

I would like to thank the Peoria Chamber of Commerce for hosting the annual State of the City address and thank you all for taking the time to be here. Not a bad crowd considering Charlie Spoonhour's at the Bradley Chiefs club luncheon today!

When I ran for Mayor two years ago, my campaign theme called for a New Generation of Leadership in Peoria. It's important to note that this appeal wasn't meant to exclude or criticize the existing leadership in Peoria who had served us so well in the preceding years. Instead, it was a call to my generation to boldly take on the responsibility each generation faces in leading their community into the future.

I also called for an inclusive atmosphere – one that represents all citizens, one that welcomes anyone who wants a voice and who is willing to participate in leading improvements, and one that encompasses all sectors – government, private, nonprofit and volunteer – because indeed the solutions to the challenges and opportunities we face require collaboration among a variety of entities.

Today, in my second State of the City address, my focus is on some of the many new leaders in this community who have answered the challenge with a spirit of collaboration and inclusiveness, and the great benefits they've already brought to Peoria as a result. I'll re-cap the State of the City following 2006 and where I see us moving in the future. And I will continue to challenge you, the business community, with activities you can set in motion through your time, capital dollars and expertise to assist in building Peoria into a highly desirable community in which our children will grow up and want to stay and raise their families.

Have you noticed the Energy that's moving around in our community lately? Have you?

- You'd have to be living in a bubble if you haven't heard about Operation Springboard at Bradley University, the project which encourages budding entrepreneurs to present their business plans for consideration for funding of their start-up costs, office space and expert consulting – how would you have liked to have that advantage when you were just starting your businesses?

- **Have you driven near the intersection of Knoxville Avenue and Prospect Road in the past year? Not only has the source of a great deal of criminal activities been eliminated, but in its place a real transformation of that property is taking shape. New shops, businesses and a fresh new look. And coming soon, more businesses, and a much-needed residential component. This is a prime example of the dramatic, positive change that is possible when visionary community leaders are willing to step in and turn challenges into opportunities, and you can be assured that the energy created by Alexis Khazaam and his associates will not be limited to Junction City.**
- **How about the Riverfront as a destination for those with vision? Have you seen that ICON at 60 State Street and wondered what it is they do in that multi-million dollar building that grew out of a parking lot to boldly bear the letters E L M? ELM is all about risk management. This is a business crowd and you all know the importance of minimizing and managing your risk. ELM specializes in it. Environmental consulting, Liability Transfer Services and Innovative Waste Water Treatment Technologies are only a few. In addition, ELM has grown their utility locating business to 16 states and counting. And to think, they did all of that *before* they hired me! Our homegrown Lee Graves could have set up shop in New York, LA, Dallas, Dubai or Hong-Kong, but instead he based his business and his visions here. Why? You can ask him that, but along with Alexis and others, they are the new face, the new attitude, the new business model, the new leaders in Peoria's future. I would also like to thank Lee & his brother Jim for allowing me to continue to give back to the community while working for them. Your elected officials all hold full-time jobs and without companies that allow us flexibility, we wouldn't be able to devote the time we do to these positions. All businesses who allow their employees time to participate in making our city a better place deserve a round of applause.**

**There are many others out there too numerous to mention today who are emerging as a new generation of leaders – you're sitting next to many of them right here – and I thank them as well. I am very excited about the new face of Peoria.**

We've got a lot on our plate, led by the medical expansions at OSF St. Francis, the Children's Hospital of Illinois, Methodist Medical Center and the University of Illinois School of Medicine at Peoria Campus. (The Peoria school of medicine...finally growing.....YES!) And you'll be hearing more from them very soon. We are so fortunate to have Dr. Jasti Rao and his team of researchers here in Peoria!

There's the Caterpillar Visitors Center, our new Museum, the Zoo and Bradley University. Peoria NEXT and the Knowledge Economy of our future, Intermodal Logistics through the Regional Port District and, hopefully, a re-developed Southern Gateway with ethanol and Biodiesel. Councilman Jacob has taken strong leadership on the Southern Gateway and it has enormous potential. And don't forget the Warehouse District, which has been energized by a form-based code that was brought about through the hard work of many, many citizens, volunteers, business people, developers, commissioners, investors and city of Peoria staffers. As a result you will see a transformation of old warehouses and industrial buildings into exciting mixed uses of commercial businesses and residences. Shops of all kinds, studios, restaurants, and other businesses limited only by the visions of the next generation of leaders in our area.

