

## **STATE OF THE CITY**

**2008**

**Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's my pleasure to be here today to present the State of the City as your new Mayor. Since being elected your Mayor, I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of good people and to hear many positive and encouraging comments about our City. I've had the opportunity to see the results of the hard work and the creativity which have made Jackson the great community which we enjoy today. We have many, many reasons to be proud of Jackson and of all the work and efforts of our creative people. Mother Theresa, a true servant, once said, "The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it." Let me say that I am happy to be your Mayor, and I look forward to the work ahead.**

**The quality of life we enjoy in Jackson is being challenged and over the past few months, I have asked community leaders to help find solutions to the pressing needs that exist in our city. The Public Buildings Committee recommendations led us to the decision not to privatize our public buildings, but to use the private sector to assist in providing services when needed. It is anticipated that through our reorganization efforts, we can reduce overall costs and provide better and more efficient services to our citizens. The Safe Neighborhoods Task Force, whose mission was to look at ways to reduce crime and remove blight, has very successfully completed its work. My heartfelt thanks to chairperson Dr. Vicki Lake and approximately forty of our most dedicated and hardworking citizens. While the Task Force was working to set priorities and identify weaknesses, the City moved ahead and created the Department of**

**Neighborhood Services. This department, staffed with personnel from Health and Sanitation and existing Code Enforcement Officers from the Building Department, is already making a difference in addressing the code violations that exist in many of our neighborhoods. One of the tasks given to this new department is to assist neighborhoods in establishing neighborhood associations. The task of improving our neighborhoods cannot be carried by city staff alone. It must be a joint effort by the city and the residents of neighborhoods. The residents, after all, have a vested interest in the success of improvement efforts. Neighborhood improvement is too great for any one person, any one neighborhood, or any one city department to carry alone, but the work ceases to be a burden when it is shared by all. As part of the City's efforts to share the task, we will establish an Environmental Court whose specific charge will**

**be to oversee codes compliance and whose mission will be to eliminate those things which threaten our quality of life and impact the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens, our neighborhoods, and our City.**

**As in the case of the Public Buildings Committee, The Safe Neighborhoods Task Force brought to the table recommendations and strategies as they looked for innovative ways to reduce crime and eliminate blight.**

**These recommendations were prioritized and the top recommendations were: to place 1 police officer in each public middle school and 2 police officers in each public high school; to expand the Drug Task Force from its current staffing of 12 officers to 22; to establish an Environmental Court; and to establish Neighborhood Enhancement Action Teams to conduct neighborhood sweeps. The committee also recommended that the city implement an Offender**

**Management Program that would include a three-fold approach: Reentry (Parole) from prison, regular probation and intensive probation. Of the recommendations made, one in particular that I strongly support is the implementation of a saturation patrol strategy. Its aim will be increase the presence of law enforcement in our neighborhoods especially within the boundaries of our existing Weed & Seed area by allowing the assignment of police officers to neighborhoods where they live; allowing officers to take their cars home; and allowing our officers to respond to calls and provide proactive patrols in these same neighborhoods.**

**These are just a few of the 53 recommendations forwarded to me by the Task Force. We are already reviewing each recommendation, assigning responsibilities, and putting together a timeline. You will hear considerably more on this in the days to come.**

**I've just presented a few of the current challenges that we face today as a community. However, I don't want you to leave today thinking, "The sky is falling." For the next, few minutes let me talk about our accomplishments and some of the good things that are happening in Jackson. First, let me say that good employees can make even a rookie boss look good. Believe me, I know. Shortly after I was elected, I went around, met with each department, and let me report that our city employees are our greatest asset. Their professionalism, talent and experience certainly make my job easier.**

**Over the last few years, the City has been vigilant in tracking its revenues and expenses. This vigilance has resulted in a reasonable fund balance, which is important when the storms of life come, literally, as we experienced after the 2003 tornado.**

