



State of the City Address

Bill Falkner, Mayor

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Public Affairs Coffee

Sponsored by the St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce

Radisson St. Joseph Riverfront Hotel

I would like to welcome everyone here this morning. I know the successes we have shared over the last eight years, could only have been accomplished by working together and for that I thank you.

I would like to thank the St. Joseph Chamber of Commerce, President Patt Lilly and his staff, for hosting this event. I believe we have the hardest working Chamber in the state, if not the nation. Last year, our area saw considerable economic developments. Everyone says that we need to be bringing in good paying jobs; well we are doing just that. In fact, many businesses in our area cannot find enough qualified people to fill these positions. So with the partnerships between the Chamber, Missouri Western State University (MWSU), St. Joseph School District, Innovation Stockyards, and local businesses, the task of educating and training a workforce has been initiated. And if you are a small business owner, a visit to the "Cup of Joe" events, might give you a chance to make business connections that will help you succeed and with the opening of CoJoe, entrepreneurs now have a place to interact with one another, or work together on projects. Exciting things happening, right here in our community.

Several years ago my assistant, Jeré McKay, and I came up with the idea to have a contest and have students from different schools design t-shirts around various themes. The former mayors and I would pick the top five (5) designs, and have the patrons of the Mayors' Thanksgiving Dinner pick the winner, all while raising money for Second Harvest Community Food Bank. The winning student would then be presented their design on a t-shirt. This year's theme was "If I was Mayor..." and the winner was Gabrielle King from St. Joseph Christian School, who is unable to attend today, so I will take the shirt to her and present it in front of her classmates. All the students have done an excellent job with the themes given to them, and it's been fun seeing what they have come up with because they see things with different eyes.

Since we are handing out t-shirts, the "Not Your Average Joe" t-shirt was started in my first year as Mayor, through collaboration with Community Alliance Director Steve Johnston. These t-shirts are only given out by the mayor and to individuals that have gone above and beyond and done amazing things in our community, so I thought I would give one out this morning to someone that is well-deserving, and quite frankly, should have been given one long before today.

This individual is always helping causes in several different ways. I am honored to give this “Not Your Average Joe” t-shirt to Pat Dillon.

One of the definitions of vision is, “the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom.” Now we all know that elected officials and wisdom don’t always go hand in hand. Back in 1910 through 1912, the planning and developing of the parkway system took place. Keep in mind that this was not a very popular project at that time, but standing by their vision, the members of the Park Board (Henry Uhlinger, John Richardson, W.D. Webb) and the City Council (John Egli, J.W. Holtman, C.L. Kennedy, E.A. King, J.C. Wyatt, and Mayor A.P. Clayton) at that time pushed the project forward and because of their vision and fortitude, we now enjoy one of the finest parkway systems in this country. I would like to propose, with Council’s approval, that we place a marker honoring these individuals on the first tract of the parkway worked on, Noyes Boulevard, near the tennis courts, so their actions will not be forgotten, and to also inspire others to dream with vision, and elected officials to have the courage to carry these visions through.

On your tables, you will find glasses, but these are not your ordinary glasses. Now, these are rose colored glasses that we can look into the future with, so if everyone will put on their glasses, together, we will look into the future. (Lights went out)

Wow! Someone must be wearing them backwards, because I think we are reliving the eclipse. (Lights back on)

Talk about having vision with a plan! Other than “Mother Nature” putting a damper on things, didn’t our community step up! What a wonderful job the St. Joseph Convention Visitors Bureau did, from getting the information out all over the world and informing local businesses what to expect. The City and Buchanan County departments worked together organizing different viewing areas. I attended the eclipse at the Rosecrans Memorial Airport, there people from several different countries came to witness the event. Buchanan County Presiding Commissioner Harry Roberts and I walked around the area, (with a military escort, compliments of the 139th Airlift Wing, thank you very much) we talked with several of the campers. Abe Forney, our airport manager, and his staff, did an outstanding job making everyone’s time over there enjoyable while in our community. I had a couple from Minnesota call me while they were driving back home, telling me that they were trying to think what else we could have done to make the event better, but they couldn’t think of one thing. Due to the planning this community did, visitors were able to come and go with very little imposition to local citizens. I would like to thank the Missouri Highway Patrol, the Buchanan Sheriff’s Department, the St. Joseph Police Department, and many others for everything they did, and for keeping everyone safe.

