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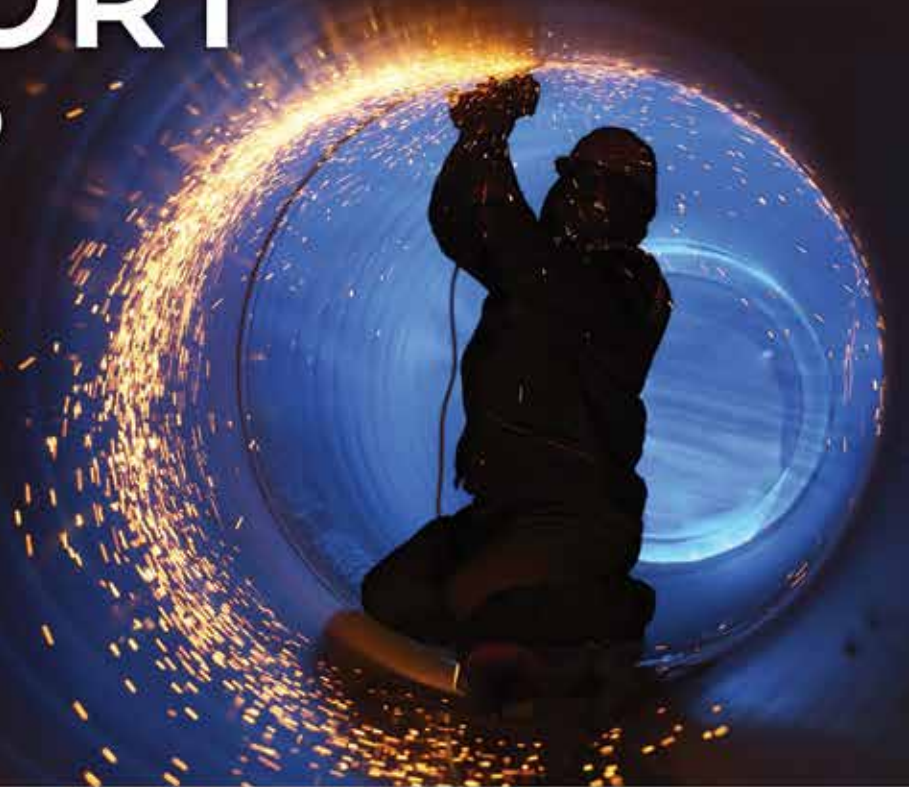


- 7 BUSINESS CLIMATE OVERVIEW**
With hard-working leadership at all levels, Arkansas has created an environment for growth and prosperity.
- 10 INTERVIEW WITH GOV. HUTCHINSON**
Gov. Asa Hutchinson took a data-driven approach to saving lives and jobs during pandemic.
- 16 INTERVIEW WITH MIKE PRESTON**
Arkansas Secretary of Commerce Mike Preston shares how the state focused on helping businesses respond to pandemic challenges.
- 19 TELLING THE ARKANSAS STORY**
Amplifying the voices of successful Arkansas companies.
- 22 BLUEPRINTS TO SUCCESS**
When doing business in Arkansas, you can expect the best customer service in the industry.
- 24 STATISTICAL PROFILE**
A look at the state in facts and figures.

- 28 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
Arkansas' Future Fit Program is creating a custom-made workforce for employers.
- 32 BUSINESS WORKS HERE**
Arkansas' remarkable tale of entrepreneurship is characterized by giants like Walmart, J.B. Hunt and more.
- 36 A SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION**
Public-private partnerships are catalyzing momentum in various ways across the state.
- 40 AEROSPACE & DEFENSE**
Major aerospace and defense firms have their sights set on Arkansas.
- 42 METALS**
Northeast Arkansas leads the nation in steel and metal production.



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46 TIMBER & FOREST PRODUCTS
A timber revolution is taking root in Arkansas.

48 CORPORATE & SHARED SERVICES
For a fraction of the cost, Arkansas' corporate firms find an able and skilled workforce to fuel growth for years to come.

50 FIREARMS & AMMUNITION
From Sig Sauer to FIOCCHI, firearm and ammunition makers target Arkansas.

52 TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT
With a skilled workforce and access to major industry players transportation equipment manufacturing is on a roll in Arkansas.

56 FOOD & AGRIBUSINESS
Global companies like Tyson Foods and Gerber continue to invest in the state, generation after generation.

58 TECHNOLOGY
Affordability and an abundance of tech talent lure tech companies to Arkansas.



60 DISTRIBUTION & LOGISTICS
On top of its central location, Arkansas' transportation infrastructure moves goods to domestic and global markets quickly and efficiently.

62 REGION PROFILES
Arkansas' four regions support growth across a diverse range of industries.

66 REMOTE WORKING
From its enviably high quality of life to its improved connectivity, working from home in Arkansas is easier – and better – than ever.

68 PARKS, RECREATION & TOURISM
No trip to the Natural State is complete without visiting these 9 parks and attractions.

70 BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE
Broadband expansion in the state's rural communities promises opportunity and growth for all.

74 PHOTO GALLERY
Views from The Natural State.

80 INDEX TO ADVERTISERS



119 ACRE CERTIFIED SITE

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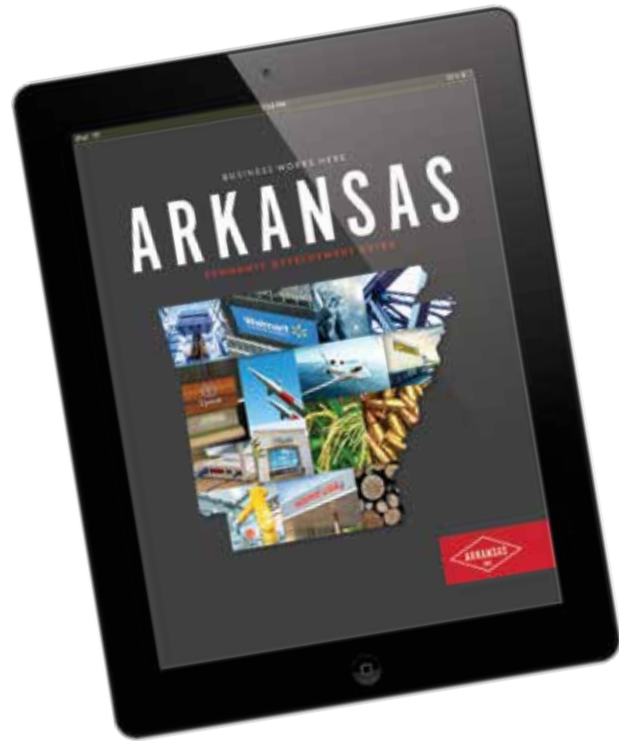
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What Happens When You Never Stop Working?

In the case of Arkansas, you get a vastly improved business environment.

by **RON STARNER**

Sometimes a headline says it all. On the Arkansas Economic Development Commission's website, the "Meet the Governor" page says this: "He'll be the guy with his sleeves rolled up."

It's an appropriate image, because Gov. Asa Hutchinson never stops working to improve the business climate of Arkansas. Sworn into office in January 2015, he immediately went to work to pass the largest income tax rate cut in state history. But he didn't stop there.

He followed that up with an initiative to require computer coding classes in every public high school, making Arkansas a model of public education for the nation.



Gov. Hutchinson at Koppers Announcement Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor



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5 Fortune 500 Companies are headquartered in Arkansas

Source: Arkansas EDC



“Thanks in large part to Gov. Hutchinson and our partners in the great state of Arkansas, Camden is poised to become a major center of large solid rocket motor production.”

– Eileen Drake, CEO and president, Aerojet Rocketdyne

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor regularly visited foreign CEOs on their turf to tout the many reasons why they should expand to Arkansas. He traveled to France, Japan, Israel, Germany, India, Dubai, China, the Czech Republic and Cuba.

During the pandemic, he made critical job-saving decisions as well. Relying upon data from public health experts and a team of economists, Hutchinson took a measured and balanced approach toward managing both the health crisis and the recession. As a result, more than 100,000 jobs were spared.

Management like this is a big reason why so many CEOs have publicly endorsed Hutchinson’s approach to economic development. Big River Steel CEO David Stickler said that Arkansas has the potential to become the nation’s incubator for artificial intelligence for manufacturing, and his steel company continues to make investments in the state.

Other CEOs have followed suit. They include the leaders of Transplace, Lockheed Martin, and Gerber, to name a few. Sizable expansion projects are occurring in the state as well. Just recently, Arkansas secured significant expansion investments from Emerson, Nice-Pak, and Aerojet Rocketdyne.

Emerson announced on Oct. 19 that it plans to open a \$35 million facility in Ash Flat that will employ 245 people

within the company’s tools and home products segment. Nice-Pak announced on Nov. 16 they will add a new disinfectant wipe line adding 176 jobs in Jonesboro. Aerojet Rocketdyne said on Oct. 6 that it officially opened its new solid rocket motor facility in Camden.

“The Engineering, Manufacturing and Development facility is the newest, state-of-the-art large solid rocket motor manufacturing facility in the nation, and we look forward to expanding our decadeslong solid rocket motor production capability in Camden,” said Eileen P. Drake, CEO and president of Aerojet Rocketdyne. “Thanks in large part to Gov. Hutchinson and our partners in the great state of Arkansas, Camden is poised to become a major center of large solid rocket motor production.”

Other CEOs have joined this growing chorus of voices endorsing the Arkansas business climate, and they all generally sing the same refrain. They point to the high-quality workforce found in the state; best-in-class talent for retail and consumer packaged goods companies; ease of doing business; quality of life; and very affordable cost of living and doing business. According to CNBC, Arkansas offers the third-lowest cost of doing business in the nation.

Add to that mix a Governor who never stops working to better his state’s business climate, and you get an unstoppable force. ◊



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How Arkansas Saved 100,000 Jobs

Data-driven approach to decision-making saves lives and jobs.

by *RON STARNER*

When COVID-19 hit America in early 2020, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson did something that very few other governors across the country even contemplated. He decided to base all his pandemic response decisions on data.

Employing a team of scientists, public health experts and economic researchers, Hutchinson determined

that the best course of action for his state moving forward would be to forego the widespread shutdowns and instead roll out case-by-case moves designed to maximize public health protection and ensure economic continuity.

The strategy worked, and it has worked exceedingly well ever since.

In a frank interview with this publication, the governor recently took time out to address this strategy and how it paid off for the people of his state.

Gov. Hutchinson presenting the Arkansas Ready for Business campaign during a COVID press conference. Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor



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From the onset, my administration surrounded itself with experts in the field. I declared a public emergency and took temporary measures for select businesses that were most likely to spread the virus, but I never issued a shelter-in-place order.”

– Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson

A recent economic study reported that your response to the COVID-19 pandemic saved about 100,000 jobs in Arkansas. How were you able to do that?

Gov. Hutchinson: While COVID-19 has impacted the state of Arkansas, it also has awakened a resilient state that has put its best foot forward in the recovery process. We took a measured, data-driven approach to the pandemic and were able to save a lot of jobs as a result.

From the onset, my administration surrounded itself with experts in the field. I declared a public emergency and took temporary measures for select businesses that were most likely to spread the virus, but I never issued a shelter-in-place order.

In addition to allowing companies to stay in business, we supported them by administering many state and federally funded programs. And we never stopped our efforts to attract new businesses to the state, which have paid off — several companies have announced new projects to expand or invest in Arkansas this year. These measures have helped our economy and are a major reason our unemployment rate continues to be lower than the national average.

What were the key pillars of your state's response to the pandemic and resulting recession?

Gov. Hutchinson: Our response strategy continues to be focused on consistent communication with the public and a strong partnership between the state government, the private sector and our communities. One of our biggest strengths is Arkansas's willingness to work together. Our state government strives to operate lean and efficiently, thereby giving us flexibility to make important decisions quickly in the dynamic

environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. We acted promptly and carefully to utilize state and federal support to help businesses around the state. As a result, there are many examples of businesses that have remained open and kept employees on the payroll.

What will it take for your state to fully recover from the impacts of the pandemic?

Gov. Hutchinson: In Arkansas, we work together, and that will continue to be a critical element of our successful recovery. A strong partnership between the private and public sectors is of utmost importance to push the state forward. I established an Economic Recovery Task Force to examine the impact and recovery needs across a variety of businesses and industries, and to develop strategies and recommendations to restore our economy. I think this Task Force will be instrumental in helping the state recover from the pandemic. The Task Force is chaired by Steuart Walton, grandson of Walmart founder Sam Walton, and is made up of 35 industry and state leaders from the public and private sectors. The group works in conjunction with the Arkansas Department of Health and various subject-matter experts to provide guidance, resources, and recommendations on best practices for each sector of the economy on measures that will lead to our economic recovery.

What do you think have been some of your state's biggest economic development wins of 2020?

Gov. Hutchinson: Despite COVID-19, we have continued to attract and grow various industries across the state. For instance, Cynergy Cargo, an enclosed cargo trailer manufacturer headquartered



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Since 2015, the Hutchinson administration has led the effort to cut more than \$250 million in income tax for 1.3 million Arkansans.

Source: Arkansas Governor's Office

in Douglas, Georgia, is building a new facility in Crossett, Arkansas. The company plans to hire 70 new full-time employees, including carpenters, welders and electricians, among others.

Gerber is an existing company that has grown through the pandemic.

Gerber Products announced it will be adding a product line at its manufacturing facility in Fort Smith. This will result in 50 full-time jobs and a \$30 million investment for new food manufacturing, food processing equipment, and machinery and infrastructure improvements.

We are also excited to see Amazon open its first fulfillment center in Little Rock. The new fulfillment center, which is expected to launch in 2021, will create over 1,000 new full-time jobs with industry-leading pay and comprehensive benefits. Amazon has announced four expansion projects in Arkansas since 2018.

And then we have an Italian-based company, Fiocchi of America, which is establishing a new manufacturing facility in Little Rock, our capital city. Fiocchi is a global leader in small-caliber ammunition and will invest \$15 million to establish a fully independent industrial platform in the U.S. The new plant will strengthen the company's focus on manufacturing premium products and improve its position in the premium segment of the market.

What are your top three priorities for your state heading into 2021?

Gov. Hutchinson: In 2021, we will continue to care for our existing businesses and ensure they have the resources necessary to navigate future challenges in the wake of this pandemic. We will continue to strengthen and capitalize on our recruiting efforts to attract businesses and grow our highly skilled workforce in the state. And we will continue to work with our education system and industry to strengthen our workforce development programs.

How has the brand identity of Arkansas changed over the last five years?

Gov. Hutchinson: The "Arkansas Inc." brand was born five years ago to communicate our story of a

pro-business environment that operates leaner and faster and is more focused through a streamlined state government. My administration has worked very hard to place the private sector at the forefront of this narrative, letting businesses in Arkansas tell their success stories, and thus elevate our name as a brand. Since 2015, my administration has led the effort to cut more than \$250 million in income tax for 1.3 million Arkansans. In addition to these tax cuts in 2015, 2017 and 2019, we've maintained a balanced budget and we are investing significantly in our infrastructure.

Companies are responding by placing their confidence and their capital in our state. In the past five years, we have announced projects worth over \$10 billion in new capital investment and over 24,000 new jobs.

What is your state's best-kept secret?

Gov. Hutchinson: Arkansas boasts a largely stable economy, thanks in part to the diversity of our industry. This diversity translates into a wide range of skills, workforce and people. I think you would be surprised at the number of high-caliber professionals in the state of Arkansas and the diversity of their expertise across fields that include engineering, technology, education, arts and film, among others.

As talented, knowledge workers flee bigger cities and look to work remotely in more rural locations, how can your state take advantage of that trend?

Gov. Hutchinson: The pandemic has opened the doors for a new way of doing things. Balancing work and home are becoming increasingly important as people work remotely. Why not strike that balance in a state that offers natural beauty and abundant outdoor recreational opportunities along with the amenities of any large city? In Arkansas, you can experience the best of both worlds — from the culinary and cultural arts to the outdoor enthusiasts. With the cost of living ranking third-lowest in the nation, some of the lowest commute times in the country, and the ease of doing business here, it's easy for entrepreneurs of all ages and backgrounds to call Arkansas home.

What are you doing to attract more foreign direct investment to Arkansas?

Gov. Hutchinson: The Arkansas Economic Development Commission houses three international

offices that connect with companies across the globe that are looking for a safe place to invest. They want a location — geographically and logistically — that provides certainty and stability, and a place where they feel welcomed and supported through partnerships that lead to a strong workforce and excellent business connections. When travel restrictions allow, I frequently visit companies around the world to promote investments in Arkansas. In 2019, my team and I fostered international trade and investment by attending a total of 163 company meetings, trade shows, investment seminars, special events, trade missions and prospective company visits.

What are some emerging industry sectors in Arkansas that you wish people knew more about?

Gov. Hutchinson: Arkansas is a global leader in financial technology. The Venture Center, based in Little Rock, is a support organization for entrepreneurs that helps startups become viable; helps

high-growth businesses by leveraging the expertise of world-class mentors; provides intensive programming; and generates connections to the investor community.

The Venture Center operates two leading FinTech programs: the FIS FinTech Accelerator in partnership with FIS, the world's largest global provider dedicated to banking and payments technologies; and the ICBA (Independent Community Bankers of America) ThinkTech Accelerator, the only community-bank-focused fintech accelerator in the world. These two programs lead promising and innovative FinTech businesses through rigorous, 12-week programs each year. Both programs are highly competitive, with hundreds of applicants from around the world vying for 10 spots per accelerator. ◊

In the past five years, Arkansas has announced projects worth over \$10 billion in new capital investment and over 24,000 new jobs.

Source: Arkansas EDC



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Mike Preston, Secretary of Commerce, at a local announcement

Listening, Learning & Leading

How the Arkansas EDC pivoted and paved the road to recovery.

by RON STARNER

From the Governor's Office on down, Arkansas government has been focused on leading the state toward a comprehensive recovery from the unanticipated global pandemic known as COVID-19. Just as Gov. Asa Hutchinson based the state's coordinated response to the coronavirus outbreak on hard data, his cabinet members in Little Rock and other leaders across the state followed suit. Leading the charge on helping businesses respond to the many challenges created by the pandemic was the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. We recently caught up with Mike Preston, Secretary of Commerce and Executive Director of AEDC, to get the view from the top.

