***After Thirty-Six Years, the Freeman Era Comes to an End in Many***

After 36 years of progressive leadership, Mayor Ken Freeman is set to retire on June 30, 2021. When Mr. Freeman first ran in 1989 for the office of Mayor of Many, he made the following promises: To run the town as a business; to obtain as many state and federal grants as possible; to build a strong and effective police department; and to support and assist our sister communities and/or organizations in Sabine Parish.

Under his leadership, Many has seen its total assets increase from 6.2 million dollars to 18.3 million dollars, a 166 % increase. His administration is leaving the community debt free, having paid off 5.5 million dollars in long-term debt. The city’s sales tax, of 5.265% is the same as it was in 1989 when he assumed the office of the Mayor. Town of Many property taxes have not increased since his tenure as our Mayor. His reasoning for never increasing property taxes within the city limits, was to keep them lower than anywhere else in the Parish, making Many a more attractive community for new businesses in which to locate, leading to an increase in sale tax revenue by creating more jobs. Revenues for the Town of Many have increased from 1.6 million dollars in 1989 to 5 million dollars today, which represents growth of 168%. For the past 32 years, Mayor Freeman has managed to run your city with a balanced budget each year. The only time Mayor Freeman called for a tax to be voted on by the town’s citizens was in 1999, and that was to replace all the water lines in town, and add new fire hydrants to increase fire protection. It was a 10-year tax that was paid off and as he promised, your tax payments were reduced in 2010.

Under Mayor Freeman’s guidance, his administration over the years has obtained 21 million dollars in state and federal grants. These monies have been spent to provide the citizens of Many much-needed services such as an airport, which will allow jet planes to land at that location in the near future, thereby increasing industrial and tourism growth in the Parish. Grant money received was also spent on housing for rehabbing five old houses and building five new ones; purchasing needed equipment to keep our streets in good repair; and much needed improvements at the Many water and sewer plants. Additionally, grant money was spent on the recreational needs of our citizens by building the Many Baseball Park, tennis courts, a children’s playground at Sabine High Park, Leon James Park on MLK, and new playground equipment at the Many Ball Park. Grant monies were also spent to build a walking track at the Fairgrounds which also serves as the fairway for the Sabine Parish Fair. The Many Community Center, aka the Sabine Theatre, that provides our citizens with free movies and musical events, was also restored inside and out with grant money and donations from Parish citizens. Book Nooks, located all around the town of Many, contain donated books that are available free of charge to any Sabine Parish citizen of all ages. This project was funded by and is still managed by the Town of Many, with books that are continuously donated by our citizens. Additionally, the Many Depot was also restored with grant money and donations from citizens and will become a museum, which will open next year. Freeman has often said, “Sabine Parish has a good story to tell and we hope that the Many-Sabine Parish Historical Museum will tell our story for generations to come. “After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, with the community being without water for a long period of time, the Mayor applied for and obtained grant monies to purchase 9 generators in 2007, so that during periods of ice and snow storms, hurricanes, and any other natural disasters, the people of Many would not be without water and sewer services. This recent one-week long ice and snow storm, the Town of Many was one of the few communities in NW Louisiana, not to lose water and sewer services.

The Mayor’s third promise was to build a strong and effective police department to protect and serve our citizens. To that end, his administration has provided funding for all new patrol vehicles with in-car communications, training, and state-of-the-art equipment including protective equipment, a canine unit, along with a special unit to help reduce drug abuse in our community. All of these improvements have made our police officers more efficient and effective in their job protecting our town’s citizens, visitors, and their property.

Finally, his last promise was to support and assist our sister communities and/or organizations in Sabine Parish. The Mayor has often said, “As a rural parish, we do not live in Many, Zwolle, Florien, Converse, Fisher, or Pleasant Hill; we live in the community of Sabine Parish and what’s good for one, will improve us all.” Mayor Freeman served on the Board of the SARC and during his tenure, he took steps to oust the corrupt administration and return it to those citizens who were least able to defend themselves. He also served on the board of the Sabine River Authority (SRA) and was instrumental in creating the Toledo Bend Advisory Committee, whose goal was to keep a consistent lake level at 172 feet msl and to provide information affecting those residents along Toledo Bend Lake. Both of these goals were accomplished and continue today. Former Governor Mike Foster appointed Freeman to a task force to develop Louisiana, specifically Toledo Bend Lake, as a destination point for retirees. He was also the Chairman of the Joint Toledo Bend Lake Board between Texas and Louisiana. Freeman was likewise the Chairman of the Sabine Industrial Development Board which acquired land to develop an industrial park for Sabine Parish and he actively solicited industry to locate in that park. Freeman was appointed to serve on the board of the El Camino Real Commission whose purpose is to four-lane Highway 6 from the Atlantic Ocean to Mexico. He served as its Chairman for two years but sat on the board for 30 years. Freeman led the charge to stop the closing of Hodges Gardens south of Florien after it was taken over by the state’s park system.

Freeman has often said that the first impression of a community, is a lasting impression and he wants Many and Sabine Parish to have a positive impression on visitors and residents alike. To that end, he developed the “Get Off Your Fanny and Clean Up Many” program which enlisted the help of community volunteers to assist city crews with an annual spring cleaning of litter from streets and ditches throughout Many. He also began sending letters at the same time, to absentee-property owners, whose lots created either an eyesore or a health risk, in an effort to reduce blight within city limits. He also started a program by tearing down old, dilapidated structures and adding the cost to owners’ property taxes at the end of the year. His administration built new sidewalks and planted seasonal flowers in pots and flowerbeds all throughout the town. His administration also installed wrought iron hand railings along San Antonio Avenue for our citizens and other shoppers to be safe as they shopped and walked along the Avenue. The Mayor and his administration developed the Many Christmas Festival the first Christmas he was in office, in 1989. This much-loved event consists of an hour-long parade through town ending at the Fairgrounds for the spectacular Bucky Slay Memorial Fireworks display. Mayor Freeman was instrumental in assisting local merchants with the annual “Shop at Home” program that advertises and encourages our local citizens to support their local merchants.

Prior to the development of Homeland Security in Sabine Parish, and after calling the emergency phone number in Baton Rouge for assistance, but hearing the recording telling him “this office is closed due to the storms”, which were Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Mayor went to work again for the Parish. Because of the wide-spread power outage throughout “Sabineland”, there was a shortage of food, water, and ice. He organized the delivery and distribution of donated truckloads of the same at City Hall, which continued for several weeks following Hurricane Rita until power was restored. Freeman was appointed by the Sabine Parish School Board to the committee tasked to build the new Many Jr. High School. Freeman also has served on committees that ultimately built the Sabine Parish Animal Shelter adjacent to the Industrial Park, on land donated by the Industrial District.

In all of these many efforts, Mayor Freeman has met his goal of supporting and assisting organizations, communities, and their residents to improve the quality of life for all Sabine Parish citizens.

In thinking back over his career as the longest-serving mayor in Many’s history and also one of the longest serving mayors in the state, Mayor Freeman wants citizens to know that any decision he made, was made for you and your future, including being arrested. “I honestly believe that I am leaving your hometown in better shape than I found it in 1989. It has been my honor to serve you as your Mayor. I also want to thank all of my staff, grant writers, and council members over the years for your hard work in making Many a better place for all of us to live and work. I wish all of you and our community every success in the future,” he stated.