

# 10 Minutes with EDGE

## Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage



Photo Courtesy of the City of Elizabeth

**Your city has experienced remarkable growth since you came into office 20 years ago. Give me three reasons why.**

Great geography...we are convenient to everything. Great diversity...more than 35 different languages are spoken here. And the Jersey Gardens Mall, which really led the way for Elizabeth to convert from a manufacturing economy to a service economy.

**What's the coolest thing about the city that almost no one knows about?**

George Washington had lunch here on the way to his inauguration in New York. Also, America's first ice cream soda was served on the corner of Fulton and 6th. Does anyone even drink ice cream soda anymore?

**If you could bottle one thing about your city and sell it—not including ice cream soda—what would it be?**

The strength of the people. They are focused, determined and always looking for opportunities to succeed.

**What's changed the most about politics during your two decades as mayor?**

The general demeanor. People who disagree with your policies feel it's now okay to paint you as a horrible human being because of them. Also, thanks to social media, people can say or do whatever they please, regardless of the truth, and it becomes part of the permanent record.

**Speaking of social media, would you rather have a Facebook "like" or a Twitter follower?**

Twitter follower. They seem more engaged.

**What part of your job takes way more time than anyone can imagine?**

Scheduling. I might have to be eight or ten different places on a Saturday.

**What is the hardest thing to say NO to as mayor?**

Saying no to promotions because of budget constraints. Sometimes the things you know will help your town are not possible because of decisions made at the state or national level.

**Who were your heroes growing up in Elizabeth?**

Teachers. They were encouraging, informative and fun to be around.

**Yankees or Mets?**

Dodgers, actually. My father was a Brooklyn fan, so we rooted for them after they moved to Los Angeles. Sandy Koufax made a big impression on me, even though I was a right-hander. He seemed like the quintessential baseball player.

**What did you think you'd be doing when you grew up?**

I had no idea. You don't need to have a set plan. You just need a direction.

**What first intrigued you about politics?**

I had a brother born with Down Syndrome and severe disabilities that prevented him from living at home. A local Councilman, Maurice O'Keefe, picked up the phone and got my brother into a facility where he could be cared for properly. I was really moved by this. I saw firsthand how politics could help people. When Maurice lost his election in 1978, I got into politics and ended up taking his seat on the City Council four years later.

**What is the origin of the name Bollwage?**

German. My sister traced our family to Pine Street in the early 1800s. I bet we were leftover Hessians from the Revolutionary War!

**What's your favorite food?**

In this town, with so many great restaurants, I'll get in trouble no matter what I answer.

**Okay, when your wife offers to make you something special for dinner, what do you ask for?**

Reservations...Uh-oh, I'll probably get in trouble for that answer, too.

**Editor's Note:** Mayor Bollwage wasn't kidding about Twitter. You can follow him @MayorBollwage. While you're at it, follow EDGE, too @EdgeMagNJ.