

ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

2009 Year End Report

Delivered February 2, 2010

Mr. President Pro Temp, Madam Clerk, Mr. City Attorney, Members of the Council, Members of the Media, Distinguished Guests, and Citizens of Jonesboro;

On behalf of my administration and the dedicated employees of the City of Jonesboro, it gives me great pleasure to report to you that the state of the city is strong and viable, and that we have an optimistic outlook for our future.

While 2009 was a year of numerous challenges and opportunities, the resilience and tenacity of our citizenry and our employees never cease to amaze me. Time and again, the call to be bigger and better than we ever thought imaginable was answered on numerous fronts by so many who are committed to their families, their faith, their friends and this community.

Whether it be pulling together to recover from the effects of the worst winter storm in at least half a century, lending a hand as a part of the North Jonesboro cleanup, or pitching in to accomplish more with less during critical budgetary cutbacks; I could not have been more proud of our people.

This year for me is far too full of highlights and memorable moments for me to even pretend that I could include them all in this address. We celebrated 150 years as a city, culminating with a weeklong series of events in October. Chairman Tim McCall and his network of volunteers and staff did a tremendous job in helping us to mark this historic occasion with such class and fanfare.

We joined with our friends at Arkansas State University in celebrating that institution's Centennial Celebration. As a graduate and former Chairman of the Board of Trustees, it was very special for me to serve as Mayor during this period in history.

We were privileged to witness many acts of nobility and character throughout the past year, and honored so many in our community for a vast array of accomplishments and personal triumphs. None, however, were any more special than when we recognized 8 year old Donovan Stockdale along with his mother and Battalion Chief Brett Winstead, Officer Kerri Varner and 911 Dispatcher Charles Jones for their heroic roles in saving the life of 2 year old Grant Stockdale after a near fatal incident in the family's pool. Moments of celebration like that are far too special to ignore.

Because of our people, we continue to be a city of interest and investment. We are strengthened as a destination for investment capital, new industry, retail expansion, healthcare and education advances and residential growth.

However, even with all our strategic and economic advantages, we were not able to deflect the effects of a weakening economy. Sales tax revenues declined from 2008, placing us behind the previous year as well as significantly under budgeted revenues.

Our administration and department heads diligently worked to meet the demands for service while trying to reduce spending to hit a declining revenue target.

We started the year with a budget of \$62,398,516 in budgeted expenditures from all categories. Throughout the year, we amended it up to a total of \$68,516,477. However, our employees and management team rose to the occasion to hold our total expenditures to \$58,085,196...coming in an incredible \$10,431,280 below the amended budget, over four and a quarter million dollars below the original adopted budget; and...it should be noted that over four and a quarter million dollars of those total reductions from the amended budget were in our operating and maintenance budgets. These reductions were only possible through aggressive spending cuts, expenditure freezes and a daily review of cash flow.

Unfortunately, our best efforts were still not enough.

We began the process of reorganizing many aspects of our organization in 2009 to meet both current and future demands; and our work is not yet completed. We continue to look for ways to improve service and reduce costs.

After a year in office, it is becoming increasingly clear that we have an inverted services strategy within the city of Jonesboro. Services where the public must come to us in order to do business are scattered throughout multiple locations; while our police department remains centralized.

This alignment challenges us in our efforts to efficiently provide the most cost effective and productive services to our citizens. It is a priority in the coming months to find an equitable solution that will help us create a framework for service that will endure this community for years to come.

In that spirit, public safety remains a top priority for my administration and our community. In 2009 we moved into two new fire stations on Patrick Street and Nettleton Avenue, increasing our ability to effectively protect and respond. As the year came to a close, we signed a letter of intent to purchase land on Harrisburg Road for the next to last station on our facilities plan that, when completed, will improve our overall ISO rating and put all of our citizens under a better blanket of protection.

Our fire department conducted a total of 4,569 incident runs in 2009. Almost 87% of our response times were 6 minutes or less; with over 59% in 4 minutes or less. Our city proudly experienced no fire fatalities in 2009.

2009 saw the culmination of over 4 years of hard work when in November our Police Department became CALEA certified. As one of less than 900 departments in the entire United

States of America to earn the accreditation, it validates what we have known for some time; that we have one of the best police departments in Arkansas.

Still, they remain challenged. In 2009, even in the face of increased call volume and staffing shortages, overall crime totals remained relatively constant with 2008. However, when you examine the categories that most negatively impact quality of life; Crimes Against Persons and Property Crimes, both were down 5% and 11% respectively.

A positive sign of enforcement is that while the total number of criminal reports remains the same; the number of arrests is actually up. Total reports taken for 2009 was 13,284; a decrease of 127 incidents. However, there were 8,077 arrests; an increase of 940 (13%).

As with the fire department in previous years, we must now turn our attention to the facilities and physical deployment of our police department. As I referenced only moments ago, our community continues to spread out geographically and the traffic congestion can slow response time from a single point of command; so we find it necessary to look to a new model of protection with the possibility of multiple police precincts strategically located to better protect and serve our citizens. We are in the process of studying the most efficient manner and locations to execute the strategy; but we feel it is paramount to our future success as a police agency.

E-911 and Animal Control continue to absorb an increased demand for services.

Our E-911 Dispatch Center answered 252,129 calls in 2009, an increase of 8,427 calls. Animal Control unit officers handled over 30,000 calls for service. The adoption initiative started in 2008 resulted in 427 animals successfully united with new owners.

