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By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Dave Harrison recently started his second term as a Liberal City Commissioner, and at its April 9 meeting, the board voted to make him the city’s newest mayor. Harrison, who has lived in Liberal for almost 30 years, has been in the cattle business with a partner for most of those nearly three decades, and he has also become heavily involved with the community, serving on numerous boards, in addition to the city commission.

He has formerly served on both the Southwest Medical Center’s board of trustees and the hospital’s foundation board. He is still a member of SKADAF’s board, and now, he begins a new term on the city commission.

Harrison reflected on some of the progress that has been made in Liberal in his time on the board, and he said getting new pavement on Western Avenue and upgrades to Light Park, as well as getting nearby Adventure Bay Water Park have been some of his favorites. He called the last one a “huge accomplishment,” and he talked about some of the smaller ones that have taken place.

“The streetscapes that we’ve done along north Kansas Avenue and Pine Street,” he said. Harrison said the city is looking at doing some more projects in the near future.

“There are some new sidewalks coming around the schools on the south part of town,” he said. “On the whole south end of town, I think we’re going to get some extra lighting down there for safety reasons. Lots of projects planned. Upgrades at Six Points, No Man’s Land down on Clay Avenue across from Fellowship Baptist, a new sign on the west entrance to Liberal, just a lot of things going on.”

The commission recently voted to pass a resolution stating the city is considering starting a Rural Housing Incentives District in Liberal. Harrison said this should soon be paying some dividends for the city’s housing shortage.

“That particular thing I think is going to stimulate some interest here in the next 30 to 60 days,” he said. “I think we’ll see some movement on that. I think we’re going to see maybe some development on rental properties, maybe some more apartments, maybe some more single family dwellings as well.”

Harrison said the city continues to search daily for anything that will stimulate housing development in Liberal.

“One thing that has to happen is you have to have someone that’s interested in doing it,” he said. “They’re going to do it because they can make money doing it. The housing market has to help us as well.”

The commission also recently voted to hire the consulting firm, Retail Attractions, to help grow the city’s business community, and Harrison said this was a good step toward doing so.

“Anytime we can bring new business to town, it’s going to help stimulate more business and bringing more people into our community,” he said. “We’ve seen that with about every business that comes to town.”

Harrison said one simple test shows that some growth is showing.

“The easiest way that I can point to something is to drive through parking lots with a business and see where tags are from,” he said. “It’s always interesting to me. Anytime we can help get somebody else here, I think it’s good for Liberal. I think it’s good for our community.”

Harrison said city officials are looking for other answers to grow Liberal’s business district.

“Economic development works daily on developing contacts with small manufacturers,” he said. “Anybody that’s local that wants to expand, there are programs in place to help them with that. They’re working all the time to find people that are interested in relocating any job here.”

Harrison said all of this, and a few other things, will help him accomplish his primary goal as mayor – taking pride in Liberal

“Demonstrate it by maybe taking your area of town and doing what the folks in northeast Liberal have, maybe have a cleanup day a couple times a year,” he said. “Just spruce our town up.”

Harrison said much work has been done in cleaning up the community, such as removing graffiti, but more remains to be done.

“The city employees are doing a nice job on Thursdays,” he said. “They all get out and pick up trash in different areas of town. Just show a little more pride in our community.”

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