

2016 Lynchburg State of the City Address

PRELUDE: NEW HERITAGE SINGERS

VICE MAYOR'S INTRODUCTION OF THE MAYOR

Good evening, and welcome to the State of the City Address. I am Vice Mayor Ceasor Johnson. The talented group of young people who provided the entertainment tonight is the New Heritage Singers from Heritage High School. They perform under the direction of Ms. Barbara Elliott. Let's give them another round of applause. And now ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, the Mayor of the City of Lynchburg, the honorable Michael Gillette.

MAYOR GILLETTE

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow members of Council, City staff members, citizens and honored guests, welcome and good evening. As is fitting with events of this type, we would like to begin the formal portion of our program with the singing of the National Anthem. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Nia Dyke to the podium and stand as she sings our National Anthem.

ANTHEM

I have had the pleasure to hear Ms. Dyke, who is a senior at E.C. Glass High School, perform at a number of community events. I am always impressed by her talent and poise. Thank you very much Nia for sharing your talents with the City this evening.

Fellow Lynchburgers, it has been my great privilege to serve on City Council for the last 12 years and to serve as Mayor for the past four years. Since I have already announced that I will not be running for a fourth term on Council, I am sure that you can appreciate what a bittersweet moment this is for me—to deliver my final State of the City Address. I am honored to have served the City for the past dozen years, and I am humbled by the trust that the citizens of Lynchburg and my fellow Council members have placed in me. I have enjoyed my time on Council, and I am proud of the work that I have done. And although I am sure that I would enjoy another election and another term, I believe that it is appropriate to encourage a rotation of Council members. I will miss the work, but the hardest part of stepping away from this position will be the loss of opportunities to work with so many gifted and giving people. Lynchburg is replete with caring citizens who give of themselves in often very quiet ways to make our community better. We will begin tonight's festivities by recognizing a small group of exceptional individuals.

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AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Tracy Baker – Turner Perrow

After moving to Lynchburg, Tracy Baker decided the best way to make friends was to volunteer. She did so by getting involved with her children's schools and served as volunteer coordinator and newsletter editor for Paul Munro, RS Payne and Dunbar Middle Schools. Currently, she is the PTO President for EC Glass and assists at the Guidance Office and copy room. She has served as president for the Lynchburg Symphony Youth Orchestra and is also the concert program editor. Tracy has coordinated Red Cross blood drives, volunteered at the Free Clinic and is past president of the Lynchburg Academy of Medicine Alliance. Today, and many days, you'll find Tracy at the Tools4Schools Warehouse, organizing free supplies for teachers. In fact, that's where our camera caught up with her. Let's watch her video now.

Donald & Frances Giles – Jeff Helgeson

Virginia born, Don and Frances Giles met while in college and have been married for 51 years. If you name a board in Lynchburg, there is a good chance that one or both have served or are serving on that board!

Together, this couple has made a huge impact on the Lynchburg community through their volunteer work. Frances, a graduate of Randolph Macon Woman's College, established the Helen and Ruffin Jones Global Studies Scholarship for students and faculty members to study abroad. She has also served on the boards of United Way, the Awareness Garden, the Junior League and Amazement Square. She holds the distinction of being named an Honorary Goddess for her community service.

Don is also heavily involved in volunteer work. As the chairman of the board of the internationally known company, Moore and Giles, Don has lent his time and expertise to Randolph College, United Way, the Craddock Terry Shoe Corporation and Craddock Terry Shoe Foundation and many other charitable and civic organizations. This power couple believes in family and community. Let's learn more about them now.

Shaun Spencer-Hester – Joan Foster

Shaun Spencer-Hester is a neighborhood leader and an historian. Her grandmother, famed poet Ann Spencer, left a legacy of poetry and other writings, and her granddaughter is also leaving a legacy of historic preservation. Her passion for history is inspiring others through tours of the Ann Spencer House and Gardens and by serving on the Academy Center of Arts Board of Directors. She organizes events to engage the neighborhood children including holiday parties, summer cookouts, spruce-up activities, and restoring the neighborhood's "Old Store" which boasts a freezer full of free popsicles for all the neighborhood kids. Please join me as we learn more about this remarkable lady.

