

2018 City of Mesquite Update
“CommUNITY”
Presented by Mayor Stan Pickett
February 8, 2018

Good evening. It’s good to be with you tonight. On behalf of the City of Mesquite, I want to thank the Chamber of Commerce for the invitation to be a part of their program tonight.

For myself and the Mesquite City Council, this event is an opportunity for us provide an update on City programs and services. However, before I jump right into the City news, I would like to talk about a topic that is important to every city across this country. That topic is “Community.”

If any of you were to look up the word “community” in the dictionary, one of the definitions you might find would state *“a group of people living in the same place.”* But in Mesquite we believe community is more than just a definition.

Moreover, if you take a closer look at the word “community”, there is another word that lies within it that I feel truly embodies the essence of Mesquite, Texas. That word is “Unity.”

Mesquite has displayed its unity by embracing many programs and projects. Those efforts have helped so many here locally and beyond the city limits. I was amazed in 2017 by the examples of unity I witnessed in our city. Tonight, I would like to take this opportunity to share just a few of those experiences with all of you.

Mesquite’s strength is - and will always be - its people.

Our citizens and business leaders have illustrated many times how strong this city really is. One example is the annual “Santa Cop Toy Drive.” Through the years, the Mesquite Police Department has run this drive to help families in need. But, they have not done it alone.

People like Helen Etheridge have helped tremendously. This small business owner in downtown Mesquite once again opened her shop doors on a business-after-hours event to collect toys for this drive. And, it is people like the Shaji and Shiney Daniels, who hosted an all-day toy drive at their Agape Home Health headquarters. Because of the passion to help displayed by Helen, the Daniels, and our entire community, the Santa Cop program raised resources to assist more than 800 families during the holidays in 2017.

Our students of MISD have also shown great passion to help others. For example, they donated \$18,000 dollars to the toy drive I just mentioned. And, they raised another \$54,000 dollars for Hurricane Harvey victims in gulf coast areas. Even families who struggle to make ends meet contributed to these causes. Incredibly, they were giving whatever they could to help others in need.

Folks, that’s what I call unity!

The City of Mesquite employees also demonstrated their dedication to helping others in need last year. Once again, they stepped forward to support charities that assist people right here in Mesquite. Their “Real Texas Giving” campaign generated more than \$27,000 dollars in funding for local charities.

Two of the charities were Mesquite Social Services and Sharing Life Community Outreach. The city’s efforts to help both of those food pantries was on display throughout last year. Our “Spread the Love” campaign raised enough Peanut Butter & Jelly to help make 41,000 summer lunches for Mesquite children living in food insecure homes. That total was more than double of what our community donated in 2016!

In addition, our civic friends and corporate partners showed their support of this program with contributions of funds and with donations of PB&J. Let me tell you, anytime you see on social media your local food pantry executive director dress up for Halloween in a PB&J costume you know the support is strong.

Citizens of Mesquite, repeatedly, expressed their unity in 2017. They donated to the Mesquite Library’s book drive called “Back the Blue - Bring a Book.” The drive supported MISD and their “Read Play Talk” campaign.

Also, our residents showed up on a Sunday afternoon to express their support of ALL our first responders during the City’s “Real Texas Heroes” event.

Daniel Norwood and others from the group called Vision Mesquite held bi-monthly “Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast” events at the Mesquite Arts Center. Those events helped reinforce important relationships in our community throughout the past year. With inspirational speakers and with words of faith, they helped strengthened our city.

And again this past year, thousands of volunteers demonstrated their caring nature for Mesquite in October on “Addressing Mesquite Day.” Our city was able to assist more than 100 homeowners with exterior repairs and landscaping projects. Most of these homeowners were senior citizens and the disabled who just needed a helping hand.

In November, our corporate friends at Whataburger helped kick-start our funding campaign to build a new “Mesquite Veterans Memorial.”

