

2020 State of the City – As Prepared

Video - This Place

I want to tell you a story about THIS PLACE in North Dakota.

You see, this place is special...

This is a great place to learn... whether you are just finding your voice or if you are if you're getting ready to tackle the world head on... This place will help you grow as a person

This place is at the cutting edge of technology... even when that technology is always changing.

This is why I love this place because it's never content with just sitting still.

This place you know your neighbors for the rest of your life and you help them when you can because you know when you need help they will be there for you.

You can feel safe and protected... and when things aren't going your way, you're able to find ways to get back on your feet.

This place you can play outside year round... It's just a matter of how many layers you're wearing... and when mother nature gets a little too aggressive... This place doesn't panic. They roll up their sleeves and get to work... because they don't know any other way.

As much as this place can teach you... it also is willing to listen to others... because in order to become a great place for all... you need to be willing to learn.

This place is caring,

This place is cutting edge,

This place is home.

THIS PLACE IS... GRAND FORKS.

Good Afternoon.

Thank you Paula, and thank you all for being here for the 2020 State of the City. It is an honor to be here with you.

How about another hand for Red River High School student, Temi Haastrup, our anthem singer, and the Police Department color guard.

I am so grateful for our team, Team Grand Forks.

We can't do what we do without the support of so many. Specifically, I want to thank my wife, Dr. Ann Brown.

Your passion for the community and especially public art's impact is inspiring. You and the Public Arts Commission have curated the current exhibit of the Mayor's Choice Art in City Hall that focuses on Veterans. It is moving. Please stop by City Hall to experience it. Thank you.

I also want to thank Barry Wilfarht, Kim Strom, and the Chamber team, as well as Anna Rosburg and the Alerus team.

And, of course, our City Administrative team that did all the work the last 365 days that gives us so much to talk about today.

And a special acknowledgment to our City Council members, led by President Sande and Vice President Vein. It's not lost on me that I am up here and most of you are comfortably kicking back at your tables.

Actually, you've earned it. This is the most effective and collaborative Council I've worked with.

As you saw from the introduction, we're going to talk about "This Place. Grand Forks".

We are unique in our history, in our strengths, in our character, and in our challenges.

We are unique in our collaborative approach, unique in our resilience.

Today, I will talk a little about how "this place" was so special in 2019 and will discuss our path forward.

First, I would like to take this opportunity to honor Eliot Glassheim, longtime City Council Member, North Dakota State Representative, and model of leadership to generations.

Eliot, you will be missed, but "The Glassheim Way" will continue to live on in all we do for North Dakota, and Grand Forks.

What is the State of the City?

Grand Forks is solid and resilient to its core, and, with bold actions, will flourish in the 21st century economy.

Why?

Because our City and our City administrative team perform the most critical functions reliably and skillfully.

Because Grand Forks has a collective focus on the wellbeing of our neighbors and our community.

Because Grand Forks is the Proud Home of the University of North Dakota and we continue to uncover layers of that prolific relationship.

Because Grand Forks is blessed with a nimble network of local business owners and community champions that nourish a rich quality of life and a robust economy.

And because Grand Forks is where, literally, the sky is NOT the limit and we act confidently and competently to reach new opportunities.

Because this place, Grand Forks, is special.

Today's speech is live streamed online, just to make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate. In fact, I'll be checking with a few watch parties over the next hour.

First, City Government's core mission is to "Protect and Serve" and our team does it well.

We can do all of the rest because "Protect and Serve" is what we do best.

And this will be evident in the upcoming Spring Flood. This could potentially be a Top 5 flood.

We were there to meet the challenge back in 2009 and 2011 and am confident we will do it again.

I assure you that the City and our State and County partners will be prepared.

Our flood protection system is in place, thanks to work done two decades ago and by those who have maintained it since.

I have complete confidence in our flood fight team. Thank you again to the Engineers, Public Works and Water Works Operators and our public safety responders and emergency management professionals, as well as our federal, state and local partners.

I also want to emphasize personal responsibility is always the best course of action.

In times of emergency, the City and partners are there to assist.

As they are, day in and day out, to protect and serve.

Several years ago we set a strategic goal of 92 sworn police officers, including adding Community Outreach Officers and School Resources Officers. I am proud we accomplished that goal.

