Good afternoon! I want to start by thanking each and every one of you for being here today. If you really want to understand Lakewood’s essence, look no further than this event. Today, members of our community have come together to support the very bedrock of Lakewood. You and your organizations are the ones that day in and day out improve lives, enrich our culture, and help those in need. This coming together speaks to our mutual understanding that the more we do for each other, the more we do to make Lakewood a great community.  
  
I want to extend my deepest thanks to Bill Marino and Tom Quinn for making this event a success. I’m delighted with the amount of money we have raised to support nonprofits who serve Lakewood kids.   
  
I also want to take a moment to honor a gentleman who has been a pillar of our community. George Valuck has been the face of the Alameda corridor during his time with the Alameda Gateway Association. He has always stepped forward when his community needed him the most. George wasn’t able to be here today, but I want to thank him for his hard work, dedication and commitment to Lakewood.   
  
He is among those who have established a strong foundation for future leaders to build on, and I want to acknowledge some of our new leaders here with us today and let them know how proud we are to have them become part of the Lakewood family. 

* We are thrilled FirstBank has opened its new headquarters on West Colfax, where Ron Tilton, Jim Reuter and Emily Robinson will lead our hometown bank into a new era.

* Dr. Donald Sweeting at Colorado Christian University will continue to make CCU a premier university right in the heart of Lakewood.

* At St. Anthony Hospital, we are proud to welcome Edward Sim who will lead this top-notch facility serving our residents and the entire region.

* This new generation will join our long-standing leaders like David Perez of Terumo BCT, Kimra Perkins at Colorado Mills and Randy Brodsky at Primus Aerospace.

I’ll admit, a small part of me was nervous about this speech. It’s not public speaking that bothers me so much. It’s really the problem of condensing everything that Lakewood has done and will do into 20 minutes. Well, for the all our sakes, we hope it’s only 20 minutes.  
  
I want to start with some highlights from the past year. For the second time in our history, Lakewood received the prestigious [All-America City Award](http://www.lakewood.org/AAC/). Winning it twice in five years is like winning back-to-back Superbowls. And by the way, I’m still waiting on my rings.  
  
What makes Lakewood an All-America City isn’t just what we’re doing today although we certainly have a lot to brag about. It’s about our ability to collaborate across all parts of the community. The All-America City Award is really about people who live here like Maddie Nichols.  
  
Maddie has been active in her Two Creeks neighborhood in northeast Lakewood for decades, pursuing issues that make her neighborhood better. Maddie is a grandmother who barely breaks the 5-foot mark. But she’s a real powerhouse. Her passion and commitment to the community clearly moved the All-America City judges when she told them just what the [Mountair Park Community Farm](http://www.lakewood.org/Documents/Community_Resources/Parks_Forestry_and_Open_Space/Mountair_Park_Farm.aspx) has meant to her and her neighborhood.  
  
The farm has grown more than 10,000 pounds of produce, which has helped feed families, given fresh vegetables to kids at Molholm Elementary and supported a farm stand. As Maddie told the judges, it’s provided a gathering place that she and her neighbors really wanted. It has also brought new life and energy to the neighborhood.  
  
Our other All-America City projects have this same kind of strong community support, and the city’s role has simply been to build on those collaborations, which we’ve accomplished through the [Lakewood Linked](http://www.lakewood.org/neighbors/) initiative where we helped neighbors connect with neighbors, churches with businesses and businesses with schools. We all sat down at the table to make a difference. That doesn’t happen everywhere, and that’s why we’ve won this award twice.  
  
The All-America City Award represents what our community does day-in and day-out. It represents the efforts of residents like Liz Breuer who has worked with Whitney Carloss from White Fence Farm to host an annual dinner for veterans, the homeless and others needing a Thanksgiving meal.   
  
It includes Rick and Linda Enstrom who delivered more than 400 boxes of their delicious toffee to the Lakewood Police Department as a token of their appreciation. I hope I get my candy when I get my rings.  
  
It represents the commitment of Kathy Hasfjord and her neighbors who have remained involved and committed to the planning efforts and projects on the [West Colfax corridor](http://www.lakewood.org/Planning/Community_Plans_and_Programs/West_Colfax_Avenue___West_Rail_Line.aspx).  
  
