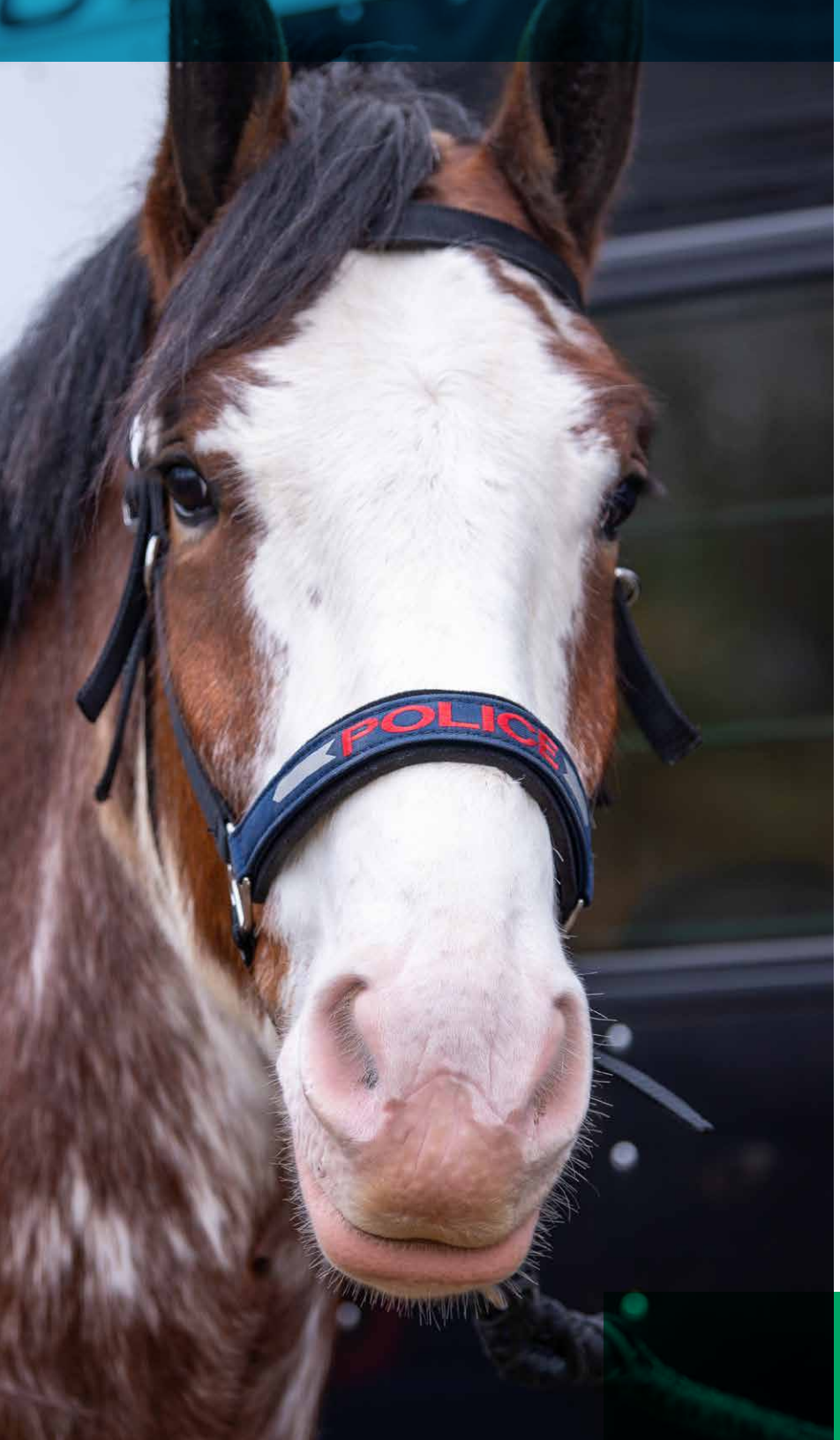

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

CITY OF MERIDIAN

WELCOME TO MERIDIAN
HOMETOWN OF
David Ruffin
the Temptations

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CITY OF MERIDIAN

MAYOR'S LETTER

To the Citizens of Meridian

The year 2020 has been a year of challenge and opportunity.

