The pages that follow provide you with a detailed update on our progress over the past year and a glimpse of what’s to come. It was an honor to serve you as presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council. I look forward to working with our members, volunteers, and new presiding co-chair, John Tyson, as he guides the program in the new year.

Sincerely,

G. David Gearhart
Presiding Co-Chairman
Northwest Arkansas Council

Rick Allen, Allen Canning Company
Jay Allen, Jay Allen Communications
Don Baciagalupi, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Dick Barclay, Brail Barclay
Susan Barrett, Consultant
Rick Barrows, Multi-Craft Contractors, Inc.
Jeff Bassore, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Fadi Bayyari, Bayyari Construction and Properties
Rob Boaz, Carroll Electric Cooperative Corp.
Ray Bracy, Walton Stores
Ed Bradberry, B & B Resources
Bill Bradley, Washington Regional Medical Center
Rosalind Brewer, Sam’s Club
Mary Beth Brooks, Bank of Fayetteville
Tim Brown, Arkansas Men’s Health
John Brown III, Windgate Foundation
Frank Broyles, University of Arkansas
Raymond Burns, Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce
Wayne Callahan, H. J. Heinz Company
Steve Clark, Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
Ed Clifford, The Jones Trust
John Cooper III, Cooper Communities Inc.
Rich Davis, SourceGas Arkansas
Tommy Dewees, AEP SWEPCO (retired)
Lee DuChanois, APAC-Central, Inc.
Eric Eduakine, Rich Baseball Operations
John Elrod, Conner & Winters
Danny Ferguson, Southwestern Energy
Greg Fogle, Viabond Construction Services
Cathy Foraker, ATV&T
Alan Fortenberry, Beaver Water District
Wallace Fowler, Liberty Bank of Arkansas
G. David Gearhart, University of Arkansas
Stan Green, Lindsey Green Properties
Mary Ann Greenwood, Greenwood Gearhart Inc.
Scott Grigsby, Arvest Bank
John Paul Hammerschmidt, former U.S. Congressman
Howard Hamilton, Liberty Bank of Arkansas
Gary Head, Signature Bank of Arkansas
Dan Hendrix, Arkansas World Trade Center
Tom Hopper, Crafton Tull & Associates
Dina Howell, Saatchi & Saatchi X
Dennis Hunt, Stephens
Walter Husman, WEHCO Media Inc.
Mitchell Johnson, Ozark Electric Cooperative Corp.
Robert Jones III, Conner & Winters
James Keenan, The Raven Foundation
Jeff Koonsig, Upchurch Electrical Supply Company
Peter Kohler, UAMS Northwest
Bob Lamb, Consultant

When my term as presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council commenced last July, I knew the next 12 months would involve the establishment and implementation of many of the objectives outlined in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Regional Development Strategy. We’ve accomplished most of what we set out to do a year ago, and I’m proud to present a summary of those outcomes in our annual report.

One of our most important successes this year was strengthening relationships with our neighbors in the state and throughout the region. We held the Central/Northwest Arkansas Leadership Summit in February to promote more collaboration between the state’s two largest regions. We also welcomed Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker to our region to talk about shared economic opportunities, and we’re communicating more than ever with our friends in nearby Fort Smith about ways we can work together.

Meanwhile, our Regional Economic Development Work Group is off to a fast start. With the help of a team of business and chamber partners, entrepreneurial support and existing business services were in place before the end of 2011. The Council also enlisted some of the greatest marketing minds in the region, making significant strides toward developing a regional brand. Our logo, tagline, and a foundational marketing package featured at our annual meeting mark a milestone in this effort, and we look forward to utilizing it to tell our story to the world.

The Infrastructure Work Group focused on the re-issuance of GARVEE bonds to improve access to interstate 540 and will work to garner support for a major expansion of the interstate, Bella Vista bypass, and the start of the U.S. 412 bypass of Springdale. Water quality remains at the top of our list, and we continue to work with business and local governments to find workable solutions with the state of Oklahoma. With a June groundbreaking, the Razorback Greenway made another step toward forming the backbone of a regional trail network.

The Educational Excellence Work Group continues its work at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, expanding and creating programs to encourage students to re-enter and complete higher levels of education.

The Community Vitality Work Group has successfully launched leadership and volunteer programs and will expand its efforts to the areas of diversity and health before the end of the year.

Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council:

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G. David Gearhart
Presiding Co-Chairman
Northwest Arkansas Council
Officers of the Council

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<tr>
<th>Position Held</th>
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<td>Presiding Co-Chair (2011-2012)</td>
<td>G. David Gearhart</td>
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<td>Presiding Co-Chair (2012-2013)</td>
<td>John Tyson</td>
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<td>Past Presiding Co-Chair (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Jim Walton</td>
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<td>Vice Chair</td>
<td>Scott Van Laningham</td>
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<td>Secretary / Treasurer</td>
<td>Mark Simmons</td>
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<td>Chair Emeritus</td>
<td>Alice Walton</td>
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<td>Chair Emeritus</td>
<td>John Paul Hammerschmidt</td>
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Members of the Executive Committee

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<tr>
<th>Type of Appointment (term of appointment)</th>
<th>2011-2012 Executive Committee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presiding Co-Chair (1-year term)</td>
<td>G. David Gearhart</td>
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<td>Vice Chair (indefinite term)</td>
<td>Scott Van Laningham</td>
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<td>Secretary / Treasurer (indefinite term)</td>
<td>Mark Simmons</td>
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<td>President of NWA Chambers of Commerce</td>
<td>Steve Clark (through January 2013)</td>
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<td>Co-Chair’s Appointees (1-year term)</td>
<td>Greg Lee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #1 (1-year term)</td>
<td>Becky Paneitz (term expires in 2014)</td>
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<td>Nominating Committee Representative #2 (1-year term)</td>
<td>Cameron Smith (term expires in 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #3 (1-year term)</td>
<td>John Brown III (term expires in 2012)</td>
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The Brand
New brand merges messages of business friendly, high quality of life

Work Groups
Volunteers keep strategy’s 16 objectives on course during first year

Year in Review
Region’s growth remained remarkable though 2011-2012

Milken Institute Review
Unique, long-term view of Milken’s top places puts NW Arkansas at No. 4

Business Retention
Team focuses on boosting existing businesses here through BRE program

Infrastructure
Nov. 6 vote is key to region’s biggest highway projects moving forward

TIME ‘Most Influential’
Magazine puts Council member among its top 100

Leadership
Transition puts one of region’s top businessmen in charge for 2012-2013

Members
Council’s members include region’s top business, civic leaders

Northwest Arkansas residents in March celebrated the opening of The Iceberg, a shared workspace for entrepreneurs in downtown Fayetteville. The facility will be home to the startups participating in the first ARK Challenge, an entrepreneurs bootcamp that starts in August. (Photo by Todd Gill of Fayetteville Flyer)
Notable Initiatives

Rep. Emerson Visit
Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council helped coordinate a visit from U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson of Missouri. The visit in January 2012 focused on paying for highway projects that go from Arkansas to Missouri, as well as conversations about banking and agricultural issues.

How It Helps: Emerson’s visit gave her a clear view of how Arkansans view the Bella Vista bypass, Interstate 49 projects, as well as certain banking regulations and agricultural issues.

What’s Next: The Northwest Arkansas Council has been called upon to host visits for members of Congress on occasion and that should continue.

Razorback Greenway
Accomplishment: Construction of the Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway started in June 2012. The trail, funded by a federal grant and Walton Family Foundation gift, will be a 36-mile cycling and pedestrian path from Lake Bella Vista to Fayetteville.

How It Helps: One of the strategic actions under Objective 4 of the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to “build the trails system detailed in the Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Plan, including the regional, Razorback Greenway and projects in local communities.”

What’s Next: Guided by the staff of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, the entire 36-mile path will be complete by the end of 2013.

