2017 State of the City - Mayor Andy Hafen

Good afternoon!

It’s a wonderful day to be in the greatest city in America!

True to form, Station Casino’s Green Valley Ranch has really outdone themselves.

We hope you’ve enjoyed the great food they provided!

Their fillet and the sea bass is really wonderful.

But for those of you who prefer chicken, I have it on good authority that on January 26th, Henderson will be opening the first two Chick-Fil-A’s in the state of Nevada!

I’d also like to thank Cox Communications for broadcasting this event and for enabling us to stream live on the internet.

You know, for the past 30 years I’ve been on this city council, and I still get excited every time we talk about Henderson!

Winston Churchill once said that history would be kind to him, because he intended to write it.

I feel a little like that quote with all the time I’ve spent here!

But it has been worth all the effort, and I wouldn’t trade a minute of it.

The vast majority of my experience has been remarkable, and I’ve always felt blessed to be able to work for the city that I love.

I’ve been fortunate to be a part of this great city that has become a beacon for others to follow.

But as I start off today, I want to share a little known fact.

When I was growing up, people couldn’t *wait* to *leave* Henderson…and they *definitely* didn’t want to move here.

Members of our Henderson Historical Society – and I know we have a lot of them here today – they might remember what it was like then.

Other than a job at the plants nearby, there was very little that would make anyone want to live here.

*My* story in Henderson began not far from Water Street.

We lived on Elm Street when I was young…and a bit later we moved to Center Street.

In 1953 my dad opened Hafen’s OK Tire on Frontier Boulevard…which today is known as Lake Mead Parkway.

Back then, we shopped at the Five-and-Dime on Water Street.

We bought clothes at Perry’s Men’s Shop and Van Valey’s.

Mom took me grocery shopping at Foodland downtown near where the Eldorado Casino stands today.

Back then, one of the most important people I knew was the telephone operator.

If Greg or Mike, or any of my buddies wanted to get ahold of me, it was the BMI operator who would patch them through to Frontier 28-286...that was my phone number!

She would connect us and we’d soon be off on another adventure exploring the surrounding hills.

Those hills were full of rocks and lizards and all sorts of fun things for a young boy.

I remember back then… there was one park in town with a few slides and swings, but not much else… except the little brick huts where we’d have Cub Scout Sloppy Joe Night!

Believe it or not, that was a real treat!

If we wanted to play ball, we would find a flat patch of dirt and pick out all the big rocks and then rake the ground to create our little makeshift baseball diamond.

If it was hot, we’d sometimes swing by the old BMI Pool, or visit the Frost Top.

That was pretty much my world then.

Growing up in Henderson… that was about all we had.

There were a handful of other little businesses and shops…and eventually we did get a baseball diamond at Morrell Park.

But by the time I’d graduated from Henderson Jr. High School and headed to Basic High School – which was then on Van Wagenen – everyone knew that if you *really* wanted to have fun… you had to get out of Henderson.

Many of us spent our weekends or evenings at the old Charleston Plaza Theater or cruising Freemont Street.

I remember at home when we had company we would always want to take them into Las Vegas for a nice dinner.

Of course, nice for us back then was the Kentucky Fried Chicken on Sahara!

People didn’t look kindly on us in those days…and living in Henderson *kind of* had a stigma.

While it was a fun place for a kid, the reality back then was…you just weren’t that cool if you lived in Henderson.

And, sadly, through those early years I watched people move away… looking for more opportunities for a better life.

But for me, I always loved this city of Henderson.

I loved that everyone here cared about you.

I loved the wide open spaces and the way that neighbors watched out for each other and kids played together.

I loved that you could live and work and play here…to me, it just always felt like home.

Of course, being in a small town meant that everyone knew everyone else.

There were good and bad aspects to that.

But because of it, I had the opportunity to interact with many good men and women who helped make me who I am today.

I’ve often said that there were three groups of people who helped mold my life.

Those three groups were… first…my religious leaders.

Second, my school teachers.

And, third, the businessmen and women of the community.

Being that Henderson was small back then, many of the people in *one* of those categories often showed up in *two… or even all three* of those categories!

But each was important and helped make me who I am today.

People like Marlan Walker and Kent Anderson and Tharol Lefler.

