

City of Meridian
State of the City Address

Friday, April 1, 2005

Isn't this a great facility?! Special thanks to those at Jabil, Colliers International, Thornton Oliver Keller for allowing us to hold this event here. We wanted to use this facility to showcase this tremendous asset. Most of us only recognize the building from the interstate if you haven't taken a tour, please do so, you will be amazed. Our goal is to attract a primary employer to this building, the time is right, be ambassadors to make this happen. It will benefit not just Meridian, but the Valley.

I would like to thank our sponsors, Wells Fargo and Meridian Ford. We appreciate your involvement in our community and for hosting this event.

There are always many people to thank in coordinating events like this; as is true today. All of those involved in putting this together are listed in your programs, please note these individuals and businesses and join me in expressing our thanks.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to present the State of the City:

Meridian and Treasure Valley businesses, distinguished guests, fellow citizens, City of Meridian Directors and staff members, City Council members, welcome all. We appreciate that you are here today.

City Council members, I am honored to serve with you, I believe you are among the best that this city has ever had.

I look forward to working with you, as well as our talented and dedicated staff, to continue our progress making Meridian a great City, a premiere place to live, work and raise a family. I thank everyone for their hard work and their accomplishments.

Many of you are probably thinking, we just held the State of the City. No April Fools - we did; a little more than six months ago. However, we moved this annual event to Spring as a more appropriate time to discuss the State of the City. This is the time we assess our achievements and goals met, evaluate our strategies and benchmarks for the year ahead.

You won't see me again in another six months guaranteed, although, with the pace of change we see here in Meridian we would certainly have plenty to report.

I am proud to say that Meridian, over the one hundred and one years of incorporation, is a fully integrated, self-reliant city.

We value our community and our history. We love our homes, places of worship, our schools, post office, police and fire stations, and parks. We know the roads, albeit crowded, like we know our own hallways. We are proud of our growth in parks, schools, and businesses. We feel comfortable and safe in Meridian.

We love our families, and very often, the meaning of "family" extends to our neighbors. This passion for families and neighborhoods is one of our City's greatest strengths.

We share an enthusiasm with our neighbors for the places we live, and we count on the cooperation of our neighbors to get things done. In Meridian we have a tradition of citizen involvement.

We have made it a priority to recognize the great deeds of those who have helped build a strong community, leaving positive legacies. I would like to recognize four individuals who are the first-ever recipients of the Mayor's Legacy Award.

The Mayor's Legacy Awards go to citizens who demonstrate a long-time commitment to the betterment of the community by volunteering, supporting and building a legacy for future generations.

Many work tirelessly for their communities. Only a few, who make a difference in the lives that follow, leave a legacy.

First, when you hear the name Walt Casey it is synonymous with Western Ada Recreation. He served on their Board for many years and was instrumental in the development of Fuller Park. He practically watched over every blade of grass that was laid. In addition, he was a charter member of Meridian Parks and Recreation Commission, and has been involved in the Meridian Chamber of Commerce. He leaves a legacy through his commitment to recreation. Through his diligent behind the scenes work he has left a mark on this community for generations to enjoy.

Next we honor someone who has taken on seemingly endless tasks from a Main Street Pharmacy caring for the sons and daughters of lifelong residents, to working as a registrar and helping conduct elections in Meridian for many years. We all appreciate the work she has done to make sure we can exercise our right to vote. Recently, she enlisted the Good Sam Club to watch over the final touches of Adventure Island playground and has raised awareness and funds for countless charities. From the auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to visiting assisted living centers, when you think of service to the community you think of June Pack.

He served as a Rural Fire Commissioner and Board member of Western Ada Recreation and was, I am told, a pretty fair football player in his day. Since he was in High School this gentle, quiet man has made his mark on the community by stepping up and supporting a variety of community projects. Through all of this he has kept the tradition of his family and continues to farm the homestead his grandfather established in 1891. However, it is through his tireless work for the Meridian Dairy Board that Marty Hill will long be remembered.

Last, if you mention Meridian's history then the next person to come to mind is Lila Hill. While we can't say she is Meridian's History, we can say she has been a voice for the preservation of our rich past. She has been writing a column for the newspaper for the last 14 years. She has been an invaluable resource to the State of Idaho, and established Meridian's Historical Society. Her list of service and preservation of our community's history is longer than my arm. Downtown's Generations Plaza, celebrating Meridian's past, is Lila's legacy and symbolic of what she has done. Lila is the heart and soul of Meridian's history.

