

State of the City Address
The Honorable Tammy de Weerd
Mayor, City of Meridian
February 4, 2009

“We treasure Meridian as a creative, caring and involved community. We will take bold action to ensure a vibrant and diverse economy, a well-trained workforce, safe and active neighborhoods, lifelong learning and growth opportunities for all, and an attractive and sustainable environment. Working together, we believe Meridian can be the most innovative, prosperous and healthy community of our size.”

I read these words in the Idaho Statesman in their ‘Vision for the Valley’. If you read the paper, you probably know I changed ‘Valley’ to ‘Meridian’; because it’s very reflective of what Meridian has been doing. It is a confirmation of sorts that our focus, and our actions, are important. We must continue this path, focusing on what is beneficial to Meridian - and the valley. So...

We are a creative, caring and involved community. We take **bold** action to be a partner to diversify our economy, train our workforce, assure lifelong learning and growth opportunities for all, and most importantly have safe and active neighborhoods in an attractive and sustainable environment. We can’t do this alone.

Together we can create a stronger and healthier Meridian; essential in achieving our vision which is, ‘Meridian is a vibrant community whose mission is to be a premier city to live, work, and raise a family.’

Before I go any further, I would like to recognize a few of the people who are with us today.

Thank you to our title sponsor, St. Luke’s. We appreciate your involvement; as well your role as a key stakeholder in Meridian’s Health Science and Technology Corridor.

Many others have also helped make this event possible. Please look in your program for our sponsors – they not only support this annual event, these funds have supported youth scholarships, public art, and the Meridian Youth Baseball team’s trip to the World Series in Virginia. Thank you for your generosity.

We were led in the pledge by one of our local Special Olympians. Josh, along with others, will be representing this community and State; as Idaho hosts this worldwide event. We wish all of these athletes well!

I invite you to join us Friday, at 10:30, at City Hall when the Special Olympics torch will be making one of three stops in Meridian. This is a great opportunity to support local athletes, like Josh, and others coming from around the world.

You might have noticed the youth among us today; many are members of the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council or MYAC, whom you'll hear from shortly. In addition, we are joined by 'Inclusion Revolution' representatives from Rocky Mountain, Mountain View, and Meridian High Schools. Inclusion Revolution is not a club but rather an initiative, a revolt, a challenge for us all to be inclusive. More on this later.

I am also joined onstage by members of the City Council and senior leadership team. They have not been afraid to lead in these times of challenge.

To the City of Meridian employees, you are the ones that make good things happen! Thank you for the work you do and your service to our citizens. Will you all stand to be recognized?

Finally to my family; I am grateful for your encouragement, love and support. Thank you for being here.

I am honored to have this opportunity to tell Meridian's story for 2008, and share with you the good news, in a time when negative news gets the focus. That is not to say we are immune; but we have been busy during this slow down positioning Meridian to prosper - when opportunities present themselves - we are ready.

Meridian is poised and ready to 'step up' to tomorrow's challenges - today. Our dedication to making Meridian grow from 'Good to Great' has allowed us to be ready to step up to future challenges. This means having the right people on the bus, identifying and being willing to face the brutal facts, to keep us moving in the right direction.

We are stepping up to meet the expectations that you - the taxpayer, the business owner, the homemaker, the senior, the student - expect from your government. We are here to provide the customer service you deserve, the support to accomplish your goals, and the fortitude to make the hard decisions when needed.

Last year I talked about the 'hedgehog concept' meaning "What we can be the best in the world at?" Customer Service was first on the list. To be the best, we are willing to face the brutal facts - the good ones too! With that objective, we now have customer comment cards available at each City office and they're going into the field with our Police and Fire Departments. This provides citizens the opportunity to comment on the customer service they received. Feedback from the comment cards help us recognize staff members who provide exemplary service and identify areas for training or improvement.

