

Star-Telegram

Tarrant County has 'never been better,' Whitley tells chamber

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FORT WORTH -- In his first State of the County address, County Judge Glen Whitley said Thursday that the condition of Tarrant County "isn't just good ... it's never been better."

Whitley told more than 300 people gathered at the Omni Fort Worth Hotel for the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce's inaugural State of the County event that Tarrant is producing new jobs and new developments that are generating unprecedented growth.

Around the country, people are asking how the economy can be turned around and how government can be more efficient, he said.

"In Tarrant County, we're already doing it," Whitley said.

"That's because this county has the best formula for success of any county in the nation: Great people plus great infrastructure plus limited government equals a growing economy and a bright future."

Whitley gave a primer on the workings of county government, a body that he said is unlike any other in America.

"Where sometimes national politics is focused on what divides us, county government centers on what unites us. We do so much for so many," he said, referring to maintaining vital records, collecting taxes for 65 government entities, building roads and caring for the sick with public health institutions.

"Simply put, county government is about solving problems. We don't have time to fight and bicker like they do in Washington. We are too busy building the future," Whitley said.

Despite growing by 350,000 people in the last decade, Tarrant County is "living within its means," even as it lowered the property tax rate of 26.3 cents per \$100 valuation by more than a penny, he said.

"That is part of why our economic engine is roaring in this county," he said.

The county is building for the future with a long list of transportation projects, including the \$2 billion North Tarrant Express and \$1.4 billion Chisholm Trail Parkway.

"No one in the nation is building more transportation than North Texas. No one," Whitley said, noting that the county has also spent more than \$56 million of a \$200 million transportation bond package to improve local roads and neighborhood streets.

The chamber also kicked off a new annual honor -- the Vandergriff Determined Drive Award, named after longtime County Judge Tom Vandergriff, who died last year.

Fittingly, the honor went to General Motors, a business that Vandergriff helped recruit to Tarrant County.

This year, GM announced a \$331 million expansion of its Arlington plant.

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