

State of the City 2010

26 January 2010

Mayor Steve Womack

Members of the Rogers City Council, department heads, key staff members, city employees and my fellow citizens. As required by Arkansas law, I am pleased to report to you the *State of the City* of Rogers, Arkansas.

I will admit, up front, that I was not disappointed to see 2009 end. The year was barely under way when one of the area's most devastating ice storms occurred in late January. The City went into a state of emergency to clear roads, restore power and provide basic services to those affected. The region was given a disaster declaration by the President and within a few weeks, recovery operations had the City back to a near-normal operating environment with very little visual effects remaining—only the vivid memory of trees buckling under the weight of ice, much like the sound of a war zone. Every major subdivision of city government participated. The Mayor's *Call to Service Day* was a huge success and was credited with a rapid and efficient recovery of storm debris. Following FEMA reimbursements, the City expended only about \$170,000 for this massive clean-up. In the vernacular of sports, we "fell behind" early, but thanks to the resiliency of our people, we recovered nicely. But, still, I say good riddance to 2009.

In contrast to the eleven previous annual reports, 2009 was not a stellar financial year for the City of Rogers—or for most Arkansas cities—with the effects of the recession still hitting a lot of people. The loss of jobs, a weak housing market, tight credit, rising foreclosures and bankruptcies, and an overall lack of confidence in the American economy should have served notice to those in elected office that it is not "business as usual" in northwest Arkansas and the times dictate a strong and determined fiscal discipline as we recover—and I believe the recovery will take a while.

Consider these facts. City sales tax revenue, our single biggest source of municipal revenue, was down more than 6% in 2009 (\$735,000) and County sales tax revenue slipped seven percent (\$587,000), despite our successful effort to transform Rogers into a retail shopping destination. Sales tax revenue in 2009 was just ahead of the 2007 level. It impacts our budget and the speed at which we pay off bonded indebtedness—critical to future bond issues purposed in financing expensive improvements in streets, parks, public safety and other important infrastructure.

We did, however, experience increases in other revenue sources that helped the City exceed its overall revenue projection by approximately \$60,000. State turnback was up 25%; County turnback was up 26%; court costs and fines were up 14%; alcohol beverage fees were up 7%; and franchise fees improved by 5 ½%.

Our department heads and staff did a masterful job in managing expenses in 2009. Overall, our city used less than 95% of its authorized budget in human resources, and 92% of operations and maintenance budgets. That accounts for nearly \$2 million in budgeted, but unspent dollars. This fiscal accountability prevented the necessity of tapping reserve funds for *operational* expenses—and in fact, allowed the city to maintain a \$14+ million general fund reserve, even after cash-flowing major expenses at Veterans Park and the new Recycling Center. It is an amazing

accomplishment when a municipal corporation, in a known, down economy, can maintain its level of service and manpower; add value to its quality of life without having to raid its reserves.

The City remains in very healthy financial condition. Should economic conditions improve in 2010, we are prepared to lead northwest Arkansas in the recovery from the recession. Our ability to improve the job market, stimulate the housing market, and grow our retail trade will be critical to this recovery. I believe there will be ups and downs as we negotiate this recovery. The closure of our Ford dealership at the end of 2009 just prior to the groundbreaking of Academy Sports earlier this month is an example of this expected pattern.

2010 is a very important year for the City of Rogers. Essentially, it is a year of preparation. This year is an election year and the impact of this fall's municipal election will likely be historical. With the decennial census this year, our city is expected to pass a very important threshold in population. When a city of the first class in Arkansas exceeds 50,000 in population, election cycles change for the Mayor, City Clerk and City Council. The bottom line is that IF we go over 50,000 in population this year, whoever is elected this fall to the position of Mayor and City Clerk will automatically add two years to the four-year term—to put them in the quadrennial election cycle in 2016. Council terms will automatically go to four-year, staggered terms. So, changes are on the way insofar as elected representation is concerned. The 2010 census will not be “official” until certified in the spring of 2011—so the impact is “after the fact” for the fall elections. This change does not affect the elected City Attorney, who will remain in the off-year election cycle.