People such as these build communities with more than bricks and mortar. They put the heart and soul in our community and in our neighborhoods.

When I ran for this office, I had a plan to improve the quality and life of our community. The City has both direct and indirect influence to this end. That plan has five major components:

Maintain or improve services to protect our quality of life. Advocate transportation solutions with our transportation funding agencies. Work closer with our schools public, private, and higher education. Maintain integrity and enhance efficiency in City government, and access to good jobs

We have a focused commitment to these areas. Through increased efficiency, innovation, better management, better use of technology, and tight fiscal controls the effective delivery of vital services will continue to improve. For that, we can thank our department directors, managers - all of our employees.

You, our customers, are our priority.

We have improved our planning. Our employees are better trained. And, everyone knows, they are held accountable for doing the job right the first time.

People are noticing, and they want to be a part of it.

What accounts for this surge of interest in living and doing business in the City of Meridian?

In the course of participating in a great number of ribbon cuttings, dinner meetings, awards banquets, public speeches, community and sporting events over the past year, I have met and talked with many of our citizens and business leaders. This is what I am hearing:

"Meridian embraces its citizens and businesses and works hard not to take them for granted."

"Meridian is centrally located and still has affordable land; families can get more for their hard-earned dollar."

"Meridian has an excellent school district, noted for their innovative programs, charter schools, and over-all academic performance despite their growth challenges. We have many easily accessible choices for higher education."

"Meridian is a safe community. We have a feeling of community that values history, families, and neighbors."

"Meridian spends the taxpayers, hard-earned money carefully and works to keep taxes low."

I am proud to be a part of this dynamic City.

We are committed to customer service and streamlining processes. We accepted the task of improving city government, becoming more efficient, and bettering the quality of service to our citizens our neighborhoods and businesses -- protecting them, keeping them strong and prospering.

Most of all, we want to make sure Meridian remains a place where people want to settle, make friends, raise families, and enjoy their lives.

I believe we have been successful, and I can report to you today that the State of our City is strong, and I don't have to tell you that it's growing.

Meridian's growth has been unprecedented. I am not sure if everyone in this room quite comprehends Meridian's growth, our staff, that touches it every day can; and they do a valiant job not only keeping pace, but meeting it head-on, which you will hear today.

If Meridian were to stop all growth in its boundaries today, the schools would continue to grow and the roads would continue to be crowded. Why? Meridian is not the only contributor to those challenges.

Meridian School District is 385 miles large and is impacted by W. Ada County, including Boise, Meridian, Star, and Eagle; East Canyon County and Nampa - the most rapidly growing area in the state. There are approximately 147,000 people in this area.

Concerning traffic: Meridian is central to the valley, we therefore, accommodate the valley's growth and traffic that travels east and west or north and south. The Eagle and Meridian interchanges accommodate 97,000 trips a day, do the math; not all are Meridian residents.

Growth has not only brought challenges, it's brought great benefits to our community and our valley. Most importantly, it's brought opportunities for our children as they grow, to stay or return after college. They will be able to raise their families and find jobs, housing, shopping, and entertainment choices to enjoy.

We view the challenges we have with our growth as opportunities to prove our commitment to service. The demands on our budget and staff are huge. However, I can say that I truly believe there is no other community in this nation that could meet these opportunities better than Meridian has. We have dedicated citizens, businesses, partners, and city employees that are up to the task. (*Recognize volunteers, project contributors, partners.*)

With this said, our quality of life is good, we have choices where we work and what we do, and crime levels remain low, we feel safe.

I would also like to commend those who have helped build this community that remain under the radar; the priests, pastors, ministers, bishops, and deacons of the City. During the last year, dozens of neighborhood churches have done hundreds of things that knit the social fabric of this community -- including after-school programs, substance abuse support, youth recreation, scouting, family and senior services.

Half a dozen times this past year, I have picked up my phone and asked for their help. Not once did any of these men and women of faith say they thought that the City's business was none of their business.

Our community events are successful as well be it the Meridian Symphony, National Cowboy Fast Draw championship, the Scarecrow Festival, the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, Dairy Days, or the Chamber Chili Cook-off. There are many opportunities for our citizens to gather and enjoy the rich offerings of this City.

People and businesses are choosing Meridian for the quality of neighborhoods and business parks. The quality of life in neighborhood after neighborhood is good. There is a choice of housing. We have shopping centers, business parks, industrial and manufacturing employers, call centers, high tech firms, service providers, financial institutions, and neighborhood centers we will even have an eighteen screen movie theatre opening in May!