How did AEDC pivot and lead the charge during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

MIKE PRESTON: When we got hit with it, our economy was really humming along. We had growth for five or six years, and we were at 3.6% unemployment. Our first positive COVID case was in mid-March. It wasn't long until our weekly unemployment claims shot from 1,000 to 60,000. We put all our resources to work. We knew the federal government would allocate PPP funds to help companies, but we also knew it would take a while for a bill to pass through Congress. We acted quickly to set up a \$9 million bridge loan program to help local firms keep people employed until the PPP funds came in. Companies could get \$1,000 to \$25,000 from this state program. Many businesses were trying to reopen and had to adhere to new guidelines

put forth by the CDC and our public health agencies, but many companies did not have the resources necessary to acquire the needed PPE. We were able to redirect CARES dollars and set up \$130 million in grant funds to help companies adhere to CDC guidelines and reopen. I give the Governor a lot of credit. He drew nationwide criticism for his decision not to issue a full shelter-in-place order. Now we have the results to show for it. His thoughtful decisions saved 100,000 jobs in our state. By keeping the state open and working, we avoided a situation that would have been much worse. The governor tracked the case numbers every day and based his decision to stay open on the data. Keeping businesses open made a big difference in our state.

What are your organization's top three priorities for 2021 and beyond?

PRESTON: First and foremost, it is helping our businesses. There are still challenges out there. We also want to pivot back into economic development. We have already been able to bring some prospects back. We want to get back to proactively marketing Arkansas and telling our story. We really want to focus on finding new opportunities. There will be a lot of new opportunities to bring manufacturing back to this country. There will be new industries coming out of the pandemic. We want to make sure we are fully taking advantage of that. For example, companies do not have to be on the East Coast or the West Coast anymore. Why not move to where the costs are lower? We are targeting companies in large cities that are looking to shed costs. With people working remotely, companies are not going to want to pay the high leasing rates that they currently must pay in New York and San Francisco. This will allow those businesses to save a lot on real estate, taxes, and overall costs of

doing business. Meanwhile, we are looking for additional ways to cut taxes to grow our economy.

What were your three biggest economic development wins of the past year?


PRESTON: I am proud of the work we did during the pandemic. We awarded \$130 million in Ready for Business grants, which impacted about 225,000 jobs in the state of Arkansas. We deployed another \$125 million to rural Arkansas to deploy broadband into those smaller communities. Amazon announced a large fulfillment center in the Port of Little Rock, which is under construction now. It will be home to over 1,000 Amazon employees. Crossett landed Cynergy Cargo. They are based in Georgia. They make cargo trailers. It was about 70 jobs. For a small town, that is very meaningful. The owner migrated from Guatemala in the 1990s. He wanted a bigger part of the American Dream. He grew his company from just his wife and him to over 200 employees today. They chose Crossett as their new home. This is a second facility for them. We also announced that Emerson, a global leader in technology and software solutions, will open a facility in Ash Flat, Ark., where it plans to invest \$35 million and create approximately 245 new jobs within four years. We continue to see companies starting to pick their projects back up. The team at AEDC is excited to do competitive economic development work again.

What is the brand identity of Arkansas? How is it changing?

PRESTON: We have always been very strong in agriculture, manufacturing and logistics. What is changing for us is that we are also becoming known as a technology-driven state. Most of Walmart's growth is in e-commerce and

technology-driven jobs. The Governor's initiative to mandate that computer coding be offered in every high school is making a huge impact, not just in computer fields but in many sectors that require employees to be computer savvy. We are the first state in the nation to do that. And now, the Governor has expanded his computer science education initiative to require students to have a computer science credit to graduate. Our colleges and universities are building out new programs in computer science and cybersecurity. Technology is going to be at the forefront of our growth.

What are the biggest challenges facing Arkansas businesses now?

PRESTON: Obviously, it will be COVID-19 — what happens in the coming months and how businesses prepare for the future. How do you adapt to the new normal? We have overcome adversity in the past and we will do so again. As unemployment levels off, labor becomes a challenge again. Finding skilled workers will be an issue that must be addressed. The services sector was hit very hard. Tourism is the second biggest sector behind agriculture in our state. It will take longer for them to come back. We are fortunate that we have such a Natural State — our nickname. We took advantage of what we have here during the pandemic. People could still visit our state parks. There are a number of challenges facing Arkansas businesses due to the pandemic, but I am confident that Arkansans will continue to put people back to work under Governor Hutchinson's leadership and the recommendations of our Economic Recovery Task Force. Our Recovery Task Force has three cabinet secretaries, including myself. Go to www.ArkansasReady.com to see the most recent reports from the task force. 

Telling the Arkansas Story



Clint O'Neal, EVP of Global Business, at a local announcement

Amplifying the voices of successful Arkansas companies.

Arkansas has a diverse economy, with companies across a variety of sectors experiencing growth and success. Business leaders are often the best advocates for the state and its business-friendly culture. Clint O'Neal, Executive Vice President of Global Business for the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, wants everyone to hear what these executives are saying. In his role, O'Neal leads the marketing and sales teams at AEDC where he is working to deliver a strong message that Arkansas is among the top places in the world to do business. In this interview, he discusses Arkansas' approach to telling the story of why the Natural State is poised for success.

What do you say to companies that are evaluating Arkansas as a potential business location?

CLINT O'NEAL: Our message is simple: listen to the business leaders who have found success here. Stephens Inc. CEO Warren Stephens tells business owners, "You can feel the heartbeat of the country" in Arkansas. Ron Cohen, CEO of Sig Sauer, says, "Business is personal," and that his personal relationships with leaders in Arkansas, including Governor Asa Hutchinson, made the difference in his decision to create jobs here. Companies here find that it's easy to work with state and local government, and they are embraced by our citizens who are ready to go to work. Investing in Arkansas has meant long-term growth and success for many companies throughout the state.

Jessica Breaux, Manager of Economic Development for Amazon, told me in a podcast interview how excited the

company is about its recent expansions into Arkansas and noted the state's great support system. She said, "It always helps when Arkansans want to see Amazon be successful."

Our team at the Arkansas Economic Development Commission fights for every available opportunity to influence location decisions. But our pitch is not to listen as I tell you how great Arkansas is. Instead, we encourage business leaders to listen to their peers. We tell the stories of how entrepreneurs have started companies and taken them to the Fortune 500 list, and we show that the same environment exists for today's entrepreneurs to do the same.

What's the strategy behind AEDC's "Make Your Move" marketing campaign?



Several companies recently announced expansions in the state, creating thousands of new jobs across a variety of sectors, including supply chain, food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing.

O'NEAL: AEDC, in partnership with Entergy, the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, and Oklahoma Gas & Electric, recently launched a digital marketing campaign called "Make Your Move." Our message to business leaders is clear: If you've reached your breaking point of frustration due to the heavy-handed mandates that state and local governments are placing on your business in your state, then we invite you to "make your move" to Arkansas. We believe this campaign will resonate with business owners and executives. As some states proclaim which businesses are essential and which are non-essential, we've declared that Arkansas has one category of business: essential.

The success of even the best advertising depends on the quality of the product, and our product, the state of Arkansas, is easy to sell. When it comes to cost of doing business and cost of living, Arkansas is consistently among the nation's lowest in both categories. Safe, outdoor activities are in abundance here, including beautiful lakes, scenic rivers, and award-winning trails for hiking, biking, and stunning views. But there's another quality of Arkansas

that's especially appealing right now: we welcome, support, and value business. Arkansas is one of only a few states that never issued a shelter-in-place mandate. We have helped our businesses find innovative ways to continue serving customers while keeping employees safe and on the payroll. To be fair, like businesses all over the world, plenty of Arkansas companies have struggled this year. But our unemployment rate has remained well below the national average because a higher percentage of our population continues to be employed. That means our diverse economy has weathered the economic storm better than most.


Many states claim to be "pro-business," but in Arkansas, we walk the walk. Governor Asa Hutchinson and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission actively work to recruit businesses to Arkansas, and when a company decides to expand here, we make them feel welcome. Even during the pandemic, businesses have come to Arkansas. Several companies recently announced expansions in the state, creating thousands of new jobs across a variety of sectors, including supply chain, food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing. These companies have found the spirit of collaboration in Arkansas between the public and private sectors to be beneficial, and we're confident that many other companies are searching for a home where they, too, are valued as successful businesses and job creators.

What is AEDC doing to build excitement and awareness about economic opportunity in Arkansas during a pandemic?

O'NEAL: While we rely on marketing campaigns to help keep Arkansas on the radar screens of prospective companies and site selection consultants, we also make it a priority to foster relationships within our communities and among influencers around the state to help share the excitement about company

expansions and job growth. We stay engaged with key contacts through our "Arkansas Inc" monthly email newsletter and our four industry-specific newsletters. Through social media, AEDC makes a habit of celebrating wins in communities across the state. A recent example is an expansion announcement from Emerson in Ash Flat, Arkansas. Ash Flat is a small town with a lot of pride in its community. Our social media posts about the announcement were shared over 330 times. It speaks to Arkansas' culture; we tend to help and advocate for one other.

How do you ensure that AEDC is able to compete with economic development organizations in other, larger states with more staff and bigger budgets?

O'NEAL: At AEDC, we strive to be lean and nimble, and we're able to adapt more quickly. Last year, we made an important organizational change and brought our business development and marketing teams together within the Global Business division at AEDC. This move has enabled those two groups to work more closely together, and since making that change, Business Development and Marketing are doing some new and innovative things, like creating personalized landing page experiences for prospective businesses that showcase Arkansas and give the prospect a one-stop shop for documents, site information, and key data points. As we reach and engage new business contacts through digital marketing, our business development team is immediately brought into the loop. The content that we produce for our website, emails, blogs, podcasts, and brochures is being updated with direct input from our business development team to ensure that we are sharing the type of information and updates that matter to C-Level executives and site selection consultants. This organization change has made AEDC more competitive. 

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Blueprints to Success

When doing business in Arkansas, you can expect the best customer service in the industry.

Above: AEDC's Business Development Team. From left to right: Tim Frith, Bentley Story, Katherine Andrews, Katherine Holmstrom, Dutch King and Jack Thomas

The business development team at the Arkansas Economic Development Commission prides itself on providing the best customer service in the industry. When I visited with Bentley Story, AEDC's Director of Business Development, he gave me some insights on the standard of excellence that companies who consider Arkansas can expect when evaluating locations for a new project.

What does excellent customer service look like for an economic development organization?

BENTLEY STORY: It starts with building a culture of excellence. There are two common attributes that you will find across every member of our team: 1) a true desire to work with companies to better the lives of Arkansans by creating more higher-paying jobs in our state and 2) a work ethic that focuses on providing a customer experience that exceeds expectation. We know that when companies are looking for a new

location, several factors are important. Our team helps to identify real estate options, to serve as a single point of contact with community leaders and workforce development providers, and to communicate Arkansas' favorable business climate. We do this all in a way that sends a strong message that Arkansas values business, and we'll work hard to make sure every area of concern is addressed.

Tell me about your process and how your team engages with companies?

STORY: The Project Managers on our business development team are champions for economic development in Arkansas. When they aren't busy working with companies on expansion and recruitment projects, they are either working to generate new leads to compete for or working with our economic development partners around the state to get ready for upcoming opportunities. With each opportunity presented to compete for a new project, a Project Manager is assigned



“Arkansas is well positioned for companies that want to mitigate their risks. Our team is here to ensure companies have confidence in planning their future.”

– Bentley Story, Director of Business Development for the Arkansas Economic Development Commission


to be the point of contact. Each Project Manager knows that in a multi-state competition, they have counterparts who are working to close the deal in their states. We make ourselves available 24/7, we listen to the company's priorities and challenges, and we respond with solutions.

How much of a difference does good customer service make in economic development?

STORY: I believe 100% that excellent customer service from our team can result in winning projects that we would not otherwise have won and can result in better opportunities for Arkansans. Our job is to work with our partners to make a compelling case for why companies should do business in Arkansas. By going the extra mile, whether it be offering to travel to a company's headquarters, presenting information in a format that is convenient and easy to understand, or by introducing them to our Governor, other government official or private sector leaders that can speak to their experience in Arkansas, we believe that customer service matters. Companies and site selection consultants know that they can count on us to make their location analysis in Arkansas as streamlined

as possible, and they know that they can have confidence in recommending us to their clients, customers and friends?

Who are your economic development partners and how does your team collaborate with them?

STORY: Local communities often have economic development organizations, typically either a Chamber of Commerce or as a function of City Hall. When companies select locations to expand or to locate new facilities, they are ultimately evaluating communities. Our team may take the lead in the initial stages of a project or we may support a local EDO that is leading a project. Either way, we work hard to have good relationships with local EDOs, as ultimately, they will have more contact with the company. Other important partners include utility companies, workforce development providers, regulatory agencies, elected officials, and anyone else that adds value to the project. We work in an all hands-on deck fashion, and we do it in a way that most benefits the company. When it comes to how we give customer service as a team in Arkansas, we go by the words of Sam Walton, there is only one boss, the customer. 

Arkansas by the numbers

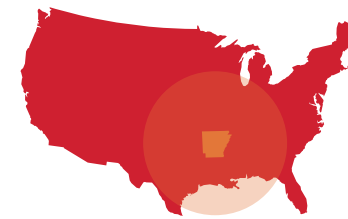
Top 20 Projects 2020

Companies	City	Sector	Category	Projected Jobs	Projected Investment
DXC Technology	Conway	Corporate/Shared Services	Expansion	1,200	N/A
Amazon	Little Rock	Distribution & Logistics	New	1,000	N/A
Carvana	West Memphis	Distribution & Logistics	New	400	\$40,000,000
Transplace	Rogers	Corporate/Shared Services	Expansion	375	N/A
Lockheed Martin Missiles & Fire Control	East Camden	Aerospace & Defense	Expansion	326	\$142,000,000
Emerson	Ash Flat	Manufacturing	New	245	\$35,000,000
Nucor Steel Arkansas	Blytheville	Metals	Expansion	100	\$230,000,000
SupplyPike	Fayetteville	Technology	New	180	N/A
SCA Pharma	Little Rock	Pharmaceuticals	Expansion	180	\$10,000,000
Nice-Pak	Jonesboro	Manufacturing	Expansion	176	N/A
Structurlam	Conway	Timber & Forest Products	New	130	\$90,000,000
La-Z-Boy Of Arkansas	Siloam Springs	Manufacturing	Expansion	125	N/A
Superior Group of Companies	Eudora	Distribution & Logistics	Expansion	125	\$10,000,000
Alleviant	Little Rock	Corporate/Shared Services	Expansion	115	N/A
Fiocchi	Little Rock	Firearms and Ammunition	New	85	\$15,000,000
SFI	Conway	Metals	Expansion	75	N/A
Atlas Tube	Blytheville	Metals	Expansion	75	\$150,000,000
Cynergy Cargo	Crossett	Transportation Equipment	New	70	N/A
Coca-Cola Consolidated	West Memphis	Food & Beverage	Expansion	60	\$33,000,000
Gerber Products Company	Fort Smith	Food & Beverage	Expansion	50	\$30,000,000

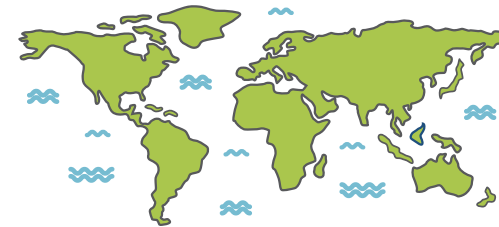


The Arkansas team at the Paris Air Show in 2019 promoting the state.

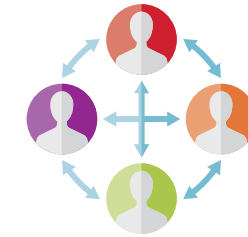
Overview



40%
of the U.S. population
is within a day's drive.
(550 Miles/880 Kilometers)



293
Foreign Owned
Operations in the State



Arkansas has some of the
LOWEST UNION
membership rates in the U.S.



