

**State of the City Address**  
**The Honorable Tammy de Weerd**  
**Mayor, City of Meridian**  
**February 4, 2010**

Thank you for joining us to *celebrate* Meridian. Comments from past State of the City events have been enthusiastic regarding the activity and progress in our community. Many were from those with intimate knowledge of the great things that take place in Meridian, but some seemed surprised. It struck me, that not all see first hand our evolution as a city. So this last year we worked hard to capture “Meridian”, to tempt you to pull off the main roads you drive and experience our amazing community.

That’s our Meridian! We have advanced significantly as a community over the last decade. Meridian has moved from a sleepy town to a vibrant city – the third largest in Idaho. We can live, work, and study right here at home.

We have much to *celebrate* regarding the progress we have made over the last 10 years. These advancements have been accomplished by a community willing to roll-up its sleeves and work for a better tomorrow. We have persevered through the highs and lows during this period. Together we have made a phenomenal difference.

Just ten years ago, Meridian’s population was just under 29,000 who lived in 10,000 homes or apartments. We had limited employment choices close to home, and only a few places to shop or dine.

Today, our population is over 75,000. We serve approximately 23,000 households. Our commercial market value has surged to \$1.8 billion dollars. That’s a 400% increase over ten years, bringing employment centers that add jobs and services. Meridian now provides a wide variety of shopping and dining options that attract people from the valley and beyond. We now have choices and continue to see businesses attracted to Meridian even in today’s economic climate. We are a community that is truly ‘built for business and designed for living’!

YOUR city servants, in serving YOU the PEOPLE, have responded by bringing city services to a new level to meet the needs of our growing population and related demands. The City maintains 380 miles of sewer lines and 450 miles of water lines, compared to 125 and 145 respectively ten years ago. We have over 9,000 manholes, 3500 active fire hydrants, and 18 water wells.

The Fire Department’s response times have improved by 20% to 4 minutes and 58 seconds from 6 minutes and 10 seconds in the last ten years. We added paramedics to every engine crew. We just hired 6 part-time firefighters bringing the total to 20 that help augment staffing levels. Ten years ago, we served citizens from one station; today, we have five stations reaching every part of our city – making every second count. These expanded services, have resulted in improved fire ratings – from a 5 to a 4, and last year to a 3 – saving money on YOUR insurance bills.

Our Police department has transitioned from a residential police force to full a service department that now protects a rapidly growing commercial base and all the specific types of crime it brings. This year the crime rate has decreased by 19%; while crimes solved have increased! In the last decade our crime rates dropped 45%. We have a Crime Analyst that tracks types of crimes and their location, so we know where to use our resources wisely. These efforts continue to assure we are ***the safest***-city-of-our-size in Idaho!

Ten years ago, within our city limits, our School District had 5 elementary schools, today 12; we had 1 middle school, today we have 4. In 1999 we had 1 high school; we have since added 3 more. Where there was little choice in education then, today our public schools have added professional technical and magnet programs; we now have 4 charter, 4 alternative, and 3 private schools that didn't exist 10 years ago -- education choices have increased dramatically. Opportunities ***in*** Meridian specific to higher education have gone from *no choice* and the need to travel, to 1 public university and 2 private universities—not to mention a rapidly growing community college within a stone's throw.

We have worked together to advance our community - citizens, businesses, investors, educators, and local government alike. We all put 'community first'. It's that 'community first' attitude we celebrate; that focus has allowed us to succeed!

Our evolution as a community is founded on three pillars – on which I will focus today. *Pillar 1* - we designed our community for living; 2) - we built our community for business; and 3) -we stay focused on efficient and effective city government. We celebrate these three pillars!

*'Built for business, designed for living'* is not just a slogan – it's a goal – it is our mantra. We have set strategies and tactics, measurements and benchmarks so we know where we want to go, how to get there...and when we arrive.

