



MAYOR JONATHAN WEINZAPFEL

**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
MARCH 15, 2005**

*PRESENTED TO:
THE ROTARY CLUB OF EVANSVILLE*

THANK YOU, RON, FOR YOUR KIND AND GENEROUS INTRODUCTION. IF YOU EVER CONSIDER DOING PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT, JUST GIVE ME A CALL.

I'D LIKE TO START WITH A SINCERE "THANK YOU" TO THE ROTARY CLUB, FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT ON THE STATE OF OUR CITY. AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, TO REPORT ON THE BRIGHT FUTURE THAT EVANSVILLE AND HER RESIDENTS HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO EXPECT AND EXPERIENCE. AND I WANT TO THANK ALL OF YOU, AS WELL AS THE PEOPLE OF EVANSVILLE, FOR GIVING ME THIS, THE BEST OF ALL JOBS.

DESPITE ONLY BEING MAYOR FOR ABOUT 14 MONTHS, I FEEL LIKE I COULD TALK ALL DAY ABOUT THE PROGRESS WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE ON ALL FRONTS OF OUR CIVIC LIFE. BUT, AS MARK TWAIN ONCE SAID, "FEW SINNERS ARE SAVED AFTER THE FIRST 20 MINUTES OF A SERMON." AND TODAY, I PLEDGE TO FOLLOW THAT ADVICE.

SO, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, START YOUR WATCHES.

WHEN I SPOKE TO THIS GROUP LAST YEAR, WE TALKED ABOUT THE SIZABLE FINANCIAL MESS WE INHERITED. THIS YEAR, I AM PROUD TO REPORT THAT THAT MESS HAS BEEN CLEANED UP. WE HAVE CUT BUDGETS. WE HAVE MADE PRUDENT AND DIFFICULT DECISIONS. AND, WE'VE DONE IT ALL WITHOUT REDUCING ANY CRITICAL SERVICES TO THE CITIZENS OF OUR CITY.

DURING THESE PAST FOURTEEN MONTHS, OUR STAFF IN THE CITY FINANCE OFFICE HAS BEEN IN FULL BATTLE GEAR. WORKING WITH OTHER CITY OFFICIALS, THEY HAVE CUT 1.3 MILLION DOLLARS FROM THE CURRENT 2005 BUDGET. AND TODAY, I CAN REPORT TO YOU THAT THEY HAVE MOVED OUR CITY BACK TO FISCAL BALANCE.

SUCH FISCAL RESTRAINT IS THE RESULT OF HARD WORK AND SACRIFICE BY ALL OF OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS AND STAFF. AND, BECAUSE ALL OF THOSE FOLKS ARE HERE TODAY, I'D LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT AND ASK THEM TO STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED FOR THE TIME AND DEDICATION THEY PUT IN BEHIND THE SCENES EVERY SINGLE DAY. WITHOUT THEM, NONE OF THE THINGS I'LL DISCUSS TODAY WOULD BE POSSIBLE.

PLEASE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE TODAY WHO HAVE HELPED ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS.

THROUGH ALL OF THESE PEOPLE'S EFFORTS, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DELIVER A BALANCED BUDGET TO EVANSVILLE'S TAXPAYERS.

A LARGE PART OF IDENTIFYING SAVINGS ACROSS EVERY DEPARTMENT OF CITY GOVERNMENT WAS A THOROUGH EFFICIENCY REVIEW THAT WE CONDUCTED DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2004. WE NOT ONLY FOUND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN SAVINGS; WE ALSO HAVE STREAMLINED EVERY DEPARTMENT AND TURNED THE ARDUOUS CHORE OF DEALING WITH YOUR CITY GOVERNMENT INTO A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE.

THE PUBLIC HAS FOUND IT MUCH EASIER IN MY ADMINISTRATION TO ADDRESS THEIR CONCERNS WITH CITY GOVERNMENT – WHETHER IT'S THROUGH OUR NEWLY STREAMLINED DEPARTMENTS, OR THROUGH OUR TRAVELING CITY HALL PROGRAM.

