



Mayor A C Wharton: An Open Letter to Steve Forbes

Mayor A C Wharton's Notes

An Open Letter to Steve Forbes Share
 Today at 11:29am

In this note
 No one.

Forbes Magazine needs to hear from you. Send them a letter about why you love this city to Forbes Magazine, 60 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10011 or email sforbes@forbes.com.

Dear Mr. Forbes,

Last Tuesday, I had the privilege of welcoming home a team of physicians, surgeons, and specialists from Memphis' Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center who traveled to Haiti to attend to the youngest victims of the devastating earthquake. These are exceptionally brilliant and compassionate lifesavers and caregivers, some of the finest in the world. They selflessly gave up weeks of their own lives, careers, and time with their families to minister to the needs of impoverished strangers on the other side of the planet.

When I stepped out of Le Bonheur, I looked up at their new hospital, currently under construction and slated to open this summer. This \$340-million, 610,000-square-foot facility will double their current space for care, research, and teaching. Across the street, FedEx is sponsoring the constructing of a home to provide housing for families of long-term patients.

FedEx House will sit at the corner of a larger mixed-income, mixed-housing development called Legends Park. It's one of several Hope VI developments that have flourished in Memphis over the past couple of decades. This past summer, HUD Deputy Secretary Ronald Sims called Memphis "one of the bright shining examples in the United States today," of inner-city revitalization and blight removal.

Down the street from Le Bonheur and Legends Park I could see St. Jude's Children Research Hospital, which provides lifesaving care to children from around the world, regardless of their ability to pay. Around the corner, the new UT Baptist Research Park is under construction, which will make Memphis a global leader in bioscience. Methodist University Hospital, where Apple CEO Steve Jobs came to get a new liver last summer, is a short distance away.

The following night, the Memphis Grizzlies defeated Toronto in a thrilling overtime battle. The Grizz are doing better now than they have in years, and might even secure a post-season berth. Two nights later at FedEx Forum, near historic Beale Street, our beloved University of Memphis Tigers utterly dominated the visiting Southern Methodist University Mustangs. The coach of the Tigers is a young man named Josh Pastner, who may be the least miserable person alive.

This past Saturday, I saw a ballet at the Jeniam Center, our new, \$15 million performing arts complex in the heart of our midtown arts district. This facility, modeled after Chicago's famed Steppenwolf Theatre, was financed completely by private gifts and contributions.

In a few weeks, we're going to break ground on the Salvation Army Kroc Center, a 100,000 square foot worship, arts, education, and recreation center a few blocks away. We're one of only 25 cities in the United States that will build a Kroc Center, which required our community to raise \$25 million in private funds. Memphis is routinely cited as one of the most charitable cities in the United States.

My point is not about a hospital or a housing complex. It's not about a basketball team or a ballet. **It's about our people.** As their mayor, I simply cannot allow to pass without comment some of the things you have published about our city.

Your magazine mentioned "unemployment, taxes (both sales and income), commute times, violent crime and how its pro sports teams have fared... weather and Superfund pollution sites... [and] corruption based on convictions of public officials," as the factors for inclusion on your recent list of America's most miserable cities.

By your own criteria, there are far more cities on your list that have far higher unemployment and far longer commute times than Memphis. Most of them lack professional sports altogether. Violent crime in Memphis is declining steadily. There is a new era of transparency and ethical behavior in City Hall, due to a couple of executive orders that I drafted and signed when I took office last October. The sun shines here 230 days a year.

Memphis is not a miserable city, not by any definition, not by any metric.

Memphis is a city of joy. You can hear it coming up from our high school gymnasiums and football fields every Friday evening. You can hear it rocking on Beale Street late every Saturday night. You can hear it in our churches every Sunday morning.

Memphis is a city of innovation. The accomplishments of our past are outshone only by the brilliance of what's happening right now in our arts and business sectors. I'm sure at some point in your life you've enjoyed the music of Otis Redding or Al Green or B.B. King or Johnny

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Cash. Those artists and countless other achieved lasting, worldwide fame after getting started in Memphis. Brands like FedEx and AutoZone were born here and keep their world headquarters here; companies like International Paper and ServiceMaster have both relocated here in the past five years.

Memphis is a city of resilience. Floods, fire, pestilence, and poverty may have tested us, but they have never broken us. We are a city built on a bluff, positioned to withstand storms that other cities cannot. If the rates of unemployment, high school drop outs, and crime are to be our new battlegrounds, then we will join those fights, and we will prevail. For all of the problems you might show me, I can point to a legion of government agencies, non-profit organizations, churches, volunteer groups, and grassroots activists working together as one Memphis to find the solutions.

Maybe it's something in our water. Maybe it's something in our soil. **I think it's something in our souls that makes us Memphians.** We know who we are - and miserable is not part of the definition.

We know too that our city's song is not complete. It is being written every day, and it is sung by a chorus of hopeful, energetic voices that will resonate for generations.

Memphis is actually not my hometown. I was born and raised in a small town, about 240 miles east of Memphis. My wife and I made a deliberate choice to put our roots down here, make our careers here, and raise our children here about 40 years ago. I don't know if you've ever been to Memphis, but please accept this letter as my formal invitation to come visit us at your earliest convenience.

You'll have the time of your life, I promise you.


Best wishes,

A C Wharton, Jr.
Mayor, City of Memphis


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 Alys Drake and 33 others like this.




 **Denice Mann** Our Mayor is the bomb and he has what it takes to WIN; the guts & balls to STAND Up and voice his thoughts on behalf of the citizens of our community.....HOORAH Mayor Wharton, You R by all definitions A ROCK STAR!!!!!!
39 minutes ago · [Report](#)

 **Rosemary Lubiani** I am proud to be a lifelong Memphian, and I am finally able to say that I am proud of my Mayor! Thank you, Mayor Wharton.
28 minutes ago · [Report](#)

 **Lisa Ortasic-Hayes** I'm with you, Rosemary! And my daughter just said, "Why do I love this city? Because A C Wharton is mayor!" And she's a teenager. There's hope!
19 minutes ago · [Report](#)

 **Sean Lovejoy** Sometimes you just have to stand tall and carry a big stick. Thank you Mr Mayor.
9 minutes ago · [Report](#)

 **Luanne Ray** Wonderful letter Mayor Wharton!
4 minutes ago · [Report](#)

