

## Seeber's Night To Shine



Staff Photo By Herb Nygren Jr.

**CATCHING UP:** Tyler Mayor Joey Seeber talks with friends and colleagues at a reception before a tribute dinner at the Tyler Rose Garden Center on Tuesday.

**By CINDY MALLETTE**  
Staff Writer

With tears, applause and laughter among friends - hundreds of them - Joey Seeber celebrated his 12 years of service on the Tyler City Council.

A Rose City Salute was held in the mayor's honor Tuesday at the Tyler Rose Garden Center. People who worked with Seeber during his six years as a city councilman and six years as mayor spoke about the honor it was to have followed his leadership. Others who knew Seeber as a friend talked about the leadership qualities he displayed even when not serving in the public eye.

"Joey has truly been a leader for our city and I'm so happy to have worked with him these many years," said Councilman Steve Smith, who co-chaired the Salute along with former mayor and current State Sen. Kevin

Eltife and Nelson Clyde IV.

Eltife said he will be sad to see Seeber leave office after the May 10 elections. Due to term limits, Seeber is unable to run for a fourth term.

Eltife praised the mayor's work in reducing property tax rates, eliminating general obligation debt and incorporating a pay-as-you-go system of funding capital improvements.

"For those of you who don't know, being mayor is a non-paying job. Those of you who think you can get rich by being mayor, you don't," Eltife said. "You make a lot of sacrifices. Sacrifices of your time, your work, your energy."

He brought Seeber's sons, Joseph and Witt, onto the stage and thanked them for giving up time with their father while he served the city.

"There have been basketball games, baseball games, a lot of things your father was not able to make because your father was serving the citizens of Tyler," Eltife said. "You don't realize the impact you have made on the city of Tyler because you allowed him to serve."

He presented flags and certificates from the state of Texas honoring the Seeber family's sacrifices during Joey's work as a councilman and mayor. Eltife especially thanked Kristin Seeber for supporting her husband throughout his career.

"You've just done an incredible job for the city of Tyler," he said to her.

The tone of the evening wasn't entirely serious.

Police Chief Gary Swindle gave the mayor a 1/35-inch scale model of a Tyler Police patrol cruiser, to remind the mayor of his various roadside encounters with patrol officers.

"You can put this in your dash, or your rearview mirror to remind you," Swindle said.

A few council members ribbed Seeber about his stylish hair, clothes and eyewear. Councilman Steve Smith joked that he was growing his hair into the "Seeber Swoop," because his wife admired it so much. Councilman Ralph Caraway, dressed in a polo shirt and khaki pants, said he took his dressing cues from the mayor.

"Normally, I would wear a suit and tie to a function like this," Caraway said. "But because of the mayor's influence, I decided to dress comfortably."

Caraway spoke more about the friendship he developed with Seeber through their time on the council together.

"One thing I admire about Joey Seeber is his openness and willingness to listen," he said, adding that Seeber would always do what he knew to be right, in spite of the criticism he faced.

Caraway, who pastors St. Louis Baptist Church, said his admiration for the mayor increased after Seeber attended one of his services.

"I knew the mayor meant what he said when he showed up on Sunday to hear me preach. After that, he became a personal friend," he said.

Hector Guevara, Founding chair of the Hispanic Leadership Council, spoke about the mayor's disciplined character and his ability to recognize qualities in people that would make them effective leaders, too. Guevara said he also admired Seeber's humility.

"At the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast he prayed with the rest of us, and that said a lot to me," Guevara said. "It was meaningful to me that you would do that."

Nelson Clyde IV said he was glad Seeber seized the opportunity to serve Tyler, even though he isn't a native.

"He recognized that there is room for people who didn't grow up here - like me - and he decided to get in the game and make a difference," Clyde said. "He's done that."

Clyde encouraged Seeber to take a moment and reflect on the things he's accomplished in 12 years.

"Sometimes, a leader gets frustrated and feels like he hasn't done enough," he said. "It's times like this we need to stop and look back and see what you've done. It's time for a pat on the back."

Part of the proceeds from the Salute went into a scholarship fund set up in Joey and Kristin Seeber's names. Gaylord Hughey, the scholarship's underwriting chairman, said the fund is estimated to be at \$45,000.

Seeber took the stage last and gave thanked his friends, family and co-workers for their love and support over the past decade, and became emotional a few times in the process.

"I get to tell all of you how much I appreciate all of you," he said, wiping his eyes.

He cried again when he addressed his wife.

"She's rejoiced with us at the mountaintops and stood with us in the valleys, but she has never flinched," he said. "I couldn't have had a better partner for the last 12 years, and for that I love her."

Finally, Seeber applauded the city employees, whom he said deserved all of the credit he usually received.

"Most of all, I am eternally grateful to the employees of the City of Tyler," he said. "You are our everyday heroes who served the people every day. I may get the credit, but you, the city employees, deserve the credit."