THE TRAVELING CITY HALL PROGRAM GIVES A VOICE TO EVERY EVANSVILLE RESIDENT. THE PEOPLE OF EVANSVILLE CAN SIT DOWN WITH ANY DEPARTMENT HEAD, FACE-TO-FACE, TO EXPLAIN THEIR PROBLEM, AND TO ASK FOR SOLUTIONS FROM THE VERY PEOPLE WHO CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN. WANT TO TALK ABOUT STREETS AND SIDEWALKS? ED ZIEMER, OUR DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION AND SERVICES, HAS A TABLE AT THE TRAVELING CITY HALL. HAVE YOU SPENT FAR TOO MANY YEARS PLAGUED BY A DRAINAGE PROBLEM? GO SEE PAT KEEPE, OUR CITY ENGINEER. HE ALSO HAS A TABLE AT OUR TRAVELING CITY HALL MEETINGS.

AND IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR ME, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS GRAB THE SEAT ACROSS FROM ME. SEVERAL PEOPLE DO JUST THAT AT EACH OF OUR TRAVELING CITY HALLS – AND I WOULDN'T WANT IT ANY OTHER WAY!

BUT WHEN WE FIRST ANNOUNCED THIS PROGRAM, THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF SKEPTICS SAYING THAT OUR PLAN TO TAKE GOVERNMENT ON THE ROAD WAS A CASE OF “STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE.” NOW THAT WE'VE HELD TRAVELING CITY HALLS AT 12 DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, SPREAD ACROSS ALL SIX CITY WARDS, WE DON'T HAVE TO ARGUE OUR CASE ANYMORE. WE CAN SIMPLY POINT TO THE RESULTS.

TAKE THE CASE OF LEANNE BESWICK, WHO CAME TO OUR SECOND TRAVELING CITY HALL MEETING TO INFORM ME THAT SHE AND HER NEIGHBORS ON CULVERSON AVENUE WERE NOT RECEIVING CITY WATER. CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT?

WELL, I AM PLEASED TO TELL YOU THAT LEANNE NO LONGER HAS TO DO WITHOUT. WE RECENTLY OBTAINED THE LAST EASEMENT FOR THE CULVERSON AVENUE AREA, AND CONSTRUCTION HAS BEGUN ON EXTENDING CITY WATER TO NEARLY 60 RESIDENTS ON CULVERSON, VAN BIBBER AND RHEINHARDT AVENUES. ALL MS. BESWICK DID WAS SHOW UP AT THE TRAVELING CITY HALL.

NOW, SHE AND 59 OTHER FAMILIES WILL BE ENJOYING CITY WATER. MS. BESWICK IS WITH US TODAY AND I WOULD LIKE FOR HER TO TAKE A BOW AS A CITIZEN WHO CARED, WHO SPOKE UP, AND WHO GOT THE WATER RUNNING IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD.

AT OUR MARCH TRAVELING CITY HALL, HENRY DAVIS TOLD US ABOUT A SECTION OF SWEETSER AVENUE THAT WAS SO NARROW, TWO CARS COULD NOT PASS SIDE BY SIDE. WELL, THANKS TO CITIZEN DAVIS, THAT DANGEROUS SECTION OF SWEETSER AVENUE HAS BEEN WIDENED. HENRY DAVIS, PLEASE STAND UP AND BE RECOGNIZED.

FOLKS, THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE ARE FINDING SOLUTIONS TO PEOPLES' PROBLEMS. THE TRAVELING CITY HALLS ARE WORKING!

BY THE WAY, OUR NEXT TRAVELING CITY HALL WILL BE A DEPARTURE IN THAT WE WILL CONVENE RIGHT HERE AT THIS BEAUTIFUL COLISEUM DURING THE LUNCH HOUR, FROM 11:30 A.M. TO 1:30 P.M., NEXT WEEK, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23RD. OF COURSE, ALL OF YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN CITY GOVERNMENT DOES NOT END WITH THE TRAVELING CITY HALLS, THOUGH. I WON'T ASK FOR A SHOW OF HANDS, BUT I BET EACH ONE OF YOU HAS SEEN ONE EVANSVILLE SIDEWALK, OR TWO SIDEWALKS, OR EVEN TEN SIDEWALKS IN DESPERATE NEED OF REPAIR OR REPLACEMENT.

