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CITY OF MERIDIAN
ANNUAL REPORT



CITY OF MERIDIAN





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TO THE PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN

The Live Love Grow campaign we pursued over the past year describes how we are building on Meridian's characteristics and strengths to provide a broad spectrum of pride to the people in our area. We have acted to make our neighborhoods more livable, to give our citizens and guests more reason to love our city, and to grow our local economy.

Each city department is dedicated to creating resourceful ways to leverage every dollar for maximum benefit while continuing to provide programs and services to people in our community. For many residents and visitors, the rich architecture of our downtown area represents the face of Meridian. Downtown development continues through projects that strengthen the economy and add to our city's historic and unique character. The plan to convert the Threefoot Building into a hotel will turn one of our state's landmarks into an economic asset once again. The addition of the Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience will bring new excitement and growth to our vibrant downtown.

Elsewhere in the city, the development of Phase 2 of Meridian Crossroads will greatly expand shopping opportunities and provide more retail and dining options. Throughout Meridian, new restaurants, medical clinics and hotels help us meet the medical, retail, industrial, cultural and business needs of neighboring communities. Meridian also continues to host a number of musical and cultural events bringing local and international attention to century-old venues. City Hall Lawn set the stage for the annual

Jimmie Rodgers Music Festival, 59Twenty Music Festival and Threefoot Arts Festival. Spectators watched thousands of athletes parade into downtown Meridian for the Opening Ceremonies of the State Games of Mississippi. Local rap artist Big K.R.I.T. performed in the historic Temple Theatre. The MSU Riley Center for Education & Performing Arts continues to host a variety of top-tier concerts and other performances.

Efforts to lead in promoting health, fitness and recreation took a spotlight as the Mayor's Health and Fitness Council developed programs aimed at encouraging healthy lifestyles. Residents participated in the Meridian Movement Health Fair and took to walking trails in an effort to reach personal health goals. Major projects through the Parks & Recreation Department focused on community growth and expanded activities. The opening of the Highland Park Splash Pad and plans for the new Velma Young Community Center speak to our commitment to quality of life and belief in our community's future.

This report underscores the commitment by our management and employees to meeting the needs of the people of Meridian. Live Love Grow: It's how we move confidently into the future.



Percy Bland, III
Mayor of Meridian

CITY COUNCIL

Dr. George M. Thomas – Ward 1

New developments include the openings of new facilities for Berkley Southeast Insurance Group and the United Way of East Mississippi Volunteer Center, improvements at Brookdale Meridian, the move to new offices by the Community Foundation of East Mississippi, the opening of The Club 24 fitness center and the growth of the new Free Clinic of Meridian. The success of the volunteer-driven Free Clinic demonstrates the community involvement that is carrying the city forward.

K. Dustin Markham – Ward 2

The planned new Velma Young Community Center will help meet the educational and recreational needs of area youths and adults. Ground has already been broken on the \$2 million facility, which marks the first time the City of Meridian, Lauderdale County, the Meridian Housing Authority and the East Mississippi Business Development Corporation have worked together on a project in a predominantly African American part of the city. The new center will host a variety of classes and programs and will be rentable for community events.

Barbara Henson – Ward 3

Council member Henson applauds plans for the new Splash Pad at Highland Park and the many other projects that support community growth and development. The children of Meridian join her in appreciating the new amenity. Other projects in the works include updates to streets and sidewalks and improvements to roads. Such infrastructure upgrades may not be as much fun as the Splash Pad, but they too improve the quality of daily life for Meridian's residents and visitors.

Kim Houston – Ward 4

The revitalization of James Chaney Memorial Ball Park and opening of the New Destiny Daycare & Learning Academy served as major projects for Ward 4. The park, which had been a neglected patch of grass for years, is now a well-groomed ball diamond, perfect for baseball, softball or kickball. Councilwoman Houston focused on implementing programs and community outreach projects with civic organizations and local churches. Such partnerships help make government more responsive to those it serves and give citizens a greater stake in helping the city grow and prosper.

