

11/14/2021

From the Desk of Mayor Dean R. Kaufert

Good afternoon,

Thank you all for coming. This morning I want to talk about this community's and my future.

I have been given the honor and privilege to help lead Neenah, this wonderful community of almost 27,000 people I have called home my entire life. This opportunity has been a dream job and one that I have enjoyed for almost 8 years. The people that live here are hardworking, respectful, and care about each other and the community. It would be hard to find another community like ours that continually reminds me of a hallmark movie scene.

When I was elected my wife gave me a placard that still sits on my desk that reads "Neenah, No Place I'd rather be" and that still holds true today.

I have been blessed to have had a wonderful life with a mother Ruth that even though she passed away when I was 18 she taught me that hard work pays off. Brothers and sisters (Kelli, Gary my Campaign Treasurer for my entire career, Scott and Lee) that were always there for me when I needed them. Family, Aunt Shirley, brother-in-law Kip Kitzerow who was an alderman in Neenah, Father-in-law Wayne, uncles and cousins that helped whenever I needed it. Friends, lots of friends that were there for me during difficult times, opening my businesses and running for office.

And my wife Renee, my biggest contributor to all my successes. As most of my friends will attest none of this would have been possible without her support, help and guidance. She has been a wonderful first lady for Neenah. Along with two wonderful daughters Casey and Kari that have been my pride and joy for many years and am extremely proud of both of them. Being in the public eye is challenging at times

for family and I want to say thanks for being supportive all these years so I could follow my dream of public service. I also had the benefit of a role model as a teenager that helped change my life. My stepfather Marshall, a Neenah Police Officer helped shape me for the road ahead along with my step mother Brenda. Both were instrumental in preparing me for life as an adult.

Grocery store clerk, Jays Potato Chip salesman for 10 years, Small businessman Trophy Shop owner, along with becoming a husband and father made me want to become more involved with the community.

So in 1985, Thirty six years ago I ran for alderman for the sixth ward just wanting to make Neenah better. Give something back to the community was the goal. Public service and helping people was the simple reason I wanted to get involved. My government teacher George Scherck made me realize that one person could make a difference. Four years later found me announcing I would be running for the 55<sup>th</sup> State Assembly representing Neenah, Menasha and Town of Menasha. With support and guidance from Senator Mike Ellis, one of the States most productive and influential Senators in our history I embarked on a campaign that had me personally knock on every single door in the district. At the time I was undetermined if I was a Republican or a Democrat, I just knew that helping people and solving problems was something I was good at and enjoyed. My slogan was "Listening to people is the most important way to represent them" I worked hard in Madison doing what I believed in to help make the state and the Fox Valley a better place. But Politics changed and the goals were to further divide the state with the parties being the focus and become divisive with the peoples best interests not being as important as being in control.

At that point I realized my heart was with my hometown and I could help make Neenah a better place. Coming home to the place that has

been so good to me and my family through the years as a child, father, husband and small businessman in this community and making it a great place to live, work and play was possible. In 2014 running for Mayor and winning was a dream that I never thought possible but one that would fulfill my passion for helping make a difference.

Knocking on every door in the city and meeting residents that believe Neenah is the best place to live fueled my desire to work hard to lead this great community.

None of this would have been possible without family and friends and people that believed in me. Once again my family and friends were there like Council President Todd Stevenson and brother Judd, Ruth and Wayne, Betsy, Arnie, Gary and Gail, Larry and Maureen, Ken and Jan, Larry and Cindy, Kurt Schultz along with so many others were there to support my efforts. One man I would like to thank in particular that has been unwavering in his support of the community and my goals and hopes for the city is John Bergstrom. His commitment to Neenah is unbelievable both philosophically and financially. His help has made Neenah a special place. I would never have had this opportunity without any of these friends. All of you and many others gave me the opportunity to make a difference.

We have done some pretty incredible things here over the last 7.5 years. The staff that I have been blessed to work with in my career that has helped guide me, truly has the citizen's best interests in mind and has been the key to my success in helping this community excel

Surrounding myself with good help for me my entire career. My Madison staff and people like Fiscal Bureau Chief Bob Lang taught me to be judicious with taxpayer funds and also taught me to lead.

In addition all the Neenah department heads here have shown me that my first day in office goal of "finding a way to yes" is possible. My time in Public Service has taught me that working together regardless of

party affiliation, conservative or liberal, young or old that if you sit down and look at all the possibilities there usually is an answer that works. If both sides are a little mad then you probably have a deal that works.

We have done some pretty great things here during my time here. For a community our size I have often been quoted saying "We do things big here in Neenah"

With the help of a tremendous staff and Council here is a small list of accomplishments both for Neenah and the region I'm extremely proud of to have had a small part of:

- ✓ A few years ago we helped to convince Theda Clark to stay right where they are at and last week they announced a \$100 mil renovation and expansion plan.
- ✓ Successfully convinced the Legislature to provide a \$1.6 mil Stewardship Grant for the Loop The Lake Project
- ✓ Helped bring "The Plaza" to downtown Neenah
- ✓ Removing Minergy Plant from downtown Arrowhead Park
- ✓ Helped to bring the Plexus Design Center Project downtown
- ✓ After many years of pause we improved Lakeshore Avenue to Kimberly Lighthouse with a beautiful trail for citizens
- ✓ Acquiring most properties in the 200 block Main Street without Eminent Domain
- ✓ The cities first two new higher end apartment living projects to the downtown area are under construction
- ✓ Started the state's first Transportation Fee in lieu of special assessments for road improvements thus saving homeowners thousands of dollars
- ✓ City began making land purchases west of Neenah for housing development
- ✓ Got rid of the junkyard between our industrial Park and Highway 41 clearing the way for a future project.