Together we are working to expand these collaborations by personally meeting with the service clubs in the city to include them in Lakewood Linked to help make their work even more powerful. With so many of our business representatives here today, I encourage all of you to become active with these service groups to create another link in building our community. I ask you and your employees to get involved with a Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks or Optimists club because these groups do amazing things for our kids.  
  
Speaking of collaborations, I want to take a moment to thank each [City Council](http://www.lakewood.org/citycouncil/) member for working with me, our fellow council members and our constituents. These council members spend untold hours in the evenings and on the weekends talking and listening to Lakewood residents. They are diligent and dedicated to being the voice of our community.

I also want to applaud the council for its unanimous approval of the [2017 budget](http://www.lakewood.org/budgets/) and the city’s tireless employees for their thoughtful and transparent work on it. The budget is a reflection of what matters most to us in Lakewood. This budget is an investment in protecting the most vulnerable residents among us, improving the amenities we all care about while maintaining an exceptional level of service for residents.  
  
These investments include eight new police agents for our [Police Department](http://www.lakewood.org/police/), which will help strengthen the department’s community policing efforts. The additional funding also enables the department to create an elder abuse unit for investigating crimes against seniors and at-risk adults.   
  
The 2017 budget will also bring improvements to multiple parks and finally fulfill what Lasley Park residents have wanted by expanding the trail system, adding a climbing structure, providing public art and so much more to their park. These investments ensure that our park system will remain one of the most desirable in the metro area.   
  
This year, we will update previous traffic studies into a new, comprehensive [Union Boulevard plan](http://www.lakewood.org/CommunityPlans/). With more than 13,000 employees working along Union – and with more to come – traffic congestion is a major economic, public safety and quality of life concern. This new study will allow us to better understand the issues in the corridor, setting the stage for collaborative problem-solving.   
  
Equally important, we have a housing study underway. It will identify the gaps in housing options that are leaving residents struggling to find what they need now and in the future. It will allow us to determine the best way to respond, and we will respond.  
  
In addition, the budget allows an expansion of our pioneering and award-winning [Sustainable Neighborhoods Program](http://www.lakewood.org/greenneighborhoods/) to more Lakewood neighborhoods.  
  
When it comes to budgets, we have always been smart with your money in Lakewood, and our finances remain strong. During the last decade we continually saved money, adding to the city’s savings account every year. Now, we can invest some of those savings into the Police Department, our parks and programs important to your quality of life.   
  
The budget will keep roads maintained and snowplowing at a high level. As you know, [snowplowing](http://www.lakewood.org/snowplan/) is a big deal, and mayors have lost their jobs over it. Thank you, Ron Wagoner for helping me keep mine. Ron directs Lakewood’s snowplowing crews, and he was named the 2016 Leader of the Year out of the entire city workforce.  
  
The human element of city services sometimes gets overlooked in budget discussions. But behind every line item are people – those who receive critical services and those who deliver them. I want to take a moment to commend [Kathy Hodgson](http://www.lakewood.org/City_Managers_Office/City_Manager_s_Office.aspx) and the entire Lakewood staff. These are people committed to the idea of public service in its truest form. Lakewood could not be Lakewood without you. You truly are neighbors serving neighbors.  
  
One of those dedicated employees is our new Police Chief Dan McCasky. For more than 30 years, Dan has provided first-rate service to our residents and is committed to maintaining strong relationships with the community. Dan has become our department’s eighth chief and the 72nd law enforcement chief to come from the ranks of the department. I know our community has a very capable and compassionate leader in Dan.   
  
I want to acknowledge a few more of our employees who embody what makes Lakewood a special place. These employees are dedicated to our families and our kids.

* Let me start with Alameda High School Resource Officer Moose Chavez. I have to tell you, I really look up to Moose, and not just because he could run laps around me any day of the week. To know Moose is to know he’s a runner. He has raised more than $60,000 through his running to help charities and programs at the school. Every December, Moose puts together his annual Christmas Cheer program. Last year, more than 50 families from Alameda High enjoyed a White Fence Farm dinner and received gifts from a Runners Roost toy drive. When it comes to community service, there’s a lesson we can all learn from Moose: lace up.

