

2017 West Chicago State of the City Address  
Delivered by Mayor Ruben Pineda  
Monday, April 17, 2017

Good evening and thank you to the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce Board and staff for sponsoring this evening, for providing a wonderful reception and networking experience, and for all you do throughout the year to support our business community and the City. Your partnership has made this evening possible.

And thank you to Boy Scout Troop 33 and its leadership for being here tonight to properly lead us in paying tribute to our flag and our country. You do so with dignity and a commanding presence which befits the occasion. Thank you also for your continued support of our community throughout the year, whether it be opening ceremonies at special events, planting spring flowers downtown or lending a hand raking the leaves of our seniors. We can always count on our Scouts to answer the call and come prepared to serve.

I'd like to take a moment to share my gratitude to the community for allowing me to continue to stand before you as Mayor and to thank you for your encouragement and support on my reelection for another four years.

I would also like to reflect on the significance of this date, April 17th and how it has brought me to this moment in time. Five years ago today, our City lost a great man and a great Mayor - and I lost a great friend. Mayor Michael Kwasman, or as I was fond of calling him, Kwasio, left us too soon. His record of passionate service was driven by his great love for this community and his legacy will benefit generations to come. He inspired me to grow in my desire and ability for public service, always challenging me. Five years ago, at his memorial service, I said "I am not Michael Kwasman, but I would be the best Ruben Pineda I can be." I will keep that promise. I would like to take a moment of silence in his memory.

Looking forward, I am so grateful for the opportunity to be able to finish some of the important work we have started together, as well as to begin new and exciting projects on the horizon with an amazing team that makes up the West Chicago City Council. Please stand when I call your name:

Lori Chassee, Jayme Sheahan, Al Hallett, Melissa Ferguson, Sandy Dimas, Kurt Meissner, John C. Smith, George Garcia, Becky Stout, Noreen Ligino-Kubinski, and City Clerk Nancy Smith. Oh yeah, Alderman Jim Beifuss.

I'd like to welcome two new members to the City Council, Bonnie Gagliardi and Michael Ferguson - I look forward to serving alongside you; and I'd like to share my thanks and admiration for two Aldermen who depart the Council after serving their terms faithfully,

Alderman Laura Grodoski and Alderman John Banas. You have each contributed in significant ways to our City's progress and we thank you.

There are some other people here tonight who I'd like to recognize and thank for their presence and continuing partnership.

I'd like to kick start our annual progress report and set the direction for the evening, by calling your attention to one of the screens in the room.

### **(Video presentation)**

Partnerships make it possible in West Chicago. Whether you are serving in an official or unofficial capacity, on a Board or Commission, as a volunteer or in an elected position, another inter-governmental entity, a service club or not-for-profit, the media; a business owner, entrepreneur, or employee; you need to know how much your partnership with the City means to the success of our community and the lives of everyone enriched by your involvement.

I'm here to tell you tonight that you own some part of all the great news I have to share.

Now, on to some specifics of the progress we have made in 2016 and the plans we have for 2017 and beyond.

### **Fiscal Health**

First, let's cover the enviable state of our fiscal health, which drives many of the programs, services and initiatives that I'll be talking about tonight. The 2017 Annual Budget totals \$45,118,600 which is a decrease of 8.29% as compared to the 2016 Budget, as amended; specifically the General Fund reflects an increase of 1.48% as compared to the 2016 Budget, as amended. This is no small feat and a credit to the dedication and foresight of City staff and the input and oversight of our City Council. Through their financial stewardship, West Chicago is able to maintain the proud tradition of being in the black since the turn of the century.

While there are many highlights of the 2017 Annual Budget, which is available to the public on our website's Transparency Portal under the heading Government, the one that will resonate the most with our customers is our holding the line on tax, fee and rate increases with no reduction in services. The property tax levy will remain the same for the sixth year in a row. That there is worth a round of applause!

Also noteworthy is the recognition for the 17th consecutive year, by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada, for the accounting and financial reporting of the City's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, also found on the City's website. We hope that by sharing this information, residents and other customers will have a better idea of how their tax dollars are spent to provide them with the best possible standard of living.

## **First Responders**

That standard of living, first and foremost, means safe neighborhoods.

