

FACTS to Dispel Rumors and Inaccuracies

Dear South Harrison Resident,

As your Mayor, I have adopted a policy of not engaging nor participating in social media rhetoric or postings concerning the Township. However, in light of recent events, I feel compelled to dispel the rumors, innuendo, and misinformation being circulated concerning my family business, which I hold dearly as a 4th generation farmer. I further believe that I have a duty and obligation to provide the residents with factually accurate information rooted in the "truth" to foster and promote complete transparency to the South Harrison Township residents that have contacted me personally seeking the truth.

➤ ***History about Sun Valley Orchards and what it has become today:***

Simply put, growing up **all I ever wanted was to be a farmer**. Sun Valley Orchards was my family's 4th generation produce farming operation. Following in the tradition of my father, my brother and I grew Sun Valley Orchards into the largest fresh produce farm in NJ and one of the biggest in the Northeast. Sun Valley and the Marino names are still to this day considered one of the most progressive and impactful farming operations in the State of New Jersey. Not only did we excel in farming, but my family and I served many years on various boards and councils advocating for various agricultural policies, both at the State and Federal level. My father, Russell Sr, served on State Board of Agriculture; Gloucester Co. Board of Agriculture, Chairman; Mayor of South Harrison for 20+yrs; and 2 term President of Gloucester Co. Mayors Association, which are just a few of the long list of services to our community and agriculture in his lifetime. My father was instrumental in the implementation and the success of the New Jersey Farmland Preservation program. This program is responsible for preserving 1,000's of acres in Gloucester County, as well as working with elected officials to ensure the program's long-term success and funding. My mother, Judi, served many years on the NJ Farm Bureau Woman's Committee volunteering at Ronald McDonald House providing families a free place to stay while coping with their children's medical treatments. She also served on NJ Agriculture Society Board, which pioneered the New Jersey Agriculture Leadership Development program & Farmers Against Hunger. Farmers Against Hunger is a NJ program that picks up surplus produce from participating farms in New Jersey and distributes the food to various food banks throughout the Garden State. Sun Valley has historically participated every season in this worthy program donating 1,000's of tons of fresh produce to the needy, as well as participating in community gleanings of crops after marketable harvest.

➤ ***Why I serve our community:***

My parents are great examples of unselfish service and leadership that has played a fundamental part in my interest to be involved in both the agricultural industry, as well as service our community. South Harrison was and still is today a wonderful place to grow up and call home. My interest in serving on the Township Planning/Zoning Board and later for Township

Committee/Mayor was to **ensure our community remained visibly the same as it was growing up for future generations.** This meant smart growth planning by not allowing public water or sewer while still accommodating some commercial rateables.

Compared to most rural communities throughout the State, South Harrison was shielded from the explosive housing market during the early 2000's by not permitting public water and sewer services in the Township. While other surrounding towns experienced 90-120% residential growth, South Harrison expanded by ~18% during the same timeframe. South Harrison is home to the Gloucester County Landfill; Americold Freezers (legacy Mullica Hill/Garden State Freezers); a turf supply warehouse; SJ Gas facility; landscape businesses; and Lineage Cold Storage (legacy Sun Valley Cold Storage) all of which provide valuable rateables that afford our taxpayers one of the **lowest municipal tax rates in the County.**

I made the important decision to serve on the South Harrison Township Committee/Mayor for two primary reasons.

First, I was compelled to figure out a way to provide **24/7, 365days/year Police coverage to the residents of South Harrison Township.** Prior to becoming Mayor, our police department coverage was limited from 7am-10pm Monday-Friday with only State Police response coverage after hours. With the support of our former Chief and fellow officers, the President of the PBA and our Twp Committee members, I was able to successfully broker a shared service agreement with Woolwich Twp for **FULL TIME police coverage for the first time in our Township's history, with considerable savings to our residents.**

The second motivating factor toward my public service was to renegotiate a **new Host Community Benefit Agreement with the Gloucester Co Improvement Authority, which currently owns and operates the landfill in our community.** The current agreement was a result of fierce opposition, fighting and litigation originating in 1984, which agreement is now outdated. Since its inception, NJDEP developed new standards for these agreements, which essentially provides the basis for South Harrison to benefit from a new agreement providing for increased funding and possibly other concessions we are currently litigating, which includes significant aesthetic improvements that were never completed. I am the first Mayor since my father's tenure as Mayor to challenge the current outdated Host Community Benefit Agreement by demanding a new agreement with GCIA. I've personally spent a lot of time working with County and elected State Officials to renegotiate this important agreement and I'm **happy to say that we recently filed a petition with NJ DEP to help us reach an agreement.**

➤ ***Warehousing Clarification:***

Financially, 2019 was a devastating year for our farm- **forcing us to consider a liquidation of all farming assets.** Covid was setting in, and lockdowns caused unrecoverable market losses to produce farms up and down East Coast. While retail grocery sales were up, the loss of food service business was too much to offset. The losses we incurred in 2019 would carry into 2020 and again into 2021. By mid-summer 2021, my brother and I had to face the harsh reality that **we could no longer continue farming and that a sale of all farm assets was needed to satisfy all prior and current debts, mortgages, and prior generational buyouts.** December 11, 2021, was the hardest

day of my life. Early on the morning of the 11th, I went down the line of equipment starting them for the last time in preparation for the countless farmers from all around coming to **buy, piece by piece, part of our lives and family business until there was nothing left.**

