

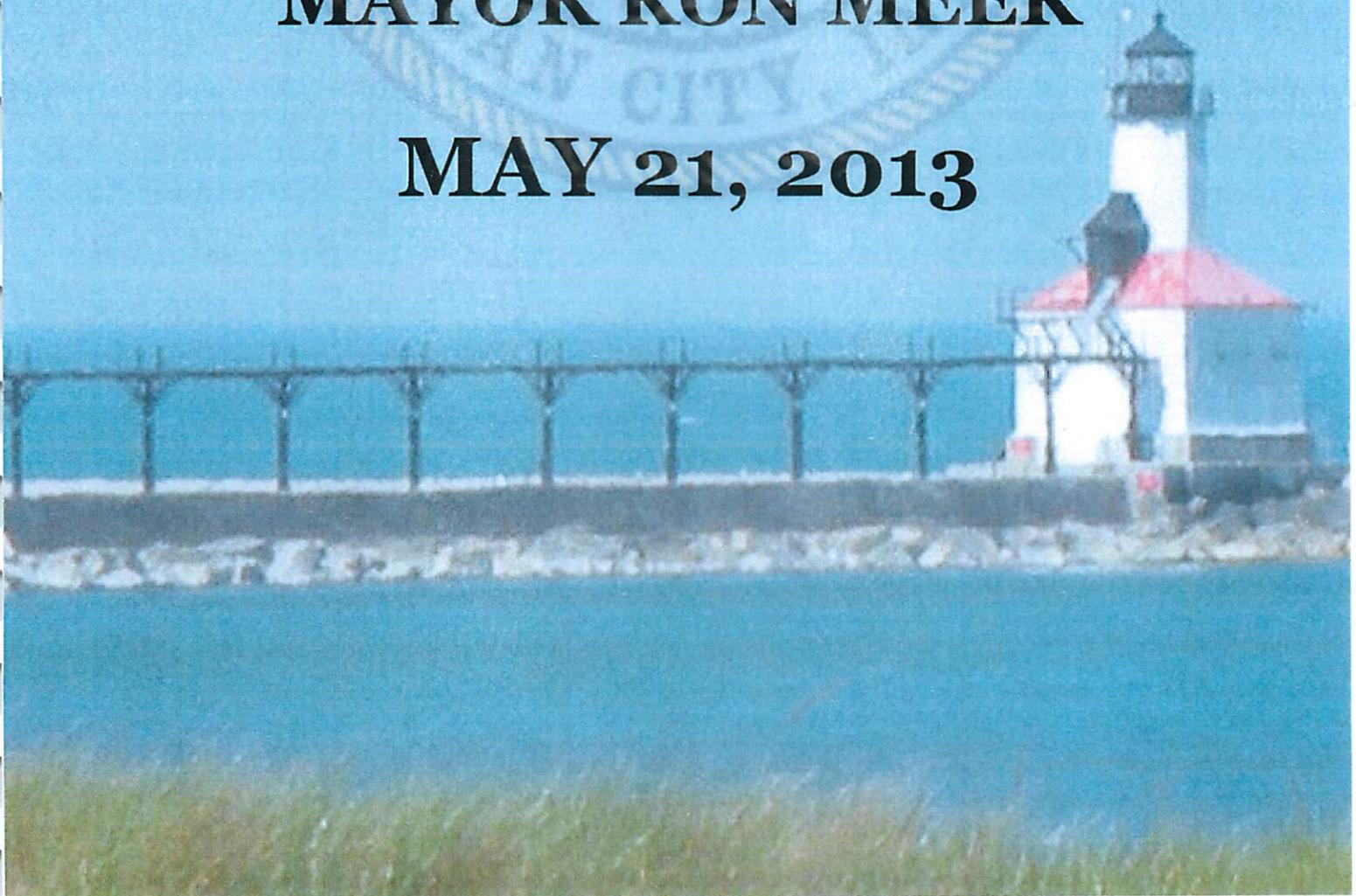
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

MICHIGAN CITY, INDIANA

“MOVING FORWARD”

MAYOR RON MEER

MAY 21, 2013



Good Evening. I would like to start off by thanking the members of the Michigan City Common Council, the citizens of Michigan City, and the representatives from various city departments and local agencies who are here in attendance with us tonight.