Our first responders are a brave group of men and women who run into burning buildings or potentially deadly altercations rather than away from them. They are who we call when the worst thing possible happens to us or our families. And they take their lives in their hands doing it for us.

I'd like to acknowledge the work of our Police Department in safeguarding our community.

Last year, the Department provided rail safety education, hosted a child safety seat inspection event, conducted roadside safety checks, and personally got to know members of the community through National Night Out and Touch a Truck. They are there when we need them 24/7, responding to traffic crash scenes, domestic disputes, or, if ever necessary, more serious criminal activity.

The promotions of three experienced police officers, John Zurick, Joe Gaztambide, and Anthony Cargola, to the demanding and important position of Sergeant last summer, have strengthened an already solid Police Department. We have also more recently celebrated the graduation of a new officer from the Illinois State Police Academy, Officer Paula Schoonhoven. She won class valedictorian honors as well as the class physical fitness award. She will now begin a fourteen-week intensive training program in the field.

Our men and women in blue have our backs. They put themselves in harm's way every day they show up for the job. And that job has gotten a lot harder over the past year due to some national news stories that distort reality and dishonor the uniform.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share my admiration, respect, and gratitude to our police men and women, and KNOW you will want to join me.

Another group of first responders that deserve recognition tonight are those of the West Chicago Fire Protection District. Last month, in our community, our fire fighters were called to a burning building.

While inside, one of the men, Firefighter Lou Carre, fell through an area of the burning structure and couldn't get himself out. Without thought of their own safety, but rather through sheer courage, skill and training, Firefighters Todd Ba-si-ggio and Brandon O'Leary rushed in to save him. By the grace of God, they all made it out alive. I would like to read a short note written by Firefighter Carre as he painfully recovers. After all he went through, and continues to go through, the respect and love for his job – his calling, still remains:

*Hello Mayor Pineda,*

*Thank you so much for reaching out to me. I am doing better every day. I'm still in a lot of pain but little by little, I'll make it back. I am so grateful to be a part of West Chicago and the West Chicago Fire Protection District. I am also grateful to everyone who was there that day. From Chief Tanner on down, to the West Chicago Police Department, West Chicago Fire and to all in the Alliance, everyone there was working hard to help me in my time of need.*

*I am here today because of all of them, especially FF Brendan O'Leary and FF Todd Ba-si-ggio. I will always be eternally grateful to everyone there that day.*

*Our fire department motto came true for me, "Our family helping yours". Well it was my family helping me. Fire, Police, EMS, all three came together as one unit, one family ----- my family, to help me.*

*Thank you again*

*Lou Carre*

I understand Firefighter Carre is already back on the job, imagine that kind of dedication.

We are honored to have these three brave men here with us tonight, let's give them a special round of applause.

## **Public Works**

The health, safety and comfort of this community are also impacted by the year round services provided by the City's Public Works Department employees. Our commitment to maintaining our infrastructure and providing quality services at a reasonable cost to our customers remains a priority. Our Public Works team is actively involved in the day to day upkeep of public spaces, including the City's public buildings and landscape; its beautification efforts with the hanging of seasonal downtown banner and holiday displays and flower beds; its work behind the scenes at downtown special events and so much more.

Plus, there were many successful projects in 2016 worth mentioning:

- The Street Resurfacing Program in the Cornerstone Lakes Subdivision
- Curb rehabilitation throughout the Forest Trails Subdivision
- The Crack Sealing Program throughout the City, including the Forest Trails Subdivision, Old Heidelberg Area and Joliet Street between Route 59 and Geneva Street
- Sanitary Sewer Evaluation by Smoke Testing in the Alta Vista Subdivision
- Sidewalk maintenance throughout the City

- The Blair Street Roadway and Water Main Rehabilitation Project; and
- Repairs to the A. Eugene Rennels Bridge

For sure, Public Works facilitates connections – it links us through our streets, roads, and bridges; and keeps us healthy and allows our communities to grow and prosper through clean water and sanitation services.

## **Business Growth**

On to business development news. Our Community Development Department staff has been involved with the administration of a number of major studies to fulfill the economic development objectives outlined in the 2016 Strategic Plan. To that end, we are engaged in a market feasibility study for the North Avenue/Route 59 District and have invested in an updated study of the 2007 Central Main Street Redevelopment Area, which more accurately correlates with current market trends and emphasizes residential development for this corridor.

