



Mayor Merle S. Gorden (left) and James Douthett pay attention to the small details that pay off for the community.

Better in

BEACHWOOD

Collaboration is key to keeping the city on track to success.

BY THERESA NEUHOFF

Due to the popularity of Beachwood's summer programs, it was no surprise that local families and their children formed a line outside City Hall on a Sunday in early March to sign up for various activities.

Mayor Merle S. Gorden was on site that day to greet those standing in line with their chairs, blankets and coolers. Gorden, who has been in office 21 years, takes pride in ensuring the 12,000 residents in the 5.2-square-mile radius of the city are pleased with the services provided for them. He also strives to

ensure the same level of satisfaction for his 499 employees and more than 2,500 businesses from the one-person firm to the *Fortune* 500 company.

It's Gorden's belief that paying attention to small details leads to success. That is the reason he and his fellow city employees respond to incoming communication from residents within one day. It's the reason he prides himself on the city's superior services, from its safety forces to its efficient snow-removal team. "Beachwood has heated streets," he is fond of saying.

"People who moved into Beachwood 40 or 50 years ago are still here," Gor-

den says. "They raise their family, they grow with the community and they remain in the city. This is where they live for a long, long time. There are very few transitions in and out. This is not a transient community — whether it's residential or business. We have a lot of things that have been systematically planned over the years."

For a city that welcomes an estimated 100,000 visitors a day and is coming off its 100th year celebration, success becomes the standard when proper planning is put in place. Expectations in Beachwood are so high that as soon as one goal is achieved, another one

is set. According to Gorden, the secret to Beachwood's success is simple. He's surrounded himself with "a team of good people," including nine directors who are specialists within their field.

"I empower them because I want their expertise to lead us into the future," Gorden says. "I feel any leader is only able to do so much. There's only so many hours in a day, and you are only knowledgeable in so many areas. Our directors stay with us. This becomes their business, their livelihood, their future."

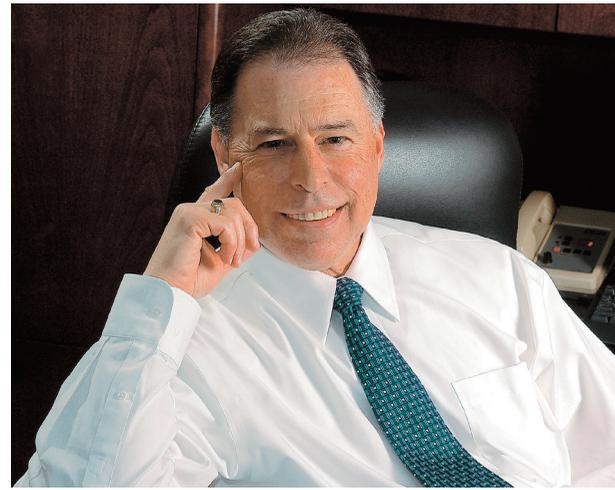
With a five-year master plan in place, Gorden and his directors are certain Beachwood will continue to prosper. The plan was envisioned by Gorden. Once he shared it with Economic Development Director James Douth, the idea became reality with the help of the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission (CCPC).

CCPC sent out surveys to 900 residents and 575 businesses. According to the study, 99.4 percent of residents indicated the quality of life in Beachwood is good, and 99.1 percent rated

city services as good/excellent. A survey sent to businesses revealed that 88 percent believed the business climate was good/excellent. CCPC Executive Director Glenn Coyne says it was the first time his organization sent out a business survey to a community.

"I've worked closely with cities in the past where situations change because of a new mayor or a budget crisis, which can impact the master plan, but, with Beachwood, we have a very good feeling about the direction the master plan is headed," says Coyne, who is working on master plans with Cleveland Heights, Olmsted Falls, Parma Heights and University Heights. "We feel strongly about the buy-in from not only the mayor and the administration, but also city council and the planning

Officials take part in a ground breaking ceremony for Chagrin Highland Center, a new 45,000-square-foot office center on Park East Drive in Beachwood.



commission. This isn't a plan that is going to be put on a shelf. It is one that requires action, and we feel action will be taken."

An example of Beachwood's proactive efforts to provide superior services is the way it brought together its nine hotels three years ago by forming a Convention & Visitors Bureau. Douth regularly meets with hotel executives to discuss the best ways to promote tourism to the city. With the Republican National Convention on the horizon, hotels are 90 percent booked, according to Douth.

"Beachwood is special because it's a great, safe city especially in winter," says Tulio Garonzi, area director of sales for Embassy Suites and Residence Inn in Beachwood. "In surrounding cities, the roadways may be covered in snow, but the streets are just wet here because the city services are first-class."

"We also have so many things for people to do in town, including three major shopping areas," he adds. "They are within 2 to 3 miles of one another, plus there are 25 restaurants within 2 miles. We are the hub for people to stay and do many things."

Garonzi's response is no surprise to Douth, who has come to expect that level of excellence from Beachwood.

"You earn a reputation, but then you have to go out every single day and consistently justify that reputation and build on that reputation," Douth says. "That's what we attempt to do. It's a very unique situation in terms of city government." ■



CITY OF BEACHWOOD