

Northwest Arkansas Council



GREAT FOR BUSINESS. GREAT FOR LIFE.



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www.nwacouncil.org

2012-2013 Annual Report



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June 26, 2013

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-rating 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 Presiding 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 Presiding Co-Chairman role. Mark guided the efforts to develop a regional economic development strategy in 2010 and has done so much to build his 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



Members

Jay Allen, Jay Allen Communications
Rick Allen, Allen Canning Company
Don Bacigalupi, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Dick Barclay, Beall Barclay
Susan Barrett, Consultant
Rick Barrows, Multi-Craft Contractors, Inc.
Neff Basore, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Fadil Bayyari, Bayyari Construction and Properties
Rob Boaz, Carroll Electric Cooperative Corp.
Ed Bradberry, B & B Resources
Bill Bradley, Washington Regional Medical Center
Rosalind Brewer, Sam's Club
Mary Beth Brooks, Bank of Fayetteville
Tim Broughton, McKee 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.
Dana Davis, Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce
Rich Davis, SourceGas Arkansas
Tommy Deweese, AEP SWEPCO (retired)
Lee DuChanois, APAC-Central, Inc.
Eric Edelstein, Rich Baseball Operations
John Elrod, Conner & Winters
Danny Ferguson, Southwestern Energy
Greg Fogle, Nabholz Construction Services
Cathy Foraker, AT&T
Alan Fortenberry, Beaver Water District
Wallace Fowler, Liberty Bank of Arkansas
Ed Fryar, Ozark Mountain Poultry
G. David Gearhart, University of Arkansas
Stan Green, Lindsey Green Properties
Mary Ann Greenwood, Greenwood Gearhart Inc.
Scott Grigsby, Arvest 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, Saatchi & Saatchi X
Dennis Hunt, Stephens
Walter Hussman, WEHCO Media Inc.
Mitchell Johnson, Ozark Electric Cooperative Corp.
Eli Jones, University of Arkansas
Robert Jones III, Conner & Winters
James Keenan, The Raven Foundation
Jeff Koenig, Upchurch Electrical Supply Company
Peter Kohler, UAMS Northwest
Bob Lamb, Consultant

Peter Lane, Walton Arts Center
Randy Laney, Empire District Electric Co.
Randy Lawson, Lawco Exploration
Greg Lee, Tyson Foods (retired)
Jim Lindsey, Lindsey Management Co., Inc.
Jeff Long, University of Arkansas
Bill Mathews, McDonalds of Northwest Arkansas
David Matthews, Matthews, Campbell, Rhoads, McClure & Thompson
Wayne Mays, Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce
Tim McFarland, Elevate
Dan McKay, Northwest Health System
Jeff Milford, AEP SWEPCO
Elise Mitchell, Mitchell Communications Group
Mike Moss, Moss Financial Group
Becky Paneitz, NorthWest Arkansas Community College
Neal Pendergraft, Donald W. Reynolds Foundation
Gene Pharr, Arkansas Farm Bureau
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 Scharlau, Southwestern Energy
Jeff Schomburger, Procter & Gamble
Anita Scism, Endeavor Foundation
Lee Scott, Walmart Stores
Mark Simmons, Simmons Foods
Steve Stafford, 1st National Bank of Green Forest
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 Tomlin, Rockfish Interactive
Walter Turnbow, Beaver Water District (retired)
John Tyson, Tyson Foods
Scott Van Laningham, Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport
Eddie Vega, EZ 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
Dean Worley, Dillard's Department Stores
Charles Zimmerman, Walmart Stores
Randy Zook, Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce



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

| Position Held | Officer |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Presiding Co-Chair (2012-2013) | John Tyson |
| Presiding Co-Chair (2013-2014) | Mark Simmons |
| Past Presiding Co-Chair (2011-2012) | G. David Gearhart |
| Vice Chair | Scott Van Laningham |
| Secretary / Treasurer | Mark Simmons |
| Chair Emeritus | Alice Walton |
| Chair Emeritus | John Paul Hammerschmidt |