In 2004 there was \$518 million dollars worth of construction permits.

There is an optimistic feel about the City and the future.

Why? I will highlight three initiatives as examples of why:

- v Downtown renewal;
- v Quality developments, and
- v Job creation.

First Initiative: Reinvesting in our downtown. We are getting results.

Last fall I talked about our vision for downtown. Now we see tangible signs of that commitment. I can't say enough about City Hall's neighbor Farmers and Merchants Bank. Their investment in our community has been long-term over 30 years. Their belief in and commitment to Meridian has culminated with the opening of the Meridian office that also houses their Trust Department and later this year, Operations.

Another exciting project that is underway as we speak. Dave Buich is transforming the corner of Bower's Gas Station to a three-story office/retail mix of uses with condos on the top; this is in front of Council next week. Later this spring we will see the demolition of the Double D, building after they move to their new location on Victory and Meridian; the new building will have a 16,000 square foot print with condominium living on top as well. Another example of our resurgence is Tony Hickey's alley-loaded housing project. We can't forget the Library Coffee House on Carlton; and across the street, Cole Valley Christian School, moving dirt later this month on a major addition of a gymnasium.

In the old days folks *lived* downtown, and walked to work and home. Main Street didn't roll up the sidewalks at 5 p.m. That was part of the magic. If you ask me they still should. It is great to see buildings with apartments or condos above them.

I applaud Councilmen Bird and Rountree, the MDC Board members, Executive Director, Clair Bowman, and City Planner Steve Siddoway, we dared to dream, the dream caught hold; and now we are seeing it unfold before our very eyes.

Next year we will recognize those that have, dared to dream for infill and redevelopment with the Meridian Infill Development Award.

Our **Second Initiative**: Quality developments. Have you noticed as you drive through our neighborhoods and commercial areas, landscaped berms, architectural designed entryways, waterfalls, and splashes of color? Meridian's edge, is encapsulated in our city's slogan, Built for Business, Designed for Living.

The development community grabbed hold of the goals of our city comprehensive plan, resulting in residential developments like: Baldwin Park, Meadow Lake Village, Heritage Commons, Bridgetower, Lochsa Falls, Paramount, Tuscany, and Bear Creek;

Our thriving business parks: Silverstone, Central Valley Corporate Park, Fairview Lakes, El Dorado, DBSI, Troutner...

There are many more examples drive around and take a look.

We will recognize our community developers and builders, here as well. Next year we will not only recognize a quality business or residential subdivision for uniqueness and design, but will also have an award for creating a building that is pleasing to the eye and built to last.

Our third initiative: job creation. Our economy has diversified. Meridian has quality jobs that keep our workforce on our home turf. Our citizens no longer have to drive thirty miles round trip daily to work they have choices to stay in town, close to home.

Businesses have expanded Micro 100, Idaho Truss, Louisiana Pacific, Michaels of Oregon. Businesses have located here: T-Mobile, Great West Casualty, Zilog, Citigroup. Citigroup's experience was very positive in our community; so much so they will build their second building that will bring another 1800 jobs, anticipated to begin this year.

The City added 2.1m square feet of commercial in '04 with a value of \$91m. Two new business parks recently approved or in the works will add 1.8m square feet alone on 183 acres.

The City is actively engaged in the Boise Valley Economic Partnership (formerly BMEDC) and we are excited about how far they have come over this last year. Their new venture is a five year marketing program to promote the valley for its economic diversity and success.

As partners in that success, we must have our house in order. We formed the Mayor's Economic Development Council that is working on a plan to address our own economic vitality and sustainability as businesses come to Meridian, we will be ready.

We are working hard to retain the businesses we have. I visit with companies that are thinking about leaving the City, and also visit with those who are contemplating relocation within our boundaries. Knowing that the Mayor and City Council care about what they do has changed their view. Louisiana Pacific is a great example of that.

We teamed up to pursue a community block grant through the state that has helped keep this company in Meridian, and in Idaho. We have retained 60 primary manufacturing jobs and added nearly 40 new jobs; these are the type of jobs our state and country are losing by the boatload. We have been able to retain those jobs here in Meridian.

Manufacturing jobs are the key to economic diversity that is essential to our city and our state. We are glad to work together as a team, business, city, state - to save jobs.

Businesses truly appreciate what the City, our community, has to offer most of all a city government that cares.

Teamwork is the key to city development and teamwork is the key to our City's future. We have excellent team leaders, our Department Directors. Let me introduce them to you and share a few examples of their efforts to make Meridian a premier place.

