



Steve Leary

Mayor

MAYOR'S FOUNDER'S AWARD PRESENTATION & 2019 STATE OF THE CITY

Speech delivered by Mayor Steve Leary

The Alford Inn at Rollins College | Noon | February 22, 2019

MAYOR'S FOUNDER'S AWARD

The Mayor's Founder's Award honors an individual, family or organization whose commitment, dedication and actions have built upon our founders, Loring Chase and Oliver Chapman's vision, and have developed Winter Park into the best place to live, work and play for individuals and families of all ages. Each year's award is unique and reflective of the honoree.

A critical component of a successful, healthy community is its faith-based organizations. The more time people spend in pews, the less time they will spend on the psychiatrist's couch. This year's honoree has served as both priest and counselor for many in his congregation and beyond. The Very Reverend Richard Walsh, is this year's recipient of the Mayor's Founders Award.

Father Walsh was ordained to the priesthood on June 16, 1968, and this past year was honored for 50 years of devoted and dedicated service. He has been the pastor of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church since 1985 and leads the spiritual well-being of over 3,500 families.

Father Walsh has initiated programs both locally and internationally such as Family Promise, Shepherd's Hope Health Center, Bridging the Color Divide, KUDU Orphanage in Uganda, Haiti Outreach and more. He is only here today, as his latest trip to Haiti, where he has led the construction of St. Theresa Chapel, was cancelled due to unrest in the area. This is the 13th Haiti church that he has been instrumental in spearheading since 2008.

Father Walsh is the recipient of the Distinguished Pastor Award from the National Catholic Education Association, served as the Interim Administrator of the Orlando Diocese in 2010 and is presently the Vicar General of the Diocese. He has served as the Chaplain of the Winter Park Police Department and was recognized as "The Shepard" by *Winter Park Magazine* in 2015 for being one of the most influential people in Winter Park.



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Father Walsh is also the longest serving pastor of any church in Winter Park. Father Walsh is a humble, energetic and dynamic individual who has enhanced not only his own parish, but the spirit of community in Winter Park.

This year's award was hand-crafted by a completely untalented, and frustrated wood worker (me), out of live oak logs that fell during Hurricane Irma. The inscription reads: *"2019 Mayor's Founder's Award, Father Richard Walsh, with sincere appreciation for your lifetime building upon our founder's vision."*

Ladies and gentlemen, the Very Reverend Richard Walsh.

2019 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Thank you Father Walsh and all of the individuals that care for our spiritual health here in Winter Park.

Thank you again to the Chamber for your efforts today and every day in Winter Park. I want to thank my fellow City Commission members for their dedication and friendship. Thank you to our city staff who work every day to keep us such a special place. I especially would like to congratulate our new Fire Chief Dan Hagedorn, our new Parks Director Jason Seeley, who were both promoted from within, and Bronce Stephenson our new Planning Director who joined us from Oklahoma. And most especially I want to thank each of you for your contributions to Winter Park.

2018 was another great year in Winter Park. Some of the projects that I'll mention have been multi-year and are now just coming out of the ground. One of the biggest is the undergrounding of the Fairbanks electric transmission lines from I-4 and across U.S. Highway 17-92. This is a \$16+ million project paid for by state grants and has been in the planning stages for close to seven years. They are currently tunneling under 17-92 to prepare lines to connect to our sub-station near the Winter Park Village.

While we are on Fairbanks and 17-92, the city will be working with our partners at the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to create an additional lane around that intersection. This is due to our strategic and profitable, acquisition of the old Fairbanks Bowl. We are also working on a PD&E Study for 17-92 to help alleviate some of the vehicular and pedestrian concerns.

The Lee Road extension has been completed and we have witnessed smoother traffic flow around this once challenging intersection. We are also actively working with the FDOT to better manage the traffic situation on Orange Avenue alongside Orwin Manor.