Randy B. Hammon – Ward 5

The groundbreaking for the Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience (MAEE) along with downtown revitalization efforts served as catalysts for community growth and development. The MAEE, a new kind of immersive, hands-on museum showcasing the state's creative artists past and present, is projected to draw 125,000 to 150,000 visitors to downtown Meridian each year.







Together, as partners,
we all help make
Meridian an even
better place to live.

TO SERVE

They do the tough jobs. The necessary jobs. They keep us, our property and our money safe. They work to take risk out of our lives. Every day, they do everything they can to help make Meridian a great place to live.

The citizens of Meridian seldom realize all the ways in which city employees make everyday life run smoothly. The members of the Police, Fire, Public Safety & Training and Public Finance & Records departments are fine with that. They derive satisfaction from serving quietly, behind the scenes.

We can count the number of police arrests, but not the lives turned around or saved by an officer chatting one-on-one at a civic group meeting or teaching schoolchildren how to resist drugs. Or a technician properly installing a vehicle's child safety seat.

We can't quantify the countless blazes that never happen because Fire Department members educate adults and children about fire safety and enforce fire codes and ordinances — and provide free smoke detectors to those who can't afford them.

We can only guess at the number of people safeguarded and the amount of property preserved across the state of Mississippi by the cutting-edge training that responders received at the Meridian Public Safety Training Facility.

We don't know exactly how much money the people of Meridian get to keep in their pockets because the Finance & Records Department keeps the city's bond rating strong and constructs conservative, efficient budgets that allow improved services without tax increases.

We do know this: Many men and women work hard every day to make it easier for their neighbors and friends to live their everyday lives. We proudly recognize their contributions.

POLICE

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Partnerships make up an essential part of everyday life in any community. We have aggressively sought partnerships with other official entities and with the citizens we serve in order to keep improving our law enforcement efforts.

In 2015, we partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the federal Drug Enforcement Administration and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to address drug and gang activity in our area.

The effectiveness of our interstate highway patrol efforts led to a partnership with Jones and Hancock counties to assist in their interstate patrol efforts. Our Interstate Team also received federal credentials from the Department of Homeland Security for incidents relating to Homeland Security matters, such as human trafficking and terrorist activities.

We gave our interstate patrols another boost by purchasing Tag Readers, which automatically scan car tags and check law enforcement databases to see if the vehicle is suspected of association with criminal activity. The readers are helping us combat drug transportation and other illegal activities.





We also upgraded our technology by purchasing body cameras for all of our personnel and a Firearm Training Simulator (FATS). The simulator puts officers in realistic shoot/don't shoot scenarios that they may face on the street. It sharpens both decision-making skills and firearms proficiency.

Perhaps our most important partnerships are those that we form with our community.

In 2015, we partnered with the Meridian Housing Authority to provide a full-time Liaison Officer to establish neighborhood watch programs and address criminal activity at Housing Authority sites. We partnered with the East Mississippi Boys and Girls Club and Mississippi State University to secure a grant for Project H.O.P.E. to help revitalize the East End area of the city.

We started a Bike Patrol program, allowing officers to nimbly make their way through crowds at events. We added an additional officer to the East Mississippi Drug Task Force. We held our first two Junior Police Officer Academy classes for kids, helping them understand our work and showing them that we are their friends.

Together, as partners, we all help make Meridian an even better place to live.



FIRE

Security looms large among our everyday concerns. To protect our citizens, we at the Meridian Fire Department continue to step up our professionalism and grow our many technological capabilities.

Last year, we addressed our staffing challenges by graduating two Basic Fire Fighter Classes. Each nine-week class achieved a 100% graduation rate. In addition, three of our officers graduated from the prestigious Mississippi Executive Fire Officer Program. This yearlong course focuses on management and administrative skills, research techniques and data analysis.