\$115.93 BILLION
Real Gross Domestic
Product for Arkansas

Business Climate

1st TOP STATE FOR SMALL BUSINESS FRIENDLINESS
Source: Thumbtack, 2019

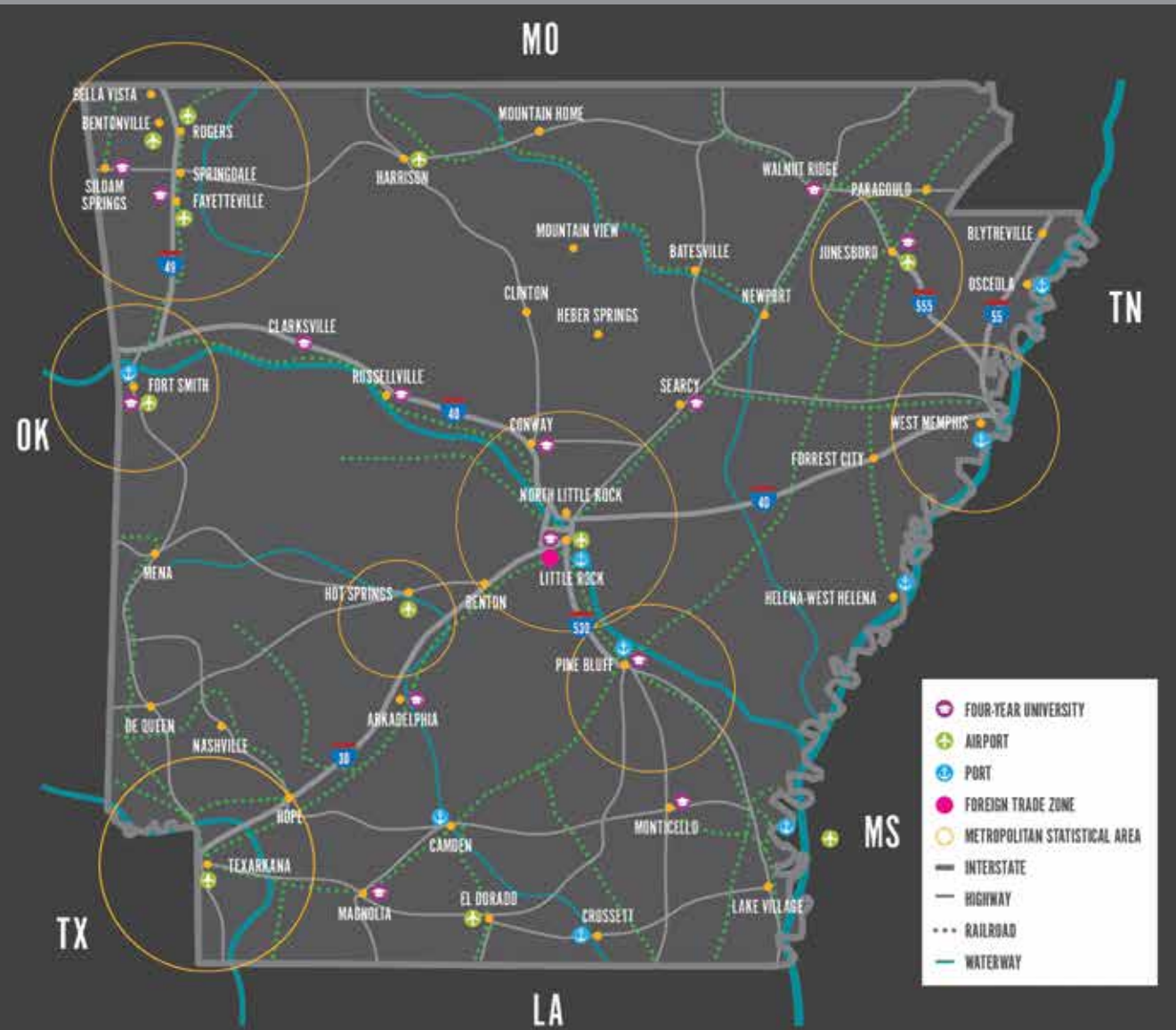
1st IN THE U.S. FOR RELATIVE VALUE OF \$100
Source: BLS Employment & Earnings, Annual 2018, Source: Business Facilities Magazine 2019, 15th Annual State Ranking Report

3rd LOWEST COST OF DOING BUSINESS
Source: CNBC, Cost of Doing Business State Rankings 2019

5th ON THE COST OF LIVING INDEX
First Qtr 2020, Source: C2er, Source: U.S. News And World Report, Best States Rankings Report

10th BEST BUSINESS CLIMATE
Source: Business Facilities Magazine 2019, 15th Annual State Ranking Report

Infrastructure and Transportation



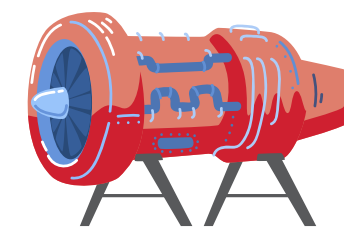
- NAVIGABLE WATERWAYS
1,000 miles
- CLASS I RAILROAD
1,670 miles
- STATE AND U.S. HIGHWAYS
16,418 miles
- PUBLIC AIRPORTS
approximately 100

Education & Workforce



50 Colleges, Universities & 2-Year Colleges

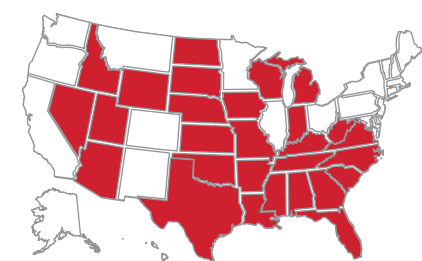
throughout Arkansas



7th Top Manufacturing State

by percentage of Workforce, Third in the South

Source: BLS Employment & Earnings, Annual 2019

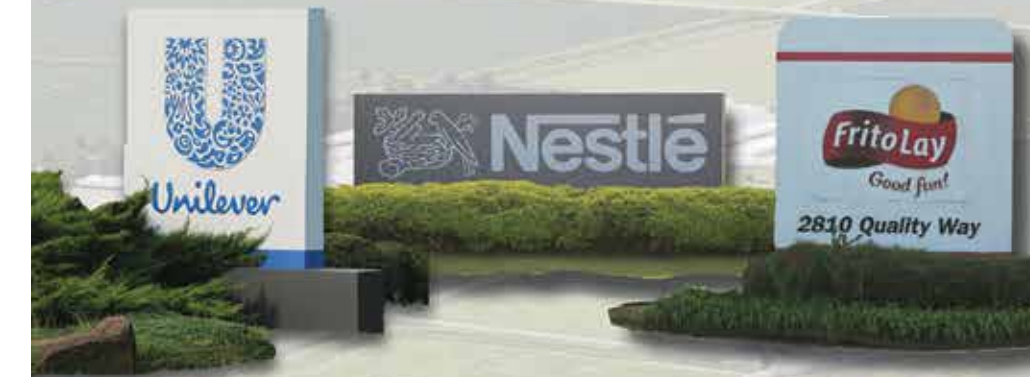


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For a Brighter Future

Arkansas is stepping up workforce development with "Future Fit."

A student adjusts a pneumatic valve during a Future Fit class in Camden.
SOURCE: ArkansasEDC

Now in its second year, Arkansas' ambitious "Future Fit" program is helping to provide essential skills to unemployed and underemployed Arkansans to help meet the workforce needs of manufacturers.

A project of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Arkansas Office of Skills Development (AOSD), Future Fit is designed to accommodate a diverse group of people; high school graduates who do not plan to enroll in college, military veterans and non-violent

by GARY DAUGHTERS

offenders among them.

Eight higher-learning institutions, led by the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, have been selected to deliver Future Fit training, which includes a mix of classroom instruction and hands-on lab work designed in collaboration with manufacturing firms that, to date, have included such companies as Rheem, MAHLE, Trane, Gerber and International Paper.

Steve Sparks, AEDC's Division Director, Existing Business Resources, says the expanding Future Fit program has been a boon to both workers and employers.

“ We want to make sure that the companies that are here stay here, and that any company that wants to move to Arkansas will have the workforce that will help make them successful.”

– Steve Sparks, AEDC's Division Director, Existing Business Resources

What was the genesis of the Future Fit Program?

STEVE SPARKS: Everyone has heard of the skills gap. In late 2018, we actually brought in 30, 40 companies into one room and asked them all, "Do you have trouble finding people with the skill sets and background in technology that you're looking for?" And the answer was absolutely, yes. But when we asked them what the gap looked like, it was crickets. They said they know it when they see it.

How did you take it from there?

SPARKS: Those companies ended up sending me a stack of job descriptions three inches high. We sat down and we were able to break them into three general categories. One was a production operator/assembler kind of role. Next was a mechanical repair role. And then they needed mechatronics-level people who can fix just about anything. But the first two categories were the ones they were screaming for most. So, we took

the industry's information, we engaged Tooling U -SME [a manufacturing training division of SME], and identified what the companies wanted, created a matrix of skills in a format that made sense to them and then worked with the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith to flesh out the classroom material. We rolled it back out to the companies and they loved it.

Why did you choose the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith for the launch?

SPARKS: They were hungry for what we were trying to put together and they were receptive to the approach. Their region has a lot of industry and a lot of jobs. We wanted to create this program in such a manner that we could use it anywhere in the state. The diversity of companies we were able to bring into the pilot from the Fort Smith and Russellville areas allowed us to do that. Fort Smith has been doing this for a long time. They were engaged and ready.



Future Fit involves a mix of classroom instruction and hands-on lab work. SOURCE: ArkansasEDC

What specific skills are being taught?

SPARKS: We knew from the start that we couldn't create a curriculum that was too specific. We had to have it where it worked for everyone. The companies we worked with to put this together were so varied that we were able to do that. Our entry level class, the production operator/assembler, will fit nearly every company in the manufacturing realm at an entry level role. We intentionally made our curriculum broad enough yet specific enough that our graduates would have all the essential skills they needed to have. Those skills include machine operations, parts assembly, blueprints, tolerances, torque, drawings, quality assurance, standard work orders and power tools among many others. Safety is a big thing for everyone as are teamwork and conflict resolution. Among the companies that are working with us now, we haven't found any that have needs for entry level people that are any different from what we've covered.


How do you tailor Future Fit to accommodate workforce needs as they vary by region?

SPARKS: Our manufacturing mostly follows the interstates and population bases. In the southern half of the state, we have a strong timber industry with associated pulp and fiber. In the northeast, we have a lot of steel. The central part of the state has a hub for aerospace and defense. For entry-level basics, Future Fit covers pretty much covers all of them. After our initial rollout, we bring industry back and ask what they'd like to see covered more in-depth. That's where it gets into customization for the regions. As we roll out the program to a new area, the first thing we do is to reach out to those companies, bring them together and find out what they need.

What is the connection between Future Fit and Arkansas's commitment to promoting business retention?

SPARKS: The biggest issue for companies right now is human resources. Companies that can't find the workers they need will go where they can find them. We call on companies every day, and among the questions we ask them is, "What keeps you up at night." No. 1 on the list is always finding and maintaining qualified people. If they can't do that, their production goes down, quality goes down and profitability goes down. We want to make sure that the companies that are here stay here, and that any company that wants to move to Arkansas can have the workforce that will help make them successful.

What kind of feedback have you gotten from participants?

SPARKS: Our participants have really loved it, especially as they've finished it. For many, it's hard, it's new and it's different, but in the cases of some it's been life changing. We have participants who have come out of the justice system. They've come from making nothing to making 15 bucks an hour or more. It literally has been life changing. They tell us that the confidence we have shown in them has given them faith and confidence in themselves. 



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Business Works Here

Entrepreneurs built the Arkansas economy and continue to lead it.

by RON STARNER



Ever wonder how Walmart became the largest company in the world? Or how Tyson Foods became the largest meat producer in America? Or how J.B.

Hunt Transport Services became the nation's largest trucking company?

The story behind the meteoric rise of each of these firms begins in Arkansas. It is a remarkable tale of entrepreneurship, risk-taking and visionary leadership. When the established players in retailing, protein production, and transportation and logistics zigged, the founders of Walmart, Tyson and J.B. Hunt zagged.

Today, all three brands are household names, but they all have their origins in Arkansas. Sam Walton, a former J.C. Penney employee who founded Walmart in 1962 in Rogers, Arkansas, laid the foundation for that success when he famously said, "The customer is the boss."

But things weren't always coming up roses for these entrepreneurs, or for Arkansas. From 1940 to 1955, Arkansas lost 13% of its population as some 251,000 Arkansans left the state to seek out better job opportunities in other places.

Fortunes changed once a notable influencer was recruited to Arkansas. Winthrop Rockefeller was persuaded to start his post-military life after World War II in Arkansas by Frank Newell.

As founding chairman of the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, Rockefeller recruited 600 companies and more than 90,000 jobs to the state.

Other risk-takers were Witt and Jack Stephens, local bankers who took a chance on Walmart when others wouldn't. They raised the money and led Walmart through its IPO, launching Sam Walton's fledgling company from \$32 million in annual sales to the \$515 billion behemoth that Walmart is today.

J.B. Hunt was a truck driver who was driving his route from Little Rock to St. Louis when he stopped in Stuttgart and partnered with farmers to turn rice hulls into poultry litter. The J.B. Hunt trucking company was formed shortly thereafter.

Innovation Never Stops

The list goes on, and it continues to this day. In April 2015, Jeston George founded Apptegy, an education technology company in Little Rock. He secured in-state venture capital to launch his product. He started it because, as an uncle, George wanted to know when his nephew's school programs were scheduled. He found that local schools lacked a centralized tool for sharing information with the families of students. In five years, Apptegy has grown from a startup in George's spare bedroom to one of the fastest-growing ed-tech firms in the U.S.

Other recent success stories have



The Walmart Museum and "Walton's 5 & 10," a storefront virtually identical to its appearance when Sam Walton opened it in 1950. It was Sam Walton's second store. The museum is located in the downtown square in Bentonville. Photo courtesy of Walmart

cropped up as well, including Movista, Intimidator, Venture Center, Supply Pike, Bad Boy Mowers, West Rock Coffee and First Orion. Founded by former Axiom CEO Charles Morgan in 2008, First Orion is a telecommunications technology

getting in on the entrepreneurial act. Walmart just launched its premium subscription service called Walmart Plus, which offers subscribers to its \$98-a-year platform benefits like unlimited delivery, discounts on gas and scan-and-go purchasing at any of its bricks-and-mortar stores anywhere in the world.

Economic Development Changes

Innovation is also embedded in the DNA of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. When state business leaders realized that people were not coming back home to Arkansas to search for postwar jobs in the late 1940s, C. Hamilton Moses of Arkansas Power & Light organized a group of executives statewide into the Arkansas Economic Council.

That group eventually became the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, which located its first company, Gay Apparels, in Cotter in April 1955. Over the next decade, under

“They all determined that they were **not going to be followers.** They were going to be leaders.”

– Clint O’Neal, Executive Vice President of Global Business, Arkansas Economic Development Commission

the leadership of Chairman Winthrop Rockefeller, the AIDC would recruit 600 more firms to Arkansas and generate an annual statewide payroll of \$270 million.


By 1974, Arkansas was squarely in the game for foreign direct investment. Bekaert Steel Wire Corp. of Belgium located a plant in Van Buren that year — a \$40 million facility that was built on the Arkansas River. Two years later, the state would open its first international office of AIDC in Brussels, Belgium. Offices later followed in Tokyo in 1985 and Taipei in 1988.

In 1979, the agency changed its name under the leadership of then-Gov. Bill Clinton to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Clinton wanted to broaden the meaning of the agency to reflect involvement in the total economy rather than just manufacturing. Other southern states, like Georgia and Texas, had already

adopted similar name changes, and Clinton wanted Arkansas to compete with those states for the best jobs and the best industries.

It was a spirit of entrepreneurship that reflected the roots of industry titans like Sam Walton, J.B. Hunt, John W. Tyson, Witt and Jack Stephens, William Dillard, Charles Murphy and Joe Ford — Arkansas legends whose legacy of leadership lives on to this day.

Clint O’Neal, executive vice president of global business for the Arkansas EDC, says that all of these titans were bound together by “a lot of ingenuity and an independent streak. They all determined that they were not going to be followers. They were going to be leaders.”

When they added a spirit of teamwork and collaboration to their unparalleled work ethic, notes O’Neal, Arkansas became an unstoppable force. 



Walmart does

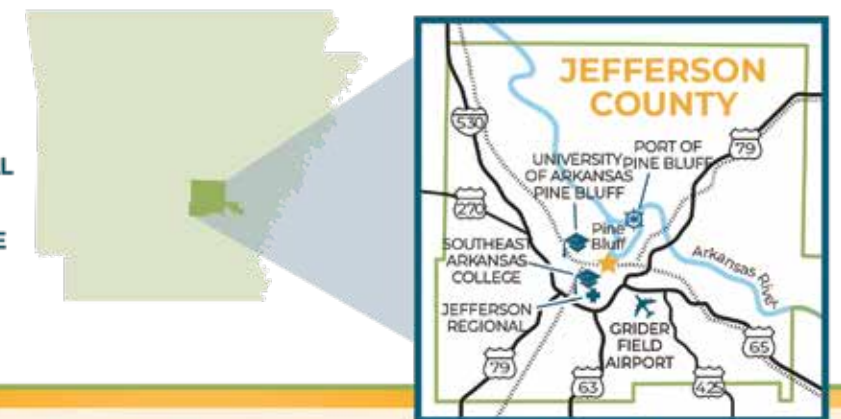
\$515 billion/year

in sales – most of any company worldwide.

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Industry, institutions and governments work together to transform the Arkansas economy.

(L to R) Secretary Stacy Hurst (Department of Parks, Heritage & Tourism), Stuart Walton, Chair of Economic Recovery Task Force, Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Secretary Mike Preston (Arkansas Department of Commerce)

A Spirit of Collaboration

by ADAM BRUNS

In April 2020, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson created the Governor's Economic Recovery Task Force to examine the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and industries in the state and then recommend a strategy for the economy to shift out of low gear consistent with public-health guidance. Led by Stuart Walton, a scion of the Walton family whose roles cross business and philanthropic lines, the task force comprised 35 leaders from the private and public sectors. It was thus the latest manifestation of a public-private partnership (P₃) approach that has catalyzed momentum in a number of modes throughout the state.



Faculty and students work in a research lab at the University of Arkansas, whose system not only benefits from industry support, but stands to benefit further from P3 legislation going into effect in 2021.

Photo by Whit Pruitt courtesy of University of Arkansas

The most familiar mode to most is highways. Arkansas entered that arena in 2017 with enabling legislation known as the Partnership for Public Facilities and Infrastructure Act (PPFIA), which permits a state agency to contract with a private party to provide toll roads, bridges and highways (though not those administered by the Arkansas DOT). But the reach of the Act goes well beyond transportation, which may help the state economy attract a whole new level of global capital.

In spring 2020, the state Department of Transformation and Shared Services published the final PPFIA rules that allow projects across a wide array of infrastructure. Specifically: “a ferry, mass transit facility, vehicle parking facility, port facility, power generation facility, fuel supply facility, combined heating and power facility, central utility plant facility, distributed generation facility, oil or gas pipeline, water supply facility, water treatment intake and distribution facility, wastewater treatment and collection facility, waste treatment facility, hospital, library,

school, educational facility, medical or nursing care facility, recreational facility, administrative facility, law enforcement facility, fire department facility, public administrative office, toll road, correctional facility, technology infrastructure facility, public building, transportation system as defined in §27-76- 103, or other similar facility currently available or to be made available to a public entity for public use ...”

Alex Johnston, chief administrative officer for the Office of the Secretary in the Department of Transformation and Shared Services, says everything is lining up for a successful rollout in 2021.

“Arkansas’ P3 program has not launched quite yet, with our program manual nearing completion in the coming month, and marketing will follow,” she said in October 2020. Among the interested parties? “Arkansas institutions of higher education, including University of Arkansas Medical Sciences (UAMS),” he said.

