
City of Tupelo State of the City Address

January 31

2012

Mayor Jack Reed, Jr. to present to City of Tupelo on Tuesday, January 31, 2012
@ 4:00 p.m. behind the Hilton Garden Inn-BancorpSouth Conference Center in
the Sweet Gum Room.



Mayor Jack Reed, Jr.

State of the City Address

“BACK AT FULL SPEED AGAIN”

Tuesday, January 31, 2012 at 4:00 p.m.

BancorpSouth Conference Center, Tupelo, MS

SMILE!



Good Afternoon!

Welcome to the State of the City Address for our city – Tupelo, Mississippi! Please join me in thanking our colorguard, and Municipal Court Clerk, Mr. Larry Montgomery, for leading us in our Pledge of Allegiance and our National Anthem.

Being the Mayor of our fair city can be both a proud – and an humbling experience. It can also occasionally be a humorous one.

This Christmas, at our church’s Christmas Eve candlelight service, one of our members had her adult daughter in town. On our way out of church she said she wanted me to meet her daughter. She

said, “Honey, this is our Mayor, Mayor Jack Daniels.” (I’m not sure if that is what she thinks of me, or just what she was thinking about!) (Maybe I’ve caused her to drink!)

The Miss. Code under “General powers and duties of mayor” states:

“The Mayor shall annually report to the council and the public on the work of the previous year, and on the condition and requirements of the municipal government, and shall from time to time, make such recommendations for action by the council as he may deem in the public interest.”

That is the purpose of today’s gathering. We will do our best to have made it worth your while.

Before I begin, I want to introduce our City Council and have them stand; President Fred Pitts, Vice-President, Nettie Davis, Markel Whittington, Jim Newell, Jonny Davis, Mike Bryan, and Willie Jennings.

I want to begin by identifying some of the challenges facing us today – then reporting to you on how our city has performed this past year, and why that history gives us reason for optimism in 2012.

ANNEXATION.

Of course this administration did not begin the annexation proceedings, but we are ready to respond to it if it occurs this year. It currently rests with the Mississippi Supreme Court. To summarize my two days of testimony before the Chancellor last year: our city has the resources to include all of the proposed annexed area – our Water & Light Department, our Fire, our Police, our Public Works – all departments are at the ready – whenever it may come, if it comes, in 2012. To those citizens in the proposed annexed areas, we say that we look upon this as a responsibility and an opportunity to show you what benefits citizenship in Tupelo can mean to you. (For example, I know a woman who is excited about having recycling; a man who is excited about having our Fire dept., being his first call.)

THE TUPELO PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

No one means more to us than our children – their welfare – and their success. A perfect storm of leadership volatility, new accountability standards, poorer scoring, demographic changes in our city and in our school system, new competition from a private school, and publicly-discussed personnel decisions have combined to bring Tupelo’s commitment to a great public school system, attended by most of our city’s children, into question.

I strongly believe that we politicians should not be able to interject our positions of power into the school system. This Mayor – or a Councilman – should not be able to tell a teacher to let our child make a team or retake a test; and I have tried to lead by example and be respectful of that relationship.

Having said that, the success of our public schools is joined at the hip with the success of our town. I currently spend a day a week in our schools, and this past Friday, I visited an all-girls, all-minority public school in Atlanta (where our son Jack teaches) that had a 98% passing rate on the Georgia middle school state reading test. I am encouraged that we will begin to see immediate improvement here in Tupelo for at least 4 reasons:

First, we will soon have a new superintendent. As Hank Bounds, former State Superintendent of Mississippi Schools, says “At the end of the day, leadership matters.” We’ve had an excellent response from qualified people who are excited about Tupelo and accepting our challenges.

Second, the very high profile personnel issue now before the board, will soon be settled, one way or the other, and we can all move on-whichever way it goes – with grace and understanding how excruciating these episodes are for all.

