

2018 Grand Forks State of the City

Good afternoon and thank you.

I LOVE Grand Forks.

How about another hand for our national award-winning Summer Performing Arts program featured singer Temi Haastrup and pianist Shalom Onyeka, 10th graders from Red River High School, and for Ali Rood providing the opening music, the Grand Forks Youth Commission for the State of the Youth Report, and for our Police Department Color Guard for setting the right tone for today's event.

....

I am so grateful for this opportunity to talk about the strength of our community, the character of its residents and the promise of its future.

The state of Grand Forks: Ever Stronger.

Isn't it great we are here on Valentine's Day. What better time to talk about the community we love.

I am so proud of all we have accomplished and all that is ahead of us.

It is enough for a city of any size to be proud of.

Today I will emphasize how we're leading locally.

We have good partners at the State and Federal levels, and we're grateful for them.

But this is the time to "Lead Locally".

This is when the public and private sectors, academia, non-profits, faith-based and individuals are all synchronized to problem solve, to grow opportunity and to get things done.

I'm going to talk about the City's four key roles: To protect, to serve, to support and to inspire. And about how they help us do our part to lead locally.

First, I want to share my gratitude. Thank you to my wife and family, the most important partners on my journey. Happy Valentine's day.

Thank you to Barry Wilfarht and the Chamber team for once again partnering with us.

Thank you to the City Council members. I appreciate your dedication to the citizens of Grand Forks. Most of all, I respect how you model courtesy and decency in your discussions.

Thank you to our city employees for all you do and to our Department Heads and City Administrator, Todd Feland, incomparable in thoughtfulness, professionalism and collaborative spirit.

Before we get started, I owe you an update.

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Last year we spent a lot of time listening to taxpayers about how to best fund our water and roads infrastructure.

With a 73% majority, the citizens passed the vote to invest in ourselves.

In turn, we committed to be open and transparent about every aspect of that tax and how it was going to be used, so let's get an update.

[Sales Tax Update Video]

(Mayor Michael R. Brown - from 2017 State of the City Address)

...[T]hat's why I believe with all my heart and mind a sales tax for water and roads infrastructure needs to pass a vote of the people.

So I commit to put in place as many listening systems as possible to ensure anything that goes on a ballot truly reflects the community's voice.

(Maureen Storstad, Finance)

So now that the city sales tax has passed for the additional half percent, we went to work right away here at the city. The 2018 budget had been passed with a 6% utility rate increase. Now that we have the sales tax we can apply toward our debt payments for the water treatment plant facility. We have amended those rates down to a zero percent so you see no increase in your water rate for 2018.

(Fred Goetz, Water Plant)

Today we're here at wells concrete looking at our concrete panels for the new regional water treatment plant. We're glad to keep everything local. Keep it here and keep everyone working here, you know. That was our goal as we designed it, was one of our biggest things was to keep it local and keeping our people working. One of the things we wanted to do as we were designing this is make it comfortable for the operators. The operators are 24/7/365 and I wanted everything at their fingertips to be able to get their job done. They're always in command. The holes that are in the wall, these are for submarine doors for being able to get into the basins and clean them out, instead of always having to drop a ladder down. Now the guys can crawl through the hatch and clean out the basins. What we're looking at here are your high and low solid basins.

(Leah Rae Amundson, Public Works)

The sales tax allocation that goes to minor street repair will help in several ways. We will be able to use upgraded equipment and additional materials in order to provide a longer lasting pothole patch. At the same time, we can do crack sealing on newer pavement to prolong its life, and ultimately the GPS technology will also provide data we can share with our partners in engineering as they plan and as they provide for pavement condition and analysis.

(Dave Kuharenko, Engineering)

The Engineering department has been continuing to assess the streets in Grand Forks and with the passing of the sales tax we are actually able to rehabilitate more of our streets. And in addition to that, we are also able to reduce the special assessments that our residents are going to see.

(Mayor Michael R. Brown)

We listened to you and we heard you. We went to work right away and I want you to know the City takes its responsibility very seriously. That's why we're going to have opportunities on line for you to see how much of the sales tax has been collected and where it is being spent. Just look for this water and roads icon.

