

# *Mayors and Village Hall*



*View of Village Hall in 2018*



# Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

POLL BOOK OF SPECIAL ELECTION HELD UPON THE  
23 DAY OF February, 1918, TO OBTAIN THE  
SENSE OF THE ELECTORS IN THE TERRITORY DESCRIBED  
IN THE PETITION OF Albert Blitch ET AL  
UPON THE QUESTION OF THE INCORPORATION OF THE  
VILLAGE OF Cuyahoga Heights

1. Albert Blitch - 4935 East 71 Street.
2. George Stenk 4570 " 49 Street.
3. J. E. Pennington 4976 " 49 Street.
4. F. C. Farrer 4909 " 71 Street
5. A. E. Clapp 4508 " 49 Street
6. B. D. Kerr 4502 " 71 Street.
7. Joseph F. Schmitt 4810 " 49 Street.
8. L. M. Gerdon 4824 " 49 Street
9. J. H. Conner 7123 " 71 Street
10. Carl Facke 7906 " 71 Street
11. F. W. Clase 4303 " 49 Street
12. A. J. Schmeider 4535 " 71 Street
13. W. M. Morgan 4442 " 49 Street
14. B. Strector 4223 E 49 Street
15. R. B. Kerr 4502 " 71 Street
16. John Polcen 7120 Dressler Ct.
17. John P. Walsh 7127 Marceline Ct.
18. J. Kennedy 4552 East 71 Street
19. George Rackway 4894 East 71 Street
20. Lou Kennedy 4552 East 71 Street
21. Edward Winkler 7133 Marceline Ct.
22. Frank Jaskolski Canal Rd.

February 23, 1918 Secession Petition



# Mayors and Village Hall

by Laura Bacci Merhaut

## A New Government

Democracy wielded its powerful pen when citizens banded together in 1918 signing a petition to secede from the Village of Newburgh Heights and form a new government—the Village of Cuyahoga Heights. Once that government was formed, a mayor was elected and served a two-year term of office.

**Definition:** mayor (noun) the elected head of a city, town, or other municipality.

**Derivatives:** mayoral (adjective). mayorship(noun). | **Origin:** Middle English: from Old French maire, from the Latin adjective major ‘greater,’ used as a noun in late Latin.

## Cuyahoga Heights Village Charter | Article II

The Charter was adopted by the electors of the Village of Cuyahoga Heights on August 2, 1919, to become effective January 1, 1920.

### Section 1. Elective Officials.

The elective officials of the Village shall be the **Mayor**, the Clerk and six (6) Council Members elected at large. Said officials shall be elected at the time and in the manner provided by law for the election of Village officials commencing on January 1, following their election as follows: a. Commencing with the regular municipal election in 2009, the Mayor shall be elected for a term of four (4) years and every fourth year thereafter commencing on the first day of January next following such election, and shall serve until his or her successor is duly elected and qualified.

## The Mayors Who Shaped Our Village

(Data gleaned from our Historical Committee files)

### Joseph Schmidt (earlier spelled Schmit) | 1918 to 1931 | First Mayor

Joseph Frank Schmidt was born November 19, 1882 in Newburgh Heights, Ohio to Peter and Mary Margaret Henninger Schmit. His father was born in Belgium or France and his mother, in Germany. Peter came to America in 1873 while Mary and her family came in 1870. Joseph was born and raised on the Schmit family homestead on what is now East 49th Street in Cuyahoga Heights. His siblings were William, Mary Meyer, Peter, Andrew, Julius, Catherine Basel, Margaret and Mathilda.

Joseph was a member of the Newburgh Heights Council from 1910 to 1911. He was one of the 59 men that voted in the special election held February 2, 1918 to secede from Newburgh Heights and was one of four trustees elected for Willow Township. Joseph was elected the first mayor of Cuyahoga Heights on March 16, 1918. Serving as the part-time mayor from 1918 to 1931. One of the first items on Mayor Schmidt’s

## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

agenda was a lawsuit by Newburgh Heights who wanted their village hall back. The court said the building belonged to the Village of Cuyahoga Heights. Newburgh Heights went back to court and the suit went all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court. They found in favor of Cuyahoga Heights. Not only did the village get the old town hall, but also their office equipment, a Ford police car, a garbage collection outfit and \$12,396,630 which was 86 percent of Newburgh Heights' cash. The only bad part was the village got 83 percent of their debts amounting to \$270,515.21. When Schmidt left office, Cuyahoga Heights was still paying off that debt.

As mayor, he was paid \$500 a year from 1925 to 1927 and in 1928 until he left office, his salary was \$1,250. During his 13 years as mayor, many road improvements were made in the village. The sewer line was started on Marcelline Court in 1920. During 1921, Harvard Avenue was improved, and sidewalks were set in the northern part of East 49th Street which was graded as well. In 1922, the mayor broke council's tie vote to remove Helen Bletch Jones from the village council. A week later, council also removed Florence F. Pierce. It was determined that both women did not meet the necessary residency requirements before seeking public office.

The trunk line sewer was started on East 71st Street in 1923. That year East 49th Street was paved. Sidewalks, sewer, water lines and grading were also done on Grant Avenue. The fire department was formed during Schmidt's term and in 1924, the first firehouse was built for about \$57,500.00 on what had been the Gallitz family homestead on Grant Avenue. Water, sewer and sidewalks were put in on Marcelline Court, East 72nd Place and Bletch Court in 1925. East 71st Street and Grant Avenue were paved that same year.