Members of the Executive Committee

| Type of Appointment (term of appointment) | 2012-2013 Executive Committee |
|---|---|
| Presiding Co-Chair (1-year term) | John Tyson |
| Vice Chair (indefinite term) | Scott Van Laningham |
| Secretary / Treasurer (indefinite term) | Mark Simmons |
| President of NWA Chambers of Commerce | Perry Webb (through January 2014) |
| Co-Chair's Appointees (1-year term) | Rick Barrows Cathy Foraker |
| Nominating Committee Representative #1 (3-year term) | Becky Paneitz (term expires in 2014) |
| Nominating Committee Representative #2 (3-year term) | Cameron Smith (term expires in 2013) |
| Nominating Committee Representative #3 (3-year term) | Chip Pollard (term expires in 2015) |



The World Trade Center Arkansas is located in a thriving retail area west of Interstate 540 in Rogers. Opened in 2007, the center helps Arkansas companies do business around the globe.

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Northwest Arkansas Creates Excellent Environment for New, Rising Companies

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 \$100 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 graduate 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 Picasolar — 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 adviser, 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.

Acumen Brands, NanoMech, Collective Bias, Field Agent, and TTAGG are examples of innovative companies gaining solid footholds in the region, and they are being joined by at least 10 of the 15 companies that completed The ARK Challenge last year.

MineWhat, Truckily and Btiques, participants in the first of two, 14-week entrepreneurial boot camps and competitions, are excellent examples of new companies establishing operations in Northwest Arkansas after participating in The ARK Challenge boot camp, said ARK Challenge Director Jeannette Balleza Collins. The business accelerator's primary purpose is to provide

mentoring and expertise to help entrepreneurs with new technology companies that support retail, logistics, and food processing become successful long-term businesses.

"When we looked at our two-year proposal, part of our proposal was to create 60 jobs," said Balleza Collins, who said The ARK Challenge is on course to meet the 60-job goal. "We're continuing to create these jobs. We count that as a win. People have options to come here from other places, and they are staying here because they see opportunities."

Members of the second ARK Challenge class were announced this month. The 10 teams selected will present at Demo Day on Sept. 5 where they'll describe what they accomplished, show off their work to potential investors, and try to win one of the two

\$150,000 top prizes, Balleza Collins said.

In addition to The ARK Challenge, there's also business expansion and growth assistance coming from Innovate Arkansas, an Arkansas Economic Development Commission-supported effort to assist early-stage, technology-based companies. Since starting five years ago, Innovate Arkansas has assisted about 100 clients, supporting \$193 million in private and public investment. Those clients include

Northwest Arkansas companies such as TTAGG, CrossFleet, Acumen Brands, Field Agent, BlueInGreen, NextGen Illumination, Red Clay Design, Silicon Solar Solutions, BiologicsMD, Boston Mountain Biotech and all of The ARK Challenge participants.

The initial place-making goal was achieved by the Northwest Arkansas Entrepreneurship Alliance with the 2011 opening of The Iceberg, a low-cost, co-working facility near Dickson Street in Fayetteville where The ARK Challenge is based. There is presently an effort to create a similar facility in Bentonville.

The Natural State Angel Association was the first formal angel network in Northwest Arkansas when it formed in 2011. It has grown to 150 members, and those members are invited to attend bi-monthly meetings where they see presentations and consider local companies as investment possibilities. During this year's first four months, members invested \$1 million in projects.

"The members are passionate about supporting early-stage companies," Amerine said.



The ARK Challenge Demo Day at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in December 2012 provided potential investors and community leaders their first chance to see the work of the teams that participated in the 14-week program.



Honorary Lifetime Members

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



Bill Clinton

The Arkansas governor was elected U.S. president in 1992 and served two terms. In 2010, former President Clinton was named the Council's first honorary lifetime member.



Alice Walton

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 become 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.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS



A Dollar Invested is Worth \$298 to Region

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.

The Council often looks at member investment in the organization compared to the money the region receives to improve highways, water systems, universities and other key parts of the Northwest Arkansas community as a way to evaluate impact.

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, 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 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.



Despite having far fewer **Fortune 500 companies** than larger metros, Northwest Arkansas is one of just 11 regions in the U.S. where the revenue of Fortune 500 companies exceeds \$300 billion annually. The number of Fortune 500 companies in each region is indicated.

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 Irving, Texas-based Exxon Mobil will hold the No. 1 position.

Walmart Stores came out on top this year. Exxon Mobil held the top spot last year.