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Hylan “Hank” Hubbard – *Treney Tweedy*

Our next recipient is Hylan Hubbard. “Hank” as he is known, moved to Lynchburg nine years ago, but he didn’t waste any time getting involved in the community. Hank is a member of the Centra Health Board, chairs the Boys and Girls Club “Caring for Kids” Golf Tournament, and serves as the Selection Committee chair for the Dunbar High School Legacy Scholarship Fund. He is a Randolph College Trustee and is Treasurer and board member for STEP with Links. Let’s meet Hank a little more up close and personal by watching this video.

Tom Webb – *Treney Tweedy*

Tom Webb is a lifelong resident of Central Virginia. Young people have always been important to Tom, and most of his career has been spent educating, mentoring and supporting students. As an educator and principal for the Campbell County School system, he made such a lasting impact that he had a street named after him known as “Webbs Way.” He spends much of his time volunteering in the Lynchburg community including serving three terms on the Lynchburg School Board. Let’s learn a little more about Tom by watching this video.

Jack Edma “DJ Ed” – *Randy Nelson*

This year, we’re recognizing two young men with the Vice Mayor’s Award of Excellence. The first is Jack Edma, known professionally as “DJ Ed.” As CEO of MG Productions, named after his mother, Jack has leveraged his talents to assist with a number of local projects including the 2015 Lynchburg Food Truck Rodeo, the International DJ Festival and MG Cares. MG Cares has supported programs of United Way, CASA, STEP with Links, Out of Darkness Walk, the Junior League, and IRON Lives, just to name a few. Born and raised in Haiti, Jack led a team of 13 volunteers on a humanitarian mission after the devastating earthquake that violently shook Haiti in 2010. He also assisted his home country through Haiti Harvest Distribution which helped improve agriculture production through technical and financial support services. His love of music and DJ’ing has given him a platform to make a difference in the lives of many—both here and abroad. Please join me as we watch Jack’s video.

Philipp Gabathuler – *Randy Nelson*

Our second Vice Mayor Award recipient is Philipp Gabathuler. Born and raised in Lynchburg, Philipp graduated from EC Glass High School in 2002. His college studies in Environmental Policy and Planning and his post graduate studies in Urban and Regional Planning helped steer his philanthropy as an advocate for building stronger communities by making healthy choices.

To this effort, Philipp serves on several local boards including the Daily Bread, Lynchburg Grows, Friends of the Community Market and the Lynchburg Area Food Council—where he volunteers his time regularly. In making healthy choices, he starts with himself by biking to work every day! As an avid outdoor enthusiast, he’s even hiked the entire Appalachian Trail. Let’s meet Philipp in this video and learn more about his efforts to help our community get stronger and healthier.

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VICE MAYOR JOHNSON

Thank you, Mayor. Good evening again ladies and gentlemen. Before I go further, please join me in thanking Mayor Gillette for his service to the community and for his leadership as Mayor. (Applause)

The Mayor said earlier that tonight is bittersweet because this will be his last State of the City Address. I understand how he feels because as you know, tonight is also the last time that I will stand here as the Council representative for Ward II and as your Vice Mayor. I thank my constituents for their support for all these years. Serving on City Council has been one of the defining moments of my life, and I am humbled to have had this opportunity to serve on City Council. But tonight is not about me, it is about this great community. It is about all of you here and at home, and it is a celebration of all that makes this City a great place to live, work and play.

Before I begin, I want to thank our Public Works Department for the great job they did during our last two snow events. Too often we forget about the men and women who work long, difficult hours plowing our streets, shoveling sidewalks and steps and making it possible for us to go about our day. It is a difficult and potentially dangerous job, and I want them to know that their work is much appreciated. Public Works Director, Gaynelle Hart is here with us. Please let your staff know that we appreciate all they do to keep this city running. Tonight, I will spend my time before you reviewing some of the many accomplishments of last year and to talk about some of the challenges that lie ahead. I'm here tonight to report that the City of Lynchburg is as strong as it has ever been. Together we are building a thriving, healthy, and innovative future for our city—a future that ensures that we remain a strong and productive community and a place where all of our citizens can thrive.

