Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council:

Greetings and welcome to the 2012-2013 Annual Meeting of the Northwest Arkansas Council. Because of your involvement and the willingness of so many organizations throughout our region to partner together, we are building a greater Northwest Arkansas.

This year brought us a great deal to celebrate. For the first time ever, Northwest Arkansas has three companies on the Fortune 500 list. Our region of just under 500,000 residents has more companies on the list than 23 states. The national accolades continued with Forbes.com and other place-rat ing organizations putting our metro area on several “best of” lists.

We also launched the first ever campaign to raise the awareness of Northwest Arkansas in the minds of site selectors and business decision-makers across the U.S. The majority of those surveyed know little about our great region. We’re seeing positive attention provided by national media and trade publications, and the effort started only a few months ago.

Finally, we continue to celebrate the region’s strong support for the November vote for infrastructure funding. The proposal put forth by the Arkansas Highway Commission contained several key regional projects for which the Council has advocated. Our team and others throughout the region helped ensure that voters in Northwest Arkansas fully understood all the benefits of the proposal. These much-needed highway improvements will begin within a few months thanks to the efforts in Northwest Arkansas and support of voters statewide.

It has been an honor to serve as President Co-Chairman of the Northwest Arkansas Council, and I know that the leadership of our organization will be in good hands as Mark Simmons transitions into the President-Coordinator role. Mark guided the efforts to develop a regional economic development strategy in 2010 and has done so much to build our company, our region and the Council as an organization.

Thanks to each of you for your support of the Northwest Arkansas Council and for the work you do to grow jobs and economic opportunities in Northwest Arkansas.

Sincerely,

John Tyson
Presiding Co-Chairman
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 1999-2006. Mr. Tyson also served as the Council’s presiding co-chair in 2007-2008.

Mark Simmons, the 2013-2014 presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council, is chairman of the board at Simmons Foods. He has served as chairman and CEO of the company since 1987. Mr. Simmons serves as Chairman of the steering committee for the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy.

Officers of the Council

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<td>Past Presiding Co-Chair (2011-2012)</td>
<td>G. David Gearhart</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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<td>John Tyson</td>
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<td>Mark Simmons</td>
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<td>President of NWA Chambers of Commerce</td>
<td>Perry Webb (through January 2014)</td>
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<td>Co-Chair’s Appointees (1-year term)</td>
<td>Rick Barrows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Representative #1 (3-year term)</td>
<td>Becky Paneitz (term expires in 2014)</td>
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Council’s members include region’s top business, civic leaders
Northwest Arkansas is on a good course for startups, and outsiders are starting to notice the region’s fast developing entrepreneurial support system.

Evidence of that arrived in a single week this spring when three out-of-state venture capital firms invested nearly $300 million in three Northwest Arkansas companies.

The region is also successfully building on the regional, national, and international success achieved by startup companies mentored by Carol Reeves in the University of Arkansas entrepreneurial entrepreneurship program. Reeves’ program is one of the most successful graduate launchpads for scalable ventures in the nation. This year, four of her teams received numerous business plan competition wins, and two—HomeDX and Picasonar—received early-stage investments.

The region as a whole is building the kind of economic assistance and mentorship that small company founders didn’t find in Northwest Arkansas just a few years ago.

Jeff Amerine, the University of Arkansas technology venture director and an Innovate Arkansas advisor, said the region is establishing programs, place-making, events, and networks that young companies need to grow. “They all address a key objective in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy that includes enhancing ‘Northwest Arkansas’ culture of entrepreneurship by expanding the scale and scope of small business support services in the region,” Amerine said.

The Northwest Arkansas Council and its members are playing important roles in all four critical areas that must be supported for new companies to develop successfully in the region, and they are being joined by at least 10 of TTAGG are examples of innovative companies gaining solid footholds in the region, and they are being joined by at least 10 of TTAGG.

The mission of the Northwest Arkansas Council expanded in 2011, but the annual goal of giving Council members a high return on their investments didn’t change at all.