However, “Who’s No. 1?” is the easy, quick way to evaluate the Fortune 500 list. A deeper look at the Fortune 500 shows Northwest Arkansas’ economic strength and just how important the largest companies are to the regions’ amazing success.

Northwest Arkansas has No. 1 Walmart, No. 93 Tyson Foods and No. 486 J.B. Hunt Transport Services, the region’s new member of the Fortune 500. But 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, Louisville and Memphis. 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 18 in Washington, D.C., the 17 in Minneapolis and the 15 in Atlanta.

Rick West, co-founder and CEO of Field Agent in Fayetteville, said Northwest Arkansas provided the perfect setting for his company that launched in 2010. The mobile research and retail data collection company, which has 25 full-time equivalent employees, has added 10 workers in the past six months. The company’s customers include Walmart, Target, Walgreens, Sam’s Club, Johnson & Johnson, and Procter & Gamble.

“We knew the supplier community was going to bring great people to Northwest Arkansas,” West said. “We think those companies bring the best and the brightest, and Northwest Arkansas is a great feeding spot for us. You have tremendous access to entrepreneurs and great thinkers. I can pick up the phone and talk to the people I need to reach.”

Meanwhile, those interested in assisting entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs are able to take part in business-idea events that include “Gone in 60 Seconds,” an elevator pitch contest launched in 2011. While the first contest was in Fayetteville, “Gone in 60 Seconds” events have occurred in Rogers, El Dorado, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Conway, Jonesboro and even in Canada under the Pitch101 banner. The event has connected startup founders, creative, techies, investors, and service providers and serves as a feeder to The ARK, Innovate Arkansas, Natural State Angel Association and the other funds around the state.

Other events are bringing business people together so they can build their knowledge. Groups hosting regular events include Creatives United, Tech Drinks and the Northwest Arkansas Entrepreneurial Alliance.

The availability of local talent creating exciting new companies has bred interest in generating funding sources beyond the angel level of investing. Discussions are underway for the creation of a regional venture capital (VC) fund to take advantage of the deal flow in this area. The hurdles to creating VC funds may be high, but the advantages of a local fund to deploy significant levels of risk capital are strong motivators to investors in Northwest Arkansas. The entrepreneurial eco-system has developed to the point that the time is right for a regional VC fund.

“There has never been a more dynamic, exciting time in Northwest Arkansas for new business creation as evidenced by over \$100 million in out-of-state venture finance for Arkansas startups in the past year,” Amerine said. “Through the will and belief of the startup founders, the support of the Northwest Arkansas Council, local business leaders, the University of Arkansas, Innovate Arkansas and the state, this region is poised for a startup-led renaissance that will continue to make Northwest Arkansas one of the best places to live and work in the country.”

DCI, Council Work to Move Region from ‘Blank Slate’

Ensuring that site selectors and business decision makers know about Northwest Arkansas is the central part of a targeted marketing campaign being pursued by the Northwest Arkansas Council.

Working with New York-based Development Counsellors International (DCI), a survey commissioned by the Council last year showed Northwest Arkansas is a “blank slate” in the eyes of site selectors. The site selectors, who help companies evaluate places for possible expansions, indicated they don’t have a positive or negative perception of Northwest Arkansas. Instead, they have no perception at all, said Andy Levine, DCI’s president and chief creative officer.

Now, the Council and DCI are making sure site selectors and business decision makers know Northwest Arkansas’ best attributes.

Additionally, DCI is reaching out to national media outlets, telling about specific projects and companies in Northwest Arkansas that would be good story topics.

“Northwest Arkansas is currently not top of mind when site selectors research locations for their clients, media look for places to write stories, or companies look to relocate or expand,” Levine said. “However, when information and facts about the region are shared, key influencers are intrigued and want to learn more.”

Among the steps was a May trip to New York where site selectors, company executives and some of the nation’s largest media outlets met with DCI’s staff and Mike Harvey, the Council’s chief operating officer.

“Mike made a point of communicating with everyone he met that the region knows what it’s good at and what it is not,” Levine said. “Many site selectors who met with Mike said that focus on areas where the region can be competitive is by and far the way to go.”

DCI has drawn media attention to Northwest Arkansas by engaging news reporters, editors and producers who work for major newspapers and magazines, national television networks, radio networks, news websites and blogs. The region in the past five months has received positive national exposure in publications such as Upstart Business Journal, Solar Today, AltEnergyMag and Startup 50. Stories in larger publications are scheduled for later this year.

