

# Power of Attitude

## 2008 ANNUAL MAYOR'S ADDRESS

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*Presented by Mayor Randy Hope  
Thursday, May 22, 2008  
Wheels Inn, 615 Richmond Street, Chatham*

Good Evening Everyone. On behalf of Council and the citizens of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, I am pleased to welcome everyone to the 2008 Annual Mayor's Address.

Once again, the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce deserves our gratitude for hosting this event. All of our chambers are important partners in reaching the full potential of our community.

I would also like to thank our sponsor... Bell Canada. We very much appreciate your great corporate citizenship and your commitment to Chatham-Kent. A number of elected representatives are here tonight, and I would like you to join me in recognizing them.

### RECOGNIZES ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

I am very pleased to appear before Chatham-Kent's distinguished business and community leaders again this year. In fact, your advice and support... and your criticism, too... are essential to Chatham-Kent Council's governance of our community. Your daily contributions as citizens affect all areas of community activity.

I believe these contributions spring from an attitude of duty and community service. You have a keen appreciation of the opportunities and potential of Chatham-Kent. It is a positive "can do" attitude. You find opportunities, develop strategies and strive to reach goals. There is a power to this attitude... a flow. As you move forward... this flow includes other Chatham-Kent residents. We begin to move together as a community... shaping our course, turning the wheels of industry, replenishing our land... and working toward a green, productive future.

We who have been elected by the people to serve on Chatham-Kent Council share your attitude of community service. We are determined to provide the leadership our community demands of us. This is a leadership that shapes our course according to the needs and wishes of our people. Moving together, we can ensure the power, productivity and creativity of our community in a very competitive world.

In 2007, I stood right here and talked to you about the Chatham-Kent Community Strategic Plan. This is a plan we had all put together and then updated as a community. This plan was very useful in shaping Council's Strategic Directions and Goals for our four-year term. We are developing our recreational and cultural opportunities. We are supporting sustainable growth in business and industry. We are diversifying and growing Chatham-Kent's population. And we are striving to be a municipality of quality services, effective structure and fiscal responsibility.

On that last point, especially, we took a bold step. In municipal leadership... there is no shortage of critics. That is how it should be. With elected office comes great responsibility. But on this point, we actually went one step farther. We invited an independent, outside consulting team to come in and be our toughest, most well-informed critics. Why? Because, to move forward, we had to be sure that we were on the right course.

We commissioned the Berkeley Consulting Group to assess how Chatham-Kent is governed. We asked them to analyze how our municipal services are administered. And we knew they would pull no punches. That report has been publicly presented to Council and has posed some challenges.

The report said that Chatham-Kent has dealt with many of the challenges of amalgamation quite well. Our municipality is where you would expect it to be 10 years after the amalgamation of 23 municipalities, 13 public utilities commissions, and five police service boards. But, the report also said that change is needed to Chatham-

Kent Council. Citizens need to feel that their concerns for their local communities are being heard and acted upon. They need to believe that municipality-wide concerns are being heard and addressed. They need to know that, as a community of communities, Chatham-Kent can compete with the world's many other active, assertive communities.

Next steps include task forces to follow up on the consultants' recommendations. It has been recommended that Council reduce its number of members... that it establish local community councils or standing committees on fields of operation... and that it look at realigning ward boundaries. It is with an attitude of community service and responsibility that I say to you... we will find a "made in Chatham-Kent solution."

The report also said that our municipal corporation has challenges as well. Of 85 manager positions, one in six is vacant or filled by someone in an acting role. This is referred to as a "fragile management structure." It results in difficulties making decisions with confidence or planning for the long-term. It causes workload problems for people who are filling in for vacant positions. We are taking action by recruiting a permanent Chief Administrative Officer to address staffing issues.

The report also said that our corporation is relatively lean and cost-effective. And it said that our employees are professional in their attitudes. On behalf of Chatham-Kent Council, I want to express our full appreciation and gratitude for the expertise and daily efforts of our 14 hundred employees who work so hard to serve our community and the needs of individual citizens. You are well appreciated.

