

to the city council and the people of Meridian

Even though it was a tight budget year, 2001 was a time of significant development for our community. After Meridian was selected by a statewide committee as the

site of the proposed Southern Arts and Entertainment Center, the Mississippi Legislature officially named Meridian as the home of the SAEC, which will be located at Bonita Lakes. We're in the

process now of pulling together a statewide group of arts and business experts to guide the process of developing the center and identifying sources of funding.

Meridian is most definitely on its way to becoming a major arts center. The project to develop the Marks Rothenberg building as an arts education and conference center and to restore the magnificent Grand Opera House of Mississippi is right on schedule. Architects have been selected to design both renovations and, in about three years, the students of our area will have access to a wealth of arts opportunities and our downtown will be enriched by an infusion of students, teachers and artisans.

As a companion to the project, which will be named the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center, the Meridian City Council approved a \$7 million project to build a parking garage to serve the center, downtown merchants and other visitors. An architectural firm has been selected and we

have acquired options on the block between Seventh and Eighth Streets and 23rd and 24th Avenues for the parking garage.

The Grow Meridian Team I formed last year has completed its work and the excellent recommendations the team made for the growth of our community are being implemented as time and resources allow.



Mayor John Robert Smith holds the piggy bank, heavy with coins, donated to the Red Cross by an anonymous child.

Photo: Ron Brown



A huge American flag on a ladder truck welcomes runners who stopped in Meridian as part of a national "Flags Across America" cross-country run.



city council members

This annual report documents the hundreds of other projects and programs our city staff and community leaders were involved in during the year. But without warning, without time to mentally grasp what was happening, September 11 changed us all. What had seemed important before wasn't anymore. We were shocked, horrified and angry. But we rallied, putting our priorities in order, drawing our loved ones close, then looking around to see how we could help.

So, this report is a tribute to the countless men, women and children of our community who came together to give of themselves—only a sampling of whom is shown on these pages. Some donated money, others gave supplies, and still others rolled up their sleeves to give blood. We did it for people we had never met but who are our neighbors because we are all Americans.

Like the anonymous child who took her bright blue piggy bank to the Red Cross to help those in need, our people responded with great compassion and with a determination to keep our nation strong. **GOD BLESS US ALL AND GOD BLESS AMERICA.**

Mayor John Robert Smith

Meridian City Council, above from left: Barbara Henson, Ward 3; Jesse Palmer, Ward 4; and Mary Perry, Ward 2; at right: Bobby Smith, Ward 5; far right, George Thomas, Ward 1, council president.