***Pillar 1, Designed for Living*** - is visual and dynamic. The living landscape of the City of Meridian has changed drastically in the last 10 years. During this time, we have grown in a well planned, efficient, and attractive manner. Our residents can now meet their needs within the City, whether it is retail shopping, professional or medical services, education, or recreation....

Meridian has seen great progress in offering areas for 'living' that offer choices for housing styles and size. They are set in active communities with amenities such as walking paths, activity centers, and neighborhood recreation facilities. Many of these neighborhoods built over the last 10 years have unique and distinct gateways that define the 'community' within. Some are designed as mixed use, encompassing neighborhood commercial providing access to many essential goods and services.

Residential growth has slowed the last couple of years and foreclosures are up, but Meridian continues to be where the energy is. This statement is embedded in the numbers of building permits and houses sold alike; as Meridian in 2009 had nearly 50% of all residential building permits issued in Ada County, and north Meridian had the highest amount of home sales.

National livability rankings list housing choice as important, but such rankings also hold art and culture and parks as essential measurements of quality of life and community identity.

Although our Meridian Arts Commission is just three years old; much has been accomplished due to the donation of their time and generous sponsors of the arts. The 'new' City Hall brought opportunities to feature the artistic and cultural talents of our community and the Valley, both indoors and out.

Initial Point Gallery, located on the third floor hosts art exhibits monthly in almost every art medium. Later this year, the Commission will bring the 'first to Idaho' showing of a very prestigious exhibit.

The National Watercolor Society's travelling show has a limited number of showings; only one in the Northwest – right here in Meridian, Idaho! Starting September 10<sup>th</sup>, the month-long exhibit will feature work of well-known artists from around the nation.

Outdoors in City Hall's plaza, Concerts on Broadway kicked off a summer series last June with the Kings of Swing with great energy and flair. These popular concerts will continue this summer – sure to become a tradition for citizens of all ages.

The spotlight will shine later this month on the performing arts, as the Missoula Children's Theater returns. They will bring Pinocchio to Cole Valley Christian School, featuring our local talent. I hope you will join me February 27<sup>th</sup>.

A new report by Gallup and the Knight Foundation states residents are most attached to their communities when they have fun places to gather, a welcoming atmosphere, and public spaces to enjoy. The report also found that positive feelings have a connection to local GDP-growth over a longer-term period.

That's Meridian! We offer fun and welcoming experiences in our award-winning parks and recreation programs. We currently have 188 acres and 18 parks for residents to enjoy – compared to only 38 acres and 4 parks ten years ago. This progress is a result of numerous partnerships. We have examples where little to no tax dollars were spent in building these facilities. Renaissance Park used only growth impact fees and developer donations and no other tax dollars; while the Meridian Youth Baseball Complex spent 2% taxpayer dollars and the remaining in impact fees and donations.

Last summer we announced the 60 plus acre, turn-key donation, of the Julius M. Kleiner Memorial Park. This park will have large water features, rolling terrain, dominated by over 900 trees. It will host bike & pedestrian pathways, a band shell and amphitheatre, a formal grand plaza, and an arboretum. It is at 30% design and expected to open the summer of 2011 – centrally located at Eagle and Fairview. Part of the generous \$25M donation has a civic complex that includes a Library and Senior Center – the land, and now, the buildings are part of that donation.

We continue to improve our parks so there is something for everyone. This last year we opened tennis courts, play areas, picnic shelters, a 'bark park' for dogs, and horseshoe pits. As people were staying closer to home – these were well used. Another milestone achieved was in the purchase of 77.7 acres of future parkland in South Meridian located

near Locust Grove and Lake Hazel Roads. This will be a great addition serving our residents in the south.

The popularity of a 'signature' activity grew to new heights and gained national attention with the summer CableOne Movie Night. The 2009 season attracted between 1,000 to 3,000 moviegoers every Saturday night! Now others have caught on, bringing this experience to their citizens throughout the State and across the nation.

During the last year we set a priority to begin 'connecting' our community through pathways. We just completed an evaluation of a 12' wide trail along the rail corridor. This 7 mile trail would connect the Ten Mile area, Downtown, and Eagle Road, providing the beginning of a regional system. We have had preliminary conversations with critical partners, and look forward to further discussions as the next step with Union Pacific and Watco Rail Road.