The rate of return on the membership’s investments from July 1, 1990 through May 31, 2013 is more than 29,800 percent. For every dollar invested in the Council by members, the region has received at least $298.

This year’s math looks especially good, largely due to the November 2012 passage of Issue No. 1, a half-cent sales tax approved by voters that will lead to major highway and transportation improvements in Northwest Arkansas.

Northwest Arkansas Council’s Executive Committee when the organization started in 1990, Walton founded Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in 2011. She was named an honorary lifetime member in January 2012.

The Northwest Arkansas Council has three people who were selected as honorary lifetime members of the organization.

Bill Clinton

The first chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Executive Committee when the organization started in 1990, Walton founded Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in 2011. She was named an honorary lifetime member in January 2012.

John Paul Hammerschmidt

Hammerschmidt served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1967-1993 and became the Council’s chairman soon after leaving Congress. He served as the Council’s chair for 13 years. He became an honorary lifetime member in January 2013.

Life Members

Honorary Lifetime Members

Bill Clinton

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THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

Walmart

Sams Club

Tyson
**NW Arkansas Shines in All Sorts of Fortune 500 Ways**

The business community in Northwest Arkansas looks at the Fortune 500 list closely each year because there’s often a question as to whether Bentonville-based Walmart or J.B. Hunt Transport Services, the region’s new member of the Fortune 500, will consider these unique ways to look at Northwest Arkansas’ Fortune 500 companies:

- With three Fortune 500 companies, Northwest Arkansas has as many on the list as regions with far more people, including Kansas City, Indianapolis, Tampa, Miami, Columbus, Phoenix and Nashville. Bigger metropolitan areas, including Oklahoma City, Austin, Orlando, Tulsa, San Diego and Portland, have just two Fortune 500 companies.

- The annual revenue of the three Fortune 500 companies in Northwest Arkansas ($507 billion last year) was 25 percent of the $2.06 trillion in revenue for New York’s 84 companies on the Fortune 500 list.

- Just five regions — New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Houston and Dallas — have more revenue produced by their Fortune 500 companies. All five regions have at least 6 million residents, meaning they are all at least 12 times larger than Northwest Arkansas.

- Tyson Foods would be the largest Fortune 500 company if it were located in larger metropolitan areas, including Denver, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Phoenix.

- The revenue of Walmart, Tyson Foods and J.B. Hunt exceeds the revenue of the 21 Fortune 500 companies in Los Angeles, the 38 in Washington, D.C., the 17 in Minneapolis and the 15 in Atlanta.

**Notable Initiatives**

**RAZORBACK GREENWAY**

Accomplishment: Construction on the Northwest Arkansas Razorback Greenway started in June 2012 and now major sections of the trail are complete in Benton County. 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, which includes the regional Razorback Greenway and projects and local communities.”

What’s next: Guided by the staff of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, the entire path remains on schedule to be complete by the end of 2013. Cities, particularly Fayetteville, continue to make expansions to their own trail systems to connect to the greenway’s spine.

**NW ARKANSAS REPORT CARD**

Accomplishment: An education report card published by the Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, in partnership with the Northwest Arkansas Council, shows students in Northwest Arkansas outperform their peers elsewhere in Arkansas. The 2012 Northwest Arkansas Report Card shows public schools in Benton and Washington counties are outstanding in several areas when compared to other districts statewide. Among the report’s findings is that 13 of 17 school districts had a higher National Percentile Ranking (NPR) on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), which helps to compare students and districts across state lines, than the state as a whole.

How it helps: The report, which includes information about secondary and higher education, provides a single place for people to learn about the region’s outstanding schools.

What’s next: The report, which was published in December, is due to come out later this year.
Arkansas rate poorly in measures of wellness when compared to their peers across the nation, but EnergizeNWA has a goal to change that over the long term through a series of healthy living recommendations and actions.

EnergizeNWA launched the healthy living effort in January with a summit focused on providing Northwest Arkansas residents with better access to healthy food and physical activity.

