



DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE OF CHESTER COUNTY

201 WEST MARKET STREET, SUITE 4450

POST OFFICE BOX 2746

WEST CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA 19380-0989

TELEPHONE: 610-344-6801

FAX: 610-344-5905

Joseph W. Carroll
District Attorney

Patrick Carmody
First Assistant District Attorney

James C. Vito
Chief County Detective

Shawn D. Riley, Sr.
W.E.B. Administrator

CHESTER COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S NEW YEAR'S PRESS RELEASE

Traditionally, New Year's Day is a time for making resolutions for the coming year. Like most others, I have my personal ones, like spending more time with family and friends, eating a more healthy diet, and starting to exercise again. I also have some professional goals as well: things like lowering the crime rate in the county, providing more training for police, getting cases to trial more quickly, and finding ways to provide better service on a limited budget.

But for 2009, most of my professional goals center on the City of Coatesville. It troubles me that violence there has escalated there over the last couple years and City Administration doesn't seem to have a plan to address it. I'm concerned that the major construction and economic rebirth that seemed imminent three years ago appears to be on hold indefinitely, and some members of City Council don't seem to recognize the relationship between that and the crime problem. It strikes me as unfair that a municipality with what I believe is the highest tax rate in the county (combined real estate and earned income) has problems balancing its budget and providing a safe environment for its children. And I am saddened that the Coatesville Police Department has been decimated over the last 18 months, making control of the crime problem much more difficult, and some members of council don't seem to realize what they have done.

I fear that we have reached a crisis point: that if Coatesville continues on its current path for another year or two, recovery during my lifetime will be improbable, if not impossible. The people who live and work there deserve better. There is no reason for the crime rate in Coatesville to be higher than that in Phoenixville, West Chester, Kennett Square, or Oxford. And the good citizens there should not be saddled with the problems that a higher crime rate brings with it.

I don't know much about many aspects of municipal government. But I am certain that the quality of life in Coatesville will improve dramatically if crime drops there. People will feel safer. Employers will find the city more appealing. Property values will increase. And builders will see the benefit of investing there.

So, for the next year I will put unprecedented emphasis on the City of Coatesville, both as the chief law enforcement officer of the county and as a concerned taxpayer. My goals:

- Spend at least 10 hours a week walking the streets and talking to people to find-out first hand what the biggest community concerns are
- Fund more after school programs for kids (something the DA's Office already does through United Way) concentrating on academic development and other life skills
- Develop block watch groups working 3 nights a week, 5 hours a night on at least 50 blocks, including my own on North 8th Avenue. This will include financial support for equipment, training, and a coordinator to help participants be effective and safe.
- Develop a community service program to help clean-up the trash in the parks and streets of the City.
- Deploy a minimum of 10 cameras in crime "hot spots", both for their deterrent value and for use as evidence
- Help elect new council members to replace at least 2 of the 4 members of City Council up for election in 2009, in the hope that doing so will result in philosophical and personnel changes in City government
- Deploy additional law enforcement resources in the city to help an undermanned police department
- Pressure council to hire a chief of police who is a certified Pennsylvania police officer with significant command experience
- Reduce the Coatesville crime rate by a minimum of 15%

These changes won't happen unless a lot of people are willing to work for them. I think it will take about 500 volunteers willing to spend an average of 2 hours a week. This can include both young and old; people who live there and those who don't; people who have never been in trouble and those coming out of prison; in other words, anyone who wants to help. It will also require thousands of voters who take the time to learn about the issues and candidates before the 2009 elections.

I know that I don't have all the answers, so I'm trying to learn and looking for all the help I can find. I hope to have a series of public meetings for that purpose in January and February if I can find suitable locations for them in the City. Until then I ask anyone with ideas to improve conditions in the City or considering a run for city council to please call me at 610-344-6826, write to me at jcarroll@chesco.org, or visit me at 16 North 8th Avenue on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., or at other times by appointment. I would also welcome any opportunity to talk with church members, fraternal organizations, civic associations or other groups.

As was the case with the Philadelphia Eagles this past Sunday, Coatesville will need a little luck to be successful. But I've noticed over the years that the harder you work the luckier you get. And I think there are lots of hard-working heroes in Coatesville just waiting for the chance to get in the game. Like the Eagles, working together as a team we will change the direction of this City.

The few violent criminals ruining Coatesville are no match for the rest of us. We must convince them of that by demonstrating that we are not afraid, that we are a united community, and that lawless behavior will not be tolerated. Once we do, they will have three choices: change their ways, leave, or face the just consequences of their actions. A few police officers, no matter how good, are not enough to protect a city like Coatesville. All of us should do what we can to make our community safe— whether it is providing information to police, joining a block watch, or simply turning on a porch light at night.

I want to thank all the police officers and the wonderful people I've met in the City over the past few months for their comments and support, especially those I've met on 8th Avenue and nearby streets. You have convinced me that the City can recapture the spirit and prosperity it had when I worked at Buddy's Pizza at 1st & Lancaster Avenue and the YMCA when it was in the center of town in the 1970s. Let's start today. I'll keep you posted on progress with updates on the Chester County District Attorney's web site: www.chesco.org/da.

My wish is for a happy and safe New Year for all.

Joe Cannell
12/30/08