Another major advancement over the last 10 years raising our self-sufficiency is the investment of shopping centers, retail, and dining. There is no other area in the State of Idaho that hosts the market radius numbers and demographics that Meridian has, drawing shopping and dining to the population center of the Valley. Choices, large and small - from Kohls to Old Navy and Renewed Expressions to Zella Marie's; and dining favorites, Goodwood Barbeque or Flatbread Community Oven and Good Thyme Grill to Gino's. They found Meridian and call us 'home'.

And as we think of home, we think of Meridian's downtown. This area is filled with opportunity for investment – in the right economy of course. While all over Meridian we have seen massive change, downtown hasn't kept up. However, the vision of a mixed-use core with shops, restaurants, offices, and homes remains the focus. The Meridian Development Corporation, our urban renewal agency, began the process last fall to create a master plan. This will guide development and solidify the City's image of 'built for business and designed for living'.

The effort called 'Destination Downtown' will balance the plan of downtown for 'living', with the need for a vibrant and healthy business climate. The City and MDC have implemented a number of changes over the decade with free Wi-Fi, utility infrastructure plans, improved streetscape and seasonal banners, urban-sized parks, a community center that opened last June, and of course, the City Hall building. Food Network favorite, Guy Fieri, discovered our downtown, highlighting Rick's Press Room on the program Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives giving national exposure this last year.

The recently opened downtown 'Ground Floor' business incubator is an exciting public/private partnership. It advances our efforts to attract 'creative types', start-ups and small business as the anchor to an envisioned 'entrepreneurial corridor'. The Ground Floor is an adaptive, connected, and sustainable workspace; where clients can rent space based on their need.

A downtown must have an attractive and efficient gateway. With the completion of the Split Corridor Phase I, a more efficient traffic flow and entry into downtown has been created. The design of Phase II is currently underway for construction by ACHD in 2013. Our next challenge is to improve the access from I-84, the rebuilding of the

Meridian Interchange. Many from throughout the valley have joined us in efforts to find funding to build this needed improvement.

**Pillar Two**, '*Built for Business*' is reflected in our success, citywide, realized over the last 10 years. To be a self-sustaining community it is important to have jobs for your citizens as well as attract workers from throughout the Valley. To do this we must encourage and support investment and job creation, strategically attract appropriate businesses, and support existing business by providing a positive environment to operate within.

We are committed to Economic Excellence – critical to this is working with our investors that bring quality places that attract business. In this we *celebrate* the investors – Winston Moore, Roger Anderson, Tommy Ahlquist, Dennis Baker, David Turnbull, Greg Johnson, Frank Varriale, Ron Van Aucker and others - who have brought Meridian high caliber business parks and new businesses.

These 'employment centers' attract those that want to be located closer to the workforce and their customers. We have a number of business parks and retail centers in various stages of development. They have attractive landscaping, nice amenities, and thoughtful design – Meridian's business parks offer a great work environment and ideal locations.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

Last month in Silverstone Corporate Center, an impressive corporate office facility, Silverstone Plaza opened with full-service amenities. This building will house the new headquarters for the Sundance Corporation among others. They have attracted a number of primary employers such as: Citi, Power Engineers, Workspace, and T-Mobile to name a few.

In El Dorado Business Campus, they too have brought investment and jobs to Meridian. MDU Resources Group, the parent company to Intermountain Gas and three other utility companies, announced they would build a facility here to serve customers across eight states creating 140 new jobs and expected to open later in 2010. They join other business such as Great West Causality, Complex Care Hospital, Stanley Consultants, and others.

Meridian's popular retail, services and dining development, CentrePoint, just saw the opening of Hobby Lobby and, coming soon, Dick's Sporting Goods. CentrePoint has almost 282,000 sq ft of occupied space with only a 1% vacancy. Truly amazing in times like these!

