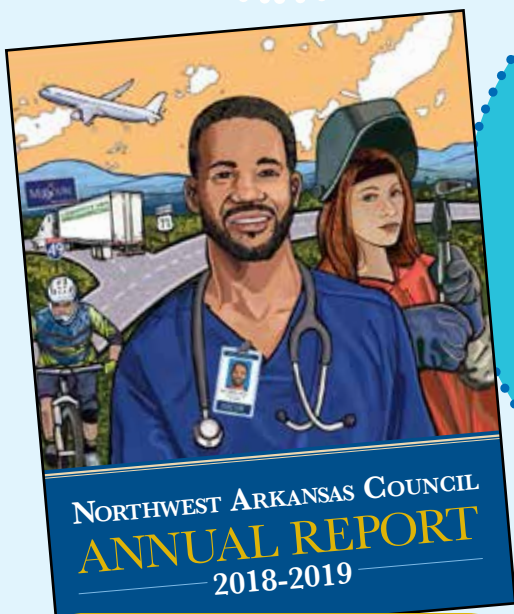
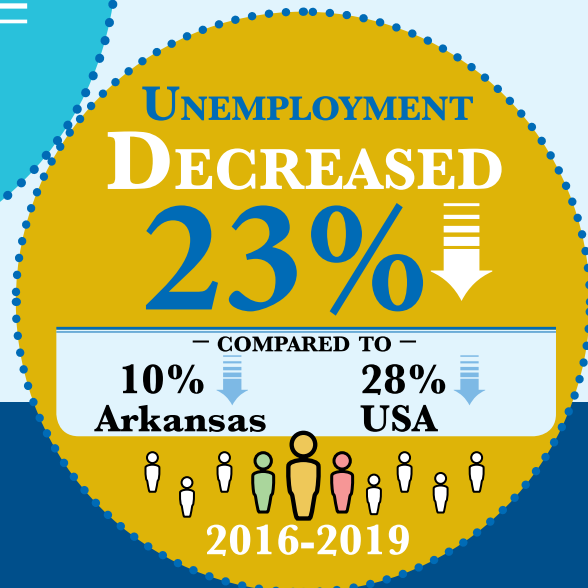
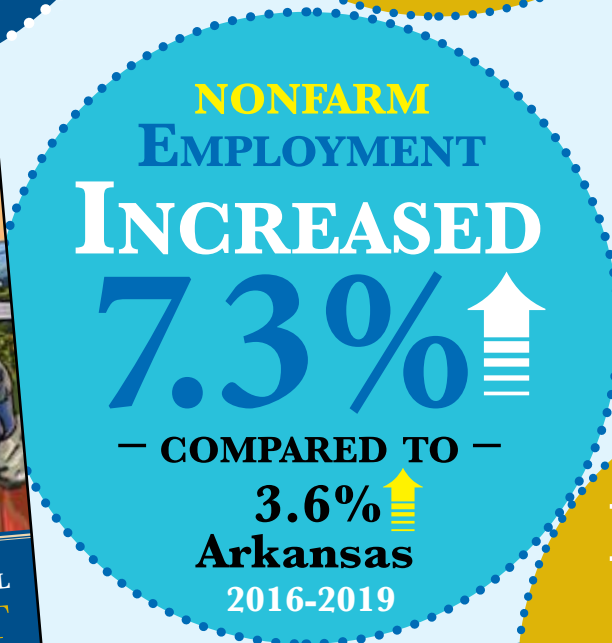
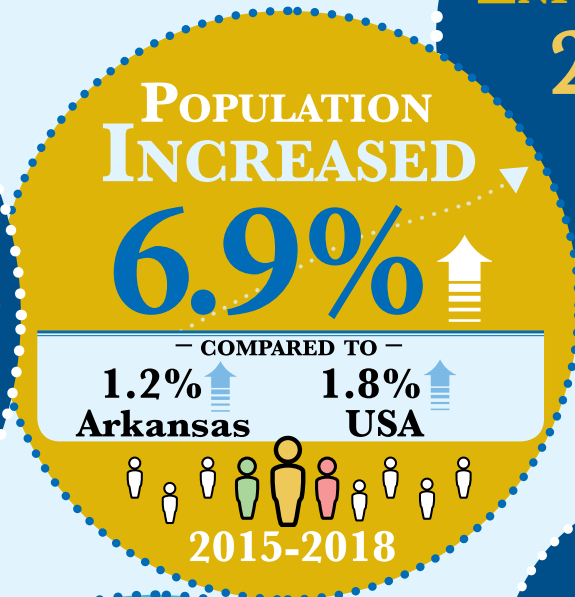
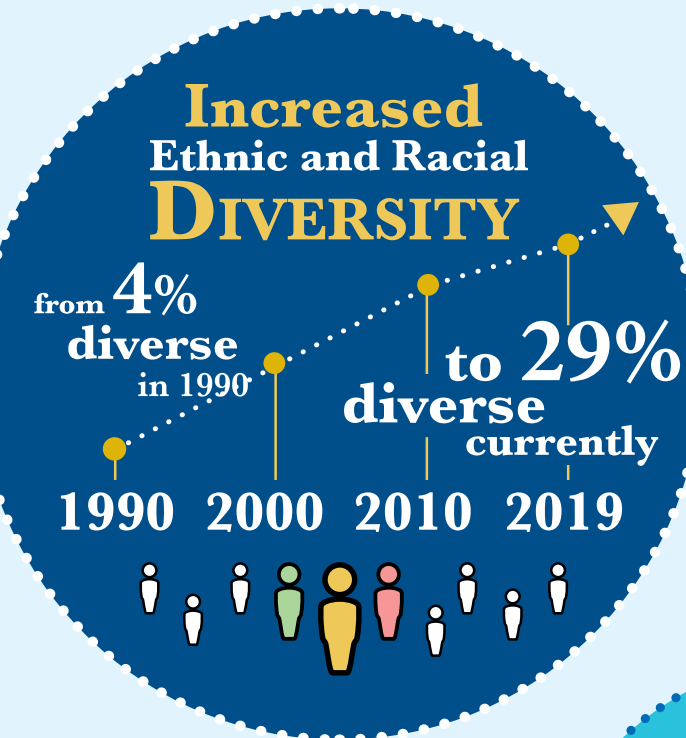




NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

Northwest Arkansas

◆ BY THE NUMBERS ◆



ON THE COVER

Hand-drawn illustrations are by Fayetteville resident Greg Moody. ◆



July 17, 2019

Fellow Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council, Welcome to the Annual Meeting.

This year, like many in recent memory, Northwest Arkansans witnessed our region move forward in key areas, including infrastructure, workforce development, and entrepreneurial ecosystems. This progress will help us build better companies and a stronger economy through increased innovation and talent attraction.

In July 2018, we assembled at the University of Arkansas. There we announced a new strategic plan. This plan emphasized key Council initiatives while adding focus to innovation and entrepreneurship. We stated a goal to “increase research spending at the University of Arkansas and strengthen the mechanism to get that research out of the lab and into the marketplace.” Over the past year, we made great strides toward that goal. The recently announced partnership with Silicon Valley-based Plug and Play will build on our innovation strengths in supply chain and logistics, reinforcing the Council’s dedication to innovation and entrepreneurship.

At long last, travelers between Missouri and Arkansas can breathe a sigh of relief. This year, the state of Missouri received a \$25 million federal grant that provided the last portion of funding needed to

complete Missouri’s portion of Interstate 49’s Missouri-Arkansas Connector. This “Bella Vista Bypass” has been a sticking point for decades. The Council was able to work with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission as well as the Arkansas and Missouri delegations to secure the \$25 million needed by Missouri for this project. That final chunk of funding made available more than \$100 million to complete this important project in both states in 2022.

The Council also worked with partners to develop a plan to enhance our healthcare sector. You received a printed copy of our comprehensive healthcare report, *Northwest Arkansas Healthcare: Assessment, Economic Impact, and Vision for the Future*, at our Winter Meeting in January. The concept of becoming a healthcare destination is a long-stated Council goal. That’s why we pulled together healthcare providers and educators to analyze our healthcare economy. National consultant Tripp Umbach found that because we are growing so fast, our existing providers simply couldn’t keep pace with the demand for highly specialized healthcare services. As a result, the region has been losing nearly \$1 billion each year due to out-migration

of healthcare services. The plan, which calls on regional providers to work collaboratively, is being implemented. If successful, more residents will stay in Northwest Arkansas for treatment, boosting our economy by as much as \$3.5 billion per year.

This annual report highlights local initiatives improving our workforce, recruiting low-cost carriers to XNA, and implementing the nation’s first region-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion program.

It is appropriate to hold our Annual Meeting at TheatreSquared, our region’s newest quality-of-life amenity. After 14 years here, this professional theatre group now boasts a beautiful permanent home. This facility joins Crystal Bridges, the Scott Family Amazeum, the Walmart AMP, the Walton Arts Center, and the soon-to-be-completed Momentary as an example of the kind of quality-of-life investments our region must continue to support in order to attract talent in support of our amazing companies.

I’ve been honored to serve as presiding co-chair and am excited to see how Northwest Arkansas advances in the coming years.

Thank you.

Nick Hobbs
2018-2019 Presiding Co-Chair

A Year in Review.....

