Good afternoon! I very much appreciate the opportunity to come before you each year to share a message about the “state” of our city. This year, I want to share with you the story of our community…. An amazing story of where we came from, where we are, and in working *together*, where we can be in the future….

This is the sixth State of the City Address that I’ve had the honor to present as your mayor. And let me tell ya, we’ve seen a lot of changes since then!

A few of you may recall how bleak the situation was just five short years ago. But, that’s part of our story… I’m sure you will agree, we are a community that tackles adversity and embraces change in support of the future… and it has served us well!

The definition of a “community” is a group of people living in the same place or having particular interests or goals in common.  Here in Surprise, we have both!

We live in the same city, or we operate a business here… and *together*, we share the common goal of success.

That means maintaining a safe and sustainable community that delivers on a vision that enriches the quality of life for ALL of us today, and sets the path for generations of new residents who have yet to hear of us. But they will!

Our modest roots stem from agriculture. We grew roses, cotton and citrus…. The railroad and Grand Avenue connected us to areas far beyond our original square-mile, which was purchased nearly 80 years ago!

In 1940, fewer than two dozen people lived in Surprise. They saw the opportunity and with pride in their hearts… *together* they helped to incorporate our city and lay the foundation for the future….

That community pride resulted in paved streets, the first of which were paid for out of the mayor’s own pocket! That personal investment in community brought new businesses and neighborhood gatherings, including parades and even a rodeo back in the day…..

Our connected spirit was ever-present during the high-growth period of the late 90’s and early 2000’s…. This is when we built our parks, pools, recreation centers, the tennis complex and Surprise Stadium.

People wanted to be part of the promise… the opportunity unfolding in the community of Surprise… so much so our population soared to the 100,000 mark!

It was that spirit of *community and shared sacrifice* that helped us through the nation’s last economic recession. We had to make some tough decisions to keep this city afloat, and thanks to sound council policies, the hard work of our city staff and the support of our residents; Surprise was able to make it through the financial crisis ….

*Together…* as a unified *community…* *WE* got through it.

As a result of these tough times we realized a need to change the formula for how to grow the city and make it sustainable for the future. You told us you wanted to work close to home, giving you more time with your families… and t*ogether*, we made strategic enhancements in our economic development and community development portfolio that attracted new employers to town and more than 1,000 new jobs, even during the recession!

When I arrived in Surprise 13 years ago, I fell in love. Our clean, new and fresh look was so appealing… just like it was to you! But, what got me hooked was what I didn’t see…

That’s when I recognized an *opportunity* to get engaged with the city council and residents to identify the ways WE could make a difference in growing a *city for all ages*.

One of the most crucial pieces missing in Surprise was a lack of focus on education after high school.

We needed to plan for career and technical education options for those who want to entire the workforce right after high school.

We needed to plan for a four-year residential university… Giving students wanting a higher education the full experience of university learning.

Our students, *our future*, have to leave us to obtain a college degree and in many cases after graduation they won’t return… without a job opportunity to bring them home.

We want to keep that knowledge base here in Surprise.

A community with a well-educated and skilled workforce is where businesses and employers want to locate… and that cycle of learning and working, is what makes a “living” community *thrive*!

No one can deny that our council has made education a priority ingredient of the “new formula” we follow to grow a sustainable community.

Drive down Grand Avenue today, and a new 19 acre technical training center is transforming the gateway to our city.  West-MEC, will work with our business community to ensure their programming responds to our businesses, that need a workforce ready to go in the areas like advanced manufacturing and medicine.

It’s because of this focus on a vision to grow a vibrant, self-sustaining community; your City Council went to work and made attracting a residential university a priority within our Strategic Plan…

Today, I am thrilled to announce that Ottawa University is transitioning into a residential college campus right here in Surprise at City Center!

Thanks to a partnership between Ottawa, Maricopa Community Colleges, Dysart Unified School District and the city, Surprise will be a college town!

Beginning with the next school year, which starts in August, our graduating high school seniors will have the option to pursue a college degree right here in their hometown.

While the journey begins with several hundred students, this campus will grow to 3,000 students and student-athletes. How fitting that we will be cheering for the new “Spirit” that invigorates our young community!

Expansion plans for the Surprise campus include development of residential housing, an indoor activity center, dining and conference space, and new athletic fields, including a stadium for football and soccer!

Few things compare to the feeling we have as a result of nurturing a vision and launching a four-year university experience in Surprise, Arizona…

Keep in mind that residents of ALL ages will benefit from the presence of Ottawa University.

Please join me in welcoming Ottawa University President Kevin Eichner.

