

**2019 Mayoral City Update**  
**Presented at the Mesquite Chamber of Commerce Banquet**  
**February 7, 2019**

Good evening. First, I have been to so many ribbon cuttings this year, I thought I'd begin by putting on my Chamber Mustanger jacket. I am honored to have this opportunity to present this City Update to you.

Let me thank the Chamber of Commerce, its Board of Directors and its membership for this invitation to speak. On behalf of the entire City Council, it is a wonderful platform to share the City's story. Tonight I would like to make something very crystal clear. The City of Mesquite supports the Chamber of Commerce! As the Mayor of the City, I support the Chamber!

I believe the City Council has confidence in the Board of Directors, and that they will take the Chamber to new heights in 2019. And, I pledge to the Chamber membership, as your Mayor and a small business owner in this community, I will do all that I can to support your efforts.

As you can see, this year, I have decided to change up the way I present this update. It's been an honor to be the Mayor of this city for almost four years now. And, I was a member of the City Council for many more years before that. In all that time, much has changed in our community. The city has accomplished a lot. We have re-built streets, roads, and replaced water and sewer pipes all over town. We have started new programs. We have launched new initiatives.

However, one thing has not changed. And that is, the love and support I have received from my family. Moreover, the guidance and friendship of my wife, Mary Jo. I want to thank them for everything they have done for me in allowing me to serve all of you.

Before I provide you an update on the tremendous year of business growth we enjoyed, I would like to share a few things about the City of Mesquite. It is important to all of us that we convey the many positive and great things happening in our community.

Tonight I want to focus on Mesquite and why it is a great place to live, to work, to play, and to own a business. In 2018 we started with a splash. Your City Council plunged right into the New Year. With great anticipation, we jumped into the waters with projects and programs to improve our community. Those are images of a few of the City Council at the very cold Polar Plunge to raise funds for Special Olympics. It shows we are regular citizens and can have a good time while leading this City - and how we love to support worthy causes in our community.

Allow me to share a few of the many great things the City of Mesquite did last year. Our staff accomplished quite a bit in 2018. Our community survey results last year continued to tell us the topic of “public safety” is a high priority. So let me begin there, with the health and welfare of this city.

As your Mayor, your public safety is always at the top of my list. Our Mesquite Police Department has done a tremendous job continuing to protect us and keep us safe. However, when people do come into our community and commit a crime, your Mesquite police officers are most likely to catch them!

Overall, crime in Mesquite continues to trend downward. Whereas some types of criminal activities have risen, others have gone down significantly. The City is always looking to do better with everything that we do - this includes catching criminals and preventing criminal activity.

I support Chief Cato and have confidence in his dedicated officers, and their approach to 21<sup>st</sup> Century policing in our community. They continue to earn the public’s trust by protecting us with their purpose and passion for a safer Mesquite.

Last year to improve our safety, the Mesquite Police Department joined the Neighbors App community. It puts the power of connection to our police department and other residents in the hands of our citizens! Today, our citizens have more access than ever before to share information, post crime alerts and help us keep Mesquite safe.

Another area that our citizens tell us is important to them is “community appearance.” In 2018 we continued our tireless efforts to address that. Our code enforcement initiative is strong and swift - but fair. We educate before we enforce, and that approach is working well. However, we strive to be compassionate and understanding when it is difficult for a citizen to comply immediately. And that’s when our HOME initiative goes to work, which I will talk more about later.

Our efforts seem to be gaining positive traction. We have an 86 percent voluntary code compliance rate. That means almost nine out of every 10 property owners that we speak to are addressing their violations. Once it’s brought to the attention of the property owner, our staff has seen issues like high grass or broken fences taken care of fairly quickly.

Our Code Ambassadors have had a tremendous impact on this as well. These citizen volunteers help our city staff monitor residential areas and make sure we are offering the best curb appeal possible.