We provide enhanced levels of service to our customers online, allowing them to do their business when it's most convenient to them. We have a plethora of information available on our website! Our Utility Billing provides direct billing options that can simplify how citizens and businesses do business with us. These are a few examples of 'stepping up' in customer service!

Our advancements and focus in Meridian, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, are reflected in the 10 steps identified as the 'Vision for the Valley.' I will use these to add Meridian's color to the valley's canvas – our ten actions to 'stepping up'.

1. A strong economy.

In today's climate, a strong economy is first and foremost part of our vision. In Meridian we have worked hard to diversify our business community to better withstand the economic highs and lows. We took a hard look at ourselves and the role we play in our business community's success. We work to know and understand them. Last year, our economic excellence team and I visited with more than 150 business owners. We want to be part of their success. We are identifying industry and service sectors that would be beneficial to our community and to our businesses bottom-line. Strong business growth brings strong job growth.

We have seen success in businesses expansion and attraction. The Department of Labor reports that from the third quarter in 2005 to the third quarter of 2008, we grew by 510 businesses, equating to over 6600 jobs. Over that same time period, we had \$534 million in commercial growth.

This past year we have seen the emergence of companies in Meridian such as VengaWorks and Power Engineers. Like other companies they chose to make Meridian their home.

Power Engineers, moved their largest office to Meridian this past fall, with a total of 300 employees. They are Idaho's largest engineering firm specializing in energy, facilities, and communications.

VengaWorks, the launch pad for business, opened last year. They provide new and exciting opportunities for companies looking to start, expand, or find a new home. This one stop shop for business, meets all their needs in an exciting and environmentally friendly location. VengaWorks uses the latest in meeting technology. I encourage you visit them!

In addition to new businesses, others like Scentsy continue to grow and prosper. Scentsy, was founded in 2004 with 5 employees. They now have 230 employees with 23,000 distributors; and have doubled the size of their operation in 2008 alone.

We have seen job growth in many sectors. According to the Department of Labor, in the last year we have seen growth of nearly 8% in professional, scientific, and technical services. In health care and social assistance we have seen a 12% growth – the largest growth in any field of employment.

You can understand why our Economic Excellence efforts have focused on the Health Science and Technology corridor – positioning for prosperity – and that premiere place to work. The concept behind this corridor is to support our existing industries by bringing together like minded or complementary companies. Michael Porter, a Harvard professor and leading authority on competitive strategy, describes these efforts as 'clusters'. Industry 'clusters' build critical mass giving businesses more resources and workers more choices in employment.

With the addition of Idaho State University to this corridor, we anticipate greater opportunities for existing businesses, as well as companies that want to locate near a university. Universities convene faculty, students, researchers, investors, entrepreneurs, and others who can share ideas and create new ventures. This leads to new companies, jobs, and is a generator of development.

In the last two and a half years, this corridor has seen 44 businesses open, including Complex Care Living Center. They brought over 100 new jobs and are ramping up! By the end of the year, they anticipate having 200-300 employees with a payroll \$20-25 million annually.

Health care has been the initial focus of the corridor; now, the technology side is also moving forward. Just last week, we announced that Silverdraft Studios is locating in the corridor. This integrated film, television, new media production and live entertainment company will house the largest film and television soundstage in the northwest as well as revolutionary high definition technology unrivaled in the industry.

Eagle Road is the artery of this corridor. This is the State's busiest highway and we are very concerned it's not on ITD's funded plan for improvement.

Last year, we announced an exciting project at Eagle and Fairview – a lifestyle center by CenterCal LLC. This \$200M development is expected to bring 3000 construction jobs and 2500 permanent jobs to the area. This project has been delayed until this fall, not only because of the economy but also for lack of improvements on Eagle Road. We urge ITD to work with Governor Otter and his staff to make this a 'shovel ready' project. Put these 3,000 people to work - today; they and their families are counting on it!