* Lakewood employee Cindy Coon also knows that her commitment to the community and our public safety extends beyond working hours. Cindy runs the Girls Circle program, where she helps teenage girls learn how to handle peer pressure and make good decisions. Cindy knows that helping teens navigate the tricky path to adulthood strengthens our community in equal measure to the impact it has on individual lives.

* For more than a decade, we’ve been committed to building Lakewood into one of Colorado’s most inclusive communities. A great example of this is head coach Lateffa Ramsey. She helps her students become top qualifiers in regional and state meets. While coaching an athlete who is deaf, Lateffa purchased a sign language book to teach herself and other gymnasts some phrases to communicate better with their teammate. That’s what we mean when we talk about inclusiveness. It’s not just respectfully acknowledging the diversity in our community, but making an active effort to appreciate and integrate our differences.

What these employees share is an understanding of something that is often forgotten. An investment in our kids – in their education, their health, their safety and other needs – is one of the smartest investments we can ever make. You’ve probably heard the saying: It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults.  
  
Enriching a child’s quality of life enriches everybody’s quality of life. A city that’s great to grow up in is a city that’s great to settle down in, and a city that encourages and fosters a child’s future success is a city that’s built to last.   
  
And that’s a fact.  
  
This remarkable city has offered me so much. It is a great privilege to stand before you as your mayor and give back to my community. In my youth, many who knew me would have thought I most likely would be standing before a judge than up here today. In many ways, my childhood and early adulthood were shaped by the loss of my parents. I tried every which way to fail, but the Lakewood community wouldn’t let me.  
  
Believe it or not, I wasn’t considered an ideal student. I was actually asked to leave a school or two, but there was another school that believed in me. When I got in trouble with the Lakewood Police, they still believed in me. When I went before one of our own judges – maybe more than once – they believed in me. And when I dropped out of school, Lakewood never gave up on me. You would not let me fail, so I am not going to fail you.  
  
It is this great spirit of community and hope that we must continue to offer the next generation of kids. We must make sure that no matter how much your parents make or whether you live in an apartment, a house, a townhome, a motel room or have no home at all, you will have the opportunity to achieve your dreams!  
  
And I know kids dream in Lakewood. They dream of becoming chefs and opening restaurants. They dream of becoming teachers, police officers and electricians. They dream of becoming star athletes or doctors who will cure cancer and authors who will write the next great novel.   
  
The things we enjoy in our youth often translate into what we seek as adults. As kids, we want to play, we want to feel safe, and we want to feel that we belong. The city’s core services address many of these.  
  
Our kids want to run around outdoors to hone their athletic talents in our parks. They dig in the dirt at their community gardens. They learn music, to paint and to become actors in the countless arts classes we provide. They love mentors like Moose, Cindy and Lateffa.  
  
But the city can’t do it alone. Our kids love learning about the world around them, and they need engaged teachers who can live in the same neighborhoods as their schools. They need the Parent-Child Home Program, the Whiz Kids mentoring and the Gold Crown Teen Tech Center. They need to learn real-world financial skills at the Young Americans Center in Belmar. And they need more of these places and opportunities because not every kid can make it to the Teen Tech Center or to Young AmeriTown.  
  
Last year, I focused on understanding what makes a healthy community. This year, [I want to hear directly from our children and what they think about Lakewood](http://www.lakewood.org/youthview/). I want to see Lakewood through the lens of our children’s eyes. We can learn a lot, and I will share what they have to say with you and other community leaders throughout the year.  
  
That leads me to the question I want to ask now. What can we do to build our children’s future today?  
  
I want to use that question to help shape a new vision for the city, which is critical for our community. Talking about a city’s vision is big, and we need to understand the impact vision has on a community. Without it, a city doesn’t move forward. As former Mayor Steve Burkholder always said, communities will either get better or get worse; they cannot stay the same.  
  
Being rooted with a strong vision is what has always allowed this country to work through our difficult times and to strive to become a shining city on the hill. The same is true for us. Working on the day to day keeps the city running smoothly, and that’s always important. But when we ask each other what will keep our children here in 30 years, that’s a forward-looking question. I ask that because we want to make sure that Lakewood stays great. We want to make sure that we are creating a city that people will want to call home now and for decades to come.  
  
The impact of visionary ideas and strong leadership can be seen all over Lakewood. It was the vision of our residents who were determined to create something innovative to replace an old mall that has given Lakewood a downtown it never had before. Decades ago, those visionaries were committed to building a Lakewood their children would want to live in and raise a family. This vision helped coin the phrase “live, work and play.”  
  
