

# MAYOR'S NEWSLETTER

*APRIL, 2006*

Just like the coming spring flowers, up pops the newsletter. I'll be the first to admit, the roses are a lot nicer to look at, but at least you don't have to water this letter. The format of this letter is going to be a little different and I'll tell you why. It seems to me and a lot of other people that perception is often times more important than fact. Why, you ask? Well, because if something is "perceived" to be true, it will be believed whether it's true or not. Our city is suffering from this dilemma and the purpose of this newsletter is to separate the perceptions from the realities. Hand in hand with perception is expectation. If someone or something is perceived to be bad or good, they will be "expected" to act accordingly by those around them. I think even more importantly, depending how a person perceives himself or herself will determine what they will expect from themselves. A city is the same way. I think it's time to look at ourselves and find out what we see. Ready? You may be surprised!

**POLICE DEPARTMENT** We all know, or think we do, that crime is on the increase in our city. Right? Well, it may come as a shock that the facts tell otherwise. While even one crime committed against one of our citizens is one too many, the fact is that the incidents of crime in N.C.H. went DOWN in 2005 as compared to 2004. We had 132 less total details than we had in '04. That's not a whole lot, but a more significant number is the number of traffic details increased by 365. This means serious crimes, such as theft, disorderly conduct, drug offenses and vandalism went down. For example, in 2004, we had 212 reports of vandalism/criminal damaging. In 2005 we had 191. Don't get me wrong, we're not ready to go out and fly any balloons, but it's time we all realize that our city is improving, not imploding as some would have us believe. Our police officers do a great job, day in and day out and deserve our thanks and help. We are very proud of them all. Speaking of that, contrary to some other talk you may have heard, we have more full time officers now than we have had since the 1990's. Yes, we are utilizing less part time officers than before but right now it seems to be working.

Our Police Department is constantly trying to be innovative and striving to help our citizens and businesses. To this end, we have developed a new program called PROJECT SAFEGAURD. You may not know this, but our officers randomly exit their vehicles and physically check both private residences and businesses for security. This new program will take this one step further. If they check your facility and find something that seems like a potential problem, you will receive a note from the officer. If there is a false alarm and he/she finds nothing wrong, you will receive a note that it was checked out and everything was OK. If there is a problem, you will be notified and asked to call the police for advice. This is just one more way that we can work together.

We are trying to re-start the Citizens on Patrol so watch for information if you are interested. By the way, you may find it interesting that for some reason, more police details occur on Monday's between 3:00 PM and 11:00 PM than any other time of the week.

**FIRE DEPARTMENT** It has been an interesting year to say the least. It seems like fire departments in general in the area have gone through some tough times internally. We are no exception. However, we want you to know that despite negative efforts by some, our department has come a long way. I applaud those within the department for caring enough to come forward and

share their concerns and ideas for making us better. Sometimes it's hard to change but more often than not, when change is done for a valid purpose, it is good. We think that's what we have done. There is a new committee now functioning within the department made up of firefighters and officers to formulate department policies. A training committee has also been formed to work with the Assistant Chief in formulating the training regimen for the department. We have a new medical advisor, a doctor that advises and teaches our people on the issuing of drugs in emergencies and establishes medical protocol for the department. Dr. Paul Blanchard is very excited about this position and even agreed to ride along with our staff on some emergency runs. Thanks Doc! The attempt, obviously, is to make our department more inclusive. Our belief is, while rank and authority must be maintained and respected, there must be room for input and involvement by everyone. Everyone's job is important and each individual has value. That also must be maintained and respected.

Hats off to Assistant Chief Mike Lotz. He applied for a federal grant last year and we received word that we got it! This is a big deal. The grant is worth approximately \$180,000. That's right, I didn't type in too many zeros. We will be able to buy equipment and tools that, without this grant, we would never be able to purchase. The most visible to us, the general public, will be the new exercise equipment acquired through the grant. The basement of City Hall will be transformed into a physical fitness area for not only the firefighters, but will be shared with our police officers as well.

So what happens to our meeting space? The Citizens for N.C.H. Community Center received a grant for \$50,000 from the Schmidlapp Fifth Third Trust. Part of this money will be given to the city for the purpose of starting Phase One of the Center. We will be renovating the space adjacent to the new administrative offices into a larger, more comfortable and handicap friendly meeting space. Thanks to Fifth Third for not giving up on us. This may be a small step but it's one going in the right direction. Talk about a win-win!

Don't forget the firefighter's festival in July.

