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**The City that Keeps
Investing in Itself**

**SB&D's 2011
Person of the Year:
The Citizens of
Oklahoma City**

The City that Keeps Investing in Itself

By Mike Randle

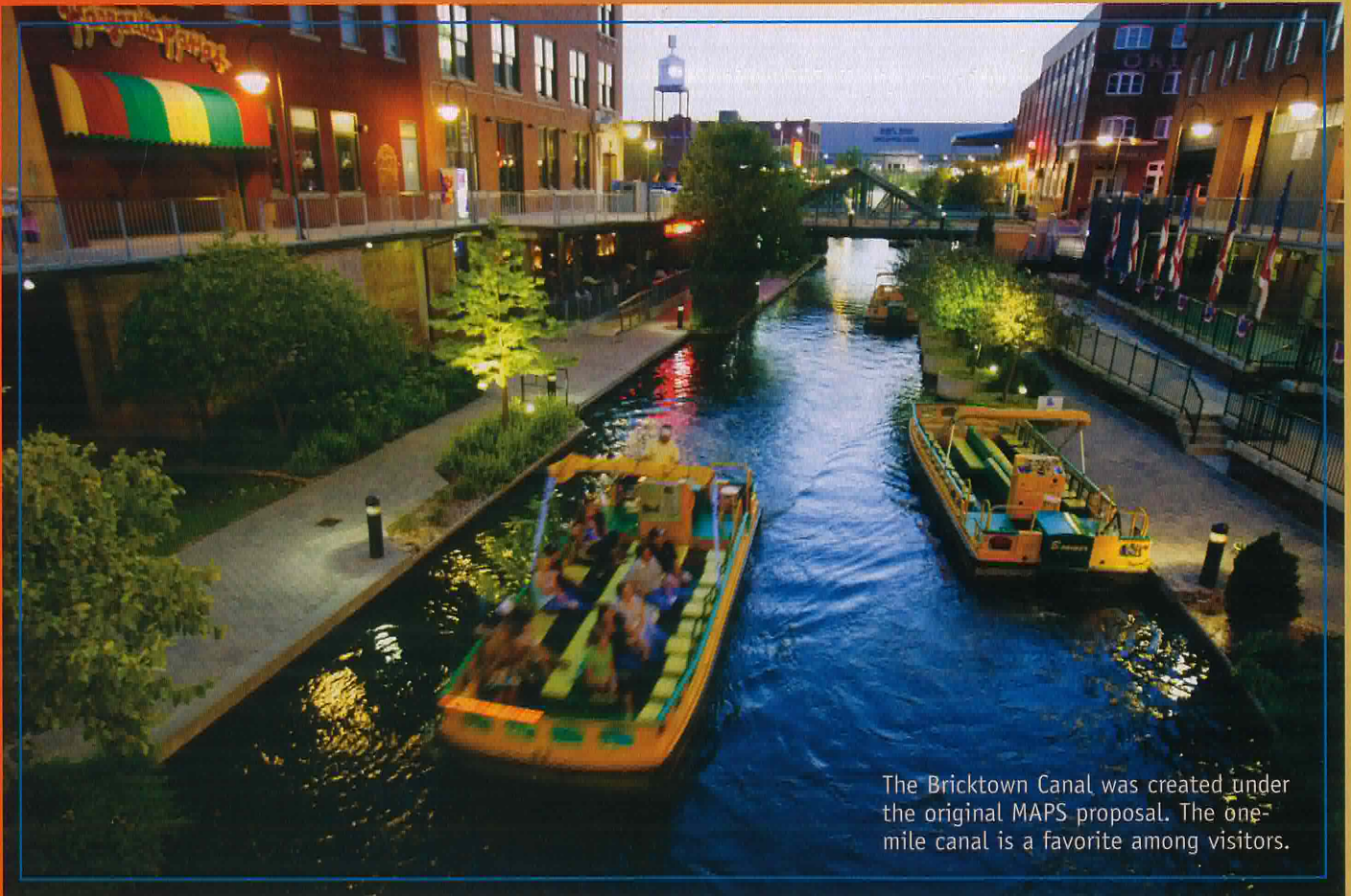
In an age of marked skepticism of government in general, Oklahoma City stands out like no place in the country. It is a city that has continued to invest in itself over and over again and the results are nothing less than extraordinary. In fact, there is no place - country, state, county or city - that we know of where trust among the people and their leaders in government is stronger.

We realize that the citizens of Oklahoma City are not a "person" to recognize in our annual "Person of the Year" cover story. But when we asked several in-the-know economic developers and politicians in Oklahoma City which "person" is most responsible for the success the city has earned over the years, none of them could identify a single "person" behind OKC's transformation. They all had the same

answer: the citizens of Oklahoma City are responsible for the city's remarkable resurgence as one of the best economic development stories in the South and the nation over the last two decades.

