

WILKES-BARRE CITY

Thomas M. Leighton
Mayor



40 East Market Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
(570) 208-4158- phone
(570) 208-4101- fax

PENNSYLVANIA

Mayor Thomas M. Leighton's "I believe..." speech
June 9, 2005

- o Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
- o Thank you for coming here this evening.
- o It is truly a pleasure and an honor to stand here with you tonight.
- o Since taking office, both my administration and the community have taken great strides
- o These accomplishments would not have been possible if it weren't for the dedication and commitment of many people.
 - o My family... who have stood by my side.
 - o Governor Edward G. Rendell and his staff
 - o Attorney Murray Ufberg
 - o Congressman Paul Kanjorski
 - o Representative Kevin Blaum
 - o Senator Raphael Musto
 - o Wilkes-Barre City Council
 - o The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry
 - o All local business leaders
 - o Gus Genetti and his staff, Rodano's Pizza, Pizza Bella and the Lion Brewery who all made tonight possible
 - o Those extremely generous members of the community who have helped to make our dreams a reality
 - o All of the groups who have volunteered to better the City, including
 - Leadership Wilkes-Barre
 - Diamond City Partnership
 - Downtown Resident's Association
 - The Wilkes-Barre Crime Watch
 - King's College, Wilkes University, Luzerne County Community College, College Misericordia and Penn State and the students at these institutions AND
 - All of the rest of the City's volunteers

- I would also like to take a second to thank those people who are here tonight who have expressed an interest in relocating their business to Wilkes-Barre.
- So... why are we here?
 - After hearing so many predictions over the past few days, I thought I would compile a list of the TOP FIVE REASONS WHY WE'RE NOT HERE:
 - FIVE: We are not announcing that the 2012 Olympics are going to be moved from New York to Wilkes-Barre. However, we did apply but were rejected by the committee. They felt a marathon of 130 laps around Public Square would make for bad television.
 - FOUR: Donald Trump did not buy the gaming rights to bring riverboat gambling to the Susquehanna.
 - THREE: I am not announcing a revolutionary plan of converting the City's canopy system to solar power and using it to heat the Coal Street pool.
 - TWO: The City is not announcing a new cost-saving policy of propping up collapsing buildings with the old downtown streetlights...AND
 - NUMBER ONE: We are not going to announce that W. Mark Felt is only a cover for the REAL Deep Throat, Councilman Jim McCarthy, who was there.
- Now, why are we really gathered here tonight?
 - While running for office and then being elected Mayor of this City, I knew that we had great problems to solve, but I was also confident that we had the ability to become a truly GREAT city.
- We are **NOT** here tonight to discuss **BRICKS AND MORTAR**.
 - Since taking office in 2004, I have made difficult decisions, never the easy decision, but the **RIGHT** decision.
 - My administration has always carefully considered all of our options regarding the future of the City and planned accordingly.
 - We have not made premature decisions and been left with gaping holes.
 - What I'm here to announce tonight is **FAR** more important than bricks and mortar.
 - It is about the mindset of the City, which directly impacts the success of my administration's even **BEST** laid plans.
- At the beginning of my term, the perception in Wilkes-Barre was that the City was DEAD and had no future.
- Upon taking office, I encountered:
 - \$10.8 million dollars of unpaid bills

- Streets that needed immediate paving
- Countless stalled projects, like the infamous hole in the ground
- Crime and drugs
- Low morale throughout the City workforce, residents and visitors
- Unsuitable equipment
- City owned buildings in poor condition
- No hope could be found in our City.
- **No one believed** in our future.
 - Ask yourself right now, ARE YOU JUST ANOTHER PERSON WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN WILKES-BARRE?
 - If you are, I ask you to listen to my words this evening.
 - Because for those of us who do have faith, we cannot win this battle by ourselves or by taking shortcuts.
 - There will be days when we hit bumps and get knocked down, but I can tell you, when we get knocked down, we will get back up and complete our job.
 - WE WILL NOT STAY DOWN, WE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.
 - We must stay strong and have a POSITIVE BELIEF in the City and in ourselves.
- The question we must ask ourselves is: Do we want to be successful or do we want to live with failure?
 - In the past, we merely had hopes for success.
 - Now, WE ARE SUCCESSFUL. Look around.
 - The theater project
 - The Intermodal Transportation Center
 - The Hotel Sterling
 - The street lights
 - The Riverfront Project
 - The Pine Ridge Development
 - Look around... NO ONE BELIEVED that those projects had life... NOW, BELIEVE IT!
 - **Over the next 5 years the City of Wilkes-Barre has over \$250 million dollars worth of projects to benefit you.**
 - We have purchased 8 new police cruisers
 - 2 garbage trucks
 - New DPW equipment
 - Computerized City Government
 - And yesterday, I authorized our Fire Chief to put specifications together for 3 new fire engines and 2 new ambulances.

