



State of the City
presented by
Mayor Stan Pickett
as a part of the
Mesquite Chamber of Commerce
Annual Banquet
held at the Mesquite Convention Center
on Friday, January 22, 2016

Tonight, the Chamber had an auction to support their programs of work.

And it reminded me of the last auction Terry participated in.

He bid on a parrot.

Terry really wanted this bird.

So, he got caught up in the bidding.

Terry kept on bidding, but he kept getting outbid.

So Terry bid higher and higher.

After he bid way more than he intended to, Terry won the bid.

The parrot was his at last!

As Terry was paying for the parrot, he said to the auctioneer,

"I sure hope this parrot can talk. I would hate to have paid this much for it and find out that he can't talk!"

The auctioneer replied,

"He can talk. Who do you think kept bidding against you!"

Seriously, before I begin allow me to recognize the Chamber of Commerce for organizing this event.

Terry, the Chamber staff and Board of Directors have devoted a lot of time to make this night a success.

Let's give them all a round of applause.

Most importantly, I want to thank all of you for sharing your valuable time to spend a Friday night here at this event.

Your attendance shows your commitment and dedication to the Chamber and to this community.

And, I personally want to thank you for that.

I also want to recognize someone tonight who has made this night possible for me.

She has been my friend and confidant.

She has always supported me during our life together.

And, especially this past year.

She has been my encourager, my cheerleader and my sounding board.

Please help me thank my lovely wife, Mary Jo for putting up with me.

As you enjoyed your dinner, I also hope you enjoyed those photos we showed on the screens.

I was fortunate to be able to attend many of those events.

Seeing those images reminded me again how proud we all should be of our city.

Tonight, I am equally proud to talk about some of Mesquite's great accomplishments during 2015.

And, to highlight our plans for 2016.

Specifically, I will talk about:

The changes in our community during 2015,

The City Council's policy areas for this year,

And a challenge for each of you to consider.

Also, I will take a moment to honor some outstanding City employees.

So with that, let me offer you the 2016 State of the City Address for the City of Mesquite.

Last year was an exciting time for our city.

The City of Mesquite and our entire community went through quite a bit of change.

Within the community, MISD Superintendent Dr. Linda Henrie retired and Dr. David Vroonland took over in July. Also, Pastor Tom Wilbanks of First Presbyterian Church of Mesquite retired after 47 years of service in Mesquite.

Both were long-time leaders and trailblazers in this city.

And, the City of Mesquite also had its share of changes.

After more than 30 years of service to our citizens, the last 7 as Police Chief, Derek Rohde announced his retirement.

We are currently in the process of finding his replacement to lead many new programs in our continuing efforts to address crime.

Also, City Manager Ted Barron and Deputy City Manager Carol Zolnerowich both retired.

They took with them a combined 60 years of public service experience.

However, we are blessed to have a vast amount of knowledge and experience with our new City Manager Cliff Keheley and our new Deputy City Manager Jerry Dittman.

Combined, they have 35 years of public service experience.

I believe these new leaders will embrace all the changes in our community.

And, the challenges each of those changes will present.

They will add their own ideas to the great many accomplishments in the services the city already provides.

And, to the new projects the city has started.

Speaking of accomplishments, Mesquite enjoyed great success in 2015.

These include the tremendous improvements made at our Mesquite Animal Shelter.

And, the sustained excellence in the city's Police Department.

This past summer, we graduated 9 new patrol officers.

And in the fall, a new class of 16 recruits started our internal training academy.

That means 25 new police officers have been trained or have been hired in the past year!

The city also had increases in the number of people participating in programs hosted by our Parks and Recreation Department.

The direct beneficiary of all that success is the people we serve each day.

They are our citizens.

They are our visitors.

And, they are you - the business community.

Now, I could stand up here all night and tell all of you about each success story.

But, lucky for you, I am not going to do that.

While staying respectful of your time, I do want to highlight our accomplishments through a concise, yet informative program.

On the topic of economic development, we welcomed Ashley Furniture and their new 457,000 square-foot facility to town.

Not long after I took office I was asked to attend a dinner to meet a new business prospect for Mesquite.

Imagine my surprise when I learned it was Ashley Furniture, one of the largest furniture manufacturers in the U.S.!

