



## **2021 ORO VALLEY STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS**

**Mayor Joseph C. Winfield**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Town of Oro Valley's 20<sup>th</sup> annual State of the Town Address. Wow... 20 years. What a milestone! That really speaks to the strength of the partnerships here in our community.

Twenty years ago, Bob Workman and founding members of the Oro Valley Chamber of Commerce had the idea to hold an annual state of the town in Oro Valley. What emerged was a partnership between the Town of Oro Valley and the Chamber that would continue to grow in the years to follow.

This event—which is hosted by the Chamber—is a tremendous undertaking, so it is with sincerest gratitude that I thank Dave Perry, Kristen Sharp and other Chamber staff and board of directors for their tireless work. Please join me in a round of applause for our friends at the Chamber.

I would like to thank the El Conquistador, a Hilton Resort, and General Manager Otton Suarez and resort staff for their outstanding service. The tourism and hospitality industries have been hit particularly hard during COVID, so it is great to be back with each of you enjoying one of the gems of our community.

When looking back, the words that capture what I've experienced as mayor over the past year are gratitude and optimism.

Gratitude for the elected officials who worked together during the most difficult year in recent history to do their best to responsibly serve their constituents.

Gratitude for a community that responded to public health officials and looked out for each other.

Gratitude for Town staff and community leaders who continued to provide the highest caliber of service to our residents, businesses and schools.

Optimism that the fruits of strengthened regional and community relationships would pay dividends in the years to come.

Optimism that despite the challenges, I continue to personally witness the best in people.

Optimism for Oro Valley's future.

Too often, negative news and divisiveness overshadow the good work that is being done right here in our own region and community. My goal today is to share with you a message that is framed by optimism and gratitude, for things big and small, that make living, working and recreating in Oro Valley such a blessing.

Staying optimistic throughout this pandemic has helped us to identify opportunities for overall improvement. I'd like to acknowledge some of the ways this challenge has permanently adjusted the way we do business—for the better. Even difficult times can yield innovation and reasons for gratitude.

We've learned how to connect and communicate in new ways, leveraging technology and being willing to try a different approach. Online opportunities help ensure that everyone has a chance to engage with us. In fact, even though Council has returned to in-person meetings, we've changed our policy for public hearings to include public participation via Zoom. Our newly renovated Council Chambers provides increased seating capacity, larger monitors for better visibility, upgraded lighting and audio/visual systems.

Perhaps the best example of a new way to connect was through the successful OVSafeSteps program, which was an effort to help support our local businesses and promote safe and healthy shopping experiences during the pandemic.

The program, which was funded by money made available through CARES Act dollars, resulted in nearly a million dollars in aid being distributed to more than 200 local businesses in Oro Valley. OVSafeSteps helped develop closer connections between the Town of Oro Valley, the Oro Valley Chamber of Commerce, and local business owners. The program resulted in a robust database of nearly 600 local businesses that allows for faster and more direct communication with them. These efforts led to a new culture of respect between business and local government.

Those new relationships and that culture of respect are the result of personal outreach: phone calls, emails, direct mail and Zoom meetings. Most importantly, we physically visited Oro Valley businesses to meet with owners, managers and staff to discuss their challenges and concerns and formulate actions.

I personally had the opportunity to visit several of our businesses with Dave Perry, as part of OV Safe Steps. On more than one occasion the only person operating the business was the owner, because they are quite literally a sole proprietorship—sometimes not out of choice, but out of necessity. This experience helped me appreciate the sacrifices being made by some of our business owners.

It was always a rewarding experience to make businesses aware of OVSafeSteps and then to receive expressions of appreciation not only for the financial support, but also for the Town genuinely caring. This was especially evident at a meeting organized by the Chamber that included Congressman O'Halleran. About a half dozen small business owners at the meeting expressed gratitude for the assistance provided by the federal government, the Town of Oro Valley, and the Chamber. With heartfelt emotion, one business owner expressed gratitude for grocery gift cards distributed by the Chamber to help their employees in their time of need. What a testimony to how small acts of service make a huge difference in the lives of others.