Our Police Chief and leadership team have accomplished national accreditation and collaborate so well with partners including our Grand Forks County Sheriff's Office.

The most recent is with the Northern Valley Law Enforcement Memorial which I am so proud is on its way . . . with immense community philanthropic support, of course.

Our Fire Department and Water Works Department have achieved the top ISO rating, which, in English, means we are ready to respond effectively, exactly as they did just last Sunday.

In addition, our Fire crews perform community risk reduction visits so they are as familiar as possible with buildings and their inhabitants before an emergency happens.

Further, our Fire Department is on the cutting edge of technology, helping to lead with data-driven decisions and the use of UAS technology in emergency situations, like flooding.

Fire Chief Lorenz and PSAP/911 Director Becky Ault are also recognized leaders statewide through their work in the development and implementation of a Statewide Interoperable Radio Network.

Our Public Works crews who deliver on signature services like Spring Clean Up, Leaf Pick Up, and unmatched streets and sanitation maintenance have been tackling snow . . . and more snow. About 8,000 truckloads so far. How about a hand for our road crews over the past few months?

Our team's work includes plowing and maintaining 580 lane miles of streets, over 750 miles of water infrastructure, 5,000 city lights, and 330 miles of sidewalks and in 2019 we completed \$43 million in road construction projects.

And while doing all this, we have kept our mill rate flat for the last several years, property valuations continue to grow modestly due to new construction, and sales tax collections, despite the retail sector concerns, are stable and increased from 2018 to 2019.

Executing the fundamentals well creates an environment that fosters growth.

That was demonstrated in 2019 with the start of our five-year "Billion Dollar Boom".

It's a boom that boasts projects like the J.R. Simplot expansion, Red River Biorefinery, UND Campus Work, Altru Hospital, and all the downtown investments like Pure Development, Selkirk, Argyle, Epic Place, and the DeMers Construction, not to mention upcoming projects like Olive Ann.

I know there was some initial skepticism of the "Billion Dollar" number, but new construction value in 2019 already reached \$329 million dollars, a third of the billion and over 73% higher than the last ten year average.

In fact, there's a good chance we'll have to increase the "billion" in the next few years.

The City's major projects are on track, as well, including the new Bus Facility.

Congratulations, Dale Bergman and the Cities Area Transit team.

And the new Grand Forks Regional Water Treatment Plant, a herculean funding effort that spanned four biennia is a prime example of local and state partnerships.

This is a good time to recognize Council Member Ken Vein for his tireless and unmatched work on water infrastructure and thank our North Dakota legislators, particularly Senator Holmberg and Representative Sanford, for much appreciated state infrastructure investments.

Mark your calendars and please join us June 1 for the Grand Opening of the Water Treatment Plant.

We have a solid relationship with our state partners and, in fact, I believe our vision and direction with Governor Burgum and Lt. Governor Sanford has never been more in sync.

One area, for example, is our shared focus on streamlining government through technology.

Our City Government is online.

Our Building Inspections and IT teams introduced a new online renewal program and 12%, or more than 300, contractors and rentals took advantage in just the first six months.

These numbers follow the success we're seeing for utility bill payments.

And our special events program, scheduled with one phone call to our Public Information Center, processed over 400 unique experiences last year including concerts, Farmer's Markets, and street fairs, will be going digital in 2020.

Like any good, adaptive organization, City Administrator Todd Feland continues to ensure efficiency by putting people in the right places for their skills and passions and creating effective teams.

For example, he and our Human Resources team have created interdepartmental teams to focus on innovation, performance, succession planning, and to guide our UND partnerships and critical workforce related issues.

We are simply proud to be public servants.

I think the desire to "do good" is inherent in all of us and, fortunately, we preserve it as City employees.

Video - Doing Good Never Grows Old

We believe in people. We empower people. And we improve lives.

Healthier residents and healthier neighborhoods result in a healthier community as a whole.

A Community Health Assessment was recently completed.

This assessment gives us the data we need to engage our residents, create meaningful goals, and address challenges.

We can't improve what we don't track.

Notably, the assessment revealed the priority areas for improvement are substance use, mental health, obesity, transportation, and the cost of health care and housing.

