



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL

2014 – 2015 Annual Report

July 20, 2015

Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council:

Welcome to the 2014-2015 Annual Meeting of the Northwest Arkansas Council. This meeting is one of our biggest — our 25th anniversary celebration of what our region has accomplished and about what's next on our organization's agenda.

All of you know the Northwest Arkansas Council's story. We started in 1990 when the Northwest Arkansas population was 239,000 people. Our region's largest employer back then was Walmart with sales near \$32 billion annually.

It's so different today. Northwest Arkansas has 510,000 residents, and Walmart's annual revenue is near \$482 billion annually. We're a region with three Fortune 500 members, and that's impressive.

The growth of Walmart, other companies and our population has been possible, in part, because the Council embraces regional solutions. The Council didn't build highways, water systems or airports. Rather, in all cases, the Council helped identify the best path, and then encouraged partners to work together toward a common goal. That regional approach to big projects worked in the 1990s, and it still works today.

Our annual report this year includes some long-ago history, provides information about what's been accomplished recently, and it describes some of what's ahead. You'll read about the important work of John Paul Hammerschmidt, Sam Walton, Alice Walton, Don Tyson, John Tyson, J.B. Hunt, Mark Simmons, John Lewis, Uvalde Lindsey and many others way back in the beginning. You'll also read about recent steps taken by the Council and its partners to address workforce, placemaking and infrastructure. In every instance, partnerships and regional solutions are the key.

It has been my honor to serve as Presiding Co-Chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council. It's provided me with new insight into some of the challenges our region faces in the years ahead, and I've had the opportunity to be closely involved as part of the Council in addressing those challenges.

Sincerely,



Rosalind Brewer
Presiding Co-Chair



April Moreton, director of development at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, was among several university leaders who participated in January's announcement of the private Christian school's \$125 million Campaign for the Next Century. The university has raised about half of the fund-raising goal.

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Survey: Half of 'Prime' Employers Face Difficulty Finding Workers

More than half of prime employers in Northwest Arkansas who participated in an annual survey are having difficulty attracting the workers they need to be successful in the region.

The Northwest Arkansas Chambers of Commerce and the Northwest Arkansas Council made the Employer Retention and Expansion (ER&E) survey's findings available in March.

Mike Harvey, the Council's chief operating officer, said 54 percent of the 140 prime employers who participated in the survey indicated they have difficulty filling some jobs at their facilities in Northwest Arkansas. Additionally, 56 percent of 104 companies answering another survey question said the difficulty is unique to Northwest Arkansas, not a nationwide issue for their particular industry.

Prime employers include companies that produce and distribute goods as well as maintain headquarters operations located in the region. They include some of the region's largest employment centers.

"What's clear to the Council, our region's Chambers of Commerce, our colleges and universities, and our local school districts is that Northwest Arkansas must do more to produce a workforce that meets the needs of our local employers," Harvey said. "There is a diverse array of high-paying job opportunities out there, yet employers are struggling to find the talent they need. It's an issue that's only become more pronounced as the economic recovery gains momentum. That's why workforce development is a key element in the region's three-year economic development strategy and why so many partners are working to address this issue."

The Council announced a new regional three-year strategy in January that prioritizes such things as developing "a pipeline of available workers that aligns with the demands of regional employers," attracting "talent that meets employer needs for more immediately, specialized, or tenured positions," and retaining new workers to reduce employer onboarding costs.

Other significant findings from the 487 ER&E surveys completed in 2014 were:

- Employers plan to hire 1,541 new workers over the next three years.
- Employers plan to invest \$112 million in expansions over the next three years.
- The prime survey participants identified community strengths over weaknesses by a 2-to-1 margin. Business climate as well as economic and community stability were among the strengths. Inadequate skilled worker supply was commonly listed as a weakness.
- The CRTS survey participants listed strengths over weaknesses by a 3-to-1 margin. Economic and community stability, quality of life and business climate were often



Mike Harvey, chief operating officer of the Northwest Arkansas Council, talks at a press conference about how federal statistics show the region added 10,000 jobs in 2014. There remains a strong need to upgrade the quality of the region's workforce by providing more educational opportunities and training.

cited as strengths. Poor infrastructure and transportation were listed as weaknesses. CRTS stands for Convention, Retail, Tourism and local Services, and includes businesses such as restaurants, banks, insurance agencies, movie theaters and retail stores.

The annual survey, which is conducted by Chamber of Commerce representatives in Bentonville/Bella Vista, Fayetteville, Rogers-Lowell, Siloam Springs and Springdale, began in late 2011. The program allows outreach specialists with five Northwest Arkansas Chambers of Commerce to conduct structured interviews with a representative of the leadership teams at businesses, nonprofit organizations and local governments.

The responses are entered into the Synchronist Business Information System database maintained by the Northwest Arkansas Council. Synchronist allows the Council and the Chambers of Commerce to track the information provided by the companies and to periodically review the feedback.

"We're to the point now where we are able to see trends that impact employers throughout the communities as well as identify situations that are unique to individual employers," Harvey said. "The face-to-face interviews position the Chambers of Commerce in a way to assist employers based on what they've heard during the interviews, and give the local employer a trusted contact they can turn to if they ever need to address an issue they might be facing."