OVSafeSteps wasn't the only big win during COVID.

The Town's Planning Division received the Arizona Planning Association Public Outreach 2020 award for its work on the Town's General Plan Amendment public outreach efforts. The Division produced informational videos and held Zoom neighborhood meetings to provide community engagement opportunities for residents during a time when in-person meetings were not an option.

Over in Parks and Recreation, staff adapted to COVID-19 restrictions by establishing an online reservation system that helped provide safe recreation programming. The reservation system has been so successful and appreciated by patrons that Parks and Recreation has decided to permanently implement this tool.

Another interesting and optimistic development for the Town has been our Transit services. In Oro Valley, there's been an 86% ridership increase on our Sun Shuttle Dial-a-Ride! Post-COVID transit is breaking ridership records, and with that, bringing staffing challenges. In short—we're trying to recruit more drivers, so if you know of anyone looking for a side-hustle, just visit our website for details!

When looking back at our successes and accomplishments over the past year, I see a common theme: PARTNERSHIP. None of these "wins" would have been possible without the partnership of regional groups and organizations. These partnerships are another reason why I feel so much gratitude for what we've accomplished as well as optimism for what lies ahead.

OVSafeSteps was successful because we have a Town Council, Town staff, and Chamber of Commerce who are dedicated to supporting local businesses. Special thanks to Assistant Town Manager Chris Cornelison who led the OVSafeSteps team, and to Margie Adler who was instrumental in business outreach.

Another great partnership "win" this year is the successful annexation of the 80-acre Westward Look Resort, as well as customized zoning to make way for future development on the property. We have wanted to annex Westward Look for more than 15 years. It was only through partnership with the property owner, resort General Manager Andrew Stegen, and public input from area residents, that the Town was finally able to bring this high-priority annexation effort to fruition.

Yes, the Westward Look annexation is a wonderful addition to the Town; however, the process was not without its challenges, and I commend everyone who had a role in the outcome. As with any large endeavor, there are pros and cons. I acknowledge that some of the adjacent homeowners don't support the proposed site plans included in the annexation. But there are many who do. In fact, the night Council approved the annexation, I received an email that said:

"Mayor Winfield, I wanted to personally thank you for allowing tonight's Oro Valley Town Council meeting to go as well as it did. I really appreciated the increased building setbacks in Concept Plan B, moving the dumpster away from our backyards and the good discussion that took place with regard to mixing and matching between the Westward Look Resort development plan options."

We may not always be able to meet everyone's wishes all of the time, but when we collaborate and listen to one another, we are able to find compromise. And I am grateful for that.

What else am I grateful for this year?

The Arizona Chapter of the American Public Works Association named Oro Valley winner of the 2021 Project of the Year for its project, *La Cholla Boulevard: Overton Road to Tangerine Road*. The project was completed on time and slightly under budget. The improvements provide traffic capacity and all-weather crossings, improve user safety and operations, and increase mobility. It also completes a vital connection between two other Regional Transportation Authority projects.

And as you all have noticed, thanks to a multi-year partnership between the Town and the Arizona Department of Transportation, Oracle Road was recently repaved, from Magee to Calle Concordia. I'm seeing a lot more smiles driving down Oracle Road now! ADOT has indicated that the remaining section of Oracle Road, from Calle Concordia to Tangerine Road, will be re-paved sometime next year.

This year, we also launched a new effort that I'm particularly passionate about.

During the pandemic, litter along our roadways became a growing eyesore. So I worked with Town staff to address the problem, and as a result, the Keep OV Beautiful campaign was born. While the Town already has beautification programs like Adopt-A-Road and Adopt-A-Trail, I wanted to create an opportunity where groups could come together on a selected day to make a difference in the community.