2. Environmental stewardship.

[play IDEQ Commercial]

The City of Meridian has 'stepped up' as a leader to improve the air in the Treasure Valley and to avoid non-attainment. Some examples of these efforts are: our participation in Clean Air Zone Idaho; have flexible work schedules and offer Virtual Private Network (VPN) to work at home; promote carpooling and offer alternative transportation programs; reducing citizen trips to City Hall through autopay and doing business online; and, requiring a dustless surface for areas that vehicles drive on.

My friends – to improve our air, we will all need to make changes in our behaviors. To make a personal impact, you can find ideas on the DEQ website.

In addition to air quality initiatives, Meridian became the first city in Idaho to be issued a Class A Reclaimed Water Permit. The permit signifies a change in how we use our existing water resources. We will begin using highly treated, or reclaimed, water instead of irrigation water on city parks and open spaces. This allows conservation of ground water and reduces our discharge flows into the Boise River.

The restoration of 700 linear feet of Five Mile Creek is another example of our environmental stewardship. The Public Works Department worked with partners to move this first-of-its-kind project forward in Meridian. We will see a portion of the creek restored to a more natural condition and preserve the floodplain from development at no cost to the City.

[play City Hall video piece]

Our new City Hall has historical significance and meaning in our design, greater efficiency and service to our customers, and is a prime example of Meridian's efforts to be good stewards of the environment.

Through this design, we are pursuing LEED - Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, Silver Certification. This "Green building" standard refers to the design, construction, and operation of buildings in an environmentally friendly way.

This will be accomplished by several approaches: First, we cleaned the site and soil, removing 600 tons of contaminated materials and 8,600 cubic yards of contaminated soil.

Then, many of the building materials were chosen for minimal environmental impact and recyclability: insulated windows; low volume water fixtures; roofing material that deflects the summer heat; and light fixtures that determine how much light is needed. These are just some of the "green" attributes of the building. Idaho Power tells us that our annual power savings could provide power for 56 homes for a year.

Additionally, more than 80% of all construction refuse was recycled; we designated a no-smoking campus; employees are incentivized with preferred parking to carpool or drive low-emission vehicles; we provide on-site bike storage, and showers and lockers for employees to bike or walk to work. As you see, its not just talk about environmental stewardship; we're stepping up.

3. Educational opportunities.

We are energized by our solid partnership with Idaho State University. They will open the doors to ISU-Meridian, the Treasure Valley campus in the fall of 2009. We have been working with ISU to not only strengthen educational programs and create partnerships with the private sector. The ISU President's Southwestern Idaho Advisory Council on Health Science Education and Economic Excellence will focus on specific business and research opportunities. This Council of business and educational leaders is helps prepare ISU to expand health science education opportunities and support the emerging biomedical industry in the Health Sciences and Technology Corridor.

College of Western Idaho – the Chairman of the Board said it best: "In any community college, focus should be on community. This defines our mission and the service we provide." Yes, bringing a community college to the Valley was a fight worth fighting; our citizens' and business community should reap the benefits. CWI serves the needs of business – training employees to

have competitive skills. CWI is for our citizens – providing for those seeking career advancements in a meaningful and cost effective way.

Renaissance High School – This magnet school brings new opportunities this fall. RHS will combine rigorous academics with the International Baccalaureate program and challenge students to push their talents and interests. Students will be able to specialize in Law and Leadership, Research and Medical Arts, or International Studies. This 300,000 square foot facility is located in the School District building; adjacent to Renaissance Professional Technical Center that offers elective classes in pre-engineering, architecture, and construction.

The School District opened two schools last fall: Rocky Mountain High School and Sienna K-8 School. Each has unique offerings that compliment the quality education our district provides. These are all key ingredients to a premiere place to raise a family!

4. Investing in mobility.

We continue to work with our local and state transportation agencies to create a viable network of roadways in our community. Locust Grove overpass is a great example of public partnerships to move our citizens from point ‘a’ to point ‘b’ in the most effective manner.