Joseph never married. He lived and worked the family dairy farm on East 49th Street. He died at the age of 90 on November 17, 1973 in Cleveland, Ohio and is buried in Calvary Cemetery. The surname Schmit is an occupational name. It is a variant spelling of Schmidt which comes from the German word *schmied* meaning blacksmith. The English spelling is Smyth or Smith. We have not found any descendants of Peter and Mary Schmit still living in the village.

### **Isaac "Ike" Kennedy | 1932 to 1945 | Second Mayor**

Isaac Garfield Kennedy came into office during the Great Depression. His major task was providing jobs during this period of serious unemployment.

He was born April 15, 1880 in the Kinsman area of Cleveland, Ohio to Alexander and Julia Bletch Kennedy. His father was born in Ireland and came to Ohio sometime after 1845 with his parents and two brothers. His mother, Julia Bletch was born in Illinois and her parents came from Baden, Germany. They came to Cuyahoga County before 1855. Isaac's siblings were Edith and Lewis. His father, uncles and brothers were all blacksmiths around the Kinsman Road area. Sometime between 1884 and 1900, Ike's father died and his mother moved the family to Brecksville and then Newburgh Heights. Ike, as he was known to the villagers, was a blacksmith and wagon maker. In 1918, he changed with the times and became an auto repairman and had his own shop at 4952 East 71st Street.

He married four times. Charlotte Grenweldinger of Brecksville was his first wife (married June 21, 1904). She died in 1926. His second wife was Gladys M. Herron (married April 5, 1928). His third wife was Sarah Viola Walters of Cleveland (married September 24, 1930). She died in 1941. His fourth wife was Lorna M. Shatto Hanousek of Cuyahoga Heights (married about 1950). She died in 1960. His daughters were Norma





*Joseph Schmidt — 1918 to 1931*



*Isaac "Ike" Kennedy — 1932 to 1945*





*William R. Gerdon — 1946 to 1965*



*George J. Gallitz — 1966 to 1968*



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

and Dorothy (daughters of Sarah Viola Walters). John Hanousek was his stepson.

Ike was one of the 59 men that voted to leave Newburgh Heights in 1918. He was a Cuyahoga Heights council member from 1918 through 1931. During this time, a councilman was to attend two meetings a month. He was paid \$10 per meeting, but only if he went to the meeting. He was the primary advocate for the first village fire station and became the second mayor of Cuyahoga Heights in 1932, serving through 1945 as a member of the Square Deal Party. During his time as mayor, sewers were completed on Grant Avenue. In 1937, Cuyahoga Heights paid off all of the bonds inherited from Newburgh Heights. The tax rate was dropped from \$1.98 to \$1.34, the lowest in the state. Industry in the village contributed 98% of all revenue. As mayor, he entered into an agreement with the City of Cleveland that guaranteed employment at the Southerly Sewage Plant for village residents.

To meet social needs and public services, Mayor Kennedy was instrumental in building the present village hall in 1935 for \$135,000. It soon became the center of community activities. He supported the industrial leaders who wanted a school built in Cuyahoga Heights. With the aid of H.R. Klepinger of the American Steel and Wire Company and other industrial leaders, the Cuyahoga Heights School District was created and opened in 1938.

Kennedy had one of the highest salaries of any suburban mayor when he left office in 1945. He was being paid \$5,000 a year. He died in 1956.

### **William R. Gerdon | 1946 to 1965 | Third Mayor**

William Gerdon was born and raised in Cuyahoga Heights. He attended South High and East Tech. After graduation, he worked as a line foreman for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. He also served 12 years as a member of the Cuyahoga Heights Police Department.

He was a former policeman, councilman and truck driver. He took over the mayor's post after World War II. It was a challenging time with the community reaching an all-time peak in industrial expansion during the war when more than 18,000 people worked here and were involved in production of military equipment. He stood 6'5" in stocking feet and became a legend. His antics and love of life over the years made newspaper headlines everywhere he went. He was a close personal friend of Senator Robert Taft Sr. and served as his personal bodyguard at two National Republican conventions. Gerdon's administration saw the expansion of the police, fire, recreation and service departments. After suffering a political setback in 1965, he was successfully reelected two years later but died before taking office. The William R. Gerdon Pool was built in 1955 and later was named in his honor. William Gerdon was born in 1909 and raised in Cuyahoga Heights, the son of Clinton M. Gerdon and Edith Eda Rosalie (nee Krapf). Clinton Gerdon's name was on the list of electors for the special election held on March 16, 1918 to separate from Newburgh Heights. He was living at 4824 East 49th Street at the time. He was on the first council of Cuyahoga Heights, and served several terms as councilman. Clinton's wife, Edith Eda Rosalie (nee Krapf) served one term on the Cuyahoga Heights School Board (dates unknown).

## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

William Gerdon served his country in the Army in World War II. He entered the political arena in 1943, with his election as councilman in Cuyahoga Heights, in which he served for two years until 1945. In 1946, he was elected as the third Mayor of Cuyahoga Heights and served in that position until 1965, when he lost to George Gallitz. During that time, in 1955, the William R. Gerdon pool was built and named after him. William Gerdon ran for the position of Mayor again in 1967 and won. He died on December 11, 1967, one month before being sworn in as Mayor. In 1970, William's wife, Frances, ran for Mayor and lost.

### **George J. Gallitz | 1966 to 1968 | Fourth Mayor**

George Gallitz had the distinction of serving five years as a councilman; seven years as clerk; and eighteen years as treasurer before taking over during 1966 to 1968 as Mayor. Mr. Gallitz was defeated by William Gerdon in his 1967 bid for reelection, but Gerdon died before he could be sworn in. The village law director's ruling allowed Mr. Gallitz to continue in office. During his administration, he negotiated public transportation under a subsidy with the Cleveland Transit System (CTS).

George was the youngest of 12 children. He married Luella Root. He worked and enjoyed a successful career for the Newburgh & South Shore Railroad for over 50 years. He lived at: 172 Grant Avenue; 4129 East 49th Street, at the intersection of Grant Avenue and East 49th Street; 4089 East 74th Street off Harvard Avenue; 7133 Bletch Court; and 4936 East 71st Street, his daughter Marion's home.

September 1968 *Plain Dealer*

### **Mayor Gallitz Resigns from Suburban Post**

Last Wednesday, Mayor George Gallitz resigned his post in a letter to the village council in which he advised the legislative body that he was leaving for personal reasons effective September 1, 1968. Although Gallitz was defeated in the 1967 November election, he retained the post due to the death of Mayor-elect William R. Gerdon prior to taking office. The village solicitor ruled that Gallitz should continue to serve as mayor until a qualified successor was elected. Due to the fact the village charter was not clear on the succession to the mayor's post under these conditions, Gallitz continued to serve. An effort to hold a special election was requested by the petition of more than 300 of the suburb's 500 eligible electors but a ruling by the Secretary of State advised the board of elections the procedure was not possible. Gallitz's resignation closes a long political career of more than 35 years. He previously held the posts of councilman, clerk and treasurer. He is a retired railroad employee of the Newburgh and South Shore Railway. Tentative plans indicate that he and his wife, Lou will move to Florida later this year. Replacing Gallitz will be council president Stanley J. Klima, 59, who twice was an unsuccessful candidate for the post. Klima started his political career in the suburb in 1946 when he was a member of the Gerdon Progressive Party slate. He has served ten terms in council. Currently he is employed as a shipping foreman at the Grabler Manufacturing Company.





*Stanley "Jack" Klima — 1968 to 1971*



*Louis Vincent John Bacci — 1972 to 1984*





*Ralph Contipelli — 1985 to 1989*



*Louis Vincent John Bacci — 1990 to 2005*



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

### **Stanley “Jack” Klima | 1968 to 1971 | Fifth Mayor**

Mayor Klima was married to Clara Kornowski. They had two children: Gail and Joyce. Their home was located at 7137 Marcelline Court. Klima was a veteran councilman and served well as mayor, providing leadership with great success. His integrity made him a popular and respected leader. He brought experience to the office from his successful career in industry at the Grabler Manufacturing Company. During his stewardship, the village-owned Chapek’s Grove and recreation area was developed and upon his retirement, it was named Klima Gardens in his honor.

### **About My Father, Jack Klima by Gail Klima Knaus**

“I have accepted the very difficult task of writing about my father, Jack Klima, and more specifically, his role in politics and his part in the proud community of Cuyahoga Heights. In order to tell his story honestly and completely, I have to start at the beginning. My dad was born to immigrant parents who lived in the Bohemian settlement near East 55th Street and Broadway Avenue in Cleveland. It was a large, poor family and my dad was the youngest. There were few jobs, little money and no respect for or encouragement regarding education.

Dad sold newspapers at the corner of East 55th Street and Broadway Avenue as a young lad just to bring home a few cents for his mother to purchase groceries. He told many stories about having only the vegetables to eat that he and his mother were able to grow in the back yard. Their weekly menus included potato pancakes, potato soup, mashed potatoes, fried potatoes and tomato sandwiches. He grew up in poverty, but learned very quickly to work hard and someday, hopefully, live above it.

Dad was lucky enough to find good employment at Grabler Manufacturing. He worked hard and soon became a valued employee. As a young man, his leisure activities were playing baseball and going to old-time dances. As you may expect, at one of those dances, he met a pretty, young lady who captured his heart. Soon, they were married. Of course, this was my mother, Clara Kornowski, who lived in Cuyahoga Heights and whose father owned a rental property where they, as a young couple, married in the 1930s, were able to live.

So this explains how my dad, Jack Klima, came to live in Cuyahoga Heights. Dad told a story of the fierce rivalry between the married men challenging the single men in baseball. As Bill Gerdon became aware of dad’s previous baseball experience, he happily drafted him for the team of married men. His recruitment was kept a secret until the big game. And...the story goes that Frank Bartczak, of the single men’s team, was furious about what he considered unfair recruited competition. Thus, was the introduction of my father into the men’s social world of Cuyahoga Heights. There are not adequate words to describe how much my dad loved this new environment. One has only to remember the dirty, poor surroundings from whence he came to this new home with pleasant, cheery neighbors; clean, well-kept properties and a caring, friendly community and neighborhood. It was obvious to everyone that dad was overcome with joy and happiness to become a new resident of this beautiful village. He was a total devotee of this new life and despite the years, he never lost any of his great love of his new hometown. That happiness and pride never waned. He proudly proclaimed that Cuyahoga Heights was “the garden spot of America” to anyone who would listen



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

and he sincerely meant every word of it.

