



Oro Valley State of the Town Address 2011

Dr. Satish I. Hiremath, Mayor

October 6, 2011

Hilton El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort

Good afternoon everyone. On behalf of my colleagues and the staff of the Town of Oro Valley, welcome to the 10th annual State of the Town Address.

Allow me to begin by recognizing my fellow Councilmembers who are with us today. As I call your name, please stand: Vice Mayor Mary Snider, Councilmembers Bill Garner, Barry Gillaspie, Joe Hornat, Steve Solomon and Lou Waters.

Last year, during my first State of the Town address, I identified the various pieces of the puzzle required to make the Town of Oro Valley so extraordinary. I also acknowledged the significant challenges in fitting these pieces together in order to create our "Community of Excellence." We set out to achieve that goal by choosing to be deliberate in everything that we do, and by establishing a culture of respect.

One year later, we have made great strides, but many people across our region and across the nation haven't been as fortunate. Fewer entrepreneurs are starting businesses, and the ones that already exist are struggling. There are fewer jobs for those who are willing and able to work, and foreclosure rates are still at an all time high.

These issues contribute to an atmosphere of cynicism and distrust; even more so today than at any time in our history. In this environment, it is reasonable to have our perceptions of community grow smaller and smaller, while our distrust for the individuals and institutions on the outside increases.

From the Town's perspective, we could follow suit, by taking a narrow view of community, limited residents and businesses within the existing Town boundaries, because it is much safer and more predictable. But we know that community is much more than just a line on a map. A community is a group of people who have similar interests, who know one another, who look out for one another, who belong to the same organizations, and who support the same establishments. As Mayor of the Town, I believe in this expanded view of our community, which extends beyond borders, to our friends, family members and colleagues across the region, whether they reside in Marana, Tucson, Sahuarita, Vail, or unincorporated Pima County.

Contrary to some beliefs, the challenges that lie ahead cannot be addressed simply by getting government out of the way. It will take an active government to reverse the tide of economic and physical insecurity we face. I am here to tell you, that in Oro Valley, government works. The State of the

Town is Strong. Our organization is innovative. And for businesses, for residents, for veterans, and for our region, Oro Valley is working to build a stronger community and maintain our quality of life.

Life in Oro Valley is good. Our roads are smooth; our water is clean; our public safety is second to none. For such a young community, we boast an already rich heritage of arts and culture. Oro Valley is the place to live, work and play. And many whose jobs lie outside our boundaries choose to live here for these very same reasons. We are an active community with a demographic that is shifting, to include families and young professionals. As such, we are looking at ways to expand our recreational programs and facilities to meet the growing need of our residents and keep our youth engaged. With the challenges of today's economy, we are having to become increasingly creative to expand our services and maintain our quality of life.

This afternoon, I am going to tell you about some of the innovative approaches the Town is developing to move us forward, together.

The first area is in economic development.

Small businesses in our community have been hit hard by the recession. Some, like the Town, have had to cut back. Others are simply hoping to weather the storm. And some, including many of you in this room, have been fearless, refusing to lay off your employees, and doing whatever it takes to ensure the survival of your business.

Everyone here knows that small businesses are where most new jobs are created. We want to encourage businesses to start hiring, but more than anything, entrepreneurs need credit. The problem, the same one facing small businesspeople in Oro Valley and millions of others across the country, is that due to federal rules and regulations, banks have tightened their lending standards. Many simply aren't making small business loans, not even to those with an established customer base or a solid business plan. Without credit, local businesses can't expand or hire the way they would like to.

With perseverance and luck, many business owners will continue to reinvest their profits back into the business and grow them slowly. But to get to the next plateau, to get our economy moving again, many businesses need capital. Next month, the Town of Oro Valley will host a Business and Banking Forum. This event, which we will put on in conjunction with the Northern Pima County Chamber of Commerce and the Oro Valley Business Club, will bring together lenders and business people to break down some of the barriers standing in the way of growth.

We intend to demonstrate, very clearly, the links between lending institutions and small businesses, in our community and throughout the region. The Town is committed to investing in our small businesses, and we want the banks to share in this commitment. Fostering relationships between borrowers and lenders—and between neighbors—is one way that the Town of Oro Valley works for small businesses.

The \$94 million budget approved by Council this fiscal year included revenue enhancements, and for the third consecutive year, expenditure reductions.

Sales tax is a major source of revenue for the Town, representing 47.5% of the Town's general fund. There is a direct connection between shopping locally and our quality of life. The fact is, our infrastructure, public safety and parks, core programs and services that Oro Valley residents and visitors have come to enjoy are funded through local sales generated by shoppers. That is why, in 2008, we launched the "Shop Oro Valley" campaign.

To continue the momentum of Shop Oro Valley, we will be rolling out a new program later this fall: OV Dollars. This program operates much like a regular gift card, but instead of only being able to use it at one retailer, you can swipe your card at any of the participating businesses in Oro Valley. So this holiday season, instead of giving your employees, family members or friends a gift card to one merchant, consider supporting Oro Valley businesses by giving an OV Dollars gift card. When each one of us—individuals, families and larger organizations—make the intentional decision to shop locally, we can make a difference for Oro Valley businesses and for the community as a whole.