Improvements to I-84 from Meridian to Garrity are crucial to moving people and goods. Bonds were made publicly available in January, and **SOLD!** to fund this critical I-84 GARVEE project; which included the Ten Mile Interchange. Requests for Proposals to construct the interchange will be out in April, with construction to begin in July 2009 – not a moment too soon!

In addition to roadways, we are finding ways to move citizens through the community on safe and connected pathway systems. The Parks and Recreation Commission have been working on prioritizing pathway segments. Their work is dividing future pathway improvement into two categories: driven by development, or City-driven. The first priority is improving connections to the existing Bud Porter Pathway from Meridian Road to Fairview Avenue. The next step is to identify funding mechanisms.

Mobility also means the City, as an employer, must play a role in taking steps to give employees viable commuting options. Whether it’s the “find-a-ride” program or other City initiatives earlier described, we are doing our share to reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles on the road; keeping our cars at home.

5. Training our workers.

Companies that bring family wage jobs need educated workers. To understand that need, last year I committed to develop the Mayor’s Professional and Workforce Development Advisory Council, to facilitate the development of a professional and ready workforce for our business community and specific targeted industries.

This group is tackling workforce development needs; finding ways to enhance access to the current programs; and expanding partnership opportunities. Mark Gilbreath of VengaWorks and Bill Bach of University of Phoenix are co-chairs.

We must listen to our business community and engage educational institutions to make sure that our employer's needs are identified and met.

6. Constructive collaboration.

For the City, being successful in today's economy and leveraging taxpayer dollars requires innovation and the ability to work with developers, community groups, and other government agencies. This allows you – the taxpayer – to see a wise use of your funds and allows new amenities to be achieved far ahead of schedule. I will share a few examples:

The opening of Fire Station No. 5 on N. Linder Road underscores the value of partnerships. The Rural Fire District funded the construction of the station and eight months of staffing costs; bringing it on-line long before we could have fully funded it. This relationship is a win-win for City and rural residents enhancing fire protection services above what either agency could do on its own.

There were two other components of this project: the land was donated to the City, and the station was built with office space for the Police. The police 'kiosk' will save time and money allowing officers serving this area a place to meet with citizens and do paperwork.

Our development community teamed with ACHD to bring roadway and intersection improvements ahead of schedule. A few months ago, our community saw a vital connection between Meridian's downtown and Eagle Road with the extension of Pine Avenue. This roadway improvement through ACHD, paid for by developer Dennis Baker, wouldn't have been built for years. The private sector also drove intersection improvements at McMillan and Linder and McMillan and Ten Mile.

Community partnerships are critical in park development. One example is Renaissance Park in south Meridian. This park had developer-provided improvements of \$1.45 million in land donation, grading, irrigation, landscaping, and other improvements. With this great start, the City can invest in other amenities for this park.

We have been able to realize an unprecedented return on the taxpayer's dollar. Renaissance Park used zero tax dollars to the 39% growth impact fee and the 61% donation by developer, Greg Johnson. The Meridian Youth Baseball complex in Settlers Park used only 2% of taxpayer dollars, to the 44% donations and 54% impact fee. I would also note that we have grown our parks from 1.1 acres per thousand residents in 2002, to 2.7 in 2008. Our community partners are also stepping up to help create this premiere place!

7. Strong neighborhoods.

Strong neighborhoods have many components. These are places where people want to be; where they know their neighbors; where there's a connection to the community; and where they are safe. We are pro-active in helping create an atmosphere where neighbors can meet neighbors, important in our efforts to be a premiere place to live.

Safety first, Meridian's crime is decreasing. The number of felony offenses is down 11% from 2007 and our misdemeanor offenses dropped 5%. Our Criminal Investigation Division's clearance rate remains high at 46.6% – nearly 5% over the State average. Our response times for police and fire remain stable over last year's. This is impressive when you consider our increased service areas, road construction, and additional vehicle traffic.

