

Mesquite Mayor John Monaco
2014 State of the City Address
January 31, 2014
Mesquite Convention Center

Thank you for that great introduction, Jerry.

But don't run off just yet.

As most of you are aware, Jerry recently retired from Blue Bell Creameries after nearly 40 years.

During that time, his community service was woven into the fabric of Mesquite.

So, although I have already named a street after him, I'd like to again take a moment to publicly thank Jerry for his selfless contributions.

Good evening, I truly appreciate all of you coming out tonight to celebrate and thank the wonderful people, just like Jerry, who make Mesquite the great city that it is.

This annual State of the City Address gives me the opportunity to highlight some of this City's greatest accomplishments during the past year, and to preview some of what is coming in this new year.

Given all of the excitement of 2013 and all of the plans for 2014, my staff and I had a hard time selecting the stories I am about to share with you.

This led to draft, after draft, and long days of practice in the office.

And for many of those days, I continued practicing at home with my 8-year-old grandson Aidan as my audience.

And, as I was wrapping up last night's rehearsal at home, Aidan told me that his class was studying the Gettysburg Address.

With that in mind, I bragged to Aidan that I knew all about that great speech.

In fact, I thought I'd show off a little bit and recite to him the best part:

"We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain...that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

So, I turned to Aidan and said, "And we have kept President Lincoln's promise for more than 150 years."

With that, Aidan looked up at me and said, "Wow, Pee-pa ... did you get a picture with him?"

I told Aidan that I couldn't get a picture with him because he got off the stage too fast!

While I wasn't there when President Lincoln made that promise, I am blessed to be surrounded by great leaders and dedicated citizens who embody the American principles of freedom, democracy and public service.

So, before I begin my formal remarks, let me take a moment to introduce two very important groups of people who embody those American principles.

I'll begin by introducing some of our great leaders – Mesquite's former mayors.

These leaders have provided Mesquite a solid foundation upon which our great city now stands.

I believe none of our successes today could have been achieved without their hard work and dedication.

And it is for those reasons and so many more, that I'm going to ask our former Mayors to please stand and remain standing as their name is called.

I am going to begin with:

- The Honorable B.J. Smith, who served from 1977 to 1981; next is
- The Honorable George Venner, who served from 1987 to 1991, and my immediate predecessor
- The Honorable Mike Anderson, who served from 1997 to 2007.

You have heard me say this before, but it bears repeating:

I stand upon the broad and sturdy shoulders of all the mayors who came before me and, I remain grateful for the privilege.

The second very important group that I want to highlight before we start, is our United States military.

I was honored to spend time with some of them just this past June, when I met with our local military recruiters in Mesquite's Town East Park as they prepared new recruits for basic training.

I personally witnessed their enthusiasm and dedication to those American principles I noted earlier – Freedom, Democracy and Public Service – as the recruits prepared to take their place in our Armed Forces.

And tonight, we are honored to be joined by some of those recruiters, as well as a few of our community's retired military veterans.

So at this time, will all of you please stand to be recognized?

In fact, let's take a moment to recognize all of the veterans and active duty military personnel who may be here with us this evening.

Please stand, so that we may thank you for your service to our country.

We know that your service doesn't end with your last tour of duty.

Let's give them all a big round of applause.

The service of our past mayors - and of our brave men and women in the military - have enabled Mesquite to experience positive growth over these many years.

And, that service has also allowed us to weather several economic storms, and one of the most severe storms – was the recent recession.

However, I want you to know that last year was a very good year for Mesquite as we saw our crime rate drop and our economic activity rise!

And this year is already off to a great start.

As you know, none of this happens by accident.

So to lay the groundwork for 2014, our City Council held a planning workshop last year with the focus being the future of Mesquite.

It was during that “workshop” that we were introduced to Rebecca Ryan’s book, “Re-generation: A Manifesto for America’s Next Leaders,” where she said:

“Planners plan cities...engineers engineer cities...Mayors manage cities...but only citizens can love their cities.”

I want you to know, that really resonated with me.

And, as I was pulling together all of the wonderful stories of our citizens, city staff and others - I knew that the common thread was the love all of us have for the City of Mesquite.

