

Good Morning.

So good to be together. While we've come together for the last 46 years for the Annual Mayor Theodore Mann Community Breakfast, it's never quite been like this. We're on the verge of seeing each other's faces again, giving a friend a hug, and being able to come for music and theatre and more in this beautiful setting at the restored Allen House in West Newton.

The Newton Cultural Association purchased this historic home behind me in 2012 with generous donations, grants, and funds from the City's Community Preservation Act. The doors are now open for art, culture and community. Adrienne Hartzell Knudsen and NCC demonstrated a determination for a decade that we see over and over in Newton - to join hands to create spaces and programs that nourish our community's soul. Bravo!

This year, with hope in the air, it feels particularly right to renew our commitment to each other and to our good City of Newton. And while I miss breaking bread with you in person this morning, it feels really good to be able to say, see you soon – and mean it literally.

I'm grateful for the enduring partnership with the Harmony Foundation and the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association who again this year didn't skip a beat in planning this hour of hope and joy even during the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19. Thanks also to Hattie Kerwin Derrick, the City's new Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion, who switched her official role in this breakfast from the Harmony team over to Team City Hall. Working closely with the phenomenally talented Stephen Kessinger of NewTV and our City IT staff, we're in for a special morning.

Boy, do we need it. It was quite a year. Peculiar. Unsettling. Filled with grief, anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness. COVID-19, financial loss, racial reckoning, political strife: Our nation and our city have been reeling.

Yet, when we could see no end in sight to the suffering, we came together. Newtonians were spectacular. Despite our own hardships, we rallied to support our Black and Asian neighbors, to order take out and help local stores, to help those experiencing loss, suffering illness or facing financial hardship. We are a City filled with people of compassion and resolve.

Traditionally at the Mayor's Community Breakfast I honor one City employee. This year, we instead celebrate and thank the 3,000 essential City and School employees who served all of us during the past difficult and unusual year.

VIDEO

We will never forget that day in March 2020 when we closed our doors at City Hall, our schools, the Newton Free Library, and the Senior Center.

Overnight, Newton employees opened themselves up to new ways of service in the midst of the pandemic.

Think of our nurses and social workers in Health and Human Services and our educators in the Schools... our librarians, veterans service officer, planners, lawyers, and treasury, museum and purchasing staff ... our Human Resources professionals, inspectors in ISD, IT, clerks and elections staff ... our employees in the Department of Public Works, Parks, Rec and Culture, and Assessing ... our Public Buildings staff who marshalled an army of contractors to address ventilation issues our City staff laser focused on our older residents, small businesses and residents facing housing and food insecurity –

everyone pivoted to help, to comfort, to give up-to-date information, to educate, to contact trace, test and vaccinate, and to make sure trash and recycling was picked up, our streets were plowed, and our bills were paid.

For our first responders – our Police officers, firefighters, EMTs - the pandemic meant donning PPE, and responding wherever needed. In the early days, the sirens never stopped as one COVID patient after another was transported to Newton-Wellesley Hospital. These women and men left their own families at home to take care of our families in Newton.

I am so proud of how when our mettle was tested, NPS and City staff stepped up, persevered, and supported so many with kindness and hard work. On behalf of a grateful City, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Introduce Rabbi Gardenschwartz.

The word rabbi in Hebrew translates to “my teacher” – it’s a perfect description for our keynote speaker this morning, Wesley R. Gardenschwartz, senior rabbi at Temple Emanuel. He is a teacher to his Congregation, and a source of so much wisdom and kindness for our entire community. Rabbi Gardenschwartz.

Thank you Rabbi Gardenschwartz, yes, may we go forward with an ever-deeper gratitude for all that we have lost and found once again.

During the pandemic we have lost 214 of our neighbors to COVID-19 and so many more that we knew and loved across the world.

The day before yesterday, yesterday and later today Newtonians have come together and soon will to mourn at the funerals of three special residents, each unique and yet each exemplars of the wonderfully tangled intersection of City service, love of Newton and all things family.

Mary English, born and raised in Newton, the 11th of 14 children, was the heart of a family dedicated to service to the City - Her sister ran payroll for the Newton Fire Department; her husband Robert, served

as a Newton deputy fire chief, and her daughter, Lisa, is essential to the operations of Newton's Police Department.

Nikki Lightly, greeted everyone warmly as a receptionist for our Parks and Rec Department. A Gold Star Mother, Nikki turned the pain of the loss of her son Ricky in Vietnam to advocacy for veterans and served as Treasurer for countless church and non-profit organizations across the City.

Audrey Cooper was the beloved assistant to the principal at Underwood and spent more than 60 years in the City she loved working for those most vulnerable among us, our children and our elders plus our library patrons.

I don't know if these remarkable women knew each other; they were all so very different. And yet, they exemplified what is the best of us: A love for Newton, and a commitment to making our community better.

Over the past 14 months, I saw so many Mary's, Nikki's and Audrey's, people across our city, in every neighborhood and in every village reach out to help their neighbors.

Good people from different backgrounds, with different passions, working every day to build a better, brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

As we move forward into our next normal, fueled by gratitude, let's hang on tight to this spirit of community. We'll model ourselves after Mary, Audrey and Nikki who were kind, listened intently, spoke up passionately and chose words and acts laced with respect and empathy.

Let's take our masks off, give each other a smile, and work together to create a next normal that will fulfill that Athenian Oath found on the walls of Newton North - to transmit our city greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.

The music of the Lovetones and the words of their Newton based song will help us on that journey!