AFTER NUMEROUS MEETINGS WITH NEIGHBORHOOD REPRESENTATIVES FROM ACROSS OUR CITY, I FORWARDED A NEW SIDEWALK CAPITAL POLICY TO CITY COUNCIL – AND THEY APPROVED IT. THE POLICY PROVIDES 1.5 MILLION DOLLARS FOR A GOVERNMENT MATCHING PROGRAM, ALLOWING US TO HELP RESIDENTS FIX THEIR SIDEWALKS.

THIS IMPORTANT PROGRAM HAS HIT A HOT BUTTON WITH THE PUBLIC. JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, MORE THAN 120 PROPERTY OWNERS CAME TO AN OPEN COMMUNITY MEETING TO FIND OUT HOW THEY COULD BE PART OF THE PROGRAM.

WE'VE ALSO RECEIVED TREMENDOUS COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR OUR FRONT DOOR PRIDE PROGRAM. THAT PROGRAM AIMS TO REBUILD AND REVITALIZE OUR DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOODS, WITH GOALS THAT INCLUDE:

- ENHANCING THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD – CLEAN THEM UP... MAKE THEM LOOK BETTER... AND IMPROVE CURB APPEAL;
- INCREASING HOUSEHOLD DISPOSABLE INCOME VIA CREDIT COUNSELING AND BUDGET MANAGEMENT;

- EXPLORING AND INCREASING HOMEOWNERSHIP IN THE NEAR-DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOODS; AND
- CREATING AND MAINTAINING DIVERSE, MIXED-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS.

AS PART OF FRONT DOOR PRIDE, WE CONDUCTED A VERY SUCCESSFUL HOUSING FAIR LAST AUGUST IN WHICH DEVELOPERS SHOWCASED NEARLY 100 DIFFERENT HOME DESIGNS COMPATIBLE WITH THE NEAR-DOWNTOWN AREA.

PROGRAMS LIKE THIS ARE INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT. IF WE WISH TO COMPETE WITH CITIES LIKE LEXINGTON, FORT WAYNE, AND SOUTH BEND, WE MUST TAKE CARE OF THE SIMPLE THINGS - LIKE REPLACING SIDEWALKS AND REHABILITATING THE HOUSING IN OUR CITY'S CORE.

WE ALSO MUST PRESENT AN ATTRACTIVE "HEART" OF OUR CITY. OUR DOWNTOWN IS OUR CITY'S CORE; IT IS WHERE OUTSIDERS LOOK FOR OUR CITY'S IDENTITY. EVERY MAYOR SINCE VANCE HARTKE HAS STRUGGLED WITH IMPROVING THAT IDENTITY.

THE WEINZAPFEL ADMINISTRATION HAS CRAFTED A NEW PLAN TO REVITALIZE OUR CENTER CITY. BUT BEFORE I GO INTO THAT, I SHOULD COMMEND THE PRIVATE SECTOR - FROM OLD NATIONAL BANK TO VECTREN TO CASINO AZTAR - FOR THEIR SIGNIFICANT COMMITMENT BOTH ARCHITECTURALLY AND FINANCIALLY, TO OUR NEWLY VIBRANT RIVERFRONT.

OUR NEW CITYSCAPE ALONG THE OHIO RIVER IS NOTHING SHORT OF DAZZLING – AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR SHOULD TAKE A BOW. PLEASE WELCOME JIM BROWN FROM CASINO AZTAR, WAYNE HENNING OF OLD NATIONAL BANK AND DOUG PETTIT OF VECTREN.

THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN. NOW, BACK TO BUSINESS.

LAST MONTH, WE LAUNCHED INTO THE NEXT PHASE OF OUR DOWNTOWN LOFT PROGRAM WHEN OUR FIRST NEW LIVING SPACES WENT ON THE MARKET. THEY ARE ONLY THE FIRST OF 24 NEW HOUSING UNITS WE'VE HELPED SUBSIDIZE THROUGH THE LOFT LOAN INCENTIVE I ANNOUNCED IN THIS SPEECH LAST YEAR.

IF THE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS WE EXPECT, IT WILL RETURN PEOPLE TO RESIDENCY IN THE IMMEDIATE DOWNTOWN SECTOR. THESE FOLKS WILL HELP CREATE MORE DEMAND FOR A HOST OF SERVICE TYPE BUSINESSES. THEY WILL FILL THE TABLES AT EXISTING RESTAURANTS, AND THEY WILL HELP FILL MORE SEATS FOR THE EVER-INCREASING NUMBER OF EVENTS AT THE VICTORY AND THE CENTRE.