Across Eagle Road, in Ustick Marketplace, Pristine Pools and Spa just broke ground on a first-of-its-kind-in-Idaho facility that will bring to life design features in a virtual outdoor showroom. They have a vision for the role they play in building the Idaho experience.

Even our mature business parks have seen investment and job growth as Central Valley Corporate Park, at I-84 and Main Street, over the last decade brought United Heritage and MWI Veterinary Supply, and this last year an expansion at PKG; adding to long-time employers such as Datatel, Computrol, and the Department of Labor.

These business parks and others create and support over 30,000 jobs in Meridian – more than doubling the number of jobs in our community the last decade. We still have much work to do in attracting family-wage jobs; but we have come a long way. Sadly, we have lost some businesses; however, we had over 100 new businesses open their doors over this last year.

The City works with these business park developers, as their success is our success. To retain and attract business, we are working with stakeholders in developing strategic growth areas. 2009 brought the official launch of one of those – The CORE – Meridian's 3-mile long corridor, which straddles I-84 and runs along Eagle Road west to Locust Grove forming an industry-specific business cluster.

This private/public partnership is focused on the bringing together complimentary related businesses in health sciences and technology. The Core is a model for research, innovation, and job creation. The private sector has taken The Core beyond branding to forming a 501(c)(6) and pursuing tools to retain, expand, and attract quality wage jobs and investment to the area.

The Core includes, Blue Cross of Idaho, Crucial Technology, and a number of technology and health-care related companies and professionals. In addition to the advantages of having existing infrastructure and businesses; education has a strong presence as well. The new Idaho State University-Meridian Health Sciences Center opened last fall bringing over 1000 students, nearly 100 faculty and staff, and 27 degree programs from associates to bachelors to their doctorate in Pharmacy degree. ISU's campus is a center for education, research, and clinical practice. They have several research projects; one of these is focusing on the study and prevention of infectious diseases.

A major partner in The CORE, and today's title sponsor, is St. Luke's. They are not only a great community partner; they are a business leader providing much needed service critical to the region. The impact of St. Luke's-Meridian in 2009 was over 1,800 jobs and almost 1,300 babies.

St. Luke's has future growth plans that could reach \$1 billion dollars of capital investment, a good portion here in Meridian. With a 58-acre campus, they have plans for a Children's Specialty Center, Surgery Center, Sleep Lab and other exciting plans.

Another 'Core' partner; Portico of Meridian, just announced the location of Scentsy's new corporate headquarters in their Portico Office Tower. Last year, I spoke of Scentsy's growth – well, they continue to grow. They had over \$200M in sales last year. Others in the Portico development are ESI's headquarter offices and the next great restaurant – Ling & Louie's Asian Bistro. We also announced what will be Meridian's newest hotel – a six story destination hotel that will be a prominent landmark. This upscale facility will have approximately 175 rooms and generous conference facilities; planned for early 2012.

A second strategic growth area is experiencing exciting activity in West Meridian. The construction of the Ten Mile interchange is the next economic expansion area; attracting

attention by investors and businesses alike. The interchange is on schedule to open in late spring to early summer of 2011.

We just recently annexed and zoned 115-acres, west of Ten Mile along I-84, which offers mixes of use for employment, retail, housing choices, as well as an amphitheater, green belt, and water features. This development reflects the scale and design envisioned for this area.

You might be asking, “How does supporting existing businesses fit into the built for business efforts?” Well, this is where we spend a major portion of our time; creating relationships and a supportive environment. That pro-business environment was evident last May and again early November as we were hosts to Meridian Business Day I and II. These two events saw between 300 – 350 business folks come together to gain tools, share successes, and develop business relationships while focusing on the positive ‘vibe’ in Meridian. Local small businessman, Brandon Wright of Ultra Clean, was a huge driver of this effort.

The City also worked with stakeholders as we updated our sign ordinance; as well we have worked with a local company, BizReach, to provide free Meridian business listings where residents can find local goods and services.