One of the first projects was a pick-up event along Oracle Road that stretched from Suffolk Drive to Rancho Vistoso Blvd. About 200 volunteers picked up approximately 200 large bags of litter that day. It was a great event that was a catalyst for re-branding and re-launching our other volunteer beautification opportunities.

While we're on the topic of community beautification, Oro Valley—in partnership with the Southern Arizona Arts and Cultural Alliance, Visit Tucson and the Oro Valley Chamber—commissioned our first-ever public mural, and it was finished just last month! Artist Ashley White was selected based on her concept of "Dream it, then do it," which included collecting the hopes and dreams of Oro Valley residents of all ages, and painting them into the background of the mural. More than 85 people submitted their dreams to be added to the mural. You can't see those details in this photo, so that means you need to go see it in person! It's located at James D. Kriegh Park on the north side of the Aquatic Center.

To have achieved all these things in such a challenging year is reason for both gratitude AND optimism for what is to come! And there is a lot on the horizon, especially now that we have completed the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and Council has recently approved expanded use of the half-cent sales tax as well as \$25 million in low interest bond financing for park improvements and maintenance. The annual premium of the \$25 million recreation bond will be paid largely through the reduction in the golf subsidy, and no property or sales tax increases will be required.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan was completed and presented to Town Council in May 2021. It was the culmination of an 18-month process and included two phases – a Needs Assessment, which drew heavily from community input, and a Comprehensive Master Plan.

With the Master Plan, Council set a list of priority projects that will be built with the bond financing. These include the build-out of Naranja Park, adding several important connections to the Town's shared-use path system, and completing needed exterior upgrades at the Community Center. Several of these improvements are in the process of going out to bid now. In the next few years, Oro Valley residents and visitors will have additional facilities for recreation that will meet the needs of our area's growing population.

To tell you a little more about what we have planned, I'll kick it over to our eternally optimistic Parks and Recreation Director Kristy Diaz-Trahan!

**VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkOQ3RmC5bo>

Thank you, Kristy! And I'd like to point out that while these exciting new projects are unfolding, the Town will continue maintaining the high standards that have consistently been a hallmark of the Town's Parks and Recreation services.

On top of all that great news, golf has remained strong, adding to the overall success of Parks and Recreation. The Town entered into a new golf management service agreement with Indigo Golf Partners, and after the first year of partnership, we have exceeded performance projections for the 36 holes of El Conquistador Golf.

In the past twelve months, membership has increased by 16%, and public play has increased by 46% thanks in part to Indigo making more tee times available, renewed interest in outdoor recreation and the launch of the El Conquistador Golf mobile app. I would like to thank Indigo Golf Partners General Manager Bernie Eaton and Indigo staff for their outstanding efforts!

Here at the Pusch Ridge 9-hole course, the Town approved a funding plan for the next three years, thanks in part to the partnership of three HOA groups. November 1<sup>st</sup> is our target date for re-opening, and we're on track and ready to go!

Lastly, one of the major accomplishments this past year—and something we know our residents are incredibly grateful for—was the installation of an ADA accessible playground at Naranja Park. And folks, playgrounds these days are much cooler than when we were kids. And I'll let you in on a secret: at the ribbon cutting, Council decided we should probably test out the equipment to make sure it's safe... for the kids! I believe we've even got some video of that...

**VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=src2SGrQg0A>

Like I said... we did it for the kids!

It has been gratifying to visit Naranja Park and watch children and their families utilizing the playground and other amenities. During one of my visits, I spoke to a mother from Marana who said Naranja Park was her favorite! She told me how much she loved to bring her daughter to the playground and that the mountain views were spectacular. She also shared with me that she belongs to an adult soccer league and that the Naranja fields were the best in the area. I appreciated her comments because I was visiting the park prompted by a complaint about field conditions, and I wanted to see them for myself. This is another great example of the value in seeking out different perspectives on any given issue.

The decision to continue investing in our parks and recreation is a real indication of an optimistic outlook. Quality of life continues to be a driving force behind an individual's or family's decision to move here or a business owner's decision to set up shop here. In addition to great parks, quality of life is also defined by public safety, and the Oro Valley Police Department continues to excel under the leadership of Chief Kara Riley.

In fact, when I meet residents for the first time, I will often ask them what led them to move to Oro Valley. Many of the responses are tied to Oro Valley being a safe place to live.

When it comes to public safety, success isn't just determined by crime stats, although that is important; success is also measured by the way in which our police officers serve the community. This is an area where OVPD continues to go above and beyond.

One evening, I was driving south on Oracle Road. I was stopped at an intersection when my car stalled. When I tried to start it there was no response. I got out to investigate the problem and almost immediately an Oro Valley police officer drove up behind me, and soon after that a second officer arrived. They helped me get my car safely off the road and offered additional assistance. I've heard similar stories like this from others. The treatment I received is the same service they would have provided to anyone.

Our culture of safety here in Oro Valley is unique. So it's been especially difficult to see the level of scrutiny that our public safety officers have faced on a national level in recent years. But amid that scrutiny, the Oro Valley

Police Department has risen to the challenge and continued providing outstanding services that make the community safer.

More than a dozen OVPD officers are credited with saving 11 lives this past year through CPR, Narcan, first-aid and de-escalation. In an effort to expand the ways in which residents can reach out for assistance, OVPD has launched a "Text-to-911" program.

And in response to the national attention regarding how police departments respond to mental health calls, OVPD has implemented a full-time Mental Health Support Team officer in an effort to assist with the mental health needs in our area.

Sometimes I'm asked, "What keeps you awake at night?" The first thing that comes to my mind is the safety of our police officers. Before serving as mayor, I didn't give a lot of thought to seeing someone pulled over by the police. Now, I immediately think about the officer's safety. And it's more than just their physical safety. It's also their mental and emotional safety that occupies my thoughts.

That's why I'm proud to report that OVPD also invests in the wellness of our officers through a new Officer Wellness Program that focuses on three pillars of wellness: fitness, mental health and nutrition.

Coincidentally, today is National First Responders Day, so please join me in giving a hand to the Oro Valley Police Department, Golder Ranch Fire District, Northwest Fire, and all those who serve on the front lines in our community.

In addition to great parks and public safety, there are other factors to consider when a family or business is deciding to move to Oro Valley, such as quality of life, building availability, educational opportunities and the like.

And there's no-one better qualified to discuss what all these assets mean to the local business community than Chamber President and CEO Dave Perry. I've invited him to share his thoughts on the exciting things happening at Roche Tissue Diagnostics and at the new University of Arizona Veterinary School here in Oro Valley.

**VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBiuee1yefs>

Thank you, Dave.

Those are just two of the many success stories we have to tell here in Oro Valley. Throughout the pandemic, our Community and Economic Development Department was hard at work processing permits, helping new businesses open, and attracting prospective employers. In fact, they issued more than 2,600 permits this past year, which represents more than \$250 million in new construction.

Medical services in Oro Valley grew with the opening of AZ Blood and Cancer Specialists, TMC One, A Wise Move Physical Therapy and Pilates, Sol Physical Therapy, AZ MediQuip and Greenspring Inspire Medical Aesthetics. Also, Lux Dermatology and The Back Alley are currently under construction and coming soon!

Fitness offerings expanded as we welcomed Pure Lit Studios, F45 Fitness, Spenga and Desert Dance Collective Studio.

In the retail sector, Ashley Home Store, Brooklyn Bedding, Five Below and Sally Beauty Supply opened storefronts in Oro Valley. Icon Electric Vehicles is under construction.

Commerce Bank, Oppenheimer and Company and Soss Investments LLC expanded our financial institutions.

And we can't forget about the Town's excellent dining scene with new choices like Salted Pig BBQ, Peachwave, Seis Kitchen, Noodleholics, Wow Wow Lemonade Stand, Jersey Mike's, Mali Thai, Denny's, Tuk Tuk Thai and The Landing.

We also welcomed neighborhood development, to include Ironwood Estates and Tranquilo at Rancho Vistoso by Pulte, Capella by Richmond American and Saguaro Viejos East by Meritage.

Over the past year, the Community and Economic Development Department took action to increase the Town's competitiveness to attract quality employers through targeted zoning code amendments. Improvements include expedited reviews and approvals as well as increasing the amount of land available to quality employers.

Lastly, in an effort to better showcase the quality of life in Oro Valley and the key industries that are doing business in the Town, staff is creating a new website to foster business attraction. The site will also consolidate useful information for business owners and site selectors. The launch is scheduled for April 2022.

As I previously mentioned, the two words that came to mind for this year's speech were gratitude and optimism, and I've spent most of our time today talking about gratitude for successes and partnerships. So let me share a few things with you that make me feel very optimistic about Oro Valley's future and continued path of success.

For example: our Finance Department, with Council support, literally saved us millions this year. How? Through sound fiscal management, the department kept the Town's credit rating at a very strong AA+, while also putting together a plan to fully fund our Public Safety Personnel Retirement System's unfunded liability. That plan includes the issuance of \$17.6 million of pension obligation bonds and a \$10 million payment from reserves, both of which saved us in excess of \$9 million. An additional \$250 thousand was saved when the department refinanced our Water Utility debt.

The department's hard work did not go unnoticed. I'm proud to announce that we were the recipient of three national awards from the Government Finance Officers' Association, including: the Certificate of Achievement Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting; the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award; and the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting.

That's just cause for optimism.

Here in the Southwest, water supply is rarely a source of optimism, especially as the Colorado River Basin continues to experience drought, triggering the first-ever Tier 1 shortages, which will begin in 2022. Although this will not impact Oro Valley's Central Arizona Project water supply, it is still a sobering reminder of this finite resource, and a confirmation of our commitment to long-term water conservation. In fact, I would say that Oro Valley's management of its water portfolio is reason for optimism.

Town Council recently adopted water code amendments that provide a better understanding of how water resources should be utilized in case future water shortages or temporary water system outages limit the Water Utility's ability to meet consumption demands.

Moving forward, the Utility plans to increase its capability to deliver Central Arizona Project water supplies to the community by more than 150 percent with the commissioning of the Northwest Recharge, Recovery and Delivery system in 2024.

Additionally, Water Utility customers play an important role in conservation when they participate in WaterSmart—our web-based conservation and leak detection program.

As I bring things to a close, I would like to take a moment to recognize Town staff. Our employees are dedicated to public service. They have worked tirelessly to ensure services were uninterrupted even during one of the most challenging times in recent history. While Council is responsible for determining priorities, setting policy and providing direction, it is staff, led by Town Manager Mary Jacobs, who execute our vision and provide critical services to our community every day. Ms. Jacobs and all members of Town staff, please stand so we can recognize you.

Thank you.

I would also like to recognize my fellow councilmembers. This council has faced many challenges this year. Each of us is passionate about Oro Valley, and we are working to ensure Oro Valley remains a special place. It is with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge my fellow councilmembers. Please join me in recognizing them: Vice Mayor Melanie Barrett and Councilmembers Tim Bohlen, Dr. Harry “Mo” Greene, Joyce Jones-Ivey, Josh Nicolson and Steve Solomon. Thank you for your service and dedication.

Oro Valley is a special place where residents, businesses and public servants have worked together to strengthen our town during the worst public health crisis in our lifetimes. And for that, I am most grateful.

As we look to the future, I am optimistic that together we can grow Oro Valley and support the things that make our town special: outstanding public safety, strong fiscal management, recreational opportunities for our residents, and preservation of our mountain views and open spaces for all to enjoy.

I invite everyone here today to continue working together to keep Oro Valley an exceptional place to live, learn, work and play!

Thank you.