ENGAGE



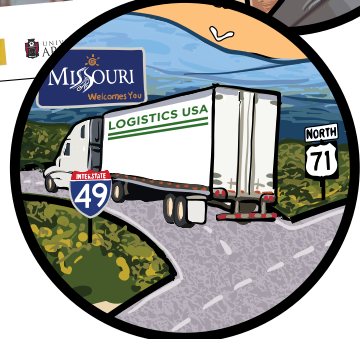
July 2018

EngageNWA revealed a four-year strategic plan. It focuses on five areas: economic development, government leadership and equitable access, community civic engagement, safe and connected communities, and education. ♦

P. 23

October 2018

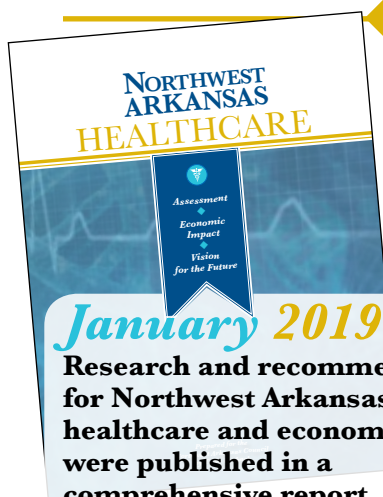
The University of Arkansas Center for Business and Economic Research and the Council work in partnership to release a State of the Northwest Arkansas Region Report. The report compares Northwest Arkansas to peer regions. ♦



December 2018

The U.S. Department of Transportation announced it will provide a \$25 million grant to complete a key section of the Interstate 49 Missouri-Arkansas Connector. The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission and the Council worked in partnership to ensure that the application for the Missouri funding gained attention. ♦

P. 13



January 2019

Research and recommendations for Northwest Arkansas healthcare and economic success were published in a comprehensive report by Tripp Umbach. ♦

P. 19



February 2019

The University of Arkansas announced that its annual statewide economic impact was \$2.2 billion in 2018. That is an 83 percent increase from 2014. ♦

TABLE OF CONTENTS

P.

5

Entrepreneurial Assistance

P.

9

Workforce Development

P.

13

Infrastructure

P.

19

Healthcare

#4 *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Places to Live in U.S."

eNDeaVOR NW ARKANSAS

March 2019

Global organization Endeavor announced it will create a Northwest Arkansas office. ♦

P. 5

wework

April 2019

New York-based WeWork Companies Inc. announced it will establish a Bentonville location. WeWork is a co-working space that currently has 689 locations in 120 cities around the globe. ♦



April 2019

P. 9

April 2019

Frontier Airlines announced nonstop flights between the XNA and Denver, starting June 27. ♦

P. 13

PLUGANDPLAY **May 2019**

The Council was central to Plug and Play's announced expansion to Northwest Arkansas. ♦

May 2019



peopleforbikes

Four of our cities earned a Top 25 national ranking from PeopleForBikes for the work they are doing to advance cycling. Selected cities were: Bentonville (No. 11) Fayetteville (No. 15) Springdale (No. 19) Bella Vista (No. 22). ♦

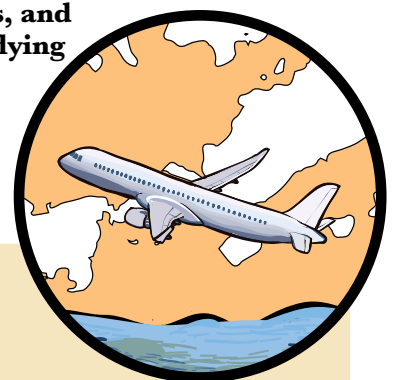
Antaven Stephens, Cody Stewart, and Cole Rutledge were among the 32 students who took part in Fayetteville High School's first Career and Technical Education (CTE) Signing Day. Before the April 17 event, all three students had lined up jobs at Marris Electric based on the skills they learned in high school. ♦

June 2019

FAREFLIGHTNWA.org

P. 25

The Council launched a website to encourage travelers to prioritize flying from XNA. Tools include a calculator designed to encompass cost of driving, toll roads, and other factors that make flying from Tulsa, Kansas City, and other regions less attractive, overall, when compared to XNA. ♦



P. 23 **EngageNWA**

P. 25 **Finding NWA**

P. 27 **Quality of Life**

P. 30 **Legislation**

P. 32 **Members**

LAUNCHING TODAY: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS
SUPPLY CHAIN & LOGISTICS ACCELERATOR



photo courtesy Plug and Play

Northwest Arkansas

is one of the nation's ten

RISING,
SMALLER **TECH HUBS**

as noted by
urban researcher Richard Florida.

#1 Walmart
#80 Tyson Foods
#395 J.B. Hunt
Transport Services

FORTUNE®
500

PLUGANDPLAY
wework
-endeavor
NW ARKANSAS



READY FOR BUSINESS

**NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TRANSFORMS TO HELP ENTREPRENEURS
LAUNCH THE NATION'S NEXT GREAT COMPANIES**

Successful businesspeople worldwide likely know someone eager to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams in Northwest Arkansas.

Almost overnight, this region has transformed from a place with a few key assets for startup support into a region in which entrepreneurs have access to a plethora of tools useful in growing startup businesses into the nation's next great companies.

"Northwest Arkansas has got to be one of the most dynamic areas for startups for a region our size,"

said Rick Webb, the co-founder and director of Grit Studios, a Bentonville organization supporting growth-stage startups focused on data analytics, retail technology, and global supply chain. "It's coming fast with the Endeavor group, WeWork, and Plug and Play, and the trend is toward acceleration."

The Northwest Arkansas Council remains active in much of the region's entrepreneurial rise, and there continues to be phenomenal interest in supporting business owners with bright ideas. The Council was

central to Plug and Play's expansion to Northwest Arkansas, announced in May. The Council has also strengthened our connections with the University of Arkansas as we support the expansion of research funding to benefit startups, innovation, and the economic opportunities created throughout Arkansas.

"Creating the next great startup, supporting innovation, and having as much of that as possible occur in Northwest Arkansas is front-of-mind for so many people," said Nelson Peacock, the Council's president and CEO. "Northwest Arkansas leaders know the region has to show more support for innovative entrepreneurs, and they understand these actions are good for our local economy."

The most recent entrepreneurial expansion in support of entrepreneurs came from Plug and Play, the Silicon Valley company recognized

Above left: The Council led a delegation to Silicon Valley for a signing ceremony establishing Plug and Play Northwest Arkansas. Plug and Play will bring startups to work with anchor partners to solve supply chain and logistics challenges. The program, made possible with support from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission and the Walton Family Foundation, will spur innovation and provide an influx of investment capital.

for connecting rising technology startups with large companies seeking solutions. Plug and Play signed an agreement with the Northwest Arkansas Council, Walmart, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Tyson Foods, the University of Arkansas, and the Walton Family Foundation to open a Northwest Arkansas office this year.

Working closely with founding partners to bring in exceptional global startups to focus on supply chain and logistics projects, the Northwest Arkansas site will be the fifth Plug and Play location in the western hemisphere. The others are in San Francisco, New York, Cleveland, and Guadalajara.

New York-based WeWork Companies Inc. announced in April that it, too, will establish a Northwest Arkansas location. Plans are underway to build a 200,000-square-foot building about two blocks south of the Bentonville Square. WeWork is a co-working space that currently has 689 locations in 120 cities around the globe. WeWork is expanding rapidly, and most of its expansions are occurring in metropolitan areas with populations larger than Northwest Arkansas.

The global organization Endeavor announced in March that it will also create an office in Northwest Arkansas. A \$2 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation will enable Endeavor NWA to focus on selecting high-impact entrepreneurs and businesses from multiple sectors that have the potential to scale significantly and reinvest back into the country by mentoring and providing financial support for successive generations of entrepreneurs.

“Endeavor NWA will allow us to provide fast-scaling entrepreneurs with resources that can further accelerate their growth and enable them to have an even greater impact on the region,” said Elise Mitchell, Endeavor NWA board chair, as well as Mitchell Communications Group founder and chair. In addition to Mitchell, Endeavor NWA’s impressive group of founding board members includes Clete Brewer, Carl George, Ashley Hubka, and Todd Simmons.



STARTUPNWA ESTABLISHED

As national companies were announcing plans to expand, the Northwest Arkansas Council created StartupNWA as a resource for innovators in the heartland of North America to flourish. This online hub for entrepreneurial activity was designed to provide information about local co-working spaces, business accelerators, and companies interested in providing capital to entrepreneurs.

Before Plug and Play, Endeavor, StartupNWA, and WeWork were sizing up Northwest Arkansas, the University of Arkansas was ramping up its support of entrepreneurs. The university launched its Office of Economic Development in February 2018. One goal was to streamline resources on the Fayetteville campus that focus primarily on business, industry, and community success.

The university received a \$23.7 million investment from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation late last year to support the development of new technologies, expand industry partnerships, and catalyze startup companies, as well as grow the university’s research enterprise. In the ensuing six months, the office awarded almost \$500,000 in grants to support the development of new intellectual property and support faculty-led startups.

“These new funds are game-changers for campus commercialization efforts,” said Stacy Leeds, the university’s vice chancellor for economic development, who leads the economic development office. “Faculty inventors and entrepreneurs now have financial support to bring their ideas to market more efficiently, increasing the economic and social impact of university innovations.”

The funds will advance the number of solutions coming from researchers at the University of Arkansas that benefit businesses around the world. From May 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019, the university was awarded 17 patents and filed 59 new patents.

The University of Arkansas hosted a University Industry Demonstration Partnership workshop in May that brought companies and researchers from around the world to Northwest Arkansas to discuss how universities outside of major metro areas can successfully work with industry partners. The workshop was a project with the university’s Office of Innovation and Industry Partnerships, which plans to launch an online tool later this year that will enable industry collaborators to quickly and efficiently connect with university research and facilities.

In late 2018, the region also hosted the inaugural Heartland Summit, an event in Bentonville that showcased innovation across the nation’s 19-state Heartland. The summit brought an impressive mix of innovators, businesspeople, and thought leaders to learn from one another. The dozens of events over four days included a happy hour where Arkansas entrepreneurs were able to introduce themselves to people such as billionaire Steve Case, an entrepreneur and investor.

All of those Northwest Arkansas advances — Plug and Play, Endeavor, StartupNWA, WeWork, the Heartland Summit and the University of Arkansas’s focus on economic development to benefit startups — came to the region in part due to the steps that had already been taken to support startups.