“Going from zero awareness to high-level positive awareness will take time, and we acknowledge the challenge of having to build Northwest Arkansas’ position from the ground up,” Levine said. “We do think the region is moving in the right direction and is in position to promote Northwest Arkansas’ key attributes and strengths.”

Harvey said trips later this year to Kansas City, Dallas, Chicago and California present opportunities to share Northwest Arkansas’ story.

“I’ve worked in economic development for 18 years, and I’ve never encountered this level of market unfamiliarity,” Harvey said. “It’s a great opportunity, but it’ll require an aggressive, sustained ground game to make an impression on our audiences. We have a great story to tell, and we’re implementing a plan to do that in the most effective manner.”

“When information and facts about the region are shared, key influencers are intrigued and want to learn more.”

Andy Levine, DCI

Notable Initiatives

Volunteer work groups and the staffs of the Northwest Arkansas Council, Endeavor Foundation and the five largest Northwest Arkansas chambers of commerce pursue an impressive list of projects, completing some entirely and establishing others for long-term success. A synopsis of some of those projects starts here and continues throughout this report.

LEADERSHIP/VOLUNTEER FAIR

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Leadership Council held the first regional volunteer fair in May 2012 in Rogers, bringing more than 70 nonprofit organizations together to promote their organizations. The goal was to help working professionals identify organizations they may be able to assist with their knowledge and expertise. Meanwhile, two board service training programs offered through Emerging Leaders occurred this year, and there were 48 total participants.

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 evaluated the first volunteer fair and will make adjustments for a second fair, which includes holding it in the fall. A third program Emerging Leaders board service training event is also planned for the fall. Additionally, there are efforts to engage working professionals via social networking opportunities, such as the May 30 event called Thursday Squared, a downtown dining event in Bentonville. Similar networking events are planned later this year in Springdale and Fayetteville. New attention later this year will be put toward developing a mentoring and leadership circle for mid-level and senior company executives.



EnergizeNWA



Dr. John Agwunobi, Walmart Stores' president of health and wellness and a former U.S. assistant secretary for health, was the keynote speaker at the EnergizeNWA Summit, a January event that launched a regional effort to improve access to healthy food and physical activity.

EnergizeNWA Sets Out to Make Healthy Choice into Easy Choice

Arkansans 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 decade, I know we are really at a tipping point in our region and Energize has the potential to bring together the voices and resources to change our region for the better, both for today's citizens and for the generations to come,” said Margie Alsbrook, 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, catalyze a regional conversation and facilitate the development

unprecedented,” said Craig Douglass, who led the Move Arkansas Forward program.

“We are not aware of any statewide issue campaign that has enjoyed the level of active and financial investment as was provided to Move Arkansas Forward by the Northwest Arkansas Council and the interests it represents.

“Not only did the financial commitment allow targeted campaign media primarily in Benton, Crawford, Sebastian and Washington counties, it freed up funds contributed by others to be distributed more efficiently statewide. Further, the support of Northwest Arkansas helped promote the fact that Issue No. 1 was bi-partisan, appealing to Republicans and Democrats. The collaboration with the Northwest Arkansas Council allowed Move Arkansas Forward to execute a winning campaign.”

The Council also commissioned primary research in mid-2012 that showed how much Northwest Arkansas needs major highway improvements, and the research was shared with the public last fall. The research by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute showed traffic congestion costs Northwest Arkansas \$103 million annually. An annual cost had not been assigned to the region's congestion prior to the TTI research.

To put that severe congestion in perspective, some larger regions have traffic congestion that costs about \$60 million annually. Four of the highways studied in Northwest Arkansas would rank in the Texas 100, a measure of that state's most congested roads. Far larger Texas metro areas, including El Paso and McAllen, didn't have as many highways in the Texas 100.

“Investment in roadway infrastructure to achieve safe, fast, and reliable travel is about creating economic growth and opportunity,” said David Schrank, one of the transportation institute traffic researchers who evaluated conditions in Northwest Arkansas. “The economic success fostered by sound roadway infrastructure investment

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 this quality of life.”

