

State of the City Address

Bill Falkner, Mayor

December 3, 2010

St Joe Rising Event

Sponsored by the St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce

Stoney Creek Inn Conference Center

Stoney Creek Inn

I would like to thank everyone for being here this morning.

It has been a very exciting year for the city. First, we had the Blue Angels fly in with the rest of the air show. It brought thousands of people out to witness a spectacular show. It was brought together by several groups working in unison, the Missouri Air National Guard, the County, the Chamber of Commerce, the City, and many other organizations.

Then before we knew it, something that a lot of people said couldn't be done, the Kansas City Chiefs training camp came to town. The City witnessed an indoor and outdoor practice facility come to life. A facility that the National Football Commissioner stated was one of the best training camps in the country. Once again bringing in thousands of visitors to our city, not to mention the national exposure St. Joseph received on television and radio stations. This also was a product of cooperation between many organizations. Our State Representatives, Missouri Western State University, the County, the City, the Kansas City Chiefs, and many others made this dream a reality. This stimulated our local economy, both during training camp and the construction phase as well.

The city played host to several softball tournaments at the award-winning Heritage Sports Complex. While at the State tournament, I talked to several of the visiting teams' parents. They told me that we had one of the best complexes at which they had ever played. The Parks Department did an outstanding job on the fields and the organization of these events. Softball tournaments helped fill our hotels and bring in additional revenue to our local businesses and our city.

The rebirth of Phil Welch Stadium, and success on the field by the St. Joseph Mustangs, brought a whole new excitement to the historic ballpark. Fans of all ages enjoyed not only the ballgame itself, but the entertaining atmosphere as well. The Mustangs qualified for the playoffs in only their second year. Congratulations!

We have also witnessed growth in our business sector. With the expansions at Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Heartland Health and National Beef Leathers, to name a few, it shows that

our city has the ability to attract and retain businesses, to help move our economy forward.

The City, the County, and Missouri Western State University, have worked together in bringing this region to the forefront in animal health advancements, with the Kit Bond Incubator playing a vital role in this endeavor. Once again, several organizations showed how teamwork helps move things along. This is one of the reasons I believe that the City should show support for the County's desire to build an Ag Expo Center. This could only strengthen the County's and City's ability to attract more businesses in the animal health industry. I value the partnership between the County and the City, and I hope it grows stronger over the next few years as we explore different ways to help both entities work toward common goals.

Partnerships play such a vital role in achieving our most notable goals. There has been talk about whether or not the new Muchenberger Community Center should be built. I do not believe we've explored all of our options. I previously introduced an idea about the City taking the money that had been allocated for the new center and buying the downtown YMCA, having the YMCA run the programs. This concept is working in other communities and I believe it could work here as well. This plan included funding to be set aside for additional maintenance for the building. It would also allow the City the opportunity to collaborate with the St. Joseph School District and the YMCA to enhance a youth program in the Deer Park area, but this idea was discouraged because this was not what was presented to the voters when the current CIP was passed. We stated that a new community center would be built. On one hand, I feel that the same objective would be achieved, but on the other hand, it's not exactly what was voted on. Tough call, but I would still support the idea.

Within the next few months a new partnership will be developed. A new city manager will be hired. The process is under way and this will be a very important decision this Council will make. I would at this time like to thank our current City Manager Vince Capell, for his hard work and dedication he has shown to the city. I, along with the rest of the Council, wish him luck on his future endeavors.

We have seen several advancements in our community, but there is still much to accomplish. With federal and state funding shrinking, we must find a way to prioritize what is important and discover innovative ways to pay for them.

Earlier this year, with the help of Community Alliance, a survey was mailed out to city residents asking them to rank different aspects of city and county services. With this information, the Council decided to make those items with the lower approval rankings, goals for improvement. This will mean channeling additional funding to streets and public safety, while decreasing funding to other city services. We will need to take a hard look at how we use the Cell Phone and Riverboat Gaming Funds.

While I support not using these funds in day-to-day operations until they are secure, I believe we need to use these funds to support our goals. We must also be careful on how we use our city employees to achieve our goals. Just because the City may be able to save money on a particular project by using city employees, the cost to employ them year round may negate any cost savings. Using local contractors may be the answer.

More importantly, I believe that the City should not use taxpayer's dollars to compete against the very businesses that pay these taxes. I know there will be exceptions, but we should not make it a practice.

In the near future, we will be coming to the voters to pass a bond to help pay for the overflow sewer issues and updating of the sewer treatment plant. The passing of these bonds will allow the City to apply for low interest funding. When you are talking about millions of dollars, every percent helps. Please keep in mind that the improvements to the sewer system will not happen overnight, and neither will the ability to pay for them.

The failure of the hotel/motel tax was disappointing. I thought the additional funding would have been a step in the right direction to help the programs that bring people to our city. The arts, museums, festivals, riverfront, and downtown would have benefited, along with the citizens of our city. However, it told us that the voters are concerned about their dollars. They want to know exactly where the money is going, and there is nothing wrong with that. We just have to do a better job in narrowing down how the money will be spent.

I have been extremely proud of this Council. They have shown the willingness to listen to the public and bring those concerns back to the rest of the Council for discussion. I thank them for all their hard work and dedication.

In closing, I truly believe that we are heading down the right path. Is everything perfect? No, but by building on the relationships already formed and to keep looking to form new ones, I'm convinced we are making great strides toward where we want to be.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone for coming this morning.

Thank You

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