Third, I am encouraged that our community still cares enough about the success of our schools to voice these concerns, that our school board members are proactively reaching out to our community, and

that many members of our community who care just as much, (but are not part of a new concern group) are coming forth to show their support. If all of us who are involved in these discussions and I include myself – will treat each other with respect and with the courage and humility to admit that we may not have all of the answers but that we are bonded together by our common love of our city’s children and their success, I believe we will see improvement soon.

And fourth: I believe improvement is already underway, just below the high profile surface. Just last week, I had 2 of our long-time teachers – one at THS – one at Joyner Elementary – tell me that they were having “a great year”. This past Thursday, Lisa and I spent a morning with Dr. Hank Bounds listening to his ideas about Tupelo’s schools. Dr. Bounds said that there is absolutely no reason that we should not have 100% high performing schools. I was delighted to learn that his #1 recommendation for getting there was a concentration and focus on school structure the first weeks of school. This is precisely what our school system began doing this year with our “1st 20 days of school” strategy.

In addition, under our new program of hiring retired teachers to come back to school and teach students who have failed the state exams two or more times, 31% of these students have now passed sample tests this fall.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION.

One of our very simple goals is “Every part of town is the good part of town.” This goal speaks both to us – our current residents – and to those we hope to attract. We have now committed some of our tax dollars toward making that a reality. We know we have some blighted areas of town that have deteriorated into places no one wants to live. They can and do spread. This year we begin to seriously attack them. Our new capital budget calls for \$600,000 – a year for 5 years to make a real difference in our core

neighborhoods. You can expect an announcement in the very near future that will show you what a smart investment this will be.

DEPARTMENTS.

Each of our departments has prepared a summary of their accomplishments and updates as we begin 2012. These complete reports are published on our city website: www.tupeloms.gov

I will take a few minutes to mention some highlights from each.

TUPELO POLICE DEPARTMENT:

- A. In my mind, your city's first responsibility to you is your safety. I'd like to ask Chief Tony Carleton and members of the Tupelo Police Department to stand during this comment. The Operations Division, led by Major Jackie Clayton, is committed to excellence in conducting criminal investigations.

In 2011, involving our most serious crimes, our TPD worked; 3 homicides, all three were solved and arrests made.

- 3 bank robberies, all 3 solved and arrests made.
- 16 aggravated assaults, 15 solved and arrests made.

The North Mississippi Narcotics Unit fights an ongoing battle against drug use in Tupelo. Our Patrol and Traffic divisions continue to perform well as they support the daily emergencies.

Our Special Operations Unit led by Major Anthony Hill includes our Community Policing efforts; which enlightened police departments all over the country are spending more and more effort on – that is presence and prevention, interacting the police with the neighborhoods and the

citizens. (**GOAL:** As Chief Carleton has so dramatically described, “is to have youth and adults run toward the police, not away from them.”)

These efforts include a tremendous increase in youth participation with the Police Athletic League, and initiating new programs such as the “Pastors on Patrol” and self-defense for teenagers and women.

This division also includes the North Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Academy – which trains new officers for all our region, the School Resource Officers, the Bomb Squad and the Records Division all of which will certainly benefit from the soon underway new Tupelo Police Department Facility which will be located on the corner of Front and Franklin Streets. Long needed, it will give our law enforcement team the quarters they need to protect and defend us.

The administration; with the approval of the City Council has just hired 6 new police officers to strengthen our patrols and are hiring one new animal control officer.

This should be a good year for us as we support our officers of the peace. Please join me in thanking them.

MUNICIPAL COURT

- B.** Of course, once laws are broken and arrests are made, it is up to our City Municipal Court to handle these cases appropriately. This has been an unusual year for our court. For the first time in over 10 years, the city needed to replace Prosecuting Attorney Trent Kelly and City Judge John Weddle.

I’d like to ask these 2 men to stand along with senior Judge Dan Davis, new Judge Jay Weir, new Prosecutor Richard Babb, City Court Administrator Mr. Larry Montgomery, and other members of our Municipal Court staff.