First. Safety services contribute to our outstanding quality of life. Police and Fire are doing their jobs assuring protection of our neighborhoods and businesses. They work with tight budgets and are able to perform miracles in some instances. We not only meet previous year's service levels, but each year we exceed them! We believe that our police and fire departments are second to none, that is no April Fools.

Let's begin with Chief Bowers and the **Fire** Department. Chief Bowers has been our full-time fire chief since 1992, and a veteran of more than 30 years with the Meridian Fire Department. Chief Bowers has led this department through tremendous growth from a volunteer to a full time professional department. He is stepping down as Chief to focus his attentions on facilities and operations. Thank you, Chief.

I would like to welcome and introduce our new Fire Chief, Ron Anderson. Chief Anderson comes to us from Nampa where he has served as their Fire Chief for the last seven years. He will bring great experience and leadership qualities to Meridian. I have had the privilege of seeing his passion and dedication to Meridian first hand. He will lead the Fire Department to the next level.

We were led in the pledge today by representatives from our Fire Department, the County EMS, and Ada County Sheriff's Department. I asked these safety professionals to join us today for a reason. These fine individuals showed what training and heroism, is all about when just over a month ago they risked their lives to save a young girl pinned under tons of steel. This was a true example of quality cooperation among emergency responders. We count on that, professionalism and collaboration, across agency lines. Thank you.

Our 30 firefighters had over 7100 hours of in-house training. This training is apparent each time they respond to a call they save lives and property.

The Meridian Fire Department is a city/rural district that protects 54 square miles. They responded to 2,612 calls last year. Seconds count when lives are at risk; with the opening of Station 3 last year the department's overall response time improved to 5 minutes and 21 seconds. In the first two months of this year we are at 5 minutes and 5 seconds.

Partnerships continue to be a cornerstone to this department's success. The Meridian Rural Fire Protection District relationship has been critical to building Station 3 and the construction of Station 4 on S. Eagle Road to open by years end. They have been a driving force behind the Fire Safe House.

We are pleased to announce the opening of this facility. The Safe House will be open for students and members of the community to attend fire safety instruction and we will also offer courses in safe cooking and babysitting as well.

This year Meridian will hire 12 firefighter paramedics as we open Station 4 to allow better medical response with our partners, Ada County EMS. We will work closely with them for countywide medical training in basic and advanced life response. Currently an EMS unit is co-located at Fire Station number 2 and has improved medical response times.

Our **Police** Department, under Chief Musser's leadership, is gaining ground through better coordination, increased efficiency, technology, community outreach and reorganization to better serve our community. As a result we continue to be the safest community of similar size in Idaho.

This kind of success does not happen by accident; the department is proactive in dealing with issues we face. In fact, calls for service, have decreased over the last two years and the numbers of reported crimes stayed below the curve of our population increase. Our police patrol division, traffic teams, and detectives, schools, prosecuting attorneys office, mutual aid partners, and volunteers all work together to make sure our citizens are safe.

Training has been a priority with over 11,300 hours for our 53 officers.

The police department implemented the Crime Prevention Unit, achieving our goal of active involvement within the community. Our firearms education program; revitalization of our volunteer programs; and renewing our Neighborhood Watch programs are just a few examples of this commitment. Additionally, Meridian citizen, Connie Petersen, stepped up and is coordinating the efforts for our new dog adoption and care program.

The Police Department's "Spirit of Partnership" is also seen through the establishment of our Community Services Division as well as in our increased participation with the Ada County Sheriff's Office for drug enforcement, special operations (SWAT), information sharing, and the Critical Investigation Task Force.

Our Mayor's Anti-Drug Coalition has identified community assets and issues and has created important partnerships examples are the Boys & Girls Club and Drug Free Idaho. The Coalition has created focused areas for business, schools, civic/youth organization, and faith-based groups. This effort is a priority for our City. This month we will hire a half-time coordinator for our "war" on drugs.

One final project in Police I would like to highlight: our K9 training facility. The partnerships that the City is privileged to develop with our community members are endless. Primary sponsor, Hubble Homes, is gaining ground and is looking towards the first of May to break ground on this project. Basalite has agreed to donate the block to match the masonry of the Police building.

Our **Parks** Director, Doug Strong, would strongly suggest (forgive the pun) their Department's success over the last several years has been built on the relationships and partnerships that have developed over time. Some of the City's most important amenities are its parks, green spaces, from

tiny pocket parks and playgrounds that serve as points of neighborhood pride and enjoyment, to our larger parks that offer a variety of uses.