And, the City has not forgotten about commercial properties in our fight to address code and safety issues. Our “T25” program continues to make a positive impact. In 2015, the City created a list that identified the 25 worst properties with public safety and code issues. That list has evolved. A total of 63 properties have been added to that original T25 list. And, 29 properties have already come into compliance and been removed since we began this program. Furthermore, 12 properties involve the demolition of structures and other significant improvements.

The process of economic redevelopment has also been a key contributor to the T25 success. One example is the former community hospital property located on I-30. The former hospital sat vacant for years. With the use of the T25 program, we accelerated the demolition of a building, and now there is a new \$15 million dollar medical office building under construction. That is concrete evidence of our success to turn property decay into profitable development.

So you can see, the combined efforts of City staff and citizen volunteers on code enforcement has significantly improved the quality of our neighborhoods.

On the topic of our neighborhoods, I'd like to thank our citizens. Many have really stepped up in the past year to help us improve our community. Their use of social media to tell us their opinion on issues has been tremendous. Citizen attendance at our City Council meetings and public engagement events has been encouraging. But, it has been the participation in our neighborhood programs that has been inspiring. We have witnessed many of our residents showing us they truly care about making a difference. Let me share a few examples with you.

In 2018, the City held its first-ever Neighborhood Summit. We saw citizens from all walks-of-life and from all different backgrounds attend. We spoke with them about what they liked and what they didn't like about Mesquite. It was a benchmark moment for our City. It launched our Neighborhood Vitality efforts upward. And throughout 2018, we saw many improvements with our neighborhood programs.

The number of neighborhoods hosting National Night Out events soared. Volunteerism increased in our HOME program, which stands for Helping Others in Mesquite Everyday. This community partnership between our Code officers, C-D-B-G Grant Program and volunteers helps the elderly, the disabled, and the disadvantaged get needed repairs.

Additionally, our crime watch and neighborhood groups saw renewed interest from residents wanting to get involved. A central theme in all of this is our citizens. I am sure you have heard the saying, "Government can't fix all your problems." That may be true. We try, but we need your help.

There were some memorable moments of our citizens getting involved during 2018. The Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association earned State Chapter of the Year. That is the 8<sup>th</sup> state-wide award these volunteers have earned in the past decade! Led by citizens, this group has been instrumental in so many public safety services to aid our police officers.

The dream of building a lasting memory to the many early families in and around Mesquite became a reality. Led by citizens and Historic Mesquite, the Brickyard Cemetery was built and dedicated to the legacy of the laborers and their families who made that area their home.

And, the community's vision of building a Veterans Memorial to honor our military veterans and their families became much clearer in 2018. Led by a citizens committee, enough money has been raised to begin the design and we will break ground on the first phase this November.

These examples illustrate the power of the people in our community. We are privileged to have many dedicated citizens in Mesquite. But, we are also fortunate to have many exceptional and professional staff at the City. Allow me a minute to share a few of their accomplishments in 2018.

The Mesquite Animal Shelter had its highest save rate ever! Events like the annual Clear the Shelter and our extraordinary rescue partners helped the City maintain a 90 percent save rate. The State of Texas recognized the City for its information transparency. Mesquite became just the 6<sup>th</sup> city in Texas to earn all five of the Comptroller's transparency stars for public accessibility.

And lastly, I was beyond humbled when I attended a function at Sharing Life last February. The City of Mesquite was honored with the inaugural Community Impact Award. We were recognized for the Spread the Love peanut butter and jelly drive that helps feed hungry children during the summer.

All of the City's success, which I have shared with you tonight, could not happen without good employees who genuinely care about the community. We have three of them with us this evening.

It is my honor as the Mayor of this city to recognize these phenomenal city employees. To assist me, I would like to ask the City Council to please join me on the stage to my left. As they make their way up, I ask these three City employees to join on the stage to my right.

