

- City Council members, City employees, and fellow citizens of Benton: It is not only my duty but a privilege to be able to come before you with the annual "State of the City" Address.
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- The year 2008 was one of uncertainty and hardships for many Americans but in regards to our City; it was filled with many of God's blessings.
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- On a recent trip to the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference in Washington, DC; I listened to other leaders in cities across our nation as they shared the hardships of their respective cities and states. Most are experiencing unprecedented job losses, home foreclosures and a complete shut down of any economic growth.
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- As I listened to their stories I felt such sorrow for their situations and at the same time such thankfulness for the state of the City of Benton.
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- I stood in awe of monuments to some of the greatest leaders in our nation's history and felt a profound sense of gratitude for God's grace on America over the last 233 years.
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- I read of the sacrifices that these great leaders and everyday citizens made to ensure that we could enjoy the blessings that God has so graciously bestowed and continues to bestow upon us.
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- I was inspired to work harder to ensure that my service to you not only benefits the present but will ensure opportunities and stability for our future generations.
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- The quest for high-performance government that facilitates progress and unlocks our community's full potential **is** the ultimate goal of this administration. As I say every time the opportunity presents itself, we are indeed fortunate to have such qualified and dedicated employees who daily serve our citizens.

- Each department head within our city has prepared a detailed report outlining their services and accomplishments for 2008. I will take this opportunity to hi-light some of the information contained in each department's report and to let you know that their detailed reports are attached and available to the local newspapers and to every citizen online at www.benton.ar.gov .



- In addition to the normal activities outlined in detail in the report attached, our Community Development Department has been involved in a variety of projects.
- Our City Engineer, Gail Mainard, has been heavily involved in damage control due to the three (3) major storm events in 2008. Thanks to his efforts, a new floodplain ordinance was passed and the City received the "Community of the Year" award from the Arkansas Floodplain Management Association. Dr. Guffey, Director of our Community Development department worked with the Central Arkansas Planning and Development District on a project to rebuild or rehabilitate substandard housing in the Ralph Bunche Community. Construction on these projects is scheduled to begin this summer.
- Our Community Development Department also worked with the Central Arkansas Planning & Development District and the CADC Benton Sr. Adult Activity Center on another project that will rehabilitate their current facilities and construct a new resale shop. Thanks to the hard work of our Community Development Supervisor, Jim Towe, we were awarded a grant in the amount of **\$240,000** for this project.
- The zoning ordinance was revised to better equip the City to deal with truck stops and manufactured housing issues. Additionally a new sidewalk ordinance is being developed and numerous sidewalks around town have been added or replaced.
- As far as economic development is concerned, work is continuing on a new franchise agreement we hope to complete soon with Charter Cable. As a result of our efforts, Charter has made high-speed internet available in some areas. We are also hearing many favorable comments about AT&T's U-verse, which became available in Benton this year.

- Downtown Benton was nominated to the National Register of Historical Places and a historic district was established to protect this valuable resource. Buildings such as the Royal Theater, the Saline County Courthouse, the Masonic Lodge and the Old Post Office are some of those included in the district. We are fortunate to have a city council and many citizens who realize the importance of preserving the history of our great city and as such an ordinance was passed creating a Historic District Commission. We received a grant in the amount of \$3500 from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program for the training of the Historic District Commissioners.
- Annexations are key to Benton's future growth—500 acres at Exit 114 were annexed into the City in 2008, which gives us a blank slate for mixed-use development on the **last** I-30 exit between Little Rock and Texarkana.
- Thanks to the efforts of the Saline County Economic Development Corporation, an agreement was reached with Alcoa/Almatis/St. Gobain, which will allow them to operate more economically in our county thereby keeping their operations in Saline County and allow Benton to annex valuable property for future industrial development.
- We have been blessed to see important retail development in Benton with the opening of exceptional businesses such as Best Buy, Petco, Harp's and Firestone and the re-opening of Backyard Burgers —businesses like these will help to ensure continued growth in our sales tax receipts.
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- Under the leadership of Chief Blankenship, our Fire Dept completed 15,691 hours of training and responded to 2,642 requests by citizens for assistance. They continued the fire safety programs that they provide to all pre- school and elementary schools in addition to developing a Sr. Citizens home safety program. They continued work with the Benton Water Utilities in coordinating replacement and new construction of the water system to provide the best fire protection available with our system's capability. This year 25 new fire hydrants were added to new and underserved areas of our city to better enable our dept to protect our citizens. Our Fire Dept continues to be considered one of the most competent in the region, being recognized as some of the most qualified in our field. They continue a record of excellence in enhancing the quality of life for our residents. A detailed report of this outstanding department and their many accomplishments are attached.

