**Mayor Ardell F. Brede on January 3, 2018**

Happy New Year!  It is always a joy to reflect on the past year while looking ahead to the challenges that will face us in 2018, challenges that come in many sizes, some self-inflicted and are not necessarily new but none the less add excitement to our city, our council and personally.

This is the beginning of my 16th year as your Mayor.  We have just finished a very busy year but we seem to say this virtually every year.  DMC has made it busier for our staff, however, we did pass the goal of $200 million in DMC Development, the threshold required for the release of State funds as is legislatively defined.

Regarding the Destination Medical Center Board, we will be faced with replacing a couple of original members: Former Lt. Governor Tina Smith DMC Board Chair, and  Susan Park Rani.  Tina Smith, now Minnesota U.S. Senator, will be missed greatly, not only for her great leadership skills but as a friend!  Susan Rani brought great expertise as a business owner.  The Governor is seeking applicants as he will appoint these two openings.

February 16, 2018 is the year of the Dog as is celebrated in the Chinese New Year.  Councilmember Johnson may have special feelings as she has a successful dog training business, Good Dog Camp.

My year began with a trip to India promoted to study in the region where Mahatma Gandhi, Indian activist employing non-violent civil disobedience lived and studied.  The area was also where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. followed Gandhi’s teachings.  The purpose for our group of about 12 from across the United States was to “Reinvigorate Non-Violence in America.”  Rochester Police Lieutenant James Evenson was also in our group, Walking and studying in the footsteps of Gandhi, daily practice of yoga and time with Swami G was both inspiring and emotional.  The Swami proclaimed that “It’s time to quit building temples and start building toilets.”  He explained that in schools the bathrooms are so few or bad that young girls will not eat or drink all day to not have to go to the bathroom.

Swami had a small gift and prayer for each of us but a special one for my wife Judy.  The theme was “From India with Love.”

The trip certainly complemented my on-going efforts to help make Rochester an even more Compassionate City.  In September the Council approved a resolution declaring Rochester as a Compassionate City, applying for and receiving the official designation from the International Charter for Compassion.  To my knowledge we’re the only city in Minnesota to be designated as such.  The Golden Rule is the basis for being compassionate but as simple as that may be:  “Do onto others as you would have them do unto you”, we continue to fall short in our efforts.  Hence, I continue to bring this up in my annual report.  In my first State of the City Address, January 6, 2003 the calendar for that day had this Japanese proverb, “One kind word can warm three winter months.”

Offering great assistance in this effort have been Cathy Ashton who convened the Compassionate Rochester MN group and Mary Alessio who initiated and created the Locks of Compassion, an idea that started in Paris where so many locks were put on a bridge they had to be removed for fear the bridge would collapse.  Our locks were on a “fence” constructed by Rochester Builders.  Located during the summer in front of the Chateau Theatre were over 1,000 locks that were purchased, signed and decorated by individuals from the community and from all over the world.  The display has been moved to the Mayo Civic Center near the Art Center.

Individuals have shared that they will take the idea of “Locks of Compassion” back to their home communities.  As the quote on the post card says, “What if a decorated lock could express your compassion and the hope it inspires begins to ripple.”  You also may have noticed a couple of billboards popping up in Rochester, compliments of Fairway Outdoors Advertising – Rochester, MN – City of Compassion.”

The Chateau Theatre continues to be the Heart in any planning for the Heart of the City, DMC District.  Due to the properties on either side of the Chateau not being finalized we have felt it would not be smart for us to proceed with the restoration of the Chateau without knowing the final status of those 2 properties.  No one wants to be faced with “had we known……” we wouldn’t have done this or that.  So while it’s frustrating we have put on hold our original plans for the Chateau.  I am confident we will have answers soon so we can move forward with our renovation plans.

This past year the 2nd Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast was held.  About 160 attendees hearing prayers from and for differing segments of our community left feeling refreshed and inspired.  I couldn’t help reflecting on the potential and benefit it would be for ourselves, our council and our community to begin our City Council meetings with prayer, delivered by the diversity of our faith community.  Maybe that time has come.

The needs in our community are great and in many cases we are unaware.  Thanks to the Sisters of Saint Francis who have organized and coordinated the past couple of years an all-day event creating awareness of human trafficking of young girls (and boys) in our community.  We are often shocked but pleased with the efforts by the Sisters, and others, devoted to addressing this serious issue.  Our Rochester Police Officers also help to identify and target the “John’s in sex trade.”  In addition to the Sisters and Police we thank Mission 21, founded by Stephanie Holt in their effort to provide resources and restoration services to child victims of sex trafficking.

In a recent visit by the Sisters I became aware that the efforts provided has gotten greater than they can provide and have asked if the City or County would be able to assist in this effort by providing perhaps a half-time staff person.  I know the City did not have such a person in its 2018 budget and not sure about Olmsted County, perhaps in their Victim Services Department, they had this additional staff.  We will be addressing the significant need.

On a much more positive note the need that we are fully aware of, affordable housing, is going to be addressed by the creation of a new Community Coalition for Rochester Area Housing, a collaborative program announced by the Rochester Area Foundation with the founding partners: Rochester Area Foundation, City of Rochester, Olmsted County and Mayo Clinic.  The Coalition’s fundraising goal of $6 million received a commitment of $4 million from Mayo Clinic over the next 2 years.  This collaborative community program will acquire, invest, manage and distribute funds and resources to create and preserve affordable and workforce-priced housing.  This is an amazing community coalition I believe few communities can match.  Thanks to all who have worked creatively and hard in addressing this community need.