And, one great example of that love was the City of Mesquite's Project Renewal, which we started in 2007.

As many of you will recall, this project has brought together the efforts of our private citizens, our public servants and others to lower crime and improve our quality of life.

And, it also signaled a new direction for the City of Mesquite with its long-range plan to transform, rebuild and re-invest in our community.

It should be noted at this time, that it was important to me and your City Council that Project Renewal empower our citizens to seize new opportunities to improve their local community.

While at the same time, all of us would be held accountable for moving those projects along and, most importantly, for delivering results.

Speaking of "results," let me talk about what we accomplished to improve the quality of life here in Mesquite.

And on this subject, our 35th President John F. Kennedy was once quoted as saying, "What unites us is far greater than what divides us."

I believe that quote says much about the City of Mesquite.

In fact, one of the most visible, hands-on examples of our "quality of life" efforts can be seen in the amazing success of our annual Addressing Mesquite Day.

How much success?

Well, I am proud to share with you tonight that last year we surpassed our 500th house!

Yes, with an army of more than 5,500 volunteers over the course of nine years, we restored more than 500 homes!

What makes this accomplishment even more remarkable is that this nationally recognized program had very humble beginnings.

More specifically, Addressing Mesquite Day was hatched over breakfast one day between two local pastors, a city councilman and a Mayor.

Since that breakfast more than 10 years ago, we have seen what a City can do on one Saturday, every year, for nine consecutive years!

Now, let me tell you about the owner of that 500th home – Ms. Ola DeSmith.

This 40-year resident of Mesquite, who recently lost her husband, had no idea what she was in for.

I was there just this past November morning, and embraced Ola as she watched wide-eyed as our volunteers, city staff, City Council, and others, planted flowers, trimmed trees and painted her house.

Needless to say, this made a positive impact on Ola's quality of life, and the lives of those other 499 Mesquite neighbors before her who were helped during an Addressing Mesquite Day!

Our dedicated volunteers, civic organizations, churches and city staff have shown us that this concerted effort offered through Addressing Mesquite Day makes Mesquite not only a good place to live, but more importantly, a great place to call home!

But, we do not stop with Addressing Mesquite Day!

After helping our neighbors, our city leaders decided to address the larger issue of homes that had been left vacant, often through foreclosures - which occurred during the most recent recession.

And, our Community Services Director Valerie Bradley, and her team of JoAnn Rodriguez and Rick Smith led the revitalization of those homes with a relatively new program called, "The Neighborhood Stabilization Program."

They identified and purchased vacant homes, made them like new again, and sold them to qualifying first-time homeowners eager to be a part our community.

It should be noted, that this program was kicked off with a federal grant and will continue its mission with the money we make on the sale of these homes!

Additionally, the City of Mesquite also received state grants to improve its residential services.

As an example, the Mesquite Library, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in just a few months, was able to expand its services with several grants from the Texas Library Commission.

And, one of those new services that I want to talk about this evening is our “Books for Babies.”

What makes this so very special, is that it will allow Library Director Jeannie Johnson and her staff to promote early literacy through book kits for new Mesquite parents.

And, not stopping there, another way the City improved our community through grants last year was to add more parks in Mesquite.

As you know, our parks are that place where we can meet our neighbors and friends.

And, that was what Community Development Director Richard Gertson and his staff had in mind when they made dramatic enhancements to the historic Truman Heights neighborhood.

You see, not only did they improve the appearance of the streets and make the area more pedestrian-friendly, but they also planned for a new “pocket park.”

These small “pocket parks” are developed on land that otherwise might have little use because of their size and out-of-the-way location.

And I want you to know, this “pocket park” was made possible by our Keep Mesquite Beautiful program, led by Executive Director Paige Swiney, which landed a 20,000-dollar grant from Lowe’s to help make that new “pocket park” a reality.

In addition to grants, Keep Mesquite Beautiful earned the “President’s Circle Recognition” from Keep America Beautiful.

They did this, by rallying our local schools in the “Recycle Bowl.”

Not one, not two, but seven Mesquite schools won the top spots for the entire state of Texas in this recycling competition.

In fact, our own Sam Rutherford Elementary won the top spot for the second year in a row!

