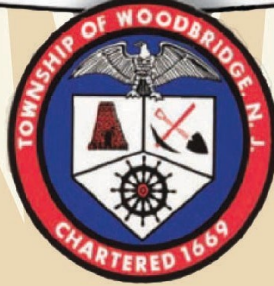


Chartered 1669



Historic Tour of
WOODBIDGE

Volume XVII

A Parade of Mayors Vol. II

Compiled by the
Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

First Edition – 2026



Building upon the stories and leadership legacies introduced in Woodbridge Township: A Parade of Mayors Vol. I, this second volume of our town's Mayors Brochure continues the journey through our Township's civic history. Here, we highlight the next chapter of dedicated public servants whose vision, resilience, and commitment shaped our town through times of growth and change. As we turn the page from the foundations laid by earlier leaders, Woodbridge Township: A Parade of Mayors Vol. II invites readers to explore the evolving challenges, achievements, and personalities that have guided Woodbridge Township toward the vibrant community it is today.

**MAYOR RALPH P. BARONE
(1967-1971)**



Before becoming mayor in the spring of 1967, Ralph P. Barone was a dedicated public servant—serving on the Woodbridge Township Board of Education, two years as Councilman-at-Large, and five years as Councilman. Elected to his first full mayoral term in November 1967, Mayor Barone ushered in a transformative era for Woodbridge.

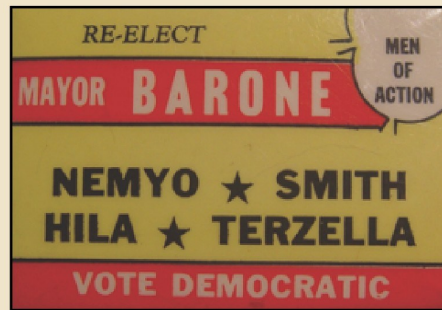
During his administration, Woodbridge experienced unprecedented industrial growth. Through innovative use of the Free School Lands, he attracted major industries such as Eastern Airlines, Concord Electronics, Hess, Dynadyne Inc., Pilot Chemical, American Merchandising Corporation, and Alcan Aluminum. These major developments generated millions in taxable revenue and firmly positioned Woodbridge as a commercial hub. Notably, Mayor Barone also oversaw the

dedication of the Metropark Train Station in Iselin—bringing high-speed rail access to the Township.

Cultural and community development thrived as well. His tenure saw the opening of two major theaters—the Walter Reade Woodbridge Theater on Route 35 and the Fox Theater on Route 1. A new 1,500-seat St. James Roman Catholic Church was built, replacing its 89-year-old predecessor. The Avenel Presbyterian Church opened its doors, and the First Congregational Church of Woodbridge was dedicated.

In 1968, Mayor Barone authorized a special census to boost state education aid—resulting in an additional \$27 per pupil. The Township also adopted a new municipal seal under his leadership. The design—featuring an eagle for strength, a kiln for the nineteenth century clay industry, a pick and shovel for agriculture, and a wheel for commerce—symbolized the Township's rich heritage. The outer circle of the seal proudly read: "Township of Woodbridge, NJ, Chartered 1669."

Mayor Barone's first term culminated with the Township's Tercentenary Celebration in 1969. Marking 300 years as New Jersey's oldest Township, the festivities peaked with Mayor Barone and his family arriving by stagecoach to a grand reception at St. Anthony's Auditorium in Port Reading.



Barone Campaign Button

Reelected in 1969, Mayor Barone continued his ambitious agenda. He transformed former clay pits—once valued at \$3,000 per acre—into the site of the Woodbridge Center Shopping Mall that opened in 1971, one of the state's most exciting commercial projects, with its land value soaring to \$125,000.

His second term also introduced a comprehensive storm drainage plan, effectively ending flooding in central Woodbridge and surrounding areas. As his term concluded, he called attention to the pressing need for a modern solid waste treatment solution.

After two impactful terms, Mayor Ralph P. Barone continued his service to the Township as Director of Public Works—leaving a legacy of growth, modernization, and civic pride.

