

Mayor Todd Strange Reflects on the State of the City

2014 was a year full of great accomplishments in the River Region. To begin, Montgomery achieved new levels of success and national recognition largely due to citizen and visitor driven campaigns and testimonials.

We were named the happiest city in Alabama, the 6th safest city for drivers in America by Allstate and voted Best Historic City in the nation by *USA Today* readers. Being named the Best Historic City in the United States speaks volumes about our history and compels visitors to come enjoy all we have to offer. In addition, we won the All-America City Award, which is often called the Nobel Prize for civic accomplishment. We also earned the reputation as the sports capital of the South due to a flood of tournaments and events, culminating with ESPN's Camellia Bowl – which showcased Montgomery in primetime. All of this recognition stems from positive change our community has undergone and from successfully marketing and selling everything Montgomery has to offer. And as a result, these efforts allowed us to achieve the highest hotel occupancy rate in the state.

Along with tourism, our community's overall health and well-being continues improving, too – both physically and financially. Through our combined efforts, we have attacked indigent healthcare and have 35,000 fewer obese residents in the River Region. Our unemployment rate has decreased over the past 5 years from 12.6 to 5.6 percent, putting 9,300 more people back to work. In addition, our per capita income rate increase was the best among Alabama's major metro areas and also higher than the state and national average.

As we continue recovering from the great recession, our revenues are increasing, we're holding the line on spending and we've increased our reserves from 3 to 18 million dollars, which is very positive to the financial community. We also led the state in the business confidence index for 13 of the last 17 quarters, including the last three of the year.

These accomplishments would be extremely difficult without the efforts of our stellar city employees and community leaders, who have never worked harder. In fact, this year we were the first city in our state to ever achieve an Insurance Services Office (ISO) "1" rating, thanks to our superior fire/rescue, water works and emergency communications services. This rating means

Montgomery has joined an elite group of fewer than 2 percent of municipalities nationwide, which could ultimately lead to lower insurance rates for businesses and homeowners.

Throughout this progress we refuse to rest on our laurels and grow complacent, but instead we're taking proactive steps to secure a brighter future for decades to come. The new Municipal Recycling Facility has not only ensured we are one of the greenest cities in the nation, but it has contributed to a better quality of life in the River Region by protecting our environment. It is one of the most technologically advanced recycling facilities in the U.S. and brings Montgomery to the forefront of innovation. In its first year of operation, MRF has received numerous visits by leaders from across the nation who hope to follow our lead in rejuvenating their cities. Protecting our watershed is another part of our plan to enhance quality of life in Montgomery. In doing so, we created a pristine, yet functional, outdoor recreation area on West Fairview.

We will continue investing in our future by renovating our current infrastructure. From downtown and Maxwell Blvd. to West Fairview and the Bypass, we complement private developers' efforts through repaving our roads, building new facilities and breathing new life into a once-abandoned mall. Fewer than 3 weeks ago, we broke ground on a new and improved baseball complex at Peter Crump Park on Woodley Road. Soon, we will begin construction on a new municipal court, a new pod at Park Crossing and updates to Paterson Field. The former Montgomery Mall, which currently houses modern facilities for our South Central Public Safety operations, will be transformed to house a state-of-the-art education and technology annex.

Let us assure you, we will continue focusing on communities and neighborhoods – the heart and soul of our city – by removing blight and dilapidation. This month, we swore in a new police chief, Ernie Finley, who brings more than two decades of experience and passion for community engagement. His first priority will be putting more police on our streets and in our neighborhoods. Our beautification and streetscape projects will also continue throughout the city as we prepare for two milestone anniversaries.

In March, the eyes of the nation will once again turn to Montgomery as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March. We anticipate visitors in the thousands, including many high-level dignitaries, many of whom will return for the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December. With each commemoration, we plan to partner with community leaders, local groups and other

municipalities to ensure we succeed in educating our youth and emphasizing the importance of each event that molded our city and our nation into what it is today.

We have spent the last few years priming the pump for private development, and we are pleased to report there is a very positive outlook for decades to come in the River Region. Thank you for the part you've played in making Montgomery, Alabama, not only the Capital of Dreams, but the city for success.

Todd Strange

Mayor of Montgomery