How about that!

And, I know from experience, our Mesquite residents - like those award-winning students - work together to make a real and lasting difference.

And we saw that commitment displayed again during our public education programs led by Water Conservation Coordinator Kathy Fonville.

You see, we hosted more than 500 residents in our monthly Sustainability Classes that help us work together to protect our natural resources.

And, joining all of you in this move to conserve natural resources was our Manager of Parks, Mr. Travis Sales.

As many of you are already aware, Travis's love of trees and landscaping has captivated our community through his popular "Talkin' Turf with Travis" columns that appear in the resident newsletter – and, which will soon be on video!

Hey, if you are anything like me, you need someone to not only tell you how to do something, but to show you how to do it!

So, for what all these folks do for Mesquite's "quality of life," let me ask them to stand and remain standing to be recognized for their service: Arborist and Manager of Parks Mr. Travis Sales, Water Conservation Coordinator Ms. Kathy Fonville, Keep Mesquite Beautiful Executive Director Ms. Paige Swiney, Community Development Director Mr. Richard Gertson, Library Director Ms. Jeannie Johnson, our Neighborhood Stabilization Program Coordinators Ms. Joann Rodriguez and Mr. Rick Smith, and Community Services Director Ms. Valerie Bradley.

Now, let's give them all a big round of applause!

And, though he could not be here tonight, I would like to add a special note of thanks for our Arts Director Mr. Mike Templeton, who recently retired.

As many of you know, Mike spent more than 20 years sharing his love of the arts.

Working alongside of his dedicated staff as well as with the leadership of the Mesquite Arts Board, Mike attracted thousands of high quality programs and performances to the City of Mesquite.

Thereby, opening our hearts and our minds, and dramatically improving our quality of life.

However, Mike's crowning achievement has to be the completion of the Mesquite Arts Center.

And, I understand we have several members of the Arts Center staff and members of the Board of Directors in attendance tonight.

So, will all of you please stand so that we may thank you?

Now, I want to talk about our civic organizations and the "love of community" they have shown through their many selfless gifts of time and talent!

Beginning with - the Mesquite Rotary Club - which is currently led by President John Emory.

Their volunteers once again hosted the annual Rodeo Bike Ride that attracted approximately 1,300 cyclists and raised more than \$60,000 in 2013.

And, that money will be used for college scholarships for our local students, and to support programs such as the Boy Scouts and our own Addressing Mesquite Day.

The other civic organization I would like to highlight tonight is the AMBUCS Club - currently led by President Mike Oswalt.

This dedicated group of community leaders raised the funds to purchase 70 AmTrykes for children and special custom bikes for military veterans.

This, I believe, is a case where a picture of these folks using their new, hand-operated bikes - is worth a 1,000 of my words.

And, these are just two examples of the DOZENS of civic organizations in Mesquite that, as Mayor, I am fortunate to be included in many of their functions!

In fact, I attend so many of these great events that sometimes I'm asked if there is more than one of me to go around.

And, with that in mind, I will ask my stunt-double to help me.

[Video]

Thanks Mayor, let me know how that event turns out for you for me, for both of us!

As that "Mayor" attends to those events allow me to talk about economic development here in the City of Mesquite.

During 2013, Mesquite attracted many new businesses and persuaded several existing businesses to expand.

In fact, these gains were reported in the latest Texas Retail Survey that showed Mesquite was the 35th largest retail market in the state of Texas with more than \$1.3 billion dollars in sales!

That is a “b” - as in billions!

So tonight, I am going to highlight a few of them for you.

Allow me to begin with Time Warner Cable.

Time Warner Cable choose Mesquite as the home for just their 3rd “Experience Store” in the state of Texas!

And, we witnessed further success with our Community Appearance Manual as the old Town East Crossing shopping center was made to look new again.

You see, this renovated shopping center now houses Guitar Center’s new 11,000-square-foot store and one of Conn’s Appliances’ most successful outlets!

Also, Gander Mountain, the nation’s largest retailer of outdoors specialty gear, filled one of our empty big-box locations off Emporium Circle by opening a 31,000-square-foot store.