In a May 2020 column, Ryan Corrigan, director of business development for Little Rock-based Bernhard, one of the nation’s largest privately-owned engineering and contracting firms, noted some direct advantages of P3: the transfer of risk to the private sector; catching up on deferred maintenance; more flexibility and capacity for private-sector financing; performance-based design and operation (rather than low-cost milestones); and finally, public prosperity.

“Arkansas finished its legal framework at an opportune time,” Corrigan wrote. “As states reopen, P3s can be a way to jumpstart economies. Forging new partnerships that break ground on projects will be an essential part of our return to normal.”

Old-Fashioned Collaboration

Even as the ink dries on P3 rules, however, public-private collaboration and support continues to be woven into the Arkansas economy. One example is in the broadband arena, as Arkansas Telephone Co. (Artelco) will work with the community of Fairfield Bay to deploy fiber to homes as a result of the first Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) broadband grant announced in July 2020. It’s one of many backed by \$19.3 million in CARES Act funds to be expended by the end of 2020, supplemented by \$4.7 million more from the state for projects that extend beyond year-end.

Private support of public institutions also continues in the very higher education sector that stands to benefit from P3’s rollout. And it will surprise no one that the Walton family name is part of the picture. In July 2020, the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation announced it would donate \$194.7 million in the form of a five-year grant to the University of Arkansas to power research initiatives and to back the construction of the University of Arkansas Institute for Integrative and Innovative Research (I3R). The plan also includes the hiring of 20 new faculty and a planned expansion of the university’s presence in Walmart’s hometown of Bentonville. I3R will integrate research across five overlapping clusters of innovation: data science; foot and technology; materials science and engineering; bioscience and bioengineering; and integrative systems neuroscience.

In announcing the grant, University of Arkansas Chancellor Joseph E. Steinmetz used the same word that’s contained in the name of the state department overseeing P3: transformation.

“All transformational solutions start with questions,” he said. “How does the University of Arkansas distinguish itself as a great research university among a sea of great and distinguished universities? How do we do that in a way that drives economic development and creates clear avenues for industry involvement? How do we ultimately change the culture of collaboration in such a way that it advances the research and commercialization profile and production of the university? And how do we change the way we do science on campus? The creation of an interdisciplinary and wholly integrative research institute was the answer.”

“Arkansas has long been known for its entrepreneurial spirit and as a place where businesses thrive,” said Stuart Walton, chair of the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation Board. “This grant will support the University of Arkansas as it seeks to drive innovation and transform entrepreneurship and research to commercialization for industries nationwide.” ◇

“Arkansas has long been known for its entrepreneurial spirit and as a place where businesses thrive.”

– Stuart Walton, chair of the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation Board.

Aerospace is Achieving New Heights In Arkansas



Arkansas' aerospace and defense sector is locked and loaded on a growth trajectory.

Centrally located between the east and west coasts, as well as Canada and Mexico, Arkansas is a bustling hub for the aerospace and defense sectors. The state's top export is aircraft and aircraft-related parts and services its No. 3 export is ammunitions of war used in military operations.

Arkansas' workforce pipeline is in a well-oiled machine. Across the state, 7,800 people work in aerospace and defense manufacturing. Of those, 3,000 are directly engaged in aerospace products and parts manufacturing. Additionally, the 45 colleges and universities throughout the state award over 1,600 engineering-related certificates each year.

The Little Rock Air Force Base — where the U.S. Air Force houses its C-130 Hercules and the 19th and 314th maintenance groups — has over 12,000 personnel, including civilians, active duty and Army Reserve Forces.

Aerojet Rocketdyne Blast Off in Camden

Aerojet Rocketdyne officially opened its new state-of-the-art large solid rocket facility in October 2020. Construction of the 17,000 square-foot EMD facility began last spring as part of Aerojet

Rocketdyne's ongoing expansion in Camden, where the company has long had a presence and currently produces more than 75,000 solid rocket motors per year. It was made possible with support from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Calhoun County and the Ouachita Partnership for Economic Development (OPED).

"Arkansas is playing an increasingly important role in the production of advanced national defense technologies and tools," Senator John Boozman said at the facility's opening celebration. "This facility represents the next step in that evolution, and our state is proud to partner with Aerojet Rocketdyne so that its operations in Camden are equipped to meet the company's needs for a business-friendly environment and skilled workforce capable of helping ensure the readiness, effectiveness and safety of our troops. Arkansas' rich military history and tradition is only further enhanced with this expansion, and we're excited for what's to come."

Aerojet Rocketdyne's growth in Camden began five years ago with a companywide consolidation and modernization initiative aimed at reducing costs and increasing operational efficiency. The ability to produce large solid rocket motors at

the Engineering, Manufacturing Development (EMD) facility positions the company to deliver on some of the nation's most important next generation national security programs, including strategic deterrence, hypersonics and missile defense. In September, Aerojet Rocketdyne was selected by Northrop Grumman to develop a large solid rocket motor and the post-boost propulsion system.

Radius Comes Full Circle

In November 2019, Radius Aerospace, formerly a Triumph Group Division, broke ground on an expansion at its Hot Springs' Division titanium components plant and announced it had plans to hire 65 new employees to support the expansion. This news comes on the heels of the company's recent decision to locate its headquarters in the city. Triumph has roots in the city dating back to the 1960s.

The company produces complex fabricated metallic assemblies and components used in the military, commercial, business jet, regional jet, general aviation and helicopter markets. Hot Springs' diversified product list includes aircraft skins, leading edges, doors, covers and ribs.

"Only through sound business decisions of the past can a company such as Radius Aerospace take advantage of present-day opportunities," said Hot Springs Mayor Pat McCabe. "Economic growth through business expansion is vital to the area,


and this next step by Radius Aerospace is a sign of a bright future for them and our community. The City of Hot Springs congratulates Radius on their expansion and investment in the core of Hot Springs."

"We greatly value our longstanding partnership with Arkansas and their support for our continued growth in Camden."

— Eileen Drake, CEO and President of Aerojet Rocketdyne

Defensive Assets

Though no longer military installations, the Arkansas Aeroplex and Highland Industrial Park are both ideal sites for new and expanding aerospace and defense companies to locate. Arkansas Aeroplex is located on the site of the Eaker Air Force Base, a historic military base that played an essential role in the Cold War and closed in 1992. Today, the aeroplex has 1.5 million square feet of available space and is home to a variety of businesses and federal agencies.

In East Camden, the Highland Industrial Park is one of the nation's fastest-growing defense corridors. The complex has more than 1,000 buildings with more than 5,500,000 sq. ft. of space for manufacturing and warehousing. 

Dassault Falcon Jet's largest facility in the world is located in Little Rock with more than one million square feet at the Bill & Hillary Clinton National Airport.

by SAVANNAH KING

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Photo courtesy Big River Steel

The Strength of Steel

Mississippi County leads the nation in steel production.

by SAVANNAH KING

Located in the far northeast portion of the state, with its eastern border marked by the Mississippi River, Mississippi County is perhaps better known by its other name — “Steel Mill Heaven.”

This small county of 40,600 also happens to be one of the largest steel-producing counties in the nation and has the second-largest capacity for steel production.

Big River’s Osceola, Arkansas Flex Mill™ is the world’s only LEED-certified steel mill and is the newest and most technologically advanced flat-rolled mill in North America. Currently in phase two of construction, the expansion will allow the mill to produce higher grades of electrical steel.

Over the years, Big River Steel has expanded several times. In 2018, the company entered a \$700-million joint venture with United States Steel Corporation.

“Five years ago we started Big River Steel with five employees with BIG ideas and today we are partnering with a company started by Andrew Carnegie 118 years ago,” said David Stickler, chief executive officer of Big River Steel. “As partners with U. S. Steel, we intend to prove to the world that the best way to make steel is by combining the best of traditional integrated steel making with the best of electric arc furnace mini-mill steel making.”

Across the state, job growth in this high-demand industry has increased in Arkansas by 39% since 2009. Today, the steel industry employs nearly 5,500 Arkansans with projected increases to be seen in the coming years.

With tremendous assets like the state’s rivers and ports, rail system, highway system and a reliable electrical grid, not to mention its eager workforce and status as a right-to-work state, it’s safe to say the region will continue to be an attractive location for the industry.

“We’re very excited to continue investing in a community we’ve proudly called home. Having two mills within close proximity of each other will only increase our organization’s efficiency.”

— Zekelman Industries CEO, Barry Zekelman on the company announcing it will build the world’s largest continuous ERW tube mill on property adjacent to its existing Atlas Tube mill in Blytheville, Arkansas. Zekelman Industries is the parent company of Atlas Tube

“Arkansas has some of the most talented and dedicated steelworkers in the country,” said Gov. Asa Hutchinson. “Our quality workforce and low business costs make Arkansas stand out among other states as an attractive option for companies looking to expand.”

Bigger and Better in Blytheville

In July 2019, Zekelman Industries announced it will build the world’s largest continuous ERW tube mill in Blytheville, on property adjacent to its existing Atlas Tube mill. The company projects to hire an additional 75 employees to work in the mill, growing its Blytheville workforce to approximately 150 employees. Startup of the new mill is scheduled for September 2021.

“We’re very excited to continue investing in a community we’ve proudly called home,” said Barry Zekelman, executive chairman and CEO of Zekelman Industries. “Having two mills within close proximity of each other will

only increase our organization’s efficiency.”

The \$150 million mill project represents the largest private investment in the U.S. steel industry in the last decade, enabling new domestic manufacturing capabilities. The state-of-the-art facility will be capable of producing hollow structural sections (HSS) in square, rectangular and round shapes and in sizes previously unavailable.

Atlas Tube provides structural support for buildings such as airports, stadiums, mega warehouses and large distribution centers, and they can be used for infrastructure applications such as bridges and oil & gas pipelines.

“It is a great testament to our state when companies like Atlas Tube expand their operations here rather than going elsewhere,” said Secretary of Commerce Mike Preston. “We have put a lot of effort into growing the steel industry in the state, and this is the latest company to realize that Arkansas has the tools in place to help businesses succeed.”

The new Blytheville mill will be Atlas



Big River's Osceola, Arkansas Flex Mill™ is the world's only LEED-certified steel mill and is the newest and most technologically advanced flat-rolled mill in North America. The facility is currently in phase two of construction. Photo courtesy of Big River Steel

Tube's sixth mill in North America and its fifth in the United States, all of which also produce HSS.

"We greatly appreciate the support we've received from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission over the years," said Tom Muth, president of Atlas Tube. "The AEDC has worked closely with us to ensure immense success for the Blytheville community, and we're proud to be a part of it."


Nucor Takes the Lead

Nucor Steel Arkansas opened its new \$230 million specialty cold mill complex at its Hickman facility in October 2019. The cold mill project will help Nucor expand its share of the automotive steel market, and increase Nucor's capability to produce automotive-grade steel, namely advanced high-strength, high-strength low-alloy and motor lamination steel products.

"As a world leader in steel manufacturing technology, Nucor is particularly focused on increasing productivity and efficiency, and competing in global steel production," said Jay Henderson, vice president

and general manager of Nucor Steel Arkansas. "With today's automakers counting on steel as their material of choice to reduce vehicle weight, while at the same time improving both safety and performance, our new cold mill will be at the forefront of making these advanced high-strength steel products,"

Nucor employs approximately 1,800 at four facilities in the state of Arkansas: Nucor Steel Arkansas (steel sheet), Nucor-Yamato Steel (steel beams), Calstrip Arkansas (thin-strip steel sheet), and Skyline Steel (sheet piling). Nucor's four facilities are a major contributor to Arkansas' economy, making Mississippi County one of the largest steel-producing counties in the United States.

"Mississippi County is very proud to have been chosen as the site for this Nucor expansion," said Clif Chitwood, Mississippi County economic development director. "For over a generation, Nucor has been an important pillar of the economy of Mississippi County and Northeast Arkansas. We look forward to the continued partnership between one of America's premium steel companies and one of America's premiere industrial counties." 



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See What We're Building With Timber



Arkansas is poised at the forefront of a paradigm shift in the construction industry. Don't be surprised when the timber revolution arrives in your neck of the woods.

Once the purview of renegade architects, academics and assorted dreamers, mass timber construction is going mainstream. Perhaps the best evidence is Walmart's decision to build its new Home Office campus in Bentonville out of wood. The world's largest retailer plans to use more than 1.1 million cubic feet of Arkansas-grown and Arkansas-produced mass timber, resulting in the largest campus project in the U.S. using mass timber.

A partnership with Canada-based Structurlam will bring the ambitious project to life. Structurlam, the leading mass timber manufacturer in North America, is spending \$90 million to purchase, retrofit and equip a former steel plant in Conway to expand its operations into the U.S., which will include supplying the timber for the Walmart campus. The project is creating 130 full-time jobs.

"The commercial and residential building industry is experiencing a

revolution brought on by the rise of mass timber building solutions," says Hardy Wentzel, CEO of Structurlam. "We're transforming wood, one of nature's most renewable resources, into a greener, more cost-effective and aesthetically-pleasing alternative to concrete and steel. We're proud to establish roots in the great state of Arkansas and the City of Conway, and to support Walmart as the exclusive supplier of mass timber products for its new home office campus."

Mass timber is a category of building construction featuring structural laminated wood for walls, roofs, floors, beams and columns. It consists of perpendicular layering of lumber to form building components that are comparable in strength to steel.

"It's southern yellow pine, yet you can achieve strengths that are unthinkable," says Tahar Messadi, associate professor of architecture at the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design at the University of Arkansas.

A key economic benefit of mass timber is the ability to design, model and prefabricate the structural elements of a project off-site, accelerating on-site production schedules by up to 25% compared to traditional on-site building

Mass timber construction is coming of age.

Elected officials and representatives of Koppers, a global provider of treated wood products, at the company's announcement at their North Little Rock facility. The company announced it plans to invest a minimum of \$23 million and increase the number of workers at the facility.

Source: Koppers, Inc.

"We're proud to establish roots in the great state of Arkansas and the City of Conway, and to support Walmart as the exclusive supplier of mass timber products for its new home office campus."

— Hardy Wentzel, CEO of Structurlam

with steel and concrete.

There are environmental benefits, as well, says Messadi.

"The advantage is that we don't have the toxic effect of concrete or steel. I think we really are at a turning point. There are pressing environmental issues and the younger generation is taking note of them more than their predecessors did. They want a clean, green environment. It's all combining to push the timber issue forward."

Peter MacKeith, dean of the Jones School since 2014, was an early advocate for establishing and growing Arkansas' mass timber industry. It makes sense in a state where forest products represent the leading industry in terms of capital

investment. With 19 million acres of available forest, Arkansas employs more than 47,000 people in the timber industry. The state's inventory of standing timber is worth almost \$17 billion.

In 2019, the University completed Adohi Hall, a 202,000 sq.-ft dormitory that currently is the country's largest mass timber building. In a show of global interest in the mass timber movement, 69 architectural firms from around the world responded to an open competition for the mass timber design of the Anthony Timberlands Center for Design and Materials Innovation, which will house the Jones School. Grafton Architects of Dublin, Ireland won the competition with a stunning, airy

vision that is simultaneously complex and simple.

"It's a wonderful building and a majestic piece of architecture," says Messadi. "It gets its inspiration from the vernacular of local architecture. Just looking at it you can learn a great deal. It will be very valuable for our architecture students."

Messadi says the Jones School, which soon is to establish a master's program in integrated wood design, aims to be a long-term leader in the mass timber movement. He believes the interest shown by Walmart is likely to spur the movement to new heights.

"Where Walmart goes," he says, "a lot of companies follow." 

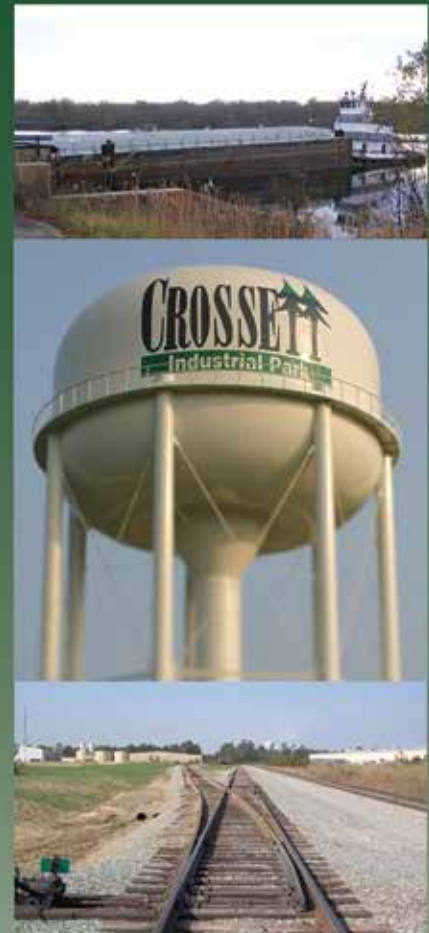
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Exceptional Talent Is Headquartered Here



by MARK AREND

Why are so many companies locating their shared services and technology operations in Arkansas? Partly because the state works overtime to recruit and help establish those operations, and partly because the companies investing in this sector find the workers they require at a fraction of the cost they would find elsewhere.

The momentum began in 2017. In September that year, Bank OZK

announced an initial 247,000-sq.-ft. headquarters building on a new campus in Little Rock. The bank had acquired a 44-acre site for initial development and future expansion for its corporate headquarters campus to support the bank's continued growth. It has the capacity to accommodate 800 to 900 employees with skills in accounting, finance, information systems, digital services, business resilience, internal

“Little Rock’s abundant arts and entertainment venues, beautiful and natural setting and rich heritage contribute to our ability to recruit exceptional talent at a national level.”

– George Gleason, Chairman and CEO, Bank OZK

audit, risk management, facilities, legal, trust and tax areas.

“Our home state has provided a talented and dedicated workforce, enabling our company to thrive and grow,” noted George Gleason, Chairman and CEO. “Little Rock’s abundant arts and entertainment venues, beautiful and natural setting and rich heritage also contribute to our ability to recruit exceptional talent at a national level. Our new campus in Little Rock will provide capacity for our company’s long-term growth over many years,” Gleason stated.