TIME ‘Most Influential’

Alice Walton is congratulated by Northwest Arkansas Council member John Brown III. Walton was recognized in April by TIME magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World.

“With Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, she has placed a daring bet that a small town can become a big art-world destination,” TIME’s art critic Richard Lacayo wrote. “We’re betting she’s right.”

The museum has exceeded its own high expectations as attendance is far ahead of what it had predicted.

November’s opening of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art drew national attention to Northwest Arkansas. Its economic impact on the region is already immense, luring thousands of tourists to Northwest Arkansas within just a few months. Businesses across the region have benefitted from the world-class museum’s opening.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker spoke before a group of 40 Northwest Arkansas civic and business leaders at an April luncheon. Chief Baker told guests he hopes to forge a strong economic relationship with Northwest Arkansas in the coming years.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker

Friends: Tim McFarland of Elevate and Cathy Foraker of AT&T share a hug at the Northwest Arkansas Council’s winter meeting in January.

Participents of the Northwest Arkansas Higher Education Consortium signing ceremony were Dr. Chip Pollard of John Brown University, Dr. Steven Gates of Northwest Arkansas Community College, Dr. George Burch of Northwest Technical Institute, Dr. Daniel Rule of UAMS Northwest and Dr. G. David Gearhart of the University of Arkansas (not pictured).

Northwest Arkansas Council member Howard Hamilton looks on as Council member Mark Simmons greets one of the Council’s guests at the winter meeting.

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Northwest Arkansas Council members, including G. David Gearhart (left) and Jim Walton (center), showed up early for the annual winter meeting to talk with Council President and CEO Mike Malone about issues affecting Northwest Arkansas. Education issues were the focus of the winter meeting.

Northwest Arkansas Recognition

Northwest Arkansas ranked 39th overall by Forbes magazine among 200 metropolitan statistical areas for “Best Places for Business and Careers.” (June 2012)

Northwest Arkansas ranked 26th on the Milken Institute’s list of Best Performing Cities in 2011. The region ranked 43rd in 2010. Northwest Arkansas was the top-ranked place in 2003. (The 2012 rankings will be announced in December.)

Siloam Springs recognized as one of the 20 Best Small Towns in America by Smithsonian magazine. The list focused on cities with populations of less than 25,000 residents. (May 2012)

Fayetteville picked by U.S. News & World Report as one of the nation’s best “cheap mountain towns for retirees.” (April 2012)

Bentonville recognized by Travel & Leisure magazine as one of the 12 hottest travel destinations of 2012. The magazine said Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, which opened in November 2011, “may be enough to attract culture seekers from around the country, if not the world.” (January 2012)

Forbes/New Geography ranked Northwest Arkansas at No. 21 this year among medium-sized cities in its list of Best Cities for Job Growth.

Region’s Brand Strategy Conveys Northwest Arkansas Attributes

The colorful row of arrows pointing skyward represents the region’s diversity, the potential for upward mobility and economic momentum. But if you look just right, the assembly of arrows also depicts some of the region’s iconic environmental assets: a mountain range and a row of trees.

Each of the attributes featured in the Northwest Arkansas region’s new logo was strategically designed to connect with each of the designated targets: business owners, families and working professionals. The logo was designed with an intentional depth in messaging, embodying layers of communication with the goal of reaching a broader audience. The result is that each target sees and connects with the message they find most relevant and compelling, while being influenced by subsequent attributes.

“It’s open to interpretation,” said Scott Caldwell, vice president of marketing services for Crawford Johnson Robinson Woods. “It makes you think. It makes you look a little further.”

A team from Procter & Gamble, CJRW and Mitchell Communications Group, which received early-on assistance from Rockfish Interactive and Saatchi & Saatchi X, led the effort to define a logo and tagline to help market Northwest Arkansas.

The logo and tagline — Great for Business. Great for Life. — will be used in marketing brochures, websites, advertising and publications. Working professionals pursuing jobs, company owners looking to expand or relocate, and families are its intended target audiences.

The logo and tagline capture and communicate the wealth of attributes Northwest Arkansas offers, which will help increase awareness about the region.

“Having a regional brand will accelerate our growth in the future,” said Elise Mitchell, president and CEO of Mitchell Communications. “It will allow us to compete more effectively with other regional economies, leveraging all of our assets under one brand. The new brand does a great job of sharing the message that the American Dream is alive and well in Northwest Arkansas.”

A volunteer team from Procter & Gamble kicked off the branding effort last summer by developing a list of key attributes that the brand should convey. The team, which included associate director of external relations Tim Marrin and brand manager Chetan Parikh, drew insights from longtime Northwest Arkansas residents as well as those who have recently moved to the region.

The group talked at one point about how Northwest Arkansas is a bit like “sushi and sweet tea,” suggesting that the region has an upscale, modern side while also preserving Southern warmth and friendliness. The message evolved into a new tagline, but the sentiments remained. Northwest Arkansas blends business opportunities, big-city sophistication, small-town friendliness and scenic natural beauty— that’s the message the branding campaign aims to deliver.

Five potential logos and taglines were presented. A group of national site selectors, some members of the Northwest Arkansas Council and 113 local professionals reviewed three of the marks. The consensus was that the selected logo and tagline clearly communicate that the region’s pro-business attitudes go hand in hand with the high quality of life.

Cynthia Puryear, a senior strategist with Mitchell, said she expects to see the logo and tagline become prominent in many efforts to tell people about Northwest Arkansas.

“If you are going to brand, it needs to be part of everything you are doing,” Puryear said. “If you really want to bring visibility, it needs to be on everything you touch and as visible as possible. It’s the voice of this whole campaign. You want to get people excited about it and keep them talking about it.”

Marrin said he’s satisfied with the logo and tagline that were developed, and the cooperation among those who helped with the project.

“This branding will help all of us communicate what Northwest Arkansas stands for in the hearts and minds of our region and what truly separates us from the competition,” he said.
Notable Initiatives

Implementing Objectives

Northwest Arkansas started the year without a mechanism to track the region’s new and existing business expansion activity. A regional program to encourage drops in unemployment started in September 2012. The volunteer work groups are organized around the four key strategies in the work plan: economic development, education, infrastructure, and community vitality. The collective staff of the Northwest Arkansas Council, Endeavor Foundation, and area Chambers of Commerce play a critical role implementing the plan.

The work groups are addressing the objectives with both one-time events and long-term projects. Mark Simmons, chair of the steering committee that oversees the activities of the work groups, said work group chairs Susan Barrett, John Brown III, Tommy Deweese and Anita Scism are exceptional at keeping the groups on course.

“They’ve taken the ball and run with it,” Simmons said. “They’ve been successful in getting community involvement and broadened the base of people who are involved.”

On this page, you’ll see the start of our “Notable Initiatives” list, showing many of the activities that have involved the volunteer work groups, the supporting organizations and Council staff.

The work groups started their planning and organizing as a short-term goal in the weeks immediately following the release of the development strategy, with the Educational Excellence Work Group out of the gate with the first event to address a key objective.

Reach Out Siloam launched in September 2011, with a focus on convincing dropouts to return to school in Siloam Springs. The work on that Saturday was a pilot study, and organizers will expand the initiative to other locations. Regardless of the November election results, it’s possible that the Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority, the only RMA in the state, will pursue a tax to fund regional highway and public transportation projects.

Even as voters and elected leaders determine the best way to improve highways, Northwest Arkansas faces other challenges in the areas of aviation, trails and water.

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport (XNA), for example, opened a new terminal in August 2011, creating a better first impression for visitors to the region. Work remains however. XNA would like to attract a low-cost carrier to improve access to major cities across the U.S., and an access road to the airport’s south entrance remains a priority.