And as a long time furniture store owner, it seemed to be a perfect fit for Mesquite.

They opened January 2nd, and brought 70-plus new jobs to Mesquite.

Also, both Baker Brothers Plumbing and Air, as well as Display Source Alliance relocated their corporate headquarters to Mesquite.

Baker Brothers renovated an existing facility in Mesquite for its 165 employees.

And, Display Source Alliance brought 225 jobs to our community.

For those of you counting tonight, these 3 business brought more than 460 new jobs to our City in 2015!

Mesquite also welcomed several other new businesses to town.

These included Golden Chick and Heff's Burgers.

Plus, new locally owned independent businesses Phat Wings and Kookie Haven opened in Mesquite.

And, both continue to receive very positive reviews.

Moving into 2016, Fidelis Realty Partners purchased the Market East Shopping Center on Town East Boulevard.

They have already begun attracting new tenants to the center, including Rusty Taco or "R Taco" as it is now called.

On the topic of tourism, Towne Place by Marriott will open up on Rodeo Center Drive.

They will add nearly 100 new rooms our hotel inventory.

And, we will have new residential homes in 2016.

Hagan Hill announced the development of a new subdivision in Mesquite.

In addition to hike and bike trails, the new neighborhood will feature 125 new homes priced from \$280,000 dollars and above.

This is a big deal for Mesquite!

New homes being built in our city for the first time, in a long time.

But before I go any further, our staff has produced a video to show you tonight.

It will highlight even more exciting triumphs of 2015. So, let's roll the video.

That was an amazing list of accomplishments, wasn't it!

I would like to thank our Video Coordinator Leah Burger and all the city staff who helped produce the video in-house.

I am very proud of our staff and our volunteers who played a large role in helping the city achieve so much in 2015.

Yet, with great change - comes great challenges.

To address those challenges, the city is viewing 2016 as an opportunity to implement a new vision towards the future.

A vision that we hope will support the needs and expectations of the entire community we serve.

It's a vision which will help the City Council craft new goals.

In just a few weeks, the City Council will chart a new course during a planning retreat.

It will set the foundation for the City Council to move towards improving Mesquite in several policy areas. Public safety is one of our top priorities.

The recent activity in our community is troubling!

We will continue to support our Police Officers and Firefighters.

And with a new Police Chief on board very soon, we will have new ideas.

However, it will take all of us to have a safe community.

It will take the active participation of:

Businesses.

Our Citizens.

And the city working together.

Another policy area involves improving the community's appearance.

We are currently taking a closer look at our community development policies to make sure they are helping attract new businesses.

And, that those policies help support the businesses who are already in Mesquite.

We will also spend time exploring our neighborhood programs.

This will include implementing stronger code enforcement initiatives and addressing vacant structures.

These efforts will help us in our overall goal of improving our community image.

One neighborhood program we have already launched is called “H.O.M.E.”

It stands for: Helping, Others, in Mesquite, Everyday.

HOME embodies the same spirit found in our annual Addressing Mesquite Day event.

In 2015, Addressing Mesquite Day had more than 1,000 volunteers help meet the needs of over 100 homeowners.

These were the elderly, the disabled, or the economically disadvantaged of our community.

The H.O.M.E. program will provide needed assistance on a more regular basis with the help of volunteers and donations.

Another policy area will focus on the economy.

We will address plans to revitalize aging shopping centers and our historic downtown area.

This policy area will also focus on retention efforts toward existing businesses who already call Mesquite home.

Another policy area will address our infrastructure.

We will springboard off the voter-approved street bond program to allocate resources.

Those resources will be targeted at other aspects of our aging infrastructure.

This will include:

Cleaning up our streets.

Addressing distressed business corridors.

Improving our parks.

And, starting new public safety initiatives.

Some would call it “Getting Back to the Basics.”

And, I want to commend our staff for accelerating this process.

We will also begin efforts to address future growth in Mesquite.

This will be done for our current population and for the planned development we forecast along Interstate 20.

Another area of importance will be to engage a more diverse level of participation on city advisory boards.

As I reflected earlier this week about Martin Luther King Jr.’s impact on our nation, I am reminded of his quote.

“We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.”

So as we move forward into 2016, the City Council is looking forward to all of these opportunities.

