



Steve Leary

Mayor

MAYOR'S FOUNDER'S AWARD PRESENTATION & 2021 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Speech delivered by Mayor Steve Leary

The Alford Inn at Rollins College | 12:30 p.m. | February 19, 2021

Mayor's Founder's Award

Thank you, Betsy and the Chamber, for today and for all that you bring to the city every day. Before I share the State of the City address, I would like to present this year's 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.

In the past we have recognized Congressman John Mica, Mayor Allen Trovillion, St. Margaret Mary's Father Richard Walsh and Neonatologist Doctor Gregor Alexander. Each different in their own way, have added to the depth of our community character.

This year's Honoree, headquartered in Winter Park, comprised of, and supported by, many Winter Park residents, has also transcended our geographic borders for the betterment of our entire region. **The Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation is the recipient of the 2021 Winter Park Mayor's Founder's Award.**

Mr. and Mrs. Bush came to Winter Park in 1949 where they were greeted at the train station by Dr. Hugh and Jennette McKean. President and First Lady of Rollins College. Prior to the creation of the Foundation, the Bush's personal giving to Rollins College was in the millions of dollars including A.G. Bush Science Center - Rollins first real science center. They endowed two Academic Chairs; A.G. Bush Chair in Science and A.G. Bush Chair in Mathematics.

In 1973, at the time of her death, Mrs. Bush established the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation. The Foundation remains committed to Rollins College as evidenced by being the third largest donor to the school and the largest donor to the Crummer Business School.

In Winter Park alone, the Foundation has contributed 929 grants to 73 nonprofits, totaling over \$29 million. Some of the beneficiaries include the Polasek Museum, Bach Festival, Jewish Family Services, DePugh Nursing Home, First Baptist Church, St. John's Lutheran Church, Winter Park Day and Welbourne Avenue Nurseries, the Women's Club of Winter Park and more.

The Foundation is the largest PRIVATE donor to the new Winter Park Library and Events Center, which will be opening soon. And the Foundation was part of the team that helped secure \$6 million in Tourist Development Tax (TDT) dollars for the Library and Events Center.

I noted that the Foundation reaches beyond the geographic borders of Winter Park. Since its inception, the Foundation has benefited 888 nonprofits, with 4,191 grants, totaling almost \$114,000,000 across the state of Florida and beyond. Recently the Foundation took on its "biggest grant ever" - the construction of "The EDYTH" its new 16,000 square-foot headquarters. The unveiling will be in 2022 - ready for the Foundation's 50th ANNIVERSARY in 2023!

There is more, but this is the State of the City, not the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation show. Please stop President David Odahowski anytime, he'll be glad to share more of the incredible story.

Each year's award is unique and reflective of the honoree and this was a challenge this year. After all, charitable foundations don't do what they do for awards. So rather than construct a complex, intricate award, I have chosen a very simple design.

Because the Foundation's mission is straightforward and its commitment to Winter Park true. The award is a simple block of a Winter Park Camphor tree that was necessarily felled, but replaced by a hearty, young live oak. And as we all probably know, the Camphor tree is not a native species, though it has become a part of the Winter Park landscape just as so many other transplants have and to all you Bucs fans as a bonus, if it falls in the water during the celebratory boat parade, it will float.

The inscription reads:

"2021 Mayor's Founder's Award." Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation
With Sincere Appreciation for your lifetime building upon our founder's vision."

We have at least two representatives of the Foundation here today. Vice Chairmen Matt Certo and President David Odahowski. Gentlemen, congratulations David & Matt and the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation.

2021 State of the City Address

A few thank you's before I get started and if you could hold your applause until I am done we can get through this a bit quicker and you can get on with your weekend.

Last year, I thanked the medical professionals for their service to our community and I thank you again for taking such good care of us during this challenging year. To my fellow Commission members thank you for your service to our community. Thank you to all that came before us on the dais. As I have said Winter Park is a canvas and each generation adds to it.

I want to recognize Mayors Bradley, Johnston, Hotard, Terranova, Marchman, Brewer and Commissioners Metcalf and Diebel for your wise and ever available counsel. A special recognition to those former commissioners that I have served with, Sarah Sprinkel, Tom McMacken, Pete Weldon and Greg Seidel. We did a lot of good work together, some of which I will touch on today.

To my fellow elected officials at every level, you have worked with us to improve Winter Park and in turn our progress has benefited the region. Thank you for your partnership and friendship. I talk about partnerships often and the projects I will share could not have been done without great community partners, both private and public. Thank you for your commitment.

To the residents, businesses and guests of Winter Park. You have trusted us to deliver for you and our collective future and I worked every day so that you can be proud of our community.

Thank you to my co-workers at the City of Winter Park. City Manager Randy Knight and your +500 team members, it has been an honor to work with you and represent you. You are the unsung professionals that keep our community on track. Thank you for your support and your expertise. There are many that I have worked with in the city, on the dais and at City Hall.