We firmly believe in parks and our commitment to them in this community. We must have places where neighbors can gather and our children and families can play. Our goal is to continue to develop these areas, along with our community partners, to give our community improved recreational opportunities.

Let me take a few minutes to highlight a couple of these projects:

Special recognition must go to Angela Lindig and the Adventure Island Playground group for their success in bringing a four-year dream to completion with Phase One that opened in Meridian Settler's Park last November. This was a community build, involving more than 300 volunteers. They raised \$500,000 for Phase One and are now working to raise an additional \$500,000 to add a zero depth water feature in partnership with Roaring Springs, adding climbing rocks and other features that will enable children of all abilities to play together a first of its kind in Idaho.

The west side of Settlers Park will see construction of an 8 field baseball/softball complex through our partnership with Meridian Youth Baseball/softball. MYB will be the host this July for the Cal Ripken Regional Tournament right here in Meridian another first for the state of Idaho. These partnerships are not only putting Meridian on the map, but Idaho as well.

The Police Activities League, PAL, is our partner in developing a soccer complex at a 30 acre park site on North Ten Mile road. Construction on the baseball and soccer complexes will begin this spring.

On the south side of I-84, Kiwanis Park is taking shape - this neighborhood park just south of Mountain View High School will have a fishing pond and a picnic shelter constructed from logs. Our Kiwanis, and in particular, Gordon Harris has dedicated countless hours in making this 9 acre park a reality and represents the positive community spirit that is very much alive in Meridian.

Storey Park is just completing a major facelift on the east side, adding much needed parking and safety features. Centennial Park is complete and has been a huge amenity to the Boys & Girls Club providing open grassy areas, basketball, and shaded picnic areas.

The Parks Department plans for 2005 will add 75 acres of developed parkland to the existing 92; increasing the acres per thousand residents from 2 acres to 3. We have added over 50 acre of private parks in neighborhoods, sized 2 acres or larger; through our ordinance requirements.

With impact fees produced by growth, over \$2.6m since 2001; valued partnerships, \$1.5m in the same period of time, and general fund investment, our park system continues to offer more for our neighborhoods and the city. Stayed tuned, there is more to come!

Fire, Police, and Parks are high profile and visible functions of our community. However, it's also the departments who work diligently behind the scenes that illustrate great customer service for the city.

The Idaho Statesman recently completed a week-long series on public information and open government. Our **City Clerk** Will Berg and his office take this role in responsiveness and customer service seriously. Their office handles an average over 100 calls per day. Each license, development application, minutes for every committee, commission and council meetings is processed, typed, filed and/or distributed through this office, many of these documents can be found on the city's website. Hundreds of thousands of pages of paper flow through this office. This Spring and Fall they will be focused on developing a new Records Management system. As well, they are the elections, arm of the city and are gearing up in preparation for City Council elections again this fall.

Last Fall, I made the announcement that brought our **City Attorney** services in-house and combined this critical function with the **HR Department** through the hiring of Bill Nary. I can't tell you what an important move that has been and what a tremendous team he has assembled. Ordinances have been updated, some dated as far back as thirty years, processes have improved, and better proficiency has been achieved. In the HR area, our employees have seen many positive changes in communication, outreach, and training.

The State of the City's finances are good: Thanks to the stellar oversight of **Finance** Director, Stacy Kilchenmann and her staff, and of course our Council watchdogs and Directors. They spend our dollar, as if it were theirs personally; and they turn back savings every year. Just ask our auditors, the city manages its finances very frugally. As a result, I am proud to announce that the city will be able to build a new city hall without having to go to our citizens to ask for financial help. We are in the infancy of planning this facility, I will say more shortly on this topic.

Whatever you would ever want to know about the state of our finances and more can be found on our website -- our new and improved, website. If you haven't signed on and checked it out, I would encourage you to do so. You will be amazed at what you can learn.

IT and utility billing are also a part of in this department. The website was a great example of community partnerships making a difference, Ryan Riley with CircleTree Media gave hours of his time and incredible talent.

As we are spread all over the city, communication is a challenge. We are working to implement a new mail server, streamline file access, and start the implementation of an intranet for internal city business that should help until we can all be under the same roof.

In **Planning**, Director Anna Canning, and staff are continually striving to improve customer service and proficiency through better processes and communication tools. We have made many positive strides in this department's delivery of services and planning.

Please let me take a minute to explain our planning process.