2010 will also be the year very important decisions are made regarding a future bond issue. Currently, our city has plans to issue bonds in 2011 for a multi-million dollar plan to improve streets, drainage, parks, public safety and other capital improvements. This WILL NOT involve a tax increase—only an extension of our current penny sales tax for these purposes. Timing is critical and a vote of the people is required. If passed, remaining debt from the previous bond issues will have to be retired, so a big decision looms on when to vote on this proposal. Voting too early involves the refunding of an excess amount of debt. A vote later impacts the completion timeline of important projects. Of course, market conditions and interest rates could impact our plan as well.

The last major bond issue was approved by voters in 2003 and provided for major improvements to streets, public safety apparatus and facilities, park land acquisition, and the Adult Wellness Center. We have also dedicated a portion of our property tax millage to fund bridge infrastructure on Promenade Boulevard and the Pleasant Grove overpass on Interstate 540.

The bond issue in 2011 will be primarily dedicated to streets and parks. There will likely be a component for public safety; however, the majority of funding will be dedicated to streets and parks. Already, our city is in the design phase of a major outdoor water park to replace the long-outdated Lake Atalanta pool. The Sports Park project on Highway 102 is also under design. We will also perfect plans to give Lake Atalanta Park a makeover—with the possibility of a partnership with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for a presence there.

Let me be clear. We *do not* presume the passage of the bond issue. We are confident that our citizenry believes both in our plans and our past stewardship of public dollars. We feel a strong prudence to get these plans “shovel-ready” in order to facilitate a dedication of these projects sooner than later. That involves a bit of risk—but it is the kind of risk our City Council and constituents have empowered us to take. It will be our goal to develop a proposal that our constituents will embrace—because it makes sense, addresses our city’s most urgent issues, and adds value to the quality of life that distinguishes Rogers from her peers. I look forward to that challenge.

Finally, I have one other major policy objective that I plan to address this year. It involves the structure of our Parks & Recreation Department. I realize change can be difficult; however, it is my strong opinion that our city needs to carefully analyze how we are currently organized and make changes appropriate for the future of both our *programs* and our *facilities*. Given the fact that we are about to commit a significant amount of money to facilities, it only makes sense that we look at this issue this year.

Here’s the goal. I would like to *outsource* all recreational programs and services to another entity outside the jurisdiction of city government. Currently, we manage and supervise some recreational and sports programs while the Rogers Community School Recreation Association (RCSRA) manages others. Going forward, it is my desire for the City to concentrate its effort and resources on managing the Parks *system*—and only that. This concept would put all recreational programs—current and future, youth and adult—under a separate, single authority. This entity could be the current RCSRA or some type of new structure. Of course I realize our city would need to subsidize this entity due to increased staffing and costs associated with operational support.

I will ask an outside group of interested individuals to study our current framework and the proposal I advocate to see if it has merit. This group is an impressive representation of Rogers people—young and old—who have the interest and desire to see our Parks and Recreation programs flourish. While Parks and Recreation appear to be inseparable, they both need independent structure and vision to be truly successful. An outcome of this study could be the establishment of a Joint Commission on Recreation, with representatives appointed by the Mayor and Superintendent of Schools. Perhaps a “summit” on recreation in the City of Rogers could be held as part of this study.

My concept would be for the Rogers Activity Center to be the headquarters for Recreation services, and another venue be sought to accommodate the new Rogers Parks System. Soon, it is expected that the National Guard Armory on South First Street will be vacated in favor of a regional facility under construction near the Regional Airport. I have asked the Governor to consider donating the vacant armory to the City and my intent would be to utilize it for this concept. If not available, however, we would pursue other options.

The impact on personnel, assets, budget and other considerations will have to be worked out once approved. I am only asking for consideration of this change right now. My hope is to have an “up or down” on the issue in time for 2011 Budget deliberations.

I said earlier that I am not disappointed to see 2009 behind us. It was a challenging year for a lot of people—local government included. That is not to say that good things did not happen last year. They did. The opening of the Non-Profit Center, additions to the city's Greenways and Trails program, work commencing on the Downtown Enhancement Project, as well as progress on a number of key infrastructure projects, should serve as a reminder that even in a down economy, our city remains committed to projects that add value to our quality of life.

