

It doesn't seem possible that another year has almost past and we are closing in on 2010! Much has happened in 2009, and I wanted to recap some of the highlights of this year.

Since the 2007 approval of the three community venues, we continue to make progress even in these difficult financial times. In November we celebrated the Amway Center's "Topping Off Ceremony," as the last steel beam went into place. The beams were built by local company Schuff Steel whose facilities are located just seven miles from the center. We are excited at the impact this 875,000 square foot arena is having on our community and on our local economy and look forward to its opening in the fall of 2010.

We also saw some other major projects make significant progress in 2009. The Burnham Institute officially opened the doors of its permanent facility located in Lake Nona's 'Medical City.' In other Medical City news, UCF's School of Medicine celebrated its inaugural class of 40 students with its first White Coat ceremony. In a testament to the commitment of both our community and the university to this new endeavor, all 40 students received full four-year scholarships. We also saw the Plaza Cinema Café open its doors and bring a wonderful entertainment element to our downtown corridor.

In August, we saw another component of the Mayor's three-year Public Safety Initiative come to fruition with the opening of the Orlando Police Department's state-of-the-art training facility. And this month, we will celebrate the official opening of the new Fire Station 1 on Central Boulevard in downtown Orlando. The opening of this Gold LEED certified building will centralize OFD personnel from three sites into one and more efficiently serve the citizens of Orlando.

In addition, during these tough economic times, Mayor Dyer unveiled his Strengthen Orlando plan, which is helping both our local residents and businesses weather this economic downturn. One of the programs created through this initiative, Buy Local Orlando, is helping to connect our citizens to our local businesses. With more than 300 local merchants participating, the holiday gift-giving season is a great time to utilize all of the offers that accompany your Buy Local Orlando card. For more information on this program, visit www.buylocalorlando.net.

As the year comes to a close, I also wanted to let you know that crime in District 3 is down more than 14% this year from last. Please continue to be vigilant in your crime prevention measures and don't hesitate to call the police (the non-emergency number is 321-235-5300) when you see

anything at all that seems out of place in your neighborhood. Also, if you haven't started or joined a Neighborhood Watch group, please consider making that one of your New Year's resolutions. We have a new Neighborhood Watch coordinator for District 3, Georgeanna Butler, and she would be happy to help you get organized. The number for Neighborhood Watch is 407-246-2461.

Speaking of crime, don't forget that the Holiday Season also brings out some who choose to prey on law-abiding citizens. When shopping, avoid overloading yourself with packages and secure all bags and items in the trunk or other concealed area so they are not visible in your vehicle. If you are going out of town, ask a neighbor to pick up your mail and/or newspaper and leave a light or two on inside your home so that the house looks occupied. And when putting your trash curbside after the holidays, break down any boxes from high-end items so as not to advertise what type of property is in your home. For more holiday safety tips, please visit my webpage at www.cityoforlando.net/district3.

And just a reminder that December 12th is Baldwin Park's annual Festival of Lights Celebration in the Village Center beginning at 4:30 p.m. with horse and carriage rides, followed by a parade and a festive holiday showing of the movie, "Deck the Halls." Many of the wonderful Baldwin Park merchants will be hosting open houses as well so don't miss this festive event.

Saturday, December 12th is also College Park's annual Holiday on the Drive from 6-9 p.m. Visit Santa in the gazebo at Albert Park and all of the great shops and restaurants along Edgewater Drive. For more information, check out www.onthedrive.org. After Christmas, consider taking friends and family to one of Orlando's two great bowl games at the Florida Citrus Bowl. The Champs Sports Bowl is taking place on December 29th at 8 p.m. and will pit the Miami Hurricanes against the Wisconsin Badgers. Then on New Year's Day, the Capitol One Bowl will take place at 1 p.m. with the LSU Tigers taking on the Penn State Nittany Lions. Also downtown Orlando will play host to the annual Citrus Parade beginning at 11 a.m. on December 30th.

Last, but certainly not least, I'm grateful for your support as we serve the citizens of the City of Orlando and especially District 3. I am truly humbled to serve you and am thankful for that opportunity. Merry Christmas to you and yours and best wishes for a happy and healthy 2010!