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Regarding traffic, some will tell you that the traffic increase on our arterial roads is the result of "increased density" in Winter Park. This is not accurate. The work on I-4 has increased the traffic that you see on Lee Road, Fairbanks, 17-92, Lakemont, Palmer, etc. But Orange County, from 2010 to 2018, has added 203,641 residents, a 17.8 percent increase. While Winter Park has added 2,360 residents or 1.2 percent of the total county increase, Seminole County certainly impacts Winter Park, and their population has grown by 40,842 residents or an increase of 9.7 percent.

We're in a growing region and our friends and neighbors are doing well. At certain times of the day, particularly rush hours, we feel the impact of the surrounding communities' growth. So while your City Commission and staff have worked to manage growth in Winter Park, we are feeling the growth of the region.

Our corridors have always been a bit of a challenge. In the coming months we will be holding neighborhood meetings to discuss mixed use along the Orange Avenue corridor. Mixed use is not some big scary term. Most cities have a mixed-use designation in their code. If you like Park Avenue and Hannibal Square, these are examples of mixed use in our city. Residents and businesses deserve to have the same opportunity for neighborhood status that areas like these enjoy.

Last year we began work on a city-owned, fiber optic network which, among other benefits, will allow for intelligent traffic signalization of our major thoroughfares to smooth traffic through Winter Park.

Another issue that we take quite seriously in Winter Park is our tree canopy. Our Urban Forestry Management Plan is in place and working. This plan is not a selfish one. It looks to ensure that future generations have a tree canopy as great as our current one. This past year planted 575 new canopy trees.

One of the major impacts on our canopy is the electric distribution lines that run through our city to serve our population. In 2018, we spent \$4.5 million and completed an additional 5.8 miles of undergrounding, maintaining our strategic plan while also addressing problem areas revealed during our most recent storms.

City Leadership also recognizes the importance of green space in Winter Park and this past year we finalized the acquisition of the 55-acre Howell Branch Preserve. Plans call for this to be a natural park for hiking, canoeing, kayaking and more. Recently we authorized staff to move forward with the acquisition of an 8/10 acre parcel to add to this park.



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Across from the brand new, soon to be opened Center for Health and Wellbeing, off of Lakemont Avenue, along Loch Lomond Drive, is a revitalized section of Ward Park.

Thank you to the Winter Park Health Foundation for your partnership here, we look forward to the opening of the Center. And close by we have begun work on the St. Andrews Trail, a \$2 million state funded project.

And while our federal, state and county leaders have been great partners, none of these projects could be accomplished without a strong balance sheet. For the 12th straight year we held the mileage rate at the same level, meaning that we did not increase your local property tax rate. We hold the third lowest mileage rate in the county, including our debt service. And in 2018 we increased our General Fund Reserves from 19 percent to 25 percent.

Our office vacancy is 3.7 percent versus a 6.9 percent regional vacancy rate. In the past two years we have had major companies move from Portland, Oregon and Aspen, Colorado. We must be doing something right. And our retail vacancy 3.4 percent versus region 4.5 percent. Winter Park is in tremendous shape.

Speaking of our retail environment, at my table I have Joanne McMahon. Joanne was born and raised in Buffalo, New York and moved to Boston in the late 70s. She moved to Orlando in the mid-90s and became the nation's first female sales representative for Revlon. Around 25 years ago, the restaurant bug hit her and she opened a BBQ restaurant where Armondo's is now located. You know Joanne as the owner/operator of 310, Blu, The Partridge Tree Gift Shop and soon to open Bovine Steakhouse where Park Plaza Gardens once operated. Joanne is also very active with the Winter Park Chamber. Joanne, thank you for your investment in our community.