“Focus on Priorities.” That was the slogan I used repeatedly in my address to you last year. As I stand before you tonight looking back on the first 16 months of my administration, I can honestly say that we have spent our time doing just that and now it is time to continue moving forward. Michigan City is on the right track but we must continue our forward momentum because, as Will Rogers once said, “Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

Continuing to move forward by providing our citizens and visitors with great public health and safety will always be a major priority for me and my administration. I hold the Michigan City Fire and Police Departments to extremely high expectations because each and every individual who lives in, or visits, our city deserves to be safe; this is a basic and fundamental right on which I will not waiver.

The Michigan City Fire and Police Departments are filled with brave men and women who do an amazing job that is often times performed in the face of immense challenges and pressures that most of us will thankfully never have to know firsthand.

In 2012, the Michigan City Fire Department welcomed eight new members, participated in their very first Career Regional Fire Training Academy, and hosted a county-wide Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) class at the training center.

In addition, Fire Chief Ron Martin reported 1,567 calls for duty. This is a 14% increase from 2011 and could be directly related to one of the most severe hot and dry periods seen in our area in recent memory. The Fire Department also recently purchased a 2013 fire pumper/rescue truck that will replace the 2001 truck. The 2001 truck will become the department’s spare unit, and the current spare, a 1994 pumper, will become the new training pumper.

Outreach programs, especially those geared towards our youth, is why the Michigan City Fire Department is continually mentioned as a leader in the betterment of our community. Bringing the Firefighter Phil Show to our Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade students is a great way to teach them about fire safety in a non-threatening and fun way. In supporting the school mentoring program “Hours for Ours”, children can spend time with positive role models who are willing to listen to their concerns and answer their questions; all the while these mentors are setting an example of what can be achieved through hard work and staying in school.

Michigan City Police Chief Mark Swistek’s mission for every member of the Michigan City Police Department is to consistently find ways to promote a feeling of security and safety through quality services to citizens and visitors of our community.

Under Chief Swistek’s leadership, the Police Department has reported a 3.7% decrease in total crime from 2011-2012, this coming on the heels of the 10% reduction in total crime from 2010-2011. Some additional achievements are:

- In 2012, the Michigan City Police Department, in conjunction with multiple agencies conducted several warrant sweeps that resulted in the arrests of 154 wanted individuals.
- The Burglary Task Force investigated 210 cases in 2012, which resulted in 60 arrests with an additional 21 arrests pending.
- The Michigan City Police Department took on the challenge, in 2012, of educating the faculty & staff of our area schools with “active shooter” training. The goal of the “active shooter” presentation is to better prepare our school faculty and staff in light of recent tragic events such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.
- To increase police presence and visibility in our school system, the Police Department has created the Adopt-A-School Program in which, on a daily basis, officers visit local schools to interact with and educate school staff, teachers and students.

In summer 2013, 45 Michigan City area students will be participating in a charter “Youth Leadership Academy.” These children will be mentored in good citizenship, leadership, team

building and the overall life skills that will assist them in growing to be productive members of our future generation.

In the fall of last year, a 100-foot communications tower was erected on City Hall property. This tower, which was funded through a Homeland Security Grant, makes our Emergency Operations Center Communications Room, located in the basement of City Hall, fully operational. Emergency Management Officials can now utilize this room as a command center to communicate directly with agencies at the county and state levels, thus increasing our ability to prepare for, and deal with, emergency situations.