Now, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge them.

Council, please stand and remain standing while I introduce each of you.

Audience, please hold your applause until I have introduced all of the Council.

- Mayor Pro Tem, Place 5 Greg Noschese
Greg is an active supporter of our Boy Scout community and the MISD Education Foundation.
- Deputy Mayor Pro Tem, Place 3 Bruce Archer
Bruce is very active in our neighborhoods and has just recently become more involved through his role in full-time ministry.

- Place 1 Bill Porter

Bill is from one of Mesquite's founding families and has been active in so many community programs over the years, including Historic Mesquite.

- Place 2 Jeff Casper

He was unable to attend tonight, but Jeff is the newest member of the City Council and is very involved with our Mesquite Animal Shelter.

- Place 4 Shirley Roberts

Shirley recently announced this will be her last term on the City Council. I want to thank Shirley for her selfless service to our community during these past 14 years.

- Place 6 Dennis Tarpley

Dennis has led the charge on so many programs for this community, including the HOME program I mentioned earlier.

Join me in thanking them for their service to our community.

Together, the City Council will embrace the challenges in our city and the community.

However, change will not happen overnight.

We need to evaluate programs and funding to meet challenges head on.

It will take new vision and strategic planning to accomplish this.

I am confident this Council and our new leadership will take up the challenge for each of our citizens.

We are excited about the new opportunities for Mesquite's future.

Tonight, we are excited for another reason.

We will honor three city employees.

To begin, I would like to ask Police Officer Marvin Franklin to join me on stage.

As Officer Franklin makes it up on stage, let me tell you a little bit about him.

Officer Franklin has been with the Mesquite Police Department since 2004.

In that time he has constantly demonstrated his

Integrity,

His character

And, his work ethic.

Officer Franklin has exhibited his genuine interest in improving the safety of Mesquite and its citizens.

He has an in-depth knowledge of the area he patrols.

And, he has shown the ability reduce gang violence through his proactive efforts.

An example of Officer Franklin's humility is that during a recent traffic stop he took the time to provide counseling to a military veteran.

The veteran was dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and Officer Franklin offered him encouragement and praise for his duty to our country.

So, on behalf of the entire City Council it is my honor to present Officer Marvin Franklin with the Police Officer of the Year Award.

Next, I would like to call up Fire Captain Keith Hopkins to the stage.

As Captain Hopkins joins me, allow me to share with you some of his accomplishments.

Captain Hopkins has been with the Mesquite Fire Department since 1999.

He has been promoted three times and has always served as a role model within the department and throughout our community.

His leadership has been demonstrated several times in the EMS division and on various special assignments.

Most notable, was Keith's planning efforts during the Ebola crisis.

His coordination with our paramedics and 911 dispatch was instrumental in our City being ready during that evolving crisis.

So, on behalf of the entire City Council it is my honor to present Captain Keith Hopkins with the Fire Officer of the Year Award.

Next, I would like to call up Manager of Street Services Mark Hodges to join me on stage.

As he makes his way up to the stage, let me tell you about Mark.

Since he joined the city in 1989, Mark has consistently demonstrated his dedication to the organization and his passion to serve the community.

Mark has led the charge on the city's 50/50 Sidewalk Program to help homeowners replace sidewalks in disrepair.

Most recently, he was part of the team that developed the new Optimized Pavement Reconstruction Process which will be used in the residential street bond repairs.

This process will allow the city to complete the street repairs in about half the time of traditional reconstruction.

And, at 40 percent less than the amount it has cost the city in the past to repair streets.

So, on behalf of the entire City Council it is my privilege to present Mark Hodges with the General Government Employee of the Year Award.

Tonight, I hope you learned something new about the City of Mesquite.

Please allow me to leave you with this thought.

As a call to action, I challenge each of you to get involved in your government and in this community during 2016.

There are many opportunities for you to get involved on City Boards and Commissions.

And, there are opportunities to volunteer through non-profits in Mesquite.

These include Sharing Life Community Outreach and Mesquite Social Services.

Our community will only continue to get better if everyone joins together in progressing towards a common goal.

Thank you again for your time and attention.

At this time, I will turn the stage back over to the Chamber of Commerce for the rest of tonight's program.