The region’s trail system will improve dramatically in the coming year. Final completion work has begun on the Razorback Greenway, a 36-mile paved trail from Lake Bella Vista to Fayetteville. The trail’s construction, which started in Rogers, should be complete by the end of 2013, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to travel in Bentonville, Rogers, Lowell and Springdale on their way to Fayetteville. The region already has several miles of trails in Fayetteville, Rogers and Bentonville, but the greenway will connect them.

Several important steps were taken in the past year to protect and improve the region’s water supply, and among the most significant was the further advancement of the Beaver Watershed Alliance. The Alliance, which includes representatives of Benton, Madison and Washington counties, is an organization charged with protecting Beaver Lake and its tributaries in the same way the Illinois River Watershed Partnership works to protect the Illinois River.

Several water quality challenges remain however, and none are bigger than a decades-old dispute over the Illinois River, a 99-mile stream that flows from Arkansas into Oklahoma near Siloam Springs.

Localities in Northwest Arkansas have spent about $225 million in the past decade to reduce phosphorus discharges; the state of Arkansas has passed laws to reduce phosphorus levels in streams; and companies and landowners have taken steps to ensure that phosphorus doesn’t move from pastures to streams after heavy rain. Nonetheless, Oklahoma remains convinced that more steps are necessary to reduce river phosphorus. Northwest Arkansas cities face the possibility of spending an additional $300 million to upgrade wastewater treatment plants to remove more phosphorus and even those costly improvements may not satisfy the concerns of Oklahoma.

Notable Initiatives

Accomplishment: The Diversity Team working under the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Community Vitality Work Group, is focused on creating an online guide to access information about diversity services and programs.

How it helps: It addresses the gap between perceived and actual diversity identified in the Northwest Arkansas Competitive Assessment by assembling information about the various diversity programs and services in a single place. It also allows corporate recruiters to access diversity information in a quick, efficient manner when cultivating relationships with recruits, and it gives new residents information they need to become involved with diversity programs.

What’s next: A timeline and plan of delivery will be created. The expected launch of the program is fall 2012.
Notable Initiatives

**ARK CHALLENGE/ICEBERG**

**Accomplishment:** Modeled after Reach Out to Dropout programs in Texas, Reach Out Sloam sent Sloam Springs High School administrators, teachers and community volunteers out to contact high school students who didn’t return to class in September 2011 and encouraged them to return to school. The event was considered a pilot project to see if it could be expanded to other schools in Benton and Washington counties.

**How it helps:** Re-engaging high school students increases the likelihood that they’ll become graduates. An objective in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to reduce the dropout rate.

**What’s next:** Organizers plan to expand the program to other high schools in August 2012. The goal is for Reach Out to NWA volunteers to knock on the doors of students throughout the region.

Better Roads, Good Water Keys to Northwest Arkansas Economic Development

Although the Council has added some new inroads and work streams since the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy was unveiled in 2011, we are still actively working to find solutions to improve infrastructure, the bread and butter of the organization’s work since its founding in 1990.

The Council played important roles in identifying and lobbying for funding for critical Northwest Arkansas projects such as the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, which opened in 1998, and Interstate 540.

Yet there remain critical, unfunded infrastructure projects that need action if Northwest Arkansas is to continue the economic growth that’s been prominent in the region for the past 40 years.

Among them are a massive highway proposal that the state plans to fund from a temporary, statewide half-cent sales tax over the next decade. The tax will go to referendum in November 2012, and the Council’s Executive Committee is supporting passage of the tax to pay for Northwest Arkansas’ most important highway projects.

If approved by voters in November, the tax would pay to widen I-540 to six lanes from Bentonville to Fayetteville. Other money would go toward building the first half of the Bella Vista bypass, a section of the Springdale Northern Bypass, and provide $8 million annually to local governments in Benton and Washington counties. Details about how much funding each community would receive is available at the website www.movearkansasforward.com.

Traffic on County Road 40 in Benton County backs up as drivers wait to turn onto U.S. 71. If voters approve a temporary sales tax on Nov. 6 to pay to build a portion of the Bella Vista bypass, it’s believed it would reduce congestion on U.S. 71.

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This Year in Northwest Arkansas Regional Growth Continues

Northwest Arkansas Council staff analyzed U.S. Census Bureau statistical data to evaluate statewide growth as well as growth in the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), its urbanized area and Northwest Arkansas counties and cities.

**Statewide**
- Arkansas’ population grew by 22,064 in the 15 months that ended in July 2011. Of those additions, 48.3 percent were in Benton and Washington counties.
- Arkansas added more people in the 15 months than a state twice its size (Missouri; population 6 million).
- Arkansas’ population is on pace to top 3 million sometime in 2015.

**Metropolitan Statistical Area**
- MSA population increased by over 10,600 between April 2010 and July 2011. Its population was estimated at 473,830 as of July 1, 2011, the Census Bureau said.
- During a 15-month period that ended in July 2011, only 12 MSAs nationwide grew faster than the 2.9 percent growth rate in Northwest Arkansas.
- If the MSA continues to add residents at the current pace, its population will top 500,000 by mid-2014.
- The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers MSA is the 107th largest in the nation.
- The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers MSA’s addition of 10,623 people in 15 months means it added more people than 19 MSAs with populations above 1 million people. Among those 19 larger MSAs were the ones that included the cities of Birmingham, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, Little Rock, Memphis, Milwaukee, Newark, Pittsburgh and St. Louis.
- The Northwest Arkansas Council staff last year predicted the MSA’s 2010 population would be “at least 463,300.” When new U.S. Census Bureau figures were released in mid-2011, the actual number was 463,204. We were close to correct.

**Urbanized Area**
- The Northwest Arkansas urbanized area (which is defined as areas with at least 1,000 people per square mile and adjoining areas with at least 50 people per square mile) saw its population reach 295,083 people, making it the nation’s 15th fastest growing urbanized area from 2000 to 2010. Its population in 2000 was 172,585.
- The urbanized area now includes parts of six cities that weren’t in the urbanized area in 2000. Those six cities are Bella Vista, Cave Springs, Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), its urbanized area and Northwest Arkansas counties and cities.

**What’s next:**
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**Accomplishment:**
- A grant allowed Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority to “enable sustainable, long-term growth and improve infrastructure to wide.”
- Depending on the outcome of the Nov. 6 sales tax vote, it’s possible that the Northwest Arkansas’ growth and economic competitiveness will be accelerated.
- The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to invest in statewide, temporary, half-cent sales tax voted to be assessed in Benton and Washington counties, and build parts of the Bella Vista and Springdale bypasses.
- The Northwest Arkansas Council staff analyzed U.S. Census Bureau statistical data to evaluate statewide growth as well as growth in the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), its urbanized area and Northwest Arkansas counties and cities.
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- Arkansas’ population is on pace to top 3 million sometime in 2015.

**Wayfinding**
- A goal allowed seven Northwest Arkansas cities to take the first steps toward creating a regional wayfinding system patterned after signs already in place in Bentonville. The idea is to help residents and visitors navigate the region, and the signs will promote key destinations. Participating cities are Bella Vista, Eureka Springs, Fayetteville, Lowell, Rogers, Siloam Springs and Springdale.
- The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy’s Objective 4 suggests improving “multi-modal mobility throughout Northwest Arkansas.” A wayfinding system is recommended.
- A pilot project will be agreed upon by the cities by Dec. 31, 2012. The project will be installed by July 31, 2013.
Collecting Data First Step in Program to Help Existing Businesses Thrive

The best example of the growing partnerships between the Northwest Arkansas Council and five chambers of commerce is the effort they’ve put toward the new, regional Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program.

Launched in November 2011, the BRE program utilizes a team of chamber partners to visit key employers in their communities to survey top company officials.

The team asks questions about the company’s product, market, management, industry, workforce and technology. Questions are designed to give economic development professionals a better understanding of the company, its role in the community and any potential needs it may have.