The Chambers of Commerce were asked to contact 450 employers in 2014. The goal is the same for 2015.



Workforce Plan Sets Out to Build Pipeline While Attracting, Retaining Best Talent

The Northwest Arkansas Council's emphasis on the region's human resources infrastructure has its genesis in the Employer Retention and Expansion (ER&E) outreach program.

The region's five largest Chambers of Commerce — Bentonville/Bella Vista, Fayetteville, Rogers-Lowell, Siloam Springs and Springdale — have conducted over 1,500 face-to-face ER&E interviews since late 2011, and it's clear the demand for skilled workers has increased since those interviews began.

The Council's three-year plan incorporates workforce development, but the effort to develop, attract and retain talent took on a renewed urgency when the results from the 2014 employer surveys were tallied. More than half of the "prime" employers said they had difficulty finding skilled workers in Northwest Arkansas. Most of the respondents said the problem was a community issue, not an industry-wide problem.

The Northwest Arkansas Council identified three priority areas that needed improvement. The region needed:

- **Career Education Programming** that is relevant, up to date, and fully subscribed.
- **Communication** strategies that effectively reach influencers, students, incumbent workers, active candidates, active and passive job seekers.
- **Regional Action Networks** that connect influencers, students, active job seekers, passive job seekers, and employers; and professional networks to attract and retain employees.

The Council and its partners worked to identify the objectives and action items that they could influence and have a positive impact. The overall objectives to improve the region's workforce system are relatively straightforward:

Build a pipeline of workers that better align to regional employment demand.

A point of emphasis in the pipeline objective is on the secondary and non-degreed post-secondary system. There will be an assessment of programs, and ideas for how schools can modify Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings.

Of equal importance will be generating interest among influencers and students in the programs because the end game also should be about enrollment and completion rates. Some area schools have shown an ability to develop good CTE programs. However, without more student interest, the pipeline will remain constrained. Many action items for the K-12 strategy involve communication — with employers, counselors/career coaches, parents and students.

The other point of emphasis is focused on active and passive job seekers. The Council/chambers can utilize their database of company contacts and work with groups such as the Northwest Arkansas Human Resources Association to build a network of employers that feed their openings into an aggregator.

Attract workers to the region to alleviate the need for more immediate and specialized positions.

Most actions in the "attract" and "retain" objectives are dedicated to building out a regional support system for employer efforts to find and keep good talent. They may seem a little less strategic than the action items in Objective 1. It's because many of the assets to achieve this objective are in place or being planned. The actions in this objective are, in a nutshell, the packaging and promotion of those assets.

The actions include the development and promotion of a web/social media presence that provides relocation resources, along with a portal to Northwest Arkansas' growing arts, culinary, music, and outdoor scene. The lack of a regional resource like this was noted more often than any other by company human resource departments.



Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, pictured at a political event in Rogers earlier this year, created a new Arkansas Workforce Development Board that began meeting in June. Among its goals will be to develop a long-term plan to better coordinate industry needs, skills training and public education.

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Infrastructure Investments Remain Critical To Keep Pace with Steady Growth

Northwest Arkansas highways, the region's primary airport and the expanding public transportation system keep getting busier, and it remains critical for new major investments to continue to keep pace with the area's ever-growing population.

Local, regional and state investments are turning 2015 into an impressive year for upgrades to the region's infrastructure.

"When voters approved Issue No. 1 in 2012, it was a huge victory for Northwest Arkansas and for our state, and we're seeing more and more infrastructure added thanks to what voters decided," said Mike Malone, president and CEO of the Northwest Arkansas Council. "Our residents and our companies need great highways, and the \$1.8 billion investment approved by voters is making a huge difference in the future of our state.

"Highways are only part of what we need to do, though. We need great

highways, a great airport, and we need to be investing in public transportation. Most importantly, we need to plan well to ensure that it all comes together in the right way."

While the Council's new three-year strategic plan announced in January includes some new topics to address, most of the infrastructure-related goals are ones that have long been on the Council's front burner. Protecting water quality, ensuring that the region has an adequate water supply, providing public transportation, identifying highway funding and expanding air service are still top priorities.

Much was accomplished in recent months as the Council started pursuing the goals in its new three-year plan.

The year's biggest highway project is the beginning of the U.S. 412 Bypass of Springdale, a \$100.6 million effort that will connect Interstate 49 to Arkansas 112 via a new four-lane divided highway. The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department

held a groundbreaking ceremony on April 15. Building the 4.5-mile section of the highway is expected to take until late 2018.

Northwest Arkansas motorists in mid-2016 will see a major highway project finished up. It's a \$52.6 million, six-mile section of the Bella Vista Bypass, but there remains a major challenge for the Missouri Department of Transportation. Missouri doesn't have the funding to complete its portion of the bypass.

Also, major widening projects over the next three years will occur on I-49. The Highway Department plans to have the interstate fully widened to six lanes from Fayetteville to Bentonville by the end of 2017.

While the Northwest Arkansas Council remains engaged in conversations about how to expand the region's largest highways, its work in the past two years also focused on the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport and expanding public transportation.

