

Mayor-Elect Guest Speaker and Mayor Honored

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Columbia – Mayor-Elect Steve Benjamin shared his high hopes and dreams for the City of Columbia at the 2010 Columbia Council of Neighborhoods (CCN) Annual Banquet and Awards Ceremony on Saturday where he was the guest speaker. Benjamin's speech, although brief, reiterated his belief that Columbia has great potential to be a 'wonderful and dynamic city'.

Benjamin thanked Mayor Bob Coble for sending him to the US Conference of Mayor in Oklahoma City, where he met mayors from other cities. He said the meeting gave him hope for what Columbia can become. "I met mayors for cities smaller than ours and several larger than ours, and I will tell you I believe that we have as much potential to be the most fantastic, talented, educated city in America. We have it all," he said.

Mayor-Elect Benjamin also said that God has a plan for everything; "not allowing the highs to get too high and the lows to get too low", referring to what he called, "the joy of April 20th and the challenges of April 21st." Benjamin said that the trying days that followed his auto collision with Deborah Rubens, further proved to him the power of prayer. "If I had a dime for every stranger that said 'I'm praying for you, Deborah Rubens, and the City', we could solve the budget issues of the nation."

Mayor Bob Coble also received special recognition for his relationship with the CCN. CCN president, Bessie Watson, spoke positively of the mayor and his willingness to work with the council and attend many community events throughout the city. Mayor Bob Coble was honored at the sentiment expressed by Watson and others, but also showed that he is excited and supportive of Mayor-Elect Benjamin and his new administration. "Twenty years is a long time, and 20 years is enough time," he said. "I started out as a neighborhood mayor and I'm going to end as a neighborhood mayor. And I thank you all for giving me the opportunity."

The Columbia Council of Neighborhoods is a 30-year old community-based volunteer organization that coordinates the activities of over eighty neighborhood organizations. The council, which serves as a clearinghouse for information, provides a forum for discussion of neighborhood issues and fosters the education of neighborhood leadership, has become a bona fide Columbia political player. This was evident based on the number of current and aspiring politicians attending the event. Elected officials in attendance were: Mayor Pro Tem Belinda Gergel, Councilwoman-Elect Leona Plough, Councilman Sam Davis, Rep. Leon Howard, Rep. Bakari Sellars. Political hopefuls included: Brian Newman, Emma Myers, Catherine Fleming-Bruce, Alexena Furgess, and Harold "Puff" Howard.

Inductees into the CNN Hall of Fame were: Elise Martin (McDonald neighborhood), Isaac McClinton, Sr. (Edisto Court Community), Mary Myers (Gable Oaks Tenants Association), Brenda Oliver, (Pinehurst neighborhood), Tige Watts (CNN past president), and Harriett Gardin Fields (Greenview neighborhood – posthumously). The 2010 Friend of the Year was Fred Horrick (Yorkshire neighborhood), and Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Dorothy Gordon (Jones-McDonald neighborhood).

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