

# Jim Rokakis

Previous Cuyahoga County Treasurer

Growing up in Cleveland's Archwood-Denison neighborhood, Jim Rokakis learned the importance of family, friends and community. He saw firsthand how neighbors helping neighbors could strengthen an entire community. At 22 Jim was elected the youngest member of Cleveland City Council (Ward 6, which became Ward 15), where he served for over 19 years representing those same friends and neighbors. He aggressively attacked neighborhood blight and problems that affected his neighborhood's reputation by closing down two "adult entertainment theatres" and six bars that brought violence and unrest to the area.

Jim worked tirelessly to improve the region and is known for his leadership that helped redevelop Cleveland's downtown. He was instrumental in key projects like the Gateway Sports Complex (home to the Cleveland Indians and Cleveland Cavaliers) and crafted the compromise that allowed construction of the internationally known Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Jim created the City's Gun Buy-Back Program, wrote the Chop-Shop Law that reduced car thefts, and authored the In-Door Clean Air Act. He was also responsible for the creation of Cleveland's Housing Court. Jim's commitment was widely recognized by his peers and he was appointed Chairman of the City's influential Finance Committee for his last seven years on Council.

In 1997, Jim took office as Cuyahoga County Treasurer bringing his innovative skills and passion for the community to a struggling county office. In the decade that followed, Jim overhauled the entire office and greatly enhanced the County's existing tax collection system by instituting state of the art billing and collection process and made property taxes easier for residents through web-based property information and payment options. Under his tight oversight, the office was able to expand programs and services while saving taxpayers dollars reducing staff levels.

Jim's passion for what he does doesn't stop with the day-to-day activities of the Treasurer's office, it's simply not enough. In cases where Jim was unable to implement a program because it was beyond the scope provided by state law, he worked with legislators and leaders to develop and pass legislation that made them possible. His hands-on leadership has served the County well and inspired the creation of many innovative programs to improve neighborhoods, communities and the entire region by thus improving our quality of life.

Faced with Cuyahoga County's mortgage foreclosure crisis, Jim Rokakis helped to write and pass House Bill 294 that streamlines the foreclosure process for abandoned properties. Jim took the leadership role in creating the County's "Don't Borrow Trouble" mortgage foreclosure prevention program, which combats predatory lending and assists homeowners facing foreclosure. Additionally, Jim has developed a program that uses the investment portfolio to purchase bonds from cities to help them deal with the costs associated with abandoned properties resulting from foreclosures.

As one tool to address the issue of the decline of older suburbs and the resulting out-migration, Jim developed the Home Enhancement Loan Program (HELP). This program, the first of its kind in the country, offers home improvement loans at three percentage points less than the lowest rate a bank would otherwise charge. HELP has received the

Community Impact Award from Dominion East Ohio/Inside Business Magazine, an award from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (Greater Cleveland chapter) and won the 2003 EPA Smart Growth Award. Rokakis, in partnership with the Cleveland Restoration Society, also introduced the Heritage Home Loan Program (HHLP) designed to preserve neighborhood character..

Jim understands that the role of a public official extends beyond merely performing the duties of office and he is an advocate for the community and its citizens. He was instrumental in the enactment of House Bill 293 which helps senior citizens remain in their homes by allowing them to defer all or part of their property taxes. Rokakis is also leading a debate over payments in lieu of property taxes by non-profit organizations to help lessen school funding problems created by a shrinking tax base as well as exploring ways to college financial assistance to encourage area students to remain in Greater Cleveland upon graduation. Jim is currently spearheading the creation of county land bank that would keep properties away from speculators and facilitate economic and neighborhood development.

Local and National organizations have recognized Jim by for his efforts in strengthening neighborhoods and communities. In 2007 he received the NeighborWorks America Local Government Service Award, the Leadership in Social Justice Award from Greater Cleveland Community Shares, and was named the County Leader of the Year by American City and County Magazine.

Jim earned his undergraduate degree at Oberlin College and his Juris Doctorate degree from Cleveland-Marshall School of Law. He married Laurie Shafer, they have three children Doug, Christina and Eleni.