Government as a business... The engines are running!

Baton Rouge...

A $453 million budget

Operation Take-Down

Top-rated public safety

Mayor-President Tom Ed McHugh

Street Rehabilitation Program

Message from Mayor-President

Tom Ed McHugh

Dear Citizens and Friends of East Baton Rouge Parish:

This edition of the millennium series focuses on three civic engines, which make Baton Rouge run: business, government, and education. One fuels the other; one fortifies the other, and one pumps the future expansion of the other. Like the cylinders of a great engine, the relationship among these three principal leadership sectors is circular. If one sector becomes slack, a community can grind to a halt. Today, the Metro Council and I, as your Mayor-President, take this opportunity to outline the progress of your government engine which makes Baton Rouge run.

The vision of our government and the work of its 4,400 employees is to be a government of, by, and for the people. Based on a foundation of democracy and trust, our publicly-declared mission statement ‘to serve the current and future needs of people for a safe, just, and peaceful community that thrives on civic leadership and basic values, provides economic opportunity for all, promotes quality in education and the environment, and enriches the quality of life for every resident through social, cultural, and recreational activities, that lift the spirit and build strong minds and bodies.’

Toward that end, our businesslike approach to government has traveled for the last decade into three distinct directions: 1) public safety, 2) infrastructure enhancement, and 3) public-private community-based partnerships.

Since 1989 in the safety arena, we have become a city with the top nationally rated fire, police and emergency medical services. We have retained a Class 1 rating for the fire department, the best in the nation; built a new fire department headquarters and training operation, added state-of-the-art equipment, expanded station service, and increased public education classes more than 200 percent. Our EMS program can likewise boast national distinction of being named program of the year by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians for our outstanding paramedical service. Likewise the International Association of Police Chiefs accredits our local police department – a distinct national honor. Today, this same force has the very best technology and continues to expand its use of an automatic vehicle locator system, and number of laptop computers in police units. Communications is key to protecting you and your family — noting this administration’s six-year commitment to building our fully installed 800 MHz trunked radio communications system which allows all public safety units to communicate with each other simultaneously.

Perhaps our most outstanding safety effort rests in a combined effort of Public Works and Police in Operation Take Down. Since its inception in 1995, following our town meeting on crime, workers and officers have landed 7,451 arrests and demolished 1,681 structures.

The second category of infrastructure improvement remains a symbol of progress and challenge. Though much work needs to be done on our sewer system and state roadways, local government has, to date, rehabilitated more than 1,180 miles of E.B. roadway with a half-cent sales tax originally approved by voters in 1986. We will rehabilitate 1,345 miles of streets and roads by the end of the program and 84% of all local roads is targeted for completion Underground, we have invested more than $47 million dollars in sewer system work thanks to a federal directive. With the will of the Metro Council and local voters, another $450 million is on tap for sewer work in the next ten years.

In the category of construction, your government recently opened a new mass transit facility for CTC and expanded both bus service hours and routes. We will break ground this fall for an advanced traffic management center to track and streamline operations and ease traffic congestion and emergency response. My administration has built three Head Start Centers and has prompted construction of a new riverside planetarium and IMax theater, a new downtown hotel, a $40 million expansion of the Centenory, a state-of-the-art landfill in North Baton Rouge. We also completed and launched implementation of Baton Rouge’s first master land use plan, HORIZON.

As Mayor-President, I pledge to you that the engine of government is running smoothly, with great reliability — and in a spirit of solid workforce development. Fiscally, our government is sound. Our total budget stands at $453 million. Our city-parish employees have been trained in private sector management techniques via the Total Quality Management process with our own auditing division capturing the 1999 award.

Lastly, much of the success of our administration falls in the area of public-private partnerships. I believe these have the greatest long-term impact on the future of this city ... case in point, Plan Baton Rouge. Local citizens will not fully realize the magnitude of this master plan for downtown until the new century. Other partnerships ventures have laid similar foundations for future gain — the anti-drug task force and the creation of a Juvenile Court and Project Exile, the International Relations Commission and its birth to the new Baton Rouge Center for World Affairs, the nationally-recognized Character First program, the award-winning Baton Rouge Children’s Coalition and Community Action for Children, and Create Baton Rouge. Its update will be incorporated into the Horizon Plan in the year 2000. All of these public-private partnerships have united forces which can collectively act together to deal with tough issues in the years ahead.

The National League of Cities reports governments will serve as catalysts, facilitators, and collaborators in the 21st century. We have proudly launched this style of government in Baton Rouge. Our engines are running! Won’t you join us on the highway to the future?

Sincerely,

Tom Ed McHugh
Mayor-President