**During the 2007 fiscal year, property tax revenues increased 2.4% over 2006. Over the past 10 years, assessed property values have increased by 70%. In 2007, the City surpassed the 1 billion dollar mark in appraised property value.**

**The City of Jackson's long-term debt decreased by 8.3 million dollars, or 11.5%, during the current fiscal year. This reduction dropped the debt from roughly \$82 million dollars to \$74 million. The City will be paying approximately \$12.3 million dollars thereby reducing even further the City's debt to \$62 million during the current fiscal year ending June 30, 2008. We are currently studying to see the cause and effect of refinancing the next four years of large debt payments which averages about 11 million per year over a period of 8 years to free some needed dollars for critical City services. This refunding process would not**

**extend our debt payments past the current year 2021 but would spread the large payments for the next 4 years to 8 years.**

**As all of you know, there are always to-do lists around the house, something to fix, something to paint, or something to replace. Within the City, it is no different. We just have a longer list!**

**I am happy to report that we completed our section of Hollywood Drive this year at a cost of approximately \$1,000,000. The project consisted of widening Hollywood Drive to a five-lane roadway with curbs and gutters, a new storm drain system, a continuous turn lane, new sidewalks and bike lanes. If you travel Hollywood Drive, you know how important this widening project is and our section gives you a taste of how nice it will be when Hollywood Drive is completely finished. A resolution has been passed by the City**

**Council and the County Commission in support of this vital project and urges the State to move to construction on its part.**

**Since August 2003, the City of Jackson has been under a Consent Decree to move forward in resurfacing and altering our streets, curbs and sidewalks to meet the requirements of the Title II of the Americans with Disability Act. The City has budgeted \$1.2 million this current fiscal year to begin to improve downtown accessibility for the handicapped. The areas around the new Mother Liberty CME Church and along the Royal Street improvement areas were the first to be completed. Speaking of the Royal Street Project, Phase I is complete at a cost of \$1.5 million dollars. The project consisted of new curb and gutters, new storm drainage system and new asphalt pavement. The intersection at Chester Street was redesigned for improved traffic flow**

**and new traffic signal installed along with new traffic signals at Main Street, College Street and Lexington Street. Also included were decorative brick patterned sidewalks and crosswalks at the intersections.**

**Plans are underway to improve Campbell Street from Parkway to Wetherstone Drive at a cost of \$4.8 million dollars. This project will consist of four travel lanes, a center turn lane, complete with bike lanes and sidewalks. This widening will help with traffic congestion on North Highland and provide better access to the commercial developments around the Campbell Street interchange.**

**There has been much speculation and debate over the years concerning a Southern Bypass. As many of you know, there is no need to justify an alternate route to South Highland. Two tornadoes have proven that need quite well. The City is undertaking a study, with funds, our legislators**

were successful in securing for us, to determine what form this alternate route will take. We know that a project of this magnitude will be expensive, take quite a while to complete, and securing funding will be difficult. However, we know this is the first step, and we must complete it before we can move forward.

The City, in its ongoing responsibility to maintain its streets, budgeted \$12.2 million dollars this fiscal year. Among our plans to upgrade streets and bridges are: the Second Street Bridge, Martin Luther King Bridge, East Chester Streetscape Project, Pipkin Road, Skyline Drive improvements and various other street restoration/resurfacing projects. We have to make every effort to continue to improve and maintain our transportation infrastructure. Keep in mind that these improvements must be planned for a city of roughly 100,000

**people since the population of Jackson almost doubles every day.**

**On the public safety side, the implementation of the real time mobile data system at the Jackson Police Department is 99% complete and the department is conducting training for all officers on this new equipment. It is anticipated that it will provide immediate data service to the officers in the field.**

**The Fire Department has employed and trained 17 recruit firefighters and continues to focus on providing the best service possible to the residents of our city. In addition, the City and County have recently entered into a new Mutual Aid Agreement to provide emergency assistance when there is a need.**