One can only imagine what he felt when someone suggested he run for a councilman's position in the upcoming election. When he actually won, he was overcome with joy and disbelief. His overwhelming feelings were of pride and duty. Again, remember his beginnings and that he had aspirations only to be a good husband, father and neighbor. Here, he was becoming a leader in his new village—the village he adored. I don't think he ever felt completely competent for the job. He certainly tried his best to do and vote for what he felt was best for his beloved village.

Dad eventually became mayor of Cuyahoga Heights—the highest office to which one could aspire. I don't think he ever stopped pinching himself to make certain that it was really true. My, dad, Jack Klima, was always in complete awe of his position—again, overcome with pride and appreciation.”

### **Louis Vincent John Bacci | 1972 to 1984 | Sixth Mayor | 1990 to 2005 | Eighth Mayor**

(Information provided by Laura Bacci Merhaut)

Born and raised in the village, Louis Bacci graduated from Cuyahoga Heights High School after serving in the military during World War II. Louis resided with his family at 4933 East 72nd Place. His parents were Vincenzo and Aldegonda Rossi Bacci. He had two sisters: Mary Bacci Dycus and Anne Bacci Tallon. Like most immigrant families, they used every inch of space for gardening and growing fruit trees or berry bushes. In Lou's later years, he enjoyed working the garden—the same plot tilled by his father before him and grew an abundant amount of tomatoes which he shared with residents. Family members often joked he was using those tomatoes to win votes.

Louis married sweetheart Lillian Schreiber of Valley View, and together they raised five children: Charlotte Waskielis of Bellevue, Ohio; Louis “Gigi” (deceased); Laura Merhaut now residing in the old Steve's Body Shop; John of Brownhelm Township, Ohio and Jack—our current mayor.

Louis was an entrepreneur in many ways: operating a gas station at Canal and Warner Roads in the 1950s; laboring as a cement finisher; and then buying out his uncle Giogondo Perozeni's equipment to create Bacci & Sons Cement Contractors. When weather became cold and blustery, precluding cement work, he turned to multiple jobs to support a growing family: hauling steel out of the mills for Dworkin Truck Lines on Harvard Avenue; plowing snow; and selling Christmas trees on frosty winter evenings. As the cement business grew, Lou won numerous large contracts for the Holiday Inn hotel chain and traveled as far as Rochester, New York to work on a project.

He served on the village council numerous terms and always managed to gain the top vote. Early on in his 20s, he ran for the mayor's seat and failed. He returned to the council, then ran again unsuccessfully for mayor. He succeeded on his third attempt and was sworn in January, 1972. At his inauguration, his four-year-old son, Jack Michael, delivered the gavel for his father to call the meeting to order.

When the Cleveland Regional Sewer District was formed in 1972, Louis served as its first president. “...A court order settled an action brought by the Water Pollution Control Board—the predecessor to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency—against Cleveland to which the tributary suburban communities were joined. It also settled a second action brought by the suburban communities contesting sewer rate increases. The district was charged with the responsibility for planning, financing, constructing, operating





*Marilyn LaBella Duszynski — December 2005*



*Ralph Contipelli — 2006 to 2007*





*Jack Michael Bacci — 2008 to Present*



*Jack Bacci giving his father, Lou Bacci, the gavel  
at his first inauguration as mayor in 1972*



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

and controlling wastewater treatment and disposal facilities, major interceptor sewers and other water pollution control facilities within its service area....”

As a result of a federal mandate, the “free” sewage treatment agreement Cuyahoga Heights had with Cleveland ended and the Court of Common Pleas ruled that the village be compensated for its loss. A settlement of \$250,000 was placed in an encumbered fund with the village to continue to pay residents’ wastewater usage fees. This practice continues today, long after the funds have been depleted. Mayor Bacci served on the board from 1972 to 1984. Jack M. Schulman, almost 80 years old, former Law Director for the City of Cleveland and board member from the Northeast Regional Sewer District noted: “It has been almost 40 years since we served on the board together, so I can no longer share any Lou Bacci stories, but I will say this: What I liked about Lou was that he wasn’t in love with himself, just saw himself as an ordinary guy trying to help the people in his little community, and obsessed with eliminating the disgusting odors emanating from the Southerly Sewage Treatment Plant. My recollection is that he succeeded during my tenure, 1978 to 1982. I miss him...”

As a member of the County Mayors and Managers Association, Lou worked diligently with several area mayors, including Parma Mayor John Petraska, to defeat the City of Cleveland in a lawsuit regarding its misuse of Cleveland Water Department funds. This success earmarked funds for waterline improvements throughout Cuyahoga County.