- We have spent more than \$3 million dollars to make our streets cleaner and our neighborhoods safer.
- **In my first year in office, the City of Wilkes-Barre reduced its fiscal deficit by more than \$4.6 million dollars.**
- One of my cornerstone promises, which is to relieve the taxpayers of Wilkes-Barre of the Call Center debt, is very close to becoming a reality. Eliminating almost \$13 million dollars in taxpayer liability.
- Now, the biggest obstacle that we must overcome is the negative attitude of a small, but pervasive, segment of our population.
- These people who are petty, jealous, constantly complaining and always negative do not share the dreams and goals of the people standing here with me today.
 - OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT and we cannot let the lack of enthusiasm of a few,... darken the future for us all.
- If we embrace this negative attitude, we are not only failing the City, but we are failing ourselves.
 - We MUST dispel this counterproductive mindset.
 - I feel there are three simple ways to avoid failure.
 - One: do what is right, not what is easy. We have and will continue to make difficult decisions.
 - Two: do the best that you can. We have a tremendous work ethic. Do not accept mediocrity, instead, insist on a commitment to excellence. I don't tell our department heads what to do, they know that ALL that I ask is to do their best.
 - Three: Treat others as you want to be treated, with respect and integrity.
- I encouraged city employees to accept this attitude and commit to rebuilding this City. Overwhelmingly, they have said they wanted to be an instrumental part of the rebirth of Wilkes-Barre.
- Since I was elected in 2004, I have been committed to eliminating those things that have plagued our fine city: drugs, crime, dirty streets, and a negative mentality.

- My administration has been faced with many obstacles and we have not been afraid to make difficult decisions to benefit the City and its citizens.
 - As of today, the number of **drug arrests** in the City since I took office has climbed to **372**.
 - This is an unprecedented figure and the WBPD will continue to remove this poison that has infected our City's neighborhoods.
 - As a result of this increase in drug arrests, crime has also decreased.
- Our Fire Department is second to none and we will continue to be fully committed to them to ensure their safety and the safety of our residents and visitors.
- Our Department of Public Works will continue to be supported with new equipment that will allow us to keep our streets and neighborhoods cleaner.
- City Hall employees have been provided with new, upgraded computer technology which will allow us to better serve the entire city.
- Does Wilkes-Barre truly have a future...I BELIEVE THAT WE DO!
 - President John F. Kennedy is noted for saying: "Once you say you're going to settle for second best, then that's what you become."
 - The City of Wilkes-Barre will no longer accept being anything other than #1.
 - The City's future is bright and your support here tonight is the light that produces that brightness.
- According to the classic movie Miracle on 34th Street: "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to."
 - I know your common sense has told you NOT to believe in the future of Wilkes-Barre because you have been **slighted, misled** and **disappointed** in the past.
 - I have heard comments that there have been "far too many announcements over the past ten years" and many have said that a miracle needs to happen to bring back the City.
 - Now is a new time for Wilkes-Barre.
 - Due to the hard work of the community and the enhancement of the City's morale, there is a new feeling of hope for the City of Wilkes-Barre.
 - The things that were once only visions for Wilkes-Barre become realities for those who call this fine city home, we must reverse this negative attitude.

- We must be taught how to BELIEVE again.
- Those of you who are standing here with me today are here because you care about the City of Wilkes-Barre.
 - We share the same goals and visions for this great City... WE BELIEVE IN WILKES-BARRE.
 - Leadership Wilkes-Barre member Kelly Montiz believes in Wilkes-Barre.
 - While presenting Leadership's project "Pathway to the Future", she said, "Wilkes-Barre is alive and growing stronger everyday. WE MUST BELIEVE!"
 - When the new design for our street lights was unveiled, Tom Lawson said HE BELIEVES in Wilkes-Barre.
 - New business owner Mary Ellen Higdon of the "Chill Grill" believes in Wilkes-Barre.
 - In a recent Times Leader article she said, "I BELIEVE in the city. I BELIEVE the city will come back."
 - With the recent collapse of the Perry-Block site located at West Market Street, there was concern for the future of the Sterling development project. Property owners and developers were devastated, however Larry Newman, Vice President of Economic Development at the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, ended a statement about the future of the property, saying, "it's a tragedy all the way around... but it's not going to stop me from believing that these types of projects can work in the downtown. That is the kind of thing that downtown Wilkes-Barre needs. I believe it more firmly than ever."
 - We are all here tonight to share a common purpose, that we truly care and BELIEVE in this great City, its goal and its future.
 - We can overcome those who are negative, jealous and petty, those who try to hold us back. Yes we can, because I BELIEVE...
 - I would like to present to you two words that from this day forward... will represent a new attitude in the City of Wilkes-Barre: "I Believe." Here is our new logo.
 - **I BELIEVE!!!**

