

When asked to describe New Concord, Mayor Jennifer Lyle spoke of John and Annie Glenn.

“They were both New Concord kids, grew up here, went to school together and they knew each other their whole lives, and they were actually best friends their whole lives,” Lyle said. “It’s one of those very romantic stories where they eventually fell in love and got married and had this incredible marriage.”

Lyle said she didn’t know Annie and John well, but many people in her family did. Lyle did speak with them a few times.

“You felt like you were their best friend. Even if you only spoke to them for two minutes, the eye-contact, the genuine caring is extraordinary,” Lyle said. “They were both genuinely good human beings.”

The lives John and Annie led, and the integrity and kindness they displayed, encapsulates New Concord, Lyle said.

The John and Annie Glenn Museum is in the heart of New Concord at the home that John grew up in.

Lyle is the first female mayor of New Concord, originally starting on council. As of this year, Lyle said New Concord will also have its first woman who has served two full terms of council.

“The position of mayor being more on the administrative side provided me the kind of latitude I was interested in in the projects that I’m interested in, where I could really take things on and work with the village employees and council members to accomplish things,” Lyle said.

But being on New Concord Village Council wasn’t part of Lyle’s plan. She joined because she “had (her) arm twisted.”

Lyle’s background is in classical music and business. New Concord is her hometown, but she spent much of her adult life outside of it, mostly in New York. She returned to New Concord temporarily, then met and married her husband, Dr./Coach Jim Burson. Eventually she became involved in community development projects.

“There were exciting things going on with a community organization, RENEW, that had been responsible for sprucing up our downtown and really reviving it and rehabbing it,” Lyle explained.

Lyle realized she enjoyed bringing people together, convening meetings and solving problems with others. She wasn’t looking to be in an elected office, but a friend of Lyle’s expressed his own interest in running for council. He suggested Lyle run as well as a team. Both were elected.

In recent years, Lyle has been working on economic development projects for New Concord.

“You want to thrive, but you need to have planned thriving, because otherwise, all of that stuff happens to you as opposed to you helping it happen,” Lyle said.

New Concord doesn't have traditional industry or large tracts of land to implement business districts. Lyle's work with economic development looks at how New Concord, and the broader Muskingum County, grow.

New Concord has worked with Muskingum University to create an economic development entity called a Community Reinvestment Area, which creates tax incentives for residents and businesses to create more business or renovate and improve existing lands.

Lyle's tenure as mayor began in January 2020 and it has been defined by the coronavirus pandemic. New Concord endured the pandemic well in a lot of ways, but Lyle said the loss of life was still too great for the small town.

“I think that one good thing that has come out of all this is a whole lot of people have learned how to be productive online that a lot of people have never experienced before,” Lyle explained.

Because of Muskingum University's student media program Orbit Media, New Concord's village council meetings continued to be broadcast during the pandemic, allowing the public to still be kept up to date on village happenings without being potentially exposed to the coronavirus.

Lyle said becoming mayor had a steep learning curve, but she was able to greatly progress thanks to the Mayor's Partnership for Progress. She was able to learn from knowledgeable, experienced and caring members of the partnership.

Lyle said the first thing she did when she was elected was join the Mayor's Partnership for Progress.

“There's no 'school of mayor.' There's no textbook; there's no website you can go to to say 'here are the 50,000 things you need to know about being mayor.' It's just kind of you going in there and start jumping in the middle,” Lyle said.

The networking afforded to Lyle through the Mayor's Partnership for Progress has helped greatly during the coronavirus pandemic.