More recently, in October 2019, DXC Technology announced 1,200 new jobs at the company’s Conway location. The new positions are in healthcare and life sciences, automotive and security IT services as DXC establishes a global Center of Excellence (CoE) that serving the Medicaid business for 30 states and other clients. In addition to its work with the State of Arkansas, DXC provides health and human services to clients across 42 U.S. states and territories, offering fiscal agent services, Medicaid Management Information Systems (MMIS), program integrity, care management, immunization registry and eligibility services. DXC’s Conway facility brings together nearly 450 employees and comprises one of two DXC integrated Medicaid services delivery centers in the U.S.

“We’re proud of our public-private partnership with the State of Arkansas and Chamber, in helping manage the dramatic transformation underway in public health services,” said Andrea Fiumicelli, vice president and general manager of Healthcare and Life

Sciences, DXC. “We have a great team in Conway, and our expansion here will create new job and career opportunities, strengthen our educational partnerships, and contribute to the area’s growth economically and as a center of innovation.”

Fayetteville Beats Santa Monica

Also in 2019, SupplyPike, a start-up company that offers a digital supply chain management (SCM) platform for consumer packaged goods, announced a new facility in Fayetteville, creating nearly 180 new jobs over five years. “As the state’s economy continues to grow, attracting and retaining top talent in the region starts with providing diverse and unique job opportunities,” said President Greg Kessman. “We’re thrilled to assist in growing a rich tech community that highlights everything Arkansas has to offer.”

Before the startup phase, the company served as the research and development wing within CaseStack, a private equity-backed, cloud-based logistics company founded in 1999 by CEO Dan Sanker and operating in Fayetteville. CaseStack also has offices in Santa Monica, California, which was a contender for the new SupplyPike location. The group’s primary aim is to create new and innovative ways to solve problems in logistics and supply chain management entire product journey, allowing users to work fluidly in a cross-vertical platform. The company expects to manage more than 1 million SCM interactions this year, making it the largest platform in the industry, according to company officials. 



The State That Packs Heat

Photo: Getty Images

by MARK AREND

Few states are as eager to welcome makers of firearms and ammunition as Arkansas. Forbes ranks it the second most gun-friendly state in the U.S. Governor Asa Hutchinson's first economic development success after taking office in 2015 was SIG SAUER's commitment to relocating its Elite Performance Ammunition manufacturing operation from Kentucky to a permanent site in Jacksonville, Arkansas. The new site provides significant room for expansion, a key factor in the company's decision to relocate to Jacksonville.

"We have been searching for a permanent relocation site for our ammunition division for several years and

now, coupled with an excellent physical location and exceptional economic incentives provided by the State of Arkansas, we have found the ideal site," noted Dan Powers, president of the SIG SAUER Ammunition Division. "The new location in Jacksonville gives us the room we need to expand as we continue to grow and is also beneficial from a shipping and logistical standpoint."

In 2015, Gov. Hutchinson became the first Arkansas governor to attend the SHOT Show, the industry's leading trade show. The governor has led the Arkansas delegation to the show for five consecutive years to pursue and welcome growing firearms and ammunition companies to Arkansas. Arkansas has since emerged as a premier landing

“Fiocchi identified Arkansas as a primary target for its expansion based on the **skilled labor of the state, business climate and geographic location**. This investment is a unique opportunity for Fiocchi.”

– Jared Smith, Fiocchi's General Manager

spot for companies in the firearms and ammunition sector.

Great Expectations


In July, Fiocchi of America, the U.S. subsidiary of Italy-based Fiocchi Group, announced plans to establish a new manufacturing facility in Little Rock. Fiocchi, a global leader in small-caliber ammunition, will invest \$15 million to establish a fully independent industrial platform in the U.S. Fiocchi has identified the U.S. as key to boosting the company's growth. The new plant will strengthen the company's focus on manufacturing premium products and improving its position in the premium segment of the market — a key pillar of the company's business plan.

"We are excited to start this new chapter of Fiocchi's history here in Arkansas," said President and CEO for Fiocchi of America Anthony Acitelli. "The plant is a state-of-the-art production facility that will be instrumental in offering our customers premium products and unparalleled service levels."

The Fiocchi Group has more than 140 years of manufacturing ammunition experience and 37 years of manufacturing experience in the United States. Fiocchi of America is headquartered in Missouri. As of today, the United States represents the most important market for the Group. This

investment marks a crucial industrial milestone for the Fiocchi Group and represents the first major step toward additional investments that will follow over the next 12 months. Fiocchi will hire 85 highly skilled employees with the plan to further increase the workforce as the facility reaches its full potential.

"Fiocchi identified Arkansas as a primary target for its expansion based on the skilled labor of the state, business climate, and geographic location," added Jared Smith, Fiocchi's General Manager. "This investment is a unique opportunity for Fiocchi."

In March, The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearm and ammunition industry, expressed gratitude for the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) inclusion of the firearm industry's manufacturing, distribution, retail and range businesses as essential critical services that should remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Demand for firearms and ammunition skyrocketed following the COVID-19 outbreak, and Arkansas' more than a dozen manufacturers and suppliers to the industry are working 24-7 to meet that demand. Arkansas' firearms and ammunition sector is the fourth largest in economic output per capita, according to NSSF. More than 3,200 people in Arkansas work in the industry. 

Demand for firearms and ammunition skyrocketed following the COVID-19 outbreak, and Arkansas' more than a dozen manufacturers and suppliers to the industry are working 24-7 to meet that demand.

On a Roll



With a skilled workforce and access to major industry players, transportation equipment manufacturing is on a roll in Arkansas.

When your state is home to 10 major trucking companies, 80 distribution centers, and 55,000-plus distribution/logistics employees, it only makes sense that your state will also be a leader in transportation equipment manufacturing. Add to that a prime location in the middle of the country and an enviable intermodal network, and you have a trifecta for success.

Companies in the sector have been a part of Arkansas' economic story from the very beginning. Arkansas began recruiting industry in the mid-1950s, and by 1964 Cooper Tires had found a home in Texarkana. In early 2019, Cooper Tires celebrated a huge milestone of rolling its 400 millionth tire off the line. That's 400 million, as in almost half a billion, and is the most tires produced by a single Cooper plant in the company's history. The company is a major player not just in Texarkana,

but also in the surrounding communities where it continues to involve citizens and future workers through such initiatives as Manufacturing Day. And, in case you were wondering, 400 million tires stacked end-to-end would stretch almost 200,000 miles or about eight trips around the world.

Cynergy Cargo, an enclosed cargo trailer manufacturer headquartered in Georgia, built a new facility in the Crossett Industrial Park. The company will hire 70 new employees.

The company cited support from state and local leaders among the reasons for selecting Crossett as the location for its new facility.

"Through every step of the process, we have received outstanding support from Crossett Economic Development Commission as well as the Arkansas Economic Development Commission," said Vigler Mazariegos, Cynergy Cargo owner. "In the spirit of progress, these leaders have expressed immense interest to create more employment

Cooper's celebration of 400,000,000 tires.
Photo courtesy of Cooper Tires

Connecting Arkansas with the World



60 years ago the City of Little Rock created the Little Rock Port Authority to develop the Port and its industrial park. The Port of Little Rock is the largest public port on the MKARNS (McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System) 448 mile system that stretches from the Mississippi River to Tulsa.

As the nexus of river, rail and road transportation, the Port of Little Rock connects Arkansas to over 60 countries in the global economy. Our world-class intermodal transportation hub extends Little Rock's reach to every corner of the globe through the deep-water ports of the Gulf of Mexico.

To move goods and materials within the Port, the Little Rock Port Authority operates a short-line switching railroad that services both the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Rail Roads. Almost 20 miles of track handles



over 20,000 cars annually.

And, within a few minutes of the Port, trucking companies can access Interstate 40, the country's

third longest major coast to coast highway, and I-30, the main route from Little Rock to the southwest.

The Port has wide-ranging impacts on central Arkansas's success – thousands of jobs, billions in economic impact, and the ability to connect Arkansas with the world.



- 45 plus businesses employing 4,500
- 4,500 acre industrial park
- Annually, over \$500M in commodities crosses the docks of three river terminals.
- Contributed \$5B to the local economy over the last decade
- Union Pacific and BNSF Railroads serve the Port's switching railroad, handling over 20,000 cars yearly
- Quick connections to I-40 and I-30 are located within five miles of the Port
- Adjacent to Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport
- The Port's Foreign Trade Zone #14 caters to global markets
- Kiplinger's Personal Finance ranked Little Rock #1 of America's 10 Great Places to Live.



The Port's mid-America location and world-class intermodal transportation system make it a recommended choice for U.S. manufacturing and distribution fulfillment.



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Port of Little Rock

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opportunities for citizens.”

The company recently held a ribbon-cutting where the first cargo trailer rolled off the line. Cynergy Cargo will join an expanding and diverse base of companies operating in Arkansas’ transportation equipment industry

When Governor Asa Hutchinson took office in January 2015, one of his first priorities was to increase the skill level of the state’s workforce. To accomplish this goal, a private-public workforce initiative was created with industries, two-year colleges, technical colleges, and high schools. Companies get ready-to-work skilled employees and students can get access to well-paying jobs upon graduation.

“No matter what job skills are needed for businesses currently operating in Arkansas or for businesses looking to relocate here, students are being given the opportunities to respond to the demands of industry,” said Gov. Hutchinson.

Another transportation equipment manufacturing company that has found success with an educational partnership is PACE Industries, a die-casting manufacturing and engineering solutions company that has partnered with Arkansas Northeastern College. PACE donated equipment and the college provides workforce training and class offerings tailored to fit PACE’s unique needs. The efforts have increased workforce quality and led to a Northark Board of Trustees Partnership Award.


Not even a pandemic can slow the industry in Arkansas. Just look at Hino Motors Manufacturing USA Inc. which continues to grow. The company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Hino Motors Ltd. and a Toyota Group Company, has produced axles, knuckles, and suspension components for Toyota’s Tacoma, Tundra, and Sequoia lines in Marion, Arkansas, since 2006. Hino partnered with the Arkansas Workforce Center to host a curbside job fair in July for 80 open positions including production workers, machine operators, general labor, and maintenance and electrical workers.

And Pace isn’t the only transportation

equipment manufacturing company in Arkansas seeking workers. DENSO Manufacturing Arkansas Inc., based in Osceola, also held an employment event this past summer. DENSO operates a state-of-the-art HVAC manufacturing facility in Osceola and announced plans in 2019 to invest almost \$1.6 billion toward developing and producing electrified automotive products, systems, and technologies. Continuously looking for ways to increase the quality of its workforce, DENSO is one of four companies in Arkansas to partner with Arkansas State University to offer their employees \$1,000 scholarships to advance their education through online or on-campus programs. The plant was recently honored by the Arkansas Department of Labor for achieving more than seven million production hours without a lost time accident. DENSO is a strong advocate for sustainability and is working to reduce its environmental footprint by 2030.

The quality of Arkansas’ workforce is a major reason for several companies choosing to locate and/or expand in Arkansas, including Greenbrier Industries, which recently purchased American Railcar Industries, a company that has had a freight car assembly plant in Arkansas since 1995. Just four months after the acquisition, Greenbrier announced a \$16 million investment in its Marmaduke, Arkansas, facility, solidifying the confidence the company has in the Arkansas workforce.

According to William Furman, Greenbrier’s chairman and CEO, the expansion accomplishes three key parts of the company’s strategic plan: “First, strengthening our core North American engineering and manufacturing business,” he said. “Next, growing our operations at scale in new and existing markets; and lastly, extending our talent base. The expansion of our facility in Marmaduke will further position Greenbrier for continued growth for many years to come.”

With a skilled workforce and access to major players in the industry, transportation equipment manufacturing is, indeed, on a roll in Arkansas. 



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Feeding the world. Fueling success.

Food companies in Arkansas take root and grow year-over-year.

by SAVANNAH KING

◀ Tyson Foods created a new, state-of-the-art facility designed to help the company develop more automation and robotics for its food production plants. The Tyson Manufacturing Automation Center (TMAC) is in Springdale.

Photo courtesy of Tyson Foods

One of the largest food companies in the world, Tyson Foods, has called the state home for nearly nine decades. Founded in the midst of the Great Depression, Tyson is a testament to the state's legacy as a fertile field for business. Since John W. Tyson, the company's founder and namesake, first moved to Springfield and began delivering crates of chickens across the Midwest in 1935, the company has gone on to feed the nation and the world. In fact, Tyson Foods produces 1 in 5 pounds of all the chicken, beef and pork produced in the U.S. and employs 141,000 people across its facilities.

Tyson is hardly the only worldwide food company to call Arkansas home. Today large, multinational companies like PepsiCo, Nestlé, JBS USA, Kraft Heinz and others have manufacturing facilities in the state with more planting their flag in the state every year. In fact, 23 out of the top 25 food and beverage companies in the world (by revenue) have manufacturing facilities in Arkansas.

At the end of 2019, there were 360 food and beverage companies in the state, employing 55,500 people. The industry continues to grow too. Between January 2015 and August 2020, 79 economic developments projects were announced in the food and beverage manufacturing industry alone — representing 4,270 new jobs and \$2.01 billion of proposed investments.

One of those investments was made by another giant food company with a legacy in Arkansas that stretches back decades — Gerber Products Company. Gerber's Fort Smith plant has been in operation since 1964 where it produces a range of products including purees in plastic and glass containers, meat sticks and infant cereals. In July, the company announced it was investing \$30 million into expanding the plant and creating 50 full-time jobs.

"We appreciate the state of Arkansas and the city of Fort Smith's partnership and participation in supporting our project," Gerber President and CEO Bill Partyka said. "Gerber has had a long-

standing relationship with the state of Arkansas and the Fort Smith community, and we look forward to continuing that relationship for many years to come."

Arkansas Department of Commerce Secretary and Executive Director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) Mike Preston praised Gerber's partnership with the state and the Fort Smith community.

"The Gerber expansion is another great example of how the chamber and city of Fort Smith work together to retain a legacy company in this community. Governor Asa Hutchinson and Secretary Preston's team were working in tandem with the chamber to win this project." Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Tim Allen said. "Thank you, Gerber, for your continued investment in Fort Smith." ◊

ARKANSAS AGRICULTURE RANKINGS

- #1 in rice production
- #2 for broilers
- #4 catfish (food size)
- #4 cotton and cottonseed
- #5 turkeys
- #10 chicken eggs
- #11 grain sorghum
- #11 soybeans



The Intersection of Talent and Technology

Arkansas continues to attract investment in technology sector with strategic efforts.

by SAVANNAH KING

As technology continues changing the way we live our lives, businesses and employees alike are learning they don't have to be tethered to the office. At the same time, companies are fleeing high taxes and expenses that come with coastal locations and putting more of an emphasis on digital offerings. Arkansas quickly noticed the coastal exodus and began focusing its efforts on attracting technology-centered companies to the state.

For years, established companies have understood the uniqueness of Arkansas' business climate. That's why Walmart, Tyson Foods, Murphy USA, Dillard's, Windstream Holdings and JB Hunt all call the state home. In fact, more than 145 Fortune 500 companies have more than 3,200 operations in the state, including HP, Lockheed Martin, FedEx, AutoZone and Kimberly-Clark Corporation.

Not only is Arkansas the third-least expensive state to live in, it also offers the third-lowest cost of doing business in the nation. Additionally, to directly compete with larger markets, venture capital has been a main component of the

state's focus — and with positive results. From 2009-2019, total venture capital investments in Arkansas have more than doubled. Since 2014, more than 300 startups have launched in northwest Arkansas alone.

Several innovative technology firms have opened or expanded in the city of Conway. One of Conway's claims to fame is being named one of Forbes Magazine "7 Places In The U.S. So Cheap You Can Afford To Be An Entrepreneur." In October 2019, DXC Technology, a digital information provider, chose to expand its offices in Conway and create 1,200 jobs — bringing the company's payroll in the city to 1,600. Acxiom, a marketing technology firm, is headquartered in Conway and powers more than 1 trillion transactions for more than 7,000 global clients.

The story of First Orion is one that has become a hallmark for success in Arkansas. Their software provides phone call transparency by empowering both consumers and businesses with world-class data. From their humble beginning in 2008, First Orion has grown to over 200 employees in Arkansas and has established offices in Seattle, London, and Dubai. In 2017, the company announced



First Orion World Headquarters
Courtesy of First Orion

it would expand and relocate its global headquarters to the Argenta Plaza in North Little Rock. Here, they have built a multi-story, multi-million-dollar office to house their growing team. "Central Arkansas is an inspiring place for us to be," said First Orion Chairman and CEO Charles Morgan. "We're helping to transform the region into a prominent technology hub and we are honored to be such a big part of the Argenta Plaza. Not only is First Orion building technology, but we are also building careers." First Orion is indeed proving tech companies in Arkansas can successfully innovate and compete in the global marketplace.

Illinois-based Zebra Technologies designs, manufactures, and sells a broad range of devices used in health care, manufacturing, retail and transportation and logistics environments. In late 2018, the company expanded its facility in Bentonville and added 100 employees to its payroll. Before the expansion project of the 80,000-square-foot Bentonville facility, many of the company's U.S.-based customers were being serviced in Mexico through an outsourced repair relationship inherited from Motorola Solutions. In 2017, Zebra permanently transferred those product lines and their respective customers to the Bentonville facility.

"Zebra is excited by the results of

our expanded operations in Bentonville where our team has been instrumental in protecting our customers' investments with an advanced level of technical and repair service that have helped businesses achieve maximum uptime and peak performance with their Zebra mobile devices," said Zebra Technologies vice president of global repair operations Mike Underwood. "We look forward to the next phase of our expansion in Bentonville as we continue to deliver world-class service to our customers."

Winning Combination

A key part of the state's focus on tech-related enterprises has been in preparing its youngest residents for gainful employment. Arkansas was the first state in the nation to mandate coding education courses. The program began just under five years ago and is already providing companies with a technologically prepared workforce. Beyond the K-12, the state noticed a 160.3% increase between 2014 and 2018 in the number of students who graduated with a computer science degree.

