

Call The Roll

An E-Publication of Columbus City Council

December 2007

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Frequent readers of *Call the Roll* will know that one of my highest priorities is helping develop strategies to address homelessness. Reducing homelessness is a challenge that takes a coordinated, team effort to help solve. In order for our community to transition people from the streets to long-term housing solutions, we must build partnerships and work together across jurisdictional boundaries.

In this December edition of *Call The Roll* you will learn more about my recent trip to Washington, D.C. to speak at the Supportive Housing Leadership Forum. This annual meeting brings together local and state policy makers from around the country to discuss the best and most creative methods to provide access to permanent supportive housing and end homelessness.

While I was there to learn about the many innovative ways other cities are addressing homelessness, I was also there to tell our story about what Columbus is doing. National leaders are recognizing the programs and initiatives that we have implemented in the Columbus region with our many different partners, including the Community Shelter Board, Franklin County, and the numerous social service agencies that come into contact with our homeless population on a daily basis.

As we celebrate this joyous holiday season, please keep in mind those who are less fortunate.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Mentel
Council President



During the tree lighting ceremony at City Hall this year, Council President Mentel asked Columbus residents to remember those who are less fortunate this holiday season.

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SNOW WARRIORS ARE READY



Councilmember O'Shaughnessy (left) and Mayor Coleman (right) talked with Snow Warriors as they inspected Columbus' snow fleet.

Every year when the Columbus Snow Warriors gather at City Hall with their trucks and snow removal gear for inspection, winter weather is never far behind.

[Maryellen O'Shaughnessy](#), chair of the Public Service and Transportation Committee, joined Mayor Michael B. Coleman to offer words of encouragement to the men and women who will be working this winter to keep Columbus roads clear of ice and snow.

"Every year we work to make sure that we have the best possible snow removal plan in place to help Columbus drivers remain safe on our roads," said O'Shaughnessy. "In 2007, we have invested in new equipment and technologies to make the job of ice and snow removal as efficient and effective as we can."

The City's snow removal fleet now stands at 121 vehicles, which is the most in Columbus' history. In accordance with legislation that City Council passed this summer, the Department of Public Utilities is also able to retrofit some of their trucks with blades and spreaders.

"Public Utilities will now have a total of 17 vehicles ready to help clear snow," said Rick Tilton, assistant director of Public Utilities. "That's due to the retrofitting of 13 additional trucks. We will have a total of 20 drivers available, so whenever and wherever they are needed, the citizens of Columbus can count on them to help during winter weather."

Columbus has also purchased eight new single-axle trucks and four new snow plows to be used during winter weather emergencies. In addition, 20 City snow plows are being equipped with global positioning technology to better keep track of their snow removal progress.

"Safety is at the core of our snow removal plan," said Mary Carran Webster, assistant director of Public Service. "Our Snow Warriors are first sent to high-speed, high-volume streets. Then they fan out into the neighborhoods. Our snow plan calls for plowing residential side streets after a four-inch snowfall. We have 30,000 tons of salt at our disposal, the best possible equipment, and the highest trained workers possible. We are ready for winter."



Public Service and Transportation Committee Chair Maryellen O'Shaughnessy commended the team of Snow Warriors for the dedication they exhibit in keeping Columbus' streets and roadways safe.

SCHOLARSHIP CONTINUES SPIRIT OF LOCAL MUSIC LEGEND



Council President Pro Tem Kevin L. Boyce thanked the Kirk family for allowing Mr. Kirk's legacy to be associated with the scholarship.

For music aficionados, the name of Rahsaan Roland Kirk is synonymous with artistic genius. The Columbus native's energy and passion for jazz is still being felt more than 30 years after his passing.

With the help of City Council President Pro Tem [Kevin L. Boyce](#), Kirk's legacy now will help Columbus high school seniors realize their full artistic potential. Boyce was joined by Columbus City Schools Superintendent Dr. Gene Harris at the Fort Hayes campus to announce the creation of the *Rahsaan Roland Kirk Scholarship for the Arts*.

The RRK scholarship will help foster artistic achievement in the form of a college scholarship and encourages the growth of the recipient as an artist contributing to the cultural discourse.

"This scholarship will pique the interests of the best and brightest arts students in our community," said Councilmember Boyce. "The *Rahsaan Roland Kirk Scholarship for the Arts* is a superb example of the type of innovative approaches our community must embrace to cultivate Columbus' creative economy. I would like to thank the Kirk family for allowing Rahsaan's name to be associated with this scholarship."

The scholarship is open to high school seniors in the Columbus City School District. The applicants are asked to submit portfolios of their work in a respective discipline (visual art, music, writing, theatre, multimedia, or dance) to a selection committee, which will narrow the field down to seven finalists. The seven finalists will compete at a performance/exhibition in May. The winner will be announced at the event.