As Meridian and Lauderdale County were faced with increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases, local hospitals were stretched to the limits, and added stress was placed on healthcare workers, local businesses, and residents. However, we still continued to build on Meridian's character and strengths to provide residents with better jobs, better infrastructure, safer neighborhoods, and a better quality of life. Each city department remained dedicated to creating resourceful ways to leverage every dollar for maximum benefit while continuing to provide programs and services to people in our community.

In 2020, Meridian celebrated local talents Todd Tilghman, who was voted winner of NBC's "The Voice," and Jamal Roberts, runner-up on BET's "Sunday Best." Momentum continues with major developments including the Mississippi Children's Museum-Meridian, the Threefoot hotel, Threefoot Brewing, and the Castle corporate headquarters in the heart of downtown Meridian.

Certainly, we have had challenges throughout the year, but our mission is to keep the momentum going so the energy continues to move us forward.

The year 2021 will be a year of opportunity and hope. Our team is focused on enhancing livability by paving streets throughout Meridian and keeping our community safe. Our goal is to make Meridian a place where people will want to live, work, and raise a family.

Percy Bland, III
Mayor of Meridian

EXECUTIVE

Percy Bland, Mayor
Eddie Kelly, Chief Administrative Officer
Chrissie Walker, Human Resources Director
Stacey Thompson, Equal Opportunity Officer
Sid Barnett, Risk Manager
Julia Norman, Government Affairs
Michelle McDonald, Personnel Technician

CITY COUNCIL

GEORGE THOMAS
WARD 1

DWAYNE DAVIS
WARD 2

FANNIE JOHNSON
WARD 3

KIM HOUSTON
WARD 4

WESTON LINDEMAN
WARD 5

1860
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
CITY OF MERIDIAN
1914

POLICE

Chris Read, *Chief of Police*

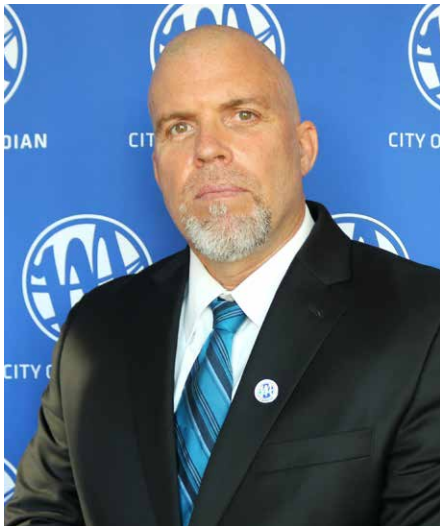
Meridian Police Department has brought back its Mounted Patrol Unit. We have two beautiful Clydesdales, Blayze and Maverick. Cpl. T. McKenzie and Officer B. McNeese are assigned to our full-time unit. Our mounted unit will patrol our downtown district along with all of our various parks, all scheduled parades and similar events, and school events.

We have also started our Explorer program this year. One of the most important aspects of effective community policing is investing in our youth. With this program, young people will have an opportunity to work alongside our police officers and learn the different aspects of the job. They will also have an opportunity to work with the mounted unit.

We have made great logistical improvements by placing over 64 cameras throughout the city, with such functions as gunshot detection, license plate recognition and pan/tilt/zoom, at no cost to the taxpayer. We understand that crime will occur, but there are things we can do logistically to help deter and prevent it as much as possible.

We have a department that has become proactive when addressing crime and safety. We have joined with our federal and state partners, and neighboring agencies through memorandum of understanding agreements, to help reduce crime against persons and property. We have also reached out to our various community leaders to work with us in this effort.

Officer Ladarious Spivey was sworn in as a Marion Police Officer. He was also the City of Meridian's honorary guest at the swearing-in ceremony of Chief of Police Chris Read. Officer Spivey has had and continues to have a profound effect on our law enforcement community. We are honored to have him as one of our representatives.