Rosecrans wasn’t the only place set up to view the eclipse, the Remington Nature Center, Trails West, which stayed open an extra day to allow patrons to view the eclipse at City Hall, East Hills, Heritage Park, and other city parks were made available for the public and they all did such a wonderful job.

Okay, everyone put your glasses on. Let’s turn our sights to the downtown area. Rising up from once where the Civic Arena stood, now stands a new Event Center. The brick facade gives

tribute to the older structures that once graced the skyline of our downtown, inside the spacious meeting rooms allow businesses in our community to host conventions, while also having adequate space for concerts. As we look across the street, where Commerce Bank is today, a new Hotel Robidoux. The architecture and the workmanship rival the buildings of the past. No longer are the double-decker bridges hiding the view of the river, long gone are they, with park like settings, farmers markets, and an amusement park for small children in its place.

As we follow the crowds of people, young and old alike, we find ourselves at the newly redesigned Felix Street Square. There we enjoy the sounds of jazz, blues, and bluegrass, catch up on old friendships and create new ones. We laugh as we remember the ones that were saying the vision for our downtown was a pipe dream, and would never happen, but with businesses like Mosaic Life Care, Hillyard, Inc., St. Joe News-Press, Sunshine Sign, unique one of a kind small businesses, and the Downtown Associations, the area grew. Now it's hard to find a space to rent. If we listen closer, we can hear young people tell one another how nice it is to live downtown, and how there are so many things to do.

Let's turn our attention west. We find ourselves looking over across the river, across the newly repaired levees, over to Rosecrans. We see a new building housing the motion simulator, with the Open Skies Treaty and the training missions; we see planes from all over the world, causing us to change the name to Rosecrans "International" Airport. The 139th will be given more assignments with more missions, and making home to a higher number of military personnel, which a new group will be formed, C.O.O.L. "Collective Organization Of Leaders". But we can't stop there, off of North 169 Highway we see the Army National Guard unit has started building on that property, bringing with them several divisions of military personnel there as well.

As we drive across town, we notice how clean our community looks. No more are the properties in disrepair, the new Land Bank program is working out the way we were hoping, people once again were taking pride in their neighborhoods, children were talking to each other, and not texting to one another. No longer were we walking past trash, we were following the lead of Brad McAnally and Hy-Vee, picking up the trash and throwing it away.

Our parks are the talk of the state. Hyde Park with its new splash pad and concession area are playing host to a little league World Series. Krug Park with its newly remodeled outdoor stage area is the "go to" concert venue. New bantam league football fields, with stands, are located along the river.

Our school district becomes the top performing district in the state, because of its adequate funding, parent participation, and the hard work and compassion that the teachers do today carry on. At this time I would like to thank all the individuals that have served, are serving, or are about to serve on the school board. Sometimes it's hard to stand up, trying to do the right thing with so many rocks being thrown in your direction, but you have done it very gracefully and I thank you.

As we continue to look through our glasses, we see MWSU get the additional funding they need, and, AND, get the additional board members appointed so they once again have a full board.

Need transportation to the new KCI Airport? No problem, just hop on the light rail system that has been built, with stops to other venues in the Kansas City area.

With the Nutrient program in place and bringing in additional funding, our sewer bills start to decrease. The new treatment plant on the east side of town is up and running, allowing additional industry to locate here. And the neighborhood in the Mark Twain school area, are able to open up their windows and smell fresh air.