Our Building and Planning Departments play an important role in a ‘supportive environment’. They initiated an outreach program soliciting input to improve and expedite the building or permitting experience, so businesses will think ‘Meridian First’ with expansion or new projects. They listened and responded; beginning a ‘Project Sponsor’ program for a single-point-of-contact to obtain information and monitor progress.

We listen to our stakeholders: our citizens, businesses, investors, our customers. We listen to our citizens through customer comment cards, social media, and public gatherings. We listen to our investors by bringing all parties to the table shortening regulatory time frames and reducing building barriers. We listen to our business community creating ‘business to business’ and ‘business to citizen’ opportunities. We listen to our employees - our frontline – that provide services and take pride in working with you and helping solve your needs.

Yes, we listen with a ‘can do’ attitude, and we do it guided by our core values of C.A.R.E. - customer service, accountability, respect, and excellence. These improved services I just spoke about, brings me to:

***Pillar 3 - efficient and effective City Services.*** Meridian became the city it is today -- by listening to the needs and desires of our community. Our employees are second to none; they take pride in what they do and understand the value of hard work.

They work with efficiency and are accountable to our budget. They care about the environment and what we pass on to future generations. They know who they work for – you the people. You are a face to them.

Many have asked us how the economy has affected our ability to provide quality services – we proudly answer that we not only are maintaining our services, we

continue to improve them. Our City's Finance Department, City Councilmen, and Department Directors, are great stewards of the public's dollars. Our Finance team accurately forecast a sharp decline in revenues for '09 establishing a conservative spending budget. Our budgeted revenue was slightly better than expected and exceeded expenses by almost \$400,000. Now that's worth celebrating!

Our budget requires close attention from all departments; finding efficiencies and sharing resources. Contracts have been evaluated, spending policies reviewed, programs scrutinized for effectiveness, and the result was 7% of last year's budget was returned to the General Fund at the end of the year. This will be used to fund future Capital Improvements for Police and Fire; maintaining a tradition of 'saving' for our needs, keeping us debt free.

We not only are focused and determined to be great stewards fiscally, but environmentally too. Sustainability is more than talk in Meridian. The City Hall building was built as our commitment to long term sustainability with: conservative energy use, changed behaviors in recycling, and increased transportation choices. We hope to be an example for others. I am pleased to report that we recently learned that we achieved LEED silver certification for City Hall.

Meridian is moving forward with our sustainability plans in the way we use our existing water resources. Last year I announced that Meridian became the first city in Idaho to be issued a Class 'A' Reclaimed Water Permit. We successfully implemented the re-use water project at Heroes Park this last summer. The City is also bringing this precious resource to our newest growth area at Ten Mile and I-84; and we are pursuing at a long-term plan with DEQ for a citywide reclaimed water program.

These are just two examples of the City's efforts and commitment to our environment. There are a number of other projects underway in stream and natural waterway preservation, examining ways to make our Waste Water Treatment Plant an energy producer, and expanding our recycling program. The city has a keen interest in public involvement in these and other programs, and has worked hard to develop communication tools and public engagement opportunities to exchange information.

We launched a major overhaul of the City website last June, initiating a plethora of information for our citizens to receive through various communication mediums. We post on Facebook, we tweet on Twitter, we blog twice a week. We have Council and Commission meeting agendas and minutes on our website; we even post our checkbook in our desire to be accountable and transparent. Everything you want should be right there at your fingertips.

We offer a variety of events designed to bring City government to you. Coffee with the Mayor and Town Hall meetings give citizens the chance to get their questions asked and answered from our leadership team.

Recently, one of our Councilmen shared a comment he received. A politically involved leader told him they were impressed that they knew more about Meridian than the City in which they live. Now that's progress! We not only have increased the information and communication disseminated to our citizens, we also have more citizen involvement as a result! Everyone wins.

We earned the interest of others outside our community as well. They want what we have; they want to do what we have done. So, who are they that want to recognize what we have done?