But I could not have performed without the help of those closest to me. Family, business partners and friends. Thank you for your support as I took on this "side gig." Especially Meg who has been my right hand for over 10 years. To my boss, partner, friend and brother Bill Leary. You have been supportive of me and so many other individuals and causes in central Florida and you never ask for anything in return.

To my children Alexandra, Jack and William. You guys are the reason I stepped forward to help build a future for you and your friends way back in 2010, when you were just 5 years old. People talk about legacy. You are my legacy and I am extremely proud of you. And finally to Caroline. I will always be grateful for your support and commitment to our public life and especially our children.

Now a round of applause.

Folks, Winter Park is in great shape.

In 2011, I compared Winter Park to the great live oak trees that grace our city. Our roots are strong. We reach out like strong branches and expand our brand beyond our sound roots and trunk.

2020 - an unusual year for most and in Winter Park we were no different. Not only due to COVID but also for decisions made and some not. So rather than focus on 2020, I think it more important to look at trends over the past 10-years. One of the most important barometers of the strength of an organization is its financial health. Thanks to the good work of staff and past commissions, we are in tremendous shape.

In 2010, the overall taxable value of property in Winter Park was \$3.9 billion. In 2020 that taxable value has grown to \$6.6 billion. In 10 years, the taxable value of Winter Park property grew an astounding 69%. Let that sink in. A 69% increase in 10 years. Studies show roughly 40% of people rely SOLELY on the sale of their home to fund their retirement. And for most it is the single greatest contributor, and thus value is critical to one's retirement. This increase in property value is also good news for our city budget.

Property taxes comprise roughly 44% of our General Fund. In 2010, our General Fund budget was \$40 million. In 2020 it is \$56.7 million. A 41% increase. Sure, we like budget increases, but we have also been good stewards of your tax dollars.

As evidence, another measuring point is our General Fund Reserve, or our Rainy-Day Fund. In 2010, our General Fund Reserve was \$6.7 million. In 2020, our reserve was \$16.8 million. This +\$10 million represents a 152% increase. In 2010, our reserve was 17% of our annual General Fund. In 2020, it was 30% of our annual General Fund.

Thank you Mayor Bradley. You challenged us in 2011 with the 30% goal and thank you to past commissions for working every year to hit it.

During this 10-year stretch, we never raised the city's millage rate, not once. We now have one of the lowest operating millage in all of Orange County. I am extremely proud to report these numbers, as all of you should be as well.

And a bit of a peek into what we can expect next year. Projections are that next year we'll see an increase in our aggregate property values between 5% to 7%. This does not happen in the middle of a pandemic. This does not happen due to any decisions that we made in 2020. But it will happen in Winter Park. Yes, it will happen because of our sound fiscal management over the past decade and beyond.

In addition, it is imperative that government encourage and invest back into our community. Because simply saving and not investing back is a short-term celebration. So we did invest. During my tenure I have had the pleasure to be a part of many grand openings, public and private, and more are in the works. I won't go into detail on every improvement, but just listen to this list:

- The Winter Park Golf Course, or WP9
- Renovated Winter Park Tennis Center
- Revitalized Cady Way pool & sports complex
- The Community Center
- Hannibal Square
- Denning Drive
- The Alford Inn
- Innovation Triangle comprised of the Alford, soon to be relocated Cornell Museum and Crummer Business School
- New Rollins dorms
- New Edyth Bush home offices
- Center for Health and Wellbeing
- Winter Park Hospital renovation & Nicholson Pavilion
- Whole Foods Center
- Fairbanks sewer extension
- Trader Joes
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Paseo
- Heritage Square
- Legacy Park Senior facility
- Bristol Landing at the Mayflower
- Lake Berry at Westminster Winter Park

And more:

- Quiet Zones
- The Lee Road Extension
- The SunRail and Amtrak Station
- Lake Lillian in Mead Gardens
- Showalter Field & Showalter East

- St Andrews Trail
- Howell Branch Preserve
- Fairbanks Undergrounding
- Library and Events Center

These last few deserve special mention.

For these projects alone, we worked incredibly hard with private and public partners at the local, state and federal level to identify and source over \$35 million in funds to benefit the residents and guests of Winter Park. The funds did not come from our General Fund, or our Reserve, or from the CRA.

Our ability over the past decade to work with people that we may disagree with from time to time, has directly benefited the stakeholders of Winter Park in excess of \$35 million. We must continue to build these relationships.

- Property values up 69%
- Reserve up 152%
- Budget up 41%
- No millage increases
- Tremendous added assets
- \$35 million in external funds

AND, we've also introduced and strengthened other community programs.

Our Urban Forestry Management Plan is working. The 2004 hurricanes exposed the weakness in our tree canopy. Since 2014, we have removed diseased, dangerous and dead or dying trees and added 3,600 new trees to our urban environment.

We have added to our Affordable housing stock through partnerships with groups like Habitat for Humanity. We have added significantly to our Historic Homes Registry.