“As someone who has been involved in the healthy food and healthy lifestyles conversation for over a decade, I know we are at a tipping point in our region and EnergizeNWA has the potential to bring together the voices and resources to change our region for the better, for both today’s citizens and for the generations to come,” said Margie Aklesbroek, a food policy and small business attorney who’s a volunteer on the EnergizeNWA Advisory Board.

The accomplishments of EnergizeNWA align with the goals identified in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Regional Strategy, a blueprint for regional success made public in 2011.

Commissioned by the Northwest Arkansas Council, the strategy outlines 16 objectives and more than 50 strategic actions to be pursued over a five-year period. One of the strategic actions is to “develop a healthy lifestyle and physical activity initiative — Energize Northwest Arkansas — that supports child and adult fitness and wellness.”

Endeavor Foundation’s staff began branding the work as EnergizeNWA, and is engaging and connecting key partners to accomplish some of the community vitality goals in the strategy, Jill Kaplan, Endeavor’s vice president for strategy and communications, said the EnergizeNWA Summit, which included presentations by the state’s surgeon general and national leaders in healthy living initiatives, set out to build excitement about the healthy and active living lifestyle that’s possible in Northwest Arkansas.

EnergizeNWA Helps Create Jobs, Jobs and economic opportunity, in turn, fosters population growth that, ultimately, leads back to the need for more infrastructure. It is a constant battle. But it is a constant battle, forward, not backward.

“Arkansas residents made a decision that they want a certain quality of life. Taking on some additional taxes to ensure they have less roadway congestion and more reliable trips will help them to maintain that quality of life.”

A $30 million federal grant helped fund the start of the U.S. 71 Bypass of Bella Vista, and new Issue No. 1 money will build a two-lane version of what will eventually be a four-lane, 14-mile highway around Bella Vista. Five additional bypass miles are planned in Missouri.

The Bella Vista Bypass will be one of the first projects in the state funded by Issue No. 1, and the portion of the work related to Issue No. 1 should start in 2014.

The widening of Interstate 40 is expected to be among the first Issue No. 1 projects too. Much of that work is expected to occur in 2015.

The state began collecting the sales tax on June 1 this year, and local governments expect to receive the first payments in the fall. Benton and Washington counties and the cities of Fayetteville, Rogers and Springdale are expected to receive $1 million or more in additional annual revenue. That’ll be the case for the next 10 years. The sales tax is scheduled to expire in 2033.

What’s next: Work will focus on marketing and promoting the site.
Of a common agenda incorporating the best ways to increase access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities.

‘We’re excited to report we met these goals, and now the real work of bringing ideas to action will begin,” Kaplan said.

Tracy Fox, policy advisor to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and president of Food Nutrition & Policy Consultants, shared best practices from other communities when she spoke at the January summit in Northwest Arkansas.

“EnergizeNWA has the potential to influence policy and infrastructure changes that affect every day decisions impacting our health, such as the decision to walk our kids to school because there’s a safe route to get there, or to purchase fresh produce at a local market because it’s available and affordable,” Fox said. “We’ve seen significant results in other communities across the country that have embraced a culture and environment supportive of a healthy lifestyle. Given the severity of the health challenges facing Arkansas, the diversity that assembled for the summit, and resources like the Razorback Regional Research Center, and an abundance of farm fresh produce, I’m excited to see the possible becoming a reality in Northwest Arkansas.”

At the summit, Endeavor Foundation announced it would provide $400,000 in grants later this year to support community-led programs, policies and infrastructure that increase access to healthy eating and active living opportunities for Northwest Arkansas residents.

“We are fortunate here in Arkansas that policymakers and many others are willing to work together on effective solutions,” Arkansas Surgeon General Joe Thompson told summit attendees. “Outside-the-box policies and changes in the way we design our communities are critical to making healthy lifestyles accessible. The only way to change behavior and improve health is to make the changes easy and part of everyday life.”

David Wright, Bentonville’s Parks and Recreation Department director, said EnergizeNWA brings a regional approach to a “Get Out and Play” effort started a couple of years ago in his community.

“It’s get out and run and swim and bike,” Wright said. “We encourage our citizens to be as healthy as we can be, and it’s similar to the Energize movement.”

