

State of the City 2011

Good evening and thank you for attending tonight's State of the City address.

Over the past few years the City of Peru has faced many challenges. From constitutional amendments on property tax caps to unfunded mandates; consequently, local governments have had to rethink the way they do business.

The City of Peru has made many changes in the way we operate. We have been proactive in our approach. When we heard that the statehouse was looking at making sweeping changes to local government, we acted. We didn't want to wait to see what happened, we took action before it happened. Being proactive, we were able to transition to a new way of operating that benefited the city we serve. Each department head has been told to find new ways of funding their department outside of property taxes. Because of their efforts we are still providing all the services that our citizens need and deserve. To have been able to accomplish this is a testament to the quality of people we have working for the City. I would like to publicly thank each and every employee for their dedication and willingness to work with us during the challenging times.

During tough economic times it is easy to become negative, but tonight I want to share with you the positive things that have happened in our community over the past few years and will continue into this year as well. Hopefully, this will show why we should be optimistic about our community and our future.

In past State of the City addresses I have shared with you statistical data about each of our departments. Tonight I want to share with you more information about the positive things going on in our community. That is not to say that the statistical data is not important, it is, but in the interest of time I have decided to not include it in this address. The data will be available for you on our City website. I would encourage you to visit us at www.cityofperu.org to review that information. I believe you will gain a greater understanding of all that our employees do for you.

Many communities have had to drastically reduce employees and services to meet budget cuts. We have, through attrition, reduced our workforce over the past two years, but we have not reduced the services you receive. I believe it is important to provide you with all the services we offer. In this way we can continue to have a safer and more attractive community.

For example, the City previously had 30 police officers. Through attrition we lowered that number to 28. I am not looking to reduce it further and here is why. Last year we received 19,000 calls for help. That equates to 52 calls a day 365 days a year. This is in addition to their normal duties they perform. Also, it does not reflect the calls we receive for our drug task force. To answer these calls and perform their other duties takes a lot of man hours. We should always have sufficient personnel to answer all calls in a timely fashion. You deserve that. We should never have to say "we do not have anyone available at this time". That is not acceptable.

Furthermore, one of our neighboring communities has a problem with heroin use. Our police department is working constantly to ensure that this drug does not get established in Peru. We are committed to do everything in our power to keep drugs off of our streets and in turn protecting our citizens, especially our youth. We cannot reduce our department further and still provide the level of protection I want for our citizens.

We have reduced our fire department by one member. In 2010 they responded to 1101 calls. In that year we also started providing back up ambulance service for Dukes Hospital. We only run when no other ambulance is available. Chief Betzner started this program and has proven to be an asset to our community and to others. On January 20th of this year a call was received at Station 1 for an ambulance. This was the same day we were receiving 4 inches of snow. The report was that two children, ages 2 & 3, had swallowed liquid heart worm medicine and no ambulance was available. They were also informed that the location was in Bunker Hill. Without hesitation our ambulance drove to the scene and transported the victims to the hospital for further treatment. Both children will be fine.

These are things that our public safety employees do every day. They respond when you need them. You will truly understand the value of these departments when it is you that is making the call for help. I am proud of them and I hope that you appreciate the job they do for you.

As I mentioned earlier, Peru has had to deal with challenges over the past few years. We are not alone in that. Many communities across the state of Indiana and the United States have had to deal with the same issues. The difference is in how we deal with it as a community. We must not deal with these issues with unsubstantiated comments, we must always deal with the facts. Tonight, I am asking every citizen in Peru to help us as we try to lay a better foundation on which we can build a stronger community. I am not asking too much of you. All I am asking is that you get involved with community efforts, attend governmental meetings so that you will have a better understanding of what is going on in your local government and have faith that we will make Peru a better place to live, work and play. Franklin Roosevelt once said "The only limits to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith." His statement is as true today as it was then.