On Sundays, they taught me about honesty and charity and service….and during the week they taught me Spanish and Art and Science.

To this day I still remember every single one of my childhood teachers!

In the business world, I learned about hard work from my father.

I learned about the value of small business to our community.

From the many men and women who worked at the plants I learned about the value of industry and labor.

As a businessman and a state senator, perhaps one of my greatest mentors back then was James I. Gibson, the late father of my predecessor, former Mayor James B. Gibson.

Senator Gibson was the consummate example of hard work and service.

I am grateful to him…and to all those men and women who helped set the pattern that would guide my life.

It was in large part due to that upbringing that I decided to enter elected office.

Their lessons and examples led me to throw my hat in the ring for city council in 1987.

I don’t know how many of you were around then, but in that first election, my opponent was the iconic Ben Stepman… from Henderson…of course!

Winning that election marked my first foray into politics, and started me on a 30-year-path that has been nothing short of amazing.

From my very first day on the city council, I had a very clear objective that has guided me through my whole, wonderful, 30 years of elected office in Henderson.

And that was to leave this city better than I found it.

And so I set out to do my part to help make something we could *all* be proud of.

I wanted this city to be a place where little children could play ball without having to pull sagebrush and rake rocks.

I wanted it to be a place where you didn’t have to leave and go to Las Vegas to find a nice restaurant.

I wanted it to be a place where you could have a business and work and raise a family.

I wanted it to be a place where children could get a quality education, and not have to leave to have the hope of a better life.

And on days like today, in particular, when I think about what we were, and who we have become, I can’t help but feel a sense of pride.

Once a place people couldn’t wait to leave…today, we are a place where people can’t wait to live!

Today we are called home by sports stars and world class athletes… by Grammy winning recording artists…actors and actresses… politicians and professionals…and some of the most powerful and influential men and women in the world.

People like Henderson resident Connor Fields, who grew up here…went to school here…and trained here…and who just this past summer won a Gold Medal at the Olympic Games in Brazil!

Far from the dusty days of my childhood…Henderson has become a place where *everyone* wants to *be*.

Back when I was first elected I remember our city manager telling us that at build out, Henderson would probably have a population of about 140 or 150,000 people.

At that time we didn’t even have a population of 50,000.

So, that seemed really big to us back then!

We were pioneering developments like Green Valley Ranch and Whitney Ranch, which still stand as some of the nicest master-planned communities in the city.

But today, our population is nearing 300,000, and our future is as bright and strong as it has ever been.

Through the years we’ve seen other stunning communities like Seven Hills, Anthem, McDonald Ranch and Roma Hills.

Other areas like Lake Las Vegas, which has seen a dramatic recovery and new growth, have only added to the great amenities and opportunities Henderson residents have to choose from.

Today, burgeoning developments like Ascaya offer stunning views of the entire valley and provide the ultimate in luxury living.

Places like Cadence, and Inspirada, are growing beyond our expectations and will offer a whole new experience for residents that will raise the bar, yet again, for living in Henderson.

Combined, these two master-planned communities alone will add nearly 22,000 new residential units to our city.

In fact, Inspirada was ranked in the top 10 for sales *in the nation* just two weeks ago.

All these great developments combine to create the fabric of a remarkable community.

A community that… through the years…has been ranked and recognized nationally for our outstanding quality of life.

We have been recognized by the likes of Forbes, Money Magazine and Sports Illustrated.

We’ve been ranked as one of the best cities in America to live in…one of the best cities to retire, and to start a business and were recently named one of the top 10 Tech Savvy cities in America.

We’ve been listed as one of the best places for families and for singles and are an AARP Age-Friendly Community.

We’ve been recognized for so many things, sometimes it’s kind of hard to keep track of!

But the thing that is important really isn’t the recognition…although they are nice.

The thing that is important is what we’ve built.

It is the partnership that we’ve created with each of you, to create a city that has become something truly remarkable.

One of the biggest reasons I think we’ve achieved success is because we work together as a community.

We listen… and we care.

As a city, we work together in our neighborhoods, with our businesses and in our associations.

We share information and gather data and sample public opinion…we look at best practices from around the country.

Our city is here to serve you…and to make your lives, your business, your total experience…as good as we possibly can.

