

Good Morning and thank you for joining us for the second STATE of the CITY event here in the historic Merced Theatre. As Manuel said, I am the current Chairman of the Board of Directors for The Merced Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber recently celebrated our 80th year of business advocacy, representing over 400 members and companies from Merced County. And looking out at this audience, it's great to see several of them in attendance today. Our Chamber has set its sights on playing a critical role in Merced's transformation in the coming years.

Before I get to that, I'd like to introduce to you the men and women who serve on the Chamber's board. Our board of directors act as liaisons between the Chamber and our members. They set policy, work with other community leaders to solve problems, and support the Chamber to move its mission forward. I'd like to thank them for their service.

The mission of our Chamber is: *..... to promote the continuous improvement of the common good and the quality of life in the community through the pursuit of new business; the cultural, social, and economic education of our citizens; and by providing accurate and timely assistance to the business community.*

We are quite aware of the huge undertaking of this mission and are not attempting to do this single handedly. It is for this reason we are partnering with The City of Merced, Merced Main Street Association, Merced County Office of Education, UC Merced and Merced College as well as other organizations in the community. As a team, we are striving to make Merced the Crown Jewel of the San Joaquin Valley.

Our community stands to benefit greatly from a number of major projects and investments in the near future, including the UC Merced 2020 project, High Speed Rail, ACE Train, the Atwater / Merced Expressway, completion of Campus Parkway, and continued development of the former Castle Air Force Base as an business park which is home for many businesses including Hoffman Security. The Chamber has advocated for these projects locally, in Sacramento, and in Washington DC. Momentum is building here, and it is incumbent upon us to continue moving forward. WORK where you must! BUT, Shop MERCED FIRST!!!!] We need to send a positive message to investors and developers that we shop local. We buy local. We support local.

Having grown up in Merced and lived here nearly my entire life, I have heard every positive and negative comment about Merced. Since I returned to run our family business in 1999, I have seen firsthand the challenges and opportunities that local businesses face. While Merced was ground zero for the housing crisis, our City has come out stronger and continues to see promising economic growth in the future.

The Chamber helps promote our local businesses through Ribbon cuttings, social events, mixers, and features on our Greater Merced Chamber of Commerce Facebook Page. We advocate for the interests of our members with our Government relations committee, who meets monthly with local government representatives to make sure their concerns and issues are addressed.

The Chamber is doing our part to help develop the next generation of leaders. *[slide changes to LM & JLM]*. Our Leadership Merced program is preparing the next candidates for elected office, board members of Community-based Organizations, and entrepreneurs. We are currently in the midst of Class 33 of this Issues Awareness and Leadership Skill-Set Training program. And, our Junior Leadership Program for high school sophomores and juniors is currently in its 14th year. JLM is a 7-month long series of courses and workshops that teaches emerging leaders valuable skills that they can apply in the workplace. Both of the participants in these programs get a multi-faceted view of our community with several behind-the-scenes tours of local businesses and public agencies. JLM now has over 250 alumni, many of whom are now successful professionals and work in the Merced area.

We are proud of the work we are doing to build Merced into a city where businesses can thrive. In closing, we thank those of you who are supporting our Chamber of Commerce, and encourage those who aren't to become a Chamber member and get involved. Because we can't do this alone!!

Thank you very much.

Next it's with great pleasure that I introduce members of the El Capitan High School Choir under the direction of Maria Broullard singing "True Colors."

It is now my great pleasure to introduce you to our mayor, Mike Murphy. Mayor Murphy was elected to office in November of 2016 and previously served 5 years on the city council. He grew up here in Merced, graduating from Golden Valley High School. He earned a bachelor's degree in international politics and later graduated from Georgetown Law School in Washington, D.C.

After law school, he returned to California to practice law in Silicon Valley representing technology companies in important business transactions, but ultimately yearned to raise his family here in his hometown.

The mayor practices business law and his office is located in the heart of our downtown. Most people may not know that Mayor Murphy served on the city council without pay and is doing the same as mayor.

The mayor loves this city and is committed to its success. He's focused on public safety, on making Merced a great place to do business, and on many important quality of life issues that we all care about. I know I'm looking forward to hearing from him this morning -- Mayor Mike Murphy.