Further, the 2019 County Health Rankings from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranked Grand Forks County 21 of 49 counties in North Dakota for overall health outcomes and 17 for health factors.

We can do better and must do so in a holistic way that achieves the optimal level of health through a "Health in All Policies" approach.

As such, I am calling for a Live Well Grand Forks Initiative, and with it, I challenge our community leaders to consider Health In All Policies and work together to improve our rankings and bring Grand Forks County to the top 5 in North Dakota by 2025!

And I am overwhelmed with gratitude that LiveWell Grand Forks will be guided by an unparalleled steering team: Dr. Donald Warne of the UND MPH Program, Mara Jiran of Spectra Health, Debbie Swanson of Grand Forks Public Health and an extraordinary Altru Health Systems team of Kristi Hall-Jiran, Jodi Sorum, and Audrey Lorenz.

I also want to recognize Council Members Dachtler, Mock and Weigel, who have agreed to champion LiveWell Grand Forks and bring their unique expertise and passion to make it successful.

Thank you, all.

Through the Live Well Grand Forks effort, we must explore these areas:

Access to Care:

We are so grateful for Altru Health System's ongoing impact on our entire region and through their partnerships with the City, our businesses and so many more. In addition, our own Health Department continues to provide invaluable services and resources and is always there to remind me to consider the health impact of policy decisions.

Social Connections:

Public places where people can connect – like Grand Forks Public__ are important to the health and vitality of our community. If you haven't seen the library lately, you've not seen it at all. It is a model of mental invigoration, social connection, vital information, workforce skills, engagement resources, and more.

Place Making For All Ages:

If everything we do in public spaces engages 8 year olds and 80 year olds, then it engages us all. Americans over 65 will increase from 46 million today to over 73 million in 2030. 80% want to remain in their community as they age. We want them to stay, too. Let's commit to being an 8-80's community for the future where there is something for everyone that promotes healthful living.

Mental Health:

I am so proud of how our community is leading efforts in the area of mental health. Congratulations specifically to the Grand Forks School District, Altru, UND, Public Health and many others for the Mental Health Matters kick off on Saturday, March 7, at Lake Agassiz School. We are proud to be partnering with you. We are so proud of our very own Michael Dulitz, whose opioid response work at Grand Forks Public Health was recognized with the Trailblazer Award at Recovery Reinvented by First Lady Kathryn Burgum. You both inspire us with your courage and leadership.

Accessibility:

We must have an intense focus on accessibility in our community – both physical and sensory. Too often we default to the bare minimums of ADA requirements. We should not settle for meeting the bar, we should set the bar higher.

Neighborhoods:

Neighborhoods and their anchors must be a priority because that's where we do most of our living: attending school and church, socializing and recreating. In this area I really would like to see the City, as well as the County and Park District, work hand-in-hand with Dr. Brenner and the School Board with the upcoming community task force. And just so everyone knows, you can also count me as a strong "yes" to a future school district bond issue.

Poverty and Access to Employment:

The health implications of having large wealth gaps or lack of access to the education and skills training for self-sustaining employment can be significant. Employers that offer living wages help to build and sustain families. Our Non-Profits perform miracles everyday and are key stakeholders. Programs like F5 and Free Through Recovery are

leading the way in providing access to employment and education for some in our community.

Transportation Infrastructure:

We can build on the foundation of the Greenway, a robust trail system, a strong Cities Area Transit, and the Altru GrandRides Bike Share Program to create sustainable commuting and recreational options available to everyone.

Sustainability:

I believe we can build upon current successes and can grow our leadership in the area of climate change – recognizing that the economic, social and environmental impact of all the issues above are intertwined.

As our Steering Group and community as a whole develops the best possible Community Health Improvement Plan, we will also align with existing health coalitions like LiveWell Grand Cities and explore strategies like Blue Zones and the AARP Livable Communities, as well as actively engage our community members.

In fact, let's check in with the Schroeder Middle School 8th Graders and our friends at the Grand Forks Senior Center who are watching remotely.

We have found that when we work with a focus on people, empathy, and collaboration, we create a community of belonging for all.

This includes the overwhelming and nationally-recognized success of the Grand Forks Welcoming Community Roadmap.

