

Mayor Dyer's State of the City Address
Pride, Progress, and Partnership
February 28, 2007

City Commissioners, elected officials, guests and fellow citizens:

Today, as we gather to reflect on the state of our great City, it is fitting we acknowledge the momentous events of the past year.

Our community has shown the world Orlando's potential by grabbing hold of the opportunities we've been presented ... a medical school for UCF and the east coast headquarters of the Burnham Institute; we've doubled our City skyline; planned for commuter rail, continued our commitment to Pathways for Parramore, and cemented a victory to move forward with Community Venues ... we've made decisions in the past year that have set our region's course for decades to come.

I must recognize our City Commissioners for their dedication and willingness to seize these opportunities. True leadership is often not fully appreciated for months, years or decades. Commissioners, your efforts for our community and for our residents have not gone unnoticed ... and I thank you. So, please stand to be recognized.

And I'd like to acknowledge our dedicated City employees... the people who interact everyday with our citizens. They are the face of our City, the men and women who work tirelessly to provide quality urban services to the citizens of our City Beautiful.

I also want to recognize the person who everyday serves as my greatest inspiration ... the first lady of Orlando, my wife, Karen. Thank you for your support.

I welcome Orange County Mayor Rich Crotty. Thank you for being here and building our partnership ... I believe, it has never been stronger.

This is the fourth time I've had the honor of delivering this address and each year, I've reflected on what our City has gained and where our vision is taking us. This year, however, we have lost several important community advocates, and I'd like to take a moment to remember two ... Marilyn Mennello and Tom Mickle.

From supporting our arts community and leading efforts to improve our sports and entertainment venues ... these two leaders will be remembered as examples of how an individual can inspire an entire community ... and they will be missed.

As I said last year, "the foundation for our future has been laid" and we are now seeing the fruits of our vision and labor.

The state of our City is strong. Our successes and challenges can be summed up in three words – pride, progress and partnerships.

Pride in who we are as a community ... and in experiencing our City's history in the making.

Progress in moving forward with a bold vision and commitment to the future, understanding that the best solution isn't always the easiest one.

And Partnerships, recognizing that our greatest successes will not be reached alone but through partnerships between government, business and community groups, and most importantly, our citizens.

Many of our residents that I meet when I'm out in our neighborhoods aren't originally from Orlando. We need to take advantage of that great diversity and use it to create an even better City. Our future

depends on our community pride and understanding that even though we may come from different places ... Orlando is our hometown.

We've already seen success in this area. I've heard Kathy Waltz say that things have changed since she became publisher of the Orlando Sentinel in 2000 ... our mindset as a City has changed, and we realize now that we can accomplish anything we put our minds to. There is a real sense of optimism in our City ... that's the power of community pride.

And that pride is being recognized nationally. Orlando was just named by Forbes as one of the top 5 cities for job opportunities and in the top ten for business and careers. And Wired Magazine named Orlando with New York, Boston, and LA as one of the top ten "tech" towns in the U.S.

And, people want to be a part of what we are building here. One of them stands heads above the crowd, literally. Former NBA star and entrepreneur Magic Johnson, just gave me the green light to share some exciting news. Magic, through the Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund, the country's largest private equity fund that revitalizes urban and distressed areas, is bringing a \$70 million investment with a focus on the Parramore Heritage neighborhood.

We're talking about opportunities for affordable housing and new jobs. Thank you, Canyon-Johnson, for making this commitment to Orlando.

Also, on our City's Westside, high-tech activity is being propelled by plans to turn the current site of the Amway Arena into a "Creative Village." Based on the recommendations of our Creative Village task force, this project will radically transform the Centroplex into an area teeming with artists, video game designers, students and residents.

And today, our vision of becoming a Film and Digital Media destination is one step closer.

House of Moves, the world's largest motion capture service, is co-locating its east coast operation at the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy. With film credits including Spiderman II and Titanic, House of Moves will design and equip the only professional Motion Capture sound stage on the entire East Coast, serving as a cornerstone of our Creative Village.