And, Famous Footwear opened its 2nd location here in town within our Town East Mall.

And, that store opening was part of the mall’s 22,000 square-feet of newly renovated space and the mall’s new 60-foot high video marquee that debuted in October - both of
Page 14 of 36, 2014 State of the City

which helped Town East Mall maintain its 98% occupancy rate throughout the calendar year!

But, the contributions by Town East Mall to the city go well beyond what I have already told you.

You see, Town East Mall Manager Chad Hastings and his team enthusiastically gave back to the community in a number of ways.

For example, they are the proud sponsors of the Boy Scouts Pinewood Derby, the Father's Day Car Show and several American Heart Association events.

So, when you add up the record sales numbers, the special events and new corporate investments - you can see there has been substantial progress in our retail industry!

In addition to our burgeoning retail industry, the City of Mesquite has a rapidly growing medical community that is becoming one of mesquite's strongest economic drivers.

And it is with this in mind, that I'm very proud to say that the City Council had the vision to create a Medical Management District last year, which is an essential element for the development of the 60-acre Peachtree Health and Wellness Center.

And, I think you should know, that Mesquite's Medical Management District was the only one approved by the Texas Legislature during 2013!

Why is this important?

Well it is important because, this designation paved the way for the developers to have the capital required - to begin the first phase of this wonderful project.

And, when it is finally completed, this medical campus is expected to feature a wide range of health services, a conference center, shopping and loft-style residences all nestled within a nature park setting.

And, we look to this proposed development to strengthen the City of Mesquite's reputation as a healthcare destination, by complementing our existing healthcare facilities such as - the Mesquite Rehabilitation Institute.

It was during this past calendar year - that the Institute's Chief Executive Officer Brian Abraham - and his staff - celebrated the company's ranking in the top 10 percent of more than 700 rehab facilities nationally.

And, as you know, just across the street from the Mesquite Rehabilitation Institute is the Dallas Regional Medical Center and its new Chief Operating Officer, Tina Pollack.

And, I am going to ask that she stand, so that we may congratulate her on her promotion to Chief Executive Officer!

Tina, I want to thank the Dallas Regional Medical Center for again being a sponsor of the "Mayor's Canned Food Drive" at our annual "Real. Texas. Festival."

Now, let's take a look at another strong driver of our economy – our friends at Union Pacific Railroad.

I want you to know that over the years, Union Pacific has grown from a good corporate citizen into a true partner with the City of Mesquite.

In fact, just this past December, Union Pacific Senior Vice President – Robert W. Turner – took the time to fly here from their headquarters in Omaha, to co-host a community forum with me.

And, it was during that “Talkin’ Trains” forum that he delivered the great news that Union Pacific is moving forward with a \$75-million-dollar expansion of their Intermodal Facility – right here in Mesquite!

By the way – this expansion – is the second expansion in just four years!

I must tell you, that when companies like Union Pacific and industries like healthcare make these large investments, they are demonstrating their confidence in the City of Mesquite.

With that in mind, we also saw the key relocation of ECS Refining to our fair city.

It was this past May, that this electronics recycling company celebrated their investment of 23 million dollars for a new divisional headquarters – right here in Mesquite, Texas!

Furthermore, General Manager Jeff Bell shared with me that ECS plans to expand its workforce by almost 20-percent this year.

Now - with no pun intended - as I “round up” our economic focus tonight, I have to include our beloved Mesquite Rodeo.

You see, for the past three years, the Camelot Group and their team have generated a cumulative 29 percent increase in sales at the Mesquite Rodeo Arena.

And, this has happened in part, because they diversified their calendar of entertainment.

For example, did you know that two-thirds of all events at the rodeo...are non-rodeo events?

Let me repeat that...two-thirds of all events at the rodeo do not involve a horse!

It should be noted that, all of these successes by our retail, healthcare, manufacturing and entertainment sectors are not just numbers on a piece of paper.

You see, companies only make investments at this level when they have complete confidence that our city is headed in the right direction.

To that end, a lot of people contribute to this economic success, including our Planning Department, Engineering Department and our City Council members, to name just a few.

And, the man charged with coordinating all of these efforts is our Economic Development Manager Tom Palmer.