With its winning combination of tech talent, affordability and venture capital, a diverse cluster of technology companies have taken root in the state. ◊

Moving Products and Connecting Markets



DeSoto Bridge

Location and infrastructure drive a formidable transportation industry.

by GARY DAUGHTERS

J.B. Hunt Transport Services is truly an Arkansas story. Founded in 1961 by the husband and wife team of Johnnie Bryan and Johnelle Hunt, the firm got its start hauling chickens for Northwest Arkansas poultry producers such as Tyson Foods, George's, Hudson Foods and Peterson Farms. From those modest beginnings, J.B. Hunt has grown to occupy a spot on the Fortune 500 as one of the largest transportation logistics companies in North America, its 12,000 trucks a ubiquitous presence on roadways across the country.

J.B. Hunt's success is emblematic of a transportation sector that has steadily transformed Northwest Arkansas into a "global logistics hub" in the words of Frank McGuigan, CEO of Transplace, a leading provider of transportation management services. Transplace is opening an operations center in Rogers, not far from J.B. Hunt's home in Lowell. It's one of many recent investments Arkansas's transportation space.

"As people say, 'location, location, location,'" says Bentley Story, director of business development for the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. "Let's say someone is looking for a central distribution center to cover all of the U.S. It's hard to beat our proximity to both coasts. Even if you're looking for a more regional approach and want to cover Chicago, Dallas and Atlanta, you draw that triangle and Arkansas is the center."

Its advantageous location gives Arkansas access to a market of 100 million people within a 550-mile radius of the state. So, it's hardly a surprise that the state supports more than 80 distribution centers and 10 major trucking companies, which also include ArcBest, Family Dollar Stores, FedEx Freight and Walmart. Add rail and air service, Mississippi river freight and numerous intermodal facilities, and the Arkansas transportation sector employs more than 55,000 people.

On top of its central location, Arkansas has the infrastructure to make it all work. Interstate 40, a major east-west thoroughfare reaching from North

Carolina to California, bisects the state and runs through the capital, Little Rock. Interstate 30 connects Arkansas with markets to the southwest, including Texas and Mexico. More than 1,000 miles of navigable waterways link the state with ports worldwide, moving steel, fertilizers, petroleum products, grains and other goods; many of Arkansas' port locations have railway connections that provide a smooth transition for multiple modes of transportation and delivery.

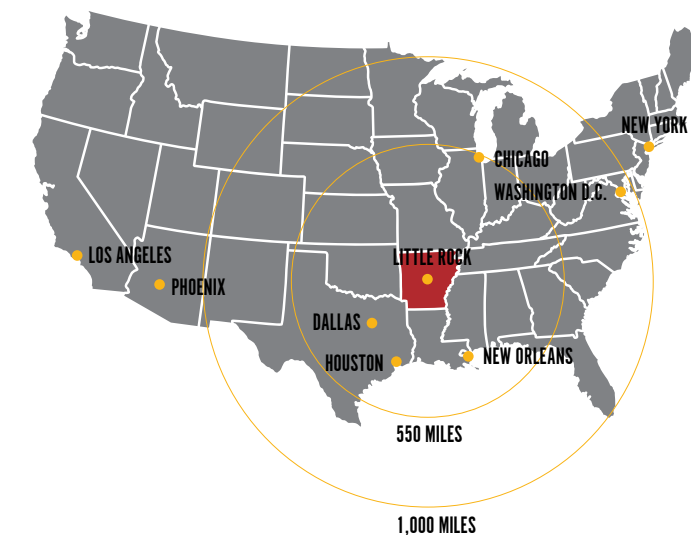
In July 2020, Little Rock broke ground on \$11.2 million worth of infrastructure improvements to its port on the Arkansas River, a major tributary of the Mississippi. One day later, Amazon announced plans to open a fulfillment center connected to the port, the company's first such facility in the state. Anticipated to launch in 2021, the fulfillment center is expected to create more than 1,000 jobs.

"Home to over 40 businesses that employ over 4,000 people, the Port of Little Rock is the largest industrial hub in Central Arkansas," said Arkansas Senator John Boozman. The Amazon project, said Boozman, "proves that investments in infrastructure truly do promote economic expansion and job growth."

Taken together with the Amazon project, a \$40 million Carvana investment in West Memphis, says Story, is another indication of a "major uptick" in the state's transportation and logistics sector. Carvana, the e-commerce platform for buying and selling used cars, is building a distribution center that's expected to create more than 400 jobs.


Similar investments are popping up across the state, in towns large and small. Superior Group, a supplier of uniforms to police departments and businesses, expects to create 125 jobs through an expansion of its distribution center rural Eudora in the south. The Greenbrier companies, an international supplier of railcars and marine barges, is expanding operations in Marmaduke in Arkansas's northeast corner, to the tune of \$16 million and 35 jobs. Logistics startup

Arkansas offers access to a market of 100 million people within a 550-mile radius of the state.



SuppyPike is launching operations in Fayetteville, and Roach Conveyors, which opened an assembly plant in Caraway in 2019, quickly announced an expansion and a tripling of its workforce to 45 full-time employees.

Plug and Play Northwest Arkansas stands as a bold illustration of the commitment of Arkansas' leading corporate players to innovating within the transportation sector. The startup accelerator, established in Bentonville in 2019, is drawing logistics startups from around the world that are developing solutions in end-to-end software, last-mile efficiency, 3D sensors, artificial intelligence software and more. The program receives support from J.B. Hunt, Tyson Foods and Walmart, as well as the Walton Family Foundation.

"Technology is changing the way we move freight and collaborating with Plug and Play gives us the opportunity to team up with leading startups on solutions that will help our customers," says John Roberts, J.B. Hunt's president and CEO. "Bringing the Supply Chain and Logistics Accelerator program to Northwest Arkansas will showcase the region's status as an innovation hub as we work with these startups on the next big idea." 

With its central location at the midpoint between the east and west coasts and Canada and Mexico, Central Arkansas offers companies a unique combination of advantages. From the region's well-connected logistics infrastructure, and its highly skilled workforce, Central Arkansas is a hub for a variety of industries including aerospace, automotive, biotechnology, financial services, food processing, health care, logistics, information technology and more.

Several global companies have locations in the region, including Acxiom, Caterpillar Inc., Dassault Falcon Jet Corp., Dillard's Inc., FIS Global, LM Wind Power, L'Oreal USA Products, Inc., Stephens Inc., and Welspun Tubular, LLC.

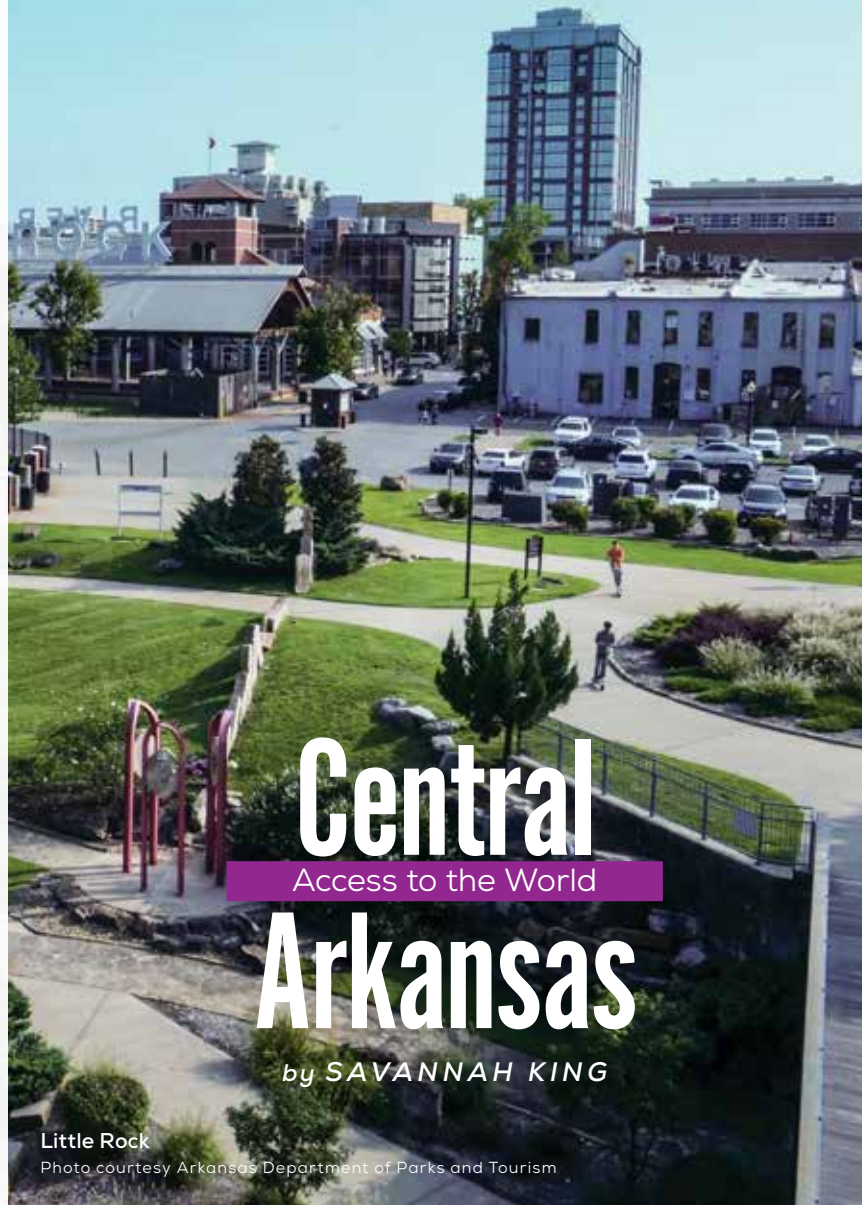
Military installations in the region include The Little Rock Air Force Base and Camp Joe T. Robinson — combined these installations represent over \$800 million in annual economic impact for the state.

More than 1 million people live in the region, providing companies of all sizes with an enthusiastic and educated workforce. Major cities in Central Arkansas include Little Rock, North Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Hot Springs, Conway, Searcy and Jacksonville.

The Port of the Little Rock serves as a logistics hub for the area offering immediate access to rail, highway and waterway, and convenient intermodal shipping solutions. The Port is part of the 448-mile McClelland-Kerr Arkansas River, which runs from the Mississippi River northwest to 15 miles east of Tulsa. The port has over 40 businesses that employ over 4,000 people.

The port began construction on an \$11-million improvement project in July 2020. The expansion will help meet heavy industrial standards in anticipation of two new companies locating at the port.

“The Port is one of the county’s most important assets, which is why investing in the core infrastructure of the Port has been a focal point of Pulaski County Government and my administration,” stated Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde. “The long-anticipated development and improvements to Zeuber Road will support the growing number of vehicles needing to safely access the Port. Having the necessary infrastructure in place is why companies like Amazon, CZ-USA and HMS Manufacturing are choosing to invest and locate their operations in Pulaski County. At a time when jobs are at a premium, I am confident that our investments will be a jobs creator as we attract evermore industries to Central Arkansas.”

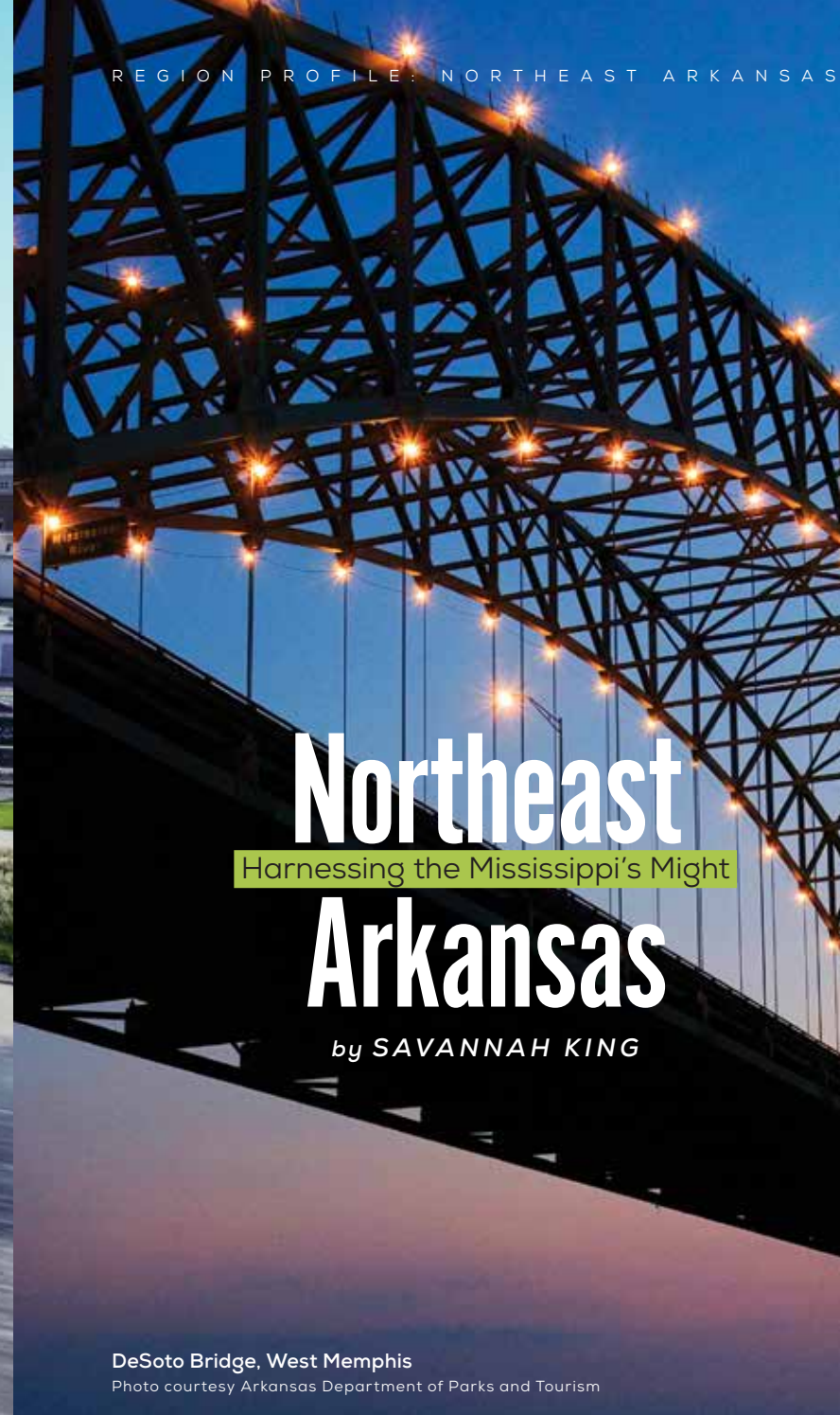
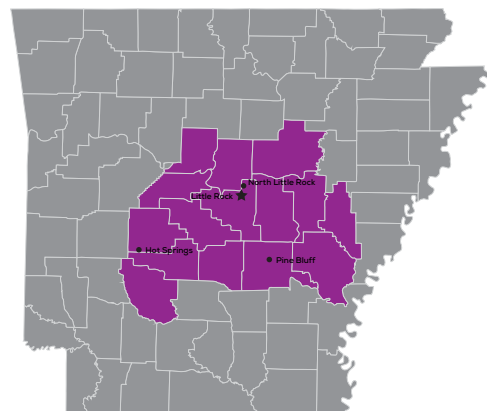


Central Arkansas

Access to the World

by SAVANNAH KING

Little Rock
Photo courtesy Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

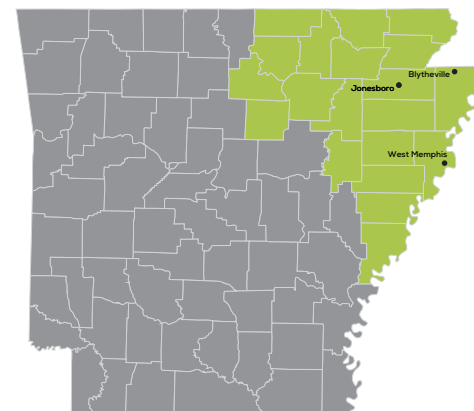


Northeast Arkansas

Harnessing the Mississippi's Might

by SAVANNAH KING

DeSoto Bridge, West Memphis
Photo courtesy Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism



The Northeast border of Arkansas is carved by the Mississippi River, which also serves as one of the region's greatest assets. A hub for distribution, logistics and manufacturing, Northeast Arkansas is an attractive location for companies trying to reach global markets. The region's rich, delta soil has also created some of the best farmland in the world.

From Jonesboro to West Memphis, multiple industries have found fertile ground in Northeast Arkansas. Some of the region's largest employers include Schneider National Carriers, Hino Motors, Family Dollar Distribution, Robert Bosch Power Tool and more. The region has also seen several recent expansions from major companies like Coca-Cola and Carvana.

For decades, Northeast Arkansas has been known for its steel and metal production. Companies like Nucor Steel, Big River Steel Mississippi County and the city of Osceola are an industrial hub for the region, particularly for the steel industry. In fact, Mississippi County's concentration of mills makes it the second-largest steel-producing region in the U.S. Earlier this year, Big River Steel added a production line to its Osceola plant and announced its plans to double its workforce to over 1,000 employees. Nucor Steel is also expanding with a recently constructed specialty cold-mill complex set to begin operating in 2021 and will add a new coil paint production line to its facility by 2022.

Between the region's higher education institutions, including Williams Baptist College and Black River Technical College, Northeast Arkansas has an educated talent base. Arkansas Northeastern College in Blytheville primes the steelworker pipeline with one of the leading steelworker training centers in the world.

Logistically, the region offers numerous interstates and highways to bring goods to market. In fact, the region's central location in the U.S. means motor freight can travel from the region to the rest of the country within a one- or two-day drive. The International Port of Memphis covers a 15-mile stretch of the Mississippi River on both the Tennessee and Arkansas sides of the river. The port is the fifth-largest inland port in the U.S. and is the second-largest inland port on the shallow draft portion of the Mississippi River.

Companies that get their start in Northwest Arkansas seem to fare better than companies that plant roots elsewhere — especially when you consider the humble beginnings of locally headquartered companies like Walmart, Sam’s Club, Tyson Foods, Simmons Foods and J.B. Hunt.