The information is collected utilizing the Synchronist Business Information System created by Wheaton, Ill.-based Blane Canada Ltd. The database allows the team and the Northwest Arkansas Council to quickly respond to an individual company’s need, but it also helps the Council identify trends that may be affecting entire industries. Formulating a response to address business climate issues that the team identifies will hopefully help all businesses in the region over the long term.

Lance Eads, vice president of economic development for the Springdale Chamber of Commerce, said companies are impressed by the attention they are receiving.

“I’ve had several say, ‘Wow, thanks for the attention, this is pretty cool.’ They see the benefit, too.”

In the first six months, chamber partners visited more than 160 companies, determining that those companies expect to add more than 600 jobs in the next three years. They also anticipate adding nearly 400,000 square feet to their businesses, and expect to make capital investments near $700 million.

Eric Canada, a partner with Blane Canada Ltd, said few communities are able to collect so much information from so many companies in six months.

The Northwest Arkansas Council goal is for the outreach team to contact 450 companies this year.

“You’ve got to get the data in there first and see what the information is telling you,” Canada said. “It’s a growing process.”

The chamber partners have already identified ways to help companies. For example:

In Siloam Springs, chamber officials learned of one company that was competing for a new product line with several other companies where the company operates. The Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce helped the company figure out how to bring the new work to Arkansas, creating about 20 Siloam Springs jobs.

“They found out we cared, the city cared and the company isn’t out there on an island trying to get this expansion,” said Wayne Mays, Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce president and CEO. “We were able to tell them and show them we could advocate for the company’s needs.”

In Springdale, Eads said he’s helping companies find new, bigger locations after realizing that they were interested in expanding through BRE interviews. He’s learned about a small Springdale company with a large Department of Defense contract and another company that makes night vision equipment for the military’s use.

“They like that someone is coming out and listening to their story,” Eads said. “They work in obscurity at times. We’re learning what they provide to their communities and how to help them.”

Notable Initiatives

CAREER COACHES

Accomplishment: Four partners — the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, the Walton Family Foundation, the Northwest Arkansas Service Cooperative, and the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group — announced in December 2011 that they found a way to encourage at-risk students to graduate from high school and have a specific post-graduation educational plan.

Modelled after Gov. Mike Beebe’s “Arkansas Works” program, the new Northwest Arkansas Career and College Coaches program will operate in Benton and Washington counties. School districts throughout the two counties will participate.

“With the right guidance, students who otherwise may have abandoned their educational pursuits are instead finding the potential for lifelong careers,” Gov. Beebe said at the time the program was announced. “By banding together, the Walton Family Foundation, the University of Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas Council are bringing more students this opportunity that will further improve Arkansas’ educational future.”

The Walton Family Foundation provided a three-year grant to the program.

How it helps: The program addresses Objective 11 of the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy. The objective aims to “continue to improve high school graduation and college matriculation rates.”

What’s next: Newly hired coaches will be assigned to schools to begin the program in the fall 2012.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT
Long View of Milken Shows Northwest Arkansas’ Reliability

The Milken Institute’s annual list of Best-Performing Cities is one of the nation’s most talked about measures of a region’s economic success. The Best-Performing Cities list includes measures of job, wage, and technology performance to rank 200 large metropolitan areas, and Northwest Arkansas is always among the best performers.

Unlike other ‘best places’ rankings, what’s unique about the Milken list is its absolute focus on the economy. There’s no quality-of-life component, meaning highway improvements that might reduce traffic congestion, and world-class amenities, such as the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, have no direct impact on how the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area fares each year.

Even without the advantages that Crystal Bridges gives Northwest Arkansas on other national measuring sticks, the Northwest Arkansas MSA does well on Milken’s list most years.

In fact, we finished No. 1 in 2003. Milken recognized Northwest Arkansas for its “diverse, stable” economy that year.

Best-Performing Cities

2002-2011

1. McAllen, Texas
2. Raleigh, N.C.
3. Washington D.C.
4. Northwest Arkansas
5. Austin, Texas
6. San Antonio, Texas
7. Huntsville, Ala.
8. Charleston, S.C.
9. Provo, Utah
10. Anchorage, Alaska
11. Durham, N.C.
13. Houston, Texas
14. Fort Worth, Texas
15. Albuquerque, N.M.

We sized up the average performance of nearby Fort Smith, Little Rock, Springfield, Mo., and Tulsa, Okla. We did better.

(or our list but not as strong on lists prior to 2008.

NWArkansas to some extent in Fayetteville. Fifty for the Future is tied to the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville. With more than 23,000 students on lists prior to 2008.

What’s next: The successful first visit is leading to additional communication between the Cherokee Nation and those in Northwest Arkansas. That could involve Cherokee Nation members doing such things as attending the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences as health care is one of the Nation’s critical needs. Northwest Arkansas business and civic leaders are likely to travel to the Cherokee Nation headquarters in Tahlequah for further discussions.

BUSINESS INTERNSHIP

Accomplishment: AT&T provided a grant for students to participate in a small business internship program. It will place 20 students from the University of Arkansas and John Brown University as business interns.

How it helps: The program introduces high-achieving students to small businesses in the area.

What’s next: The interns start work in the fall and expect to be on the job for at least the first semester of the academic year.
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14. Fort Worth, Texas
15. Albuquerque, N.M.

Milken Institute Review

We wondered what would happen if we took a long-term view of Milken’s annual list.

Our analysis started in Northwest Arkansas. We took every Milken Best-Performing Cities list since 2002 and figured out how we performed in a typical year.

We took our best year (No. 1 in 2003), our worst year (No. 57 in 2008) and all the others since 2002 and figured out that our average finish among the nation’s 200 largest metropolitan areas is 24th.

Northwest Arkansas finished No. 7 in 2004 and No. 8 in 2005. It’s finished 20th, 23rd, 26th and 27th, too.

“When a metro ranks consistently among the top 20, I think it says something about that region’s economic vitality, and perhaps, its business leaders and local government officials,” said Armen Bedroussian, co-author of the Milken Institute’s Best-Performing Cities list. “Their ability to collaborate and create a business-friendly environment is a critical ingredient in sustaining economic growth.”

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Cherokee Nation

Accomplishment: Members and staff of the Northwest Arkansas Council met with Cherokee Nation Chief Bill John Baker and his staff in April 2012, hoping their first formal meeting will build a bridge to a stronger relationship.

How it helps: With 16,000 Oklahomans working in one of four Northwest Arkansas counties each day, it’s important that both regions recognize their reliance on one another. Many people from Northwest Arkansas work in eastern Oklahoma, and Arkansas entities provide water and wastewater services to a few Oklahoma communities.

What’s next: The interns start work in the fall and expect to be on the job for at least the first semester of the academic year.

Centennial Museum at Arkansas State University

Accomplishment: The Center of Excellence in Civil Engagement required students to pitch a “small business idea” to the Centennial Museum at Arkansas State University.

How it helps: The program introduces high-achieving students to small businesses in the area.

What’s next: The interns start work in the fall and expect to be on the job for at least the first semester of the academic year.

Central/NW Arkansas Summit

Accomplishment: Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council and Fifty for the Future met in February 2012 on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville. Fifty for the Future is an arm of the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce. Ted Abernathy, executive director of the Southern Growth Policies Board, facilitated the discussions.

How it helps: Participants explored opportunities for collaboration between Central and Northwest Arkansas. Several possibilities were identified.

“The future of our state hinges on the ability of people to work together for the greater good,” said Elizabeth Small, president of Fifty for the Future. “To be successful, it’s important to have a meaningful, mutually productive relationship with our friends in Northwest Arkansas.”

What’s next: The next summit is expected to occur in late August in Central Arkansas.

Joint Meeting

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council and the region’s chambers of commerce helped organize the first joint meeting of three state commissions in April 2012. The meeting between the Arkansas Highway Commission, Arkansas Parks and Tourism Commission and Arkansas Economic Development Commission was held at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

How it helps: A dinner at the Bentonville museum introduced Northwest Arkansas to some members of the three commissions who were unfamiliar with the region.