We increased firefighter safety and added extra weapons to our firefighting arsenal by acquiring five thermal-imaging cameras, bringing our total to seven.

Our very successful Camp Fire Academy again helped strengthen our bonds with the community. The annual academy, a weeklong summer day camp, gives children ages 8-12 a hands-on look at what we do and teaches them techniques for preventing and coping with fires and other emergencies.

We actively promoted the city and the Meridian Fire Department at several job fairs throughout the year.

Our continual efforts to make sure we're operating as effectively and efficiently as possible led us to install radiant gas heaters in the engine bay at Station 1 along with a walk-through overhead door. A built-in pedestrian door allows the main overhead door to remain shut as people go in and out. Both measures reduced our energy costs.

For the coming year, the Meridian Fire Department pledges to continue to stay ahead of the ever-evolving emergency threats to our lives and property, making Meridian an even safer place to live.





weapons and tactics (SWAT) training to teen driving classes. Usage for the year by all public and private entities totaled 3,426 hours. That's an average of more than 65 hours per week.

One of the highlights was hosting and participating in a State Wide Full Exercise that challenged more than 100 responders by testing their entire skill sets. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and Mississippi Office of Homeland Security organized the exercise.

Thanks to funding from Mississippi Homeland Security, we continued our partnership with the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR). That allows us to certify emergency responders through a nationally recognized association. We hosted an Advance Search and Rescue/Search and Rescue Technician Level One Instructor/Evaluator class and NASAR Tracking Awareness training session that resulted in 18 responders receiving certificates. California has only one person in the entire state certified to that level through NASAR.

Residents of Meridian and the surrounding area can go about their daily lives with peace of mind, knowing that if an emergency should ever arise, those who respond will have state-of-the-art training to handle whatever happens rapidly, appropriately and safely.

PUBLIC SAFETY & TRAINING

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When emergencies strike, taking time to plan can cost crucial minutes — and lives. That's why emergency responders receive continual training so they know instantly how to react in any life-or-death situation. Once again this year, the Meridian Public Safety Training Facility proved its worth as the premier training resource in Mississippi, and one of the best in the nation.

In 2015, the facility hosted everything from police special



FINANCE & RECORDS

For the 19th consecutive year, the Finance & Records Department earned the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. The City also received an unmodified opinion for its comprehensive annual financial report for the fiscal year that ended September 30, 2015. This is the best opinion that an auditor can issue.

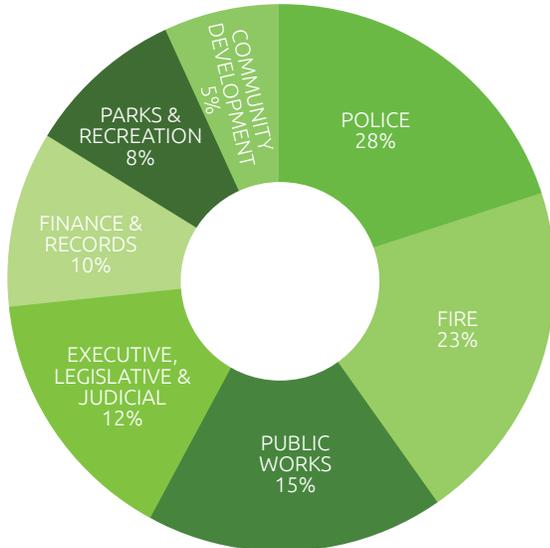
Meridian's conservative financial policies help make the city a great place to live. The fiscal year 2015 and 2016 budgets required no tax increase for residents or businesses. The City also maintains excellent bond ratings of Aa3 from Moody's Investors Service and A+ from S&P Global Ratings. These ratings allow the City to save money by issuing bonds for major projects at low interest rates.

The Finance & Records Department continues to add more efficient services, trying to make life a little easier for the people we serve. New software allows the payment of both utility bills and business license renewal fees online by credit card or e-check.