**PUBLIC WORKS** Perhaps in some other towns, the public works crews are the subject of many bad jokes. BUT NOT HERE! We have the best guys in the world. Now I may be just a bit biased but our people are the poster children for efficiency and effectiveness. You may not be aware that our entire Public Works Staff consists of 5 full-time and one part-time person. This is for a city of 10,500 people and approximately 57 lane miles of streets not to mention landscape, street cleaning, Christmas decorations, special events, parks and building facilities maintenance. I wonder what they do in their spare time? Next time you see them out in the street, how about a big THANK YOU!

**RECREATION** "There's nothing to do in NCH". Sound familiar? We think that's not quite accurate. While we will be the first to agree that there is not ENOUGH to do here, we still have a lot to offer and plan to have a lot more. For instance, North College Hill currently has organized programs for youth basketball, youth soccer, baseball, and swimming lessons and swim team. We have five parks, and a fantastic community pool. We have a gigantic Easter Egg Hunt in April, the second largest Memorial Day parade in Hamilton County. That's right; Harvest Home is the only parade that is larger. So why don't you come and see our own? We have a Firefighters festival in July, a fabulous community picnic in August, and St. Margaret Mary's festival in September. Surprised? Well, guess what? We're not satisfied. We need to expand the activities and facilities in order to serve a larger segment of our citizens and to offer reasons for people to stay here and for

new people to move into our community. To this end, I asked the Recreation Commission last year to start formulating a one, three and five year master plan for our recreational future. Our goal is to have an activity each month that will afford our citizens the opportunity to come together as the family that we are, enjoy one another, share with one another and be proud that WE ARE THE HILL! Some ideas involve an annual classic car show right on Galbraith Road ( the Police Chief just fainted), community Halloween activities, a community giving of thanks celebration, a Christmas walk and lighting ceremonies, revitalized church walk, and a weekend arts festival that will include music, art, dance and, of course my favorite, food. Sound impossible? Not really, all it takes is people to make it happen. It's our city, yours and mine. We can make it happen. More on this later.

Welcome to new Recreation Board member, Bill Diers. We used to watch Bill play basketball at N.C.H. High School, when he was young. He is a good example of fine people staying here and getting involved to make it better. Welcome Bill and good luck!

**STREETS AND HIGHWAYS** This topic is perhaps the best example of the effect perception has on our expectations. Twenty-five years ago, our city completed just ONE major capital improvement project since the early 1950's. In 1984, our streets were in such poor condition, a Cincinnati Metro bus literally fell into a huge hole on Clovernook Avenue when the entire subsurface failed. Very few people even asked about fixing their streets because nearly everyone expected that that's the way it was and it wasn't going to change. Ah yes, the "good old days". Now, that perception has changed because of the activity the citizens have supported through the road levy. The result is all of our expectations are high and eagerly wait for and expect our streets and sewers to be repaired. That's the way it should be!

In 2005, we saw the completion of Meis and West Belmar. In 2006, we will complete the Southridge project and the Goodman Avenue business district project and subject to state funding, Catalpa as well. The Foxwood Drive reconstruction project is slated to start this summer after our state grant dollars are released. The beat goes on. Yes it will be messy but it's worth it. Once again, we are leveraging our own money with that of the state so we roughly pay only 20% of the construction cost of these projects.

**FINANCE** Boy, what a subject! I think the popular belief is that our city is broke and we can't afford to operate. Well, we are not broke and we can afford to operate, however, we cannot afford to operate as we would like. This is why we are being VERY careful with our expenditures. To simplify, a city is not so different from our own households. We all WANT to do a variety of things and most of us plan ways to accomplish our goals. When the time comes to buy that new car or remodel that family room or finish the basement, we're all excited about it. But, if the raise we were counting on didn't quite come through, or we lost our job, there is no new car, family room or basement. We tuck in and make do as best we can until the opportunity comes again. That is our situation. While the anticipated income generated by the new earnings tax came in just above the projections, the state has eliminated or reduced several revenue sources including inheritance tax, intangible tax and local government funds. The result is North College Hill took a big revenue cut but our expenses continue to increase.

Now before you say that our city employees are making the big bucks, let me dispel that notion. Most of the administrative staff, including Safety Service Director, Police Chief, Fire Chief, Clerk

of Courts, Public Works Director, Tax Administrator and Tax Clerk all are paid either in the lower half of the wages paid by other cities or are within the lowest two or three. In return, they are asked to work harder and longer due to the fact that we have the least number of staff for any city even close to our size. To top that off, all of the non-contract people mentioned above received no raise in 2006. Our elected officials are among the lowest paid in Hamilton County. I think I can speak for all of them when I say we don't care about the compensation. Elected officials past and present didn't run for office because of the pay, we serve because we care. No matter what party or political belief, we are ONE great City.