In terms of serving our citizens, we said that we would develop plans and projects that promote economy, health, environment, culture, civic engagement and learning. And we have. In 2007, we initiated a Project Management Office that is now tracking 53 different municipal projects. The projects are funded by a municipal budget that taxpayers helped to form through a series of public consultation meetings. We also make good use of provincial and federal funding.

Among our successes in 2007 is the continuing Best Start Initiative. This provincially funded initiative is delivered by the municipality in partnership with many community organizations. It employs skilled professionals to provide early learning and care services for children aged zero to six. This initiative provides a Best Start for children, for families and for their future.

In Chatham-Kent, we are taking care of our future generations. That's why, in the 2007 budget, Council contributed funds in the amount of \$1.2 million over four years for the "Every Life Counts" doctor recruitment campaign. It's also why, with the province, we opened the Public Health clinic at the WISH Centre. Here, primary health care is available five days per week.

Public Health also led the Chatham-Kent Heart Survey. This survey made the personal and social costs of heart disease perfectly clear. Public Health then devised a strategy for promoting wellness. In Chatham-Kent we are concerned with all aspects of our citizens well-being. And that is why we deliver social programs of all kinds through our Health and Family Services Department.

Chatham-Kent is a safe community... and our emergency services are constantly improving our quality of service. For example, the Chatham-Kent Police Service has partnered with colleges and high schools to put together an Emergency Action Response database. This database includes evacuation routes, floor plans and photographs that help police to protect our children in a crisis. In 2007, the Fire Department completed a Master Fire Plan that streamlined operations and improved cooperation between agencies.

Turning to the provision of utilities, the Ontario Energy Board has already indicated that Chatham-Kent Energy is one of the most efficient utilities in the province. It provides excellent service at low cost. To increase that efficiency and ensure reasonable rates, CK Energy is pursuing a very active business plan. The plan includes the acquisition of part... or all... of other utility companies. For example, CK Energy and the Municipality of Dutton-Dunwich are in binding negotiations to acquire Dutton Hydro Limited.

2007 was the year that Chatham-Kent Hydro worked on the final phases of harmonizing residential power rates across the municipality. Strong management and a reduction in distribution costs mean that residential rates are now uniform and have decreased overall by three percent. In line with provincial requirements, we are among the first municipalities to phase in Smart Meters so that residents can tailor their electricity consumption and

save money. Four public conservation programs have reduced the need to import electricity. This lowered costs and provided rebates to consumers totaling \$100 thousand.

In 2007, we also improved our water and wastewater systems. Our Public Utilities Commission sought and received \$5.3 million from the federal and provincial governments. The money is being used to upgrade the Ridgetown Wastewater Treatment Plant, protecting the environment and encouraging new businesses or industries to develop in the area. The PUC also invested more than \$4 million to construct a new water tower for the community of Tilbury and the surrounding areas. This will support development for the next 20 years. We have also replaced more than 20 kilometres of rural and urban water mains. These projects are well within budget and allow Chatham-Kent to have some of the lowest water and wastewater rates in this region of Ontario.

In January 2007, our Environmental Services Department implemented the two-stream recycling program for solid waste. Residents can separate newspapers and cardboard... from cans, plastics and glass. A four bag per week limit was placed on residential garbage... and a 30 bag limit for industrial, commercial and institutional customers. As a result, 350 metric tonnes less waste went to the Ridge Landfill... costs decreased \$40 thousand... and recycling increased 12 percent.

Situated along Highway 401... a major roadway between the United States and Canada... we are in an excellent position to support strong economic growth. The Chatham-Kent Transportation Master Plan identifies our need for an integrated network of municipal roads... provincial highways... public transit... bicycling routes and trails. For example, during peak periods, the travel demands for crossing the Thames River exceed the capacity of the five existing bridges in Chatham. Residential growth is planned for the north side of the river... while industrial growth is planned south of the river and along Highway 401. By the year 2015, two additional traffic lanes in each direction will be needed across the Thames River.

