

2016 Year in Review

By Mayor Frank Fleischer

2016 has been a remarkable year for Mokena, with past and current planning and preparation paying meaningful dividends to both our residents and our businesses. Our economic base again expanded and diversified, allowing your Village Board to preserve one of the lowest property tax rates in the region while providing you with superior core public services and a balanced quality of life envied by many.

When I look back on the past year, I am particularly pleased with the way Mokena has developed its own unique identity and become a place where people increasingly want to invest their money. In earlier days, Mokena's main attraction was its location (i.e., quick, convenient access to the Chicago Loop), its quality housing stock, and Lake Michigan water. As the community has grown, we've increasingly become a regional draw as specialty entertainment and retail venues such as Accelerate Indoor Speedway and Point Blank Range & Gun Shop have committed to Mokena. Venues such as these are generating a whole new base of customers to help support our local economy and provide new recreation options for our residents. Over time, these businesses will also produce a wealth of amusement and sales tax revenue for our community.

Speaking of development, perhaps no one geographic area has blossomed more noticeably this past year than Meridian Centre. Located southwest of 191st Street and LaGrange Road, infrastructure for this prime commercial area was installed by a trio of intrepid developers during the depths of the Great Recession, and these patient developers' faith in Mokena is now reaping a handsome reward. Coldwell Banker, Chipotle, and Starbucks will soon call Meridian Centre home, and a Holiday Inn Express hotel is set to rise in 2017.

Other commercial development high points of 2016 included the opening of Binny's Beverage Depot in the Mokena Marketplace retail center at U.S. Route 30 and Wolf Road, the Chicago Swim School in the 191st Street corridor, and Whitmore Ace Hardware in the Francis Road Plaza neighborhood retail strip. Xylem, a Fortune 500 company specializing in water and wastewater treatment systems and equipment, will soon be moving operations into a light industrial property just east of 97th Avenue, north of 195th Street, and Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen recently opened along LaGrange Road.

The historical heart of Mokena is also beginning to see a bit of a renaissance. Annie's Cucina on Front Street expanded its reach by adding a formal upstairs dining area offering live entertainment, and the popular Curtain Call Community Theatre set up shop and began offering live shows just a stone's throw down the street to the west. The Parker James boutique store (the

so-called “older sister” of Pink Slip on Wolf Road) also opened in the downtown area. We continue to entertain inquiries from other parties interested in redeveloping properties along Front Street.

2016 also saw a couple of stalwart local businesses garner regional and state recognition. Mokena’s home-grown Provisur Technologies was ranked sixth among the top ten most innovative companies in the Chicagoland area by *Crain’s Chicago Business*, and Darwin Furniture, which operates a 200,000 square foot showroom in Orland Park and a 218,000 square foot state-of-the-art distribution center in Mokena, was named Illinois Retailer of the Year by the Illinois Retail Merchants Association.

While commercial development has captured the most attention this past year, our community’s reputation for quality housing has fueled yet another strong year of residential growth. We’ve issued close to 90 residential building permits this year. Roughly 75% of these permits have been issued for single family homes in our newer subdivisions, including Bridges of Mokena, Foxborough Estates, Ginger Creek, Boulder Ridge, and Whisper Creek. Moreover, some of our more mature subdivisions are seeing fresh activity as builders respond to local demand bolstered by Mokena’s reputation for quality, stability, and value.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to note the tremendous success of our community-wide Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Management Program, which was completed this year on time and under budget. The EAB impacted (directly or indirectly) everyone in our community. Your Board and staff’s dedication and commitment to this program, coupled with your personal partnership, enabled us to remove close to 3,400 EAB-infested parkway ash trees and replace them on a roughly one-to-one basis with a diverse set of over 40 different tree species in a little less than three and one-half years. Thanks to cash reserves generated through operating efficiencies and rising sales tax receipts generated by local businesses, this nearly \$1.7 million program was able to be funded at no additional cost to Mokena residents or businesses.

Positive results like these do not just happen. They’re the collective result of your faith, confidence, and investment in our community. They’re also a product of your Village Board and staff’s long-standing commitment to manage the resources you extend to us wisely and prudently. On behalf of your Board and staff, thank you for entrusting us with the tremendous privilege of serving on your behalf.