As our operating expenses continue to rise, we are receiving less and less in shared revenue from the state and federal governments. Simply put, the tax cuts you hear our politicians talk about at the state and federal levels have to be accounted for somewhere. The people who take the hit are the small cities. The "big guys" in Columbus or Washington never have to face you and me at the grocery store. We won't see them at the basketball games or school functions. But, you will see us and we're the ones you can, will and do talk to and that's fine.

Another myth is that NCH's taxes are higher than anyone else. So, we did a little fact finding. Assuming your house is worth \$100,000 and your total household income is \$45,000. Here are the taxes you pay here compared to those you would pay in other areas.

CITY/VILLAGE	PROPERTY TAX	INCOME TAX	TOTAL TAX
Greenhills	\$2,603	\$675	\$3,278
Wyoming	\$2,444	\$360	\$2,804
Mt. Healthy	\$2,061	\$675	\$2,736
North College Hill	\$1,875	\$675	\$2,550

No one likes paying taxes but we think you need to know where your dollars are going and to be assured they're not being wasted.

**DEVELOPMENT** This subject is crucial to our future as a city. For many, many years you all have patiently put up with my ranting about the importance of economic development. If you have any doubt as to its importance, you may want to re-read the above paragraphs. Some popular misconceptions being bantered about by some of our favorite antagonists are: 1.) nobody wants to move to NCH; 2.) everyone's property values are going down; 3.) everybody is moving out of NCH; and 4.) the city is doing nothing to help and/or attract business.

Well, here are the FACTS. I must apologize in advance to those whose bubble will be burst by the following but here goes. Since the opening of Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway, North College Hill has become very attractive to developers. We have entertained conversations with at least a half dozen major companies in the past three years. So why not more activity? Two reasons. First, many national chains have criteria of the type of consumers they require living within a one, three, and five mile radius of a proposed site. This outline includes income average, population densities, education levels and land values. Sad but true; if developers could just consider North College Hill we would be fine. But, the averages drop when considering three and five mile radiuses. I don't support this concept, but it is a fact of business. One of the top real estate developers in Southwestern Ohio and a major franchisee of a large restaurant chain, interested in NCH explained this to me. At first, I was very angry but then I realized that if someone in Denver is

looking at numbers and must make a decision, they need established criteria to judge it on, numbers instead of people. Ironically, the second reason there has been slow progress on development is the fact that our property values are too high.

Yes, that's right. To make it feasible for someone to afford to develop land they must be able to buy it cheaply. That is not the case in NCH. You may find it interesting that while a small area of our community has experienced a 5-7% drop in property value, the vast majority has increased by at least that much or more.

So, everyone is moving out of NCH? Not according to the facts. From the business side, as of March 1, 2006, our vacancy rate throughout all business uses in NCH is just under 8%. Over 92% of our possible business locations are full. According to professional developers, the national average is just over 8%. I hate being average but that's what we are.

Now, let's analyze the most obvious vacancies, Thriftway and Big Lots. Those companies did not leave our city because they were unhappy or because our climate was unhealthy. They closed because the parent companies were and/or are in deep financial trouble nationally. They left not only NCH but also Green, Symmes and Delhi Townships, the City of Fairfield and others. On the residential side of the coin, as of March 1, 2006, there were 124 homes for sale or pending sale in our community. That's a lot. But, it surprised me when we really looked at the total number of living units (not counting apartments) in North College Hill and found that while 124 is a significant number, it is less than 3% of our total. Again, 97% of our citizens are staying put. We took one step further and discovered that Mt. Healthy had 109 or 7% for comparison. It's interesting when you have real data.

So, what are we doing to help improve our economic base? We are stepping up our concentration in business development. We want to keep the good businesses here. When Kroger's came into town, we were in danger of losing good companies like Perkin's, Skyline and Stark Pharmacy. We took an active role in finding ways to keep these businesses here and we were successful. Now, we want to kick it up a notch, as Emeril might say. We have budgeted for an economic development consultant to help solidify a business growth plan, follow-up with prospective businesses and help put "deals" together between and among groups of businesses. We have completed a comprehensive corridor study that now gives us the tools with which we can both plan and focus our efforts. Additionally, this will act as a sales tool for those interested in what we have to offer. Planning Commission is looking into the development of a land use plan as well as other innovative ways to re-develop our business districts and residential areas.

Hats off to new Councilperson, Vicki Dunn, for being a huge help in these activities. She has proven to be a valuable resource and tireless worker. The discussions are ongoing with Walgreens, the owner of the Thriftway property and other groups. It takes so darn much time. These people must get paid by the hour.

**BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT** Vicki Dunn suggested this segment and we thought it was a good idea. We selected Buddy Rogers Music as our spotlight business in this newsletter. Buddy Rogers has been a staple business in our community for nearly 50 years. They have always been there for us when we needed help and heaven knows how many people have learned how to "make music" because of them.

Now it's your turn. Tell us what kind of business you'd like to see in NCH. Simply write it down and either send it in or drop it off at the administrative office at 1704 W Galbraith. We value your ideas and comments.

### **BITS AND PIECES**

The closing of St. Margaret Mary School is really bad news for NCH. The school was an integral part of our community with very deep roots. We have contacted the Archdiocese to discuss possible future uses and what role the city could play.

Speaking of schools, the North College Hill School system is part of the statewide program to improve the physical facilities of schools around the state. NCH School District was awarded a state grant. This means they have a chance to completely re-build nearly all of the facilities. As schools are the NUMBER 1 reason people stay or move to any specific area, this is a huge opportunity not only for our schools but for our city and for our future. It is truly an exciting time and we all need to support this effort. You'll be getting more details from the school board so please take time to read it. Some fun facts about our schools. Out of 524 students, 55% go on to college and 50% receive scholarships.

If you are an alumnus of NCH, check out the Alumni Association. It's up and running. Call Linda Braunwart at 522-9058 or check out the website, [www.nchcityschools.org](http://www.nchcityschools.org). Aren't electronics wonderful?

To make the things work around town we need people. If you want to help, volunteer! Just like Uncle Sam, we need you. Contact city hall at 521-7413 to join in this volunteer effort. It will be fun to help with programs and events to build our city. Pride can be infectious. Catch it!

Our boy's basketball team just won their second straight Division III State basketball title. We all are very proud of these young men. WE ARE THE HILL and it's time we show the rest of the world. I can't think of any better ambassadors than these young players. Congratulations and Go Trojans!!!

Don't forget, there is a law against parking your car in the grass and/or over the sidewalk. Please, if we're going to be a first class city, we need to look like it. Speaking of that, how about bringing the trash cans in in a timely manner. If you need help, ask a neighbor.

The Memorial Day parade will be on Saturday, May 27, at 11 AM. **DON'T MISS IT!**

Welcome to our new appointments; Bill Diers on Recreation and Jenny Diers on Planning Commission. Bill and Jenny are husband and wife and both natives of NCH. We've spoken about Bill earlier. Bill replaces Marcia Weaver on Recreation because Marcia is our new councilperson replacing Jason Fulmer. Jenny brings energy and a love for the city to Planning and it is a joy to work with her.

A big thank you to Jason Fulmer for his years of service on council. Jason and his wife, Denise are expecting their first child this summer. Best of luck to them with the new baby. By the way is there any such thing as an "old" baby?

The City's web site is [www.northcollegehill.org](http://www.northcollegehill.org). Check it out.

A great idea from the concerned citizens group: Adopt-a-Block. Adopt a block, any block, within the city and it is you and your teams' responsibility to make sure it is kept clean. What a great idea. We invite you to take part in this positive, neighbor-to-neighbor activity. Call the administrative offices at 521-7413 for more information.

Speaking of adopting things, it's time to Adopt-a-Basket. This will be our third year and it has been a huge success. For only \$25 you can adopt a floral basket on our light poles along Galbraith Road. Just drop off a check or money order to City Hall or send it with your name and address so you can be properly recognized for your contribution.

Well, that's it. This is a long letter but there was a lot to talk about and some important issues to clear up. We can't be as good as we can be, if we don't believe in ourselves. We can't believe in ourselves unless we know who we really are. Hopefully, you have a little better knowledge now. I happen to think we're pretty darn good. We can and must get better but, as you can see, we don't have far to go. Expect the best of each other because we are the best. WE ARE THE HILL!!!! Be proud of it. I know I am. As always, thanks for allowing me to be part of it. See you next time.

**Just a Thought...."The time is always right to do what is right".... Martin Luther King, Jr.**