Mesquite Police Officer - Winston Bowen

Mesquite Deputy Chief - Bruce Kunz

City Employee - Cynthia Sanchez

Our first honoree is Police Officer Winston Bowen. Officer Bowen is a 14-year veteran of the Mesquite Police Department. Officer Bowen is currently assigned to Patrol in our neighborhoods. In previous years, the American Legion and Elks Lodge have named him their Officer of the Year. Even though he has had numerous honors in the past, he remains humble. He demonstrates outstanding commitment to community policing and building relationships within our city.

Officer Bowen is affectionately, referred to as the super hero called “Blade”, by the neighborhood kids on his patrols. He has a heart to fulfill the needs of people in our community. One of the many examples of this was last year while on one of his patrols, he learned of a child's bicycle being stolen. After attempts to locate the bike were unsuccessful, Officer Bowen graciously purchased a new one for the child out of his own pocket.

He is always looking for opportunities to break down the barriers between the police and the public they serve. So tonight, it is my honor to present Winston Bowen with the 2018 Mesquite Police Department Officer of the Year award.

Our next honoree is Fire Department Deputy Chief Bruce Kunz. Chief Kunz started his career with the Mesquite Fire Department in 1988. He has risen through the ranks and in 2015 he was promoted to Deputy Chief of the EMS and Training Division. He has been instrumental in making many improvements to the operations of the Fire Department through the years. However, one improvement has had a ripple effect throughout the individual fire stations.

Deputy Chief Kunz started a new program called “Ready for the Call.” The program is a fitness regimen of equipment and training to prepare our firefighters for any call for service they may encounter. The Ready for the Call initiative established new training for fire staff to anticipate

the various demands of their job. From firefighting to the handling of patients, they are now more ready than ever. His tireless efforts with the program have led to safer operations within our Fire Department. The Ready for the Call program has established new levels of physical capacity for our firefighters to respond.

So tonight, it is my honor to present Deputy Chief Kunz with the 2018 Mesquite Fire Department Officer of the Year award.

Our final honoree is Cynthia Sanchez who serves as a system analyst in our Finance Department. Tonight, Cynthia thought she was attending this event to stand with her co-workers for a department-wide recognition. That embodies Cynthia's character. It's always, team first. So she is probably surprised to be standing on the stage - without her co-workers.

We are honoring Cynthia because her ability to empower others in our organization. You see, she is responsible for training hundreds of our employees to use the systems that keep the City's financial applications running. Cynthia is essential to making sure the financial backbone of the City is strong and operating at a peak performance. She is modest in her approach. But she is vitally important to the City.

When told of this honor, our Finance Director Debbie Mol said, "I think I'm going to cry. She is so deserving." I think that is the best compliment Cynthia can receive.

So tonight, it is my honor to present Cynthia Sanchez with the 2018 General Government Employee of the Year award.

As both the City Council and these City employees exit the stage and return to their seats - let's all applaud them one more time.

You may be asking yourself, "When is the Mayor going to give us an economic update?" Well, we have changed up our program to save that for the end this year. And to kickoff that portion of

the program, we have short video to show. I hope you enjoy this look into Mesquite's surging economy. Please dim the lights.

[Watch the 2019 Mesquite Highlights video.](#)

We launched into last year on the heels of breaking ground, in late 2017, on Ashley Furniture's South Central Distribution and Fulfillment Center. As Mayor of this City, I was proud to be on stage with Texas Governor Greg Abbott as we presented the impacts of this massive project. More than \$65 million dollars of investment in Mesquite! More than 1,000 jobs at total build-out! And, the countless spinoff developments that will happen on surrounding properties around the Mesquite Metro Airport!

We saw tremendous progress in 2018 across the street from the Town East Mall. Market East had grand opening, after grand opening last year. Mesquite welcomed Home Goods to town, and celebrated new locations for Michael's and Ulta. And at Town East Mall, we added a 5<sup>th</sup> anchor! As some malls in this country continue to close their doors - our mall is growing. Last year, Dick's Sporting Goods chose Mesquite, TX as a site to open one its newest locations.