And speaking of creative folks, we owe thanks to another of our great partners, Walt Disney World Resort. As part of their Year of a Million Dreams, the talented professionals at Disney Imagineering will take their creative genius into one of our favorite parks. They will transform the Disney Amphitheater at Lake Eola into an art deco inspired venue ... a downtown destination that we can be proud of.

And I couldn't deliver a speech about pride, progress and partnerships without addressing the progress made this year on projects we've been working on for decades. We reached an agreement between the hospitality industry, the City, County and Venue partners to move forward with our three community venues, a new performing arts center, a new events center and a renovated stadium. We thank our partners at Universal, Disney and Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association for their commitment to enriching the lives of our residents, as well as our visitors.

Understand, that while the events within these structures are important, equally important is the path we paved to get here. Our success in making this unprecedented investment is a symbol of our civic involvement and our collective hometown spirit.

It's important to maintain the momentum and deliver on our promise to the community. In January, Mayor Crotty and I committed the necessary staff time to finalize agreements with our Venue partners, and I want to thank Mayor Crotty for making that happen. With that continued commitment, I believe we'll bring these agreements forward to City Council in March and April.

One of the most significant statements about the pride we feel, the partnerships we've formed and

the path of progress we've set, is the amount of philanthropy raised by the Orlando Performing Arts Center. You know, it is so easy to say no ... to doubt that bold visions can become real. When naysayers doubted these projects, this community spoke loud, and spoke often ... already raising more than \$52 million, including \$25 million from the Dr. Philips Charities. And today, I'm happy to announce an additional gift of \$1 million ... all the more inspirational because it is anonymous.

These are our defining accomplishments, but we must also acknowledge the challenges that world-class cities must address ... public safety, homelessness and the continued need for economic diversity. These issues are not solved in a day, they require vision, diligence, and long-term commitment.

Cities all across the country, including our hometown, experienced an increase in violent crime last year, taking a toll not only on victims and their families but also, on our entire community.

Let me be clear about the position of this administration and this City council. When the safety of our community is threatened by a cowardly few, we will engage every local, every state and every national resource ... every community partner ... and every resident to protect our children, families, neighbors and visitors.

The most direct solution is to dedicate more resources. We've done that. Over the next three years, we are investing \$110 million for 75 additional police officers, new sub-stations throughout the City, more 9-1-1 operators to answer citizen's calls, three new fire stations, 45 more fire fighters, and a state-of-the-art training facility.

Police Chief Mike McCoy and his team are attacking the problem. They are identifying crime trends and criminal hot spots, and then striking with three specialized, tactical units to aggressively and effectively stop street level narcotics and violent crime. In just over six months, our TAC units have arrested 830 people, including 200 felony drug arrests, swept 52 firearms off our streets, and recovered 35 stolen vehicles.

We have a highly skilled and trained police department that reflects the make up of our community. And today, I'm asking the City Council to approve the top recommendations of the Public Safety Community Recruiting Panel led by Dr. Stanley Stone ... recommendations that will allow us to attract the best recruits from around the state and country, get them trained and out on our streets as fast as possible.

In August, I established the Mayor's Safe Orlando Task Force, tapping the talent and expertise of 26 community leaders to identify specific ways to prevent crime, use police resources more effectively and stop repeat offenders. Dr. Stone, Task Force Chairman and many of its members are here with us today, will you please stand and be recognized.

Next month they will deliver findings to City Council and I pledge to you we will act swiftly and deliberately to begin implementing or advocating for those recommendations. And as a sign of that commitment, I am announcing, in advance, one of the key recommendations that we will implement ...

We are adding a fourth patrol division to the core of our City, including a new TAC squad, by accelerating our three-year initiative. This will result in quicker response times and higher police presence in the areas of our city experiencing growth like Lake Nona and the Mall at Millennia.

Understand, while we're meeting the public safety needs of our citizens and businesses today, we're also securing the safety of our children's future.

While all of these efforts are critical, the best way to defeat crime is to keep it from happening.

