



September 2026 Edition

****The three employees highlighted below were inadvertently omitted from the September Service Milestones due to a system error. Our apologies for the oversight, and congratulations to everyone celebrating a milestone!***

Celebrating Our City Team

Service Milestones

Name	Department	Title	Years of Service
Henry Peskator	PW	Water Plant Operator	47
Jeffrey Marusich	Fire	Battalion Chief	28
Peter Caruso	Fire	Firefighter	22
John Brens	Fire	Lieutenant	21
Eloy Salazar	Fire	Lieutenant	21
Emily Taub	Administration	Assistant CM	16
Joel Fontane	CD	Director of CD	13
Pedro Urbina	Police	Police Sergeant	10
Daniel Norton	Police	Police Officer	10
Hermes Quezada	PW	Bus Driver PT	9
Philip McGuire	CD	Fire Inspector	5
George Haramis	Police	Fleet Mechanic	5
Michele Molini	Fire	Firefighter	5
Nicholas Obrzut	Fire	Firefighter	5
Andrew Mazurkiewicz	Fire	Firefighter	4
Benjamin Calamari	Fire	Firefighter	4
Eric Parfenoff	CD	Senior Inspector	3
David Brzezinski	CD	Plan Exam./Insp.	3
Nicolette Anichini	Administration	Admin & C/S Spec.	2

Jazmin Alejandro	Administration	Social Services Spec.	1
Ava Barker	CD	Planning Intern	1

Welcome Aboard!

Name	Department	Title
Holly Hart	CD	Clerical Support PT
Anthony Sarkis	Police	Police Officer
Angel Rosario	PW	Maintenance Worker

Farewell

Name	Department	Title
Archana Mohanchandra	CD	Building Division Manager
Jane Lucido	Finance	Accountant



After 26 years of dedicated service to the Highland Park Fire Department, Lieutenant Stanley will retire on October 5. Throughout his distinguished career, he has shown an unwavering commitment to the Highland Park community, his colleagues, and the safety of others.

His trusted partner, Dexter, will join him in retirement. Dexter's service and companionship have made him a valued member of the HPFD family. Please join us in thanking Lt. Stanley and Dexter for all they have given to the department and wishing them a happy, healthy, and well-deserved retirement!

The HPFD is also pleased to congratulate Firefighter Kevin Best on his promotion to Lieutenant/EMT II. He will officially step into his new role on October 9. Congratulations, Lt. Best, on this well-earned achievement!

Highland Park Employees WIN

Creating a culture of health

Newsletter
September 2026

In partnership with:
 **CHC** WELLBEING



-  **October 31 WIN Program Deadline:** We are entering the last stretch of the 2025–26 WIN Program year. To secure your 2027 insurance premium discount, all requirements must be completed by **October 31, 2026**. Log in to the CHC Wellbeing app and click “Rewards Level” to confirm your progress. Be sure you’ve completed:
 - ✓ WIN Points (Single:100 points. Employee + Spouse:150 points combined)
 - ✓ Coaching Calls (if applicable)
 - ✓ HRA Survey
-  **Hydration Challenge Wrap-Up:** Thank you to everyone who participated in August’s Hydration Challenge! All those who logged 1000 ounces of water have been credited with 25 reward points. Staying consistent with hydration is a great habit to carry forward into fall!
-  **North Shore Turkey Trot Registration (Coming Soon!):** Mark your calendars for November! The City will once again sponsor runners for the annual North Shore Turkey Trot. Keep an eye on your inbox this month for the registration announcement and details on how to join the team.
-  **Did You Know?** You can continue to earn points through on-demand content in the CHC app:
 - o Learn & Earn Webinars: 15 points each (limit 2 per month)
 - o eLearning Modules: 5 points each (no monthly limit, 30-point annual max)
- **New to WIN?** Let’s Get Started! Enroll today by visiting: <https://app.chcw.com/#newparticipants>. Use Program Code: 7092Cit189. You’ll be guided through registration and prompted to schedule your initial health screening. Your premium discount kicks in once the screening results are received.

Healthy Highland Park



Nationwide Representative On-Site

Brian Miller, our Nationwide representative, will be on-site at various City locations from Monday, September 14, through Wednesday, September 16, to meet individually with employees regarding their 457 Deferred Compensation plans. Spouses are also welcome to attend.

Employees may enroll in the City's 457 plan or make changes at any time throughout the year.

- If you've never participated, now is a good time to sign up for the City's tax-deferred savings plan.
- If you're already in the plan, meet with Brian to make changes or ask questions.
- Thinking about retirement? Learn about special tax-saving catch-up options available only to those over age 50.

