



community development

Above: Students from Crestwood and Poplar Springs Elementary schools spent the year beautifying a section of Front Street paralleling the railroad tracks. Below right: New trash receptacles promote a litter-free downtown.

To encourage more development in the city, the Planning Division created a subdivision incentive package, approved by the city council, to give developers tax breaks during development and provide infrastructure assistance from the city. Even without the new incentives, the Inspections Division, which made more than 10,000 inspections during the year, reported that the construction value of building permits was \$31.7 million, a 28 percent increase over the previous year.

The Planning Division also worked to create a more responsive zoning ordinance and crafted an amendment to the city's Comprehensive Plan to allow for the rezoning of the north-eastern-most portion of the 1995 annexation area to facilitate the new industrial park. About 70 households in the annexation area were hooked up to city sewer service in Phase 2 of a Community Development Block Grant project with a total price tag of \$745,000.

Our planning staff, along with the Engineering Division, is developing plans for a 3.5-mile loop trail around the upper Bonita Lake. This \$268,400 project is funded by the Mississippi Department of Transportation. Another grant of \$350,000, a HOME Rehabilitation Grant, will be used to rehabilitate at least 10 single-family residences. Staff also coordinated the third World Changers program, which brought 200 energetic Southern Baptist Youth volunteers to town to renovate 15 homes for low-income and elderly residents.

The Engineering Division staff completed the 10th Avenue improvement project from 26th Street to North Hills Street, a petition paving project of seven street segments and a new city map using GIS data. Our staff is also working on two more petition paving projects, one consisting of 10 street segments and the other of 1,500 feet of new street on 10th Avenue north of Windmill Drive.



Honoring those who lost their lives to terrorism, the Keep Meridian/Lauderdale County Beautiful program will plant "Liberty Gardens" in public spaces, thanks to an Environmental Awareness Grant from Wal-Mart. The KAB staff won a statewide, second-place award for its innovative Youth Mini-

Kindergartner Angel Spencer helped raise money for Afghan children. Virgil Walters completed special training to help staff his church's certified emergency shelter. Cecilia Hollis served as a Red Cross volunteer and coordinated fund-raising. Carolyn Truhett and coworkers at Hospice South raised just over \$400 by selling large, hand-made red, white and blue bows.



Angel Spencer



Virgil Walters



Oakland Heights Elementary School



Cecilia Hollis



Carolyn Truhett

building a better city



Grant program, which awards money to youth groups for outdoor classrooms, butterfly gardens and beautification projects.

In the constant crusade against litter, our KAB staff coordinates a program of litter pick-up on state-owned rights-of-way in the city using a van we bought from the Mississippi Department of Transportation for one dollar. Partnering with the Main Street Division, KAB also purchased new trash receptacles now placed throughout the downtown area.

Our Main Street staff added the Downtown Mardi Gras Block Party, the Men's Holiday Fashion Extravaganza and the Christkindlemarkt to its roster of special events. The staff also helped plan the Dr. Martin Luther King Parade and Celebration and coordinated room bookings and tours of Union Station. The number of holiday events at Union Station was up 25 percent in the last year.



Above: Music takes center stage at the new Downtown Mardi Gras Block Party. Top: Pottery, paintings and other creations lured thousands of people to Arts in the Park.

One of the premiere arts events of the year also gives a big boost to the local economy. Arts in the Park drew more than 72,000 visitors, resulting in \$36,000 in revenue from ticket sales alone. The Cultural Affairs Division also brought to town Artrain USA, the nation's only museum on a train, housing an exhibit of art related to NASA and space travel. Meridian was the only city in the state to host Artrain.

Record crowds, some dressed in costumes for the Proud to be an American Parade, jammed Bonita Lakes for the annual Fourth of July Meridian Symphony Orchestra Pops Concert, military fly-over and spectacular fireworks display over the lake.

More retirees are deciding to put down roots in Meridian. Our Retiree Recruitment program answered nearly 2,000 inquiries from retirees, with 16 households deciding to relocate to Meridian. Since the program began, we have attracted about 66 retiree families.

Laura M. Morris donated medical supplies, boots and gloves. Kevin Adams is ready to coordinate Midway Baptist Church's new emergency shelter. Mrs. W. L. Stutts donated flashlights and batteries. Witherspoon Elementary Principal Brenda Edwards encouraged students to respond to the disaster through artwork and donations. Virginia Cornwell gave gloves, powder and eye-wear for relief workers at Ground Zero.



Laura M. Morris



Kevin Adams



Mrs. W. L. Stutts



Brenda Edwards



Virginia Cornwell