“The fact that [healthy living is a] regional approach becomes a message that all the major cities begin to sing. Maybe Energize is the umbrella that engulfs us all. The importance of making the healthy choice the easy choice becomes a message to Northwest Arkansas residents rather than just to Springdale or Bentonville or Rogers.”

Within days of the summit, EnergizeNWA started the website: EnergizeNWA.org, a portal to help people determine where and how to get active and eat healthy in the region.

In addition to awareness created by the website, an interactive, regional map is being developed by the Center for Applied Spatial Technologies at the University of Arkansas, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission and Alta/ Greenways with oversight and support from Endeavor Foundation.

As a community foundation, Endeavor’s primary role in advancing EnergizeNWA will be centered on grant making that results from the request process with the $400,000 funding announcement at the summit.

Endeavor is excited to invest in what can be a long-term culture shift that supports a healthy future for everyone in Northwest Arkansas,” said Endeavor Foundation CEO Anita Scimm.
Notable Initiatives

REGIONAL BRAND

Accomplishment: Four advertising and public relations firms worked with Procter & Gamble to develop a regional brand made public in July 2012. Since that time, Council staff has worked with firms to show how Northwest Arkansas is “Great for Business. Great for Life.”

How it helps: Market Street Services, the company that helped create the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy, determined Northwest Arkansas lacked a brand to promote the region. Objective 8 of the strategy recommends a regional brand to “attract new business investment by more effectively marketing the region to target audiences.”

What’s next: The region’s brand — “Great for Business. Great for Life” — is being used in the marketing materials shared with companies interested in expanding, site selectors who help companies decide where to expand, and individuals interested in advancing their career who are considering jobs in Arkansas.

CAREER READINESS

Accomplishment: A Workforce Development Team, part of the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group, has worked with members of the Governor’s workforce cabinet and legislators to develop a plan for state-sponsored job training.

How it helps: The program would allow community colleges to issue bonds for employee training with companies currently expanding companies. The amount of the bonds issued would be established by the contracts between the community college and companies receiving the service.

What’s next: The Council will work with partners to advocate for workforce program funding.

Business Retention: Companies Plan to Provide 965 Jobs, Increase Payroll

The first-year results from the Northwest Arkansas Business Retention and Expansion program arrived earlier this year, showing the region’s companies have plans to increase their presence here. The Northwest Arkansas Council worked with five area chambers of commerce to establish the BRE program, collecting data from 459 companies in Benton and Washington counties. They met the goal of contacting 450 companies in 2012 and are on course to contact 450 companies again in 2013.

From large manufacturing operations to small retail outlets, restaurants and banks, Northwest Arkansas businesses expressed optimism about their prospects and were pleased to visit with chamber outreach specialists about their operations.

Significant findings in the BRE research in Benton and Washington counties included:

• Businesses plan to hire 965 new employees in the next three years.
• Businesses plan to invest $808 million in expansions in the next three years.
• Northwest Arkansas companies of all sizes are selling more often to international customers.
• Businesses identified three times as many “community strengths” as “community weaknesses” when asked about Northwest Arkansas.
• The respondents gave Northwest Arkansas high marks for business climate, quality of life, and education.
• The respondents identified infrastructure and the availability of skilled labor as top concerns.

The BRE program allows outreach specialists to conduct structured, confidential, face-to-face interviews with managers, executives and owners of area businesses. The responses are entered into the Synchronist Business Information System database maintained by the Northwest Arkansas Council. The Synchronist database allows the Council and outreach specialists to closely track the information provided by the companies and periodically review the feedback.

“We want to achieve two objectives with the BRE program,” said Mike Harvey, the Northwest Arkansas Council’s chief operating officer. “First, we want to provide assistance to individual companies as needed. Second, we want to identify data in the aggregate to identify negative trends. If those negative trends are something we can mitigate, we improve the region’s business climate for everyone.”

Another benefit to the BRE program is that it builds on the strong relationships our chambers of commerce have with the businesses in their communities. It’s a way to remind businesses that the chambers and the Northwest Arkansas Council want to help make businesses of all sizes more successful.”