But as exciting as this all is, folks, I implore you, this is NOT the time to take a breath. As people whisk into our city on the brand new I-74 they quickly realize that something exciting is going on here, but we have more work to do to ensure that they're taking the exit ramps and driving to Peoria rather than driving through Peoria.

Peoria is a growing city, a vibrant city, a city that is enjoying its lowest unemployment rate in decades, a city that is focused on addressing its problems head-on and building upon our strong foundation.

Do we have the ability to continue to fuel our business base and the new entrepreneurial attitude that's building momentum? I say we do. But we're not without our challenges.

Let's start with our schools. On this we will all agree. There is nothing more important than a world-class education for our children. Not a decent education, not a good education – a world-class education. My friends, we have some outstanding schools in

our area, public and private. But the bottom line is that WE have to take ownership of District 150. That's right – WE. YOU and I have to do whatever we can do to help right the ship. Give them the tools they need to perform and demand nothing less than that world-class education.

I'm asking you – give us your time, give us your ideas, give us your experience, give us your money and give us your support. And then demand the quality education that comes with that community investment. We need the same level of leadership and commitment we're seeing in the business community to support the educational community. And we need to set the bar high. We were very fortunate to have President Bush in town yesterday. The President actually spoke of this very situation and called it “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” Let's be sure we establish the bar at “world-class level”.

How can you help? Ask yourself. Your investment could make the difference in Peoria's future. Whether your kids are in 150, Private Schools, Dunlap Schools, home-schooled, not in school, out of school or you're without kids.....the success of Peoria shares the same umbilical cord with District 150.

Tying in with education very closely, there is an important community effort under way that I want to take a minute to talk to you about. It is an effort to bring our library system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and support this knowledge based economy we keep talking about. Do you realize that the Peoria Public Library has not made a capital investment in its facilities in over 35 years? Yet did you know that over 1800 people come through the doors of the Peoria Public Library each day for a total of over 540,000 people per year? That is more than the total attendance for the Rivermen, Chiefs, Symphony, Ballet and Museum combined! Last year over half of the items circulated by the Peoria Public Library were checked out from the Lakeview Branch Library. Director Ed Szynaka and the Library Board have been working hard to educate Peorians on the importance of their efforts to increase real estate tax support for the upgrades. Please give this referendum serious consideration at the ballot box in April. The Council endorsed the referendum but likely won't take a formal position on it so you need to do your homework and make your own decision on this important issue.

**The more we help our youth, the less they will be drawn to one of the biggest issues facing our city – Crime. As ugly as it is to talk about, I will because it has a major impact on the state of the City. The Crime Group I put together has been working very hard the past year. Chief Settingsgaard, Sheriff McCoy, judges, the US Attorney’s office, school district, FBI, Councilman Turner and others have not quit. There is extreme urgency on this issue.**

**I made crime prevention an important part of my campaign and pledged an intensive effort to fight crime. I’m pleased to say that overall crime statistics in Peoria showed a decline from last year:**

- **Property crimes were down 12%, and violent crimes are down as well.**
- **Criminal sexual assault, down 37%**
- **Burglary, down 14%**
- **Motor Vehicle theft, down 28%**
- **Arson, down 26%**

**All in all, Crime was down 11% last year, and we owe a great debt of gratitude to our law enforcement officers for making Peoria safer. But as positive as these trends are, homicides in our city remain at an unacceptable level. Tragically, we had 17 homicides in Peoria last year. We haven’t experienced a number that high since 1993 when we had 19, or 1989 when we had 23. I will make this very plain: the city of Peoria will not rest until we have reduced that number to zero.**

**This is a very difficult issue that defies easy solutions but we will continue to make every effort to reduce these troubling crime figures.**

- **From open forums with neighborhood leaders and residents throughout the city came an outpouring of ideas and encouragement from many people in search of ways to protect, stabilize, and improve neighborhoods, one example of which is**

**the creation of 21 new Neighborhood Watch groups and 3 Business Watch groups**

- **The council added another half-million dollars to our budget this year to deploy cameras in high-crime areas of the city.**
- **Chief Settingsgaard developed an initiative called saturation patrols to concentrate large numbers of officers in troubled areas to pounce on those committing crimes in our city. The council also allocated additional dollars to continue that successful program this year.**
- **Soon you will see a combination of our Street Crimes Unit and our POP team to mobilize their efforts and zero in on those who would make our neighborhoods un-safe.**