2015 GENERAL FUND DEPARTMENT EXPENDITURES

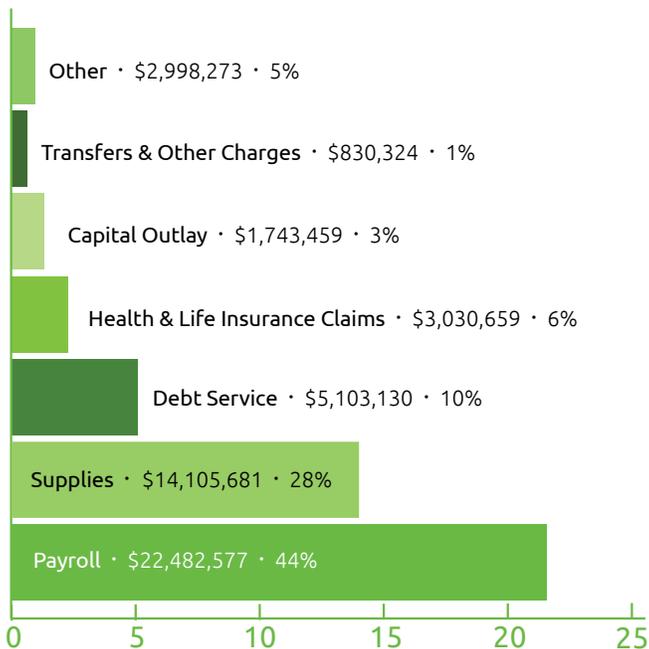
For fiscal year ending September 30, 2015



Police	\$7,586,202
Fire	\$6,920,358
Public Works	\$4,571,955
Executive, Legislative & Judicial	\$3,658,327
Finance & Records	\$2,905,666
Parks & Recreation	\$2,486,038
Community Development	\$1,622,946

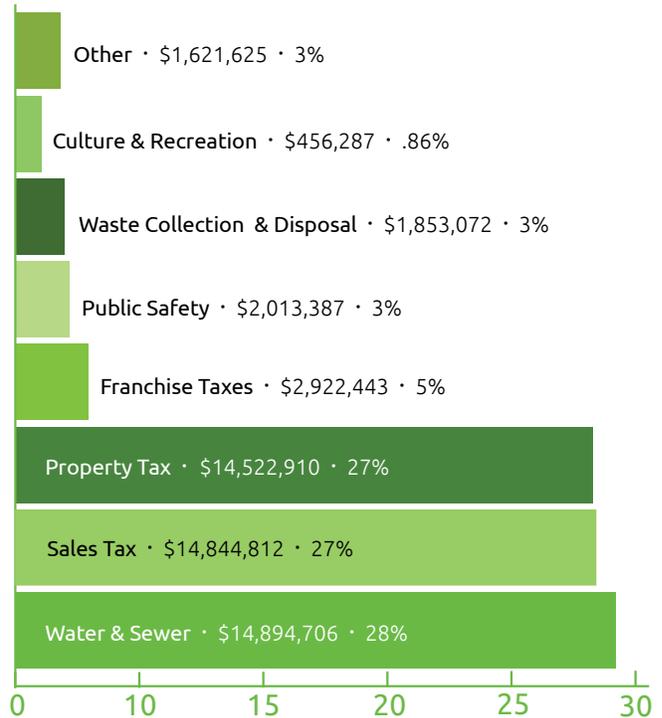
2015 USE OF FUNDS

For fiscal year ending September 30, 2015



2015 FUNDS FROM ALL SOURCES

For fiscal year ending September 30, 2015





Love

We took significant, visible steps toward making Meridian a prettier, healthier, happier, more prosperous and even more lovable place.



TO INSPIRE

These departments make sure every resident can be proud of living in Meridian. Block by block, event by event, activity by activity, they show the city some love.