What’s next: It’s not known whether the commissions will meet jointly again in another part of Arkansas.

Northwest Arkansas Council

Accomplishment: We sized up the average performance of nearby Fort Smith, Little Rock, Springfield, Mo., and Tulsa, Okla. We did better.

Northwest Arkansas has no direct impact on how the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville. With more than 23,000 students last fall, the university’s enrollment has increased by 1,000 students over what it was a decade ago.

Northwest Arkansas, the home of the University of Arkansas and a nice mix of retail, food processing, logistics and other companies, is consistently among the nation’s top Milken performers, and only a few other places can make the same claim.

Northwest Arkansas Council

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How it helps: With 16,000 Oklahomans working in one of four Northwest Arkansas counties each day, it’s important that both regions recognize their reliance on one another. Many people from Northwest Arkansas work in eastern Oklahoma, and Arkansas entities provide water and wastewater services to a few Oklahoma communities.

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Collecting Data First Step in Program to Help Existing Businesses Thrive

The best example of the growing partnerships between the Northwest Arkansas Council and five chambers of commerce in the effort they’ve put toward the new, regional Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program.

Launched in November 2011, the BRE program utilizes a team of chamber partners to visit key employers in their communities to survey top company officials.

The team asks questions about the company’s product, market, management, industry, workforce, technology. Questions are designed to give economic development professionals a better understanding of the company, its role in the community and any potential needs it may have.

The information is collected utilizing the Synchronist Business Information System created by Wheaton, Ill.-based Blane Canada Ltd. The database allows the team and the Northwest Arkansas Council to quickly respond to an individual company’s need, but it also helps the Council identify trends that may be affecting entire industries.

The Synchronist Business Information System enhances the Council’s ability to survey top company officials to tell them and show them what they can advocate for the company’s needs.

In Springdale, Eads said he’s helping companies find new, bigger locations after realizing that they were interested in expanding through BRE interviews. He is involved in a new Springdale company with a large Department of Defense contract and another company that makes night vision equipment for the military’s use.

“They like that someone is coming out and listening to their story,” Eads said. “They work in obscurity at times. We’re learning what they provide to their communities and how to help them.”

The chamber partners have already identified ways to help companies. For example:

The springboard to new work for the Northwest Arkansas Council is the team and the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group – announced in December 2011 that they found a way to encourage at-risk students to graduate from high school and have a specific post-graduation educational plan.

Modeled after Gov. Mike Beebe’s “Arkansas Works” program, the new Northwest Arkansas Career and College Coaches program will operate in Benton and Washington counties. School districts throughout the two counties will participate.

“Our goal is to have as many students as possible start thinking about higher education and the future, and we want to make it possible for students to take advantage of those opportunities,” Beebe said at the time the program was announced.

How it helps: The program addresses Objective 1 of the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy. The objective aims to “continue to improve high school graduation and college matriculation rates.”

What’s next: Newly hired coaches will be assigned to schools to begin the program in the fall 2012.
This Year in Northwest Arkansas
Regional Growth Continues

Northwest Arkansas Council staff analyzed U.S. Census Bureau statistical data to evaluate statewide growth as well as growth in the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), its urbanized area and Northwest Arkansas counties and cities.

Statewide
- Arkansas’ population grew by 22,064 in the 15 months that ended in July 2011. Of those additions, 48.3 percent were in Benton and Washington counties.
- Arkansas added more people in the 15 months than a state twice its size (Missouri, population 6 million).
- Arkansas’ population is on pace to top 3 million sometime in 2015.

Metropolitan Statistical Area
- MSA population increased by over 10,650 between April 2010 and July 2011. Its population was estimated at 473,830 as of July 1, 2011, the Census Bureau said.
- During a 15-month period that ended in July 2011, only 12 MSAs nationwide grew faster than the 2.9 percent growth rate in Northwest Arkansas.
- If the MSA continues to add residents at the current pace, its population will top 500,000 by mid-2014.
  - The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers MSA is the 107th largest in the nation.
  - The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers MSA’s addition of 10,623 people in 15 months means it added more people than 19 MSAs with populations above 1 million people. Among those 19 larger MSAs were the ones that included the cities of Birmingham, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, Little Rock, Memphis, Milwaukee, Newark, Pittsburgh and St. Louis.
- The Northwest Arkansas Council staff last year predicted the MSA’s 2010 population would be “at least 463,300” when new U.S. Census Bureau figures were released in mid-2011. The actual number was 463,204. We were this close to correct.

Urbanized Area
- The Northwest Arkansas urbanized area (which is defined as areas with at least 1,000 people per square mile and adjoining areas with at least 500 people per square mile) saw its population reach 295,083 people, or about 1,272 people per square mile.
- Northwest Arkansas’ population in 2000 was 172,585. We were this close to correct.
- According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the Northwest Arkansas urbanized area will increase by more than 15 percent to 340,000 by 2015.

WAYFINDING
Accomplishment: A grant allowed seven Northwest Arkansas cities to take the first step toward developing a regional wayfinding system patterned after signs already in place in Bentonville. This allows residents and visitors traveling the region, and the signs will promote key destinations. Participating cities are Bella Vista, Eureka Springs, Fayetteville, Lowell, Rogers, Siloam Springs and Springdale.

How it helps: The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy’s Objective 4 suggests improving “multi-modal mobility throughout the region.” Objective 4’s Accomplishment: A grant allowed seven Northwest Arkansas cities to take the first step toward developing a regional wayfinding system patterned after signs already in place in Bentonville. This allows residents and visitors traveling the region, and the signs will promote key destinations.

What’s next: Depending on the outcome of the Nov. 6 sales tax vote, it’s possible that the Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority will pursue a sales tax.

VITALITY/VOLUNTEER FAIR
Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Leadership Council held the first regional volunteer fair in May 2012 in Rogers, bringing around 75 nonprofit organizations together to promote their organizations. The goal was to help working professionals identify organizations they might assist with their knowledge and expertise.

“This event provides a wonderful opportunity to connect nonprofit organizations that have volunteer needs with people looking to share their time and talents,” said Krista Khone, who helped organize the volunteer fair. “The venue offers an easy way for potential volunteers to learn more about the options in our communities.”

How it helps: Objective 12 of the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to “develop the next generation of leadership in Northwest Arkansas by promoting citizen engagement, volunteerism and leadership training.”

What’s next: Organizers are evaluating the first volunteer fair and making adjustments for a second fair, tentatively planned for May 2013. Additionally, the Leadership Council is recruiting 50 young mid- to upper-level managers to participate in the Certificate of Leadership in Board Service at the ALPFA Institute at the University of Arkansas this fall. Another 25 people will be picked to participate in the Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders program in the spring of 2013.

DOWNTOWN ENHANCEMENT
Accomplishment: The Built Environment Task Force, part of the Community Vitality Work Group, is creating a way to evaluate the overall health of the region’s downtowns. The envisioned report will include data on commercial and residential areas in downtowns as well as public and private investments, taxes, and visits to key attractions. The report will provide information to assist after/out of school programs and the need for a regional health assessment.

How it helps: The development strategy’s Objective 1b is to support the work of community and social service providers to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the region’s populations.

What happens next: The outcomes and objectives of the three-to-five-year active living initiative are in development. The rollout of the initiative and awareness campaign will begin in early 2013.

HIGHER ED CONSORTIUM
Accomplishment: Five colleges and universities in January 2012 formed the Northwest Arkansas Higher Education Consortium. It includes the University of Arkansas, Northwest Technical Institute, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest, Northwest Arkansas Community College and John Brown University.

How it helps: The consortium creates a mechanism for colleges and universities to work together on projects of mutual interest. The agreement calls for collaboration focused on recruitment, retention, fields of study and marketing.

