

State of the Village

December 2013

In 2013, we worked on restoring “Pride and Progress” and “Ending the Division”. Sauk Village’s accomplishments in 2013 completed mostly in part due to the hard work of many dedicated residents that love our community and believe in Sauk Village.

Volunteerism is on a rise and with the help of many eager volunteers we were able to host several informational workshops assisting residents in housing, health and utility bill assistance, establish a Neighborhood Watch and participated in National Night Out. In 2014, it’s estimated that Sauk Village will have more events than our community has had in the last four years. This again will be possible because of our volunteers.

Events for village residents will continue, however, the residents need to know that finances are limited and volunteerism and donations are paramount to continue with these events and make them appealing to all. Those who have ideas that would appeal to more residents are welcome to join or attend committee meetings to promote those ideas.

In 2013, we focused on retention of current businesses and recruitment of new businesses with our economic development team, which is lead by the Mayor and consists of representatives from local, state and federal agencies, attorney’s, engineers, financial team and others. This allows Sauk Village to now immediately provide the information requested by inquiring businesses or companies looking at Sauk Village.

This last year Sauk Village residents witnessed store fronts re-open to the following businesses:

- Title Max
- Boost Mobile
- Just Phones
- H&R Block

Let me reassure you, businesses are looking to Sauk Village again! This is something that hasn’t happened in the last five to six years. Earlier in the year we announced a positive development for the village’s industrial community and in October 2013 finalized a redevelopment agreement with VHE II-Sauk, LLC. The Village through its economic development team worked with the developer over six months in order to facilitate the almost \$17,000,000.00 purchase and development of a 496,260 square foot building. Recently, Trustees have been informed that additional businesses have contacted Sauk Village. In 2014, the economic development team will remain focused on continued growth.

Although we have seen positive growth this last year everyone is still feeling the effects of The Great Recession. The residents, the village, the state and the federal government are all struggling financially. Sometimes projected state and federal revenue sources are late because of the financial struggle.

There are times that the village finds we must borrow money from other accounts like the water fund to keep the village moving forward. By law, any monies borrowed from the water fund to make payment of bills or salaries must be returned upon receipt of the tax revenues. The need for these loans can be caused by state or county revenues coming to our village late or reduced because of the county or state financial issues.

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The village is currently averaging three months behind in payment to our vendors; however, we have reduced that from the average of five months in the past. The village remains in debt but we are currently working on ways to reduce increased debt and searching for ways to address that which has already occurred.

Shortly after accepting the position of Mayor, I began to look into why financial audits were not available. It was no surprise to find that the audits were held up due to the turmoil of the last administration and miscommunications which has since ended. While audits take time, this administration and the auditors are on track to have them completed in a timely fashion, but as you can imagine a village audit takes more time than a personal audit or that of a small business. In 2013, we completed two village audits (FY2009 – 2010 and FY2010 – 2011) and have started the third audit (FY2011 – 2012).

Once the audits are completed the auditors will need to be paid. Normally, audits are performed once a year and the auditors are paid within each calendar year. We now face billing for two or three audits in one year however, once done we will be back on track. Audits will be presented to the State with or without the police pension portion that we have no control of obtaining and so the state does not fine us for noncompliance. We will continue to give the State all reports required on a timely manner along with an explanation of why any information might be missing so the village does not incur any further penalties.

Other issues that we started to address in 2013 and will roll into 2014.

- Union contracts, as with many other functions, were on standstill for years. We are working diligently to negotiate professionally with our staff to come to a financial and responsible conclusion for all.
- As for pension deficits, it appears all governmental bodies are in arrears and we are no different. There is much work to be done to find ways to solve this issue. Just as this is priority in our state capital we are committed to finding a solution in Sauk Village
- Litigation was ended between the Village of Sauk Village and the IEPA and Attorney General avoiding millions of dollars in fines by maintaining the temporary air strippers and preparing to install permanent air strippers and conduct water treatment plant improvements. In 2014, work should begin on the pump stations improvements.
- Earlier this year the village board passed an ordinance to reinstate the position of police chief. This allowed the village to restore the chain of command by reinstating a Police Chief position and filling the position with a qualified individual from within the ranks that is focused on bringing law and order back to our streets.

Our new Police Chief has implemented a plan to reduce crime, is working on a presentation for the public to show both how our officer training and demeanor will be addressed and how our public can assist the police in reducing crime as this must be a partnership to succeed.

The village has filled vacancies placing additional police officers on the streets and providing them with the equipment and support needed to perform their jobs. The village has just recently added several new squad cars to the Police Department fleet and updated the municipal code book.

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In 2014, the police department will continue to work on implementing and enforcing the Crime Free Housing and Vacant Property ordinances.

- Just recently it was announced that Sauk Village home values have gone up 6.4% over the past year and Zillow predicts they will rise 0.7% within the next year.

This is why you may notice the village administration, committee, commission, police, fire, and public works moving throughout your neighborhood. It will take all of us in a joint effort to make your block, your section of town, your street better, safer and more beautiful so that as the economy recovers our town recovers and our home values recover as well. This is another reason why in 2014 our Code Department will focus more on enforcing local property maintenance ordinances.

- In 2013, we opened a line of communication with our state and federal representatives. This last year residents had the opportunity to meet State and Federal officials at events such as town hall meetings and “meet your Congresswoman”. The village also opened the village hall and encouraged representatives to have satellite offices within the village so they could meet with residents.

In 2014, I look forward to continue working with our state and federal representatives as we strive to get Sauk Village back on its feet financially and grow through economic development.

As we approach 2014, we will continue to build on the forward momentum that was started in 2013. As a community we must continue to make tough decisions as we look for ways to address the financial deficit the village faces, continue to take a firm stance on crime and focus on economic development, both retention and new.

Thank you and God Bless,

David A. Hanks
Mayor of Sauk Village
A community of “Pride and Progress”