"The RRK scholarship encourages students to find their own voice in their own way," said Superintendent Harris. "Each of us discovers our purpose in life differently. This scholarship will allow the students to forge their own way in the discipline they have chosen."



(top) (L-R) Fort Hayes Principal Milton Ruffin, Council Legislative Analyst Kym Nelson, members of the Kirk Family, Dr. Gene Harris and Councilmember Kevin L. Boyce came together to announce the creation of the RRK Scholarship for the Arts.

Students interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Victor Johnson at the Department of Curriculum Leadership & Development at (614) 365-5025.



(left) *Rahsaan Roland Kirk*. Mr. Kirk was legendary for playing multiple instruments simultaneously.

CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS WITH THE *SPIRIT OF GIVING*



Councilmember Priscilla R. Tyson thanked long-time Columbus resident Ms. Alberta Tomsic for donating the 50-foot Norway Spruce used in this year's ceremony.

Recreation and Parks Committee Chair [Priscilla R. Tyson](#) and Council President [Michael C. Mentel](#) accompanied Mayor Michael B. Coleman for this year's holiday tree lighting celebration.

The trio were joined by the *Columbus Children's Choir* and *Tuba Columbus*, who filled the air with holiday carols. Prior to lighting the holiday tree, Councilmember Tyson reiterated the City's commitment to *green* energy policies.

"For over 30 years, the City of Columbus has held a tree lighting celebration at City Hall," said Councilmember Tyson. "This tree has thousands of multi-colored LED lights, which use significantly less energy than conventional light bulbs. As of this year, the grounds around City Hall are also now lit using this same energy-saving technology."

Guests of the holiday tree lighting event celebrated the spirit of giving by purchasing soup that was distributed in hand-crafted bowls.

"This year's ceremony has a much deeper meaning than just the lighting of this tree for the holiday season," said President Mentel. "It also signifies a time when we all come together to help those around us. *Empty Bowls* is a project where volunteers and artists from across Columbus create handmade, one-of-a-kind ceramic bowls. During the month of November the bowls are offered for sale, with all proceeds going to benefit the Mid-Ohio Food Bank. To date, more than \$100,000 has been raised. For every \$1 that is received, the food bank can purchase \$8 worth of groceries to be distributed to those in need."

"This is a great time for our city and a great time of year for all of us to come together," said Mayor Coleman. "I look forward to many things that are going on in Columbus during this time of year, such as Ballet Met's performance of the Nutcracker, First Night, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra presenting the Holiday Pops Series at the Ohio Theater, and COSI's *Science of the Season* exhibit. These are all very wonderful opportunities for our community."



(above) President Mentel helped present Connie Argus of the Mid-Ohio Food Bank with a check for \$100,000. The money was raised by the 2007 *Empty Bowls* campaign.



(left) The holiday tree located in front of City Hall.

BUILDING A "BRIDGE" TO SUCCESS

Under the leadership of [Hearcel F. Craig](#), City Council continues to work with the Columbus Chamber of Commerce to give local businesses an opportunity to succeed.

Craig recently announced the funding for a minority business internet portal called *Diversity Bridge*. The website will give leaders of minority and female owned businesses a place to learn about contracts up for bid and to share stories about their best practices.



(L-R) Columbus Chamber of Commerce VP of Government Relations Steve Tugend, Councilmember Hearcel F. Craig, and the Chamber's Senior VP of Business Development Services Michael Gordon announced the concept of the Web portal during a press conference.

"The City of Columbus has done a great job of leveling the playing field, making sure all businesses have a chance to succeed," said Craig, who chairs the Judiciary and Court Administration Committee. "Now, we need to ensure that this trend continues."

The Chamber of Commerce is still constructing DiversityBridge.com. Once completed, the site will serve as a one-stop shop to help expand economic opportunities for minority and female owned businesses.

"This site will serve not only the minority business owners looking to grow their share in the marketplace, but also corporations looking to partner with minority owned businesses," said Michael Gordon, Senior Vice-President of Business Development Services for the Chamber.

DiversityBridge.com will have a list of minority owned businesses and the various services they provide. It will also offer an on-line application process for businesses to receive minority business status.

"Networking is vitally important for business owners and employees," said Craig. "When minority businesses succeed, we create job opportunities that can spur growth in other sectors of our economy."

Diversity Bridge

Click on the Diversity Bridge logo to pre-register for DiversityBridge.com and to be notified when the Web portal is fully functional.

COUNCIL CALLS FOR MORTGAGE AND PAYDAY LENDING REFORM

With a home foreclosure crisis sweeping the nation, Health, Housing and Human Services Committee Chair [Charleta B. Tavares](#) recently sponsored a resolution urging Congress to pass a pair of foreclosure related bills currently under consideration.