**Two great things happened this year as the City saw the completion of Gabriel's Garden in the North Park and the**

**West Tennessee Healthcare Sportsplex. Gabriel's Garden, the largest inclusive special needs playground in the nation, was the result of a partnership between the City, West Tennessee Healthcare Foundation, local civic organizations and a dedicated volunteer committee. Gabriel's Garden provides special needs children the opportunity to interact with other kids and to enjoy a wonderful, accessible playground experience. The West Tennessee Healthcare Sportsplex had a very successful first year. Let me say this at this point. As far as the Sportsplex, some of you love it, some of you hate it, but let me remind you, we have it and "Scotty cannot beam it up to the Starship Enterprise!" Its ours to make it as successful as we can, and I can tell you I'm very optimistic about the future of the facility. It hosted 26 tournaments; there were over 1,500 tournament games with 673 participating teams. 214 of the 673 teams had overnight**

**stays in Jackson. This influx of visitors had a positive direct impact on the increase of hotel/motel taxes and revenues. Many restaurants saw revenue increased from our visitors. The Sportsplex is expecting a 25% increase in the number of tournaments to be held this year.**

**The Sportsplex is having a positive effect on the City's efforts to "Save the Jaxx." The Jaxx saw a 19% increase in attendance this past year and was presented the Award of Excellence by the Southern league. The new owners have plans to market the Jaxx with special promotions aimed at the young players and their parents. The new owners say that the Sportsplex, the quality commercial developments in close proximity, as well as opportunities for new development in the future, help to insure that the Jaxx remain here.**

**The City continues to work toward planned annexation through ordinances, zoning proposals, plans of service and notices of public hearings. These annexations will allow the City to grow and help to create an orderly system of infrastructure and service delivery to the urbanized areas surrounding Jackson.**

**During the year, the City showed continued residential growth as it reviewed and approved 134 separate subdivision plats. The areas included Casey Commons, Cedar Brook Farms, Copper Ridge, Shiloh Springs and a number of others. The City saw continued commercial and industrial growth. A total of 59 site plans were reviewed for zoning compliance. Seventeen of the site plans were forwarded to the Jackson Municipal Planning Region Commission.**

**The City issued 250 residential building permits and 101 commercial building permits in 2007. A review shows**

**that Johnson City, Tennessee, issued 277 residential permits and only 19 commercial permits. Murfreesboro issued 882 residential permits but only 83 commercial permits. Franklin, Tennessee, issued 458 residential building permits and 54 commercial permits. You can see that Jackson was somewhat lower in its residential building but considerably higher in its commercial activities.**

**The year has seen some gains and losses in our industrial recruitment and maintenance efforts. On January 7, 2007, Black and Decker announced its plans to reduce employment by 160 jobs. The majority of these jobs were replaced when Perseus Distribution moved into the old Bendix facility on Paul Coffman/Flex Drive and brought 150 jobs and a capital investment of 150 million dollars.**

**Missouri Smelting located in the Airport/Jones Lawrence Industrial park is investing 124 million dollars in**

**capital improvements. The new automotive plant in Tupelo is expected to provide Jackson and West Tennessee with possible expansions for existing automotive suppliers and is an ideal location for future automotive suppliers to locate.**

**As many of you have experienced, the City's health care costs have increased dramatically. As a cost containment measure, a contract was entered into with a local health clinic to provide primary healthcare services to all full-time employees and their legal dependents at no cost. The clinic is a means to decrease the cost of pre-employment medicals and initial screening of all on-the-job injuries as well.**

**It is expected that this action will provide a significant reduction in health care costs.**

**As I close my first State of the City Report, I take this opportunity to thank you for being here and hope that you share my optimism for what lies ahead and my passion to be**

**a participant in it. A popular children's author, Dr. Seuss, wrote in one of his books, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not." Fortunately for Jackson and the future of our City, all of you here today do care a whole awful lot. We'll work together and we will get better. We will.**

**God Bless you and thank you for your kind attention.**