The second area in which an innovative approach has served us well is in developing partnerships.

From the once-reliable housing market to the ever-shrinking federal and state budgets, we must seek out creative solutions to our funding challenges. Most importantly, we cannot expect that things will be the same as they were before. By creating and taking advantage of opportunities, we are learning to re-define success and financial sustainability.

The strength of our community is found in the network of innovative partnerships we have developed. The team at the Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau has been instrumental in helping to attract sporting events to Oro Valley, such as the IronKids National Triathlon, and just this year, the National Duathlon Championships, which has committed to return to our community in 2012 and 2013. These two events attract participants from all over the world who stay at the Hilton El Conquistador, dine in our restaurants, and shop in our businesses – contributing more than one million dollars to the region!

Another unique partnership—and one that hits close to home for many of us—is the newly-established Veterans Support Initiative.

On October 1, 2010, I listened to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, tell a crowd about the unique challenges facing our wounded warriors, veterans and their family members. I was reminded of the extraordinary maturity, experience, discipline and dedication exemplified by members of our armed services. Those qualities that make great soldiers also make valuable, highly-skilled employees. But for the men and women of the military, transition to civilian life is not always simple.

At the request of community leaders, and in response to the Admiral's message, on June 1, 2011, I issued a proclamation supporting the creation of the Oro Valley Veterans Support Initiative. This group is reaching out to local businesses and membership organizations to develop opportunities for veterans. The Initiative will focus on the acronym H.E.E.D.: Health, Education, Employment and Discounts.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the community leaders who were responsible for bringing this issue to my attention, and who are now leading this initiative: Jim and Sandra Briney, General John Wickham, Patricia Linder and Ed Davis. Please stand so we can recognize you.

In the spirit of the Veterans Support Initiative, we must continue to create partnerships and opportunities that build on existing assets and capitalize on our strengths. This community offers a wealth of knowledge and experience, which we are tapping into through volunteer programs. During the last year, volunteers at the Oro Valley Library logged nearly fourteen thousand hours, providing homework help, staffing summer reading programs and the Friends of the Library book shop. Fourteen THOUSAND hours just last year! Even at Arizona's minimum wage, that's more than 100 thousand dollars of donated time and talent from members of this community.

The Oro Valley Police Department has an equally-impressive volunteer program. Founded in 1997 with just 12 volunteers, the Police Department Citizen Volunteer Assistance Program—also known as CVAP—has grown to more than 80 active members who contributed nearly seventeen thousand hours in 2010. The department's most popular volunteer service is the DarkHouse program. Residents who will be out of town for at least seven days can sign up to have the Oro Valley Police Department and the members of CVAP check the exterior of their home regularly.

Based on the overwhelming success of our library and Police volunteer programs, the Town is expanding the program to involve all departments.

The third area of innovative that will serve us well is in regional collaboration.

We will strive to develop relationships, to strengthen organizations, to build a community that works. We realize that while jurisdictional lines on a map are in many ways superficial, those lines have significant consequences in terms of the services provided to residents and businesses. Today, we live in a region that is home to nearly 1 million people. While about half of those people live within the boundaries of the City of Tucson, the rest of us live in surrounding areas that were once rural, but are now very much part of the urban core. That is why our partnerships with groups like the Pima Association of Governments and the Regional Transportation Authority are so crucial.

Greater Tucson is a flourishing metropolis, but unlike many metropolitan areas, we have only a handful of cities and towns dedicated to providing municipal services to residents. Today, the combined population of Oro Valley, Marana and Sahuarita is just over 100 thousand, while some 380 thousand reside in unincorporated areas of Pima County. This is a huge problem for our region. Let me tell you why.

Each year, our region loses out on more than 60 million dollars in state-shared revenues. These are your sales tax dollars...your income tax dollars...and your gas tax dollars that are collected by the state, and are never returned. The distribution of these funds is based on the population of incorporated cities and towns, and because so many in our region lie outside city and town limits, that money stays in Maricopa County, when it should be returned to pay for roads, bridges, water and sewers, parks, recreation programs, police and fire protection here in Greater Tucson. Today I call on leaders in our community, leaders in Tucson, Marana, Sahuarita, Vail, Casas Adobes, and Catalina Foothills, to come together to address this problem. A concerted effort to promote annexation and incorporation is the only way to ensure that locally-generated tax revenues stay in our community.

Our vision for Oro Valley is to widen our sphere of influence, and take responsibility for the provision of municipal services to the residents of Northwest Pima County. We have just taken the first step—proposing an extension of our planning boundary, south to Orange Grove Road, and West to Thornydale.

Expanding our planning boundary does not signify that those areas will be annexed tomorrow, but it does indicate the Town's intention to take on a more significant role in regional planning and the provision of urban services to northwest area residents. As our current residents and businesses know, the Town of Oro Valley is a responsive and effective unit of local government. And we understand that long-term sustainability will depend on our ability to develop a broader constituency for the Town.