I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO MEET A COUPLE OF OUR TRAILBLAZING LOFT DEVELOPERS -- MATT JOHNSON AND MIKE MARTIN. THESE YOUNG MEN BELIEVE

IN DOWNTOWN, AND ARE PUTTING THEIR MONEY AND CREATIVITY BEHIND THAT BELIEF!

BUT BRINGING RESIDENTS BACK ISN'T THE ONLY KEY TO A THRIVING DOWNTOWN. WE ALSO NEED TO CREATE THE KIND OF ENTERTAINMENT AND FAMILY ATTRACTIONS THAT WILL BRING NON-RESIDENTS – AND EVEN OUT-OF-TOWNERS – TO DOWNTOWN EVANSVILLE. THAT'S WHY THE WEINZAPFEL TEAM HAS HELPED “PACKAGE” A DEAL TO BRING A MAJOR FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE TO THE GORGEOUS - BUT EMPTY - FORMER CENTRAL LIBRARY BUILDING. WE ARE EXCITED TO GIVE HANDS ON DISCOVERY CHILDRENS MUSEUM A PERMANENT HOME, AND I AM THRILLED THAT CITY GOVERNMENT WAS ABLE TO FINANCE MUCH OF THIS PROJECT.

PLEASE WELCOME KAREN MAGAN, THE FOUNDING INSPIRATION OF THE HANDS ON DISCOVERY MUSEUM. AND, PLEASE THANK NIEL AND KAREN ELLERBROOK FOR AGREEING TO CO-CHAIR THE COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH RAISING ANOTHER 3 MILLION DOLLARS TO FINISH THE FUNDING OF THIS SPLENDID PROJECT.

WE ALSO ARE PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF LST-325 ON EVANSVILLE'S RIVER BANKS. THIS JULY, CAPTAIN ROBERT JORNLIN AND HIS CREW WILL DOCK THEIR WORLD WAR II SHIP AT MARINA POINTE, BRINGING A SHIP LIKE SO MANY BUILT IN EVANSVILLE TO ITS NEW, PERMANENT HOME.

OVER TIME, THE SHIP WILL BECOME THE ANCHOR FOR A HOMEFRONT WAR MUSEUM THAT WILL SALUTE, IN DRAMATIC FASHION, THE “GREATEST GENERATION” AND EVANSVILLE’S ROLE IN WINNING WORLD WAR II.

ALSO, SONDRRA MATTHEWS AND HER COMMITTEE HAVE DONE AN OUTSTANDING JOB ORGANIZING AND PREPARING FOR THE NEW AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM IN THE OLD LINCOLN GARDENS PUBLIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENT. THIS WILL SERVE AS A WONDERFUL REMINDER OF THE HISTORY AND CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY SOME OF EVANSVILLE’S GREATEST RESIDENTS.

THESE TOURIST ATTRACTIONS - ALONG WITH OUR ALREADY FIRST RATE EVANSVILLE MUSEUM ON THE RIVERFRONT, THE VICTORY, AND THE CENTRE – WILL BRING DOWNTOWN EVANSVILLE A GIANT STEP CLOSER TO BEING THE DESTINATION FOR TOURISTS SEEKING NOT JUST A “DAY TRIP,” BUT RATHER A TWO DAY OR THREE DAY MINI VACATION.

OF COURSE, IN DOING THAT, WE WANT TO MAKE SURE ALL OF OUR GREAT ATTRACTIONS ARE INSIDE EVANSVILLE'S CITY LIMITS. AND AT THE MOMENT, THE LST'S PLANNED DOCK IS NOT.

FOR NOW, ALL I CAN SAY ABOUT THAT IS: WAIT.

IN THE COMING MONTHS, MY ADMINISTRATION WILL BEGIN A PLAN TO ANNEX MORE LAND INTO THE CITY OF EVANSVILLE. THE FIRST PHASE, WHICH WILL BE UNDERWAY SHORTLY, WILL BE TO EXTEND THE CITY LIMITS NORTH TO INCLUDE ALL OF THE EVANSVILLE REGIONAL AIRPORT, AND SOUTHWEST TO MARINA POINTE – THUS BRINGING THE LST'S HOME INTO OUR GREAT CITY.