Carol Reeves (center), the associate vice chancellor for entrepreneurship at the University of Arkansas, was among the attendees at the inaugural Heartland Summit. She's recognized nationally for outstanding work with entrepreneurs, and many of the students in her classes go on to establish their own companies in Northwest Arkansas.

photo by Rob Smith



Great for Business. Great for Life.



The Arkansas Research and Technology Park, opened in 2004, focuses on innovation and technology development in association with the University of Arkansas. J.B. Hunt Transport Services in late 2018 opened J.B. Hunt on the Hill at the technology park, allowing up to 60 university interns each semester to gain experience working in the company's engineering and technology business areas.

The University's entrepreneurship program, led by Carol Reeves, is recognized nationally for its excellence. The program boasts 27 victories in national business plan competitions, more than any other school in the nation. The Brewer Family Entrepreneurship Hub that opened near the Fayetteville Square in 2017 provides a home for students pursuing their business dreams.

ADDING TO WHAT STARTUP JUNKIE, GRIT STUDIOS STARTED

With all this, there is yet another entrepreneurial support business making waves in a great way in this region.

Fayetteville-based Startup Junkie, which has worked in Northwest Arkansas for a decade, hosts an annual entrepreneurs' boot camp for high school students, an annual Startup Crawl highlighting the region's new companies, and many other events. Its 16-week boot camp called Fuel, which is put on in partnership with RevUnit, focuses on helping growth-stage startups address supply chain and logistics challenges.

Bentonville-based Grit Studios, meanwhile, focuses on later-stage startups, often in some of the nation's largest metropolitan areas. One of Grit Studios' goals is to show companies that it makes business sense to have operations in Northwest Arkansas. Yet, Webb, of Grit Studios, said there remain some needs. Most regions, including Northwest Arkansas, face a shortage of talent to support the startups, particularly those focused on technology.

Technology, analytics, and supply-chain management growth remain centric to the region's growth, which is why recruiting talent to the region is a primary focus for the Northwest Arkansas Council. ♦



Northwest Arkansas students have the opportunity to learn such skills as welding before graduating from high school. This Rogers School District welding course is taught at the school district's career center.

Great for Business. Great for Life.



Real. Live. Education.

STUDENTS GAIN PRACTICAL TRAINING THROUGH
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The Northwest Arkansas Council is working with the region's school districts, helping to inform, shape, and expand career-training models to ensure that students graduate with more than a high school diploma.

During her two years at Springdale Har-Ber High School, Sierra Pittman took four Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses to prepare her for work after graduation. She graduated in May and immediately landed a job with Kimbel Mechanical Systems because of what she knew how to do. She'll become an electrician, starting a career that's not so different from what her father did.

"He'd take me to work with him when I was a little kid," Pittman said. "The experience made me feel connected to my father, and I still love being around it."




photo by Jason Ivester of the Rogers School District



photos by Jason Ivester

Pittman is one of 10 Har-Ber High School students who took part in the nation's inaugural National Career Signing Day. Thousands of students across the U.S. signed letters of intent, kicking off careers that will lead them to become electricians, plumbers, cabinet makers, homebuilders, diesel mechanics, certified nursing assistants, and a wide array of other needed occupations.

Fayetteville High School had a similar event in April, recognizing 32 seniors. Many of the students planned to start jobs right away, but a substantial number of others will head to college.

The students' high school CTE experiences allowed them to rule out some career options and zero in on others. Many of them will attend Arkansas colleges with a better idea of courses they should take that align with what they like to do.

"Workforce training is continuing to be a priority for high schools across the region," said Charles Cudney, director of the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative in Farmington. "Northwest Arkansas school districts have become much more aggressive in providing students with workforce skills that upon graduation can be taken to a job or post-secondary education. With technology rapidly changing in a global economy, school districts must continue to change at a rapid pace to ensure that students are prepared to enter jobs that have yet to be created or are transforming daily."

Thousands of students in Northwest Arkansas will receive CTE training before graduating, and through the shared efforts of the Northwest Arkansas Council, school district leaders, chambers of commerce, the cooperative and industry members, students will receive increased levels of career guidance, career awareness, coaching, mentoring, and employment opportunities going forward.

Joe Rollins is a former career educator and administrator who began serving as the Council's

workforce development director in October. He leads the effort to bridge the gap between training programs, schools, and employers. Among his assignments are the connection of students and employers, the creation of career connection tools to assist students and adults alike with job searches, and building awareness among training program leaders about companies' needs and which skill sets are in highest demand. He is tasked with looking ahead and planning for the evolution of regional employment needs. That's important because industries are constantly changing and expanding.

Connecting students with real career opportunities, and establishing the plan to help them build a future in Northwest Arkansas is critical to the region's future. Leaders must focus energy on the creation, maintenance, and connection of a talent pipeline to enter the workforce. This effort will require those involved to be part of the awareness-building, coaching and mentoring, training experiences, and recruiting of students of all ages and institutions. The Council works hand in hand with school districts and post-secondary training institutions to create awareness of the opportunities in Northwest Arkansas. In the school year ahead, the new efforts will include work focused on career coaching and mentoring in partnership with the region's employers. Additional opportunities for experiential and hands-on learning will emerge, and there will be increased efforts to create pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship options for students. This is exciting work, and it's already showing students new opportunities for employment based on the credentials they achieve.

Robert Maples, a master electrician who started work as a CTE teacher at Springdale's Har-Ber in 2016, said students in CTE programs are positioned to pick their jobs.

"There are many trades jobs open out there and they'll be filling them," Maples said. "This isn't like applying for a job where you hope they choose you."



A growing number of Northwest Arkansas school districts offer an expanding range of Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. Shown at left: Rogers Heritage High School's family and consumer science class teaches teens to sew. Center: One of the more popular courses at Rogers High School is a food safety and nutrition course. Right: A medical professions course introduces students to career possibilities at expanding healthcare systems.

Great for Business. Great for Life.

With all of these guys, it will be them choosing the job, not them getting chosen. Skilled trades are a high-need area in Northwest Arkansas and across the nation as communities face shortages. A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report shows high-demand careers in the future are healthcare-related occupations such as certified nursing assistants and registered nurses, and there's also a high need for teachers, plumbers, electricians and an increasing number of other professions.

School districts in Northwest Arkansas are working more closely with postsecondary institutions and employers than ever before. They are integrating post-secondary courses, professional credentials, and workplace experience into the learning process, resulting in new levels of applied learning and employment opportunities upon graduation.

Outstanding examples of early successes in this area include the Bentonville School District's Ignite professional studies program, offering training in such things as culinary arts, digital design and photography, construction management, the health sciences, technology, and global business. The Springdale School District's Don Tyson School of Innovation model celebrated its inaugural graduating class this year. The school placed 100 percent of its 117 graduates either directly into offered career positions in healthcare, diesel technologies, information systems technologies and other fields in their continuing collegiate studies.

The Pea Ridge School District's Manufacturing and Business Academy continues to be a strong example of workforce readiness and partnership between school districts and the region's employers. Current efforts are underway to expand career exploration and awareness to students, beginning with elementary and middle school years. That step will create a firm foundation for high school experiences through the Pea Ridge Exploration of Pathways program.

Corporate leaders, including Michael Paladino, co-founder of RevUnit, are noticing the successes. He said four of his Bentonville company's 105 employees received technology-focused training in the Bentonville Ignite program. The four started out as unpaid interns while in high school, and gained full employment after graduation.

That success has led Paladino to stay engaged with Ignite, doing what he can to ensure that the training received by students matches local companies' needs.

"We all know about the talent pipeline issues, specifically in technology, so we're always looking for creative ways to get access to software developers," Paladino said. "Ignite students are the cream of the crop, and we're getting access to those students."

The partnerships of industry and training programs are taking root across the region, and Rollins is recruiting additional businesses to become part of this shared workplace-training model. Whether the experience is in the classroom, in the workplace via an internship,

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC AREAS:

Awareness ♦ Opportunites

The region's long-term success depends on student awareness of employment opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships, as well as employers' awareness of schools' training programs.

Guidance ♦ Advocacy

Industry leaders and their employees can coach and mentor students to guide career paths. Work environments and needs change rapidly. The Council creates online tools to align job seekers with job opportunities.

Experience ♦ Exploration

Opportunities for employers to have face-to-face interaction with Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors can alter course offerings so they reflect current needs. The Council works to identify employers for those interactions.

Onboarding ♦ Recruitment

Companies must create more internships and apprenticeships to support the long-term success of workforce development. Internships and apprenticeships allow both the company and the student to determine whether the match is a good fit for all. There currently aren't enough internships and apprenticeships available in Northwest Arkansas. ♦



pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, or post-graduation hiring, workplace experience cannot be replicated. Rollins encouraged industry leaders to join the effort, allowing the companies to become connected to programs that help shape a new wave of workforce talent.

In addition to ensuring that companies and schools are sharing information about sought-after work skills, Rollins is tasked with supporting efforts to fill the talent pipeline. This work addresses the need for new workers with certain skills, and it addresses the need to replace workers who will leave during an anticipated surge of retirements for "Baby Boomer" trades workers.

One way to fill that pipeline is to heighten career awareness by telling students what it's like to have high-paying, skilled trade jobs. Students need to know about internships and apprenticeships and the Council shares that information. One way to help students and people seeking career changes or career advances is through a new website being developed that will help match people's training, skills, and interests with real Northwest Arkansas job opportunities.

"Making an informed career decision depends largely on knowing the real opportunities that exist," Rollins said. "This new system will connect job seekers of all ages to the needs of Northwest Arkansas employers, and we'll be working closely with employers to make sure the information being provided is current."

Many employers are already engaged with Rollins and the school programs, but there's the need for more employers to join them.

"We have experienced great responses from our regions' educators and employers in collective events like our Northwest Arkansas Partnership Summit in March, and our career area curriculum advisory teams have created added opportunities for educators and employers to have a face-to-face dialogue about workplace needs," Rollins said. "Additionally, forums such as the Northwest Arkansas Apprenticeship Forum in April laid the foundation for our growing apprenticeship network."