**As you can see, we are committing more resources to fight crime, but we also need the help of victims and witnesses to solve some of these crimes. With the assistance of McFarland Bragg and Reverend Tim Criss, we are forming a community hotline similar to Crimestoppers where citizens who have information on criminals can come forward with their leads without fear of retribution. We must give our Police Department every available resource to fight those who would and do make Peoria unsafe. In addition, I believe that we will have a group operating a Ceasefire-type initiative in our City very soon – in fact, I hope to announce details in the coming month or so.**

**While we are ratcheting up our battle against crime we are also partnering with the business community to offer positive alternative opportunities for our youth. Let me give you two examples:**

- **The first is a new program targeted at helping disadvantaged kids find meaningful employment and gain self esteem. It is called the ELITE Youth Program. ELITE Youth, in partnership with the CHOICES Youth Outreach Program of Peoria, is establishing an employment program targeting socio-economically disadvantaged high school youth from all District 150 Schools.**

**ELITE Youth's founders, led by a 1-man army for our kids, Carl Cannon and his team, are seeking proactive, progressive businesses interested in providing real opportunities to qualified, motivated and capable youths. Their goal is to place 100 youths in full or part-time jobs with local businesses by May of this year, and then to retain as many as possible as trained, vital components of the community work force. It's important to note that this is NOT an entitlement program. Candidates will undergo rigorous job and life skills training and must earn certification before placement with a business. There is one condition these students have to abide by – candidates are required to attend and actively participate in school. No school...no job.**

- The second program is one Councilman Spears and I initiated along with the Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Development and District 150. It's called the Mayor's Careers for Youth program. Many of the business owners here participated in our first-year effort last year, and I'd like to publicly thank them for their involvement. This isn't just a make-work, feel good program – employers helped the students learn more about the business and career opportunities within the organization, and provided meaningful employment experiences. The initiative included a Job Fair held in early June that attracted 33 high school students from District 150 and 16 employers. The results from the first year were encouraging: of the 33 students who participated in the Job Fair, 23 were hired. Employers offered positions for office assistants, cashiers, day camp assistants, hosts or hostesses, food servers, warehouse assistants, telephone service representatives, carpenter helpers and youth instructors. Seventeen of the students successfully completed the 8-week internship program. Eight of those students were offered permanent employment opportunities. Thirteen of the participating employers said the program was a success and will participate again this year. Will you? I would ask that you contact the Chamber or Workforce Development this afternoon for more information. We can't do it without you.**

**The benefits of the ELITE Youth program and the Mayor's Career for Youth Program are profound. The youth benefit by gaining vital skills that will last a lifetime.**

**Businesses benefit by accessing quality, trained personnel. Our community benefits by empowering disadvantaged youth with skills that allow them to become quality parents and citizens --- laying the foundation for success in the next generation and beyond. I will tell you right now that we will have an exciting announcement in late February about an expanded Mayor's Career for Youth Program this year, with new partners joining the existing group and more kids being employed as well.**

**Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the vital role that parents play in the positive development of our youth. I am working with Councilman Turner to bring an ordinance forward that will address parental responsibility. Councilman Turner has identified and studied several communities that have mandated parental accountability, and we will too.**

**Another initiative from 2006 is our anti-litter campaign. I hope you've noticed the poster prominently displayed here today: Pride in Peoria is Picking Up...Put Litter in its Place.**

**At this event last year I challenged the community to help address the litter situation in Peoria. I believed, as many of you did, that litter was out of control and unacceptable. I challenged someone to come forward, and that someone was heaven-sent. Steve Pierz accepted the position. Call him the Garbage Czar or whatever you want, I'm gonna call him priceless. His energy, enthusiasm, leadership and vision (there's that word again) have made remarkable progress in our battle against litter. In one short year the Mayor's Litter Committee, headed by the 6 Sigma Blackbelt from Caterpillar, Steve Pierz and his group have developed a long term strategic plan to address litter, both proactively and reactively.**

**They have sponsored cleanups on the East Bluff, Western Avenue and War Memorial Drive. At the West Bluff cleanup, they initiated what is going to be their new "standard for 2007", that being 200+ people participating in each Cleanup event. In addition, there have been 26 neighborhood clean ups!**



Steve's team has redistributed 100 trash receptacles in the neighborhoods and Branded Peoria's litter cleanup logo as you can see. Hundreds of city blocks have been adopted and are cleaned at least every two weeks. Momentum is building and they can use your help, or that of your church, PTO, scouts, or any other organization. They're looking for funding sponsors too (hint, hint). The Mayor's Litter Committee plans to have at least one major cleanup event in each district – Mark your calendars for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month beginning on April 21<sup>st</sup> from 9 to 11am. You can contact us at the Mayor's office if you'd like more information. Controlling litter is critical to creating and sustaining a desirable community, and putting this standard and these processes in place now is important so we can keep up with it as the city grows.