AFTER THAT, WE'LL START LOOKING AT OTHER AREAS JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS THAT ALREADY USE MANY CITY SERVICES LIKE THE COMMERCIAL AREA NORTHEAST OF BURKHARDT ROAD AND THE LLOYD EXPRESSWAY.

BRINGING THESE AREAS INSIDE OUR CITY LIMITS WILL ALLOW US TO BUILD A LARGER TAX BASE; IT WILL HELP US IMPROVE OUR INFRASTRUCTURE; INCREASE POPULATION; AND AID IN PROVIDING BETTER SERVICES TO OUR RESIDENTS.

BUT I DIGRESS.

BEFORE I LEAVE THE ISSUE OF A REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN FOR GOOD, I WANT TO THANK KEN ROBINSON AND THE STAFF OF VISION-E FOR MOVING AHEAD WITH THE DIGITAL DOWNTOWN CERTIFIED TECHNOLOGY PARK. THIS PROJECT WILL MAKE EVANSVILLE HOME TO ONE OF JUST TWO URBAN TECH PARKS IN INDIANA, AND WILL HELP OUR PUSH FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY ALLOWING US TO CREATE MORE HIGH-SKILL, HIGH-TECH, AND HIGH-PAYING JOBS.

WE ALSO HOPE TO USE THE PARK IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA'S PLANNED CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

KEN ROBINSON IS WITH US TODAY AND SHOULD RECEIVE OUR APPRECIATION FOR ALL HE HAS DONE IN THE PAST, AND HIS VISION AND LEADERSHIP ON THE NEW DOWNTOWN TECH PARK.

SINCE MY LAST ADDRESS TO YOU, I HAVE MADE GOOD ON YET ANOTHER PROMISE FROM MY 2003 CAMPAIGN. LAST YEAR, WE FORMED THE EVANSVILLE EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE. THIRTY MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY ENTHUSIASTICALLY ACCEPTED MY REQUEST TO SERVE, CONFIRMING ALL OF OUR DESIRE TO HAVE EVANSVILLE SECOND TO NONE WHEN IT COMES TO EDUCATING OUR MOST PRECIOUS ASSET – THE CHILDREN WHO WILL LEAD OUR COMMUNITY FOR DECADES TO COME.

EVERY ASPECT OF OUR COMMUNITY IS REPRESENTED AT OUR ROUNDTABLE – FROM LEADERS IN EDUCATION, BUSINESS AND LABOR, TO ORDINARY, EVERY DAY – AND VERY SMART EVANSVILLIANS! I SEE SEVERAL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE TODAY – PLEASE STAND AND ALLOW US TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO OUR COMMUNITY'S YOUTH AND TO THEIR FIRST-RATE EDUCATION.

ONE OF THE ROUNDTABLE'S FIRST TASKS WAS TO HELP FOSTER FORMER INDIANA FIRST LADY MAGGIE KERNAN'S MENTOR INDIANA PROGRAM. THE PROGRAM PAIRS 7TH GRADERS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS, WHO DONATE THEIR TIME TO TEACH AND TUTOR THESE STUDENTS.

SINCE WE LAUNCHED THIS PROGRAM AT HARWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL, VOLUNTEERS HAVE GIVEN MORE THAN 400 HOURS TO OUR LOCAL STUDENTS. AND, I'M PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT EVERY STUDENT INVOLVED HAS AT LEAST HELD HIS OR HER GRADES STEADY – AND MANY HAVE ACTUALLY IMPROVED THEIR GRADES.

NOW, WE'D LIKE TO EXPAND THE MENTOR INDIANA PROGRAM, TO INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE MORE AREA SCHOOL. SO TODAY, I AM CHALLENGING YOU – THE MEMBERS OF THE EVANSVILLE ROTARY CLUB – TO FURTHER YOUR DEDICATION TO MENTORING BY VOLUNTEERING YOUR TIME TO HELP OUR COMMUNITY'S MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

I'M PROUD TO SAY THAT THE MEMBERS OF MY STAFF ALREADY HAVE EMBRACED THIS PROGRAM. WITH US TODAY ARE THREE STUDENTS FROM HARWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL – ALL OF WHOM ARE BEING MENTORED THIS YEAR BY STAFF FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE. ANTHONY, ASHLEY AND CARA - WOULD YOU PLEASE STAND?