Business growth, which generates added tax revenue and stimulates the local economy, plays a large role in the solvency of our City. Last year at this Address, I was proud to share the list of new businesses which joined our City the previous year leading up to the 2016 Address, and this year I'm pleased to do the same.

For 2016 we welcomed a total of 51 new businesses to West Chicago, and since January through March 2017 another 21, bringing a total of 421 jobs with them.

Choosing West Chicago among the many surrounding areas reflects the growing awareness that the business community has for West Chicago's assets; affordable water costs, transportation access, and a strong, diverse workforce.

The names of these new businesses are contained in the handout you may have found on your chair as you entered the room tonight, otherwise, there will be more placed outside on the table. I encourage you to take a look at the diversity of industry sectors reflected; ranging from manufacturing, construction, retail, professional, scientific and technical services.

On the horizon, we are following the construction of two new exciting businesses:

- Speedway Gas Station has broken ground on the construction of a new facility at the northwest corner of Roosevelt and Washington, bringing added convenience and important tax dollars to our City.
- Burrito Parrillo Mexicana, a new fast, fresh Mexican restaurant will be opening at the site of the former Wendy's at 100 W. Roosevelt Road. The menu will be authentic Mexican cuisine created with fresh ingredients and flavors influenced by the kitchens of Mexico City. With other locations in Naperville, Carol Stream, Lombard, Lisle and Glendale Heights, we are delighted West Chicago was chosen for their further expansion.

These new businesses are only a part of the equation. We are also seeing continued growth, expansion and investment within the existing business community, signaling optimism and confidence in the future.

Business development projects that have taken place or have been initiated in 2016 include:

- Construction of new building which will bring approximately 30 new employees to DS Container at 2500 Enterprise Circle in the DuPage Business Park. With headquarters in an adjacent community, DS Containers came to West Chicago for their 546,000 square foot expansion for West Chicago's competitive electric rates, transportation access and overall location.
- Simpson Strong-Tie, manufacturer of adhesives for the construction industry at 2505 Enterprise Circle in the DuPage Business Park, continues to make ongoing improvements which will bring an anticipated number of between 65 – 80 new employees to the West Chicago workforce. Simpson Strong-Tie merged two of its facilities, one in Baltimore and one in another DuPage County community, to relocate to West Chicago.
- Nearing completion, the Thornton's Gas Station, at 1330 S. Neltnor Boulevard has elevated the corner of a high traffic intersection at 59 and Roosevelt Rd. The big plus for Thornton's is there will be access from both Rt. 59 & Roosevelt Rd.

We are grateful for the investment of existing businesses in our City, and we will continually strive to provide value in our services and formal recognition for their efforts on behalf of their objectives and those of greater benefit to the community.

Since 2009, the Brilliance in Business Awards Program has been a vehicle for us to recognize and showcase the accomplishments of over 40 individual businesses for their innovation, creativity and corporate citizenship. Last November we honored Wise Plastics Technologies, Gloria's Jewlery, Salud Dental, Evo Exhibits and the Jel Sert Company with awards. These stellar businesses continue to thrive in our community – one for instance is Jel Sert, which has been here for 90 years and counting. I encourage you to visit the City's YouTube channel to learn why each business received this important recognition. And while you are there, take a look at past winners of this prestigious award.

Each business has a unique and compelling story that I guarantee will give you a greater appreciation for what they do and which will underscore the importance of our partnership with the business community.