[End Sales Tax Video]

My deepest gratitude to our taxpayers who chose to invest in our community and to help us lead locally.

Your trust in us is duly noted and it is appreciated.

I am more than confident in our ability to live up to this trust because our efforts to track our progress is backstopped by our award-winning Finance Department.

Year in and year out they hold our bond rating steady - now at AA2 – and are consistently recognized at a national level for budgeting and reporting.

In short, our residents will have all the information needed to know exactly how their investment is making a difference in our community.

I need to say a personal thank you to the Chamber and Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation, and especially to the sales tax campaign chairs, Matt and Rachel, and all the private sector supporters for their leadership.

It takes a special love of community to put your neck out there on a tax increase on both a personal and a business level.

This is leading locally and I thank you.

[Protect]

Our most critical function at the city is to protect.

This year our Police Department was reaccredited by the national Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, or CALEA.

As I sat on the panel in with Chief Nelson, I couldn't help but be struck by the professionalism and competence of our team. We are blessed with such a strong force.

Grand Forks is well served, whether it's through a hard response to crime like the Operation Denial international fentanyl case, or taking the softer approach of what Chief calls, "getting out of the cars and into the community".

Protecting your homes from fire is also a priority and our community recently achieved an ISO Class One rating.

That is the very best and we are one of two communities in a five state region recognized with it.

My thanks to our Water, PSAP and Fire integrated team for your hard work in achieving this ranking.

And a special note to recently retired Fire Chief, Peter O'Neill, a public servant without parallel in his respect for and commitment to his people. Thanks, Chief.

I also want to make sure to point out our City Inspectors – both building and health –and how they protect us day in and day out in the buildings we live in and businesses we visit.

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Our role to protect from the opioid crisis was front and center in 2017.

Our community's Call to Action on Addiction and Substance Use Disorder is taking action to create hope on the horizon.

Of course, the courageous work of North Dakota First Lady Kathryn Helgaas Burgum and Governor Burgum has literally reinvented how we are addressing addiction, treatment and support.

Let's be clear: Addiction is a chronic disease. In all we do, we must eliminate the stigma. Prevention works, treatment is effective and people do recover.

With our many partners and with the leadership of our Public Health Director, Debbie Swanson, and the sheer hustle of Michael Dulitz, our Opioid Response grant coordinator, Grand Forks is making great strides.

We have greater education and prevention efforts in the schools and in the community.

We are training first responders and community members on how to use Narcan to reverse overdoses. We are initiating best practice solutions like Medication Assisted Treatment with community partners such as Valley Community Health Center. The City and the Chamber are engaging businesses through an upcoming lunch program February 28.

We're also fostering hope rather than stigma with the Second Chance Job Service program, the state's Free through Recovery effort and exploring innovative approaches like the F5 housing program.

I'm also excited about continuing to expand treatment and recovery options through Northeast Human Services and others.

With a focus on intentional community outreach, they will continue to explore the best ways to get treatment to people when and where they need it.

If you haven't already, please join our Call to Action. We all have a roll and together we can eliminate the stigma of addiction and develop even more solutions to protect our community.

[Serve]

The City's next key area is to SERVE.

And our mandate is to serve as smartly and efficiently as possible.

Throughout the organization, from water to streets and from sanitation to community development we are collaborating between departments.

We have and every day we meet high standards in providing essential services and we continue to add technical efficiencies.

We are also making sure our crews are empowered to act and to innovate at all levels.

All of this means better service to you, the taxpayer.

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Last year I challenged our organization to increase listening and engagement. Boy did we.

Thanks to Council Members Schneider and Weigel for championing the Pop Up City Hall project that connected with thousands of residents and resulted in more than 600 online surveys and 300 in-person surveys at 10 locations across the community.

We learned a lot about engaging with technology and by going to where the people are. In fact, look for similar pop-up and online opportunities to engage in the upcoming 2019 budget discussions.

Frankly, a big part of why we're so efficient is because we have city employees who value doing the best job possible.