Love takes many forms. It expresses itself in acts of caring and concern, in an attitude of doing for others, in guidance and instruction when needed, and sometimes in pure joy.

The departments of Community Development, Public Works and Parks & Recreation are all in the business of making it easy to love life in Meridian. Most obviously, Parks & Recreation offers wide range of recreational and social activities, and the Cultural Affairs Division of Community Development promotes an ever-growing list of events. They make a point of reaching out to everyone, regardless of age, race, abilities, neighborhood or anything else — especially those who may historically have been underserved.

Those departments also facilitate ways

for people to help others. Coaches channel youthful energy into healthful pursuits. Festivals and other events enrich the city's cultural menu while raising money for worthy causes. Friends encourage each other to healthier lifestyles through the Mayor's Health & Fitness Challenge.

The Planning Division of Community Affairs keeps Meridian a Tree City USA by encouraging the planting of trees. Even zoning and code enforcement helps make the city more lovable by clearing away blight and ensuring that structures are safe and won't endanger residents, visitors or neighbors.

And everyone loves the magical machine known as the Dentzel Carousel, which has the power to turn a senior citizen back into a laughing child again. Parks & Recreation keeps it spinning all year round.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Community Development Department touches the lives of Meridian citizens every day. The Cultural Affairs Division helped coordinate more than 270 events during 2015 that collectively provided millions of dollars in economic impact. If you attended a festival, athletic event, parade, block party, trolley tour, auditorium event, holiday festivity or other celebration, then we helped put that smile on your face.



We also organized the Mayor's Health and Fitness Advisory Council, dedicated to encouraging healthy eating, fitness and preventive health. The council sponsored a health fair on the City Hall Lawn in October.

The Building & Inspection Division helped brighten the face of Meridian. To help facilitate the boom in new and remodeled commercial and residential structures throughout the city, the division added a code enforcement manager and two additional code enforcement inspectors, upgraded the computer system for permits and payroll, and provided uniforms to add an additional touch of professionalism for all staff.

The Code Enforcement Division has been working to get dangerous eyesores either renovated or removed. Last year, 142 condemned structures were demolished. This year, the division plans to identify 150 to 200 additional abandoned and dilapidated structures for demolition. It plans to address most or all such properties in the city within three years. The division will also target abandoned vehicles and piles of garbage and rubbish.

The Planning Division wrapped up its work on some projects, such as the renovation of the Holbrook Benevolent Association Building and the downtown drainage project to alleviate storm-related flooding, and began work on others, such as Threefoot Building renovations and the downtown streetscape pedestrian project for the African-American Business District.

Serving as staff for the Tree Commission, the division applied for and received the Tree City USA designation from the National Arbor Day Foundation for the 25th consecutive year. The Tree Commission also received the City Government of the Year Award from the Mississippi Urban Forest Council for the establishment of the Meridian Tree Bank.

All in all, we took significant, visible steps toward making Meridian a prettier, healthier, happier, more prosperous and even more lovable place.

PUBLIC WORKS

The Public Works Department works behind the scenes to maintain and improve the infrastructure that makes our community the kind of place we love. We take pride in doing our jobs effectively and professionally, usually without much recognition.

So we were surprised and pleased in 2015 to receive an important public honor. The Alabama-Mississippi Section of the American Water Works Association named the North Meridian Water Treatment Plant the Mississippi Plant of the Year.

We also embarked on a \$6 million project at the South Wastewater Treatment Plant for mechanical and electrical upgrades. Whether or not the plant eventually wins an award, the work is important to maintain and improve the quality of life for us all.

We developed a comprehensive street maintenance program and took the first step toward carrying it out by buying a crack sealer machine. The machine will save time and money by fixing street issues at an early stage, before they develop into much larger problems..



We're also working in partnership with Meridian Community College to create a training program for city employees.