I'd also like to acknowledge three additional projects taking place because of the significant benefit they bring to West Chicago:

- The DuPage Airport Authority is constructing a 30,000 square foot, clear-span structure for a new hangar, increasing capacity and adding value to the airport and the community. David Bird and his staff see to it that West Chicago continues to soar to new heights with their stewardship of this tremendous community asset;
- St. Mary's Catholic Church is planning an expansion and renovation of its campus, which will entail the demolition of the existing 3-story school building to make way for an approximately 15,000 square foot chapel with parking lot improvements, which will allow it to go from 10 to 5 masses on Sunday.
- A public project funded by the City, that was conceived and planned as a collaborative venture with the West Chicago Park District for the enjoyment of the entire community, will be ready in time for a summer season of quality outdoor entertainment. I'm talking about The Shell, a brand new band shell nestled in Reed-Keppler Park just east of the ARC Center and Turtle Splash. The new structure will be programmed with many free summer events including a concert series, movies in the park, youth entertainment, early morning and evening fitness classes and much more. Pack a picnic dinner and grab a chair or blanket from home and head to The Shell for a great family outing. Don't forget to mark your calendar for Saturday, June 10th for grand opening festivities that will begin at 1:00 p.m. You won't want to miss a minute of the lineup which includes Wayne Messmer and the Chicago Skyliner performing the Great American Songbook.

We thank the Park District Board and staff for their efforts with The Shell, their support of Healthy West Chicago and our upcoming Railroad Days, which will be held again this year at Pioneer Park, thanks to the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce which masterfully coordinates the event.

Our partnerships make it all possible.

### **Marketing & Communications**

We launched a new City website with a fresh, visually appealing design and increased functionality; brought back the print newsletter, Windows to West Chicago, now delivered to every household in dual language; and again, based on the direction provided in the West Chicago Strategic Plan, hired a marketing consultant to assist with more effectively positioning West Chicago's unique attributes regionally. We're proud to live in West Chicago, we know that. We want others to know that too.

An invitation to participate in an upcoming marketing focus group to share your ideas is now posted on the City's website.

### **Education Partners**

Our education partners continue to “bring it on” with quality services, programs and facilities which further the academic, athletic and social advancement of our children and the image and reputation of our entire community. Their investments to create and maintain state of the art spaces in which our students may excel have not gone unnoticed.

- West Chicago Community High School District 94 and DLA Architects were honored with an Award of Distinction in late 2016 in the annual Invitational Exhibition of Educational Environments sponsored by the Illinois Association of School Board Service Associates. Superintendent Doug Domeracki hosted tours of the impressive new buildout. There is no doubt this was a wise investment in our students’ futures. Just look at what our students are accomplishing:
  1. 33 West Chicago Community High School students were named Illinois State Scholars;
  2. 9 students from the club WeGo Global volunteered for five days in rural villages in Costa Rica last July;
  3. last year, as a junior, Tai Bibbs was a national finalist for the Army-Hall of Fame Award for Excellence;
  4. WeGo Drama students were interviewed on the air by Dean Richards of WGN Radio just prior to their departure to Scotland to participate in the International Fringe Festival last summer, representing the United States.
- Wheaton Academy, one of the oldest and most respected private Christian high schools in America, continues to expand in West Chicago with a 31,000 square-foot addition to the main academic building. Wheaton Academy recognized they needed to offer their students, our students, the opportunity to excel in the math & science arena. The two story science wing addition with a full basement, will provide additional classroom space for the chemistry and physics curricula. To the school’s credit and the community’s pride, its Girls Soccer team brought home a State Championship in 2016, sophomore Will Lyon was named second chair for the cello in the State of Illinois Music Educators Association, and Wheaton Warrior now a Northwestern Wildcat, Ty Seager, was named 2016 Gatorade Player of the year.
- Another team that went to State to compete this year, has honored us by being here this evening, and I’d like to introduce them to you, the WeGo Wildcats Special Olympics Basketball team. These young athletes from our community played hard and had a lot of fun. We also have the privilege of watching them every year in our Kwasman Classic, where they play with our Police & Firefighters.

Supporting their efforts throughout the year, the West Chicago Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 85 and the West Chicago Professional Fire Fighters Association 3970 raised funds through various activities like Cop on a Rooftop, Police Torch Run, Polar Plunge and Dunk a Cop tank at Railroad Days. That’s a real team effort and they all deserve congratulations! Please stand.

- West Chicago Community School District 33 has been a great collaborative partner for advancing the connections our youngest students have with City Hall and the community at large. This past year I visited schools to share lunch, read to students, and celebrate the work of Frosty Fest essay participants. Plus, outside the classroom we walked together during September's Move with the Mayor Challenge and hosted a visit to City Hall to learn about government and civic responsibility. Hopefully a seed was planted that will inspire more than a few future civic leaders. I love seeing the smiling, bright and inquisitive faces and listening to enthusiasm they have for going to school.