I could not be more proud of the Roadmap's impact and the leadership and partnership of all involved, particularly Roadmap Coordinating Fellow, Robin David.

The list of accomplishments is noteworthy and included local restaurants featuring talented new chefs, increased awareness of community offerings, greater celebration of Grand Forks Pride, an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Map, and enhanced UND student engagement, including partnering with the outstanding work of UND Student Affairs and the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion.

With this Roadmap, voices from all over the community are helping to shape Grand Forks and to forge new entry points to ensure . . . Grand Forks is not just the best community to be from, but to come to.

Which leads me to the Census.

Because all our people count, we must make sure we count all our people.

Each of you are worth \$19,100.

I bet that's surprising to a few of you, but that's what we lose over ten years of Census-related appropriations if you're not counted.

In the next month, you will receive a postcard with instructions on how to complete your easy 10-minute census online.

Brad Gengler and Stephanie Halford from our Planning Department are doing an outstanding job leading our Complete Count Committee, specifically targeted at how to reach traditionally undercounted populations.

This Census is critical. Our community, especially those in the most need, depend on the funding for a high quality of life.

I want to take this time to recognize and welcome Dr. Steve Gander, Mayor of East Grand Forks.

There's something special about Doctor Mayors, isn't there, Doctor ... Mayor?

East Grand Forks and Grand Forks are connected by so much more than that which separates us. Thank you for you and your team's partnerships on transit, wastewater, Downtown development, and continuing to find ways to connect.

We shared in the "construction pain" along DeMers last year and we will share in the benefit of its completion.

A good share of the mitigation of pain and maximizing of benefits is due to the Downtown Development Association. Thank you to Blue Weber and the DDA members and leaders.

I look forward to continuing to partner on future projects and perhaps expanding your reach, to include even greater East Grand Forks linkage and opportunities in the areas of shared street banners, flowers and aesthetics and, perhaps someday, parking and maintenance.

And here's a little factoid some in our community might not know: "Downtown" is what an airman from the Grand Forks Air Force Base calls our entire community, not just the city center.

In public speaking, we call that a transition. . . from "downtown" to "Grand Forks Air Force Base".

We are pleased to work with Wing Commander Colonel Pringle, and his leadership team.

Let's take a moment to recognize all active and retired military members and veterans, including our North Dakota National Guard members in the room today. If you are able, please stand.

Last year, the Grand Forks Air Force Base became the 319th Reconnaissance Wing with an Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, or ISR mission.

With the change, it literally opened a world of leading edge opportunities and I'm excited about the future.

Grand Forks Air Force Base has been home to many missions over the decades, but the *Community's* mission has remained the same: Support our military members and the Base, for the Nation.

I am proud Grand Forks' support is recognized as the "Gold Standard" by Air Force Chief of Staff General Goldfein.

I am honored and grateful to work alongside Community Business Leader Jim Bradshaw, as my appointed leader of the newly formalized Base Promotion and Retention Working Group. This is the group charged with communicating the Grand Forks story to our congressional delegation and Air Force leaders in the months to come.

Grand Forks prides itself on bringing Air Force leaders solutions, not problems, as we did with our team last week at the 16th Air Force in San Antonio, which is the command center for the ISR mission.

Our team includes the Grand Forks County Commissioners, Director of Administration, Tom Ford, who does such an outstanding job, the Base Retention and Investment Committee, and Grand Sky, where the incredible innovation and commercialization is being driven by partners General Atomics and Northrup Grumman.

And our team includes legislators like Senator Meyer and Representative Vetter, who led efforts on quality of life matters like license reciprocity and military retirement income tax exemption. Thank you.

At his State of the State in Grand Forks last month, the Governor articulated a goal for North Dakota to be the most military friendly state.

I agree, and where better to lead this than from Grand Forks, the most military friendly community.

Being a military community defines Grand Forks and so does being a College Town, the Proud Home of the University of North Dakota.

The relationship between UND and the City of Grand Forks has never been better and I am both optimistic and confident it is only going to reach new levels.

We are excited about the incoming President, Andrew Armacost. I also can't say enough about President Wynne and the stability he brought. He is exactly what we all needed, and more, during this transition.

