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San Marcos shows character amid fiery trial, Desmond says

By Aaron Burgin

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SAN MARCOS — San Marcos continues to remain a thriving community, even when faced with the devastating wildfires of 2014, Mayor Jim Desmond said in his state of the city address.

Desmond was the keynote speaker at the event, which served as both the state of the city and the Chamber of Commerce's board installation and business awards luncheon.

During his half-hour remarks in front of the 250 people in attendance, Desmond listed the achievements the city had accomplished last year, none more so than the collective community effort during the Cocos fire, which burned more than 800 acres and forced nearly half of the city's residents out of their homes due to evacuation orders.

Desmond lauded the fire department, city, local schools and colleges and residents for their roles in the city's response to the wildfires.

"A thriving community, or country for that matter, doesn't stay passive against challenges," Desmond said. "It plans, it trains and it faces challenges, and it is willing to learn and improve from the challenges it faces. We did that."

Desmond said the next challenge on the horizon for the city is transitioning from the 30-year period of rapid expansion to a "maintenance city" nearing build out, which means more attention paid toward the city's aging infrastructure.

The council, Desmond said, began the transitional efforts in 2013 and set aside money for "long-range infrastructure challenges," including maintaining roads and city facilities.

"While we're still not 100 percent funded, this year's budget effort is the first step towards making sure future councils, residents, sheriffs, and firefighters, and future generations, have the resources in hand, to keep current levels of service and maintenance available," Desmond said.

Desmond's remarks highlighted the city's activities that improved the quality of life of residents, protected its coffers, responded to residents' needs and grew the local economy.

He credited the Sheriff's department and police departments in other cities along the state Route 78 Corridor for an overall drop in crime rates, and praised the city department for its efforts, which have led to lower response times and the agency being rated among the top 2 percent of fire departments nationwide.

The city's parks, Desmond said, also grew in 2014, with the opening of Connors Park, which has become a busy attraction along San Marcos Boulevard, and the city also hired two part-time park rangers to assist with the growing green space citywide.

In addition to Connors Park, Desmond highlighted the continued revitalization efforts in Richmar, which include two new affordable housing complexes and a future park that continue the renaissance the community has experienced.

On the business and services front, Desmond talked about the ongoing construction of the new Department of Motor Vehicles building on Rancheros Drive, and the Hobby Lobby and Winco stores that are slated to occupy the former Lowe's Home Improvement space on San Marcos Boulevard.

Other major projects completed or on the horizon include the \$47 million infrastructure improvements set to occur over the next five years in the San Marcos Creek District, which will pave the way for the long-anticipated revitalization efforts in that area; the opening of Palomar Station, the massive mixed-

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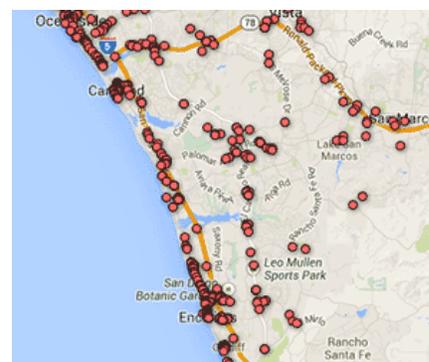
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use development adjacent to Palomar College, and completed projects near Cal State San Marcos.

He also credited the city for maintaining a balanced budget and giving property owners a tax break last year when they refinanced the community facilities district bonds in several areas of the community.

Finally, Desmond shined a light on the partnerships between the city and various agencies, including the Chamber of Commerce, **North County Health Services**, San Marcos Unified School District, Cal State San Marcos and Palomar College, acknowledging the community college's outgoing president, Robert Deegan.



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