A \$10 million federal grant helped fund the start of the U.S. 71 Bypass of Bella Vista and now Issue No. 1 money will build a two-lane version of what will eventually be a



Fayetteville Mayor **Lioneld Jordan** and community leaders celebrated the start of a project to allow drivers going north on College Avenue to more easily reach Interstate 540. Although federal money is helping with the overpass project, Northwest Arkansas communities such as Fayetteville lead the state when it comes to investing local dollars in projects to improve highways.

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 540 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 2023.

Notable Initiatives

EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

Accomplishment: The University of Arkansas, Northwest Technical Institute, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest, NorthWest Arkansas Community College and John Brown University formed the Northwest Arkansas Education Consortium in 2012. A sixth member – the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith – was added in April 2013.

How it helps: The consortium creates a mechanism to work together on projects. The agreement calls for collaboration on student retention and college degree completion programs such as Graduate NWA.

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.

DIVERSITY GUIDE

Accomplishment: The Diversity Team, part of the Northwest Arkansas Council's Community Vitality Work Group, launched the online guide in June 2013. A memorandum of understanding with the NorthWest Arkansas Community College for data collection and upkeep of the guide was signed prior to the launch date.

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

What's next: Work will focus on marketing and promoting the site.

Notable Initiatives

REACH OUT NWA

Accomplishment: In September 2011, Reach Out Siloam allowed Siloam Springs High School administrators, teachers and community volunteers to contact high school students who didn't return to class and encouraged them to return to school. That pilot program, which became Reach Out NWA, was expanded to other high schools through Benton and Washington counties in August 2012.

How it helps: An objective in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to reduce the high school dropout rate. Among the goals is to ensure that as many students as possible become high school graduates.

What's next: Twelve high schools are expected to participate in Reach Out NWA. It's currently scheduled for Aug. 19-24.

WAYFINDING

Accomplishment: A grant is allowing seven Northwest Arkansas cities to create a regional wayfinding system patterned after signs already in place in Bentonville and many of those signs will be going up this summer. The system will 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.

How it helps: The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy's Objective 4 suggests improving "multi-modal mobility throughout Northwest Arkansas." Within that objective, a wayfinding system is recommended.

What's next: The wayfinding pilot project signs will be installed by July 31. Five of the seven cities plan to install their entire sign system by Nov. 30.



Infrastructure



Arkansas Highway Commissioner **Dick Trammel** thanked regional leaders for their Issue No. 1 support at a January meeting of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority. Trammel spoke to dozens of organizations statewide about Issue No. 1 before voters approved it on Nov. 8, 2012.

Council Plays Key Role In Sharing Issue No. 1 Facts with Voters

Historians may well look back at Arkansas' approval of a half-cent sales tax to support \$1.3 billion in highway construction as one of the most important transportation decisions in the state in the past 30 years.

The projects, which will kick off in Northwest Arkansas next year, will be the largest regional highway investments since 1999 when the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department spent about \$450 million to build Interstate 540 from Alma to Fayetteville.

When Issue No. 1 was approved Nov. 6, 2012, the \$1.3 billion in spending that was permitted by voters accounted for 75 percent of all the transportation-related funding approved nationwide that day.

Scott Bennett, the Highway Department director, said counterparts in other states were impressed by Arkansas' passage of Issue No. 1. Missouri and other states have examined Arkansas' ballot issue success, and they consider the campaign to be a model for what they might pursue.

"We had a clear and very consistent, easy-to-understand message," Bennett said.

Now comes the construction of the first two lanes of the U.S. 71 Bypass of Bella Vista, the widening of Interstate 540 to six lanes between Bentonville and Fayetteville, and the first portion of the U.S. 412 Bypass of Springdale. Additionally, millions of dollars will go to Northwest Arkansas cities and counties to address transportation needs.

The Northwest Arkansas Council supported the efforts of Move Arkansas Forward, a statewide effort to inform voters about Issue No. 1, and it launched its own information sharing in Northwest Arkansas. The Council created a MoveNWAforward website and Twitter account related to Issue No. 1. Highway Commissioner Dick Trammel, other Council members and the Council staff spoke to city councils and civic organizations throughout the region about Issue No. 1 in the weeks leading up to the Nov. 6 vote.

"The organized and effective support of business interests in Northwest Arkansas on behalf of the Issue No. 1 campaign was

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 schools 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 diverse leadership that assembled for the summit, and resources like the Razorback Regional Greenway and an abundance of farm fresh produce, I'm excited to see the possible become 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 promote increased 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.