At last year's speech I set town/gown goals in key areas, including advancing reconstruction and development along University Avenue, building on our successful internship program, becoming a recognized Top 10 College Town, implementing formal collaborative structures, and the increased use of the "City as a Research Lab".

We hit the mark on all of these and are reaching for more, including moving forward with programming partnerships in the Herald building, a joint UND/City public transit operation beginning in the Fall, and improving the University Avenue corridor from campus to downtown in a project led by the Community Foundation and supported by the Knight Foundation.

We are also securing a new UND/Alerus Center agreement in 2020, in time for new playing turf and the Missouri Valley Football Conference for the Home of UND football.

Partnerships work because of relationships.

Our community team works well with UND's leadership team of Provost Tom DiLorenzo, Vice Presidents Jed Shivers, Meloney Linder, Dr. Cara Halgren and Dr. John Mihelich.

In fact, exciting partnerships blossom throughout campus, from Space Studies and Engineering to Communications . . . and with people like Associate Dean of the Graduate School, Chris Nelson.

Propelled by the inspiration and leadership of Dean Nelson and Council Member and President of the Jobs Development Authority, Bret Weber, a transformative approach to workforce, applied research, and experiential learning is being developed that is fittingly dubbed STELLAR: Strategic Topics for Enhanced Learning and Living and Applied Research.

I believe STELLAR can be a signature program that incorporates undergraduate, graduate and doctoral level student engagement and applied research from faculty, classroom projects, innovative design studios and industry-ready applications.

Of course, we await President Armacost's arrival for further discussion, development, and next steps on these and his new directions but I am pleased at how our community is rolling out the red carpet for him and his family with genuine excitement and positive partnerships.

Last year, UND was graced by incredibly generous donors like Hal and Kathy Gershman who are transforming the graduate engagement center and Werner and Colleen Nistler for their commitment to the College of Business and Public Administration Building.

I have high hopes for a strong and long term community presence in the Nistler Building to engage students with the community in workforce development and otherwise enriching their experience.

Our community has been blessed by philanthropy.

Nowhere is this more evident, of course, than the overwhelming generosity of Ralph and Betty Engelstad, the Engelstad Foundation and the hands-on work of Kris Engelstad McGarry. There is not an aspect of life, from education to faith and from safety to hope, that has not been touched by the Engelstad's, and we are grateful.

As we continue to build collaborations and seize our rightful place as a Top 10 College town, we will partner on workforce, innovation and research and of course, on continuing to promote a positive student experience, encouraging engagement, and promoting social and professional opportunities.

But don't take my word for how things are going, let's hear from Gracie Lian, UND Student Body President.

UND Student Body President Gracie Lian (Text as Prepared)

“For those of you millennials and younger in the crowd, what the Mayor meant is that Grand Forks has some pretty sick stuff going on rn.

My name is Gracie Lian, and for those of you who don't know me here are a few quick facts: I'm this year's Student Body President at UND, I'm studying Political Science and English, I'm a Grand Forks native, I spent 15 years with the Summer Performing Arts Program as a student, volunteer, and employee, and I'm bike path and greenway enthusiast. Some of you probably heard me speak at the Wake Up to UND event back in September. Then, I got to speak about the exciting things our Student Government administration wanted to work on throughout the year. Most important to me was building off of my passion for both UND and the City of Grand Forks to connect these two entities even further. Mayor Brown already touched on a lot of the exciting things happening, but I have the pleasure of sharing the student, or “young person” perspective, along with some additional pretty cool opportunities and events that are happening on campus.

Student Government has been hosting meetings of a “Campus Community Engagement Committee” where we bring city leaders, non-profit organizations, businesses, UND athletics, and UND administrators all in the same room so as a group we can talk about how to further engage students and exchange ideas. A goal of the group has been to establish a “rhythm of events” for UND students who so often say “there's nothing to do in Grand Forks.” From this group we've been able to find some amazing ways to collaborate such as the “February Thaw” pre-hockey student event that happened last weekend through Student Government collaboration with the Ralph Engelstad Arena. We also recently announced Spring Fever Round 2 with Bryce Vine at

the Alerus center after working with their team. We've also made a concentrated effort to get students to events like the Greenway Takeover Festival, sponsored by HB Sound and Light, and the Hugo's Concert Series through sponsorships for tickets or food vouchers.