Being proactive about improvement and adhering to policy is part of my commitment to Michigan City. As a local Northwest Indiana mayor said, “Defenders of the status quo, the ones who defend a broken system and are afraid to change it, act like they are the good guys in government. In reality, it’s the people that are willing to change the system, and taking shots to their reputation in the process, that are the ones worth keeping around.”

Last year I appointed Dr. Angela Jackson as the Executive Director of the Human Rights Department. Amended in 2010, a local hiring and contract compliance ordinance was signed into law here in Michigan City that states City-funded projects in excess of \$200,000 must meet, or exceed, the Michigan City resident hiring requirements. In addition, these ordinances set forth goals for hiring women and minorities. With my new administration and her leadership, we discovered that large city-funded projects were seeing minimal adherence and enforcement to this ordinance since its inception. This is an unacceptable practice that will no longer continue under my watch. I have been working carefully with Dr. Jackson and our City Attorneys John Espar and Amber Lapaich to legally proceed in taking stringent action against companies who do not adhere to this local ordinance. The local hiring ordinance does not require contractors to hire unqualified workers, nor does it require contractors to pay ghost pay-rollers. It simply obliges companies who bid on our public works projects to give qualified Michigan City residents employment at jobs on all projects that are in excess of \$200,000. In addition to her work monitoring the local hiring and compliance ordinance, Dr. Jackson remains fully engaged in her daily work inside the department.

As I told you last year, inter-departmental cooperation and the sharing of city resources would become a mandatory requirement under my administration. There was no better example of this new teamwork than in late October and early November of last year when the effects of Hurricane Sandy moved into our area and buffeted Michigan City with winds of 60+ miles per hour. Conditions were so severe on the lakefront that public safety became a huge concern. So in conjunction with local and county emergency management officials, I decided to shut down access into our lakefront and Washington Park. I was extremely proud of the way all of my department heads came together to assist the Park Department in the monumental job of cleaning up the downed trees, debris, and mountains of displaced sand so the city could re-open the park in a very timely and safe fashion. It is this "spirit of cooperation" that will continue the positive change all of us want to see in Michigan City.

In speaking of Parks and Recreation, Michigan City is blessed to have a wonderful Parks and Recreation Department that includes the Michigan City Municipal Golf Course, the Senior Center, and the historic Michigan City Zoo. Parks and Recreation Department Superintendent Jan Orlich and her staff have worked closely with my office to place a high priority on enhancing our spectacular natural resources. Fedder's Alley is a nine acre stretch of land that was overgrown with invasive species. In 2010 and 2011, the McNeat Group approached the Park Department with an idea of opening up a viewshed in Fedder's Alley. Along with Jan Orlich, I worked diligently with City Forrester Frank Seilheimer and Mr. Dale Enquist to determine that putting this plan into action would result in what is now a beautiful vista with improved public access to the lake for our citizens and visitors alike.

The Parks and Recreation Department actively seeks and applies for grant funding to offset capital expenses. For the year 2012, the Parks and Recreation Department received a total of \$197,215 in grant funding. The city's match for this funding amounted to \$72,732, which means the department was able to leverage \$269,947 in grant dollars for capital improvements. The Parks and Recreation Department is committed to renovation projects that enhance accessibility and inclusive play according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. The department applied for a grant through Variety, the Children's Charity of the United States, which had funds

available for which three communities, including Michigan City, were vying. This grant would supply funds to renovate our parks and make the playground equipment ADA compliant. In September of last year, the department received word from Variety that Michigan City was the recipient for the grant funding of \$32,000. The department also worked closely with Neighborhood Planner Judy Pinkston in applying for, and being awarded, funding through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) in the amount of \$70,000. The target park for this renovation is Joe Hawkins Park, located at 1501 W. 8th Street. The Parks and Recreation Department hopes to have the new Joe Hawkins Park ready for play with a grand opening sometime this summer.