Our public works departments remain a vital contributor to our communities overall quality of life.

Our sanitation department has as an exemplary organization with a reputation for going above and beyond to deliver the very best customer service to every sector of the city.

Our sanitation department collected and processed nearly 32,000 tons of refuse in 2009, including over 4,000 tons of limbs and ash from the January ice storm and over 27,000 tons of residential waste.

Recycling efforts remained strong as the department collected just under 100 tons of newspaper and office paper; 30.5 tons of cardboard; and over 284 tons of residential blue bag recyclables.

2009 saw the official closure of the landfill on Strawfloor Drive; and as of the end of the year we were in the process of obtaining an air permit from ADEQ for the installation of an incinerator later this year to address the impending disposal of existing and future yard waste.

Our street department has had an extremely busy year on road maintenance and drainage related projects.

We put down over half a million linear feet of striping on our streets; hauled over 800 tons of rock; laid nearly 700 tons of asphalt; poured almost 700 cubic yards of concrete; and cleaned in excess of 12 miles of open ditches.

In engineering, we have made great strides in not only working through the backlog of open work orders on file, but in expediting current public requests as they come in. Addressing engineering concerns can be a tedious and time consuming process.

In 2009, we received 274 public requests for service, and completed 214 of them. We currently have a total of 282 active public requests in our system being handled by the department.

Our inspectors conducted 4,299 inspections of various types in 2009; and received 68 site plans, 22 grading permits and 4 subdivision plans for review.

Our planning department was successful in leading efforts to complete a future land use and master street plan in 2009. The department processed some 863 total cases for the year, including 453 residential site plans and 278 multi-family or commercial site plans. They handled 24 rezoning requests, 6 conditional use permits and 27 variance appeals to the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

Our parks and recreation department continued to set new standards of service to the community. Over 2,900 children participated in City Stars basketball and soccer last year, with an additional 300 playing Wolf Club football. At the end of the year, an agreement had been worked out to provide City Stars baseball and softball for over 400 children in North Jonesboro beginning March 2010.

Our community centers remain popular destinations. Even though we changed tracking systems last year, we are still able to validate over 24,000 visitors to our city's three centers; with over 9,000 at Allen Park, nearly 7,900 at Earl Bell and nearly 7,300 at Parker Park.

Our traffic surveys indicate that some 231,000 vehicles entered Craighead Forest Park; leaving us to estimate annual park attendance as high as over 450,000 for the year.

One of the proudest accomplishments for the department came in the form of a \$1.7 million dollar federal grant from the National Scenic Byway's for construction of the first phase of the Crowley's Ridge Trail greenway.

Our community development department was recognized on the state and national level for having one of the only true citizen-driven CDBG programs in the nation. We are currently working hand-in-hand with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation on the creation of a

community initiative to completely revitalize North Jonesboro, which will eventually become a model to replicate in other parts of our community.

We began an aggressive multi-year effort to build or rebuild a useable sidewalk infrastructure in North Jonesboro; assisted in the demolition of condemned properties and the cleanup of blighted areas; and assisted in several projects with our parks department, sanitation department and a host of non-city agencies and faith based groups to improve our at-risk and low income neighborhoods.

We continue to lead the region in traffic planning through our MPO. Historic traffic data counts and forecasts obtained last year have played a significant role in planning for our upcoming trip to Washington to discuss critical transportation and infrastructure needs.

The department played a key collaborative role in the development and study of the Master Land Use and Traffic Plans as well as the Walkability Study conducted last year.

Our public transit system continues to evolve and 2009 was a year of evaluation and readjustment. We continue to super-serve the public when possible; including special services offered during the Northeast Arkansas District Fair, Arkansas State University home football games, and the highly congested retail shopping weekends in December.

We welcomed Seaport Air to our municipal airport, broke ground at Nordex, and partnered with PDI/Nice-Pak and the Governor's Office to launch a nationwide beta test on hand hygiene and the prevention of communicable disease.

We were ranked as the 29th Best Small Place in America for Business and Careers; the highest in Arkansas and up from our 46th place ranking the year before. We are well on our way to becoming the Best Small City in America!

As we close the books on 2009 and look ahead to 2010, I continue to be energized and excited about the opportunities that lay ahead.

We will face the challenges of an unsettled economy with diligence and caution. We will work together to chart our course as a community; always striving to do better and reach higher.

As a city government, we will increase our efficiency and productivity and heighten our awareness of service. We will continue to look for ways to better serve our community.

We have some big decisions ahead; but we are up to the challenge. With God as our guide and the citizens as our conscience; we will push forward with a renewed enthusiasm for the coming opportunities.

I continue to be eternally grateful for this privilege of serving as your Mayor; and to have the honor of working with an extremely dedicated staff that is committed to serving the citizens of Jonesboro. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the members of the City Council for the trust and confidence they have placed in my administration; and for working hand in hand with us to develop the kind of working relationship necessary to run an open, transparent and effective city government.

I personally pledge to work with each of you to do all that we can in order to improve the quality of life and abundance of opportunity for every man, woman and child that make up our community.

May God watch over each and every one of you and your families; may he protect our citizen soldiers who find themselves in harm's way, and may He continue to bless our city, our state, and these United States of America.

Thank you.