Locally, it was parents for Nickelodeon's Best Park, the School District's Advocate of the Year, Compass's Leadership in Motion for Ada County; Statewide, it was the Association of Idaho Cities, the Idaho Chapter of the American Planning Association, and the Idaho Recreation and Parks Association; Regionally, it was the Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association and also the Northwest Alcohol Conference Award; and Nationally, we received the Exemplary Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention.

Our story was told in four different national publications on architecture, parks, events, even horseshoes. Why is this noteworthy? If others are noticing the exemplary and innovative things we are doing, that must mean we are, indeed, providing the level of service our community wants and deserves.

One of the groups that received the interest of other communities is the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council. This passionate and articulate group of young people is determined to leave their fingerprint on the community in which they live or attend school. As is tradition, I am proud to introduce you to the Chair of this awesome group to share with you those activities and accomplishments in which they celebrate. Please welcome Eli Nary.

These young people leave a legacy of their own in the hopes that others will care as deeply as they do and carry on the tradition. Thank you, Eli, for your words today as well as for your leadership.

At this time, I want to tell you about a park; it's not your average park. Meridian Settlers Park has received a great deal of attention over the last ten years; recognition and accolades for three specific partnership projects. Those partnerships were in baseball, tennis and horseshoes, and a playground. A special playground.

The visioning for this playground began around a kitchen table in July of 2000. The discussion: a playground that would be universally accessible for all children; enabling children or adults with disabilities to interact and play along with others regardless of their physical well being. The mission of the group was one of education, recreation, and inclusion.

The vision took hold. By September of 2002, a groundbreaking ceremony was held and in August of 2004 a Community Build took place with more than 300 volunteers participating in the construction of this facility. Adventure Island Playground opened shortly thereafter.

There were 3 more phases to this facility. The final touches were completed this June.

None of this would have been possible without the vision and leadership of the Lindig family; Angela, Darren, Amber, Ryan, and Elise. Through their, and others efforts, nearly \$600,000 in funds and in-kind donations were raised. They have created a

message of tolerance, learned through 'play', leaving a lasting legacy for our community – a place we can celebrate our differences. I would ask you to join me in saying thanks as I proudly present this year's Mayor's Legacy Award to the Lindig Family.

These stories...the people; are examples of the success of our community and the progress we have made. The three pillars I shared with you today: a community that is designed for living; an environment that is built for business; and a city government that is efficient and effective – equals a premiere city to live, work and raise a family. We are a community that works together; a community that cares.

We will continue to focus on the 'designed for living' aspects that define us and foster an environment for individuals and families to grow stronger. We will all look with an eager eye for the 2011 opening of Kleiner Park, for art and cultural offerings, and for safe pathways that connect our city.

We look forward to a healthy downtown that will, once more, be that pedestrian friendly destination for young and old alike to gather, play, work, eat, or just sit under a tree and dream. Let's celebrate our quality of life.

We are hopeful for a resurgence of economic prosperity, sooner rather than later, in an environment that is built for business...and their success. We will partner with our investors and business community to be that premiere place in meeting business needs. We will shop, dine, and do our business here at home as we recognize that supporting Meridian businesses will help them survive – keeping buildings full and jobs close to home. Let's celebrate our businesses.

We, your public servants, will continue to be frugal and will work hard to deliver efficient and effective city services. We will plan for the health and long-term vitality of our community; one that we will proudly hand over to these young leaders for their care and nurturing. We will be diligent in our efforts to communicate, engage, and stand accountable to the people of our city. We will continue to hold our standards high and strive to be a model others desire to be; as that is a measurement demonstrating we are doing it right. Let's celebrate our city employees.

As we look at closing out this decade in 2010, let's celebrate our unlimited opportunity and treasure that pioneering attitude of the people of Meridian, both long-timers and the newly arrived. We celebrate Meridian as a community that knows how to roll-up their sleeves, get the work done, and continue to move forward to the betterment of our citizens and our community.

It is my honor to serve as your Mayor. Now let's celebrate Meridian - with a 'taste of Meridian'. Thank you.