Over the years my farm's cold storage and precooling capacities grew with the growth of the farm. In the late 90's we began consolidating and packing other produce for our customers and this continued into a year-round business service. The business provided our key employees stable year-round employment. Philadelphia, PA, Wilmington, DE & Gloucester, NJ are primary ports of import for produce and frozen foods. Importers discovered some farms in NJ had cold facilities and began utilizing the capacity in their off season. Facilities like Mullica Hill Cold Storage/Garden State Freezers (apple/peach farmer in South Harrison); Eastern Propack (NJ peach/blueberry packer in Glassboro); Lucca Cold Storage (peach farmer In Hammonton, NJ); Manfredi (mushroom farmer in Kennet Sq, PA); and Bifulco Farms/Four Seasons Cold Storage (leafy greens farm in Pittsgrove Twp, NJ), all were farms that transitioned into full-time PRW Cold Storage/Freezer Companies. Sun Valley on Vestry Rd specialized in imported fruit. We also provided value-added services like bagging citrus and many other retail packaging needs. **Due to the financial hardship our farming activities experienced, my brother and I decided to make plans to transition from farming to full-time cold storage service with our existing facilities.** We applied for a subdivision of the existing facilities of about 7 ac. to operate commercially not associated with farming. The transition was well received with our customers who asked us to grow with the increase in imported fruit programs. We made subsequent applications in preparation for the most recent expansion. Late in summer of 2021, we were approached by an acquisition opportunity to purchase our cold storage business (Sun Valley Cold Storage).

Lineage acquired Sun Valley Cold Storage and all its assets in December 2021. Lineage asked me to stay on and help them build their new fresh cold storage services that was different from their traditional frozen business model. My job with them is to help build Lineage Fresh market share in other markets like Savannah, Houston, Los Angeles, and Netherlands. It has been a difficult transition for me personally from farming to working in a corporate environment and **not a day goes by that I don't miss farming.**

➤ ***WITHDRAWAL of Lineage recent 42ac application/expansion:***

Due to obvious conflicts, I was voluntarily placed under a gag order by attorneys and Township Professionals. I was unable to comment publicly in any way shape or form concerning the Lineage Application before the Township Planning Board. It was extremely difficult for me to sit by and listen to rumors, innuendo, false accusations and gaslighting over the last year. I am happy that Lineage has since decided to withdraw the application and I am currently working to negotiate an agreement that will hopefully get our 42 acres back to enroll in farmland preservation not only the 42 ac., but the surrounding 35 ac. of woods and wetlands in the NJ Farmland Preservation Program!

I've been working with the State Agriculture Development Committee Chairman, who is excited to preserve the remaining non-preserved land on Vestry Rd. My parents' property will hopefully be included to complete a block of PERMANENTLY PRESERVED land from our Twp. border on Russell Mill Rd all the way East to Eldridge's Hill Rd!

The Township Committee and I will continue to keep water and sewer out of our master plans to ensure South Harrison doesn't negatively transform from uncontrolled growth like many of our surrounding Municipalities have experienced. Thanks to smart planning and the Farmland Preservation program, there are very few development opportunities in South Harrison Township.

Contrary to the misinformation campaigns and gaslighting by anonymous residents, I have proudly served South Harrison Twp as Planning/Zoning Chairman for over 10 years, and Mayor for almost 6 years **ethically and with the intent of balancing growth while maintaining the character of the town I grew up in.**

I was able to negotiate a **successful transition to full-time police coverage** through shared service and I'm presently **renegotiating our GCIA landfill agreement.** The new agreement will provide South Harrison with the needed funding to support our Fire Department, Park and Municipal services, as well as potentially reducing our municipal tax rate even further. Due to recent activity sparking increase in public awareness, the Township Committee and I approved funding to **launch a new and improved Website** and recent approval to move forward with **software to fully integrate all agendas and applications digitally** allowing instant upload of any/all available public information to our website.

➤ **Call to Action:**

I am asking for your support in my re-election bid for Twp Committee. Those running against me in the primary are disgruntled residents unhappy with an ordinance amendment and have been embattled in a neighbor dispute for a few years now. One of the candidates has been hiding behind fake aliases making inaccurate statements and gaslighting residents in our community. Our residents deserve honesty, maturity, professionalism, & experience. **Despite efforts to mischaracterize my public service record and intentions, my service over the last 16+ years has a long unblemished history with a proven track record of positive results for the Township.**

Hopefully, this letter answered some questions and provided some insight as to who I am and my unwavering commitment to South Harrison. Thank you in advance for your continued support.

I am happy to discuss any/all concerns.

Mayor Joseph Marino
609-685-2576