And we have grown – we have annexed over 900 acres in 12 months, which represents a 3% increase in the size of the city and exceeds the total area annexed in the past five years! Included in this growth is the approval of 27 new subdivisions. Peoria's growth has led to an increase of EAV in Growth Cells from \$5 million in 1996 to \$124 million, and we're projecting a \$12.4 million increase in EAV for 2006

We have also initiated the second phase of the Heart of Peoria Plan for 8,000 acres, or ¼ of the City. To remind you, this is a citizen-led, citizen-initiated, and citizen-supported project, whereby over 500 citizens actively contributed to the charrette process, and developed the pending Land Development Code [LDC].

This growth bodes well for the businesses in our city – the businesses that you run each day, the businesses that you work so hard to sustain and grow. Well, in an effort to assist in that growth, and to live up to another campaign pledge, I am pleased to say that we continue to gain momentum in making Peoria increasingly business-friendly. We have truly begun making it easier to do business with the City of Peoria. Led by the Business Task Force, a team of developer and business representatives have created a Developer's Guide that was published this month, we have eliminated zoning certificates for non-residential transfers, we have consolidated building/zoning application and review, reduced the time frame for review, and shortened approval time for subdivisions meeting all requirements. This is still a work in progress, but the

gains that have been made have already begun to bear fruit, and we welcome ongoing involvement from business leaders in the city.

I'm also happy to announce that under my direction we conducted the first ever comprehensive review of the City's appointed commission structure to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the valuable contribution of citizen volunteers and City resources. This task was completed by Councilmembers Sandberg, Morris and VanAuken, the Clerks office and a large number of our staff and the review achieved the results intended.

All of these things were on my agenda when I ran for Mayor, and are things for which I and the Council are responsible to you, based on the faith you placed by electing us. And speaking of elections, please allow me a couple of moments to urge you all to get involved in our upcoming at-large elections. Many of our current council members are here today. I would like to ask them to please stand and be acknowledged for their hard-work and tireless efforts for the betterment of our city. I would especially like to thank Council members Chuck Grayeb and John Morris, who have announced that they will not be seeking re-election this year. Councilman Grayeb has served honorably for 12 years, and Councilman Morris has served equally hard for the past 8 years.

There is nothing more important than exercising our right to vote. Yes, I believe that our cumulative voting for at-large members is flawed, as I'm sure many of you do. But at least for now, it's the system we have. Let me simply ask you to PLEASE engage in this election. Make it a priority to learn about the candidates. Think about who you can support and what special skill sets they can add to our council. Please elect leaders who will collaboratively and constructively engage in problem-solving. Leaders who will express a positive vision for moving Peoria forward and seek solutions, not scapegoats. Leaders who will complement the district council representatives and help build on the energy and momentum that I've outlined today. Wouldn't it be great to seat a new council in May with at-least a 50% turnout of registered voters instead of having a small fraction – usually 15% -- determine the future of the city? I encourage you to do your homework, and I ask that you encourage your family, friends, employees and co-workers to do the same. The primaries are only a few weeks away and the general soon

**after. Please be a part of the decision making process for our next City Council...and make it a Positive, Results Oriented, Solution developing, business-minded, and teamwork-minded Council.**

**As I near the conclusion I want to discuss two significant developments that I believe will benefit our city for years to come.**

**First, during my Mayoral campaign, I proposed the creation of a City/School Liaison position to foster better communications and collaboration between the city of Peoria and area schools. In addition to facilitating dialogue and understanding, the person will work with state and federal legislators to identify possible grant funding opportunities for area schools and the city. This is part of a trend not just in Illinois, where Rockford and Springfield created similar positions, but nationwide, where more Mayors are seeing that better schools help cities prosper. And Peoria is at the leading edge of that trend. I am pleased to officially announce today that the person who has filled this position is Dr. Bill Collier. Bill is a highly respected local educator and administrator for over 20 years in the Peoria area. He grew up in Peoria and attended District 150 Schools, raised his family in the city and served the Dunlap Community as superintendent of schools. Did you know that 70% of the students in Dunlap Schools live in the City of Peoria? Yes, “They” are part of “US”. The Education Liaison position has been privately funded by grants from the Civic Federation, Chamber of Commerce and Workforce Development, all of which have a vested interest in education in our community. I would like to personally thank all three of these groups for their support of this important position. Bill is committed to serving in this role and I would like to thank him for accepting the challenge.**