Assistant District Attorney Weddle and District Attorney Kelly leave big shoes to fill. I am confident we have the right two men to replace them; along with Judge Davis we have a bright, loyal, common sense cadre of officers of the Court, supported by a capable staff.

An important additional contribution to our city is made by our Community Work Program. These men and women working off fines filled over 10,000 bags of trash off our roads. They are led by Big Dan Morgan. I continue to get praise from visitors on how clean our city looks. Please help me thank all of these folks for a job well done.

C. FIRE DEPARTMENT.

I'll ask Fire Chief Thomas Walker and his team to please stand. Our Fire Department responded to 2,600 incidences in 2011. We had 3 documented medical saves. That is, we brought 3 citizens back to life.

Significantly by virtue of hard work and opening our new fire station on North Gloster – the Tupelo Fire Department dropped from a Class 5 to a Class 4 insurance classification from the Mississippi State Rating Bureau. Only 12 cities in the state have achieved this rating. This will save citizens thousands of dollars by lowering our insurance rates. This was the first drop since 1972. We will use \$500,000 of our new capital budget to purchase a new fire engine this year to ensure keeping our Class 4 rating.

In a story all of us can appreciate, the TFD was the first emergency responder team to respond to the Smithville tornado tragedy. We helped in many ways and helped man their fire department for 2 weeks following the tornado. Our Captain Scott Morgan serves as the Chief of the Smithville Volunteer Fire Department and spent days of heroic services to our sister community. **I'LL ASK SCOTT TO WAVE.**

JOIN ME IN THANKING THEM.

OUR SOLDIERS.

Under the heading of safety, comes our security not only as Tupeloans, but as Americans.

I'd like to ask new District Attorney Trent Kelly and our city employees who have served our nation overseas to please stand. Lt. Col. Kelly brought me this flag when he returned from the Iraq war. It flew over TAGI, Iraq, above the 155th Brigade of the Mississippi Army National Guard whose home is Tupelo, Mississippi.

It reminds me every day to try to be the kind of leader and the kind of American citizen these brave men and women and all of our service men, and women are protecting.

Please join me in thanking them for their service.

D. FINANCE.

I'd like to ask our top notch Finance Department team, led by Chief Financial Officer Lynn Norris and City Clerk Kim Hanna to stand.

When this Administration accepted the reins in the summer of 2009, the country – and our region – were certainly looking into uncertain economic times. The city had just experienced an almost \$1,000,000 drop in sales tax revenues and had to go into our reserve fund \$ 2 million to complete the fiscal year which ended just 3 months after we took office.

Since that time, under a strategic financial plan of no tax increases, no raises, no layoffs, shrinking through attrition, a dedication to cross-training of existing employees and postponing capital expenditures, we were able to navigate the tricky waters of the past two years very successfully.

This year's budget, passed by the Council, is a balanced budget , with no plans to utilize our \$16 million reserve fund for daily operations. We did this by reducing the number of city employees from 474 to 452 which permitted us to give a 3% raise to our remaining employees, their first raise in 3 years. And we have begun the year with 3 strong months of sales tax increases.

For the first time – we also – have in place a 5-year capital budget so that we can intelligently anticipate major expenses like the fire truck, public works equipment, demolition and revitalization needs for neighborhoods, and an aquatic center. This was one of our most significant observations when we arrived at City Hall. No organization our size should have to finance major capital improvements only 12 months at a time. It prevents any real planning – mid-term or long-term.

We also saved the city \$1.6 million dollars by refunding and then reissuing Urban Renewal Bonds to take advantage of these historically low interest rates. We began the first of our three step plan to issue bonds to finance our 5 year capital plan – at 2.45% interest for 19 years – the lowest interest rate we've ever had.

Specifically, we have worked with the CDF and Lee County to keep Cooper Tire Company and its 1600 jobs in Tupelo. We moved two staff members into the tax office to free-up our Department of Development Services to put more man-power (and woman-power) into Code Enforcement efforts. We installed WIFI in Fairpark and – we received an unqualified audit; proving to you our vigorous daily dedication to 100% appropriate financial stewardship.