The city's comprehensive plan is a blueprint for our city's growth. We work diligently to shape the broad contours of growth and development according to public concerns through this document. This comprehensive plan and our city ordinances are our primary tools to manage growth and shape Meridian's future as desired by our citizens who helped craft it.

Developments begin with a pre-application meeting involving planning, public works, fire, police, schools, and sanitary services. Staff guides them on what the City's comprehensive plan envisions for the area. Applicants are informed where development is being encouraged and discouraged where services are not available, Note where the development is happening, it may not seem concentrated at ground level, but it is. Many applications are resubmitted until they comply with the expectations of the comp plan.

The roads and sidewalks are evaluated and managed by Ada County Highway District and they have their own process of review.

Throughout this process Meridian is meeting and exceeding many of our goals. We haven't attained them all; but in the areas we have direct responsibility, police & fire, parks, water and sewer - we not only meet but exceed services levels despite our rapid rate of growth. We have awesome staff!

In the indirect areas such as schools and transportation we are taking extraordinary steps to partner with these agencies to better cooperate with each other.

Our zoning ordinances, or the unified development code, are going through a total overhaul. Such undertakings typically take two years. Our process started in January '04 and we will begin the public hearing process on April 18th after 14 months of tedious work.

We have had a team of stakeholders working with this document, examining it from every angle you could imagine, this dedicated group has invested hundreds of hours. When complete, this will take many layers out of our process and bring incentives and results for the City. We will not compromise quality because of quantity. If developers have exciting, high quality projects that are consistent with our Comprehensive Plan, we want them to think of Meridian first.

Last year City Council approved more than 3,400 new residential units and approved the annexation and/or zoning of 373 acres of commercial and office zoning.

We have seen a greater diversity of housing types, particularly in the attached single family, duplex, and townhouse markets. Our densities, each year are increasing, another sign of a small town emerging into a city. Of the 1250 acres annexed this year the average density was 3.54; as a point of reference, the 257 acres that Boise annexed last year had an average density of 2.94.

Finally, with planning we are developing a greater vision for our comprehensive plan that will integrate the expanded North Meridian Plan, incorporate planning being done regionally with the ITD/Compass Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth processes, broaden our planning time frames, and examine areas south of Meridian identified through meetings with Boise, Kuna, and Nampa public works staff for water and sewer services.

Growth will continue, we manage it with good planning tools and following our plan

Growth will generally follow installation of services such as water and sewer. Our **Public Works**/City Engineering Department under Brad Watson's leadership oversees construction operation and maintenance of water and wastewater facilities, as well as the building department. Public Works reorganized last fall, improving proficiency and accountability. Department operations were separated into two distinct divisions: Development Services and Engineering. Roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated bringing greater accountability.

An example of the merit and efficiency gained can be found through the Ada County Surveyor's office scoring system. These figures show how well our plat review process works. Meridian has the highest number of plats and lots reviewed; has the lowest score (the lower the better) and the lowest average time of submittal to signature, high quality operation with faster results.

We have also established a unique relationship with IDEQ, not only with our fast track process, but in allowing them to waive review on some smaller projects upon Director recommendation, as well.

Our **Water** Department is proactively meeting the growing demands placed on the department. They completed three new wells over the last year, installing over 5 miles of new water main. Our well production in 2004 was up by 2.7% to 2.63 billion gallons, enough to cover 1 square mile almost 13' deep.

Meridian is recognized statewide for the depth and quality of our wells. They met the state's water quality requirements by 100 percent.

Their focus this year is immediate, preserving the City's municipal water rights for a planning horizon of 10 to 30 years. This application will be only the second such application in the state, protecting the City's post-1987 and future water rights in order to sustain our growth. We are also focusing on improving our cross-connection control program.

Operationally, we will transition from reading water meters with a hand held wand to a radio read system that will result in a long-range savings to the City in staffing.

In **Wastewater Treatment** we have a collection system of more than 250 miles of sewer lines and 13 lift stations. The completion of two major projects, the Black Cat and North Slough Sewer Trunks, will open up more than 2,000 acres to development.

The department has updated the sewer master plan and obtained IDEQ approval on the wastewater facility plan. The treatment facility has been designed and the upgrade will be completed, nearly doubling capacity, by mid 2007.

In December the assessment fee rate, a cost passed on to new growth, was increased by 108% for water and 41% for sewer that will be used for needed capital expansion projects and to reimburse developers for oversized lines they install.

Probably an understatement, but our **Building** department continues to see increased activity, single & multi family housing permits increased 45% from the year before; equaling 47% of the Ada County's total growth. Meridian added 38% more multi-family units than Boise this last year.

