

**City of Salem Illinois – State of The City
Mayor John Raymer – January, 2013**

If someone asked you to summarize the quality of life in Salem, what would you say? Would you focus on the economics, the job opportunities, the dollars you make, or perhaps talk about the friendships you have, the places you like to go, or the churches, clubs and groups that speak to what you believe is good, what is right and what is beauty. Most of all, you could recall what others have said and done that impressed you in the past year. At the recent City-Wide Unity Forum 75 people attended representing 27 organizations, boards and commissions. Through the Unity Forum people shared their accomplishments and vision for what needs to be done to maintain and move Salem forward. I thank people for sharing ideas through thousand of phone calls, emails and personal conversations.

The City of Salem fits into the picture as we deliver services to you and we believe we do a good job at that. Much of the money we receive comes from the taxes you pay at the gas pump and returned to Salem by the State of Illinois. A major project for 2013 will be the resurfacing of South College Street and North Shelby Street using \$505,000 from state taxes and grants. Replacement of the City water main on West Main Street and sewer pipes in the Frisco area were completed, with planned replacement of older sewer pipes on North Hamilton Street and repairs to our water treatment plant set as work for 2013.

Living a good life requires good water, effective sewage treatment, road maintenance, safe gas service and dependable electricity. We tend to take these for granted as City workers work in heat, cold, mud, rain and snow to keep things running well. In 2012 we applied oil and chip to over eleven miles of streets. Our water plant treated more than 330 million gallons of water, water crews repaired over 100 water main breaks, the gas crew replaced over 300 old gas meters with new ones, the cemetery workers opened and closed 51 grave sites and made repairs to more than 30 damaged headstones. We took down two old water towers, one by the reservoir and the other on the south by the City gas plant, as the price of scrap iron was high and reduced the cost of the job as the metals were recycled. And, we do it with fewer workers than ever. Over the past 20 years the City has reduced the number of public works employees by 30%, using new technologies and methods to provide the safe and dependable supply of water, waste treatment, natural gas, City streets and close our landfill operations.

In 2011, I visited every business in Salem and asked owners and employees to identify things that we should protect in Salem as most dear and needed. By far people want to keep the comfortable, safe, small-town feel to our city. Chief Campo and the Salem Police officers go about their work in a professional and friendly manner. The work they are called to do is often to calm arguments or intervene in domestic arguments, definitely good places for a cool head and a rational plan. Like public

works, the police do much of what we depend upon in a quiet manner out of the view of most citizens. The respect they receive is deserved and appreciated. Crime in Salem continues to be low.

The Department of Emergency Management plans for how we respond to potential problems. In the 2012 mock disaster, over 40 people spent a day practicing response to an imagined chemical fire at a manufacturing plant. When I visited Harrisburg and saw what that 2012 tornado destroyed, coming home to see the preparations that the Salem DOEM makes was reassuring to me. A new local business, Safe Sheds manufactures concrete above-ground tornado shelters marketing a completely assembled building from raw materials and providing several local jobs. Safe Sheds Inc. builds hundreds of these buildings each year, shipping them to military and private institutions.

We are impressed by the fire protection we get from the Salem Fire Protection District. The design of our district is inexpensive to taxpayers as our volunteers training and performance give us low insurance rates and quick fire responses. Fire Chief Roger Mann has overseen the development of the fire training facility on Selmaville Road for training our firemen as well as volunteers from many other cities.

The new jewel in Salem is the Salem Aquatic Center in Bryan Park. 2012 was the third year of operation with over 31,000 visitors. The "New Pool" has made Salem a popular destination for people from many places in Southern Illinois, as well as Salem residents. The Salem Swordfish Swim Team represents Salem and hosts the annual Swim Meet, drawing teams to Salem for competition. With eight competition lanes and the beautiful setting in Bryan Park, the Aquatic Center is sought after as the place for competitive swimming. The City Council also opened up the City reservoir for slalom skiing in a test of the lake's ability to accommodate power boats and water sports.

Soccer, volleyball, and men's softball teams operate under the direction of the Recreation Department. Sherry Daniels oversees these programs as well as special events, including the Christmas in My Hometown festivities that includes train rides, movies, downtown business treats and caroling. The birthplace of William Jennings Bryan is available for tours and special events. Salem Historical Commission provided the challenge of establishing a City of Salem Museum to preserve artifacts and important items that define Salem. Dr. Robert Raver requested that the City accept a donation of the old Bryan-Bennett Library building as a place to develop the museum. That remains a challenge for the City to consider and find ways to fund needed repairs and operating costs.

A Bryan Park Advisory Committee was appointed by the mayor to meet the demand by a group of citizens concerned about the condition of trees in Bryan Memorial Park. Concerns for the conditions of city equipment and trees in other City parks focused efforts to make our public parks more sustainable and viable for the future. Grants were sought and the City was able to secure a Union Pacific Railroad Foundation grant for \$15,000 to bring in experts to assist in updating the parks plan, creating a Salem tree nursery and studying ways to make parks safer and more usable to residents. The grant calls for a new parks plan to be presented to the city council by 2014. The city received grants totaling \$10,000 for new shelters along the nature trail.