Today, more than 1,400 global brands have operations in the region. An innovative and entrepreneurial spirit exists in the region, which has been recognized by several publications, including Entrepreneur and Fast Company as a top location for startups. The region supports entrepreneurs with a variety of resources as they grow and scale their businesses.

Walmart is expanding in its hometown of Bentonville with a new Walmart Home Office. The new campus is designed to compliment the region’s natural environment. J.B. Hunt also recently expanded its operations and local workforce in the nearby city of Lowell.

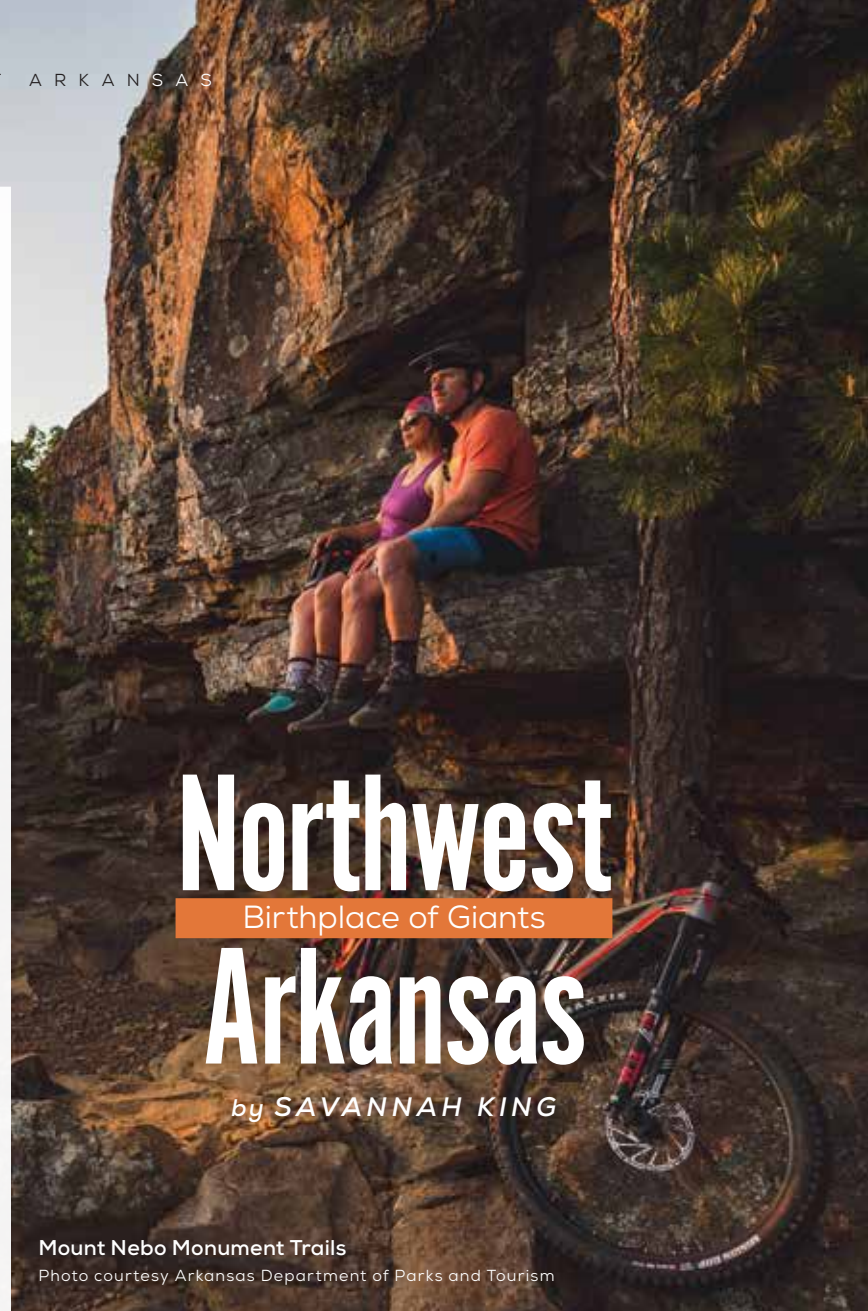
Northwest Arkansas is rapidly growing with more than 500,000 residents living in cities like Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, Bentonville and Siloam Springs. Over the last 25 years, the population has nearly doubled, primarily from immigration. By 2050, the population in the region is expected to double again.

Robust manufacturing hubs in cities like Fort Smith, Harrison and Russellville offer a hardworking, affordable and trained labor force. More than 10 divisions of Fortune 500 companies are in Russellville, where a diverse manufacturing base makes everything from frozen dinners, railroad crossies, elevator signal fixtures, parking meters, aluminum foil, graphite electrodes and aircraft and automotive parts.

The region also boasts a world-class infrastructure located near the center of the U.S. population. Major Midwestern markets within a half-day’s drive include Kansas City, St. Louis, Dallas-Fort Worth, Little Rock, Tulsa and Oklahoma City. The region is also well-connected via rail, river and air.

Northwest Arkansas National Airport offers daily nonstop flights to multiple business destinations including Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago O’Hare, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles and New York, San Francisco and more. The airport supports 1,450 Walmart suppliers with operations in the region.

The region is also home to several higher education institutions, ensuring a steady stream of new graduates for the needs of the regional workforce. The University of Arkansas, John Brown




Northwest Arkansas

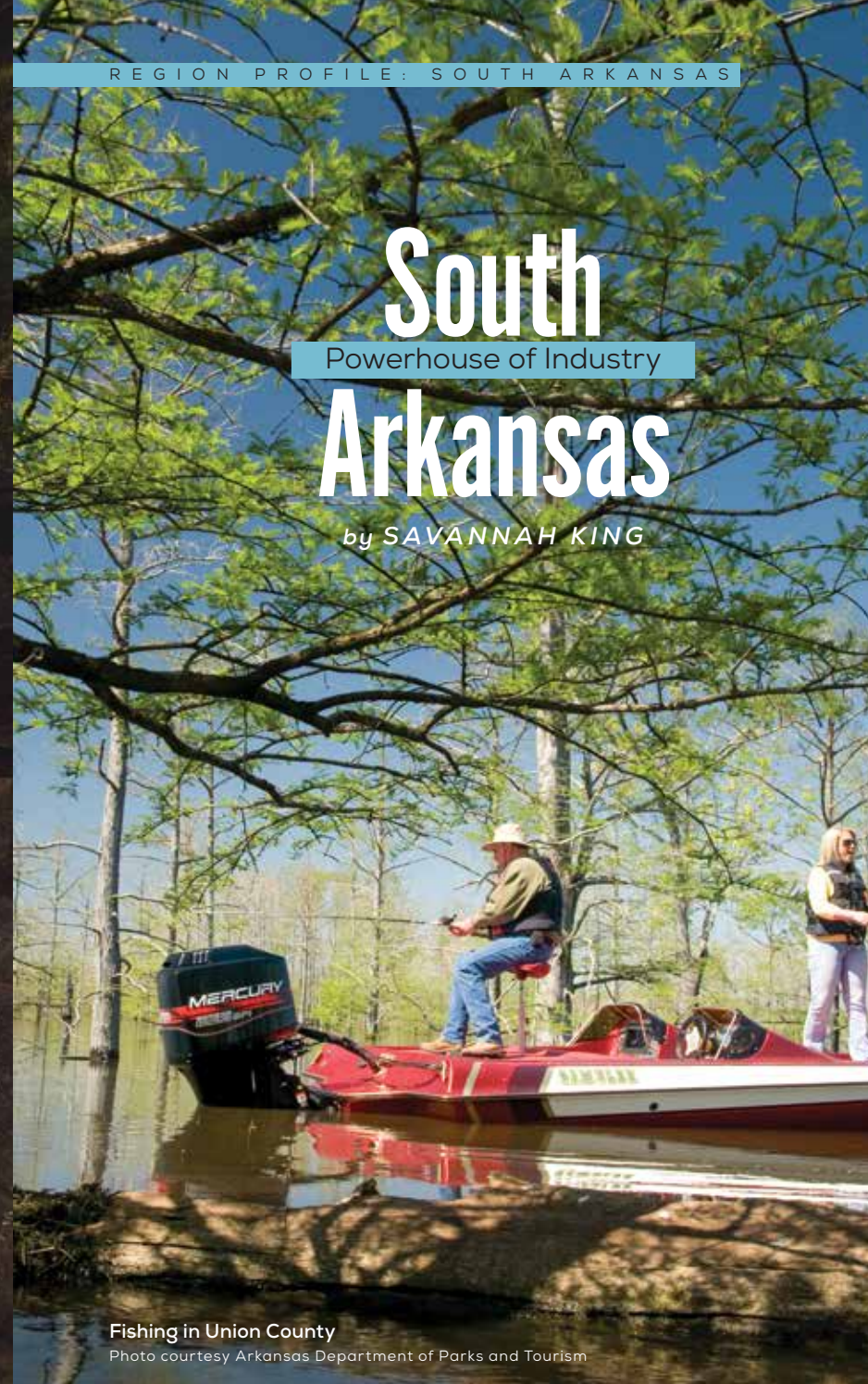
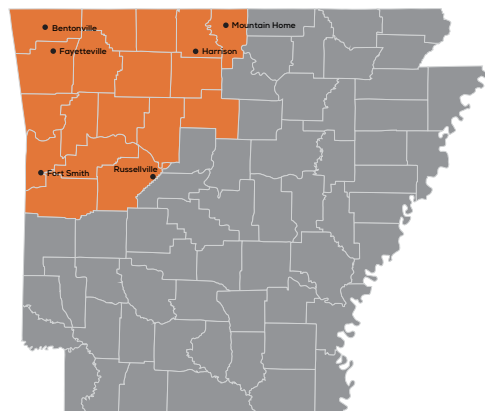
Birthplace of Giants

by SAVANNAH KING

Mount Nebo Monument Trails
Photo courtesy Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

University and Northwest Arkansas Community College collectively enroll nearly 40,000 students annually.

A clear signal of Walmart’s founding family’s commitment to the region, the University of Arkansas was awarded \$194.7 million grant from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation in July. The funds will be used to build the university’s new Institute for Integrative and Innovative Research. The institute will house five Centers of Excellence, distinct innovation clusters that will drive innovation across the region, state and the country. 



South Arkansas

Powerhouse of Industry

by SAVANNAH KING

Fishing in Union County
Photo courtesy Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism


Encompassing 21 counties, South Arkansas is a powerhouse of industry with an abundance of opportunity.

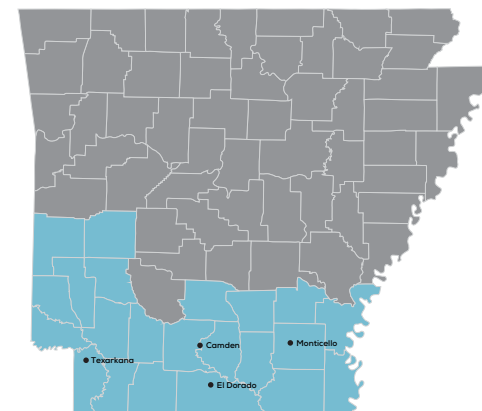
Union County is the largest in the state (roughly the size of Rhode Island) and boasts the second-largest Brine reserve in the world (second only to the Dead Sea). In fact, Union County and its neighbor Columbia County account for 40% of global bromine production. Union County is also home to the world’s largest medium density fiberboard plant, Del-Tin MDF and the second largest merchant power plant, Entergy-Union Power Station.

Just over the county line into Ouachita County, two major manufacturing projects have launched in the aerospace sector. When Lockheed Martin announced a \$142 million investment at its center of excellence in Camden last year, it shined a light on South Arkansas highly skilled workforce and logistical assets. The company manufactures various products used in military and defense operations for the U.S and its allies. Currently Lockheed Martin employees 700 people at its Camden facility with plans to hire 326 new employees over the next few years.

“The high-paying jobs Lockheed Martin provides in the Camden area improve the quality of life for our communities and the state as a whole,” said James Lee Silliman, Ouachita Partnership for Economic Development executive director, “and we’re thankful for their partnership in the Golden Triangle.”

Camden is also home to aerospace company Aerojet Rocketdyne. The expansion represents the latest chapter of Aerojet Rocketdyne’s ongoing partnership with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Calhoun County and the Ouachita Partnership for Economic Development.

“The aerospace and defense industry continues to be one of the top economic drivers in Arkansas,” said Gov. Asa Hutchinson, “and that wouldn’t happen without the incredible workforce and their employers. We’re thrilled to see Aerojet Rocketdyne continue to grow in Camden, and we appreciate the investments they make in South Arkansas and in our nation’s security.” 



Wired for Working Where You Want to Work



by MARK AREND

Working from home is a challenge for some and a blessing for others. But opportunities abound, in the Land of Opportunity, for remote workers to take advantage of Arkansas' natural beauty and many outdoor recreational amenities. Zoom meetings work outdoors as well as indoors, so why not get out of the house and find a Wi-Fi accessible spot in one of Arkansas' 52 state parks? They're home to 1,800 campsites, 1,050 picnic sites, 208 cabins, five lodges and 415 miles of trails.

"Arkansas is moving quickly to improve our connectivity across the state, which will enable remote access and make it more doable," says Stacy Hurst, Cabinet Secretary for the Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. "It's a priority initiative of the governor. There are monies available now for rural connections and for increasing connectivity in our state parks. Arkansas

is on the fast track to improving throughout the state the ability to access Wi-Fi and work remotely, which will make doing that an even more attractive option."

Following his July 23, 2019, announcement establishing the Arkansas State Broadband Office, Governor Asa Hutchinson announced in August 2019 "Arkansas Rural Connect," a new \$25 million grant program within the Arkansas State Broadband Office. The goal is to provide high-speed broadband to rural communities throughout Arkansas by 2022, as outlined in the State Broadband Plan released in May 2019. The Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) program will provide grants to qualifying communities of at least 500 people to deploy high-speed broadband to its residents.

"The long-term success of our economy will be determined by the resources our entrepreneurs have access

“So much is **attractive** about our state from a **quality-of-life** point of view.”

– Stacy Hurst, Cabinet Secretary for the Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism


to, and high-speed broadband is at the top of that list," said Governor Hutchinson. "The Arkansas Rural Connect program is an important tool that will allow the state to assist our local communities with the critical funding necessary to reach our goal of statewide connectivity."

Finding the Work-Leisure Balance

That funding is more critical now as workstyles shift away from office buildings to where workers need — or want — to be until the pandemic blows over.

"Arkansas is a small, wonderfully connected state with a population of about 3 million people," notes Secretary Hurst. "We have a high level of connection. That is beneficial in that you can continue to get work done from your home or a coffee shop with the ability to connect with the people you need to connect with."

Working remotely affords employees a new sense of work-leisure balance, if they take advantage of the many outdoor amenities throughout the state.

"So much is attractive about our state from a quality-of-life point of view," says Hurst. "We have abundant access to nature and the outdoors. We are very much becoming a cycling center throughout the state — Northwest Arkansas has led the way, but Central Arkansas is the same. We're completing a wonderful 84-mile trail in Eastern Arkansas. Working remotely and being able to jump on a bike and go to lunch or do a quick workout is very appealing and very doable in Arkansas, because our outdoor opportunities are very nearby. Even from midtown Little Rock, we can get to West Little Rock and Pinnacle Mountain and Rattlesnake Ridge within 15 minutes, and we can reach the [17-mile-long] Arkansas River Trail in five minutes. Access to parks and federal lands is very handy in Arkansas." 





Destination Arkansas

by GARY DAUGHTERS

The Natural State is a journey into authenticity.

Known as the Natural State for its forested hills, pristine lakes and streams and enchanting valleys, Arkansas offers unforgettable experiences to those who visit. The state is a rare destination that affords travelers opportunities to dig for diamonds, retrace the footsteps of civil rights pioneers, shoot wild river rapids, dine with gusto and much, much more.

“Arkansas has a robust tourism product, offering consumers natural beauty, outdoor adventure, arts, culture and a rich history and heritage to engage people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds,” says Stacy Hurst, secretary of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism.”

The secret is getting out. Arkansas greeted more than 36 million visitors in 2019, an impressive annual increase of 10.2%. Total travel expenditures climbed to \$7.68 billion, up 4.2% from 2018. Just under 70,000 people now work in the state’s travel industry.

Welcoming and authentic, Arkansas stands out as a singular place to relax and recharge. Here are nine uniquely Arkansas spots that are not to be missed.

Crater of Diamonds State Park. The world’s only “finders keepers” diamond site open to the public, Crater of Diamonds is a one-of-a-kind experience that brings people from all over the world to the town of Murfreesboro, south of the Ouachita National Forest. Visitors to the park search a 37-acre field, the eroded surface of a volcanic crater, for a variety of rocks, minerals and gemstones. Anything they find is theirs to keep. The 40.23 carat Uncle Sam diamond unearthed at the park in 1924 is the largest diamond ever found in the United States.

Johnny Cash Boyhood Home. Johnny Cash, the American music icon, grew up in the Arkansas town of Dyess on the Mississippi River Delta. His boyhood home, built by the Depression-era Federal Emergency Relief Administration, has been painstakingly restored and joined the National Register of Historic Places in 2018. The Johnny Cash Heritage Fest, held at the site each October, is a three-day celebration that honors the musical legend and the New Deal programs that shaped his childhood.

Blanchard Springs Caverns & Recreation Area. A “living cave” that is constantly changing and growing, Blanchard Springs Caverns is one of the most spectacular caves found anywhere in the world. It’s located in the Ozark National Forest and is believed to have been formed by a mountain spring that pours into a glassy-surfaced trout pond below cave, called Mirror Lake. Blanchard Springs also offers camping, fishing and swimming areas, as well as biking and hiking trails.

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Founded in 2011 in Bentonville by Alice Walton and the Walton Foundation, the museum features one of the largest collections of American art under one roof. Notable pieces include works by Andy Warhol, Norman Rockwell and Georgia O’Keefe, as well as lesser-known gems from the colonial era through the present. Sculptures grace more than 3 miles of trails across the 120-acre property.