In continuing with the theme of forward movement, under the leadership of Jessica Ward, the Michigan City Municipal Airport has persisted in improving upon their mission of providing a safe and efficient option for air transportation into and out of Michigan City. In 2012, a parking lot and taxi lane resurfacing project was completed, and a self service Jet A fuel pump was established. This will address issues with after-hours calls and more importantly will allow for a quicker turnaround time for the Coast Guard during emergency fueling stops. The Michigan City Municipal Airport consists of 285 acres of property which presents an ongoing opportunity for exciting upgrades, additions, and growth to continue forward in 2013.

My administration, along with the Michigan City Sanitary District, is aggressively addressing the inherited issues of the past Sanitary District administration. We have been working diligently to be in compliance with state and federal regulations. As a result of a recent reorganization, the Sanitary District has been able to utilize district staff to perform more in-house repairs, replacements and construction. This has resulted in more work completed at the same cost, if not with additional cost-savings. Improvements accomplished in the last year include:

- Complete cleaning of the 54 inch sanitary sewer that runs from Lighthouse Mall all the way to the wastewater treatment facility located on E. Eighth Street
- Complete cleaning of the four digester tanks at the treatment plant
- Washington Street sod and tree replacement, with the cooperation of other city departments

- The purchase of a new combination sewer cleaning truck
- The purchase of a new Compressed Natural Gas combination sewer cleaning truck through a regional Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Grant that was awarded in 2011. This CNG vehicle will not only reduce emissions to improve air quality, it will reduce the cost of fuel charges.

Although the Sanitary District has suffered some small setbacks with the sewer system and wastewater treatment plant, the management has immediately addressed the issues as they occurred and have put plans and policies in place to assist in minimizing or eliminating reoccurrences. Although this appears to be a continuation of past problems, the Sanitary District has been very open and honest in discussing these matters, not only with state and federal regulatory agencies, but also with the staff and the public in general. This, by far, has been one of the greatest improvements made by leadership at the Sanitary District.

2012 was a transitional yet productive year that saw additional major accomplishments in our City which included:

- A \$2 million dollar investment in the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant sidewalks project.
- The demolition of the old Goerg Marina building late last year. In early June of this year, the grand opening of a new public access park built in its place will be open to the citizens and visitors to our lakefront.
- The Elston Grove Project, highlighted by new streetscaping and infrastructure improvements in the historic Michigan City neighborhood.
- Community Development successfully acquiring property and constructing eight new homes in the city's Westside Neighborhood, as well as providing assistance in the form of owner-occupied housing rehabilitation including exterior renovation assistance through the RECAP program, education, rental assistance, as well as assistance to the homeless in our community.
- The City of Michigan City hiring Stuart Sirota, of TND Planning Group, to analyze the pros and cons of various route alternatives for the re-engineering and realignment of the South Shore Commuter Rail in Michigan City.

2013 brings a new set of goals in our efforts to keep Michigan City moving forward.

- As members of the Indiana Downtown Program, we will work to develop a series of priorities and action steps to revitalize the city's North End.
- The Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy which is geared toward implementation of common public improvement projects highlighted in various North End related plans.
- We will develop and install new way-finding signage to direct our citizens and visitors around the city and lakefront.
- The department has hired a new code enforcement inspector, Terry Borolov, who will enhance our ability to enforce the vacant housing and building registration program. Progress is already being seen, as a major demolition of the former Dwyer Products building is currently underway and more demolitions of vacant and dilapidated buildings are slated for 2013.
- Phase II of the Michigan Boulevard Project will be let out for bids this summer, with construction set to begin in the fall of this year.

A key component of this continued forward movement was the appointment in October 2012 of new City Planner Craig Phillips. Mr. Phillips has a Bachelor's Degree in geography with an emphasis in land use, environmental planning and geographic information systems from Central Michigan University. Mr. Phillips also holds a Master's Degree in urban and regional planning from Michigan State University. Working as the Assistant Director of Planning in Elkhart, Indiana from 1999-2004, and as the City Planner in Valparaiso, Indiana, from 2004-2012, it is easy to see why Mr. Phillips has hit the ground running and already made positive strides for our community. He brings an extremely high level of expertise, experience, and motivation to Michigan City.