A number of our residential developments have low vacancy and turn over rates, in part because of the thought and vision that went into the open space and community gathering places that define 'neighborhood'. These subdivisions offer neighborhood amenities such as a community center, swimming pool, connected trail systems, and/or play courts – amenities that help create 'community'.

National Night Out, Neighborhood Watch, park events and recreation offerings, fire and police prevention programs, and our public safety citizen academies are other opportunities for neighbors to meet neighbors and citizens to meet citizens. People are brought together through these events – sometimes by the lure of food and family fun; to gather and learn; discuss concerns and seek solutions; or band together to watch out for their neighbor and keep their streets safe.

To connect further with our neighborhoods, this past year we began doing Town Hall meetings, bringing the 'City beyond our walls.' This is in addition to our regular Coffee with the Mayor. These both are designed to bring City leaders into neighborhoods or places of business, providing opportunities to speak with the Mayor, City Council, or one of our Department Directors. Whether the discussion is about the City budget, upcoming road improvements, or other issues, reaching out to the citizens is essential to the process of building our community.

Finally, to keep our neighborhood's strong; the City has taken an aggressive position regarding the illegal use of drugs and alcohol. Substance abuse can destroy communities; one person, one family, one neighborhood at a time. While some communities may feel powerless to fight substance abuse, we don't. The Mayor's Anti-Drug Coalition, is working with neighbors, places of worship, and businesses to form a strong partnership to prevent substance abuse.

[play 'Believe' video]

These Pathways Middle School students show us how, working together and 'believing', we can fight substance abuse.

Last year I pledged that we would be diligent in our pursuit of the Drug Free Community grant. I am proud to say we did it! This is a \$625,000 five-year grant, with a five year renewable – totaling \$1.25 million dollars. Using these new resources, we will help keep our community and

neighborhoods strong by addressing the complex set of factors that contribute to substance abuse.

8. A caring community.

The Mayor and CEO's Book Club is in its third year; one of my monthly highlights. It's not only popular with the kids – as the class was full the first day of sign ups; but it's popular with our CEO's – they commit immediately following their discussion session for the next year, so they can do it again. It is heartwarming watching these CEO's; they are amazed by these 3rd through 5th grader's reading retention and comprehension. These are leaders that are readers...that care about our kids!

Our Faith Ambassador Council continues to impress me with their willingness to separate philosophical or doctrine differences, coming together for the common cause of building awareness of our societal challenges seeking solutions to strengthen our community. They have participated in substance abuse issues, homelessness and hunger, the annual 'old town' neighborhood clean up, and more. I am grateful that we have faith leaders, who not only have open hearts they have open minds!

Many of these faith leaders are involved with the food bank. The Meridian Food Bank will have a new location on the 21st! They are moving to the SE corner of Bower and Meridian Road. Many thanks to their partner and landlord, ACHD; they made this location available for use through July 2011. Check out their new location! Better yet, gather up some food items and bring them on down; they are serving more people now than ever before.

9. A Charitable Climate.

Volunteerism is a tradition in Meridian; as evidenced by enthusiastic volunteers that have donated over 17,400 hours supporting City departments. You also don't need to look far for examples of the giving spirit of our community.

My first example is the Julius M. Kleiner Memorial Park. This 60 acre park will be our largest; a turn-key project where both the land and the improvements will be donated by the property owner. A design team is currently being selected, with the goal of breaking ground this year! This park will be dedicated to more passive and traditional park uses.

The enormity of this generous gift doesn't end there, as part of the land donation is for the development of a 20,000 square foot Senior Center. There is a dollar for dollar match up to \$2 million dollars. This facility will have plenty of opportunities to build collaborative partnerships with the planned professional kitchen, library, indoor walking track and more. What a gift to our community, and valley, for our growing senior population!