I want to describe some other significant financial successes this year that have come from wisely leveraging some of our city funds resulting in major infrastructure improvement:

- We leveraged city funds to match Mississippi Department of Transportation Funds to build a new corridor from Downtown along East Main Street, leading to the Elvis Presley Birthplace. One of MDOT's new priorities is safer, more attractive pedestrian transportation. Most of America's most livable communities are already providing many more sidewalks, and bike paths and walking paths for citizens to live healthier lives than Tupelo currently provides.

When we came into office, and during our campaign, one of our goals has been to connect what has long been called "East Tupelo" seamlessly with just "Tupelo". The eastern part of our city has some our loveliest property; our city's world-wide photo op in the Elvis Presley Birthplace, expansive Veterans Park, a strong school in Lawhon; our city colleges in ICC – Tupelo and Ole Miss – Tupelo and much more. This new corridor will join with another major improvement – the completion of the new bridge on Eason Blvd.

- There we leveraged city funds to get federal and state funds

to make a major quality-of-life difference in moving traffic to and from ICC-Tupelo and the North Mississippi Medical Center Campus and beyond.

- We leveraged city funds with FAA and state funds to lengthen our runway at the Tupelo Airport – a project still very much worthwhile as we give potential clients as many options as we can.

- We leveraged city funds with Mississippi Tourism funds to enlarge the Elvis Presley Birthplace as Mississippi begins to tout itself as "The Birthplace of America's Music".

Private funds are also being raised to complete this project.

The TRA also contributed the property at Fairpark for the just completed addition to The Renasant Center for IDEAS and the new CDF headquarters, which gives our world-class economic development organization enough room and quality space to continue its critical mission of bringing jobs to our people.


PLEASE JOIN ME IN THANKING OUR FINANCE DEPARTMENT

E. HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT.

Our Human Resources Department has had a transformative year. I'd like to ask Department Head Cassandra Moore to stand along with Assistant Department Head, Contanna Purnell **and their team.**

Prior to this year, the Human Resources Department has been primarily an employee payroll, benefits department.

This year the H.R. leaders were intentional participants in all of the City's hiring interviews and the few disciplinary interviews. They led job interview classes for perspective City employees to help the unemployed learn how to put their best foot forward. They participated in our new "Plant A Seed" Program to introduce Tupelo teenagers to the job world through our Summer Work program. They added to our City's bottom line by assisting in reducing our Worker's Compensation by 5%, and enrolling 369 employees in direct deposit to save payroll check costs. Again, just like the Finance Department, they received an A+ Annual Audit Finding concerning our handling of employee files.

( As an aside, I appreciate their daily efforts to continue to encourage me to be a "cool" mayor.)

They have big plans for 2012 including an automated City employment application, continuing to use social media to update employment candidates.

Please join me in thanking them for their contributions to our City.

F. DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES.

Our Department of Development Services & Planning is led by our Director, B.J. Teal and our Planning Director, Pat Falkner. I'll ask them and their team to stand.

There is not an easy job that I have identified at City Hall, but I'm not sure there are any tougher ones than the jobs we ask our code enforcement team members to play. If you could observe these women and men as I have and see the professionalism they exhibit often in the face of unpleasant, too often rude people—you would appreciate their service, as I do.

We are taking a tougher stance on blight and public nuisances in Tupelo. (You may have heard of our new increase from \$10 a year to \$25 a year for landlords' registrations in the City. Someone told me the only thing we could have done to raise more anger was to try and shorten deer season!)

Thanks to the City Council's approval we now as I mentioned, for the first time have budgeted \$600,000 per year for 5 years to purchase blighted properties and turn them around to make some tremendous quality-of-life improvements in our neighborhoods—particularly in the older central core of town. (We are not alone, Meridian demolished 62 homes last year.)