The regional airport had a record-breaking 2014, increasing its passengers by more than 10 percent over 2013. With about 640,000 passengers last year, the airport is on pace to increase that number by about 4 percent this year.

The airport last year completed a new 20-year master plan that anticipates about \$200 million in upgrades in future years. Those upgrades include a parking deck, additional parking areas for rental cars and a new airport access road. The access road, which would connect the section of the U.S. 412 Bypass that's now under construction, would connect to the airport's south entrance. The access road has remained a regional priority for more than a decade.



APAC-Central, Inc. crews worked through the winter months and are now approaching the end of a \$10.1 million project to widen Interstate 49 to six lanes between New Hope Road and U.S. 62/102 in Rogers. The work should be complete later this year.

The airport facilities have long been considered excellent, and the airlines provide about 50 daily nonstop flights to 13 destinations. Yet, airfares remain a major area of concern for the region's business and leisure travelers.

The Council surveyed the region's employment centers in 2013, finding out that they paid some of the highest fares on flights to New York, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth and Atlanta. The employers said they'd like to see competition increased on those routes to drive down fares.

The Council over the past year has communicated directly with legacy and low-cost airlines, making the business case for why the airlines should provide new service in Northwest Arkansas.

Statistics kept by the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics show the average domestic roundtrip fare last year from XNA was \$477, ranking it as one of the nation's most expensive airports. For domestic fares, the national average was \$391.

The Council, meanwhile, has worked closely with Ozark Regional Transit to ensure that its leadership team knows about some of the workforce challenges being faced by area employers.

Employers indicated in annual surveys conducted by five Northwest Arkansas Chambers of Commerce that some

workers quit jobs and others didn't apply for jobs because of transportation issues.

Ozark Regional Transit stepped up to that challenge, providing new workforce-focused routes in Springdale to see if it could provide Springdale residents with access to jobs while addressing the employers' needs for more workers. ORT General Manager Joel Gardner thinks those experimental workforce-focused routes, which started in May, could increase ridership to over 343,000 trips this year.

The system boarded 321,000 passengers in 2014, and that was an increase over the previous year. The 2014 increases can be attributed to additional financial contributions from Springdale, Rogers, Fayetteville, Bentonville and Washington County. The additional funding allowed for new fixed routes to be created.

ORT is also one of the first customers of a new compressed natural gas station that opened in May. Opened by Kum & Go, it's the first CNG station in the region, and ORT is taking its four CNG buses through the station.

While the CNG buses cost more than those that rely on gasoline, ORT's expectation is the use of the less expensive CNG will reduce fuel costs in the long run, saving ORT thousands of dollars each year.



Huntsville High School students, who work closely with the Beaver Watershed Alliance, measure phosphorus concentrations in Town Branch. Since November, students have gone to six sites each month to check water quality.

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An area of support Human Resources professionals were seeking was in marketing the region. The Council will support employers by organizing around a few key events each year and taking the region's "Great for Life" message to other markets.

Additionally, the Council will support an annual technology summit in-region, with a goal of making it a destination event.

Retain incumbent workers to reduce the on boarding costs facing local employers.

The importance of retaining workers was cited just as often as attracting them in the Council's fact-finding process. Turnover is costly, and keeping young talent in Northwest Arkansas is a high priority for employers. In describing some of their key challenges, employers cited the difficulties that their new employees have "plugging into" the community,

especially in social and professional networks. Much of the Northwest Arkansas Council's activity will be focused on alleviating these issues.

The web/social media presence mentioned in the previous objective will be universal, and it will be used more by incumbent workers than those candidates evaluating Northwest Arkansas as a location to live and work.

The Council supports the expansion of programming efforts of the NWA Emerging Leaders group. Emerging Leaders has grown into a strong, young professionals organization, and it's prepared to take programming to a new level. A vibrant young professionals group was cited as a critical need, and Emerging Leaders can fill that role.

The Council also supports EngageNWA, a regional effort designed to engage the region's rapidly growing diverse populations.

\$1 to Council Gives \$270 in Benefit

A primary goal of the Northwest Arkansas Council is to provide members with high returns on their membership investments.

For every \$1 invested in membership fees since the organization was founded, members receive about \$270 in value. The figures represent how fees compare to the combination of federal, state and private grants received in Northwest Arkansas for specific projects.

Most of the grant money arrived in Northwest Arkansas for big-ticket projects over the past 25 years. They include such things as the federal funds received for the construction of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, opening the Benton-Washington Regional Public Water Authority and highway construction.



25-Year Message: Let's All Work Together Throughout Region

Northwest Arkansas Council Promotes Collaboration on Big-Ticket Projects

The U.S. is filled with fantastic organizations capable of bringing partners together to work regionally, but few can match the long-term success of the Northwest Arkansas Council.

Prior to the Council's establishment in 1990, Friday night high school football rivalries often carried over into a lack of cooperation between Northwest Arkansas cities. The Council's founding members say those rivalries started dying that year, and today's Northwest Arkansas is one where regional collaboration is the norm, not the exception.

Focusing on what's good for the region as a whole rather than what's best for one city, county or business, nearly every step the Council took over 25 years favored no Northwest Arkansas community over another.

