

**NATCHEZ MAYOR DAN M. GIBSON**

**2022 State of the City Address/ July 21, 2022 / City Auditorium**

**Outline**

**INTRODUCTION**

*Like the mighty river that flows beneath our magnificent bluffs, we must flow steadily together as one, ever forward and in a constant state of renewal. The success our city has seen over the last two years is not the work of one person, but the collaborative efforts of many.*

**We are that Natchez Current – and our current is strong! So let’s report on what is currently happening in Natchez...**

**Economic Development**

**JOBS, JOBS, JOBS**

**Business Highlights**

New Businesses

Historic! 185, up from 70 just a year ago

The Natchez Adams Chamber of Commerce reports they have added 20 new members in last six weeks!

New Jobs

We have lost count. So many new businesses – and so many existing businesses are growing.

**Every major employer in our area tells us they are hiring**

Indeed.com has over 600 listings

Employer Highlights

Countless new restaurants, shops, service providers, health clinics

Loss Prevention Services, already almost out of space

Southern Designs at Old K-Mart, growing and expanding their footprint

Delta Fuel, nearly doubling right here in Natchez

Jordan Carriers, Celebrating 30 years and GROWING!! Up 80 employees since January, about to double that number by year’s end, and soon breaking ground on a new 28,000 square foot headquarters.

Delta Energy, World Energy, Von Drehl, Jones Lumber, (Just to name a few)

More on the way! Not the least of which is Velocys/ Bayou Fuels, what will be America’s Largest Bio Refinery breaking ground next year. \$1.5 Billion – hundreds of new jobs

A \$16 Million renovation of Natchez Rail is now complete – we can now ship fully-loaded rail cars anywhere along the entire Eastern Seaboard!

Every available square inch of our Industrial Park is now under contract. Historic! A good problem to have! Some exciting announcements coming soon! Natchez Inc. has 13 active clients at the present time. Counting Velocys, we're looking at over \$3 billion in potential investment!

Record Number of New Building Permits:	1,322 / Over \$53 million in new construction!
Historic Renovations:	More than any other city in the state. Proud of our Historic Natchez Foundation!
Record Number of New Home Sales:	Nearly 700
Record Number of Entergy Inspections:	1,576
Sales Taxes Hitting Record Highs:	Surpassed \$500k five times last year.  Surpassed \$500K three times so far this year.  We are now running \$300k ahead, right now, of where we were this time last year – and last year was a record year!  On a Per-Capita Basis, Natchez is now ahead of many cities such as: Biloxi, Vicksburg, Gulfport, Southaven, Ocean Springs, Brandon, and even major college towns like Starkville, Jackson, Cleveland, and we're gaining on Oxford.  No wonder some at the MS Development Authority are now calling Natchez one of "Mississippi's Fastest Growing Economies"!

Our New Downtown Natchez Alliance is moving forward with our Master Plan! Christmas in July, Crepe Myrtle Festival, many more promotions and events in the making!

We are once again a Mississippi Main Street Community!

And Code Enforcement is back and getting better – So grateful to our new City Planner, Frankie Legeaux

### **Tourism Highlights**

More Festivals Than We Can Name or Count – Pilgrimages – Special Events – Car Shows – Bike Rallies

From Christmas In Natchez to Black History Month!

From Mardi Gras to Euro Fest to Juneteenth!

Natchez Festival of Music, just celebrated 31 years!

The Natchez Little Theatre, about to celebrate their 90<sup>th</sup> year!!

Mudbug Festival – "2021 Best Small Festival Award", MS Tourism Association, and 2022 was even better with Lucas Nelson, Cody Jinks, and so many more!

Successful July 4 Festival Featuring Alabama and Robert Earl Keen

Minor Street Jubilee Next Weekend!

First Ever “Blues and Soul Superbowl” coming this October will feature Patti Labelle, along with Celo Green and Kool and the Gang

Our amazing Balloon Festival, about to celebrate our 37<sup>th</sup> year! And our 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Angels on the Bluff – so popular having to extend to two weekends this November.

And don’t miss Longwood Afternoon coming end of October featuring Deana Carter and our own Eleanor Swede

Movies Coming Soon: “Rumble in the Dark”, “From Black”, “A New Orleans Noel” with Patti LaBelle!

Can still enjoy Every Time a Bell Rings!

### **More Great Tourism Offerings:**

Our Monument to the US Colored Troops is about to be in the design phase.

Hop On Hop Off Bus Tours – Smallest City in the World to have it!

