

# MAYOR'S CORNER



A BLOG BY MAYOR JAMES D. STEWART, JR.

JUNE 1, 2026

## FAVOR AIN'T FAIR

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not. – Galatians 6:9

On Friday, May 29, after **2,004 days**, the City of Irondale did what many called impossible: we welcomed Costco, the third-largest retailer in the world, home.

Before anyone talks about square footage or jobs, here is the truth: we did not arrive because the road was fair. We arrived because of favor. The word I want to hand you this week: **favor ain't fair.**



### FIRST – THE SEED

#### The Promise Came Before the Proof

It began on a cold December morning in 2020, at the summit on the very hill where Costco is constructing its building. I had been your mayor for barely a month. The ground under contract, and a handful of us stood in the wind – Hugo Isom of JLL, the Costco team, our engineers from Sain Associates, and a brand-new mayor, with no building, no blueprint, just a vision. Right there, the seed went into the ground. The promise came before the proof.

### SECOND – PASSION

#### Purpose Is Born Out of Passion

You do not chase a promise for years for a paycheck. You do it because something deeper is burning in you – for me, the conviction is that Irondale's families deserve more. Passion gets you started, but it never finishes the race; something has to grow in you along the way.

### THIRD – PERSEVERANCE

#### The Road Was Long, So We Kept Walking

The promise did not come easily. We started on that Grants Mill Road hill, then proceeded to Grants Mill Station – today's The Hill, which fell through. The site by Benchmark Imports got close before things beyond our control pulled it apart. Three sites – and then God did what only favor can explain: He brought us right back to where we started. *The last location was the first location.*

A faithful few refused to let it die – Debra McGill Smith, Heather Carter, Hugo Isom, and me. Heather re-engineered the whole project in a way that finally made the numbers work, and Costco chose to come home to that first site.

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MAY 26, 2026

## Favor Ain't Fair (continued)

### FOURTH – PRAYER

#### It Was Developed Through Prayer

This deal was not developed in a conference room – it was developed on my knees. I learned to pray without ceasing, like the persistent widow: knock, and knock, and knock again, until heaven answers. We did the work. But every time a closed door swung open, I knew whose hand had turned the handle. Prayer was not our last resort; it was our first strategy.

### FIFTH – PATIENCE

#### Patience Only Comes Through Pain

Patience is not a personality trait. It is a lesson, and the classroom is pain. On July 29, 2025, I announced Costco was coming, and the due diligence period began. I thought that was the easy part. Those long months proved me wrong. Our city attorney, April Danielson, called some days with progress, other days with another wall. On Friday, March 13, we were one piece of paper from closing – and didn't. Negotiation fatigue set in, and everyone was ready to walk away. Then, at 2:46 p.m. on Friday, May 29, the call came: every party had signed, and we closed. Out of the pain, joy was born.

### SIXTH – THE TURN

#### Now, Why I Call It Favor

By every fair measure, this should have died a dozen times. But favor does not follow the rules of fairness. You cannot work hard enough to earn it – and that is what makes it a favor. We did our part with passion, perseverance, prayer, and patience, but what carried us across was the favor of God. And favor ain't fair. Thank God it isn't – if it were, none of us would make it.

### A Word for You This Week

I did not write this to talk about a store. I wrote it for the one holding a promise that has taken far longer than you imagined – the marriage, the business built in the dark, the child you are praying over.

**Hear me, as your mayor and your brother in Christ: do not grow weary in doing good. The harvest comes in due season – His season – and the only ones who miss it quit before it arrives. So do not faint. Keep planting, keep praying, keep walking. Your harvest is coming.**

**DiE – Do It Every Day.**



The City of  
**Irondale**

Build Community. Build the Future.