Thank you for being here…. Thank you for your partnership… I cannot wait to see our future leaders walking the Ottawa University Campus in Surprise!

Education is a critical component of our aggressive economic development strategies for attracting new jobs and business and clean industry….

No one can deny that we are also about supporting the businesses that are already here….

We all recognized that the Bell-Grand Interchange Project would have an impact to area businesses.  So we worked with those businesses, the Surprise Regional Chamber of Commerce and Arizona Department of Transportation to create a plan to minimize the impacts.

An accelerated construction schedule; continued business access points; a temporary signage policy; and a Shop Bell-Grand marketing campaign all helped keep shoppers in the area.

How WONDERFUL to see that the bridge is now open and the project is complete!

I know it wasn’t easy, but *together* *WE* got through it as ONE Surprise!

Now, I purposely refer to our economic development strategy as aggressive, because we are not satisfied to compete for crumbs.

We have no interest in stealing from our neighbors, for no net benefit to Arizona’s economy.

We have proven that we have the talent and the will to develop our own market, unique in the Valley… targeting companies and investment, both domestically and internationally.

We are strategically engaging with companies that will bring high-quality, head-of-household jobs to Surprise and our strategies are working!

The recent additions of Iris USA and Cobalt Rehabilitation Hospital to our city are just two more examples of our success.

We are also making solid connections through our *Surprise International* initiative…

Last month, I participated in a roundtable discussion in Toronto in which we discussed the growing trend of international patients traveling to the United States for certain medical procedures.

In a 2016 subject-matter report, issued by VISA and Oxford Economics, the medical tourism industry was valued at $100 Billion and is poised for 25% year-over-year growth by 2025!

Our good friend and today’s emcee, Glenn Williamson, with the Canada Arizona Business Council conducted some local research and found that one million Canadians visited Arizona in 2015, spending more than $1 Billion.

Surprise alone, has more than 15,000 Canadians who winter with us, many in homes they own. That number will continue to grow… and we welcome them!

Could that provide a new opportunity for us in the medical-tourism industry? We’re going to take a close look to find out.

Today, I am announcing the upcoming launch of a cross-border task force that will research and identify ways in which*together,*Surprise can set a new standard in the medical tourism industry.

While we are early in the stages of development, I am pleased to tell you that Economic Development Director Jeanine Jerkovic will serve as a co-chair of this bi-lateral task force. Jeanine, thank you for your leadership on this important venture.

Job and business growth of course aid in creating a great quality of life for residents and visitors alike.  But, there’s so much more that goes into growing a community that people want to be a part of…..

You have to be safe. Nobody wants to be somewhere where they don’t feel safe.

That’s why this fiscal year, we increased police, fire-medical and court staffing levels so that public safety is not compromised.

Our Fire-Medical Department launched its ambulance service to improve response times and quality of care.

Our Police Department completed a multi-year CALEA accreditation process to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of police services.

It’s true that public safety is a fundamental component to creating a great quality of life, and arguably our number one responsibility. But, here in Surprise we also know that growing a great community means leaving no one behind.

Two years ago, our City Manager Bob Wingenroth created the Human Service and Community Vitality Department that through a variety of public, private and non-profit  partnerships has provided much-needed services to support our veteran population and those residents that are most vulnerable.

To date, our Surprise Resource Center has helped more than 1,000 families make it through another day….

Our partnership with Maricopa County and many other agencies have helped people pay a utility bill or a month’s rental payment so that they could remain in their home with the lights on.

We have helped those living in abusive households connect with the people that can support their courage, to move OUT of that environment.

We’ve connected those unable to afford food with the agencies that can help stock their cupboards.

We helped to provide training and skill opportunities to veterans transitioning out of military service and into the civilian workforce.

And while we are humbled and honored to have helped so many people through these programs, our peers also recognize the importance of this work….  Westmarc selected the **Surprise Resource Center** as the West Valley Quality of Life Award winner last fall.

City services are complimented by so many valuable partners, including Sun Health’s *At Home* program that provides highly-personalized support that allows our most senior residents to live independently in their home, feeling safe and confident as they get older. This Best of the West award-winning program is making a difference in our city. Thank you to all of our partners.

Here in Surprise, we are all about neighbors helping neighbors…. Our inaugural Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Celebration and Service brought out the best in us!  Several hundred people spent the day cleaning parks, reading to the elderly and creating care packages for the homeless.

Our volunteers are what make this city shine!

Now, I’m excited to tell you about a new partnership… with Experience Matters! This non-profit intentionally pairs retired volunteers with community-based organizations that can benefit from their expertise and experience.