It was also the vision of the neighbors and businesses along West Colfax for an arts district tied to the history and culture of America’s longest – and some say wickedest – main street. Now we have the flourishing [40 West Arts District](http://www.40westarts.org/), endorsed by the state and given the National Endowment for the Arts’ largest Our Town grant for the [new ARTline loop](http://www.lakewood.org/40WestARTline/). This walking and biking route will use art to join three of our parks while tying the loop into the creative 40 West businesses.  
  
This kind of vision has led to the Lamar Station Plaza, the rekindled home to our one-and-only Casa Bonita, where, yes, one I day I will do a cannonball off the cliff.   
  
Now, a child who dreams of becoming a cliff diver or an artist can realistically think of having a studio in the 40 West Arts District. The child who dreams of becoming a teacher can work at one of our colleges in Lakewood or teach in our terrific public schools. The child who dreams of becoming a chef can grow up and open a new restaurant in a revitalized Sheridan corridor – just imagine that.  
  
The vision created by Two Creeks, Eiber, Morse Park, Applewood Valley and other neighborhoods has inspired rain gardens, historical surveys and investments in the W Line and West Colfax corridors. This has resulted in developments such as the West Line townhomes, which will provide new ownership opportunities in a neighborhood that urgently needs them.  
  
A collaborative vision has created a new community garden in the Southern Gables neighborhood, adding to our [great garden network](http://www.lakewood.org/CommunityGardens/) started by Ute Trail in Green Mountain. We’re building community through these gardens, and we’re bringing more fresh vegetables to our kids.  
  
I can also proudly say that we’ve invested in the community’s vision for open space and parks with more than 100 parks. But that vision shouldn’t end there because kids in other parts of Lakewood need recreational opportunities close to them.  
  
Lakewood was built neighborhood by neighborhood, and creating opportunities and improvements for neighborhoods remains a high priority. You see that in the [master plan for Carmody Park](http://www.lakewood.org/CarmodyParkMasterPlan/), giving us the city’s first universal playground for able bodied or physically challenged children.  
  
We’ve spent millions in the last several years building sections of sidewalks to make it safer to walk and ride in our community. The new sidewalk coming along Sheridan will take a step forward in the vision for walkable neighborhoods with access to light rail. This project will have a significant impact in a neighborhood with many needs. It will transform a sketchy dirt trail where we’ve seen mothers pushing strollers close to dangerous traffic into a safe place to walk and ride.  
  
In the Police Department, the [sector liaison unit](http://www.lakewood.org/Police/Crime_Prevention/Sector_Liaison_Unit.aspx) is at the forefront of law enforcement leadership by addressing neighborhood needs through community policing. To help address an unfortunate national trend here at home, the department is the first in Jeffco to use a program that allows the police to administer a lifesaving drug to overdosing victims.  
  
Our neighborhoods help build our children’s future today. Spending the year listening to our children and how they see Lakewood is so important. I believe the voices we will hear will move us with a spirit of generosity and fill us with a mission that is larger than ourselves. Staying focused on our children’s aspirations is essential to keeping us from being stuck in petty differences, pet projects, pesky anxieties and spiteful conspiracies.   
  
As we begin to debate and discuss the next budget, zoning issue, transportation study or master plan for our community, let’s focus on building our children’s future today. I can tell by looking out into this audience that this is a visionary community. We know that Lakewood is great right now. But it’s our responsibility to make sure that it stays that way.   
  
In this coming year, let’s look at every new policy, every new initiative, every challenge and every opportunity with an eye to the future. Let’s do it through the lens of our children’s eyes. Take your years of experience, your years of success in business and in your community, and frame it with the question we’ve been discussing.   
  
Back when you were a kid, what did you think about your city, and what was important to you?   
  
After all, what we can do to make Lakewood better for our kids is what we can do to make Lakewood better for everyone.  
  
Lakewood is a strong, resilient and smart community with foresight and compassion. We want to keep it that way.   
  
It is my greatest honor as your mayor to say the state of the city is strong. I want to thank each and every one of you for your support and commitment to our community. I have great hopes for Lakewood’s future, and please remember, together we will do great things.

Thank you all so much.