What makes a city thrive? Certainly one important factor that contributes to the health of a community is citizens who are gainfully employed and have the ability to take care of themselves and their families. Governments don't create jobs, but there are things that we can do to remain business friendly and work to attract businesses to our city.

In 2015, our Office of Economic Development and the Economic Development Authority continued to implement progressive initiatives and incentives to promote Lynchburg's business community, centered around six key areas: Business Attraction, Business Retention & Expansion, Entrepreneurship, Infrastructure, Talent Development and Economic Empowerment. The Department is working with employers to develop local strategies to connect people to jobs and working together to equip citizens with relevant skills and engage those who may lack the typical profile of educational degrees and career experience.

There have been other important developments that strengthen our economy. In 2015, commercial building permits totaled nearly \$77 million in real property investments, over 205

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jobs were created in Lynchburg Enterprise Zones, and Real Property Improvement Grants of \$1,275,499 leveraged private commercial property investments of more than \$22.8 million.

Our thanks to the Office of Economic Development's Director, Marjette Upshur and the Economic Development Authority for all of their hard work in ensuring that we continue to have a vibrant economy.

There isn't much that local government can do to directly affect the bottom line of companies; however, we can continue our efforts to remain a business friendly community and to attract other businesses so our citizens are able to gain meaningful employment.

We have to acknowledge that there is still more work to be done. Unfortunately, several of the city's major employers recently announced layoffs. Our thoughts and best wishes are with the employees who have lost their jobs, and we hope they will find other employment soon. We also know that we have a 24 % poverty rate and that is unacceptable. While government certainly has a role in reducing this, it will take everyone—the business community, non-profits, engaged citizens, all of us to work together to turn this around. One thing that government can do is to work hard to attract new businesses as well as support our existing ones. This will help our citizens to find employment, and when our citizens are successful, our community is made stronger.

Businesses look at many factors when making decisions about expanding or locating in a community. Not the least of those factors is a city's quality of life. Company officials ask if this is a place where people want to live, if this community offers the amenities that people value, and if there opportunities for citizens to become involved in the community they call home. I think our award winners can certainly answer that last question. The seven of them were honored tonight for their volunteerism and involvement in improving this community.

Last year, we welcomed a new Parks and Recreation Director, Jenny Jones. Please join me in welcoming her. Jenny hit the ground running and is doing a great job.

Easy access to parks, green spaces and recreation areas is critical to the wellbeing of urban communities. From improving the health and wellness of citizens to creating a healthier physical environment, city parks are vital to the future of cities. Lynchburg residents have access to one of the best urban trail systems in the country. The recreation centers provide an anchor for low-income neighborhoods, serving as information hubs which foster community engagement and build social capital.

Department staff, alongside residents, created the Tinbridge Hill Sustainable Neighborhood Plan and worked with the Jefferson Park neighborhood to record its rich history. The Parks and Recreation Department offers something for everyone—programs for all age groups and interests, and they add greatly to this community's quality of life.

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Museums help provide an experience for people so that when they come to visit our community, or move into this region, they feel there is a sense of vitality and sense of place and sense of vibrancy. The Lynchburg Museum system plays a critical role in providing that experience. Last year, our museum system saw a 42% increase in visitation and housed a number of excellent exhibits like Experience the James and the celebration of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. I encourage anyone who has not visited the museums lately to do so.

Our downtown continues to grow with new businesses and residential spaces. Last year, many of us had the opportunity to attend the opening of the newly completed Bluffwalk. This wonderful, new public space was an \$8.3 million project that included CSO utility upgrades, sewer separation work and the creation of an entirely new environment for the existing and proposed buildings along its path. It has already become a popular spot for residents and visitors alike.

There is no way we can talk about last year without acknowledging the work that has taken place to improve our infrastructure. Yes, I know, Midtown is not quite complete but should be soon! This work, while inconvenient, is a needed investment in this city's future.

What happens when you don't invest properly in your city? By now, we have all heard about the plight of the residents in Flint, Michigan and the serious problems they have with their drinking water. I am proud to say in Lynchburg, our Water Resources Department has repeatedly earned awards for excellence in drinking water quality and for the ninth consecutive year, the City has received an award from the Virginia Department of Health for producing drinking water that is three times cleaner than the EPA requires. These awards should give residents confidence in knowing that here in Lynchburg we have great water. Our thanks to Tim Mitchell and his staff for their continued dedication and commitment to excellence.