Take a look at some of the latest "top 10" lists circulating around the country, and odds are you will see the name "Oklahoma City" on most of them. A city that used to be known

SB&D's 2011 Person of the Year:



The Bricktown Canal was created under the original MAPS proposal. The one-mile canal is a favorite among visitors.

The Citizens of Oklahoma City



Pictured is a rendering of Oklahoma City's proposed MAPS 3 convention center.

only for cowboys, dust and the overuse of concrete is now being referred to in conversation with phrases like "strong economy," "great quality of life" and "big league city." Oklahoma City did not end up on these lists by accident.

Oklahoma City has made a complete transformation over the past 20 years and the credit for this success can be traced back directly to the people who live there -- the Oklahoma City Citizens. Time and time again these proud citizens have offered an enthusiastic "YES" every time they have been asked to invest their own time and money into making their city a better place to live.

Since 1993, Oklahoma City Citizens have passed eight multi-million dollar initiatives to improve their hometown, even if that meant taxing themselves in order to raise the funds. Many times, these elections weren't even close, passing with nearly 80% of the vote. Over the years, the investment made by Oklahoma City Citizens has totaled nearly \$3 billion (that's with a "B," folks). When looking at the

"Our city is moving forward. The citizens and government here are not okay with floating by or simply surviving. They want to make it better, and they are! Just in the last 5 years we have thrust ourselves into another tier of American cities."

— Tristan Shutt, Dell

outside investments that followed, both public and private, that investment blossoms to more than \$5 billion.

Oklahoma City's transformation began in 1993. After losing a bid for a United Airlines Center due to the fact that none of its employees wanted to

live in Oklahoma City, the citizens of Oklahoma City stepped up to the plate and agreed to tax themselves to change their city. They approved a five-year, 1-cent sales tax called Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) to fund the renovation and/or construction of nine major projects in Oklahoma City's central business districts. This magnitude of public facility enhancement was virtually unheard of, but Oklahoma City Citizens had faith and passed the initiative with 54% of the vote. Projects included a new arena, library and ballpark. It is believed that Oklahoma City is the first city in the country to undertake a public facility enhancement project of this size. Much of the time MAPS was being implemented coexisted with the time Oklahoma City citizens were trying to cope and rebuild after the tragic 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

In 2001, the Oklahoma City Citizens turned their attention to education. They agreed to extend the MAPS tax and passed a combination



Bricktown Ballpark was created under the original MAPS proposal and is now home to the Oklahoma City Redhawks minor league baseball team.

sales tax and bond initiative known as MAPS for Kids that was used to renovate or replace every school building in Oklahoma City's school district by 2012. Passing by 61%, the program also included major transportation and technology upgrades.

Five years later in 2006, when horse show related venues were in desperate need of upgrading, the Oklahoma City Citizens once again stepped up and said YES to increase the current hotel and motel tax by 3.5%. Oklahoma City Citizens were able to see the value in this, even if they weren't directly involved in horse show activities. The revenue generated by the tax increase funded improvements to horse show related venues at State Fair Park.

In 2007, the Oklahoma City Citizens felt there was more work to be done in the school system. Passing by a

whopping 78%, the YES for Kids bond issue was designed to build on the momentum developed by MAPS for Kids. The \$248.3 million bond issue focused on capital improvements, technology, transportation and improved

"The city is what we make it. If it is going to change it is up to us!"

-Steve Walden, ELC Roundtable

safety in Oklahoma City's schools.

Also in 2007, Oklahoma City Citizens saw that the city's infrastructure was in need of an overhaul. When asked for help, more than 80% of citizens stepped up and said YES to an \$835.5 million G.O. Bond Issue to improve that infrastructure. The G.O.

Bond went to helping improve streets, bridges, parks and more.

In March 2008, when the MAPS for Kids tax was coming to a close, Oklahoma City Citizens were presented a rare opportunity that might land the city an NBA team. While many other cities wouldn't be comfortable with taking such a risk, Oklahoma City Citizens took a gamble and overwhelmingly voted YES (nearly 62%) to extend the MAPS for Kids tax for 12-months to renovate the Ford Center, making it potentially one of the best NBA facilities in the country. Their gamble paid off -- Oklahoma City landed the Seattle Supersonics NBA team shortly thereafter, and Oklahoma City Citizens are now fiercely proud of their hometown NBA team, the Oklahoma City Thunder.

As if all this change weren't enough, just a couple months later in

May 2008, the Oklahoma City Citizens had a chance to invest in the aerospace industry, one that is vital to its economy. The Board of County Commissioners asked Oklahoma City Citizens to vote on a \$84.5 million bond issue that would allow the County to purchase the former and then vacant General Motors Facility and allow Tinker Air Force Base to lease the facility for its use, which would give Tinker the flexibility to execute new workload and secure a long-term future in new areas. Guess what the voters in Oklahoma City said? They said YES.

