

THE State of the City

ONE YEAR LATER



We're well on our way to making history – again

My fellow Biloxians:

As I write this, we're approaching the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the storm that has forever changed our lives and the look of our city.

We've removed the vast majority of the debris that filled our streets and neighborhoods.

We've issued thousands of repair permits and more than a hundred permits for new homes. At this point, many property owners, particularly those in east Biloxi and Eagle Point, are either waiting on insurance settlements or grants or other financing, contemplating the impact of the new flood elevations, or still unsure of where they are going to rebuild. In many cases, your city government is facing the same issues.

But one thing is clear: Biloxi is coming back stronger and stronger every day.

I have seen the future and it is bright, exciting and inviting. You can see it, too, in a number of places. You can catch a glimpse in the Reviving the Renaissance report, highlights of which are included in this report. The effort represents the thoughts, ideas and recommendations from 200 of your fellow Biloxians who met for months on various quality-of-life committees, poring over information from the Governor's Commission and generating their own ideas on how Biloxi can build back better and responsibly.

The best place to see the future of Biloxi, however, is to look at our past. The story of Biloxi is the most compelling you'll find anywhere in the Katrina recovery zone.

In the decade before Katrina, we were enjoying the most prosperous and productive time in the 300-plus year history of this community.

We oversaw \$6 billion worth of development in Biloxi. Nine casino resorts helped create 15,000 new jobs and opportunity for all. We saw the number of hotel rooms in our area grow from 6,000 to nearly 20,000, and we went from a million visitors a year to between 8 and 10 million a year.

We hadn't built a new school since 1960, but during that decade or so of prosperity, we invested \$80 million in public education, building three new state-of-the-art elementary schools and a \$35 million high school, and we gained worldwide attention as being the first school district in the country to have surveillance cameras in every classroom of the district.

At the same time, we invested tens of millions of dollars in affordable housing, public safety and recreation. We invested in our heritage and culture, and preserved historic neighborhoods. We were doubling the size of our airport and were getting ready to launch a project to double the size of our convention center. And, let's not forget, we cut our city property tax rate in half while we were providing our residents a much-deserved and enhanced quality of life.

Then Hurricane Katrina came along.

Katrina destroyed 6,000 of the 25,000 homes and businesses in Biloxi. Hundreds of historic homes and landmarks were leveled. Entire blocks of neighborhoods were reduced to debris fields. Huge casino barges broke from their moorings and were pushed across U.S. 90 as far as three-quarters of a mile down the road.

Our infrastructure was decimated. And 53 people lost their lives in Biloxi alone, according to the county coroner.

But months after Katrina, even as we were dealing with day-to-day issues of recovery, we came to realize something.

The decade of prosperity we were enjoying before the storm was only a glimpse of what our potential is today. We stand poised to reach even greater levels of prosperity and opportunity.

And this is not just A.J. Holloway talking. The facts bear witness to what I'm reporting.

Today, thousands of our residents are back at work. Many returned to their jobs at the five casino

resorts now back in operation, with two more on the way. More and more businesses and amenities will be returning over the next several months. More and more homeowners are going to move forward in their rebuilding process.

We're already seeing encouraging signs in our economy. Casino tax revenue, which represents more than a third of our operating budget, is at 83 percent of its pre-storm levels.

We saw \$6 billion in development in that decade leading up to Katrina, and we've seen concrete proposals for nearly as much since the storm.

The painstaking recovery from this unprecedented natural disaster will spawn the largest building boom ever seen in these parts.

Governor Barbour has said he wants to see a renaissance created as part of the rebuilding process. We agree, and here in Biloxi, we're going to go about reviving the renaissance we were enjoying prior to Katrina.

And that's what we're going to do.

I want to thank all of you for the support and encouragement that you've shown. Not a day goes by when I don't hear something positive from a resident or business leader.

You, however, deserve the credit for the remarkable things we're seeing here in Biloxi. Just as generations before us have done, we're successfully dealing with adversity.

I said something in the wake of the storm and you're making it happen: People across this country are going to remember Katrina not so much for the devastation, but for the remarkable recovery effort here in Biloxi.

We have a ways to go and we'll face a number of decisions, but we're headed in the right direction. We're building back better and responsibly. We're on our way to reviving the renaissance.

God bless you and God bless Biloxi.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A.J. Holloway".

August 2006



Updated information about your city at your fingertips

Since 1999, the City of Biloxi's Public Affairs Office has produced an annual State of the City newsletter, normally in conjunction with the mayor's State of the City address in February.

The brochure fulfills the state law that requires the mayor to provide an annual report "to the council and the public on the work of the previous year."

This year's "State of the City: One Year Later" is an expanded version of the annual report, providing residents and a national audience a status report on the community's ongoing recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

You also can find detailed information about the city's recovery as well as read previous State of the City reports on the city's web site at biloxi.ms.us.



City Council

Mayor and members of the City Council at their swearing-in ceremony, which was a mere 60 days before Hurricane Katrina (clockwise from lower left): David Fayard of Ward 7, Mike Fitzpatrick of Ward 5, William "Bill" Stallworth of Ward 2, Edward "Ed" Gemmill of Ward 6, George Lawrence of Ward 1, Tom Wall of Ward 4, Charles T. Harrison Jr. of Ward 3 and Mayor A.J. Holloway.