"I hope that [healthy living as] a regional approach becomes a message that all the major cities begin to sing. Maybe Energize is

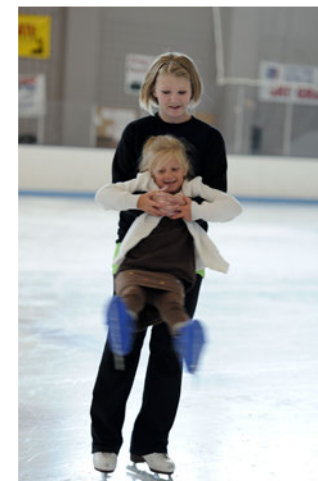
the umbrella that engulfs us all. The importance of making the healthy choice the clear, easy choice becomes a message to Northwest Arkansas residents rather than just to Springdale or Bentonville or Rogers." Within days of the summit, EnergizeNWA started the website: EnergizeNWA.org, a portal to help 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 supporting 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 Scism.



One of the region's best places for physical activity is **The Jones Center** in Springdale. The 220,000-square-foot center opened in 1995, and has an ice-skating rink, swimming pools, a basketball court, meeting rooms and educational facilities.

Notable Initiatives

XNA COMMERCE PARK

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport hired a consultant to start updating the airport's master plan as it relates to a potential commerce park. Feasibility, financial options and preliminary development are issues that are being addressed by the consultant, which started the work in September 2012.

How it helps: A strategic action in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to "develop a multi-modal industrial park adjacent to XNA."

What's next: A preliminary draft of the feasibility work for a 2,000-acre commerce park at XNA is expected later this year.

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" in 2011. The second report, made public in September 2012, showed employment growth had returned to pre-recession levels. "Northwest Arkansas continues to outpace competitor regions in producing job opportunities, which is the key to continued prosperity," reported Kathy Deck, the business and economic research center's director. Deck said the region's relatively low level of educational attainment is a constraint that needs to be overcome to enjoy future economic gains.

How it helps: The report serves as a benchmark for how the region compares to other successful metropolitan areas. Comparison areas are Tulsa; Kansas City; Omaha; Huntsville, Ala.; and Knoxville, Tenn.

What's next: The third annual State of the Region Report will be released later this year.

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 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.



BRE Update

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



Chung Tan, economic development director for the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, is an important part of the team that collects information as part of the region’s Business Retention and Expansion program.

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/

Razor COACH Team Helps 323 Students in First Year; Two Years to Go

Career coaches and program leaders believe they are making a positive impact by helping students take full advantage of high school while setting their sights on attending college.

Josh Raney, director of the Razor COACH program, said the career coaches work with 323 at-risk sophomores, juniors, and seniors at 17 Northwest Arkansas high schools.

Organized and funded through a partnership between the Walton Family Foundation, the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, the Northwest

Arkansas Council’s Educational Excellence Work Group and the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, Razor COACH was made possible by a generous, three-year grant from the foundation.

The program, which completed its first full year this spring, put 15 University of Arkansas students pursuing master’s degrees into high schools in Benton and Washington counties. Modeled after Gov. Mike Beebe’s “Arkansas Works” program, the career coaches work with at-risk students and their families to determine each student’s best opportunities after high school.

COACH stands for “Creating Opportunities for Arkansans’ Career Hopes.” The program runs to July 2015.

The coaches who work with sophomores and juniors monitor academic performance to ensure that they remain on a path toward high school graduation, set up job shadowing experiences, and discuss each student’s possible career path. When working with seniors, the coaches turn their attention toward helping the students prepare to take the American College Testing (ACT) assessment exam, applying for college scholarships, setting up college campus visits, and submitting college applications.



Josh Raney of the Razor COACH program updated the Educational Excellence Work Group on the program at a Feb. 19, 2013 meeting.

The coaches, meanwhile, gain experience working in an environment that many plan to spend their careers in — working with high school students.

While program leaders won’t finish compiling all of the information evaluating the first year of Razor COACH until the end of June, they have anecdotal evidence that students, the career coaches, and the program itself are on good courses.

For instance, a career coach assigned to West Fork High School reported that one student didn’t have a specific career idea, but a Kuder career assessment helped focus the student, who now plans to attend the Northwest Technical Institute.