Repurposing of old sites was a successful tool for us in 2018. We saw Snuffer's, Fitness Connection and Peter Piper Pizza reuse existing properties to hang a shingle out in our town. Plus, I have been told that the long awaited opening of Porch Swing is coming February 18<sup>th</sup>!

Furthermore, Mesquite is becoming the corporate headquarters for many new businesses. Industrial Developments International completed the Skyline Trade Center. Elements Internationals' new 463,000 square-foot facility is almost complete, with a ribbon cutting next week. They are moving their headquarters from Rockwall – plus, consolidating their Houston and Garland warehouses into one Mesquite location. And they are bringing 80 jobs to Mesquite in their first year!

As new businesses came to town, we continued our efforts to strengthen existing business.

GMAN Properties built a 100,000 square-foot facility to expand two Mesquite companies, the Pickle Juice Company and GTI.

With those businesses, and many more, making the decision to remain in Mesquite, we need to do all we can to retain them. That is why I want to extend a big congratulations to the Chamber of Commerce.

It has been rewarding to see the results of their partnership with Eastfield College, Workforce Solutions of Greater Dallas, MISD and the City - to grow the Business Retention and Expansion Task Force. The “BRE” - as it’s called - hosted so many great events to provide resources to business leaders and owners right here in Mesquite.

The value of Mesquite as a business magnet was very evident last year. An example of this was our Mesquite Metro Airport. In December, a Texas Aviation Study confirmed that our airport has a \$22 million dollar total economic impact on the Mesquite community. In tourism, we welcomed the \$14 million dollar Town Place Suites by Marriott. It is the first new hotel to open in Mesquite in 10 years!

In Downtown Mesquite, we were making tremendous progress. In 2018, we started our efforts to improve the infrastructure. We launched a new brand. We formed a board with property owners and business operators. And, we earned the prestigious Texas Main Street designation! This summer, we will start our first project – Front Street Station. This will include a total reconstruction of Front Street.

From our charming downtown to massive developments, Mesquite continues to grow! Last year, we added more than 700,000 square feet of new commercial space. And, the value of all building permits rose to \$344 million dollars in 2018, from just \$79 million dollars in 2015!

I am proud of all that we have accomplished since I became Mayor in 2015 in regards to keeping businesses here in Mesquite and expanding others. The value of commercial remodels and additions to existing businesses have skyrocketed! From \$17 million dollars in 2016 to more than

\$79 million dollars in 2018! And we had more than 300 permits pulled by businesses to improve their operations to keep pace with our growing economy.

With all this business growth, people will be moving to Mesquite and they will need a place to live. That is why I am so happy that the City Council has demonstrated the leadership to allow for more quality homes built in Mesquite.

Last quarter, the value of a new home permit exceeded \$330,000 dollars. We have many different types of residential developments underway and on the way.

Bloomfield Homes is expanding their footprint in Mesquite from Hagan Hill on I-20 to Ridge Ranch located off Cartwright Road. Vacant lots and new homes are already selling before they even finished building any of the model homes near Horn High School. Also looking east on I-20, we will see new homes in Polo Ridge, Skymark, and Trailwind. Plus, we just approved another new housing development on Gus Thomasson called Cloverleaf.

The new Iron Horse development near the rodeo will offer an array of new housing types including bungalows, villas and townhomes. This \$116 million dollar development will also include new stores, new places to eat and an overall enhancement of the properties surrounding the historic Mesquite Arena.

In total, we will see more than 3,000 new quality homes being built in our community!

With these new people coming to Mesquite, it re-enforces the need for us to have a strong community. We need to continue to have a community that is built by people getting involved and making a positive difference.

It has been said that “one’s actions, often define one’s character.” We have people in Mesquite with amazing character. I had the blessing of meeting one such man in 2018.

Impacted by vision loss, he is a man who can't see very well. But, he saw the possibilities in our community by getting involved. Don Douglas took up an opportunity to help kids in need at one of our elementary schools. Most of you probably heard about his story or saw it on TV. Mr. Douglas stopped by the principal's office one day to ask how he could help the students.