Tom, would you please stand so we can recognize you?

Working with Tom and our economic development team, meant that I had an opportunity to talk with a lot of these corporate leaders, as well as dozens of small business owners - who tell me that they are attracted to Mesquite for the safe, affordable neighborhoods, good access to healthcare, and a steady supply of quality employees.

And, I believe, that this is a compliment to our public and private educational opportunities.

As an example, on the college level, our partners at Eastfield Community College – led by President Dr. Jean Conway – continue to give the personal attention needed to nurture its 14,000 students.

You see, this personal attention has led to their “High School Dual Enrollment” program - being the largest in the Dallas County Community College District!

And, if students want to go in a different direction, they can find a diversity of educational opportunities at Mesquite’s Carrington College - where Executive Director Todd Paulsen tells me that 100 percent of their medical billing and coding students are finding work in that field immediately upon their graduation.

Yet before our students can think about attending these great institutions or moving on to bigger universities, they must first succeed in our grade schools and high schools.

In that regard, the Mesquite Independent School District continues to improve every year!

Last year, in fact, the Mesquite Independent School District – led by Superintendent Dr. Linda Henrie – was 1 of only 14 Texas school districts to be honored for increasing student access to advanced placement courses.

On a personal note, I had the treat of meeting the brilliant and bright students of the Mesquite Independent School District's student marketing club.

These spectacular students have shown great leadership through significant community service projects.

And, if any of our businesses partners who are here tonight have an internship or part-time job available, I encourage you to seek out their leader, Ms. Kathy Benson of John Horn High School.

In fact, why wait?

You can reach out tonight, because Ms. Benson and some of those amazing students - and their teachers - are here this evening.

Would the marketing club students and faculty please stand to be recognized?

I want you to know, that these students are prime examples of how Mesquite's teachers are inspiring our next generation to succeed.

And, I am confident that these students will be future leaders!

Moving along, this next story really brings that lesson of inspiration home.

Last year, I learned of Darnesha Moore.

Darnesha was a 16-year-old homeless girl who had just moved with her family into a Dallas shelter.

Further, I am told, that from that Dallas shelter, Darnesha and her younger sister took the DART train and transferred to our “COMPASS” shuttle bus system to travel into Mesquite.

Once in town, Darnesha dropped her 8-year-old sister off at Florence Black Elementary and then headed to class at Mesquite High School.

And, I want you to know, the two girls did this for quite awhile - in fact - until the “love” of the teachers and administrators of the Mesquite Independent School District took over.

Now, let’s take a look at Darnesha’s incredible story and more importantly – learn of her accomplishments.

[Video]

First, I want to thank Darnesha for allowing me to share her inspirational story with everyone this evening.

And although, Darnesha is away at college and could not be here, I understand her tennis coach, the administrators and others who helped Darnesha are with us this evening!

Would all of you please stand so that we may thank you?

Moving forward - as we just witnessed the impact of a community's love towards a student - I wish to share with you the dedication the City of Mesquite has for its residents!

With prime examples of this dedication being found - on a daily basis - in both our Fire and Police Departments.

Allow me to begin with our top ranked Fire Department.

As many of you are aware, the Mesquite Fire Department is led by Fire Chief Mark Kerby and is staffed by approximately 200 professional firefighters and paramedics.

Together, they worked hand-in-hand to reduce our Emergency Medical Service response times by seven percent - even as their call volume increased by 12 percent.

That means, our Fire Department addressed more than 15,000 fire and medical emergency calls with an average response time of under 5 minutes.

And that also means, they were able to do this while also volunteering their off-duty time to numerous community causes, like the Muscular Dystrophy Association - where for more than 10 years they have volunteered at its summer camp.

And last year alone, they raised more than 30,000 dollars through the "Fill the Boot" campaign so that kids could attend that very special camp.

Complementing these public safety accomplishments, were those of our leaders in Texas Law Enforcement - the Mesquite Police Department!

With approximately 230 sworn and dedicated officers, and the leadership of Chief Derek Rohde, this exceptional group of professionals reduced Mesquite's overall crime rate significantly, which included a decline in burglaries by 10 percent during 2013!