In addition, just last month, we held our inaugural “Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Event.” This event further illustrated that Mesquite has no racial or ethnic boundaries, which could prevent us from achieving great things in our city. I was honored to stand on stage with Pastor Reginald Jefferson of New Hope Baptist Church to light a Unity Candle to symbolize all that is great in Mesquite, TX.

I could not be prouder of the constant expressions of support that magnifies the core strength of Mesquite – and that is- the people who live... work... play... and pray here.

The city's efforts to build upon the unity of 2017 will continue this month. Our very first "Neighborhood Summit" on February 17 will provide residents the opportunity to build relationships with their neighborhoods – as well as residents from other neighborhoods. The event will build a bridge of information and knowledge to grow more citizen involvement within Mesquite.

Now, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize someone who has been an ambassador of our community for decades. B.J. Smith, our City Attorney, is retiring this year. Many of us know him, and consider him a living legend. His impact on the City of Mesquite will be felt by our community for generations to come. He has served with professionalism and tremendous excellence. B.J. has been a supporter to many and a friend to thousands. He and his wife Ann have given of their time, their talent and their resources to so many community endeavors. In short, Mesquite and the people who live here are better off today because of B.J. Smith and his family.

B.J., the words "thank-you" do not suffice to express what you have meant to all of us for these many years. You are a man of our time, and a man of all time here in Mesquite. Therefore, at this time I ask that everyone here tonight please stand. And, join me as we all honor B.J. with a round of applause.

We also want to celebrate our businesses in Mesquite. And, "business" was great in 2017. Let me share a few of the numbers with you tonight.

Last year we issued 325 CO's compared to 290 in 2016. That is a 12% increase in the quantity of certificate of occupancy permits. Furthermore, we added more than 800,000 square feet of NEW commercial space in Mesquite. That is a 47% increase from the previous year. And the value of all building permits in Mesquite rose to more than \$362 million dollars in 2017. Incredibly, that is a 90% increase over 2016! Additionally, we saw 314 permits pulled by businesses for remodels and additions. This tells me, that current businesses in Mesquite like being here. They want to remain in Mesquite. Businesses are investing in their location, right here in our town.

Great economic news was also seen in our residential growth. Two years ago, the average new home permit value in Mesquite was \$199,000 dollars. In 2017, the average value of a new home permit in our community rose to nearly \$262,000 dollars. That is more than a 30% increase! So, as you can see the economy in Mesquite is good and is growing - everyday!

As Mayor, I am honored to work alongside some wonderful people who help foster that phenomenal economic growth. These individuals truly have the community of Mesquite in their best interests. I am referring of course to the City Council.

Together, we seek to make decisions that will create a better Mesquite for all of us. Although we may not always agree, through professional dialogue and healthy debate, we strive to reach common ground on most issues. We are partners in the process to build a stronger community.

Therefore, this year, I would like to have each of them provide you a brief update on some of what we have accomplished in the city in 2017. And, what we are looking forward to in 2018.

At this time, we will show you a video hosted by our City Council. I hope you enjoy it.

As you can see, we achieved quite a bit in Mesquite last year. However, we still have much more to accomplish in 2018 and beyond. We will continue to work together towards improving Mesquite for today and for future generations. The decisions we make now, we hope will create a stronger city and a more vibrant community.

Employee Awards

The City Council and I would not be able to do our jobs effectively if not for the employees of the City of Mesquite. Their dedicated service to our community is essential for our success. Each day they are out in our community providing good customer service to our citizens and visitors. We are blessed to have men and women who are devoted to this city. You see them in our city facilities and at our programs serving our citizens.

There are a few employees though, who truly stood out last year. They are employees who are providing what we call “Real. Texas. Service.” They go to new heights in their efforts and in their efficiencies to provide outstanding customer experiences. Tonight, I would like to honor them.

To assist me, I would like to ask the City Council to join me on stage. As the City Council makes their way to stage, I would like to ask three employees to join me.

Mesquite Firefighter - Samantha Criswell,
Mesquite Police Officer - Paul Wathen and
Public Works Maintenance Crew Chief - Keith Chilton.