“West Fork High School chose him to receive the scholarship to NTI,” the career coach wrote in an email to Raney. “This kid is why we have this program!”

Meanwhile, a Springdale Har-Ber student will receive \$21,000 in scholarships to an Oklahoma college, and a Razor COACH helped pursue the funding.

Heather Spickard, a Razor COACH who worked at Rogers High School, shared a story with Raney about a boy who started the 2012-2013 school year as a junior. He accomplished his goal of earning enough credit to catch up with his original classmates, who were seniors. He credited Spickard for helping him catch up.

“Thank you so much for helping me throughout the year Ms. Spickard, sincerely,” the boy wrote in a text message. “I would not have been able to graduate without your help and encouragement. You’ve been nothing but wonderful to me and I thank you deeply for not only wishing to help but for being there to listen as well.”

Whitney Farrar, a coach who worked with Gravette and Bentonville students, is sentimental about the coaches’ work with students.

“I think of this program not only as an investment in children’s futures, but also within

the student’s families, the community and careers,” Farrar said. “Many times the sad truth is that students fall through the cracks, meaning that they go without notice until graduation. This program gives students a chance to shine and find out what their potential is.”

The 323 students in the Razor COACH program represent a cross section of Northwest Arkansas. Many participants are high school juniors (44 percent). Hispanics represent a large percentage (34 percent).

Eleven percent of students have parents who obtained four-year college degrees. One-third of the parents didn’t complete high school; many didn’t attend high school (13 percent).

Lauren Jones, a career coach at Pea Ridge High School, said she recognized the hard work of full-time counselors and understands they don’t have time to help all student determine their plan after high school.

“There are not enough hours in the day, especially when you’re in charge of up to 400 students,” Jones said. “I was successful in college because I had parents who had been through the post-secondary education system but for students who could succeed in college but don’t have the support or the know-how, this program is doing wonders.”

Notable Initiatives

BUSINESS INTERNSHIP

Accomplishment: In 2012, AT&T provided a grant for students to participate in a small business internship program. It placed 20 University of Arkansas and John Brown University students as interns. Several companies hired the interns after the 12-week program ended.

How it helps: The program introduces high-achieving students to area businesses. It's important to establish pipelines between regional colleges and universities and businesses where graduates can work.

What's next: The internship program is placing students with 14 businesses this summer. Six more internships are planned for fall and there's still time for businesses to request interns.

LOW-COST CARRIER

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council surveyed employers to determine how high fares affect their businesses. The surveyed companies represented about 12 percent of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport's 565,000 passengers last year. They said low-cost flights to Dallas/Fort Worth, Atlanta, Chicago and New York would be of the most benefit, but they recognized the competition created by any low-cost carrier would reduce the XNA's high fares to most destinations.

How it helps: A strategic action in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to "attract new airlines to XNA, particularly discount carriers." Although the airport provides excellent service to 16 destinations, XNA has one of the highest average fares in the nation. Reducing the average fare benefits businesses and the community.

What's next: Council staff is supporting XNA administrators in the effort to bring a low-cost carrier to the airport. The administrators lead the effort.



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 2025," 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 BRE 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



Stephanie Flores of the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce listens as **Tom Ginn**, vice president of economic development at the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce, explains how he helped a company deal with an H1-B visa issue after a BRE visit.

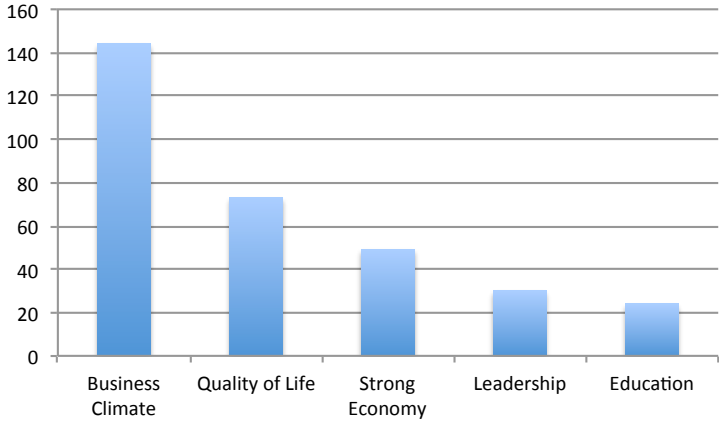
vice president of economic development at the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce, learned some of the company's employees were driving to Little Rock just about every week to renew driver's licenses because they were in the U.S. on H1-B visas. Ginn convinced the state to train an employee in 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."