And because we have support teams from the Information Technology department who get us the right tools and training and from Human Resources who so effectively support our collaborative approach to a culture of innovation.

Let's take a look behind the curtain at just some of the things we're doing to be smart and efficient.

[Smart, Efficient City Video]

(Adam Jonasson, IT)

As a city, we're working to leverage technology and data to continue to be a smart and efficient city. We're updating software to be more mobile, more connected, and more efficient for city staff at their desk or in the field, while offering new tools for citizens for online bill pay and online dashboards to continue the Mayor's mandate of a smart, efficient city.

(Sherie Lundmark, Finance)

We want to make your interactions with the city as easy as possible. We're continuing to expand our online services to include things like business licensing and pet registration to enhance your customer experience.

(LeahRae Amundson, Public Works)

We're excited about AVL and GPS technology because it sends us notification when equipment is due for service. Also, our supervisors and staff can review routes for training and efficiencies. And ultimately, we want to put this information on a map and show people where we are in terms of routes so that they can plan for things like when they're going to clear snow from their driveway ends or place leaves for collection. And we believe that this technology provides enhanced communication and information for the public.

(Adam Jonasson, IT)

One of our major focus areas at the city is our first responders. We've made major updates in software and hardware to improve communications and efficiencies across agencies that are helping to reduce response times.

(Nicole Weigel, Dispatch)

Our new CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system integrates seamlessly with FBI and state databases and local agencies. It allows our emergency responders to see real time information being put into a call, sometimes before we're even off the phone and able to give it over the radio. This allows for more efficient and faster responses and dispatches, helping to keep our community safe.

(Bruce Weymier, Fire)

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Smart technology has helped the Grand Forks fire department in a huge way. The addition of our new CAD system enables our crews to see dispatches come in real time and allows them to get to the apparatus quicker and out the door faster. With the upgrade in our traffic pre-emption signals that now use GPS, it enables the crews to get to the emergency scenes quicker. This is part of what helped us earn an ISO Class One rating. It took all departments. It took PSAP, Water, IT, Engineering, Finance, . . . It took everybody for us become the first community in the state to have an ISO Class One rating.

(Samuel Zelinski, Altru Paramedic)

We never had this CAD system before. We got it this past year. It helps us out getting real time information from dispatch about the call. It sends us mapping, if we need it, for a hard-to-find address and I believe it's really made the city and the county safe.

(Jim Remer, Police)

We want to take a sophisticated approach to policing. With the new CAD system that we have in our squad cars, we're able to seamlessly transfer that information into our new records management system, Premiere One. We're also working with other departments in the city to ensure that we're engaging the public and we're providing them some crime mapping information, which we've had for a while here at the police department, but allows all of us, citizens and police alike, to dig deeper into the information to know what's happening in our city.

(Josh Vigness, IT)

We have updated our GIS system to improve internal processes and make information more accessible for the public.

(Adam Jonasson, IT)

We're working together to be smart and efficient throughout the city, providing useful tools and information for all.

[End Smart, Efficient City Video]

A critical way the City serves its residents is by promoting health and wellness.

With a focus on public policy and environmental change, our Public Health Department is the vanguard of health and wellness in our community.

Their teams epitomize our community's approach by being innovative, collaborative and proactive.

Of course, it helps we are blessed with incredible recreational amenities like the Choice Health and Fitness and Altru YMCA facilities, a bikeway system that is a Bronze-level recognized, unparalleled neighborhood parks and Grand Forks' emerald jewel, our 2200 acre Greenway.

I am so proud and grateful for all our health partners and want to specifically thank a lead partner, Altru Health System, for committing to a new 250 million dollar hospital that will be so important for the future of the whole region.

What I want to emphasize is our collective approach to innovation and finding solutions and that by celebrating our success helps us reach further success.

Look at the colocation of health services we call the 4th Street Health Hub, including the myriad services of Valley Community Health Centers, the new Social Detox Center, Inspire Pharmacy, Centre Inc., and LaGrave on 1st, all literally reinventing how we improve health for our residents.

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And consider the recent innovation of the Northlands Rescue Mission. Incorporating a social work component and clear long-term goals, they have helped 50 people into self-supported housing. Great job!