The Council was instrumental in the development of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport, and for working to bring funding for projects such as U.S. 412 from Siloam Springs to Springdale. Northwest Arkansas was among the largest metropolitan areas in the nation without an interstate highway connection, and getting one was immediately a Council priority. Additionally, the Council helped obtain federal grants and loans that led to the Benton/Washington Regional Public Water Authority's formation, ultimately delivering Beaver Lake drinking water to smaller cities and towns across the region.

All the while, John Paul Hammerschmidt, who was the Council's chairman from 1993 to 2006, reminded members that the Council didn't build any physical infrastructure. His message was that the Council could facilitate and bring people together, but it was the public entity that accomplished the goal.

"The Council could look at the options, attempt to identify the best one and become an advocate and encourage the public entities to pursue it," said Scott Van Laningham, the president and CEO of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport.

The Council's roots were established about a decade before the airport, the highway projects or the water system were done. It was probably in 1986 or 1987 — no one knows for sure — when Walmart founder Sam Walton dialed up Fayetteville banker and long-time friend John Lewis to talk about the need for Northwest Arkansas cities and companies to work together, said Tommy Deweese, a current member of the Northwest Arkansas Council who knew both men.



Walmart founder Sam Walton (above) led the formation of the Northwest Arkansas Council, but he worked closely with **Fayetteville banker John Lewis** (left) to get the organization started. Lewis for years had envisioned the creation of a regional business organization.

(Photos courtesy of Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and Shiloh Museum of Ozark History.)



Alice Walton, Scott Van Laningham and Uvalde Lindsey worked together on the Northwest Arkansas Council's initial goals, which included improving U.S. 412 between Springdale and Siloam Springs, connecting the region with its first interstate highway, and opening a regional airport.

"That's sorta like Genesis in the Bible," Deweese said. "That's when the Council was formed. It was the 'in the beginning.'"

"John and I laughed about it. Sam made the call to John and said I think we can get things accomplished regionally that the individual towns can't accomplish by themselves. From that point, I heard John keep saying 'Friday night loyalty was good on Friday night, but the regional concept has a whole lot more to offer.' Regional was the way to go."

Rogers attorney David Matthews, a Council member since those earliest days when the organization was forming, said the Council was Lewis' "brainchild."

"John Lewis had talked about a roundtable group of influential business leaders to promote Northwest Arkansas," Matthews said. "But John Lewis, as good as he was, didn't have the stick to make things happen. Once you had buy-in from Sam and the Walmart folks and the Tyson folks, the rest was easy."

Sam Walton, his son Rob Walton, Don Tyson, Jack Stephens, Charles Murphy and a small group of state business leaders had already formed the Arkansas Business Council in 1987, and it had worked on a statewide basis to address business issues

and higher education. A newspaper columnist deemed it "the Good Suit Club."

"I don't think anyone ever voiced the idea that Sam and Don and Rob and others in Northwest Arkansas decided to have the Northwest Arkansas Council replace the Arkansas Business Council," said Archie Schaffer III, a Northwest Arkansas Council member who back in the day served as the Arkansas Business Council's executive director. "Many people, particularly in Northwest Arkansas, felt like in many ways it did."

The Northwest Arkansas Council did officially come together in 1990. A year earlier, Oklahoma leaders had traveled to Siloam Springs to announce that they'd be connecting Tulsa to Arkansas via a high-quality, four-lane highway, putting pressure on Arkansas to do something about its unimpressive two-lane route from Siloam Springs to Springdale.

In 1990, Sam Walton summoned Uvalde Lindsey, the head of the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District in Harrison, and his wife, Carol, to a meeting at a Fayetteville bank. Lindsey and many others aren't 100 percent sure who attended, but the list was a who's who of Northwest Arkansas: Sam's wife Helen was there and so

were Lewis, Tyson, Jim Blair, Red Hudson, Frank Broyles, Walter Turnbow, John Cooper, Ross Pendergraft, Vic Evans, Bob Lamb, Ed Bradberry and many others.

"He laid out what he wanted us to do," Lindsey said. "We huddled for a minute, said 'yes,' and moved 30 days later."

Lindsey's first assignment was big: Gear up for Springdale to host the U.S. House Public Works and Transportation Committee. Hammerschmidt was a committee member.

On Sept. 8, 1990, Northwest Arkansas Council members Sam Walton, Don Tyson, Jim

Blair, Alice Walton and J.B. Hunt were among the speakers who told the committee that the region's economic future hinged on three critical projects: Building four-lane U.S. 412 from Siloam Springs to Springdale, completing U.S. 71 as a four-lane highway from Kansas City to Shreveport and building a regional airport.

Sam Walton said his company's sales of \$32 billion could quadruple to \$130 billion by 2000. "But we need the airport and the roads to do it," Walton said, according to the Arkansas Gazette.

Dan Ferritor, who was the University of Arkansas chancellor from 1986-97, said Sam Walton was not very smooth when he first started talking.

"I still remember him mumbling a little bit, and he said, 'I just can't talk like this,' and he reaches behind him and put the Walmart cap on and he became a silver-tongued devil after that," Ferritor said. "He held court. It was something to behold."