We kept busy throughout the year, completing 1,197 of the year's 1,230 work orders by the end of 2015.

We also finished a very important program that we had been working on for some time: the Safe Routes to Schools project. In partnership with the Mississippi Department of Transportation, we built pedestrian walkways for children on their way to and from school. It's just one of the many ways, large and small, that the Public Works Department makes Meridian a better.





We also put a lot of time and effort into making our special events truly special. We take pride in the smiles of enjoyment we see.

PARKS & RECREATION

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Fun requires a lot of preparation and planning. At the Parks & Recreation Department, we work hard year-round to bring quality recreational activities and special events to all segments of our community.

Our crews keep ball field complexes, parks and other facilities throughout the city in great shape for a tremendous variety of athletic, social and special events. Putting on those events requires many hours of organizing by our staff. Summer programs alone include summer league basketball, summer league baseball, swimming, Home Run Derby, adult flag football and Pitch, Hit & Run.

Among our other programs are women's basketball, youth boxing, youth jujitsu, women's kickball and coed kickball. Whatever recreational activity people love, we try to provide it.

We also put a lot of time and effort into making our special events truly special. We take pride in the



smiles of enjoyment we see at such events as the Nickelodeon Day of Play at Highland Park, the Father-Daughter Dance, the Senior Gala, the Grandparents Appreciation Luncheon and Meet Santa at the Dentzel Carousel.



Two major new projects will help the people of Meridian love their community even more. Designs have been finalized for the Velma Young Community Center in Magnolia Park. The Mississippi Development Authority has approved a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant for construction. The center will complement the existing center and pool house, adding more space for recreational and community activities and rentals. The center will also host after-school programs for local children.

For summertime fun, the Highland Park Splash Pad will feature a large water play area and rentable activity space for parties and special events.

At the Parks & Recreation Department, we're lucky. We get to see the payoff for our hard work: people of all ages, from all parts of our community, loving the opportunities we've created for them.



*City's comprehensive
action plan for growth:
building on the past,
progressing confidently
into the future.*

TO GROW

When we grow, we create more for everybody. That simple truth drives us to seek every opportunity to build on what we have here in Meridian and make it even greater.

Perhaps the most striking symbol of our commitment to growth, and certainly the tallest, is the Threefoot Building, the 16-story historic landmark that dominates our downtown skyline. Ascent Hospitality Management Co., LLC, bought the beautiful Art Deco building from the city in January and plans to convert it to a Courtyard by Marriott hotel of at least 120 rooms.

Renovation work should start as soon as the Mississippi Department of Archives and History finishes its permitting process, perhaps as early as this fall. The MDAH must approve changes because the building is an official Mississippi Landmark. The hotel will help fill a critical need for lodging

to accommodate the explosion of visitors that the Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience will bring when it opens just a few blocks away in 2017.

Also downtown, Mississippi State University-Meridian began holding classes this spring in the Rosenbaum Building, former site of a Kress department store. Along with the Deen Building (former home of a Newberry's department store) and the MSU Riley Center, the Rosenbaum Building makes up MSU-Meridian's Riley Campus. The still-growing campus houses the university's Division of Business and kinesiology program, among other educational offices and programs.