The commercial permit increases were 30% over '03 numbers; adding 1.3m total square feet. The highest value projects in Ada County were in Meridian with T-Mobile at \$8m, followed by Lowe's at \$6m. Combined value of construction, residential and commercial, was over \$420m compared to \$258m in '03.

All of this could not happen without the valuable partnerships we have mentioned; a strong belief in the City we have become; and dedicated city employees who work hard for our community and make things happen. Longtime employees Bruce Stewart (PW), Jean Moore and Lt. Gene Trakel (Police) total 95 years of service between the three of them, their long-time service to the City and community that has been invaluable. Please join me in expressing our thanks.

This is also an appropriate time to recognize the family members and our citizens that have served or are currently serving in the military. We would like to recognize, Officer Myron Severson, for his dedication to this country as well as the community, he is on active duty assignment with the Marine Corp Reserve deployed in Iraq and doing well.

Would those that have served our country, or are currently serving please stand, additionally those families with members in the military, would you please stand as well. We would like to thank you for your sacrifices for our country.

These sacrifices protect our freedoms that we must not take for granted.

This is a time of new possibilities in the City of Meridian

We are seeing people and businesses coming into our City.

This is all good news. The City of Meridian sees our schools and transportation agencies as partners in our success, extended departments of the City. We have strengthened our relationships and our planning; results will be better because of it.

We are also partnering with our future.

Will the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council members in the room please stand up. Thank you.

I invited these students here today for two reasons. One, they are our future leaders; these are the members of the Youth Advisory Council and, two, because I wanted them to remind all of us of something something we may sometimes lose sight of - our future leaders and next generation.

I want you to know that our future is in good hands. The Youth Council is in the infancy stages of making their presence known in the community; they represent three of our high schools. They first met in December and have already achieved some milestones. I want to invite Tari Ferguson, from Mountain View High School, who is the chair, to talk with you a couple minutes about the direction they have set. Please welcome, Tari.

Thank you, Tari. These individuals are so outstanding. I am very excited to have our young adults involved in the future of their community.

Meridian is an attractive city and choice for families because of our schools. We must all cultivate a network of great schools. Great public schools, great private schools--great charter schools.

Thirty-three percent of our population are 18 and under. Approximately 80% of the growth in Ada County last year was in the Meridian School District. Our cities and the counties need to be full partners with the School District, 18, of their 40 schools, serve Meridian families.

The School District is a participant in our pre-application meetings for new developments. Our staff participates on their facilities committee. Councilmember Christine Donnell, is our former superintendent of the Meridian School District and brings a great perspective to the City's decision-making.

Schools are a focus of the Blue Print for Good Growth study. Our police officers are fully committed and located in the schools within our city boundaries. Communication between city leaders and school district leaders is strong. I have met personally with our public and private school leaders.

We need to prepare our children so they have a real opportunity to pursue their dreams. We need to prepare our children for good-paying jobs and to be good citizens. We are dedicated to working closely with our education partners to assure our schools are the best, and they are the best!

Meridian also enjoys working with our higher education partners. We have successfully worked with the University of Phoenix on several projects, BSU is a partner in our Water facility, and they both contribute in our economic development efforts

Transportation is a huge issue for the valley, and a great challenge for Meridian. Our approach has been one of collaboration, building partnerships, and in supporting sustainable Treasure Valley-wide solutions.

All of our elected leaders are involved on regional efforts for air quality, public transportation, as well as road improvement projects. Meridian has a dedicated staff member, Steve Siddoway, who works to coordinate our transportation needs with the various agencies that have decision making authority over our transportation network.

ACHD is the road department. They added 27.2 miles of new streets through 51 final plats in 2004, along with 3.9 miles of sidewalks. So far, during the first two months of '05; 8.5 miles have been added. Value - \$26 m paid by the development community, maintained by the taxpayers.

Road development and improvements are expensive and funding is limited. We not only have had to strengthen our communication relationships with our partners, we have had to be creative and look at alternative funding options. Let me give you a few examples.

Meridian is the only city that has put city general fund dollars on the table for road improvements. Because of this the Locust Grove overpass will be a reality in 2006. Our investment of \$1.8 m helped keep this project a priority - because of the partnerships between the City, ACHD, and ITD.

The Downtown Transportation Management Plan represents a successful collaboration between the City and ACHD. This project is unique, and will be presented at an upcoming conference of the Institute of Traffic Engineers.