Take a look at the latest in our series of Why I Love West Chicago, produced by Lemay Middle School Broadcasting Communications instructor Sal Ta-ma-yo and his students. It was unscripted and captures some of the enthusiasm of our youngest residents and is guaranteed to make you smile.

### **(Video Presentation)**

That's what a supportive, caring environment does for our youth.

- Our students going to Norton Creek School on the City's north side also enjoy their classroom experiences, and this year, a new Outdoor Learning Center brought the classroom outside. This beautiful new space provided a quality addition that fosters a greater appreciation for the natural world, positively affects physical health, helps with socialization and fosters collaboration. The gardens, with raised beds, a sensory station and butterfly garden have been great additions.
- And let us not forget about another education partner Benjamin School District 25. Benjamin is the oldest operating school in Wayne Township. Graduates from Benjamin Middle School feed into West Chicago Community High School and I'd like to acknowledge the fine work Dr. Ehrhardt and his staff are doing to prepare their students for their secondary education.

Our Public Library has always been a prized community asset and one that continues to evolve through interior renovations which keep it comfortable, engaging and relevant. In 2016, an open floor plan was implemented in the Adult, Young Adult and Youth areas, a smartboard was added in the youth services department for interactive learning options and programs, seating was added to the lobby, and a television was installed to display news and important events. Also, thanks to the Library Foundation, installation of a new wireless system for improved wireless access has added greater functionality for technology users.

Moving beyond our business, intergovernmental and education partners, there are many others who have contributed to successful initiatives this past year and assisted in putting West Chicago on the map in the realm of health, the arts and volunteerism.

## **Health Partners**

Health partners like our Healthy West Chicago team, Northwestern Medicine/Central DuPage Hospital, FORWARD, the American Heart Association, the National Forum for Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention, the American Cancer Society, Common Threads, and the GardenWorks Project, continue to contribute to the vitality of our community in significant ways.

Together, we are changing the way our residents view the benefits of active lifestyles and healthy beverage choices.

Last September, we partnered with the National Forum on a month long walking campaign widely promoted as Move with the Mayor.

In total, 598 walkers participated in the four walks and the Challenge concluded on Thursday September 29th – with a Celebration for World Heart Day. Healthy food, live music, and a keynote address from local cardiologist Dr. John Kefer, in honor of this international celebration.

Our City's reputation as one which cares for the health of its citizens and the sustainability of the community overall, has received national attention.

Following the success of the Move with the Mayor campaign, I was invited to speak at the National Forum's 14th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. I received the agenda for the forum the Thursday prior to the Wed. when I was going to speak.

I noticed that they forgot to mention one little word, Keynote. I was the keynote speaker, so needless to say my speech went from a few words to a half hour speech and a power point.

I shared the Healthy West Chicago story with cardiologists, community leaders and others interested in duplicating some of our successful outcomes in their communities. I was the only one in the room without initials after my name, so I went as Ruben Pineda, Jr.

More recently, we presented Healthy West Chicago at the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus at the ARC Center and the American Heart Association's Drivers of Diversity Summit. They say imitation is the best form of flattery and in this case, the healthiest one. We would be very pleased if other cities rolled out similar programs and a culture of health was strengthened nationwide.

The ReThink Your Drink campaign had a successful roll out earlier this year, so much so that it caught the attention of one of our local businesses, CH2M, the company that runs our wastewater treatment facility. Maria Lenzi and Brent Lautenbach wanted to get their company involved with a community project.

I mentioned the need for the drinking fountains at Community School District 33 at lunch one day with Maria, and CH2M jumped in with both feet! They went to corporate for a donation that would fund the project. They will have one drinking fountain and water bottle filling station installed in each District 33 school by the end of this school year.

They also donated the 1st 250 pedometers for our walking kids. Talk about the stars aligning!

Northwestern Medicine's financial support made possible the West Chicago Park District's after school program with Common Threads, a nonprofit that teaches children how to cook healthy meals on a budget with available resources. "Small Bites" focuses on youth preparing healthy after school snacks, and "Cooking Skills and World Cuisine" teaches youth global exploration through healthy meal preparation.