- With this logo I would also like to announce **5 new initiatives** that will benefit the entire community. In the last 18 months, my administration has attended thousands of meetings where **YOU** have told us what you would like to see done. We have listened and are here today to announce some of the programs you have requested.

- **“I believe... in beautifying my neighborhood”**

- A new project termed The Leighton Initiative will establish a program where we go into neighborhoods, purchase multiple bad properties, demolish them and turn the land over to people committed to building new homes on larger properties.
 - This project alone will have a two-fold benefit. 1) It will rid the street of problem properties and 2) it will attract reliable hard working families into our neighborhoods.
- We have met with the major employers in Wilkes-Barre and are jointly developing a plan where they would offer financial incentives for their employees to move into our city.
- We have established a new “Yard of the Month” program recognizing the best kept properties in our neighborhoods. These properties will receive gift certificates from local businesses for their efforts.
- The contest will be held July, August and September
- We encourage people to take pride in their properties and recognize those who care about the beauty of their neighborhoods.
- We are bringing our City’s neighborhoods back and this is a way for the City to commend those residents who take pride in their homes.

- **“I believe...in bringing new business to Wilkes-Barre”**

- Thanks to PNC Bank, I am very happy to announce a new initiative to assist small businesses throughout the City of Wilkes-Barre.

- The program, called **“Invest in Wilkes-Barre”**, will provide the City with \$3 million dollars for small business lending.
 - “Invest in Wilkes-Barre” will not only bring business to our downtown, but allow main roads like George Ave to once again become a thriving business district.
 - Within the next year we will have a new restaurant occupying the former First National Bank on Public Square.
- **“I believe...in advancing the technology in Wilkes-Barre”**
 - While cities throughout this country are looking for WiFi capability in their downtowns, we are aggressively moving toward bringing WiFi to our ENTIRE City.
 - We are also going to install cameras for public safety in our neighborhood parks and in our downtown.
 - We would like to outfit our police cruisers and fire engines with computers to make their jobs safer. Can you imagine firefighters having building plans and hydrant layouts within seconds while they are responding to a fire?
 - We will purchase a municipal software program that will allow residents to utilize city services from home.
 - Today, we have launched our new website to assist residents with their needs. Our address is www.wilkes-barre.pa.us
 - **I believe...in having fun in Wilkes-Barre**
 - Not only are we getting new playground equipment in Coal Street Park and Kirby Park, but we are looking at redoing both parks.
 - We are in the beginning stages of planning with the **PENGUINS** a comprehensive overhaul of Coal Street Park, which will include bringing back ice and deck hockey along with additional recreational activities.

- At Kirby Park, we are looking at adding a lighted rubberized running track and a permanent Healing Field memorial.
- This year's 4th of July celebration will have 3 days of events which will cater to many demographics. We have listened to what you want and encourage you to come celebrate with us.

- **I believe...in celebrating our heritage.**

- For three days in the summer of 2006, we will celebrate the future of our fine City while honoring its bicentennial at Wilkes-Barre's 200th Anniversary Celebration.
 - This will be a first class event that will feature premium entertainment, a gala ball, an ice breaker on Public Square, family entertainment and much, much more.

- We do have a bright future.
- We have achieved a lot of growth in just under 18 months!
 - The theater... BELIEVE IT!
 - The intermodal... BELIEVE IT!
 - Hotel Sterling... BELIEVE IT!
 - Streetlights... BELIEVE IT!
- If you believe that we are on the path to success and want to do your part in bringing back Wilkes-Barre, please on the count of three repeat...I Believe...1...2....3
- Now, I ask all of you, whether you are a Council member, a CEO, a laborer or a student, to go out and tell your colleagues, families and friends that **YOU BELIEVE**.
 - And more importantly, make **THEM BELIEVE**.
- Thank you for coming tonight and please embrace this new mindset for the City of Wilkes-Barre.