When the principal shared that many kids did not have money for their lunches, he immediately reached into his pocket and placed \$100 on the desk! He said, "When that runs out – give me a call!" News of his kindness and selfless act was so well received, that a local company offered to help him with their new state-of-the-art eye glasses. And, I was honored to join him as the Mayor of this city when he was invited back to the school. He was invited by the very students he had helped financially, to read to them with his new eyeglasses!

I will tell you we need more people in Mesquite like Mr. Don Douglas. He is humble and he is motivating. And, he is here with all of us tonight! Please join me in applauding Mr. Don Douglas for being a beacon of compassion and love in our community.

When I became Mayor of this City almost four years ago, I pledged to the community that I would give all my effort to improve Mesquite. In 2016, I told you the City was getting back to the basics and we did!

We have more police officers on the street than ever before! We accelerated our neighborhood street bond program from 10 years to eight! Two years ago, I stood before you and said the City can always do better - and we have.

We initiated a review of our City Ordinances to find ways to improve. And our customer service report cards, completed by our citizens, show that 94 percent feel we are doing a good or excellent job in serving them!

And last year, I reminded you about the word "unity" that lives within the word Community. An example of that unity, was realized in 2018 as we completed our 1,000<sup>th</sup> home in the 14-year history of Addressing Mesquite Day.

Our unity continues to remain strong thanks in large part to groups such as Mesquite AMBUCS, Mesquite Rotary, Sharing Life Community Outreach, Mesquite Social Services, Young Life, Raising the Bridge, and the Mesquite chapter of the NAACP.

Those groups and many others like them, form the nucleus of a robust community. They make Mesquite a great place to live and call home. Mesquite is distinctive, exceptional, and special. Mesquite responds. And it's not about the City of Mesquite, it's about you - the leaders of our town. It is overwhelming to witness our community acting with kindness, time and time again.

I recently met with the owner of the largest furniture manufacturing company in the world. As we discussed business, family, and other things, I asked him what he attributed his success to all these years.

He told me in one word - optimism. He told me, "It is easy to be negative, to always look back and ask 'why'." But, if you look to the future, for what can be, and what will be. You will see how you want things to be and strive to do whatever it takes to get there with optimism.

All of you should be optimistic about our community. The future looks bright for Mesquite in 2019 and beyond!

Our citizens asked that we make changes to the City Charter to position us for a new way of governance. The citizens ask for it and we delivered. By a vote of the citizens, we finalized a new single-member district structure for City Councilmembers. By a vote of the citizens, we moved elections for City Council from May to November. By a vote of the citizens, we created terms limits for City Councilmembers of no more than eight consecutive years of service.

All this will shape our community as it continues to evolve. Our hope is that it will create opportunities for others to serve. And, will invite greater participation in local government.

In closing, I want to assure you that as your Mayor and Council, we are here to serve the citizens of Mesquite. We are committed to a unified vision that moves Mesquite forward. We discuss the issues at hand and we evaluate the data we have.

Through surveys, scheduled town hall meetings, and continual feedback from each of you - we are listening. Technology has allowed us to collect more data about our services, and we continue to develop strategies based on facts to deploy our resources. Being a data driven organization means we measure the results of our actions. And that we make improvements along the way for our community to be safer, cleaner, and a great place for all of our citizens.

We will foster a spirit of inclusiveness so that all of our residents have input on important programs and services. Our community will continue to embody a passion for others. We will focus on the optimism of love and hope that makes Mesquite strong. Together we will move Mesquite forward.

As I look to the future, it is not about what I want, what I think, or even what the Councilmembers may want. It is about you - the citizens. It is not about where Mesquite is today or where we were 30, 40 or 50 years ago. It is about our future!

Ask yourself, what type of community do we want to provide for our children and our grandchildren. Each and every day we should be thinking about and working on the legacy we leave for future generations. It is about them. It is about a brighter future. I promise the best is yet to come for Mesquite.

It is an honor to serve you. Thank you and goodnight.