As these employees make their way to the stage area, I want to remind everyone here tonight how much the City Council appreciates the professionalism and effort put forth by ALL our employees.

To begin, I'd like to ask Ms. Samantha Criswell to join me here on the stage. Firefighter Samantha Criswell is a leader who consistently demonstrates professional excellence and moral integrity. She started her career with the Mesquite Fire Department in 2001. She received her Paramedic Certification in 2002. And, she earned a Life Saving Award in 2012. Samantha also spearheads the Fire Department's diversity recruiting at local schools and events.

However, Samantha is a valuable asset to the community in ways beyond saving lives and fighting fires. She is the driving force throughout the city in the annual MDA “Fill The Boot” Campaign. Not only does she help collect donations for the campaign, Sam has volunteered for a decade as a camp counselor at the MDA Summer Camp. Samantha has also been a constant volunteer to help families at the Ronald McDonald House. Also, she can be seen every October volunteering at the homes of our elderly residents during Addressing Mesquite Day.

Samantha Criswell embodies the sense of unity that I have been referring to tonight. She fosters an atmosphere of teamwork within the Fire Department. Moreover, she builds a sense of pride within Mesquite.

It is my pleasure to recognize Samantha Criswell as the 2017 Mesquite Fire Department Firefighter of the Year. Please join me in congratulating her for this prestigious honor.

Next, it is my honor to ask Mesquite Police Officer Paul Wathen to join me on stage. Mr. Wathen began his career as a police officer with the Mesquite Police Department in 2012. He is on our Mesquite streets working patrol as one of our DWI enforcement officers. He has done such a fantastic job, that Officer Wathen has been the department's leading arresting officer on DWI-related offenses. And, due to his mentoring of younger officers, there has been a steady increase in DWI arrests every year in Mesquite.

Officer Wathen demonstrates his passion for his job through his performance and his influences on others. Many in the Mesquite community have recognized him for his deep-rooted dedication to law enforcement. Here are just a few examples:

Officer Wathen has received 22 commendation letters from citizens and outside agencies. He has earned a Police Department Certificate of Merit Award for his commitment to the DWI enforcement program. And, the Elks Lodge in Mesquite named him their Officer of the Year.

However, probably one of the most telling examples of the impact Officer Wathen has had on DWI enforcement in Mesquite is the Mothers Against Drunk Driving program. MADD has paid tribute to Officer Wathen with their Enforcement Hero Award. They presented him with that honor in 2014. And, again in 2015. And, a third time in 2016! When it comes to DWI-enforcement, Mesquite is a safer community because of Officer Wathen.

So tonight, it is my honor to present Paul Wathen with the 2017 Mesquite Police Department Officer of the Year award. Please join me in congratulating him for this prestigious honor.

Next, I would like General Government Employee Mr. Keith Chilton to join me on stage. The City Council is grateful for the efforts put forth by ALL city employees. We are especially appreciative of the workers who are out there in the community doing work that is very labor intensive. And in some cases, it is work that goes unseen, and often unnoticed. Keith Chilton is a prime example of this.

As a Public Works Maintenance Crew Chief, Keith is an experienced tradesman in the City's Streets Division. Every day, Keith demonstrates his knowledge in roadway maintenance and pavement preservation techniques. Keith's background and talents are essential to our street operations. This includes everything from street patches to complete asphalt overlays.

Some may say this work is not glamorous, but I will tell you it is vitally important. Mesquite is an older inner ring suburb of a large metropolitan area. We need to do all we can to maintain our roads, and Keith is a critical contributor to those efforts.

But, Keith has life outside of road repair. He helps repair faith in the minds and in the hearts of many. You see, Keith is also a pastor of the United Missionary Baptist Church. At work, Keith is fixing roads. After work, Keith is all about fixing souls. That's being impactful!

Keith is a natural leader and exceptional member of our team. So at this time, I would like to present Mr. Keith Chilton the 2017 General Government Employee of the Year Award. Please join me in congratulating him for this prestigious honor.