**MAYOR JOHN J. CASSIDY
(1971-1979)**



John J. Cassidy, a lifelong resident of Woodbridge Township, was elected mayor in 1971 on the Republican ticket, defeating incumbent Mayor Barone. Educated in the Woodbridge Public School System and a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, Mayor Cassidy was deeply engaged in community life. He was an active member of the American Legion, the Knights of Columbus Council #857, and the American Irish Association.

During his eight-year tenure, Mayor Cassidy led a period of significant growth and revitalization throughout the Township. His administration saw the completion of the Woodbridge Center Office Complex and the expansion of the Woodbridge Center Shopping Mall. Building upon earlier efforts, he continued to address long-standing flood control challenges by securing federal funding to bring relief to flood-prone areas across the Township.

Mayor Cassidy was reelected in 1973 and again in 1975. His strong fiscal management enabled him to stabilize the municipal portion of property taxes, even during economically tight times. He creatively transformed the old Township Incinerator on Main Street into a Township boxing and weightlifting facility, providing new recreational opportunities for residents. In 1975, his vision led to the development of the Woodbridge Township Marina in Sewaren. Throughout his terms, he prioritized recreational development, resulting in the addition of eighteen new tennis courts and eight basketball courts with lighting, as well as the creation of the Township's first Annual Mayor's Tennis Tournament.

A strong supporter of civic tradition and cultural enrichment, Mayor Cassidy worked with the American Irish Association to organize Woodbridge's first St. Patrick's Day Parade—now a cherished community tradition. He also established the Meals-On-Wheels program and Senior Citizen

Transportation services. He also led the construction of a new senior center on Rahway Avenue, later dedicated to former Mayor Frederick Adams.

His passion for the arts was evident through his leadership in establishing the Baron Cultural Arts program in 1977. Thanks to his advocacy, the 100-year-old historic Baron Arts Center was officially recognized on both the State and Federal Registers of Historic Places.



The Barron Arts Center

Following his reelection to a fourth term in 1977, Mayor Cassidy launched the “Action Now” hotline, a 24-hour service providing residents with direct access to Township government. He also modernized police headquarters by installing new computer systems that integrated with the New Jersey State Police, enhancing law enforcement capabilities. As a result, the FBI recognized Woodbridge Township as the “Safest Community in the United States,” based on incidents of violent and high-fear crimes per 100,000 residents.

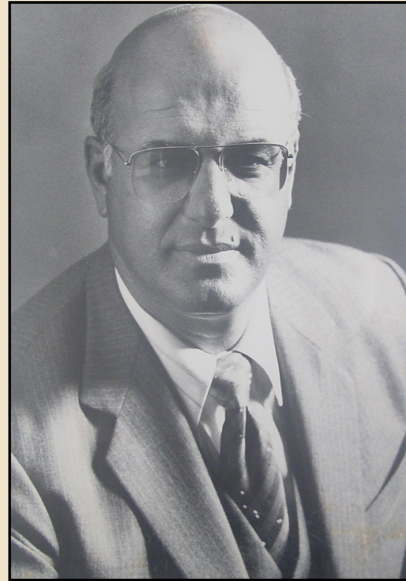
Throughout his administration, Mayor Cassidy made numerous significant appointments, including Joseph A. Dambach as Municipal Judge, John Redmond as the Township’s first full-time Tax Assessor, Walter Neff as Assistant Tax Assessor, Alan Rockoff as Law Director, and Richard Lapinski as Director of Planning and Development.

Mayor Cassidy also stood at the forefront of environmental advocacy. He led legal opposition against the proposed Distragas Liquefied Natural Gas facility on Staten Island and filed an injunction against New York City for pollution affecting the Sewaren shoreline. The resulting investigation uncovered hazardous waste and hospital refuse, ultimately leading to a full settlement from New York City to fund the cleanup. His efforts also contributed to the adoption of a regional ordinance requiring ships to use containment booms to prevent oil spills while loading and unloading.

Mayor John J. Cassidy’s dedication, leadership, and unwavering commit-

ment to the residents of Woodbridge left a lasting legacy of progress, safety, and civic pride. His administration shaped a stronger, more vibrant Township that continues to benefit from the foundation he built.