So when the United Way sets a collective target on poverty in our community, I know Grand Forks will accept it is a real issue and also that we have what it takes to make real and lasting impact.

I fully support the United Way and all their partners.

Together, I believe our community should target a reduction in the childhood poverty rate over the next five years by about 3.5 percent, from 17.1 percent to the state average of 13.6 percent.

I know our generous community is already working hard and with full hearts. 20,000 summer time meals are provided to area families, over 600 children get a regular backpack of food and more than 30 families use our food banks daily.

I also know we can be proactive, collaborative and innovative to go upstream on this issue and actually reduce the childhood poverty rate.

One way to do that is develop a Grand Forks Promise Fund that employs donations and support of philanthropic foundations like Bremer, Bush and Knight – not tax dollars – to spur innovations in equity similar to Northlands Rescue Mission's.

My thanks to Pat Berger who has agreed to chair a conversation on this idea with the United Way, the Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Region and our faith-based organizations, as well as others.

[Support]

The next City role is to support.

While we do so in a variety of ways, I believe the core is twofold: One, to enhance the mission of our partners, and two, to help attract investment of social and financial capital around a cause.

Mayor Gander and the City of East Grand Forks are great partners and last year we got to celebrate the Wastewater Interconnect Project together. That project was built, in part at least, on years of collaborations like bussing, mutual groups like the MPO, Chamber and CVB and collaborating on the critical workforce training of Northlands Community Technical College.

I look forward to partnering on the Downtown Master Plan, as well as discussing other potential projects including pedestrian or neighborhood bridges.

And as the Proud Home of the University of North Dakota and Best College Town in America we proudly support the mission of the Chief Opportunity Engine of North Dakota and the Premiere Flagship Institution of the Northern Plains.

Through more internships, Uber and Lyft, and the successful Game Day Experience, we are working to better connect with students. We can do more with active student participation on more City priorities like the Downtown Master Plan, bike share and coordinated transit.

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Speaking of Game Day, this is a good time to thank Alerus Center's new leader, Anna Rosburg. You're doing a great job. Welcome to you and the Spectra team.

There are many ways we can support President Kennedy's bold vision and OneUND strategic plan.

For example, our real-world issues can be the focus of research, drawing from the expertise of faculty, and our city streets and skies labs for testing and commercialization in sectors like UAS, Data and Energy.

And like we did with the successful Game Day Experience, we will partner on the exciting Coulee to Columbia effort. It will go a long way to put fit and finish on the UND campus, which is one of Grand Forks' most authentic and beloved neighborhoods.

We all know UND has been named one of the nation's 25 Most Innovative Schools, right? But did you know the Air Force's Air University now recognizes UND's programming, providing airmen expanded educational opportunities?

Which brings me to the Grand Forks Air Force Base.

We've got a glimpse of their leadership in the opening video.

Who wouldn't want to be a Global Hawk airman and live in this amazing Global Hawk Community?

Our community support of the Grand Forks Air Force Base is simply a part of who we are.

Helping lead this support is Grand Forks County, who along with the Base Realignment Impact Committee, are strengthening the UAS mission and exploring others such as an Arctic mission.

This work exemplifies leading locally.

It is multi-sector collaboration that specifically leverages private sector investment of Grand Sky UAS Business and Aviation Park, its anchors Northrup Grumman and General Atomics, and the total of more than 30 companies and 380 UAS jobs that literally did not exist just a decade ago.

There are more examples, recent and upcoming, of private sector investment that give me great confidence. The expansion and construction projects of Red River Bio refinery, Minnkota, Midcontinent, North Dakota Mill, LM Wind Power, Cirrus, Steffes and more combine for more than 100 million dollars. Thank you all for your investments.

You see, the important thing is investing in ourselves, in what differentiates Grand Forks, and what emphasizes our strengths.

That's the genius of Governor Burgum's Main Street Initiative and why we are grateful to be partnering on it.

Through its three pillars of smart, efficient infrastructure, healthy, vibrant communities, and highly skilled work force, cities are encouraged to be fast adopters of best practices, bring out our best, and lead locally.

