

I want to praise the Belvoir Neighborhood Association for inviting the two candidates for county commission in district 8 to speak at Barger Academy last night. Commissioner Adams spoke first and soon left. I agreed to wait until after the Barger Choral Ensemble sang before I spoke. This large group of elementary girls and boys put on a fabulous show. They demonstrated exactly the best in our magnet schools. Kudos to their teacher Juana Wilson-Roberts!

How do you follow an act like so inspiring? I decided to talk about bluebirds.

That's right. I talked about bluebirds because it's a project the Belvoir Neighborhood Association has taken on. I had been following with great interest the Bluebird Watch Trail Project that this Brainerd community group was putting together. I had talked with Ken Dubke, Chattanooga's bird watcher extraordinaire. And I spoke with John McGirk that evening. He heads up the project.

You see, the Belvoir Neighborhood Association represent one of our district's finest models of regular community gatherings and action. I told them I was proud of their caroling in December and now the bluebird project. I said that I really wanted to encourage them to continue bringing their neighborhood into the outdoors. Then I presented Jerry Evans and John McGirk with a National Geographic bluebird box for the new trail. Here's what else I said:

You have worked with the city on this initiative, and I want to thank the mayor and city councilwoman for supporting this project. As your next county commissioner in district 8, I will also support initiatives like this one because they promote community and healthy living. I plan on walking around this neighborhood with another bird watcher, Ken Dubke, as soon as your project is up and running. I plan on walking in every neighborhood in District 8 as part of my "healthy living" initiative.

What you are doing is so important. You are raising wildlife awareness, promoting safe streets (whether with traffic calming or ideas about sidewalks), and creating healthy living. Sidewalks are a little part of a community but they are a big part of community opportunity. They encourage foot traffic and street safety. That's why I'm going to support funding that will bring sidewalks to neighborhoods that need them in District 8. I have two elderly friends who are afraid to walk to a grocery store just two blocks away because no sidewalks exist. Sidewalks are inviting and safe.

The time is NOW for change in District 8. We need, more than any other time, quality education, business growth, and restored trust in the county commission.

We must move from bickering and hostility to cooperation and resolution. As your next county commissioner, I will focus on teacher retention, fiscal discipline, and a responsibility agreement that makes both the school board and the county commission act like professional adults.

We must move from low-end wages to business opportunity, from desperation to vitality. Every time I drive down Brainerd or Ringgold Road I see another check cashing or pay advance shop opening. As your next commissioner, I will focus on returning our streets to community businesses, living wages, and cluster business development.

We must move from closed doors to open doors, from exclusivity to inclusiveness. As your next commissioner, I will support community resources that come to the neighborhoods to promote healthy living and safety. That's why I've opened the doors to the community with the Community Ideas Resource Center. This center is open today to provide a venue for gatherings and workshops as well as a brain center for information to help the community. In fact I've already invited some of your members to participate as leaders of workshops. This is your place in District 8. And I am your servant.

I believe the time is NOW for change in District 8. Not four years from now, but NOW. I ask you join me in creating a thriving future for District 8. Your support and your vote will make that happen. Thank you.