Annexation will provide numerous benefits to commercial and residential property owners, such as police protection, inclusion in the Town's economic development efforts, and streamlined services for new development and future expansion or renovation. Annexation also ensures that locally-generated tax revenue benefits area residents, and allows the Town to plan for the efficient provision of services to the community. Annexation is one way that Oro Valley works for our region.

This type of innovative thinking—reaching beyond our existing boundaries and the limitations of our old ways of doing business—enables us to continue to provide the unique services and opportunities that make this community exceptional.

So where do we go from here? How do we ensure that the Town of Oro Valley remains an innovative and thriving community? Our success is contingent upon the deliberate decisions we make each and every day.

For our elected officials, that means making the decision to lead with purpose. During my first year as Mayor, it took me a while to figure out what leadership truly meant. I have come to this conclusion: Leadership is not about being popular. Leadership is not about being courageous. Leadership is about making logical decisions...which may be unpopular due to emotion...and then being able to withstand the criticism until such time success is achieved. I encourage all of my fellow elected officials to follow this definition when you are faced with making difficult decisions.

Though we still face economic challenges both locally and nationally, sound financial planning, coupled with innovative problem-solving, has put us in a position of strength, ready for the new opportunities, partnerships and ideas that will come our way.

We will only be able to take advantage of these opportunities if we've been diligent, proactive and purposeful in our management. We must become strategic instead of reactive. Think outside of the box, instead of being preoccupied with what's already in the box.

For our employees, that means continuing to provide an incredible level of service to our residents and businesses. I know each and every one of you has worked longer and harder hours, taking on more responsibility with the same pay, in order to meet the expectations of the Council and the community. I want you to know, although I may not say it enough, that I appreciate the hard work you do, day in and day out. You are valued and appreciated, and your efforts do not go unnoticed.

For our residents, that means accepting the idea that we are all in this together, and that together we can make a difference. We all bear the responsibility for achieving success in the Town of Oro Valley. This is a government of the people, by the people, for the people. At a time when there is little trust in government, building trust is not a unilateral job description. It's a collaborative job description, carried out by a fully, and positively-engaged community. The general plan which was ratified by the citizens, states that our quality of life revolves around financial stability. It also states the importance of balancing the needs of today without compromising the needs of our future. We must meet each other half way in order for our local success to continue.

Many of you here today are small business owners. Like you, as a small business owner, I know the value of having dedicated employees. We are all smart enough to know our staff makes or breaks the success of our business. The Town of Oro Valley is no exception. As Mayor of Oro Valley, I stand before all of the employees today, committed to helping create a great working environment. This means not only verbally appreciating what you do, but also providing monetary compensation commensurate with your skills, talents, and dedication.

As I stated earlier, the staff of the Town of Oro Valley works tirelessly to provide a community that you can be proud of. Understand that the people who are in public service exist to serve you. They work hard to challenge the perception that public employees should be expected to provide highly-skilled services for minimal compensation, or that they should be grateful to have a job at all in this economy.

Some residents continue to suggest that we cut pay and benefits for our employees, but we devalue them and the services they provide when we don't provide proper compensation. I believe that the outstanding reputation of this community can be directly attributed to the talented employees who consistently exhibit a strong work ethic.

The Town of Oro Valley would not be a model of innovation today if it weren't for our dedicated management team and outstanding staff. I'd like to ask our Town Manager, Mr. Greg Caton, to please stand and be recognized.

At this time, I ask that all of our Town employees here today please stand and be recognized for your service. Thank you for your commitment to excellence and your loyalty to the members of this community.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the board of directors of the Northern Pima County Chamber of Commerce, President/CEO Dave Perry, and each of the sponsors who made today's event possible. The Chamber has been and will continue to be an important partner in Oro Valley's success. Thank you for your ongoing support.

I would also like to thank the Hilton El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort. Lynn Ericksen and his staff, as always, have put on a phenomenal event!

And last but not least, I'd like to thank my better half Stacy, my children Mason, Mahra, Macallan and Jordan, Stacy's mother Kathy, and my parents Dr. Indudhar and Yashoda Hiremath.

I couldn't do any of this without their support.

As I look around the room at the individuals seated here today—from the Councilmembers, to the Town staff, to business and community leaders and elected officials from other jurisdictions—I realize that we have more than partnerships in this room; we have relationships. We genuinely care about one another's success and quality of life, and we realize that our community thrives when we boldly and purposefully move forward together.

Those of you who know me, know that I often quote my father. Today, as I bring our event to a close, I would like to leave you with two of the most powerful messages he ever shared with me.

My father taught me that all excuses are legitimate, but we cannot allow ourselves to use those excuses. We must understand them and find a way to get around them. But we must not allow them to prevent us from moving forward.

My father's second message is this: Only four things are required for success: vision, execution, determination and perseverance. With these four ingredients, he told me, you will NEVER fail.

I am proud to stand before you today as Mayor and tell you that the Town of Oro Valley will not allow excuses to prevent us from moving forward together as a Community of Excellence. We have a vision. We will execute our plans. We are, determined and we will persevere!

Thank you for joining me today!