Redneck Adventures and Mid-South Broadcasting continue to bring great outdoor tourism events like the Bigfoot Festival and BassTactix National Tourney

More Federal Funding for Forks of the Road and Completion of Lighting and Signage for the Proud to Take a Stand Monument! Natchez is now on the MS Freedom Trail and US Civil Rights Trail (Dr. John Banks House) and so many other historic sites, such as the Rhythm Night Club Historic Site, are now getting their proper attention! In fact, we are finally helping maintain the Historic Watkins Street Cemetery – with more plans in the works! And we have started the development of Historic Revels Plaza!

### **Conventions! Many conferences taking place...**

Natchez Literary and Cinema Celebration

Spring Governor’s Conference On Tourism – their largest ever!

MS National Guard Annual Conference

MS Chancery Clerks Association

MS Head Start Conference

POLICE CHIEF JOSEPH DAUGHTRY IS NOW THE PRESIDENT OF THE MS CHIEF’S ASSOCIATION AND WILL BE BRINGING THE CHIEFS TO NATCHEZ IN DECEMBER FOR THEIR WINTER CONFERENCE!

AND NOT TO BE OUTDONE, CHIEF ROBERT ARRINGTON IS BRINGING THE MS FIREFIGHTER’S ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN 2023 AND 2024 – ONE OF THE LARGEST CONFERENCES HELD IN MISSISSIPPI. THEY WILL BE CELEBRATING THEIR 100TH ANNIVERSARY NEXT YEAR IN NATCHEZ!

### **Workforce Development**

Hiring Ms. Tuwana Higgins Williams as the Director of Workforce Development in January has been a Game-Changer! Working under a partnership formed by the City of Natchez, the Adams County Board of Supervisors, and the Natchez-Adams County School District, Tuwana has hit the ground running!

Other partners include Natchez, Inc., the Natchez-Adams County Chamber of Commerce, Alcorn State University, Copiah-Lincoln Community College, the Fallin Center, and the WIN Jobs Center! So grateful for amazing support from our BOA, our Supervisors, Superintendent of Education Fred Butcher and members of the NASD School Board, President Felecia Nave (ASU), President Jane Hulon-Simms (Co-Lin), VP Sandra Barnes (Co-Lin), and Mr. Cleveland Moore (Fallin Center).

Working with our partners, and area employers, we have already identified multiple Academic and Career Tech Programs being offered in our city:

From Nursing and Biology, to Social Work and Criminal Justice  
From Welding and Automation & Control to Respiratory Therapy and LPN  
From Early Childhood Development to Digital Media

These programs already serve hundreds of people in our community, and I haven't even mentioned so many others. The CDL Program has been restored thanks to a partnership between Coastal Truck Driving School and Co-Lin.

And thanks to a generous donation by the Natchez Adams School District, the Steckler Building, a large facility on the Natchez High School campus, will soon be home to a new Workforce Training Center, with plans to offer programs in Hospitality/Culinary, Electrical Basics, and Heavy Duty Equipment Operators.

And since I mentioned the high school, let's celebrate the fact that Natchez will soon be home to the NEWEST STATE OF ART HIGH SCHOOL IN MISSISSIPPI, not to mention a fully-renovated Middle School!

In speaking of developing successes of our young people, it's important that we mention NECA, our Natchez Early College Academy. Just last month, we honored 40 NECA Graduates who have now received both their high school diploma and two-year associates' college degree from Co-Lin. All of these graduates will soon be entering college as juniors, two years ahead of their peers, many with scholarships and 4.0 GPAs. Some actually have earned GPAs higher than a 4.0, which I didn't even realize was possible! Thank you Co-Lin VP Sandra Barnes and NECA Principal Heather Jackson for making this program such a success.

Last but not least – we are so proud to now have The Vault, Natchez own Small Business Incubator, located on Main Street. The brainchild of Robbie and Maurice Furdge and their HUBB Foundation, this collection of Executive Suites is now 28,000 square feet full – they need more space – and home to many new business ventures just now beginning to take root in our beautiful city. Mississippi's Second Largest Small Business Incubator, just behind Tupelo. Epicenter for training new businesses and non-profit organizations.

## **Recreational Renewal**

IT'S HAPPENING IN NATCHEZ!

Hired Sanora Cole, Natchez' first Full-Time Parks and Rec Director since 2008 – and staff.

New Playground Equipment will be installed by fall at all six parks

Restoration of both the North Natchez Youth Center and Duncan Park Golf Clubhouse about to be underway!

Restrooms at North Natchez Park and Concord Park have been renovated – Renovations coming soon to the bathrooms at Duncan Park! And the restored Auburn Billiard Room will once again be a venue available for rent!