Raymond Burns, the president of the Rogers-Lowell Chamber of Commerce, was among those who listened to Walton, Tyson and the others talk. "To me, that's where history was made, and that's when the Council became real," Burns said.

The airport, which was envisioned as something to replace the Fayetteville Municipal Airport as the region's primary facility, was always a front burner topic during the congressional field hearing and in the years that followed.

However, the first big regional infrastructure successes that involved the Council were highways. In 1995, a four-lane, 10-mile section of U.S. 71 was widened from I-40 to Mountainburg, shortening the drive to Fayetteville, and then \$50 million was spent to build U.S. 412 from Siloam Springs to Springdale. The 412 project finished up in 1996.

All the while, more and more people were getting behind the airport. Van Laningham, a former journalist, was hired by Lindsey in 1992. Van Laningham was ready to contribute and Lindsey unintentionally made it difficult at first.

"We had a meeting with engineers on the layout of the airport, and he knew more about the plan than the guys who wrote it," Van Laningham said. "The second meeting was with the airport finance guys, and he knew more about their plan than they did. And the third meeting was about the Onward Airport campaign, and I thought, 'Great I can contribute to this.' Same thing happened. Not five minutes into the meeting it was clear that he knew more about it than anyone."

Indeed, Lindsey was the perfect hire because he knew more about everything than everyone else whether the topic was highways, airports or water projects.

"I truly believe he reads the Federal Register at night just for fun," Burns said. "He knows where all the nooks and crannies are. He knew what it would take to get a project like the airport done. It was his intelligence and Carol's persistence that got it done."

It didn't hurt that Lindsey had major support from Alice Walton, who was the first chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council, and Hammerschmidt, who retired from Congress and replaced Alice Walton as chair in 1993. For the next 13

years, Uvalde Lindsey and Hammerschmidt guided the Council's work.

Alice Walton is best known for her support of XNA and building Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, but she probably doesn't get enough credit for encouraging the construction of U.S. 412 in Northwest Arkansas, several members of the Northwest Arkansas Council said.

"She'll say the higher accomplishment was the airport, but let's not forget she did a lot for getting 412," said Mark Simmons, one of the Council's charter members.

A new round of infrastructure successes started with the arrival of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport in November 1998. Thousands awaited Air Force One, carrying President Bill Clinton to Arkansas to celebrate its opening.

In January 1999, a four-lane divided highway from Mountainburg to Fayetteville

made too much progress. Everyone wanted to continue."

In its 25 years, the Council brought regional ideas focused on infrastructure, economic development and education.

Among the biggest was the Council's 2001 study by a Kansas City firm that proposed a future \$1.34 billion grid network of highways.

In 2002, the Council released the findings of a commissioned economic development study of Northwest Arkansas, presenting those findings to a state legislative committee. The study showed Tyson Foods, Walmart and J.B. Hunt Transport Services would continue to enjoy healthy growth, but probably not at the same amazing clip.

Lindsey described what the study showed to an Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reporter after the meeting.

"You expect an economic development study to tell you to go out and recruit companies, but that's not what this study told us," Lindsey said. "It told us we've got to give our people the skills they need to be more productive. Also, it says we need to put more research into growing more industries."

By then, Northwest

Arkansas was being recognized as an economic powerhouse. Led by the growth of Walmart, Tyson Foods, J.B. Hunt and Walmart suppliers, the Milken Institute put Northwest Arkansas atop its list of the nation's Best Performing Cities in 2003.

The remarkable leadership of Hammerschmidt and Lindsey was approaching its end. In 2005, they announced they'd be leaving the Council and the organization implemented a new chairman's system. Instead of the same individual leading the Council year after year, leaders such as Jim Walton, John A. White, John Tyson, Kirk Thompson and Lee Scott began serving one-year stints as "presiding co-chairman." The same system continues to be used today, providing the organization with a constant infusion of new ideas and fresh approaches to the most pressing regional issues of the day.

"The commitment to make it a better place to live has been, without measure, the reason we are the community we are. It wouldn't have happened, or it wouldn't have happened nearly as fast, without the Northwest Arkansas Council."

— Dan Ferritor



replaced a section of U.S. 71 that had been described by Reader's Digest as one of the nation's most dangerous highways.

In mid-1999, the Benton/Washington Regional Public Water Authority, commonly referred to as "Two-Ton," began treating Beaver Lake water and delivering it via a 70-mile pipeline to small towns and rural customers in Benton and Washington counties. The Council played a role in obtaining federal funding for that project.

With water being pumped, U.S. 412 and U.S. 71 much improved and airlines taking more than 350,000 regional airport passengers a year to destinations, the Council was at a crossroads. In short, what next?

"We had a council meeting at James at the Mill about whether we should declare victory and go home," Van Laningham said. "We decided to keep the effort going. We'd



State Sen. Uvalde Lindsey (top), the Northwest Arkansas Council's executive director from 1990-2006, and several other Council members and friends have worked with a local production company and the Council's staff to record their thoughts on Northwest Arkansas in recent weeks. Lindsey made clear there was not an instruction book on how to build a regional airport. The completion of **the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport's terminal** (above) was one of the region's great accomplishments.