- Our Police Department personnel completed 3,900 hours of training for the year. The Patrol Division was responsible for handling 14,988 calls for service and handling 1,312 accidents. They made 590 felony arrests and 1,692 misdemeanor arrests. They made 9,639 traffic stops issuing 3,902 citations to motorists. The patrol division also served 1,507 arrest warrants.
- Our Police Dept successfully obtained \$56,000.00 in important Grant Monies for 2008
- Driving while intoxicated (DWI) charges were enhanced by DWI and Seat belt task forces based out of the Patrol Division that is supported by federal overtime funding. Based upon these combined efforts, 327 arrests were made for DWI in 2008 making our city streets safer.
- In 2008 The Benton Police Department contributed to a significant reduction in crime in the City of Benton. It is our belief in 2009, that the goals outlined in the complete report attached, along with the energy and drive of the leadership of Chief Lane will inspire all members of the Benton Police Department to the highest degree of integrity, professionalism, and pro-activeness. In doing so, the Benton Police Department will continue to improve the services provided to the City of Benton and achieve it's mission as outlined in the Mission Statement of the Benton Police Department.
- In our communications dept there were 2,710 calls dispatched for the Fire Dept.; 9,726 for the Police Dept and 8,488 for Med-Tran. The Dept worked closely with FEMA/ADEM on the tornado and flooding issues that plagued many of our citizens. There were new traffic lights installed at Market and Carpenter, Market and Conway and Market and Sevier streets. Director, Tim Blocksom worked with engineering firms on traffic light plans for the Military Rd expansion in addition to other projects you will find in the complete report attached.
- Animal Control Dept. Head, Beverly Vinyard reported that their dept. worked with rescue groups and are now on line with Pet Finder. Com. Due to the success of that partnership, our Animal Control Department saw a substantial rise in pet adoptions. There were over 1300 calls answered and 1400 animals taken into the shelter in 2008.

- Tony Floyd, Our Street Dept. head reported 5 contract projects: Winchester Drive, Watson Place, Edgehill Drive, Chris Drive and Fairfield Road. The Dept used 1,874 tons of hot mix asphalt for resurfacing and patching projects. They replaced 539 signs due to poor condition, accidents and vandalism. They repainted all crosswalks, parking and other street markings. The Dept did an outstanding job constructing a much needed new road from Airplane Drive to the Holland Ball Park. They provided annual Spring Clean up services to all city residents who requested it during the month of April; in addition to extensive storm damage clean up.
- The City of Benton has experienced record growth in the past 5-10 years, and it has been a challenge to meet the demands placed on us by the growth. Numerous street and utility projects are underway. The biggest street project currently underway is the construction of two overpasses and two bridges in the area of Hwy 35 and Hwy 183. The railroad tracks in this area have caused a bottleneck for Benton and Saline County for many years and we are pleased it will soon be eliminated. Other street projects in the works include improving Sharon Road behind the shopping center that contains the movie theater, extending the Downtown Streetscape project on South Street to I-30 and widening Military Road to 4 lanes from Congo Road to I-30, this is a \$12 + million dollar project and will be funded with stimulus monies.
- Under the direction of the Public Utilities Commission and leadership of Utilities General Manager, Terry McKinney, we completed all but one of the 2008 projects that were in the original \$26.5 million bond for wastewater improvements.
- The new wastewater treatment expansion project is slated to be completed by mid-October 2009. The project is ahead of schedule and close to budget.
- A new gravity sewer line was completed from the wastewater treatment plant to I-30. A sewer force main from Exit 114 to Airplane Drive was completed. Christy Acres sewer line project was approved in 2008 and construction is underway. The design for repairs due to April floods have been completed and construction began early this year. A second FEMA project due to the September floods is under design and construction is underway.

- We are continuing to move forward on the design of as many projects as we can so that we can take advantage of any stimulus funds that come our way.
- In our Utility Billing Dept we began on line credit card bill pay, telecheck verification and brought bill printing and mailing in-house. The money spent to produce bills is now being spent in our own community and at the same time will provide better billing services to our customers.
 - The Parks Dept and Parks Commission are making remarkable progress to improve our current park facilities with many completed projects in 2008.
 - Dept Head, Curtis McCormack reported that at Tyndall Park we continue to make improvements to enhance the park experience for our citizens. Events at Tyndall included the girls' softball competition for the Wally Hall tournament, ASA District 9 district tournament, Sparks in the Park, and the first Staycation.
 - Bernard Holland Park was improved with the installation of two covered playground areas which were partially funded by an Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism grant in the amount of \$65,000. The Wally Hall tournament was held Memorial Day weekend and brought many visitors to our City. In preparation for the Wally Hall tournament and other tournaments in the future, many improvements were made to the softball fields and the baseball fields. Additional fencing, expanded parking, and an additional park entrance were included in the improvements. These projects were completed with the assistance of the City and the A & P Commission.
 - Through a partnership with the Benton Advertising & Promotion Commission, Parks acquired the property at 924 Fairfield Road, which includes 5 acres.