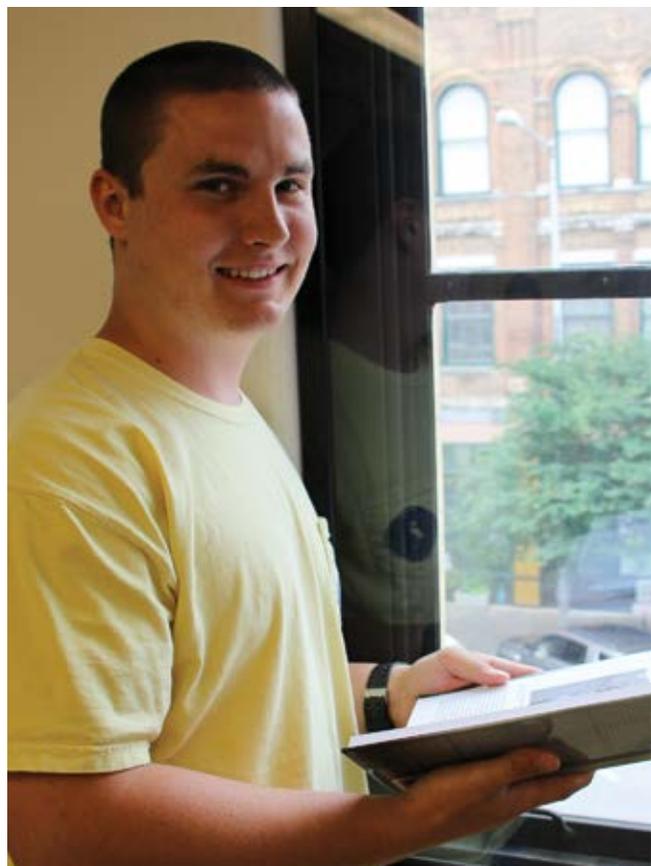
COMMITMENT TO GROWTH

The Riley Campus has already brought tremendous energy and growth to the heart of our city. It has succeeded by tapping Meridian's greatest assets: the intelligence, diversity and creativity of our people. A new educational partnership, just announced at the Riley Campus itself, further augments this wellspring of progress. MSU has joined forces with East Mississippi Community College and Meridian Community College to increase collaboration on nine baccalaureate degree programs.

The agreements will help students pursuing an associate's degree at EMCC and MCC to continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree from MSU. That will draw students to Meridian from throughout the region. MCC president Scott Elliott said the partnership would spur economic development. "This is a strong signal to prospective industry that we are serious about higher education opportunities in east Mississippi and west Alabama," he said.

The City of Meridian pursues growth opportunities in every way that we can. Even relatively small improvements to our quality of life can pay big dividends when they attract visitors and new residents, and inspire our young people to stay and contribute their talents to their hometown rather than seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Our city is rising again, and the growth is coming from within. It flows from the restless imaginations and can-do spirit of those who call the city home. We're taking charge of our own destiny.









Encouraging a vibrant cultural life strengthens our creative economy. Fostering arts education and lifelong learning, and promoting the impact and value of culture strengthen Meridian as a regional cultural destination.

Two examples show the increasing range of festivals and events. The annual Jimmie Rodgers Music Festival continues to grow, bringing thousands of new and returning visitors and providing a substantial economic boost each May. The Earth's Bounty Festival, created in 2012, lets local food producers and artists showcase their products the first Saturday of every month from April through November.

Meridian's largest park, beautiful Bonita Lakes, becomes an even more enticing natural escape through the revitalization of its walking paths. A \$700,000 Sidewalk Rehabilitation Grant from the Mississippi Department of Transportation will allow construction of 1.5 miles of Americans with Disabilities Act-certified sidewalks on the west side of Meridian, between Highway 19 and 71st Place, enhancing safety and community pride.

The City has been working diligently to line up community partners to renovate Planet Playground, a 10,000-square-foot playground in Northeast Park. Community volunteers built it in 1999, so it's due for refreshing. To polish this jewel of the Queen City, we plan to incorporate an ADA area so that all children, regardless of disabilities, can have the opportunity to play.

Meridian will also renovate another of its treasures, this one known nationally and even internationally. The historic Dentzel Carousel House, which has sheltered the enchanting Dentzel Carousel in Highland Park since 1909, will get an upgrade to provide better accommodations for parties and tours and greater energy efficiency. The house is the only remaining carousel building built from a Dentzel blueprint.

The update will help preserve the carousel itself. And it epitomizes the City's comprehensive action plan for growth: building on the past, progressing confidently into the future.





Painting by: Cooper French