We are fortunate in Surprise to have an amazing base of diverse skill sets and a rich talent pool among our senior residents that have so much to offer to the community… Look for details on this partnership the closer we get to launch!"

As I mentioned earlier, we share the goal for success in Surprise and while we may not always agree on how to do that, I believe we can reach consensus by learning more about the people that make up our community.

Outside of our city limits many think of Surprise as a city filled with age-restricted neighborhoods….  And while we do have some beautiful communities built for retirees, the median age of our residents is actually 39.

Want to see for yourself? Head out to 8-Acre Park on any weekend, year-round, and see the thousands of young people enjoying our many sports programs!

By the way, let me brag a minute about our community’s youth…. They are eager participants in shaping Surprise!

We have a very engaged Surprise Youth Council and I love the summer months when City Hall is filled with young people that are there to learn real-life government work skills through the Surprise Youth Employment Program.

In the lobby just outside those doors, you saw the Countryside Elementary Cambridge Academy’s “Citizenship in Surprise” award-winning entry! Students in grades 6 – 8 were asked to express their ideas for how to improve the city.

Among the needs they identified were more recreational amenities, an animal shelter, cancer treatment facilities, and a college.

These priorities, as identified by our future leaders, remind us of what WE can do NOW… to deliver to them a city that will keep them living here when they grow up. But, it will take resources; more on that in just a minute.

As we saw in the video, we are business people, veterans, and students.

We are kids, young working families and retirees.

We represent high-income and mid-range earners; people living on a fixed income; and some of our neighbors even struggle to make ends meet.

And while our needs may be different, *together as a community,*“We Are ALL ONE Surprise!”

Surprise remains a growing community….  Wallethub has named us as the 5th fastest-growing city in the country!  Our population is rapidly approaching 130,000.

With growth comes an increase in meeting demands to ensure Surprise remains a vibrant, welcoming and safe city.

If our shared goal as a community is to offer a great quality of life for residents and visitors, now and into the future, then we must all recognize the elements involved in achieving that goal.

It means maintaining drivable streets throughout the *entire* city….

It means adding police and fire-medical stations in new growth areas to reduce emergency response times in *every* section of Surprise…

It means providing better educational opportunities and investing in parks and open space.

It means paying attention to detail, and delivering on architectural form that is pleasing to the eye.

These are the things that attract new business, jobs and residents to a city and grow a city’s revenue base.

But, we cannot achieve these goals in isolation. It takes ALL of us to make this happen and it requires a commitment to invest in *OUR community*.

If those residents that came before us had never built any parks or fire stations, or paved a road, or even helped land Surprise Stadium, how many of us would have chosen to live here?

How many existing businesses would have opened in another town?

These investments mattered then and they still do!

Last year’s general obligation bond package would have addressed many of the needs that I just talked about.  It failed by fewer than 500 votes.

*Together*, we are getting so very close to truly understanding our community needs and knowing that it will take a financial commitment to address them.

There’s opportunity here! We heard the voices of our voters… Why they voted yes, and why they voted no. We look forward to continuing that dialogue so that we can craft a long- term plan that moves *OUR community* forward.

Of course, it’s not always about the money when it comes to growing a community. It takes sweat equity…. What can YOU do to make a difference?

Attend one of the many civic educational classes and public meetings to find out first-hand what’s happening here.

We need YOU to be part of the conversation!

You can serve on a number of our city’s boards and commissions to help shape the city’s development, its recreational opportunities and the arts and cultural scene.

Be a volunteer sports coach….

Become a member of public safety’s Citizens Patrol or Crisis Response teams.

Share what you know! Mentor a student or one of our small businesses so they can be successful.

The opportunities to truly be a part of your community are endless!

Finally, I want to share a personal story that helped shape my journey as your mayor...

Shortly after I was first elected, I attended an orientation in Boston with past, present and future mayors.

I was privileged to have lunch with Michael Nutter, who at that time led the city of Philadelphia… the “City of Brotherly Love.”

He presented me with his business card, he turned it over to the back and slid it across the white tablecloth … and neatly printed on the back was the *Athenian Oath*. I was so moved by this simple statement of commitment, I had my own business cards printed with the same oath… and it remains there today!

At the center of your table you will notice the Athenian Oath on display…. It might as well be our city’s mission statement!  This portion in particular, hits so very close to what we are doing in Surprise….

*“We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public’s sense of civic duty. Thus, in all these ways, we will transmit this City not only, not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.”*

It’s what we’ve always done and what we MUST continue to do!

I and your entire City Council look forward to working with ALL of you in growing the best Surprise possible!

Thank you for being here and don’t miss out on the opportunity to help us write the next chapter of our story.