Paladino, the RevUnit co-founder, praised the Northwest Arkansas Council for its work to connect companies with schools. The face-to-face meetings between technologists and school representatives are invaluable.

"When you build those relationships, that's when sparks fly and good things start to happen," Paladino said. ♦



COORDINATED EFFORTS ADVANCE REGIONAL

INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATIONS IN MISSOURI, ARKANSAS ENSURE \$25M FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING FOR LONG-DELAYED INTERSTATE PROJECT; REGION SECURES LOW-COST CARRIER

The Northwest Arkansas Council's effective work with local, state, and national partners helped the organization achieve two major regional infrastructure priorities this year. These efforts will benefit Northwest Arkansas by reducing fuel consumption, shortening travel times, and reducing airfares.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) announced in December that it will provide a \$25 million grant to complete a key section of the Interstate 49 Missouri-Arkansas Connector. The grant eliminated a funding gap in the project, allowing Arkansas and Missouri to complete a 19-mile

section of I-49 in Northwest Arkansas and Southwest Missouri.

Just a few months after the I-49 grant was announced, Frontier Airlines began flying into Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport (XNA), starting with nonstop flights to Denver. The Council identified luring a low-cost carrier to the airport as a top goal and it continues to work with XNA administrators to attract even more low-cost service. Frontier's first flight from XNA took off in June.

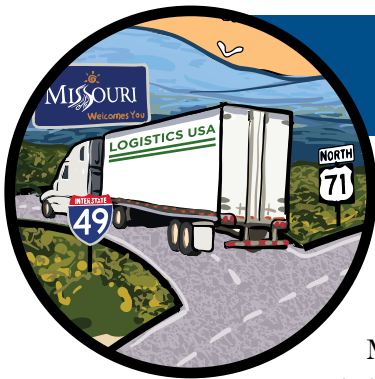
"Completing I-49 and having a low-cost carrier such as Frontier at XNA will save our region millions of dollars a year, both our companies and our travelers," said

Nelson Peacock. "I-49 will make it quicker and less expensive to drive, and the fuel savings should be significant. As for Frontier, we're already seeing the savings, as Frontier's fares have been consistently less than competitors, causing the other airlines to slash their prices."

The Council's infrastructure work, however, stretches far beyond highways and the airport. The organization leads or participates in projects related to water quality and quantity, trash disposal and recycling, public transportation, and workforce/affordable housing.

See the chart on next page for highlights. ♦

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL'S 2018-2019 INFRASTRUCTURAL SUCCESSES



I-49 Missouri-Arkansas Connector Funding

Led by U.S. Senator Tom Cotton's advocacy, members of Congress in Missouri and Arkansas played key roles in the pursuit of a \$25 million grant.

Members of Congress successfully explained why an interstate highway through the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area and into America's Heartland is critical.

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission filed the grant application in July 2018, and the Council used its resources to ensure leaders in both Missouri and Arkansas prioritized the project. Strategists began referring to the roadway as the "Missouri-Arkansas Connector" instead of the "Bella Vista Bypass" to clearly convey the project's national importance and its location.

"Although our project proposal uniquely met the program criteria, it is unlikely that the grant would have been approved if it hadn't been for the efforts of Nelson Peacock and his staff at the Northwest Arkansas Council," said Jeff Hawkins, the regional planning commission's director. "They kept the project on the radar of federal and state officials, the DOT, as well as the ultimate decision-makers in Washington, D.C. We couldn't have done it without them."

The federal grant obtained by the regional planning commission frees both states to get rolling on a project that required far more funding than the \$25 million. Complimenting the federal grant is \$22 million already set aside for the work in Missouri. Additionally, a half-cent, voter-approved sales tax being collected in Arkansas through 2023 will provide \$35.2 million for 2.5 miles of I-49 in Arkansas near the Arkansas-Missouri line plus \$51.4 million for a new interchange where I-49 meets U.S. 71 in Bentonville.

Construction is expected to be complete by both states in 2022.

The importance of the Missouri-Arkansas Connector is clear. The city of Bella Vista is the only location in the 270-mile stretch between Fort Smith and Kansas City in which traffic must slow to 45 mph and drivers encounter nine traffic signals in the city. As such, traffic congestion is common. While the Council worked behind the scenes to gain support for the project, the more than 40 letters of support were helpful in convincing the DOT to fund the project.



Completing I-49 and having a low-cost carrier such as Frontier at XNA will save our region millions of dollars a year, both our companies and our travelers.

I-49 will make it quicker and less expensive to drive, and the fuel savings should be significant.



Those who sent letters of support to Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao included Cotton; Arkansas Sen. John Boozman; Arkansas Rep. Steve Womack; Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill; Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt; Missouri Rep. Billy Long; Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson; Missouri Gov. Mike Parson; Walmart; Simmons Foods; J.B. Hunt Transport Services; Tyson Foods; the Arkansas Trucking Association; the Missouri Trucking Association; Mercy Hospital in Joplin, Mo.; Ducommun Inc. in Joplin; Hampshire Pet Products in Joplin; Jasper Products in Joplin; local chambers of commerce in Missouri and Arkansas; and more than a dozen Missouri and Arkansas cities and counties.

"Those letters showed the DOT that both states view this roadway as a huge priority," Peacock said. ♦



Low-Cost Carrier

In 2014, the Northwest Arkansas Council and administrators at XNA began working fervently to lure a low-cost carrier.

The Council joined the XNA team at national airline recruitment conferences, including Jumpstart and Routes America, where there were conversations with multiple airlines about serving XNA.

The travel information collected from companies by the Council and discussed with the airlines demonstrated the value of excellent air service to Northwest Arkansas companies. Airlines unfamiliar with XNA statistical data are often impressed by how much of the airport's traffic is business travel.

The Council's goal in seeking additional airline services is to reduce fares by creating competition. Low-cost carrier Frontier Airlines' announcement of nonstop

service to Denver is helping. United Airlines charged more than \$500 for certain roundtrips to Denver, as monitored by the Northwest Arkansas Council staff in the spring. The price of those trips fell to less than \$250 in the days following Frontier's announced nonstop Denver flights. Some flights were less than \$150, roundtrip.

In June, the Council launched its FareFlightNWA program, an effort to encourage travelers to prioritize flying from XNA. It includes a cost calculator that allows people to include the cost of driving, toll roads, and other factors that make flying from Tulsa, Kansas City, and other regions less attractive, overall, when compared to XNA.

The goal of the program and accompanying website is to encourage individuals to fly through XNA. Increasing the number of travelers makes the airport more attractive to airlines that are considering expansions. ♦



Waste and recycling

One of the goals of the 2018 Greater Northwest Arkansas Strategic Plan is to systemize the ways in which regional communities recycle.

The Council has found a willing partner in the Boston Mountain Solid Waste District.

The District, which includes Washington and Madison counties, received a state grant to develop a 10-year solid waste and recycling plan. When the consultant completes plan in 2020, it will include suggestions for how the region can ensure more cities are recycling the same materials in the same ways.

The Council's recommendation to the District's staff came after residents expressed their dismay at all the

distinct ways recycling occurs in Northwest Arkansas. Cities such as Prairie Grove and Fayetteville accept aluminum and steel cans, plastics, glass, cardboard, paperboard, newsprint, and office paper, but other cities' lists of approved materials aren't as expansive.

Adding to the recycling conversation, the the Council engaged the The Sustainability Consortium to complete a one-year study of the region's recycling circular economy. The study's findings, which will also be made public in 2020, will show how recycled products are transported and used. Creating circular material flows can open economic opportunities while reducing the environmental toll those materials can make and providing a stream of materials back to manufacturing. ♦

Public transportation

The region's primary public transit systems are coordinating their work more effectively than ever, ensuring that their routes are well coordinated so that riders can transition from the University of Arkansas' Razorback Transit to Ozark Regional Transit.

The Council staff remains engaged with both transit systems, and it organized an April meeting in which key Northwest Arkansas' employers were invited to provide feedback that will help a regional planning commission consultant complete a transit development plan. This plan, which will include recommendations about how to improve transit and detail how much those improvements will cost, completes the hat trick: it, too, will be ready in 2020.

Ozark Regional Transit's bus system continues to evolve to better meet the needs of riders. Ozark is working to reduce wait times at bus stops in Fayetteville, transitioning from a system in which buses stopped every hour to one in which they arrive every 30 minutes.

Joel Gardner, the bus system's director, said that's resulted in a significant increase in riders, and he's interested in seeing similar improvements in Springdale, Bentonville, and Rogers.

By year's end, Ozark will turn its attention toward building its new administration facility in Springdale. A \$2.9 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration will pay for the new building. ♦



One-half-cent sales tax approved by Arkansas voters in 2012 provided funding for the Arkansas portion of the Interstate 49 Missouri-Arkansas Connector (pictured). A \$25 million federal grant ensured Missouri has the funding it needs to complete its portion of I-49. All sections of I-49 in southern Missouri and Northwest Arkansas are now funded and the project will be finished in 2022.

Great for Business.

Great for Life.



photos by Rob Smith of the Northwest Arkansas Council



Steve Burt, pictured above, of the NWA Continuum of Care, addressed the need to expand affordable and workforce housing in Northwest Arkansas at a public meeting. The event was held on Oct. 18 at the Walker Park Senior Adult and Wellness Center in Fayetteville.

Kelly Johnson, the chief operating officer at the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, spoke at the April 8 press conference to announce Frontier Airlines introduction of nonstop flights from XNA to Denver. The airline started flying the route on June 27, creating competition and driving down airfares. ♦

photo by Rusty Hubbard;
courtesy of the Arkansas
Department of Transportation

\$3.4 billion

will be added to the Northwest Arkansas annual healthcare economy by **2040** if every recommendation in this report is accomplished.

7%

of Northwest Arkansas employees are working in the healthcare sector.

Peer regions such as Madison, Wis., and Des Moines, Iowa, have higher portions of their economies focused on healthcare. (9% and 8.6%, respectively)

An additional **8.5 cardiologists** are needed to serve Northwest Arkansas' current population. The region has 23 cardiologists in 2018.

