Good afternoon. Thank you to the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce for hosting and Dewberry for underwriting this years’ State of the City. I’m honored to present my thoughts for your consideration in this, my 15th year as Mayor.

You may (or may not) remember that in last years’ address I challenged this audience to work together to “Change the Narrative” in our community. Many of you have taken the challenge to heart. Thank you very much. To the rest of you, “what are you waiting for?” If you rely on others to tell your story……..OUR story, you are not pulling your weight. We need to work together inclusively to move our community forward.

I’d like to ask everyone here who started a business, to please stand up. Please join me and thank these people. As a business group, you understand the value of the entrepreneurs who start businesses. There are over 30.2 million small businesses in the United States comprising 99.9% of all U.S. Businesses. Small businesses employ 58.9 million people, which is over 47.5 % of our country’s total workforce.

Today I’m going to tell you a few things occurring in and around Peoria. My goal is to encourage you to become more informed about the dynamic that’s happening here..............and then add your data and pass it along. The current “buzz” that’s happening in our area will be more like a “roar” when we’re all contributing and sharing our successes.

To get this year’s address focused, let’s watch this short video.

(The Future is here Video)

Yes, the future is here. It’s not by luck that we’re seeing extensive development happening and much of it in the INNOVATION space. As you will learn shortly, some of these inventions have the capability of changing the world as we know it.

I’d like to start by introducing you to Enduvo. Enduvo is an immersive learning platform that enables anyone to teach and learn in minutes, without coding, and at a fraction of the typical cost. Enduvo enables anyone to quickly create and share on-demand AR/VR learning experience. Lessons are created in minutes; content is distributed and managed easily. Long lead times for VR training are eliminated. Learning is enhanced by realistic, 3D learning. Compared to
traditional learning methods, Enduvo makes teaching, learning and training better. Users are seeing a 75% savings in content development costs, 70% decrease in content development time and 95% increase in learner confidence. Let’s view a quick video from Enduvo creator Dr. Matthew Bramlet, pediatric cardiologist at Children’s Hospital of Illinois and University of Illinois College of Medicine.

(Enduvo video)

As Dr. Bramlet mentioned, his work in large part was made possible through the ARCHES endowment. Applied Research for Community Health through Engineering and Simulation. The $112 million dollar endowment provides up to $4 million dollars in funding for local projects each year.

AIM, or Advanced Imaging and Modeling is an innovative collaboration pairing clinicians and engineers with the most advanced imaging and modeling technologies available. Through the ARCHES endowment, these clinicians and engineers are achieving operational excellence at OSF and JUMP Simulation by lowering barriers to virtual reality education across their institutions.

I’d like to welcome Dr. Bramlet to the luncheon this afternoon. Thanks for being here Doctor.

Over the past year, sustainable materials startup Natural Fiber Welding (or NFW) has been quietly growing and expanding operations at their facility on Galena Rd. Let's watch this video to learn more about NFW's innovative approach to using plants, not plastic.

PLAY VIDEO

Not only has NFW expanded their square footage from 30,000 to over 55,000 square feet, but they've hired 14 new employees with plans to hire another 20 this year. What’s even more sensational is the global interest that NFW has been attracting, with 8 international partners or customers traveling to Peoria plus countless others making the trip from across the US, including big names from the west and
east coast. In total, over 22 unique industry partners, potential customers, and global brands have come to visit NFW in just the past year. And clearly it’s been working.... In 2019, NFW secured over $6 million of equity funding, most of which is from outside Greater Peoria, and includes a world-leading textile mill with a global footprint and customer base. Additionally, they secured more than $2M of grant funding in 2019 to help expand their product lines, which includes Mirum: the world’s FIRST plant-based leather alternative that is receiving tons of positive press including over a dozen feature stories in prominent global media outlets including Textile World, Marker by Medium, Fast Company and Vogue Business. Additionally, NFW is part of an exclusive Amsterdam based Accelerator - Fashion for Good and continually being invited to speak or present at global conferences. So far in the just the first month of 2020, NFW has been an invited speaker and participant at Neonyte in Berlin, Texworld in New York City, Future Fabric Expo in London and the ChangeNOW Conference in Paris.