In Florida, drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1-4. Resident Michael Dively brought forward the concept that became our Splash, Float, Swim, program which gives every person in Winter Park the opportunity to learn how to swim.

We take great pride in our support of the arts. Our commitment to the Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center allowed them to further fund their campus. A beautiful venue beyond our borders, that benefits our community and makes us a more complete region. And within Winter Park we continue to support our local arts and cultural organizations. While we canceled this year due to COVID, next year we will bring back the “Weekend of the Arts.”

So to the future - Florida, Orange County and Winter Park are no secrets. The growth of our state and our region over the past 10 years has been intense. The populations of Florida and Orange County have increased by 2.8 million and 244,000 respectively. And while at times it may feel that Winter Park has seen all of that growth, we have only grown by 2,600 residents. Winter Park grew at about half the rate of Orange County and is responsible for roughly 1% of the growth of Orange County during that time period. Most of the congestion we feel at times is from those around us, coming through us. But as goes Florida and more specifically Orange County, so too goes Winter Park. We are not an island.

As in business, if you’re not evolving you’re dying. Our challenges and our opportunities fall out of this growth. Infrastructure. Budgets. Development. Traffic. You get the picture. However, we need to embrace the future, the growth, the new demands of the new resident. Not only residents from elsewhere, but residents from within and close by are looking for newer, more advanced assets and offerings.

COVID has made it abundantly clear that our residents and businesses need high speed internet alternatives. High speed access is no longer a nice to have, it is imperative if we are to meet the future needs of our residential and business communities. A few years back, we initiated the first steps to bring high speed access alternatives, both hard-wired and Wi-Fi, to our stakeholders. We recognized the need and the work has begun. Residents and businesses deserve better, faster service and we will deliver it to them. The next phase of high-speed fiber and Wi-Fi is close. We have the people and the partners, we can do this quickly and I believe we’ll have 100% support.

We have been discussing additional parking inventory to our Central Business District for the past few years. We have the needs, the support of the public and the funding. This parking can be placed underground to hide it from view and allow parkland to flourish above. If you do not like to park in a garage, I’ve got good news, you don’t have to. I, and many others, will park underground and open up spots for you topside.

But we must forgo pet projects. Projects that will bludgeon our reserves and our CRA. We were able to secure \$35 million to assist the city over the past decade. Let’s get creative and figure this out. We have the way, but do we have the will? I hope so.

We had the opportunity to add another high-end, boutique hotel to our offering.

This is the type of product that will benefit residents, businesses and guests for decades. As well, the Orange Avenue Overlay was a community led plan that was lauded by planners and professionals across the state for the manner in which it was developed and the final product.

These opportunities do not come around often, ask past commissioners and nearby communities who are now seeking these projects and plans. We need to work more closely with developers to get projects like these across the finish line. Developers are offering to provide water retention, parks, public parking, traffic management systems. Collaboration can provide solutions without additional hits on our taxpayers.

And here's why that's especially important. Our tax base is 78% residential, 20% commercial and 2% other. This means that city services are overwhelmingly paid for by residents. Businesses are much less demanding on city services and offset residential demands. We need to commit to a more balanced tax base to lessen the tax burden on our residents.

This means working with individuals and organizations to bring businesses to Winter Park. We are in competition with all of our regional partners. We need to attract more, right-sized businesses to Winter Park. We will not be able to do that if real or imaginary, the business community believes that Winter Park is closed for and to business.

We must watch our words and actions so that we can work to build on our founder's vision to the benefit of our residents. I mention the +\$35 million that we've received from our county, state and federal partners. This does not happen without a strong, open, economically balanced community. However, as we seek their assistance, financial and other, we must also communicate our challenges with ideas being forwarded at different levels.

When Tallahassee or DC pre-empt local control of zoning regulations, they hurt each of our individual communities and the greater region. Again, this year there is a bill at the state level that preempts local control of short-term rentals. Do you really want your neighbors renting out their homes on a daily basis? Is this your idea of Winter Park? Neighborhoods of short-term rentals? I don't think so.

We must also be a welcoming community. New and different are not necessarily bad. We have the opportunity to be that community that our founders imagined. Last year I asked you to raise your hand if you or your parents moved to Winter Park from somewhere else. The vast majority of attendees raised their hands.

I imagine it would be similar today, especially if we were able to convene at full capacity. Most of us or our parents were new to Winter Park at some stage.

Let's not close the door behind us. Let's be that city that welcomes residents, businesses and guests. Each has something to offer. We can BUILD upon on our founder's vision or we can stagnate and wither. Let's continue this good work that I highlight above. Be daring. Continually saying no is debilitating to a community and planning. Let's work to yes. A yes that we all can accept.

A Winter Park of disciplined fiscal policy, that works with public and private partners to develop daring, new assets and is welcoming to one another and new residents, businesses and guests.

Thank you all for your time today and your support this past decade. It has been an honor and a privilege to represent you and to serve as the 54th Mayor of the City of Winter Park.

Have a great weekend.