There are two ways you can schedule an appointment:

1) Use this link to choose an open time slot at your building location only:

City Hall (Pre-Session Conference Room)

Monday the 14th 9am to Noon

Schedule online: <https://bit.ly/hpcityhall>

Police Department (Training Room, 1st Floor)

Tuesday the 15th 9am to Noon

Schedule online: <https://bit.ly/hppd>

PW/CD (PW Large Conference Room, 1st Floor)

Wednesday the 16th 9am to Noon

Schedule online: <https://bit.ly/hppw>

Fire Department (Fire Station 33 Training Room)

All three days: Monday, 9/14 – Wednesday, 9/16 | 1 to 3pm

Schedule online: <https://bit.ly/hpfireddept>

You will be sent a reminder email 24 hours before your appointment.

2) If you don't have electronic access, you can contact Brian by phone at (847) 573-0156. He will schedule your appointment and notify you of the time.

Remembering September 11: 25 Years Later



As we mark the 25th anniversary of September 11, we remember those affected, honor those who responded, and thank City employees for sharing their personal reflections from military service and a young student watching history unfold to a City employee experiencing the events at the Highland Park Police Department. Twenty-five years later, their stories remind us why we continue to pause, remember, and honor.

"I remember where I was that day. I was at the 500-yard line at the rifle range for pre-qualifications at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, NC. One of the lieutenants got word of what was going on, and news spread very quickly that the Twin Towers in New York had been hit. At that point, we didn't understand if we were under attack or if it was a horrific accident.

They called the range for the day and basically shut down the base. I had to immediately pick up my son from daycare—he was only seven months old at the time. Then I was recalled back to work. I was really nervous about what they were going to tell us.

That day impacted the world and somehow managed to affect everyone in some way. I think about the lives that were lost, the devastation at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania, and the heroes who emerged in every corner. I think about the deployment of our armed forces, friends I lost in combat, and my own two combat tours in Iraq. The impact and suffering have stayed with us as a nation, and we will never forget this tragic day." - Cecilia Gonzalez

"I was a freshman in high school on September 11, 2001. I was sitting in first-period art class when we heard over the radio that the second tower had been hit. At that point, it was clear something was very wrong. Shortly afterward, we went to homeroom, where our teacher turned on the news. That was pretty much the rest of the school day—moving from classroom to classroom with the news on and very little regular teaching taking place.

I also remember the first anniversary in 2002, standing outside the school with the entire student body gathered around the flagpole while the school band played the National Anthem.

A few years later, for a school project, I interviewed my grandfather about where he was when President Kennedy was assassinated. It strikes me now that we are essentially being asked the same question about September 11. There are certain events that become dividing lines in history, where nearly everyone who lived through them can tell you exactly where they were.

For me, September 11 marked the end of my insulated 1990s childhood innocence about the world. I became more engaged with the news and more aware of the world beyond my own experience. Things felt different afterward, and in many ways they have ever since. Looking back 25 years later, what stands out most is how suddenly that sense of innocence disappeared and how quickly we all had to move on from it."
- Nick Barnes

"I was at work here at the HPPD on September 11, 2001, when the planes struck the World Trade Center.

I had my computer open and saw a live news feed of the smoking North Tower. Not reading the captions, I initially assumed it was from a movie being filmed in New York. Then I realized it was live. I alerted the Chief and Deputy Chief, and soon we saw the second airplane strike the South Tower. We immediately turned on the TV so we could all watch.

We watched in horror as the events unfolded. The TV remained on all day. There was not much talking—just disbelief. I remember the bravery of those responding and those helping their coworkers evacuate. In the days that followed, we held a vigil in front of the Police Department. People stopped their vehicles and came over to participate and give comfort to one another.

My brother-in-law was at a work conference in Washington, D.C. that day. After all airline flights were canceled, he and his coworker were able to secure one of the last available rental cars and make their way back home to Illinois." - L.D.

Coming Together in Remembrance

The City of Highland Park will hold a 25th Anniversary Observance of September 11, 2001, at 9 AM on Friday, September 11, at Bennett Gordon Hall at Ravinia Festival. The ceremony will remember those affected and honor all who answered the call to help. It will also be livestreamed and available afterward on the [City's YouTube channel](#).

Visit the [City's website](#) for complete event details.

We sincerely thank Cecilia, Nick, and L.D. for sharing their personal reflections in recognition of this significant anniversary.

Around the City – Department Highlights

Big accomplishments, exciting milestones, and impressive numbers! There is always something worth celebrating across the City!

Congratulations, Commander Merkel!

Please join us in congratulating Brian Merkel on his promotion to Commander, effective August 31! We wish Commander Merkel continued success as he takes on this exciting new leadership role.



1,100 Members...and Counting!

The Senior Center has welcomed more than 1,100 members this year! With over 50 activities offered each week, the Center continues to provide engaging programs, meaningful connections, and plenty of opportunities for members to stay active and involved. What an incredible reflection of its impact on our community!



A Major Milestone Three Years in the Making!

After nearly three years of planning, collaboration, and hard work, the Finance, IT, and Public Works departments successfully launched the City's new water billing software. The transition included moving more than 10,000 customer water accounts into the new system, an impressive undertaking made possible through outstanding teamwork across departments.