His administration maintained a high standard of services. He modernized municipal buildings. Revenue from the village income tax provided the necessary finances for programs without increasing real estate taxes. His guidance led the council to acquire 26 acres of land on Canal Road, formerly the site of Cleveland’s incineration plant. The village eventually built the John Bohdan Service Center on this property fronting on Canal Road. The additional acreage has been dedicated as park lands for residents to enjoy and ultimately was named in Mayor Lou Bacci’s honor.

When Bacci passed on October 5, 2005, family members directed unused campaign monies and generous donations from friends be used to fund the Louis V. Bacci Scholarship Fund at Cuyahoga Heights High School. Since its inception, thousands of dollars have assisted graduating seniors with their continuing education. When his wife, Lillian passed away, in 2017, the family requested donations to the fund in lieu of flowers, increasing the fund. During 2018, \$2000 was awarded. At the same time, the scholarship added Lillian’s name to its title: the Louis V. and Lillian Schreiber Bacci Memorial Scholarship.

### **Newspaper and Magazine Articles Spoke of Mayor Bacci**

*Cleveland Magazine*, March, 1983, dubbed him the “Italian Hillbilly” due to his affection for country western music and cowboy hats. “By virtue of his position as mayor, plus business associations he has cultivated over the years, Bacci has emerged as one of the most powerful political figures in the Cleveland area...”

*La Gazette*, an Italian publication, wrote about “Bacci’s Land of the Free”

*Ohio Magazine* wrote an article in January 1995 about “Mayor Bacci’s Gardenspot”



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

### **Ralph E. Contipelli | 1985 to 1989 | Seventh Mayor | 2006 to 2007 | Tenth Mayor**

Ralph Contipelli was the son of Elia Contipelli (who served as one of the original firemen holding the rank of Lieutenant) and Josephine Fontana Contipelli. He graduated from Cuyahoga Heights School in 1953. He attended Kent State University for four years and became an accountant for General Motors. Ralph married his first wife, Rose Marie DeLorenzo, and had three children with her: Renato, Ross, and Reno, all of whom held positions in public service. Renato also was elected to council and is serving again in the 2018 term. Ralph's second wife was Rita Pallini. He had two children with Rita: Rochelle and Rick.

Ralph served on council for approximately 20 years and served in the clerk's position in between his terms as mayor. When asked why he eventually sought elective office, son, Renato Contipelli, replied: "I chose to run out of a sense of duty to make a difference—better the lives of our residents and to protect our village...(this was) instilled in me by my father, Ralph, and Mayor Louis Bacci..."

### **Marilyn LaBella Duszynski | December 2005 | Ninth Mayor**

Marilyn C. LaBella was born in Cleveland. She married George A. Duszynski on October 25, 1958 and had three children: Greg, Ken and Renee. It seemed fitting that Marilyn, always a strong Bacci supporter, would sit in when Mayor Louis Bacci was medically forced to leave office. Marilyn was president of council when Mayor Bacci passed away in October, 2005.

She was elected and served on council numerous terms until 2017. The council honored her 26 years of service by passing a resolution in December, 2017.

### **Jack Michael Bacci | 2008 to Present | Eleventh Mayor**

Terms: 2008 to 2009 | 2010 to 2013\*, 2014 to 2017, 2018 to Present

\*In 2013, by an affirmative vote of citizens, terms for Mayor were changed to four years.

In 1968, Jack Michael Bacci was a surprise addition for Louis and Lillian Bacci who were 42 and 40 years of age respectively at the time. When this last child was born, Lillian gave her husband the task of naming the baby. "Jack" came from former Mayor Stanley "Jack" Klima and "Michael" was in honor of another dear friend, Michael Mikolaczyk.

Jack grew up in the village, but attended St. John's Lutheran School for a while because it was his mother's desire that he have a strong religious foundation in his early education. He returned to the Cuyahoga Heights Schools in ninth grade, graduating in 1986. Jack played sports including football, basketball, and baseball.

As a young man, Jack delivered both *The Press* and *The Plain Dealer* newspapers to earn money and later offered his entrepreneurial services as a laborer to complete just about any task: landscaping, gutter cleaning, snow removal and special pickups. After high school, Jack worked at an assortment of jobs, joining the Operating Engineers Union handling heavy equipment and owned his own entrepreneurial snow plow and excavation business.

Eventually, he decided to attend the Ohio Peace Officers Training Academy (OPOTA) at Case Western Reserve University—a move that reversed routine protocol for an applicant for eligibility to become a police



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

officer in the village. Normally, one would attend OPOTA *after being hired*—which left the department short a man while this training took place. Jack wanted to have an edge—and be prepared for the job when hired. During his time in the Cuyahoga Heights Police Department, Jack served as a patrol officer for 13 years, then served as a detective for two years.

Jack, a proud father, is raising three daughters in the Cuyahoga Heights tradition. Two daughters have graduated from Cuyahoga Heights High School. Madison, the eldest, is a senior finishing her degree in environmental studies at Cleveland State. Brenna, now a junior at John Carroll University, is studying business. Lily Anne, the youngest, is in second grade at Cuyahoga Heights Elementary School.

Growing up in a public service family, one cannot help but be instilled with that same ethic—Jack was no different. However, working for your father, the mayor, was no cake walk. The boss was much tougher on Jack than he was on other employees.