I believe in my heart that going forward, no city is better prepared to lead the recovery in northwest Arkansas than Rogers. Our balance sheet is strong, our leadership team uniquely prepared and committed, and our vision clear. We are optimistic that 2010 will be our best year ever.

Departmental Summaries

Police Department

The Rogers Police Department, led by Chief Steve Hamilton, is the largest city department with 99 sworn officers and a support staff of over 40 civilian personnel.

A goal for the year was to improve citizen satisfaction involving police services and the department. A citizen survey in December 2008 indicated a citizen satisfaction of 77%. The same survey completed in December 2009 indicated a satisfaction rating of 82%. The department continued with re-structuring and review of process and systems during 2009. A review of calls for service led to the realignment of police beats from five to six. The sixth beat should equalize workload and assist with response time. A review of peak workload hours indicated a need to reallocate personnel to address this need as well. Peak times for calls for service were determined to be 3:00 PM – 1:00 AM, Wednesday through Saturday. An overlap shift was created to meet this need. Staff was reassigned from the Criminal Investigations Division to an overlap squad. The department began disposing of property through the use of PropertyRoom.com rather than auctions. This service picks up property at the department, sells it via a website and returns proceeds, less expenses, to the department. This limits the large amount of staff time normally required for an auction and frees up limited space in the property room on a regular basis.

Community Oriented Policing was emphasized in 2009 with the creation of two part-time Police Area Representatives or PAR officers assigned to address issues at two apartment complexes. These two complexes combined accounted for 989 calls for service, including a homicide and a police shooting. The PAR officers develop a relationship and build trust with residents in order to solve problems.

The first Citizens Police Academy was held in 2009. Twenty citizens began the ten-week class, an educational program designed to foster a better understanding of public safety issues and improve communication between citizens and police through familiarity of police operations and responsibilities. The program provides the department an opportunity to gain insight into how citizens feel about their police department and, in doing so, provides an effective way to better serve and address the concerns of the residents.

The Rogers Police jail changed from a jail facility to a temporary holding facility in 2009. Prisoners cannot be held more than an hour before being transferred to the county jail. Civilian personnel formerly assigned to the jail became Prisoner Transport Officers freeing up the time of Police Officers in transporting and booking prisoners.

A re-write of all police policies in 2009 laid the foundation for applying for accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) in 2010. Accreditation is a process that reviews processes, systems and policies to ensure adherence to national standards and practices in policing. Less than 4% of police departments in the United States are accredited.

An alarm ordinance was passed by City Council in 2009 after more than 3,000 false alarms required police response in 2008. Preliminary reports indicate a 25% reduction in false alarms since the passage of the ordinance.

Fire Department

With a new Chief on board during 2009, the Rogers Fire Department saw unprecedented change to establish itself as a leader in public safety across the region. Station 5's remodel was completed with great success including winning a notable mention in the November 2009 edition of *Fire Chief Magazine*. A major planning process, involving the various divisions within the fire department, was undertaken and has resulted in a unified mission and goals for the members. The entire policy and procedures manual has been rewritten, along with an assessment of the future growth pattern and capital asset needs. In 2009 the department sold eleven vehicles and placed seven new pieces of apparatus in service. The RFD continues to stay very active with fire and injury prevention, reaching thousands of citizens in 2009. Also in 2009 the department responded to nearly 6,000 calls for service, an increase over the previous year. In 2010 the department will continue efforts to pursue accreditation and become the first "ISO One" department in Northwest Arkansas.

Planning and Transportation

The Street Department completed several street projects in 2009 including street overlays in various locations throughout the City as well as the construction of Subbert Way, which solved a huge traffic problem near the Benton County School of the Arts. The Street Department also constructed Happy Trails Drive at the airport. They solved several drainage issues in the City that included the installation of drainage boxes across Arapaho, and the construction of a drainage swale north of the J-Street cul-de-sac. They also assisted many other departments including the Recycling Center, the Animal Shelter and City Hall.