FIRE

Ricky Leister, *Fire Chief*

In the last year, MFD has accomplished the following projects:

1. Received a new E-ONE rescue pumper (this is a Heavy/Light Rescue apparatus that also has the ability to function as a frontline pumper if needed).

2. Graduated MFD's first Shift Friendly EMT class (12 students; all passed the class).

3. Successfully conducted the first on-shift delivery of the IFSAC accredited Apparatus Driver Operator (17 students; all instructors were MFD personnel).

4. Saw 18 firefighters receive honors from the state and city for their actions taken at emergency incidents they responded to.

5. Completed phase I of an HVAC system upgrade at Station 1.

6. Started open application period for entry-level firefighters (which allows individuals to complete an application for hire anytime throughout the year).

7. Initiated two-platoon shift schedule (80 personnel for full manning vs. 102 for three shifts; 48 hours on/48 hours off, with two consecutive "Kelly days" allowing six consecutive days off every 28-day cycle).

MERIDIAN FIRE & RESCUE
Pierce
ANDERSON REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

PUBLIC SAFETY & TRAINING

Doug Stephens, *Director*

1 Coordinated distribution of disinfection, personal protective equipment, and sanitation supplies for the departments of the City of Meridian. Also distributed supplies to the community as supplies were available from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. All City of Meridian departments have face masks, gloves, face shields, hand sanitizer, and disinfection supplies.

2 Applied for and managed grant funds of $1,266,517 for COVID-related response, of which we have received reimbursements of $983,152. These funds have supported the personnel costs for employees that had to be off due to exposure and when the City was on limited staffing. Funds have supported the cost of personal protective equipment, disinfection supplies, and sanitizer. Every department has been provided an electrostatic disinfection machine in order to safely disinfect their departments buildings and equipment, resulting in the City not having to contract with a vendor to provide these services. Fifty-seven laptops have been purchased to increase each department's ability to have employees work from home when necessary for the safety of all our employees and customers. In departments where the

community comes in close contact with employees, temporary glass windows have been added to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Currently, the department is coordinating the bid process to update the audio-visual capabilities of the City Hall Auditorium in order to ensure the citizens' ability to participate in open meetings while following the CDC guidelines for social distancing and large gatherings.

3 Applied for and managed federal grant funds of $433,842 for training, equipment, and supplies. Training grants have allowed the department to provide training to over 60 fire departments, 30 police departments, and numerous other private and public partners in search and rescue or active shooter response. The police grants have allowed for the purchase of bulletproof vests for new police officers and all SWAT team members. The police department has also received new radios and gas masks for their SWAT team from these funds.

4 Worked with the Mississippi Office of Homeland Security to become a training hub for law enforcement active shooter training in the state of Mississippi. Active shooter training has been occurring all across Mississippi for years. This year the Meridian Public Safety Training Facility worked with the Office of Homeland Security to provide an outdoor course that will use our open range areas and up to five acres of wooded areas. We are proud of our continued nationally recognized programs with the Texas State ALERRT active shooter training programs, NASAR search and rescue training programs, and The Tactical Games.

5 In March 2020, our training was halted due to the novel coronavirus. Since the restart of training July 1 we have conducted 19 classes for 262 students.

FINANCE & RECORDS

Brandye Latimer, *Director*

Utility Billing Division Proposed Information

- Improved customer relations in the community by **95%** via on-site visits and phone calls as related to inquiries and complaints.
- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Utility Billing and Line Maintenance teams persevered to complete pulling Sensus meters and installing **1,639** Mueller meters around the city.
- Achieved **100%** actively monitoring water meters alerts daily via Mi.Net.
- Active water connections – **14,517**; active customers – **12,299**
- Cross-training of UTB has been full speed ahead for office staff and water service representatives to ensure effectiveness and efficiency for our customers.
- Reduced Arista billing of 4-digit zip codes by **98%**.
- Offered customers another option for payments – pay by phone.
- Billed statements totaled **$4,664,399.81** and number of bills mailed totaled **40,885**.
- Obtained an "A-" rating from S&P Global Ratings for the Special Obligation (Water and Sewer Revenue) Bonds, with a stable outlook.
- Purchased **57** laptops reimbursed by MEMA Coronavirus Relief Act funds to allow for remote operations due to COVID-19.