In November, I hosted a summit where, for the first time ever, mayors and police chiefs from

Florida's largest cities discussed the best ways to combat violent crime. We learned about a successful initiative in Jacksonville, which became the basis for our new Illegal Gun Bounty Program.

And it's already working ... just this morning the Crimeline Board of Directors unanimously approved the 1st reward payout to a citizen whose tip resulted in several guns being recovered. Guns that were used in multiple armed robberies, are now off our streets.

Citizen involvement and corporate partners make this program work. Clear Channel Communications is posting billboards throughout our City this week, and our regional transit partner, LYNX will be airing public service announcements to educate their more than 80,000 daily riders. It is partnerships like this that show everyone can help.

These are best practices and programs that we can implement. And we have. What I'm committing to today is that when change on our streets requires change in our laws ... we will do everything possible to bring State and Federal resources to bear on those that choose to act outside the law.

I was one of the first to pledge support to Governor Crist's "Anti-Murder" bill to keep violent criminals off the streets and back in jail where they belong. We met with U.S. Marshall Tom Hurlburt and expressed our desire for an enhanced United States Marshals presence in Orlando, and we will work directly with the Florida Congressional Delegation to make sure that it happens.

We will ensure Federal and State officials understand that support for homeland security is important, but so is support for hometown security.

Over the past few months I've met with hundreds of residents in different neighborhoods around the City to listen to their concerns. I've seen firsthand their eagerness to empower themselves to prevent and combat crime.

One proud group of volunteers are leading the way in this effort ... Citizen Observers are the eyes and ears patrolling our streets ... and now, their ranks are about to grow. The City of Orlando has put out a call to our retired public safety officials, including police and fire retirees as well as our veterans ... and they have responded.

This month, several have volunteered to form a specialized squad to join the 67 current members ... thank you to those of you that have joined us today, please stand and be recognized.

In Orlando, we believe in the "Broken Window Theory" that says a broken window left unfixed can quickly encourage more crime and vandalism; and it has inspired New York and other major cities to crack down on broken windows, graffiti, and other infractions to reduce more serious crimes in those areas. And it works.

Through Keep Orlando Beautiful, we are launching an information clearinghouse where citizens can report graffiti through a dedicated hotline. This group will work in tandem with City departments and the OPD Gang Enforcement team to aggressively locate and remove graffiti. It isn't just an eyesore; it's a symptom of crime. And criminals are less likely to act out in an environment that is cared for.

Our administration has been squarely focused on finding solutions to crime and opportunities to prevent it. We need to engage our young people and give them the tools they need to forge a different path ... because they are more likely to fail our community if we fail them.

Spearheaded by the City and supported by a \$2 million dollar investment from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other local partners, our Parramore Kidz Zone initiative has reached more than 2,000 at-risk children ... providing access to health care, after school programs, tutoring, pre-K education, and mentoring.

Today, we're unveiling three of our latest efforts. Through a partnership with A Gift for Teaching,

we're opening after school labs or "Homework Roomz" to offer children a safe-haven staffed by tutors and outfitted with computers and educational supplies. Already, Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy and Florida Citrus Sports have committed to sponsoring additional labs.

And, the first Kidz Zone Mentoring program will recruit and match 250 mentors with the most at-risk children in Parramore, developing a model to be used citywide in every neighborhood.

The Orlando Magic have also stepped up and committed a quarter of a million dollars in advance of the SAFE Orlando recommendations, to take at-risk youth who are vulnerable to drugs, gangs and violence, off the streets through Parramore Kidz Zone and by expanding Commissioner Wyman's After School All-Stars program.

Thank you, Commissioner Wyman and thank you, Orlando Magic, for caring about our children.

Remember, while we are building the bricks and mortar of our City's future, we must also build our children to become the next generation of leaders, advocates and teachers for our community.

We remain equally committed to building a sustainable foundation for all of our residents by providing new jobs and economic opportunities.