SO WE'VE HAD A GREAT FIRST YEAR. BUT THERE STILL IS A LOT OF WORK TO DO, AND WE'RE NOT GOING TO GET IT DONE BY SITTING ON OUR LAURELS, REVELING IN OUR EARLY SUCCESSES.

THAT'S WHY I AM WORKING WITH KEY BUSINESS LEADERS, OUR UNIVERSITIES, AND COUNTY OFFICIALS TO CREATE A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OUR AREA. OUR GOAL IS TO IDENTIFY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR COMMUNITY TO CREATE JOBS.

ONCE WE'VE COME UP WITH A PLAN TO DO THAT, WE'LL FOCUS ON STREAMLINING THE EFFORTS AND RESOURCES OF ALL THE LOCAL AGENCIES WORKING TOWARD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. AND WE WILL INVOLVE OUR NEIGHBORS IN GIBSON, POSEY, WARRICK AND HENDERSON COUNTIES TO WORK WITH US IN CREATING ONE STRONG, COHESIVE DIRECTION FOR OUR ENTIRE REGION.

WE'RE STILL IN THE EARLY PHASES OF DEVELOPING THIS PROGRAM. AND WE KNOW THAT, IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE OUR CHANCES FOR GROWTH, WE WILL NEED A COMMUNITY-WIDE EFFORT. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE ALREADY ASKED BOB JONES, THE CEO OF OLD NATIONAL BANK, TO SPEARHEAD OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE. WON'T THIS BE A NICE INITIATION FOR BOB INTO OUR COMMUNITY?

WE ALSO ARE WORKING TO FOSTER FURTHER INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH IN OUR AREA. AND SO, DURING A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C. LAST WEEK, I ASKED OUR LOCAL CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO SUPPORT THREE MILLION DOLLARS IN FEDERAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP US FUND A NEW INDUSTRIAL PARK IN OUR CENTER CITY.

USING THAT MONEY AND OTHER FUNDS, WE HOPE TO TURN 140 ACRES OFF FULTON AVENUE IN PIGEON TOWNSHIP INTO A NEW REDEVELOPMENT AREA. WE WANT TO DEMOLISH THE EXISTING, SUBSTANDARD BUILDINGS; CLEAN UP ANY ENVIRONMENTAL WASTE ON THE PROPERTY; AND TURN THE WHOLE AREA INTO A LARGE INDUSTRIAL PARK.

WHY? BECAUSE THIS PROJECT WILL IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OF THE SURROUNDING RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS; IT WILL REPLACE LOST MANUFACTURING JOBS; IT WILL ADD ASSESSED VALUE; AND IT WILL REDUCE PRESSURE TO DEVELOP ON OUR CITY'S PRECIOUS REMAINING GREEN SPACES.

AND SPEAKING OF REDUCED PRESSURE ... IS MY LAWYER HERE? GOOD AFTERNOON, DAVID.

SHAKESPEARE ONCE WROTE: "FIRST, WE SHALL KILL ALL THE LAWYERS". AND FOR A TIME LAST YEAR, IT SEEMED THAT THE FOUR LABOR UNIONS REPRESENTING OUR CITY EMPLOYEES HAD TAKEN UP THE BARD'S CREED.

BUT FORTUNATELY, MY CHIEF CITY ATTORNEY, DAVID JONES HAS SURVIVED – AND HE'S COME OUT THE OTHER END OF CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS IN GOOD SHAPE. ALONG WITH HIS TEAM, DAVID HAS NEGOTIATED FOUR-YEAR CONTRACTS WITH THE UNIONS REPRESENTING OUR VARIOUS CITY EMPLOYEE GROUPS. WE APPRECIATE HIS EFFORTS, AS WELL AS THE FIRM BUT FAIR REPRESENTATIVES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE.

WE ARE EXCITED TO MOVE ON – TO CONTINUE TAKING GREAT STRIDES IN PUBLIC SAFETY – NOW THAT THOSE CONTRACTS ARE SIGNED AND SEALED THROUGH 2008.