In our 2015 Citizens Survey, you told us that you believed Lynchburg was a safe community and that is important to us. We have experienced an 11% reduction in overall crime and reductions in both violent and property crimes. The credit goes firstly to all of you, the law-abiding citizens of this community. Secondly, we credit our three public safety departments representing Police, Fire and Emergency Services who work together to ensure that we remain a safe community. All three are reaching out to the community to establish stronger relationships with the people they serve.

The Police Department established a Community Policing Advisory Committee in July of last year to provide citizen input as it relates to strategic planning; policy development and review; problem identification and proposed solutions; public education; and fostering collaborative, positive working relationships within the community.

The Department was one of 73 police agencies nationwide that was awarded a grant from the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs to implement a body worn camera program. This grant will outfit all 173 sworn officers with body worn cameras within the next two years.

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These cameras not only afford the community with another level of accountability, it also protects the men and women who put their lives on the line to serve this community.

Last year, Police Chief Parks Snead retired after 31 years of service. After a nationwide search and an extensive community and department vetting process, City Manager, Kim Payne was successful in bringing a highly qualified candidate to the City. Our new Police Chief Raul Diaz comes to us from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. After the weather we have experienced lately, I hope he isn't having second thoughts and is yearning for the sunny beaches of Ft. Lauderdale. Ladies and gentleman, please join me in welcoming Police Chief Raul Diaz.

Excellence is a hallmark of the Fire Department. Last year, the Department received the Emergency Medical Services Agency of the Year for this region as well as the Outstanding Achievement in EMS award. No one wants to have a heart attack, but if it should happen, be thankful that our Fire Department received the "Gold Level" Heart Saver Award from the American Heart Association for its work on cardiac arrest and resuscitation. Fire Chief Brad Ferguson is with us tonight. Thank you and your staff for your service.

The Department of Emergency Services provides excellent 9-1-1 services, and last year, they handled over 71,000 calls for assistance. Not only are they assisting citizens during emergencies, they are making efforts to inform citizens on how to be better prepared before an emergency with its Ready Lynchburg education program. We thank them for all they do. Director Melissa Foster, thank you.

In thinking about what makes a city vibrant, I have to mention our public school system under the leadership of Superintendent Scott Brabrand and the Lynchburg City School Board. They are working hard to ensure that our children receive a quality education. We've talked a lot about the achievement gap this year, and it is certainly a troubling problem to have. Be assured that our school system is not taking this problem lightly and neither should we. A quality education has a lasting impact on the lives of our citizens and in the sustainability of our community. There are no easy solutions, and it will take all of us to find the answers. Parents have to be involved in their children's education. It is not enough to just send our children to school. We have to volunteer in the schools, we have to help with homework, and we have to do all we can to make sure children have the resources they need. Most importantly, parents have to send the message to our children that attaining an education is vital.

President Obama, in his 2009 State of the Union address, said, "Dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country."

Lynchburg, we are better than this. The Schools are doing all they can to turn this around but we have to do our part as well. Let's all work together to address the issues of poverty and the achievement gap so that next year, whoever is standing before you, can report that this community came together to make a difference, and we will be a stronger city because of it.

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My time before you is coming to a close. I want to thank you for giving me, a transplant from Mississippi, the opportunity to serve the greatest city in Virginia. Thank you for opening up your homes and your hearts to me and my family. It has been a privilege that I have not taken lightly. I hope that I have had a positive impact on this city and especially in Ward II. I am excited about the future of Lynchburg and I pledge to continue to stay involved and to work with you to make sure that Lynchburg remains the City we all love to call home.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS

Thank you, Mr. Vice Mayor for reviewing some of the accomplishments of the past year. Thank you also for all of the hard work that you have engaged in over the past 12 years, for your leadership as our Vice Mayor for many of those years, and for your friendship since we met for the first time at a Voter's League forum at the outset of our first election campaigns in 2004. We have served together on Council for both of our complete tenures, coming in together and going out together, and it has been a pleasure to know that throughout that entire time, I could always count on you for unwavering support and for good counsel.