**MAYOR JOSEPH DeMARINO
(1980-1983)**



Joseph DeMarino was elected Mayor of Woodbridge Township in 1979 defeating incumbent Mayor Cassidy (Independent) and Republican Councilman Philip Cerria, bringing with him nearly two decades of public service. His career began in 1960 as a police officer, followed by his role as Senior Defense Investigator at the New Brunswick Prosecutor’s Office. Prior to his mayoral election, he served as Middlesex County Sheriff.

His campaign centered on the need for full-time leadership after eight years under a part-time mayor. DeMarino stepped into office as a full-time mayor, and backed by a 7-2 council vote, he was granted a full-time salary to match his commitment.

As mayor, DeMarino championed initiatives that enriched the lives of Woodbridge senior residents. He launched Evergreen, a recreation program dedicated to senior citizens, and oversaw the development of the Senior Citizen Building on Inman Avenue in Colonia.

Under his leadership, plans were initiated for a Township park at Sewaren Peninsula—later named Alvin P. Williams Park in honor of a Woodbridge police officer who tragically lost his life while attempting to rescue two children being carried away by flood waters.

Mayor DeMarino secured 25 acres of land through negotiations with County Freeholders, paving the way for the construction of a Fire Academy and a new police training range in Keasby.

DeMarino secured a \$600,000 grant to address flooding along the South Branch of the Rahway River, protecting homes and businesses from recurring water damage. He also obtained a \$20,000 grant to begin design work on the Sewaren Marina Park, enhancing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Committed to public safety, he served on the committee that advanced the bond issue to reconstruct the Green Street Circle, a vital project aimed at reducing traffic accidents and fatalities at the intersection.

In 1980, nearly 70% of Woodbridge’s undeveloped land was classified as wetlands—limiting development and economic expansion. Mayor DeMarino led a successful reassessment with the Federal EPA, reducing that designation to just 7%. This pivotal change opened the door for new businesses, increased job opportunities, and boosted local tax revenue.

The year 1983 brought financial strain to municipalities across New Jersey. Due to a statewide budget deficit, Woodbridge lost \$3 million in gross utility tax revenue—funds withheld by the State to balance its own books. Mayor DeMarino faced this challenge head-on, implementing necessary measures to stabilize the Township’s finances, including difficult but essential tax adjustments to maintain services and operations.

In the final chapter of his term, DeMarino led a successful campaign against the refilling of Liquid Natural Gas tanks on Staten Island—an environmental threat to the Arthur Kill. Alongside Planning Director Richard E. Lapinski and Law Director Alfred Russo, he presented the Township’s case before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C., resulting in the withdrawal of the application.



DeMarino Campaign Button

Though his bid for reelection in 1983 was unsuccessful, Joseph DeMarino continued his commitment to public service as Middlesex County’s Traffic Safety Coordinator.

**MAYOR PHILIP CERRIA
(1984-1987)**



Philip Cerria was elected Mayor of Woodbridge Township in November 1983, defeating incumbent Mayor Joseph DeMarino. Prior to his election, Cerria served on the Town Council from 1974 to 1983. As the sole Republican on the nine-member, Democrat-controlled council, he successfully sponsored several impactful ordinances, including:

- Prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages on public property
- Mandating smoke detectors in all apartments and single-family homes prior to resale
- Establishing pet waste disposal regulations in public areas (commonly known as the "Pooper Scooper" Law)

One of Mayor Cerria's first initiatives was to transition the mayoral role back to a part-time position.

Fulfilling a key campaign promise, Cerria led efforts to rezone multi-family areas into single-family zones, curbing the development of apartments and condominiums. This move aligned with his "Woodbridge Township Tomorrow" vision—steering the community toward a more suburban character.

Reflecting a strong commitment to suburban living, Mayor Cerria championed several key initiatives to enrich a family-friendly atmosphere. These included the construction of a brand-new Little League Baseball field, the launch of a Youth Center at School #6, and the creation of the Iselin Athletic Basketball League—each designed to foster community spirit, active lifestyles, and opportunities for young people to thrive.