Two new additional tennis courts are about to be constructed and Natchez now has Pickleball!

Renovation of Duncan Park ballfields to occur this fall

We now have a Disc Golf Course –18 hole tournament- ready!

Multiple programs- Easter Egg Hunts, Pajama Jam, Father/Daughter Dance, Movies in the Park, Girls to Ladies, Boys to Gentlemen, Too Many To Mention!!

Kickback to School TOMORROW.

And Fishing with Fathers happens THIS SATURDAY!

Thank you to so many sponsors and partners – and to our Department of Public Works, always there to help.

**And may I applaud our Youth for setting the example?!**

First ever senior day where all area high school participated in a mile long motorcade and picnic at Duncan Park – Natchez High, Natchez Early College, Cathedral and Adams Christian. So grateful for our high schools, and so proud of the example of our youth!

The Mayor's Youth Council, Bert Hughes and so many outstanding students from all of these high schools working together to make a difference in Natchez. Saturday projects – Park improvements – Even raising funds for the Natchez-Adams Humane Society.

**We are a city that cares.**

Numerous Charitable Events – Thousands and Thousands Raised – Too Many To Count!

Natchez Stewpot feeds thousands each month and our Senior Center Delivers over 1000 meals per week

Natchez Transit – Low Cost Transportation for so many in need

Dr. Carolyn Myers – Seeds of Change Foundation doing amazing things!

Community Gardens – And our Farmer's Market – Thank you Valencia Hall, Eddie Burkes and Jim Blough

Habitat for Humanity – About to complete their 24<sup>th</sup> house!! Thank you Andrew Calvit

**Build a Safe City**

New Police Chief Joseph Daughtry is doing an incredible job! Under his leadership, we are solving crimes!

He and our outstanding Fire Chief Robert Arrington are working as a team!

We have purchased new fleet of police cars, to include some new fire department vehicles, and improved equipment to include our radios.

A major return to traditional policing.

We've had successful drug busts, working every day to get criminals off the street and getting illegal guns off the street!

Shortage in law enforcement and firefighters quickly going away. Morale on the rise.

Crime Stoppers is Back! 1-800-222-TIPS

VIPER Unit.... SWAT Team

The result: LOWER CRIME RATES ACROSS THE BOARD!

GET READY– NATCHEZ WAS JUST AWARDED \$100,000 PUBLIC SAFETY GRANT TO PAY OVERTIME FOR “OLD-FASHIONED” POLICING! BUCKLE THOSE SEAT BELTS – MIND THOSE SPEED LIMITS – OUR OFFICERS ARE GOING TO BE HARD AT IT!

MS Municipal League Public Safety Award

MS Crime Stoppers Department of the Year Award

MS Crime Stoppers Lifetime Achievement Award

ANNOUNCEMENT – NATCHEZ PD HAS JUST BEEN ACCREDITED AS A LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING ACADEMY! WE CAN NOW PROVIDE TRAINING TO PART-TIME AND AUXILLIARY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS FROM ALL OVER MISSISSIPPI, RIGHT HERE IN NATCHEZ!

### **Fiscal Renewal**

This may be the most amazing story yet!

In the midst of a pandemic, when so many thought we could never rebound, Natchez – we have thrived!

In less than two years, we have caught up on three audits and are about to complete a fourth. We have accomplished all of these things I have just mentioned, to include historic raises for city workers, WITHOUT RAISING TAXES.

Under the leadership of City Clerk Megan McKenzie and her team, Natchez is in great shape – well prepared to meet any challenge.

Better benefits package – About to begin our third year with a new Health Insurance Program – better rates, better coverages, saving \$350,000 per year – Thank you Consultant Bill Henley “who helped us for free!” and Fred Parker and Byrne Insurance Agency.

And during this past two years, we have operated in the black, with healthy reserves, and working together with our partners, we have brought in Millions in grants and special appropriations:

The City alone, over \$13 million

The City working in collaboration with its partners, the County, Airport, National Parks, MS Department of Archives and History, and others, with the help of our lobbyists Gregg Harper and Manning McPhillips: Another \$20 million, including \$8 Million for MDAH projects at the Natchez Grand Village and Jefferson College.

Add this up and it adds to over \$31 million. And actually we are still counting!

**LOOKING FORWARD AS THE NATCHEZ CURRENT CONTINUALLY REFRESHES THE NATCHEZ RENEWAL, WE NOW HAVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES ON THE HORIZON THAN EVER BEFORE!**

**MED NATCHEZ – Medical Economic Development**

Today we release our MED NATCHEZ PLAN – a comprehensive study completed for us by the Horne Group through a grant provided by Natchez, Inc. It is now available on the city’s website and on Facebook. In it, we have identified a Medical District (soon to be Commercial B-5), currently pending approval by our Planning Commission and Mayor and BOA.