Issued and processed 16,354 service orders:

- Referrals to line maintenance – **117**
- Meet customers for meter problems – **24**
- Fire hydrant installations – **37**
- Inspect premises – **273**
- Leak adjustments – **838**
- Change meter box lids – **22**
- Check meter for problems – **1,078**
- Delinquent offs – **2,999**
- Delinquent ons – **2,404**
- Meter leaks – **196**
- Meters locked – **579**
- Pulled meters – **856**
- Customers door tagged – **117**
- Customer transfers – **3,729**
- Various other service orders – **3,085**

- Worked with bond attorneys and advisors to issue:
  - **$41,000,000** Special Obligation (Water and Sewer Revenue) Bonds for EPA consent decree related sewer projects
  - **$6,000,000** General Obligation Bonds for paving projects and street maintenance equipment

2020 GENERAL FUND
DEPARTMENT EXPENDITURES

For fiscal year ending September 30, 2020

REVENUES	
Licenses & Permits	$3,026,520
Intergovernmental	$14,928,520
Charges for Services	$4,491,500
Police Fines & Forfeitures	$450,000
Miscellaneous	$518,000
Amount Necessary to Be Raised by Tax Levy	$12,373,577
Total General Fund Available Cash & Anticipated Revenues	**$35,788,117**

Water & Sewer Fund	$16,381,661
Lakeview Golf Course	$280,000
Concessions	$25,508
Union Station	$387,233
Waste Collection & Disposal	$2,533,384
Public Safety & Training Facility	$703,227
Arts District Parking Garage	$52,000
Total Enterprise Funds	**$20,363,013**
Debt Service Fund	**$5,100,000**
Total Revenues for All City Funds	**$61,251,130**

EXPENDITURES	
General Government	$3,775,045
Finance & Records	$3,480,708
Community Development	$1,656,117
Parks & Recreation	$2,764,529
Public Works	$8,195,390
Police	$8,660,396
Fire	$7,255,932
Total General Fund Expenditures	**$35,788,117**

Water & Sewer Fund	$16,381,661
Lakeview Golf Course	$280,000
Concessions	$25,508
Union Station	$387,233
Waste Collection & Disposal	$2,533,384
Public Safety& Training Facility	$703,227
Arts District Parking Garage	$52,000
Total Enterprise Funds	**$20,363,013**
Debt Service Fund	**$5,100,000**
Total Expenditures for All City Funds	**$61,251,130**

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Laura Carmichael, *Director*

Significant commercial development, like the Threefoot Brewing, Puckett Rental, Hype, and Castle Corporate Headquarters, has produced astounding increase in the construction value of permits issued by the Inspection Division. A vibrant and successful downtown is bringing an $87 million-dollar investment to our city, with more new developments and projects that will continue the growth and strengthen our economy.

In 2020, the Building and Inspection Division completed more than 4,675 inspections and issued 854 permits, including building permits with a total value of $154,776.45. The division serves to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community, including through codes and ordinances. The Code Enforcement Division served more than 400 Notices of Violations and addressed 133 Complaints/Citations, with 38 abandoned/dilapidated structures being condemned throughout the year. The division enforces codes and ordinances, makes field inspections to ensure compliance, and answers complaints from the public concerning plant growth, rubbish, garbage, and abandoned junked vehicles.

The Planning Division operates the City's Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission. Planning staff members

worked with developers of the Threefoot Brewing, Mississippi Children's Museum-Meridian, and the new Meridian Assisted Facility located on Highway 39 North. Thanks to the urban forestry program, the city was designated as a Tree City USA for the 31st consecutive year by the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Union Station, Meridian's Multi-Modal Transportation Center, continued to serve as a hub for transportation even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Greyhound bus lines, Amtrak, and Choctaw Transit saw decreased numbers throughout the year while maintaining convenient schedules for travelers. Union Station also serves as a venue for private rental functions and conferences.