Phil Cerria formed the Mayor's Advisory Commission, which organized the 60th Anniversary celebration of the Municipal Building on June 14, 1984.

To enhance public safety, Mayor Cerria appointed Chief Anthony O'Brien as Director of Police. Under his leadership, the department expanded residential patrols, introduced steady shifts, deployed walking patrol officers,

and strengthened the Narcotics Division.

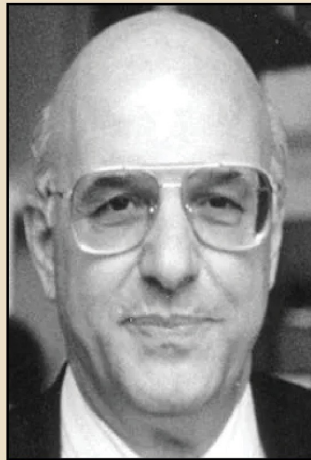
Woodbridge also became the first municipality in New Jersey to appoint a medical professional as Director of Health & Welfare. Along with Dr. Edward Rittweger, who was appointed to this new position, Cerria reorganized the Health Department into Human Services, launching senior nutrition programs at Evergreen and broadening community wellness efforts.



Cerria Campaign Button

In the 1987 election, Cerria faced a rematch with former Mayor Joseph DeMarino, who reclaimed the office of Woodbridge Mayor.

**MAYOR JOSEPH DeMARINO
(1988-1991)**



Joseph DeMarino returned for his second term as Mayor of Woodbridge Township, seamlessly continuing the work he began four years earlier. With unwavering dedication, he committed himself fully to the role, restoring the position of Mayor to a true full-time responsibility and reaffirming his focus on serving the community.

During his second term, Mayor Joseph DeMarino saw several landmark initiatives come to life. The vision he began in his first term transforming the Sewaren Peninsula was realized with the dedication of Alvin P. Williams Park,

a vibrant marina and recreation space for the Township.

He also played a pivotal role in opening St. Joseph's Home for the Elderly, made possible through a successful fundraising campaign that financed a \$2 million annex for the Strawberry Hill Home.

A major focus of his administration was infrastructure. Mayor DeMarino spearheaded a \$40 million sewer improvement project, working closely with Public Works Commissioner Bob Molnar to modernize the Township's facilities. Together, they oversaw the cleanup of long-standing dump sites in Keasby and Sewaren and upgraded the aging municipal dump, ensuring a cleaner, healthier environment for residents.

**MAYOR JAMES MCGREEVEY
(1992-2001)**



The Democratic Party turned to a fresh face—James McGreevey, a rising political figure, and newly elected NJ State Assemblyman. McGreevey was nominated for Mayor and, despite DeMarino's returning to the race as an Independent after his acquittal following a 1991 indictment, McGreevey emerged victorious in a competitive four-way election. Although the Democratic Party lost control of the Town Council, McGreevey made history as Woodbridge Township's youngest Mayor at age 34.



McGreevey Mayoral Ball Button

From the outset, Mayor McGreevey focused on “restoring pride and integrity” to local government. He initiated a comprehensive financial review of the Township and was soon appointed to the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Healthcare Commission, where he tackled the growing crisis of healthcare affordability. His first term saw bold fiscal reforms, including the elimination of 70 municipal jobs and the issuance of \$35 million in bonds to close a \$24 million budget gap. He also led the restoration of the Township’s 67-year-old town hall.

In 1993, McGreevey announced his candidacy for State Senate in New Jersey’s 19th Legislative District. Despite criticism over his desire to serve simultaneously as Mayor and Senator, he won the seat. A majority of the Town Council proposed a Township ordinance to cut McGreevey’s mayoral salary upon serving both roles, but he was able to retain his mayoral salary under state ordinance, which classified the Senate role as a part-time position and entitled to maintain a full-time job without any loss of pay.