The outreach specialists, who work for the chambers of commerce in Bentonville/
Graduate NWA

New Program Sets Out to Increase College Degrees

If Northwest Arkansas leaders want the region to remain among the nation’s economic elite, Northwest Arkansas will need to increase its supply of college graduates to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy.

That’s the primary reason the Northwest Arkansas Council is working with six colleges and universities on Graduate NWA, a program established to encourage adults with some college credit to return to school and complete their degree. The program, which includes a website as well as a marketing campaign to ensure that people age 25 or older understand the value of a college degree, was launched in September.

Graduate NWA first included five schools: the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Northwest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville, Northwest Technical Institute in Springdale, John Brown University in Siloam Springs and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences-Northwest in Fayetteville. The University of Arkansas – Fort Smith joined in April.

Research shows individuals with college degrees are in a better position than those without degrees to earn higher incomes. More degree holders will make Northwest Arkansas more attractive to expanding and relocating companies.

“We need to increase the competitiveness of our region by increasing the number of people who’ve advanced their education beyond high school,” said John Brown III, the chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group. “To attract high-quality, high-wage jobs, we must demonstrate to companies that we can provide the workforce they need to be successful.”

The website (www.GraduateNWA.com) is the gateway to the regionwide effort. It provides information to adults interested in returning to school, including resources for them to learn more about paying for college, employers’ tuition assistance programs, and juggling the responsibilities of family and work while in school. It guides visitors to a person at each of the partner schools who can answer questions specific to each individual’s situation.

The Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Windgate Foundation, Northwest Arkansas Council and the chambers of commerce in Bentonville/Bella Vista, Fayetteville, Rogers-Lowell, Siloam Springs and Springdale are assisting in the effort.

Last year, the state Higher Education Department started Come Back 2 Go Forward, a program to help people complete degrees. “Graduate NWA and Come Back 2 Go Forward provide excellent opportunities to improve Arkansas and also help us move closer to Gov. Mike Beebe’s goal of doubling the number of degrees by 2015,” ADHE interim director Shane Broadway said last year. “We know 22 percent of people have some college credit, but they don’t have degrees. Having people complete college creates a sense of accomplishment in people and enables degree recipients to earn a better living.”

A goal in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy was to increase the percentage of residents with degrees so the region “can more effectively compete for 21st Century jobs.”

In April 2010, Market Street Services, the Atlanta firm that put together the strategy, completed a competitive assessment. A finding in the assessment was that the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area trailed peer regions in bachelor and associate degrees.

Bella Vista, Fayetteville, Rogers-Lowell, Siloam Springs and Springdale, are helping solve very specific problems as they make their rounds collecting data from businesses.

The Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce took several actions after meetings with businesses last year, said Chung Tan, the chamber’s economic development director.

Among the biggest steps was an effort to assist businesses in the Fayetteville Industrial Park after learning about their needs. The businesses were interested in street lights, and 29 were installed. They wanted sidewalks, and the chamber of commerce worked with the city to ensure that they are built later this year. The BREP interaction with the businesses in the park led to the city’s mayor and chamber president meeting regularly with the park’s tenants.

The Fayetteville chamber also helped a day-care business that was having difficulty attracting customers by sending an email blast out about the business to its members. That effort helped the day-care business attract new customers.

Chamber of commerce employees in Rogers and Springdale worked with businesses already in their communities needing larger facilities. Those businesses are now in larger buildings that better service their needs.

More unique was the help Tom Ginn provided to a Bentonville company with about 200 employees. Ginn, the vice president of economic development at the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce, learned that the company’s employees were driving to Little Rock just about every week to renew driver’s licenses because they were in the U.S. on H-1B visas. Ginn convinced the state to train an employee in a Bentonville office to handle those renewals, eliminating the more-than-three-hour drive to Little Rock.

“It certainly saved the company travel time, employee time and lost production,” Ginn said. “It also added a positive to their ability to recruit new employees to Bentonville.”