A substantial amount of work was performed on bond projects, including Pleasant Grove West, 26th Street, and the completion of the Pleasant Grove Overpass. The joint construction project of the Olive Street Overpass got under way this year as well, which promises to alleviate another major traffic congestion problem for both Rogers and Bentonville when complete.

Other projects scheduled for 2010 include the addition of a lane on the north side of New Hope from First Street to Eighth Street; improvements to Rainbow by the Pollution Control Facility; the construction of Price Lane from First to Eighth; and improvements to the intersection of Arapaho and Osage.

Design will be completed for the next phase of bond projects as well. These projects include Bellview Road, Pleasant Grove Road west of Bellview, 21st Street north of Perry Road, and Perry Road from Bellview to 21st.

In the Planning Office, work on the Drainage Manual is 95% complete, and pending review and final comments from the engineering and development community, will be released this year. Several codes and plans were updated including the Rogers Sign Code, the planning area outside our city limits, and the Rogers Bike Routes. The GIS website was updated with the 2008 aerial photography, contours and drainage structures. Work began on the Downtown Enhancement Project with scheduled completion before May 2010. The Planning Department also started working on the proposed Eastern Corridor alignment from the south city limits north to Hwy 62. On the development side, Large Scale Developments were down to 23 submissions in 2009.

At the Rogers Municipal Airport, construction of the final phase of the east parallel taxiway project began in 2009 with continued financial support from our friends and partners at the Federal Aviation Administration and Arkansas Department of Aeronautics Commission. The new taxiway and runway safety area improvements will be completed in 2010. The Airport also received State funding for the first of several anticipated pavement maintenance projects. The Airport's award winning fixed base operator, Beaver Lake Aviation, completed its new 36,000-square-foot hangar and state of the art fuel farm complex in 2009, adding capacity and improving efficiency. On the north end of the field, the Airport's t-hangar customers will enjoy more convenient access in 2010 with recent improvements to Happy Trails Drive. Other projects being planned include apron reconstruction and a runway sealcoat.

The Rogers Municipal Airport has not been immune to the challenges of decreased aviation activity, cost inflation and reduced revenues. To address these challenges in the short-term, the Airport Commission adopted a new rate structure effective January 1. Implementing the new rates is a critical part of the short-term strategy to ensure our Airport remains financially viable and poised to supply high quality facilities and services to its customers and the aviation community. Resolution of funding issues associated with air traffic control services is a priority for 2010. As part of its long-term plan, the Airport Commission and City staff continues to explore new and innovative strategies to enhance revenues and reduce expenses so that the Airport will remain a source of community pride and continue to support the growth and development of our City. Also of note, our city lost one of its most dedicated servants—Airport Commission Chairman Alan King—who died following a brief battle with cancer. His leadership, vision and dedication to our airport will be impossible to duplicate.

Rogers Water Utilities

The Rogers Water Utilities finished 2009 with a slight upswing in growth. The number of water customers grew 2%, up slightly from a year ago. A 6% water rate increase in October netted an additional \$78,000 for 2009. The 2010 estimate for water revenue growth is \$178,000, due to the

rate increase. Even so, the Rogers Water department projects a net loss for 2010 of about \$159,000. A reduction in force at Rogers Water Utilities last November should impact the bottom line in a positive way (about \$400,000 per annum). The Rogers Waterworks and Sewer Commission is continuing to monitor the Water Department financial outlook very closely.

2009 saw the completion of a \$21 million expansion and improvement at the Rogers Pollution Control Facility. A recent change to the method of solids disposal will save the sewer rate payers about \$148,000 per year. The second two-million gallon elevated water storage tank at S. 24th St. was completed in 2009, which will provide needed operational flexibility to the Rogers water system, as well as additional capacity. RWU extended a 24-inch water transmission main in Pleasant Grove Road in 2009, which greatly improved the hydraulic capacity in southwest Rogers. The aging sewer system in northeast Rogers (N. "B" and "C" Streets) was replaced in 2009. RWU cooperated with the City of Rogers and its contractors on the downtown Rogers intersection improvements.