- ✓ Successfully negotiated border agreements with our neighbors
- ✓ Successfully annexed Town of Neenah Power Plant bringing \$250k revenue to the community yearly.
- ✓ Saved communities millions of dollars of interest by objecting to the Fox Cities Expo financing plan
- ✓ Helped to convince Kimberly-Clark and the State to keep the Cold Spring Plant in Fox Crossing OPEN
- ✓ Next year a new trail through Bridgewood Golf Course and Jewelers Mutual will be in place
- ✓ Numerous Road Projects throughout the Community
- ✓ After many years helped Neenah acquire land for a Dog Park
- ✓ New Police Station addition on the horizon
- ✓ I have also made national headlines for banning dancing and also got quite a few people worked up for proposing the city make a name change to "Whoville". All done to promote High School Musicals risky but well worth the effort

All of these were accomplished as a team and in most instances my role was small. This community is well served with hard working people like Mike Easker, Chris Haese, Aaron Olson, Kevin Kloehn, Gerry Kaiser, Gretchen Raab, Lindsay Kehl, Mike Kading, Joe Wenninger, Tony Mach and Adam Westbrook.

I'm grateful for a Common Council that was civil, respectful to each other and understood the need to think outside the box sometimes. The community is lucky to have a group of nine dedicated leaders working for them especially Council President Stevenson who has given over 30 years to the community and been a great right hand man to me and a great leader to the community during my career.

I worked with wonderful people like Eileen McCoy, Judge Jim Gunz, Attorney Jim Godlewski, former Mayors George Scherck and Marigen Carpenter, Councilman Kunz and many others. In Madison, Governors Thompson, Doyle and Walker are friends and were helpful in so many

ways. My former Administrative Assistants Adam Field, Matt Kussow and Cale Battles helped guide my initiatives and future.

My rock and person that had the most difficult job helping to make me look good is my current Administrative Assistant Joni Heinz. She is a tremendous asset to the city and kept me on the straight and narrow. We are extremely lucky to have her.

And all the other 260 employees of the city that work hard day in and day out to improve our quality of life. Early in my tenure I tried to do every job in the city through my "Working with the Staff" initiative and found out just how important every role was towards making the community great. I salute all of you for the job you do.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as Mayor of this great community. It is now time to stop and smell the roses, start taking things off the bucket list and allow another person to step up and further lead this community to prosperity.

Public Service has been a wonderful calling and I appreciated the opportunity to make a difference. I was 28 years old when it began and now 36 years later, it is time to step back, rest a little and spend time with family. Being on call 24/7/365 has been part of my life. Being in the public domain brings challenges for my time. At age 64 I want to enjoy more time with grandchildren Kaiden, Ashton, Carson, Easton, Riley, Sam, Casey, my daughters Casey and friend Brian, Kari and son in law Clint, and of course Renee and our family business.

So after much thought and hesitation **I am announcing that I will not be running for reelection as Mayor of Neenah.** The decision to retire has not been an easy one due to the love for this community and the opportunity to make it even better tomorrow. Getting older makes staying up later past 10 pm to work on the budget harder to do, Committee night meetings after all day at the office are more difficult and answering the phone calls, emails and texts daily is

challenging. Maybe being the only Mayor in the state to give out my personal cell phone is not such a great idea. Calls from constituents at 6 am or 11 pm get answered by me often. The reaction from the person is taken aback because they expected to get an answering machine. Being a hands on leader, my staff especially, public safety like Police and Fire could call in the middle of the night when large events or tragedy struck.

Many folks have agreed with me over the years and many have not. I've had death threats directed towards me and uncomfortable situations in public where someone was upset with an issue or decision. My family and children have had to endure unpleasant interactions with upset constituents and folks that many times were emotional or somewhat aggressive. But the overwhelming majority of folks have been understanding and supportive over the years and a pleasure to represent.

And COVID has drained a lot of energy out of me with daily decisions necessary to guide and protect 26,000 people and 260 employees. The pandemic has made the last 18 months a challenge that has drained me emotionally and physically. The responsibility of protecting our community was immense.

But it has all been worth every minute of it. Helping thousands of people with problems with city or state government has been rewarding. Finding a way to yes, and negotiating deals that benefit our community has been fulfilling.

It is time to enjoy my cottage more, do more traveling, find out what a Memorial Day or 4<sup>th</sup> of July is without a parade or day in the park, help out in the family business and family time. Watching more of the grandkids football and baseball games will be nice.

**I have had a great run 17 elections without a loss. Undefeated at the ballot box. Three terms as Alderman, 12 terms (24 years) in**

**the legislature as a State Assemblyman and 2 terms (8 years) as Mayor leading the best community in the state.**

To my friends in the press Thank you for what you do and for treating me fairly over my career. You reported on the good positive things and smacked me when I made a mistake. I have always been a supporter of transparency and open government. I appreciate what you do.

Maybe I just need to recharge the batteries. Never say never to a future return to Public Service but time will tell.

They say you will know when it is time to retire.

My goal was to make a difference in the community and state and to leave Neenah in a better position than when I got here.

I'm proud to say we made a difference in people's lives.

"I've given you all I've got to give. It's been an amazing, great run, no regrets.

Neenah will always be my home and I will be around to help if needed or asked. I love this Place.

I did my best and thank everyone for the opportunity.

I will leave you with this:

My favorite movie song

Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey "I've had the time of my life"

Public Service is a great calling and I thank the citizens of this great city for giving me this tremendous honor and responsibility to lead this community for 8 years as Mayor.

Thanks for all you do to make Neenah a great place to live, work and play.

Thank you all for coming.