As we return to the “here and now”, removing our glasses, if only it was this easy. To put on a pair of glasses and know what you should do to move forward on a project, and what effect it would have on our community, both today and in years to come. I applaud the Chamber for getting ready to start the Community Planning Initiative. I feel that it could be valuable source to the new mayor and council as they work to set their goals with city staff.

As I look around the room, I see so many organizations represented, that have partnered with the city on several different projects. Working with the Buchanan County Presiding Commissioner Harry Roberts, Western Commissioner Ron Hook, and Eastern Commissioner Scott Burnham, has been a pleasure. I think it’s also been beneficial that we work so closely together, and seeing the improvements to the levee, after such a long battle, is quite rewarding.

Col. Ed Black, and your staff, it has been such an honor to be a small part of everything that is going on at the base. Watching the partnership grow between the 139th and MWSU, gaining educational classes that benefit the guardsmen, and earning the university recognition for their efforts, is truly remarkable.

Dr. Robert Vartabedian, I can’t express enough what you coming to our community and making such a positive impact has been. It can be seen working through the Kansas City Chiefs’ Training Camp, to the Walter Cronkite one act plays, and partnering with several organizations for the indoor swimming pool.

Dr. Bernd Eichenmueller, with Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc. (BIVI), it’s been great to see him and his wife at many community events. It means a lot to so many people, and I hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoy seeing you.

Dr. Mark Laney, and the entire staff, at Mosaic Life Care stepped up for this community. From winning awards as one of the best hospitals in the nation, to helping revive the downtown. The German American building looks great and so does the new parking structure. Partnerships are so important, and you can see the transformation Downtown has gone through these last few years.

Hillyard, Inc., I want to thank you for making the commitment to stay and grow in the downtown area. I know you knew the challenges were going to be more in the area, but you put the community’s needs above the cost of the project.

We are fortunate to have so many great companies located here, Gray Manufacturing, Altec, Johnson Controls, and BIVI, to just name a few of the many businesses that have taken

leadership roles, in one way or another in our community.

I know I have stated this before, but I feel that the Community Alliance, lead by Steve Johnston, is one of the best organizations we have here. It has been the vehicle we have used to get the levees repaired, advancing the missions for the 139th, and strengthening our relationships with our elected officials. Such a valuable tool!

Our school district will be bringing on a new superintendent and new school board members this year. Dr. Newhart, thank you for your service along with Dennis Snethen and Martin Rucker. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for all of the teachers that continue to work hard in providing our children a quality education. I feel everyone in this room shares that same thought.

Every community needs to have a solid foundation to be successful, and that foundation has to have God in it. As elected officials, I believe we need to step up and acknowledge what the power of prayer can do for a community. That's why the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast has been an event that I am very proud of, and I would like to thank everyone that has served on this committee.

I would also like to express my appreciation for our city staff and employees. We are very fortunate to have the quality of employees working for our community day in and day out. Police Chief Chris Connally and Fire Chief Mike Dalsing, both of your departments do an outstanding job for our community.

To the new incoming mayor and councilmembers, please get to know the city staff. Work hard on keeping the communication channels open and constructive. In order to work through heated issues, and there will be some of those, trust me, you need to be able to depend on and trust city staff.

I would like to thank my fellow Councilmembers. For all of the work sessions, meetings, and functions you attended, working for your district and for the city as a whole, I thank you for the support that you have shown me.

When I was first elected mayor eight (8) years ago, I wanted to represent St. Joseph in a positive manner, not just here in our community, but State wide as well. I wanted the Mayor's office to be respected, and I wanted everyone to be more respectful to one another, even if you didn't agree with them. Working with my assistant, Jeré, hopefully you feel we accomplished these goals. It's truly been an honor to serve this community as your mayor.

In closing, vision is so important to any community, but you have to have open minds, collaboration, and just like the groups that advanced the parkway system, the fortitude to see it through.

Thank you.