As the nation struggles to slowly recover from the most devastating financial crisis since the Great Depression, the question I am asked about most concerns the creation of jobs. A commitment to not only attract potential investors but retain established businesses is at an all-time high and that reality is no different here in Michigan City. We already have existing industrial parks, excellent infrastructure, and a close proximity to major interstates and rail spur.

We must showcase these attributes and offer some business friendly incentives as we compete in this fierce battle for new employment opportunities.

The Economic Development Corporation Michigan City (EDCMC), in conjunction with my office, began developing a comprehensive action initiative in February 2013. The process is intended to provide an assessment of our local economy, our demographics and our future economic evolution with a focus on employment and financial quality of life. To begin, we identified five strategic goals that will enable the growth necessary for sustained job creation.

The five goals are as follows:

1. Workforce Development & Education
2. Business Retention & Expansion
3. Business Attraction & Development
4. Integration with Community Development
5. Organizational Sustainability

Since economic development efforts must be tailored according to the community's needs, stakeholder involvement is critical for developing a realistic understanding of our community. The EDCMC held its initial public/stakeholder meeting on April 12th with approximately 80 participants that included board members, elected officials, city department heads, educators, civic and business leaders. The participants represented the diversity of people in Michigan City to ensure that the strategic planning process would include the interests of all citizens.

In preparing for this long-term strategic initiative, we are taking an important first step toward establishing a foundation from which we can overcome the current issues and future challenges confronting our great city. Because I consider employment opportunity to be not only a city initiative, but also a county-wide endeavor, my administration has a commitment to stay engaged with people, organizations and projects that can help bring jobs to Michigan City as well as LaPorte County. Industrial outlines such as the Kingsbury Industrial Park Project will have a positive impact on employment opportunities for our Michigan City residents. We recently completed a Water Line Extension Improvement Project to 600 West, which is adjacent to the Michigan City Airport. This land has available sites for retail, commercial, and office space,

which broadens potential opportunity for additional growth and opens up the area for future economic development.

Along with this acquisition of land, in October the Redevelopment Commission began the process of demolition and rebuilding portions of Dunes Plaza, in conjunction with developer Key Development Group, to make way for the new Kohl's and other retail stores. This redevelopment project of Dunes Plaza is on schedule and slated for completion in 2013, which will offer further employment opportunity.

We will continue to encourage business growth within the boundaries of Michigan City. Job creation can be a challenge but it will continue to be a priority as my city team is committed to the economic development and growth of Michigan City.

I would like to revisit a poem from Mayor Martin T. Krueger's 1928 State of the City speech I shared with you last year that reflects my love for Michigan City...

There's a City by the lake
That is bright and wide awake.
Michigan City, Indiana!

You can travel up and down
And never find a better Town
Michigan City, Indiana!

Michigan City Hurrah!
Folks Hurray!
Strong in December
And full of pep in May!

And the water is always fine
In the good old summer time!

In Michigan City, Indiana!

Last year I asked you to "Focus on Priorities." This year I ask you to move forward not only in making Michigan City a leader but also in protecting, strengthening, and growing all the benefits our city has to offer its hardworking citizens as well as visitors alike. To reiterate this sentiment I would now like to read a poem from Michigan City's first lady, Agnes Meer.

Michigan City is for you!

Where sunsets and smiles make your day

Michigan City is for you!

Where exciting moments whisk you away

Our lakefront city is home to scenic views

No matter the day or season

Be sure to stay more than a while

And enjoy the many reasons

Michigan City is for you!

Come expand your horizons along our shore

It only takes one visit

Then it's Michigan City, Indiana, forever more!

I would like to conclude tonight by saying; God bless America and God bless Michigan City, Indiana!

**“Defining the Moments
and Exceeding the Times”**