Special Events that bring visitors to Salem include the World Coon Hunt, Marion County Fair, Little Egypt Festival, Apple Fest, Annual Home Show, Salem Theater Presentations, Antique Power Days, Farmer's

Market, Easter Egg Hunt, Salem Triathlon, Salem Invitational Basketball Tourney, Missoula Children's Theater, Junior High State Cross Country Meet, and school sports events. Sunday church services are held in 39 different church buildings in Salem with an estimated 4000 people attending each week (out of a population of 7400). On an average day 12,000 vehicles travel US 50 through Salem and 10,000 travel on Interstate 57 with fewer than 1,000 exiting here. Salem's location as county seat, county fairgrounds and Bryan Park recreation continues to be an advantage. Getting more retail business from Interstate traffic remains a new source of local business prosperity.

Regarding City finances, the City operated in the black for the 2012 year. No increases in property tax rates were requested by the City. Sales tax collections increased by nearly 5% over 2011. Reserves in the general fund remain very low, but the City Council remains committed to operating within funds available and leaving tax rates as they are.

Regarding the economic outlook, drought remains a big concern. With many area farmers contributing to the agricultural economy, recent drought reduced the available jobs and opportunities in farming. The City's water supply from Lake Carlyle could be affected by declining water levels and increased need for water to be released for Mississippi River operations. Manufacturing is a bright spot with announced new jobs at North American Lighting and stability in outdoor prefabricated buildings and decking, athletic equipment production, abrasives, electrical power maintenance, propane truck fabrication, tire recapping, tornado shelter fabrication and niche producers. Retail operations remain stable, as well as real estate and financial services. Downtown district new businesses included Tavie Tots, Poppy's Sewing and Alterations, Birch Graphics, Der Majestic, R and G Photography, Woodruff Attorney at Law, Blue Northern Energy, and Curves. Rollinson's Home Center added a full line of home appliances. The business community is holding its own in this down economy and high tax environment in Illinois.

Signs of Life in Salem 2012 – Mayor's State of the City List for 2012

- City hires Bill Gruen as new City Manager
- City Manager Gruen names Kim Eblin, Jill Combs, Becky Phillips, Natalie Wright, and Erica Paul to new positions at City Hall
- Ben Stratmeyer named City Finance Director
- City begins annual Unity Forum for Goal Setting and Planning
- City joins efforts to Keep Murray Center operating in face of state closure
- Salem Animal Control committee seeks Marion County Board action for domestic animal control
- US 50 4-Lane Coalition expands to include Clinton and St. Clair Counties
- City receives \$505,000 in State grants for resurfacing College and Shelby streets
- City receives \$15,000 Union pacific Grant for Parks Sustainability
- City receives 2011 Governor's Hometown Award for beautification and gardens
- PKC World Coon Hunt Expands and beings in Super Stakes Hunts

- Marion County Fair expands buildings and events at the summer fair
- Little Egypt Festival and Parade celebrates 40 years
- First Baptist Church Celebrates 175 years
- Apple Fest expands Chamber of Commerce efforts
- Salem Theater sets goals for three-year effort to restore the building and expand programming
- Salem Area Aquatic Center announces plans for indoor swim pool and therapy pool
- Keep Salem Beautiful announces need for expanded recycling collection and sorting
- Apostolic Church and Open Arms Fellowship begin construction on major expansions
- Farmer's Market expands to 25 vendors and moves to Bryan Park Thursday operations
- Marion County Savings Bank expands operations to Pekin, Illinois
- North American Lighting announces 200 new jobs in 2013
- RADIAC abrasives announces new safety, environmental and community involvement plans
- Safe Sheds Inc. reports strong demand for their tornado shelters
- Chamber of Commerce monthly business luncheon breathes new life into area business forum
- City adopts electric aggregation option to reduce household electric rates for Ameren customers
- Daffy-Dill Garden Club and Master Gardeners announce expansion of Display Garden at Bryan Statue
- USSonet announces plans to expand operations and seeks old Armory building from city
- Salem Community Activities Center announces \$10,000 grant from Union Pacific Foundation
- City Receives \$5,000 grant from Modern Woodmen for new shelter along nature trail
- City receives \$5,000 grant from Lowe's/Keep America Beautiful Community Improvement Grant for 2nd new shelter along nature trail
- City seeks Federal Trails Grant funds to expand walking trails in Bryan Memorial Park
- Salem Twp. Hospital begins work on expansion of hospital building and services
- Salem Swordfish Swim Team holds huge invitational swim meet at Aquatic Center
- Salem Soccer seeks land for new soccer field complex