We are also working with the province to make sure the municipal voice is heard regarding the Highway 40 corridor... and about improvements to the Highway 401 corridor. We will be exploring the possibility of a Highway 401 interchange at Charing Cross Road... and will be holding community meetings in June to receive residents' views. During 2007, we accessed \$2.5 million from the Canada Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund toward the cost of replacing 14 bridges as approved under this program. We also continued with lifecycle rehabilitation or replacement of many other structures. Altogether, we have 845 bridges of various sizes in Chatham-Kent. In 2007, we dedicated \$6.1 million toward the lifecycle maintenance of 66 kilometres of asphalt and gravel roads. In 2008, we will be getting \$2.8 million in federal gas tax funds to continue this essential work.

The municipality is also following up on our commitment to save the CSX rail line through Chatham, Dresden and Wallaceburg. The loss of this line would be a significant blow to both existing and new industries and businesses. We are constructing a business case to possibly run a short-line rail service. In another initiative, we are examining the options for expanding affordable, reliable public transit across Chatham-Kent. And recognizing the potential for tourism and recreational activities... the Lake Erie shoreline... the Thames Valley... the northwest... and the Rondeau/Ridgetown/Blenheim areas... have all been identified as having great potential for walking and bicycling routes.

To restore this natural environment, we formed a community Greening Partnership. Our goal is a 10 percent forest cover for Chatham-Kent. Partners include Stewardship Kent... the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources... the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority... and the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority. Many community partners have also supported the strategy with money, volunteers and tree supplies. In 2007, we received \$100 thousand in donations and planted 100 thousand trees. Such natural attractions, combined with recreation and culture, make Chatham-Kent a more attractive and healthy place to live.

In 2007, we committed to investing \$2 million to enhance recreational amenities... and we developed a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to ensure that all residents have access. Chatham-Kent's 10 arenas provide safe, clean and reliable facilities at competitive rates all year round. We have also committed \$400 thousand toward the expansion of the Gable-Rees Rotary Pool in Blenheim... and are moving forward with construction.

Social and cultural life are also important aspects of a healthy community and a vibrant economy. In 2007, Council funded 30 community improvement projects. They included 20 festivals and other events for a value of \$195 thousand from the Community Partnership Fund... and \$17 thousand from the National Child Benefit

Supplement. Projects ranged from the Farmers' Market in Chatham to the celebrations of the Wheatley Fish Festival.

In 2007, Chatham-Kent launched its cultural mapping project, taking stock of cultural resources that can support quality of life, tourism and economic development. We understand that culture is directly tied to the creation of wealth and economic vitality. And in 2008, we took on ownership of the Capitol Theatre and received \$7 million in provincial funding to help the community develop a major cultural attraction in downtown Chatham.

From theatres to fishing, tourism is a significant source of income. We are working with community partners to develop new attractions while continuing to support those that are already well established. For example, it was already a good year for ice fishing and outfitters in Mitchell's Bay and along the Lake St. Clair shore. The ice was thick and the perch were biting. But a good year became a banner year when Council introduced a pilot project making ATV travel legal throughout the community of Mitchell's Bay. Council was listening and Council responded to the need.

A strong community... efficient and cost-effective municipal service... and a worthwhile quality of life... help to make a good foundation for sustainable growth in business and industry. Our updated Economic Development and Tourism Strategy has promoted our easy access to major markets... our skilled workforce... competitive business costs... and an excellent quality of life. In a challenging international marketplace, we have provided a supportive environment for existing and new businesses.

We welcomed progressive automotive manufacturers such as German-based Continental AG to Chatham... and Mahle to Tilbury. We welcomed Kruger Energy's 44-turbine wind farm in South Kent... which will provide green energy to Ontario's energy grid. We encouraged innovation in agriculture... such as the study of renewable energy technologies at the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus. We helped Global Composite Manufacturing to locate in Tilbury and make modular utility poles. We then purchased some of those poles for our St. Clair Road expansion. We also celebrated the new Prostar truck line at International Truck and Engine, with its \$270 million investment in the Chatham plant.