Lindsey, who was later elected as a state representative and then state senator, was replaced by Fayetteville native Mike Malone in January 2006, and Malone remains the Council's president and CEO.

By 2007 and into 2008, an economic recession began impacting the nation, and its strong effect was felt across Northwest Arkansas. Council leaders saw the downturn as an opportunity to plan for when the economy improved, and the Council hired a consultant in February 2010 to develop a new strategic economic plan.

"This is an acknowledgment that we need to be correctly aligned so that when

the economy comes back, we're ready to break out," Malone told local media outlets.

With assistance from Main Street Services of Atlanta, the Council spent much of 2010 planning for a new, bigger way of operating, announcing a new five-year strategic plan in 2011. The Council added staff and began pursuing more than 50 strategic actions related to education, economic development, infrastructure expansion, and community vitality.

The challenges were enormous: Create a regional brand, increase college graduates, help high school students earn diplomas, figure out how to build more highways, establish a wayfinding system, assist downtowns, promote healthy eating and

exercise, help local employers interested in expanding their companies, recruit new companies to the region and tell the story of Northwest Arkansas to anyone interested in hearing it.

There were big successes as statewide voters approved a sales tax to build highways, a wayfinding system was installed in seven cities, and a regional brand was used to share why Northwest Arkansas is "Great for Business. Great for Life."

Additionally, local employers expanded, out-of-state companies learned about Northwest Arkansas and programs were created to increase college degrees and reduce high school dropouts.

Most of that work was completed in four years, so the Council early this year established a new three-year plan, one that focuses on improving Northwest Arkansas' workforce, attracting talent to the region and improving infrastructure. There are aspects of the plan related to placemaking, developing the next generation of regional leaders and continuing to help newcomers as they learn more about living in the region.

"The five-year plan was an incredible win for the region," said Ted Abernathy, an economic consultant who helped the Council and its partners develop the three-year plan. "The statistics about job creation, wages, educational attainment and so many other things show the plan worked and most of the goals were achieved. When something is working, you keep doing it, and that's what the next three-year plan sets out to do with some additions in a few key work areas."

Amid highway upgrades, airport construction, and the pursuit of economic development goals, the Council's work to bring people together to improve Northwest Arkansas is the organization's top accomplishment. Regional collaboration remains a priority.

"This is an excellent place to live and work, and it's moved from nobody heard of it to being recognized more often as Northwest Arkansas," Ferritor said. "The commitment to make it a better place to live has been, without measure, the reason we are the community we are. It wouldn't have happened, or it wouldn't have happened nearly as fast, without the Northwest Arkansas Council."



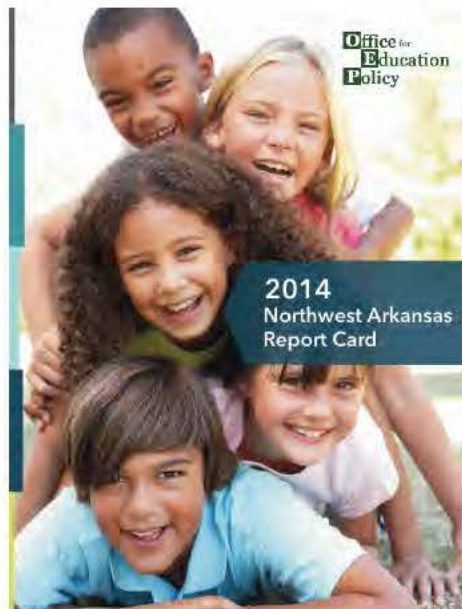
Annual Report Card: Northwest Arkansas Students Remain Best in Reading, Math, Science

Education report cards produced each year as part of a partnership between the Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas Council continue to show the state's top schools are located in its northwest corner.

The 2014 Northwest Arkansas Report Card, which was made public in March of this year, showed Northwest Arkansas students are performing well above state and national averages on tests that measure reading, math and science.

The report incorporates information on student performance, graduation rates, and district financial information from a variety of resources, and it presents the information in a "district dashboard" format that makes it easy for educators, school administrators, parents and state lawmakers to see how the region's school districts are performing.

"It can be difficult to locate reliable information about school districts, so this report provides the key information about all our regional districts in one place," said Gary Ritter, faculty director for the Office for Education Policy.



"Information on school performance shouldn't be limited to those who are experts in education. We hope to push discussions and ensure that policy decisions are made with informed data.

"When we look at all the data, we see that Arkansas, and especially Northwest Arkansas, is providing good schools.

Arkansas' high school graduation rate is above the national average, and our students score above the national average on reading, language and math."

The Northwest Arkansas Council is a partner in the report's publication because it allows newcomers to see what's occurring in the region's school districts. Strong educational systems are critical and the region's largest employers have expressed the need for school-related information they can share with candidates being recruited to accept jobs.

The Northwest Arkansas Report Card provides information about how students in 15 school districts and three charter schools are performing. Information about enrollment growth, per pupil expenditures, student-teacher ratios, high school graduation rates, test scores and student demographics is included for each district.

"What's clear is that Northwest Arkansas is home to a variety of high-quality public school districts and choices," Ritter said. "There are smaller districts, bigger districts, and several open-enrollment charter schools, and they each have their own strengths."