Parks and Recreation

2009 was another banner year for Parks. As in 2008, the two most high-profile projects were the renovation of Veterans Park and the construction of miles of new trails.

On December 18, 350 days *behind* schedule, the Veterans Park Renovation project was deemed "substantially complete." It will be home to both the Mounties and War Eagles beginning next month. The funds we have spent there will, dollar-wise, make it the largest outdoor recreation project in the history of Rogers.

Major trail projects in northwest Rogers were completed, and engineering is complete for multiple sections in the southwest quadrant of our City. As soon as we get Highway Department approval, we will pierce the I-540 corridor at three different locations. In all, ten thousand feet of new trails were completed in 2009, another nine thousand are under way and many thousands more are on the drawing board.

Through the cooperation of the Rogers Community School Recreation Association, our programs, leagues, and facilities serve a large number of residents. We continue to sustain some of the largest recreational sports in Arkansas. Paid admissions at our aging pool at Lake Atalanta reached an all-time high in 2009, more than double our 2006 figures—without raising rates.

We are deep in our planning and preparation for the 2011 bond election. Architects have been hired for all three major projects. We have already committed substantial sums toward the design of these facilities so that, if the voters approve, we leave open the possibility that these facilities will be complete and open to our residents by the summer of 2012.

The Rogers Adult Wellness Center continues to see success in changing the face of the aging population in our community and beyond. Countless success stories remind us of why we built this place, and the thousand-plus people who use it each day are so thankful that it is here. We've attracted more than 12,000 people to sign up for membership since opening our doors. Retention of existing members continues to improve, and we sign up new members daily. As the number of people over 50 continues to rise in our nation and the health care crisis amplifies, Rogers is ahead of the rest in dealing with this population shift and the critical changes that it

requires. Encouraging personal responsibility is key to combating chronic illnesses and increasing years of independent living. At the AWC, we do it, and we do it well. This year we plan to focus on a Pay It Forward mindset: getting members to give back time and talents to a community that has given them a place to enhance their quality of life. In 2010, the Adult Wellness Center Foundation will be established. The Adult Wellness Center will also be participating in several research studies with UAMS and the U of A to help identify future programs that will be successful in helping people age gracefully and with dignity. From operating as a shelter during times of need, to serving those aged 50-100+ during a normal day, the AWC is a blessing to our community

Building Inspection, Code Enforcement and Animal Services

Once again, the building industry continued to decline in 2009. In 2009 a total of 2,434 permits were issued compared to 3,026 in 2008. These include building permits as well as electrical, plumbing and HVAC. One hundred and ten commercial permits for new, remodels, and additions were issued in 2009 compared to 161 in 2008. Two hundred and twelve new residential building permits were issued in 2009 compared to 213 in 2008. The Building Inspection Division invested a lot of time and effort to ensure completion of both the Center for Non-Profits and Veterans Park.

2009 was another busy year for Code Enforcement. A total of 2,981 notices of code violation were issued, along with 13 citations. Foreclosed property continued to plague the city in 2009 with abandoned property our single biggest issue. We continue to work with mortgage companies to ensure repairs and compliance. Our graffiti abatement program proved very successful in 2009 in limiting the time of exposure and serving as a deterrent for offenders. More than 300 individual cases were abated in 2009.

Rogers Animal Services had 4,401 calls for service in 2009. Six hundred and eighty-eight notices were issued along with 119 citations. These include dog-at-large, rabies vaccination and city tag violations. Over 2,500 animals came through the shelter in 2009 with 521 coming from Bentonville. Animal licensing was up 18.87% over 2008. In April, the shelter was retrofitted with metal awnings to cover kennels and sidewalks to provide additional cover during inclement weather. In October, Animal Services held its first annual Howl-O-Ween event that increased public awareness and raised \$1,000 in donations. In late December, Animal Services received its new crematory replacing our former unserviceable unit.