**Now I would like to announce what I regard as the most significant initiative in my mayoral tenure so far. I am proud to announce this, not just as Mayor, but as a citizen and parent in this community who places a high value on education.**

**Last year, at this State of the City address, I asked our city to dream big dreams and consider a program called Peoria Promise. Based on a similar program in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and recently successfully emulated elsewhere, Peoria Promise would enable**

**any student graduating from Peoria Public Schools to be eligible for a college scholarship. Today, I am excited to announce the first step in Peoria Promise – a guarantee that eligible high school graduates qualify for up to 100% tuition while working towards a degree or certificate at Illinois Central College.**

**We are very fortunate to have Illinois Central College in our community, and they have been extraordinarily helpful to us on this project. I'll touch on a few of the details, and there will be more information available through ICC to all who are interested.**

- Peoria Promise is offered to City of Peoria residents who graduate from one of the following high schools: Manual, Central, Woodruff, Richwoods, Dunlap, Limestone and Peoria Alternative. Tuition will be provided based on a sliding scale determined by how long the student attended Peoria Public schools. Those attending all 12 years receive 100% funding. This is based on the philosophy that those children and families who reside in the City the longest and attend the public schools the longest should reap the greatest benefit.**
- Peoria Promise will begin funding the tuition scholarships with the high school graduating class of 2008.**
- Applications will be made on-line at ICC's website during January through March of each year.**
- Students must have a minimum two point zero grade point average following each semester at ICC to maintain eligibility.**
- In addition, Peoria Promise will pay tuition at other community colleges for students who choose programs not offered at ICC.**

**I am sure that people will have many questions on this program, and we will answer all of them. But I wanted to unveil the program today and provide the basic details to send a message to all Peorians...and the world...that education is essential and vital to our community; That all young adults in Peoria who want to continue their education after high school now have that opportunity, regardless of their economic status. I still have**

concerns about the gap between the “Haves” and the “Have Nots” in Peoria and this effort should help close that gap.

This program will establish Peoria as a nationwide leader in innovation and commitment to the education of our next generation. This historic initiative announced today is a start, and we will again need your help. Necessary funding for the first year is roughly a million dollars, and that number increases in future years. But you know what – if we want all our kids to have HOPE that they can live the American dream, they have to KNOW that they’ll have an opportunity for a good education. One thing missing in many children’s minds today is just that...HOPE. I make no apologies folks.....NO museum, zoo, civic center or ballpark takes precedence over education.

Keep in mind that while this program has important educational benefits for Peoria, don’t overlook the economic development impact. Already, families are moving into Kalamazoo and Hammond, Indiana where a similar program called College Bound is in place, to take advantage of educational scholarships for their children. Increased population growth, more economic activity, a vibrant housing market – all these and more are occurring in other communities and will happen here too. We have already talked to people very energized by the opportunity to put our priority for education front and center and pledged support for the project. This isn’t just feel good my friends, it’s the real deal. Please step up and acknowledge your support for Peoria Promise. We need your help. Information will be available as you leave the ballroom today.

I will continue to pursue having IDOT urge AMTRAK to complete a feasibility study to bring passenger rail service back to Peoria. We are the second largest municipality outside Chicago and we deserve consideration. Senator Durbin spoke in support of our feasibility study just last week in the Quad Cities and Congressman LaHood supports the study as well.

I can’t put a close on this year’s address without thanking the cornerstone of our community for all they do for us, so much of it behind the scenes and out of the

**spotlight. Peoria would not be in the position it is today without the leadership and vision of Caterpillar, Inc., and for that we are all very grateful. Thank you Caterpillar.**

**I could go on, but we have to get back to work. Peoria is on the move and it is so exciting to be a part of it. We are all a part of it. You know I've lived in Peoria my whole life, and I've lived most of it with people telling us what's wrong with this town. I'm amazed that those looking at the glass half-empty have stayed so long. Well we didn't listen to those who didn't share the visions of the Beckers, the Connors, the Carvers, the Rutherfords and so many others who really put Peoria on the map. And now it's the Graves', the Khazaams, the Chio's, and many more who are and will be our next generation of leaders. I urge you all to share the vision – who among you will be the ones I am able to highlight in next year's address? Who among you is ready to become more involved in helping to set the agenda for our future, to become an integral part of something bigger than you are? Who among you is inspired by the momentum I've outlined today, but also knows that with the time, effort, money or expertise you hold it could accelerate even faster?**

**We have a proud history and an even prouder future. I'm proud to call this city my home and proud to be your mayor. Have a great afternoon.**