We’re excited to have founder and CEO Luke Haverhals and COO Steve Zika joining us today. What they’re doing here could be transformational for our city and our world!

I have one more startup to talk to you about this afternoon, NTS. NTS is a nanotech company founded with a mission to commercialize University-based nanotech discoveries. They are currently focused on bringing a novel/proprietary energy harvesting technology to market called Graphene Energy Harvesting or GEH. GEH converts ambient energy into electricity with non-circuitry in conjunction with graphene membrane. GEH has a higher projected energy density than existing energy harvesting methods. Initially, NTS will enter the market as a chip level internal recharging mechanism for IoT devices like wireless sensors and GPS trackers, etc. GEH is scalable and NTS has ambitions to utilize it for increasingly higher power outputs over time. Breakthrough discoveries of Graphene were made at the University of Arkansas by physics professor Dr. Paul Thibado where R&D is continuing. The commercialization team is based right here in the Peoria area.

I think you’ll enjoy this short video. (Play NTS Video)
I am proud to welcome the Founder and CEO of NTS, Don Meyer who has joined us here today. Thanks for coming Don.

So we just introduced 3 invigorating companies located here that are at various levels of development and getting their breakthroughs to market. And there are more just like these.

(Innovation Hub)
And as we work together to reinvent the future of Peoria through innovation, I could not be more excited for the work taking place downtown at the ICC Thomas Building to create the Peoria Innovation Hub.

Modeled after the 1871 technology accelerator in Chicago, the Peoria Innovation Hub will be a magnet for talent and entrepreneurship in our region. The facility will house co-working, a makerspace, private offices for start-ups and spaces for community collaboration and education. The Peoria Innovation Hub is located in a federal Opportunity Zone and across the street from the new OSF Healthcare world headquarters.

The Peoria Innovation Hub is part of a larger Illinois Innovation Network that includes a dozen other sites in the state. While each of these sites offers important strengths and opportunities for collaboration, I am delighted that Peoria is leading the way to implement this effort and that our efforts have been recognized by Governor Pritzker who came to Peoria to officially kick-off the Peoria Innovation Hub and lend his endorsement just a few months ago.

On May first of last year, the Peoria Innovation Alliance set the ball in motion at their launch event titled, “Change the Narrative.” A diverse cross section from across the community came together and was exposed to some of the great innovative initiatives and companies operating here in our backyard. Not just the companies already mentioned but those you saw on the big screens during lunch like Bump Boxes, Big Picture Initiative, Widecast, River City Labs, Better Earth Logistics and others.

Following that event, on October 8th the Peoria City Council unanimously approved the designation of an Innovation District in downtown Peoria in
partnership with the Peoria Innovation Alliance. This 9-block area is the area that we are targeting for economic and innovative growth. The District will be home to a Smart City pilot including autonomous vehicle test routes, smart transit solutions, public Wifi, pedestrian sensors, open data, and other innovation-related initiatives aimed at bringing concentrated economic activity to Downtown Peoria.

The mission of the Peoria Innovation Alliance is to share our region’s innovation history, promote our progress and vision for the future, and enable and empower the next round of innovators, entrepreneurs and startups that call Greater Peoria home. I’d like to thank Peoria Innovation Alliance Founder and Executive Director Jake Hamann, his team and Board of Directors for their hard work and focus on the launch of the Innovation District.

One of the most sensational things I have the privilege of announcing today is that the Peoria Innovation Alliance has secured Peoria as the city selected to host the first ever North American competition for the Future Agro Challenge startup competitions.

Part of a 60-country global initiative, hundreds of participants including agriculture-based startups and corporations from across the Midwest will be descending on Peoria in mid-April to compete in a 2-day pitch contest in categories like food security & sustainability, agriculture education, nutrition & health, agroforestry, and agriculture production just to name a few.

