

From the Mayor's Desk

From the November, 2008 *Tybee Breeze*:

I hope everyone had a nice October. It seems, knock on wood, that we have avoided the wrath of yet another hurricane season and for that we should all be extremely grateful...

Before I begin, thanks to the residents of Lewis Avenue for their hospitality and generosity for hosting Tybee's annual Halloween trick-or-treating. The thing has gotten so popular that we have kids from all over the county coming out to take part. Maybe one of these days our neighbors to the west will see the light and realize that cordoning off one street, providing supervision from local police and ensuring all necessary precautions are in place for the safety of the little ones are VERY GOOD ideas. Maybe they'll start taking the lead from Tybee on this. Anyhow, we all owe these residents a big thank you for their continued support of this wonderful event.

The City is actively working on a street paving and drainage project for the southwest portion of Tybee. The scope of the project has expanded after initial plans were evaluated and deemed insufficient to adequately address the drainage issues. Kudos to the Infrastructure Committee—Councilmen Eddie Crone, Barry Brown and Paul Wolff—for making sure this project will be a success and for continuing to push it forward.

Also, if you live on the north end of the Island, you have by now been affected in one way or another by the Ft. Screven water line project. This project has been in the works for some time and is finally coming to fruition. Although it will no doubt be an inconvenience for many of us, the project will ultimately be a major improvement in the City's water delivery system. It is part of a long term plan to stop band-aiding the Island's infrastructure and actually fix the problems once and for all. This project is a huge step in the right direction.

That brings me to the issue of water and sewer rates. These projects (i.e. Ft. Screven water line project) cost a lot of money. What the City is working on now is basically trying to kill two birds with one stone: First, the State has mandated that we implement a tiered water rate system that encourages conservation. Secondly, we are also required to have a self-sustaining Water/Sewer Enterprise Fund. In other words, tax dollars (with a few exceptions) cannot supplement the Water/Sewer Enterprise Fund. So as the City Council implements the state-mandated tiered rate system, they also are attempting to bring the Enterprise Fund back into balance and, again, address two problems at the same time. This is a wise decision. But at the same time, we must do so by adequately informing the public and by ensuring that the plans are scrutinized by those that will in the end be affected so that we can ensure it is done fairly and intelligently. That being said, we also should dedicate ourselves to lobbying for county, state and federal dollars to pay for some of the upgrades. For instance, we have been advised that we must drastically expand our Sewage Treatment facility. You might ask, why should the State or Feds give us money to build a new sewage treatment facility? The answer is pretty straightforward: because they are the ones mandating that we do it. They are the ones that enact laws and policies dealing with water quality and sewage outfalls. We will use that argument to push for state and federal funds with the same tenacity that we fought for funds for the re-nourishment project. We also will continue to fight for our fair share of county-collected sales tax revenues to pay for these projects.

We had a meeting recently with an expert on the process our City will hopefully undertake of becoming a "Bicycle-Friendly" Community. I am very excited about this project as I think it will help lead our City to become much more pro-active in planning for ways to make Tybee an even better place to ride our bicycles. Should City Council support this plan, we will be hosting a workshop at City Hall in the near future to begin the process by getting input from our citizens. Roswell is the only other city in Georgia to have achieved this designation and I am optimistic that Tybee can become #2.

Many thanks to all that volunteered their time and effort for the Piratefest this year. We had a wonderful turnout despite the bad weather. People from all over the country came to Tybee for the event. As I stood on the stage Friday night waiting to get kidnapped by marauding bands of pirates, I was amazed at how many people were in the parking lot...literally shoulder-to-shoulder as far as the eye could see. I had no idea there were that many pirate aficionados!

I would like to commend the staff and City Council for supporting the return of the annual Marathon. Actually, this year it will be a Half-Marathon. Dale Critz stepped up to sponsor the race and we have the crew that organizes the Bridge Run (Robert Espinoza from Fleet Feet) on board to handle the logistics. So start training now!

Finally, Mrs. Sylvia turns 100 this year. For those of you that haven't had the pleasure of meeting her, just go down to Doc's on any given Saturday night. It's not too early to start reminding everyone about the festivities. We're all hoping to make this a truly unforgettable event. And I have no doubt that Michael Sullivan's TV empire will be there to cover it from start to finish! So mark your calendars for the week of February 2 as we plan on making it a weeklong celebration.

Have a wonderful November!

Mayor's Night In will be on November 18 as the second Tuesday (11/11) in November is Veteran's Day. Please contact Vivian Woods at 786-4573 ext. 103 for an appointment.

As always, feel free to contact me at 786-4573, ext. 108 or via e-mail at buelterman@hotmail.com. See you around town.