Primarily, it represents an example of context sensitive design that balances the needs of both traffic flow and downtown revitalization. The final report is being edited and will then go through public hearings to amend our Comprehensive Plan. The study was jointly funded and our staffs are working together on ideas to phase the project and move it forward as quickly as possible.

The Ten Mile interchange has been a project of serious focus for the city over this last year. I was in front of the ITD Board twice last year, with the help of Compass staff, we were able to give very compelling data. Meridian has two interchanges; both shared with other communities and both connecting to state highways 55 & 69. These two interchanges serve a twelve mile stretch of I-84 between the Wye and Garrity Boulevard in Nampa; and more than 147,000 residents!

It's time we get the Ten Mile interchange; it will not only help relieve the congestion on Eagle and Meridian roads, but many of the vicinity roads as well. We have been vocal, we have support from ITD & ACHD and we believe we have the support of Western Ada and East Canyon County residents. It is time our citizens are vocal, that this is a priority.

These are the steps we are taking to help gain this interchange sooner rather than later. We have applied for FY06 federal appropriations for the EIS. The City and ITD have requested federal funds through the reauthorization of TEA-21, this was fifth on their statewide list and the only priority in the Treasure Valley. ITD funded the access study that will be complete by July. The environmental assessment will begin this month. The City of Meridian fully supports the Governor's proposal for GARVEE Bonds that will help this project become a reality. Private property owners have committed \$5 m to the project.

We would also like to recognize and give kudos to ACHD and proactive developers for allowing road projects to be constructed ahead of schedule through public/private partnerships, this is another first.

Eagle Road & Overland: Silverstone/El Dorado
Pine Ave, east of Eagle Road: Van Auker
Ustick Road & Eagle: Turnbull & Moore

In all of these cases the developers paid for the improvements and will be reimbursed by impact fees over time. We are exploring this same example of partnership for the Main / Meridian / Central / Waltman intersection.

I have highlighted only these three as examples of how working together can be beneficial. There are more and we expect to see many new ideas unfold through the Communities in Motion and Blue Print for Good Growth region-wide process. We not only look forward to the long-range planning aspects of the land-use and transportation, but for tools to assist in funding needed improvements as they are needed.

I have the privilege of presenting these two projects later this month at the Boise Metro Leadership conference along with ACHD Commission President John Franden. These projects will provide useful tools for both transportation and growth management.

I would like to close, briefly discussing two projects that we have been working on -- and will start to develop over the year to come.

Let me start with our public golf course. The Cherry Lane Golf Course has been leased since it was developed in the 70's. The lease is due to change hands this month, the buyer will be Boise Ranch Golf Course or LakeView Meridian Investors. They have committed to a number of needed improvements and have agreed to specific golf course maintenance standards. We are thrilled about the potential of this new partnership and the improvement of this community asset.

Earlier, I mentioned that the City is able to build a new city hall without asking our community for additional funding. The City completed a space study, detailing the city's needs for the next twenty years, and will plan for a 60,000 square foot facility. Doing business with Meridian will be easier with all our services under one roof. The city will partner with the County to provide a one stop shop, for our residents, as well as residents of West Ada County. The Department of Motor Vehicles is planned to be housed in this facility. A site selection process for a new City Hall is in the final stages for one of three potential downtown locations.

We also envision a civic center in downtown. This project is community initiated. A citizen focus group has been meeting to carry on the planning last fall to bring a community/civic center to Meridian. This group has been exploring possibilities, funding options and potential partnerships. A feasibility study is proposed and hoped to be completed by the end of the year; helping to detail funding partners and opportunities. The City Hall and civic/community center projects will no doubt continue the great movement and momentum of our City center's revitalization.

Meridian is all about community.

Our City values its citizens and our youth. Every year the City recognizes those unsung heroes that lift up our youth and support our families. Earlier this year the Governor recognized all of Idaho's Brightest Stars. Meridian's were present to receive greatly deserved accolades. The American Legion was one of our awardees. Would you please stand to be recognized?

Get involved, be part of this community. There are many events coming up. Participate in one of the many projects I have mentioned, or find your way to one of the many others.

I want to close, as I opened, by thanking everyone; everyone in this room, everyone in the business community, everyone in our neighborhoods for being part of the team that is making Meridian great. I'm proud of what we have accomplished this past year, and I hope that you are too. We've accomplished a lot, and we have great deal to show for our work.

We have made important progress in the last year: Meridian has earned respect as the region's true heart and soul.

I look forward to working with all of you during the coming year, dreaming great dreams and then working hard to make them a reality.

Thank you.