And, they continued to improve their performance through the launching of their new police academy, which includes a program tailor-made for policing in Mesquite.

Furthermore, the number of neighborhood crime watch groups here in Mesquite doubled over the past two years, thanks to the persistent efforts of Officers Don Williams and Jeff Goodfred.

And, for the 21st year in a row, the department educated more than 3,000 of this community's 7th graders on the consequences of their life choices.

In that regard, it was just recently that i was privileged to attend a presentation of this year's program, called "C.S.I. – Choices Shaping Individuals," and witnessed the positive impact that this program has on our youth.

But in addition to these regular duties, our Police Department continued to partner with various groups to improve our community in other new ways.

And, just one great example of this, is the department's partnership with our local schools to collect teddy bears for the officers to use at crime scenes involving children.

Additionally, the department partnered with local motorcycle enthusiasts for another successful Santa Cop Toy Drive.

By the way, this was the 19th consecutive year for the Santa Cop Toy Drive – which has been led these many years by Officer Don Williams.

So, for all that our devoted fire and police personnel do in protecting this community - and for so much more - will Chiefs Mark Kerby and Derek Rohde - as well as other department members - please stand so we can thank you?

Supporting the outstanding work of our fire and police departments, is our very successful and newly minted, "court of record."

This new "court of record" designation means that criminal and civil citation hearings are now heard right here in the City of Mesquite, instead of being routinely referred to the City of Dallas.

Well, for those who don't already know, this "court of record" was created just over a year ago.

And in that one year, the total number of appeals dropped from 2,600 - to only one.

Yes, that's correct, we had only one case go to appeal last year!

Further, by holding these hearings in Mesquite, Municipal Court Judge Stephen Crane and his team have increased fine collections by 17 percent.

And, it should be noted, this is revenue that was previously lost to other jurisdictions.

Of course, none of this would have been possible, without the Information Technology Strategic Plan the City Council approved in 2011.

That plan, implemented by Finance Director Debbie [MOLE] and Information Technology Director Zak LaJoie, features new software applications that make our technology more robust, resilient and efficient than ever before!

So - Judge Crane, Debbie and Zak - would you and your staff please stand so we may thank you?

As our fire, police and courts were keeping Mesquite safe on the ground, our dedicated airport staff was improving safety overhead.

In fact, it was just last month, Mesquite soared to new heights when we cut the ribbon for our new air traffic control tower.

It should be noted, that this \$2.8-million-dollar tower was funded primarily with federal dollars.

And, with more than 250 aircraft as well as the Texas Department of Public Safety already calling Mesquite Metro Airport home – we feel this control tower will only further increase corporate traffic and attract new airport-related businesses.

Without question, much of our success at the airport is due to the 17 years of dedicated service of Cynthia Godfrey, our Airport Director.

So, at this time, Cynthia, will you please stand so we may thank you?

Now, back on the ground, I want to tell you about our Parks and Recreation Department, led by Director Cliff Keheley - as he raised the bar of excellence in 2013 to make Mesquite's parks nationally recognized.

And, I'm glad Cliff raised the bar of excellence – because he certainly didn't raise his golf game any!

Moving on, with the help of Cliff we earned the titles of "Playful City USA" for our commitment to playgrounds and the title of "Field of Excellence" for the Eastfield Soccer Complex.

Plus, we were once again designated "Tree City USA" by the National Arbor Day Foundation.

In addition, the Parks Department stayed on target when it unveiled the new archery range!

And, Cliff's team also expanded our jogging and biking opportunities with the first phase of the new Mesquite Heritage Trail.

So, for all of these reasons and so many more - Cliff, would you and your staff please stand? Thank-you!

Notwithstanding the record Texas drought and our local attention to water conservation, our Public Works Director Tim James and his crews worked hard to ensure that we have fresh, free-flowing water for our homes and businesses.

In fact, our Public Works Department provided more than six-billion, again, that's "b" for billion - gallons of safe, clean drinking water during calendar year 2013.

Furthermore, and I believe, just as important as their standard day-to-day operations, was the herculean effort our Public Works Department displayed during the December ice storm.

While all of our city departments responded remarkably – providing city services and public safety support – I want to especially commend our Public Works crews.