I need to recognize Bob Murnane, our City Manager, Josh Reid, our City Attorney and Sabrina Mercadante, our City Clerk…and their great team of employees.

Bob has taken us to great levels where we are examining every aspect of our day-to-day operations and measuring what we do and how we do it.

Through our Henderson Quality Management efforts, we are always striving to be more efficient and more effective at what we do.

Not only are we looking at our day-to-day efforts, but we’re also working to identify future needs to make sure we are equipped and ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

As a part of the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and other groups… I’ve served on committees across the country.

And I can tell you…without reservation….that the men and women serving you in this city are some of the finest, most talented people I’ve ever seen.

Our employees have helped this city be recognized not once -but twice – as the national gold medal winner for parks and recreation excellence.

Under the leadership of Councilwoman Debra March, they have spearheaded the award-winning Southern Nevada Strong effort, creating a regional vision for our valley’s future.

Just this year our emergency management program became the first in Nevada, to earn national accreditation.

Our building and fire safety programs are nationally accredited as are our police and fire departments.

In fact, our fire department now holds three national accreditations and is one of the most innovative in the country.

I’m particularly proud of the great work our emergency responders do.

As a community, we should be extraordinarily grateful… and do all we can… to ensure that we have the very best, most capable emergency response agencies in the country.

We’ve been recognized as one of the safest cities in America…a recognition we definitely do not want to lose.

I’m particularly proud of our police department and how hard they’ve worked to be transparent through the White House Police Data initiative… and to become a leader in how they recruit to provide more diversity.

Their outreach and efforts are paying dividends.

These efforts will give us a depth of experience and opportunity to help make our first responders even more equipped and ready to keep our community safe.

Our police and fire personnel are continually out in the community working to protect us.

That is why I’m also proud to say that this year we did something that we haven’t done for a long time.

A few weeks ago on a chilly hillside in West Henderson, I joined the men and women of our fire department and representatives from Inspirada, in breaking ground on Fire Station 91.

Station 91 is the first new station we’ve built in the last 15 years.

The 11,000 square foot building will be built to LEED standards, and is strategically located to provide support and service to one of the fastest growing areas in our city, West Henderson.

West Henderson will be one of our most important areas for economic development and growth for the future.

When you look at our city geographically, it’s easy to see that we are perfectly situated to play a major role in the future of our state.

With the I-15 and with the I-11 corridor…each of these major routes comes directly through Henderson.

And with several new, major projects ready to go or underway, we are prepared to move forward with our vision.

Between the South 15 Airport Center and the Henderson Freeway Crossing project from Pannatoni …and Harsch’s Henderson Commerce Center alone…we have more than 1 million square feet of industrial property ready to go *right now*, with an additional 144,000 square feet coming online later this year.

With such a strong position, we will continue to attract and diversify our economic development efforts, with new and exciting companies.

Companies like snack food distributor Core-Mark International, who relocated their plant here this summer, along with nearly 250 jobs.

Turano Bakery will also be bringing their operations to serve their international clients like McDonalds, Olive Garden and many others through the expansion of their west coast operations.

Companies like credit and gift card manufacturer Arroweye and Pacific Dental Services.

Or with companies like Pro Caps, who are working on a new 156,000 square foot expansion of their operations here.

Or TH Foods, BarclayCard, Barrick Gold or Ethel M chocolates, who have all joined in expanding their operations in Henderson.

Companies like K-2, where they are working with new lithium ion battery solutions, or Vada Tech, where they design integrated computer solutions for aeronautical applications and the defense industry.

These are companies that will not only bring new jobs and new growth to the city… but they are companies that will help establish a foundation for our future.

I am particularly proud of the work that’s been done to help us establish a vision to bring new development and new business through our Henderson Strong Comprehensive Plan.

That plan will help guide the future of this city, and will help us take advantage of the wonderful economic growth opportunities that exist here, especially in West Henderson.

We’ve done great work internally and with industry leaders identifying the need for infrastructure in West Henderson and how to most equitably and efficiently pay for those improvements.

We’ve been aggressively working to make sure we are prepared and moving forward with a vision in West Henderson and we are beginning to see some great signs of success.

As we build there though, it’s also important that we be sensitive to the great history and natural environment that exists there.

