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Mayor offers optimistic take on Lufkin's future; PG Films to occupy shell building

By STEVEN ALFORD, JESSICA COOLEY
The Lufkin Daily News



Friday, January 23, 2009

At the first First Friday Luncheon of the year, Mayor Jack Gorden and Angelina County Judge Wes Suiter each gave an address on the state of the city and the county at Crown Colony Country Club Friday afternoon.

The luncheon, hosted by the Lufkin/Angelina County Chamber of Commerce, was a chance for local officials and business leaders to hear what's in store for 2009.



Steven Alford/The Lufkin Daily News (ENLARGE)

Lufkin Mayor Jack Gorden asks guests to look at their glasses as 'half full' during the State of the City/County address Friday afternoon at Crown Colony Country Club. The luncheon, hosted by the Lufkin/Angelina County Chamber of Commerce, was a chance for local officials and business leaders to hear what's in store for 2009.

Suiter began the presentation with a slide show spanning the past year's events and what new things can be expected.

"One of our main goals this year was Cassells-Boykin park," he said. "We've begun construction on phase II and it's something we're all excited about."

Additions to the park on Lake Sam Rayburn include new boat ramps, parking and an amphitheater which can be used to host events such as popular bass fishing tournaments.

Another project launched in November in conjunction with the Burke Center is a regional mental health facility newly named the Psychiatric Emergency Service Center.

"We've serviced 83 patients since it's opened, which has taken some burden off of our hospital emergency rooms," Suiter said. "It's an asset to the community."

Suiter said that for 2009 the county will implement a master plan, which includes expanding the landfill and airport, as well as several other upcoming projects.

One of the biggest events in 2008 was Hurricane Ike, which left extensive damage to Texas. Reflecting on the storm, Suiter noted that Angelina County was luckier than others.

"Even though this happened to our community, we are still very fortunate," he said. "If you think it was bad out here, drive down to Galveston. It's mind boggling."

In closing, Suiter stressed county wide participation in the upcoming census and the need to make sure this year's legislation in Austin doesn't undermine the needs of East Texans.

"We'll be looking out for the best interests of our community," Suiter said.

To begin his presentation, Mayor Jack Gorden asked guests to raise their glasses, while offering an optimistic take on the future.

"We need to look at the glass as half full," Gorden said. "That's our commitment and I think the future looks bright."

In thanking Judge Suiter, Gorden noted that both offices have been working hard together all year for East Texans.

"I think the city and the county are enjoying the best cooperative spirit I've ever seen in my time here," he said. "Together, we can accomplish a lot."

Despite a shaky national economy, overall the mayor's predictions for the future were positive.

Lufkin's sales tax revenues have been on the rise, rising 10 percent in November, Gorden said. While the city has seen recent losses of industry, the mayor listed several upcoming projects that should bring job growth to the city.

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Nearly 120 jobs will be created within the next three years through a deal with PG Films, a Mexican company which is building a plant in Lufkin. After the deal is finalized, the company will occupy the old shell building located at the corner of Henderson Street and Old Mill Road.

"They are an international company that makes the film that goes on pallets and cartons of cokes," Gorden said.

"It is a very clean and safe business."

The U.S. 59 corridor will also be bringing industry and tourism to the city and is predicted to be the next major "hot spot" of growth in Texas, Gorden said.

"Are we not situated in a great position to take advantage of this?" he asked. "We've got everything they need."

Gorden also spoke about the growing medical field in Lufkin and noted the construction of a new \$48 million tower at Memorial Health System of East Texas as a sign of the industry's strength.

"The medical community literally continues to be the heart of the city," he said. "What better way to show the growth of the health of this city than with their expansion?"

Other projects for 2009 include Whitehouse Drive expanding to connect with Highway 69.

A \$5 million grant, acquired as a result of damage from Hurricane Ike, will fund the building of an Angelina College campus in Livingston.

With all that the city and county has planned for 2009, both Gorden and Suiter used their presentations to paint a portrait of a growing region with upbeat and involved leaders.

"It's been an honor to serve as your mayor," Gorden said in closing.

"Let's have a wonderful year together."

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