You see, they were in the thick of the storm, working around the clock, clearing fallen trees and assisting residents who lost power or were stuck in their homes!

So, at this time, Tim, will you please stand with the rest of your hard working team so that we can recognize and thank all of you?

Before moving to my favorite part of the evening - our awards ceremony - I want to introduce you to the people I have the privilege of working with - my fellow Councilmembers.

I want you to know I am both - honored and privileged - to serve with them and grateful for their many, many contributions.

So fellow Councilmembers, as I call your names, please join me on stage - to my left.

I am going to begin with:

- The Honorable Mayor Pro Tem Shirley Roberts, next
- The Honorable Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Al Forsythe, next
- The Honorable Bill Porter, representing Place 1, next
- The Honorable Greg Noschese, representing Place 5, and finally
- The Honorable Dennis Tarpley, representing Place 6.

And, for reasons beyond his control, the Honorable Stan Pickett, representing Place 3, could not be here with us tonight.

I want to take this opportunity to publically thank your City Councilmembers and my colleagues for their service, support and dedication to our city!

Now is that special moment my fellow Councilmembers and I look forward to every year – recognizing our dedicated City Management staff.

In fact, I just recently added it up – and they have an amazing 86 combined years of dedicated service to our city!

So, at this time, I ask that you please stand as I call your name, and remain standing:

- Managing Director of Administrative Services, Mr. Ted Chinn, next
- Assistant City Manager Mr. Jerry Dittman, next
- Deputy City Manager Ms. Carol Zolnerowich, and finally
- Our City Manager Mr. Ted Barron.

Please, join me in letting them know that we are grateful for their continued leadership.

Mr. Barron, would you remain standing?

I know you don't want to, but please indulge me!

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of making a special presentation, a presentation I want to share with all of you this evening.

You see, I recalled that it was around 1988 that a city manager's average tenure with any given city was about five-and-a-half years.

By the way, today, I'm told now it's only about 4 years!

Well, it was that same year – 1988 – when Ted Barron started his 25-year career with the City of Mesquite - a large portion of it in the role of City Manager!

Over the years, Ted has led this City through extraordinary growth, challenging times and – as you know – has a great many achievements to his credit!

This evening, I wanted to publicly thank him on behalf of the City Council and myself.

In fact, let's all give Ted a round of applause for his long-tenured, selfless dedication to the City of Mesquite.

Thank you, Ted.

These next three guests - who will join me on stage - are three great examples of city employees who truly "love" their city and will be receiving awards this evening.

So let's get them up here!

As I call your name, would you please join the City Council and myself, on the stage - to my right.

– The first award will go to the Fire Officer of the Year - Captain David Shedd;

- The next award will be for Police Officer of the Year - Brandon Snyder, and
- The third award goes to our General Government Employee of the Year – Library Administrative Aide Karen Hipp.

So, as they come up on stage, let's welcome them with a warm round of applause.

Now, I will begin with our Fire Officer of the Year award.

Captain David Shedd has been with the Fire Department for the past 25 years, serving the last nine years as Captain, and when called upon, Acting Deputy Chief at Station #5.

And, Captain Shedd is known for his "love" of his staff, which is evidenced by the manner in which he builds camaraderie and team spirit with his crews.

While working at the City's busiest fire station, Captain Shedd has found the time to promote fun and fitness, while establishing a sense of trust among his peers.

Further, he is a tireless volunteer who serves his community through Keep Mesquite Beautiful and the United Way.

So, it is easy to see why this is the third time Captain David Shedd has been chosen as Fire Officer of the Year.

With that, please join me as we honor the 2013 Mesquite Fire Officer of the Year - Captain David Shedd.

Next, we have our Police Officer of the Year, Brandon Snyder.

Officer Snyder began his career with the Mesquite Police Department in 1998 as a Detention Officer.

And it was just two years later, that he was promoted to a sworn officer position.

During his career, Officer Snyder has served this community as both a patrol officer and criminal investigator.

And today, he protects the children of our community as a special "Crimes Against Persons" investigator.

I want you to know, that Officer Snyder has been recognized by civic organizations for his efforts, including being named "officer of the year" by both the American Legion and the Elks Lodge.