200 additional residency positions are recommended to be pursued in Northwest Arkansas.

Healthcare accounts for about **\$3.2 trillion**,

or **17.8%** of the nation's gross domestic product

300 medical students will graduate within 70-miles of Springdale by 2022. Medical programs in Fort Smith, Joplin, and Tahlequah will reach full enrollment by that year.



Northwest Arkansas Healthcare by the Numbers

Northwest Arkansas has room to grow the economy's healthcare sector.

\$950 million

leaves Northwest Arkansas each year as residents travel to hospitals and physicians in other regions to provide the services they seek.

There are **3,490 registered nurses** in Northwest Arkansas. Peer Evansville, Ind., has a smaller population but has 4,450 RNs.

In 2018, there were **22,450** healthcare-related jobs in Northwest Arkansas.

6,000 jobs

are recommended to be added to the Northwest Arkansas healthcare economy.

1,400 hospital beds

in Northwest Arkansas are serviced by acute care, critical access, psychiatric, military, rehabilitation and women's healthcare providers.

5,840

Estimated annual hospital stays occur outside Northwest Arkansas because residents seek treatment for advanced cancer care elsewhere. Those hospital stays have an average estimated cost of \$37,000.

The healthcare sector currently adds

\$2.7 billion to Northwest Arkansas' economy annually.

Only 5% of the nation's medical schools offer **research** as a key curriculum component.

58 years

Average age of Northwest Arkansas' specialty care physicians. As physicians are recruited, many will replace "aging out" retirees rather than add to the number of physicians serving the growing population.



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS HEALTHCARE ABOUT TO FLOURISH

**REPORT REVEALS STRATEGIC STEPS TO ADD BILLIONS
TO NORTHWEST ARKANSAS ECONOMY WHILE
IMPROVING HEALTHCARE FOR RESIDENTS**



The right combination of healthcare investments and strategic implementations now should result in a \$3.43 billion economic gain for Northwest Arkansas¹ by 2040.

That economic projection was a key finding of national healthcare and economic research firm Tripp Umbach. The Northwest Arkansas Council hired the firm to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between healthcare and economic success. Tripp Umbach serves hundreds of communities at the intersection of health, education, and economic development. The Northwest Arkansas Council serves as a convener for regional economic and community initiatives.

Unlike traditional healthcare assessments with the purpose of focusing exclusively on the access,

¹ For this research, Northwest Arkansas was defined as Benton, Madison, and Washington counties in Arkansas.

If growth in advanced specialty healthcare services increases to exceed regional demand and attract patients from outside Northwest Arkansas, the local healthcare sector can be at par with peer markets by 2040.

quality, or capacity of healthcare services, this report also recommends actions intended to drive regional economic prosperity, advance quality of life, reduce costs, and increase productivity through collaboration.

Research and recommendations by Tripp Umbach were compiled into a report, *Northwest Arkansas Healthcare: Assessment, Economic Impact and Vision for the Future*, printed and released at the Northwest Arkansas Council's Winter Meeting in January. A core recommendation — developing a Healthcare Transformation Division at the Northwest Arkansas Council — is underway.

“We are proud to have worked together to accomplish that first step,” said Nelson Peacock. “Working together is the key, and because the Healthcare Transformation Division has been established, we can move forward together. The ability to coordinate helps make everything else possible.”

While the Tripp Umbach research showed there are some weaknesses in Northwest Arkansas healthcare, one of our strengths is family practice. The number of primary care physicians is adequate,

The recommended areas of priorities must be undertaken to measurably increase the economic impact, health status, and overall competitiveness of the region.



the quality of their care is high, and the cost of primary care is considered affordable compared to other places.

But there's significant work to do in other areas.

The report indicated that increasing the availability of high-quality specialty care, expanding research and development, and growing healthcare educational offerings would help capture some of the \$950 million a year spent by people who travel elsewhere to meet medical needs. Those healthcare and educational improvements will be helpful in attracting patients to Northwest Arkansas.

The healthcare sector can expand to become a far larger portion of the region's economy by 2040, the researchers concluded. Further, the failure to take these steps could slow future economic growth.

"Northwest Arkansas has the leadership and community assets necessary to transform the healthcare sector, to establish the region as a healthcare destination, and for the region to become a model for population health management," said Paul Umbach, the healthcare and economic research firm's founder. "Taking the right steps will result in billions of dollars added to the regional economy, thousands of high-paying jobs, and better health outcomes for regional residents."

Dozens of stakeholder interviews, as well as healthcare-focused data collected about Northwest Arkansas, shaped Tripp Umbach's report.

The report released four recommendations:

- 1) Establish a division of the Northwest Arkansas Council focused on healthcare transformation (Immediate Focus Area)
- 2) Expand Graduate Medical Education (GME) (Short-Term Focus Area)
- 3) Develop an interdisciplinary research institute (Mid-Term Focus Area)
- 4) Expand medical education and/or develop a four-year medical school in two to seven years. (Long-Term Focus Area)

"The healthcare transformation report provided invaluable information on the current state of healthcare in Northwest Arkansas, as well as the direction that we as healthcare providers need to pursue in the future," said Pearl McElfish, vice chancellor of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Northwest Regional Campus. "By working together to increase the number of specialty care physicians, graduate medical education opportunities, and collaborative research, we can leverage our existing infrastructure and resources in Northwest Arkansas to make our region a premier healthcare destination for this area of the country and, eventually, for all of America."

Based on the positive response to the report, Tripp Umbach was retained to assist in the implementation of those goals, focusing initially on the creation of a healthcare-focused division at the Council.

The report indicates "the underperformance of the healthcare sector will negatively impact future health status, economic development, and Northwest Arkansas' population growth unless a healthcare-focused strategy is developed." Tripp Umbach suggests the Northwest Arkansas Council lead the development of that strategy.

Washington Regional Medical Center, Northwest Health System, Mercy Northwest Arkansas, Arkansas Children's Northwest, the University of Arkansas, and UAMS Northwest were active partners in the study of healthcare in Northwest Arkansas that kicked off in early 2018. Leaders with biotech companies such as Now Diagnostics, Ascendant Diagnostic, and Lineus Medical also were involved throughout the project.

Northwest Arkansas falls short when it comes to its number of medical specialists. Major shortages exist in the number of cardiologists, neurologists, and endocrinologists, the consultant reported.



Designers of Arkansas Children's Northwest, which opened early last year in Springdale, ensured that the hospital's spaces are comfortable for the patients. The area that houses the CT scanner, for example, was designed to calm children, who often experience anxiety during imaging exams. The room is equipped with lighting that changes to a patient's favorite color, intended to keep the patient relaxed and engaged.

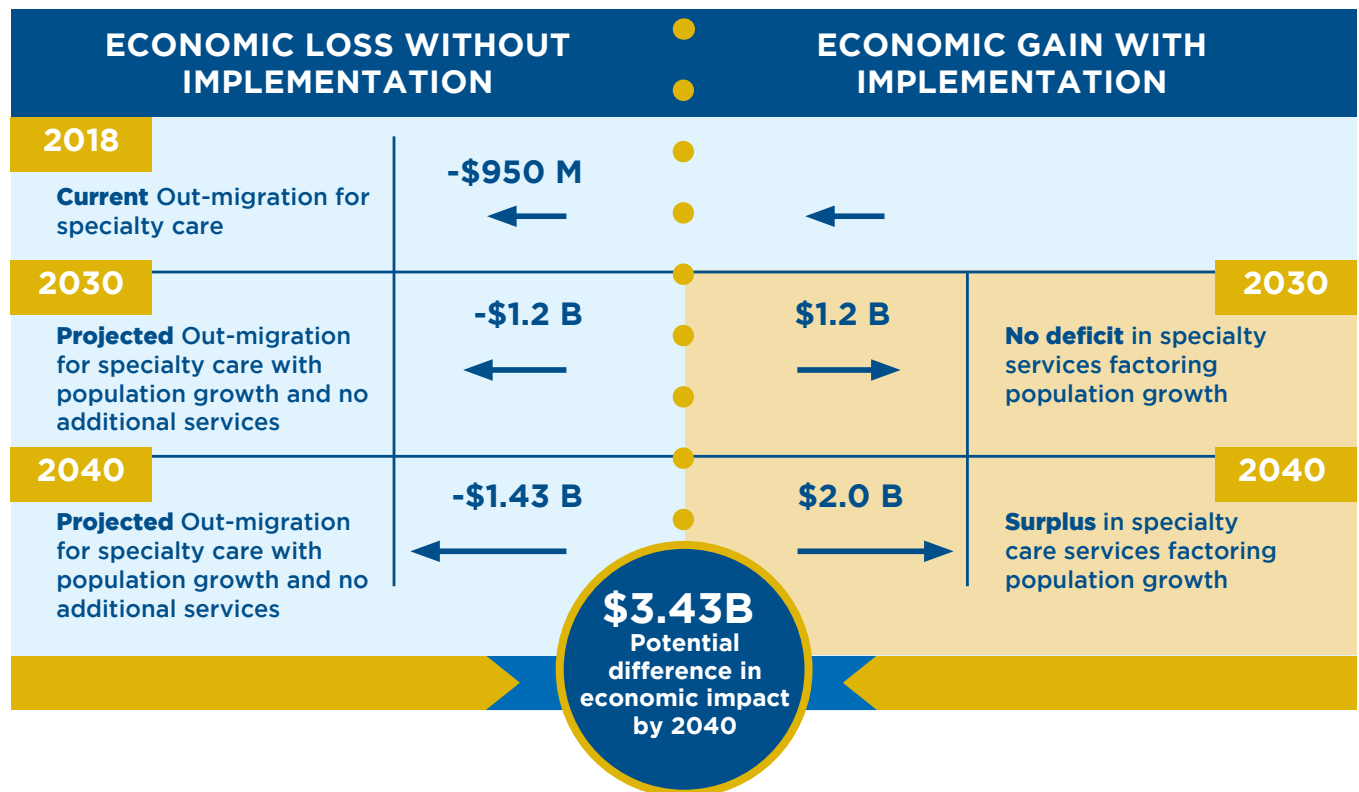
Great for Business.