When Mayor Louis Bacci was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2005, he wanted to continue as mayor and run for that position one more time. The illness was taking a toll and family members suggested he withdraw his petitions and encouraged Jack to run as a write-in candidate. Jack did an excellent job in his campaign against former Mayor Ralph Contipelli, but fell short by a few votes—so close it required an automatic recount. He had to wait two more years to campaign again.

In the November 2007 election, Jack won the mayor's seat with a strong majority. During his inauguration in January, 2008, he focused his speech on future generations, saying "...the politician thinks about the next election—whereas leaders think about the next generation—I intend to lead..."

Like father, like son—sometimes. As mayor, Jack has been elected repeatedly by his peers on the Suburban Council of Governments to represent them by serving on the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer Board since 2010. This is a position his father held at the board's inception. As a member of the board, Jack and fellow trustees oversee budgets in excess of \$100 million.

Once in office, Jack has been proactive in tackling problems. He's proven that government can work together for the greater good, and takes pride in all that council and his administration have accomplished. His passion is marketing and letting the world know about all what this place we call home has to offer. As a newly elected mayor in 2008, Jack met with, listened to, and acted upon the local businesses' mandate that the village present a sharp image to those who visit their establishments. He implemented the continuing Bacci open door policy for all and hosts two events annually to seek ideas and suggestions from the backbone of our community—industry.

In 2008, the mayor, clerk and council reviewed and enacted a new program designed to increase reinvestment in residential homes. *The George M. Suhy Grant* was put into place as a conduit for reimbursing homeowners making qualified home improvements. Monies spent over \$1,000 and submitted to the building department for inspection and review, could be reimbursed up to \$1,000/year two times in a given period. Recently, village council voted to increase the program to three grants within a five-year period. Numerous residents have taken advantage of this program. When an economic downturn hit the country and the village that same year, Bacci, who espouses sustainable finances, implemented basic economic principles in order for the village to survive. Belts were tightened, employees were laid off and—it hurt. Yet, these actions eventually turned things around and ultimately, employees were brought back to their jobs.



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

Development of Bacci Park continues, creating a legacy and recreational destination for all. Identifying and making application for grant monies to address not only infrastructure improvements, but also enhancements to the park, have been a hallmark of this administration. All departments—police, dispatch, fire, service and village hall staff—work every day to maintain the level of care that residents have come to expect. Providing a superior lifestyle for our residents, young, middle and older, continues to be Jack’s trademark—with a childish grin, he’ll quickly state: “We work hard, but...we like to have fun...”

### **The History Of Our Village Hall**

This highly-maintained and revered structure was built in 1935—a major expenditure in the midst of the Great Depression. A bond issue was passed by voters to allow local officials to fund the project at \$135,000 which included the site and construction. The architect designing the building was Fox and Duthie. The successful bidder was Leo Schmidt who also did the plumbing and sewer aspects of the job. Harrington Electrical was approved for electrical work. During the project, it was deemed that part of the land purchased would not be needed and a one-half acre parcel together with the right-of-way to lay and maintain a drain pipe as set forth in a deed from Peter Brown, et al, to the Village of Newburgh Heights, executed February 18, 1905, was advertised for sale, via Resolution 1935-51, passed June 25, 1935.

The most interesting fact about this facility is its timelessness and the obvious thought given to what this structure would be, how it would serve the community and why it would serve well into the future. It is interesting to note that as plans were laid to acquire a site and start construction, the building was referred to as “public hall,” then “village” and “community hall.” The entryway plaque states: Cuyahoga Heights Public Hall.

With just a few renovations over the years, the space serves the community’s needs to this date—a true community center! The village hall planners thought of everything, including a caretaker’s apartment with a living room, small kitchen, bath and a bedroom. The original caretaker was Mr. Al Shatto. Other caretakers were Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Davis, Ted and Dorothy Umerley, Cheryl and Tim Harris, Stanley and Helen Chase, Joe and Ruth Dorris, Joan Unger and Bobby Schuschu. This area has been renovated and currently is used as a small conference room with a kitchenette/lunch area.

In 1978, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required accessibility for all. As a result of this mandate, Cuyahoga Heights responded by constructing an addition on the south side of the building that would house the elevator moving from the lower level to the second story auditorium/meeting room. An exterior heated ramp area provides safe, easy access. With this addition, came extra office space and the health and wellness clinic for residents over 60 years of age. The second story community room has witnessed decades of elected officials’ inaugural celebrations, theatrical presentations, happy and spooky holiday parties, joyful family celebrations, voting and even Mayor Louis Bacci lying-in-state before his burial.

Council still meets in the same room originally designed for that purpose and work sessions are held in the caucus room as originally planned. The mayor’s office relocated to its current position adjacent to the caucus room. The village clerk now uses the original mayor’s office. Interestingly, it has a door opening directly into the council chamber. The reception area is the first office visitor’s see upon entering the building.



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

It also serves as the office of the clerk of courts and administrative assistant to village hall. Of note is that at some point during the 70s or 80s portraits for former mayors Schmidt, Kennedy, Gerdon, Gallitz and Klima were commissioned and painted by local artist, James E. Seward. These portraits can be seen gracing the walls of the council chambers at village hall. In more recent years, the mayors were photographed. During his tenure as mayor, Louis Bacci encouraged a group photograph of each administration together for posterity.