Let us not focus our view on looking only for negative. Every community will have negatives. Likewise, every community will have positives. Deciding which view you choose to look for is an important first step. Don't always look for fault in people; look for the good in people. Don't always search to find negative when positives are right in front of you. Yes, we may have differences of opinion from time to time, but let us resolve those differences by debating and not by debasing.

Recently, a young lady shared a story with me that concerned me very much. She said a friend of hers received a phone call from a business she used to work for that was considering locating here. They asked if she would be interested in being the assistant manager. She was excited about this opportunity. But, in the end, the business decided against locating here. The reason, they said, was that the citizens they spoke with were simply too negative and they didn't want negative people working for them. We must change that perception.

I have received phone calls, e-mails and have seen websites declaring that Peru is dying. My opinion is a polar opposite. Yes, Peru is in a state of change, but it is a change for the better. Change happens to everyone and as I have said many times "If you don't change with the times, the times will surely change you."

Let me tell you why we are not dying. Peru is now seeing a rebirth of the entrepreneurial spirit. There are citizens of our community re-investing in our community more than we have seen in a long time. Take a look at the far end of West Main Street. That development happened because of local investment. Improvements to the South Side Sales property... local investment. Neal Tire has been purchased and will undergo a renovation for a new business... local investment. Discussions are ongoing for a new movie theater... local investment. These are not the only projects going on in our community. I name these to give you an idea that we are moving forward, not backward. The City will continue to make improvements that will encourage further local investment.

In the history of Peru we have suffered setbacks before. And every time we fought back to regain what we lost. Many of us remember when this was quite a railroad town. It has been estimated that at their height the railroads employed around 3000 people. Due to corporate restructuring by the railroads we lost many of those jobs. But we didn't quit. In 1991 we heard the news that Grissom Air Force Base would be realigned and become Grissom Air Reserve Base. Approximately 4500 jobs were impacted and an economic impact loss to our area of \$105,000,000.00. We were deeply concerned, but we didn't quit. We rolled up our sleeves in both instances and went to work to reverse the losses. It has been a long road, but we are seeing jobs return to Peru. Today, Grissom has an economic impact to our area of \$130,000,000.00. That is an increase of \$25,000,000.00 from where we were after the de-activation occurred. The hard work definitely paid off.

My point in all of this is we have dealt with adversity in the past and we came back. Any adversity we face now or in the future we must remember the courage and faith we had in the past that guided us to a better tomorrow.

One of the biggest positives we have achieved in our community is the addition of Ivy Tech. We all know that the quickest way to turn a community around is through better education. Now our citizens can earn a college degree right here in their home town. Many people worked diligently to make the dream of a college campus in our community become a reality. The Peru campus is one of the fastest growing campuses in the Ivy Tech organization. This means that more people are preparing themselves for the jobs of the future. The jobs of the future will demand a better educated workforce. I ask that we all prepare ourselves for the future by continuing to improve our job skills. We have brought Ivy Tech to our city, but it is up to you to take advantage of it.

Recently, Peru High School was recognized as a state leader in improving the graduation rate of our senior classes. They have also implemented new activities such as the intern program that help prepare our students to be successful after high school. PHS has proven that they want our students to set lofty goals and they will help navigate the way to success in achieving those goals. This is further evidence that Peru is taking education seriously and will continue to make our city a community of learners. My congratulations and appreciation goes to Peru Community Schools for the advances they are making in ensuring our youth will be able to achieve their dreams through education.

Improving education has better positioned our community to attract new interest from prospective business and industry. For a community to continue to grow and succeed they must create new job opportunities. In 2010 we saw new jobs announced for the Peru / Miami County area. Baldwin Painting and Conforce will be creating 375 new jobs between them. We are very pleased and excited to welcome them to our community.

Bringing these businesses to Peru took a lot of time, patience and commitment from a lot of different individuals. City and County officials worked hand in hand to provide incentives to help attract these new industries. That spirit of cooperation does not happen in many other communities, but here it does. The Miami County Economic Development Authority deserves the most credit in these endeavors. They worked tirelessly to gather the data these organizations needed,

they spent hours negotiating and explaining why our community would be their best choice. Even when things may have looked bleak they never gave up.