In 2020, COVID-19 guidelines put a halt on large gatherings and many festivals and events held throughout the city. Despite pandemic challenges, the City's Cultural Division continued the popular Earth's Bounty Festival (under safe guidelines), providing a sense of stability for local farmers, vendors, and attendees.

Two drive-by parades were held honoring local music talents, Todd Tilghman and Jamal Roberts, as the community celebrated their successes in the entertainment industry. In addition to the Tree Lighting Ceremony held on City Hall Lawn, Meridian residents enjoyed the annual Christmas Parade as floats, marching bands, and festive dancers proceeded through downtown streets. The Community Development staff also worked with Threefoot Festival and State Games organizers to plan bigger and better events for 2021.

The City of Meridian Community Development Department focuses on economic progress, cultural vitality, safety, and property values through planning, development review, code enforcement, and active public engagement. Our main goal is making Meridian a great place to work, live, and play.

PUBLIC WORKS

High Smith, *Director*

Completed Highway 80 pedestrian project.
700 linear feet of sidewalk – funded through Mississippi Department of Transportation grant *(80% State/20% City match)*

Replaced and repaired 2,500 LF of sidewalks.
Replaced and repaired 1,750 LF of curb and gutter.
Funded by remaining 2016 bond

Paved 1.6 miles of residential streets.
Funded by $300,000 appropriation by City Council.

MDOT Paving Bond: $12.5 Million

Wastewater Treatment had several challenges during the past year and a few highlights:

- The wastewater treatment process was operating with only one digester blower for several months. A new digester blower and necessary piping and valves were placed in service December 2019. This created the proper mixing needed for sampling and treatment.
- A new effluent auto-composite sampler was placed in service January 2020. This eliminated the need to collect manual or hand samples for testing.
- A new emergency shut-off system was installed for the chlorine and sulfur dioxide feed systems in June 2020. The chemical feed system will shut off if there is a gas leak detected.
- For the first time since Mississippi Power started receiving our effluent, we successfully performed a reversed flow without any issues. This occurs when the flow from the East Meridian plant is pumped back to the main plant and both plants discharge to Sowashee Creek.

- We started sampling and testing for the next permit reapplication cycle. This occurs every five years, and the new permit will be effective August 2021.
- We received one new vehicle and lawn mower for the wastewater division.

However, the Wastewater Treatment Plant constantly had process control issues and equipment failures:

- Approximately half of the primary clarifiers are operational, and only a portion of the secondary clarifiers are fully operating properly. To keep an optimal hydraulic or flow balance, these tanks remain on line and allow water to flow through the tank, without the collector boards operating.

There were successes and challenges with staffing:

- The water/wastewater operators received a pay increase.
- Majority of Public Works department staff are considered essential workers. We operated under reduced staffing due to COVID and hiring issues.
- We had several part-time employees; however, we were unable to retain the majority of them to become full-time employees. The new employees we received were transferred from another division.
- Division 261 completed Phase I of the treatment plant upgrades; $932,000 was spent upgrading and repairing the filters at the North Plant. Phase II, a $4.3 million project, was planned. Construction should start in early spring 2021.
- Bonita Lakes hosted a lot fewer events due to the COVID situation but was still highly used by the public.

PARKS & RECREATION

Trent Posey, *Director*

2020 Accomplishments

Unfortunately, the majority of our programs were cut due to the pandemic. We continued to look for ways to provide safe services to this community.

