

# Mayor Spano is Special Guest for Yonkers Rotary



Mayor Mike Spano at a Yonkers Rotary Club meeting, with President Dr. Alix Schnee.

Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano was the special guest at the Sept. 27 meeting of the Rotary Club of Yonkers-East Yonkers at the Dolphin Restaurant. Club members and many others from local community organizations were present to listen to the mayor outline the programs the city has undertaken over the last six years.

The perception of Yonkers – the fourth-largest city in New York State – has changed because good stories have been repeated over and over again in the media, as the media normally tends not to cover good news, said Spano.

The mayor pointed out that according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Yonkers has been ranked among the top 10 safest cities in all of the United States for the last 20 years. Crime is down 30 percent in Yonkers overall, which is important and people need to be told about this good news, he said. The mayor added that he is trying to tell the story and that Yonkers is building on this success.

Yonkers Public Schools are doing well and the school district is being built up one step at a time. Out of the five big cities in New York State, Yonkers has the highest graduation rate. The Administration is diverse, and Yonkers has the first Latino school superintendent. The Yonkers Basics Program is reinforcing the notion that third-graders need to be reading at their grade level; 70 percent of the third-graders in Yonkers are at or below poverty level.

Spano said the community has the ability to give every child a free lunch, and we should, so that there is no stigma attached for those on the Free Lunch Program. In addition, the expectation to every student that they will go to college and have a decent job afterward should be promoted, he said.

Yonkers has 1,700 units of affordable housing, which are being rebuilt over the next five years. Also, the mayor said he has reached out to businesses to test out projects in Yonkers before trying them out in New York City.

The mayor highlighted three items in the city's budget that are escalating in costs: union contracts, pension costs, and health care costs. Health care costs grew by \$12 million last year, and will continue to grow by double digits over the next three years, said Spano, explaining that these have to be paid for before the

city can hire more teachers, police or firemen.

The top teacher salary in Yonkers is \$165,000, which the mayor said is decent and every bit of it well-deserved.

Yonkers will still have challenges, like every other city, but it has made remarkable progress. State approval has been received to build three new schools, which will be on the football field of Gorton High School, Ashburton Avenue and Ravine Avenue. Unfortunately, Albany is not approving money to rebuild the existing schools.

The city needs to push economic development, ensure safer streets, and rebuild its schools one step at a time, said Spano. The new schools will make office space available for doctors and dentists, so students can get the checkups they need, he said. School security is being enhanced by having drills and providing police radios to school security personnel.

Among those present at the recent meeting were Rotary Club President Dr. Alix Schnee, President-Elect Sundra Lee-Ingemanson, Past District Governors Matts Ingemanson and Gregory Arcaro, Club Rotary Foundation Chairperson Bina Ahmad, and Club Membership Chairperson Jeffrey Landsman.

Yonkers Second Deputy Mayor Steve Levy accompanied the mayor.

The Yonkers Rotary Club has been involved in local and international projects, helping communities near and far, by providing scholarships to deserving Yonkers High School graduates, helping victims of the Hawley Terrace Fire, building a playground at Yonkers School 9, providing pencils to every Yonkers first-grader, donating books to the Yonkers library, and supporting various youth organizations and soup kitchens.

Internationally, the Rotary Club has sent a school bus for children in Liberia, helped send computers to Guatemala, and built sanitary latrines for women and children in remote Bangladesh. There are approximately 1.2 million Rotarians in more than 30,000 Rotary Clubs in 161 countries.

To learn more about the Rotary Club of Yonkers-East Yonkers, its projects and activities, visit [www.yonkersrotary.org](http://www.yonkersrotary.org). Also pass by the display at the main entrance of the Will Library on Central Avenue, or contact Membership Chairman Jeffrey Landsman at Jeffrey.Landsman@gmail.com or 917-859-0331.