WE CAN TURN OUR FOCUS TO LOCATING A REGIONAL POLICE ACADEMY RIGHT HERE IN EVANSVILLE. THE EVANSVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT IS WORKING WITH THE VANDERBURGH COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT AND OUR LOCAL EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES TO NAIL DOWN A LOCATION, SO WE WILL BE ABLE TO OFFER QUALITY LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING RIGHT HERE IN THE RIVER CITY.

WITH A CHANGE IN PENSION LAW LIKELY TO SEND ALMOST 50 OFFICERS INTO RETIREMENT BY 2008, WE'RE LIKELY TO BE USING THE ACADEMY QUITE A BIT. HAVING A BRANCH LOCATED NEARBY WILL BETTER EQUIP US TO RECRUIT AND TRAIN THE ARMY OF NEW OFFICERS WE WILL NEED.

THAT BEING SAID, IF ANYONE HERE IS LOOKING FOR A CAREER CHANGE, PLEASE SEE CHIEF HILL WHEN I'M FINISHED.

AND WHILE EVERYONE IS LOOKING THAT WAY - CHIEF BRAD HILL, WOULD YOU PLEASE STAND? FOLKS, THIS GENTLEMAN HAS GUIDED THE EVANSVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT FROM A GREAT POLICE FORCE TO THE LEAN, MEAN CRIME-FIGHTING MACHINE IT IS TODAY. FOR CHIEF HILL AND ASSISTANT CHIEF, ROB HAHN, THIS PAST YEAR HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON FINDING THE SAVINGS TO CUT MORE THAN \$300,000 FROM THEIR BUDGET, WHILE IMPLEMENTING EFFICIENCIES TO PUT 23 MORE OFFICERS ON THE STREET FOR YOUR PROTECTION.

OF COURSE, THEIR EFFORTS WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR NAUGHT WITHOUT THE DEDICATION, LOYALTY, AND ENTHUSIASM OF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE DEPARTMENT.

OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT ALSO HAS ADDRESSED STREAMLINING MANPOWER – AND BY RESTRUCTURING ITS PERSONNEL, WE HAVE TRIMMED COSTS BY \$100,000.

IT WAS POSSIBLE TO MAKE THOSE CUTS, AND TO MAINTAIN A WORLD-CLASS FIRE DEPARTMENT, BECAUSE OF THE STELLAR LEADERSHIP OF OUR FORMER FIRE CHIEF, GEORGE FLOWERS. CHIEF FLOWERS RECENTLY RETIRED, AND I WILL BE NAMING A NEW CHIEF VERY SOON. IF THAT PERSON CAN HOLD A CANDLE TO CHIEF FLOWERS' HIGH STANDARDS AND LEADERSHIP, I WILL BE ONE HAPPY MAYOR.

SO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE JOIN ME IN HONORING GEORGE'S STORIED CAREER ON THE EVANSVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT.

AS MAYOR, MY BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS RATHER LARGE – MORE THAN 120,000 EVANSVILLE RESIDENTS. AND, IF ANY OF THOSE PEOPLE WERE NOT INTRODUCED TODAY, PLEASE SEE ME AFTER THE SPEECH; WE'LL SEE IF WE CAN WORK YOU IN NEXT YEAR.

BUT, ALL KIDDING ASIDE, I WANTED TO MAKE THE POINT THAT CREATING A CITY THAT IS MOVING FORWARD REQUIRES AN INVOLVED CITIZENRY, WILLING TO SERVE ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, AND TO WORK AT SOMETIMES SMALLER SALARIES THAN I WOULD PREFER.

I'M PROUD TO SAY, I'VE RECEIVED AN AMAZING RESPONSE WHENEVER I CALL ON THE PEOPLE OF EVANSVILLE FOR GOOD ADVICE ON ONE SUBJECT OR ANOTHER. AND AS WE CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD, I HOPE I CAN CONTINUE TO COUNT ON YOUR COUNSEL, YOUR SUPPORT, AND YOUR SERVICE. THAT INVOLVEMENT IS THE KEY TO TAPPING EVANSVILLE'S POTENTIAL, AND MAKING IT THE GREAT CITY WE ALL KNOW IT CAN BECOME.

MY FRIENDS I WILL CONTINUE TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY WITH THAT AS MY GOAL. AND I LOOK FORWARD TO ALL OF US WORKING SIDE-BY-SIDE TO MAKE IT A REALITY!

THANK YOU, AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS OUR GREAT CITY!