McGreevey was reelected Mayor in 1995 by a 2-to-1 margin. His second term was marked by a zero-tax increase, expansion of the police force, reopening of two library branches, and the digitization of public records. In 1997, he accepted the Democratic nomination for Governor of New Jersey. Though narrowly defeated by incumbent Christie Whitman, McGreevey remained committed to Woodbridge, opening a senior home in Iselin, revitalizing Fords Park, and continuing crime reduction efforts that led to a 40% drop since 1990.

In 1999, McGreevey secured a third term as Mayor. He prioritized educational technology, launching a township-wide computer upgrade that connected every classroom to the library’s internet server. Under his leadership, Woodbridge entered the new millennium with major developments, including the revitalization of the Sewaren Peninsula, new commercial growth along Routes 1 & 9, and the opening of the Woodbridge Community Center and skating rink.

In 2001, McGreevey once again pursued the governorship. Building on his record of achievement and public service, he won decisively. In January 2002, James McGreevey stepped down as Mayor to become the 51st Governor of New Jersey—leaving behind a legacy of innovation, fiscal responsibility, and community revitalization in Woodbridge Township.

MAYOR BRENDA VELASCO (JANUARY 2002)



On January 2, 2002, Town Council President Brenda Velasco made history as the first female mayor of Woodbridge Township, stepping in to fill the role until a successor was chosen for the unexpired term of Mayor James McGreevey.

MAYOR FRANK G. PELZMAN (2002-2006)



The Town Council unanimously appointed longtime Third Ward Councilman and Avenel resident Frank Pelzman to serve as interim Mayor. On January 17, 2002, Pelzman was officially sworn in at Woodbridge Middle School—where he attended High School—marking the beginning of a transformative era for the Township.

Throughout 2002, Mayor Pelzman and the Democratic Town Council continued the fiscal and development initiatives of the previous administration. Running unopposed in the November election, he completed the remainder of the four-year term.

In 2003, Mayor Pelzman completed his first full elected year in office with a zero municipal tax increase and a \$3 million reduction in Township debt. He pledged closer collaboration with the Board of Education and began revitalizing the community with major projects, including the 100,000-square-foot Gaylans Facility and the conversion of the former Caldor store on Route 35 into a World Class ShopRite supermarket. Municipal

departments saw significant upgrades in computer technology.

Pelzman also spearheaded an ambitious infrastructure program, repairing over 250 miles of roads and upgrading 400 miles of sewer and storm drains. Key improvements included the Route 1 & 9 merger, Woodbridge Center Drive and Main Street overpass, and New Brunswick Avenue in the Fords/Hopelawn area.



Reelected in November 2003, Mayor Pelzman secured state and federal grants to enhance the Sewaren waterfront and approved a landmark 3.2 million-square-foot warehouse off Port Reading Avenue—Woodbridge’s largest development project to date, projected to generate \$3 million in annual tax revenue.

In 2004, the Township invested \$1 million in public works equipment and added 13 new police officers. Over the first three years of his administration, Pelzman reduced Township debt by \$5.5 million and introduced a pay-to-play ordinance to strengthen ethical standards in local government.

Working alongside State Senator Joseph Vitale, Mayor Pelzman advocated for tougher sex offender notification laws and equipped first responders with advanced truck radio communication systems. By 2006, Township debt had been reduced by \$10 million, and crime had dropped by 12% since Pelzman took office.

At the end of 2005, the Woodbridge Township Historical Preservation Commission (HPT) had been inactive since its chairperson passed away the prior year. Mayor Pelzman worked to reinstate the HPC to a working commission that continues to operate today committed to preserving the rich history of Woodbridge Township.

In June 2006, Mayor Frank Pelzman was diagnosed with acute melanoma. Despite his illness, he remained committed to his duties by attending events, working daily at Town Hall, and serving the community with unwavering spirit. Sadly, he passed away on June 29, 2006, becoming the first mayor in Woodbridge history to die while in office.

A lifelong resident of Woodbridge Township, Mayor Frank G. Pelzman left behind a legacy of integrity, progress, and heartfelt service. He often said, “Being the mayor of Woodbridge Township is the greatest job in the world.” In tribute to his enduring im-

pact, Avenel Park was renamed the Mayor Frank G. Pelzman Memorial Park.

