



MACON-BIBB COUNTY
STATE OF THE COMMUNITY 2019

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY! LOVE IS IN THE AIR!

MY TALK TODAY WILL REFERENCE LOVE, BUT FIRST, LET ME THANK THE GREATER MACON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR AGAIN PROVIDING ME WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE THIS "STATE OF THE COMMUNITY" ADDRESS. THIS IS ALWAYS AN EXCITING TIME, AND IT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO REPORT TO A LARGER AUDIENCE.

I UNDERSTAND THIS YEAR HAS RECORD ATTENDANCE OF NEARLY 500, AND I WANT TO THANK THE LINCHRIS HOTEL GROUP, A MASSACHUSETTS-BASED ORGANIZATION, WHICH HAS BECOME THE NEW OWNER OF THE MARRIOTT CITY CENTER HOTEL, AND MANAGER OF THE CONFERENCE CENTER FOR THEIR EFFORTS TO MAKE IT A SUCCESS, NOT ONLY TODAY BUT FOR EVERY EVENT AND GUEST THEY HOST HERE. THEY ARE IN THE PROCESS OF REDECORATING AND UPGRADING BOTH FACILITIES, AND THEIR FOUNDER AND CEO, CHRISTOPHER GISTIS, SAYS HE SEES WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT IN MACON-BIBB COUNTY. THEY HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND THEY SEE A LOT OF GREAT POTENTIAL HERE. LET'S THANK NOT ONLY THE LINCHRIS GROUP BUT ALL OF THEIR EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE WORKED TO PREPARE AND SERVE OUR MEAL AND HOST US TODAY.

SPEAKING OF APPRECIATION FOR THE WORKFORCE HERE TODAY, I SHOULD ALSO THANK THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LEADERSHIP NOT ONLY FOR PUTTING ON

THIS STATE OF THE COMMUNITY EVENT, BUT ALSO FOR GUIDING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IN MACON-BIBB COUNTY IN SO MANY WAYS, ESPECIALLY IN THEIR RECENT EFFORTS TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION. I AM EXCITED TO WORK WITH PRESIDENT YVONNE WILLIAMS AND PAST BOARD CHAIR, RON SHIPMAN, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH JIM MANLEY, THE CHAIR FOR THIS YEAR. WHEN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TEAMS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, IT'S A POWERFUL COMBINATION, AND WE ARE VERY FORTUNATE TO HAVE SO MANY WONDERFUL CORPORATE CITIZENS AND THE CHAMBER TO COORDINATE EFFORTS TO ATTRACT, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN THE WORKFORCE WE WILL NEED TO SUCCEED.

MOST OF THE MACON-BIBB COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ARE HERE TODAY, AND I APPRECIATE THE TEAMWORK THAT CONTINUES TO MOVE US FORWARD TOGETHER. AND THAT INCLUDES OUR CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS AND OTHER ELECTED JUDGES AND OFFICIALS. WOULD YOU ALL PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

I ALSO WANT TO THANK THE MACON-BIBB COUNTY EMPLOYEES FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND SERVICE. MANY OF THE DEPARTMENT HEADS ARE HERE TODAY, AND I WOULD LIKE FOR THEM TO STAND UP AND BE RECOGNIZED. THEY KEEP THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RUNNING AND RECOGNIZE WE CAN'T SHUT DOWN. PUBLIC SAFETY, FIRE PROTECTION, PUBLIC WORKS, PARKS, RECREATION, AND GENERAL OPERATIONS MUST BE PROVIDED ON A CONTINUOUS BASIS, AND WE ALL OWE THEM A TREMENDOUS DEBT OF GRATITUDE.

NEXT, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE HELP OF SO MANY PEOPLE, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE MAKING MACON-BIBB COUNTY THE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY IT IS BECOMING. I WILL MENTION SOME OF THEM BY NAME TODAY IN MY REMARKS, BUT IF I FAIL TO CALL YOUR NAME OR YOUR ORGANIZATION, BLAME IT NOT ON MY HEART, BUT ON MY HEAD AND THE CONSTRAINTS ON OUR TIME.

OVER THE NEXT FEW MINUTES, I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU A BRIEF REPORT ON WHERE WE ARE FINANCIALLY, WHERE WE'RE TRYING TO GO, AND HOW WE'RE GOING TO GET THERE.

WITH THAT HAVING BEEN SAID, LET ME BEGIN BY SAYING THAT THE STATE OF OUR COMMUNITY IS “MORE HOPEFUL”. I SAY THIS BECAUSE THE KNIGHT FOUNDATION TEAMED UP WITH THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION TO HOST AN “ON THE TABLE” EVENT IN OCTOBER IN WHICH AN ESTIMATED 5,000 PEOPLE PARTICIPATED. THE PARTICIPANTS WERE DIVERSE IN AGE, RACE, GENDER, INCOME, AND ADDRESS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY, AND “A SOLID MAJORITY (74% OF MEN AND 63% OF WOMEN) RESPONDED THAT “LOOKING AHEAD TO NEXT FIVE YEARS OR SO, THEY FEEL **MORE HOPEFUL** RATHER THAN **MORE WORRIED** ABOUT WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

THE PARTICIPANTS DID EXPRESS CONCERN WITH CRIME, VIOLENCE, & PUBLIC SAFETY AS WELL AS POVERTY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY, **BUT ALMOST 70% FELT THAT OUR COMMUNITY IS CHANGING FOR THE BETTER**, AND ALSO FELT THAT WE HAVE SHARED GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

WHY WOULD THEY FEEL THAT WAY? WELL, HERE ARE SOME FACTS AND FIGURES THAT SUPPORT THEIR OPTIMISM:

- OUR FY18 AUDIT REPORT WAS CLEAN AND SHOWED A FINAL GENERAL FUND BUDGET OF \$154.7 MILLION, WHICH IS WELL BELOW THE COMBINED FY14 BUDGETS OF THE FORMER CITY OF MACON AND BIBB COUNTY AT \$165.6 MILLION. SO, WE’RE SPENDING LESS NOW THAN WE WERE 5 YEARS AGO; WE HAD A SMALL DEFICIT IN FY18, SO WE HAVE BUDGETED FOR SLIGHTLY LESS REVENUE IN FY19 THAN WAS ACTUALLY RECEIVED IN FY18, AND I’M PLEASED TO SAY THAT OUR REVENUES ARE INCREASING AND WE’RE HOLDING THE LINE ON EXPENSES;
- WE HAVE APPROXIMATELY 300 FEWER EMPLOYEES NOW THAN WE DID FIVE YEARS AGO, AND WE ARE FILLING VACANCIES CAREFULLY, TRYING TO MAINTAIN SERVICE LEVELS WHILE HOLDING COSTS DOWN;
- EVERYBODY IN MACON-BIBB CO. IS PAYING THE SAME RATE OF TAX, AND 2/3 OF THE CITIZENS ARE PAYING A LOWER RATE OF TAX, EVEN WITH THE RECENT RATE HIKES, THAN THEY WERE 5 YEARS AGO; FOR THE 1/3 WHO ARE PAYING MORE, THERE ARE ROAD IMPROVEMENTS, NEW FIRE

STATIONS, AND NEW RECREATIONAL FACILITIES BEING PROVIDED. WE'RE MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER;

- THROUGH THE INDUSTRIAL AUTHORITY, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RECRUIT NEW BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, BRINGING HUNDREDS OF JOBS AND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS INTO THE COMMUNITY (J.D. IRVING, AMAZON, THE NICHIIA EXPANSION, STEPHENS AEROSPACE, AND EMBRAER);
- DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT IS CONTINUING WITH NEW RESIDENTS AND RESTAURANTS THANKS TO NEWTOWN MACON, THE PEYTON ANDERSON FOUNDATION, THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, AND PRIVATE EQUITY INVESTMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS, ESPECIALLY NOTEABLE BEING THE GODSEY FUND AT NEWTOWN MACON AND THE GRIFFITH FAMILY FOUNDATION;
- OUR K-12 EDUCATION IS SEEING DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS, AND THE "LEADER IN ME" PROGRAM WILL BE IN MORE SCHOOLS, THANKS TO THE GENEROUSITY OF OUR CITIZENS, ESPECIALLY THE CONTRIBUTION FROM THE JONES FAMILY FUND. OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE EXPANDING AND PROVIDING NEW PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES; AND
- RAFB IS EXPANDING THEIR MISSIONS AND HIRING 1200 NEW EMPLOYEES. THAT'S A COMMUNITY ASSET WITH WHOM WE NEED TO CONTINUE BUILDING AN EVEN STRONGER PARTNERSHIP.

WELL, THAT'S WHERE WE ARE, BUT HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING. I BELIEVE THESE SUCCESSES ARE A REFLECTION OF A PHILOSOPHY ABOUT COMMUNITY SUCCESS: **"A COMMUNITY IS NOT LOVED BECAUSE IT BECOMES GREAT; A COMMUNITY BECOMES GREAT BECAUSE IT IS LOVED."**

I THINK WE NEED TO BUILD ON THAT IDEA AND USE IT AS A MODEL FOR OUR FUTURE.

"LOVING A COMMUNITY INTO GREATNESS" HAS PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENTS, AND I WANT TO ADDRESS BOTH. A VIDEO THAT HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER BY CHRIS FLOORE AND RACHEL GAMBILL WILL HELP US GET STARTED.

VIDEO BEGINS

“I LOVE MACON!” THAT’S A SLOGAN, NO- A MANTRA WHICH WAS CREATED SEVERAL YEARS AGO BY A GROUP OF YOUNG LEADERS TO PROMOTE A PASSION FOR OUR COMMUNITY, FROM ITS STORIED PAST THRU TODAY AND INTO ITS VAST FUTURE POTENTIAL AS THE “HUB CITY” OF MIDDLE GEORGIA.

YOU HAVE HEARD IT AND SEEN IT ... FROM LAPEL PINS TO BUMPER STICKERS TO A VERY VISIBLE ART SCULPTURE IN DAISY PARK. BUT, IT’S MORE THAN THAT. IT’S A FEELING WE ALL HAVE THAT TIES US TOGETHER. IT’S WHAT DRIVES US TO HELP THOSE AROUND US AND MAKE OUR COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.

IT’S THE BASIS OF OUR CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT MOTTO “FORWARD TOGETHER”. WE’RE GOING TO MOVE THIS COMMUNITY FORWARD ONLY IF WE DO IT TOGETHER... AND WE DO IT BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY. **WE LOVE MACON!** THAT ATTITUDE BRINGS US TOGETHER, BUT IT DOESN’T **DO** THE WORK. HOWEVER, **IT ENABLES THE WORK TO BE DONE.**

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH SOMETHING YOU LOVE?

YOU INVEST IN IT!

IMPROVING OUR ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO KEEP PEOPLE MOVING AND MAKING IT SAFER TO BE A MOTORIST, PEDESTRIAN, OR CYCLIST.

IMPROVING OUR RECREATION CENTERS, PARKS, AND GREEN SPACES WITH MORE THAN \$80 MILLION OF SPLOST REVENUE OVER 16 YEARS; AND MORE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS TAKING AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN CREATING AND MAINTAINING THEM; FROM S.M.A.R.T. PARK NEAR HOUSTON AVE. TO FRIENDS OF FILMORE THOMAS PARK ON LOG CABIN DR., TO FRIENDS OF TATNALL SQUARE PARK ON COLLEGE ST., TO FRIENDS OF ROSA PARKS SQUARE IN DOWNTOWN. THEIR INVOLVEMENT, INPUT, AND SUPPORT MEAN THE WORK DONE TO CREATE OR IMPROVE THE PARKS CAN BE SUSTAINED IN THE LONG RUN.

DEDICATING NEARLY \$26 MILLION TO ATTACK BLIGHT IN A COMBINATION OF DEMOLITIONS, PARK AND GREENSPACE CREATION, AND IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY IN NEIGHBORHOODS.

AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS LIKE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, THE COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT AUTHORITY, AND HISTORIC MACON HELP TO REBUILD THE CORE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS WITH NEW HOMES, WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND REHABILITATING HISTORIC STRUCTURES.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH SOMETHING YOU LOVE?

YOU PROTECT IT!

WE ARE WORKING TO MAKE SURE OUR PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL HAVE THE EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES THEY NEED TO BY BUYING NEW VEHICLES, INSTALLING A NEW 800 MHZ RADIO SYSTEM, UPGRADING AND MODERNIZING THE SEVERE WEATHER ALERT SYSTEM TO GO FROM SIRENS TO PHONE, TEXT, AND EMAIL MESSAGES, AND BUILDING NEW FACILITIES THAT MEET THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS TODAY AND TOMORROW.

THIS PAST YEAR, SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES AND FIRE FIGHTERS RECEIVED PAY RAISES OF UP TO 12%.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH SOMETHING YOU LOVE?

YOU MAINTAIN IT!

WE HAVE REORGANIZED COUNTY WIDE, CURBSIDE, RECYCLING AND SOLID WASTE COLLECTION, AND WE'RE TRYING TO DO MORE TO CLEAN UP OUR STREETS.

FROM LITTER AND MOWING CREWS WORKING TOGETHER TO HAVING MORE PEOPLE JOIN IN. EVERY YEAR, WE PICK UP, CLEAN UP, AND SPRUCE UP TO MAKE OUR COMMUNITY MORE ATTRACTIVE, BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP.

PICK UP LITTER WHEN YOU SEE IT, AND TELL OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. SPREAD THE WORD TO STOP LITTERING.

WE'RE REPAIRING OUR ROADS; NOT ONLY RESURFACING BUT ADDING CAPACITY . WE'RE WORKING WITH GDOT ON MAJOR PROJECTS AND WE'RE FIXING POTHOLES . OUR PUBLIC WORKS CREWS RESPOND AND REPAIR POTHOLES AS QUICKLY AS THEY CAN, AND LAST YEAR, THEY FILLED 848 OF THEM.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH SOMETHING YOU LOVE?

YOU NOURISH IT!

MACON-BIBB COUNTY CAN BOAST OF A BURGEONING RESTAURANT SCENE, FULL OF VARIETY AND FLAVOR.

FROM SOUTHERN CLASSICS THAT HAVE BEEN AROUND TO NEW INTERNATIONAL FLAVORS AND CUISINES. EVEN FOOD TRUCKS CAN BE SPOTTED HERE AND THERE. OUR COMMUNITY IS WELL FED.

BUT WE ALSO NEED TO FEED IT THROUGH SPIRITUALITY, CULTURE AND CONVERSATION.

GREAT COMMUNITIES ARE MORE THAN JUST ROADS, BRIDGES AND BUILDINGS;.

THEY NEED PARKS AND GREENSPACE;

THEY NEED PUBLIC ART;

THEY NEED MAJESTIC DISPLAYS OF LIGHT AND.

I LOVE MACON; YOU LOVE MACON; WE LOVE MACON.

VIDEO ENDS

MACON-BIBB COUNTY HAS ALWAYS HAD AN ENLIGHTENED CITIZENRY AND COUNTLESS HEROES, NAMED AND UNNAMED WHO HAVE LOVED THIS COMMUNITY, INVESTED TIME, MONEY, AND RESOURCES IN IT TO MAKE IT A GREAT COMMUNITY! **TO BUILD A PUBLIC REALM THAT PROMOTES PRIDE, INSPIRES HOPE, AND PROMPTS PARTICIPATION.**

LET'S TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT HISTORY TO CONFIRM THIS.

MACON-BIBB COUNTY STARTED OUT AS A FRONTIER COMMUNITY; WHEN THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE WAS CONCLUDED IN 1803, CONGRESS DETERMINED THAT A POSTAL ROAD WAS NEEDED TO CONNECT WASHINGTON AND NEW ORLEANS. THE ROUTE PASSED THROUGH MIDDLE GEORGIA, BUT BECAUSE THE AREA WAS OCCUPIED BY THE INDIANS, A FORT WAS COMMISSIONED AND BUILT IN 1806. A

COMMUNITY GREW UP AROUND THE FORT AND BECAME A HUB OF ACTIVITY AND COMMERCE. IN THE 1820s, THE INDIANS WERE FORCIBLY REMOVED TO THE OKLAHOMA TERRITORY, AND THE FORT WAS NO LONGER NEEDED AND WAS DECOMMISSIONED. THE CITIZENS DECIDED THAT THEY WOULD CROSS THE RIVER AND LAY OUT A NEW DOWNTOWN ON A GEOMETRIC GRID. THERE WOULD BE WIDE BOULEVARDS, UNIFORM SET BACK LINES, GREEN SPACE, AND PARKS, AND THE SLOGAN OF "A CITY IN A PARK" WAS COINED BY SIMRI ROSE, THE SURVEYOR WHO LAID IT OUT. THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSED THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT." THE NEW CITY OF MACON WAS INCORPORATED BY THE STATE LEGISLATURE IN 1823, AND EDWARD DORR TRACEY BECAME ITS FIRST MAYOR.

THE CITY BECAME QUITE SUCCESSFUL, AND A LITTLE MORE THAN 10 YEARS LATER, THE ORGANIZED EFFORTS OF AN ENLIGHTENED GROUP OF CITIZENS ATTRACTED WESLEYAN COLLEGE, THE FIRST INSTITUTION CHARTERED TO GRANT DEGREES TO WOMEN, TO LOCATE IN MACON IN 1836 AND OPEN IN 1839. GEORGE FOSTER PIERCE SERVED AS THE FIRST PRESIDENT, AND FAMILIES FROM ACROSS THE SOUTH SENT THEIR DAUGHTERS TO MACON TO STUDY AND LEARN. AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON ARTS, EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND REFINEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY WERE THE RESULT OF THE ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY AND STUDENTS AT WESLEYAN COLLEGE. OUR COMMUNITY HAS BEEN BLESSED BY THEIR PRESENCE EVER SINCE. AGAIN, THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSED THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT."

IN 1870, SHORTLY AFTER THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR, ANOTHER GROUP OF ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS AROSE AND INSTITUTED THE ACTIONS THAT RESULTED IN A BOND ISSUE OF \$125,000 AND A GRANT OF 6 ACRES OF LAND ADJOINING TATNALL SQUARE PARK TO PROMPT MERCER TO RELOCATE FROM PENFIELD, GA TO MACON, AND MERCER UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, H.H. TUCKER, AND MACON MAYOR GEORGE S. OBEAR SIGNED THE AGREEMENT. AGAIN, PROMINENT FAMILIES FROM ACROSS THE SOUTH SENT THEIR CHILDREN TO MACON TO BE EDUCATED IN THE SCIENCES, THE ARTS, AND THE HUMANITIES, AND OUR COMMUNITY HAS BEEN THE BENEFICIARY OF THEIR PRESENCE HERE FOR ALMOST 150 YEARS. AGAIN, THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSED THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT."

OUR STATUS AS A RAILROAD HUB TODAY CAN BE TRACED BACK TO ANOTHER GROUP OF ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS. AT THE INTERSECTION OF THIRD AND MULBERRY STREETS IN MACON STANDS THIS STATUE OF WILLIAM M. WADLEY, PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILROAD FROM 1866 TO 1882. WADLEY TOOK A RAILROAD THAT HAD SEEN 170 MILES OF TRACK DESTROYED BY WAR AND RETURNED IT TO PROSPERITY. AS RAILROAD HISTORIAN MAURY KLEIN SAID, "THE RESTORATION OF THE CENTRAL AND THE GUIDING OF ITS DESTINY THROUGH THE DIFFICULT POSTWAR YEARS BECAME HIS LIFEWORK. THOUGH HIS ACHIEVEMENT WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS SHORTCOMINGS, HE SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THE CENTRAL THE MOST POWERFUL CORPORATION IN GEORGIA AND ONE OF THE FINEST RAILROAD PROPERTIES IN THE SOUTH." AGAIN, THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSED THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT."

OTHER RAILROADS MADE CONNECTIONS TO MACON, AND AN ENLIGHTENED GROUP OF CITIZENS BUILT THE TERMINAL STATION IN 1916. THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE WAS CONSTRUCTED ON THE SITE OF THE OLD MUSIC CONSERVATORY IN THE LATE 1800s, AND FOR THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF MACON-BIBB COUNTY, AN ENLIGHTENED GROUP OF CITIZENS SPEARHEADED THE EFFORTS TO BUILD THE CITY AUDITORIUM IN 1923. AGAIN, THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSED THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT."

WE HAVE CONTINUED THIS TRADITION OF INVESTMENT, SERVICE, AND FOCUS ON THE COMMON GOOD RIGHT UP TO TODAY. CITIZENS OF MACON-BIBB COUNTY HAVE SUPPORTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ROBINS AIR BASE IN THE 1940s, THE FOUNDING OF MACON JUNIOR COLLEGE IN 1968, THE FOUNDING OF KEEP MACON-BIBB BEAUTIFUL, THE FIRST AFFILIATE CHAPTER OF KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL, IN 1973, THE OPENING OF THE MEDICAL SCHOOL AT MERCER UNIVERSITY IN 1982, THE REHABILITATION OF THE DOUGLASS THEATRE IN 1995, THE GEORGIA MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND SPORTS HALL OF FAME IN THE LATE 1990s, AND THE REVITALIZATION OF DOWNTOWN THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF NEWTOWN MACON, THE PEYTON ANDERSON FOUNDATION, AND THE KNIGHT FOUNDATION. ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS HAVE PROVIDED PRIVATE INVESTMENTS TO IMPROVE THE MUSEUM OF ARTS & SCIENCES, THE TUBMAN MUSEUM, THE

HEART CENTER, THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, AND THE AUTISM CENTER AT NAVICENT HEALTH.

THE FAMILIES OF OTIS REDDING AND PHIL AND ALLEN WALDEN CONTINUE TO KEEP OUR MUSIC HERITAGE VIBRANT AND TO MAKE POSITIVE IMPACTS ON OUR COMMUNITY. THE RESTORATION OF CAPRICORN RECORDING STUDIOS IS SURE TO SET THE RIGHT TONE FOR OUR FUTURE, AND WE ARE GRATEFUL TO MERCER AND ALL OTHERS INVOLVED IN THAT EFFORT.

WE HAVE A RECORD OF SUPPORTING SPLOST ISSUES, EDUCATION IMPROVEMENTS, AND BOND ISSUES TO ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIES TO OUR COMMUNITY. IT TAKES A MAJORITY OF CITIZENS TO DO THIS, AND AGAIN, THIS "LOVE OF COMMUNITY CAUSES THE COMMUNITY TO BECOME GREAT."

WE ARE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT WE HAVE NOT ARRIVED AT OUR DESTINATION. OUR PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS OLD AND NEEDS IMPROVEMENT.

WE STILL HAVE NAYSAYERS AND NON-BELIEVERS, BUT WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. THE SIGNS OF PROGRESS ARE UNDENIABLE!

SINCE WE BECAME A CONSOLIDATED COMMUNITY ON JANUARY 1, 2014, THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF CHANGES, BUT NOW WE ARE AT A POINT WHERE OUR ROLE IS BECOMING CLEARER AND OUR TASK MORE DEFINED.

GOING FORWARD, WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP OUR DOWNTOWN AND BUILD ON ITS HEALTHY EDGES INTO OUR FIRST NEIGHBORHOODS: THE HISTORIC MAIN STREET, TINDALL HEIGHTS, AND PLEASANT HILL NEIGHBORHOODS.

WE NEED TO LEVERAGE THE IMPROVEMENTS MADE BY GDOT IN PLEASANT HILL AND CONNECT THEM TO THE OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL. WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP THE OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL AND ITS CONNECTIONS INTO DOWNTOWN AND ALONG THE RIVER FROM AMERSON RIVER PARK TO THE OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT. (SOON WE HOPE TO BE EXPANDED AND

RENAMED SINCE THE BILL TO DO THAT WAS PASSED BY THE SENATE 2 DAYS AGO AND IS GOING BACK TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.)

WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO REPAIR AND REBUILD OUR AGING STORM WATER INFRASTRUCTURE. WE CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE CONTINUE TO POLLUTE OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS AND TO HAVE SINKHOLES AND EROSION DEVELOP UNDER OUR STREETS.

WE NEED TO ATTRACT AND MAINTAIN BUSINESSES & INDUSTRIES AND CONTINUE TO IMPROVE OUR AVIATION CONNECTIONS WITH CONTOUR AIRLINES & OTHER AEROSPACE OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE RUNWAY EXTENSION PROJECT.

WE NEED TO PARTNER WITH EXISTING BUSINESSES AND INSTITUTIONS & BUILD PARTNERSHIPS W/ RAFB TO STRENGTHEN AND SECURE ITS ROLE FOR THE FUTURE.

WE NEED TO COOPERATE WITH THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR INTERNSHIPS AND MENTORSHIPS THAT CREATE WORKFORCE FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW.

WE MUST ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF POVERTY AND BLIGHT. ABANDONED AND DELAPIDATED STRUCTURES DON'T JUST REDUCE SURROUNDING PROPERTY VALUES, THEY SAP THE ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM FOR OWNERS OF NEIGHBORING PROPERTIES AND INSTILL A SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS INTO THE FAMILIES FORCED TO LIVE IN THE MIDST OF THESE CONDITIONS.

WE MUST ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF CRIME, AND THAT WILL REQUIRE BOTH REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE STRATEGIES. APPREHENDING AND PROSECUTING CRIMINALS CANNOT SUCCEED ALONE. WE MUST WORK WITH CRIMESTOPPERS & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO CLEAN UP BAD NEIGHBORHOODS AND HAVE A PROGRAM OF COMMUNITY INTERACTION AND INTERVENTION. WE NEED TO SPUR SMALL BUSINESS EFFORTS, AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR SMALL LOCAL BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IS ESSENTIAL.

GOVERNMENT CANNOT DO ALL THIS ALONE. OUR CITIZENS MUST HELP.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL, BUT I AM ASKING YOU TO JOIN US BY DOING SOMETHING!

HELP US LOVE OUR COMMUNITY INTO GREATNESS. TAKE A STICKER AND PUT IT IN THE TOP CENTER OF THE REAR WINDSHIELD OF YOUR CAR. THE PEOPLE BEHIND YOU WILL KNOW THAT YOU LOVE MACON, AND EVERY TIME YOU LOOK IN YOUR REAR VIEW MIRROR, YOU'LL SEE IT AND BE REMINDED OF YOUR OWN COMMITMENT.

YOU CAN PICK UP LITTER; YOU CAN VOLUNTEER WITH UNITED WAY'S "READ TO SUCCEED" OR OTHER COMMUNITY IMPACT PROGRAMS. YOU CAN JOIN JUNE O'NEAL'S "MENTORS PROJECT", OR VOLUNTEER AT THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB. YOU CAN SERVE ON A BOARD OR COMMISSION- JUST LET ME KNOW.

BUT AS I SEE THE END OF MY TENURE AS MAYOR COMING IN DECEMBER 2020, I AM REMINDED THAT THE ELECTION OF THE NEXT MAYOR AND COMMISSION IS NEXT MAY, ONLY A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AWAY. IF YOU WANT TO SERVE, ACT NOW TO LEARN WHAT COMMISSION DISTRICT YOU'RE IN AND WHAT WOULD BE INVOLVED IN SERVING AS AN ELECTED OFFICIAL. IF YOU PERSONALLY DON'T WANT TO RUN FOR OFFICE, FIND SOMEBODY WHO WILL AND GIVE THEM YOUR SUPPORT.

AFTER ALL, WHAT IS A CITY, BUT ITS PEOPLE? THEY DEFINE IT; THEY MAKE IT; AND THEY CAN LOVE IT INTO GREATNESS. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO TO CELEBRATE OUR 200TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2023?

I AM ONE OF THOSE CITIZENS WHO ARE MORE HOPEFUL ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY, BUT I KNOW IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US TO REALIZE OUR FULL POTENTIAL.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY AND YOUR COMMITMENT FOR OUR COLLECTIVE TOMORROW. YOU GOOD PEOPLE ARE THE WAY OUR COMMUNITY WILL BECOME GREAT.

MAY GOD BLESS AMERICA, AND OUR EFFORTS "TO LOVE OUR COMMUNITY INTO GREATNESS".