Our staff is also committed to working with property owners in repairing their properties, adopting a new development code that gives us more flexibility, encouraging our neighborhood associations and our citizen – led Planning Committee and our Mayor's Task Force on Neighborhoods as they help us toward our goal of "making every part of town the good part of town".

We also inspected and guided \$41,000,000 in new construction last year.

Please thank them.

G. PARKS & RECREATION.

Our Parks & Recreation Department did a tremendous job in 2011; both for our own citizens and as a host to visitors coming to town with their pocketbooks to athletic tournaments and events. I'll ask Department Head Don Lewis and his team to stand. Nationally, Tupelo Parks & Rec received the

National Softball Award as one of the highest rated national tournaments in America. Statewide we received three awards for excellence from the Mississippi Recreation & Parks Association.

Parks & Recreation continues to receive more attention from all progressive communities as leaders realize how important their amenities are to the quality of life in a town. Don is a valuable member of our Mayor's Health Task Force. Under the leadership of Hank Boerner and Liz Dawson our Task Force is transforming our city into one where we are celebrating healthier lifestyles for our citizens. From healthier eating choices in convenience stores to daily exercise campaigns to losing over 5,000 pounds , Tupelo has been recognized statewide, regionally, and nationally for our efforts. We simply can't sit still and expect our reputation to be enough. Have you driven through New Albany lately and seen the ten new tennis courts being built on the right side of the road across from the baseball/softball complex on the left? We had over 350,000 participants in our programs and events last year. We continue to add new programs—one of my favorites is adult co-ed kickball.

Last year was a wonderful year for our citizen aquatic programs. We completed a long overdue renovation of the CC Augustus Pool and Center.

We were forced to replace our City Pool Dome which had completely worn through with one that can be used in two years to cover four tennis courts at City Park when our new Aquatics Center opens at Veteran's Park.

There is genuine excitement throughout our community for this new center which will be a tremendous contribution to our city's dedication to healthy lifestyles as well as a strong new magnet as an economic development driver in keeping Tupelo North Mississippi's leading community

Every ward of the City will see the benefits of Parks & Rec's 2012 work. Join me in thanking them for a job well done.

H. PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.

No department has done more to reduce its costs of operations since our administration took office than our Public Works Department. I'll ask Department Head Sid Russell and his team to please stand.

In the past year, the Public Works Department under Sid's excellent leadership and with the support of his team reduced its staff by 20%. The department also has gone to a 4-day 7:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. work week saving money by reducing down times & equipment set-ups. Some staff remains on duty Fridays to answer phone calls and an on-call crew responds to weekend emergencies.

We maintain approximately 300 miles of roadway within the City limits—all funded currently through the general fund.

Beautification of our city rests with this department. Last year they participated in planting thousands of daffodils and thousands of wildflowers, maintaining our cemeteries and planting over 2000 trees throughout Tupelo. In fact, Mr. David Knight, our City Arborist and Tree Farm Manager received Mississippi's highest annual reforestation award at the 2011 Statewide Celebration of Trees.

Our current city policy is for every 1 tree removed, 7 are planted.

In addition, in 2011 our Public Works Department oversaw –along with our COO Darrell Smith- the building of the Eason Bridge to 4 lanes, the beginning of the widening of South Gloster and the repairing of 6 city bridges.

Importantly, in one of the biggest improvements to citizen quality of life, we began significant drainage projects all over the city—and last but not least, didn't they do a terrific job handling our snow and ice storms last winter?

Please join me in thanking these unsung heroes.

I. **OTHER DEPARTMENTS.**

In addition to our departments, we have 5 organizations that have their own separate budgets but which come beneath the administration's ultimate responsibility:

For a little levity – I'll give you a hint for the 1st one: **Sing-I am a lineman for the city**

1. The Tupelo Water & Light Department is run by Johnny Timmons. I'll ask Johnny and his team to stand.

First, and most importantly, the Electric department did a great job of keeping our city's electric grid running while maintaining the lowest rates in the TVA!

