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HUGO — As his final days as Hugo city manager come to a close, David Rawls reflects back on his near decade of service to the community of Hugo. Rawls became city manager on April 23, 2007 and his last day is scheduled for Jan. 17.

Rawls stated his proudest accomplishment as Hugo city manager was helping bring the community and county together. "The city's working relationship with the county commissioners, the council members, the hospital board, etc., is something that I hope continues in years to come," Rawls said. "A lot of the credit is given to Hugo residents who elected great officials and commissioners who have made it their priority to help Hugo become the city that it is."

According to Rawls, the Hugo Police Department has also turned a corner. The officers have seized a few vehicles and cash that will be going to the District Attorney's office for aid in court cases. Rawls said a good portion of the money could be coming back to HPD upon closure of the case to help the police department with financial needs. There are also a few projects that the city is involved in and are nearing completion.

The council is waiting on estimates for the rehabbing of the restrooms at the Todd Whatley/Lige Hammock Arena. At this time, there is \$75,000 remaining of the loan money from Choctaw Electric. This money must be spent by the first week of June. There is a wish list submitted by the PRCA committee that the council will take into consideration for making decisions on what to upgrade at the arena.

The second phase of the street project is underway. There are 47 blocks of streets to be reconditioned. The majority of the streets have been assigned to commercial contractors and the remaining streets will be prepared by the city of Hugo. Bids for the project have been published and city officials are just waiting on the meeting with the contractors before beginning reconstruction.

The estimated open date for the Boys & Girls Club is March 15. The reconstruction of the old Glove Factory into the Boys & Girls Club has passed the original timeline of completion. Rawls said the contractor in charge of this renovation is suffering a \$500 day penalty for being behind. Also, the city has received a grant for \$343,000 from The Department of Commerce for extending a sewer line from Lane Frost hospital east along the right-of-way to just in front of China Garden restaurant. These funds will also build a lift station at the low point of the right of way west of the USDA building and a line to the USDA building that will pump into the force main. The council is waiting for DEQ to produce the revised permit for the sewer line and lift station so that the project can be bid out.

Rawls reminded that the city of Hugo held public meetings several years ago so residents could openly discuss what they perceived the city's greatest needs to be.

"The four things that were voiced at those meetings were reconditioning the streets, more activities for the children, school improvements and general clean up of the city," Rawls said. He said he believed these meetings were a good thing and helped the council to determine what city officials needed to focus on as priorities.

Rawls believes the biggest challenge in front of Hugo is keeping the positive inertia with good relationships between the city and county and the ability to keep it going.

When asked his advice for the future public officials, Rawls stated, "You have to bend your will to the will of the people. You try to accommodate them to the best of your ability. You just have to remind yourself who you're working for... the city of Hugo."

Coming Monday, a look at Hugo's present financial situation, and general city salary ranges for key positions.