New retail ventures have included the Wal-Mart Supercentre development in Chatham... redevelopment of the CountyFair Mall featuring Wal-Mart and other national chains in Wallaceburg... and the Canadian Tire-Mark's Work Warehouse development in Tilbury.

And our downtown business people continued to revitalize our historic urban areas. Chatham's Retro Suites Hotel was presented with the "Bricks and Mortar" Project Award by the Ontario BIA Association. This boutique hotel was recognized for its fine architectural restoration... and for serving as a model of thoughtful redevelopment.

In Chatham-Kent, we also promote a positive relationship between entrepreneurs and the workforce. Our sixth annual Chatham-Kent Business Appreciation Awards recognized employers who provide training and employment to Ontario Works recipients. As a result of their participation, almost two thousand social assistance recipients started full-time or part-time employment. We have one of the most successful Ontario Works Employment Programs in the province.

In 2007, we also launched the Wallaceburg Community Task Force. It was jointly funded to the amount \$400 thousand by the municipality and by the Province of Ontario. This community-based group of citizens and professionals, working with the municipality, has taken on the revitalization of Wallaceburg's local economy. The two-year pilot program received an additional \$186 thousand from the province to analyse the local economy and the labour market... a study which will be completed in June.

Also in the Wallaceburg area, we are working with St. Clair Township and other partners to encourage development of a Shell Canada oil refinery near Courtright. Feasibility studies could take several years... while the construction phase could have a value of \$3 billion and involve 10 thousand people. More than 500 permanent jobs for skilled workers are possible. This project could pay big dividends in Wallaceburg and throughout Chatham-Kent.

We also welcome new skills and diversity among our citizens, and with the Chatham-Kent Cultural Coalition are reaching out to immigrants through a Newcomers Information Portal on the Internet. Overall, we are reaching out in many different ways to attract investors, entrepreneurs and skilled workers to our community.

At the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, we are starting with an attitude of public service, responsibility and constant striving for excellence. We are adding the wisdom to listen and a determination to constantly improve. Then we add vision... a vision of real community... people helping people... now and into a better future. And that is the vision Council wishes to share with everyone in Chatham-Kent.

Government can't do it all. No matter how well-informed... organized... well-staffed... well-equipped and efficient we become... government can't do it all. But with an attitude of community service... citizens helping citizens... local communities helping other local communities... all of us helping Chatham-Kent... our home and the home of our children... with this attitude, we can truly achieve wonders. This is a grand vision worth pursuing.

Just the other day, the Chatham Daily News carried a front page story... not about a very large project or a very expensive project... but a project that is a very fine example of the power of community spirit. The photo is of local resident Sid Ebare in his wheelchair enjoying the sandy beach on the Lake Erie shore at Laverne Kelly Park in Erieau. This was made possible by a new boardwalk built especially with physically challenged people in mind. It was Mister Ebare's first visit to that area.

Much of the \$10 thousand in funding was provided by Home Depot, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the municipality. Other organizations included the Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program, Stewardship Kent, Ontario Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, the Rondeau Bay Watershed Coalition, Stewart Brothers, and Town and Country Lumber. Individual citizens led by Roy and Joan Pickering did much of the work. Thanks to these individuals, many people, including people with mobility challenges, are now taking advantage of the fine views and fresh air this boardwalk offers.

This project and projects like it both improve quality of life for our residents and attract visitors. These amenities and the community spirit they show send a message well beyond the boundaries of Chatham-Kent. That message is: "Chatham-Kent is a beautiful, caring and progressive place to visit, to live, to work and to invest."

This project started with an attitude of caring... an attitude of citizenship... an attitude of cooperation. Success breeds success.... and we can and should approach the future of Chatham-Kent with confidence, optimism and excitement. There is power in a community with that attitude... real power in the real world... and I invite all our citizens to share in that power.

Thank you.