So if you're looking at towns around Lee County or otherwise---if you are comparing the cost of living---remember Tupelo has the cheapest electric rate anywhere!

Citing another advantage of living in Tupelo—a life and death advantage—as we were so terribly reminded by the Smithville tragedy this spring—we upgraded 7 and installed 8 new tornado sirens in Tupelo in 2011. (I want to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to sign up for the county's new Code Red telephone alert system. Call City Hall for details.)

The Water & Sewer Department kept us in good, clean, safe water (not an automatic quality of life issue everywhere) and completed a upgrade of Haven Acres standing sewer system which is making a real difference in the lives of homeowners in that neighborhood.

We are now serving the Toyota Automobile Assembly Plant with anticipated needs of 1,000,000 gallons of water a month.

Goals for 2012 include the construction of a new 500,000 gallon water tank in the Belden area and completing a fiber optic loop around the City. Thank you.

2. **THE TUPELO CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU.**

Is led by Director Neal McCoy and I'll ask them to stand, along with the CVB Board.

FY 2011 saw Tourism Tax collection from restaurant-and hotels increase by 6% over FY 2010 to \$3,400,000.

Major investments in infrastructure include 3 new hotels opened (😊 Neal gave me one of the great city quotes for 2012 – he said, quoting one expert, “Tupelo is not overbuilt with hotels, we are under demolished.” I think we see an example of that with the demolition of the old Holiday Inn and the rise of 2 new hotels on that site.)

The CVB was instrumental in the new construction at the Elvis Presley Birthplace as well as seeing the new Country Music Trail Marker there. Our Tupelo Film Festival was named one of the top 10 small film festivals – thanks to Pat Rasberry.

2012 Plans include a new 10 year marketing plan; a mobile app for Tupelo; a Tourism Leadership Program – already begun for local businesses and a goal of a 1% increase in tax revenue. THANKS.

3. TUPELO AIRPORT AUTHORITY.

Our Tupelo Airport Authority Director is Josh Abramson. I’ll ask Josh and his team and the TAA Board to stand. Of all of the casualties of our country’s recession, our airport and its commercial air service has been our biggest macro-economic challenge. We have a terrific new director in Josh Abramson. Under his leadership and with the unmatched services of our CDF, we turned what was going to be a \$1,800,000 loss into a \$300,000 investment in bringing in a new company United Assets Management and their jet recycling operation 100 new engineering jobs, to replace the Air National Guard who left this year to relocate to their new \$30,000,000 facility.

The TAA also began operating in the black, and is currently in the process of examining options to privatize our Fix Based Operations for private aircraft.

Our biggest challenge in maintaining commercial air service is an environment where Delta Airlines no longer wants to service airports our size – including Hattiesburg or Greenville and has cut Memphis service by over 35%. We see this as a valley in the landscape of commercial air service in Tupelo. I cannot believe that as Toyota continues to ramp up and we become a daily world-wide destination, that a regional airline will not be able to operate profitably in Tupelo. We are working with our delegation in Washington to fight for this every day. (In fact, I was on a conference call with them yesterday). Thanks.

4. **THE COLISEUM COMMISSION.**

(Oversees the BancorpSouth Arena) Todd Hunt is out of town. I'll ask his team and Board to stand. Despite national trends and the recession, we continue to post excellent results in a very, very competitive industry. As evidence of Todd's high regard, he takes the reins in 2012 as the Chairman of International Arena Manager's Venue Committee.

2011 accomplishments included 3 sold out performances: Rascal Flatts, Monster Jam and Casting Crown (how's that for diversity!) Appearances by major national acts such as Ringling Brothers, Keith Urban, Cirque du Soleil, Miranda Lambert, and Reba McEntire.

2011 was the 3rd largest in our 18 year history. This was our 4th consecutive year where attendance was greater than 200,000 – the 1st time that we have had such a strong 4-year run.

Due to our strong financial position we were able to replace our arena roof without any impact on the city's budget. The new roof should last 20 years. Our arena continues to enhance the quality of life of our citizens and it continues to help Tupelo stand – out in our region. Help me thank them.