As I sat down to prepare this State of the City Address, I contemplated what the purpose of events like this should be. There is no question that the State of the City Address is a wonderful time to report on the activities of Council and staff over the past year, to celebrate the successes of the previous year and to consider the challenges of the year that lie ahead. Our Vice Mayor has done an excellent job of describing to you many of this past year's highlights, and based on all of that information, along with much more detail that is too extensive to review tonight, I can happily and confidently report that the state of our City is strong!

None could deny that Lynchburg has done well over the years to maintain progress in many important areas. Our economy has grown, many of our City departments have received accolades, our citizenry is engaged, and we are well justified in exclaiming that Lynchburg truly is a great place to live, work and play.

It would be disingenuous, however, to emphasize only those aspects of Lynchburg life of which we are justifiably proud. We must also recognize that we continue to face many challenges. Some of these challenges, like the poverty rate, are amorphous and do not readily admit to easy definition or remediation. Some are easy to identify and quantify, like the performance gap in our schools, but do not admit to simple fixes. Some are much more discrete, easy to discern and straightforward to eliminate—like our backlog of deferred capital improvement projects—but their scale is of such magnitude that it is no easy task to harness the resources necessary to eliminate them. In considering both our successes and our continuing challenges, one common theme seems to echo throughout—time.

None of the victories of 2015 were accomplished within 2015 itself. None of the challenges of 2016 have arisen instantaneously. All things happen over time, and they all unfold because of

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factors that slowly build throughout the years. To do our jobs well here on Council, in City Hall, and across all of Lynchburg, we must strive to avoid being merely reactive. We must plan carefully, think creatively, act consistently and envision boldly. This requires taking the long view; and it requires both meticulous planning and the courage to stick to the plan. We must be flexible in applying our plan so that we may adjust when conditions change, but we must also be stalwart in our commitment to carry those plans forward. Without an ability to look beyond the immediate, we would never sustain forward momentum. Without the courage to pursue our aspirational goals even in the face of local stress, we would remain forever in uncertain turmoil. To prove my point, let's consider some of the grand successes that we have achieved over the past 15 years.

When we think back over the last decade-and-a-half, there can be no doubt that the single most noticeable contrast would be that between a 2007 pre-recession economy and a 2008 post-recession economy. Our country, and the entire world, lived through an economic downturn of tremendous proportions. Entire communities were fiscally gutted and many individuals faced personal calamity as businesses downsized, mortgages failed and the economy severely contracted. But I think that we must also note that in Lynchburg, none of these effects were felt nearly as powerfully as they were in other places. Lynchburg faced the great recession with aplomb. We absolutely did feel the strain of 2008, and we responded by tightening our budgets and controlling our expenditures, but our economy was far from decimated. Our property values held significantly and we were able to continue many of the important projects and fund many of the important programs that gave us our resiliency. None of this would have been possible were it not for the careful balance that we have maintained here in Lynchburg between fiscal restraint and wise investment. We have spent money where it needed to be spent and we have resisted the urge to over-spend. We have adhered to our conservative fiscal policies, and that allowed us to retain and improve our excellent credit rating as a municipality.

To demonstrate the power of good planning, consider the fact that in the post-downturn economy, we in Lynchburg were able to manage a slew of necessary infrastructure improvements. In 2010, we completed construction of a new Sandusky Middle School at a cost of \$28 million. Not only is Sandusky Middle an up-to-date modern facility, but it was the first LEED certified school in the area. By the way, Sandusky Middle School was built just a few years after the successful completion in 2006 of the E.C. Glass \$26 million renovation, and commensurate with the 2010 completion of another LEED certified building, the \$25 million new Juvenile Domestic and Family Relations Court. These major projects did not prevent us from dealing with a host of other important construction projects. We completed phases one and two of the Fifth Street Master Plan (price tag \$5 million plus); we repaired the D Street Bridge (\$3 million); renovated the Miller Community Center (\$6 million); and we initiated the now almost complete and absolutely essential \$77 million construction of a new Heritage High School.