Rochester, recently received the official designation of being a Purple Heart City.  The Purple Heart is the nation’s oldest military decoration given to military members who were wounded or died in combat.  Rochester continues to value our veterans and military personnel and will be putting up signs acknowledging this significant designation.  The first may be across from Fire Station #1 on Broadway in Hazama Square.  There are at least 150 Purple Heart recipients in the Rochester area.

Mentioning Fire Station #1 it’s encouraging that funds for the restoration and placement of the Historic clock matched by a generous challenge gift by Alan Calavano has been reached.  Additional funds are needed and I would encourage your participation.  I and my wife have purchased a paver towards the goal.

A year ago there was a question by the council about how diverse was our process for recruiting and recommending individuals for the more than 15 Boards and Commissions the City has.  It was strongly suggested by some staff that a different system used for recruiting job applicants might cast the applicant net more broadly, resulting in a more diverse pool of applicants.  The software system NEOGOV was to be used.  I resisted initially but ultimately I and my associate agreed to try it.  NEOGOV is used for job applicants and therein lies the problem.  There were minimal changes we could make with the system avoiding violation of the contract; changing words like “salary requested”, “willing to relocate” and numerous categories labeled- “we do not wish to obtain this information” were not possible.  To me we were willing to try NEOGOV but it was a “square peg in a round hole” system.  Many volunteers express frustration in a system that looks like and is a system for applying for a job.  I do not think this system has given us any different or diverse number of applicants.  Currently we have seven boards with openings and had 25 applicants for which I do a 30 minute interview.  Fifteen are women, very few ethnic.

There are systems available that are designed for recruiting volunteers and I believe we need to explore and select this and abandon a system not designed for volunteers. Ethnic recruiting will remain a challenge that needs to be addressed but a system that asks what salary you require and are you willing to relocate for a volunteer position is not the answer.

We are blessed with the number and quality of applicants we receive for our many openings.  Many say, “I feel I should give back to the community” or the best was the man who said “I should do more than pay taxes.”  Where was he at Truth and Taxation night?”

A recent situation occurred at a Council meeting relative to agenda items that may not be appropriate for members of the audience, specifically youth.  These generally relate to massage parlors where there’s been a violation.  To have these matters discussed at a separate Council meeting or as what was decided, put as the last item on that night’s agenda brought thoughts of censorship or the possibility that each agenda item be rated ‘R’, ‘PG13’ or ‘G’ in the future.

It is my understanding that the Rochester Charter Commission will be discussing Ranked –Choice voting, a system that’s often viewed as complicated but has been used in the last two city elections in Minneapolis and St. Paul.  I recently had a visit by proponents of the system, not from Rochester, promoting this system.  I expressed my lack of support but we’ll see what the pros and cons of such a system might be.

There will be a lot of institutional and professional knowledge going out the door this year.  This past year Stevan Kvenvold retired after a “lifetime of work” --- 47 years --- dedicated to the City of Rochester.  The recruitment process worked extremely well in finding and selecting our new administrator, Steve Rymer.  He’s learning about us as we learn about him and it looks like it’s going to be a great marriage for us and the community.  
  
2018 will see an exit of several long-term city employees:

Assistant City Administrator – Gary Neumann  
Police Chief – Roger Peterson  
Fire Chief – Greg Martin  
City Attorney – Terry Adkins  
Public Works Director – Richard Freese

The one significant change in this slate of openings is that the Mayor ultimately selects and informs the City Council of the new Police Chief.  The chief and the four others have all devoted a good part of their careers to the City of Rochester so these selections will be critical.  We thank them for their great contributions to our City and wish them well.

On a personal side in addition to the demands of the City is the fact that my wife of 56+ years has been in the nursing home one and one-half years.  As much as possible I’ve been able to visit her on average every day, sometimes twice.  And with two new knees I was off work briefly.  I say this to put in perspective the sincere thanks and appreciation to my associate, Donna Bussell for rearranging, as necessary, my schedule and scheduling Council President Staver and various council members to “stand in” for various greetings, ribbon cuttings and ground breakings.  Thanks to you all.  
On a lighter note, pun intended, the two domes on City Hall can now be lit with seasonal or holiday colors.  This has had its technology problems but Jess Rubow, maintenance has been persistent and I believe we may have it fixed.  This past holiday season: Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa were all recognized with appropriate colors and New Year the domes were lit –red, white and blue.   The number of colors are virtually unlimited.  The next display will be Martin Luther King Day, January 15th.

In closing, people, including the media have been asking for the past year, “Are you going to run again?”  “With new knees I will be able to run again.”  The potential is to have a record 20 years of service.  Former Mayor Chuck Hazama once told me, “go ahead, and beat my record of 17 or 18 years.”  There have been many respected members in the community that strongly encourage me to run again, but of course there are those that not so quietly or via social media state or predict the opposite with some negativity.  It is humbling to have people I respect deeply say the City needs a steady and respected Mayor especially at a time we are losing so many outstanding staff to retirement.

While I will continue to give 100% to representing this great city I will not be seeking re-election in 2018.  It has been a unique honor to serve Rochester as your Mayor and while we are not Bedford Falls, “It’s Been a Wonderful Life”.

Happy New Year and God Bless!  
Ardell F. Brede, Mayor