On the ground level here at home, this focus is being steered by our Community Development Office, or as I call it, the Office of Awesome.

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But, just as importantly, it is being driven by individuals and by organizations like the Downtown Development Association, whose leadership in events, programming and aesthetics already have differentiated our downtown.

And we are set to convene regular meetings with the County, the School District and Park District to coordinate infill development policies and how we work together on smart, efficient, walkable, and healthy neighborhoods.

A special thanks to the Park District and School communications teams for the help with this year's community calendar and for our partnership on the new skate park.

Also, congratulations to Dr. Nybladh on your announced retirement. Thank you for your service.

Before the next video runs . . . when you lead local, remember to “Fly Local at GFK”. Ok, run the video.

[Authentic Grand Forks Video]

(Mayor Michael R. Brown)

We need an authentic Grand Forks. Where we invest in what we love, accentuating the unique people and neighborhoods that make our community special.

(Meredith Richards, Community Development)

The Mayor, and so many in Grand Forks, have a strong vision for what Grand Forks is, who we are, what we love about the community. It's the importance of our neighborhoods, keeping them strong, whether it's the Near North, new Southend, Downtown . . . That's why Governor Burgum's Main Street Initiative is so great, it really helps articulate why infrastructure and a healthy community and a strong workforce are so important. And it really showcases what Grand Forks has done so well and what we'll continue to do well into the future.

(Governor Doug Burgum)

This is about local leadership. We've encouraged you to figure out what your gaps are, what is the process locally that's going to say, "What's our Master Plan? How are we doing it? How are we going to become the lead Main Street initiative?"

(Brad Gengler, Planning)

I think it's critical we continue to invest in ourselves, and one way to do that is to support infill development, primarily in the downtown but there's other areas in the community that have infill potential and the benefit to doing that is the infrastructure is already in place. You've got streets, sidewalks, utilities. Everything is there, ready for development.

(Ryan Brooks, Planning)

In the downtown, there's a \$100 million of private investment looking to be done in the next five years. We have the Water Treatment Plant site. We have the hotel a developer recently purchased. And on top of that you also have the DeMers Avenue project that the DOT is coming through with. All of these things will be investments that are on top of the existing infrastructure that's already been paid for.

(Meredith Richards, Community Development)

This people-oriented, data-driven approach is meant to maximize the taxpayer investment. Whether it's smart, efficient infrastructure, strong workforce, or healthy, vibrant neighborhoods and communities, it impacts the whole community, not just 'Main Street', not just downtown. Take UND, it's a college campus but it's also a great neighborhood that is valued tremendously in Grand Forks.

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(Mike Pieper, UND Facilities)

The University Avenue and Coulee to Columbia Projects are important to the University. We're trying to make a very vibrant neighborhood for our students and staff. We know that they want to not only work but live in the neighborhood and the link to the downtown is just as vital. So working with the city hand in hand, we're creating a better link to the downtown, helping to make our campus more vibrant which makes the city more vibrant.

(Governor Doug Burgum)

Take the top 51 cities in America, for the first time since pre-World War 2, the urban parts of those cities is growing faster than the suburbs. There was a demographic shift that was moving toward the edge that has reversed and that is happening in North Dakota.

(Becca Cruger, EDC)

A Young Professional workforce really wants to be able to walk out their office door and meet their friends for lunch or to bike to the grocery store. And that's the type of investment we'd like to see because that's what a 21st century workforce wants.

(Meredith Richards, Community Development)

Local leaders making smart investments. It's what we do. And we have a great opportunity once again to build things that will make future generations proud and that people will want to preserve 100 years from now.

[End Authentic Grand Forks Video]

[Side Stage –Leading Locally]

Moderator – Julie Rygg, Executive Director, Greater Grand Forks Convention & Visitors Bureau

Sarah Prout – Executive Director, Downtown Development Association

Becca Bahnmitter – Executive Director, Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks, and Region

Becca Cruger – President, Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals

Cole Bachmeier – President, UND Student Government

[“Way Cooler Than You Think” Video – No Transcript]

What a fantastic video. Way cooler!