Great for Life.

photo courtesy Arkansas Children's Northwest

CURRENT AND PROJECTED ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Northwest Arkansas can make significant additions to its \$2.7 billion healthcare sector by reducing how many residents seek healthcare services elsewhere. The right combination of community investments can result in a \$3.43 billion economic gain by 2040.



Researchers made comparisons using peer regions the Northwest Arkansas Council had previously defined as benchmarks, such as Des Moines, Iowa, Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C., and Madison, Wis. The firm added Spokane, Wash., and Evansville, Ind., because significant healthcare advances have occurred there.

The peer comparisons showed Northwest Arkansas lags a bit, as just 7 percent of the region's jobs are in the healthcare sector. Comparatively, Durham-Chapel Hill has 17 percent healthcare-related jobs, Spokane has 12 percent, and Evansville has 11 percent.

The consultant concluded Northwest Arkansas should act to align its distinctive advantages to grow and strengthen the regional healthcare sector. Distinguished faculty, researchers, and other physicians, as well as their next-generation equipment and other

advanced technologies, should be leveraged to become the preferred providers in the region. With healthcare reform dramatically shifting how hospitals operate, industry experts believe traditional academic medical centers could become obsolete if they don't quickly adapt to today's economic realities. Northwest Arkansas has the distinct advantage of timing.

The region has a long history of providing medical education, which provides a valuable and necessary foundation for expansion through existing infrastructure and assets with multiple partners. Expanding medical education and related population health research focused on regional strengths of quality and cost-effectiveness will help establish Northwest Arkansas as a premier national healthcare market by 2040. ♦



EngageNWA

WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO ADVANCE EQUITY, INCLUSION

Employers across Northwest Arkansas are interested in seeing more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming workplaces. EngageNWA is an active partner in achieving that goal.

As such, the Northwest Arkansas Council's EngageNWA program turned its attention toward hosting workshops focused on diversity and inclusion. Those events came just months after EngageNWA announced its four-year strategic plan, outlining the goals and objectives that it aims to achieve.

"If we're going to move forward as a region in this space collaboratively, we need to use a shared framework to make that happen," said Margot Lemaster, the

EngageNWA executive director. "We need to have a common baseline understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion before we can make significant changes as a region."

Equity means fairness and justice and focuses on outcomes that are most appropriate for a given group, recognizing different challenges, needs, and histories. Employers can advance equity in the workplace by doing such things as removing people's names and other identifiers from job resumes, placing job openings in ethnic publications so that more people know about the opening, and by adapting policies and programs to make sure the workforce is more representative of the community as a whole.



Julie Gehrki, vice president of the Walmart Foundation, spoke at a July 31, 2018 reveal of EngageNWA's four-year strategic plan. The Foundation and Tyson Foods are key financial supporters of EngageNWA.

***Great for
Business.
Great for Life.***

The training put on by EngageNWA and its partners went a long way toward ensuring that more leaders know about subjects related to diversity and inclusion and the best ways to address them.

EngageNWA first partnered with the University of Arkansas' new IDEALS Institute to provide an introductory workshop on implicit bias that reached 312 participants across the region. The partnership continued in May when EngageNWA and the institute offered racial equity workshops led by Race Forward, a leading national trainer in the field. There were 183 people who attended the Race Forward events.

The timing of the EngageNWA work is harmonious with Northwest Arkansas' accelerating diversity shift. The region's racially and ethnically diverse population accounted for about 4 percent of residents in 1990; it will reach 31 percent by 2022. The region's Hispanic/Latino, Asian, African-American, and Pacific Islander populations are expected to continue to increase in the coming years.

Established in 2013 with founding partners Tyson Foods and Walmart, the EngageNWA program's strategic plan was made public on July 31, 2018. It focuses on five areas: economic development, government leadership and equitable access, community civic engagement, safe and connected communities, and education.

Common challenges were identified by stakeholders who helped develop the plan, and they became focus areas. They included:

- A need to attract, grow, and retain a thriving, successful workforce.
- A shortage of diverse representation in leadership in all sectors.
- A gap in newcomers' understanding of local systems and how to access services.
- A greater need for cross-cultural communication and cultural awareness.

A variety of educational, municipal, consultancy, nonprofit and business partners support the EngageNWA work. "The EngageNWA work wouldn't be possible without the strong support from the Walmart Foundation and Tyson Foods, as well as the University of Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas Council members who have prioritized this work," Lemaster said.

In the past 11 months, businesses, cities, and organizations across the region have taken steps to address diversity and inclusion. They include:

The Walmart Foundation provided a grant to the Northwest Arkansas Council, part of which supports implementation of the EngageNWA strategic plan.

Tyson Foods gave grants to five entities that are taking actions to support diversity and inclusion. Those recipients included EngageNWA, the City of Springdale, CanopyNWA, Welcoming America and

Teen Action Support Center.

The University of Arkansas announced that it received state approval and private grants to start the University of Arkansas' Office for Diversity and Inclusion's IDEALS Institute, a resource for diversity-related research, training, education and support that works statewide.

The City of Springdale hired a welcoming coordinator and it launched community forums and a civic academy as part of its Welcoming Communities program.

The Greater Bentonville Area Chamber of Commerce hired its first talent initiatives and innovative inclusion director. The chamber also worked to create a four-part Community Retention and Attraction of Future Talent program focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.

EngageNWA worked with the University of Arkansas Center for Business and Economic Research to conduct a business survey focused on understanding steps being taken in workplaces to advance diversity and inclusion. The survey included questions about employee turnover among non-white workers, whether the company had staff dedicated to working on diversity and inclusion efforts, and what companies are doing to ensure that they have a diverse workforce.

The Walmart Foundation and Walton Family Foundation funded the Arkansas Community Foundation to launch TRUE Northwest Arkansas, a three-year pilot initiative to train, report, uplift and engage the Northwest Arkansas community toward diversity and inclusion. After its creation in 2018, TRUE announced grants to 20 organizations in May so employees can receive diversity and inclusion training and develop an action plan. The Northwest Arkansas Council is one of the organizations participating in the learning cohort.

Arvest Bank hired its first diversity and inclusion officer who serves as the primary subject matter expert and an architect of its diversity and inclusion and cross-cultural relations plans and programs.

In the coming months, EngageNWA will work with cities, schools, and companies to prepare for Census 2020. One of the challenges in any region with an increasing, more diverse population is ensuring that all residents are counted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The counts are exceedingly important as communities with more residents receive a greater share of the hundreds of billions in federal dollars that come to communities based on their populations. A 2017 report showed 132 federal programs use U.S. Census Bureau information to distribute more than \$675 billion each year.

As Northwest Arkansas continues to blossom, EngageNWA will remain active in ensuring community members have the tools they need to grow more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming workplaces. ♦



photo by Rob Smith



Children dance and play while attending the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks' annual International Festival. The Garden, a nonprofit, member-supported, public space, is dedicated to education and environmental awareness. More than 80,000 visitors a year enjoy the property, which is comprised of twelve themed gardens and includes the region's only butterfly house. The Garden's varied workshops, classes, and lectures offer unique outdoor experiences for all ages.

Finding NWA

PROGRAMS CONNECT NATION'S JOB SEEKERS WITH REGION

Across the country and the world, economic development and tourism groups tout their best successes, telling their audiences via social media and on websites about good news in their communities.

But in Northwest Arkansas, where national recognition, corporate expansions, and major quality-of-life improvements develop so quickly, it can be hard to select which stories to showcase. There's never a shortage of positive news.

Among the region's best advocacy tools are Finding NWA and the Northwest Arkansas Digital Ambassadors programs, both managed by the Council.

These resources highlight announcements such as the *U.S. News & World Report's* April decision to rank Northwest Arkansas as No. 4 on its "Best Places to Live in the U.S."

list. In May, they helped push news that PeopleForBikes listed not one but four Northwest Arkansas cities in a Top 25 ranking of "Communities Doing The Most To Advance Cycling."

Finding NWA aims to gain the attention of job seekers as it connects individuals interested in relocating to Northwest Arkansas to a myriad of resources designed to improve family transitions. The website hosts information about business opportunities, including travel, network, entrepreneurship and tech; the region's schools, from daycare through higher education, including camps; the major cities that comprise Northwest Arkansas, including statistics and quality-of-life amenities; community resources, including healthcare, philanthropy, and faith; outdoor adventures, including cycling and water sports; and entertainment

options, including festivals, food and drink, arts, sports, and music.

The website attracted 45,468 new, unique users this year, twice as many as in the previous year. While 41 percent of those visits came from people in Northwest Arkansas and the Fort Smith region, there were visits from more than 130 different metro areas including large audiences from Dallas/Fort Worth (4,258 visitors or 9 percent), Little Rock (1,882 visitors or 4 percent), New York City (1,617 visitors or 4 percent) and Oklahoma City (1,378 visitors or 3 percent).

Large social media audiences come from Finding NWA's ever-growing presence on Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Since July, Finding NWA has shared 876 posts across its social media channels, generating over 3.3 million impressions and increasing its base of followers by 14,394.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The Northwest Arkansas Council maintains this family of websites:

NWACOUNCIL.org

The Northwest Arkansas Council's home website. Includes published regional reports, a blog, and statistical information.

FINDINGNWA.com

A relocation gateway, this site caters to job seekers by providing at-a-glance information about Northwest Arkansas' cities, schools, businesses, quality-of-life amenities, and the outdoor enjoyment opportunities.

NORTHWESTARKANSAS.info

Intended for business people who are interested in expanding to the region, this site hosts rich demographical data as well as information about the local economy and the cost of doing business here.