**MAYOR PATRCIA OSBOURNE
(JUNE 2006)**

Following the passing of Mayor Frank G. Pelzman, the current Town Council President Patricia Osborne stepped forward to serve as Acting Woodbridge Township Mayor. She fulfilled the mayoral responsibilities until a successor was chosen to complete the remainder of the current mayoral term.

MAYOR JOSEPH VITALE (2006)



New Jersey State Senator Joseph Vitale was chosen to serve as Mayor of Woodbridge Township until the election in November 2006. In a moving ceremony, Dorothy Pelzman, widow of Mayor Pelzman, held the bible as Senator Vitale was sworn in, symbolizing the continuation of Mayor Pelzman's legacy of dedicated service to the community.



**MAYOR JOHN E. McCORMAC
(2006-current)**



John E. McCormac was elected to serve the remaining 14 months of Mayor Pelzman's term on November 7, 2006 and was re-elected to his own four-year term in 2007 and then again in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, becoming the longest serving Mayor in Woodbridge Township history on November 13, 2024.

Mayor McCormac served 10 years as the Township's Chief Financial Officer (1992-2002) and four years as the Treasurer for the State of New Jersey (2002-2006) and used his accounting background to restore fiscal integrity to the Township's financial infrastructure.

Mayor McCormac began his career with a crackdown on illegal housing and improper property maintenance which greatly improved the Quality-of-Life in town. He responded to a major cut in State Aid by revamping the Township's trash collection system by moving to automated trucks and consolidated services to make the Township's Public Works outreach more efficient.

Mayor McCormac implemented a unique partnership with the Board of Education, unlike any other with the State, and the Township financially supported new school buildings including Ross Street #11 and Avenel Street School #4 and major renovations to Matthew Jago School #28, Lafayette Estates School #25, Oak Tree Road School #29, Avenel Street School #5 and Woodbridge Middle School. A brand new Hopelawn School #10 is on the drawing board.

Economic development flourished under Mayor McCormac's tenure, with a Redevelopment Agency that shepherded dozens of projects in town which created jobs, cleaned-up environmental contamination and removed eyesores from the Township landscape including warehouses, power plants, retail centers, office

buildings, and residential complexes. The Redevelopment projects provided millions of dollars annually to the Township budget(s) which enabled Woodbridge to aggressively pave roads, improve sanitary and storm sewers and enhance parks, playgrounds, and libraries.



**The Woodbridge Township History
Museum Ribbon Cutting**

Under the leadership of the McCormac administration, public safety and public health & wellness were top priorities. This is reflected as Woodbridge continues to set the standard as the most sustainable municipality in New Jersey leading the way in green policies and practices. Additionally, the Township expanded resources with the free mobile health unit, six senior centers, three youth centers, ten senior housing complexes, and a recreation program that offers over 100 concerts, dozens of children's events, thriving youth sports programs, and premier facilities like The Club at Woodbridge and the Woodbridge Community Center, Gallery on Main and a History Museum which helps capture the illustrious legacy of Woodbridge Township.



Governor Excellence Award 2014

**IMPACT OF WOODBRIDGE
TOWNSHIP MAYORS**

Mayors are the heartbeat of local leadership—visionaries who turn community needs into action. As the elected heads of cities and towns, they shape policies that directly impact our daily lives, from public safety and transportation to housing and education. Their decisions influence how we live, work, and grow together. This brochure explored the vital role Mayors play in Woodbridge Township building resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking communities and why their leadership matters now more than ever.

Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

The mission of the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission is to inform, educate, advise and unite public officials and the community at large as an advocate for the preservation of the rich history of Woodbridge Township.

Commission Members

Dr. Dolores Capraro
Gioffre, Chairperson
Courtney Lowry,
Vice Chairperson
Bruce Christensen

Debbie Coccaro
HAWT Liaison
Julie Cohen
Daniel D'Arcy
Daniel Dias
Martin S. Genser

Amy Wright
John A. Lande
Miguel Martin
Frank Pelzman
Brenda Velasco,
Township Historian

Special Thanks to Mayor John E. McCormac



Old Town Hall

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Photographs courtesy of Woodbridge Public Library

