

Hello there and welcome to my last column of the year.

As Mayor, I'd like to look back at five memorable aspects of life in HRM during 2009, specifically: our economy; recreation; public safety; setbacks; and some fun stuff.

Let's start with our economy.

This has been a relatively good year, despite the fragile international situation.

The number of people employed in our area is up more than three per cent from a year ago. In fact, StatsCan reports we beat all other municipalities in job gains.

Housing starts have been down but are bouncing back. In October, they were up 15 per cent over the same month last year.

Building permits dipped to \$47 million from \$56 million last year but the value of non-residential permits issued is up \$8 million.

To sum up, HRM is doing better than most places in terms of the way we're doing business and it's being noticed out there. International credit ratings agency Standard and Poor's has raised our public finance rating to an "A positive." Not only that but CIBC puts us in first spot nationally in the third quarter for our economic momentum.

Recreation Projects: Remember that old saying about "All work and no play"?

Well, with all the recreational facilities sprouting up around metro HRM these days, there shouldn't be any shortage of places to play!

Centrepiece is the \$42-million Canada Games Centre on the Mainland Common. Ready by next November, it'll house an eight-lane pool, four NBA-size basketball courts convertible into a dozen volleyball courts and a 200-metre, six-lane elevated track.

Another major centre is the \$39-million 4-Pad Arena in Bedford. It'll be ready next fall and contain four NHL-sized rinks.

HRM has also built new community centres in East Dartmouth and Fall River with another one under way in Prospect.

Let the all the games begin (soon)!

Public safety: I'm happy to report a number of recommendations from my Round Table on Violence and Public Safety have been implemented.

A Public Safety Office has been set up and a full-time Public Safety Officer appointed to spearhead the drive for safer streets.

Initiatives are underway to: identify root causes of crime in HRM and prepare an action plan; create strategies for increasing the number of safe and affordable houses in HRM; and to examine all aspects of safety in the downtown core.

The year is ending on a high note in terms of crime prevention. In November, we had a successful gun-amnesty program teaming HR Police and Henry's Cameras. It resulted in 1,074 weapons being turned in. Compare that to Toronto which is 20 times our size and which netted 1,900 weapons in a similar amnesty.

The fun stuff: Who can forget the visit of the graceful Tall Ships in July, or the return of hometown hero Sidney Crosby with the Stanley Cup in August?

And what about those world-class rock concerts we staged in July, thanks to the visits of Sir Paul McCartney and Kiss.

Then there was the exciting International Canoe Federation's World Senior Canoe-Kayak Championships in August and the thrill of seeing the Olympic torch pass through HRM in November.

Truly, this was a wonderful year to be living in HRM.

And finally, the setbacks.

There was the flooding of the Halifax Sewage Treatment Plant in January. Happily, restoration work is on track for a successful restart in spring and a return to a cleaner harbour.

We had two major fires this year but, thankfully, no lives were lost.

The first was in Spryfield in April; it destroyed half-a-dozen homes and forced more than 1,000 people to flee.

Then there was the September blaze which claimed the popular Beaver Bank-Kinsac Community Centre.

In both cases, the crises brought out the best in HRM's selfless volunteers and dedicated emergency personnel.

I'm proud to be living in the same community with them all.

My best wishes to all of you for a happy and prosperous New Year.

[] Reach me here at City Hall at kellyp@halifax.ca or by phoning me at 490-4010.