A few months ago we realized a dream…years in the making…when we joined representatives from the BLM for the dedication and opening of Nawghaw Poa Road and the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area Visitor Center.

Sloan Canyon is a treasure…full of Native American petroglyphs and natural rock formations that make up some of the most spectacular natural and historical landmarks in our state.

So we were delighted to be a part of the culmination of so many years of hard work between our congressional delegation, the BLM and local elected officials.

Preserving and understanding our history is important, because it gives us a foundation to build on what we can become.

And as I think about that, I am absolutely confident in saying that we have built a rock solid foundation for a strong and successful future.

And let me tell you why.

We’ve been hard at work to put into place programs and policies that are laying the foundation for new generations… that will help position us for economic growth and success well into the future.

Let me give you some examples.

Two weeks ago…on some of that very desert land where I used to play as a boy … I took over the flight controls of a UAV at the ribbon cutting of the new Henderson Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Range.

Located at Nevada State College, and in partnership with the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, we celebrated Henderson’s commitment to pursuing this new and exciting area for future economic development.

This is an area that has huge potential for the future, and we’re proud to be at the forefront to attract such a new and exciting industry to our city and our state.

Nevada State College is a great partner with us, and will play a huge role in our success for the future.

We are hopeful that our legislators will continue to help in that effort, exploring ways to fund the buildings and the programs that will allow them…and us…to be successful.

Another example where we are finding success for the future is on Water Street.

We’re making great strides with our efforts there, and expect even more synergy and success with the growth at Cadence, which will naturally flow into Water Street as they grow in the coming years.

We’ve already seen great new businesses like the highly successful LoveLady Brewing right at the entrance to Water Street at Lake Mead.

On the opposite end, the “South End on Water” project is nearing completion and will bring a new dynamic to the area with that innovative addition from Tate-Snyder- Kimsey .

Water Street is also home to another exciting project for our future.

Founded in Silicon Valley, the Transmosis Center is a nationally recognized workforce accelerator program that trains residents for the high-quality, high tech jobs we want here.

I’m pleased to say that through this partnership with the Governor’s Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, we just graduated our very first class in December!

We hope that is just the start!

Just to the north of Water Street is perhaps one of our proudest accomplishments for the future for our city and our state.

We all know that in order to sustain any type of quality of life, we must improve the healthcare opportunities in this state.

I’m proud to say we’ve made huge steps to do just that!

I can’t express how excited I was to join officials from the Valley Health System as we cut the ribbon just a couple of months ago on the new, Henderson Hospital!

The hospital is performing better than expected, and will soon be adding new services to include a neonatal intensive care unit later this year.

Part of the visionary $1.2 billion dollar…170-acre… Union Village Project, Henderson Hospital is the first of many incredible new facilities there.

Las Vegas Athletic Club is expected to begin work soon, as is work on a 125-bed skilled nursing facility, an acute care hospital, assisted living, independent living and memory care facilities.

With plans for upscale family and senior housing, retail and entertainment, Union Village is poised to be *the first medical tourism and wellness destination in the state*.

And just across the street from this incredible new campus, I am happy to say we will soon see the very first medical pavilion in Southern Nevada from our longtime community partner, Dignity Health!

Their $9.9 million dollar, 29,000 square foot facility will provide much-needed primary, urgent and diagnostic health care.

But in order for these undertakings to be successful – and in order to bring other great facilities - we are going to have to educate and train a workforce that will sustain our needs.

In my entire life, the only time that I *did not* live in Henderson… was when I moved to Las Vegas to attend UNLV.

When I was young, there just really weren’t many opportunities to pursue an education here.

That is no longer true.

Today, we are a city with many great public and private educational institutions.

I couldn’t be prouder of the great work we’ve done for our future in this critical area.

Today, Roseman University and Touro University are providing some of the best private medical training in the country… *right here in Henderson*.

With campuses for UNLV, the College of Southern Nevada, Nevada State College, and a host of other institutions… we are home to some of the finest public and private higher education campuses around.

Earlier this year, Councilman John Marz, Councilwoman Gerri Schroder and I were privileged to join tennis legend Andre Agassi, at his new Pinecrest Academy at Cadence, for the opening of another of our great new charter schools.