Great job to our panel. And a special thanks to Julie Rygg from the Greater Grand Forks Convention and Visitor’s Bureau for moderating. The work of the CVB simply cannot be overstated on how it promotes our Destination City. Thank you!

The final key role the City plays, and all community leaders should play, is to inspire.

We must inspire innovation and empower leadership at every level, particularly for the people and groups who build the type of community we all want to live in.

Like Nick Jensen, whose Freezeway project won the Knight Foundation’s Knight Cities Challenge and has sparked wonder in people and communities all across the region.

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And like the 2nd annual Downtown Street Fair and the inaugural Greenway Takeover music festival, as well as the launch of the 701 Co-working space by Evolve Grand Forks, the epicenter of our startup community.

We are the cheerleaders.

And we inspire dreamers.

Clearly, that includes making sure Grand Forks is a community for ALL who are here to achieve the American dream.

I'm proud the City Council recently passed the Inclusion Resolution and of all the great work of the Grand Forks Immigrant Integration Initiative and partners like Global Friends Coalition, Lutheran Social Services and our churches to help define and support our welcoming city.

My heart sings every year when I attend the Global Friends Community Picnic, World Refugee Day, the Bhutanese Society celebration and UND's feast of Nations - which, by the way, sold out AGAIN just last week.

And it swells with pride when I attend the annual UND Timeout Wacipi.

I strongly encourage everyone take advantage of this wonderful opportunity and genuinely seek a greater understanding of the cultural values, heritage and traditions of our region's original people.

The City will be reviewing our own internal functions for barriers to inclusion and I will be going on a mini State of the City tour to various locations around town to listen more, share more and engage more.

And, with a technical assistance grant from Welcoming America, we will compile information, host discussions, and create a strategy to further build on our reputation as a welcoming community.

When I think of inspiration I also think of the Library, particularly how it serves as an asset to all our residents as a hub of curiosity and of exploration while also a resource of practice and of utility.

Andrew Carnegie said: "A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert."

Surely that was what Joe Neel, Jr. could have been thinking when he humbly but inspiringly gave a 675 thousand dollar gift.

Individuals pairing their passion with their resources. Leading locally.

Let me take this opportunity to underscore that point . . . with a thank you to the Engelstad family . . . because any time is a good time to say thank you to a family who has made such an impact on our community.

On the issue of the library, I am asking a favor of our residents: For the next few months, don't talk about location or whether to rehab or build new.

Instead discuss this one question: How can the Library inspire the next generations of our community?

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Speaking of inspiring generations, please join me in supporting the completion of the Veterans Memorial Park.

If we leave nothing else to the folks 100 years from now, let's let it be a tribute to the men and women who fought for our liberty!

The first steps have been taken with an organized committee, solid plan and important donations, but now is your chance to be a part of something truly special.

Finally, join me in supporting the inspirational vision of the Public Arts Commission, or PAC.

Every great city deserves great public art.

PAC's plan is to use private funding, like that of the generous Bill Marcil, to literally brighten our skies and to brighten our hearts.

I also believe this plan will open doors for local artists and generate opportunities to showcase our world-class talented artists who live right here in our region.

The PAC Chair, Mike Kuntz, is here, along with several board members. Thank you for your efforts.

Our community is ready to get behind PAC and bring more great public art to this great city.

[Conclusion]

We have a lot to be proud of.

We have much work to do.

Most of all, we have an abundance of opportunity.

We protect our community and we seek to do more to address addiction and opioids.

We serve our residents and strive to be better through technology and innovation.

We support our local partners and commit to invest in ourselves and break barriers of poverty.

And we inspire to be the best, most authentic version of Grand Forks by including all residents and by building awesome things.

I am proud of what we have done and what we are about to do.

Leading locally, each with our roles, to get the job done.

With determination, we march on.

With gratitude, we are both grounded and confident.

With curiosity, we seek and reach and dream.

And with humility, we learn and thereby grow.

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We meet challenges and we harvest opportunities.

Grand Forks is strong.

And each day . . . Grand Forks is ever stronger.

Thank you.