What’s next: The consortium members identified student retention as a paramount concern, and so much of the group’s energy will go toward programs to retain students and to provide the region with a well-educated workforce.

WELLBEING INITIATIVE
Accomplishment: The Wellbeing Task Force identified an active living initiative as its first priority, and the Endorse Foundation agreed to take the lead on its behalf. The vision for the initiative is that “Northwest Arkansas is a healthy community where routine physical activity and healthy eating is accessible, easy, affordable and safe for everyone.” Additionally, the task force is evaluating the need for a study associated with

Notable Initiatives

HIGHWAY BONDS
Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council supported approval of GARVEE bonds for statewide highway improvements that included organization 1-540 in Benton and Washington counties. Voters passed the measure in November 2011.

The Council’s Executive Committee also took a position in support of the statewide, temporary, half-cent sales tax that’s on the Nov. 6, 2012 ballot. If approved, the tax would pay for widen I-540 to six lanes in Benton and Washington counties, and build parts of the Bella Vista and Springdale bypasses.

How it helps: A goal within the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to invest in infrastructure to “enable sustainable, long-term growth and improve economic competitiveness.”

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Notable Initiatives

POINT OF CONTACT/SITE VISITS
Accomplishment: The Arkansas Economic Development Commission last fall deemed the Northwest Arkansas Council to be the regional “point of contact,” meaning companies considering Northwest Arkansas as a future location are being encouraged to make their initial contact with the Council. The Council works closely with the region’s chambers of commerce to ensure that companies are able to easily identify the best possible Northwest Arkansas expansion sites, and to ensure that the company is provided with the best, most reliable economic and statistical information about the region. With the Council’s assistance, it will ultimately be the chambers of commerce that “close the deal” with companies expanding to Northwest Arkansas.

How it helps: A regional economic development contact ensures that companies receive consistent, reliable information.

What’s next: While few companies were interested in expanding to Northwest Arkansas in late 2011, there was a notable increase in companies considering Northwest Arkansas as a place for possible expansion in the first half of 2012. By working together, the Council and the region’s chambers of commerce expect that upward trend to continue.
Better Roads, Good Water

Keys to Northwest Arkansas Economic Development

Although the Council has added some new infrastructure work streams since the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy was unveiled in 2011, we are still actively working to find solutions to improve infrastructure, the bread and butter of the organization’s work since its founding in 1990.

The Council played important roles in identifying and lobbying for funding for critical Northwest Arkansas projects such as the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, which opened in 1998, and Interstate 540.

Yet there remain critical, unfunded infrastructure projects that need attention if Northwest Arkansas is to continue the economic growth that has been prominent in the region for the past 40 years. Among them are a massive highway proposal that the state plans to fund from a temporary, statewide half-cent sales tax over the next decade. The tax will go to referendum in November 2012, and the Council’s Executive Committee is supporting passage of the tax to pay for Northwest Arkansas’ most important highway projects.

If approved by voters in November, the tax would pay to widen I-540 to six lanes from Bentonville to Fayetteville. Other money would go toward building the first half of the Bella Vista Bypass, a section of the Springdale Northern Bypass, and provide $8 million annually to local governments in Benton and Washington counties. Details about how much funding each community would receive is available at the website www.movearkansasforward.com.

Traffic on County Road 40 in Benton County backs up as drivers wait to turn onto U.S. 71. If voters approve a temporary sales tax on Nov. 6 to pay to build a portion of the Bella Vista bypass, it’s believed it will reduce congestion on U.S. 71.
Notable Initiatives
Volunteer work groups and the staffs of the Northwest Arkansas Council, the Endeavor Foundation and the five largest Northwest Arkansas chambers of commerce pursued an impressive list of projects in the past year, completing some entirely and establishing others for long-term success. A synopsis of some projects starts here and continues throughout our annual report.

**STATE OF REGION REPORT**

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council partnered with the University of Arkansas Center for Business and Economic Research to create the region’s first “State of the Northwest Arkansas Region Report.” The report compared Northwest Arkansas with its peer regions of Lexington, Ky.; Gainesville, Fla.; and Huntsville, Ala. Also included in the evaluation was Austin, Texas, an aspirational region that serves as a model for Northwest Arkansas.

The report, made public in September 2011, showed Northwest Arkansas with rising levels of employment growth and maintaining an unemployment rate below the national average.

“The State of the Northwest Arkansas Region Report is designed to highlight both the region’s strengths and put a focus on areas where our competitiveness lags our peers,” said Kathy Deck, director of the University of Arkansas Center for Business and Economic Research. “This report demonstrates how employment opportunities and establishment growth in the region surpassed our benchmark group over the last decade, but also highlights areas where we can improve.”

How it helps: The report serves as a benchmark for how the region compares to other successful metropolitan areas.

What’s next: The next State of the Region Report will be released in September 2012.

Implementing Objectives

Northwest Arkansas started the year without a mechanism to track the region’s new and existing business expansion activity. A nonprofit regional program to encourage dropouts to return to high school or a regional event to connect working professionals with nonprofit organizations in need. Thanks to the dedication of four volunteer work groups, the supporting organizations and Council staff.

The work groups started their planning and organizing as a short-term goal in the weeks immediately following the release of the Northwest Arkansas R twelve months, the work groups are addressing the objectives with both one-time events and long-term projects. Mark Simmons, chair of the steering committee that oversees the activities of the work groups, said work group chairs Susan Barrett, John Brown III, Tommy Dewese and Anita Scism are exceptional at keeping the groups on course.

“They’ve taken the ball and run with it,” Simmons said. “They’ve been successful in getting community involvement and broadened the base of people who are involved.”

On this page, you’ll see the start of our “Notable Initiatives” list, showing many of the activities that have involved the volunteer work groups, the supporting organizations and Council staff.

Northwest Arkansas started the year without a mechanism to track the region’s new and existing business expansion activity. A nonprofit regional program to encourage dropouts to return to school.

Regardless of the November election results, it’s possible that the Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority, the only RMA in the state, will pursue a tax to fund regional highway and public transportation projects.

Even as voters and elected leaders determine the best way to improve highways, Northwest Arkansas faces other challenges in the areas of aviation, trails and water.

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport (XNA), for example, opened a new terminal in August 2011, creating a better first impression for visitors to the region. Work remains however XNA would like to attract a low-cost carrier to improve access to major cities across the U.S., and an access road to the airport’s south entrance remains a priority.

The region’s trail system will improve dramatically in the coming year. Final completion work has begun on the Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway, a 36-mile paved trail from Lake Bella Vista to Fayetteville. The trail’s construction, which started in Rogers, should be complete by the end of 2013, allowing pedestrians and cyclists starting in Bella Vista to travel through Bentonville, Rogers, Lowell and Springdale on their way to Fayetteville. The region already has several miles of trails in Fayetteville, Rogers and Bentonville, but the greenway will connect them.

Several important steps were taken in the past year to protect and improve the region’s water supply, and among the most significant was the further advancement of the Beaver Watershed Alliance. The Alliance, which includes representatives of Benton, Madison and Washington counties, is an organization charged with protecting Beaver Lake and its tributaries in the same way the Northwest Arkansas Council member Jeff Koenig chats with Fayetteville resident Nancy McVey in the new concourse area at the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport. The new concourse, which opened in September, makes a nice first impression of the region when visitors arrive.

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Several water quality challenges remain however, and none are bigger than a decades-old dispute over the Illinois River, a 99-mile stream that flows from Arkansas into Oklahoma near Siloam Springs.

Localities in Northwest Arkansas have spent about $225 million in the past decade to remove phosphorus discharges. The state of Arkansas has passed laws to reduce phosphorus levels in streams; and companies and landowners have taken steps to ensure that phosphorus doesn’t move from pastures to streams after heavy rain. Nonetheless, Oklahoma remains concerned that more steps are needed to further reduce river phosphorus. Northwest Arkansas cities face the possibility of spending an additional $300 million to upgrade wastewater treatment plants to remove more phosphorus and even those costly improvements may not satisfy the concerns of Oklahoma.