- One major project in development could very well be the jewel in Benton's crown for generations to come. As you know, the Benton A&P Commission has been hard at work with Saline County, the Saline County Fair Board and the Benton Parks Commission & Parks Dept. developing a plan for the land known as Watts Field. The Central Arkansas **Fairplex** is an exciting project that will bring improved and expanded facilities to Bernard Holland Park and the Saline County Fair.
- New Community Centers will offer a clean and modern facility for Benton's many civic and non-profit groups as well as a place for citizens to hold family reunions, anniversary and birthday parties, fundraisers and more. The main arena will enable expanded bookings and multiple events to take place concurrently. The main arena can accommodate rodeo, concerts, trade shows, basketball, indoor soccer, and of course, Benton High School Graduation. The economic impact of the Fairplex should be extremely substantial. In addition to tourism dollars being pumped into our local economy, there will be a creation of many jobs. The Central Arkansas Fairplex at Saline County will be an economic driver for Benton's bright future.
- In 2008 there were 89 Ordinances and 54 resolutions considered. These are listed by number and title in the detailed report attached and are available on-line at www.benton.ar.gov . I want to thank our 10 aldermen, City Attorney Houston and City Clerk Stracener for their dedicated service in their legislative duties.
- I want to recognize our Council and those who chair various Committees: Alderman Wolf, Animal Control, Alderman White, Drainage, Alderman Cunningham, Community Services, Alderman Richards, Alderman Ponder, liaison to the Public Utilities Commission, Alderman Moore, liaison to the A&P and Parks Commissions, Alderman Sparks, Streets, Alderman Lee, Health and Safety, Alderman Stracener, Finance & Economic Development and liaison to the A&P Commission and Alderman Donnor, Personnel committee who implemented a very successful "Employee of the Month" program in 2008 to recognize our employees.
- These 10 aldermen attend approximately 4-6 committee meetings monthly, in addition to the twice monthly agenda & council meetings. I thank them for their leadership and commitment.

- We are fortunate to have a workforce that consists of over 200 dedicated employees. Each of these, supervised by very qualified, experienced dept heads who strive daily to ensure that every citizen receives the quality of service that you deserve. The Dept Heads within the City not only do an outstanding job of ensuring the best services for our citizens in the present, they also dedicate many hours to planning for the continuing & phenomenal growth of our City and it's future generations.
- Benton has many great volunteer programs and organizations and I applaud all of them for their efforts. In 2008; many of those volunteers were nominated and received the "Mayor's Outstanding Community Service Award".
- We are blessed with an abundance of citizens with a heart for community service and I am grateful as I know everyone in our city is for their commitment to better our community through various organizations.
- One of those organizations that I would like to report on is the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council. This group of outstanding young people continues to grow with a present membership of 34. They have given over 1300 hours of volunteer service to our community through the various projects they have participated in.
- Their annual Awareness & Prevention project on Teen Dating Violence continues to serve as a valuable educational outreach for "Safe Haven", our local Domestic Violence Shelter. The MYAC received "in class" and "in shelter" training to certify them as Domestic Violence Advocates and in partnership with the administration, they hosted their 2nd annual educational campaign at Benton High School.
- Other projects they participated in included hosting a LUAU last July for their peers to enjoy a night of fun and safety. They volunteered for various projects that benefited organizations such as: The Boy's and Girls Club, Sr. Adult Center, Downtown Benton's Spook City and Easter Egg Hunt, the Hometown Health Coalition Fitness challenge and health survey and The Chamber of Commerce. They programmed over 750 weather radios for the Office of Emergency Services and volunteered at the 1st annual "Wally Hall Tournament" and "Staycation".

- In addition to their service to our community, they received leadership training through a program at UALR. In an effort to show their appreciation and respect for their peers, they have recognized a peer every month as the "Outstanding Youth Citizen"
- The Mayor's Youth Advisory Council continues to grow and be recognized not only in our county but statewide. News of their success and their work has prompted other cities in Arkansas and some neighboring states to look to our Youth Council as a model.
- We are blessed to have this organization and the outstanding young people who comprise it. It has been said that "future success depends on the conscientious stewarding of the next generation", I am proud and thankful for this organization, they **are indeed** our future leaders.
- The year 2008 was one of many accomplishments and in looking ahead, I am excited about the future plans for our city.
- In closing, let me say, "It is my belief that governing effectively begins with vision and ends with progress. Good leadership makes it possible, **if** informed, collaborative and strategic."
- I pledge the continued service of your municipal government, myself and our employees; and while we are charged with the task of making wise, informed and responsible decisions for our city, we must always be mindful that; "we can make our plans but the final outcome is in God's hands."
- Thank you and God bless you and God Bless the City of Benton.