From sports and leadership like the innovative SLAM Academy… to STEM learning at the Coral Academy of Science…all these schools are an important part of the educational opportunities that we want to *ensure* are available for Henderson residents!

In addition to our great private and charter schools, we’re also home to some of the best public schools in the school district.

Schools like Foothill High School, where just three weeks ago their marching band represented Henderson, and Nevada, in the national spotlight at the Rose Parade!

Or at my alma mater –formerly known as Basic High School– home of the 2016 Division 1-A state champion baseball team!

Over the last year, I have been tremendously impressed by the many good people I’ve met from all our public schools in Henderson.

Some of the finest work that I believe we’ve done as a city… has been with these educators as we’ve tried to work together with them, with legislators, the school district and parents to meet the requirements of AB 394 to change the way we do things in our schools.

Public safety, good roads, parks, economic development…all these things are critical for our continued success.

But I believe that one of the most critical areas we need to involve ourselves in… both personally and as a community… is education.

Each of us needs to ask ourselves what our commitment is to help new generations succeed.

I believe the biggest impact we can have, first and foremost, is within the walls of our own homes… with our own children.

But beyond that, to what degree do we engage in furthering the educational opportunities in our community?

I know some of my most cherished memories as mayor… will be of times I’ve spent visiting our elementary schools… as I’ve read to students during Nevada Reading Week.

I’ve watched for many years as companies like Atkins and others have donated tens-of-thousands of dollars helping Henderson students embrace reading through our APPLE Partnership.

I’ve watched many good business and community leaders like Bob and Sandy Ellis pour their hearts and souls and bank accounts into making sure our underprivileged kids get shoes and books and things they need to be successful.

As a result of the restructuring processes from AB 394, there are many new and exciting ways for each of us to be involved!

AB 394 has created school advisory boards, called site councils, at every school.

These boards are comprised of parents, working hand in hand with educators, administrators and support staff.

As a city, we will be creating our own Community Education Advisory Board - or CEAB - to look for additional ways to support education.

The CEAB will help us enhance the services we already provide and allow us to look for ways to provide additional assistance and resources to support parents, schools and learning.

We also now have smaller areas within the school district that will be overseen by associate superintendents.

These superintendents will be coming to our city council meetings on a regular basis to present data on how our schools are performing…and how they are making improvements.

We are pleased to have two of those associate superintendents with us today, Mr. Bob Mars and Mr. Jeff Horn.

We look forward to working with them!

I know my fellow council members join me in this effort. They are as committed a group as I have ever seen.

Each one of them is dedicated to making sure that our city continues to build on the successes of our past, to ensure an even more successful future.

Councilwoman March, Councilwoman Schroder and Councilman Marz, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I’ve had to work alongside you.

You are some of the finest elected officials…and finest people…I’ve had the pleasure of knowing.

And to our newest member, Councilman Dan Stewart… I couldn’t be more excited for your tenure on the city council…and I am proud to serve with you for the next few months.

As I look back, I’ve worked with many different city council men and women through the years… and I consider myself fortunate to have been able to associate with so many of them.

People like Lorna Kesterson and Jim Gibson, and so many other mayors and council members.

Each taught me valuable lessons, for which I will always be grateful.

So today, I end where I began.

With the lessons I’ve learned from those three groups of people I mentioned…who had such an influence on my life so long ago.

And as I do, I’m reminded of something First Lady Michelle Obama shared.

She said, “you may not always have a comfortable life… and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once… but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have… because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own. “

I see that every day in Henderson… and I see it in each of you here today.

You inspire me… and I am fortunate to count you among those groups who have made such a difference in *my* life.

And just like those three groups of people influenced me when I was young… each of you have the opportunity to help influence and mold and shape the lives for the future leaders of our city as well.

For 30 years I’ve been privileged to carry the Henderson torch.

A torch that I will soon pass to someone else.

That flame, lit so many years ago, has been carried by many courageous people.

People who each did…and continue to do their part… to carry that flame forward to build something wonderful.

For everything we were…and everything we are today… I believe that Henderson’s best days are yet to come.

I’ve been so honored to be a part of our history…honored to have played the small role that I have… in helping build one of the greatest…most awarded…most recognized…most wonderful cities in America.

I’m grateful that you’ve allowed me to play a part in that success.

Thank you.