“In the first half of this year, there were more than 10,700 foreclosure filings in Columbus,” said Tavares. “That is one in 70 homes, and ranks us 20th in the nation.”

The resolution asks federal leaders to address the foreclosure crisis in a comprehensive way by providing a continuum of services and strategies on the national, state and local levels to prevent home foreclosures.

“Foreclosures tear families and neighborhoods apart by uprooting lives,” said Tavares. “I will work to ensure money is in the City budget for pre-purchase counseling programs offered by organizations such as Homes on the Hill, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and Columbus Housing Partnership.”

The Foreclosure Prevention Task Force appointed by Governor Ted Strickland studied the problems associated with foreclosures. Governor Strickland has proposed a compact between the state and sub-prime mortgage lenders aimed at reversing the tide of foreclosures in Ohio. Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO), was a member of the Task Force and addressed City Council.

“Mortgage lenders continue to make bad loans to people who simply cannot make their payments,” said Faith. “Counseling programs that begin before homeowners start a downward financial spiral are key to curbing the foreclosure problem in Ohio.”



Councilmember Tavares urged the Ohio General Assembly to adopt legislation that would help break the cycle of chronic borrowing that payday lending often creates.



Bill Faith, executive director of COHHIO, showed his support for Council’s actions at a press conference held by Councilmember Tavares.

City Council also passed a resolution sponsored by Councilmember Tavares to support efforts to break the cycle of debt many residents find themselves in after going to a payday lending institution.

The Coalition for Responsible Lending (CORL) says in their report entitled *Trapped by Design, County after County* that 37,515 Franklin County residents are in a cycle of debt that has them paying \$37,540,853 in loan fees to payday lenders.

Gail Meyers, who spoke at the Council meeting, was one of many Columbus residents who went to a payday lender looking for short term help with her finances, but fell into a two-year debt trap.

“I started out on a Friday borrowing \$300 dollars, and two weeks later paying back \$345,” said Meyers, who thanked City Council for their leadership in bringing this issue to the public’s attention. “I strongly believe that payday lenders need to be regulated. I also strongly support the idea that payday loans need to be capped at a 36% interest rate.”

PROMOTING SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

At the end of each year City Council, the City Attorney's office and the Division of Police work with community leaders to help protect public safety by presenting objection resolutions for certain liquor permit renewal requests. These resolutions are brought against establishments that have a documented track record of code and health violations, recurring police runs, and a refusal to work with the neighborhood.

"Public safety is always Council's top priority," said Councilmember [Andrew J. Ginther](#). "The liquor license objection process is a powerful tool that the community has at their disposal to voice their neighborhood's concerns."

As chair of the Public Safety Committee, Ginther will present the resolutions of objection at the December 10th Council meeting. Once adopted, the resolutions will be delivered to the Ohio Division of Liquor Control for consideration as the Division conducts its annual review of liquor permit renewal applications.



**Safety Committee Chair
Andrew J. Ginther**

"Objecting to an establishment's liquor license renewal application is not an issue that Council takes lightly," said Councilmember Ginther. "We base our objections on facts and figures derived from police reports and code enforcement officers, as well as the counsel of the City Attorney's office. However, the most important aspect taken into consideration is the feedback we receive from the community."

PRESIDENT MENTEL TAKES HOMELESS ADVOCACY TO WASHINGTON



President Mentel and Mayor Coleman announced the creation of the position of Homeless Advocacy earlier this year.

The Community Shelter Board estimates there are 1100 individuals who are homeless on any given day in Columbus. While there are many reasons why these people live off the land or rely on the generosity of others, a multitude of governmental, social service, and religious agencies are working to help transition the homeless into long-term housing solutions.

To help make that goal a reality, Council President [Michael C. Mentel](#) and Mayor Michael B. Coleman have created the position of Homeless Advocacy within City government. This advocate will direct every facet of Columbus' response to the challenges of homelessness.

"This is truly a collaborative effort to bring the vital, and sometimes life saving services, to the people who call the streets of Columbus home," said President Mentel. "Our Homeless Advocacy initiative will help bring together City resources to help the homeless. It will also help us continue the strong relationship we have with our partners at the Community Shelter Board and other social service agencies that assist people trying to break the cycle of addiction or obtain the job skills needed to lead successful, productive lives."

The cooperation in Columbus between governmental agencies and social service groups is being recognized on a national level. Council President Mentel recently spoke at the Supportive Housing Leadership Forum held in Washington, D.C. about the broad-based approach being put in place here in Columbus to reduce homelessness. President Mentel was a featured speaker during a session entitled *Collaborating Across Jurisdictional Lines: Examples of Practical Partnerships & Results*.

"It was a tremendous honor for me to represent the City of Columbus at this conference. What we are doing in Columbus is not only changing the lives of those who live in our community, but also those who live across the country," said President Mentel.