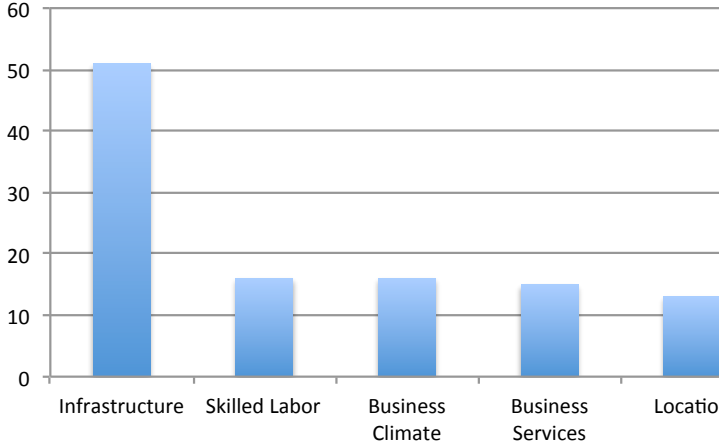
SURVEY FINDINGS

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.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS



COMMUNITY WEAKNESSES



Notable Initiatives

THE ARK CHALLENGE

Accomplishment: The ARK Challenge, an entrepreneurial boot camp, completed its initial program in 2012. Winners MineWhat, Btiques, and StackSearch each received \$150,000.

How it helps: The ARK Challenges and The Iceberg support the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy objective of “enhancing Northwest Arkansas’ culture of entrepreneurship by expanding the scale and scope of small business support services.” The ARK Challenge continues to focus on bringing in startup companies dedicated to building a new scalable web-based or mobile technology service or product serving the retail, logistics or food processing industry clusters.

What’s next: Teams were selected to participate in the second boot camp that’s already started. Demo Day will be Sept. 5 at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

FLINT CREEK POWER PLANT

Accomplishment: The Northwest Arkansas Council worked to inform the Arkansas Public Service Commission about the importance of the Flint Creek Power Plant. The University of Arkansas Center of Business and Economic Research examined the consequences of losing the power plant, and the economic benefit that will come if the plant is allowed to be retrofitted at its current location near Gentry. Mike Malone, the Council’s president and CEO, ensured that the commission members understood how important the plant is to the region.

How it helps: The Flint Creek Power Plant is the region’s only baseload electric power source and losing that would harm the region’s ability to attract new companies that need a reliable power supply.

What’s next: The Arkansas Public Service Commission as of early June was considering whether to allow the plant’s retrofit.



Mid-Point Review

Council on Course toward 55 Actions; Mid-Point Review on the Agenda

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 wide network of volunteers who contribute hundreds of hours each year toward achieving the regional goals.

“We’re 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 council’s 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:



Long-time Northwest Arkansas Council members **Tom Hopper** (left) and **Mark Simmons** remain involved in the effort to complete all the strategic actions recommended in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy.

- **BRE.** 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.
- **EnergizeNWA.** 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 for 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 540 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 facilitating 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.”

Notable Initiatives

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. The report will provide information to assist in planning for downtown areas, and it could be similar to Arvest Bank’s Skyline Report, an analysis of the region’s housing market that’s completed by the University of Arkansas Center for Business and Economic Research.

How it helps: Objective 9 in the Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy is to “enhance the quality of the region’s infrastructure and the region’s downtown and population centers.”

What’s next: There are three tasks that leaders focused on the success of the region’s five largest downtown areas will attempt to complete this year. Those three tasks are to ensure that each city has a downtown master plan backed by the city government, to create a downtown dashboard that provides an economic snapshot of each downtown, and to establish a professional, downtown-focused organization in each of the five cities. “Downtowns are a community’s canary in the coal mine,” said Daniel Hintz, executive director of Downtown Bentonville Inc. “You can instantly assess the health of a city by how it develops and supports its downtown, the heart of any vibrant community.” After completing the three tasks, each city will publish individual reports that will feed an aggregate regional downtown development strategy.