

Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr - Biography

Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. is widely considered to be one of the most visionary and highly effective governmental leaders in America.

First elected Mayor in December 1975, Mayor Riley is serving an unprecedented eighth term. Under his leadership, Charleston has increased its commitment to racial harmony and progress, achieved a substantial decrease in crime, experienced a remarkable revitalization of its historic downtown business district, seen the creation and growth of Spoleto Festival U.S. A., built the beautiful Waterfront Park, developed nationally-acclaimed affordable housing, and experienced unprecedented growth in Charleston's size and population. Mayor Riley has led a city government with an impressive record of innovation in public safety, housing, arts and culture, children's issues, the creation of park and other public spaces, and economic revitalization and development. The City of Charleston is recognized as one of the most livable and progressive cities in the United States.



Mayor Riley has held numerous national leadership positions and received many awards and distinctions. He served as President of the U. S. Conference of Mayors 1986-87 and currently serves on the USCM's Executive Committee. He served as Chairman of the Cities Task Force of the Southern Growth Policies Board and served as President of the National Association of Democratic Mayors (1988-92). He was given the Outstanding Mayors Award by the National Urban Coalition, the Distinguished Citizen Award by the National Association of Realtors and named the 1991 Municipal Leader of the Year by American City & County. Mayor Riley has received the Order of the Palmetto, been named South Carolinian of the Year, and given the 1982 Verner Award by the South Carolina Arts Commission for outstanding contributions to the arts. Mayor Riley received many commendations for his leadership of the Charleston community before, during and after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. In June 2000, he was awarded the first President's Award from the U. S. Conference of Mayors for outstanding leadership. In July 2000, he was honored as the first recipient of the Urban Land Institute J. C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development. In February, 2002, he was given the Keystone Award, given for exemplary leadership to those who use architecture to transform their communities, by the American Architectural Foundation.

Mayor Riley's vision, leadership, and impressive list of accomplishments have brought him and the City of Charleston national and international acclaim. Washington Post columnist David S. Broder said, "...what has been achieved here under his leadership is extraordinary," adding "...it is mainly the way that Charleston treats the social problems that all old cities share that has made Riley's long reign so remarkable." Conde Nast, in its August, 1997 issue, said, "...of America's colonial cities, Charleston is the most dramatically reborn." The article further noted, "Charleston's revival is a story of shared pride and work..." An issue of Newsweek named Mayor Riley one of the twenty-five most dynamic mayors in America. The City of Charleston has also been named an All-America City.

Through his lifetime of experience in Charleston, Mayor Riley has become a leading expert on urban design and livability issues and is a frequent speaker across the country on these topics. He was a founder of the Mayors' Institute for City Design (MICD) and has provided critical urban design support to mayors across America. Mayor Riley received the 1994 Thomas Jefferson Award from the American Institute of Architects for Public Architecture for "his exceptional leadership and 'Jeffersonian' vision in redefining the promise and, ultimately the future, of our nation and its cities." In 1997, he received the Seaside Prize from the Seaside Institute for exemplary leadership and contributions to high-quality urban design throughout America. The American Society of Landscape Architects named him an Honorary Member for his leadership and vision.

Joseph P. Riley, Jr. was born in Charleston in 1943. He graduated from Bishop England High School, The Citadel (1964) and the University of South Carolina School of Law (1967). In 1968, Mayor Riley was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, where he served for six years. He and his wife Charlotte have two sons, Joe and Bratton.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Charleston has seen a tremendous decrease in serious crime over the past two decades and has, under the leadership of Police Chief Reuben Greenberg, been a national leader in innovative police practices, especially in the field of community-oriented policing. The Charleston Police Department is frequently recognized as one of the best-trained and most successful departments in the nation. Charleston's Fire Department, one of the most effective fire departments in the nation, has been recognized for its performance as well as innovations such as its residential smoke detector installation program. The Department has also achieved an ISO Class I rating, the only city in South Carolina to do so.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Mayor Riley has actively used public-private partnerships to leverage all of the city's resources to stimulate new development and restoration in historic downtown Charleston. Restoring the "heart" of the City of Charleston, Mayor Riley has helped create one of the most vibrant and productive downtowns in America, including the dramatic rebirth of King Street, Charleston's main street. From Saks Fifth Avenue on King Street to the development of Charleston Place, a major hotel and retail shopping complex, to the creation of the award-winning Visitor Reception and Transportation Center (VRTC), Mayor Riley has provided the leadership and incentives necessary to make Charleston a great place to work, live, and visit.

HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HOMELESSNESS

The City of Charleston has been recognized as one of America's leaders in the creation of sustainable affordable housing for its citizens. Charleston's scattered-site housing program received a Presidential Design Award. The City's housing and community development initiatives have also won four HUD Blue Ribbon Awards for Best Practices. In addition to city initiatives such as the Minor Home Repair program, the Paint Program, and the owner occupied and rental rehabilitation programs, Mayor Riley has fostered the creation of non-profits dedicated to the creation and rehabilitation of affordable housing. He established the Mayors Council on Homelessness and Affordable Housing with the goal of creating affordable housing opportunities for very low-income families. They were instrumental in establishing a statewide Housing Trust Fund and are working locally to develop a recurring source of funding for the development of affordable housing. Mayor Riley recently unveiled the Charleston Homeownership Initiative, a program to provide 200 units of new or rehabilitated housing for sale to low, moderate

and middle-income families. Charleston was designated in 1994 as an Enterprise Community and named one of the 11 top national performers in 1997. The Enterprise Community Initiative is a neighborhood revitalization strategy for improving affordable housing options, provides health and human services and increasing economic opportunities. A Strategic Economic Development Plan has been completed and adopted and provides the framework for increasing economic opportunity in the Enterprise Community.

CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Mayor Joseph Riley, Jr. continues his leadership on children's issues and delegated the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Families to mobilize every sector of the community - businesses, education, communities in faith, non-profit and government - to secure and connect the fundamental resources to meet the needs of children and youth in our community. He has pledged his support of America's Promise with "Charleston's Promise" -providing 10,000 children access to the five fundamental resources. Mayor Riley has created a Children's Cabinet, and a Mayor's Youth Commission on Violence. In 1999, he established the Charleston Education Network, a foundation dedicated to improving public education in Charleston. Mayor Riley has provided leadership on children's health issues, after school programs, reading and literacy, and community service workdays. He has strengthened the city's collaborative partnership with the Charleston County School District, hosting meetings throughout the school year with the city school Principals to identify the critical needs of the Charleston children and work on strategies to reach out to enhance community involvement on our schools. He was instrumental in securing two full time AmeriCorps Promise Fellows positions that focus on connecting and linking Charleston's Promise Commitment Makers to delivering resources for children. The City of Charleston was awarded a \$100,000 Urban Challenge Grant by 3COM to utilize air connection technology to transform education and improve Charleston County public schools.

ANNEXATION & GROWTH

Recognizing that the economic well being of Charleston is dependent on a diverse and expandable tax base, Mayor Riley has successfully pursued an aggressive annexation strategy. The physical size of Charleston has increased from 16.7 square miles in 1975 to almost 104 square miles today. With the relocation of the Family Circle Cup tennis tournament, the completion of Blackbaud's corporate campus and the development of several neighborhoods and corporate facilities, Daniel Island, annexed by the City of Charleston in 1991, is well on its way to becoming a diverse and high quality new urban development.

PARKS, PUBLIC SPACES & THE WATERFRONT

Mayor Riley has paid special attention to the creation and protection of Charleston's very special parks and public spaces. Providing his "generation's gift to the future," the wonderful Waterfront Park opened in May, 1990 and serves as a joyous, public gathering place for thousands of Charleston residents and visitors. Citing the waterfront as "the birthright of the people of Charleston," Mayor Riley has pursued an ambitious plan to give the public access to the water's edge: from the South Carolina Aquarium to the Charleston Maritime Center to the Waterfront Park to the Battery to the Ashley River Walk to the Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Baseball Park, the public will one day have access to nearly every foot of Charleston's precious waterfront resource. Mayor Riley has also renovated many parks and playgrounds, including the gorgeous 54-acre Hampton Park. He used abandoned railroad right-of-ways to create the West Ashley Bikeway and the West Ashley Greenway. In addition to the Aquarium, major new parks include the West Ashley Park and the Dill Tract.

ARTS & CULTURE

Charleston has a long and distinguished tradition of leadership in the arts, a tradition which began over 300 years ago. The Charleston Museum was this country's first; America's first opera was presented in Charleston. The beautiful Dock Street Theatre harks back to the original theatre building established more than 250 years ago with the production of "the Recruiting Officer" presented in 1736. In the last quarter century under the leadership of Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., Charleston has experienced a tremendous arts renaissance that has reinforced Charleston's international reputation as a leading city in the arts and has stimulated growth and development in the arts statewide. Since Riley's Administration began in 1975, his special focus on the arts has resulted in the establishment of Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston in 1977; the development of the Charleston Symphony into one of the nation's finest regional orchestras; the home of Charleston Ballet Theatre since 1988, South Carolina's professional dance company; the establishment of Piccolo Spoleto and MOJA Arts Festivals in 1979; and the on-going activities of the many fine arts organizations and galleries which thrive in the Lowcountry. Riley's long-range arts plans include the development of a new symphony hall to be located near the beautiful Charleston Waterfront Park. Work is currently underway to renovate the historic railway property, the Camden Tower Sheds, into a cultural Arts District and Children's Museum.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Mayor Riley has always stressed the importance of giving Charlestonians avenues for participation and input into city government and constantly searched for new ways to provide increased access. Early in his administration, he created the Office of the Ombudsman and Citizen Participation and an Office of Neighborhood Services, which has fostered the creation of over seventy very active neighborhood associations. These neighborhood associations serve as a conduit for information from the city to neighborhoods and neighborhoods to the city. The Mayor meets monthly with small groups of presidents to share information and discuss neighborhood concerns. In the spring of 1999, the Mayor established an annual Neighborhood Presidents Roundtable, which brings all of the neighborhood presidents together to share success stories and to receive leadership training as well as information on city projects. Through Mayor's Night In, a monthly period set aside for citizens to have an opportunity to meet with the Mayor in his office, every citizen knows that they have the opportunity, at least once a month, to share their concerns and ideas with the Mayor personally.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Citing small business as the backbone of our community, Mayor Riley has worked to assist in the development of a strong and vital economy for the City of Charleston. Mayor Riley created the Charleston Citywide LDC to provide assistance and low-cost loans for businesses throughout the City. He has wisely leveraged public funds and projects to enhance and partner with private development. The support of the City has additionally helped with the expansion and growth of business in the areas of tourism, shipping, medical services, and high technology development. With newly annexed areas, the City is attracting larger projects such as Mikasa, a major international corporation. Economic efforts have led to increased opportunity for all citizens and to the economic well being of the Charleston region.