**DIVERSITY GUIDE**

Accomplishment: The Diversity Team working under the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Community Vitality Work Group, is focused on creating an online guide to access information about diversity programs and services.

How it helps: It addresses the gap between perceived and actual diversity identified in the Northwest Arkansas Competitive Assessment by assembling information about the various diversity programs and services in a single place. It also allows corporate recruiters to access diversity information in a quick, efficient manner when cultivating relationships with recruits, and it gives new residents information they need to become involved with diversity programs.

What’s next: A timeline and plan of delivery will be created. The expected launch of the program is fall 2012.

**STOPOUTS**

Accomplishment: For an effort coordinated by the Educational Excellence Work Group, the region’s higher education institutions joined forces to establish a system targeting “stopouts” to help them finish college. “Stopouts” are people with some college credit but no degree.

How it helps: Statistics show about 22 percent of the region’s population falls into the stopout category. Companies need a workforce with certain educational and skill levels to be successful. The nation’s top regions typically have more than 30 percent of their residents with college degrees. The system should boost the number of college degree holders and lead to a more educated workforce.

What’s next: The region’s stopout system is expected to be operational by year’s end.
**Notable Initiatives**

**CAREER READINESS**

**Accomplishment:** A Workforce Development Team, part of the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group, has partnered with various human resources organizations to increase the number of residents in Benton and Washington counties completing Arkansas Career Readiness Certificates.

**How it helps:** The certificates provide assurance to company hiring managers that a certificate holder has basic workplace skills in Reading for Information, Locating Information and Applied Mathematics. Many Arkansas companies consider whether a job candidate has obtained a Career Readiness Certificate in their pre-employment screening process.

**What’s next:** A strategic plan of action will be completed and implemented with the help of educational institutions and the employer community.

**MAYORS TRIP TO D.C.**

**Accomplishment:** Six Northwest Arkansas mayors, along with representatives of the Northwest Arkansas Council and chambers of commerce, went to Washington, D.C. in October 2011 to discuss highway and water issues with representatives in Congress, along with state and federal officials.

**How it helps:** The contingent was able to convey the challenges faced by Northwest Arkansas when it comes to traffic congestion and water quality.

**What’s next:** The Council helps organize trips to Washington every two years so another regional trip is likely in 2013.

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**Northwest Arkansas Recognition**

**Northwest Arkansas** ranked 39th overall by Forbes magazine among 200 metropolitan statistical areas for “Best Places for Business and Careers.” (June 2013)

**Northwest Arkansas** ranked 26th on the Milken Institute’s list of Best Performing Cities in 2011. The region ranked 43rd in 2010. Northwest Arkansas was the top-ranked place in 2003. (The 2012 rankings will be announced in December)

**Siloa Springs** recognized as one of the 20 Best Small Towns in America by Smithsonian magazine. The list focused on cities with populations of less than 25,000 residents. (May 2012)

**Fayetteville** picked by U.S. News & World Report as one of the nation’s best “cheap mountain towns for retirees.” (April 2012)

**Bentonville** recognized by Travel & Leisure magazine as one of the 12 hottest travel destinations of 2012. The magazine said Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, which opened in November 2011, “may be enough to attract culture seekers from across the country, if not the world.” (January 2012)

Forbes/New Geography ranked Northwest Arkansas at No. 21 this year among medium-sized cities in its list of Best Cities for Job Growth.

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**Region’s Brand Strategy Conveys Northwest Arkansas Attributes**

The colorful row of arrows pointing skyward represents the region’s diversity, the potential for upward mobility and economic momentum. But if you look just right, the assembly of arrows also depicts some of the region’s iconic environmental assets: a mountain range and a row of trees.

Each of the attributes featured in the Northwest Arkansas region’s new logo was strategically designed to connect with each of the designated targets: business owners, families and working professionals.

The logo was designed with an intentional depth in messaging, embodying layers of communication with the goal of reaching a broader audience. The result is that each target sees and connects with the message they find most relevant and compelling, while being influenced by subsequent attributes.

“It’s open to interpretation,” said Scott Caldwell, vice president of marketing services for Crawford-Johnson Robinson Woods. “It makes you think. It makes you look a little further.”

A team from Procter & Gamble, CJRW and Mitchell Communications Group, which received early-on assistance from Rockfish Interactive and Saatchi & Saatchi X, led the effort to define a logo and tagline to help market Northwest Arkansas.

The logo and tagline — Great for Business, Great for Life. — will be used in marketing brochures, websites, advertising and publications. Working professionals pursuing jobs, company owners looking to expand or relocate, and families are its intended target audiences.

The logo and tagline capture and communicate the wealth of attributes Northwest Arkansas offers, which will help increase awareness about the region.

“Having a regional brand will accelerate our growth in the future,” said Elise Mitchell, president and CEO of Mitchell Communications. “It will allow us to compete more effectively with other regional economies, leveraging all of our assets under one brand. The new brand does a great job of sharing the message that the American Dream is alive and well in Northwest Arkansas.”

A volunteer team from Procter & Gamble kicked off the branding effort last summer by developing a list of key attributes that the brand should convey. The team, which included associate director of external relations Tim Marrin and brand manager Chetan Parekh, drew insights from longtime Northwest Arkansas residents as well as those who have recently moved to the region.

The group talked at one point about how Northwest Arkansas is a bit like “sushi and sweet tea,” suggesting that the region has an upscale, modern side while also preserving Southern warmth and friendliness. The message evolved into a new tagline, but the sentiments remained. Northwest Arkansas blends business opportunities, big-city sophistication, small-town friendliness and scenic natural beauty — that’s the message the branding campaign aims to deliver.

Five potential logos and taglines were presented. A group of national site selectors, some members of the Northwest Arkansas Council and 113 local professionals reviewed three of the marks. The consensus was that the selected logo and tagline clearly communicate that the region’s pro-business attitudes go hand in hand with the high quality of life.

Cynthia Puryear, a senior strategist with Mitchell, said she expects to see the logo and tagline become prominent in many efforts to tell people about Northwest Arkansas.

“If you are going to brand, it needs to be part of everything you are doing,” Puryear said. “If you really want to bring visibility, it needs to be on everything you touch and as visible as possible. It’s the voice of this whole campaign. You want to get people excited about it and keep them talking about it.”

Marrin said he’s satisfied with the logo and tagline that were developed, and the cooperation among those who helped with the project.

“This branding will help all of us communicate what Northwest Arkansas stands for in the hearts and minds of our region and what truly separates us from the competition,” he said.
Time ‘Most Influential’

Alice Walton, who was recognized as one of the Northwest Arkansas Council’s second honorary lifetime member in January, was selected by TIME in April as one of the magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World.

“TIME 100 is not a list of the most powerful people in the world, it’s not a list of the smartest people in the world, it’s a list of the most influential people in the world,” said TIME Managing Editor Richard Stengel. “They’re scientists, they’re thinkers, they’re philosophers, they’re leaders, they’re icons, they’re artists, they’re visionaries. People who are using their ideas, their visions, their actions to transform the world and have an effect on a multitude of people.”

Certainly, Alice Walton has a lifetime of positive impacts on Northwest Arkansas, but her latest project is most certainly the crown jewel.

In November 2011, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art opened in Bentonville, giving the Northwest Arkansas region its single most impressive project in at least 40 years.

“With Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, she has placed a daring bet that a small town can become a big art-world destination,” TIME’s art critic Richard Lacayo wrote. “We’re betting she’s right.” The museum has exceeded its own high expectations as attendance is far ahead of what it had predicted.