And, when he is not investigating crimes, Officer Snyder can be found volunteering his time to such worthy causes as the Special Olympics and our own Santa Cop program.

He could not have done any of this without the support and "love" of his devoted wife, Amanda, and their adorable daughter, Reagan Leann.

So, please join me as we honor the 2013 Mesquite Police Officer of the Year - Officer Brandon Snyder.

And finally, it gives me great pleasure to honor our General Government Employee of the Year, Ms. Karen Hipp our Library Services Administrative Aide.

And, I want you to know, that Karen just celebrated her 40th anniversary working at the Mesquite Public Library.

During those four decades, she has faithfully served the citizens of this community.

And for this very reason, Karen has been called an “ambassador to the public.”

Further, Karen’s “love” for Mesquite goes well beyond her role at the library.

You see, she has also volunteered her time to many community endeavors such as the building of the Kids Quest Playground, service on our United Way Committee and planning the Mesquite Rodeo Parade.

So, at this time, would you please join me as we honor the 2013 General Government Employee of the Year, Ms. Karen Hipp.

As the City Council and these award-winning employees exit the stage to take their seats, let’s all thank them once again.

For several weeks now, Mesquite citizens have been asking me, “Who is this year’s ‘Pillar of the Community Award’ winner?”

So, I am glad to finally be able to reveal the 2013 winner – make that “winners” – of our Pillar of the Community Award.

And, I want you to know that this is the first year we are honoring a married couple.

You see, they have been working together, raising a family together and giving back to the community together.

And, they just celebrated their 20TH wedding anniversary together.

So, it is only fitting that they are honored together.

This wonderful couple embody the values of charity, hard work, and “love.”

Let me tell you, that it was just two decades ago, that they created a business – a business based on love of God and community – as they sat around their kitchen table, right here in Mesquite.

Remarkably today, that company has grown to be a leader in the home healthcare field with more than 2,000 employees!

Continuing, as this couple grew their company, they also grew their family.

And, they are now the proud parents of five wonderful children: Paul, Sarah, Ruthann, Marybeth and Priscilla – all of whom are here tonight.

And, as they watched their growing family and growing business, these pillars of the community decided that they also wanted to grow their commitment to Mesquite.

Accordingly, they have stepped up many times over the years to ensure the success of pretty much all of Mesquite's community events.

More specifically, their support can be seen in everything from Kidfish and Pumpkin Fest, to our Chamber of Commerce Taste and Trade and Family Night at the Mesquite Rodeo.

And, on top of all of that, they took the time to start a ministry, as yet another way to give back, not only here, but abroad.

So it is for all these reasons and so many more - I am proud to announce that Shaji and Shiney Daniel, the owners of Agape Home Healthcare, are tonight's "winners" of the 2013 Pillar of the Community Award – and ask that they join me here on stage – to my right!

Please join me in congratulating the Daniels!

As the Daniels take their seats, I will end - where I began - talking about the love affair people have with their communities.

I am confident that it is the relationships that are built, the emotional connections that are made and the opportunities presented that sustain our "citizens' love of their cities."

And, I hope that some of the stories I have shared with you this evening – from Darnesha to the Daniels have shown you the “love” our citizens have for the City of Mesquite.

So as I bid you my farewell this evening, I would like to offer a quote by former President Ronald Reagan who stated during his farewell Address, “All great change in America begins at the DINNER TABLE.”

So with that thought in mind, I hope during tonight’s dinner, you learned that - while Mesquite had a great year in 2013 and is on track for another high impact year in 2014 - what really makes a difference in our community is you - our citizens!

It’s Addressing Mesquite Day. It’s making friends in your neighborhood parks. It’s recycling for a better tomorrow.

In other words, it’s the lessons we take home with us and share around the dinner table that make the biggest difference in the long run.

At this time, I want to thank my family – especially my wife Alice – for the love and support I receive that allows me to continue to serve the citizens of Mesquite.

And, once again, I want to thank all you for the privilege of serving as your Mayor.

Good night and may God bless you and yours, the City of Mesquite, the State of Texas, and may God bless the United States of America.

Good Night! ###