In fact, there's so much going within this group that UND and the City of Grand Forks collaborated to co-fund a student position titled "UND/City Liaison Intern" whose main goal is to establish a framework for continued collaboration between our entities. This student is not only doing great work for our community, but also benefiting educationally and professionally from our efforts to further integrate UND and the city.

Campus is evolving and changing. A new Memorial Union, a new building for the Nistler College of Business and Public Administration, and some bold planning for the rest of campus means our university is going to look bigger and better than ever in the near future. As physical changes occur, so will our educational, professional, and social opportunities. They already have in many incredible ways thanks to the work being done between UND and the city. Foundations are being set and conversations are being had, and I only see collaboration increasing from here. Take it from someone who sees UND day in and day out, supporting students is one of the best investments this community can make – your city leadership recognizes this, and that is why I firmly believe UND and the City of Grand Forks are only going to become bigger and better from here on out.

As the Mayor mentioned, one of our shared goals is to become a recognized Top 10 College Town. I am proud that I and other Student Government leaders are on the team with UND and City officials to make that happen. It is my pleasure to introduce this video produced by the UND Communications & Marketing Team that will be part of our submission for recognition by the International Town and Gown Association later this Spring. Folks, you're seeing it here first!"

VIDEO - UND

In the town of Grand Forks and the University of North Dakota, change started with a pothole.

That pothole, yes, was a rough part of a road. But it also represented a crack in how the two worked together.

See ... that pothole was on a road that connects the University and the heart of downtown.

The physical connection that ties the university and city together.

We decided ... why just patch a pothole, when instead we could reimagine everything all together.

A functional road. ... But also one that attracts students, faculty and staff to live, work and play.

That pothole sparked a conversation.

It sparked action.

Joint internships

Regular meetings between city and student governments Student research shaping city policy Class projects with government agencies.

A bike share program

Concerts for students, hosted at a city-owned events center.

Downtown teaching space

Combined transportation plans

Scholarships

Community events

Coworking space

And even a meal for 1,000 on that new road.

An entire community moving things forward Sharing a meal and ideas For Grand Forks and the university, There's no magic one thing It's everything From that pothole to where we are today How does this all happen?

Here in Grand Forks, it's as easy as taking a seat at the table.

Thank you, Gracie and wow, outstanding job to the UND Communications and Marketing Department for telling our Top College Town story so vividly.

You couldn't miss the showcasing of The Longest Table. The Governor's Main Street Livable Community Award-Winning Longest Table, by the way!

Congratulations and, moreover, thank you, to the Community Foundation of GF, EGF and Region and the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals for the event, for bringing out so many voices, and for capturing the data on these table conversations that can be found at longesttablegf.com.

Our community is better when voices are heard. Both those that are expressing great ideas and those expressing great concern.

The loudest of concerns recently involve our changing retail sector and what the City can do about it.

To both the general public and to local business owners. We have heard you. Loud and clear.

That is why I am calling for a new Destination City 3.0 initiative.

Just as businesses must evolve to thrive in the market, so too must communities evolve to meet customer expectations.

For those old enough to remember, we ordered from the Montgomery Ward catalog as kids. We circled toys and hoped packages arrived at the door.

After several iterations, shopping is now not much different.

Destination City 3.0 acknowledges this and will focus on where we can lead.

This initiative is founded in the work of the Regional Market Capture Committee.

Information is power.

Thank you to the chairs, Matt Walkowiak and Russel Crary and to all partners.

Just as every business owner knows, there are no easy paths to success. No silver bullets.

But there are solid business plans.

Here's ours: Embrace the new "experiential economy" with a two pronged approach of A. Supporting local businesses and experience providers, and B. Attracting new ones to fill gaps.

To begin, we will remove bureaucratic obstacles for new and expanding ventures. I have asked our City Administrator to realign our community development staff to this end and prioritize what Barry Wilfarht would call a Business Concierge Service.

Next, we will create a clear menu of incentives and assistance programs for business development - existing and new.

Working with the City Council, Jobs Development Authority and City Attorney, we will start conversations on ideas like citywide incentive districts and storefront rehabilitation programs and package them alongside programs like Start-Up Grand Forks and the Renaissance Zone.