The most motivating part is that the winners from this Peoria competition will be awarded an all expenses paid trip to Greece in September to compete in the global competition with the chance to win up to $100,000 and meet with the top agriculture companies and experts from around the world.

This event will undoubtedly put another feather in Peoria’s innovation cap and help us continue to showcase our community’s support for entrepreneurship, innovation, and startup activity at a regional, national, and global level.

We know, here in Peoria, that Innovation is not a “new” phrase. Caterpillar was founded on innovation. They put the “trac” in track-type tractor. They were the
first to put a diesel engine in that tractor. They were developing autonomous driving technology decades before it became in vogue.

And for 50 years, the University of Illinois College of Medicine–Peoria has been preparing future physicians, performing clinical research and guiding collaboration with partners in the community. Regional Dean Meenakshy Aiyer and her team train over 500 medical students, residents and fellows annually. Included in that number are 244 students in the four year curriculum. The students, residents, fellows, faculty and staff drive millions of dollars into our community every year.

It’s no surprise that Healthcare has become the largest employment segment in Central Illinois employing over 30,000 people. According to the Greater Peoria EDC, that’s over 16% of our workforce. We’re privileged to have World-Class Healthcare providers in Peoria.

I’d like to congratulate Dr. Keith Knepp, who was recently named Regional CEO for Unity Point Health Central Illinois. His leadership will insure Unity Point maintains their quality care and fine service to our community as the eighth senior affiliate of UnityPoint Health, the nation’s 5th largest nondenominational health system.

UnityPoint Health is proud of several stimulating new programs, all to expand on the cutting-edge healthcare that’s available right here in Peoria. Midwest Orthopedic Hospital at UnityPoint Proctor has launched, in partnership with the physicians of Midwest Orthopedics. The Midwest Orthopedic Hospital at Proctor is a specialized Orthopedic hospital, offering the convenience and ease of outpatient care with the resources and expertise of a full-service hospital. Also, in 2019, UnityPoint was honored to join forces with the Human Service Center and Tazwood Center for Wellness, coming together to form UnityPlace. The vision of UnityPlace is to provide comprehensive, coordinated Behavioral Health and Addiction services to our region. At the same time, UnityPoint is tackling the opioid addiction crisis head-on, including being awarded a $1.7 million grant to provide improved addiction services in their hospitals. The Cardiovascular surgery team is excited to be performing minimally invasive aortic valve replacement surgery, providing state of the art cardiology care. Finally, Methodist College
continues to expand into new programs, building new opportunities for students and growing a professional workforce.

You know last year I was gratified to present the Mayor’s Outstanding Community Service Award to OSF HealthCare for their commitment to and investments in Peoria. Their decision to renovate a historic building in downtown Peoria as the new home for their Healthcare Ministry Headquarters was a massive shot in the arm for all of us. We recently learned that OSF Healthcare is requesting permission from the state to approve the construction of a $237 million dollar regional Comprehensive Cancer Center on its Peoria campus. The new Center will provide life-saving innovations and state-of-the-art technology like proton beam therapy which is only found in about 30 locations across the country. More people will come to Peoria from across the Midwest to receive highly specialized care. The new Cancer Center will elevate Peoria as a destination for cutting-edge cancer treatment and continue to restore a strong sense of community pride and economic vibrancy.

So we all know there have been some difficult times recently with the loss of some executive positions at Caterpillar and the overall dismal business climate in our State. I sense a strong sense of urgency in our community to be a shining light to attract new business and vibrancy here. In addition to the ventures I’ve mentioned today, I’d like to take a moment and talk about how the focused efforts of a single individual have dramatically influenced the dynamics and optimism in the community.