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It is amazing that we were able to manage such a large number of significant and important projects in the midst of an international economic crisis, but because of the City's good planning, we were also able to maintain progress in other ongoing efforts. Lynchburg was successful in signing a new Consent Order with the Department of Environmental Quality which radically amended our Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan. That change, which took ingenious work by City staff, will save Lynchburg nearly \$250 million! And, I am happy to report, that the last major pipe has been laid in the last phase of the James River Interceptor project: the pumps are offline, and sod will soon be laid at Riverfront Park!!!

Making plans and executing plans. That is how all of these milestones have been realized. Did you know that in 2004, the total assessed taxable value of ALL downtown properties was under \$80 million, and that today the value has nearly doubled to over \$156 million? As of this month, there are 750 residential units in the downtown area and the growth of this re-vitalized urban section of Lynchburg continues to accelerate. We have seen projects such as the Craddock Terry Hotel, The Virginian Hotel, Midpoint Lofts, Cliffs Edge Lofts, City Market Lofts, the Parlor Lofts and others all feed a growing number of restaurants and retail establishments. The growth is uncanny, and it shows no signs of abating. We all wait in great anticipation to see that this renaissance of our central business district supports the successful completion of the renovated Academy Theater.

Of course, if you want to talk about downtown, and you want to talk about vision, you can't help but talk about one particular organization that will soon be celebrating its 15th anniversary. If Mort Sajadian is here tonight, please stand up. Let's all give Mort, his Board, and all of the hard working visionaries a well-deserved round of applause as they prepare to mark 15 full years of serving the region's children next month.

The phenomenal success of Amazement Square serves to highlight the fact that much of what we have accomplished as a community goes well beyond hard financial investment and infrastructure improvement. Much of the work is done by City staff, but much more is done by local entrepreneurs and un-elected civic leaders. As an additional case in point, one significant source of great civic pride that stands out over the past 15 years is the Dialogue on Race and Racism. Spawned by unfortunate events and organized by the City, the dialogue program brought together a large group of diverse citizens to share with each other, learn from one another, and develop actionable concepts for improving our community. Many of the fruits produced by those study circles are being implemented today, and that is because we took the time to imagine a better future and to work collaboratively to make those dreams a reality.

I could go on with more examples of good planning and clever execution. The list of ideas and idea makers is almost endless. But it is not my goal tonight to provide a complete inventory of our successes. I have reviewed these few specifics as mere examples of a more important theme. It would have been easy to lose sight of our goals when intervening troubles obscured the view. It would have been easy to think only of the current and to forget how stretching to invest today

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will pay dividends for our children tomorrow. It would have been easy, easier than it actually was, simply to respond and react to the pressures of the day—to take our eyes off of the ball—and to move as a rudderless ship.

I don't want to overstate the case, or to narrow the focus onto a small set of individuals improperly, because there absolutely are too many deserving people to mention in a speech such as this, but there is one individual person who does deserve, on this night, special recognition. If the citizens are the stars by which we set our course, and if council is the hand on the rudder, then the rudder itself can be no one other than our long-serving, highly talented, completely trustworthy and soon to be retiring City Manager, Kimball Payne.

L. Kimball Payne has been our City Manager for the past 15 years. That means that I, who have been on Council for only 12 years, have served with no other City Manager. For that reason, I consider myself lucky. Kim has demonstrated all of the qualities that tonight's State of the City Address is about. He has been creative and forward looking in his vision, steadfast in his commitment to carry his vision forward, honorable in agreement and disagreement, respectful of the division of labor between an elected body and hired staff in a Council-Manager form of government, and wise in his counsel and advice. When looking back over the last 15 years of Lynchburg's success, one cannot help but to see Kim Payne's fingerprints all over it. At this time, I would like to formally recognize Kim Payne for the completion of 15 years of service to the City of Lynchburg. Kim, please rise and accept the applause of this crowd for your exceptional leadership.

We have heard tonight about accomplishments both recent and extended. I have tried to argue that short term success is not possible without long term vision. We have been fortunate in Lynchburg to be led by a group of exemplary individuals, some elected, some hired, many volunteers, who are proof of this view. It is my profound hope and sincere expectation that the long view will prevail in Lynchburg and that for generations to come this community will remain the very best place in the Commonwealth of Virginia to live, work and play.

Thank you very much for all of your support over the years, and good night.