Special thanks to Christine Icasiano, Maria Gomez-Machuca, Lara Lukasik, Babrok Arman, Bill Painter, Keith Miller, Khoshaba Haji, and Jose Moreno for helping bring this major project across the finish line!

Building Knowledge and Earning Credentials!

Congratulations to Bess Abramovitz on earning her International Code Council (ICC) Permit Technician certification and to Shawn Norton on earning his ICC Residential/Commercial certification! These accomplishments reflect their dedication to continued professional growth, expanding their technical knowledge, and providing knowledgeable service to the community. Well done, Bess and Shawn!

Congratulations, Eric Parfenoff!

Eric Parfenoff was promoted from Interim Senior Inspector to Senior Inspector, effective August 24. Since joining the City in September 2023, Eric has contributed more than 35 years of experience in architecture, housing development, and construction management. We wish him continued success in his new role!



Get Connected with LGHN!

The City is a member of the Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN). Employees interested in becoming a member or learning more about the organization are encouraged to contact Erin Jason at ejason@cityhpil.com.



City Hall staff gathered, smiled, and joined the fun for City Hall Selfie Day!



Hear ye, hear ye! Thank you to everyone who joined us at the Bristol Renaissance Faire... and a special thank-you to Vic Walter for organizing yet another fun employee gathering!

Summer Sounds & Good Times! 🎵



It was a beautiful evening at Port Clinton filled with nostalgic music, delicious food, and plenty of great company. A special thank-you to Diane Larson for organizing such a fun Employee Night Out!

National Night Out Makes a Splash!



This year's National Night Out brought community members and first responders together at Hidden Creek AquaPark for an evening of connection and family fun. Guests enjoyed swimming, games, a bounce house, live DJ, petting zoo, touch-a-truck, free pizza, and a fireworks finale!

Thank you to the Highland Park Police Department, participating City staff, community partners, and everyone who helped make the event a success!

Employee Golf Outing & Patio Party



Join your coworkers for an afternoon of golf, food, friendly competition, and fun on **Thursday, September 24, at Sunset Valley Golf Course!**

Golf & Patio Party – \$40

Includes nine holes of golf, an entrée valued up to \$20, light appetizers, soft drinks, and entry into golf contests and prizes. Tee times begin at 3:00 PM.

Patio Party Only – \$15

Includes an entrée valued up to \$20, light appetizers, soft drinks, and participation in the annual bags tournament. Guests may arrive between 4:30 and 5:15 PM.

To RSVP, email Nick Barnes at nbarnes@cityhpil.com with your package choice and preferred golf partner or foursome, if applicable. Cash payment should be delivered to the HR Office at City Hall by end of day Wednesday, September 16.

Employee Spotlight:

**Gabriel Bahena
(Police Officer)**



Where did you grow up, and what's one fun/quirky fact about your hometown that people might not expect? [I grew up in Melrose Park, where Kiddieland was located.](#)

As a kid, what did you imagine you'd be doing as an adult—and does any part of that dream still live on today? [I always wanted to be a Police Officer, so my dream is very much alive.](#)

If your personality were a season, which one would it be and why? [Fall, it is the perfect mix of not too cold or too hot and still allows for outdoor activities.](#)

What show, podcast, or book are you completely hooked on right now? [I am currently watching How I Met Your Mother for the 4th time.](#)

If you could wake up tomorrow having instantly mastered one skill, what would it be—and how would it change your daily life? [Adaptability- I would be ready for all situations and scenarios and be able to handle everything in the most effective manner.](#)

What's your go-to workday snack or drink that keeps you going? [Cherry Limemade Ghosts and a Super Cookie Crunch MET-RX Bar.](#)

It's karaoke night! What's your go-to song to bring the crowd to life? [My Way-Frank Sinatra](#)

You get three seats at your dream dinner table—anyone from any time. Who's on the guest list? [Matthew McConaughey, David Goggins, and Tobey Maguire](#)

Hollywood is making a movie about your life—who plays you, and what's the title? [Jeremy Allen – The Bahena](#)



Don't Take the Fall: Ladder and Fall Protection



Falls can happen in seconds—but the consequences can last a lifetime. Whether you're climbing a ladder, working from an elevated surface, or simply walking across a wet floor, taking a few extra seconds to identify hazards can help prevent an injury.

Watch for Wet & Slippery Surfaces

Fall weather can bring rain, wet leaves, mud, and slick walkways. Slow down and watch where you're walking.

Be Prepared for Changing Weather

Temperatures and conditions can change quickly in the fall. Dress appropriately and be prepared for rain, wind, and cooler temperatures.



Daylight Hours Getting Shorter

Reduced daylight can make hazards harder to see. Use adequate lighting, wear high-visibility clothing when appropriate, and use extra caution when working or walking outdoors during early morning or evening hours.

Wear Appropriate PPE

Use the proper footwear, gloves, eye protection, fall protection, and other PPE required for the task.

We'd love to hear from you!

Have feedback on this issue or an idea for a future feature?

Email us at hr@cityhpil.com

Keep in Touch!



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