The generous spirit of giving is also evident at the Boys & Girls Club. They opened their doors in Meridian through a City partnership utilizing the former police department in 2002. Within a few years, kids served reached 1,400 necessitating a new facility. The club moved last October to the former school district building on Meridian Road. This has provided room to

accommodate all kids that wish to attend. Today, the numbers and the need, is greater than ever. Numerous organizations and businesses have helped with the remodel project and the move in; we know our community will continue to be generous with this organization.

Meridian facilities and programs have historically been recipients of community efforts; bringing parks, public safety facilities, community events, and assistance to those in need. Truly, a premiere place to live, work and raise a family!

10. A creative culture.

Since the inception of the Meridian Arts Commission just two years ago, we have seen energy and awareness in cultivating the amazing creative talent in our community. From the selection of art for City Hall, to bringing opportunities for our citizens to engage in a creative culture, we are ‘stepping up’ our role in bringing new experiences in the arts.

As part of the Art in Public spaces, City Hall integrates visual art into its functional spaces on hallway walls in the building. City Hall also provides space in which art is the function: Initial Point Gallery, located on the third floor of city hall. The first exhibit in this gallery was the Idaho Watercolor Society’s fall show that featured the work of dozens of Idaho artists. Currently the photography of Charles and Tracy Hoffman is on display. The Commission is in the process of gathering potential artists for future shows.

This spring, the Commission’s focus on performing arts is bringing the Missoula Children’s Theater to Meridian. This group is internationally renowned for the quality of its performances, its emphasis on inclusion and teamwork, and the fun of putting on a show.

Additionally, this year we will see a summer concert series in the City Hall amphitheatre. These free performances, “Concerts on Broadway,” will provide opportunities for residents and visitors to experience performing arts in a wonderful outdoor venue.

As evidenced, Meridian has been living and breathing the Vision of the Valley’s 10 steps of action for the last several years; and will continue to stay focused in our efforts. These are not random or piecemeal in nature, but strategies that unfold over time. The future is ours – what we do or don’t do today, we will leave for our children to either enjoy or have to remediate.

I would like to invite Nicole Foster, Chair of MYAC, to share the amazing accomplishments of the Youth Council over the last year, and the days and months ahead.

[MYAC Chair Nicole Foster’s Comments]

[MYAC video presentation]

I am sure that I don’t have to tell you why I enjoy spending time with these youth leaders. These are today’s leaders.

I have shared where we have been; however, I think it's equally important to speak to a few areas of focus that we will be spending time on over the next year. First, I would like to take a couple of moments to speak of the state of our City's finances.

In the climate that has seen statewide budget cuts, we have often been asked, "So what is the City doing?" It's a relevant question. We've historically been very careful in setting our budgets and conservative in how we forecast revenues. It is important to remember, for the most part, city services are in higher demand. Crime doesn't go away, people will speed, fire and medical calls still happen, parks are in greater demand and use, toilets flush and water faucets are turned on, utility accounts must be billed and bills paid, environmental regulatory requirements continue to change and increase, etc. – you get the hint, I'm sure.

Last summer, our Finance Department reduced our already conservative projected revenue numbers, in some cases by more than 13%, before we set the budget in our general fund. As an update, we received our first quarter revenue sharing from the state, our revenues were slightly more than budgeted. As you see we work hard to avoid budget shortfalls. In fact, the 2009 budget is 8% less than 2008's. We continually look to lower costs. Here are a few things we do to keep costs in line.

You have already heard how we leverage tax dollar in parks. The City has lower costs this year because we contract inspection services in our building department. The lower demand is resulting in over \$200,000 in savings because we contract, rather than have employees. Our Engineering Division has implemented process changes for coordinating utility stubs and services for property owners resulting in a savings of over \$100K. In Water, we increased meters equipped with 'radio read' to 40% of our total system, reducing personnel needs by 33%.