Only one other person — former President Bill Clinton — holds the distinction of being an honorary lifetime member of the Northwest Arkansas Council. Clinton was selected as an honorary lifetime member in 2010.

Notable Initiatives

REP. EMERSON VISIT

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council helped coordinate a visit from U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson of Missouri. The visit in January 2012 focused on paying for highway projects that go from Arkansas to Missouri, as well as conversations about banking and agricultural issues.

How it helps: Emerson’s visit gave her a clear view of how Arkansans view the Bella Vista bypass, Interstate 49 projects, as well as certain banking regulations and agricultural issues.

What’s next: The Northwest Arkansas Council has been called upon to host visits for members of Congress on occasion and that should continue.

RAZORBACK GREENWAY

Accomplishment: Construction of the Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway started in June 2012. The trail, funded by a federal grant and Walton Family Foundation gift, will be a 36-mile cycling and pedestrian path from Lake Bella Vista to Fayetteville.

How it helps: One of the strategic actions under Objective 4 of the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to “build the trails system detailed in the Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Plan, including the regional Razorback Greenway and projects in local communities.”

What’s next: Guided by the staff of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, the entire 36-mile path will be complete by the end of 2013.
G. David Gearhart, the 2011-2012 presiding co-chair, became chancellor at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville in 2008 after serving 10 years as a UA vice chancellor. Mr. Gearhart was the second university chancellor to serve as the Council’s presiding co-chair. The first was John White (2006-2007).

John Tyson, the 2012-2013 presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council, is chairman of the board at Tyson Foods. He was chairman and CEO of the company from 2001-06. Mr. Tyson also served as the Council’s presiding co-chair in 2007-2008.

Northwest Arkansas residents in March celebrated the opening of The Iceberg, a shared workspace for entrepreneurs in downtown Fayetteville. The facility will be home to the startups participating in the first ARK Challenge, an entrepreneur’s bootcamp that starts in August. [Photo by Todd Gill of Fayetteville Flyer]

### Officers of the Council

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<th>Position Held</th>
<th>Officer</th>
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<td>Presiding Co-Chair (2011-2012)</td>
<td>G. David Gearhart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presiding Co-Chair (2012-2013)</td>
<td>John Tyson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past Presiding Co-Chair (2010-2011)</td>
<td>Jim Walton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice Chair</td>
<td>Scott Van Lamingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary / Treasurer</td>
<td>Mark Simmons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chair Emeritus</td>
<td>Alice Walton</td>
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<td>Chair Emeritus</td>
<td>John Paul Hammerschmidt</td>
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### Members of the Executive Committee

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<th>Type of Appointment (term of appointment)</th>
<th>2011-2012 Executive Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Presiding Co-Chair (1-year term)</td>
<td>G. David Gearhart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice Chair (indefinite term)</td>
<td>Scott Van Lamingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary / Treasurer (indefinite term)</td>
<td>Mark Simmons</td>
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<tr>
<td>President of NWA Chambers of Commerce</td>
<td>Steve Clark (through January 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Chair’s Appointees (1-year term)</td>
<td>Greg Lee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #1 (3-year term)</td>
<td>Becky Paneitz (term expires in 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #2 (3-year term)</td>
<td>Cameron Smith (term expires in 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #3 (3-year term)</td>
<td>John Brown III (term expires in 2012)</td>
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The pages that follow provide you with a detailed update on our progress over the past year and a glimpse of what's to come. It was an honor to serve you as presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council. I look forward to working with our members, volunteers, and new presiding co-chair, John Tyson, as he guides the program in the new year.

Sincerely,

G. David Gearhart
Presiding Co-Chairman
Northwest Arkansas Council

Rick Allen, Allen Canning Company
Jay Allen, Jay Allen Communications
Don Bagcioglu, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Dick Barclay, Brall Barclay
Susan Barrett, Consultant
Rick Barrows, Multi-Craft Contractors, Inc.
Neff Basore, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Fadil Bayyari, Baysan Construction and Propeties
Rob Boaz, Carroll Electric Cooperative Corp.
Ray Bracy, Walmart Stores
Ed Bradberry, B & B Resources
Bill Bradley, Washington Regional Medical Center
Rosinal Breder, Sam’s Club
Mary Beth Brooks, Bank of Fayetteville
Tim Brown, McKeever Foods
John Brown III, Windgate Foundation
Frank Broyles, University of Arkansas
Raymond Burns, Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce
Wayne Callahan, H.J. Heinz Company
Steve Clark, Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
Ed Clifford, The Jones Trust
John Cooper III, Cooper Communities Inc.
Rich Davis, SourceGas Arkansas
Tommy Dewees, AEP SWEPCO (retired)
Lee DuChanois, APAC-Central, Inc.
Eric Edelstein, Rich Baseball Operations
John Eldred, Conner & Winters
Danny Ferguson, Southwestern Energy
Greg Fogle, Viabooks Construction Services
Cathy Foraker, AT&T
Alan Fortenberry, Beaver Water District
Wallace Fowler, Liberty Bank of Arkansas
G. David Gearhart, University of Arkansas
Stan Green, Lindsey Green Properties
Mary Ann Greenwood, Greenwood Gearhart Inc.
Scott Grigsby, Avest Bank Group
John Paul Hammerschmidt, former U.S. Congressman
Howard Hamilton, Liberty Bank of Arkansas
Gary Head, Signature Bank of Arkansas
Dan Hendrix, Arkansas World Trade Center
Tom Hopper, Crafton Tull & Associates
Dina Howell, Enderman & Associates
Darrell Hussler, Scott Van Laningham
Cathleen Johnson, Observer Media
Stephen Jones, Conner & Winters
James Keenan, The Raven Foundation
Jeff Koenig, Upchurch Electrical Supply Company
Peter Kohler, UAMS Northwest
Bob Lamb, Consultant

Peter Lane, Walton Artes Center
Randy Lawson, Laco Exploitation
Greg Lee, Tyson Foods (retired)
Jim Lindsey, Lindsey Management Co, Inc.
Jeff Long, University of Arkansas
Bill Mathews, McDonald’s of Northwest Arkansas
David Mayes, Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce
Tim McFarland, Elevate
Dan McKay, Northwest Health System
Jeff Milford, AEP SWEPCO
Elsie Mitchell, Mitchell Communications Group
Mike Moss, Moss Financial Group
Beverly Pate, Northwest Arkansas Community College
Gene Pharr, Arkansas Farm Bureau
Neal Pendergraft, Donald W. Reynolds Foundation
Buddy Philpot, Walton Family Foundation
Chip Pollard, John Brown University
Ken Reeves, Fedex Freight
John Roberts, J. B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc.
Reynie Rutledge, First Security Bank
Maggie Sans, Walmart Stores
Nick Santoleri, Rockline Industries
Archie Schaffer, Tyson Foods
Charles Scharf, Southwestern Energy
Schaumburger, Procter & Gamble
Paul Schroeder, Dillard's Department Stores
Anita Scism, Endeavor Foundation
Lee Scott, Walmart Stores
Mark Simmons, Simmons Foods
Cameron Smith, Cameron Smith Associates
Scott Street, Mercy Health Systems of Northwest Arkansas
Philip Taldo, Weichert Realtors, The Griffin Company
Jim Taylor, First Security Bank
Kirk Thompson, J. B. Hunt Transport Services
Kenny Tumble, Rockfish Interactive
Walter Turnbow, Beaver Water District (retired)
John Tyson, Tyson Foods
Scott Van Laningham, Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport
Eddie Vega, E2 Spanish Media
Jerry Vest, Regions Bank of NWA
Fred Vorsanger, UAMS AHEC Board
Alice Walton, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Jim Walton, Arvest Bank Group
Rob Walton, Walmart Stores
Perry Webb, Springdale Chamber of Commerce
John White, University of Arkansas
Wayne Woods, Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods
Charles Zimmerman, Walmart Stores
Randy Zook, Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce