

Hello, Residents. I can hardly believe it is already 2025.

These years seem to fly by in a whirlwind, but we have been hard at work behind the scenes here at the Village of East Alton to improve our village month-by-month and year-by-year for the benefit of our residents.

First and foremost, I am very excited for the negotiations with Wieland Group, one of our largest industrial partners, over the past two years, give or take. These negotiations were instrumental in securing Wieland to announce a \$500 million-dollar investment into the Village of East Alton. This investment is keeping Wieland in East Alton, and Wieland committed to the Village over the next 100 years! Wieland is constructing new buildings with modern equipment, and will also modernize the existing facility to meet Wieland's growing needs in the future.

With the addition to Wieland, infrastructure within the Village also needs upgraded to meet the needs of Wieland, while also continuing to meet the needs of our customers without affect. The Village was able to secure grant funding in the amounts of \$5 million-dollars (from our Senators Richard "Dick" Durbin and Tammy Duckworth), as well as a \$1.5 million-dollar grant (from the closing of the old power plant), enabling the Village to improve on the existing water plant. East Alton is fortunate to have the **second lowest water rates in Southern Illinois**. These grants will help the Village accomplish the upgrades to the water plant, while also maintaining low water rates for our residents and businesses.

Not too long ago, we were able to spend over a million dollars to re-surface Airline Drive, all thanks to federal, state, and local grants and funding, and looking forward, another major re-surfacing project is set to begin for St. Louis Avenue at the end of 2025 or beginning of 2026. This project will run from Cotter Street to Main Street. The oil and chip program will also be running again, as it has the last three years, hitting different locations within the Village each year. Please check the road program article located on PAGE ?? within this newsletter for more information.

One of the first things I wanted to address when I became Mayor was public safety, and I am proud to say the improvement within the police department since 2021 has been significant. Starting with only 10 full-time officers in 2021, the Village has been able to add three more full-time officers, bringing the full-time officer amount to 13 – a number we had not seen in East Alton since 1997! One of these officers was able to be added thanks to the federal COPS grant.

Due to the increase in staff at the police department, they have had the numbers to be more proactive when it comes to dealing with crime, including drug offenses. Last year alone, the department had 1,900 different individuals charged with myriad criminal offenses. This number in 2021 was only 900 arrested and charged. Over the last four year, the police department has made 313 arrests for possession of controlled substances, 14 arrests for fentanyl trafficking, 185 methamphetamine arrests, 14 methamphetamine trafficking arrests, and 11 cannabis trafficking arrests. Seized during these arrests: three pounds of methamphetamine, more than 600 capsules of fentanyl, more than six ounces of cocaine, and more than 10 pounds of cannabis. Along with these numbers, they seized \$27,381.00 in currency, two vehicles, two houses, and six weapons. This means all of this is now off of the streets of East Alton, keeping the citizens safer.

In addition to the arrests, we were able to secure over \$295,000.00 in grant funding, which has been used to purchase body cameras for all police officers. A new "live scan" fingerprint system has been

added, as well as a major overhaul within the department's building itself with new construction for handicap restrooms and, most importantly for the safety of the officers, a new "sally port" system with electronic gate at the back of the building.

The fire department has also received funding with the help of fire personnel in the amount of \$260,662.00 to purchase new equipment. Additional grant funding was used to obtain eight new AED (automated external defibrillators) which will be distributed throughout buildings with the Village. The board also authorized the purchase of a used fire truck from the City of Alton to be used as a reserve fire truck, which was very much needed.

I also want to remind all of our citizens of the events coming up this year. Besides the Soap Box Festival and the Easter egg hunts held at the Keasler, there were not many other family-oriented events hosted by the Village. I raised my family here, just as many of you are raising your families here also, and events for children are important within our community. The two biggest events added are the "Back to School" program, started five years ago, and the "Night of Christmas" started four years ago. "Back to School" is giving away exclusively brand-new items now, serving over 200 East Alton students with items needed to begin a new year at school. "Night of Christmas" serves around 400 total participants, with 250 being children, who get to visit with Santa and pick out a new toy, while enjoying chili and hot chocolate and other goodies. I am also hoping to bring back the Summer Day camp for kids this summer, as well as "Kids to Park" day this May.

Besides the kids' events, we were able to add the Food Truck Festival in the fall, which grew quite a bit from the first year to this past year, as well as improvements to the senior program within the Village. Seniors, make sure to check out PAGE ?? for more information on the events. With free monthly breakfasts and special events like the Easter luncheon, Summer Country Hoe Down, Halloween Luncheon, Thanksgiving Luncheon, and Christmas Luncheon (for only \$7 a person), you do NOT want to miss out!

It is my honor to be your Mayor and to serve the Village of East Alton. Looking forward to continuing to do so.

Mayor Darren Carlton