Another healthy partnership is literally growing before our eyes. The GardenWorks Project, a nonprofit organization founded in 2012 that empowers, educates and promotes organic suburban agriculture to improve the wellbeing of the community, the environment and families facing food insecurity.

We are excited that The GardenWorks Project chose to open its Suburban Agriculture Resource Center in downtown West Chicago invited here by Healthy West Chicago and in close proximity to the community gardens already spearheaded by People Made Visible.

The increase in the network of food-producing gardeners in our community will yield great results for our families and also support our local food pantries with food donations.

### **Volunteer Partners**

We are a community blessed with caring, compassionate and generous people. Whether it be the many faith-based organizations, service clubs, youth organizations, committee or commission volunteers, the people of West Chicago answer the call to serve.

This past March, through caring volunteers and a partnership that extends across the globe, 21 West Chicago high school students visited our Sister City in Taufkirchen (Vils) Germany thanks to the coordination of West Chicago Sister Cities. What a great way to discover friendship, language and customs through this diplomacy network.

We have a dedicated group of people working on environmental projects including recycling and rain conservation.

Last year, 6.83 tons of paper was shredded as a service to the community and 602 pounds of holiday lights were kept out of landfills through a recycling program.

The Environmental Commission will host another document shredding event on June 3rd here at the City Hall parking lot, and rain barrels which can be ordered now through a link on our website, will be available for pickup that day too.

I am proud to announce that I signed the Monarch Pledge. The monarch butterfly is endangered. We have lost approximately 90% of our monarch butterflies. West Chicago is committed to bringing them back. We will be encouraging our residents to plant milkweed seeds in their yards in hopes of saving this species.

## **Arts**

We have another dedicated group of people who share their creative gifts with the community. The Cultural Arts Commission has advanced the arts in West Chicago and facilitated our reputation as a creative destination.

Thanks to their efforts, we dedicated a piece of public art at Sesquicentennial Park last October. Artist and resident Buddy Plumlee donated his time and talent to enhance the landscape of the pedestrian path with a compelling piece of art that bikers, joggers and walkers; or passengers along the Metra line, can now enjoy.

Signa Rotae is an intricate mosaic mural which combines elements of West Chicago's industrial roots as a railroad town.

Another great partner in the arts, People Made Visible, a nonprofit founded by two West Chicago residents, Sara Phalen and Anni Holm, to facilitate community while fulfilling its artistic, social, educational and cultural needs, has really added great vitality to the downtown through its programming. Events like its Artist in Residency receptions, Family Art Nights and community gardens have built a thriving following and received great media coverage.

Plus, the Mexican Cultural Center DuPage has done wonderful work to promote our cultural heritage through special events like the Mexican Independence Day Festival and Las Fiestas Patrias.

## **MEDIA PARTNERS**

Thank you to our media partners, several of whom are with us here tonight. We depend on your fair and accurate reporting throughout the year, and greatly appreciate your coverage of the many positive features we share with you. Whether it is a hard-hitting story or one on the lighter side, we count on you to help us communicate.

## **VETERANS**

And finally, last but by no means least, West Chicago has a proud tradition of honoring those that make the ultimate sacrifice for us, our military veterans.

Thanks to two organizations in town, the VFW and the American Legion, we have a direct connection to them and take every opportunity to acknowledge our gratitude to veterans past and

present. Our community rose to the occasion last November by supporting a fundraiser which provided wreaths for all the gravesites of veterans buried at Glen Oak, Oakwood and Calvary Cemetery. What an amazing effort and appropriate tribute.

West Chicago's DuPage Airport is also proud to host the 5th Annual DuPage Veterans Honor Flight fundraiser, May 6th at 11 a.m. This allows our treasured veterans to visit their memorials in Washington D.C. It costs \$55,000 to send a plane of veterans to Washington and we've been able to accomplish that feat every year since we began.

### **Conclusion**

We know that when we work together, we work more effectively and with more intention. Partnerships in West Chicago run deep and make it all possible. And that, my friends, is a great reflection on the state of our City.

Thank you, God bless you, God bless the City of West Chicago and God bless this wonderful country we live in, the United States of America.

Good Night.