has been very active in the community participating on numerous community Boards and volunteering for many activities:

- She is a founding member of the Coalition for Dismantling Racism; she is a KABA mentor to students; and
- She is a Kenosha County representative on SEWRPC.

Adelene will retire in September after 26 years with Kenosha County. We look forward to seeing her continued work in the community. Thank you, Adelene!

The work done with and for children in our community can be some of the most difficult work people can do.

In February, four infants died in Kenosha County, requiring more investigations in one month than are typically encountered in an entire year. It was a heart-wrenching and emotional time for those in the Human Services Division of Child Protective Services.

April is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, it also marks the 26<sup>th</sup> year since Kenosha County Social Worker Connie Reyes tragically lost her life while serving the children and families of our community.

Last week, Chris Hribal, a social worker supervisor in the Division of Children and Family Services, received the Connie Reyes Award for Excellence for his work to prevent child abuse and neglect. Also last week, he was selected to receive the Elliot Shaw Award for a professional who has made a difference in the lives of children with disabilities.

Chris Hribal is retiring from Kenosha County in August, after 28 years of coordinating excellent services for Adults & Children with Disabilities and/or Special Needs. He has dedicated his career, and has lived his life, helping children and adults with disabilities have a better life. We all consider Chris a champion for children with special needs and he is viewed as an expert in his field by his peers across the State. Thank you, Chris, for all you have done for our county. And, thank you to the Kenosha County social workers and all the employees of Human Services who work to keep our children and families healthy and safe.

We have excellent employees doing great things all across our county, forming partnerships with other organizations and municipalities to provide better, more cost-efficient services to taxpayers.

Our Information Technology Division, with a consortium of businesses and organizations, is continuing the installation of outdoor Wi-Fi in downtown Kenosha, from Carthage College to the Anderson Arts Center. There is also free, outdoor Wi-Fi at the beach area of Silver Lake Park, and work will begin this summer to add Wi-Fi to Petrifying Springs Park.

Kenosha County has been leading a multi-jurisdictional, inter-governmental effort to promote a unified and integrated county-wide commercial marketing strategy. Planning and Development Director Andy Buehler has been instrumental in this process. Together, working as a team, we look to broaden the tax base, create diverse jobs and enhance the area quality of life.

This will be accomplished by:

- Direct marketing of all communities,
- Development of a county-wide website, and
- Promotion and development of quality of life amenities.

It's an exciting time to be involved in Kenosha County government.

The State of Kenosha County is strong and will be stronger as we continue to work on our collective vision:

- To make our infrastructure investments that will lead to more economic development and jobs,
- To keep our county's fiscal condition strong,
- To continue our efforts to reduce waste and abuse,
- And, delivering our many mandated county services more efficiently and effectively to all of our citizens.

I look forward to us working together on making Kenosha County an even better place to live, work and raise a family.

May God Bless America and May God Bless Kenosha County.

Thank you!

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