

East Chicago State Of The City Address

I am honored to serve as the Mayor of East Chicago. 2005 was a year of Connecting our Community. Together we have accomplished so much. I know people are amazed at what we've done because I sure am. But I could not have done this alone. I give credit to all of East Chicago for working together for a better tomorrow. This is our City! Together, we have made great progress! We have achieved the most ambitious agenda in city history!

We could not have accomplished all of this without the help of our City Judge, the City Clerk the Common Council, the various Department Heads, and all of the outstanding City Employees.

We have invited Central High School students here today because they are the future leaders that will play a big role in the success of our community. We are bringing everyone together to celebrate today! By connecting East Chicago we have moved and will continue to move forward to achieve success.

During my campaign, I promised to deal with issues such as: public safety, services, education, jobs, economic development, housing, and recreation. Our City is better today because we have changed the way business had previously been done. We have cut our costs, improved services, and restored confidence in our City. We are bringing hope to each neighborhood and the City will grow stronger because we are working together. Our City is strong and will only grow stronger! This is the rebirth of East Chicago!

We have connected our community through public safety. The past year has been a year of partnerships. A great example is our Police Department headed by Police Chief Angelo Machuca. They have done a great job building partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies. The Police Department has reduced crime in East Chicago by 14% in one year's time. For instance: there were 650 fewer crimes this year, and 85 percent of homicides were solved. We added new and improved squad cars on the streets. We put more police officers on the street, and John Nava, the head of the Gang Unit Task Force was recognized by the Lake Shore Chamber of Commerce for taking criminals off the street.

Our battle against crime will be more successful because police cars are equipped with computers to help us catch more criminals and to share information with neighboring cities.

What does this all mean? It means our city is much safer! As a former officer and Police Chief, I know what it takes to boost morale and bring unity and to make positive things happen. A couple of years ago, they wanted to search nationwide for a police chief to come in and make an impact in our city. I knew better, we all knew better, and that person was found in our own backyard.

I am proud to say we have a Chief that is from East Chicago and knows what it takes because he lives here and is protecting HIS community, YOUR community, OUR community! Great job Police Department!

I have many stories like this and today we honor our Police, Fire, and EMS teams for their dedication. We have connected our community through quality services. We are now giving people choices and opportunities to help rebuild our City.

The first thing we did was eliminated the 2 percent club, which required all city employees to contribute 2 percent of their salaries to the Mayor's Political Organization. Our employees will not be forced to donate to any election campaign. We should all be allowed to take home what we earn and decide for ourselves how to spend our money.

We must be accountable to the individuals who serve this City. When we inherited this administration it was \$5.5 million in debt. With the responsible management of our City Controller and his outstanding team, we reduced the budget by over \$2 million. We improved our credit rating. We decreased our City payroll by \$1 million. We provided \$1000.00 tax relief for homeowners with Homestead Exemptions. We set aside over \$1 million for improving the streets, and we set up a capital improvement fund. We did all of this without eliminating the quality of our services.

We also committed millions of dollars to upgrade the City's aging water treatment plant that had previously seen minimal to no repairs since it was built in 1964.

We revitalized the marina and gave it back to the community. We hosted several successful events celebrating the summer holidays at the marina in 2005.

We have connected our community through education. The future of our city lies in our students' education. Ten years ago, East Chicago students were behind students in Gary and Hammond. But now, East Chicago has surpassed both and ranks 1st among them. East Chicago graduates are also pursuing college education at a higher rate than many school districts in Indiana.

Last year nearly 88% of East Chicago graduates pursued a college education. This percentage is near the very top in the State of Indiana. We have honor students and student council in attendance here today! Let's give them a round of applause. Education is ensuring that they are well rounded in all areas including the arts.

I have always felt strongly about the arts and felt there should be more emphasis placed on music education. That is why my administration has worked with the school board and Dr. Flores, our superintendent, to help strengthen music programs such as our band and choir. Just take a look at the talented individuals today that sang our opening prayer. We have great talent.

Our East Chicago Central High School choir is led by Mr. Leon Kendricks. It has been proven that music & art has been connected with: better reasoning ability, better math scores, and a deeper understanding of science. It's a dangerous to mistake to let our kids miss out on these programs.

Together, we can make sure all children feel and learn from the power of music. We have connected our community through jobs. I know how important jobs are to this community! Let me tell you a story about a young man named Cesar Rodriguez. Last

year this young man was working a security job, until he enrolled in our JET Program. Now he has a dream of becoming an electrician journeyman with a future in the trades.

We started a program called Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) to get jobs for East Chicago residents. This free program trains individuals in skilled labor jobs such as electricians, carpenters, welders, iron-workers, and prepares them to obtain promising careers.