Library and Museum

2009 was another busy year at the Rogers Public Library. Over 522,000 items were checked out and the facility saw approximately a quarter million visits. Over 5,000 new library cards were issued during the year. Staff answered over 64,000 reference queries. The Library continues to provide online homework assistance through a grant from the RPL Foundation and works closely with Rogers' schools to encourage literacy, and provide informational and recreational materials for all ages and educational levels. Through a grant from the Friends of the Library and by participating in an Arkansas Library consortium, Rogers Public Library was able to increase significantly the offerings of downloadable audio books through a provider called *OverDrive*. This service has

allowed the Library to provide popular titles that were unavailable through the other service the Library uses, and membership in the consortium provided the service at much less cost than individual libraries are able to obtain. Over 26,000 downloadable audio and eBooks were checked out during 2009. The Library also added a computer dedicated to job search links to help in these difficult economic times. Meeting the demands of a growing patron base continues to be the focus of the Library staff. With help of the City IT department, the Rogers Public Library is investigating ways to improve public Internet service while saving the City and taxpayers money.

At the Rogers Historical Museum, four major exhibits were produced, one traveling exhibition was hosted and four special events were held for the public. The Nonprofit Center was added to the list of venues hosting the Museum's community exhibits. Over 48,000 people, including nearly 28,000 area school children, were served by local exhibits and programs. Over 700 objects were added to the permanent collection and just over 70 items were added to the teaching collection, bringing the total number of objects in the permanent and teaching collections combined to an impressive 44,163 items. In 2009, the Museum will open three major exhibits, host two traveling exhibitions, and offer a variety of educational programs and special events. The Museum will complete the re-accreditation process, and the staff and Commission will incorporate the findings of the recently completed feasibility study into preparations for the planned expansion.

Finance, Human Resources, IT

The Finance Department continues to deliver timely and accurate financial information to department managers and decision makers within the City. During 2009, even with declining sales taxes, the City managed to meet its budgeted revenue projection while holding spending levels below budget projections, enabling the City to continue to maintain reserves that exceed the fiscal policies set out for the City. The City was able to also prepare for the future by adding additional funds to the Police Fleet Fund and the Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund.

The 2010 Budget continues to control costs through the effective management of resources, while allowing for a 4.5% increase in health insurance premiums and a 2% wage increase for staff. The safety policy implemented in 2009 delivered dividends this year through a reduction of more than \$79,000 in workmen's compensation insurance for 2010. We were also fortunate mid year 2009 when the City was able to hire Angela Brewer, who has a Masters Degree in Human Resources, as the new HR Director. Our City continues to find quality professional staff to lead the City into the future.

Our City, like all others, is only as good as our automation platforms go. Our IT staff was responsible for a number of critical improvements to this infrastructure including the implementation of mobile data solutions for our public safety departments. More than 1,100 trouble reports were received and cleared by this small, but efficient department.

Rogers District Court, City Attorney

Rogers District Judge Brad Karren implemented Night Court in 2009, dealing with citations written by the Rogers Police Department. The Court received 24,000 new criminal and traffic cases, and disposed of 27,000 cases. Over 1,100 civil cases and 1,172 small claims case were

handled by the Court last year. The court took over the collection of all fines and costs. \$850,000 in fines and \$130,000 in costs were apportioned by the court last year. Fines and costs can now be paid with a credit card online by going to ARcourtpay.org. There are plans to link the online payment site to the City's web site. The Court started the process of scanning criminal and traffic dockets, which will save in the price for storing paper dockets. Plans to start scanning civil/small claims are anticipated this year. Plans for cross training personnel in criminal/traffic and civil/small claims have been implemented.

In the Office of the City Attorney, 2009 saw the resolution of the lion's share of some very contentious litigation. More specifically: eminent domain litigation necessitated by ongoing street projects was resolved. By the close of the year, pending litigation was reduced to three active cases—two involving leases at the airport and one regarding an ambulance warranty. On the criminal prosecution side, through cooperation with Judge Karren and his staff, a number of procedural changes were successfully made which resulted in less court overcrowding and smoother traversal of cases through the system, benefitting both the Court and the general public.