Top 5 Accomplishments

1. **Lakeview irrigation agreement and implementation (currently in process).**
2. **Lakeview greens approval and implementation (prep work is currently being done, and new greens will be installed in May).**
3. **East Coast Sox baseball agreement and facility upgrades.**
4. **Phil Hardin Park renovation.**
5. **Drainage issue resolution at Planet Playground (Jeannie's Place).**

Notable Accomplishments

1. Reached a multiyear agreement with East Coast Sox baseball. This agreement not only brought a lot of traffic to Meridian, but also improved our facility in the process. The fields look much better after the improvements. This will continue over the next few years.
2. Received approval to fix the irrigation system at Lakeview as well as rebuild greens. The irrigation upgrade has already begun. The greens will begin in May.
3. Phil Hardin Park:
   - Old press boxes have been removed and fencing has been replaced.
   - We are now asphalting all the common areas.
   - All bleachers have been ordered and will be delivered on-site as soon as asphalt is completed.
   - Batting cage nets have been purchased and are in the process of going up.
   - Bathrooms have been cleaned and repainted.
4. Batting cage nets have been replaced at Crestwood.
5. James Chaney Park:
   - A park sign was put up.
   - A basketball goal was put up.

6 Lakeview greens were overseeded with ryegrass for the winter months.

7 Sammie Davidson Sports Complex:

- Lights and wiring on several fields were fixed.
- All dugouts and bleachers were repainted.

8 Jaycee Soccer Complex – Lights were replaced on every pole with the exception of one due to a wiring issue.

9 We continued to run programs at the Meridian Activity Center in a limited role.

10 We continued programs and open gym at Velma Young Center in a limited role.

11 New drainage was installed and issues were resolved at Planet Playground.

12 The swimming pool was cleaned and swimming was offered this summer.

13 A ping-pong table was purchased for the Velma Young Center.

14 Fencing was fixed at Northeast Park Softball Complex.

15 An agreement with Raising Cane's has been reached on a Dog park. We are currently looking for the right location.

16 Northeast Park Tennis Center:

- Pickleball courts have been striped.
- Bathrooms have been cleaned and repainted.

17 Meridian Activity Center:

- Roof has been repaired.
- Yoga Room wall has been rebuilt.

18 New mulch was spread out across our playgrounds.

19 Highland Park has been cleaned up tremendously. Brush and trees have been cleaned up, parking lines have been repainted, and light poles have been replaced.

20 Introduced the "Have A Ball" Event where we at Parks & Recreation donated over 200 balls for kids In the community.

21 Most athletic fields have been overseeded and aerated this winter.

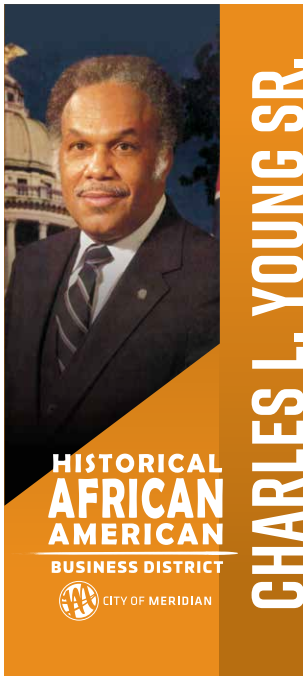
22 New nets and rims have been replaced on numerous basketball goals around town.

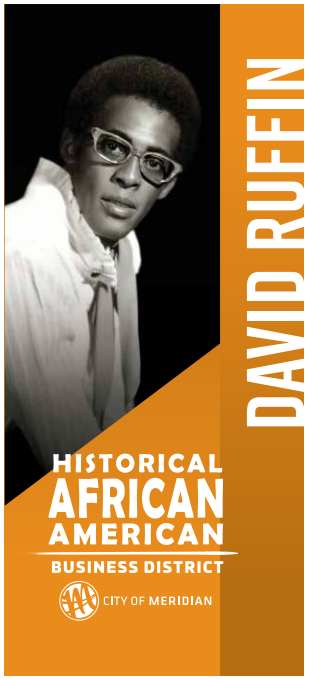
23 Youth and adult basketball leagues were played prior to the pandemic.