Included in this district already are key healthcare partners for Natchez: Merit Health, Doctors Row, Southwest MS Mental Health (a newly-refurbished facility now offering residential mental healthcare), and Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center (which just pumped almost \$1 million into it’s newly renovated state of art facility.

Included in our Medical District will be important components of our plan to build a Healthcare Hub in our City on the Bluff:

Development of the old Community Hospital – currently in the planning stage under new ownership

Development of “The Trace Township Medical and Retail Center” to include Residential

Most exciting detail: the eventual development of a Medical School in Natchez, MS!

Watch for more details to be forthcoming – our MED Natchez Task Force will soon be hard at work to improve healthcare for Natchez. Strategies will include Physician and Specialist Recruitment and retention – we can’t wait to get started! And we thank local Physician Ben Yarbrough for stepping up to serve as our chairman.

**CRUISE SHIPS ARE ON THE NATCHEZ CURRENT – TWO NEW SHIPS ARRIVING IN AUGUST!**

American Queen brings 3 boats per week. American Cruise Lines brings 4.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: The American Viking arrives SOON!

ACL’s American Symphony arrives August 30!

Our weekly boat count is about to be 9 – historic numbers!

Approximately 3000 visitors every week the majority of the year!

**BIG ANNOUNCEMENT – The American Symphony has chosen Natchez to be her “Godmother City” – which means, by 2025, we will be her Home Port! Mark your calendars – We will Christen this new ship right here in Natchez at 12 noon on August 30!**

**In partnership with The Eola Hotel and Southern Airways, American Cruise Lines will make Natchez the first city in Mississippi to serve as a Port of Origination. Watch out Memphis and New Orleans! We are now approaching Viking and American Queen to do the same!**

**And YES – The Eola is happening! And YES – Commercial Flights are returning to Natchez!!**

**THE EOLA AND A NEW DOWNTOWN PARKING GARAGE!!**

**JET NATCHEZ!!**

**AND WE WILL COMPLETE SILVER STREET AND DOCKING IMPROVEMENTS IN 2023!**

### **MAJOR INVESTMENTS – Coming to Natchez’ Buildings and Streets!**

Without raising taxes.... A strategic Use of City Resources... Living Within Our Means and Smart Management of Public Funds...

\$3 Million Renovation of our City’s Most Valuable Asset, the Natchez Convention Center

- Make it competitive in today’s market so we can drive more conferences to Natchez!
- Fill up our Hotels and Restaurants!
- Drive our Historic Sales Tax Revenues Even Higher!

### **\$2 Million Renovation of the City Auditorium**

- Make it a Major Regional Venue!
- Better serve our local community
- Special Events and Festivals

### **Over \$1 Million for other City Projects**

This year, we renovated the exterior of NAPAC, we replaced the leaking roof on City Hall, and began improving other neglected city properties. But we must do more:

Police Department – New 911 Operations Center

Fire Department – First renovation of multiple fire stations in over 20 years!

Community Center – Our “Civic Center” will better serve our city!

City Council Building, Better Utilities at the North End of the Bluff, Renovated Community Center at the Duncan Park Canteen, and a restored City Hall!

**AND IT IS TIME TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH COMPLETION OF HIRAM REVELS PLAZA!**

### **\$6 Million for Streets!!**

This year we thoroughly cleaned Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Street from beginning to end- for the second year in a row!

We continued the beautification of Liberty Road at Sgt. Prentiss, including a first-ever cleaning of the overpass.



We completed the Daisy Street drainage project, and refurbishing of Marblestone is almost complete. For the first time in a generation, these residents can enjoy a better community.

New and improved Flower Baskets being hung right now – thank you Garden Lovers and again Public Works!

And get ready – we are about to renovate Commerce Street downtown and also Locust Alley!

But more must be done. We need major street improvements, and yes, Morgantown Road must be repaired.

Get ready Natchez – we are going to devote \$6 Million to significant street projects throughout our city and we are going to complete this by next year!

### **RE-LIGHTING OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BRIDGES!**

Things are about to get brighter for Natchez – literally. Thanks to \$500,000 appropriated to us by the State Legislature, Phase One will soon happen. May not have color and movement yet – but we are making a start!!