Lamb, Hammerschmidt Provided Strong Leadership

Two early leaders of Northwest Arkansas Council died in the past year.

Fayetteville resident Bob Lamb, 82, died on Oct. 25, 2014, and Congressman John Paul Hammerschmidt passed away April 1 this year. He was 92.

Lamb was executive vice president of the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Industries of Arkansas. He later moved to Fayetteville, working 18 years for Arkansas Western Gas Company.

"Bob Lamb was an institution in Arkansas economic development and governmental relations circles," said long-time Northwest Arkansas Council

member Archie Schaffer III. "He was a fixture at the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and the State Capitol for decades, and we were lucky in Northwest Arkansas when Bob decided to 'retire' in our part of the state. After his 'retirement' to Northwest Arkansas, he continued working for the betterment of our region and our state for another 10-15 years. We are eternally grateful for that."

Hammerschmidt, a Harrison native, was among the most important political figures in state history, serving 26 years in Congress. Soon after leaving Congress, he took over as chairman of the Northwest Arkansas Council, holding the position for 13 years.

"John Paul is a great example of the impact one man can make on the lives of many," said U.S. Senator John Boozman. "He never forgot about the people he was elected to serve in Washington and never passed up an opportunity to help Arkansas. John Paul was a true statesman whose dedication will live on as the standard for all public servants.

"As a mentor and friend, John Paul's wisdom and counsel has shaped my time in Washington more than anyone else. When I ran for Congress in 2001, I sought out John Paul for guidance. The advice he gave more than a decade ago continues to help me in my service to Arkansas today."



Amazeum, Greenway's Completion Highlight Northwest Arkansas Enhancements

Northwest Arkansas continues to add big-city amenities to further augment its position as a haven for art, outdoor recreation and interactive education.

The past five years have seen the region become a quality-of-life leader with new destinations such as Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Walmart AMP, Siloam Springs Kayak Park and miles of mountain bike trails. That trend continued in 2015 with the openings of the Razorback Regional Greenway and the Scott Family Amazeum.

The Scott Family Amazeum, the region's newest amenity, welcomed its first visitors on July 15 with its grand opening celebration. The 50,000-square-foot, hands-on, interactive museum for children and families, which is named for and received financial support from former Walmart CEO Lee Scott and his family, is located near the main entrance to Crystal Bridges in Bentonville.

The museum is designed as an interactive space that will bring learning to life for curious minds – whether those minds belong to children or adults. A Walmart Market allows children to shop or get behind the counter, while the General Mills Lift, Load and Haul exhibit helps participants learn about movement. The Ozarks come to life through an art studio and cabin experience.

More than a decade in the making, the Razorback Regional Greenway is a 36-mile paved trail that connects Northwest Arkansas from Fayetteville to Bella Vista. It passes through six cities, provides alternative transportation options and helps build more connected, vibrant and



The openings of the **Scott Family Amazeum** (top) and the **Razorback Regional Greenway** (above) celebrated new quality-of-life amenities.

healthy communities. While much of the Razorback Regional Greenway has been open for several years, a crucial connecting piece in Springdale and Lowell pulled the entire greenway together, making it possible to ride the entire route uninterrupted.

"The greenway is a vital piece of our regional transportation infrastructure," said Misty Murphy, regional trails coordinator for the Northwest Arkansas Council. "People use the trails as a work or school commute for both health and economic reasons. Through trails, we are helping build thriving communities that make Northwest Arkansas stand out as a desirable place to live or visit."

The Northwest Arkansas Council hosted a May 2 grand opening in downtown Springdale for the now-connected greenway. Mayors from seven cities participated in the

grand opening, and about 400 people rode the trail from end to end. More than 2,000 people walked, rode a bike, took a bus or hopped on the Arkansas & Missouri Railroad to reach downtown Springdale for the celebration.

While the Greenway is connected, trail development in Northwest Arkansas is not finished. Re-routes are planned to make the greenway more usable and accessible, particularly in the Pinnacle Hills area in Rogers. Regional trail signage, benches, and additional trailheads are in the works as well.

The Greenway is the backbone of a 100-plus mile paved system. It connects mountain bike trails at Slaughter Pen and Lake Fayetteville, and there are plans to extend spurs to Lake Atalanta, Mount Kessler, Blowing Springs and Springdale mountain bike trails. The region's leadership in mountain

bike culture was recognized last year with the designation of Fayetteville and Bentonville as ride centers by the International Mountain Bicycling Association. Bentonville joins nine destinations internationally as silver-level centers, and Fayetteville is among 16 bronze-level centers.

"Ride center designations in Northwest Arkansas represent destinations for riders who look for the 'best of the best' in the mountain bike world," said Steve Schneider, IMBA's South Central regional director. "Since the ride center designation hit Northwest Arkansas, we have seen an influx of riders from all over America. We've witnessed people from Europe visiting here to ride."



Rosalind Brewer, the president and CEO of Sam's Club, is the outgoing presiding co-chair of the Northwest Arkansas Council. **Jim Walton**, the chairman and CEO of Arvest Bank Group, is the new presiding co-chair. The 2014-2015 year will be Walton's third stint as the Council's presiding co-chair.