In December of 2018, there was an announcement that the Peoria Heights Library would be transformed into the Betty Jayne Brimmer Center for the Performing Arts. The beautiful performing arts and conference center held its grand opening in August of 2019. In May of 19, it was announced that the boutique “Atrium Hotel” would be built in the Heights and hopes to open in the summer of 21. In April, we were elated to learn that the beautiful and historic Scottish Rite Cathedral had been purchased and was being renovated and restored. A new concert Steinway piano will be a hallmark feature in the renewal of “The Scotty”. It’s sure to be one of the hottest locations for entertainment, concerts, banquets and other community events. Next, was a huge shot in the arm for the Peoria Women’s Club in downtown Peoria. The Women’s Club headquarters was the beneficiary of a $500,000 donation towards their fundraising goals. At the end of
'19, a spectacular announcement that with a big investor getting involved, the Peoria Armory was finally going to come back to life as a major sporting and concert complex. There’s also the Sankoty Lakes Resort and Retreat, Al-Fresco Park rejuvenation and more to come.

A native son came home and he’s teaching us that someone who grew up in Spring Bay and went to East Peoria High School, Illinois Central College and Loyola University, can go on to have great success anywhere, in no small part because of the values that were instilled in him right here in central Illinois. He’s demonstrating to us that we have something very special to offer – with our unique history and architecture and work ethic and inventiveness and landscape including our greatest natural asset, the Illinois River that runs through it. He’s instilling that we can compete with anybody and to ask, “Why not here?” and also help us remember what it feels like to be optimistic again, just like OSF did last year.

For these reasons and many more, I’m proud to announce this years’ recipient of the Mayor’s Outstanding Community Service Award. We have with us today the Executive Chairman of Tandem Diabetes Care, the entrepreneur behind multiple successful start-up companies, and the guy who says “I’m not from California, I’m from Spring Bay.” Please help me congratulate and say “Thank you” to Mr. Kim Blickenstaff.

There are so many stimulating and positive things happening in the community that there’s just not enough time to mention them all. I’m going to rapid-fire a few more right now.

We’ve talked about Bump Boxes in the last few State of the City addresses. The world now knows Bump Boxes as the largest, fastest growing subscription box for mom and baby. CEO and co-founder Christine Deehring’s vision to help solve the challenges across their industry, including the lack of investment capital for women-focused and women-owned businesses recently announced her plans to invest at least $1 million dollars into early stage mom-focused companies. Peoria thanks Bump Boxes for their investments here and we want to help you stay here for the long haul.
The only multidisciplinary museum of its kind in the nation, the Peoria Riverfront Museum uses art, science, history and achievement to inspire confidence, lifelong learning, and talent. Since opening in 2012, the privately funded museum has provided more than one million experiences. The Peoria Riverfront Museum has more than 200 community and national program and content partners, including affiliation with the Smithsonian. From their “every student” initiative, Lego to Tiffany & DaVinci and beyond....... President/CEO John Morris is doing an outstanding job with the quality and content of their programs and exhibits and he tells me 2020 will be spectacular!

Talking about taking great things here for granted, do you realize that our Peoria Park District is a 3-time winner of the National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal? They serve an area over 60 square miles and 9000 acres of land including 52 miles of trails. When you look at amenities like our Zoo, the Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum, Owens Recreational Center and more public golf holes than San Diego. It’s truly amazing. Just last week the community showed over-whelming support for their Donovan Sculpture Garden Concept, not to be confused with the already successful Sculpture Walk downtown. Thanks to the Park Board and their Executive Director Emily Cahill for providing exceptional services to our community.

You need look no further than right here to acknowledge success. Last year the Peoria Civic Center hosted 23 sold out performances here. Thanks to the PCC Board and GM Rik Edgar and his team. Keep up the great work.

Along the same lines, our Peoria Public Library is one of the tops in the country. They have an outstanding Board and Executive Director Randall Yelverton and Deputy Director Roberta K providing our community with exceptional service. I encourage you to participate in this year’s Peoria Reads project, “The Hate U Give”. It’s a very good read.

Big Picture Peoria! Peoria has come to realize how important the Arts are to our community. The Arts brings millions of dollars in revenue’s and tens of thousands of visitors to our community every year.