Companies cited positive factors 3-to-1 when selecting the region’s strengths and weaknesses. Business climate, quality of life, and the regional economy were cited as the region’s strongest attributes. Infrastructure, skilled labor, business climate topped the charts as challenges.
The annual meeting of the Northwest Arkansas Council marks the halfway point toward achieving 16 objectives and dozens of strategic actions described in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy. That five-year strategy guides much of the work taken on by Council staff, its partners and its widespread network of volunteers who contribute hundreds of hours each year toward achieving the regional goals.

“We made a lot of progress, but I’m not the definitive opinion,” said Mark Simmons, chairman of the steering committee that worked with a consultant to establish the regional objectives and strategic actions. “We do need to reconvene the people who worked on the strategic plan and measure how we are doing. We need to assess and revise the plan as necessary.”

That re-evaluation and measuring will occur in the next few months, said Simmons, who will be the Council’s presiding co-chairman in 2013-2014.

Ted Abernathy, who didn’t know the Council planned an assessment of how the strategic plan is going at the midway point, suggested in an email that such a review is important. Abernathy is executive director of the Southern Growth Policies Board, and he assisted the Northwest Arkansas Council and the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce’s Fifty for the Future organization in their discussions last year about ways the two organizations can collaborate.

“Fully implementing plans are rarer than you might think,” Abernathy wrote. “The ones on the shelves surely outnumber those that have checked every box. A mid-plan check-in and passionate ‘and miles to go before we sleep’ get-together always helps.”

Each of the councils four volunteer work groups — community vitality, economic development, educational excellence and infrastructure — can report a level of success toward achieving their specific goals. They are determined to check every box. Among the most notable successes were:

- BRL. The Council worked with five chambers of commerce to establish a Business Retention and Expansion program. First-year results showed companies like being in Northwest Arkansas, and a significant portion plan to expand gradually in the region over the next three years.
- EnergyNWA. The Endeavor Foundation, one of the Council’s partners, launched a healthy living initiative that should improve the lives of Northwest Arkansas residents.
- Education programs. The Council worked with partners to start a Career Coaches (now called Razor COACH) program focused on helping at-risk high school students. It also created Graduate NWA, a program to encourage nontraditional students to finish college, and Reach Out NWA, a program to encourage high school dropouts to return to class.
- Regional brand. The Council in mid-2012 announced its new brand: “Great Business. Great for Life.” The message and a regional logo are being used to tell people and companies across the nation about Northwest Arkansas.
- Highway upgrades. The Council worked closely with Move Arkansas Forward and the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department to ensure that voters knew the benefits of Issue No. 1, a huge highway improvement ballot measure approved by voters in November. Its passage will mean Interstate 49 will be widened to six lanes and major portions of the U.S. 71 Bypass of Bella Vista and the U.S. 412 Bypass of Springdale will be built.
- Entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Council has supported partners to develop and expand efforts to assist new companies in the region. The Ark Challenge, a 14-week boot camp for entrepreneurs, finished its first year in 2012. The 2013 class was announced earlier this month. Meanwhile, efforts to provide capital investments to new companies so they can expand are finding success in the region. The Council, its partners and volunteers are pursuing four dozen other strategic actions outlined in the regional strategy.

“We knew we could only tackle so much at once and some of it had to be delayed,” Simmons said. “We also need to know what are new things we should consider doing too.”

The Council’s executive committee at the request of long-time Council member Tom Hopper added one new strategic action in April. That action has Council staff and a subcommittee initiating regional meetings focused on the possibility of compressed natural gas being made available in Northwest Arkansas.

All 55 strategic actions are being pursued simultaneously. Some of the strategic actions, such as establishing a regional brand and creating the Graduate NWA program, will require constant attention for many years by the Council or one of its partners.

By the end of 2012, the Council was pursuing 51 of the original 54 strategic actions. The last three strategic actions were started earlier this year.

“We can report that all 55 actions are in the works as we reach the halfway point of the strategy,” said Council President and CEO Mike Malone. “We’re on a good course, but that’s not to suggest we’re about to finish. Some actions take months and some take years. There’s lots of work to be done.”