5. **DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET.**

Debbie Brangenberg and her staff run Tupelo's Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association, with the help of literally hundreds of unpaid volunteers. I'll ask Debbie, her staff and Board to please stand.

Their biggest accomplishment in 2011 was accepting the Mississippi Department of Transportation's challenge to produce a project to connect Downtown Tupelo with the Elvis Presley Birthplace. The engineering for that project is now underway. The impetus for turning the traffic pattern from 4 lanes to 3 lanes with a turn lane came from a trip to Greenville, South Carolina that the previous administration, led by the CDF took, to learn how magnificently successful that same change was to the renaissance of their city. It will no doubt be the same for Tupelo.

The Elvis Presley Festival, The Chili Festival, the Farmer's Market, The Christmas Parade, Wine Downtown, Pigskins in the Park, and the Down on Main Free Concert Series combined to help make Tupelo a "cool community" for our young adults and the young at heart of every age.

It also provides a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to get to make new friends and find a place of their own to enjoy being a part of The Tupelo Spirit of volunteerism.

Please thank them.

J. ADMINISTRATION. The last group of fellow city employees I want to highlight are the staff in the Mayor's Office. Please stand. This group and I field hundreds of calls every day from citizens within and without Tupelo. They are often the first call for help, or advice, or to hear a complaint, or a compliment. Despite experiencing the tough personal loss of his lovely wife Willa last year, Darrell Smith, our COO continues to make every effort to answer or return every phone call by days end every day. He is a tireless worker with a lot of experience. Much of his time this

past year was spent overseeing our infrastructure projects. Plus he sits in on all personnel hearings and is the Department Heads conduit to the Mayor.

Sally Williams, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, continues to generate deep appreciation from citizens for her happy personality, her compassionate ear to citizens in trouble, and her professional over-scheduling of yours truly. Her hiring was my first personnel move as Mayor and it has been a wise one. She is also a wonderful asset to our customer service culture of “how can we make you happy” at City Hall.

Sandy Pirkle, is our Administrative Assistant to our COO. She is the first person you see when you walk into the Mayor’s office. She has a ready smile and a professional, courteous personality.

Ora Baldwin, our Retirement Director, while part-time, gives Tupelo an experienced, articulate ex-teacher-a woman who touts Tupelo very successfully to potential retirees looking for a retirement community. I also get frequent praise from new residents on Ora’s good work. Just last week, Mr. John Brannon, retired from West Tennessee to Gun Club Road here and wrote me a letter bragging on our reception team.

Annabeth Wyatt, our Communications Director, has contributed more than any single person to our commitment to have a transparent, open administration. Every day she communicates with our 2 newspapers, and 2 television stations about what is happening in the city that day; she has – with the help of our IT Department – overseen a much more up-to-date website; she continues to help the Mayor communicate to you what we are doing and why, with daily updated Facebook & Twitter accounts (which are now up to over 3,000 followers!).

And, she was the driving force – the quarterback of Tupelo’s triumphant journey to Kansas City, Missouri this past summer where our team of 30 of Tupelo’s most energetic and inspired citizens proudly brought back home Tupelo’s 4th All America City Award! I’ll ask any members of that All America Team to stand-remain standing.

If you are a member of any of our Mayor’s Task Forces, or serve as a volunteer on any of our committees, commissions, or boards. Please stand. The people you see serve without pay simply because they care about our hometown. For example, our Mayor’s Education Task Force led our very successful “Tupelo Reads” project – and our “Goodnight Moon” project where every child born at NMMC (2500) goes home with a book. All of these are making these kinds of contributions.

Please help me in thanking all of these folks.

I would be remiss if I did not mention how valuable our partnerships have been this year and going forward will be with:

- The Natchez Trace Parkway – Superintendent Cam Sholly is here. (How many cities have the honor of having a National Park within its borders?) and we continue to discuss with the Chickasaw Nation their hopes to build a cultural center here).