I will look to the extraordinary leadership of Julie Rygg and the Greater Grand Forks Convention and Visitors Bureau to help develop and conduct a "shop local, attend local" effort that includes raising awareness of community offerings and reinforcing loyalty to our local owners, to our community.

In fact, noting GFK Airport is the third busiest airport in the nation, we should add Fly Local. Who knows, we could become the second busiest now that Dr. Brown and I will be frequently visited by our new grandson and his family.

At last month's Chamber Annual meeting, both Chamber Chair Paula Anderson and the Ralph's Jody Hodgson urged the same Shop Local, Attend Local.

In Jody's words, "Live is Life". As in live concerts, live sporting events, and live theater.

We must show up at events like the Wacipi this April, events held by the Alerus, the Ralph, the Empire and Fire Hall theaters, and the North Dakota Museum of Art, and the events like Greenway Takeover, Hugo's Concert series and more.

Let me be clear: Every one of us has the opportunity every single day to support a local business.

In fact, you can start right in this building tomorrow with KISS and David Lee Roth tomorrow night.

And how about that just in the last few weeks the Alerus has announced Def Leppard with ZZ Top, Bryce Vine for the UND Spring Fever Concert and the most recently announced Luke Combs! I guess “When it rains, it pours”! Look out attendance record!

The last key action from the Regional Market Capture Committee is to create even more unique experiences in Grand Forks.

These are our “Differentiators”.

Examples like Choice Health and Fitness, the Veteran’s Park, and the Alerus Center/Canad Inn complex prove that not only is Grand Forks worthy of great things, but we can get it done.

The Chamber is best equipped to lead this effort and energize the community to identify possible “differentiators” like an aquarium, children’s science museum, or similar attractions.

The ideas can be honed through a “shark tank” -like process, feasibility studies, and prepped for private developers, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists.

I’ve got a few specific things I’d like considered.

First, Town Square is in need of an upgrade. We have a beautiful Downtown Action Plan that is truly the people’s plan.

One of the next major actions will be to refresh the 20 year old Town Square with private sector funding leveraging public dollars.

And I would like the second project to come from the Grand Forks Youth Commission. Their leadership, particularly in addressing the stigma of addiction, is known statewide.

I’ve challenged the Youth Commission to develop a “Legacy Project” by engaging their peers and identifying something special for the future youth of our community.

I am so grateful for the commission’s facilitator Sarah Shimek and to all our Youth Commissioners. They are here today and will be staffing a booth after this event for you to learn more about the commission to support them.

Let me be clear. I am not worried about Grand Forks being cool. I just believe our economy, our workforce development, and our quality of life should always be focused on being “way cooler”. . .

VIDEO - Cooler Relocation Guide

Another incredible video! Thank you GF Is Cooler.

As you saw in the video, GF Is Cooler has created a Relocation Guide and they're letting us launch it right here!

It showcases our entire county and provides newcomers with a treasure chest of information.

The guide is NOW available in electronic format at grandforksiscooler.com.

Workforce retention and attraction are key issues and the good news is we're making progress on key demographics.

The data shows that we've seen 15% growth in 25-34 year olds and 22% growth in 30-35 year olds.

Those are Keith Lund's "go-to stats" and I just stole them before his Annual Meeting next month.

Do me a favor and act surprised when he says them?

Of course, a major reason for this success in retaining young professionals is the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals.

Led by Executive Director Kathryn Kester, the YP's have established themselves as a trusted pillar of the community. With social, professional and philanthropic opportunities as their tools, they have created a dynamic network of professionals that serve their members, our businesses and our community.

Here's another ad: GGFYP is hosting a regional YP Summit here this Summer. Get your tickets and encourage your coworkers to get theirs!

So we're doing well in the young professional demographic.

However, Grand Forks lags in the concentration of high tech jobs and the level of pay for those that are here.

Considering the educational, intellectual, and organizational assets we have in the region, that shouldn't be the case.

I believe we can change that.

Grand Forks can pioneer the next generation of technology, not only as the epicenter of UAS, but as a growth center for the digital innovation economy.

Like John D. Odegard did 50 years ago, our time is now to plant the seeds that will grow into a world class “intelligent technology” center, fueling artificial intelligence and data science solutions in the fields of health, energy, and aerospace.