ENGAGENWA.org

Through a systematic, collaborative approach to harnessing local talent and energy, this site aims to ensure Northwest Arkansas remains one of the nation's best places to live, work, and play.

FAREFLIGHTNWA.org

Just launched, this site highlights airlines offering low fares from the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport. It contains an interactive tool to calculate the true cost of travel from Tulsa and Kansas City, and it promotes the economic benefits of each traveler's decision to fly from XNA.

IMPACTNWA.org

Designed to amplify cause-related stories and opportunities, this site heightens awareness of regional efforts and engages broad audiences of advocates, volunteers, and donors.

STARTUPNWA.com

This site serves as a hub for the region's entrepreneurs and those interested in their success. Includes information about co-working spaces, investing in startups, community events, mentorships, and business services. ♦

The #findingnwa hashtag was used more than 7,500 times on Instagram and the Finding NWA team curated content by reviewing nearly 133,000 posts from Northwest Arkansas-based Facebook pages in this past year alone, said Aron Shelton, who oversees the Finding NWA program.

"It really proves that our hypothesis is true, which is that the story of what it means to live, work, and play in Northwest Arkansas is being shared by numerous individuals in myriad ways," Shelton said. "Finding NWA serves to capture and give those stories a home, and keeps evolving as a resource for recruiters, out-of-state job seekers, and newcomers."

Finding NWA, in fact, is so successful that it inspired the Council's creation of other websites focused on specific topics: StartupNWA and ImpactNWA. StartupNWA includes information of interest focuses to entrepreneurs and startup companies. ImpactNWA provides information about volunteers, the environment, and community organizations that are making a positive difference in Northwest Arkansas.

The Northwest Arkansas Digital Ambassadors program takes a different approach than Finding NWA and its sister websites, asking almost 700 ambassadors who've signed up to help in sharing and re-sharing messages on social media. The ambassadors share primarily via Facebook, but Twitter and LinkedIn have substantial audiences, too.

Messages related to the University of Arkansas often gain the most attention. The three most popular topics from the past year were the university hosting the NCAA Men's and Women's Golf National Championships, the university's \$2.2 billion economic impact on Arkansas, and the partnership with the Northwest Arkansas Council that created an annual State of the Northwest Arkansas Region Report. These stories and others reached more than 2.1 million social media accounts through the Ambassadors.

One thing is certain: at this pace, there should be no lack of narratives to show current and potential residents alike that Northwest Arkansas is great for business, great for life. ♦



Live, Work, and Play

the Northwest Arkansas Way

AMENITY INVESTMENTS CRITICAL TO TALENT ATTRACTION

Each day, Northwest Arkansas leaders produce new amenities that make the region more and more attractive to newcomers who want to build their careers in the Natural State.

The region's unemployment remains so low that Northwest Arkansas companies must attract talent from across the U.S. and around the world, and every enhancement makes it easier to impress someone who is sizing up the region as a future home.

Fayetteville's TheatreSquared, the first permanent home for the 10-year-old professional theatre

group, joins the Brightwater Culinary School, Kessler Mountain Regional Park, the House of Songs Ozarks, and the newly redesigned Walton Arts Center as examples of quality-of-life upgrades that make Northwest Arkansas more attractive.

"Talent is the No. 1 driver in 85 percent of the site-selection decisions our clients are making," said Larry Gigerich, the executive managing director of Ginovus, an Indiana firm that helps companies decide where it makes sense to expand. "We've entered into this phase where we have so many 18- to 35-year-olds who are picking where

they want to live and then they are figuring out where they want to work. Those investments in quality of place are critical to attracting talent across all demographics, but especially the younger people."

Investing in quality-of-life attributes is front and center in Northwest Arkansas, and that's been true for more than a decade. It wasn't all that long ago that Northwest Arkansas opened the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks (2007), Arvest Ballpark (2008), Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (2011) and the Walmart AMP (2014).



photos by Rob Smith



Cycling facilities are rapidly being expanded across Northwest Arkansas, but none of them are quite like the Runway Bike Park at the Jones Center in Springdale. The park's centerpiece is one of the world's best pump tracks. As such, the park hosted the Red Bull Pump Track World Championship on Oct. 13. ♦

Great for Business. Great for Life.

The arrival of the House of Songs Ozarks in early 2018 in Bentonville is an example of an amenity few places can replicate. It's led to a steady stream of international songwriters and musicians coming to the city to create music with Arkansans. During their 10-day visits, the artists collaborate, and they perform at places such as Bike Rack Brewery and The Meteor in Bentonville, and The Dickson Street Pub in Fayetteville.

The music can lead to major exposure, and Ramy Essam's visit to the House of Songs last year gained unprecedented, worldwide attention. The 32-year-old Egyptian's performances in Cairo's Tahrir Square were central to the Egyptian revolution in 2011. When he came to Arkansas seven years later, Essam produced a YouTube video to the song "Balaha," shooting most of the footage on a two-lane street in Bentonville. It's been watched 5 million times.

"We get people moving here to live in Bentonville who are from India, Pakistan, and places all over the world," said Troy Campbell, the founder of the House of Songs. "I want people who live here to know there are artists here who they can brag about being here to the people back home."

In 2018, Northwest Arkansas also became home to Runway Bike Park at The Jones Center in Springdale. It includes the largest pump track in North America, which hosted the Red Bull Pump Track World Championship in October.

The pump track adds to an already-impressive array of cycling-related infrastructure, including the 2015 completion of the Razorback Regional Greenway, and the opening of The Railyard, a bike park just east of downtown Rogers.

And there is more to come.



Agymah Kamau, Zoe Banks, and Kouakou Yao “Angelo,” all members of Afrique Aya Drum and Dance Company, were among the performers at the fourth annual International Festival held in September at the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks. The festival is attended by hundreds of people each year. Participants exchange knowledge and traditions as they relate to dance, music, and art from around the world. The drummers shown carry on traditions inspired in West Africa. ♦

The City of Fayetteville is creating a Cultural Arts Corridor in the heart of town, linking TheatreSquared, the Walton Arts Center, the Fayetteville Public Library, and the planned Windgate Art and Design District. A \$40 million gift from the Windgate Charitable Foundation to the University of Arkansas will pay for the district, located on MLK Boulevard, and provide additional space for the newly endowed University of Arkansas School of Art.

The School of Art’s endowment was part of a \$120 million gift from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation in 2017, which is the largest ever given to a U.S. university to support or establish a school of art.

“Northwest Arkansas leaders are wise to spread investments across sports facilities, parks, museums, theatres, and concert venues. Savannah, Greenville-Spartanburg, Knoxville, and Northwest Arkansas are

examples of mid-sized regions that have invested well in quality of place,” Gigerich said. “It’s a mistake to focus in any one area.”

Just a few miles up Interstate 49, in Bentonville, the transition of a former Kraft Foods factory into a contemporary arts venue is approaching its completion. Called The Momentary, the venue should be finished in early 2020.

“It allows you to cast that net so much wider from a talent perspective,” Gigerich continued. “If you have a lot of well-done places that cover a lot of different things you are better off than trying to dominate any one category.” ♦

LEGISLATORS MAKE KEY DECISIONS ON E-FAIRNESS, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT; VOTERS TO DECIDE ON HIGHWAY TAX

Months before each legislative session, the Northwest Arkansas Council brings together business leaders from across the region to establish goals for a regional legislative agenda.

Once that agenda is developed, the Council makes those goals public and goes to work in Little Rock to pass that agenda through work with coalitions, legislators, the governor, and advocates.

The 2019 Legislative Session was successful for the Council. Fifteen of the 21 items on the legislative agenda received action, and each key issue identified by the Council was addressed.

The Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce serves as a key partner with the Council. The chamber allows strategist Jon Moran, chamber vice president, to spearhead the building of an agreed-upon legislative agenda and the pursuit of it.

“The 2019 Regional Legislative Agenda was one of the most successful efforts we have employed,” said Moran. “There is no such thing as luck when it comes to a successful legislative agenda. We were successful because we were focused, intentional, and deliberate in our approach.” ♦

Northwest Arkansas Council Highlights from the Arkansas State Legislative Session, 2019

E-Fairness

The new law makes it so every business pays sales taxes on the products they sell in Arkansas. Passage of e-fairness positively impacts Walmart, but it also supports small businesses that are increasingly selling their items in a global marketplace. E-fairness was part of a package of statewide tax reform measures. The reduction in corporate income tax, expanding the net operating loss carryforward, and the adoption of a single sales factor are part of the legislation that was approved. ♦

Highway Tax

The half-cent sales tax, which expires in 2023, will be on a statewide ballot in November 2020. The proposal this time will be for a permanent, half-cent tax. If approved, it will raise about \$200 million a year. Legislators approved Senate Bill 336, which increases the state diesel tax by 6 cents per gallon and the gas tax by 3 cents per gallon on Oct. 1. It also creates an annual registration fee for electric and hybrid vehicles and the act ensures that a portion of new casino-related revenue is provided to the Arkansas Department of Transportation. ♦

Workforce Development

In early 2018, the Council and the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce began working together on workforce training. State Sen. Jane English worked with the Council and the State Chamber to draft and sponsor a package of bills that passed. One of the approved measures brings career education and workforce training under one umbrella. Another expands the availability of job training courses being offered at community colleges. Approval of these measures advances the region toward the goal of building a world-class workforce program. ♦



The
WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



Walmart 


Walmart
Foundation


Tyson

Major Investors

Northwest Arkansas Council Team:

Nelson Peacock, president and CEO

Mike Harvey, chief operating officer

Joe Rollins, workforce development director

Rob Smith, communications and policy director

Stacey Sturner, project manager

Aron Shelton, program manager

Kathryn Hunt, office manager

nwacouncil.org

*Great for Business.
Great for Life.*

About this report:

Visual communication assistance,
including editing and design by:

Amanda Cothren
creative communication strategist
amandacothren.com

Illustrations by:

Greg Moody
illustration & design
moodyimage.com

Northwest Arkansas Council Executive Committee

2018-2019 Presiding Co-Chair:	Nick Hobbs
Presiding Co-Chair Elect:	Todd Simmons
Co-Chair:	Karen Roberts
Co-Chair:	Jim Walton
Co-Chair:	Noel White
Co-Chair:	Joseph E. Steinmetz
Chair Emeritus:	Alice Walton
Vice Chair/Treasurer:	Marshall Saviers
Co-Chair's Appointee:	Stuart Scott
Chambers of Commerce Representative:	Wayne Mays
Nominating Committee Representative:	Carl George
Nominating Committee Representative:	April Seggebruch
Nominating Committee Representative:	Scott Spradley

Northwest Arkansas Council Current Members

Jay Allen, Jay Allen Communications
Ramsay Ball, Cignus Real Estate
Susan Barrett, Mercy Health System, retired
Rick Barrows, Multi-Craft Contractors, Inc.
J. Neff Basore, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Fadil Bayyari, Bayyari Properties and Construction
Steven Beam, Burns & McDonnell
Clinton Bennett, CBRE | Brokerage Services
Rod Bigelow, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Clete Brewer, NewRoad Capital Partners
Tim Broughton, McKee Foods
John Brown III, Windgate Foundation
Raymond Burns, Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce
Wayne Callahan, Delta Dental of Arkansas
Ed Choate, Delta Dental of Arkansas
Aaron Clark, The Stephens Group
Sarah Clark, Mitchell
Steve Clark, Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
Ed Clifford, The Jones Trust
Graham Cobb, Greater Bentonville Area Chamber of Commerce
Justin Cole, Rich Baseball Operations
John Cooper III, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Matt Crafton, Crafton Tull
Lane Crider, Beaver Water District
Rich Davis, Black Hills Energy
Tommy Deweese, AEP Swepco (retired)
Marcy Doderer, Arkansas Children's Hospital

Mike Dodge, Carroll Electric Cooperative
Lee DuChanois, C-Synergy, LLC
John Elrod, Conner & Winters
Paul Esterer, Newmark Moses Tucker Partners
John Evans, Landmark CPAs
Cathy Foraker, AT&T
Troy Galloway, Arkansas National Guard
Brock Gearhart, Greenwood Gearhart
Carl George, Georges, Inc.
Charles George, Georges, Inc.
Darin Gray, Cranford Johnson Robinson and Woods
Stan Green, Clear Energy Services | Lindsey Green Properties
Mary Ann Greenwood, Individual Member
D. Scott Hancock, Centennial Bank
Gary Head, Signature Bank of Arkansas
Dan Hendrix, Arkansas World Trade Center
Jessica Hendrix, Saatchi & Saatchi X
Nick Hobbs, J.B. Hunt Transport
Blake Holzhauer, Bank of Fayetteville
Tom Hopper, Individual Member
Brock Hoskins, Garver
Dennis Hunt, Stephens, Inc.
Walter Hussman, Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette
Mitchell Johnson, Ozarks Electric
Robert L. Jones III, Conner and Winters
Evelyn Jorgenson, NorthWest Arkansas Community College
James Keenan, The Raven Foundation



Nick Hobbs, the president of dedicated contract services at J.B. Hunt Transport Services, served one year as the presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council. He has been with J.B. Hunt for more than 30 years.

The new presiding co-chair is **Todd Simmons**, the CEO of Simmons Foods, a manufacturer of poultry, pet, and animal nutrition products based in Siloam Springs.



2018-2019 Presiding Co-Chair:
Nick Hobbs

2019-2020 Presiding Co-Chair:
Todd Simmons

Jeff Koenig, Individual Member
Peter Lane, Walton Arts Center
Steven Lane, Colliers International
Randy Lawson, Lawco Energy Group
Brandon LeFevre, APAC-Central, Inc.
Todd Lewis, Conner & Winters
Jim Lindsey, Lindsey Management
J.D. Lowery, Arkansas Electric Cooperatives
Bill Mathews, McDonalds of NW Arkansas
Wayne Mays, Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce
Warren McDonald, Arkansas BlueCross BlueShield
Pearl McElfish, UAMS-Northwest
Tim McFarland, Elevate Performance
Jeff Milford, AEP/SWEPCO
Mike Moss, Cross Pointe Insurance Advisors
Nick Nabholz, Nabholz Construction of NWA
Becky Paneitz, Inseitz Group
Denten Park, Northwest Health Systems
Neal Pendergraft, Reece Moore Pendergraft, Attorneys at Law
Kyle Peterson, Walton Family Foundation
Gene Pharr, Arkansas Farm Bureau
Eric Pianalto, Mercy Northwest Arkansas
Chip Pollard, John Brown University
John Rausch, Raush Coleman Homes
Karen Roberts, Walmart
Reynie Rutledge, First Security Bank of NWA
Adam Rutledge, First Security Bank of NWA

Nick Santoleri, Rockline Industries
Marshall Saviers, Cushman & Wakefield | Sage Partners
Archie Schaffer III, Tyson Foods
Anita Scism, Endeavor Foundation
Larry Shackelford, Washington Regional Medical Center
Mindy Sherwood, Procter & Gamble
Mark Simmons, Simmons Foods
Todd Simmons, Simmons Foods
Jim Smith, Smith | Hurst
Scott Spradley, Tyson Foods
Steve Stafford, Anstaff Bank
Joseph E. Steinmetz, University of Arkansas
Philip Taldo, Weichert Realtors | The Griffith Company
Ian Tholking, Procter & Gamble
Kirk Thompson, J.B. Hunt Transport
Walter Turnbow, Beaver Water District
John Tyson, Tyson Foods
Jerry Vest, Regions Bank
Don Walker, Arvest Bank Group
Matt Waller, University of Arkansas
Alice Walton, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Jim Walton, Arvest Bank Group
Rob Walton, Walmart
Perry Webb, Springdale Chamber of Commerce
Noel White, Tyson Foods
Randy Zook, Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce
Stan Zylowski, Movista



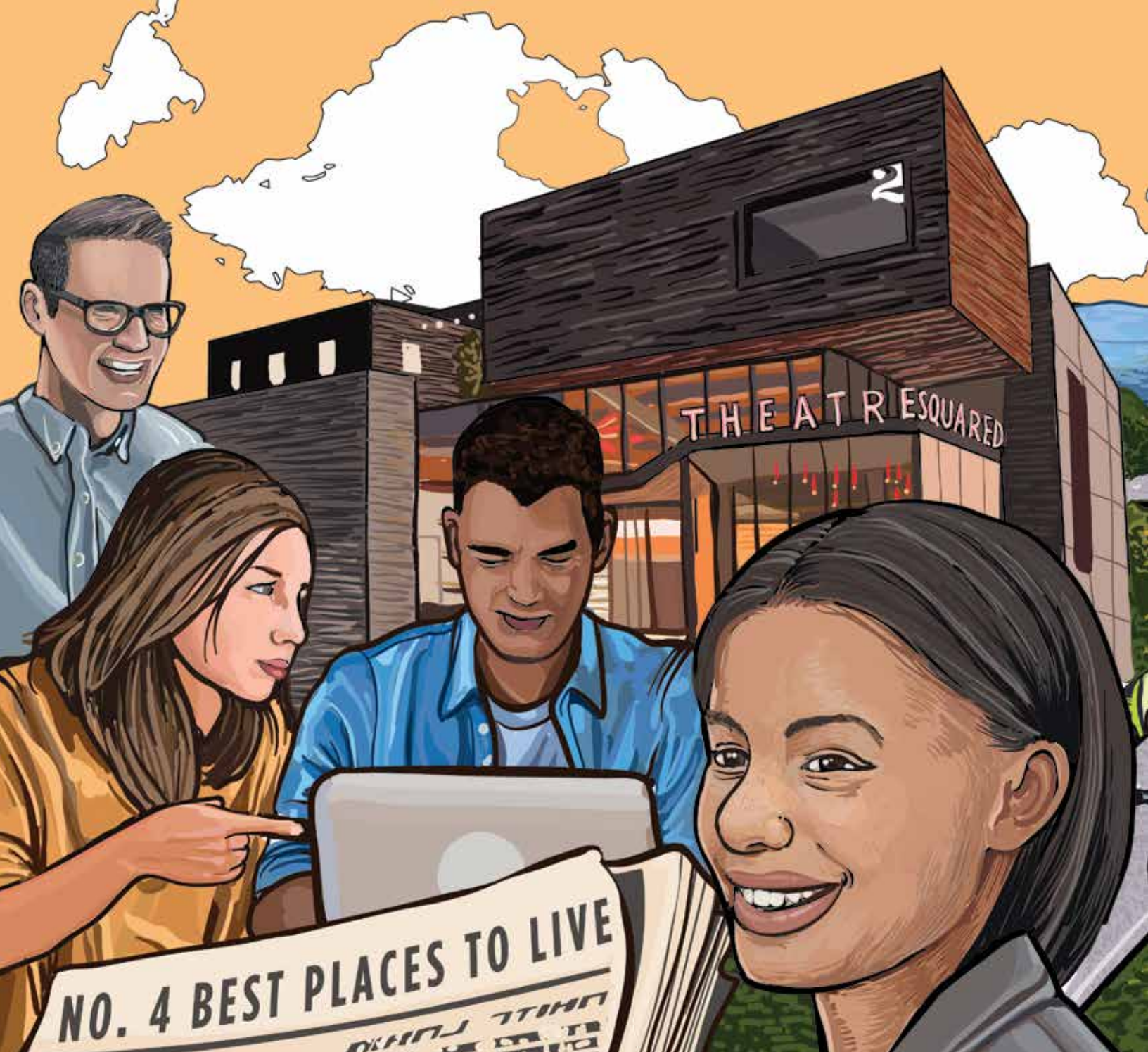
Great for Business.
Great for Life.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS
COUNCIL

www.nwacouncil.org



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019



Great for Business.
Great for Life.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS
COUNCIL

www.nwacouncil.org