- The NMMC – a tremendous partnership in working to change our culture into the Healthiest City in Mississippi.

- The CDF – their cooperative efforts include: Cooper Tire, United Assets Management, the Downtown East Main Corridor and more;

- Lee County – I’ll be glad to get Annexation behind us and spend all of our time cooperating. Tupeloans are also Lee Countians and we are the County Seat.

•The Tupelo Public School District – In the past year the city has partnered with the school district to begin the Read & Rise Program with Scholastic; we received over \$100,000 worth of books in order to give one to every child in the Tupelo schools and to begin a parent training program to teach parents how to effectively teach reading at home. I want to thank my wife Lisa for originating this partnership. (Honestly, I'd like to just say "I'd like to thank my wife Lisa. Period" I won't go on I might get sentimental and lose my composure!)

You will also hear in the very near future of a new joint use agreement between the city and the schools to open up some of the school playgrounds to neighborhoods after school and on weekends – a generous and much appreciated initiative.

Please help me in thanking all of these folks.

That is what your city has been accomplishing this past year and what we are currently engaged in.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it is precisely because of men and women you've met this afternoon—our city team members, our partners in the private sector, and our public-spirited citizens that I stake my optimism for our city in 2012.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "There is properly no history, only biography."

Victor Frankel, a Nazi prison camp survivor, wrote that "the ability to choose your response to what happens to you is the last ultimate freedom."

In other words it's the people, and their responses to their challenges, that make history. That really matter.

In our final presentation before the judges in Kansas City at the All-America City Competition, our team of 30 citizens young and old, black, white, Japanese, Indian – all Americans – all – Tupeloans

said that the magic ingredient to Tupelo's success has always been "our people".

That answer, "our people", is why I am optimistic about our ability to make real progress on our challenges this year.

You have seen that we have the resources to address our problems:

- We are strong financially;
- We are safe;
- We are the county seat of a county and a region as well positioned to grow job opportunities as any in America;
- We have a comprehensive plan and a vision to begin revitalizing our older neighborhoods, tearing down blighted properties and replacing them with new properties or green spaces;
- We have a large group of citizens that still care about having a great public school system for all of our children;
- Who can step forward to be mentors or proctors or senior project judges or home room readers or adopt-a-school businesses or double our contributions to AEE to support more teacher-generated projects; and who will stay engaged with our new Superintendent;
- We have been given a proud legacy to uphold-a Tupelo spirit of inclusivity, of determination, a moral compass that says " what is good enough for some of us is good enough for all of us" .

My father, who many of you know, who I am grateful is still with us at 87 – though now on a cane after 4 back operations – told me he had a wonderful dream last week: He dreamed that he and I were

back on the tennis court playing singles. And he had no back pain and he was running at full speed and so was I – and I'd win the deuce court but he would win the ad court and we played on and on. He said it was wonderful "to be back at full speed again ."

That is my vision for Tupelo: "**TO BE BACK AT FULL SPEED AGAIN.**"

Our choices are clear:

On the one hand, we can do nothing positive just criticize others; or we can do nothing positive for fear of being criticized by others – or – on the other hand, we can enjoy the camaraderie of other service – inspired citizens and find our place to pitch in and make things better.

I am proud to be Mayor of the City of Tupelo. But the City of Tupelo did not rebuild after the 1936 tornado; the self-reliant people of Tupelo did. The City did not peacefully & successfully integrate a deep South public school system in the 1960's and 1970's – the students and teachers and citizens of Tupelo did. The City did not win All-America City awards in 1967, 1989, 1999 and 2011— innovative citizens with their Tupelo spirit did.

We believe that Tupelo's history is still biography.

We believe that Tupelo's greatest assets are still "our people".

The men and women of your city government are ready to lead, and follow, and partner with you to write the 2012 chapter of the history of Tupelo. The biographies this time will be of all of us.

Our year is this year! We are ready. Join us.

Thank you.