Speaking of Arts..........let’s give it up for Jonathan and Nikki Romain and ART Inc. Artists ReEnvisioning Tomorrow. They’ve brought old Greeley School back to life
and are striving to enhance the quality of life for the community, especially our youth, through arts education and cultural programs. If you haven’t been there, get there. If you haven’t donated, please do so.

The Community showed up big time to raise funding for our new Ronald McDonald House. We are a fortunate community to have them here serving so many needy families.

Peoria Promise is in its 11th year and thanks to many of you here, is helping our future leaders achieve educational goals they never imagined. Over 3000 students have participated in Peoria Promise. No one else is doing what Peoria Promise is doing to enhance education opportunities for kids that live in the city of Peoria. The partnership with ICC is continually improving and now the Uniquely Eureka Promise provides an opportunity to expand the ICC education to Eureka College. Our students have an opportunity to earn a four year college degree at little to no cost. Only in Peoria!

By now we know that Build Peoria’s goal is to unite the community through their love of the Peoria area and to physically BUILD PEORIA into a better place and leave a LEGACY for future generations. This years’ project is the purchase and renovation of a home on the near north side to donate to the Peoria Police Department for use in our Neighborhood Officer Program. The Police Department has seen an 11.5% reduction in the number of calls for service in the existing neighborhoods with resident officers. Thanks to Nick Yates and his team at Build Peoria for their positive leadership moving our community forward.

The leadership at the General Wayne A Downing, Peoria International Airport continues to set passenger records and are working hard to provide us with outstanding direct flights with connections to anywhere in the world. Please use our airport for all of your business and personal needs. Keeping this great amenity is critical to our community. Go global, fly local.

Literally everyone here has a vested interest in making our community safe. Please invest your time, talent and/or financial resources to help PCAV grow. PCAV is the Peoria Community Against Violence. Everyone wants a safe community right? Go to PEORIACOMMUNITYAGAINSTVIOLENCE.ORG or Facebook for more information.
Perhaps an unknown fact is that the average City Manager’s tenure in one place was about 3.5 years in the 60’s and about 7 years in 2000. Up to now we’ve had two long serving City Managers. Robert Wright from 1970-1978 and James Daken from 1978 – 1987. This year will mark Patrick Urich’s 9th year as City Manager. We’d like to congratulate him and thank him for his administrative leadership to our City.

In closing I’d like to thank my peers on the Council for their dedication to making Peoria better. A shout out to all of our educators who are grooming our future leaders. A special thanks to Dr. Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat who is working hard for her board and making a difference in our Peoria Public Schools. When we talk about changing the narrative, we need to change it for PPS too. There’s so much great educating being done there. If you don’t believe me, join me for a visit to any of our local schools. You’ll be amazed. Think about how lucky we are when it comes to education. You can attend Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Development or any number of fine pre-schools, stellar grade and high schools both public and private, ICC, Bradley, UIS or other colleges and then the largest medical school in the country and never have to leave Peoria! So much we take for granted. Similar to the City, you’ve seen where our friends at Bradley are going through some challenging times. I am 100% confident the University and Peoria will reemerge from our reorganizations even stronger. Bradley is critical to our community and I wish them great success. Thanks to Gary Roberts and best of luck to the Board as they strive to bring in the highest caliber President in the nation.

You may have heard recently that Matt George, the CEO and President of Children’s Home recently wrote a book titled, “The Nonprofit Game Plan; The Proven Strategy to Nonprofit Success”. The original Shark from Shark Tank, Kevin Harrington wrote the forward to the book and has mentored Matt on writing the soon to be best seller. Matt will be autographing his books for sale in the lobby after today’s address. Congratulations Matt.

We’ve got a lot to be proud of and thankful for Peoria. Take control of the narrative in whatever sector you’re involved in our community. We’re moving forward. We can and will be better. Don’t hide your pride. Thank you for the
opportunity to serve as your Mayor. God’s blessings to all of you. Let’s have a great 2020.

Before you leave, check out this quick video about our new expansion franchise USL team, PEORIA CITY.

Show video