Our mayor's assistant's office has remained in its original locale. It should be noted that both the clerk of mayor's court and the mayor's assistant's offices have huge vaults for safekeeping important documents. Finance is located in the two offices flanking the elevator while the building department occupies the lower level space that once was a police office and jail cell area. Bowling alleys, located in the lower level, were damaged by termite infestation and ultimately removed. The space is now used for smaller events/meetings and is named in honor of former Mayor Ralph Contipelli.

In 2017, the residents voted to change the charter to restructure the village clerk's position and duties within the finance department, recognizing management of a \$15 million budget required steady, sustainable care and guidance. After the affirmative vote and citizen approval, council created the appointed position of chief fiscal officer, (CFO). Angel Hunter Meriwether was immediately named the village's first CFO. She is a critical member of our team at village hall and our first female CFO. Congratulations Angel!

### **Open, Transparent and Welcoming Village Hall**

While writing the text for this book, a former resident shared an old newspaper clipping from the 40s. A 1943 *Cleveland Press* article, entitled: "Howdy, Neighbor, Cuyahoga Heights in Wartime," noted that "the village hall has pleasant offices, a *nursery room*, community auditorium..."

Over the decades, the Cuyahoga Heights Village Hall has been the launching pad for numerous kids heading off to school in the early morning hours. Sylvia Biro would drive young daughter, Barbara, to work with her and later send her off to attend classes across the street at Cuyahoga Heights Elementary School. Ida Nobili would bring her tenant's son, Scott Zenkiewicz, to the village hall and send him on his way across the street to school every morning until he was old enough to be on his own. Eventually, Mayor Louis Bacci welcomed his Clerk Barbara Biro's little baby girl, Becky, to share space in a portable crib in her mom's office from time to time.

As the years moved on, the welcoming attitude remained and Kathy Hunter's kids, April and Eric, came to the hall after school. These days, CFO Angel Meriwether arrives with son, Zander, who goes off to school as did big sister, Kendall, for years. Current Mayor Jack Bacci and CFO Meriwether host an after school study hall with Zander and Lily Anne visiting them and learning first hand how their local government operates—Civics 101.





It is interesting to note, that as plans were laid to acquire a site and start construction, the building was referred to as public hall, then village hall and community hall.





*Protecting Village Hall!*



*Staffers Ida Nobili and Laura Bacci  
with Mayor Louis Bacci in 1978*



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial



## 2017 Memorial Day Ceremony



## Village Hall Veterans Memorial



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

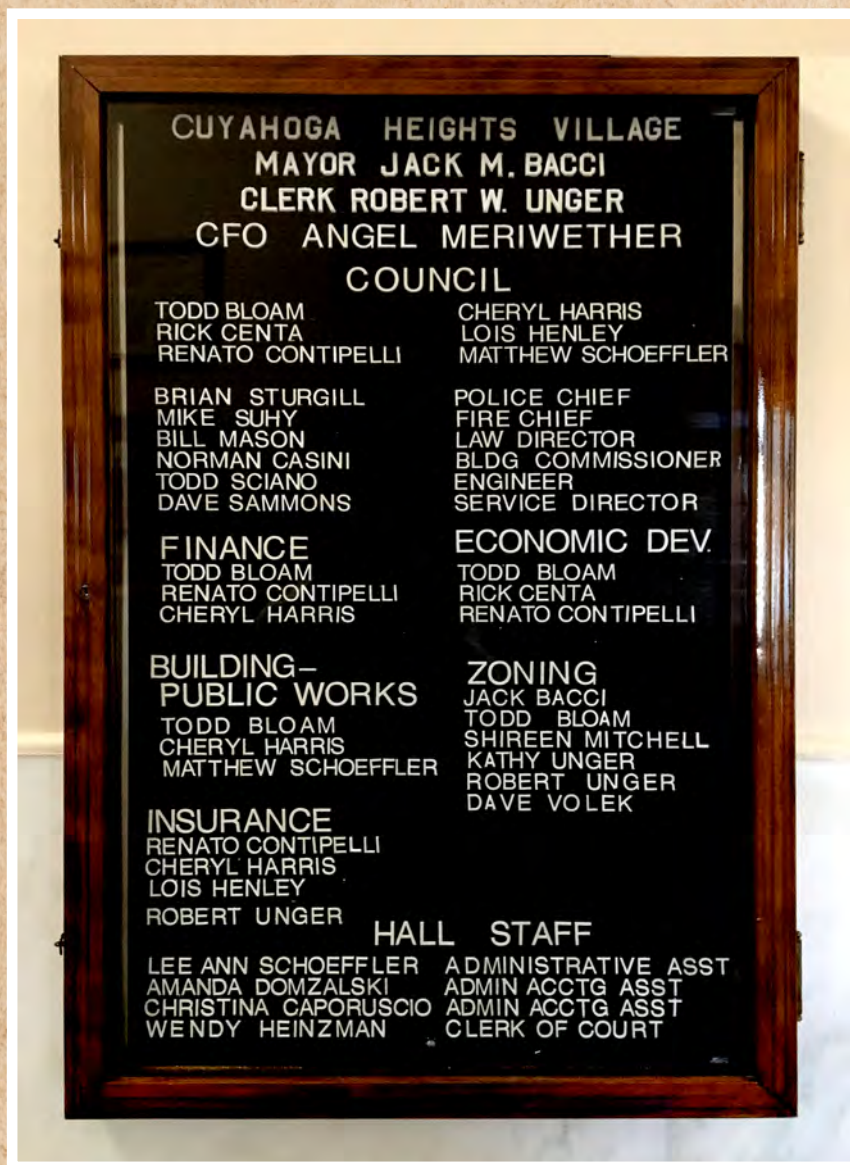


*Mayor Jack Bacci's Business Breakfast*



*Senior Citizens Flu Shot Breakfast*





*2019 Village Hall Directory*





## *Village Hall Staff*

Mayor Bacci firmly believes that no mayor succeeds without the ongoing support and assistance of his staff. Their commitment to excellence and daily enthusiasm is key.

