

Mayor Roterling named on Forbes' '40 Women To Watch Over 40' list

NICKI KOETTING, Assistant Editor

Highland Park Mayor Nancy Roterling was recently named to the Forbes "40 Women To Watch Over 40" list, among CEOs, government leaders and charitable organization founders.

The Highland Park Landmark Assistant Editor Nicki Koetting spoke with Roterling about what it meant for her to be named on the Forbes list, her time as the mayor of Highland Park, and what she envisions for Highland Park's future.

N.K.: How did you feel when you found out that you made the Forbes list?

N.R.: I heard about it a month ago. To be honest, I'm still sort of surprised. The list is such an interesting and diverse group of amazing women, and to be included in that group is such an honor. I'm just so honored and appreciative.

N.K.: What does it mean for you to be a "woman to watch?"

N.R.: My hope is that it encourages other people to recognize that there are still many iterations in their professional and community futures, and that it gives them the impetus to act on an interest or a mission that still speaks to them.

For me, it was the opportunity to grow a culture at City Hall and in our community of collaboration on solving certain issues that I know need to be recognized, but they weren't quite sure how to [address] them.

N.K.: Can you elaborate on those issues?

N.R.: One example is the human services task force. A few years ago, when I was ringing doorbells to run for mayor, I recognized that a lot of people in our community had needs that were not necessarily being met. I recognized that there were groups really in need who could be helped by our community: youth, seniors,

immigrants, disabled people and the economically disadvantaged.

So I decided to come up with this task force, to create a comprehensive human services plan in our community. We started with really working to identify all of the needs for the residents in these subgroups. ... We've finished phase three and now we're working on phase four, which is, how do we let people know that this stuff is available? How do we get the word out to people who may not have computers, or may not speak English, or may not be able to leave their homes, how to get to these services available to them? So that's the last part we're working on.

That's the kind of culture I wanted to bring to City Hall and to the community. How can I help, how can I identify what the issues are, how can I through outreach [and] getting involved make a difference in people's lives?

When I meet with kids ... my most important message that I try to share with them is that every single person has a voice. Every single person can use that voice to make change. If by understanding that as a woman over 40, your voice is strong and is heard and can be used, that's a good thing that comes through it.

Empowering people through advocacy — that's, like, my favorite thing. I teach that to the kids [and] I'm hopeful that message comes through being on this list. People always have an opportunity to have an impact.

N.K.: That's your message?

N.R.: That's my message. When you don't feel like you have a voice, you feel frustrated and you may feel like there's no chance of changing whatever it is that's interrupting your day. It may be a pothole, it may be a stop sign — it may be something larger than that. If people are able to share their issues and have a place where they get some relief in their day, then we've done our job.

One of the [issues] that came out of the human services task force was a difficulty in accessing legal services. For a lot of people, the only affordable legal services are up in Waukegan. So we're starting a legal clinic in Highland Park. We just decided to open it in October. Our goal will be to address domestic abuse issues, housing issues and immigration issues, for residents who don't have the economic means to access legal services.

[When] you're able to bring people together to address challenges — that's something anyone can do and they need to know they have that capability.

N.K.: The Forbes list was intended by its founders to inspire women over 40, as well as women of all ages, "to see new possibilities." How do you feel like you're inspiring other women, as the mayor of Highland Park?

N.R.: I am the first woman mayor of Highland Park, just that in and of itself seems to be of interest to people.

[I want to let] people know that the traditional routes aren't the only routes that need to be followed to a particular path. I started my professional career in business, and then I switched to law, and then I needed to take time off from my legal practice when my family needs became great. And then [I recognized] from working with my family that there are opportunities within my community. Those are very different paths.

Nothing is set in stone. There's the old adage: "Make plans; God laughs." You need to be able to be open to opportunities and be flexible in your own goals for yourself.

N.K.: What do you want to accomplish in the year before you run for re-election?

N.R.: [I want to] really continue what we've already started



Highland Park Mayor Nancy Roterling speaks at an event earlier this year. 22ND CENTURY MEDIA FILE PHOTO

to achieve in terms of promoting our fiscal stability, investing in our infrastructure and making sure that our public safety is as good and as high as it can be, and just increasing the vibrancy in our community.

And then there's a whole lot we're working on in terms of development. And then I just want to continue our efforts to work with the park district and the school districts and the township and so on.

We're on a great path. I'm re-

ally happy with how we're doing as a city. [We're] moving forward on the various things we've been working on.

N.K.: What would you say to young girls and women, or anyone who aspires to leadership positions?

N.R.: What I would say is "go for it." Don't wait to be asked. You have what you need from within, and it is absolutely imperative that you get out there and do what interests you and make the world a place you want it to be.