24 Camp Hoops – Our Special Needs Basketball Program was also carried out prior to the pandemic.

BILL AUTRY COURTS
at Northeast Park
Tennis Center
CITY OF
MERIDIAN
Percy Bland - Mayor
CITY COUNCIL
George M Thomas - Ward 1
Dwayne Davis - Ward 2
Fannie Johnson - Ward 3
Kimberly Houston - Ward 4
Weston Lindemann - Ward 5

THREEFOOT
GRETSCH


HISTORICAL
AFRICAN
AMERICAN
BUSINESS DISTRICT
CITY OF MERIDIAN
CHARLES L. YOUNG SR.


HISTORICAL
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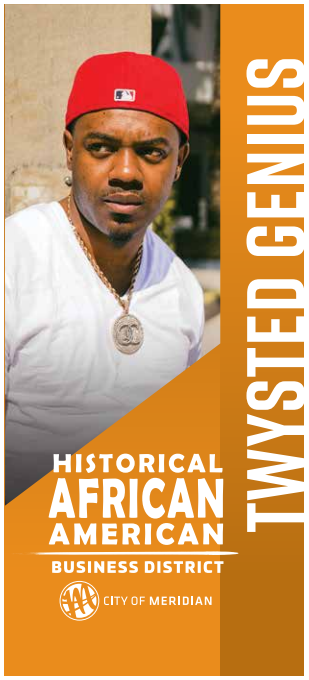
BUSINESS DISTRICT
CITY OF MERIDIAN
DAVID RUFFIN


HISTORICAL
AFRICAN
AMERICAN
BUSINESS DISTRICT
CITY OF MERIDIAN
TWYSTED GENIUS

MISSISSIPPI
CHILDREN'S
MUSEUM
MERIDIAN
GRAND
OPENING
SKY'S THE LIMIT

THREEFOOT BREWING
DONATE
LIFE

BankPlus
MISSISSIPPI
COUNTRY
MUSIC TRAIL
COUNTRY MUSIC
COMES OF AGE
Meridian's Jimmie Rodgers Day festivals of
the 1950s, the first held May 26, 1953, became
known as National Country Music Days,
marking a turning point in the nation's
enthusiasm for country music. Stars and fans
from every country music style, from
old-time hillbilly to pop balladry and rockabilly,
came together in this cele of music
that was t ns a orld.

MAYOR'S FAREWELL LETTER

Today marks the first day in a new chapter of my life, and it is one that I look forward to without any regrets.

On July 1, 2021, I will not wake up as the Mayor of Meridian, a town with the greatest people I've ever known, whether they love or hate you, a place that is heading in the right direction, and a place with the most potential to be great. On July 1, 2021, I will wake up to what I was born to be and missed a lot of memories with these past 8 years and be able to make up for lost time, I will wake up still the luckiest man in the world, as the husband of the most amazing woman I have ever known, and the father to the greatest kids a man can have.

There are so many people that I have to thank for their unwavering support and I intend to thank each one personally over the coming weeks, but I would be remiss if I did not mention them by name. My wife Deidre, my kids, and my parents have given me more love and support than I deserve. Johnnie "Boots on the Ground" Delk, a force to be reckoned with for giving countless hours to help people understand their voice should be heard. Mrs. Alexander and Mrs. Walker for their kind words and guidance. Dr George Thomas for first seeking to understand and working to find common ground. To all of the untiring public servants at the City who answer the call when called upon to help the citizens they are charged with serving.

We have accomplished many of our goals and too numerous to state here, but I am proud of the community center we built for the people of Velma Young; the numerous pay increases for our city employees, the iconic Threefoot Building so that she may continue to watch over the city for years to come; and I am proud of the lights we installed to pierce the darkness of our streets; the museums we built so that our children can see where we came from, and where we need to go; and for the public transportation system we partnered on and developed so that those less fortunate regain their independence and find the freedom they lost.

Over the coming weeks we will begin the process of readying the office for the Mayor-Elect. We will do all that we can to help him to be able to hit the ground running on day one.

Thank you for allowing me to serve you, to be a part of something great, to have the opportunity to be "The Man In The Arena." I am proud of the time the citizens have allowed me to serve and I am grateful for the friends I've made.

Sincerely,

Mayor Percy Louis Bland III

ANNUAL REPORT

CITY OF **MERIDIAN**

Contact

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