A special thank you goes to the incredible ladies of our village hall staff!

*Left to Right*

**Lee Ann Schab Schoeffler**, Administrative Assistant to the Mayor  
(Daughter of former Treasurer and member of Council Irma Billi Schab)

**Angel Hunter Meriwether**, Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

**Wendy Heinzman**, Clerk of Court and Administrative Assistant to Village Hall

**Christina Pace Caporuscio**, Administrative Accounting Assistant

**Amanda Domzalski**, Administrative Accounting Assistant



## Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

It's often said, that behind every good man—there's a good woman! This was the case in the past and is most certainly true today with village hall and its mayors. A special thanks goes out to all the former support staff members at village hall:

### **Sylvia Casavecchia Biro**

Sylvia Casavecchia Biro, former council member Barb's mom, served Mayors Gerdon, Gallitz, Klima and Lou Bacci. We believe she worked at village hall the years of 1953 to 1978. Sylvia was chief, cook and bottle washer, wearing many hats to get everything done for her mayors.

### **Ida Nobili**

Ida Nobili led the finance department for many years, working with part-time Village Clerk Norbert Chase.

### **Patti Ezzo**

Patti Ezzo worked for many years in payroll. At one point, she also served as our village treasurer.

### **Kathy Snoddy Hunter**

Kathy Snoddy Hunter also assisted in the finance department.

### **Diane Mycoski Nieves**

Diane Mycoski Nieves also worked in the finance department for many years.

### **Gail Adorni Baciak and Laura Bacci Merhaut**

Gail Adorni Baciak and Laura Bacci worked part-time one summer assisting Sylvia Biro with mayor's court documents. Gail later worked in the finance department until retirement. Laura pitched in when Sylvia died in 1978 and later became her dad's left hand serving as his administrative assistant for 14 years. It was at Ida Nobili's counsel and recommendation to then Mayor Lou Bacci that he hire Laura permanently. Mayor Bacci joked that in the first few months of her tenure, Laura lost him many votes because she didn't stretch the rules for residents and saw everything in black and white. It's interesting to note, Laura was probably the only employee ever to be hired at one pay rate and then have it reduced, when a resident complained about her pay to her father. Mayor Bacci also required that she serve in a probationary status for one year before he asked for council's approval to hire her. This was long before there were "nepotism" laws in Ohio. Of course, at times in Cuyahoga Heights, it was extremely difficult to hire anyone who wasn't a relative.

### **Katherine Bacci Unger**

Katherine Bacci Unger served Mayor Louis Bacci as his administrative assistant for 16 years.



# Cuyahoga Heights 2018 Centennial

## Village Hall Stories

Public service at its best: When resident Vince Wesley, an elderly gent could not figure out how to change his quartz watch, as months changed from 30 to 31 days, he visited Mayor Bacci for a true public service assist—the mayor would set the watch up for Mr. Wesley until the next time. “It’s just what you do...” said Lou, laughing.

•

Former council member, treasurer and lifelong resident of the village, Irma Schab, often told the story that an overzealous Plain Dealer newspaper delivery boy had landed her paper on the roof of her home—Jack and a friend grabbed a ladder and retrieved the newspaper, returning it to Mrs. Schab—and, a life in public service began.

•

As a four-year-old, Jack delivered the gavel to his father, Mayor Louis Bacci, in 1972 (see the photo on the mayor portrait pages). That gavel seemed lost after Mayor Lou Bacci’s death. Once found, Jack’s daughter, six-year-old Lily Anne, shyly delivered her grandfather’s gavel to her newly re-elected dad, Mayor Jack Bacci, at his inaugural in 2018.

•

During a contentious town hall meeting regarding the Lee Zmija Christmas display on East 71st Street that was drawing hundreds, if not thousands to the village during the Christmas season, a resident accused the mayor of breaking the law for Zmija because he was a friend. Allegedly, the mayor responded: “...That’s not true, I break the law equally for all of you—I break it for the school when they have an event—I break the law when Toscana has an event...”

## The Legacy of Village Hall

If you think about it, the construction of the Village Hall in 1935 showed a great deal of forethought as it was truly one of the first “community centers” that included: first floor council chambers, municipal offices, custodial living quarters; second floor auditorium, stage, dressing rooms, commercial kitchen, rest rooms, cloak room, projector area for movies; and lower level jail cell, police office, bowling alleys, pool tables and FUN!

Later, when an elevator was added in 1978, additional office space was created to include a diagnostic medical clinic room for residents, age 60 and up.