Other Noteworthy Stakeholders

Main Street Rogers (MSR) continues to promote Historic Downtown Rogers and undertake projects to improve the streetscape. In 2009 the pocket parks were completed and a butterfly/hummingbird Park was started at 1st & Cherry. MSR developed a design concept for the downtown intersection improvements that was later adopted and approved by the City Council. Work is under way on improving eight intersections and will be completed in late spring. Many events were held downtown in 2009. The 25th annual Frisco Festival hit a record crowd of 50,000 people and is a finalist for the Grand Old Classic Special Event award among the *Henry Awards*. The Third Friday Twilight Walks drew many people into the Rogers Historic District for art, loft tours, children's activities and hot bargains. A new event this year was *WinterFest* drawing citizens downtown for carriage rides, an Elf House for kids, street vendors and Christmas sales. Twenty-two new businesses opened their doors in downtown Rogers in 2009. In March of 2010, Main Street Arkansas will do a program assessment that will further help refine and improve the MSR organization.

Our partnership with the Rogers-Lowell Chamber of Commerce continues to strengthen as we promote and posture our community for future job growth. We are seeing signs of economic recovery as evidenced by recent announcements such as Academy Sports, SE Poultry and Hank's Furniture. In June of 2009 *Forbes* ranked the Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers MSA at No.2 on its list of best places in the nation for recession recovery, *CNN Money* ranked us one of the "Best Places to Launch a Business" at No. 13. And we moved to 27 on the *Milken* Best Performing Cities List, up from 57. Of particular significance in 2009, is new found interest in our community as a potential location for major customer care operations. Several of these major companies are looking at us for the first time. Over the past year we have seen expansions at Cryovac, Don's Cold Storage, Pel-Freez and Enfomix. In the area of sustainability we have seen several of our businesses gain LEED certification (Benchmark Group & Stitt) and Mercy Hospital was recently honored as an *Energy Star* facility. Politically, we continue to work for regional infrastructure and collaboration.

Our Community Development Block Grant program enjoyed another successful year in 2009. We were invested in the Habitat Trails project in southeast Rogers; the Adult Development Center currently under construction; transportation assistance for low-income elderly and/or handicapped citizens; public service projects for after-school programs and supplies for the Community Clinic; and large investments in sidewalk, drainage and street work in low-income areas. We received an energy grant in 2009 in the amount of \$549,700 that enabled the Center for Non-Profits and the Rogers Public Library to address lighting and HVAC improvements with a return on investment of thousands of dollars annually.

The new Rogers Recycling Center opened in the fall of 2009 and for the year, processed nearly 1500 tons of material, generating sales of product of more than \$75,000. Commodity markets were depressed during 2009 with expectations of higher returns beginning this year. The new state-of-the-art, \$2+ million facility has enjoyed rave reviews by citizens and trade experts.

The City's website, www.rogersarkansas.com, continues to provide a useful and necessary means of communicating with our citizens and visitors. Sixty-two thousand unique visitors logged on in 2009 and nearly 7 million pages were visited. Over 4,000 new documents were uploaded. The ability to upload "breaking news" and information of emergency nature helps both our citizens and our staff communicate vital information in a timely manner to those who need it.

Conclusion

Finally, a year into the new administration, our country remains divided over very important issues that face us all. Health care. Huge deficits. Armed conflict. Terrorism. Jobs. Energy prices. Global warming. And the list goes on. Through an expanded media and social networking, our attention is easily focused on these issues—and it should be. We have already witnessed a major change in the direction of our nation. The election of a Republican Senator in Massachusetts and the prospect of significant change in Arkansas' political landscape is a sign that "all bets are off" as it concerns conventional wisdom in politics.

How this affects Arkansas is still unknown. Indeed, there appear to be a lot more questions right now than answers. But let's not lose sight of the fact that many things at the *local* level should also command our attention and input. In this document (speech), I have covered a lot of material about our city, its program of work, its priorities and our way forward. I am hopeful we are exceeding your expectations. If we fail you in any way, I urge you to let us know—and I know you will.

I speak on behalf of 400+ city employees when I say that we remain committed to our work, dedicated to improving your quality of life and responsive to the urgent needs of the great City of Rogers.

God bless you all. And God bless America.