Most recently, in late 2009, while the rest of the country was in the middle of one of the worst economic recessions in history, Oklahoma City Citizens were looking toward the future. They agreed and voted YES to the extension of the MAPS for Kids one-cent sales tax to fund eight new projects. With a projected cost of \$777 million, MAPS 3

“MAPS has provided unlimited resources to new business. While most cities compete for the same business, the entrepreneurial spirit of MAPS has spurred new economic activity and endless entrepreneurial ideas.”

**– Michael Morrison, Owner,
ComTech Design Print and Mail**

passed by more than 54% of the vote, even in the middle of a recession. Projects include a new 70-acre downtown park, new convention center, and

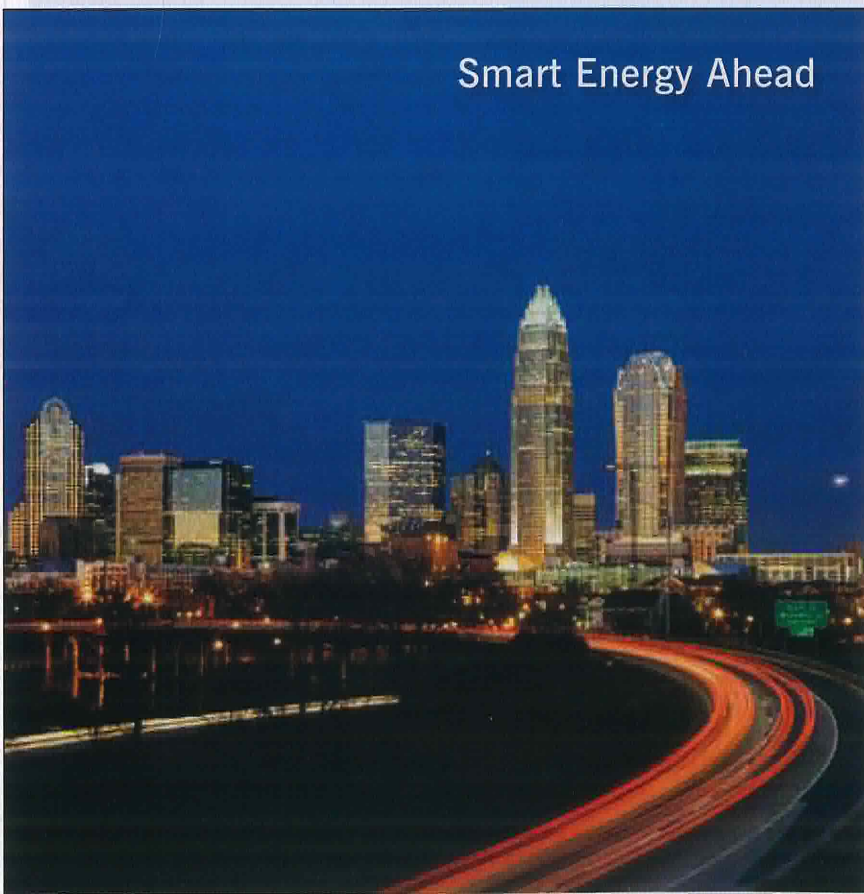


The new Douglass High School was built under MAPS for Kids.

downtown modern transit.

Not content to invest money alone, OKC Citizens have also invested their time over the years. Oklahoma City has a high volunteer rate, and was recently ranked the 5th Best Large City for Volunteerism by the Corporation for National and Community Service. It ranked second when it came to the number of volunteer hours per resident.

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Rendering of the MAPS 3 proposed 70-acre downtown park.

So what has all of this hard work and investment of time and money resulted in? It has resulted in a city that is consistently recognized for its quality of life and affordability as well as a metro that has sported one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation over the last 10 years.

Oklahoma City is also outpacing the nation in income growth, and has been named on top lists for the fastest growing city in the U.S., the best city to buy a home, the best place to launch a second career, one of the best communities for young people, least stressed cities, and one of the strongest overall metro areas ... just to name a few.

OKC also has one of the finest rowing venues in the world, a downtown that is busy every night of the week, and an increase in spending by tourists of \$1.25 billion over the past 20 years. And the city has the Oklahoma City Citizens to thank for that. That is the reason Southern Business &



Children at Horace Mann Elementary enjoy their first day back at school after MAPS for Kids renovations.

Development has named the citizens of Oklahoma City as its "2011 Person of the Year."

Oklahoma City Citizens are proud to call this city home. They are willing to invest their time, money and talents to make it a better place to live. Whether a time of crisis, such as the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah

Federal building, or a time of economic uncertainty, such as the recent recession, Oklahoma City Citizens do not shy away from doing what is best for their hometown. They have a proven history of joining together and saying YES to their city's future. I'm not sure there are many other cities who can say the same. ■