Officers of the Council

Position Held	Officer
Presiding Co-Chair (2014-2015)	Rosalind Brewer
Presiding Co-Chair (2015-2016)	Jim Walton
Past Presiding Co-Chair (2013-2014)	Mark Simmons
Past Presiding Co-Chair (2012-2013)	John Tyson
Past Presiding Co-Chair (2011-2012)	David Gearhart
Vice Chair / Secretary / Treasurer	Scott Van Laningham
Chair Emeritus	Alice Walton
Chair Emeritus	John Paul Hammerschmidt

Members of the Executive Committee

Type of Appointment (term of appointment)	2014-2015 Executive Committee
Presiding Co-Chair (1-year term)	Rosalind Brewer
Vice Chair / Secretary / Treasurer (indefinite term)	Scott Van Laningham
President, NWA Chambers of Commerce	Dana Davis (through January 2016)
Co-Chair's Appointees (1-year term)	Jeff Schomburger and Mary Beth Brooks
Nominating Committee Representative #1 (3-year term)	Chip Pollard (term expires in 2015)
Nominating Committee Representative #2 (3-year term)	Mitchell Johnson (term expires in 2016)
Nominating Committee Representative #3 (3-year term)	Evelyn Jorgenson (term expires in 2017)

2014-2015 MAJOR INVESTORS





Members During 2014-2015

Jay Allen, Jay Allen Communications
Ramsay Ball, Colliers International
Dick Barclay, Beall Barclay
Susan Barrett, Consultant
Rick Barrows, Multi-Craft Contractors, Inc.
Neff Basore, Cooper Communities, Inc.
Fadil Bayyari, Bayyari Construction and Properties
Steven Beam, Burns & McDonnell
Clinton Bennett, Coldwell Banker Real Estate
Rod Bigelow, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
Rob Boaz, Carroll Electric Cooperative Corp.
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, Vestar Capital Partners
Sarah Clark, Mitchell Communications Group
Steve Clark, Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
Ed Clifford, The Jones Trust
Justin Cole, Rich Baseball Operations
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, C-Synergy, LLC
John Elrod, Conner & Winters
Danny Ferguson, Southwestern Energy
Greg Fogle, Nabholz Construction Services
Cathy Foraker, AT&T
Alan Fortenberry, Beaver Water District
Ed Fryar, Ozark Mountain Poultry
Troy Galloway, Arkansas National Guard
G. David Gearhart, University of Arkansas
Darin Gray, Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods
Stan Green, Lindsey Green Properties
Mary Ann Greenwood, Greenwood Gearhart Inc.
Scott Grigsby, Arvest Bank Group
John Paul Hammerschmidt, former U.S. Congressman
D. Scott Hancock, Centennial Bank
Gary Head, Signature Bank of Arkansas
Dan Hendrix, Arkansas World Trade Center
Don Hinkle, FedEx Freight
Tom Hopper, Crafton Tull & Associates
Dennis Hunt, Stephens, Inc.
Walter Hussman, WEHCO Media Inc.
Mitchell Johnson, Ozark Electric Cooperative Corp.
Eli Jones, University of Arkansas
Robert Jones III, Conner & Winters
Evelyn Jorgenson, NorthWest Arkansas Community College
James Keenan, The Raven Foundation
Jeff Koenig, Upchurch Electrical Supply Company

Peter Kohler, UAMS Northwest
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
Jeff Milford, AEP SWEPCO
Mike Moss, Moss Financial Group
Sharif Omar, Northwest Health Systems
Becky Paneitz, Inseitz Group
Neal Pendergraft, Donald W. Reynolds Foundation
Gene Pharr, Arkansas Farm Bureau
Buddy Philpot, Walton Family Foundation
Eric Pianalto, Mercy Health Systems of Northwest Arkansas
Chip Pollard, John Brown University
John Roberts, J. B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc.
Adam Rutledge, First Security Bank
Reynie Rutledge, First Security Bank
Maggie Sans, Walmart Stores
Nick Santoleri, Rockline Industries
Marshall Saviers, Sage Partners
Archie Schaffer, Tyson Foods
Charles Scharlau, Southwestern Energy
Jeff Schomburger, Procter & Gamble
Anita Scism, Endeavor Foundation
Lee Scott, Walmart Stores
Mindy Sherwood, Procter & Gamble
Mark Simmons, Simmons Foods
Todd Simmons, Simmons Foods
Cameron Smith, Cameron Smith & Associates
Donnie Smith, Tyson Foods
Steve Stafford, Anstaff Bank
Philip Taldo, Weichert Realtors, The Griffin Company
Kirk Thompson, J. B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc.
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, University of Arkansas (retired)
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
Jeremy Wilson, NewRoad Ventures
Charles Zimmerman, Walmart Stores
Randy Zook, Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce

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YEARS OF LEADERSHIP

Past Chairs

Alice Walton – John Paul Hammerschmidt – Jim Walton
John A. White – Kirk Thompson – Lee Scott – David Gearhart
John Tyson – Mark Simmons – Rosalind Brewer

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS
COUNCIL

25
years

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