This is a complex initiative with a lot of moving parts, multiple layers of relationships, a stacking of assets and capacities, and an ambitious vision, so I am pleased to announce City Council President Dana Sande will spearhead this effort alongside EDC leadership. Thank you and get ready, Keith Lund and Brandon Baumbach.

Picture this: An innovation district, or tech campus, stretching out over downtown Grand Forks. Green spaces, park tables, and sidewalks teeming with people walking, biking, and sipping coffee as they head to their jobs that haven’t been invented yet, in corporate offices of high-tech businesses not yet conceived.

This 21st century workforce mixes and mingles as a cohort of peers, sharing and building on ideas before meeting for a bite to eat at a food truck or sidewalk cafe table, ultimately going home to their apartment on the 5th, 6th, 7th or 8th floor in one of a campus of mixed use buildings.

The next generation technology companies clustered here were born in the halls of UND Computer Science, UND Aerospace, UND Medical School and EERC, incubated in The 701 CoWorking Space and The UND Center for Innovation, and accelerated with resources managed by collaborative partners in the Herald Building.

With technology sparked by industry and philanthropic leaders, their products process the data from UAS on the other side of the state, power the app that monitors the health of a nearby farmer, or develop the artificial intelligence that interconnects subspace sensors and intelligent systems in the defense sector.

These startups chose this campus because, just as Governor Burgum has championed his Main Street Initiative, our downtown is a workforce magnet with diverse amenities and smart infrastructure and local partners driving 21st century workforce skills.

And the proof that this place, Grand Forks, can be ground zero for the next technological wave is right in front of us.

It is not a question of *IF* it can happen. Because it already is.

Startups like iSight RPV Services and Airtonomy are doing this work in the downtown area right now.

Let’s take a look here. This week I got to explore one of these exciting companies up close: Airtonomy.

I participated in a turbine inspection that took place halfway across North Dakota at Xcel Energy's Foxtail Wind Farm, near Kulm.

The best part? I didn't have to leave my downtown Grand Forks office.

(For the FAA and test site folks, I did NOT actually fly the drone. I'll get my Part 107 certification later.)

But I **did submit** a mission for Jared to launch and, again, I did it from my office in downtown Grand Forks. Thanks to Airtonomy.

You might have heard a bit about them this week. Big things are happening.

I'd like to invite CEO Josh Riedy up to the stage to chat about what we're seeing and what it could mean for Grand Forks and the entire state.

Josh Riedy joins Mayor Brown on stage. Josh describes what is on the screen, his thoughts of Grand Forks as a hub for these Intelligent Technology companies and who has been involved in their success so far.

Q1: Josh, please explain what we are looking at, what did I really do?

Q2: The fact that I was in my downtown Grand Forks office and could push a button to control something in the middle of **RURAL ND**?! This application is really quite exciting! How will this lead to more companies, more applications, and more industries coming into the region?

Q3: So you have received JDA dollars last year, and earlier this week I hear you received LIFT funding from Commerce? Can you talk a little about how and who else has supported Airtonomy to get where it is today?

Q4: Josh, we have a lot of partners right here. That's pretty exciting. Maybe we should check in with a few partners not able to be in the room, don't you think?

Let's drop into Governor Burgum's Conference Room. Greetings, Team North Dakota. Thanks for tuning in with us today and thank you for all you do.

And just a little further west, let's check in with some of your team at Microsoft Headquarters in Seattle. Greetings Ashish and Jim. Hey, I think I have that same jersey!

Thank you, Josh. This is truly inspiring. Our gratitude to you and the Airtonomy team for choosing this place, Grand Forks.

It's a bold future and the journey starts today.

Grand Forks is uniquely positioned to thrive because it's just what we do.

This place cares. We never tire of 'doing good', but also of being great.

This place values and invests in our health and wellness and that of our neighbors.

This place proudly supports the Grand Forks Air Force Base and we build on the foundation of being a college town, the Proud Home of the University of North Dakota.

This place is nimble enough, courageous enough to keep our small businesses, industries, and amenities strong and our economy poised for the next generation of growth.

This place dreams and inspires.

This place can change the world and has the record to prove it.

And together... *together* . . . we achieve.

This place is special.

This place. Grand Forks.

Thank you.