They reminded me of a saying offered by legendary coach Vince Lombardi. "It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get up." Well, we all may have felt like we had been knocked down, but we always got back up. The result is a positive for our community.

Continuing on the job front, Dr. Ladd will be bringing 15 medical field jobs to Peru. He has built a beautiful new building and will be opening soon. We welcome him to our community as well.

Four new retail businesses have also opened or have announced they will open soon along North Broadway. They are investing in Peru because they believe Peru is worth investing in. Best wishes to all of them and thank you for investing in our city. You are all appreciated.

As you can see, we are attracting new investment and jobs. If we continue to make the improvements we have started we will continue to see new investment. We have heard your demands for new jobs and we have succeeded in bringing new opportunities here for you. Now, I encourage you to get the qualifications necessary to be able to earn one of these new jobs.

The year 2010 was a year of many improvements. The Oakdale Addition had suffered flooding problems for many years. Peru Utilities and City of Peru worked together to correct that problem and resurface effected streets. Now Oakdale residents don't have to worry about flooding in their homes.

The North Broadway project was completed. We are still working on a plan to replace the bridge over Prairie Ditch. We hope to secure the funding for that project from an already appropriated fund within the Hoosier Heartland Corridor budget. This project has given a whole new look to that area of our downtown. A look we can all be proud of. And we accomplished this by using our own City employees and local businesses. To them I say "thank you" for a job well done. You should be proud of what you accomplished. This is also a good reason why we should keep our street department intact.

Preparations have begun for the Washington Avenue extension. For over thirty years, this has been merely an idea that was discussed. Now we are making that idea happen. This project will lead to the future development of 500 acres of land. Its location will be very attractive to developers and will create new jobs for our citizens. We are already receiving calls of interest on this property.

At the present time we have acquired land on which the road will be built. We have some preparation work to do on that land and then we can start to build a construction road. All utility companies that will be involved have been in attendance at the meeting to discuss the infrastructure design. No property tax dollars have been used to accomplish the progress we have made thus far.

The year 2011 promises to be another busy year. Our objectives for the year include getting the construction road built for the Washington Avenue extension, finalize design plans for the 500 acre development, complete South Broadway renovations (we are currently waiting for a grant announcement), develop a "Downtown Incentive" program to attract new retail, work with the Park Board on a new water park along the Riverwalk and help bring a new movie theater to our community. Our Park Department is also working on designs to improve the landscaping in our park system. These projects will not only help create new jobs, but they will also enhance the quality of life for our citizens to enjoy.

It is the goal of this administration to bring a better quality of life to this community. We believe we are heading in the right direction. We still have goals we would like to accomplish but the vision is there and it is very clear. We must continue to look toward the future and where we want to be as a community. In order to get there we must have a clear vision. Helen Keller said it best when she said "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but has no vision". We must never become pathetic.

Hopefully, tonight, you will see that our community has a lot of potential. You have heard the word "positive" many times. That was by design. I want to plant in your minds that we do have many positives in Peru. When we find negatives we must come together, as a community, to correct them. Peru is no different from any other place. All communities are made of bricks and mortar. The only

difference is the people. If there is change to be made, the people can make it happen. If we want new people, businesses and industry to come to our town we must portray an image and a vision that is positive.

In closing, I would like to thank you once again for being here this evening. I feel that it is important to share with you what your government is doing. I would like to invite you all to attend our City Council meetings. They are held the first Monday of each month at 6:00 pm right here in this chamber. I hope that you see that we are being positive, proactive and progressive in guiding our community. I do believe that Peru has a bright future. But we all have a part to play in making that happen. And things are beginning to happen in our favor. We must not be content to wait for our ship to come in, we must be willing to swim out to it. I can assure you that if we all work together, believe in our community and have faith that good things will happen we will become a stronger and more vibrant community that we can all be proud of.

Good night and God bless you.