Also at my table is Sid Cash. Most of you know Sid or at least have felt his impact on our quality of life. Sid moved to Winter Park at the age of five in 1955. Sid attended Audubon Elementary, Winter Park High School (WPHS) and graduated from the University of Central Florida. He is a father of two and grandfather of seven. Sid is with Winter Park National Bank and has been a community banker serving his friends and neighbors for over 40 years. Sid has been involved in youth sports in the area and was the coach of the 2005 Maitland Little League World Series team. A member of the WPHS Hall of Fame, he has passed on his love and involvement to our community to many, including his son Sid, Jr. who is currently the head baseball coach at WPHS. Sid's leadership with Restore the Roar led to a \$250,000 contribution from the WPHS Foundation towards the restoration of Showalter Field. His impact on physical assets and the youth of our community will be felt for generations. Sid, thank you for your leadership and the example that you set for all of us.



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This room is filled with individuals and organizations that work independently and collaboratively to make this community special. Like Rollins, adding to the Alford Inn and creating better housing options on campus for students so that the college remains at the top of the hyper-competitive higher education environment.

Full Sail, celebrating their 40th Anniversary and who will shortly be introducing "The Fortress," a state-of-the-art E-Sports arena in support of Armada their E-Sports team. Full Sail's Dan Patrick School of Sportscasting, led by Gus Ramsey, has partnered with Rollins for an educational partnership to call over 150 Rollins home sporting events Partnerships deliver for Winter Park.

We as elected officials cannot do this alone. I can point to people at every table that make Winter Park, and our entire region special. Those of us making commitments, much greater than the financial investment, to improve this great city of ours.

I have heard people say that we are a young city, a young region. And in many ways they are correct. But I would offer that we are really in our adolescence. You remember adolescence. Awkward, maybe a bit gangly. Trying to figure out what you want to be and how to get there. In many ways it is the age old discussion among parents about the difference between raising children and raising adults. Many would like to keep their children as just that, children. But successful parenting is about raising adults, preparing them for the world, providing guidance for future success.

Winter Park is a fairly young city. But as we go through our adolescence, we must prepare our city for greater things. It is uncomfortable. Challenging, at times nerve-racking, making tough decisions that you know may take years to see the benefits of.

But the alternative, doing things as we have always done, fearful that we may not make the right decision, is not an option for long-term success. And isn't that what we all want for our children and our community – to gain lifetime success as we work through the awkward years?

We need to think Big. Long term...regionally. We're getting there. The list of projects that we have undertaken have improved our parks, our infrastructure, our quality of life. The things that deliver new opportunities for residents and businesses and attract new stakeholders.

The Canopy is a perfect example. First, regardless of what some may be telling you, regardless of the opportunism of election season, we have a project that is on budget. This was confirmed by the City Manager at our last City Commission meeting. Our design team has provided additional features for the project for consideration.



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This will be an asset for Winter Park, but our lead designer, arguably the most significant architect in the world today, is presenting us a unique opportunity and continues to provide suggestions and concepts to take a great project and make it even better. World-class.

Our shopping, dining, recreational options, higher education, hotel, golf course...The Canopy will stand alongside these, AND other global venues. You can count on me, and other city leaders, to continue to look for ways to improve this project. This year, next and for years to come, fund-raising is underway and we hope to be able to add to this project. Because failure is not an option.

We appreciate the constructive comments on design, operations and similar. But simply saying "NO" is not a successful long-term strategy. Imagine NO sidewalk dining, NO Hannibal Square, NO Alford, NO Urban Forestry Management Plan, NO renovated WP9.

We owe future generations a flexible canvas on which to create their version of Winter Park. One true to our roots, but malleable enough to meet new needs and desires. As I call it, Generational Customization.

So today we honor Father Walsh and all spiritual leaders. We recognize other examples of good people making our community special. And I believe The Canopy will play a critical role in our present and future, just as these individuals do. Now, as much as, or more than any other time, we need to invest in the spiritual health and intellectual capital of our community.

We owe it to Chase and Chapman.

We owe it to other civic leaders.

We owe it to the many whose names may be lost to history.

We owe it to people who have made investments in our community to keep it from being left behind.

Winter Park is doing great. Many tell us it is the best it has ever been.

I want to thank each of you for the positive comments and encouragement as we build on our founder's vision and continue to move Winter Park forward for future generations.

Thank you.