In Fire, the City has saved over \$125K from refurbishing one fire engine, rather than replace it, and \$100K by purchasing a demo Ladder truck rather than buying a new one. We anticipate our citizens and businesses will see 'personal' savings this year from our investments in the Fire Department, to lower fire insurance premiums upon completion of the Idaho Survey & Rating Bureau review.

There are many examples – these are just a few that reflect savings of over \$600K in our various city funds. The budget process for 2010 will be tight. We will continue to examine our finances as we move forward and establish budget priorities for 2010, addressing any tough decisions that need to be made along the way. Be assured, we will not compromise our public's safety or public health.

Briefly, I want to give an overview of three areas of priority in the coming months.

Moving people and goods: We will begin discussions with Union Pacific considering the feasibility and practicality of a pedestrian and bicycle pathway along the rail corridor within our area of impact. This is seven and a half miles of corridor that would connect key employment areas from Eagle Road in the east, to downtown/old town, then west to the Ten Mile and McDermott area. By connecting these three critical economic areas of our community with a continuous pathway system, we would be able to create synergistic uses along the rail lines

showing how moving people and moving goods are compatible, in addition to, the economic benefits of both. We are in the initial stages of this planning process.

Regional training facility: We have read over the last year, law enforcement agencies across the region have been in search of firing ranges for training. All have been able to find fixes, but its unknown for how long. In December, Chief Lavey and I discussed this topic with the Treasure Valley Partnership introducing the idea of planning for the long term – as a region. We will invite Mayors, Chiefs, Commissioners, and Sheriffs in the coming months to discuss our collective needs and explore the possibility of a regional state of the art training facility. Meridian is willing to fund a third party consultant to work with law enforcement agencies on this effort. All options will be on the table in an effort to leverage every law enforcement dollar. These facilities are expensive; above all if you plan for future growth and technology.

Lastly, Inclusion Revolution is a phenomenal effort that is the brainchild of Meridian High School student leaders and their advisor, Chad Bloxham. It's a 'revolution' and it's catching on. The three high schools are engaged, while maintaining their school's uniqueness in implementation. They are spreading the spirit of acceptance and inclusion to all parts of our culture. It's catching on, Buffalo Wild Wings opened last week in Meridian – not only do they make tasty wings, they are the first business to sign on showing their commitment to our youth and community.

We hope that businesses and other groups will adopt 'Inclusion Revolution' as part of their culture. They can do this by participating in at least one community or work activity that promotes equality and encourages all to join together in unity. Whether it's forming a fan club for a special Olympian or holding a food drive; we need to follow our youth leaders in truly making the word 'inclusion' be a part of everyday life.

Championing youth is a perfect segway into the Legacy Award Presentation and this year's recipient.

For more than 40 years, this year's Legacy Award honoree has been a champion for the success and enrichment of our community. Whether through the creation of youth athletic programs or service to worthwhile projects, this person is their champion.

While his service has touched people of all ages, it is his passionate dedication to the youth of Meridian that is noteworthy. Nearly every child who has participated in organized sports or youth activities in Meridian owes their experience to this man. Today he is an elected official, serving the community of Meridian as a city councilman for the past decade. With him helping guide our city, all residents benefit from his love for our community. In fact, he played an invaluable role in the planning, budgeting, and the building of our City Hall.

Meridian would not be the same without the staggering amount of time this person has contributed over the past four decades.

For these reasons and so many more, I give you this year's Mayor's Legacy Award recipient.....
Mr. Keith Bird.

The vision for Meridian, and the vision for the Valley; must be focused, have purpose and accountability, and be for the long-term. We have great people, businesses, blue ribbon education partners, neighborhoods, charitable organizations, an incredible outdoor environment, rich and creative talent, and so much more. We must treasure and protect that.

After all, Meridian is a vibrant community whose mission is to be a premier city to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you for sharing this last hour with me – enjoy your taste of Meridian both in what you take home from today and partaking in the delights that await you next door.