### **MOST AFFORDABLE CITY IN AMERICA!!**

**HOW WE DRIVE THE OPPORTUNITIES – KEEP THE NATCHEZ RENEWAL GOING – OUR NATCHEZ CURRENT IS UNSTOPPABLE!!!**

**Mississippi, America's Most Affordable State – Dailymail.com**

**Natchez, America's Most Affordable City – National Public Radio**

**Promote Natchez as Never Before!!!**

**Most affordable place to visit. Most affordable place to stay!**

**Bring Back SHIFT SOUTH - Almost One Billion reached last year through social and traditional media – time to do this again!!**

**Real Estate is Booming – But We Need More! And we need more Broadband!**

**VERY END..... THANK EVERYONE!!**

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

CITY ATTORNEY

CITY CLERK

MUNICIPAL JUDGE LISA JORDAN DALE

OUR DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS & CITY EMPLOYEES, TO INCLUDE OUR WATER DEPARTMENT!

OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

OUR COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

PRESERVATION AND PLANNING COMMISSIONS

MR. JOHNNY WAYCASTER

GREG BROOKING

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ENGINEERS JKS, A&M, VOLKERT, WILLIFORD, GEARHART & KNIGHT

ADAMS COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NATCHEZ ADAMS SCHOOL BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION

Vidalia is a Key Partner – Mayor Buz Craft

Alcorn, President Felecia Nave

Co-Lin, President Jane Hulon Sims and VP Sandra Barnes

Cleveland Moore, Fallin Center

Thank you to our Law Enforcement Partners – Adams County Sheriff Travis Patten, Concordia Parish Sheriff David Hedrick, and so many local, state and federal partners – from surrounding cities and counties all the way up to Homeland Security and the FBI

State and Federal Legislative Delegations

State of Mississippi, Governor's Office, MDA

MDAH Executive Director Katie Blount

Lobbyists Gregg Harper and Manning McPhillips

Chandler Russ – Natchez, Inc.

Sue Stedman – Natchez, Now

Debbie Hudson, Now Lyn Jenkins – Natchez Adams Chamber of Commerce

Our NEW Downtown Natchez Alliance – Executive Director Diane Dupont & Board Members

FOR Natchez – Friends of the Riverfront, Chesney Doyle

Revels Plaza Partners – Zion Chapel and area businesses, Rev. Birdon Mitchell and Norma West

Richard Nelson, John McCullough, Dante Weir, and Airport Commissioners

Anthony Hauer, Wilbur Johnson, and Natchez Port Commissioners

Carter Burns and Mimi Miller, Natchez Historic Foundation

Visit Natchez, and Executive Director Devin Heath, his amazing team, and our amazing Commissioners

And I don't know what we would do without Mr. Warren Reuther, Mr. Walter Tipton, and their amazing team who keep our most valuable city asset – our Convention Center – going!

Charlie Robertson, American Cruise Lines

John Wagner, American Queen

David Simmons, Viking

Our Eola Team! Hayes Dent, Randy Roth, Rob Lubin, Micajah Sturdivant, Dickie Brennan

Thank you Tate Taylor, John Norris and Crooked Letter Picture Company

Thank you Daniel Lewis, Hallmark and Lifetime

Thank you Film Natchez and Film Mississippi!

Arden Barnett, Ardenland

Mr. David Paradise

Garret May and Merit Health

Mr. Robert Pernell and the Natchez US Colored Troops Monument Committee

John Grady Burns – Suicide Prevention

Dr. Carolyn Myers, Seeds of Change Foundation

Mr. Mark LaFrancis and The Mayor's Veterans Task Force

Jackie Robinson and Christmas in Natchez

Rotary Club      Kiwanis Club

Andrew Calvit, Habitat for Humanity

Greg Everhart and Jack Kelly – Harmony in the Park

Natchez Humane Society, Natchez Spay Neuter, Hoofbeats & Paw Prints

Catherine McPhate and Natchez Childrens Services

Mike Marsh, Eurofest

Also the Natchez National Historic Park, Kathleen Bond, NAPAC, Bobby Dennis, Natchez Pilgrimage Tours, The Natchez Garden Club, Little Easy Tours, MS-Lou Heritage Tours, Southern Carriage Tours, Rev's Country Tours, Natchez Hop-On-Hop-Off, Open Air Tours, Downtown Karla Brown, and so many hotels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, and shops – we could never have time to name them all. And I know I am leaving many out!

Betty Jo Harris, Co-Lin

Our Media Partners: The Natchez Democrat, Bluff City Post, WTYJ, Listen Up Y'all, Mid-South Broadcasting – Natchez TV, Miss-Lou Magazine, Old River Peddler

**GOD HAS BLESSED NATCHEZ**

**NATCHEZ DESERVES MORE**