Buffalo National River. Running freely for 135 miles through the Ozark Mountains, Buffalo National River is a spectacular wildlife reserve area managed by the National Park Service. Home to deer, bobcats, black bear, eagles and innumerable fish and bird species, the area offers cabin and lodge rentals, RV park sites, hiking and fishing. A multiday canoe trip offers a wilderness adventure like none other.

Esse Purse Museum & Store. This eclectic museum is dedicated to the idea that a purse is more than a utilitarian bag in which a woman carries necessities, but rather is an extension of her very essence. Visitors discover that the choice of a purse tells much about a woman and her evolving position in the public sphere.

Established in 2013, the museum grew from a traveling exhibit selected from the personal collection of owner Anita Davis.

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site. Still an active education space with more than 2,500 students enrolled, this historic school is where desegregation began. In 1957, the U.S. Army escorted nine Black teenagers to class, without incident, for the first day of school. A bench now on display across from the school is a replica of the one that Elizabeth Eckford of “the Little Rock Nine” sat on after being prevented from entering the school by national guardsmen.

Thorncrown Chapel. Having celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2020, Thorncrown Chapel in the Ozark Mountains of northern Arkansas is a monument to simplicity and naturalistic architecture. The vision of Arkansas native Fay Jones, a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright, the awe-inspiring structure is nearly indistinguishable from its surrounding forest. The chapel’s simple design and majestic beauty combine to make it what critics have called one of the finest religious spaces of modern times.

Jones Bar-B-Q Diner. This straight-forward barbecue restaurant in Marianna, owned and operated by pitmaster Harold Jones, is believed to be the oldest Black-owned restaurant in the South. In 2012, the prestigious James Beard Foundation designated Jones as an “America’s Classic.” Garden & Gun has named it to its “Barbecue Bucket List.” The menu offers chopped pork by the pound or as sandwiches on white bread, with or without a mustard-based coleslaw. Jones opens at 6 a.m. and closes when the food is all gone. 

Buffalo National River offers spectacular vistas of a protected wildlife reserve.

SOURCE: Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism

NATURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS

THINKING ABOUT RELOCATING? FIND OUT HOW TOURISM-BASED COMPANIES CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A \$15,000 GRANT FOR A BUSINESS FEASIBILITY STUDY AT ARKANSAS.COM.

JUST ONE MORE REASON WHY BUSINESS IS GOOD AND LIFE IS GREAT IN THE NATURAL STATE.

ARKANSAS THE NATURAL STATE

ARKANSAS.COM

Rural Connection



Photo: Getty Images

Arkansas is investing in rural communities and improving access to broadband.

When Gov. Asa Hutchinson established the Arkansas State Broadband Plan in July 2019, it was almost like he had a crystal ball looking into the future. While the need for access to high-speed internet access is ubiquitous to our way of life and has been for a while now — it is even more necessary in the time of COVID-19.

“With the COVID-19 crisis, broadband has become even more of a necessity,” said Secretary of Commerce Mike Preston. “Telemedicine, distance education, and telework all require a strong broadband connection. The pandemic has magnified the need for the

by **SAVANNAH KING**

Governor’s program and it is timely and essential for sustaining Arkansas in this difficult time.”

In April, the Arkansas Department of Commerce launched the Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) broadband grant program to provide grants that will allow cities, counties and communities across

the state to expand the broadband footprint in rural

Arkansas. Communities are eligible if they have at least 500 in population and at least 200 of that population lacking broadband coverage and no more than 80% served. If a community does not meet the criteria they may partner with surrounding communities that do.

The high-speed broadband must

be at a speed of at least 25 megabits per second for download and 3 megabits per second for upload (25/3 Mbps). Allowable projects include deploying broadband into areas that completely lack service or upgrading areas that have poor service.

“Broadband is the great equalizer for competing on a global scale,” said Governor Asa Hutchinson. “Our students in rural Arkansas can access the same information as students from metropolitan areas across the world.”

We spoke with Judge Steven Porch, Chief Legal Counsel for the Department of Commerce and the Executive Broadband Manager for the Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) Program. Porch oversees and manages the ARC grant program for the State of Arkansas and

has been a part of the Program since its inception.

How will Arkansas’ businesses benefit from improved access to broadband?

PORCH: Broadband is a key consideration for companies in determining where to expand or start up a business. Arkansas businesses as well as out of state businesses will be able to expand into rural communities in Arkansas. This means jobs. Arkansas businesses can also offer services, via their website, to these hard to reach rural communities. Broadband is a necessity for any business to thrive and grow.



“ Broadband is a key consideration for companies in determining where to expand or start up a business. **Arkansas businesses as well as out of state businesses will be able to expand into rural communities in Arkansas.**”

— Judge Steven Porch, Chief Legal Counsel for the Department of Commerce and the Executive Broadband Manager for the Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) Program

As more people are working from home, what impact do you anticipate this initiative having on talent attraction and recruitment?

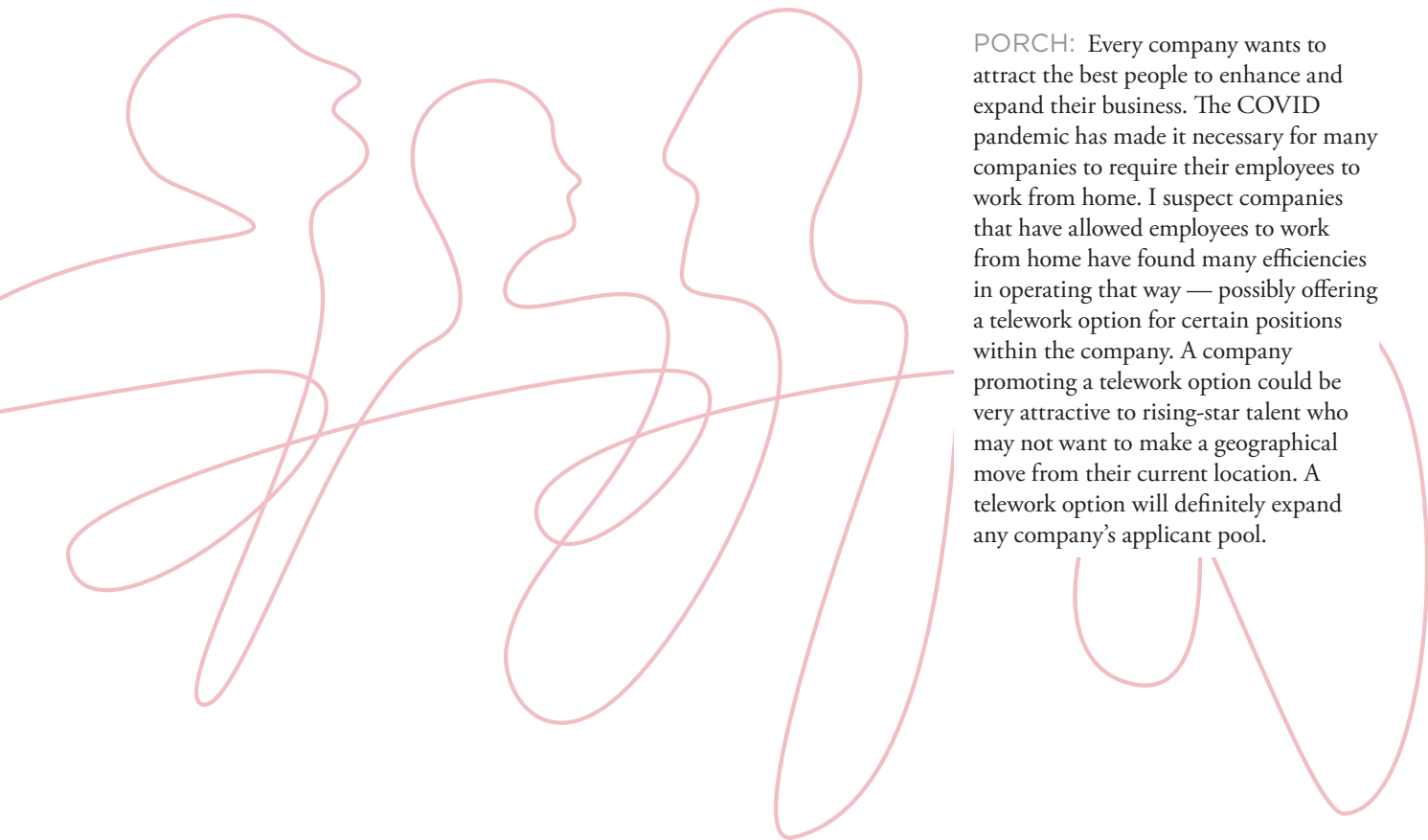
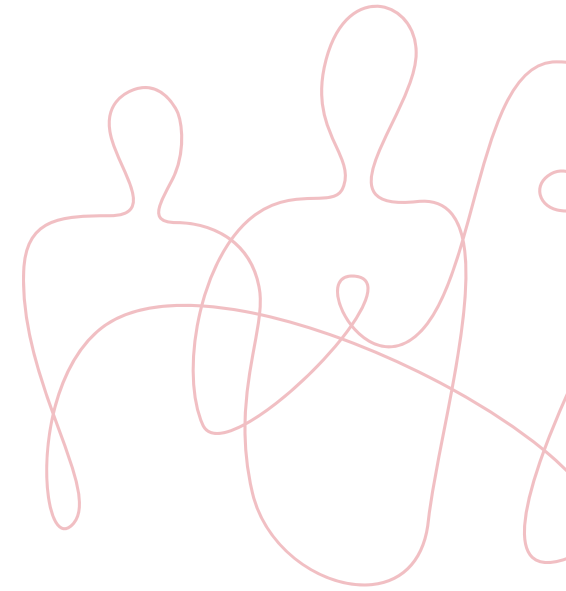
PORCH: Every company wants to attract the best people to enhance and expand their business. The COVID pandemic has made it necessary for many companies to require their employees to work from home. I suspect companies that have allowed employees to work from home have found many efficiencies in operating that way — possibly offering a telework option for certain positions within the company. A company promoting a telework option could be very attractive to rising-star talent who may not want to make a geographical move from their current location. A telework option will definitely expand any company’s applicant pool.

What are some of the bigger challenges facing the initiative?

PORCH: The bigger challenge is finding out where broadband is truly unserved or underserved in Arkansas. FCC maps have been greatly exaggerated. We have regularly received calls from communities that appear covered on the FCC maps but are not covered by a minimum of 25Mbps/3Mbps. We have a speed test on our website, www.broadband.Arkansas.gov which helps us determine which areas in Arkansas are actually served or underserved by broadband. Those who click on the speed test will have to scroll down and complete the survey. Once that survey is completed, it is sent to our office and added to our online map. We encourage every Arkansan, anywhere in the State, to go online, click the speed test and complete the survey.

How close is the state to reaching its goal of having access in population centers of 500 or more?

PORCH: We have a lot of work to do. But we are solidly heading in the right direction. We have received approval for supplemental emergency rules that allow for flexibility in both the 500 population threshold and the number of citizens unserved in a community. Not only are our smallest communities now eligible to apply for a grant, but other entities such as electric cooperatives are also eligible to apply. This will allow a better leveraging of resources so that more projects with the potential to offer broadband speeds of 25Mbps/3Mbps or better will be eligible to apply. We are now communicating with communities that have less than 500 residents. Our goal is to make broadband available to all Arkansans. ◊



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- ▲ View from the Overlook Trail at Buffalo Point in Marion County
- Blanchard Springs Caverns in Ozark-St. Francis National Forest in Stone County
- ▼ Kayaking Cane Creek Lake



Photos courtesy of Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism



- ▲ A Little Rock sunset
- Fly fishing the Buffalo River
- ▼ Highway 23 Bridge





- ▲ Louisiana Purchase State Park near Brinkley
- ◀ Hang gliding in Mount Nebo State Park
- ▼ Petit Jean State Park in Conway County



- ▲ The Walmart Museum in Bentonville
- Cruising the White River
- ▼ The Annual Arkansas Rice Festival in Weiner

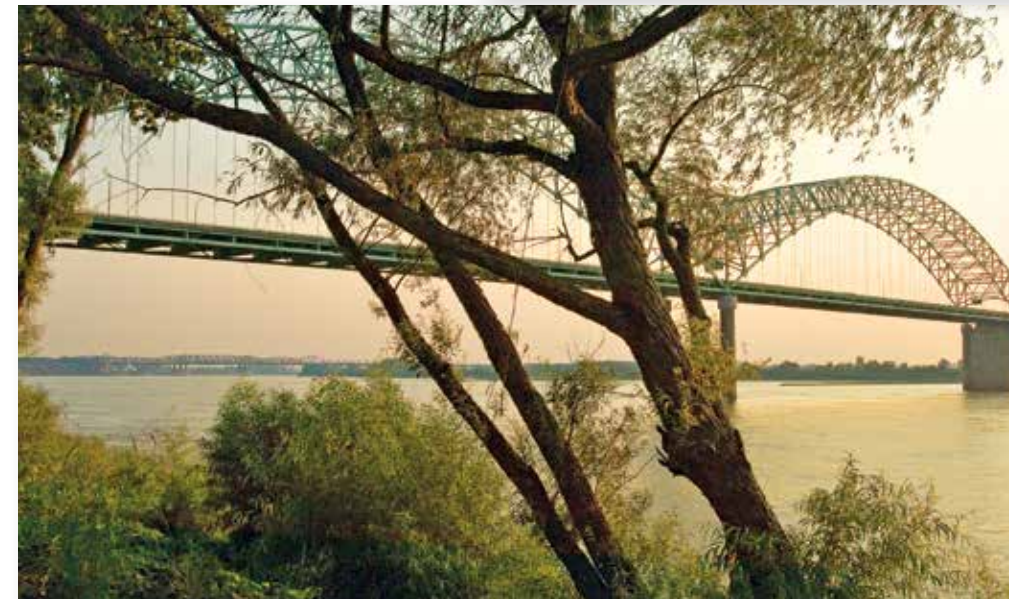




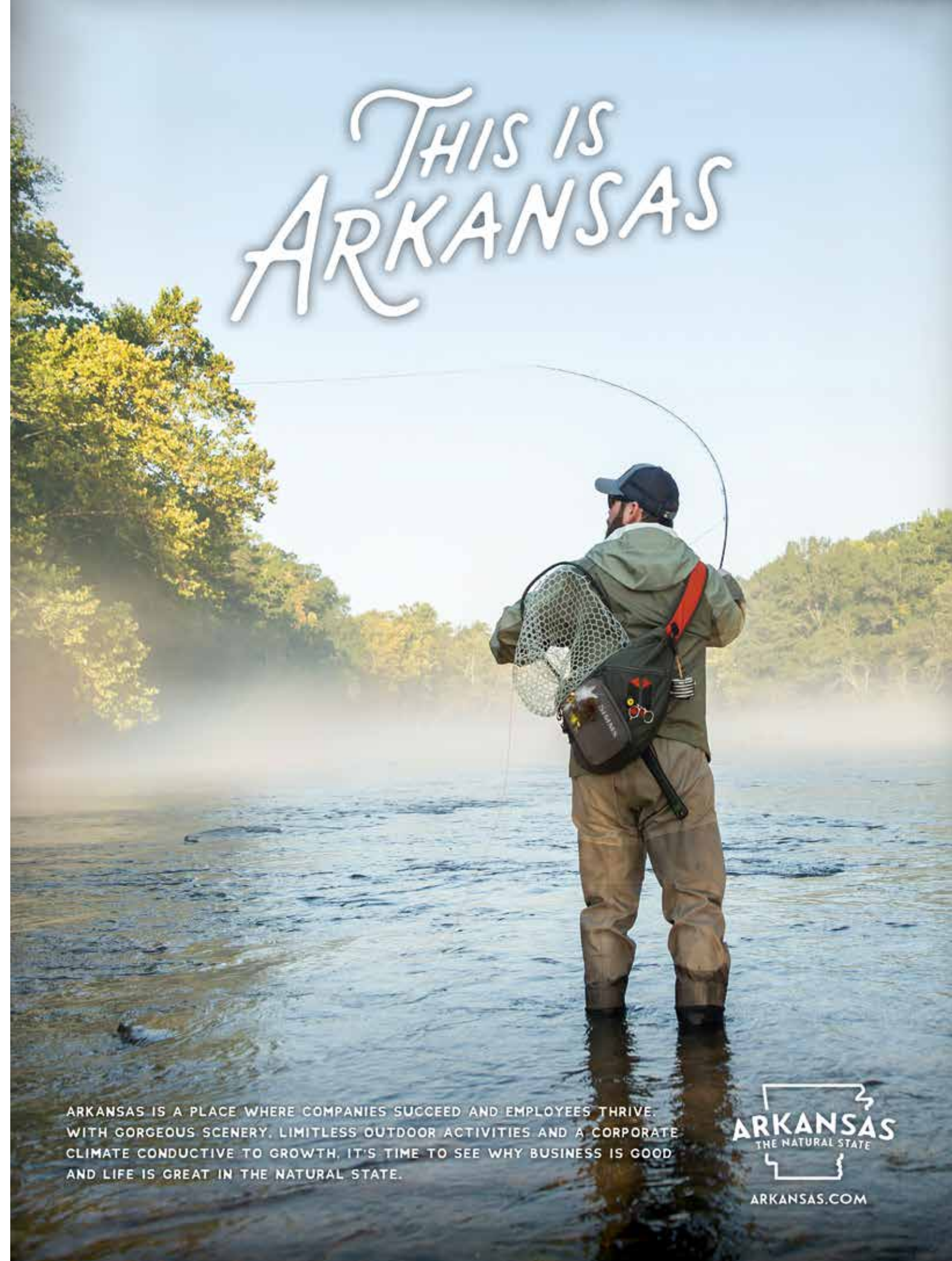
- ▲ Mallard ducks
- Overlooking Fairfield Bay from Sugar Loaf Mountain
- ▼ Mountain biking the north woods



- ▲ A Quapaw Canoe Company guided trip on the Mississippi River
- Bass fishing in Union County
- ▼ West Memphis and the Mississippi River



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Clifton Morris, General Plant Manager
Lennox International, Stuttgart

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