While these outstanding employees remain on stage with the City Council, join me in one more round of applause for ALL of them.

As the City Council and the employees make their way back to their seats, I want to once again thank the Chamber of Commerce for this opportunity tonight. The City Council and I always enjoy recognizing our hard working city staff and giving them well-deserved praise for all they do - day in and day out.

In 2016, I announced we were "getting back to the basics" with a return to a concentration on core services. In 2017, I quoted our City Manager Cliff Keheley, who said, "We can always do better," and we constantly seek to accomplish that. This year, I happy to say that we have made progress both with "doing better" and with "getting back to the basics."

We recently did a community-wide survey. The results were encouraging. It revealed that our city is heading the right direction. The survey showed 7 out of 10 respondents rated Mesquite as an "excellent" or "good" place to live.

Nevertheless, we are going to continue our focus on the issues that are most important to you - the citizens we serve. Those issues are public safety, street maintenance and neighborhood vitality.

In 2018, we will ask our city employees to **Make An Impact.**

The message is clear: **Make an impact...**
 Every Day...
 with Every Citizen.

We will elevate our commitment to providing a positive experience with each customer.

Tonight I talked about the opportunity for "unity" in our community. We will look to build on that to become the best city and the best community we can possibly be. But, we will need your help.

We will need our business leaders and citizens to show us the possibilities that lay ahead for Mesquite, for us to continue to work on becoming an even greater city. To illustrate this, I am reminded of a story I recently heard.

A newly elected state representative decided to move into a low-income neighborhood. You see, prior to being elected he lived “across the track”, in the nicer part of town. To be more effective he felt he needed to live in an area that needed some help. He moved into an area that he felt like could benefit from his help. He asked one of the local community leaders, a longtime resident whom everyone admired and respected, to meet with him. He explained to the life-long resident, that he wanted to understand the community better.

She agreed to meet with him on one of the neighborhood streets. She invited him to walk with her and asked him to describe to her what HE sees. While they walked, he said that he saw broken windows, blight, trash, and disabled cars. He went on to explain that it appeared to be a drug-infested area, full of crime. They reached the end of the street. There was a moment of silence, but then the community leader told the state rep to “get out of here, I do not need your kind!”

He started to walk away, then stopped, turned back and asked, “When you say ‘your kind’, what do you mean?” She replied, “I do not need people that only see the negative, that remember just the bad, and only focus on what is wrong.” The community leader went on to explain, “I need people that see possibilities.” She then stated - “This community DOES NOT NEED LEADERS that can state what ‘WE ARE’, but rather, NEEDS LEADERS that can imagine what ‘WE CAN BECOME’! “The citizens of this community need a leader that can see HOPE!”

And that’s the message I wish to leave with you this evening. We need to see: HOPE, we need to see LOVE and we need to see POSSIBILITIES. We need to treat our neighbors with DIGNITY and RESPECT. We need to focus on our common LOVE of Mesquite. The HOPE we have SHOULD NOT be in government or even elected officials. Our hope for a better tomorrow SHOULD lie in each other - our neighbors and our friends.

To rephrase a quote from President John Kennedy, “Ask not what your city can do for you – ask what YOU can do for your city.” Let’s not just “tolerate” or “put up with our neighbors.” Let’s focus on our collective love and hope for our city’s future.

Sometimes the smallest act of kindness toward another person - can be the greatest act that person can ever experience. Look to make a difference in the lives of others. Let us all go forward tonight - as ordinary people that are eager to do extra ordinary things to make our city great again!

Together, we will continue to change the narrative of Mesquite. Together, we will continue to rise and be better due to the “unity” of our community!

And finally, I would be remiss if I did not recognize my wife and all she does for our family. Mary Jo has been so supportive of my time away from family to perform my duties as mayor.

To her I say, “thank you” and “I love you.” Thank you again for your time and attention. And, enjoy the rest of the program.