Our residents will succeed in today's workforce. By doing this, they will contribute to East Chicago's economic growth. I have always said that we will create a better city for all of its residents. Employment is extremely important to our people and our future. That is why we are providing careers for our residents.

During the summer, we provided jobs for over 500 youth as part of our exciting Summer Youth Employment Program. This experience taught them responsibility. It connected them with positive role models, and most importantly, provided them with an income. This Summer Youth Program kept our kids working and kept them off of the streets!

We have connected our community through Economic Development. East Chicago is on the move! We know this because people want to do business here. Why is economic development so important to East Chicago? Because it provides our community with opportunity and growth! Opportunities such as jobs!

Family Dollar, one of the fastest growing discount store chains in the United States has made a home in East Chicago. Most importantly, Family Dollar employs our residents.

Marino Ware is another new business that came into our community recently and looks to triple its number of employees in the next three years. Many are East Chicagoans. Praxair and Mittal Steel have expanded. National City Bank reinvested in the City and built a brand new building, and Walgreens is doing the same. Thank you for your investment and for believing in the greatness of East Chicago.

These are great opportunities for our community! Not only are great opportunities arising in economic development, but also in our housing development. We have connected our community through housing. New housing has also been a major priority over the past year with the first city wide property rehab plan to be unveiled soon. Entire neighborhoods will be transformed. We want to provide the best and lowest interest loans to all residential owners.

The City has also received help from regional and local banks to act as partners in these efforts. Banks are committed to helping us and have signed on with the City of East Chicago. Banks such as: Bank Calumet, Peoples Bank, National City Bank, Citizens Financial Services, Mercantile Bank, Centier Bank, Standard Bank, and Banco Popular. By starting these partnerships with local banks, the City will better serve our residents.

Last week, we announced a partnership with two of the nation's most successful non-profit community development corporations. The Community Builders, Inc., and Hispanic Housing Development Corporation will redevelop the entire North Indiana Harbor section and the Lakefront. This development will bring millions of dollars of private investment into the Indiana Harbor community.

We want East Chicago to be a great place to live, to be a destination for jobs, shopping, and recreation. This is history in the making!

We have connected our community through recreation. When I took office, I wanted to bring quality sports leagues back to the community. We started: Softball, Soccer, Basketball, Football, AAU Track, Fishing, Tennis, Volleyball, Wiffleball, Water Aerobics, and Bidy Ball.

In July, the Jeorse Park Beach was opened for the first time in over ten years for public swimming and provided a beautiful beachfront experience for our community. The East Chicago Marina is also a great facility. We hosted several summer celebrations at the Marina and gave the Marina back to East Chicago, where it belongs. Thousands of people packed the Marina and this year we will continue those events.

One thing I promised was to take care of our Senior Citizens and our Youth. My administration started a Senior Outreach Committee to make sure our seniors were taken care of. This year, our seniors enjoyed: A Summer Picnic, Bingos, Movie Nights, a day at the Railcats Game, a Christmas Celebration, and were treated to Free haircuts and manicures. Our Senior Citizens will always be our priority!

We have connected our community through Peace and Unity. Last year we were shocked with the unexpected disaster caused by the hurricanes. Our churches and religious leaders showed guidance and goodwill as they lead the charge to form East Chicago CARES.

We sent two semi trucks to Mississippi filled with clothes, water, and supplies. We raised over \$18,000 for the Gulf coast victims. Thank you East Chicago for your commitment to those victims. Some victims were housed here in East Chicago. I am so proud of how every East Chicagoan united in such time of crisis. Where there is tragedy, there are blessings!

This Christmas Season was truly a blessing as hundreds of East Chicagoans gathered to celebrate another new tradition with our "Celebration of Peace and Unity" parade. This Holiday parade connected our community. The public schools, parochial schools, charter school, and many youth organizations participated as we all celebrated a Season of Peace and Unity.

One of my proudest moments was to watch our Central High School Band, led by Mr. David Walker. Mr. Walker revitalized a program that had not marched in ten years. Thank you for your commitment to your students, to our students!

We ended our Holiday celebration with our children's program, "Feed the Future." This program treated Kindergarten through 8th grade students to a lunch, a gift and a great Christmas show. It featured an awesome light show, a moon walking Santa Claus, a 25-foot Christmas tree, snow falling from inside the Central gymnasium, and entertainment. Over 6,000 East Chicago school children experienced a musical performance that was in a word-FANTASTIC!

I remind you that these Christmas programs did not cost taxpayers one cent! They came from generous donations from local businesses and a grant.

I am proud of what we have accomplished and I am very excited about the year ahead. I believe that our great task of building a new East Chicago has just begun.

Last year was only the beginning! I leave you with one last thought:
We have accomplished so much in only one year,
but I am here to tell you: THE BEST IS YET TO COME! Thank you and God Bless!

Mayor George Pabey
March 2, 2006