When we announced our \$1 billion investment in Community Venues, we said we would create a model for how communities nationwide can leverage public projects to create local jobs and local business growth. One of our goals is to develop a local workforce program that trains our citizens for the venue construction and ancillary development created by the projects.

I want to thank City staff, Commissioner Lynum, Commissioner Ings, along with our partners in the community, the African American Council of Christian Clergy, the Urban League, Black Business Investment Fund, and Workforce Central Florida for providing valuable input toward the development of this blueprint.

Due to Commissioner Lynum's initial findings, the workforce portion of this program focuses on three specific groups, local residents, ex-offenders and the homeless population. Currently, ex-offenders are released back into the community with little training or resources. This isn't working, so we are taking the lead, working with Orange County corrections, and other community partners, and lining up the resources needed for ex-offenders and the homeless to develop skills and become productive members of the community.

These programs will take the Community Venue investment and turn it into a sweeping force of change for our local economy.

While the Venues workforce program is one initiative aimed at getting the homeless population on their feet, we're coordinating at a regional level to address all of their needs. For the first time ever, a Regional Commission comprised of the City of Orlando, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties, are leveraging collective resources and developing comprehensive solutions.

A great example of regional partnerships is Project Homeless Connect, which delivered housing and job assistance as well as food and clothing to more than 600 homeless individuals. I want to thank Commissioner Sheehan and Commissioner Stuart for their tireless work on this issue. Together, we will continue to help less fortunate residents get off the street and back on their feet.

There's a common theme that runs through all the progress we've made ... partnership. As we move ahead, we remain focused on one important truth ...our greatest successes will not be reached alone but through regional partnerships.

To the partners I've already mentioned and to others like the Orlando Regional Chamber, Metro Orlando EDC, Orange County Public Schools, Central Florida Sports Commission, the Airport

Authority, Florida Hospital and Orlando Regional, I want each of you to understand how much our region is depending on you. You play a critical role in our City's future, and your involvement will help determine what our region becomes ten, twenty and fifty years from now.

Look at how one of our strongest partnerships emerging in Lake Nona will forever change our region. Last year I asked you to "envision a medical cluster" ... that may have been an understatement. What we are now building, together, is an entire Medical City ... both the Medical School and The Burnham Institute will break ground this year, serving as anchors to our biomedical and health sciences cluster in Orlando. And just last week, Nemours selected Lake Nona for its proposed children's health care campus, with a top-tier specialty pediatric hospital.

And hopefully soon, we'll make another announcement ... that the VA Hospital is locating at Lake Nona in Commissioner Diamond's district.

An area ripe with potential is now alive with opportunity, and I want to recognize two people that represent the partnership that is driving the growth of this industry ... Dr. John Hitt President of UCF and Sesh Thakkar President of Tavistock. Thank you both for being here.

Partnerships have helped us become innovative and efficient, and some are helping us "go green."

We're working with OUC and Orange County to secure a federal grant to accelerate the use of solar power technologies in our everyday lives ... improving the environment and saving us money. The grant will also help us explore development of the City's first "Green Fleet" using alternate fuel in city vehicles from our police cars to garbage trucks and fire engines.

Together, we are also studying the feasibility of using municipal solid waste as a renewable energy source. And, OUC's new administration building being built right across the street, will be one of downtown's "greenest" developments with the latest in high tech conservation and energy efficient features.

We are committed to improving the environment and quality of life for our residents, and with these "green" advancements the City of Orlando and OUC are leading by example.

In closing, I want to thank our commissioners again for your tireless leadership. To the residents of Orlando, our City is, in many ways, stronger than it has ever been. And, while we are faced daily with the challenges of growth, we are committed to diligently finding solutions that benefit the greater good.

Former President Lyndon B. Johnson once said, "The American city should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every man feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends ... this is what man sought at the dawn of civilization. It is what we seek today."

I believe this is what we strive for, and on this 28th day of February 2007, as I look at our history in the making, I am honored to be a part of the future serving as your Mayor.

Thank you and God bless Orlando.